

Mediation: An Inseparable Component Of The Christian Gospel Mandate In The Face Of Incessant Conflict In Nigeria

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Abstract: Most Christian denominations in Nigeria do not consider peace initiatives and the act of mediation as pertinent roles of the Christians; they rather see it as that of the government or the Non-Governmental Organizations NGOs. While they believe the imperative nature of the gospel mandate is an obligation, they do not somehow consider that that responsibility applies to the mediation efforts. Paradoxically, both mediation and gospel mandate are in agreement in the sense that they both address conflict in all forms, and aim at gaining peace to the conflicting parties. This paper employed qualitative research methodology. The data collected are from the internet and library resources. The evidence presented in this paper suggests that it is imperative for Christian denominations in Nigeria in particular and the world at large to consider mediation as part of the gospel mandate. Therefore, for the Christian denominations to be proactive in peace initiatives, they need to craft a theology that will anchor mediation as a Christian doctrine, hence making mediation an imperative to Christian believers.

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is as an inseparable part of human life. To a large extent conflicts occur as a result of competition, control and disagreement over resources. It has occurred in various dimensions in Nigeria (Mavalla, 2014). For example the large influx of Herdsmen into the north central and southern parts of the country has been largely responsible for the Fulani herdsmen and Farmers conflict. The major contention is over grazing area as it is believed that the type of grasses in the north central, the south and the quest for pasture suitable for the herds have made the desire to graze in these regions inevitable. Since the number of Fulani herdsmen is increasing as well as the population of the farmers on the same land, therefore the desire to protect their interest over the single resource has resulted to conflict. This conflict has become an albatross to the Nigerian Nation as there seem to be no end to it (Nwamuo 2012).

Again Nigeria is faced with the oil conflict in the Niger Delta region. This region is endowed with enormous oil resource which is important to the sustenance of the Nigerian

economy. As a result of the importance of this single resource, there is struggle over its control and this has resulted to violent conflict between the indigenes or the oil bearing communities on one side and the oil companies and the government on the other. The communities believe that they are short-changed in the sharing of the oil proceed while the state see oil as a state resource which must be controlled by the state (Nwamuo 2015)

In the north-eastern part of Nigeria, the Boko Hara Islamist group is in conflict with the government and this has affected the security of the zone. These are some of the major violent conflicts that are facing Nigeria. These conflicts and other conflicts involve people who belong different religious organisations and have different religious beliefs. However, the role of Christians in mediating in these conflicts is key to their resolution. Therefore, this paper examines the mandate of Christians and Christian denominations in mediation in conflict.

II. CONFLICT AND THE SOCIETY

There is no society that is immune to violent conflict. Conflict is a part of human existence. Therefore, one is right to conclude that conflict is embedded in the human society. Continuous conflict often escalates into violence. Sadly, violent conflict has continued to grow more violent and become more frequent in our society, particularly in this day and age. Conflict in all aspects of human existence has destabilized peaceful co-existence in human society. Different organizations are affected by conflict and conflict being a perennial issue is not a one-time episode, but a continuous phenomenon, hence, the need for each Christian denomination in Nigeria to craft a robust mediation strand to effectively take care of the incessant conflicts within their ranks and files and their neighbouring communities as well.

The gospel commission will certainly include the vertical dimension (reconciling human with God) and the horizontal dimension (reconciling human with fellow human), which is best carried out through mediation and conciliation. One of the Christian denominations, Seventh-day Adventist has as one of their fundamental beliefs, states that the main purpose of the Church is to serve all mankind, and the worldwide proclamation of the gospel (Ministerial Association 1988)

God loves peace. In the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation, he has shown desire to bless his people with peace and to empower them to bring peace to others (Sande 2004). The reason is that we are in conflict as long as life lasts. The human propensity to behave violently towards fellow humans seem to have been wired into the human's DNA. In spite of the human condition, God has not forsaken us. He sent his only begotten Son to pay the price of human wrongs and to set man free from the eternal consequences of sin (John 3: 16). Taking human sins to the cross, Jesus paid for humans' wrongs and reconciled man to God, his heavenly Father (1 Peter 3: 18). The ransom Christ offered is not only to reconcile man to God, but also to reconcile humans' interpersonal conflict including the intra-personal conflict too. God expect His love, which has been received by Christians, to be reflected in the way they love one another and others who are not of their own community of faith (John 13: 34-35). God is pleased when His people resolve their conflicts in a way that blesses those around them and strengthens their relationships (John 17: 23). This can best be carried out through Christian mediation. Paul, the apostle, states that Jesus gave Christians the mandate to continue the ministry of reconciliation in the world (Sande, & Raabe, 2002).

Violent conflict calls for the services of mediators to help in resolving not only the abuses of human rights, power or political positions or issues involving money, but also for honest and compassionate communication, respect, trusting symbiotic relationships, responsibility, and forgiveness (Cloke, 2001).

III. CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

This section looks at three key concepts this are: conciliation, Mediation and reconciliation.

Conciliation is the voluntary referral of a conflict to a neutral external party that either suggests a non-binding settlement or conducts explorations to facilitate more structured techniques of resolving conflict. The structured techniques would include confidential discussions with the conflicting parties or assisting them in the process of negotiation phase. "Conciliation has meaningful contribution in maintaining agreements and preventing future conflict over other issues. The impartiality of a third party is core to the conciliation process as is the party's non-intervention in the conflict (Miller, 2005). Johnston and Sampson, argue that a conciliation relates to the actions taken by a third party with the aim of improving the behaviour of disputing parties towards one another by correcting misperceptions, improving communication, and reducing the basis for unreasonable fears (Johnston, and Sampson, 1995). These two key terms (mediation and conciliation) are often used as synonyms, even among scholars in the field of Peace and Conflict Studies. For instance, Curle, in listing out the responsibilities of a mediator, refers to mediation as the act of helping to improve effective communication between the conflicting parties (Curle, 1986).

Johnston, and Sampson in their discussion on the role of Quaker conciliation during the Nigerian Civil War titled "To Make Real the Bond between Us All", identify the act of opening of communication lines as the responsibility of the conciliator (Johnston, and Sampson, 1995). Writing on the same topic, Bailey, in his article, "Non-official Mediation in Disputes: Reflection on Quaker Experience," describes the role of the Quakers in the Nigeria-Biafra civil war as mediation (Bailey 1985).

Mediation is the act of resolving major differences by a third party who takes an intermediary role between two or more conflicting parties. A third party, the mediator, has no power in decision making. The role of the mediator is to support the conflicting parties to arrive voluntarily at an amicable decision that will put an end to their violent conflict. The mediator helps to improve the behaviour of conflicting parties towards one another (largely by correcting misperceptions, improving communication, and reducing unreasonable fears) (Curle, 1986; cf Johnston, and Sampson, 1995).

Reconciliation is an attempt to change a protracted or lingering violence between parties into the feelings of acceptance and even the forgiveness of past animosities or detrimental acts. Reconciliation is largely used in a religious context, but it also has political implications. However, the term is religious; it is not found in the Old Testament of the Bible. Reconciliation is essential to creating conditions for durable resolutions and stability, without which the trauma of extensive violence is often passed on to future generations, contributing to perpetual cycle reprisal violence. Again reconciliation helps in settling the disputes as mediation and conciliation (Miller, 2005). Christians are expected to perform these duties in line with their religious obligation. However some Christian tenets may not be acceptable to some people and this may make mediation by Christians and Christian denominations difficult but as a religious obligation,

Christians should devise means of mediation when non-Christians are involved in conflict.

IV. THE GOSPEL MANDATE

There are three dimensions to the peace God gives to humanity through Christ: peace with God, peace with one another and peace with oneself. It is sad that many people desire peace within themselves, but care less about peace with God and peace with other people. It is impossible to have eternal peace unless they pursue peace with God and with other people Sande, 2004). This is a summary of the gospel mandate, which made it imperative upon all Christians and with no exceptions.

The Christian mandate includes the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-19), which requires all Christians to act as ambassadors of goodwill, openness and forgiveness. The correlation between the Gospel commission and mediation work is congruous since both aspire to bring peace to troubled souls, thus, restoring back bartered relationship (Mavalla 2014).

V. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOSPEL MANDATE AND MEDIATION

The Bible has two major ethnic and multi-ethnic societies chosen by God to make His character known through them to the people of their times. They are the Jews in the Old Testament and the Christians in the New Testament. From biblical accounts, the two groups in the Old and New Testaments were to share the peace of the Almighty God to the surrounding nations thus implying the concept of mediation. Conflicts cause a breakdown in a community's interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationship is a vital ingredient in a community's well-being. Conflict is "a relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have, or think they have, incompatible goals" (Clore, 2001: 4). According to Mayer, conflict may be viewed as occurring along cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions (Mayer, 2000). Individuals in conflict, in their attempt to get out of the conflict sometimes reach a stalemate which makes it difficult to move forward and get the peace they dearly desire. Hence the need of a mediator, a third party, to help them navigate their difficulties in forging for peace.

Galtung, says that conflict can act as a creator and also as a destroyer (Galtung 2003) Conflict as a destroyer is what mediation seeks to eliminate. Therefore, the concept of mediation simply means 'change' in the sense of changing human relationships that have been broken as a result of interpersonal sin.

The gospel mandate is entrusted to Christians who served as third party to help people entrenched in sin, and consequently, invite sinners to reconcile with God, thus, meeting the demand of the vertical relationship. When two persons are involved in fierce disagreement or violent conflict they need a mediator, a third party, to help them to amicably reach a resolution of their problem with one another, thus, meeting horizontal relationship requirement. The two concepts

aspire to give peace and mend human broken relationships, whether vertical or horizontal connection. Both the gospel mandate and mediation desire to transform the human situation for better. Mediation is a biblical terminology which is a role played by Christ our Saviour. It is expected that Christians should exemplify their maker as they embed mediation as a conduit through which believers are able to radically and permanently change human interpersonal relationship. The gospel envisages this for every dimension of life. This includes personal, corporate and universal transformation and a new created order, which is in conformity with the kingdom of God. So, the effect of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, when they are present and active in people and in communities, lead to a change of attitude. The Apostle Paul calls Christians to a process of transformation, urging them not to conform to the world, but to be agents of positive change.

The theological component of some of the reasons why Christians should engage in mediation, like the Old Order of the Mennonites, that sees mission not only in the light of proselytizing, but rather as committed to "peace-work as a mission." This enables the Christian mission to focus more on the life of Jesus, whose principal endeavours involved among others the teaching of non-resistance. Mission means to stand for a certain faith and a certain way of behaving in the world. Mediation and peace-making, with their "emphasis on deep resolution of conflict and its involvement of social justice as a component of peace-making, emerge out of an attempt to address the evil of the worldly realm" Gopin 2000: 255).

The active participation of mediation in religion does two key things: firstly, it shapes Christians and encourages them to be proactive in peace initiatives, as a fulfilment of the gospel mandate. Secondly, it helps in shaping mediation that reflects and responds to the realities of contemporary conflicts. Appleby argues that, "contemporary conflicts tend to be internal, precipitated by the failure of states to address fundamental needs and ensure an equitable distribution of the resources and benefit to a variety of competing ethnic or religious groups" Appleby, 2001: 826). The third thing that mediation does to participants is that it triggers that godly nature in man because he was created in the image of God, the God of relationships, who created humans because he wanted someone to return His love. Hence, to be human is to relate to another human in some way.

The position of the religious actors in mediation and peace-making is a strategic social location because religion is rooted in local communities with representatives operating in regional, national, and often international organizations. They are able to display, therefore, a powerful and pervasive international presence and exercise an important cultural role. Their easy access to the masses, their reputation for integrity in most settings and their long record of charitable services have earned some religious leaders and institutions a privileged status and unparalleled legitimacy, especially in societies where they enjoy a measure of independence from the state (Appleby, 2001).

Furthermore, this position makes the religious leaders (such as ministers, pastors, imams, religious scholars, lay leaders, monks and rabbis and the organizations they represent) creditable agents of mediation and peace-making.

In Nigeria, the Christian denomination's leaders should further intensify their engagement in training their adherents on the rudiments of how to avoid violent conflict and at the same time how they can mediate on the existing conflicts, hence, their contributions to peace in their communities. Furthermore, teach members on ways to identify early warning signs of incoming violent conflict. Christian leaders 'in some cases... have contributed not only to resolving the immediate crisis, but also to reforming the long term social structures that foster and perpetrate the religious hatred, racism, or other forms of discrimination at the root of the conflict'. They have worked to repair broken relationships and have also confronted inequalities in the political and economic system (*ibid*). It must be said here that, some degree of success was recorded even without an articulated theology of mediation as a key doctrine, which means that this meagre success needs to be complimented with an unambiguous 'mediation doctrine' as response to violent conflict. Notwithstanding, Christian religion has the power for both violence and peace as is well documented, (Nelson-Pallmeyer 2005) although peace is the core tenet in both Christianity and Islam (Appleby, 2001).

The word peace (*Shalom*) in Hebrew and in Arabic (*Salam*), signifies a fundamental sense of completeness in terms of peace, security and health (Hastings, 1963). The word peace is used to describe freedom from any form of violent conflict or war, peace is best described as the tranquillity of the heart, political and social stability, which can be secured permanently only through a reconciliation between humans, man to his community and community to community. The concept of mediation, in a Christian religious sense, deals ultimately with the settling of the relationship between God and humans and is the core of the gospel mandate and mediation. This mandate must be pursued by every Christian denomination.

Furthermore, the Old Testament defines peace as a harmonious and complete state of being, hence, the security of life, property, welfare, health, contentment and cessation of violent conflict or war (Gehman, 1970). Thus, in Homer, peace is presented as cessation of violent action, whether among the gods or among humans. When injustice and violence momentarily stop, peace is granted to the community" (Bartoli, 2004: 154). However, the fallen nature of man makes *shalom* or *eirene* (in Greek) difficult to achieve, this is why mediation becomes imperative for Christians as part of Christ's commission to his followers.

The gospel mandate is clearly outlined in the book of Matthew 28:16-20; 2 Cor. 5:17-19 and Rev 14:6-12, which implies the core reason for the existence of the Christian Church is the reconciliation of man to God and between humans. The two texts show the scope of the gospel mandate and its urgency, as illustrated by the swift flying of the angel to preach the good news of salvation to ".... them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, tongue, and people...." (Rev. 14:6). The Christians are to act as God's ambassadors on earth. The connection between the gospel commission and mediation is that both address conflict in all forms and they both aspire to restore broken relationships whether between man and God or between man and man.

In the ministry of Jesus, his focus is on reconciling people who have been in conflict with one another, such as the

Pharisees, sinners, the poor, Zealots and tax-collectors. This was the reason that he was known as a man of peace. But how do we reconcile these two apparently contradictory approaches to conflict? Jesus made a distinction between the peace that God wants and worldly peace (Jn. 14:27). The peace that God wants is a peace that is anchored in truth, justice and love. Worldly peace is a superficial peace and unity that compromises the truth, covers the injustices and usually settles for selfish purposes. This is the kind of peace that Jesus destroys, the false peace, and He even highlights the conflicts in order to promote a true and lasting peace. It is not a question of preserving peace and unity at all costs, especially at the cost of truth and justice. Rather, truth and justice must be promoted at all cost, even at the cost of creating conflict and dissension along the way (Bartoli, 2004).

How is the gospel commission relevant to peace and mediation? The key to Christ's mission and doctrine is mediation and reconciliation. According to Isaiah 9: 6, 7 cf. Micah 5: 5, Christ is the prince of peace. Jesus came into the world to reveal the character of God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus revealed qualities that bring *makarios* (happy or fortunate), *makarioi* plural translated as blessed in the King James version (KJV) of the Bible as in Matthew 5: 9, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God". This verse could be rewritten as happy or fortunate are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God (Francis, et al 1980). Peace-making or mediation is tied to the identity of the children of God. Peacemaker *eirenopoioi* is from *eirene*, "peace" *poieo* "to make."

The mission of Christ was to bring reconciliation between humans and God as well as human to human (*ibid*). Peace is central to the understanding of God's plan for his human creatures, hence, Jesus brought peace through his death and resurrection. "This redemptive action did not take the form of a conquest, but of a fragile path, exemplified by a suffering servant of God who was able to explore, present, and reveal the possibilities of forgiving love" (Bartoli, 2004).

In order to understand what Jesus meant when He spoke of "peace-makers," it is helpful to take note of the meaning of peace in Semitic thinking and speech. The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *eirene* is *shalom* means "completeness," "soundness," "peace". In view of the fact that Christ and the common people used Aramaic, a language closely akin to Hebrew, Jesus doubtless used the word with its Semitic connotations. Christians are to be at peace among themselves (1 Thess. 5: 13) and to "follow peace with all men" (Hebrew 12:14) Francis, et al 1980). In case of any contradiction to this peace, mediation should be the process that will culminate in reconciliation.

According to SDA Bible Commentary v. 5, Christians are called to pray and work for peace by taking an active role in reconciling people going through social conflict of our times both in the Church and the society outside the Church. Christians are admonished to take a constructive interest in activities that contribute to a peaceful state of society. In the Greco-Roman literature, it is often the duty of the kings to establish peace (Emerton, Cranfield, and Stanton, 1988). In the book of Revelation, Christians are reminded that they are princes and kings (Revelation 1: 6; 5: 10; 20: 6). Therefore,

Christians are expected to promote and establish peace as priests and kings in the community God has placed them.

The understanding of peace and mediation are anchored in Jesus Christ's ministry, his life and death. Both Bartoli and Raven seem to regret that, Christians claim to believe and accept the validity of the life and death of Jesus Christ, but in practice they explain away the centre of Christ's teaching on love. Love is the basis of all human relationships. God's love was demonstrated by Jesus when he left his blissful environment of heaven to come to this world and freely offered his life to atone for the transgression of the human family. The early apostles believed and recorded that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the way of the cross, is compulsory for those who would follow in His foot step. This is the Christian ministry of reconciliation, which, Jesus left for the Christians to do and He has equipped the Christians by committing the word of the reconciliation to them (Bartoli, 2004) (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

VI. THE CHRISTIAN DENOMINATION HAS THE CAPACITY AND RESOURCES FOR MEDIATION

Christian denominations have the capacity to carry out mediation successfully. The resources and materials for this include human resources and, as Christianity is deeply rooted in spirituality, the rituals based on their Holy Scriptures and sacred texts. Galtung, has argued that peace can be best achieved by peaceful means (Galtung 2003) he agrees that the peaceful co-existence between humans is easier to achieve through non-violence. Raven says that non-violence is strongly connected to spirituality (Raven, 1951). Spirituality is a divine grace that controls an individual, who has accepted and pays his or her allegiance to Christ. Spirituality contributes to a better understanding of the ways in which internalized values find expression in external acts and behaviour of human beings. Furthermore, spirituality is connected to peace (Zahn, 1992).

Peter Clarke argues that some Christian denominations and individual Christians across the globe have drifted from keeping the biblical truth, which is exhibited in agape love, but embraced falsehood. He outlines three key factors that are responsible for Christian failures in the light of the Bible as follows: the lack of godly love, which he describes as lack of conscience and sensitivity; the false belief that makes people feel some are less human and fear that destroys love (Clake, 1986).

It is worth noting that there are some of the hurdles to be encountered in mediation process which are: impasses, stalemates and deadlocks. *Impasse* refers to complete disagreement on one issue, which threatens the mediation process. *Stalemate* is when both sides are still talking, but had serious difficulty to make any progress toward achieving solution; *deadlock* simply means the lack of progress, which has frustrated both sides so much that they see no reason to continue talking to each other anymore (Dawson 2001).

VII. CONCLUSION

This article, has established the link between the gospel mandate and mediation which is one of the processes of leading warring parties into reconciliation in order to achieve a peaceful harmony. This is because, both the goal of the gospel mandate and mediation is to bring about peaceful relationships both with God and humans. This correlation between the gospel and reconciliation justifies the reason why mediation is considered a Christian imperative and not an option. Also, the gospel is so much about influencing Christian adherents to restore their community relations. To effect any reconciliation between people who have lived as enemies requires effort of Christians to act as mediators, thus reconciling them to each other by changing the disputing parties' attitude toward one another. The change of attitude is from hate to love, from violence to peace.

The promotion of mediation in Christian faith does two key things: firstly, it shapes Christians and encourages them to be proactive in peace initiatives, as a fulfilment of the gospel mandate. Secondly, it helps in crafting mediation behaviours that reflect and respond to the realities of contemporary violent conflicts.

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