

The Contribution of Religion to Social Reconciliation: A Case Study of Liberia

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Abstract

Religion, has, in the recent past, become a key factor in matters of conflict and reconciliation. In several cases, followers of different religions and political leaders across the world, have manipulated religion to pursue hidden goals. In the process, religion is misinterpreted and undermined, in some cases, leading to further conflict. This paper has two objectives. First, to articulate the convergence between various religions, focusing on Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism and the value added to social reconciliation. Secondly, the paper presents an account of a women-led interdenominational group which was established primarily to fight for political liberation in Liberia. This was after several years of political repression and human suffering under the dictatorial President, Charles Taylor, who had come into power in a coup in 1989, in a country that was highly divided by rebel factions. Liberia presents one of the fairly successful liberation processes in Africa where women rose above their religious boundaries to collectively fight for a common objective. The group portrayed religion as the universal custodian of morals with the legitimate authority to promote reconciliation. They staged sit-ins, prayed, sang and cried for peace as they demanded an election. Taylor finally succumbed to pressure and agreed to attend the peace talks with the rebels, bringing conflict to an end. The most dramatic change was the election of a female president, Ellen Johnson.

Keywords: Religion; Conflict; Peace; Inter-religious conflict, dialogue, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Liberia, Inter-denominational group.

1. Introduction

The prevalence of conflict on the continent of Africa and across the globe, continues to raise considerable concerns as it infringes on resources that would otherwise be utilized on development initiatives. Conflicts interfere with relationships at the individual, group and state levels, and in turn, several aspects of social life. The ideal end-state for any conflict is a form of settlement or resolution. Reconciliation is a process that aims at restoration of relationships. In several nations, religion has participated actively in the process of reconciliation alongside other institutions.

This paper seeks to highlight the contribution of religion to social reconciliation. To achieve this objective the paper is divided into five parts. The first part outlines the definitions of concepts. The second section discusses the origin rationale for involvement of religion in social reconciliation. The third part compares different religions and their participation in reconciliation. The fourth part presents the case of Liberia and outlines the application of religion to the liberation process. Finally, the paper concludes with a perspective of unification of religion.

2. Definitions of terms

a) Religion

Crawford (2002), defines religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, beliefs and practices which unite into a single community called a church and all those who adhere to them.”

(p. 3) Similarly, Yinger describes religion as a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggle with the ultimate problem of human life (Crawford, 2002, p. 1). Religion may therefore be

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summarised as a way of life with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion is defined from an amalgamation of views from theologians, scriptures, psychologists, philosophers and many other disciplines. It can therefore adopt a political, a legal, a spiritual, a personal, a ritual, an ethical or institutional dimension.

b) Conflict

Conflict is defined as an “incompatibility between goal-states, or values held by actors in a social system.” (Galtung, 1969). It is an unpeaceful relation (Curle, 1971) between individuals or groups resulting from different sources which range from incompatible goals, ideologies, misunderstanding, competition for scarce resources (economic), identity, governance, territory, human rights issue to greed and grievance.

c) Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution (CR) refers to a political process through which the conflict parties eliminate the perceived incompatibility between their goals and interests and establish new, perceived compatibility (Bar-Tal, 2000, p. 354). Wani (2011) considers CR a process that aims to alleviate sources of conflict. It includes negotiation, diplomacy, mediation, conciliation, adjudication, transformation and restoration of justice. Kelman (2010) describes CR as a pragmatic approach that aims to build trust between parties, by exploring the causes of the conflict, unmet or threatened needs for identity, security, recognition, autonomy, and justice (p.2). The ultimate goal of CR is lasting transformation to address, integrate and embrace the painful past and the necessary shared future as a means of dealing with the present” (Lederach. 1995, p. 5).

d) Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a step in conflict resolution, defined as ‘the process of relinquishing the right to retaliate subsequent to injury’ (Pingleton 1989, 27). It is a long inward process that leads to intrapersonal acceptance, healing and reconciliation. Forgiveness is a step used to repair broken relationships, rebuild communities and support cultures in an atmosphere of reconciliation (Borris in Fillipaldi, 1982).

e) Reconciliation

Ramsbotham (2012) defines reconciliation as the process of restoring broken relationships and learning to live non-violently with radical differences (p. 246). Reconciliation is necessitated by broken relationships. For Bloomfield (2003) reconciliation is a process through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future (p. 12). Spiritual reconciliation reconciles a person with God’s love, moving the sinner to repentance while social reconciliation restores relations with fellow human beings.

3. Rationale for Reconciliation

The post-cold war world has continued to be characterised by a legacy of violence, human rights abuses, political and economic injustices (Appleby, 2000, p. ix). Societal conflict on the continent of Africa includes slave trade which ended in the nineteenth century, interethnic warfare and apartheid in South Africa among others (Schreitter, 1992, p. 10). In the recent past, the continent of Africa and the entire world, has experienced a new wave of conflict which has culminated in political unrest and civil wars demonstrated in South Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Central African Republic, Mali, Ethiopia among other nations. These wars continue to decelerate development and deplete resources and therefore require urgent mitigation measures. The need for peace or rebuilding relationships exists in the social and political spheres as well as at the state level (Esposito and Yilmaz, 2010, p.4). Any attempt to understand violence and restore civil society after the cessation of violence such as the pursuit for reconciliation, is therefore welcomed (Gort, Jansen, & Vroom, p. 372).

4. Strategies for Social Reconciliation

The framework for social reconciliation comprises several elements that include conflict resolution, forgiveness, justice and politics and religion. Reconciliation is the process that addresses the root causes of conflict and complements the other elements. Tarimo & Manwelo (2007), view social reconciliation in terms of context, system and methodology, especially after a period of violence.

Reconciliation provides support to forgiveness, which is not an end in itself and is not enough, on its own, to create, alter, or re-establish our relationships and intimacy in a durable manner. Reconciliation begins at the stage where forgiveness is communicated to the other parties (Lulofs and Cahn, 2000, p. 333).

Social Reconciliation involves a fundamental repair to human lives, especially to those who suffered. It includes healing memories and receiving forgiveness and giving rise to a new beginning. It is also about changing the structures in society that provoked, promoted and sustained violence (Schreiter, 1992, p. 1). The struggle against injustice and restoration of peace are therefore complementary to the process of reconciliation. This therefore suggests that reconciliation addresses a process of transformation of the parties. Reconciliation can only come about if the nature of the violence is acknowledged, and its condition for continuing or reappearing is removed. (Schreiter, 1992, p. 22.). According to Gibson, it is ‘development of some means by which those who were previously foes can agree to coexist and compete peacefully rather than violently’ (Gibson, 2007, p. 257). Kelman (2010), supports this argument, that reconciliation conducted within a framework of problem-solving is positive and creates a new relationship (p. 3).

5. Social Reconciliation from a religious perspective

Religion tries to answer some mysteries regarding creation, the presence of God, good living and bad living, and the destination of human beings after death. Many religions believe that a supreme being created all living things. This “being” is called God, Father, Spirit, and many other names (Kalman, 2009, p. 5). There are thousands of religious groups in the world today, and each group has teachings, holy books and places of worship with different names: churches, temples, mosques. (p. 6).

The term “reconciliation” runs through all the sacred discourses. It delivers from violence and suffering into a state of restored relationships. This qualifies religion as a potential institution to promote reconciliation. Spiritual reconciliation which brings a person closer to God, closely complements social reconciliation. Churches have historically played an important role in the reconciliation processes because of their power in civil society and through their religious message construction which constantly preaches forgiveness and reconciliation (Crawford, 2002, p. 193). Churches and religious groupings link religion to morality and act as agents of reconciliation (Schreiter, 1992, p. 12).

Scholars are constantly trying to establish the position of religion in social reconciliation and assessing whether reconciliation is possible between denominations or between religions in the first place, and by extension, the capacity for religion to extend the responsibility to other social structures. This would provide a unified approach to reconciliation. The church itself often faces challenges of division within and across religions. Protestant reformation which took place over four hundred years ago arose from religious differences (Raymond, Helmick and Peterson, 2001, p. 82); tension between Islam and Christianity has been a long standing challenge in Sudan, Nigeria and Central African Republic among other nations in Africa; there is also standing conflict between Catholics and Orthodox in Ukraine; but this notwithstanding, Religion is recognised as the universal custodian of morals with the legitimate authority to promote reconciliation in collaboration with other political and social institutions.

Reconciliation may not be looked at as a hasty peace, a substitute for liberation or a managed process. The perpetrators of violence will very quickly propose the principle of “let bygones be bygones and a religious forgiveness (Schreiter, 1992, p. 19). This emerges as a trivialized, hasty, superficial and unsustainable reconciliation and peace, which does not necessarily uphold religious values and ignores human identity and dignity (Schreiter, 1992, p. 19). Most religions take cognizance of the need to address the causes, let go of the suffering and to restore relationships in the shortest time possible. According to Lederach (1999), reconciliation brings in an aspect of time, and is embedded in the past, present and the future of a relationship (p. 63). Appleby presents three questions related to religion in advancing a social process of reconciliation: If religious actors and religious sensibilities have a role to play in formulating a politics of forgiveness and advancing a social process of reconciliation, which religious actors? which religious sensibilities? and what role(s)? Borneman (2002), describes reconciliation as “an appreciation of the inter-subjectivity of the present” and a social project “not in terms of permanent peace or harmony, but as a project of departure from violence (286, 282). This places a challenge to religion, to reconcile in a joint regardless of the religious orientation and for a common good. According to Borneman, to reconcile is to render no longer opposed. The term is therefore, not a fixed concept but must be used as a means for retributive or restorative justice.

6. Application of Social Reconciliation by different Religions

Reconciliation has become one of the key words of current discourse in churches and in the political arena (Gunton, 2003, p. 13). In several world nations, religion has emerged as a key participant in matters of conflict and reconciliation. Mainstream religions include Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism as well as native spirituality (Kalman, 2009, p. 4).

This paper has adopted a thematic approach to religion as a means to highlight similarities and differences and the possibility to address a reconciliation from a universal point. The paper discusses the first four religions as representative of others.

7. Christianity

Christianity recognizes that people often come into conflict trying to maintain legitimate but differing interests and value (Schreitter, 1992, p. 26). Christianity describes reconciliation as “healing and bringing together broken relationships. According to Krkkinen (2013), the work of the church in the world is peacemaking, movement towards ethnic reconciliation and renewal of ecological balances between humanity and its natural environment (p. 364).

For Christians, the goal of reconciliation is “restoration of the sin-broken relationship of humanity with its creator.” Christianity believes it is God who reconciles and reconciliation cannot be initiated by humans. It is only through the understanding of God taking lead in the process of reconciliation that the world can confirm or receive support to the entire process (Schreitter, 1992). Christian teachings advance the argument that reconciliation is more of a spirituality than a strategy and that it makes both the aggressor and the victim a new creation. It therefore goes beyond righting the wrongs and repenting the evils. It is intended to bring aggressor and the victims to a place they have never been before.

The interpretation of the Pauline understanding of reconciliation is that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself”, 2. Cor. 5: 19 (Gunton, 2003, p. 1). According to Paul’s teachings, “Through Christ, God has claimed us as friends and granted us peace and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” In 2 Cor 5: 19, God has committed to us the “message of reconciliation.” For Christians therefore, reconciliation is the church’s mission in the world. The Crucifixion of Christ is the central symbol of God’s reconciliation of the world with himself and we are asked to become emissaries of that reconciliation on this earth. Reconciliation is an invitation to a new future.

From a Christian perspective, reconciliation between persons, groups and nations requires truth telling and love, remembering and forgetting, giving and receiving. It strengthens the ability to recapitulate (Krkkinen 2013, p. 367). It reflects on relationships in the past, the present and the future. Reconciliation forges an important link between creation, atonement, and consummation. Like several other scholars, Vroom argues that reconciliation is not real without justice. It requires making sacrifices and a change of heart must be forced upon us by God; essentials of reconciliation include: confession of guilt, prophetic witness and the establishment of justice. (Gort, Jansen, Vroom, p. 373).

The principles of Christianity are reflected in the Republic of South Africa and the Republic of Rwanda. In South Africa after the end of apartheid the truth commission was established to address injustices that has been committed in the past and to pave way for a shared future of different ethnic groups (Raymond G., Helmick, S. J., Petersen, R. L., 2001, p. 13). South Africa presented a situation where different Christians found themselves across the political divide of the apartheid, but the churches still took active roles in the struggle against the practice. Bishop Desmond Tutu who chaired the commission, and the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) in South Africa in his message of forgiveness and reconciliation said with reference to President Mandela, “the world admires and says” “President Mandela is what we think we ought to be, to be those who embody forgiveness, reconciliation, who embody goodness”. President Mandela announced his message of forgiveness for those who had caused him suffering, soon after his release from prison. ((Raymond G., Helmick, S. J., Petersen, R. L., 2001, p. xiii). This important gesture, paved way for the process of reconciliation which followed thereafter.

The story of Immaculee Libagiza, a Rwanda genocide survivor, which inspires millions of people, presented the possibility of forgiving perpetrators in serious cases. Immaculee’s parents and siblings were killed in 1994 alongside an estimated one million people in Rwanda. She survived by hiding in a pastor’s tiny bathroom together with seven other starving women for ninety one terrifying days. Years after the genocide, Immaculee, found herself face to face with a man called Felicien, the killer of her parents, who was then serving a life sentence. Immaculee quickly delivered a message of forgiveness to him, to the surprise of the prison staff. In her book, “Left to Tell,” Immaculee passes a strong message to the entire world, that anyone in the world can learn to forgive.” Her conviction to forgive was driven purely by her strong Christian faith and biblical teachings. This is a unique example of the role of religion at the individual level. Immaculee’s contribution kicked off the process of reconciliation, which the Government of Rwanda has also been trying to embrace in the past few years.

8. Islam

Islam is considered a religion and as a tradition it is rich with teachings and applications about peacebuilding. Scholars on Islam underline the principles of nonviolence and peacebuilding which include the pursuit for justice, doing good, the universality and dignity of humanity, the sacredness of human life, equality, the quest for peace (individual and group), peacemaking, forgiveness, solidarity, and pluralism. According to Ashraf (2008), the divine call of submission to the will of God influences every aspect of human life, which is made evident in the Qu'ran by "And Allah summoneth to the abode of peace." Human beings are born muslim which means "perfect,, "peaceful," "submitting – obeying the natural order of God" (p. 1). Further, the Arabic word, "Salam" means to be tranquil, at rest, to have done one's duty and to surrender to Allah.

Islam teachings recognise that as human beings interact, there is a reality of aggression in human affairs and the world is affected by an unstable balance between war and peace. But the essence of Islamic discipline is not aggression but perseverance in the quest for perpetual peace" "And Allah summoneth to the abode of peace." According to Islam in human affairs there cannot be peace without submission to God. In Islam, to reduce the possibility of war and strengthen peace, is jihad fi sabilAlla or "struggle in the way of God." Islam has throughout history, shown great respect and tolerance for other religions (Ashraf (2008, p. 8). Muslim scholars and saints have held open discussions with the priests of other religions including Hindu and Buddhists.

Muslim values and rituals for peace include concepts such as ihsan (perfect goodness, healing and reconciliation), samah (forgiveness), sabr (patience), adl (justice), taqwa (piety), aml al khayr (good deed) and a collective sense of communal peacemaking and human solidarity (ummah). Muslim processes of peace and conflict resolution include Muslim approaches to mediation, arbitration and dialogue. Islam inculcates respect for other religions.

9. Hinduism

The term 'Hinduism' is commonly used in the Western world to denote the wide range of beliefs, practices and cults of the Hindu religion. Hindu is derived from the Sanskrit term sindu, meaning the river or water course. Hinduism was used to identify Hindu religion, in order to distinguish it from the other religions which emerged from the Indian soil like Buddhism, Janism and Sikh religion. (Demariaux, 1995, p. vii).

The Hindu religion is based on five main principles: belief in God; prayer as the only path through which God can be reached; rebirth which emphasises that the body is the gift of God; the Law of Action which states that a man reaps the fruits in accordance with his actions and an industrious person will always reap what he sows; and finally, man is expected to exercise compassion for all living things/non-violence including animals and plants (Hinduism, 1988, p. 60). Hinduism propagates harmony of religions; God can be realised through different spiritual paths. A Hindu saint Shri Ramakrishna argued that all religions lead to the same God (Bhaskarananda, 2002, page 189). His teachings help to promote peace and understanding between the religious people of our strife-torn world. Ramakrishna argued God is the same but under different forms and names (Bhaskarananda, 2002, page 190). Hinduism believes God is the very foundation of ethics and morality and he maintains all laws on the orderliness of this universe (Bhaskarananda, 2002, page 102). According to the Hindu, "Forgiveness is the jewel of the hero." By extension, forgiveness is a prerequisite for reconciliation.

Hinduism seeks to transcend internal differences among Hindus, to bring secularized Indians back to the fold, and to reclaim the Untouchables to Hinduism. The strategy is to propagate a coherent modern version of Hinduism as the national religion of India. Thus it downplays local differences in Hindu religious doctrine and represents Hinduism, historically, as a single all-embracing ethnonational religious community including Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs (Appleby pg. 111)

10. Buddhism

Buddhism is today one of the greatest World religions, behind Christian, Islam and Hinduism. Buddhism traces its roots to Buddha, a yogi, who lived in northern India more than 2,500 years ago (Kozak, A. 2011). Buddha discovered a way to transform people's lives radically. His revolutionary insights and methods are said to be capable of transforming people's lives. Buddha's teachings encompass one of the greatest ethical teachings for humanity including mindfulness, kindness and compassion. Jane Hirshfield in a documentary on Buddha, summarised Buddha's teachings in seven words: "Everything changes; everything is connected; pay attention." (p. xi).

Buddhism provides a way to renovate relationships. It is said that Christians and Jews practice some aspects of Buddhism, while retaining their own traditions. Buddhism is described as a practice of interior and exterior revolution which takes responsibility to transform individuals, societies and the world. It brings in the element of reconciliation by preaching (p. xii). Buddhism, like all religions, embraces myths, doctrines, rituals, a moral code, and prototypical institutions (e.g., monasticism). Like Christianity and Islam, it is a missionary religion that has accommodated itself to its host societies. Like Hinduism, it has been shaped by the distinctive cultures and history of southern Asia (Appleby, p. 131).

As a demonstration of religion in reconciliation, in 1993, SamdechPreahMahaGhosananda, the sixty-eight-year old Buddhist primate of Cambodia, led hundreds of Buddhist monks, nuns, and laity on a dramatic month-long peace march from Siam Reap in the northwestern section of Cambodia throughout the central regions to the capital, Phnom Penh. This was to build popular confidence in the elections and overcome the fear that had been aroused by Khmer Rouge threats of violence and disruption. The support and success of this march saw Maharepeat the same in 1994 to support national reconciliation. A month later A Mennonite Central Committee worker on the scene noted that the marchers, scheduled to arrive at their destination one month later, on a Buddhist holy day, would plant trees as a symbol of rebirth and reconciliation (Kozak, A. 2011). This action portrays the application of religion to meet a desired objective. In this case, the march was to pass a peaceful message of reconciliation. Buddhism therefore addresses reconciliation extensively.

11. The Convergence of Religion

We live in a pluralist inter-racialist and multi-faith society and the need to understand one another is greater than ever before especially in light of the ongoing globalisation of economics, trade, regional and international integration. Nations realise the need to harmonise relationships more than ever before as no country can effectively operate in isolation. Much misunderstanding arises from racialism and nationalism and could be avoided if nations appreciated the beliefs and practices another (Crawford, 2002, p. ix). As outlined in the previous sections, many religions are concerned about social problems and injustices in the world and subscribe to belief systems intended to bring about change. All traditions and religions contain terms which reflect a desire to heal broken relationships

What reconciliation entails, whether it is a viable goal, and how it might best be achieved, however, remain matters of serious discussion. Similarly, while the concept of reconciliation has deep religious roots and resonance, there is no known consensus regarding the roles that religious communities or individuals should play in the development of restorative justice (Appleby, 2000, p. 170). The internal pluralism of Christianity, Islam, and other major religious traditions enables religious actors to select and develop theologies and moral precepts that enhance the building of local cultures of peace (Appleby, 2000, p. 276). All the great universal religions share the same ethical values, but implement them differently. The generally accepted values include love, respect, tolerance, forgiveness, mercy, human rights, peace, brotherhood and freedom (Esposito and Yilmaz, 2010, p.98). These are brought out by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammed as well as the Buddha and Hindu prophets (p. 99).

The Gulen movement of initiatives, which discusses the Islam religion extensively, believes that interfaith dialogue is a must today, and is the first step is forgetting the past, ignoring polemical arguments, and giving precedence to common points, which, he argues, outnumber the polemical ones (Esposito and Yilmaz, 2010, p.98).

12. Casestudy: Liberia

Liberia presents one of the fairly successful liberation processes in Africa. After coming to power in a coup in 1989, President Charles Taylor struggled to keep control over a country divided by rebel factions. Taylor's dictatorial regime and the rebels inflicted severe harassment and violence on the people of Liberia in the inter-ethnic struggle; by 2002, over 200,000 people had died, and a third of the country's population was displaced. While the armed combatants were almost entirely male, women and children bore the brunt of the suffering, facing regularly sexual assault. Those women who escaped such a fate were left with the task of caring for children and the elderly in the very difficult conditions.

During the 1989 – 1996 war, the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI), Concerned Women of Liberia, Women's Development Association of Liberia, and the National Women's Commission worked together to forge a common agenda across party and ethnic lines around women's rights and concerns. Religious leaders like Catholic Archbishop Michael Francis, human rights religious associations such as Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), Methodist

Bishop Arthur Kulah and Sheikh KafumbaKonneh, chairman of the National Muslim Council of Liberia and the Center for Law and Human Rights were also heavily involved in peacemaking activities. They collaborated in interfaith activities that led to the establishment of the interfaith Mediation Committee in 1990, which later became Interfaith Council of Liberia (ICL), and in 2001 the present-day Inter-Religious Council of Liberia. ICL was one of the first organisations to mediate between warring factions from a religious dimension.

The conflict forced women to rise above their religious divisions and pull together for a common objective. The women felt that the men had messed up the peace process and took up the lead role. AbibatuKromah, a leader of the United Muslim Women and Liberian Muslim Women for Peace said, “We put the factions behind us.” “We women of all ethnicities looked at the situation and said we have to put ethnicity behind us. We need to put aside our differences and move ahead. Why don’t we embrace our Christian sisters and work together? The selection of Ruth Sando Perry, a Muslim of Vai origin, to head the Liberation National Transitional Government III in 1996 was an early victory for women activists. She earned credibility as a woman and oversaw the legislative and presidential elections, which were held in 1997. Women continued to mobilise across religious and ethnic differences particularly with the creation of the broad-based Women of Liberation Mass Action for Peace. They held sit-ins at Sinkor airfield, where they prayed, sang, danced and cried for peace. They received funding from churches, businessmen and politicians as well as international sources including the American Jewish World Service and the African Women’s Development Fund (Gbowee, 2011). Their pressure sped up the conclusion of peace talks in Accra in 2003.

The women managed to get the rebels to put their guns down and talked to their brothers and sons who were fighting. They carried food to the rebels and told them, “Put your arms down so we can have an election....” Finally they were able to get a hearing with the president at the height of fighting. Charles Taylor then agreed to attend the peace talks with the rebels (Gbowee, 2011, 141). The talks which were held in Ghana, finally brought conflict to an end.

The Liberian Women Initiative (LWI) issued a statement in April 2003, saying that they did not understand why there was the need to rely on the fighters to liberate and reconcile through fighting. They said they had experienced positive results from a wave of redeemers, freedom fighters, liberators, defenders, peacemakers, reconcilers, democrats, angels and saviours among others. Demobilization was conducted through sensitization sessions. Liberian women activists encouraged the combatants to give up their arms. By the end of 2004, a total of 22,000 and 2,740 girls out of 103,000 combatants had been demobilized and disarmed. The liberation saw the presidential elections in 2005 and 2011 as free and fair. The process left no political prisoners, and political rights and civil liberties were generally protected.

Women organisations led by the United Muslim Women and the Federation of Muslim Women’s Organisations (umbrella organisation of twenty groups) have since worked towards development including adult literacy, leadership training, microfinance and other opportunities. The most dramatic change for women in Liberia was the election of a female president, Ellen Johnson through an aggressive campaign across the country. Today, women are also very well represented at the county and ministerial levels. The Liberia case provides a fairly good account of how reconciliation can be conducted by forming alliances for a common good. Religious boundaries became insignificant in this process.

13. Conclusion

Religion can come together for a common objective and for common good. Different religions have an opportunity to complement and support each other to meet this common objective. A new world order which transcends different religions may provide a common world view to reconciliation, using religion as an avenue. Building bridges through individuals, communities and institutions can promote more peaceful societies than dialogue, respect for diversity and active citizenship. All humans begin from a departure point of humanity. Pluralism should be encouraged for the good of peace and security as everyone has inherent capacity to contribute to peace. “It is through reconciliation that we regain our humanity. To work for reconciliation is to live to show others what their humanity is.” (Schreitter, 1992, p. 82).

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