Religion, Society And Theological Perspectives On Peace: A Contemporary Phenomenon

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ABSTRACT

The Christian bible is replete with instances where peace is encouraged preached. A cursory look at the life of Jesus the founder of Christianity one sees him as an epitome of peace. Before his birth, he was called 'Prince of peace.' After his birth, peace was the conveying message 'Peace to men and women of goodwill.' The religion he founded is a religion of peace. This explains why in his ministry, he called 'peacemakers children of God' (Matthew 5:9) In spite of these, there are religious and ethnic conflicts among people of various religious confessions. The question arises: from where do these conflicts that threaten the peace of humanity come? The article focused on the social function of religion but discussed in detail the theological perspectives on peace. It also surveyed the efforts religious leaders have made to bring about peace especially through reconciliation. The article recommends national reconciliation for true peace to reign in Nigeria. In order to facilitate this discussion, historical method was adopted which hinges on analytical and critical approaches. The article is hopeful that peace is achievable if all become peacemakers and lovers of one another irrespective of religion, ethnicity and political affiliations.

Key words: Religion, Society, Theology, Peace, Conflicts, Contemporary.

INTRODUCTION

Fundamentally, religion is a universal phenomenon in the sense that no human society has been identified which does not have some form of religion. It becomes evident; therefore, that man as well as woman is both a social and religious being. Paradoxically, human beings over the years have not lived in peace in spite of their religiosity. The events of our contemporary world have shown lack of peace in both local and international levels. This lack of peace agitates the mind of this writer as well as other contemporary thinkers. It is on this background that this articles sets out to find out why there is more violence than peace in a world where people profess one religion or another. It tries to survey avenues that bring peace. There are detailed discussions on religion, its social functions and the theological perspectives on peace. Historical method is adopted in this article because it hinges on analytical and critical approaches. Describing historical method, Mhlanga and Ncube (2003) explain: "The historical research methodology consists of collection, organization, verification, validation and analysis of information in accordance with specified standards" (p.35). The following sub-headings guide us in this discussion: Meaning and explanation of religion, Functions of religion, Religion manifests social functions, the theological perspectives on peace, Nigeria in the midst of threats, the importance of national reconciliation, conclusion.

MEANING AND EXPLANATION OF RELIGION

It is instructive to begin by examining the etymology of this word. According to Norbert (2004),"Religion comes from the Latin word *religio*, which describes the religious act, the three verbs *relegere*, *religari* and *re-eligere* being possible derivations" (p.1359). These three derivative verbs become meaningful when they are taken together not in isolation. If *relegere*

means constantly turning to or consciously observing, *religari* means binding oneself back to one's origin and goal. In like manner, *re-eligere* means choosing again to live religiously by his origin and goal because as human beings we fall short of the glory of God as St. Paul tells us in Romans 3:23. Because of the abundant mercy of God we are forgiven in Christ Jesus Rom 3:24. It becomes meaningful and reasonable that human beings should constantly turn to, bind themselves to, and choose this omniscient and merciful God through this medium of religion.

Many definitions have been given to explain what religion is and what it is not. We have selected few for the purpose of this article. According to our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia, Religion is defined as "a term referring to any social, cultural, and institutional forms of engagement with the transcendent reality that is believed to embrace the world and human existence" (1991, p.819). In his analysis of religion and culture, Geertz (1973) defines religion thus: "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivation in men by (3) formulating conceptions of general orders of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (p.90). Any definition of religion that focuses only on social, cultural, psychological but devoid of theological aspect is not comprehensive. McBrien (1994) includes these aspects in this definition: "Religion is the whole complexus of attitudes, convictions, emotions, gestures, rituals, beliefs and institutions by which we come to terms with, and express our most fundamental relationship with Reality God and the created order, perceived as coming forth from God's creative hand" (p.364). In order to establish this fundamental relationship with the Reality–God, Revelation is important. Religion, therefore, is our response to revelation of God himself in Christ. Some basic but essential characteristics of religion include: "a sense of the holy or the sacred, a response to the holy which involves faith-explicit or implicit, religion which gives rise to beliefs of various kinds, religion is expressed in various actions: moral behavior consistent with beliefs and liturgy" Religion also generates a community of shared perceptions and values which helps to define human beings in their relationship with one another. Religion is truly encompassing. This introduces us to the functions of religion.

FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION

It must be stated from the onset that some theories with those who propound them do exist. In an attempt to define and explain the origin of religion, these theories postulated the functions of religion. These include: Intellectualist or Rationalists by J.C. Frazer, and E.B Taylor, Sociological by Durkheim, Psychological by Freud, Functionalist by A.R. Radcliffe Brown, Phenomenological by Otto and Mircea Eliade and the culturalist by C. Geertz. Synthesizing these theories, Greenway (2007) recalls: "Malinowski proposed that the basic need religion satisfies are biological, while Durkheim argued that the elementary needs are social. Homans asserted that both are correct: individual biological as well as group needs for reduction of anxiety are solved by religion" (p.1155). Since there is need for proper cohesion as envisaged in this article, it presupposes that the function of religion using its ritual manifested in its belief is to express and maintain sentiments for social cohesion.

Religion Manifests Social Functions

The task for this section is to examine the effects religion has on society. Put differently in a question form we ask: What does religion do to maintain a well-ordered society? In a country where drought and famine are rampant and rain is very scarce, people gather to pray for rain. This is a common phenomenon in some countries of Southern Africa. When such situation arises, people of different religions and denominations gather to pray for rain. This is one typical social function of religion. Recently in Nigeria, when the peace of the country was threatened by hate speech generated from different ethnic groups, it became necessary for

people of different religions to pray together for peace in the country. This is another social function of religion. The challenging problem may be health like the case of ebola which necessitated people to gather to pray asking God to save them from that sickness. Though a health issue, it is also a social problem involving religious practices. Bourdillon (1990) was correct when he made this general remark based on healing and religion: "It does not need a sociologist to point out that many people who normally ignore all forms of religion often resort to religion when in trouble, particularly the trouble of life-threatening illness. Religion can be and dramatically effective when anxiety leads to physical symptoms of disease" (p.20).

It is also important to briefly mention another area where religion plays a social role in the transition of people from one state to another. In some societies, this transition comes about through initiation ceremonies. Such group rituals include entrance into religious orders, other associations, marriages and naming ceremonies. Evidently, these rites mark some kind of transition which involves public acknowledgement of that transition with some form of public celebration. Of recent, the 'Ozo' title is a case in point where young rich men in Igboland spend fortune to get this title they feel gives them prestige and position in the society. One thing that people will not forget is the fact that because these rituals involve invoking spiritual powers, they are religious activities in the society. One basic characteristic of these initiation ceremonies is that they give religious and social recognition. Before we go to the second part of this article, it is equally important to note this observation made by Bourdillon. Though brief, it has a powerful introduction to our next discussion. Highlighting the social function of religion, Bourdillon observes: "Rituals can also be performed to bring conflicting persons or groups together, an obvious case being the signing of a peace treaty" (p.23). The second part of this article is on peace which is very important to every society and religion.

THE THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PEACE

Fundamentally, peace has its foundation in the Bible. This fact is well highlighted in the eleventh chapter of the Social Doctrine of the Church titled: 'The Promotion of Peace.' I have adapted article 488 as the introduction of this section. This article 488 in part states:

> ...Creation which is a reflection of divine glory aspires to peace. God created all that exists, and all of creation forms a harmonious whole that is good in its every part (cf. Gen 1:4,10,18,21,25,31). Peace is founded on the primary relationship that exists between every human being and God himself, a relationship marked by righteousness (cf. Gen 17:1). Following the voluntary act by which man altered the divine order, the world experienced the shedding of blood and division. Violence made its appearance in interpersonal relationships (cf. Gen 4:1-16), and in social relationships (cf. Gen 11:1-9). Peace and violence cannot dwell together, and where there is violence, God cannot be present (cf. 1Chr 22:8-9), p.263.

The facts highlighted above have put into perspective what this section aims to achieve namely to prove that peace and violence cannot dwell together and where there is violence, God is completely absent. Tracing the various roots of peace, Ayanga (2008) has this to say: "The Greek word for peace is *eirene*. It was used to describe the opposite of war. It was the basic foundation underlying the Roman concept *Pax Romana* which described the absence of internal (territorial) strife. The Hebrew shalom went deeper than the notion of Pax Romana. Shalom referred to the absence of war, but it also described individual and national well-being. The Arabic concept of *dar-el-salaam* (the abode of peace) captures the idea of Allah's will for peace and health of believers" (p.113). The interpretation of peace in the four languages mentioned above, Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Arabic shows the importance of peace to individuals and to the world as a whole. Various Popes in the past have added their voices to what the Bible said about the need for peace among the people of God in the world. One of such

encyclicals is the one written by Pope John XXIII titled: "*Pacem* in *Terris.*" "Peace on Earth." The circumstance leading to the origin of this encyclical is well described in the Preface of the same book in these words: "The context in which it was written is that of a bitter confrontation, known as the 'Cold War' between the Unites State and the Soviet Union in 1962, that concerned the installation of Soviet missiles on Cuban territory. The world was on the brink of nuclear war" (2014, p.4). Any reasonable God-fearing person with conscience should be concerned as Pope John XXIII was concerned at that time.

In the contemporary analysis of peace as things stand now, becomes not only urgent but also incumbent on all of us in a world whose peace is threatened again. A contemporary analysis of peace should take a clue from what our Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said in his message for the celebration of the world day of peace as explicated in this text: "In every person, the desire for peace is an essential aspiration which coincides in a certain way with the desire for a full, happy and successful human life. In other words, the desire for peace corresponds to a fundamental moral principle, namely, the duty and right to an integral social and communitarian development which is part of God's plan for mankind. Man is made for peace which is God's gift" (2014, p.100). Biblically, one of the attributes of God is peace and Christ demonstrated this when he called the peacemakers the children of God. The analysis of this beatitude where Christ called the peacemakers the children of God shows that peace is both a messianic gift and the fruit of human effort. Peace reflects love and incorporates unity. The peacemaker according to Jesus' beatitude is the one who seeks the good of the other, the fullness of good in body and soul, today and tomorrow." It is on this background that Pope Benedict XVI affirms: "Peace is not a dream or something utopia; it is possible" (p.104). Pope John XXII in another text tells us the basic principles guiding the achievement of peace when he declares: "Peace on earth which man throughout the ages has so longed for and sought after can never be established, never guaranteed except by the diligent observance of divinely established order" (p.21). Continuing on these basic principles, Pope John XXII states: "In order to build peace; we must avail of the deepest nature of human beings; which is to be inherently social, and also to consider it in the light of revelation" (p.6). In fact a correct understanding of human person is essential for the promotion of peace. This correct understanding of human person requires the establishment of a proper constituted order based on justice and love. Though these two principles justice and love are essential, the social doctrine of the Church considers love more effective by saying, "true and lasting peace is more a matter of love than of justice because the function of justice is merely to do away with the obstacles of peace: the injury done or the damage caused. Peace itself, however, is an act and results only from love" (2008, pp. 265-266). Certainly for any society to promote peace, it must be based on truth. A cursory look of the analysis of peace shows that love, truth and justice are paramount to the co-existence and orderliness of any society. Recognizing the principles discussed above and the role of the society to build a true and lasting peace, Pope John XXII (2014) explains:

> *When society is formed on a basis of rights and duties, men have an immediate grasp of spiritual and intellectual values, and have no difficulty in understanding what is meant by truth, justice, charity and freedom. They become moreover, conscious of being members of such a society. And that is not all. Inspired by such principles, they attain a better knowledge of true God-a personal God transcending human nature. They recognize that their human relationship with God forms the very foundation of their life—interior life of the spirit, and the life which they live in the society of their fellows, p.39.*

As people created in the image and likeness of God, we have both rights and duties. Every created person has the right to live, right to education, right to freedom—freedom of worship and freedom of speech. Everybody has also the duty to obey the laws guiding the society, to

obey both civil and church authorities as well as the duty to respect the freedom of other people. Pope John XXIII argues that the principal function of public authorities is to recognize, respect, coordinate, safeguard and promote citizens' rights and duties. When people receive their due rights and exercise their duties appropriately, a healthy atmosphere is created and peace reigns in the hearts of all. On the contrary, when the rights of people are denied or taken away from them, violence erupts, war breaks, blood is shed, enmity grows, and society is contaminated. An ideal society is one where peace prevails and peoples' rights and duties are recognized, respected, and properly coordinated. However, when things go wrong, people should not resort to violence. Concerning the evil of violence, the social doctrine of the Church stipulates: "Violence is never a proper response. With conviction of her faith in Christ and with the awareness of her mission, the church proclaims that violence is evil, that violence is unacceptable as a solution to problems, that violence is unworthy of man. Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend; the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings" (p.266).

It is on this platform that the teaching organ of the church the magisterium condemns 'the savagery of war.' Preferring peace to war, the social doctrine of the church holds that "nothing is lost by peace; everything may be lost by war." In her wisdom, therefore, the church also teaches that "the damage caused by armed conflict is not only material but also moral. In the end, war is the failure of all true humanism, it is always a defeat for humanity" (p.268).The church classifies terrorism as one of the most brutal forms of violence which traumatizes the international community today. Unfortunately it is found even in Nigeria where Boko Haram has caused massive destruction and untold hardship to the people. For the social doctrine of the church, terrorism is to be condemned in the most absolute terms. It shows complete contempt for human life; and can never be justified, since the human person is always an end not a means" (p.276). It is because people especially world powers manufacture dangerous weapons that they have become war-mongers. The action of North Korea in terms of launching powerful nuclear war-heads is a great concern to our contemporary world. The prophecy of Pope John XXIII where he condemned as erroneous the premise of stock-piling of dangerous weapons is true in our time just as it was at the time when he warned: "There is a common belief that under modern conditions peace cannot be assured except on the basis of an equal balance of armaments and that this factor is the probable cause of this stock-pilling of armaments. Thus, if one country increases its military strength, others are immediately roused by a competitive spirit to augment their own supply of armaments… Consequently the people are living in the grip of constant fear" (p.68). The church is in support of disarmament the most dangerous ones.

It is true that guns do not know their manufacturer. This means that a gun can be used to kill its manufacturer. Consequently, the idea of manufacturing dangerous weapons is questionable. When people depend on weapons, they manufacture guns both for self defense and protection as well as for destruction. At whatever reason, they should be careful and watchful over Christ's words when he said: "As long as the strong and armed man guards his house, his goods are safe. But when a stronger one attacks and overcomes him, the challenger takes away all the weapons he relied on and disposes his spoils" (Luke 11:21-22). In this scenario, the challenger after disarming the owner of the weapon can use it to kill him. The stock-pilling of armaments is a wild wind that does no one any good. The best way of handling them is disarmament. The position of the Church is clearly stated in these lines: "The ban on the development, production, stock-pilling and use of chemical and biological weapons as well as provisions that require their destruction, complete regulatory norms aimed at banning such baleful weapons, the use of which is explicitly condemned by the magisterium… Disarmament must include the banning of weapons that inflict excessively traumatic injury or that strike indiscriminately. This

includes anti-personal landmines, a type of small arm that is inhumanly insidious because it continues to harm even long after the cessation of hostilities" (2008, p.274). The time and money used to manufacture arms could be used to work for peace which benefits everybody.

The situation in our contemporary world calls for great concern because from time to time, tensions run high which could pre-empt and precipitate the dreaded third world war. Recalling the fears of Pope Pius XII his predecessor, Pope John XXIII laments: "The calamity of a world war, with the economic and social ruin and moral excesses and dissolution that accompany it, must not on any account be permitted to engulf the human race for a third time" (2008, p.69). This is a good warning to all and sundry especially the world powers who behave and act irrationally. It is important to remind the presidents of America and North Korea of the implication of what they are toying with their unreasonable rhetoric utterances. Each time these two presidents show their muzzles by words of threat, tensions grip the whole world. Dwyer (2006) describes this tension in this analysis: "Catholic social teaching recognizes that eschatological tension marks contemporary life; the grace of the kingdom of God is already present but the fullness of God's reign has not been realized. A certain tension, therefore, exists between the vision if God's reign and its concrete realization in history. With this context, the church situates its treatment of peace and war, short of the fullness of the kingdom, peace is possible but neither permanent nor total in a world marred by the presence of sin within human heart" (p.750). The church, therefore, must not in any way be drawn into taking sides. Instead it should stand firm to condemn those actions that will escalate wars. The church should preach so as to touch the hearts of people in order to bring about change of hearts— free from conceiving wars. On the other hand, the responsibility to dissuade people from war is not limited to the governments it must start from each human heart. This explains why Jeremiah exclaims: "The heart is most deceitful and perverse! What is there within man, who can understand him? Only Yahweh can search the heart and penetrate the mind" (17:9-10). Humanly speaking, we know what is in a person's heart from what he/she says. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks Matt 12:34. If wicked hearts are converted and controlled, the use of dangerous weapons on Innocent people will be eradicated. For this goal to be realized, education through family activities in parishes, mosques and at all levels of formal learning is required as practical ingredient for changing hearts from committing evils. This brings us to another important warning from Magesa when he alluded to Carlston saying:

> *At times, however leadership fails and what Kenneth Carlston describes as constitutive conflict arises, which is a product of the incongruence of an ideal, valued social order and the actual social order, as perceived by the members of such order! Carlston argues that unless those who are leaders or occupants of posts of authority in such social order are able to arrest the trend towards disintegration by controlling the conditions leading towards its occurrence, disintegration and the constitution of a new social order or social orders will take place (p.234).*

This is a useful warning to be heeded to both on the international and national levels. When there is disorder, disintegration with its adverse effects sets in. This now brings us to the present religious and political conditions in Nigeria.

NIGERIA, IN THE MIDST OF THREATS

The Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 is a case in point that will be very hard to forget because of the hurts it created in the hearts of people. The peace and unity of the country was called to question in those years of war which brought about loss of lives and property. The devastating effects of the Nigerian civil war have not been forgotten because of the horror and agony it caused on human beings and their property. Recently, the peace in Nigeria is being threatened from these angles. Firstly, the religious intolerance perpetrated by Boko Haram now branded a

terrorist group which is trying to Islamize Nigeria with the intention of introducing Sharia law. Their way of life goes contrary to the human right of freedom of worship already outlined. Recapitulating the essentials of freedom of worship and at the same time regretting the practice of religious intolerance, Pope Benedict XVI argues:

> *One of the fundamental human rights, also with reference to international peace, is the right of individuals and communities to religious freedom. At this stage in history, it is becoming increasingly important to promote this right not only from the negative point of view, as freedom from—for example, obligations or limitations involving the freedom to choose one's religion—but also from the positive point of view, in its various expressions, as freedom for—for example, bearing witness to one's religion, making its teaching known, engaging in activities in the educational, benevolent and charitable fields which permit the practice of religious precepts, and existing and acting as social bodies structured in accordance with the proper doctrinal principles and institutional ends of each. Sadly, even in countries of long standing Christian tradition, instances of religious intolerance are being more numerous especially in relation to Christianity and those who simply wear identifying signs of their religion. (p.108).*

Current events involving religious clashes in Nigeria are not far-fetched from the situation described here by the Pope Emeritus. For example, between 2014 and 2015, there were frequent clashes between Christians and Muslims who wanted Sharia law introduced in Nigeria. Every time these religious clashes occurred, there were both loss of lives and property. Such situations do not encourage peace and co-existence in the country. The clash between farmers and herdsmen has claimed many lives in many states of the country. The recent clash in Benue caused the death of many people. When lives are lost, peace is adversely threatened. Unfortunately, those who perpetrate the violence that results to many deaths do so with all impunity. Secondly, of recent Nigeria has been polarized by hate speech where by the IPOBs, the AREWAs and the ODUDUWAs tried to alienate the ethnic group from one another. Consequently, issuing an ultimatum to leave one ethnic group or the other has become the order of the day. A situation like this does not promote peace nor does it encourage cohesion and co-existence. In the four cases mentioned above—the civil war, the clash between Christians and Muslims, the clash between farmers and herdsmen as well as the hate speech from the ethnic groups, lives and property have been lost and enmity created. Certainly, there is need for national reconciliation.

IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

In the cause of human history, religion and religious people had been known for the role they played in enhancing peace and also reconciling people when there was conflict. It is also regrettable that sometimes different religious beliefs had been sources of conflicts. In human history, there is always a paradox because people are made differently and they exhibit their cultural and religious upbringing differently. This section aims at finding out where religion has helped to reconcile conflicts. It also explores various ways of reconciliation. In the first place, it is important to bring to limelight an International organization called "*Pax Christi.*" This is an International catholic peace organization started in March, 1945 to reconcile French and German people through prayers after World War II. Since July 3, 1947 when Pope Pius XII gave the organization the papal approval, it has stood the test of time by advocating for peace. The aim of *Pax Christ* is to "promote the unity and pacification of the world through the promotion of a new international order based on the natural law and on the justice and charity of Christ." P.735. This organization has been promoting social, scientific and theological discussions and studies of peace to achieve its objective.

During the time of Pope John Paul II, he invited world religious leaders to Assisi where they prayed together for the peace of the world. Pope Benedict XVI tried to maintain this tradition started by his predecessor. Those religious world leaders commended the spirit of peace that was manifested in the Catholic Church through Pope John Paul II. In South Africa, after the apartheid and its evil effects, Truth, Justice and Peace Reconciliation Committee was formed. The committee headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu was charged to reconcile South Africans who had scars of wounds caused by the apartheid. These examples have shown that religion played its role in bringing peace and reconciliation. In this descriptive text, Anyanga (2008) tells us the meaning of reconciliation: "It refers to the setting aside of hostilities and the sources of conflict. It involves the normalizing of relationships gone sour. Thus, there is need for reconciliation between God and human beings and human beings and nature. This would be the foundation upon which, all efforts of reconciliation should be based" (p.114). In our contemporary world, the need for more reconciliation becomes more urgent and more necessary. Reconciliation not only unites warring parties, it also brings healing to all especially the most hurt. In the case of South Africa, both the oppressors and the oppressed were helped to welcome and accept one another thereby claiming their oneness in the church with one God as their Father.

This is where we are found wanting in Nigeria. After the Nigerian civil war, there was no proper reconciliation between those who fought on the side of Nigeria and on the side of Biafra. It may not be completely wrong to say that because there was no proper religious reconciliation that there are pockets of momentary resistance from some quarters of the country. It is forty-seven years since the Nigerian civil war ended, yet many people especially those who lost their beloved ones still nurse grudges in their hearts. Those who are maimed because of the physical injuries they sustained, carry around the burden of their deformity and the heavy hearts their disability imposed on them. In order to bring about the desired peace, it will be helpful to have a proper religious reconciliation in Nigeria. The affected people need to be told that they are important, that they are recognized and that the country as a whole shares their grief and sufferings with them. Surely if these aggrieved people listen to the word of God at that Mass of reconciliation as well as the contents of the Eucharistic Prayer for reconciliation II, they will be touched in their hearts. A part of this Eucharistic prayer says:

> *For though the human race is divided by dissension and discord, yet we know that by 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 peoples 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..."*

Such prayer said with faith will move mountains as Jesus said. Finally, there is need for reconciliation between human beings and the environment they inhabit. This is necessary because it has been observed as a matter of great concern that the degradation of the environment has brought to the fore the conflict between human beings and nature. The world is suffering for harsh and unpredictable climate change which has impacted negatively on many countries of the world including Nigeria. Pope Francis (2015) expresses this concern thus: "Many intensive forms of environmental exploitation and degradation not only exhaust the resources which provide local communities with their livelihood, but also undo the social structures which, for a long time, shaped cultural identity and their sense of life and community" (p.83). Recalling the importance of environment, Pope Francis continues: "In our rooms, our homes, our work places and neighbour hoods, we use our environment as a way of expressing our identity. We make every effort to adapt to our environment, but when it is disorderly, chaotic or saturated with noise and ugliness, such overstimulation makes it difficult

to find ourselves integrated and happy" (p.84). Instead of the word 'reconciliation' with the environment, Pope Francis prefers the phrase, "If the limitations of the environment are compensated." In this way, any place is destined to turn from being a hell on earth into heading towards a dignified life. When we preserve the environment and till the earth which is part of the environment we experience the dignity in labour and human dignity. Reconciliation, therefore, is a healthy activity of body and soul for both human beings and their environment.

CONCLUSION

The theme of this article has helped us to navigate through definition and meaning, functions of religion where we discussed at length the social role of religion. The theological perspectives on peace highlighted the biblical and theological implications of peace. The article also discussed the importance of reconciliation and then recommended a national reconciliation. Social and religious institutions are obliged to play a vital role in the pursuit of world peace. It is important to pay heed to the appeal of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI to all universities when he said:

> *"Cultural institutions, schools, and universities have a special mission of peace. They are called to make a notable contribution not only to the formation of new generations of leaders, but also to the renewal of public institutions, both national and international. They can also contribute to a scientific reflection which will ground economic and financial activities on a solid anthropological and ethical basis. Today's world, especially the world of politics, needs to be sustained by fresh thinking and a new cultural synthesis as to overcome purely technical approaches and to harmonize the various political currents with a view to the common good" (p.112-113). The catechism of the Catholic Church gives the summary of our discussion in this context: "Respect for the development of human life requires peace. Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries. Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among men [women], respect of dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity. Peace is the tranquility of order. Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity." (1995, p.495). Interestingly, the catechism of the Catholic Church has a very refined, solid and theological synthesis of this coveted word 'peace' in this context: "Earthly peace is the image and fruit of the peace of Christ, the messianic Prince of Peace. By the blood of his cross, in his own person, he killed the hostility; he reconciled men and women with God and made his church the sacrament of unity of human race and of its union with God. He is our peace. He has declared: Blessed are the peacemakers" (p.496).*

We began with peacemakers and we have concluded this article with peacemakers hoping that all of us will be peacemakers so as to be the rightful children of God. Peace is a treasure which every human being go for because where there is peace, there is development.

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