

Peace and Reconciliation: A Religious and Educational Priority in Nigeria

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Abstract

The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed civil wars, conflicts and destruction of properties to the extent that the contemporary world is regarded as conflict prone. What is said about the world can also be true of Nigeria because it has had its own share in the shedding of blood as well as involved in the escalated conflicts which have resulted in the destruction of properties and forceful deprivation of peoples' farmlands. The Nigerian Civil War in the past and the recent killings by the Fulani Jihadists are glaring examples. When lives are lost through shedding of blood, the parties involved regard themselves as enemies. Consequently, revenge is followed by counter-revenge and more blood is shed. Nigeria has lived under this tensed situation for a long time. As a result, some ethnic groups who feel aggrieved are calling for separation or for the disintegration of the country. There is mistrust and suspicion everywhere. It is on this basis that this article explores possible avenues through which education could bring reconciliation in order to forestall the imminent disintegration of the country. The article emphasizes the important role education could play to bring about reconciliation, peace and unity in the country. It also highlights the necessity of reconciliation in restoring national integrity and solidarity. In order to achieve these objectives, the article used historical research method for investigating, recording, analysing and interpreting events of the past in order to understand the present. The article recommends the teaching of reconciliation in Nigerian schools, the exchange of expert teachers on reconciliation to schools, re-introducing religious studies where children will be taught forgiveness and love of one another, and the formation of the committee for truth, reconciliation and national integration.

Key Words: Education, Peace, Reconciliation and Religion

Introduction

Certain things are important to humanity; however, some other things are of great priority and should be pursued with great vigour and earnestness. This article deals with education and reconciliation which it considers a national and religious priority because of the contemporary world that is becoming conflict prone. Instead of these many conflicts, the world should be re-focused to what is more essential to human life namely peace and unity. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed many wars, conflicts, loss of lives and destruction of properties. What is said of the world is also true of Nigeria because Nigeria has had her own share in the shedding of blood in all ramifications. It becomes necessary to ask these questions: What is wrong? What are the roles of education and religion in these ugly situations?

This article aims at creating an intellectual and spiritual awareness through the mediation of education and religion. The article examines the meaning and importance of education with emphasis on its role for social reconstruction. It will also consider the necessity of reconciliation in a country that is heavily divided as a result of conflict and shedding of blood. Taking stock of the previous evils, the article will demonstrate that reconciliation is indeed a national and religious priority.

Education

Education has many definitions and could be discussed under different angles and dimensions. The dimension this article tries to highlight focuses on the salient areas where education features prominently in personal restoration,

social reconstruction and national reconciliation. Thus, Education therefore means to bring up, to draw out, to lead out, to nourish, to raise and to train.

Farrant (1991) recognises and combines two ideas when he explains that:

Two ideas are implicit in the word education. One is that of leading out into a new knowledge and experience. The other is that of feeding and thereby growing and developing. Both are helpful in understanding what education is and both points to the fact that education is an essential process in human development (p. 18)

Onwughalu (2016) cited President Lyndon Johnson as saying: "For the individual education is the path to achievement and fulfilment; for the Nation, it is a path to a society that is not only free, but civilized and for the world, it is a path to peace-for it is education that places reason over force" (p.86). This is a well-reasoned and articulated statement by a statesman who knows the value of education and wisely acknowledged its role to an individual, to a nation and to the world in general. President Lyndon Johnson encapsulated what the eminent educationists advocated; for example, Erasmus saw education as developing real wisdom while for Froebel, it is leading and guiding for peace and unity with God and with one another in order to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously at all times, there is need to dispel error and discover truth as proposed by Socrates. When we look at what is happening all over the world, we wonder and we begin to ask why do we have wars and conflicts when there is high level of education everywhere. Is our education limited to training of the intellect, without refining the heart and disciplining the spirit? It is at this point that this article considers one of Plato's objectives of education as very apt when he argued the importance of identifying conflicting elements in individuals, in the nation and in the world and then tries to harmonise them.

Education for Social Reconstruction

The advocates for social reconstructionist education hold that it is based on the society can be reconstructed through complete control of education. Ukeje (1978) affirms that: "the problems of education can never be isolated from those of society as a whole. And those problems will differ from society to society in space and in time" (p1). From time to time, things go out of shape and when this happens, they are reconstructed. Reconstruction therefore can take place on anything, anytime. When what holds a society or a nation falls apart because of misunderstanding, conflict and war, there is need to bring members of that country together again. This is the role education is expected to play. Some of these roles of education can be somehow subtle. In the case of real violent conflict, there are hurts and hatred especially among the victims.

Huyse (2003) describes the place of social reconstruction in a more refined way because social reconstruction demands respecting the rights of those the powerful detest. This respect in reality is the assertion of one's own humanity. Since human beings are both constructors and builders, they attain full mental, moral and spiritual relations necessary for better coexistence with others. This is more fruitful when there are cooperative efforts to produce material, artistic and spiritual goods and achievements. These achievements could be possible through the mediation of education where it is expected to prepare students for such productive activities. It is no longer in doubt that education has the capacity to influence the society and the people in it. Russell (2003) understands the role of education in respect of society well when he argues that education is the process of the perfection of the human beings. Education is not only the process of transmission of external information but it aims at the broad cultivation of the mind leading to an awareness of man's place and destiny in the society and the universe. This creation of awareness is very vital because there is need for intellectual awareness as well as spiritual awareness for social

reconstruction and reconciliation to take place. Life is central in every circumstance that involves human beings. For Dewey (2011) life is growing and education is the process of this ever-increasing growth. If there is growth in education, education should play important role in social reconstruction in order to maintain this growth.

One of the things that obstructs intellectual growth is war. Education has a duty to create this awareness to the growing people so that they avoid war and its consequences. Where such wars and conflicts had existed, education should teach students to reconcile, unite, and live in peace with everybody so as to rebuild the society that has been destroyed by hatred, war and violent conflicts. This brings us to the role education could play to bring about peace.

Peace Education

Harris and Morrison (2011) argue that “Since war begins in the mind of man, it is in the mind of man that the foundation of peace must be constructed”. This statement challenges education to be inward looking. This explains why Harris and Morrison (2011) further define peace education as the process of teaching people about the threats of violence and the various possible strategies for peace. Peace education has an important social purpose and education should emphasize this aspect. Harris and Morrison are right when they highlight the key objectives of peace education as: changed attitudes, increased tolerance and reduced prejudices which are often rooted in ethnicity, religion or gender.

In order to have reconciliation and social reconstruction, there is need for peace. There will be no permanent peace when there are prejudices and insensitivity as a result of intolerance. Education should erase these vices from the minds of young people and replace them with those values and virtues that build the society. Harris and Morrison in their foresight recall that in a post conflict context, effective peace education has a more practical focus because it stimulates empathy, cooperation and reconciliation. In other

words, education creates a deep awareness that builds and sustains peace and reconciliation.

Discussion on Reconciliation

Reconciliation has many definitions depending on the angle one looks at it. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on historical principles defines reconciliation as: ' the action or an act of reconciling a person to oneself, or another or estranged parties to one another. It goes on to define reconciliation as the action or an act of settling or causing agreement in a controversy, quarrel...' These two definitions are in consonance with our aim in this article. In this article, the attention is focused on that action or an act of reconciling a person to oneself or another or estranged parties to one another.

There is always an estrangement because of broken relationship which has grown sour. This explains why Douglas (1963) argues that reconciliation properly applies not to good relationship in general but to the doing away of an enmity, the bridging over of a quarrel. Agreeing to these definitions, Tutu (2003) argues that the aim of reconciliation is to build a shared future from a divided past. This divided past is what causes estrangement and when this estrangement sets in, people part ways to the detriment of future development, peace and unity. In order to emphasize the importance of reconciliation in such circumstance, Tutu insists, there is no future without forgiveness which comes through reconciliation.

In a more elaborate way, Harak (2007) documents:

Understood best as one of a constellation of attitudes and practices such as contrition, forgiveness and mercy, reconciliation's chief feature is that it must be mutual: both the wrongdoer and the wronged must accede to and practise the restoration of a relationship. Furthermore, Reconciliation can take place after the wrongdoer has suffered punishment in contrast to the exercise of mercy (p. 1134).

In whichever way reconciliation is considered, it focuses on estranged relationship that should be restored. It is on this platform that Ayanga (2008) argues that reconciliation is brought into play, where there are two or more parties involved in some conflict, misunderstanding or estrangement. In this case, reconciliation is an effort to normalize relationships that have gone sour. Ayanga extends this reconciliation by insisting that there is need for reconciliation between God and human beings, and human beings and nature. Ayanga is not a lone voice in his opinion. Other authors are of the opinion that there is need to reconcile with nature and the environment. In article 463, the Catholic Social Doctrine of the church teaches that a correct understanding of the environment prevents the utilitarian reduction of nature to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited. When the environment is overly manipulated and exploited, there is an estrangement which obviously needs reconciliation and normalisation. Consequently, Ayanga (2008) was emphatic to insist that:

Reconciliation is necessary between human beings and the environment. Degradation of the environment has raised global concerns bringing to the fore the conflict between human being and nature. It has also heightened the conflict between people and other occupants of the environment (p.115).

Certainly, reconciliation between human beings among themselves, between human beings and the environment or between nations and nations cannot be fully achieved without reconciliation with God.

This explains why Fleming (1990 p.366) argues:

Man need to be reconciled to God; that is he needs to be brought back from a state of hostility to a state of peace; from being an enemy to being a friend. He offers suggestion on how this reconciliation could be achieved by saying the only that reconciliation can occur is through removal of the cause of hostility. He goes

on to affirm that Christ did this when he died on the cross; he bore man's sins.

In spite of the fact that Christ died in order to break the hostility between human beings and God, human beings continue to be more and more estranged from God the creator. Since we have defined reconciliation and explained it, it is expedient to discuss reconciliation under some headings beginning with the process of reconciliation.

The Process of Reconciliation

Some experts have made key salient points to guide us in this discussion namely that reconciliation is a complex term, because it is both a goal-- something to achieve and a process- a means to achieve the goal. In order to discuss the process of reconciliation, Tutu's remarks are very vital and helpful. He comments thus:

Reconciliation cannot be imposed from outside, or can someone else's map get us to our destination: it must be our solution. This involves a very long and painful journey, addressing the pain and the suffering of the victims, understanding the motivations of offenders, bringing together the estranged communities, trying to find a path to justice, truth and ultimately, peace. Faced with each new instance of violence conflict, new solutions must be devised that are appropriate to the particular context, history and culture in question (2003, p.1).

This description given by Tutu goes a long way to confirm that the road to Reconciliation is not only long and painful; it is also a complex journey. Thus Bloomfield (2003) argues it is not only a process: unfortunately, it is a long term process. There is no quick-fix to Reconciliation. It takes time. And it takes its own time: its own pace cannot be dictated. Finally Bloomfield (2003) highlights two observations.

- It is also a deep process: Such profound change is a vast and often painful challenge and cannot be rushed or imposed.

- Reconciliation is also a very broad process. It applies to everyone. It is not just a process for those who suffer directly and those who inflicted the suffering, central though these people are. The attitudes and beliefs that underpin violent conflict spread much more generally through a community and must be addressed at that broad level.

In other words, the process of Reconciliation should involve both the individual and the community to re-examine themselves, their attitudes and prejudices developed against the so called "enemy" during the period of violent conflict. This is the crux of this matter in relation to the Nigerian situation which has not been addressed though there are instances of past civil war and current bloodshed as a result of herdsmen and farmers clashes. This will be discussed later. However, reconciliation is a demanding process in the sense that it includes the search for truth, justice, forgiveness and healing. It is a hard nut to crack because it means finding a way to live alongside the former enemies. This is the hub of reconciliation because it is not easy to convince the victims who saw their family members wiped out to live at peace with those who killed their family members. Considering the fact that the victims carry their sad memories with them, means that brokers of peace through reconciliation should always be patient at all times if they want to attain success.

The role memory plays in the reconciliation process cannot be down played because it is a two-edged sword whereby it can play a crucial role in making reconciliation sustainable; it also has the capacity to hinder the reconciliation processes. Barness (2003) quoting Rigby documents notes that: "Too great a concern with remembering the past can mean that the divisions and conflicts of the old can never die, the wounds are never healed. In such circumstances, the past continues to determine the future". The process of reconciliation therefore, takes notes of these

conditions that could hinder reconciliation and make it unattainable. In other words, greater efforts should be required because these efforts carry great rewards since effective reconciliation is the best guarantee that the violence of the past will not return. When this happens the road to peace becomes evident. It is helpful to discuss reconciliation under African context.

Reconciliation in Traditional African Thought and Religion

Certainly, reconciliation exists in traditional African thought and this explains why various languages have different names for it. In Igbo land of Nigeria, it is called "Orikota". Among Shona people of Zimbabwe, it is known as "Kubatana" and the Taita people of Kenya call it "Kutasa". As long as human beings live together, there must be misunderstandings, quarrels and conflicts that cause estrangement. Yet people do realize at last that they should work for peace because they need peace to coexist. Consequently, they turn towards reconciliation. It has been observed earlier that when people estranged their relationship, there is hostility. In African traditional thought one of the things that causes this hostility is anger. Referring to African Traditional Thought, Stinton (2008) comments:

The only way to restore and retain the desired relationships is to get rid of the anger that arises within humans, domestic animals and spiritual powers, and this is accompanied primarily through ritual means.

For Bourdillon (1990) ritual actions are in some way prescribed and repeated which convey an element of symbolism. On the other hand, Orlando (2007) explains that ritual is a term that frequently refers to symbolic behaviour shaped by rules and repeated always in the same pattern. Since Reconciliation is necessary for the normalisation of relationships, it is repeated as often as there are estrangement caused by hostility and anger. In the African Traditional Thought, therefore, the victim and the offenders as well as the celebrant should try

to get rid of anger so that the words and gestures during the ritual ceremony will be matched by the people's inner state. In African Traditional practice, Magesa (2010) admits that there are two dimensions to reconciliation. There is on one side seeking external harmony with other community members wherever relationships have been disrupted and the inner peace that is a prerequisite for doing so. In these two dimensions, there is more action and less talk in order to receive and restore peace. This is so because there is always conflict everywhere, therefore African Traditional religion provides means of dealing with discord when it arises. This practical example from Luo and Maasai peoples of Kenya is very heart warming and uplifting and we adopt it here as documented by Kanyandago (2010)

When disputes arose between these people, the elders from both sides meet to agree on the need and satisfactory terms for peace. Then men, women, children from both communities convened on the border where the conflict took place. They chopped down trees whose saps are used as poison for arrow tips and used these trees to erect a fence along the common border. They then placed their weapons of warfare along the fence, which served as a symbol of the war which had divided them. A black dog was laid across the fence and cut into two, so its blood flowed through the fence onto the ground on both sides of the fence. Then mothers who were nursing children would exchange their babies across the fence, so that Maasai mothers nursed Luo babies and vice versa. The respective elders would pray, beseeching God to bless the covenant of peace and the participants pronounce curses on anyone who crossed the fence to do evil.

This covenant pact may appear crude to people of modern time. However, there are many meaningful symbols that convey reconciliation and peace. The death of a dog whose blood flowed

through the fence is very symbolic because places where human blood was shed, the blood of that dog has cleansed and restored them.

Another significant and symbolic action that may appear cruder to modern people is the nursing of babies. It is symbolic because life is precious. It means if you nurse, nourish and protect the life of my baby and my people, the other woman will do the same to your own. It is also symbolic because as a mother nourishes her child with milk which gives and sustains life, when she does so to another baby from a community once considered to be an enemy, any thought of poisoning is no longer there. There is another traditional way of reconciliation that is practiced in Igbo land in Nigeria called the "Orikota" In the past, communities were frequently fighting and killing each other for one reason or the other. When it was realized that many lives were being lost and wasted, the elders sought the way of reconciliation called Orikota. On this day of reconciliation, the women of the two communities cooked pounded yam and egusi soup.

Men, women and children of the two communities with their visitors acting as witnesses gathered in a large square. The cooked foods were assembled with palm wine from the two communities. The elders of the two communities would pray and pour libations facing east, west, north and south of the four corners of the earth asking God to forgive them for the blood they had shed as a result of hostility that existed between them. They prayed for the restoration of peace and for progress in the two communities. After the ritual, libations and prayers, they settled for eating. The different food cooked by the women of the two communities were mixed together and served to all present. After eating and drinking, the elders among the invited visitors spoke some words of commendation and exhortation encouraging the two communities to sustain the peace accord they achieved through this 'Orikota' reconciliation.

This Orikota reconciliation is significant and symbolic because eating together is a sign that

peace is restored, that peace exists. Enemies do not eat together. The fact that the warring communities ate together showed that they have reconciled and now they are at peace. It is symbolic also through the pouring of libations to appease the earth that has been polluted by bloodshed, praying that the land should be cleansed so that peace is restored. It was also symbolic because they called the four corners of the earth to bear witness of their reconciliation. It was also symbolic because the visiting elders acted as living witnesses who helped to solemnize their reconciliation ceremony. One important lesson our modern time should learn from the African Traditional religion and thought is the consciousness of the need for reconciliation. Nigeria has shed a lot of blood; lasting and enduring reconciliation is yet to be achieved.

Religion and Reconciliation

The two examples narrated above show that African Traditional religion has a prominent place for reconciliation. In the same way other religions especially Christianity has also a place for reconciliation. This means that reconciliation is one of the major functions of religion in the society. The fundamental premise in Christian religion is what Isaiah in chapter 53:6 said: "like sheep we have all gone astray each following his or her own way but God laid upon him our guilt". In other words, Christ reconciled humanity with God so that he was able to establish normal relationship. Ayanga (2008) situates this reconciliation properly when he remarks: "Reconciliation between God and humanity is also made easier for Christians in the sense that this reconciliation process is believed to be initiated by God. It is God's work and desire to reconcile people to himself" (p. 118). Since God is the initiator of this reconciliation, it becomes mandatory that religions especially Christianity should preach and promote it with zeal. Drawing from the experience of Schreiter, Ayanga (2008, p.132) remarks:

What underpins a successful process of reconciliation is spirituality, a view of the

world that recognizes and responds to God's reconciling action in that world. This is why reconciliation is largely discovered rather than achieved. We experienced God's justifying and reconciling activity in our own lives and in our own communities and it is from that experience that we are able to go forth in a ministry of reconciliation. Thus reconciliation becomes a way of life, not just a set of discrete tasks to be performed and completed.

Fleming (1990) has a valid point here when he affirms:

Reconciliation is God's work not man's. The fault is on man's side, but the removal of hostility is entirely the work of God" (2 Cor 5:18-19). Man is brought into a right relationship with God only through the out working of God's grace in the death of Jesus Christ (p. 366). In Christianity, from Genesis to Revelation, evidence abounds where biblical narrative concerns reconciliation between God and humanity, among humans themselves and with the environment. St. Paul is aware of this when he illustrates Christ's role in reconciling humanity to God when he explains: "From enemies we have become at peace with God through the death of his son; with much more reason now we may be saved through his life. It is not only that, we feel secure in God because of Jesus Christ, our Lord through whom we have been reconciled". (Rom 5:10-11).

The Catholic Church is conscious of the importance of reconciliation. Firstly at the beginning of the Eucharistic celebration, there is room for members of the congregation to reconcile with God and their neighbours by reciting the prayer called "I confess to Almighty God..." known as "act of penitence" or "penitential rite". Secondly, one of the sacraments in the Catholic Church formally called "penance" is now called

"sacrament of reconciliation". It is not within the scope of this article to describe how this sacrament is practiced. However, there is a prayer meant for reconciliation of people and also communities that I consider appropriate to be mentioned and discussed here. This prayer is contained in the Eucharistic prayer for reconciliation II. Amadi (2018) notes as follows:

For although the human race is divided by dissention and discord, yet we know that testing us you change our hearts to prepare them for reconciliation. Even more by your spirit you move human hearts that enemies may speak to each other again, adversaries join hands and people see to meet together. By the working of your power it comes about; O Lord that hatred is overcome by love, revenge gives way to forgiveness and discord is changed to mutual respect (p. 54).

We have learned from this Eucharistic prayer that, there is need for constant and genuine reconciliation to be emphasized because 'human race' is constantly divided by dissention and discord. There is need therefore to admit human frailty and inclination to estrangement to one another. The Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopaedia (1991) is mindful of this situation where it teaches: "Given that sin destroys our relationship with God and undermines our relationship with other human beings, reconciliation designates that precise effect of Christ's redemption of human race that restores our relationship with God and human fellowship" (p. 812-813). In our discussion on reconciliation, it is evident that there is need for reconciliation between God and human beings as well as between human beings among themselves. Sometimes, emphasis is more on between human beings and God because it is easily said. On the other hand, human beings full of pride find it difficult to admit their faults before their fellow human beings. Sometimes, people do not think of reconciliation because those who consider themselves as victims are not ready and prepared to forgive.

Unfortunately, these people are Christians who enjoy the forgiveness and peace Christ brought to them with his death on the cross. These Christians forget that the willingness to reconcile so as to resume normal relationships is based on willingness to forgive each other. Having experienced forgiveness to the fullness, Christians should be at the forefront to forgive and to initiate the process of forgiveness.

Education for Reconciliation in the Nigerian Context: A Synthesis

The sad experiences of the Nigeria Biafra war should be erased from the minds of several people who still feel neglected because their cries have not been heard and addressed through genuine reconciliation. There is urgent need for a lasting reconciliation in the country for peace to reign everywhere. This is where education plays a vital role by teaching children from primary school to tertiary level the need to live in peace and harmony. The introduction of peace and conflict resolution in secondary and tertiary institutions is a right step in a right direction.

Indeed there is need for building and rebuilding so as to reconstruct people's ideologies. Practically all who perpetrate wars and conflicts are educated; yet they silence their conscience in order to keep to the irrational aspects of human beings which favour armed conflicts. The church has its own role to play to educate their members to eschew wars and conflict. The church also should be prepared to make appeals that would touch the hearts and consciences of those in government to expedite actions that lead to reconciliation considering the fact that there are divisions and animosities in the country postponing the overdue reconciliation in the country because of either political or economic interests is not helpful in this country. Therefore the church should stand firm to preach the necessity of reconciliation. In our discussion, it is evident that the church and the state should work cooperatively in order to achieve real reconciliation. Commenting on Schreiter Ayanga (2008) observes:

Spiritual reconciliation involves rebuilding shattered lives so that social reconstruction becomes a reality. While social reconciliation seeks to create conditions for fostering reconciliation, these conditions of themselves cannot affect it. That is to say, the state can establish commissions to investigate wrong doings, offer amnesty or punish offender, yet it cannot legislate healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. Hence, secular organizations often turn to their religious counterparts for assistance with the spiritual dimensions of peace processes.

It is a fact that many people have deep wounds in their hearts that yearn for healing through reconciliation. For these messages to be well communicated to people so that their wounded hearts will open for proper reconciliation, there is need for trust and reconciliation committee to be formed with a mandate of reconciling and uniting people. Education also has a vital role to create this awareness by developing a curriculum that teaches peace and conflict resolution in Nigerian schools.

Conclusion

In the course of this article, it has been emphasised the important role education plays in order to raise the people's consciousness to value peace that comes from reconciliation since peace enhances education and war disrupts it. Some educationists abhorred wars. It was found that it is in the heart that wars are construed so education should create an intellectual awareness that helps people to eschew wars and embrace peace. This article drew some examples from traditional religion where reconciliation was practised with symbolic rituals. The article reminded the modern people especially in Nigeria to learn something about reconciliation from African Traditional Religion.

This article recognised that Nigeria has shed blood and continues to shed more blood. The article recommends that reconciliation be practised in

Nigeria to help people see themselves as brothers and sisters. For this awareness to be created and reconciliation be implemented, the church should team up with the government to form Truth, Peace and Reconciliation Committee.

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