

## Ethical Evaluation of African Religiosity amidst Violent Conflict and Crisis in Africa in Contemporary Time

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### Abstract

*Despite the high social relevance of religion in Africa and the averred intense religiosity of Africans, a number of hypotheses still connect religion to conflict in the continent. Equally though, whilst violent conflict in the form of civil, ethnic, or religious have characterized much of the growth of African countries in the past decades, the religious landscape of Africa is typified with ambivalence depicting that religion may not only incite violence but also contribute to peace. Drawing upon an extensive contemporary research and literature on African religiosity and violent conflict, this study examines the relationship between religion and conflict in African. With an insight provided into understanding the independent layers of religious conflict nexus in Africa, a criterion on what should constitute appropriate approach toward conflict resolution is thus supplied. Findings however have significant implication for cumulative research on the subject of African religiosity and violent conflict in modern Africa.*

**Keywords:** African Religiosity, Violent Conflict, Morality, Human values, Conflict resolution

### 1. Introduction

Religion appears to be associated with conflict in many parts of the world (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008) although concerns have heightened about the sustained violent conflicts in Africa. Notwithstanding the secularization thesis (Casanova, 2004: 24) culminating into the expulsion of religion from the social sciences during the last two centuries (Petito & Hatzopoulos, 2003: 108), on the assumption that modernity has made religion irrelevant in the public sphere and in the political life, relevant empirical research in the last decades reveal that instead of religion declining and eventually disappearing, it has persisted both in the individual conscience and in the public sphere, continuing to shape the political beliefs and practices of a great number of people and institutions throughout the world (Thomas, 2005: 49). Today, it has been increasingly easy to find evidence of the dynamic role of religion in the public sphere in many parts of the world. In fact, religion remains the single most important political-ideological default mechanism in global conflict and its resilience has become one of the greatest surprises of contemporary time (Haar and Ellis, 2006: 99). It will not be out of place to also avow that one of the main reasons for the anterior exclusion of religion from the public sphere since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and which were linked with the idea of religion being a source of dogmatism, fanaticism, prejudice, ignorance, repression and persecution (Mark, 1994: 21), has re-enacted itself at the turn of the new millennium and even today, religious loyalties are at the root of many of the world's ongoing civil wars and political violence, and other conflicts (Esposito & Watson, 2005: 77).

It has been argued that religion in every society constitutes a fundamental element of human dignity. Far from being a curious datum of human existence, is so essential to human development and represents the deepest part of who the adherents are, which is far more than just an ordinary lifestyle choice. This argument's corollary is that, connecting religion to conflict is straightforward a thing to do as connecting it to peace-building because of its ambivalent character, sensitivity in character and its link with individual's identity. It is not surprising therefore that religion has been branded in history as one of the major contributors to wars, hatred, bloodshed, and intolerance (Chifu, Popescu and Nedea, 2012: 18).

This contention is further reinforced scripturally (Exodus 32:28) by the first of the religious upheavals in Judeo-Christian tradition where Moses upon his return from Mount Sinai ordered the massacre of three thousand people by the Levites on the flimsy excuse that they were ‘worshipping idol’ (Takaya, 1992: 14). Also, what do we make of the account of religious horrors committed by Muslims in the history of the origin, spread and consolidation of the Islam within its first eight provinces: Mecca, Medina, Syria, Jazira (Mesopotamia), Bastra (Persia or Iran), Kufa (Iraq), Egypt and Palestine, as well as North Africa, the Mediterranean and Europe (Khan, cited by Takaya, 1992:109-123). This is despite the fact that in religions we can find the source, the origin of the development of civilized behaviour, laws, cultural commitments to values of peace, empathy, openness and even love toward strangers, suppression of the ego and of the greed for property, human rights, generous unilateral acts of forgiveness and humility to those who were wronged, acceptance and repeated forgiveness for past sins as a means of reconciliation. Not incidentally, Jesus the apostles and other prophets appear in religious narrations, in shabby clothes, as unknown persons, rewarding people who do not know them who extended their hospitality to them. Thus, religion plays an important role in the intimate life of millions of people, by contributing either toward violence or moving away from violence, and consequently shaping the propensity to violence and/or conflicts in the society.

This further explains why throughout Africa, one of the greatest surprises of contemporary time is the resilience of religion. The resilience of religion in human enterprise is evidenced in the fact that in Africa, religion shows no sign of disappearing or diminishing in public importance. Africa is a deeply religious continent, with major religions like Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion constituting a dominant culture and sources of social mores (Dawkins, 2006: 44). However, although Africa continues to clamor for peace, it has continued to witness a number of conflicts in recent times with many of them having religious undertones such that the continent is groaning under the ravages of violent conflicts. Nevertheless, this situation has made the problem of the prevalent violent conflict in Africa to be acute. Africa has been judged to be “the most warring region on planet earth” (Van Tongeren 1999:11; Jackson, 2000a:210). Nearly a third of Africa’s conflicts have started since the late 1980s and there is the likelihood that Africa is experiencing a much greater rate of increase in the number of conflicts than other regions of the world. Studies have also revealed that Africa currently has the highest number of ongoing conflicts: half of Africa’s states are in conflict, affecting 20 per cent of the continent’s population (Jackson, 2010: 19). As at the middle of 2001, serious internal conflict continued in Algeria, Western Sahara, Sudan, Chad, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Guinea, Liberia, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Angola, and the Comoros (Jackson, 2010: 21). Many other African states face high level of instability, high levels of domestic political violence, militancy, insurgency and/or rebel movements such as Lesotho, South Africa, Namibia, Kenya, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, and Nigeria (Jackson, 2010:21).

It is also pertinent to note that even though all traditions of the religions that are found in Africa have notions of human value, such as peace, justice, reconciliation, and harmony. The primary challenge posed by Africa’s conflicts lies in their religious coloration and internally driven character. Ironically, most violent conflicts in Africa are fuelled by religio-political ideologies. Currently, it would be no mistake stating that conflict pervades many of the countries in the African continent. The African continent over the past three decades, particularly in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s have faced greater challenges to stability and progress in all ramifications than ever before. In particular, threats to peace have been much more pronounced and indeed have increased in scale and intensity (Solomon and Watt, 2005: 111). Statistics show that of 116 conflicts recorded by Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) since the end of the Cold War until 2003, only seven were between states, 109 were internal, and Africa had more than 32 of these between 1989 and 2003 (UCDP, in UNODC, 2005: 65).

Historically, many of the world’s violent conflicts, both present and past, are couched in religious terms, ranging from the 1st century Jewish-Roman War, 11th century Crusades, 17th century Thirty Years War, 20th century Irish civil war, to contemporary conflicts in Somalia, Sudan, Egypt, Libya, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Iraq, and 3 Israel/West Bank/Gaza. Human history is replete with examples where the religiously motivated individuals and groups have acted in extraordinary ways to bridge divides, promote reconciliation, or advocate peaceful coexistence. It thus becomes clear that understanding the dynamics of conflict requires an understanding of the connections between religion, conflict, and peace-building. Yet sensitivities and uncertainties surrounding the mere mention of religion and conflict frequently stand in the way of such understanding.

This study therefore seeks to examine why religion is a factor in numerous conflicts in Africa and many of these conflicts seem intractable.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Scholars have identified several types of theories on religious conflict. They include ideological and nature of religion theory; political, social and economic environment theory; structural theory; the 'laundry list' theory and the human need theory. In order to properly understand the nexus between conflict and religion as well as the strategies for its prevention, resolution, and intervention, it is important to look at the relevant theories underpinning the subject matter. The theories however, must be such that will help in the understanding of the causes of conflicts. This paper therefore espouses the laundry list theory and the human need theory for its theoretical explanations for religious influence on conflict in Africa.

### **2.1 The Laundry List Theory**

The laundry list approach merely list a number of ways in which "religion affects conflict but does not put them into coherent conceptual framework". According to Lewy (2002:73) the laundry list approach involve a number of ways in which religion can be used politically to start or maintain conflict. Here, there are a variety of ways in which a religion can view war, violence and/or conflict. A religion that adopts the pacifist view believes that all violence and killing is wrong and immoral. Another view that can be adopted by a religion is the belief in "just" wars. This means that it is believed that some wars are acceptable because they are in the interest of justice. When this view is adopted, religion believes that war must be conducted according to just and morally accepted rules. A third view that a religion can adopt, is the belief in a Holy War. In the Islam religion, it is called a jihad. If a religion assume this view then they belief that their god command of them to make war on the people who do not believe in their religion. They must also kill everyone who poses a threat to their religion.

### **2.2 Human Needs Theory**

The human needs theory provides a framework of analysis that centers on the unmet human needs. The theory that unmet human needs are the remote source of conflict and violence in every society is a well established idea in the fields of politics, international relations, and development studies particularly in the specialism of peace and conflict resolution (Marker, 2003: 43; Burton, 1990a: 16, 1990b: 82; Coate and Rosati, 1988: 30). Human needs theory stipulates that there is more likelihood of conflict and violence occurring as a result of unmet human needs, psychological and physiological, rather than that of interest, as people strive to fulfill their needs (Burton, 1990a: 18). Both Maslow and Burton (in Marker, 2003: 43) viewed these needs as not limited to food, shelter, and water, but rather extend to include nonphysical elements needed for human growth and development, participation, control over their own life, as well as all those things human beings are innately driven to attain.

For Burton (1997: 56), the concept of basic human needs offered a possible method of grounding the field of conflict analysis and resolution in a defensible theory of the person. In Burton's view, the needs most salient to an understanding of social conflicts were not only material (food and shelter), but also included needs of identity, recognition, security, spiritual and personal development. Over time, however, he tended to emphasize the failure of existing state systems to satisfy any of these needs, which is the primary source of modern ethno-nationalist struggles. However, he pointed out that the level of importance of any or a combination of these needs depends on the socioeconomic, cultural, and political development of a country (Burton, 1990a: 57). Burton (2009: 71) points out that aggressions and conflicts are the direct result of some institutions and social norms being incompatible with human needs. His submission is that aggression and antisocial behaviors are stimulated by social circumstances. There are human limits to abilities to conform to or withstand such institutions and norms, since human beings are not wholly malleable. The needs that are frustrated by institutions and norms require satisfaction; they certainly must be pursued in one way or another.

Denial by or inability of society or institutions to provide material basic needs, recognition, and identity would lead, at all social levels, to alternative behaviors designed to satisfy such needs, be it religious or ethnic conflict, street gangs, or domestic violence. The great promise of human needs theory, in Burton's view, is that it would provide a relatively objective basis, transcending local, political, religious and cultural differences, for understanding the sources of conflict, or designing conflict resolution processes, and for founding conflict analysis and resolution as an autonomous discipline (Burton, 1990b: 72). The implication is that the needs theory is particularly useful for understanding the causes, resolution, and management of conflict in the developing regions, such as Africa.

This theory of understanding conflict in Africa is strikingly crucial because it moves beyond theories that blame conflicts in Africa on a primordial past, such as colonialism or neo-colonialism, global market or Africa's failure to follow Western development culture. It is also different from the theories that attribute the causes of conflicts to the inherent aggressiveness of man. In addition, it is different from the theories that see conflict causation as the natural instinct of human being to aggress and thus concentrate on using the police and other paramilitary agencies for controlling conflicts.

In Africa, the denial or neglect of the basic needs such as the material needs; religious identity and recognition, recognition of different ethnic groups, particularly the minority groups; neglect of certain identities, such as the human cost of unemployment to the youths seeking their identity in society; and other needs constitute the major source of conflicts. Just as the theory stipulates, when such non-negotiable basic needs are unmet, conflict is inevitable. The view, therefore, is that the sources of conflict concern the failure of some institutions and social norms, particularly the leadership institution, to satisfy the needs of the people. If this is the case, as this paper will reveal, then the solution may be to alter the system by addressing those aspects of the system that may impede the realization and sustenance of peace. The numerous conflicts in Africa today have unmet needs implications. Given this portrait, therefore, it would be misleading to treat most conflicts in Africa as either religious, ethnic, clan, or race as it is commonly depicted in some of the academic literature on Africa's conflicts. Just as Rupesinghe (1989) argues, behind religious or ethnic conflicts are other structural issues transcending immediate grievances. For instance, Doyle (2006: 102) in trying to discuss Nigeria's conflicts, scenarios submit that the tribal or ethnic tags are often used as excuses to describe violence in Nigeria whereas the heart of the problem is left untouched. Although Africa's most populous nation does have religious and ethnic splits, these are often exaggerated and are invariably manipulated by political/leaders in their quest for high office, which in Nigeria means access to the country's vast crude oil receipts.

There is the need to consider these basic human needs in Africa as a strategy of preventing conflicts. Unlike other theories, which point to inherent aggressiveness as the source of conflicts, the basic human needs theory grounds violence, social instability and conflicts on unmet basic human needs, and it focuses on peaceful resolution of conflicts. This will be the framework for analyzing African religiosity and conflict in this paper. This paper, therefore, will employ the human basic needs theory for understanding conflict and its resolution in Africa, and the efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution.

### ***3. Conceptual Clarifications***

#### **3.1 Religiosity**

Defining religiosity could be a very difficult academic exercise. This is because the concept is a complex social phenomenon that requires a multi-dimensional reflection and has attracted a lot of interest which crosses several academic disciplines, each approaching religiosity from a different perspective (Cardwell, 1980: 12; Demerath & Hammond, 1969: 32). For instance, theologians address religiosity from the point of view of faith (Groome & Corso, 1999: 65), which is different from religious educators who focus on orthodoxy and belief (Groome, 1998: 98). Similarly, Psychologists might choose to address the dimensions of devotion, holiness, and piety, whereas sociologists would consider the concept of religiosity to include church membership, church attendance, belief acceptance, doctrinal knowledge, and living the faith (Cardwell, 1980: 40). This use of different terms across academic disciplines to identify religiosity makes it difficult to discuss religiosity without an explicit definition. In this regard therefore, the term religiosity may be referred to as the state of one's belief in God, characterized by piety and religious zeal. It presupposes the fact that the higher an individual's piety and religious zeal, the stronger his belief in God, hence the higher his religiosity.

In the contention of Holdcroft, there are several dimensions or manifestations of religiosity such as, religiousness, orthodoxy, faith, belief, piety, devotion, and holiness which are actually not exactly the same thing as religiosity, but the reflections of the dimensions of religiosity (2006:89). Given that sociologists use the term religiosity to describe an individual's or group's intensity of commitment to a religious belief system (Renzetti and Curran, 1998: 39), it is pertinent to note that they looked at religiosity or religiousness as an important value in the individual's cognitive structure which can influence an individual's behaviour (Delener, 1994: 47). In this regard, it is strongly suggested that those who are sturdily committed to religion are both attitudinally and behaviourally capable of making decisions consistent with moral conscience (Pargament et al., Delener, 1994: 48). Admittedly, understanding religiosity and measuring it remains a complex task.

This is because religiosity is not only multi-dimensional, but also a multi-faceted concept. The importance of religiosity has been proven by many researchers such as Levin and Schiller (1987: 31), McIntosh and Spilka (1990: 56), Ellison and Levin (1998: 67), and Williams and Sternthal (2007: 19) who found out that those with higher religiosity are healthier and even live longer. Poloma and Pendleton (1990: 39) found that they experience higher levels of happiness and satisfaction with life, while Tiliouine et al. (2009: 12) found that they enjoy higher Social Well-Being; Helliwell and Putnam (2005: 60) on their part found that they have lower suicide rates; and Ellison and Levin (1998: 59) found that they have higher resistance against life setbacks. Interestingly, no scholar so far has linked religiosity with violence or conflict which makes it an illogical to reconcile the prevailing philosophy of loyalty between religion and conflict in Africa.

### **3.2 Conflict**

Since the beginning of time, mankind had been enmeshed in countless conflicts. Conflict is not only part and parcel of the social, political, economic and religious life of humans but an inevitable aspect of human interaction in every society though every human society strives to achieve peace. However, conflict becomes a thorny issue if it is poorly handled, that it can degenerate into crises and can subsequently turn out to be violent, inflicting severe damages which can result into loss of life and properties, disunity, wasting away development, use of resources on conflict/crisis management, suspicion that could lead to further crises, damage to environment, and the disruption of the social systems etc. The term conflict has been defined variously by different scholars. According to Ugwu (2011: 64), the word conflict is coined from a Chinese word *Conflictus* which means to strike together. Though the concept of conflict in peace literature has gone beyond the physical content usage to include moral connotations, Ugwu (2008:24) defines conflict as a social situation in which incompatible goals and activities occur between two parties who hold antagonistic feelings towards each other and attempt to control each other.

Writing in the same line, Folger (2002:5) described conflict as the interaction of interdependent people who perceived incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals. From the moral angle Imhabekhai (2009:103) observed that conflict connotes disagreement, imbalance or distortion in beliefs and values and situations within, between or among individuals, persons, groups, communities, states, tribes or countries. To him conflict results from changes in perception and subsequent reaction to such changes depending on which side of the divide individuals or groups belong. Similarly Mereni (1991: 203) opined that it is the perception of existence of the incompatible preferences, the desire to achieve these preferences and the behavior expanded in the direction of gaining and protecting such preferences that essentially characterizes a state of conflict. According to Imhabekhai (2009: 53), conflict is the interaction of inter-dependent people or groups who perceives incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving these goals.

Conflict as a phenomenon, is an attendant feature of human interaction and cannot be eliminated; however, its proper management and transformation are essential for peace and progress in human society. It is pertinent to note that since the end of the Cold War, concerns have heightened about sustained violent conflicts in Africa. Conflict mitigation and resolution has become the dominant governance activity in almost every part of Africa. Many of these conflicts seem intractable; conflict mitigation and resolution initiatives are at best yielding modest successes. Even so, such successes typically provide peace in the short-term but hardly lay foundations for the reconstitution of order and the attainment of sustainable peace. Part of the problem is the failure to acquire a deep understanding of conflict challenges and to fashion out appropriate responses (Sawyer, 2003: 29). Nevertheless; contemporary conflicts in African societies are frequently categorized as ethno-religious conflicts even though most of them are caused by governance failure. Such categorization is due to the fact that ethnic and religious factors are often mobilized as resources of conflict in zero-sum politics associated with highly centralized, autocratic and predatory regimes.

As critical as religion and ethnicity is to conflict, empirical evidence shows that neither religion alone nor ethnicity, constitute the primary sources of violent conflict in Africa but they can be used as an instrument of conflict (Lake and Rothchild, 1998: 35). This is not to suggest that there are no purely ethnic-based, or religious based conflicts. African societies are replete with ethnic conflicts between ethnic and cultural groups, pastoralists and agricultural groups, but these are hardly the arenas of the systemic breakdowns and cataclysmic violence that engulfs entire countries and regions; and even these are exacerbated by failure of governance mechanisms having to do with conflict resolution. Africa is the site of a violent system of conflict that has produced profound human tragedies.

While the conflict that rage there bears similarities to conflicts elsewhere in the world, each conflict warrants careful studies that uncover its special features and reveal clues as to how its challenges can be addressed.

### 3.3 Ethics

Despite daily exposure to ethical issues and beliefs, defining “ethics” as a formal activity can be difficult. This difficulty is only exacerbated with the recognition that so-called “ethical-decisions” can vary widely among people and between societies. This problem, to an important extent, applies to professional ethics as well. All of this implies that while there is a high level of exposure to ethics, it does not follow that people are effective decision makers regarding important ethical issues (Carroll, 2004: 22). ‘Ethics’ might initially be defined in two ways; first, ethics refers to well-based standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society fairness, or specific virtues. Secondly, it refers to the study of development of one’s ethical standards (Velasquez et al., 1987:81). It is important to take into account the distinction between morals and ethics, ethics being practical reflection of some moral values.

Morals refer to generally accepted standard of right and wrong in society, often learned during childhood, but by contrast, ethics are learned at the time of confrontation with problems. Ethics as field of study is universal but perception of ethical correctness differs. Ethics are fundamental building blocks in determining either individual actions or the success or failure of any institution and/or society (Schudt, 2000: 98). This however, is why Essien asserts that, “no sustainable improvement in human well being is possible without sound ethical consideration” (2012: 40). They affect institution’s reputation and help to define an organization’s model that will thrive even in adversity. In every society, individuals, leaders and policy makers make decisions that often have a critical impact on their environment and society. Ethics in the context of this discourse means behaviours or attitudes that are considered moral. Before an action or attitude is considered ethical or moral, it must have to conform to the code of conduct in the society and satisfy the expectations of the generality of the people. Contemporary African society is today lamenting a moral world fallen apart. African society seems to be in a state of near chaos in the realm of morality hence conflicts which is the result of absence in social values that helped society to remain integrated, these values things like peace, harmony, respect for authority, respect for and fear of the supernatural realities (Kinoti, 1992:80).

### 4. African Religiosity

A major component of African culture is religiosity. It is by far the richest part of the African heritage. In African context, religion refers to an indigenous system of beliefs and practices that are integrated into the culture and the worldviews of the African peoples. Like in other primal religions, one is born into it as a way of life with its cultural manifestations and religious implications. African Religion is thus an integral part of the African ethos and culture (Gathogo, 2010: 60). African religiosity is demonstrated in the ways religion cultivates the whole person and permeates all departments of life. This is comfortably accomplished through the following ways: providing African people with a view of the world; answering some existential questions that nothing else can such as suffering, purpose of human life, theodicy and others; providing humanity with moral values; giving food for spiritual hunger through spiritual insights, prayers, rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices and offerings, dedication, devotion and trust in God among other religious discourses; inspiring great ideas such as moral life, cultural achievements and others; providing a means of communication through prayer, sacrifice, common myths, legends, morals and views; providing opportunities for individuals to pays attention to the key moments in their lives such as birth, initiation, puberty, marriage and death; affording individuals opportunity to celebrates life and affirm it through dance, ceremonies, festivals, etc, and finally making provisions for people to know their limitations by letting them know that life is short and temporal hence the need to depend on the Creator (Gathogo, 2010: 31).

Traditionally, religion in Africa has been an individual and collective source of meaning, hope, comfort and deliverance. But in contemporary time, religion has emerged as a key factor within conflict situations in Africa, whether it is political, ethnic, intra-societal, or ideological in nature. Taken into account the broad-spectrum manifestations of God in African affairs, African religiosity acknowledges the reality of God but does not define God. If anything, it confesses that God is unknowable. People affirm that God is invisible, which is another way of asserting that they do not know God in any would-be physical form.

Subsequently, nowhere in Africa do we find physical images or representations of God, the Creator of the universe but African religiosity is very sensitive to and about the spiritual dimension and the mystical power that permeates the universe. This explains why religion is part of the social fabric of the Africa world and its people (Hommer, 2005: 54). Many voluntarily associate themselves with religious networks, which they use for a variety of purposes such as social, political and economic activities that go beyond the strictly religious.

For most people, 'religion' refers to a belief in the existence of an invisible world, distinct but not separate from the visible one, which is home to spiritual beings that are deemed to have effective powers over the material world (Toft, 2007: 19). For people who hold this point of view, the invisible world is an integral part of the world, which cannot be reduced to its visible or material form only. For them, the material world is linked to the spirit world, through the human spirit that is believed to be inherent in every person; hence, a regular traffic is believed to take place between the human and the spirit worlds. In such a holistic perception of the world, it follows that people's social relations extend into the invisible sphere. In the same way as they try and maintain good relations with their relatives, neighbours and friends for their own benefit, individuals and communities invest in their relations with spiritual entities so as to enhance the quality of their lives (Bediako, 1990: 43).

Thus, people all over the world enter into various forms of active communication with a spirit world in such a way as to derive information or other resources from it with a view to furthering their material welfare or interests. The fact remains, however, that for many Africans, religion is perceived primarily in terms of interaction with a spirit world. This aspect of religion is hardly considered by international organisations engaged in peacebuilding. Yet ideas concerning a spirit world play a major role in both legitimising and discouraging violence. In many of Africa's wars, fighters seek traditional medicines or other objects or substances that are believed to be channels of spiritual power. These are presumed to make the people who possess them effective in battle or to protect them from injury (Ellis, 2001: 53). The persons who dispense such medicines exercise influence over the fighters, and in some cases this can take on a clear institutional form.

By the same token, the end of every armed conflict in Africa is often accompanied by religious rituals designed to cleanse the fighters from the pollution of bloodshed. This is always done through traditional means, but may also take an Islamic or Christian form. In Liberia, charismatic churches often provide a forum where former child soldiers can confess their crimes and, in a religious idiom that recalls the symbolism of traditional initiation, can be reintegrated into society. One 11-year old former fighter, for example, having been 'born again' in Christ, said he had taken an oath never to kill again: "I am now a complete born-again Christian and a child of God" (Osagie-Usman, 1994: 97). It is interesting to note that the same idiom of being born again is central to both traditional initiation societies and charismatic Christianity. A rather different example of the use of religion in resolving conflict concerns South Africa, where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was led by an Anglican archbishop and was closely associated with the country's faith communities. The work of the TRC was based on the idea that long-term reconciliation depends crucially on religious notions of reconciliation and healing, even in the absence of a dependable formal justice. Although the TRC has been criticized in South Africa itself, its ultimate success or failure will only become apparent with the passage of time. In the meantime, however, the TRC model has been widely imitated throughout Africa. A good example is the Truth commissions which were subsequently set up in Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone (Haar and Ellis, 2006: 57).

Almost invariably, traditional peacemakers in Africa base whatever authority they have on some form of spiritual legitimacy. There have been attempts to identify traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution and harness them to international diplomatic initiatives (Zartman, 2000: 48). Nevertheless, international efforts at peacemaking and peace-building in Africa have rarely involved such authorities for purposes of peace and reconciliation to any significant degree. Still less attention has been given to the fact that traditional religious peacemakers may at the same time be organizers of war, such as the officials who initiate young men into a sodality like the kamajors and give them medicine believed to make them strong in battle by providing them with spiritual power (Haar and Ellis, 2006: 95). Consequently, throughout Africa, the power attributed to religious experts is considered morally ambivalent, in the sense that their supposed spiritual power can be used both to harm and to heal. People who are believed to possess spiritual power can be both organizers of violence as well as potentially helping to resolve conflict.

## **5. Religion and Conflict in Africa**

Religion has emerged as a key factor within conflict situations in Africa, whether they are primarily of a political, ethnic, intra-societal, or ideological nature, religion is often depicted as a trigger factor in many conflicts situations (Treverton, Gregg, Gibran and Yost, 2005: 47). Nevertheless, contemporary conflicts in African societies are frequently categorized as either religious or ethnic conflicts even though most of them are caused by governance failure (Sawyer, 2003). Such categorization is due to the fact that religious or ethnic factors are often mobilized as resources for conflict in zero-sum politics associated with highly centralized, autocratic and predatory African regimes. Evidently, religious loyalties can claim primacy over other forms of group loyalty and protagonists in conflict can more easily take recourse in ethnic solidarity. In this regard, circumstances of sustained deprivation or fears of integration into something else can accentuate religious attachments, and appeals to religious sentiments can prove to be a potent tool in conflict. As critical as religion is to conflict in every society, empirical evidence in Africa clearly shows that religion alone or itself, is not a source of violent conflict but can be used as a veritable instrument of conflict (Lake and Rothchild, 1998: 90).

This however is not to suggest that there is no purely religion-based conflicts. African societies are replete with religious conflicts between ethnic and cultural groups, pastoralists and agricultural groups, but these are hardly the arenas of the systemic breakdowns and cataclysmic violence that engulfs entire countries in the continent. Religion is also often been blamed and used as a tool to mobilize people during conflicts. This is majorly so because African people are extremely sensitive about religion because religion forms part of the people's cultural identity. The relationship between religion and conflict is a complex one, and one need to take into consideration many factors before one can arrive at a conclusion that religion is the main cause of conflict. No doubt, religion actually play a crucial role in a number of African armed conflicts such as those in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia and Uganda, etc. Also, Africa provides a very diverse religious demography which is often considered a risk factor, and religion plays a more pronounced role than it does in Western countries or countries in other regions of the world (Pew 2010; Ellis/Ter Haar 2007: 49).

Theoretically therefore, a link between religious factors and conflict can be established with different assumptions especially by a "mobilization hypothesis". Here, certain religious structures such as those involving parallel ethnic and religious identities or changing religious demographics are prone to mobilization in politics; once politicized, violent conflict becomes likelier incidence. The following explanations nonetheless constitute key reasons why religion is implicated in conflicts situations in Africa:

### **5.1 Identity Factor**

Religion is one of the fundamental elements of identity. That is why religious conflict is a type of identity based conflict. Identity based conflict is conflict that arise as a result of differences in identity. It has been argued that without identity, humans would be unable to survive psychologically and socially. Naturally, identity based conflicts as 'social conflicts are based on ethnic, cultural, religious, or national-identity differences. One of the characteristics of identity based conflicts is that the participants in the conflict are very passionate about what they are fighting for. As a result, identity based conflicts had been some of the most fierce and violent conflicts that ever took place. Another characteristic of identity based conflicts is that this type of conflicts is usually protracted. The reason for the protracted nature of identity based conflicts is that in the history of mankind, no person wants to think that everything they believe in is wrong and untrue. It is natural for a person to believe that their view of the world is accurate and true. That is why humans are comfortable around others who have the same views and identity as them. When humans disagree with each other, they are directly questioning each other's identity. Challenging someone else's identity could lead to a violent reaction which could lead to identity based conflict (Haynes, 2009: 144).

Religion is one of the cornerstones of a person's identity. That is why people are so sensitive when someone challenges their religious beliefs. That is why religion in many dimensions is regarded as a subset of ethnicity. Religion in Africa like other region of the world, serves as a source of identity. In most conflict scenarios in Africa, competing motives such as historical, political and social narratives have been constructed and pegged on the religious landscape. Religious ideologies are incorporated into every group's self understanding and justification. For example, the tribal conflicts that rocked many part of Kenya recently were justified on religio-political grounds. In the Rift Valley province of Kenya, the violence that pitted the Agikuyu against the Kalenjin community was interpreted by the former as persecution of God's chosen people.



For the latter, the clashes were perceived as a Holy War for what God has rightly given them, as well as a means to safeguard the powers that be, since there is no authority except from God (Kamwaria, 2003: 24). Similarly, in Nigeria, the country is divided between the North and the South which is dominated by the Muslims and Christians respectively. And all the conflicts scenarios are given religious coloration in all activities. The religio-cultural separation and segregation regularly sparks off disagreement and fight over many things such as natural resources involving oil, land, water; political representation, provision of basic infrastructure and revenue sharing between the Southern Christian and the Islamic North (Jok, 2007: 5-10; Lowrey, 2007: 120-124).

## **5.2 Integration Factor**

Religion in every society serves as a source of integration for any community, and can also be a source of conflict as well. This is so because religious beliefs are important in solving integrative problems because they legitimize value patterns and suggest why certain values should be preferred. The existence of a common religion helps to hold together a group of people who might otherwise be competing politically and economically. However, the integrative role of religion can be overemphasized. There is always a tendency to feel that one's religious persuasion is true, and all others are false. For example, the selection of a presidential aspirant for political office in Nigeria is always interpreted in religious terms between the Muslim North and the Christian South. Similarly, the post-election violence in Kenya in 2007 was fuelled by political affiliations of the religious actors. In the event that unfolds itself, the anti-Majimbo comments made by a Catholic Bishop left the impression that the Church supported the Party of National Unity (PNU), which rejected Majimbo in its campaign platform (Megesa, 1997: 20). Moreover, the close cooperation between the Kibaki-led government and the United States of America in counter-terrorism initiatives had increasingly alienated a considerable population of the Kenyan Muslims from the government. This is where religion, religious institutions and affiliations should provide integrative functions rather than divisive tendencies.

## **5.3 Mobilization Factor**

Religion in every society serves the role of initiation, mobilization and binding of adherents. Actors in a conflict may employ religious authorities or religious language to mobilize followers and widen their base of support. This can occur at the political level, when leaders use religious discourse to garner popular support for specific policy aims or make space for their group that may feel discriminated and/or marginalized. Military or militia movement leaders also use religion in a tactical way, as a tool for recruitment, mobilization and binding of combatants as demonstrated by examples from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Congo, Zimbabwe and Cambodia. In the case of Sierra Leone, Specht (2011: 8-9) notes that the Camajores, a civil defence force, was mobilized through Poro, a secret society. Their mobilization was done in the bush and their training based upon traditional hunting skills. Part of the training included skills to improve fighting with mystical help. Specht further notes that in Congo-Brazzaville, the practice of initiation rituals had been, for a long time, limited to isolated communities. People from town used to refer to these kinds of practices as backwards and stupid. But during armed conflict, the soldiers that had gone through initiation, proved to be much better fighters than their non-initiated modern friends. The main explanation for this was that those who were initiated were much better protected through mystical powers. Similarly, Honwana (1998: 40) notes that the combatants of the Angola war claimed to have had a lot of help from the ancestors. The ancestors would give the rules and regulations for the behaviour of the combatants through dreams, visions, mediums and other signs. Failure to abide by the rules and regulations would make the combatants vulnerable to attacks by enemies. These examples attest that religious actors employ mystic-spiritual methods in engagements and draw on a common worldview, theological language, and shared values by adherents to gain support for victory and peace.

## **6. Ethical Evaluation of African Religiosity**

Religion in every society is viewed as both a metaphysical and ethical system. In African worldview, ethics and religion are intimately related. This explains why the ultimate reality and meaning of human life in Africa consists of a set of theological, ethical, metaphysical and anthropological principles (Rivas, 2012: 70). Although it is possible to imagine a virtuous non-religious person and, conversely, a religious vicious person, religion and morality are not mutually independent in spite of the hypothesis of "autonomy of ethics". In Africa, it is evident a priori, in "the belief that an invisible Being or Beings take note of what we do, and can even read our most secret thoughts, must affect our conduct either for good or evil" (Cuypers, 1999: 47).

This dependency of human conduct on religious belief is not only a psychological fact given in commonsensical and historical experience, but also a necessary truth of African tradition and worldview. Religious fundamentalism and violence manifestation, for example, amply attests to this essential aspect of human nature. In Africa, ethics or morality asks whether the culture one lives in harmonizes with his/her purpose, meaning, and aim of existence (Magesa, 2002: 38).

In African Traditional Religion, humanity's purpose, meaning, and aim of existence finally revealed, culminated, replicated, and exemplified in the humanity and relationship with the deity. In this sense, ethics or morality from African perspective serves as the integral function of the people's spiritual life. Etymologically, both morality and ethics have ancient root words. Morality is derived from the Latin *moralitas*, meaning, manner, character, proper behavior, and norm. The other Latin derivative of morality is *mores*, which means, social rules, etiquette, and inhibitions from the society (Rivas, 2012: 71). Morality therefore, has three principal meanings. First, it is a code of conduct or a set of beliefs distinguishing between right and wrong behaviors. Second, it refers to an ideal code of belief and conduct which would be preferred by the sane "moral" person under specified conditions. The third is it is synonymous with ethics. Ethics on the other hand is also generally used in three different but related senses. First, it pertains to general pattern or way of life, e.g., custom, tradition, etc. Second, it signifies a set of rules and conduct or a moral code. And third, it is an inquiry about ways of life or code of conduct, i.e., analysis of the two above-mentioned uses of ethics.

Against this backdrop therefore, whether the influence on human conduct is benign or malign which may subsequently result in either promoting conflict or preventing it depends upon the content of the particular religious belief and ethical system. In Africa, religion, culture, and morality or ethics fall under the broader reality called spirituality. Religion is the transcendental function of humanity's spiritual life; while culture is the creative function of humanity's spiritual life; and ethics or morality is the integral function of humanity's spiritual life. Aside from the supernatural virtues of faith and hope, the supernatural virtue of love is the foundation of African religious ethics or morality. The African worldview is therefore, contentedly described as a religious worldview (Bediako, 1995: 14; Mbiti, 1990: 54). The world in Africa is perceived through a religious lens. Every activity and entity has religious significance. The elemental, spiritual and communal forces constituting cultural heritage of Africa, thus become not merely the locus of divine revelation to the African, but also the means of the human response to the divine disclosure (Bediako, 1995: 28). Humans are part of the world where spirits and gods reside. Religion is therefore not a separate entity existing to be defined apart from life. Idowu (cited in Turaki, 1999: 87) describes religion as the result of humanity's spontaneous awareness of a living Power. Religion is interwoven with human (cultural) existence in the world. According to a popular African understanding of religion, to be human is to be religious; and to live is also to be religious.

In this regard, the African understanding of religion is an understanding of the connectedness of all things. This also becomes clear from an African worldview. There is a close relationship between all things. There is also one reality, with no distinction between physical and spiritual. Meaning in life is derived from unity. Rituals are an expression of this unity. Morals and ethics are concerned with maintaining unity. Religion, therefore, does not keep this unity intact; it is the expression of this unity that is utmost (Krüger, Lubbe & Steyn, 2009: 37). Religion is not the method by which to create unity but by which the celebration of unity is achieved. An African understanding of religion holds that religion is reality and reality is religion. There is no separation between these spheres of reality. The transcendence (God(s), powers, spirits) is just as much part of reality as the visible elements in the world (Krüger, Lubbe & Steyn, 2009: 38). Religion can never be perceived as a separate fragment focused on a different 'reality'. In the same vein, Magesa (1997) illustrates this by pointing out further that, for Africans, 'the universe is perceived as an organic whole'. In African religion, 'humans maintain the bond between the visible and invisible spheres of the universe' (Magesa 1997: 20). The concept of the unity of body and spirit is true not only of ancient Greek philosophy and Hellenistic anthropology, but also applies to African Religion (Wernhart 2003: 66). Religion is not a structure created to reflect a metaphysical (virtual) world. An African understanding of religion draws no distinction between reality and virtuality (Wernhart 2003: 34). In Africa, individuals cannot exist alone. They are because they belong'. The group is where religion happens. Membership of a social community immediately means membership of a religious community. Religion binds and does not divide a community (Opoku 1993: 53). The group not only shares similar sacred beliefs and practices, but religion determines every aspect of community life (Opoku 1993: 54). The group becomes a sacred community (Mbiti 1990: 70).

There is a dynamic natural bond between the individual, the extended family, the clan and/or the tribe, as well as the ancestors, nature and God (Krüger et al. 2009: 62). This is not merely a social understanding, but extends to the ontological realm.

Sequel to this interconnectedness, the sanctity of the community is maintained by social norms and regulations pertaining to proper behaviour. Improper or unjust behaviour toward fellow members of the community disrupts harmony and damages the sanctity of a unified society or community. In Africa, whenever a violation of the sanctity of the community occurs, it is only through ritual reparation can sanctity and harmony be restored. That which is to the advantage of the group supersedes individual wishes. Ethics or morality finds ways to unite, integrate, and harmonize culture's relationship with religion. It holds together different religious groups and cultures. While religion commands one to value and die for truth, ethics evaluates whether a religious person is really honest to the truth he/she professes using the aid of different philosophical perspectives, tools, and methods. Through this mechanism, philosophy and sciences, ethics or morality helps evaluate, categorize, define, and describe a life that promises and assures harmony, integrity, unity, and meaning. It prevents religion and culture from being hypocritical and susceptible to evil hence conflict (Kruger et al., 2009:63).

It is noteworthy to aver that the basic principle therefore of an African religious and moral life is love to the neighbor which supersedes hate, conflict, violence and war. This goes to show that some of the religious-based conflicts in Africa are more political, socio-economic, structural and geographical than religious. It is therefore pertinent to note that in African worldview of grounding morality and guaranteeing the real meaning of life, religion harmonizes with science, metaphysics and ethical system. Between honest, truth-seeking religion and honest, truth-seeking science, there need never be any conflict (Hammer, 2005: 19).

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper sought to give an overview of the place of African religiosity in conflicts and myriad of crisis in Africa in contemporary time. Available evidence indicates that the norms, values and teachings of various religious faiths (Christianity, Islam and Buddhism) especially African traditional religion (ATR) demonstrably inspire and encourage devotees to work towards unity of the society and resolving conflicts and developing peace via utilization of explicitly religious tenets. However, the various incidents of violent conflicts experienced in Africa in recent time as examined in this study clearly show that the frequency is symptomatic of earnest deviation from African values and norms. The prevalence of religious based conflicts and its damaging impact on the socio-economic well being of the African people have vigorously challenged the African religiosity and thus demand one form of solution or the other to put things under control. The study established that there exist a causal connection between the need factor and the socio-economic challenges and conflicts in African societies which can be attributed to governance questions and government's responsibilities.

The study posits that the practice of using violence in the name of religion has been in use for more than 2000 years (Gopim, 2009: 120). This probably is due to the fact that religions frequently serve the identity impulse more powerfully and comprehensively than any other repositories of cultural meaning. Because religion provides such powerful support to individuals and groups as they endeavor to establish and maintain secure identities, it is not surprising that much identity competition occurs between religious groups. The peculiar ability of religion to support the development of individual and group identity is the hidden logic of the link between religion and conflict in the society. This paper examined how religion in Africa is associated with conflict and violence irrespective of its high level of religiosity. Besides evaluating African religiosity, reasons why religion is implicated in conflicts situations in Africa, justification for conflicts through religious beliefs and traditions were all subjected to analysis and discussion. It was established that there exist a causal connection between the socio-economic needs of the people in Africa and conflicts colored with religious identity.

This intolerable situation however, impels and compels the people to take solace in religio-ethnic manipulations as a coping strategy. The study argues that religiously diverse societies in Africa are susceptible to religious overtones in a number of African conflicts. In the same vein, the study discovered that religious based violence is encountered in every religion; none of them is more or less prone to violence than the others, none of them also is inherently violent or inherently peaceful. Every religion presents some concepts, religious writings or principles that can be used to justify the appeal to violence. However, the analysis of the specific context of some religious-based conflict would most probably prove that the causes and the stakes of those conflicts are more political, structural and geographical than religious (Van den Heever, 2001: 77).

It is suggested that the various stakeholders should adequately perform its duty of protecting and providing its citizens with basic societal needs in order to avoid tension and lack of trust in the society. The African experience regarding ethnic and religious conflicts has become a major factor in governance as politics is defined along religion and ethnicity line.

The study is of the opinion that some of the major causes of ethno-religious conflict in Africa are government negligence, a high level of illiteracy, and the issue of poverty, which is a result of economic deprivation through state policies. The paper strongly suggest that the best way of resolving this issue is through evolution of dynamic policies and implementation that will address the social needs and problems of the people such as education, poverty reduction and social relations within the micro and macro society. Given the magnitude and complexity of the religious based conflict system in Africa, only a sustained multifaceted conflict resolution approach involving stakeholders and actors can provide an appropriate and effective response. The first critical challenge however involves the understanding of the context, actors and incentives that drive each conflict which is of critical importance in the search for solutions to the myriad conflicts in Africa and peace as a recipe.

**Table 1: Religious and Ethnic fragmentation in Africa**

S/No	Country	Religious fragmentation	Ethnic fragmentation
1	Angola	0.49	0.80
2	Benin	0.53	0.75
3	Botswana	0.54	0.51
4	Burkina Faso	0.59	0.72
5	Burundi	0.50	0.64
6	Cameroon	0.73	0.86
7	Central African Republic	0.63	0.74
8	Chad	0.70	0.80
9	Co <sup>^</sup> te d'Ivoire	0.67	0.87
10	Ethiopia	0.61	0.70
11	Djibouti	0.54	0.48
12	Eritrea	0.58	0.50
13	Guinea	0.69	0.71
14	Kenya	0.69	0.86
15	Lesotho	0.60	0.72
16	Liberia	0.64	0.86
17	Malawi	0.73	0.65
18	Mozambique	0.62	0.75
19	Niger	0.64	0.68
20	Nigeria	0.72	0.75
21	Rwanda	0.64	Low
22	Sierra Leone	0.57	0.78
23	Somalia	0.61	0.68
24	South Africa	0.48	0.68
25	Tanzania	0.73	0.95
26	Togo	0.64	0.72
27	Uganda	0.66	0.92

**Source:** adapted from data in Jeffrey Haynes (2009: 58).

(1) Religious fragmentation index over 0.45 signifies a high level of religious fragmentation.

(2) Ethnic fragmentation index over 0.55 signifies a high level of ethnic fragmentation.

**Table 2: Number of Conflicts in Africa from 2005 to 2013**

Year	Number of disputes	Non-violent crises	Violent crises	Partial wars	Full scale Wars
2013	29	8	42	7	11
2012	22	11	44	10	10
2011	20	19	40	5	8
2010	24	22	37	4	2
2009	20	24	31	9	1
2008	16	21	30	9	3
2007	13	28	29	7	2
2006	13	25	27	13	2
2005	14	21	30	8	1

**Source:** adapted from data in Peter Kingsley (2013: 77).

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