

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RELIGION, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

Topic

***CAN THE EAST AFRICAN REGION EXPERIENCE
IMPROVEMENT IN THE QUALITY OF PEOPLE'S
LIVES, WITHOUT THE REALIZATION OF PEACE,
AND WHAT SHALL THE ROLE OF RELGION BE ?***

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GREETINGS:

In the Name of the Risen Lord : Jesus Christ and on behalf of John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre, I greet you all with His Words: “ Peace be with you” Jn.20,19

First of all, I wish to convey my gratitude to Rev. Dr. Fred Sheldon Mwesigwa, Chair of the Organising Committee for preparing such a meaningful International Conference on Religion for Peace and Development. I thank you also for inviting us to participate in this important conference.

INTRODUCTION:

We are living in a critical time in the history of many of our countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Burundi’s national and presidential elections will take place in May this year. Rwanda’s presidential election is scheduled for later this year in August. Sudan held national elections in April, setting the stage for the much anticipated 2011 referendum. Kenya maintains a power-sharing arrangement while edging towards national presidential elections in 2012. To date the fighting in Eastern Congo, one of the largest and richest countries in Africa has left more that 4.5 million people dead and displaced millions more. Uganda is also preparing for national and presidential elections in 2011, amidst growing concerns of violence and political intimidation.

Moreover, people in these nations still lack the capacity to participate in the decisions pertaining to the development of their nations. They are always at the mercy of the political leaders who rarely think in terms of the common good and the well being of all citizens. Since the majority of East Africans are strong believers in God, religion needs to be more instrumental in fostering development and pace.

The topic under discussion is : “Can the East African region experience improvement in the quality of people’s lives, without the realization of peace, and what shall the role of religion be” ? The areas under discussion are:

1. Context of the Great Lakes Region.
2. Understanding of Religion, Peace and Development.
3. Brief history of the role of Religion in promoting Peace and Development
4. Faith doing Justice, Integral Development and Peace in this Region
5. Some Proposals to focus on (Participation, Responsible Leadership, Role of women in society and Churches, Care for Environment)
6. Questions for reflection

1. THE CONTEXT OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION

The vast majority of people in many sub-Saharan African nations, and in the Great Lakes Region, are deeply connected to the practice and major tenets of one or the other of the world's two largest religions: Christianity and Islam.

Despite the dominance of Christianity and Islam, Traditional African Religious beliefs and practices are alive and coexist with Islam and Christianity. Christianity and Islam also coexist with each other, and relatively few see evidence of widespread anti-Muslim or anti-Christian hostility.

While the number of Muslims living between the Saharan desert and the Cape of Good Hope has increased from 110 million in 1990 to approximately 234 million in 2010, the members of Christian Churches have grown even faster, soaring from about 170 million to 470 million in the same period. While Sub-Saharan Africa has about twice as many Christians as Muslims, on the African continent as a whole the two faiths are roughly balanced with some 400 million to 500 million followers each. However, "According to some analysts, most people in Africa rank unemployment, crime and corruption as bigger problems than religious conflicts"¹

In the Great Lakes Region, we have experienced, during the last four decades, both some improvement in the quality of people's lives and also impoverishment or diminishment in people's lives due to violent conflicts in Uganda and most neighbouring countries as well as serious injustices of different kinds.

In a region so blessed with abundant human, natural, mineral and spiritual resources, people have been impoverished and marginalised to a life of dire poverty, violence, internally displaced people (IDP), domestic violence and undignified living in the slums of our cities and villages.

An important question: How can families and people in this region enjoy peace without social justice, that is without having all their basic needs met?

"If you want Peace, work for Justice".²

2. UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGION, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT.

What kind of Religion are we talking about?

In both academic and popular venues, there is a tendency to present religion as a simple, undifferentiated phenomenon. We live in an increasingly pluralistic society. At the same time the diversity of understanding and living each one's faith in both Christian and Muslim communities reveals a great wealth for mutual enrichment.

Religion is defined "*as the external, social, institutional expression of our faith in God*"³
B. Lonergan defines *religious faith as "knowledge born of religious love"*⁴

¹ "Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life" Article.. P.2. April 2010.

² John Paul II. New year's Message on Peace. 1990

³ McBrien Richard. "Catholicism". p.1254. Winston press. Minneapolis. 1981

⁴ Lonergan Bernard. "Dimensions of Meaning". in F.,E.Crowe., 252-267, New York. Herder.1967

Hollenbach says that: *“Religious beliefs and loyalties are facts that energize the commitment of civil society for they give people common values, effective motivation and cognitive reasons for active participation in public life”*⁵

A religious pluralistic community does not share a common vision of wellbeing or common good. Therefore a culture of dialogue in mutual listening and respect is becoming imperative today for harmonious living and promoting the common good.

All religious communities face a fundamental challenge: How to relate their distinctive visions of the good human life with the growing awareness that all persons are linked in a web of global interdependence.?

In this interdependent world, the need for a clear vision of the common good for the whole human race is evident. And yet, religious and cultural pluralism means that there is not agreement about the meaning of a global common good.

How can our religious beliefs contribute to the understanding and promotion of a more just, reconciled and peaceful society?

I would like to define briefly the following three terms:

*By Justice: I mean Social Justice (distributive, commutative and restorative).

All this in the context of Biblical Justice by which I mean: right relationships with God, myself, neighbour and Creation.

*By Peace: I mean: Total wellbeing: harmonious relations: *Shalom*.

*By Development: I mean: Integral Human Development (not just economic growth)

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN PROMOTING PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION.

“Can the East African region experience improvement in the quality of people’s lives , without the realization of peace, and what shall the role of Religion be ?” (Question of this conference)

Religion’s role is to be understood in the context of today’s conflicts with the examples of :Sudan, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. I will argue that, despite too many examples and evidence of conflicts and ethnic tensions, Christian Faith has the potential and aim of promoting Human Dignity, Human Rights, Common Good, Integral Development and care for the Environment.

*“ It is the case that many of the conflicts in the region and the world today that have religious dimensions are not simply clashes between faiths. Religion is rather a flag that serves as a rallying point for other political or ethnic purposes” .“ When high walls are constructed on the basis of religion , the religious communities involved can effectively be properly called: “fundamentalists”*⁶

⁵ Hollenbach David. “the Global Face of Public Faith: Political, Human rights and Christian Ethos”. P. . Georgetown University Press. Washington,D.C. 2003. p.112.

⁶ Hollenbach David. “The Common Good and Christian Ethics”., Cambridge University Press.2002. p.24

Yet the phenomenon of fundamentalism is not “fundamental” to all strongly professed religious convictions.

How can Religion , in a pluralistic global society, contribute to Justice, Peace and Development?. We have outstanding examples of religious leaders such as : Ghandi, M.L. King, Ar. Desmond Tutu and political leaders like Nyerere, K.Anan Mandela and B.Obama, who, motivated by their faith, fostered a more just and peaceful society. During apartheid era in South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s chairmanship of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the culmination of his long role in seeking peaceful path to a truly common justice in that country.

In our Region, the contribution of religious leaders like Archbishop Munzihirwa of Bukavu, Bishop Kataliko of Butembo, Archbishop. J. B. Odama in Uganda and others have been very instrumental in the process of peace building in the region. History tells us that in east Africa, religion has contributed greatly to enhancing authentic human development for all. However, it is equally obvious that religions still contribute to causing tensions, mistrust, violence and even deaths.

All faiths: Christian, Muslims, Buddhists and others, have often contributed to antagonise individuals and communities. Religion has also been quite often used by leaders for cultural and political purposes. Today , the challenge we face is: How can predominantly Christian Countries like Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda , Kenya, etc. fall into serious conflicts, wars and even genocides? Is the ethnic blood stronger than the Christian Baptism waters?

We need to seriously ponder the question posed by Cardinal Echezarai, former head of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace. When he visited Rwanda ,soon after the tragic events of 1994, he addressed the assembled Church leders: “*Are you saying that the blood of tribalism is deeper than the waters of baptism*”? *One of the leaders present honestly answered: “yes, it is”*. This is one of the hard questions we need to grapple with. In a controversial article: “The Clash of Civilisations” in “Foreign Affairs”, Samuel Huntington affirms that the conflicts in the world’s politics will be driven by clash of civilization and cultures rather than by ideologies and economics.

“By civilization and cultures he means: communities distinguished from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and most important, religion”⁷

The sociologist Jose Casanova describes different models for the public presence of religion in our time:

- a. decline of religion in the world
- b. privatization of religion in modern society
- c. the functional differentiation of the role of religion from other spheres of human activity.

Casanova argues persuasively that religion is not declining and being privatised. Religion can promote a sense of ultimate meaning and salvation that includes hope in all our political, economic and intellectual activities.⁸

⁷ Huntington Samuel. “The Clash of Civilizations” in “Foreign affairs”, p.24. Cambridge U.Press 1997.

⁸ Casanova Jose. “Public Religion in the modern world”,. Chicago Press. 1994 , p.6-7

We need to consider how Christian faith might relate to public life and communities. The social teaching of the Church present the following themes relating faith with public life:

- d. the dignity of the human person and human rights
- e. the importance of commitment and solidarity in sharing common resources and services.
- f. the religious significance of all human activities.⁹

The Churches need to understand the dialogic and solidarity dimension in their relations between faith, culture and public life. Among the challenges Religion face today are the following ones: How to develop a global ethic to be the foundation of a pluralistic society?

Does human dignity and rights offer sufficient foundation for a global ethics seeking the integral human development of all citizens? Can we move towards a common core of ethical values in a religious and cultural pluralism? Who can own such core ethics? What are the basic goods people have a right to and who is to provide them? What social and institutional arrangements are needed?

4. FAITH DOING JUSTICE, INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

4.1. JESUS CHRIST IS OUR JUSTICE, OUR WAY TO INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT AND OUR PEACE.

“I came that they might have Life and have it to the full”. Jn.10:10

The final Message of the second Catholic Synod of Bishops from Africa which took place in Rome in October 2009 ,reminds us that the Church is at the service of Justice, Reconciliation and Peace.¹⁰

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself”(2 Cor.5:19)

“ For He is the Peace among us and has made the two races into one” Eph.2:13-1

Only true Faith in Christ leads us to see and treat each other as members of the same God’s Family and therefore to address the different cultural, economic and political challenges seeking integral human development for all.

Looking at the Churches all over the world and in East Africa in particular, we can observe disturbing injustices within our own Christian communities. And even more disturbing is the practice of cover up and secrecy which prevents us from living in the truth and from doing justice to the victims who have their dignity and rights violated. Vulnerable people have their dreams for integral development shattered by social injustices and by the Church’s silence in confronting evil and playing her prophetic

⁹ Vatican Council II. Constitution : Gaudium et Spes.

¹⁰ Second Synod for Africa. Final Message of the Bishops to the People of God. P.12. Paulines. Nairobi. 2009

role. Our Christian Faith leads to recognise our mistakes and to go much further in doing compassionate justice to both offenders and victims of abuses.

4.2. HOW CAN RELIGION DO MORE JUSTICE AND BRING INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE ?

Political leaders often fail to recognise the role that Religious peace makers can play in building trust and fostering justice, reconciliation and participation.¹¹ They often want religious leaders contribution and service to society not to go beyond religious celebrations. However, Christian Churches have a mandate and responsibility to promote a more just, integrally developed and peaceful society and they still remain committed to promoting the integral development of every one. As prophets, covering up injustices diminishes the very credibility of our faith. Our faith often remains “external” rather than life giving and transformative to building the Kingdom of God on earth. Every abuse and lack of transparency from religious leaders means the fracturing of faith, trust and the erosion of hope in a God of love and a church of compassion and communion.

*“Placing so much power, privilege and authority on the religious leaders makes it easy for abuses of all kinds to occur. Time has come for the laity of the church to play a decisive role in the management of the church and in holding their pastors to account.”*¹²

The reality of modern culture is that there is a strong movement which holds that religion and politics should occupy radically differentiated spheres in which religious and private convictions do not exert themselves within the public square.

The question remains : what kind of religion?

As mentioned earlier, Bernard Lonergan defines *religious faith as knowledge born of religious love*. This kind of faith occurs when the love of God floods our hearts so that we can embrace values that are not only vital, but also social, cultural, personal and transcendental. This is the kind of religion that we should promote. I believe our world needs this kind of religion and faith. *“The measure of the true value of any religion is to what extent it promotes the justice, peace and happiness of humankind and projects the ideal of love. The religion we need in the world of today is not the one that tends to totalize and swallow everyone in the blaze of dogmatism or strict uniformity”*¹³ Authentic religion promotes compassionate justice and inter-religious dialogue. We need the courage of truth, the witness of holiness and prophetic action driven by the Spirit of love. Peace, in Christian teaching is the fruit of an order shaped by values of justice, truth, freedom and love. According to the Islamic teachings, peace comes through submission to Allah in Islam. Islam also aims at helping all live in peace-love.¹⁴

11. Aquilino Tarino. “The role of religion in peace building”. AFER, vol51, nr.4, p.386. Eldoret.2009

12 Stan Chu Ilo. “Sexual abuse and the fracturing of faith and religion”. Catholic Information Service Africa. (CISA). April 2010

13 Stan Chu Ilo. “Sexual abuse and the fracturing of faith and religion”. CISA. April .2010

14 Text Book on Civic/Ethics education for teachers, published by John Paul II Justice and Peace centre.. April 2010.

5. PROPOSITIONS

Allow me to point out FOUR areas where we can focus our joint efforts:

5.1. PARTICIPATION OF CIVIC SOCIETY IN DECISION MAKING

Both in the Church and State, we need to foster closer participation of civic society to include all the talents and potential in building a better world.

We need in the Churches closer cooperation that goes beyond coexistence in parallel worlds, to conjoint efforts to promote a more just, peaceful and integrally developed society. Changes and transformation rarely come from the top leaders, but from the communities and a more informed, motivated and engaged civic society, through an authentic civic-ethics education at all levels. Our Centre is engaged in this area of ethics-civic education and has presented, through the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU), a Petition to Parliament requesting them to integrate Civic education in the national Education Curriculum. This will enable all citizens, motivated also by their faith, to engage in building a more just and reconciled society.

5.2. RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP TO PROMOTE SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE COMMON GOOD

We are having a serious leadership crisis the world over. Religious, political and economic leaders are often losing credibility by the day in many countries. Without authentic faith and ethical values being deepened in our leaders, there is little hope of leaders working for the common good rather than for their own selfish interests. In such a time as this, religious and political leaders must deliver a leadership of participation, service and accountability.

5.3. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN JUSTICE AND PEACE BUILDING

The prominence of women in the Old and especially in the New Testament witnessing and services to the Church communities speaks out very eloquently. (Lk.24,1-12,22-24). Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the other women are the first and most courageous witnesses to the Risen Lord. St Paul also speaks of the help given by women, such as Priscilla and others in the early Christian communities.¹⁵ The second African Synod also affirms the principle that the irreplaceable role of women in decision making and services to the community must be ensured in the Church, as they are the back bone in the local Christian communities¹⁶.

5.4. FAITH CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

¹⁵ Navituro Bernardette. "The role of women in peace building and reconciliation in the Amecea Countries". AFER, vol.51, n.3, p.279. 2009

¹⁶ Second Synod for Africa. Final Message of the Bishops to the People of God.. nr.25. 2009

The global society and the Churches are becoming more aware of the urgency to attend to the dramatic degradation of mother Earth. Scientific evidence, like the *“Inconvenient Truth”*, show the urgency of the joint and urgent task.

However our leaders, gathered in Copenhagen in Dec.09 fell far short of their responsibility to tackle this urgent need of a global commitment to reduce the rapid climate changes taking place and which affect especially the developing nations. Pope Benedict XVI, in his New Year message on Peace, affirmed that : “ If your want Peace , care for the Earth”.¹⁷

Environmental Justice is part and parcel of our Christian faith.

CONCLUSION

“Can the East African region experience improvement in the quality of people’s lives without the realization of Peace and what shall be the role of Religion be”?

If our focus remains: to improve the quality of people’s lives in this region, then all political, cultural and in particular religious leaders must become prophetic witnesses and active promoters of compassionate justice for all, especially the most vulnerable, abused and marginalised. In the spirit of the Gospel, religious leaders need to grow into a participatory leadership, remaining close to the people with the mind and heart of the Good Shepherd. Jn.10.

Society needs leaders and religious leaders, especially today, who are prophetic, humble enough to listen , courageous and working together for compassionate justice, integral development and authentic peace. The very relevance and impact of religious faith depends on this. Shall we be able to read the signs of the times with audacity?

Shall we be free enough to be lead by the Spirit of the Risen Lord ? Shall we be passionate for Christ and passionate for humanity where we live?

Thanks for your attention. I wish you a fruitful discussion.

6. SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How can Religion foster integral development and peace in today’s society ?
2. How can we grow into communities that live a faith doing justice and building peace?
3. How can the Christian Churches contribute to promote leaders of integrity for the common good ?

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¹⁷ 2010 New Year Message of Pope Benedict XVI. www.zenit.org

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RELIGION, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT.

TOPIC

***FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS IN THE EAST AFRICAN
REGION- THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN PEACE BUILDING
AND DEVELOPMENT.***

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International Conference on Religion for Peace and Development

Subtopic: For Such a Time as This in the East African Region- The role of Religion in Peace building and development .

Abstract

The East African Region is experiencing the impasse of wars, violence, bad leadership, poverty, corruption and even genocide which hampers development. Today, peace is an essential requirement for development. Where there is no peace, development cannot happen. Wars and violence continuously destroy any form of development, while corruption and lack of care for the common good not only lead to insecurity but continue to plunge nations into poverty.

The majority of the people in East Africa are either Christian, Muslims or follow African Traditional religion. However, their beliefs rarely do translate into practices of peace, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and non-violence. The values of faith have not been translated into concrete life, especially in the socio-political, social –cultural and socio-economic dimensions. Moreover, there is also violence that is being inflicted in the name of God by religious fanatics, fundamentalists and extremists of different kinds.

However, since many people have the basics of belief in God or god (s) religion has an irreplaceable role to play in improving the quality of people's lives. Religion plays a central role in attitude and character formation. It's unfortunate that the public sphere where public policies are debated, religion seems not to have a place or it is forgotten. Critics argue that religions in East Africa are the sources of conflicts and therefore they should not be included in the process of development and peacebuilding. Off course this is not true. There can never be authentic development without peace. Any envisaged development occurs where there is peace. And since people in East Africa adhere to one religion or another, religion should be used to build peace and foster development especially by investing in human capital and enhancing authentic religious beliefs which in the long run will affect all the other spheres that pertain to individual and communal life. Thus religion should address critical issues such as good governance, social justice, security, economic empowerment, political or civic education, gender equality, climate justice, violence, conflict, the common good, ethnicity, and local capacities of self organization.

Introduction

We are living in a critical time in the history of many of our countries in East Africa (Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda) and the neighbourhood. Burundi's national and presidential elections this year in May. Rwanda's presidential elections are scheduled for later this year in August, followed by local (March 2011) and parliamentary (October 2011) elections. In April this year, Sudan held national elections, marking the end of the transitional period and setting the stage for the much anticipated 2011 referendum that will determine the future of Southern Sudan and the nation as a whole. The Government of National Unity in Kenya is maintaining a tenacious power-

sharing arrangement while edging towards national presidential elections in 2012, with the horrific events of 2007 still fresh in people's memories. To date the fighting in Eastern Congo, one of the largest and richest countries in Africa has left more than 4.5 million people dead and displaced millions more. Uganda is also preparing for national and presidential elections in 2011 amidst growing concerns of violence and political intimidation.

As mentioned before, majority of the people in East Africa follow one religion or the other. Christianity is alive and well. Examples of Christian growth and dynamism are everywhere to be seen: the number of churches and Christian ministries is on the rise, church membership and affiliation is up, Christian services are packed, seminaries and theological centres are full. It is not only growth in numbers of Christianity in Africa that has been noted, but also deep commitments and lively expression witnessed within many congregations and churches. The Gospel in East Africa is not simply a "spiritual" movement, but a social movement that has much to do with everyday issues and possibilities of health, education, jobs and welfare. Therefore, if there is any hope in the region, religion is part and parcel of that story of hope.

The Distressing factors

Although the numbers of believers are increasing, there is another story which is not so positive- in fact, it's distressing. It is the story of conflict, wars, poverty, ethnic violence, selfishness and greed which does not care for the common good, corruption, bad governance, environment degradation, injustices, civil unrest, and violence that haunts the region. From Rwanda to Burundi, to Kenya, to Tanzania and to Uganda, the growth in the number of Christians has not necessarily meant the reduction in widespread poverty, conflicts, wars, ethnicity, corruption, violence, civil unrest and environment degradation. On the contrary the social ills, in some places are intensifying. Religious beliefs rarely do translate into practices of peace, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and non-violence. "They believe in justice, but they do not practice it. They believe in Christ as the prince of Peace, but they do not uphold peace. They believe in love of neighbour as the greatest commandment in Christian living, but they do not practice it."¹⁸ The values of faith have not been translated into concrete life, especially in the socio-political and socio-economic dimensions.

This is what causes any one concerned about the future of religion and the good of the region to pause, and even ask the difficult question: What is going on? How can this region with so many people adhering to different religions continue to be mired in such intractable violence, wars, conflicts, poverty, bad governance and unbridled corruption? Does religion make any difference? What kind of difference? How can religion transcend ethnic prejudice in ethnically fragmented societies in order to cater for the needs of diverse ethnic communities? Why doesn't there seem to be any visible sign of their getting better when it comes to the history of war and ethnic violence in the region?

¹⁸ Eunice Kamaara, "Causes and Dimensions of Conflict From An African Instituted Churches Perspective, in Mayr Getau and Wasye Musyomi, eds., *Overcoming Violence: A faith -Based Response* (Nairobi: Kenaafic Diaries Limited, 2003) 73-86, at 82.

How can religion sustain the confidence of the followers in matters of governance and social justice?

In many countries that comprise the East African region, there is no safe place especially for the vulnerable places, where they can achieve integral human development. For many years, peace and security continue to elude the region. There is division in many countries, growing violent conflicts, wars and even genocides, injustices of all forms, political intolerance, discrimination and defamation of human dignity, corruption, bad leadership, violence of all forms starting from the families, divisions within and among Churches, poverty, continuous human rights abuse, families breaking up and environment degradation. There is also growth in the number of people affected by HIV/AIDS and growth in the gap between the poorest and the richest.

The issues of ethnic rivalry, hatred, wars, conflicts, poverty, bad governance, unbridled corruption and the outright violence require special and urgent attention as they threaten to undermine the basic fabric of social existence, development and peace. In fact, over the last two decades, the region has experienced an increase in civil unrest and violence associated with ethnicity and tribalism. The 2007 post election violence in Kenya and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda provide a watershed event and in many ways a mirror to those who adhere to religion in the region.

Globalization has embraced East Africa, posing numerous social-political, socio-economic, ecological and anthropological challenges that continue to hamper the integral development of the region. Since the independence of all five nations in the region, peace is a dream and where there is no peace, development is unachievable. Violent conflicts, complex ethnicity, identity struggle, the legacy of exclusion, religious fundamentalism and divisions which often times erupt into hateful and violent happenings which prevent religions from being united to fight the common enemies, are serious blocks to peace building. Violence as means of accessing, controlling and managing power and the thirst for power, leads to contempt for all the basic principles of good governance and takes advantage of people's lack of knowledge, manipulates political, ethnic, and religious differences and creates cultures where warriors and even thieves are considered heroes. Selfishness which nurtures greed, corruption and the allurements of gain at all costs instead of focusing on the common good are great enemies of peace in the region. These are the driving forces in the misappropriation of goods, services and riches destined for entire populations. The poor, the enslaved, widows, orphans of war and HIV/AIDS, refugees, vulnerable women and children, the internally displaced people in the camps, and persons on the periphery of society. They all cry for peace. They are victims of these evils.

The wounded human heart is the ultimate hiding place for the cause of everything that destabilizes the region. All evil starts from the heart (cf. Mt 15:18-19; Mk 7: 15; Genesis 4). Thus, any step in fostering the integral development of all people and peace building, need to address the human heart. Outside forces, exploit the wounded human heart of many men and women by fueling wars so as to sell arms. They back those in power, irrespective of human rights and democratic principles so as to guarantee economic benefits (the exploitation of natural resources including land and monopolizing the market). Outside forces threaten to destabilize nations in the region and to eliminate persons who wish to free

themselves from their oppression. Religion's role in peace building needs to examine this formidable situation for which the region is partly responsible and partly victim. 19

Moreover, there is also violence that is being inflicted in the name of God by religious fanatics, fundamentalists and extremists of different kinds.

This paper urges that **For Such a Time as This, in the East African Region: Religion has an irreplaceable role to play in Peace building and development.** Hence the need for not only to learn and name what is going on but also to imagine new models/strategies that God may be calling us, followers of religion to embody for such a time as this. Improvement in the quality of people's lives is feasible only after the realization of peace which religion should bring about. Thus religion should be instrumental to the cause of peacebuilding. The claim that religion cherishes public values more strongly than any other institution, makes it a credible partner in the process of social reconstruction, reconciliation and peace building.

This conference is occurring at a critical time for East Africa as millions of our people feel expectancy and anxiety, hope and despair, but also frustration for the long history of conflict, violence and other inhuman conditions that continues to hamper the integral development of the region. This time is as a **kairos** moment, a moment of "crisis and truth". A moment of truth that is shaking the foundations, not only for the politicians and economists but also of religion and believers. It is a time of crisis that brings out the best in some people and the worst in others. A crisis is a gracious moment of truth that shows up for what we really are. The Kairos invites us who adhere to different religions to step back from our busy schedules, listen, and pay attention to what is happening, that is, the signs of the time. This is also a moment of hope. Hope in the promise God gave to the people of Israel who were in exile, a people who wondered whether God still cared for them. "For, I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare for evil, to give you a future of hope" (Jer. 29: 11).

Definition of the terms as used in the presentation

What is Peace? Peace is tranquillity and harmony among people who live together or next to one another in various forms. It is the absence of violence between individuals and absence of war between groups or nations. Peace building means consciously taking the required measures to prevent conflict that can result in violence or war, to contribute to peaceful conflict resolving, reconciliation and peace promotion between individuals, in families, in and between groups of various kind and between nations. Peace building connotes activities that go beyond crisis intervention such as long-term development, and building of governance structures and institutions. It includes building the capacity of civil society for peacebuilding. Building peace is a day by day process. It follows the law

¹⁹ Cf. John Paul II, *Post –Synodal Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa*, 113-114:AAAs 88 (1996) 66-68; 71.

of gradualism. It is like rearing a child to maturity. It requires patience fostering, guidance, love and self-sacrifice.²⁰

What is Religion?: Defining the word "*religion*" is fraught with difficulty. Many definitions focus too narrowly on only a few aspects of religion; they tend to exclude those religions that do not fit well. As Kile Jones wrote in his essay on defining religion, "It is apparent that religion can be seen as a theological, philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and psychological phenomenon of human kind. To limit religion to only one of these categories is to miss its multifaceted nature and lose out on the complete definition."²¹ Barns & Noble (Cambridge) Encyclopedia *says that* "...no single definition will suffice to encompass the varied sets of traditions, practices, and ideas which constitute different religions."²²

Dictionary.com defines "Religion" as referring both to the personal practices related to communal faith and to group rituals and communication stemming from shared conviction. "Religion" is sometimes used interchangeably with "faith" or "belief system,"²³ but it is more socially defined than personal convictions, and it entails specific behaviors, respectively.²⁴

Webster's New World Dictionary refers to religion as "any specific system of belief and worship, often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy."²⁵ This definition would exclude religions that do not engage in worship. It implies that there are two important components to religion: one's belief and worship in a deity or deities. one's ethical behavior towards other persons. This dual nature of religion is expressed clearly in the Christian Scriptures in the Gospel of Matthew 22:36-39. "Teacher, what is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The Dangerousness of religions

Today and in human history religion presents some negative aspects especially when the believer is conditioned. Where religion is used to manipulate the individual, only those

²⁰ <http://www.un.org/Docs/SG/agpeace.html>

²¹ Kile Jones is a PhD student at the University of Glasgow in Scotland. See: <http://www.kilejones.com>

²² Barns & Noble (Cambridge) Encyclopedia (1990)

²³ "Religion," Dictionary.com. at: <http://dictionary.reference.com/>

²⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion>

²⁵ Webster's New World Dictionary (Third College Edition)

who are "unconverted" are able to feel, a posteriori, the harmful character of religions for individual: stifling, alienation, submissiveness, resignation, intellectual lethargy. At the collective level, there is only to look at around oneself and in books of history: wars of religion, inquisition, fanaticism, intolerance, misogyny, check to progress, confiscation of the political power have been used under the umbrella of religion. Monotheism, by its conception of a single God/god, carries the germ of intolerance. "The good God (i.e. the true one), it is mine". As in the market economy, the worst characteristics of religion are monopoly, a feeling of superiority complex "the chosen race on a reserved country (Judaism); a universality (Christianity) that leads to evangelize those who do not adhere to it, or even the religious States (Islam) who must get rid of the infidels.

Thus, religious practices should be approached as a platform that reinforces and reinvigorates an initiative intended to promote peace. This certainty is derived from the fact that religious activist shape public conscience. "Religion (in Africa) permeates all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is religion."²⁶

Role of Religion in Peace building and development

Religion has contributed tremendously to improving the quality of peoples lives. Followers in different religions have invested and developed expertise in many sectors, and more specifically in Education and health systems. Moreover, local and international organizations such as Catholic Relief Service (CRS), CAFOD, TROCAIRE, MISEREOR, ALARM, John Paul II Justice and peace Center (JPIIJC) etc. have been crucial in assisting local churches to get fully involved in addressing not only emergencies but also to the root causes of the conflicts in the region in view of building lasting peace that foster development.

Churches serve as hubs of safety and humanitarian assistance.

In crisis times, the Church premises and amenities have served as places for immediate safety and emergency relief for victims of atrocities. For instance during the genocide in Rwanda, thousands of both Hutu and Tusi took refuge in churches where unfortunately some even met their death. It was the same experience in the post election violence of Kenya in 2007 and for the twenty three years war in Northern Uganda, churches become homes for thousands of people.

This role has strengthened local and international credibility and trust in the Church institutions and the power of religion. It is upon such trust and credibility that religion could become strategically complementary to the states recovery and development programs, especially in the domains of reconstruction and reconciliation efforts.

Followers of different religions play an Intermediary role par excellence Religious leaders have been instrumental in peacemaking and the promotion of constructive dialogues among parties involved in violent conflicts in the region. Following the principle of confidentiality, this role is often played out quietly, informally and sometime officially. For instance, in the last decade, religious leaders in northern Uganda, operating under the

²⁶ Mbiti John. African Religions and Philosophy , Nairobi. Heinmann (1971) p. 2.

umbrella of the Acholi Religious Leaders peace Initiative (ALPI) have been at the centre stage of conflict resolution, peace building and reconciliation between the Uganda's government and the Lords Resistance Army (LRA).

Engine of democratization, institutional building and popular participation

The Church is one of the key pillars on which, the nascent democratization process rests and is sustained. For example, through small Christian Communities of the Catholic Church, the Church has refined its already enormous outreach capacity, making it the single most powerful community "mobilizer" in the region. The Capacity to reach out to the smallest units in the remotest corner in each country in the region, is now utilized to mobilize popular participation in the ongoing democratization process in the region.

The contribution of the church in the political elections in Uganda through the Inter religious council of Uganda, the Uganda Joint Christian council (UJCC), Inter religious council of Uganda (IRCU) and in the constitution review process in Kenya is significant. Hundreds of paralegal members of justice and peace commissions have been trained to assist the vulnerable members of the society. The church's significant role in the promotion of respect for human rights, the rule of law and promotion of democratic principles and values through civic education programs is irreplaceable.

Religion as an instrument for reconciliation and healing

Followers of different religions particularly Christian institutions in the region are better positioned than any other single actor to consolidate and to foster peace through a reconciliation and education process. While governments try to bring about reconciliation using strategies like power sharing such as in Kenya, such strategies fail to address the deep rooted causes of violent conflicts among which are often identity issues related to unhealed traumas, historical grudges and prejudices, un-forgiveness etc. that create negative identification with ethnicity or communal identity. Indeed, the wars and their corollary violence have left deep psychological wounds in most of the people in the region, especially among women and children. Hundreds of women systematically violated as rape becomes a weapon of war. It is the Church which is engaged in psychosocial accompaniment of victims through listening/counseling centers, devising reconciliation processes, and addressing the deep seated resentment between members of different ethnic communities or political parties. For instance, local religious leaders in northern Uganda have taken the lead in the reconciliation process, setting aside past grievances and old rivalries. From the pulpit, in town hall meetings and amid crowded IDP camps, religious leaders have preached forgiveness, organizing peace prayers and mediated large community disputes. Besides, religious leaders were involved as observers in the Juba Peace Process between the Government of Uganda and the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). In September 2009, religious leaders in Uganda launched the first ever National conference for sustainable reconciliation, justice and peace in the crusade for; "Sustainable National Reconciliation" in the search for sustainable justice, peace, reconciliation and good governance at all levels.²⁷

²⁷ The conference on Sustainable National Reconciliation in the search for sustainable National reconciliation, Justice and peace at all levels was organised by the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda from 10-12th Sept. 2009. The goal was to contribute towards National Reconciliation for the promotion of Justice and Peace.

Religion as a source of Capacity building and institutional moralizer.

The wars that have engulfed the region have taken the Church in the region, by surprise, especially the intensity and magnitude of violence that engulfed the region. Today the Church has increased its awareness and capacity about the role she could decisively play in peace building. Using her extensive education institutions especially the universities and theological institutions, the Church is venturing into courses for analyzing and understanding the underlying causes of conflict and their dynamics; the church is also devising strategic responses in preventing and mitigating conflicts while sustaining peace efforts in the region. The church is therefore building the capacity not only of its members but of the society at large to get prepared to prevent violent conflicts and sustain peaceful interactions among individuals, states and communities. In addition, more refined instruments are being made available, by different churches such as the Caritas Internationalis Peacebuilding manuals, working for reconciliation for ethic/civic education through institutions like John Paul II Justice and peace Center etc.

Followers of religion improve the economic status of the vulnerable

The Church's contribution in bettering the economic status of many through initiatives like CARITAS, micro finances and banks like the Centenary Bank in Uganda is irreplaceable. Through the efforts of the Church, many youth have been afforded employment and secured peace when they earn a descent salary.

AREAS THAT NEED MORE THE CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE OF RELIGION IN EAST AFRICA TODAY.

There is no doubt that a number of religious traditions are destructive. Nevertheless, the contribution that religion can play in developing the East African region and fostering peace should not be ignored especially in the socio-cultural, religious, political and economic dimension.

Socio-cultural and religious dimensions

If the Church is to fulfill the role of peace building and the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to her by the Lord Jesus, she herself must become more and more a reconciled and peaceful community. Peace is destined in every way for everyone, starting with the disciples themselves: "Be at peace with one another" (Mk 9:50). Unity among churches and her leadership is crucial if the church is to preach the Gospel of peace While Jesus' prayer is that we may all be one (Jn 17), unhealthy competition and enmity between and among churches hampers her role of peace building.

Moreover, African people maintain a deep love for their culture. Being grounded in culture conditions the integral development of individual and communities while the marring of a cultural identity leads to interior instability in persons, as seen in moral laxity, corruption, materialism, the destruction of an authentic understanding of a sound marriage and family, human sacrifice, disunity lack of respect for life, dishonesty ect., intensified by globalization. There seem to be a process destroying the African identity under the pretext of modernity. This is increasingly occurring through illiteracy, resulting from little being invested in holistic education. At the same time, some inhumane practices and beliefs from African cultures demand special attention, Witchcraft for example is tearing villages and urban societies apart. In the name of culture, women are abuse in matters of inheritance, sexual mutilation, forced marriages and domestic violence.

The inculturation of religion in East Africa is crucial . As the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us, the Gospel message needs to take flesh in the hearts of many Christians and be embodied in day today life. While Africans are known to be religious, they seem to be living dichotomous lives. There is a rift between worship and life, words and actions. They worship on Sundays and resort to conflicts, violence and even to genocides after worship. The story of a man named Adlbert, a perpetrator in Rwanda genocide expresses the dichotomy very well.

The Sunday after the plane crash was the usual choir rehearsal day at the church in Kibungo. We sang hymns in good feeling with our Tutsi compatriots, our voices still blending in chorus. On Sunday morning we returned at the appointed hour for mass; they did not arrive. They had already fled into the bush in fear of reprisals, driving their goats and cows before them. That disappointed us greatly, especially on a Sunday. Anger hustled us outside the Church door. We left the Lord and our prayers inside to rush home. We changed from Sunday best into our workday clothes, we grabbed clubs and machetes, and we went straight off to killing....²⁸

As it was in the initial stages of Christianity how the Church permeated the entire Judeo – Christian tradition, it should also do on the African soil. Understanding the incarnation process should be seen as a necessary step in the journey of understanding the Church and her role in peacebuilding. What happens when the faith and the Church are brought from one geographical and or social situation to another? What happens when they are made to move across peoples and cultures? In other words, in the long history of evangelizing peoples, how have the Christian faith and church inserted themselves in different social- cultural and economic –political situations? These encounters always imply various degrees of transformation for all sides concerned, some times nearly imperceptible and at other times quiet obvious. Religions like Christianity demands an immediate change in both perception and action as people are converted. This change occurs in its own way and at its own pace, not necessarily in the way or at the pace desired by the evangelizer.

Followers of religion need to dialogue. We need to engage in dialogue in order to get to know each other, listen to the opinions of others and overcome the barriers created by prejudice and misunderstanding. We need to compare differing social and ethical beliefs, improve understanding of these beliefs while showing mutual respect for those who hold them, and move forward together in helping to shape society, build peace and foster development. Whether it is intercultural dialogue, ecumenical dialogue between religions and churches, or dialogue between believers on the one hand and atheists or agnostics on the other, it is important.

²⁸ Jatzfeld Jean, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, New York, 2005, p. 140

Socio-Political dimension

Can religion play any role in the matter of governance? If so what role? Some may argue that religion is not only a matter of belief but also concerns itself more with the world to come than this world. Belief in God, doctrines and rituals, all relate to the other world. Religion also has dogmas irrelevant to this world. However, the other viewpoint is that religion is a way of life and also a useful guidance for life. This would intend to mould good moral character and relates to leading a successful life and to this extent it is inevitably connected with matters of good governance so that goodness is rewarded and evil is punished. Religion should start by molding peoples' characters, the change and transformation of the heart which is the source of both goodness and evil.

Some political leaders unscrupulously violate human rights and use religion and religious institution for their own purpose, while ignoring the real mission and true function of religion and of the religious institution. In the case of any political dispute, their response is violence, thereby further exploiting the citizen's lack of civic education (knowledge, skills, disposition and consciousness). The same politicians show insensibility towards the common good and a lack a sense of the state and democratic principles; they work out political deals which are unilateral, partisan, favour driven and ethnocentric. They foster division to secure their power. In some places, the party in power tends to consider the state as a personal business. The notion of authority is conceived as power-parties of power, and not as service (cf. Mt. 20:24 ff). One cannot lead successful moral life if there is no security of life and property and basic needs are not fulfilled. Good governance strengthens the rule of law, enhances quality of life and becomes a factor in enriching spiritual life. "The greatest challenge for bringing about justice and peace in Africa consists in a good administration of public affairs in the two interrelated areas of politics and the economy...many of the Continent's problems are the result of a manner of governing often stained by corruption. A serious reawakening of conscience linked to a firm determination of will is necessary, in order to put into effect solutions which can no longer be put off."²⁹ Only a stable political climate can foster economic growth and social –cultural development. If responsible citizenship is to be achieved, we need to create democratic policies. People feel that too many things are being decided behind their backs and want to see greater democratic control as well as more effective implementation of essential values. Religion needs to teach politicians to be cultured in political matters, to practice the democratic principles, while empowering all citizens to know their rights and obligations.

Given the long history of war and conflict in the region, religion needs to design remedies for conflict prevention, conflict transformation, and reconciliation at different levels.

Religion needs to address the problems created by the manipulation of ethnic affiliation.

²⁹ John Paul II , *Ecclesia in Africa* 110.

Socio-Economic dimension

With the creation of the East African community, some business men and women are seeking to reform and stabilise the economies of their respective nations and region. Financial institutions have been established, communication improved and people are displaying a determination to work in order to reduce poverty and suffering, to improve the standards of living and the health of the populations. Yet, State institutions which are supposed to provide assistance to those who are part of the economy are malfunctioning. For instance, the empowerment of the agriculturalists is in most cases neglected and some course offered in higher learning institutions do not assure the graduates any employment. Taking Uganda's case, the local investors are heavily taxed thus discouraging the production and consumption of the local products. Moreover, the sad state of the infrastructure of roads and travel routes still hinder an easy flow of goods. Subsequently, young people faced with the lack of an agriculture plan, fail to find alternatives and leave the villages hoping to find green pastures in towns and cities. Given the growing rate of unemployment, recourse to towns and cities is not the best alternative. Rural -urban migration phenomenon has ended up creating huge slums like Kibera, Mathare and Korokocho in Nairobi, Kibuli, Katwe and Katanga in Kampala among others. For the few who manage to secure a job, salaries are insufficient and others work without receiving any pay. In some countries, slavery and abuse still exists.

Moreover, multinational organisations and rich nations continue to systematically invade the region in search of natural resources including land. For instance, Egypt has leased about 9000 hectares of land in Mubende – Uganda to grow wheat. This implies expropriation of populations from their lands. Unfortunately, unscrupulous and corrupt leader's value personal gains more than the wellbeing of the citizens and the development of the nation. In addition, foreign investors start dubious businesses like horticulture, the planting of palm oil etc. These businesses have diverse effects on the environment, the well being and peace of the people and the prospects of their living in harmony.

The financial crisis, which severely impact financial institutions today has also affected East Africa. Development aid is at risk since financial projects based on foreign funding is being suspended in some countries thus endangering the lives of the vulnerable. For instance, the supply of ARVs at Mild May in Uganda was affected by the economic crunch. Because of the recession and the lessening demand for African products, poverty intensifies.

The region is still being hit by famines and crises in energy, a sign that global solutions and ethical measures are urgently needed to counteract the chaos created by the regression in the market.

Conclusion

Peacebuilding is a process of reconstructing relationships between individuals, social groups and communities. Religion can play an integral role in peacebuilding, thus fostering the integral development of individual and communities. In East Africa, conflicts at different levels are symptoms of deep seated problems in peoples hearts that must be dealt with through the process of character formation and institutional transformation. Religious leaders must play the pivotal role building peaceful families, institutions and society at large. Through the paradigm of restorative justice, religion surpasses legal and retributive dimension of justice. Religious and civic Education programs for socio- economic, political, religious and economic transformation that enhances responsible citizenship should never be neglected by any religion . Interfaith

dialogue is also important for religions to witness to the message of peace and integral development.

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