ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN CONFLICTS RESOLUTIONS IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Religious organizations have continued to play a vital role in conflict resolution in Africa, where most of it its communities have been struggling with conflicts of social, economic and political nature. The main objective of this paper was to evaluate the role of religious organizations in conflict resolutions in Afirca with special reference to Christianity which is prevailing in the continent. Christianity being dominant in Africa has been continually engaged in finding lasting solutions to conflicts. Since the times of Constantine the church has repeatedly focused on the sacramental and personal aspect of reconciliation. Africa has a continent is on records the highest rates of socially, religiously, economically and politically instigated violence causing rise of poverty, refugees and internally displace persons. Religious institutions particularly the church has been on the vanguard in reconciliation and mediation. This has incessantly helped in addressing post conflicts societies by use of biblical, cultural and religious values, to address the deepened conflicts in African that keeps re-emerging at the slightest provocations. Findings indicate that the church has been instrumental in resolving conflicts in Africa and has remained strong in the heat as they carry out their mandate of peace and reconciliation. Further findings indicated total involvement of all Christian communities is instrumental in conflict resolution. The paper identifies causes of conflicts, effects of conflicts on development and the centrality of the African Obuntu philosophy on conflict resolutions. Kenya can be restored to its original state of peace and tranquility. This as the paper underlines can be attained through theological philosophies of anthropocentrism, christocentrism and theocentrism founded on peace, love and unity.

KEY WORDS*: Conflicts, the Church, Conflict resolutions, Reconciliation*

1.0 Introduction

The Church has over the years played a leading role in improving people's welfare through socio-economic development activities/programmes which focuses on alleviating poverty levels in many communities across the Africa Continent. A significant percentage of its population subsists at or below the level of absolute poverty, most countries owe massive and enormous debts, and ever-increasing numbers of its people are afflicted by AIDS, famine, ethnic division, and seemingly unending political turmoil. In light of these many problems, a number of Churches have in one way or another individually or in partnerships with various governments in Africa in addressing these challenges. Conflicts are part of human societies for as long as human beings have been in existence. Conflicts are not necessarily negative but they can also be a source of growth by dealing with the major causes of conflicts. Therefore this paper will be discussing the causes of conflicts in Africa, the effects of conflict and the role of the church in conflicts resolution in Africa. The paper will suggest mitigations methods that the church can use in conflicts resolution. The church has been playing a significant role in conflict resolutions in Africa and their role cannot be underrated. The purpose of this paper is to identify the major causes of conflicts in Africa, their effects and the role of the church in conflict resolution.

Most of the divisions being experienced in Africa have their roots in negative ethnicity; communities group themselves according to their ethnic base and sometimes fight along that line. This has increased death rate and underdevelopment in the continent in that people don't join their hands together for one common goal. Erected premises can be devastated for no good reason; violence and wars are heard everywhere. To large groups, ethnicity is a blessing while minority group considered as a curse because the majority ones engage in doing unbecoming to the minority. For Africa to be more stable and witness integrated kind of development; Love and unity must be given a chance. As a result, Church intervention with all the means of mitigating negative ethnicity in our communities is deemed as one of the crucial elements of nonviolent inhabitations. The church must make sure that the message of peace; love and unity are preached and embraced by the Christians in their respective places of living. Other elements such as publishing and dissemination of Christians' educative programs should be conducted on regular basis for peaceful coexistence to prevail.

1.2 Conflicts in Africa.

The second rise of Christianity in Africa came in the late 19th century when European powers seeking colonies in Africa coupled their activities with spread of Christianity and missionary activities in the continent were encouraged. Colonial powers used Christianity as an explanation for their aggression and conquest in Africa claiming that they wanted to spread Christianity and civilize the people. In this scenario the church played a role by helping spread violence and attacks on a people who had lived in peace since the time immemorial. The christians church have since then played a significant role in the conflicts either as participants or as solutions in conflicts in Africa and sometimes turning a blind eye to conflicts in the continent.

According to (Johnston and Cox 2001) religion is considered as a doubled edged sword in that church is a source of conflicts or it can also play the role of abating conflicts. In Rwanda the church was an active participant in the Rwanda genocide in 1994. However, the church has a spiritual mandate to strive for peace, justice and reconciliation by creating an inclusive society where communities can live together in unity, peace and harmony.

The role of the church in armed conflict can be seen all over the continent in various actions by the church. The church has been entangled in conflicts all over the continent. In the early years the church was seen as an agent of colonisation as it served the justification for the oppression, the humiliation and inhumanity against the African people throughout the continent. According to (Mardsen 2012) he cited three incidences where religion served of a source of legitimating violence , in south Africa religion was used to legitimatize violence between the Dutch reformed church that was favouring the apartheid systems while the Yugoslavia an and Serbians Orthodox church advocated for freedom. However later it's the involvement of religious actors that brought peaceful conflict resolutions, stable peace and reconciliation in the region (Mardsen 2012) .While discussing the double edged role of religion promoting violence and peace (Appleby 2000) stated that religion is a powerful medicine and should be administered in small doses.

1.3 Nature of conflicts in Africa

In the past few decades continent of Africa have been going through difficult times of ethnic conflicts and antagonism some of the conflicts have been resolved and others remains unresolved bedrock of conflicts . However some of the existing means of resolving conflicts have not yielded lasting results. Research indicates that two thirds of the emergent nations in Africa have undergone or they are currently undergoing through serious ethnic conflicts. Several countries like Congo, Sudan, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and many others have been reduced to theatres of conflicts .According to (Osaghae 1993) conflicts starts with war of words, a simple disagreement to a scenario whereby open violence becomes inevitable and a continuous hostile environment is perpetuated. Inter ethnic violence was termed as ethnic genocide by (Aggyeman 1992), erupts from issues ranging from land and natural resources. Countries like Nigeria, Chad, Ghana, Ethiopia Somali and Sudan have ha civil wars of ethnic scourge.

1.4 Major causes of conflicts in Africa.

Negative ethnicity has had immense ramifications on the development agenda in the third world countries where Africa is part. Over years race and ethnicity has been an integral part of the society and the power behind social advantage and inequalities. Minority groups have been marginalized simply because of the fact that they do not have political and economic muscles to champion for their rights. In Africa, political mobilization is ethically oriented. This paper took the Church as the major force of reducing or eliminating negative ethnicity by preaching messages of peace, love and unity to people in our societies. According to Acts 17:26, the Bible records, "From one man he made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."

1.4.1 Structural ethnic consciousness

They are various underlying causes of conflicts in Africa among them are structural ethnic consciousness that has been use by politicians to propagate their ideologies. Structural ethnic consciousness is basically consciousness of one's own origin, background and identification with a person's ethnic background. Therefore a high degree of ethnic consciousness, which is unguarded, can result to ethnic tensions where two opposing views converge. These has pledged nations into bloodshed, with case of South Africa apartheid, and worse of all is the case of Rwanda where countrymen butchered each other out of bitter ethnic prejudice. In Nigeria for instance there was an episode in the fifties during the first republic at the western house of assembly denied the eastern non Yoruba members from becoming the first premiers of western regions. This culminated in an ethnic conflict among the two groups.

1.4.2 Scarce resources

In most African states they are faced with scarce resources and this creates a competitive environment for the scarce resources. Those who have felt aggrieved and marginalized or consider themselves as minorities. Several theories attempted to explain conflict in the African continent and among them is the Marxist theory, the resource conflict theory and the greed versus grievance theory. The resource conflict theory seeks to explain conflict from the stand point or from the economical cause angle, and is especially used to explain resource conflict in the world. According to proponents of this theory conflicts arise due to the distribution of resources available and how scarcity and abundance affect conflicts it also address the nature of minerals and their relations to conflict.

The greed versus grievance theory seeks to explain conflict from a social perspective from the angle of the rebels and what motivates them to pick up arms and fight. According to proponents of the theory, most theories begin from a point grievance and over time fluctuate to greed and back to grievance and back forth. Rebel movements are seen to start from a point of grievance's based from exclusion segregation on ethnicity race religion or from a persecution but in the process of armed struggle they change and begin to be motivated by greed instead of grievance. A good example of this theory is the South Sudan conflict, while part of the larger Sudan the SPLA and the SPLM fought side by side against their common enemy the government of Khartoum due to segregation and persecution due to their religious inclination but shortly after attaining self government the two groups started to fight each other over the control of power which meant control of huge oil revenue. Another example is the rebels under Laurent Kabila in Congo who started out as a force seeking to oust the corrupt government of Mobutu Sese Seko yet after attaining power before his death he made no changes and neither did his successor

When there is unfair distribution of resources this leads to the rise of groups that see themselves as disenfranchised segregated and in turn this groups end up taking arms and rebelling against the government in order to receive their share of the pie/resources for example Mosop in Nigeria over oil revenues. Scarcity in the theory is seen to have the likelihood of causing conflicts as the groups involved battle for the scarce resources. The abundance of resources on the other hand is seen as less likely to lead to a conflict as there is enough to go around for all. The nature of the resource also matters when it comes to conflict and can be used to explain why two states with the same resource suffer from different fates for example as is the case for sierra lone and Angola compare to their African neighbour Botswana.

In a study done by (Githagaro 2012) in Kenya on the role of faith based organizations in peace building, it was affirmed that the 2007/2008 post elections violence on disputed elections were triggered and aggravated by inequalities in availability of resources with land issues taking the lead..

Conflict in the African continent has also been caused by various factors ranging from famine as in the case in Ethiopia where every time a major famine hits the population political turmoil takes place. With the sitting regime being overthrow for example Emperor Haile Selassie and the Derg regime a communist government lead by Haile Mariam Mengistu.   The other case is the Congo (DRC), Liberia, Somalia and DRC are categorised as genocide.

1.4.3 Foreign interference

Other factor include foreign interference of either former colonialists or interested power that be with a case in point in Angola between Jose Eduardo dos Santos and Savimbi, ideology i.e. communism and capitalism as was the case between Savimbi and dos Santos as well as in Mozambique between Frelimo and Renamo fighters or the Derg regime and Meles Zenawi and his guerilla fighters.

All the three countries mentioned have diamonds deposits that complement their economies. Whereas Botswana has had no conflict both Angola and sierra Leon have had conflicts which have been funded by diamond proceeds. The RUF in sierra Leon under Foddeh Sankoh would commit war crimes and plunge sierra Leon into a murky civil war leaving many dead and many displaced. By exporting diamonds through Liberia and selling them to the international market for guns and money the maintained a guerilla army comprising mainly of child soldiers to terrorise the tiny West African nation. Sankoh and the Ruf would use forced labour and maintain the diamond mines with a ruthless hand until they were defeated by Ecomog troops led by Nigeria that joined the UN troops from all over the world. In Angola the US backed Savimbi troops in buying their diamonds and in return they funded their war effort exchanging diamonds for guns as well as receiving aid from the American government to fight the soviet backed government of Jose Eduardo dos Santos with the civil war only ending with the death of Savimbi.

1.4.5 Transition

Other theories include the Marxist theory of class struggle that show the progression of a society from one economic stage to another and the class struggles involved for transition from one economy to another. The theory is based on the writings of Karl Marx and Thomas Engel with revisions made by Vladimir Ulyanov Lenin. According to the theory a society goes through several stages of production and in each stage the transition is marked by violence. The stages include the slave economy stage the feudal economy stage the capitalist economy stage the socialist stage and finally the communist stage.

1.4.6 Ethnic conflicts

According to Gecaga 2002 ethnic conflicts can be traced back to colonization, when they compressed communities into tribal cocoons through their ethnic barriers and isolation, they promoted ethnic consciousness at the expense of nationalism and patriotism. In Kenya ethnic clashes are only trigged during the elections like the 2007/2008 election with various underlying issues like historical injustices unfair distribution of resources. In the rift valley the cause of ethnic violence was a demonstration of bitter ethnic relations due to the perception that the Agikuyu grabbed land in the rift valley(Mwangi2011).

1.5 Effects of conflicts in Africa

Conflicts in Africa and the rest of the world have had very serious effects and repercussions, the effects include death destruction of property displacement of people the rise of child soldier's rape high mortality rates and poverty among others. Conflicts and violence's have caused untold deaths, destruction of property, increased unemployment, slow economic growth sexual violence and gross human rights violations (Githagaro   2012).

Child soldiers, in Africa have become synonymous phenomena in conflicts facing third world states in Africa the Asia pacific and the Middle East. In sub Saharan Africa states like the Central African,

Republic Sudan Congo DRC Burundi Chad Cote de'ivoire Somalia and Uganda during their experience with conflict have seen the emergence of child soldiers.

Most of these children in armed groups are either raped or have other traumatising events based on their experience in combat. Some of the initiation ceremonies include the use of drugs which then become part of the child's life and if these kids are not rescued they experience repressed psychological growth.

Some of the groups found to have child soldiers within their ranks in Africa include the RUF that was notorious for use of child soldiers the LRA of Uganda led Joshua Kony and Odhok Odhiambo both of whom have arrest warrants at the international criminal court for abduction and the use of child soldiers. Groups in DRC are notoriously known to have child soldiers within their ranks i.e. the MaiMai groups which are the largest recruiters of child soldiers.

Another effect of conflict is the prevalence of rape victims among young children and women, they are raped as they go about their normal life activities such as going to work or school can easily turn into rape victims. In a country like Congo rape is prevalent to a point it is labelled the rape capital. Human rights violations are the norm on both the government and the rebel groups with arbitrary arrest by the government and rape and torture on both sides. Sexual assault on women and children is of epic proportions', in 2005 there were 25000 reported cases of rape and sexual assault in a state where most cases go unreported with most being caught up in the war as refugees or as internally displaced persons.

Heal Africa hospital in Goma city in the east treated around 4500 patients of sexual assault specifically rape all these according to martin Bells report on DRC. Sexual violence is used as a weapon of war with the intentions being to humiliate to intimidate and tear apart families and communities or to force them into alliance where family members are forced to watch. Women and girls who become pregnant as a result of rape are further even rejected by their families and communities further complicating their lives is the after math of the rape and difficult pregnancies that follow that may end up in vaginal fistula which is caused by trauma to the body manifested in the inability to control bodily functions. The risk of HIV infection is also high in rape cases as most rebel fighter is HIV positive. The spread of sexually transmitted diseases is high because of lack of use of protection and rape and the commercialisation of sex (Githagaro 2012) .

Where there is conflict there is a high number of child deaths who bear the brunt of conflict diseases and death either as witnesses or as participants in atrocities which can lead to physical or psychological trauma, the lack of functioning services such as hospitals as well as poor nutrition leads to death of many children in their infancy or before they reach their teens. No place illustrates mortality rates in children than in DRC

DRC has the largest number of children with stolen childhood and suffering from trauma especially the eastern section of DRC. School age children do not go to school in eastern DR in the refugees camp there is   lack proper sanitation , lack access to clean water) prerequisites for investment hence more poverty and a dire humanitarian condition.

The immediate aftermath of conflict is poverty in a society. This results from the disruption of the economy and normal economic activities which take time to recover. People are forced to flee to refugee camps and live in tents with no viable economic activities to lift themselves from poverty and only survive through aid provided by aid organisations and non governmental organisations.

The most obvious result of war and conflict is death and destruction of property both of which go hand in hand. All conflicts in the world see the loss of lives the burning of homes buildings and the shelling of building that take time and resources to rebuild. When a conflict starts people begin to flee for safety and to escape the violence and the insecurities that follow with it. For example, the conflict in DR Congo has uprooted children from their lives evident in the large number of internally displaced persons 1.6 million IDPs who flee close UN camps MONUC/MONUSCO for security. Kenya for example is host to up to 500,000 refugees from Somalia alone.

1.6 The role of the church in conflicts resolution

The role of the church in conflicts resolution has been enormous, the church is vested with responsibility of with a spiritual mandate to enhance peace social justice and reconciliation by creating an inclusive society where people created in the image of God are expected to live in peace and harmony. In Kenya due to the close ties between the colonial government and the church the African nationalists and anti imperialism figures in society formed the African independent churches to serve as an alternative to colonial churches and schools to promote Africans and African cultures threatened by the colonial church.

1.6.1 Mediation

On a positive role the church has been involved in conflicts across the continent as a solution to some of the most devastating civil wars the continent has ever encountered. The community of saint Egidio (CSE) is a faith based peace building originally meant to serve the needs of the urban poor but in the 1980s turned towards reducing tensions among belligerent parties and mediate among them to reach a solution. The organisation formed in the 1968s has 50000 members in over 70 countries and has been involved in conflicts in DRC Mozambique sierra Leon and cote d''ivoire. In Mozambique some of the organisations notable works are evident, in their participation in the conflict resolution process culminated in the peace treaty between the belligerent parties.

In Kenya in the period between 1986 and 1992 the church in Kenya played a crucial role in opposing the closed political system of president Daniel Moi specifically the Anglican church of Kenya, ACK the Presbyterian church of east Africa, PCEA and the Catholic church that make up 70% of all church members in Kenya and the religious umbrella the NCCK the national council of churches in Kenya. It is good to note that not all churches under the NCCK called for change i.e. the African inland church and the Legio Maria sect were against any call for change. After the failed 1982 coup the Moi administration set out to crack down on any dissenting voices and those that opposed him were labelled rumour mongers anti unity and "tribalist" as they moved towards a de-jure one party system.

The church became one of the few remaining institutions to express dissatisfaction and to confront the excesses of the state and therefore the rise of church leaders who served as critic's such as bishop Okullu alexander Kipsang Muge and David Gitari of the CPK church others include timothy Njoya of PCEA and bishop Ndingi Mwana Nzeki of the Catholic Church with the catholic church openly claiming that it would fight the reduction of the gap between the poor and the rich as well as corruption. On the other hand, Bishop Muge went further to claim that the church had a right to give a voice to the voiceless bishop Okullu as early as 1974 had called for the establishment of a democracy.

As time went by the churches mentioned above adopted as official policy stances that would be put them at odd with the government and would be joined by opposition politicians later on

participating in the call for the end of one party rule as well as the correcting the injustices in society. In response the president accused the church of causing problems especially after the clashed in the rift valley began. The church was accused of furthering ethnic dispute especially since the catholic church the PCEA and the ACK were mainly made up of large kikuyu congregation's but this was a larger discourse regarding the nature of Kenyan politics. In the end the opposition the church with the help fro the international community through starving the state of donor funds would lead to the repeal of section 2A of the constitution and the end of the one party system returning to a democratic society. In this case the church was an active participant in the conflict actively against the government and in collaboration with the opposition (Galia and Sabra 1997).

In Nigeria Quakers were involved in mediating conflicts in 1967-1970 between the warring parties during the Biafran war. In Sudan the all African Conference of Churches mediated between the southern and Northern Sudan that culminated into signing of the 1972 Addis Ababa peace agreement. In South Africa Christianity was a contributing factor in the truth and reconciliation commission. They lead the negotiations between Nelson Mandela of the ANC and William de Clerk of the national party and apartheid came to an end after forty years. Later there was promulgulation into law that saw the registration of TRC to investigate the atrocities and recommend compensation (Shore2008).They deliberately appealed to Christians to be truthful as a method of promoting reconciliation among themselves, and to mobilize communities for peace.

1.6.2 Healing and Reconciliation.

The church has access on daily basis to meeting their parishioners and therefore has a place of influence that they can use to bring social moral and spiritual influence in conflict resolution (Bercovitch and Orellana 2009) .They have been involved in bringing together warring communities and leaders in the post conflict resolution building efforts . The church leaders are empowered to preach reconciliatory messages to the congregants, holding public barazas and holding intra ethnic dialogue with the aim of forgiving each other, reconciling communities and urging them to coexist in harmony.(Githagaro2012).

In South Africa where the church played an active role in trying to heal the nation and move forward from the atrocities of the apartheid era committed by both side in the conflicts through the truth and reconciliation commission. This is evident in the fact that the reconciliation commission was led by a member of the clergy and an opponent of apartheid policies in South Africa bishop Desmond Tutu. The church was actively involved especially in the local communities where they facilitated gross human rights violation hearings. Through the South African council of churches, they organised hearings and created publicity and numerous commissioners of the TRC were clergy members who helped administer the most successful truth and reconciliation in the continent through the use of effective communication strategies. The church has continued to use the strategic roadmap, to national healing peacebiulding and reconciliation with the goal of overcoming social political and religious cleavages while mending and transforming relationships (Towards a reconciled, peaceful and prosperous Liberia 2010-2013) The truth and reconciliation commission was formed in Liberia composed of church leaders to deal with transitional process after the authoritarian government under the military of civilian rule. Its role was to address unresolved issues arising from past human rights violations (Shore 2009).

1.6.3 Negotiation and dialogue

In reference to war in; Liberia the religious actors especially both Christian and Muslims women played an active role and helped in resolving civil war through negotiation of peace dialogues between Taylor rebels and the government of Liberia during president's Doe's administrations as the war continued (Gbowee, 2011). Shore 2009 noted that the religion must take into count as religion plays a significant role in people's lives. Therefore diplomat's peace makers cannot succeed without the religious people coming on board. The Liberian Christians condemned, denouncing their actions and calling for the immediate end of the conflicts from both sides. They called for immediate cease fire, round table conferences and internal security, offering protections to all and finally there was ceasefire Later they involved religious women who were meeting every Tuesday for prayers, and the women engaged warlords at various peace conferences influencing them towards peace (Gbowee 2011).Women intervention involved Gbwee 2011 peace foundations Africa prayer and fasting and peaceful protest in the streets, they compelled Taylor to participate in peaceful dialogue with the rebels. The religious women influenced the warlord sand government representatives reached into final peace agreement (Gbhowee2011).

1.7 Conclusion

The role of the church has been greatly felt in trying to resolve conflicts in he continent of Africa. However the role of conflict resolution in African other instances the church has been accused of fanning conflict , while in some cases the church has received all manner of counter accusation from the government of the day for their role in conflict resolution. However the church has remained strong in the heat in they carry their mandate   of peace and reconciliation. In many instances the mission of the church has been more endangered and especially if the church took sides in the conflicts. The church being the salt and the light of the world however has continued and should continue with the mission of conflict resolution in Africa.

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