



TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF SUSTAINABLE MEDIATIVE DIALOGUE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT: *God, the great Communicator created the universe through communication. He wants human beings, as His image-bearers, to communicate with Him, and especially fellow human beings through various invented communication means. Social media have been one of such inventions that human beings have been using to communicate with one another. Inasmuch as conflicts are inevitable among human beings, to resolve these conflicts and have a sustainable peaceful co-existence, God wants human beings to resemble Jesus Christ (who is the Mediator between God and man) to dialogue mediatively among conflicting parties using social media as a means. To this end, this paper discussed theological basis for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in general and theological basis for sustainable mediative dialogue in particular, gave some biblical injunctions on how to prevent conflicts and have a peaceful co-existence, and concluded with the theological basis for social media.*

KEYWORDS: Theology, Mediative Dialogue, Social Media, Conflict Resolution

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is as old as humanity. It is inevitable in any society. It has become one of the defining features in the modern world. Peacebuilding is basically about the process of attaining peace. However, peacebuilding differs significantly in terms of approaches, scope of activities and time frame because of how one understands peace.¹ So, to resolve or transform conflict to peaceful coexistence, one has to understand and address the feelings, issues, and relationships as well as the behaviour of people involved in the conflict.² There have been many mediators and conciliators since ancient times that have strived to win over and soothe the hostility and anger of disputing parties.³ There may be no short cut or simple prescription for healing the wounds and divisions of people in the aftermath of sustained violence or conflict.⁴

¹ Thania Paffenholz (2009). Understanding Peacebuilding Theory: Management, Resolution and Transformation. *New Routes* 2/2009, Volume 14. Retrieved November 28, 2019, from http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ConflictTransformation_NewRoutes2009.pdf, p. 3.

² See Bernard Oladosu Omisore and Ashimi Rashidat Abiodun (2014). Organizational Conflicts: Causes, Effects and Remedies. *International Journal of Academic Research in Economics and Management Sciences*. Nov 2014, Vol. 3, No. 6. 118-137. Retrieved November 28, 2019, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJAREMS/v3-i6/1351>.

³ Marcia D. Williams (2007), *Reconciliation...the Ministry of Peacemakers* (Oakland: Marcia D. Williams), 14.

⁴ Desmond Tutu (2003), "Foreword". In Bloomfield, David et al (eds.). *Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: A Handbook* (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). Retrieved November 28, 2019, from <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/reconciliation-after-violent-conflict-handbook.pdf>, 4.



Inasmuch as “the principal causes of conflict...are closely related to the question of unsustainable development,”⁵ one of the ways to resolve conflicts and achieve peaceful and non-violent societies, which is one of the seventeen blueprints of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations,⁶ is sustainable mediative dialogue. As the world we live in today has metamorphosed from an analog world to a digital one where technological tool are taking significant roles, and the emergence of social media in particular has tremendously changed the face of communication throughout the world,⁷ sustainable mediative dialogue can be done through social media.

Theological Basis for Conflict Resolution in General

Conflict resolution simply is a process of resolving dispute or disagreement. It aims at finding peaceful solution or middle ground to warring factions. It sometimes involves negotiation, mediation, and/or diplomacy. Peacebuilding (or peace building) is the act of tackling the cause of conflict, the aftermath of the conflict, and how to promote lasting stability and justice, and improve the conditions of life of people affected by the conflict.

In spite of the fact that discussion on the role of theology in peacebuilding and conflict resolution “appears to be in its initial stages,”⁸ yet, it is expedient to review the theological basis for conflict resolution in general and sustainable mediative dialogue in particular. Christians enter into relationships with the hope that they will encounter the love and grace of God through their interactions with others. Jesus Christ has said, “he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me” (John 12:45).⁹ Building relationships through social media enables Christians to witness to the world about how God is working in their lives.

Conflict started in the Bible when the serpent believed to be the devil came to deceive Adam and Eve (the first human beings on earth) in the Garden of Even (Genesis 3). This action broke the relationship of people with God. It resulted in the relationships between people, and between people and the environment being broken. God swung into action to immediately to resolve the conflict by first interrogating Adam and Eve. Although, God gave immediate punishment, yet, He provided a way of reconciliation for humankind. The rest of the Bible is how God worked (and is still working) out this reconciliation.¹⁰

⁵ Elijah Odunayo Otokola (2016). “The Role of Church in Maintaining Peace as a Means of National Sustainable Development.” In Odeleye, Donald A. (ed.). *National Sustainable Development: The Roles of the Church*, Volume 2 (Akure: Science and Education Development Institute), 70.

⁶ Owen Gaffney (2014). “Sustainable Development Goals: Improving human and planetary wellbeing”. *Global Change*. Issue 82 May 2014. Retrieved September 17, 2019 from <http://www.igbp.net/download/18.62dc35801456272b46d51/1399290813740/NL82-SDGs.pdf>, 20.

⁷ P. White, F. Tella and M.D. Ampofo (2016) "A missional study of the use of social media (Facebook) by some Ghanaian Pentecostal Pastors". *KOERS — Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 81(2) 2016. Retrieved November 27, 2019 from <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/koers/v81n2/01.pdf>, 3.

⁸ Sara Gehlin (2017). *Educating for Peace – A Theological Task in Contemporary Times* (Stockholm: Elanders Sverige AB). Retrieved November 17, 2019 from <https://eba.se/en/rapporter/educating-for-peace-a-theological-task-in-contemporary-times/6291/>, 1-2.

⁹ This Scripture quote and others in this article (except otherwise specified) are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

¹⁰ Rachel Blackman (2003). *Peace-Building Within Our Communities* (Teddington: Tearfund). Retrieved November 5, 2019 from https://learn.tearfund.org/~media/files/tilz/publications/roots/english/peace-building/peace_e.pdf, 17.



The Bible offers very modest, yet formidable procedures for resolving conflict. These procedures are modest that they “can be used to resolve the most basic conflicts of daily life,” and the procedures are so formidable that they can be “used to mediate and arbitrate bitter divorce and child custody actions, embezzlement situations, church divisions, multi-million dollar/shillings business disputes, malpractice lawsuits, and terrible sexual abuse cases.”¹¹ As imitators of God who are to “pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14) and “...let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Romans 14:19), it is believed that hostilities should be relatively rare occurrences in the lives of practitioners or adherents of religious beliefs. It is irreligious and a sign of spiritual weakness and impatience to go around antagonizing too much and/or ceaselessly.¹² Jesus Christ has been identified as “an icon of... peaceful humanity” that Christians have to emulate because “he did not strike back; he did not kill; he did not incite violence upon others; he did not manipulate others for political control.”¹³ He was prophetically referred at the Prince of Peace in Isaiah 9:6. This peace has been associated “with the gift of the Spirit from above”¹⁴ for “...the fruit of the Spirit is...peace...” (Galatians 5:22).

Theological Basis for Mediative Dialogue in Particular

Mediative dialogue is an art of mediating between two or more conflicting parties by conversing separately with each party through constructive discussion and negotiation of the contending issue in order to make the conflicting parties reach a mutual agreeable resolution. Christians generally believe that Jesus Christ is the only divinely appointed mediator between God and man. Nicosia opined that Jesus Christ is “the peacemaker *par excellence* between earth and heaven.”¹⁵ Baptists believe that having taken upon Himself human nature, yet without sin, Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled the law, suffered and died upon the cross for the salvation of sinners. He was buried, and rose again on the third day, and ascended to His Father, at whose right hand, He ever lives to make intercession for His people. He is the only Mediator, the Prophet, Priest, King, the Head of the Church, and He is coming again to receive His faithful followers to reign with Him (1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).¹⁶ Besides, it is believed that peacemakers (another word for mediators) are children of God (see Mathew 5:9).

¹¹ John Brown Okwii (n.d.). “Biblical Theology Of Conflict Resolutions”. Retrieved November 17, 2019 from https://www.academia.edu/5505949/BIBLICAL_THEOLOGY_OF_CONFLICT, 1.

¹² BOS Udezo (2009). “Concepts and Methods of Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building: Imperatives for Religious Leaders in Nigeria.” *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*. Vol 1, No 2 (2009). Retrieved November 17, 2019 from <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jrhr/article/view/87329/77045>, 16.

¹³ Andrea Bartoli (2007). “Christianity as a Resource for Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding.” *Die Friedens-Warte* 82, no. 2/3 (2007): 49-66. Retrieved November 17, 2019 from www.jstor.org/stable/23773927, 51.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Paolo Salvatore Nicosia (2017). “Faith-based Peacebuilding: Insights from the Three Main Monotheisms.” *Athens Journal of Social Sciences*. Volume 4, Issue 1, January 2017. 7-24. Retrieved November 17, 2019 <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajss.4-1-1>, 13.

¹⁶ M. L. Moser, Jr. (n.d.) “Baptist Handbook For Church Members or Church Members.” Retrieved November 6, 2019 from <https://www.baptistbecause.com/Tracts/BapHandBk.pdf>, 22-23.



Biblical Ways to Avoid Conflicts and Promote Peacebuilding

Inasmuch as prevention is better than cure, the Bible advocates many means to avoid conflicts and live peacefully with other people. Avoiding conflicts and living peacefully with other people are the best ways to a sustainable society and these make it easier to resolve conflicts if conflicts arise. One of the ways is in the ways one uses one's words. One who would avoid conflicts and live peacefully with other people would not only care about what he/she says, but also how he/she says it. It does not matter "whether it is the words of relationships, words of eloquence, words of sarcasm, words of story, or words of song—all of these have to do with who we are and how we speak."¹⁷ The Book of Proverbs provides many samples of biblical passages about the use of words (see Proverbs 10:32; 11:9; 12:18; 13:3; 14:3, 25; 15:1, 4; 16:21, 24; 18:4, 20; 20:15; 25:18).

Another way to avoid conflicts and live peacefully with other people is forgiveness. Forgiveness does not essentially mean that the offender is not guilty of whatever he/she did to upset the offended person. It does not mean forgetting either. Rather, forgiveness means letting go of the pain the incident is causing the offended person. It has been defined as a "willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love towards him or her."¹⁸

Forgiveness has been seen as a religious virtue and central issue in Christian theology and peacebuilding.¹⁹ There can be no conflict resolution if there is no spirit of forgiveness in a relationship. If a matter or case is settled, then the case is closed and must stay closed. Some of the biblical verses that support forgiveness are Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25; Luke 17:3-4; Colossians 3:13.

As a fundamental element within the Christian belief, forgiveness encompasses a confession of sin, repentance of wrongdoing, and reflection of God's unconditional and absolute love.²⁰ These are advocated in Romans 4:7-8 and 12:19-21. Corroborating these biblical injunctions, Desmond Tutu, in an interview with BBC on YouTube, believed that without forgiveness then there is no future. He said, "...forgiveness is like abandoning my right to revenge or to pay back. By the fact that you have abused me, wronged and hurt me, you have given me a certain right over you that I could refuse to forgive you. When I forgive you, I say jettison meaning that I open the door of opportunity to you to make a new beginning."²¹

Furthermore, to avoid conflicts and live peacefully with other people, one must be ready to reconcile with people that offended one, or are at loggerhead with one. Thesnaar emphasized,

¹⁷ Justin Taylor (2009). "Introduction." In John Piper and Justin Taylor (eds). *The Power of Words and the Wonder of God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books). Retrieved November 17, 2019 from <https://document.desiringgod.org/the-power-of-words-and-the-wonder-of-god-en.pdf?ts=1446648376>, 18.

¹⁸ Andrew Campbell (2017). "Forgiveness and Reconciliation as an Organizational Leadership Competency within Restorative Transitional Justice Instruments". *International Journal of Servant Leadership*, July 2017. Retrieved November 18, 2019 from <http://restorativejustice.org/am-site/media/forgiveness-and-reconciliation-as-an-organizational-leadership-competency-within-restorative-transitional-justice-instruments.pdf>, 6.

¹⁹ Nicosia. "Faith-based Peacebuilding", 15-16.

²⁰ Campbell. "Forgiveness and Reconciliation as an Organizational Leadership Competency", 19.

²¹ Desmond Tutu (2007). "Forgiveness is the Key". Interview on BBC by J. Schlei. Retrieved November 17, 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZsYSH4f9QQ>.



“it is...an active call for all Christians to seek reconciliation within the storm of conflict.”²² Since “reconciliation and peacemaking lie at the heart of Christian life and worship”,²³ every Christian is expected to make peace quickly with any conflicting party. This are enjoined in these biblical verses: Matthew 5:23-25; Romans 12:18; Hebrews 12:14

An outstanding biblical basis for reconciliation is 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. This passage is in the context of a greater and more important reconciliation between mankind and God, which is “connected to God’s work of reconciliation through Jesus Christ.”²⁴ Commenting on the passage, Schellenberg (2017) opined that having been reconciled with God in regeneration in Jesus Christ as evident in the preceding verse, every Christian should join God in the ministry of reconciliation by bringing other people – “the world” – to God. This can be accomplished as ambassadors for Christ in the lifestyles of Christians wherever they find themselves.²⁵ Mtata (2019) clarified that reconciliation is both vertical and horizontal in dimensions. In its vertical dimension, reconciliation is religious or theological because it mends the relationship between human beings and God. In its horizontal dimension, it refers “to the mandate of those who are reconciled to God to seek to reconcile with other human beings, as well as to share the message of reconciliation.”²⁶ Mtata (2019) went on to add that reconciliation means “taking seriously the orientation of the other and placing this orientation in meaningful dialogue with one’s own.”²⁷

Based on 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 and from the Christian point of view, Nicosia (2017) discoursed that there are three main points in reconciliation. The first point is that God is the principal Author of reconciliation, while human beings join Him in the work of reconciliation. The second point is that in reconciliation, God starts with the victims before turning to the oppressor. The third point is that in reconciliation, God makes a new creation out of the history of the victims and the oppressor.²⁸

A very prominent theme in the Bible relating to conflict resolution and peacebuilding is love. The Bible in its entity emphasizes love. “In Christianity, the motivation and the purpose of our lives should be loving God and our neighbours. It involves a lifelong commitment to

²² C.H. Thesnaar (2014). “Seeking Feasible Reconciliation: A Transdisciplinary Contextual Approach to Reconciliation”, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*. Volume 70, No. 2, 2014, 1-8. Retrieved October 2, 2019 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i2.1364>, 7.

²³ An Interchurch Group of Faith and Politics (1993). *Breaking Down the Enmity: Faith and Politics in the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Belfast: An Interchurch Group of Faith and Politics), 15.

²⁴ Gertrude Marazanye (2016). *Reconciliation: Theology of Reconciliation in a Divided Society* (Centrum for Teologi och Religion/Svetenskap). Retrieved November 17, 2019 from https://www.academia.edu/29629774/Theology_of_reconciliation_in_politically_divided_societies_Gertrude_Marazanye, 14.

²⁵ Jacquelyn B. Schellenberg (2017). “Understanding 2 Corinthians 5:17-21”. *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*. Volume 18(24). June 11, 2017, 1-16. Retrieved November 17, 2019 from <https://www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/SchellenbergJB02.pdf>, 14.

²⁶ Kenneth Mtata (2019). “Transforming the World: Equipping Disciples 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.” In Risto Jukko, Jooseop Keum and (Kay) Kyeong-Ah Woo (eds.). *Called To Transforming Discipleship: Devotions from the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism* (Geneva: World Council of Churches). Retrieved November 17, 2019 from <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/publications/CalledtoTransformingDiscipleship.pdf>, 29.

²⁷ Mtata. “Transforming the World”, 31.

²⁸ Nicosia. “Faith-based Peacebuilding”, 16-17.



walk in Jesus' footsteps."²⁹ Jesus Christ summed up God's law in a twofold command of loving God and loving one's neighbour (see Matthew 22:37-40). In fact, "...love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10).

One needs to understand what love really means in the Bible to grasp its importance to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. There may be only one word used for love in the English language. However, there are at least four different words and meanings for love in Greek, one of the original languages used to write the Bible.³⁰ These words and their meanings are: 1) *eros* – sexual attraction or sexual love;³¹ 2) *Storge* – a natural affection or natural obligation³²; 3) *Phileo* – a companionable love that responds to kindness or appreciation;³³ and 4) *Agape* – a love of esteem and of evaluation that is not kindled by the merit or worth of its object, but it originates in its own God-given nature.³⁴ One biblical passage that discusses more on the love of God to humankind which humankind should reciprocate to Him and other people as a way of avoiding conflict and promoting peace is found in 1 John 4. Van Der Merwe (2017) did an exegesis of this passage.³⁵

Furthermore, Christians must love their enemies because God loves everyone, including those who do not deserve it. Loving enemies implies forgiving them. Jesus Christ did not only teach this (see Matthew 5:38-45; Luke 6:27-36), but demonstrated this when He prayed for those that crucified Him and others that were making jest of Him when He was on the cross (see Luke 23:34).³⁶ The apostles advanced this positive relationship with enemies by similar teachings (compare Romans 12:17-21; 1 Peter 3:9). It is noted that the church fathers in the early church also propagated and practiced this principle of loving and praying for enemies.³⁷

Closely related to the issues of forgiveness and reconciliation is the process of resolving conflict amicably as Jesus Christ highlighted it in Matthew 18:15-19. In fact, this passage is a good biblical passage on how to resolve conflict. Schwertley (n.d.) did a study of this passage

²⁹ Irén Frändå (2016). *Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Peacebuilding in the Middle East*. A Master thesis submitted to Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University. Retrieved November 19, 2019 from <https://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:942759/FULLTEXT01.pdf>, 25.

³⁰ Jack Zavada (2019). "4 Types of Love in the Bible: Explore the meaning of eros, storge, philia, and agape." Retrieved November 19, 2019 from <https://www.learnreligions.com/types-of-love-in-the-bible-700177>.

³¹ Dick Mills (2012). *The Four LOVES: Understanding God's Endless Love for You*. (Anza, CA: Dick Mills Ministries at Smashwords). Retrieved November 19, 2019 from <http://www.dmm.org/images/fourloveswebinar.pdf>, 4.

³² John Horsfield (2017). "The Meanings of Love". Retrieved November 19, 2019 from <https://www.academia.edu/32925066/>, 17-18.

³³ Ashley Uzer (2019). "3 Types of Love: Eros, Agape, and Philos". Retrieved November 19, 2019 from <https://www.zoosk.com/date-mix/love/3-types-of-love/>.

³⁴ See Liviu Petcu (2018). "Ἀγάπη Agape or Gods unbounded and sacrificial love for men". *Romanian Journal of Artistic Creativity*, Volume 6, Issue 1, 2018, 33-48. Retrieved November 19, 2019 from <https://www.academia.edu/37920655/>.

³⁵ Dirk G. Van Der Merwe (2017). "'Lived Experiences' of the Love of God according to 1 John 4: A Spirituality of Love". In *die Skriflig* 51(3), a2169. Retrieved November 19, 2019 from <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v51i3.2169>.

³⁶ Christopher Dorn (2013). *Peace in Christian Thought and Life: An Anthology*. Geneva: World Council of Churches. Retrieved November 19, 2019 from https://www.academia.edu/36626589/Peace_in_Christian_Thought_and_Life, 9-10.

³⁷ Dorn. *Peace in Christian Thought and Life*, 15, 26.



in relation to conflict resolution.³⁸ The context of this passage, which is a parable of Jesus Christ, among others, is forgiving fellow human beings.³⁹

In his contribution to how Christians can contribute to peace making, Oyeleye (n.d.) was of the opinion that because the Bible calls Christians the salt of the earth (see Matthew 5:13) and light of the world (see Matthew 5:14), “Christians have been given the responsibility to impact peace into their world by being the salt (solution), and the light (direction) of [the society] (Matt 5:13, 16).”⁴⁰ He has earlier argued that the solution to bitterness caused by conflicts should be introduction of sweetness of salt of Christians, while the light of Christians should brighten the shady situation caused by conflicts that needs light. In order words, Christians should have and/or make positive impacts of peace on their society.⁴¹

Okwii (n.d.) highlighted “six valuable lessons on conflict resolution” that can be gleaned from resolving conflict that is recorded in Acts 15.⁴² These lessons are: 1) hearing both sides of the story (verses 2-5); 2) engaging in discussion (verses 6-7); 3) presenting the facts and being sensitive to What God is doing (verses 7-11); 4) providing supporting evidence (verses 12-18); 5) articulating a responsible solution to the conflict based on facts (verses 19-21); and 6) putting together a communication strategy that brings clarification.⁴³

In explaining 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 where Apostle Paul admonished against taking legal actions on conflicting issues among Christians, Allen (2017) argued,

God understood the perils of the secular legal system. He warned of the risks of submitting a dispute between believers to the secular Court. And he called believers to something different. We are held to a different standard in how we live and love others. Why then would we resolve disputes according to a worldly standard? While the secular legal process may be necessary to obtain a full resolution of some kinds of disputes (i.e., divorce), Christians can still obtain resolutions to their conflicts in a way that glorifies God, honors one another, and restores peace.⁴⁴

In one of its publications, World Council of Churches highlighted Christian bases for education for peace. Among these bases are: the link between Jesus Christ and peace stands at the heart of Christian faith (compare Ephesians 2:14); as beneficiaries of Christ’s gift of peace, His disciples are called to be artisans of peace (compare Matthew 26:52; Luke 9:54-55; 10:5); peace is intrinsically linked to righteousness and justice (see Psalm 85:10); peace brings out the fundamental links between sin, forgiveness, and reconciliation (compare Ephesians 2:14-18); Christian faith affirms the need to honour as well as heal past memories, when necessary, through forgiveness; and Christian faith in the Triune God teaches that the

³⁸ Brian Schwertley (n.d.). “Conflict Resolution in the Church A Study of Matthew 18:15ff”. Retrieved November 5, 2019 from http://www.reformedonline.com/uploads/1/5/0/3/15030584/conflict_resolution_in_the_church.pdf

³⁹ See Matthew 18:21-35.

⁴⁰ Paul Oyeleye (n.d.). “Conflicts in Nigeria: Christian Contributions to Peace Making”. Retrieved November 19, 2019 from <https://www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/OyeleyeP01.pdf>, 16.

⁴¹ Oyeleye. “Conflicts in Nigeria”, 14.

⁴² Okwii. Biblical Theology Of Conflict Resolutions, 30.

⁴³ Okwii. “Biblical Theology Of Conflict Resolutions”, 30-31.

⁴⁴ Anderson Allen (2017). “The Process Of Biblical Conflict Resolution”. Retrieved November 17, 2019 from <https://www.coloradochristianmediation.com/blog/2017/5/9/biblical-conflict-resolution>.



divine persons are really distinct from, yet related to, one another. This can inspire peacebuilding in a multi-religious world.⁴⁵

Fahey (2018) approached theological basis for peace and conflict resolution from a different angle in an overview of four traditions on war and peace in Christian history.⁴⁶ These traditions are "Pacifism, Just War, Total War, and World Community".⁴⁷ Each of these traditions has effects on conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Pacifists believe that the gospel and teachings of Jesus Christ are those of peace and that "...Christians are called to a higher standard with dealing with human conflict that is based on love and forgiveness"⁴⁸ (compare Matthew 4:23; 5:9, 23-24, 38-44; Ephesians 6:10-17). A just war simply "deals with the justification of how and why wars are fought."⁴⁹ While the Bible allows for violence, it, nonetheless, limits what may be done to an opponent (see Deuteronomy 20:10-14; 2 Kings 6:20-23; 2 Chronicles 28:5-15). Fahey cited some biblical passages that supporters for the Just War in Christianity would cite to support their belief that Jesus would support Just War. These passages are Matthew 8:5-6; 10:34; 21:12; Mark 12:17; Luke 22:36; John 15:13; and Romans 13:1, although "each of these passages must be interpreted in the historical and cultural context in which they were written."⁵⁰

Furthermore, Fahey described Total War as war that is noble and glorious and victory in battle, which requires the annihilation of the enemy's civilian population. It also holds that war is something normal in human affairs and efforts and that peace are signs of weakness and betrayal.⁵¹ Although biblical passages in support of this are found mostly in the Old Testament like Deuteronomy 20:10-18 and Joshua 8:24-28, "Total War advocates use many of the same texts that were mentioned in the Just War discussion" especially Revelation 6 and 20.⁵² Lastly, "World Community" whose "advocates believe that it is merely a matter of time before the over 200 nation states in the world join a Global Union that will be governed by a World Charter (Constitution)."⁵³ Biblical passages in supposedly in support of this are Isaiah 2:2-4, Luke 4:18-19 and Matthew 26:19. Fahey concluded his discussion on these four traditions with these words: "All of these approaches, except Total War, that are shared by secular philosophies and other religious traditions are an excellent basis for dialogue and joint action for peace and justice in the world."⁵⁴

⁴⁵ World Council of Churches (2019). *Education For Peace in A Multi-Religious World: A Christian Perspective*. (Geneva: World Council of Churches). Retrieved November 19, 2019 from https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/publications/EducationforPeace_booklet_nocropsFINALweb.pdf, 2-4.

⁴⁶ See Joseph J. Fahey (2018) "An Overview of Four Traditions on War and Peace in Christian History," *The Journal of Social Encounters*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, 7-21. Retrieved November 19, 2019 from https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/vol2/iss1/2.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁹ Alexander Moseley. "Just War Theory." Retrieved November 19, 2019 <http://www.iep.utm.edu/justwar/>

⁵⁰ Fahey. "An Overview of Four Traditions", 9-11.

⁵¹ Ibid., 14.

⁵² Ibid., 15.

⁵³ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 19-20.



Theological Basis for Social Media

Terms used intermittently with social media are new media, alternate media⁵⁵ and online social network services (though this term is mainly used for an aspect of social media). Social media have been defined simply as “digital Web 2.0 platforms that facilitate information sharing, user-created content, and collaboration across people.”⁵⁶ Social media or online social network services focus on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others.⁵⁷

It is remarkable to note that God is a communicating and information-sharing Creator (see Genesis 1:26-30).⁵⁸ The whole creation was made possible because God communicates through Word, and the completeness of God’s communication and revelation was fully revealed when the Word became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14).⁵⁹ A translation of John 1:1-5 renders thus,

“In the beginning was the communication and communication was with God and Communication was God. Communication was with God in the beginning. Through communication all things were made; without communication nothing was made that has been made. In Communication was life, and that life was the light of human beings.”⁶⁰

God created human beings in His image and likeness as communicating and information sharing creatures (Genesis 3:6-12). So, “communication and information sharing are fundamental and paramount in relationships — thus, interaction between God and human beings and vice versa (Gen. 4:1-10).”⁶¹ As image-bearers of God who did not stop communicating after the creation process, but still communicates till date in various ways (see Hebrews 1:1-3), Christians are expected to reflect God in communicating with other people in various ways also. One of such ways is social media.

⁵⁵ Rukhsana Aslam (2016). “Building Peace through Journalism in the Social/Alternate Media.” *Media and Communication* (ISSN: 2183-2439) 2016, Volume 4, Issue 1, 63-79. Doi: 10.17645/mac.v4i1.371. Retrieved November 17, 2019 from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/baa4/5747fc3394f2cce6d1d6856ccf8fcf72252a.pdf>, 63.

⁵⁶ Lynn A. McFarland and Robert E. Ployhart (2015). “Social Media: A Contextual Framework to Guide Research and Practice”. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Vol. 100, No. 6, 1653–1677. Retrieved November 7, 2019 from <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/features/apl-apla0039244.pdf>, 1654.

⁵⁷ Emmanuel Akanni Olasinde (2014). “An Analysis of the Influence of Social Media Sites on Nigerian Undergraduates.” *Education and Science Journal of Policy Review and Curriculum Development*. Vol. 4 No 1. 53-65. Retrieved November 7, 2019 from <http://www.internationalpolicybrief.org/images/journals/Edu4.1/Edu5b.pdf>, 54.

⁵⁸ David K. Okai and Ernest K. Ampomah. “The Influence Of Facebook Usage On Christians, A Review.” *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*. Volume 18(48). November 26, 2017. 1-12. Retrieved December 16, 2019 from <http://www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/OkaiDK04.pdf>, 2.

⁵⁹ Joseph V. Macalangan (2017). “Experiencing God in Cyberspace: The Role of Cybertechnology in Doing Theology” *Scientia Bedista*, Vol. 4, March 2017. 109-125. Retrieved December 16, 2019 from <https://www.sanbeda.alabang.edu.ph/bede/images/researchpublication/scientia/109-Scientia2017b.pdf>, 116.

⁶⁰ “Communications”. Retrieved November 28, 2019, from https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/39720/report_comms_acc15.pdf, 1.

⁶¹ David K. Okai and Ernest K. Ampomah. “The Influence Of Facebook Usage On Christians, A Review.” *The American Journal of Biblical Theology* Volume 18(48). November 26, 2017. 1-12. Retrieved December 16, 2019 from <http://www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/OkaiDK04.pdf>, 2.



As salt and light of the world (see Matthew 5:13-16), Christians are to be like the tribe of Issachar, “who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chron. 12:32) and make things that will sweeten the bitterness of the world and brighten the darkness of the world. For the betterment of the society, they should join other men that have invent many things including “the sartorial, the architectural, the orchestral, the automotive, ... discursive communicative media such as spoken language, smoke signals, forms of signage, ...written language [and] electronically mediated communications, such as the telegraph, telephone, radio, television, and Internet.”⁶²

Information and communication technologies in general and social media in particular have linked to two biblical bases. The first basis is “Everything is created by God”.⁶³ God in His sovereignty, generosity and self-sufficiency created everything (see Genesis 1). This creation is sustained and maintained by the word, wisdom and power of God (Job 38-40; Am. 4:13; Mat. 10:29-30; Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:3; 2 Pet. 3:7). “Technological advances and ICT [in general, and social media in particular] are essentially ‘very good’ [compare Genesis 1:31] because they come ‘from the Father, from whom all things come’ (1 Cor. 8:6).”⁶⁴ God has given human being the ability to invent and develop things for the good of humanity. Social media are parts of such invention and development, and humanity should use them for their good. “Everything is corrupted by the idolatrous attitude”.⁶⁵ The “very good” scenario of Genesis 1 was ruptured with the disobedience (or the Fall) of man in Genesis 3. This started the era of idolatrous relation of the created order with the Creator. So, the “nature, source of well-being and fulfillment, is now cursed, generating discomfort and pain (Gen. 3:17).”⁶⁶ It can also be alluded to the event of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 “where people were amazed with the result of their work.”⁶⁷ and it has resulted in “the current reality of ICT, where the relations with the other and the environment are distorted and negatively affected, are symptoms of a problem greater than that of excessive, unlimited and irresponsible use.”⁶⁸ This has made many people to view technologies in general, and social media in particular as god.⁶⁹ This is referred to as “cyberidolatry”.⁷⁰ The aftermaths of this are pornography, “cyberharassment” or “cyberextortion”, cyberbullying, “cybermatoneo”, cyber fraud, online gambling, “sexting” and other vices.⁷¹

In spite of the vices resulted from technological tools in general and social media in particular as mentioned above, technological tools in general and social media in particular are veritable tools to promote religions as they “can enhance religious practices through the expansion and

⁶² Douglas Groothuis (2010). “Understanding Social Media”. *Christian Research Journal*, volume 33, number 03 (2010). Retrieved December 16, 2019 from <http://www.equipe.org/PDF/JAF2333.pdf>, 3.

⁶³ Sneyder Rojas-Díaz J. A. (2018). “Theological Approach to the Social Problems Associated with the Use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT).” *Global Media Journal* 2018, 16:31. 1-9. Retrieved December 16, 2019 from <http://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/a-theological-approach-to-the-social-problems-associated-with-the-use-of-information-and-communications-technologies-ict.pdf>, 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Macalangan. “Experiencing God in Cyberspace”, 112.

⁶⁸ Sneyder Rojas-Díaz J. A. “Theological Approach”, 4.

⁶⁹ Macalangan. “Experiencing God in Cyberspace”, 111.

⁷⁰ Sneyder Rojas-Díaz J. A. “Theological Approach”, 7.

⁷¹ Ibid., 4-7.



creation of religious communities,”⁷² and as they now likely “play a vivifying role in religious organizations’ ongoing adaptation and composition as spiritual communities,”⁷³ Against the background of the fact that “demonstrated unprecedented magical powers of speed, efficiency and cost effectiveness in attaining many facets of human endeavour”⁷⁴ of social media, social media have greatly fortified the fulfillment of the biblical injunctions about communal living and connection with fellow humans to ensure a thriving community (see 1 Corinthians 1:10; 12: 25-17; 1 John 1:7; Galatians 6:2; Proverbs 17:17; 27:17; Matthew 18:20; Romans 12:5, 16; Hebrews 10:24-25; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Acts 2:44-47; Ephesians 4:2-6).

Macalangan (2017) opined that since God was the Creator of man that invented technologies and social media, God has to interact with man who is fallible in man’s invention.⁷⁵ So, man can use technologies and social media to propagate the things of God to other human beings and “nourish the spiritual growth and development of the person as well as his relationship with God.”⁷⁶

Okai and Ampomah (2017) highlighted “some of the positive impact Facebook [and other social media have] on Christians.”⁷⁷ These include church marketing, global mission, online prayer group, introduction of new songs, photos and videos sharing, increase traffic to church website, biblical counseling, and Christian conferences, seminars and workshops.⁷⁸ However, Okai and Ampomah (2017) went ahead to also highlight some of the bad influence of social media. These include short attention span/limited learning style, low view of authority/over-focus on equality, “shallow” interactions/artificial relationships, lack of physical presence, low commitment/accountability, social isolation, poor sleeping habits, deceit, immorality, spread of fake news, and vulnerable to scam.⁷⁹

CONCLUSION

This article has tried to explain a theology of sustainable dialogue through social media by delving into the theological basis for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in general and theological basis for sustainable mediative dialogue in particular, then giving some biblical injunctions on how to prevent conflicts and have a peaceful co-existence, and concluding

⁷² Mookgo S. Kgatle (2018). “Social Media and Religion: Missiological perspective on the link between Facebook and the emergence of prophetic churches in southern Africa”. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39(1), July 2018, a1848. 1-9. Retrieved December 16, 2019 from <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v39i1.1848> or <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/vee/v39n1/14.pdf>, 1.

⁷³ Pauline Hope Cheong (2017). “The vitality of new media and religion: Communicative perspectives, practices, and changing authority in spiritual organization”. *New Media & Society*. 2017, Vol. 19(1) 25–33. DOI: 10.1177/1461444816649913. Retrieved December 16, 2019 from https://www.drpaulinecheong.com/uploads/5/5/9/8/55989981/cheong_new_media_society_2017.pdf, 27.

⁷⁴ Hyacinth C. Orlu-Orlu (2017). “A Discursive Analysis of the Use of Social Media in Building Relationships” *Ebonyi State University Journal of Mass Communication* ISSN: 2449-0369 Vol. 4, Issue 1, pp. 257-271, October 2017. Retrieved December 16, 2019 from http://www.ebsujmc.com/uploads/820187_1527710515.pdf, 1.

⁷⁵ Macalangan. “Experiencing God in Cyberspace”, 113.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 115.

⁷⁷ Okai and Ampomah. “The Influence Of Facebook Usage”, 5.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 5-6.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 6-9.



with the theological basis for social media. The bottom line of the article is this: social media are ones of the veritable means when it comes to resolving conflict mediatively and have a sustainable society. It would be good if the Christians could incorporate theology and technology together and help the people encounter God in the use of cybertechnology and maintaining a sustainable society. In spite of many bad influences of social media, if used purposefully, prayerfully, and with care, social media can add a new dimension to people's social interactions especially when resolving conflict mediatively.

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