



Christian Traditions: Resources for Peacebuilding in the Philippines Context

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Abstract

Conflict is found in almost every realm of human interaction. People also have managed to resolve their disagreements without violence, but some turn deadly and violent. Religion inspires some of these bloody conflicts. Religion may not be the principal cause of conflict. However, the conflicts have been portrayed as inter-religious conflicts. Indeed, Religious violence is among the most pressing and dangerous issues that facing the world community today faces. Peace advocates and educators have argued that sustaining any peacebuilding process must include religious traditions. This paper identifies resources in the Christian traditions that can be used to build a culture of peace and co-existence. Three findings emerged from the research, which employed the library and document research method which focused on the importance of sacred scriptures, the practice of forgiveness, and the role of religious actors. These three Christian resources are essential for promoting peace and overcoming violence in the Philippines and around the globe.

Keywords: Religion, Peace, Conflict, Religious Violence

Abstrak

Konflik ditemukan hampir di setiap ranah interaksi manusia. Beberapa orang berhasil menyelesaikan perbedaan pendapat tanpa kekerasan, namun sebagian berakhir mematikan dan kekerasan. Agama menginspirasi beberapa konflik berdarah ini. Agama mungkin bukan penyebab utama konflik, tetapi konflik-konflik ini sering kali digambarkan sebagai konflik antar-agama. Kekerasan agama adalah salah satu isu paling mendesak dan berbahaya yang dihadapi masyarakat dunia saat ini. Para pembela perdamaian dan pendidik telah berargumen bahwa proses pembangunan perdamaian harus mencakup tradisi keagamaan. Tulisan ini mengidentifikasi sumber daya dalam tradisi Kristen yang dapat digunakan untuk membangun budaya perdamaian dan kehidupan bersama. Tiga temuan yang muncul dari penelitian ini, menggunakan metode penelitian perpustakaan dan dokumen yang berfokus pada pentingnya kitab suci, praktik pengampunan, dan peran aktor keagamaan. Ketiga sumber daya Kristen ini penting untuk mempromosikan perdamaian dan mengatasi kekerasan di Filipina dan di seluruh dunia.

Kata kunci: Agama, Perdamaian, Konflik, Kekerasan Agama



Introduction

We live in a heterogenous world. However, we also live in a conflict-ridden world. Sad to say that some of these conflicts have been abetted if not aggravated by religions, flaring up in open armed conflicts and bloody repression as in Indonesia between Muslims and Christians; the armed conflict in Southern Thailand between its military and Muslim militants, the communal violence between Hindus and Muslims in India; and between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslim in Myanmar. In the Philippine, the Abu Sayyaf and other extremist groups engage in an open armed struggle with the government. According to peace educator Marc Gopin and religious historian Scott Appleby, religion plays an ambivalent, contradictory role in society.¹ Religion on its terms can underwrite both conflict and peace.² The challenge now is building a sense of community that goes beyond the traditional boundaries of the clan, tribe, status, class, region, and religion. A community with which each member and group can identify themselves, in which different groups feel responsible for resolving disputes and solving problems through joint action and dialogue. Today, we are challenged to coexist in peace, harmony, and prosperity.

The study aims to explore Christian resources for peace. By examining Christian Scriptures, the practice of reconciliation, and the engagement of Christian leaders, it can inspire and equip individuals and communities to actively pursue peace and reconciliation in a troubled world. Furthermore, the research can enrich the broader field of peace studies by bringing insights from Christianity into dialogue with other religious and secular perspectives on peacemaking.

Furthermore, the study holds significance in the Philippine context, given the country's predominantly Christian nature, where Catholicism dominates, and various

¹ M. Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking* (Oxford University Press, 2002). And R. Scott. Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

² Heather Dubois, "Religion and Peacebuilding an Ambivalent yet Vital Relationship," *Journal for Conflict and Peace* 1, no. 2 (2008). http://www.rel-med.net/pdf/religion_peacebuilding_ambivalent_hdubois_ENG.pdf (accessed March 7, 2024)



Protestant denominations follow. Numerous churches and Christian organizations actively participate in peacebuilding efforts in the Philippines. The influence of Christian teachings and institutions significantly shapes societal norms, values, and conflict resolution strategies. While Christianity is dominant, the Philippines is also home to diverse religious communities, including Muslims, indigenous peoples, and various other faiths. Exploring Christian resources for peace can contribute to interfaith dialogue and cooperation, essential for fostering understanding and resolving conflicts in a pluralistic society.

The Method

The overall approach is qualitative. This article utilized library and document research methods.³ Data refers to collected information obtained from sources such as books, reports, media, and internal papers of Christian groups involved in peacemaking. Library research differs from other forms of study that depend on fieldwork or firsthand observations, as it uses existing data. This entailed gathering and analyzing data from secondary sources, utilizing theology and related scholarly literature and public pronouncements to organize and analyze pertinent material.

Findings and Discussions

In this research we explore the relationships between religion, violence, and peace, particularly within the context of Christianity. There are several findings that emerged.

1. Religion and Violence

According to Hans Kung, there is “no peace among peoples of this world without peace among world religions” and no peace among religions without dialogue between religions.⁴ This reality necessitates the need to focus theological education in

³ Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9 (2009).

⁴ Hans Kung, et al, *Christianity and the World Religions: Paths to Dialogue With Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism* (Doubleday 1986), 440-443



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the field of interfaith relations and dialogue. Religious diversity is no longer an academic concept found only in books. It is a reality that we encounter every day. People of other religions are our neighbours, colleagues, competitors, foes, and friends. Religious pluralism is a flesh-and-blood reality. The challenge of religious pluralism today comes from the living and believing people of other faith traditions. We are challenged by people who are different from us and are demanding recognition.

Conflict is found in almost every realm of human interaction. But people manage to settle, even resolve their disputes without violence and to the mutual satisfaction of the parties involved. But some conflicts turn deadly and violent. Some of these conflicts have been inspired by religion. Stanley Samartha clearly describes how religions aggravate conflicts. *“Established religions have often divided people and nations and given rise to tensions and conflicts. They have held up scientific progress, resisted social change, supported the rich and powerful against the poor and weak, and have often added religious fuel to military conflagrations, making reconciliation more difficult. Of all the wounds human beings inflict on one another, religious wounds are the most difficult to heal.”*⁵

Most people, however, consider religion to be the antithesis of violence and, in many places and times, religion has been a force for peace and social justice. But because history and current events show that religion is frequently involved in communal violence raises intriguing questions about faith, religious organizations, and religious leaders are raised. Why is it that religious communities that teach about peace and solidarity are engaged in so many wars and violent conflicts all over the globe? Indeed, religious violence is among the most pressing and dangerous issues facing the world community.

Religion plays a determining role in many of the violent and deadly conflicts found around the world, which is not really that surprising because religion and culture are so closely interwoven. Conflicts between ethnic groups often have a religious

⁵ Stanley J Samartha., *One Christ – Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology.* (Maryhill: Orbis Books. 1991) p. 37



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dimension. In situations of this kind, religion seems to be Janus-faced. In times of prosperity, religious leaders speak of harmony and compassion, and the believers accept each other across denominational and religious boundaries. As soon as tension rises, however, religion presents another face: people dedicate themselves to a sacred cause and offer their lives in defenses of interests sanctioned by faith and stamped with a religious seal of legitimacy. Sacred writings often teach love and compassion, but in times of war, religious adherents are very adept at finding other scriptural passages that justify violent confrontation within their religion.

It could not be denied that religious diversity could cause conflict. Since religion deals with the ultimate and what is absolute, the diversity of religious traditions generates competition. A careful analysis of the fundamental texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, explains how four resources have figured repeatedly in creating religious violence: competing sacred space (churches, temples, holy cities, promised land); the creation of holy scriptures (exclusive revelations, orthodoxy vs. heresy, infidel); group privilege (chosen people, the predestined select people vs. rejected, reprobate people); and salvation (saints vs. damned). Thus, competing religious absolutes lead to religious conflict.⁶

Religion is also a deep source of group identity. It is often used as a rallying point when a particular group feels economically, socially, or politically oppressed by another group. Invoking the "good" God on one's side, the other is identified with the evil one. Destructive violence in the name of God then becomes possible. The war becomes a "holy war"—jihad or crusade. When religion becomes a source of identity in this way, it becomes easy for the leaders to make people believe that a group that shares a particular religion also shares the same economic and political interests. This

⁶ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000); and R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).



phenomenon is called communalism in South Asia. Economic and political struggles also become religious issues.⁷

Because of the involvement of religious groups in war, genocide and mass hatred, social activists often call for the abolition of all religions. The existence of social injustice, oppression and evil as a consequence of religious belief forms one of the primary arguments in the case made against religion by its critics.⁸

However, some have argued that “it is not religion per se” that gives rise to conflict but rather followers with powerful vested interests, who manipulate the emotional appeal for their purposes. They are the perpetrators of deadly conflicts. In many countries and areas of the present world, the conflict between religious groups is more political than religious, though religious symbols are used to legitimize it.⁹ In the book of Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*, he repeatedly showed evidence that religion is susceptible to use, or rather misuse, by ambitious and powerful persons to attain selfish ends, that religious militancy is usually closely linked to the project of an individual or group seeking to gain advantage from or power over others.¹⁰

Religion though is not always the primary cause of conflict. Some of the most salient past and present causes of conflict are those that fall into the broad category of violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights: slavery and colonialism; apartheid, racism, segregation and casteism; exploitation and oppression of minorities, women, children, the poor and the vulnerable; the production and trade of arms and weapons of mass destruction, the harmful role of the entertainment industry, drug trafficking, and so on. The underlying causes of human conflict are of a chiefly non-religious nature.

⁷ Ashgar Ali Engineer, et al., *Sowing Hate and Reaping Violence: The Case of Gujarat Communal Carnage*. (Mumbai. Center for the Study of Society and Secularism. 2002); and Ashgar Ali Engineer, *Communalism in India* (New Delhi: Vikas. 1995)

⁸ Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Tse-tung and Sigmund Freud are known critics of religion.

⁹ Engineer (2002) *ibid*.

¹⁰ Appleby.



2. Religion and Peace

Peace researchers can no longer ignore the role of peace activists who are motivated by their religious traditions.¹¹ According to Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Funk, “*Religion, after all, is a powerful constituent of cultural norms and values, and because it addresses the most profound existential issues of human life (e.g., freedom and inevitability, fear and faith, security and insecurity, right and wrong, sacred and profane), religion is deeply implicated in individual and social conceptions of peace.*”¹² Religion has and will continue to play a vital role in the process of peacebuilding.

Moreover, religious traditions have rich resources that can be tapped to build a culture of peace and co-existence. Islam and Christianity uniquely possess and offer a rich abundance of guidance and insight into peacebuilding. Islam is a religion of peace in the fullest sense of the word. The Qur’an calls its way –“The ways of peace...”¹³ It describes reconciliation as the best policy¹⁴ and states that God abhors any disturbance of peace.¹⁵ Christianity is a religion of peace, whose founder is Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.¹⁶ He calls the children of God “peacemakers.”¹⁷ And those who follow Jesus must come to terms with his teaching on peace – “that the God of love and peace expects God’s children also to act in loving and peaceful ways.”¹⁸

3. Three key Christian Resources for Peace

This section will highlight at least three resources in the Christian traditions, namely the sacred texts, the practice of reconciliation and the religious leaders, which can be used for peacebuilding.

¹¹ Appleby, Building sustainable peace: the roles of local and transnational religious actors,” in *New Religious Pluralism in World Politics*, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, March.

¹² Said, Abdul Aziz, and Nathan C. Funk. "The Role of Faith in Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution." *Peace and Conflict Studies* 9, no. 1 (May 2002): 37—50

¹³ See the Qur’an 5:16

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4:128

¹⁵ See the Qur’an 2:205

¹⁶ Isaiah 9:6

¹⁷ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Matt 5.9

¹⁸ M.E. Miller and B.N. Gingerich, *The Church's Peace Witness* (W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 110.



3.1 Bible as a Resource for Peacemaking.

Does the Bible promote peace, or does it promote violence? For many scholars, such as William Klassen, Willard Swartley and Rene Girard, the Bible, at its core, promotes peace.¹⁹ The biblical term “peace” (Hb. shalom, Gk. eirene) and its cognates appear 550 times in the Bible. However, some scholars see that biblical texts have been used to justify violence. Killing entire races of people, slaughtering men, women and children and showing no mercy are violent narratives you find in the Bible. Philip Jenkins, the author of *Laying Down the Sword*, has observed that the Bible contains brutal and violent texts but somehow forgotten or avoided.²⁰

The challenge is to engage our members in the art of struggling with the text or narratives that would reveal the “hidden oppressive code.” Consider the Exodus and Conquest narratives in the Old Testament, they may have a liberating message for the oppressed, but may have an opposite message for the indigenous people. Some biblical passages justify violence and certain anthropological presuppositions that are used to legitimize the exclusion of people, and the subjugation of women. How do we deal with these texts (both biblical and Church traditions) Do we avoid them, or ignore them in class?²¹

More so we must highlight the biblical stories that narrate about peaceful co-existence and non-retaliation, for example, the story of Isaac and Abimelech.

Isaac is the second of the Hebrew patriarchs. He is not as famous as his father, Abraham. Isaac is known in the Bible as the child of promise born to Abraham and

¹⁹ The most explicit work by Klassen that promotes this view is his William Klassen, *Love of Enemies: The Way to Peace, Overtures to Biblical Theology*, vol. 15 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). See also Willard Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006). In Rene Girard's works (notably, Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans., Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977). we find an emphasis upon religious violence, with a peace-oriented focal point or goal.

²⁰ P. Jenkins, *Laying Down the Sword: Why We Can't Ignore the Bible's Violent Verses* (HarperCollins, 2011).

²¹ R.S Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World New Edition*, (Maryknoll NY:Orbis Books, 1997); and Wesley Ariarajah, *The Bible and People of Other Faiths* (Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1985)



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Sarah and was willing to be offered as a sacrifice if God so willed. A conflict arose between Isaac and the Philistines regarding access to water wells. Water rights are crucial in lands with little rainfall. Thus, people prized and guarded their sources of water. However, in this conflict, Isaac avoids conflict and chooses to move instead (vss. 19-22). This is a distinct feature of the narrative compared to the conquest narratives found in Exodus and Joshua. Isaac could have opted to fight it out against the Philistines. He had the resources and the means. But he went out of his way to avoid conflicts that would be costly to both sides. Hence, non-retaliation is a viable option for Israel.

And Yahweh approves Isaac's non-retaliation. God renews the covenant with Isaac. "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham" (vs. 24) Isaac's non-violent approach bears positive fruits. In verses 28-29, Abimelech changed his attitude toward Isaac because he saw that the Lord was with Isaac. Abimelech and his men saw the benefits of peaceful coexistence. A peace covenant agreement between themselves and Isaac was proposed. This non-aggression treaty or covenant was intended to ensure that the two parties no longer would attack or molest each other. Isaac and Abimelech sealed their agreement with a feast that Isaac prepared. The making of this treaty was a cause for celebration. The next morning the men swore an oath to further solidify their new relationship. Then Abimelech and his men left in peace. (vv. 30-31). The writers (J/P) want to affirm that the hope for Israel appears to rest in the possibility of treaties of friendship with one-time enemies (Gen. 26:26-33).²²

There are many other stories with similar theme. We only have to search for them and draw out lessons from these stories. The Sermon on the Mounts and other teachings of Jesus.

²² W. Brueggemann and H.W. Wolff, *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (John Knox Press, 1982).



3.2 Repentance, Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Christian Tradition

Another resource we have in the Christian tradition is the practice of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Many conflicts in this world, in our country and in our homes can be reduced when we acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice and seek repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.²³

Repentance in Christian tradition is commonly known as penance. It means We have to acknowledge the fact that we are responsible for the many conflicts by omissions or commissions. The practice of repentance should include criticism of prejudices and biases against people of other religions, such as, Muslims are traitors, violent people, etc. Today we associate the term terrorist with Muslim people. A terrorist is a Muslim or a Muslim is a terrorist. We have succumbed to this propaganda.

Do we hear Christian terrorist in our media? No, we don't? I believe when we Christians do no thing to correct this false perception we are partly responsible for the escalating conflict. We are contributing to the building of walls and exclusivism. When we keep quiet when government soldiers violate the rights of our Muslim brothers and sisters, we are accountable for we are our brothers and sisters' keepers.

But we have in our tradition to help us rise from this failures and mistakes. The Christian practice of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation can be a means where we can express sincere apology, recognize the errors and restore relationship. Christians proclaim that we have received mercy and forgiveness from God and we are a community of reconciled people to God then this act of being sorry for the crusade becomes an act of breaking the walls that divide Christians and Muslims. St. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesian: *"For he is our peace... and has broken down the dividing wall of enmity... so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bring enmity to an end."* Jesus highlighted the importance of reconciliation. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said: *"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something*

²³ Glen Harold Stassen, *Just Peacemaking : Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1998).



against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

Since Christians claim they are forgiven and reconciled to God, they are called to forgive and reconcile with their fellow human beings regardless of race, religion and gender.²⁴ And acknowledging responsibility for violence and injustice and seeking repentance and forgiveness is a major step to start the process of dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation.

3.3 Religious Leaders as Agents of Peace

Another resource we should mention is the role of religious leaders in peacemaking. Some individuals continue the ministry of peacebuilding against all odds. Amid violence, religious people serve as agents of peace and reconciliation. They tender the spiritual resources for the de-escalation of deadly conflict and sectarian violence; they offer moral and material resources for easing or resolving situations of contention and for promoting reconciliation, social cohesion and mutually beneficial communal life. When war ends and the houses lie in ruins and the victims on either side of the conflict are staggering around in a daze and confusion, religious organizations and individuals are often among the first to bring aid and solace to the former combatants and traumatized civilian population in the form of shelter, food, concern, counseling and moral support. They contribute to reconstruction efforts and are involved in endeavors to establish and sustain peace and to foster understanding for each other.

3.3.1 St. Francis of Assisi: Inter-Religious Peacemaker²⁵

Jesus Christ is known among his followers as the Prince of Peace. He has inspired individuals, and congregations for peacebuilding. A historical figure who has

²⁴ Matthew 18:21-35 - The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

²⁵ Saint Bonaventure, Cardinal, *The Life of St. Francis* (HarperCollins, 2005); M. Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World* (InterVarsity Press, 2002). and K. Armstrong and A. House, *Francis of Assisi: A Revolutionary Life* (Paulist Press, 2014).



shown a non-violent approach to resolving conflict and advancing social justice during the Christian Crusade was St. Francis of Assisi.

St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan Order, is known today among Christians for his prayer: *“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; Where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console. To be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”*²⁶

Advocating the cause of peace, Francis traveled to Spain, France, Switzerland, Dalmatia, and most famously to Syria, the Holy Land, and Egypt during the Fifth Crusade. He attempted to negotiate for peace between the Christians and Muslims. He met the Sultan of Egypt and both developed deep respect for each other during days of intense dialogue in the midst of war. The Sultan treated Francis as a guest rather than an enemy. And Francis arrived home urging Christians live peacefully beside them.

3.3.2 Bishops-Ulama Conference (BUF)

In the Philippines, Islamic and Christian religious leaders have contributed significantly in peacebuilding through the Bishops-ULAMA Forum (BUF) later renamed the Bishops-Ulama Conference (BUC). Bishop Hilario Gomez of the United Church of Christ of the Philippines (UCCP), a Protestant denomination, was a co-convenor along with Bishop Fernando Capalla of the Catholic Bishop Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and Dr. Mahid Matilan of Lanao del Sur.²⁷ It was organized in November 1996 in support of the peace talks between the GRP and the various Muslim rebel groups, namely the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic

²⁶ Mark Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002)

²⁷ Hilario Gomez Jr "National Secretariat's Report May 25-29," in *State of the Mission of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, ed. Hilario Gomez Jr and Council of Bishops (UCCP Ellinwood Malate, Manila: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1998), 9.a



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Liberation Front (MILF). The Forum was composed of 20 Roman Catholic Bishops in Mindanao, 40 ulama and 35 Bishops and Conference Ministers of the member churches of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). Official observers are the officers of the Panagtagbo, a Confederation of 18 Indigenous Peoples of Mindanao, and bishops of the Philippines Conference of Evangelical Churches (PCEC). The BUC focused on the spiritual and cultural dimensions of peacemaking. Bishop Ledesma of the CBCP wrote: *From its inception, the B.U.F. has focused on the spiritual bases for peace from both Muslim and Christian religious traditions, grounded in the belief in one God, a common origin and a common destiny for all. Even as the government and warring groups pursue a genuine, comprehensive and lasting peace through political treaties and socio-economic development, the bishops and ulama focus on the missing component in many failed peace efforts—an affirmation of the convergent spiritual and cultural bases for peace.*²⁸

The impact of BUF in the peace effort and reconciliation in Mindanao was significant because the BUF offered a cultural and spiritual image of religious leaders of different religions meeting and dialoguing. It has offered an example and a model of co-operation, co-existence and inter-religious dialogue that ordinary Christians and Muslims could follow.

4. Implication for Religious Education

One of the aims of this paper is to provide directions for peace educators to tap resources in their own religious traditions and other traditions for peacebuilding. Religious education can include themes, narratives and religious practices which promote peace, respect for human persons, and reconciliation. A kind of religious peace education to train religious adherents to sow the seeds of peace, justice and forgiveness in a pluralist society marred by violence and fragmentation.

²⁸ Antonio Ledesma, "Interreligious Dialogue for Peace", *America National Catholic Weekly*, Vol. 187 No. 18 <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/414/article/interreligious-dialogue-peace> (accessed March 10, 2024)



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The significance of understanding the religious traditions in the context of religious diversity sometime raised a question like: “Do you still believe that Muslims will be saved with all the kidnappings and bombings perpetrated by them? What else has to happen before you realize that inter-religious dialogue is a hopeless enterprise, undertaken and pursued by people who do not see that religions are the cause of conflict and therefore incapable of bringing about peace and co-existence among religious communities?

According to R. Scott Appleby, an informed laity that knows the scripture and is at home with the sacred texts and traditional practices can be mobilized as an important resource for deterring extremist groups from promoting violence and religious confrontation.²⁹ An informed laity can question the legitimacy of religious violence and can object to religious confrontation on religious grounds. A pious and committed laity cannot easily be ignored or viewed as outsiders. The influence of the congregation is in its ability to hold dialogue with and challenge the extremists from within the theological tradition itself.

Conclusion

Our religious differences may cause disagreement but should not lead to violence and deadly conflict. Religious violence is among the most pressing and dangerous issues facing the world community. Although religion may contribute to violent conflict, it is not always the main cause of conflict. There are non-religious factors as well. The challenge to religious believers is to help defuse the escalating deadly conflict and heal the ruptures that destabilize the community and diminish our common humanity. Religions can be an instrument in the promotion of peace and not violence. Peace advocates who belong to religious traditions are challenged to ensure that their religious traditions do not become a tool that legitimizes deadly conflict. The

²⁹ R. Scott Appleby *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 284-288



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pathway of peace requires religious adherents to know the ethnic elements embedded in one's traditions.

In the Philippine context, Christians are the majority. We can play an important role in peacebuilding. The discussion above shows that we have resources which can be used for peacebuilding. Peace and peacemaking is key themes in the Holy Bible. There are practices of forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation, which can be used for resolving conflict. And religious actors who serve as model peacemakers to mention some, Jesus, & St. Francis of Assisi. Some groups provide opportunities for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation like the bishops-Ulama Conference.

According to R. Scott Appleby, an informed laity that knows the scripture and is at home with the sacred texts and traditional practices can be mobilized as an important resource for deterring extremist groups from promoting violence and religious confrontation.³⁰ An informed laity can question the legitimacy of religious violence and can object to religious confrontation on religious grounds. A pious and committed laity cannot easily be ignored or viewed as outsiders. The influence of the congregation is in its ability to hold dialogue with and challenge the extremists from within the theological tradition itself. When we, Christians can show to the world that we can dialogue with one another and settle conflicts without violence, I believe that we will have made a stronger testimony than the many statements on peace that the Churches have issued. The challenge to the Churches is whether we are preparing and working for peace while the "powers and principalities" of this world prepare for war and domination

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Armstrong, K., and A. House. *Francis of Assisi: A Revolutionary Life*: Paulist Press, 2014.

³⁰ Ibid., 284-288



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