

## **An Analysis of the Paradoxical Role of Religion in the Occurrence of Peace and Conflict in Human Society**

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**Abstract.** For many years, scholars have battled with understanding and explaining the connection between religion, peace, and conflict. However, the plethora of the ensuing thoughts and explanations has rather created more confusion than resolution of the matter, especially because scholars have hardly agreed on any of the numerous evolving perspectives. With the aim of discovering a way out of the observed dilemma, this paper embarked on an analytical approach, incorporating the propositions of the indivisibility thesis to highlight and examine the basic characteristics of religion and how they influence peace and conflict between and among people. It was discovered that the major factors that determine whether religion will promote peace or conflict in the society at any instance are the indivisibility of the associated tenets and its proneness to selfish manipulation; that the inherent characteristics of religion make it equally inclined to peace and conflict as well as to manipulation which affects its influence on them. The paper concluded that despite the equal inclination of religion to peace and conflict, it is more prone to conflict than peace, especially because of its inherent proneness to segregation and manipulation. The paper, therefore, recommended a general re-orientation of all stakeholders of peace and conflict in relation to the role of religion in the society, following the realist, rather than the utopian, claims that help maintain the unwanted influence of religion on the balance of peace and conflict in human society. This re-orientation is necessary because it will help clear the scholarly confusions on ground and to place religion in its rightful place in the promotion of the necessary balance of peace and conflict in human society.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Human Society, Indivisibility, Peace, Religion

### **1. Introduction**

From antiquity to contemporary times, conflict, peace, and religion have been unrelenting features of human society, which cohabit in different forms and combinations, informing and evolving from human interactions with each other and with their supernatural deities. Thus, from the ancient times to about the late 1940s, religion was a key determinant of how people related with each other at different levels and conditions everywhere in the world. Thus, it could not be justifiably dissociated from the discourse of the occurrence of peace and conflict in the society. But as rightly observed by Haynes (2007) and Kimball (2002), beginning from the immediate post-1945 years, scholars of the western societies began to successfully persuade their home governments and public institutions to relegate religion to the private quarters, claiming that it had become irrelevant and anachronistic, especially in matters relating to development in their immediate societies and in the entire world. This opinion was widely adopted in many western countries but disregarded in most other countries around the globe. Thus, religion continued to play significant roles in human relations in most societies of the contemporary world. Nevertheless, recent events, especially since the late 1990s, have forced western scholars and elites to reconsider their stance against religion. For instance, the involvement of Islam in the Arab Spring and the evolving terrorist attacks, with global relevance, have reawakened the consciousness of some western scholars like Juergensmeyer (2009), Haynes (2007), and Fox (2004), who wrote on the relevance of religion to development, especially through its role in peace and conflict situations which are necessary components of every advancement in human societies.

As international terrorism and related events with religious undertone unfold, with their teeming challenges to the wellbeing of individuals and groups in societies across the world, many scholars, including Haynes (2007), Ratzinger and Pera (2006), Knott (2000), and Huntington (1996), have devoted ample time to re-examining the meaning of religion, its nature, functions, and implications for the experience of peace and conflict, either directly by its tenets or indirectly through manipulation by the various elites. Consequently, in addition to the extant notions, many additional assumptions, claims, and theories have evolved in attempts to explain the involvement of religion in peace and conflict, not only as it affects the western world, but also with regard to the non-western countries from which most religious conflicts with global relevance evolve in contemporary times. So, it has become increasingly obvious that there is need for further appreciation of religion alongside its implications for peace and conflict in human society. This paper has, therefore, attempted to critique the divergent scholarly perspectives on religion in order to explain the conditions that inevitably implicate or exonerate religion in the discourse of the occurrence, perception, progression, and culmination of peace and conflict in human society.

## 2. Statement of Research Problem

The evolved scholarly perceptions have created some unresolved puzzles and have, therefore, compounded the understanding of the observable paradoxical roles that religion plays in the occurrence of peace and conflict, especially through the complexity of the confusions generated by the plethora of the often disagreeing views of religious cum peace and conflict scholars, who unflinchingly propagate the following summarised views. While some scholars like Dawkins (2006), Freud (1990), and Russell (1957) claimed that religion is an anachronistic element in the discourse of peace and conflict issues, especially in the highly developed world, others like Coward and Smith (2004), Fox (2004), Reynal-Querol (2002), Smith (2001), Ellingsen (2000), Huntington (2000), Russett, Oneal, and Cox (2000), Gurr (1994) contended that it finds a perfect fit in the issues relating to peace and conflict. Secondly, while some scholars like Kamali (2017) and Armstrong (2014) emphasised that religion exclusively offers and encourages peace rather than conflict, even though it often lends itself to manipulations for conflict, another category of intellectuals (including Hamid, 2016; Dawkins, 2006; Harris, 2005) averred that it inevitably causes and promotes only conflict. Thirdly, some scholars (including Juergensmeyer,

2009; Shore, 2009; Coward and Smith, 2004; Kimball, 2002; Noll, 2003) contended that religion is a double-edged sword, which perpetually influences the occurrence of peace and conflict at any time.

In addition to creating confusion, the foregoing scholarly perspectives have been found to be mostly biased, making reference to (in most cases) just the aspects of evidences that reinforce their perception of the issue. This is evident in the references made to the canonical and experiential evidences by the scholars who either claimed that religion brings about peace or conflict alone. Also, many of the proponents of the paradoxical roles of religion in the manifestation of peace and conflict could not explain, in explicit terms, the connection between religious tenets and the observed roles of religion. Rather, many scholars, including Kimball (2002) linked the roles of religion in peace and conflict to diverse elitist manipulations for achievement of selfish interests through religious solidarity.

Considering the foregoing complications on the nexus of conflict, peace, and religion, it is necessary to reduce the ambiguity in the general discourse by highlighting the nature of religion, as collectively defined by the different tenets of the varying traditions, in relation to the claims in the light of extant canonical and experiential evidences from historical and contemporary realities. Thus, the paper attempted to explain why religion is usually implicated by both peace and conflict in any condition of their mix, drawing from the stated kinds of evidences, and laying emphasis on the cause(s) of its paradoxical posture.

## 3. Conceptual Framework

### 3.1 The Concept of Conflict

According to Cooper (2003: 85), conflict refers to “a collision of opposing interests”, with the collision of the divergent interests ranging from very mild to extremely severe forms. Collision in this regard includes the non-violent and violent forms of disagreement. Conflict involves the disagreement of interests of different parties either by coincidence or design. The divergent interests over which disagreement ensue can be either intangible or tangible, or both. Thus, they include “...ideas, sentiments, attitudes, and feelings”. So, conflict, as applied herein, does not necessarily imply violence or threat of aggression, but disagreement, which may eventually involve aggression and violence in some cases. Therefore, even though conflict can be associated with aggression or violence, its conceptualisation in this paper does not outrightly

equate either of them. Accordingly, this paper agrees with the opinion of Swannstrom and Weissmann (2005: 9) that conflict implies "...perceived differences in issue positions between two or more parties at the same moment in time". There must be interference, which upsets an existing balance in a system, for conflict to occur. Such hindrances can result from competition. From the standpoint of Social Darwinism, Cooper (2003) suggested that such interferences are often inevitably generated by insatiable human ambitions, the associated dissatisfaction, and the use of force to impose one's will on those who are unwilling to accept it. Every want or need is achieved by altering a status quo, especially by supporting one interest against the other; every ambition usually contends with others. Thus, scholars like Reyckler (2001) and Mayer (2000) have argued that conflict is inevitable, natural, necessary, and normal for developments in human society. Being generated by human ambition, conflict has become as ineradicable from human society as the ambitions from which it is often generated. Reiterating its role in the society, Reyckler (2001) posited that conflict possesses both negative and positive attributes, which are often expressed in the forms of violence and strong motivating for modernization and peace-making. Thus, conflict can be good or bad depending on how it is handled.

Some attributes of conflict that are undeniably relevant to this discourse include that except in very few cases, conflicts generally occur in complex forms, having multiple issue-fields, which are sometimes deliberately concealed or disguised to obscure their real character. Some components of the complex issue-field are often more important than others, and are often deliberately introduced as means of manipulation for gaining some bargaining power advantages over opponents. Also, some of the elements of a complex issue-field may be just sentimental or symbolic tokenism that cannot be ignored by any consideration (Cooper, 2003).

### 3.2 The Concept of Peace

There are many perceptions of the concept of peace out of which the following three more encompassing definitions have been carefully selected. Oyesola (2005) observed that peace was traditionally defined in the context of inter-state relations to imply absence of war (i.e. *pax Romana* or *absentia bellum*), a condition in which actors decline the use of direct violence. In this case, the disapproval of direct violence implies the approval of structural violence, which seeks to maintain a specific condition in favour of some powerful minority, thereby promoting

the accumulation of wrongs, waiting for triggering events to initiate violence in the future. This is in tandem with the thoughts of some scholars (Mavalla, 2015; Mavalla, 2014; Noll, 2014; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall, 2005) that similar to conflict, peace basically exists in two forms - positive and negative peace. Conversely, in the Greco-Arabic-Hebraic perspective, peace (i.e. *eirenesala* 'am-shalom) implies the prevalence of equity, freedom, and justice in human society. It is evident that this perspective describes a condition that can hardly promote the prevalence of conflict, either as direct or structural violence, and yet unable to totally eradicate it. Finally, the Chinese concept of *p'ing-p'ingho* implies harmony and order in the world and in social and personal organisation (Oyesola, 2005), a perception which seems to promote the idea of a condition of absence of conflict or state of an ordered status quo which balances the extremities of chaos and tranquillity.

Being that human relations are constantly replete with conflict, peace cannot be accurately defined as the absence of conflict. On the other hand, the prevalence of equity, freedom, and justice in human society can only be in relative terms as the interests of all and sundry people cannot be equally promoted at any time. Distortion of any existent harmony is a persistent phenomenon in human society, therefore, the *p'ing-p'ingho* perspective can only be relatively realisable. Thus, to avoid the extremism associated with the foregoing perceptions of peace, this paper rather defines peace as a condition or situation of limited occurrence of conflict (with indivisible goals) and minimal escalation of incompatibilities into violent forms. Borrowing from Shtromas's (1995: 19) perception of peace (though on a discourse of peace in International Relations), it also herein implies the "...[existence] of an effectively working system of authoritative conflict settlement and resolution which could reliably efface the possibility [of] resorting to the violent resolution of conflicts" (emphases are ours).

### 3.3 The Concept of Religion

Religion is one of the numerous concepts that scholars find difficult to define. In fact, Haynes (2007: 13) referred to the attempt to define and conceptualise religion as "...a notoriously difficult task". This is probably because it "...evokes a wide variety of images, ideas, practices, beliefs, and experiences" (Kimball, 2002: 15), which makes it difficult for scholars to reach a consensus on its real meaning. Therefore, some of the different conceptual perspectives on religion have been highlighted and a

deduction made for its application herein. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, religion is “a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardour and faith [or] an interest, a belief, or an activity that is very important to a person or group” (emphasis is ours). Relatedly, Huntington (1996: 27) defined religion as “...the central...force that motivates and mobilizes people”, while Kimball (2002: 16) averred that religion implies “...human thinking about or engagement with God, gods, or some less personal understanding of ultimate reality...”, a personal or group response to the wish of being transcendent through such activities as “prayer, worship services, rituals, moral codes, and so on”. Borrowing from Justice Field, Peñalver (1997: 795) described religion as “...one’s views of his relations to his Creator, and to the obligations they [the views] impose of reverence for his being and character, and of obedience to his [the Creator’s] will” (emphases are ours). Approaching it from a broader dimension, religion may be regarded as a system of beliefs and practices which are sometimes connected to ultimate being(s), which is/are perceived to be supernatural, with the beliefs and practices involving a body of sacred and inviolate ideas and worldviews which consist of the theology or ethical codes that guide the behaviour of people in human society (culled from Haynes, 2007; Haynes, 1998; Aquaviva, 1979).

From a deductive standpoint, religion, herein, implies a set of inviolate perceptions of reality, which relates to an adopted worldview that mostly emanates from people’s inclination to and belief in supernatural beings whose perceived ethical injunctions must be observed as the only appropriate moral guide for human behaviour. It is a set of principles meant to guide the processes of training of the mind and the whole person for rational thought and choices of behaviour from which people must not deviate; it herein connotes an inclusion of all and sundry belief traditions relating to spiritual and supernatural beings and influences.

At this juncture, it is imperative that some clarifications be made on the existent forms of religion, especially because its forms seem to affect its relationship with peace and conflict at every instance. Haynes (2007) noted that despite the observable variation in belief and content, religion can be, simply, classified into theistic and non-theistic forms. Theistic religions are those in which a god or gods are worshipped, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and African traditional religions. Conversely, non-theistic religions consist of those in which God or gods is/are not involved, for instance Buddhism, Jainism, and Taoism. The theistic

religions are further classified into mono- and poly-theistic religions. Whereas monotheistic religions (e.g. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism) involve a focus on and worship of just one God, polytheistic religions (e.g. African traditional religions, Native American Toltec tradition, and Shinto) involve a hierarchy of gods. Hinduism violates these preceding classifications: It is both a mono- and poly- theistic religion because, even though many gods are involved, most of its adherents believe that the numerous deities associated with Hinduism are actually different manifestations of the same God. Moreover, Hinduism is sometimes considered to be non-theistic because its metaphysical philosophy is very akin to Buddhist Vedanta. Religions are also classified as Abrahamic or Judeo-Abrahamic (i.e. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) and non-Abrahamic (i.e. every other) religions. While the former lays claims to Abraham the patriarch, the latter do not, and while the former religions are monotheistic, the latter are mostly polytheistic (Ratzinger and Pera 2006; Knott 2000).

#### 4. Basic Characteristics of Religion

Discussing the inherent features of religion is germane to the comprehension of the arguments raised in this discourse, because, the characteristics of religion determine its influence on the prevalence of peace or conflict. The first characteristic of religion is that each of its traditions has and promotes a form of “...rigid theology of exclusivism...[which is often] woven into the rhetoric of...” everyday life like discussion of issues, problems, and solution (Kimball, 2002: 5; emphasis is ours). This implies that every religion has its own inflexible and uncompromising beliefs which are specifically prescribed and proscribed for adherence by its followers. Such beliefs and practices may be similar to, but never the same with any other type (Toft, 2007). For instance, while Christians believe and promote the conviction that Jesus is the Son of God, the Muslims declare that Jesus was a prophet. Also, (as noted by Kimball, 2002), while Christians claim that God is tripartite (consisting of the Father, Son, and Spirit), the Muslims insist that God is one and only. So, even though these claims promote monotheism, they do not agree on their approaches. This controversy also exists with the traditional religions in Africa and elsewhere, which perceive and promote the idea of a hierarchy of lesser gods who minister to the Almighty God. A second, but closely related, characteristic of religion is that every tradition presents its own truths about reality as the exclusively right practices which must be universally accepted. Every other truths are false and

unacceptable and therefore must be resisted. Thus, religion promotes disparaging worldviews and disagreeing truth claims by distinguishing between the sacred and profane, by means of determining events which constitute sacred stories associated to particular people, places, times, and objects (Toft, 2007; Kimball, 2002).

The third characteristic is that religion, especially Christian and Islamic traditions, often subscribes to evangelism with the intent to convert others from their faith. Such conversions may be peaceful (in the forms of personal and open-air evangelisms) or violent (in the forms of religious coercion including crusades). Fourth, by encouraging its adherents to be totally committed to the principles of the particular traditions they align with, religion lends itself to rigid intolerance and uncompromising stances. Consequently, the fifth character of religion is that, in the purest form of any of its traditions, religion simply approves totalitarianism as well as fundamentalism. Adhering to all recommended principles of a religion (in thought and action) without willingness to defect in any of them or allowing others to do so or to corrupt the perceived purity of a tradition is what fundamentalism and religious totalitarianism are all about. Incidentally, fundamentalism is promoted by all religions, even though subtly and non-violently (in the forms of evangelism for instance) in many cases. Moderation, in this regard, is often just by word of mouth without a well-defined benchmark of actions, and can be tolerated, mainly, as long as the core or fundamental beliefs are not tampered with. Religious moderation is only a chimera for any tradition in its natural circumstances. This promotes indivisibility of religious tenets, thereby making them prone to conflict or peace depending on the situation at hand.

Sixth, religion creates differential enclaves for adherents of the many traditions by deliberately structuring their lives along sacred annual events like Christmas, Passover, Hajj, Diwali, Buddha's enlightenment, and the numerous festivals of the traditional religions like those in Africa. These traditions serve for re-enactment of beliefs and rededication of the adherents to their religious commitments. Moreover, religion uses some life-cycle rituals to initiate its adherents into the different stages of human life including birth, coming of age, initiation into the community, marriage, and death. These rituals go with provision of social organisations for their adherents, thereby fashioning their social life to conform to their organisation's moral etiquettes. The rituals often occur in places specially dedicated for worship. Accordingly, Zanaz

(2016) recalled that the mosque is not simply a place of worship but a place to make young Muslims become true believers and soldiers of Islam. Interestingly, places of worship of all other religious traditions serve the same or similar purposes; whether they be churches, temples, or shrines, future generation of adherents are groomed in them. Seventh, religion, by its ability to carve niches for adherents of its numerous traditions, provides for segregative worldviews, a "we" and "they" attitude (Kimball, 2002: 13). Thus, religion is akin to and evidently aligns with apartheid, ethnocentrism, nepotism, racism, and all forms of discrimination.

The eighth characteristic of religion is that it instills both conscious and subconscious fear of the unknown in its adherents, while also filling them with guilt over their failure to meet up with the demands of their tradition. This fear often influences their behaviour since they often believe that their deeds will be judged for rewards. Thus, adherents of religious traditions often ultimately strive to please their God or gods and for this reason, they may not often care about pleasing people or any other entity. This is why people sometimes go to any length to defend or protect their convictions. An example of this situation can be found in Galatians 1:10, which states: "Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of God". Madany (2017) captured the reality of both the guilt and fear argument by commenting thus: "Every good Muslim is guilt-ridden for failing to establish the Islamic State, either by persuasion, or through violence. A Muslim remains mired in the sacred, in the forbidden, in the halal, in Paradise, in Hell; and paralyzed by the mere thought of the torments of the tomb" (quoting Hamid, 2016, para. 11). As before, this observation is not peculiar to Islam but cuts across all the theistic religions.

The ninth characteristic of religion, especially the Abrahamic traditions, is that it promotes physical self-sacrifice as a way of pleasing the supernatural for consequent reward with immortality and eternity. Adherents have to discount their physical survival by sacrificing the temporary and mortal in order to obtain the eternal and immortal. This is often presented as a rational and desirable way of showing commitment to and defending one's faith; it is usually interpreted as a true test of faith (Toft, 2007). Finally, the tenth character of religion is that it plays a dual role of making peace and causing conflict. This was highlighted by Juergensmeyer (2009: ix and x) that:

Its [religion's] role...is frequently contradictory. In some cases it provides the resources for shared values...helps to ease the cultural difficulties experienced in multi-cultural societies by providing the shared values that allow peoples of diverse cultures to live together in harmony. In other cases it sounds a prophetic note by warning against the superficial aspects of a homogenous global culture. And in extreme cases it also fosters ideologies of rebellion that embolden its proponents to reject globalisation and reassert traditional allegiances, sometimes with quite violent methods (emphasis is ours).

### 5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of analysis adopted for this discussion is the indivisibility thesis; a theory originally postulated for explaining the occurrence of civil wars in relation to their causes, especially those that can be linked to religion. This framework of analysis was adopted to explain the nature of religion vis-à-vis the aforementioned, sometimes, contradictory roles that it plays with regard to peace and conflict. Of particular relevance to the stated explanations is Hassner's (2003: 933) expansion of the indivisibility thesis, which explained that an issue field only becomes indivisible if it possesses "integrity", "boundary", and the quality of "nonfungibility" which combine to make a conflict hard to resolve or even manage. An issue field that possesses "integrity" is one whose "subjective value" significantly diminishes if and when "parcelled out or subdivided". In terms of "boundary", an issue field that possesses boundary is one that has clearly defined limits. Finally, an issue field possesses the quality of "nonfungibility" if it cannot be substituted or exchanged. Thus, an issue field possesses the quality of being indivisible when its real or perceived nature or character makes the contending actors to adopt stances that are incommensurable with all other claims to the issue field, thereby making it impossible for redistribution of the issue field to take place.

With regard to the foregoing, the adopted analytical stance for this discourse is that at any instance, religion may or may not cause, promote, abate, or stop either peace or conflict or a concurrence of both of them, nor even lend itself to manipulation for any of them, except the issue at stake is actually indivisible, misperceived or manipulated to appear to be indivisible. Also, the reality of the perceptions and manipulability of issue fields that are relatable to religion are merely possible because of the rigid stances of religious creeds of the varying traditions. Finally, the rigid stances of religious traditions, with

regard to the claims they make, consist of the determinants of religion's influence on peace and conflict.

### 6. Religion's Contribution to Peace and Conflict

Although religion is philosophical, it is basically pragmatic as well; philosophical because it is linked to reasoning and pragmatic because it has utilitarian value which aims at defining and compelling particular human behaviours as (un)acceptable in the society. The philosophical dimension of religion is often communicated through teaching and learning processes with the aim of equipping the individual to develop certain behavioural traits required for his/her present and future wellbeing. Thus, from childhood, parents and guardians often consciously teach their religious beliefs and practices to their young ones. The transmission of the religious tenets by these means often lead to collective systems of thought and action which become lifelong ideas and behaviours that influences peace and conflict in the society. For instance, Williams (2010), making reference to the comments of John Wesley's mother – Susanna – in a letter to him (John Wesley), observed that inculcation of religious tradition and culture in the individual from childhood was, and is still, a basic requirement from Christian parents. This is because such training is necessary to tame self-will in favour of the will of God. Only parents who work hard to train their children to think and act in the ways favoured by their religion are perceived to be doing the will of God. Thus, most children brought up in this manner will usually be influenced by the attitudes, culture, and tradition inculcated in them at childhood throughout life. This agrees with Proverbs 22:6 which states thus: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it". This conditioning of the mind for acceptable thoughts and actions does not end with childhood trainings. Deliberate structuring of people's lives with periodically strategic rituals and organisations help to consolidate the childhood trainings by re-enacting the beliefs and rededicating the adherents to their religious faiths.

From childhood to adulthood, the imbibed religious philosophies and practices often define the way of life of people, flowing from their sub-conscious mind to shape their choices in life. Considering the differences in the tenets of the varying religious traditions in the society and their often-rigid form of theological exclusivism, the society inevitably becomes prone to being deeply divided on religious grounds; a condition that creates the "we" and

“them” mentality with the attendant sensitivity to the points of disagreement, even when there are no imminent threats. Thus, every issue in the society becomes prone to having multiple dimensions necessitated by the multiple religious stances. This is especially so in multi-religious societies like Nigeria. With this condition in place, it becomes easy to influence the thoughts and behaviours of the adherents of any particular religious tradition through their associated religious persuasions, for promoting either peace or conflict. This is why Karl Marx referred to religion as “opium of the masses”. Accordingly, Hjelm (2016) noted that in the history of the world, no other instrument of legitimisation has been as widespread and effective as religion; and that this is because religion’s procession of legitimisation employs recognition of socially defined reality through an association of the precarious reality constructions of empirical societies with ultimate reality.

While religious exclusivism is a factor of conflict on its own, it becomes more prone to engendering conflict when combined with the usual competition for conversion of souls between and among the adherents of the varied religious traditions in the society. This is especially because it is part of the basic injunctions of religious traditions as exemplified with the call in Matt. 28:19 for Christians to go to every part of the world to convert people to Christians. Many religious traditions (especially the Abrahamic religions) subscribe to the call for massive conversion of people of other religious and non-religious persuasions while wanting their adherents to be practically intolerant to such moves from their counterparts. Moreover, the approval of totalitarianism and fundamentalism largely contradicts the moves for soul winning. So, no matter how subtle the approach may be, attempt to convert souls from other persuasions will always generate conflict, even though such conflict may not result in instant violence.

Being that religion backs up its totalitarian and fundamentalist stances with exposure of their adherents to threats of eternal losses which creates fear and feelings of guilt in their conscious and sub-conscious minds against unachieved expectations, it sometimes compels adherents to go out of their ways to take actions that they feel necessary to overcome their fears and guilt. The rewards that religion promises to those who may attain certain levels of spirituality encourage them the more even to the point of physical self-sacrifice like self-immolation and suicide bombing. Although these extremist actions are not often so stated, they are directly

implied. This is why some adherents can murder anybody who may resist their religions in any serious form; they may even cause their own deaths in the process.

These negative aspects of the characteristics of religion do not imply that religion lacks qualities that promote peace. However, religion promotes conflict more than it promotes peace between and among different traditions. Most of its peaceful characteristics like similarities in deities worshiped, belief systems, and approaches are more effective in an in-group situation, where there are usually less occurrence of the “we” and “them” situations. Thus, even though religion has both tendency for causing and promoting peace and conflict, whether it generates more peace or conflict will usually depend on whether the situation at hand is an in-group or out-group situation.

## 7. Conclusion

From all of the foregoing logical expositions on the traits of religion, it is obvious that the basic characteristics of religion makes it prone to cause, forestall, promote, sustain, abate, and eliminate either of peace or conflict. Religion, by its nature, has comparatively equal inclination towards conflict and peace until it is manipulated for the desired achievement. Nevertheless, its inclination is greater towards peace than conflict in an in-group than outgroup situation, especially where the in-group is fairly homogeneous as against the often heterogeneity of the outgroup. When religion is successfully manipulated for achievement of selfish reasons, the manipulation mainly becomes possibly effective because the nature of religion – the indivisibility of its claims – lends it to such manipulations. Religion seems to remain in a balanced inert state of existence between conflict and peace until its balance is tilted in favour of any of its inclinable conditions. Depending on the person(s), group(s), institution(s), and condition(s) at stake, religion is a double-edged sword that can be used to achieve either conflict or peace depending on the interest(s) of the wielder. Being that its subjective values are usually clearly defined, cannot be subdivided or parcelled out, nor substituted, religion always have to be manipulated to achieve either peace or conflict, for it does not, on its own, discard one for the other but equally incorporates the two phenomena.

## 8. Recommendations

Based on the observations made in this discourse, it is suggested that peace and conflict scholars begin to rethink their stances on the role of religion in peace and conflict, especially with the obvious reality that religion has equal inclination to peace and conflict, even though the balance can be tilted by the consideration of certain factors and manipulation; all stakeholders should embark on massive education or re-education of their masses on the reality of the challenges and opportunities posed by the characteristics of religion. Such education or re-education can help people to readily detect dangerous manipulations of religion by any stakeholder and to avoid aligning with such manipulations; So, rather than maintaining the largely utopian views which either exonerates or implicates religion, the realist perspective of religion being able to cause, promote, abate, or stop either of peace or conflict should be taught and promoted. This will help people to know the expected limits of their socio-religious actions thereby promoting peaceful coexistence despite their religious diversities.

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