

## **Space for Religion in Local Peacebuilding: The Role of the Church in Troubled Spaces**

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### **Abstract**

Many individuals and large communities in the world lack the will and the ability for true peacebuilding. Truly born-again Christians are best endowed and mandated to be effective peacebuilders, starting from their respective local spaces. Although it is true that Jesus himself was born and lived all his earthly life in a very troubled and peaceless space and died a very violent death, it had been prophesied that, among his other real identities and offices, he would come as the Prince of Peace. Although in his radical teaching he said he did not come to bring peace but a sword, he himself was the most peaceful human being and the most effective peacemaker. He also sent his disciples to violent communities as peaceful emissaries. Before his death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven he gave his special divine peace to his disciples (the first church). Sin is the cause and breeding ground for hatred, conflict, and lack of peace. True salvation in Jesus Christ is the only remedy for sin and the source of power for true love, true personal peace, and genuine peacebuilding. When a person is made righteous through our Lord, Jesus Christ, he or she acquires peace with God. A person who is genuinely justified is able to love genuinely, deliberately abhor wickedness, and decisively live peaceably with all people, thus being a pragmatic peacebuilder. My research method for the paper is historical-grammatical exegesis. Through it, I seek to discover the meaning of peace and peacebuilding in various Bible texts as was intended by the authors to be understood and applied by the original hearers or readers in their time.

Theological application and recommendations for peacebuilding are proposed for the church in the African setting based on specific Bible texts for specific needs.

**Key words:** Peacebuilding, local, troubled spaces, paradoxical, emissaries, genuine, pragmatic

### **Introduction**

In the *Africa Study Bible*, 'peace' is defined as,

a state of tranquility or quiet; a pact or agreement to end hostilities between those who have been at war or in a state of enmity; harmony in personal relations, especially with God; a state of security or order within a community; freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions (2016, p. 2048).

The same study Bible defines a peacemaker as, "one who makes peace especially by reconciling parties at variance" (p. 2048). In this paper, my focus about peace and peacebuilding is on harmony in personal relations, especially with God, which enables one to be free from disquieting and oppressive thoughts and emotions. That gives one the ability to make and keep a pact to end hostilities and thus have security within individuals and the larger communities. A person who is peaceful and deliberately chooses to make peace with others and actually engages in specific peacemaking endeavours is a peacebuilder.

From a biblical perspective, since the entry of sin into human life on earth, the entire world can be generally described as a troubled mega space. Just as is true of every corner of the world where sin is found, many individual Africans and African communities have been experiencing much turmoil and lack of peace. Just as the situation is in many countries of the world, it is only a few countries in Africa that can rightly be described as relatively peaceful. Problems are in every sphere of human life, both spiritual and physical. Nevertheless, what appears to be the greatest turmoil in African countries is in the interconnected socio-economic and political sectors. Thus, most peacebuilding ventures in Africa, especially by the general international peace builders such as the United National Organization, are mainly

targeted as resolving human relation conflicts in those sectors. Although those endeavours have accomplished a lot, still much more remains to be done.

The *Africa Study Bible* also defines being peaceful as being “quiet, tranquil, devoid of violence, or force; of or relating to a state or time of peace” (p. 2048). Real peacefulness is what every individual and every community needs and wants to have in the local area where each one lives or is situated at any given time. Even in the war-torn countries of Africa, the majority of the citizens in those countries are peace-loving and peace-seekers. For example, the Somali of Somalia have a proverb that states, “If you can’t resolve your problems in peace, you can’t solve them in war” (Mkole & Mugambi, 2020, vi).

Apart from those who get pleasure from inflicting pain or humiliation on others, all normal people love peace within themselves and for others. Peace is a fundamental human right throughout the world. For personal joy and progress, every sane individual needs peace. For stability and development, every country desires, calls for, and supports peaceful co-existence among its citizens. For example, in the Preamble of the 2010 Constitution of Kenya, it is stated,

We, the people of Kenya— ... PROUD of our ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, and *determined to live in peace and unity* as one indivisible sovereign nation: ...  
ADOPT, ENACT and give this Constitution to ourselves and to our future generations  
(2010, p. 12).

Similarly, in subsection (1) of Article 238 of the same Constitution, concerning ‘Principles of national security,’ it is stated, “National security is the protection against internal and external threats to Kenya’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, its people, their rights, freedoms, property, *peace*, stability and prosperity, and other national interests” (p. 152 italics added). Similarly, in reference to the Nigerian post-war situation, Ojighoro says, “... conflict resolution and sustainable peace building can be used as a tool for transforming

violent societies in Africa, since development can only thrive and be witnessed in an atmosphere of peace” (Ojighoro, 2021, p. 1). Concerning peace, Feinberg states,

The primary and basic idea of the biblical word ‘peace’ (OT *šālôm*; NT *eirēnē*) is completeness, soundness, wholeness... It means cessation of war (Josh. 9:15). Friendship between companions is expressed by it (Gen. 26:29; Ps. 28:3) as well as friendship with God through covenant (Num. 25:12; Isa. 54:10) ... Peace has reference to health, prosperity, well-being, security, as well as quiet from war (Eccles. 3:8; Isa. 45:7) ... Peace is a condition of freedom from strife whether internal or external (1984, p. 833).

Every person needs peace, whether African or non-African. Peaceful living is an international need. Due to human inclination to sin, peace within the individual human being and among communities is very elusive. It does not come naturally and is never achieved without making deliberate plans and putting effort into having it. The online *Oxford Languages* dictionary (2023) also defines ‘peacebuilding’ as the “implementation of measures intended to create or sustain peace, especially in an area affected by conflict.” If it were not possible to build and maintain peace, Christians (the church) would not be asked to make every effort in pursuing it. Buchan and Lederach ask and answer their own question thus, “The delight of building peace? Like fishing, it is the pursuit of what is elusive, but attainable, a perpetual series of occasions for hope” (1997, p. vii). To the church, peace is attainable with the help of the “the God of peace” (Rom 15:33).

### **Source of Peace in the Old Testament Era Flowing to the New Testament Era**

The source of all good things is the LORD God, the Creator of the world and all that is in it. From the Old Testament (OT) times to the New Testament (NT) times, he is the Creator and Sustainer of peace. He gives peace freely by his grace. Feinberg says, “Peace is a comprehensive and valued gift from God, and the promised and climaxing blessing in

messianic times” (1984, p. 833). Nevertheless, there is a human responsibility to desire, work for, and maintain peace. In OT times, the people of Israel were taught that the best way to get blessings was by having the LORD as their only God and by remaining obedient to his decrees and commands, as it is stated in Leviticus 26:1–6. One of the most prominent blessings for obedience was peace from God, as verse 6 in the *New International Version* (NIV) of the Bible states, “I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country.”

As presented by Philologos in *The Forward* (formerly known as *The Jewish Daily Forward*), in answer to a question by Samuel Sislen, the Jewish customary greeting of ‘*shalom aleykhem*’ (peace (be) unto you) is ancient although the phrase does not appear as such in the OT. The greeting appears simply as *shalom lekha* (peace to you (singular)) or *shalom lakhem* (peace to you (plural)), such as when in Genesis 43:23 the servant of Joseph reassured Joseph’s brothers who were afraid that they might be punished for unknowingly going back to Canaan with the money they had brought to buy grain with in Egypt. What the servant meant was that Joseph’s brothers did not need to be afraid and that they would be treated well (Philologos, 2013). In the early rabbinic period that was contemporary to the New Testament era, the greeting had become popular. The corresponding response to the greeting was the phrase, ‘*aleykhem shalom*’ (unto you (be) peace). As in ancient times, the greeting was “generally reserved for either someone [or some people] met for the first time or not seen for a long time, and it was not used with family members, neighbors, friends or acquaintances seen on a regular basis” (Philologos, 2013). Therefore, it was normally used mainly to create peace and enable amicable interaction between people who were not very familiar with each other. That way, possible conflicts were likely avoided.

Although in the OT era peace was mainly in the external physical sphere, internal spiritual peace was also known and experienced at that time. That is seen in OT texts, such as Psalm 85:10 which says, “Mercy and truth have met (*and*) righteousness and peace have kissed.” These are internal virtues that manifest themselves from a good heart to the outside. In Psalm 119:165, the author wrote that those who love God’s law (from their hearts) have abundant peace and that nothing causes them to stumble to commit sin. Also, as Isaiah says in 26:3, God keeps in perfect peace the person who trusts in him. Feinberg states, “Peace is a condition of freedom from strife whether internal or external. Security from outward enemies (Isa. 26:12), as well as calm of heart for those trusting God (Job 22:21; Isa. 26:3), is included” (1984, p. 833). Therefore, even in OT times, true peace and peacebuilding was based on a pure heart that was in good relationship with God.

Among many other eternal attributes of God, love and peace feature prominently, especially in the New Testament through Christ. For example, in 1 John 4:8 and 16, God himself is described as love. Similarly, in several passages, he is described as “the God of peace” (Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 13:20). Those are permanent supernatural attributes of God. Because human beings were created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27), the inclination to love and live at peace with God and all his creatures should have been part of their natural traits.

However, although love and peace are eternal attributes of God, to human beings after the fall, those traits were adversely affected and they can only be reacquired through salvation in Christ. True peace and the ability to build peace come from the true God only and is made possible among humans by God’s help through salvation. Dixon says, “This is why, as I have said elsewhere, I find it difficult to see how anyone can do this kind of work [peacebuilding] for any length of time without some concept of God’s sovereignty and providence” (2009, pp. 121-122). It is only when someone knows and personally experiences

God's true love through forgiveness, that person experiences the peace of God. After salvation, every Christian needs to learn and cultivate divine love through practice, building upon the love and peace that he or she has experienced personally. That way, love and peace become entrenched in human character.

Peace is the third part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit who dwells in the believer after salvation (Gal 5:22). It is only those who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them and filling and enabling them who have the mandate and the ability to be genuine peacebuilders, starting from wherever they are and spreading out to where their scope of influence reaches. Feinberg says that peace "is to be a characteristic of the NT believer also (Mark 9:50; II Cor. 13:11)" (Feinberg, 1984, p. 833). When we love God's people, we will have peace with God and with all his people.

### **Sin as the Cause and Breeding Ground for Lack of Peace and Conflict**

Before the fall into sin, Adam and Eve lived peacefully and joyfully with God, with each other, and with the rest of God's creation. It is only after the fall that peace disappeared and that resulted in conflicts and separation between humans and God and between humans and humans, and between humans and the rest of creation. We do not know when and why the devil's hatred for humans began. But it is recorded that the enmity between humans and the serpent that the devil had used to tempt the woman (Gen 3:14–15), enmity and other difficulties between humans themselves, and between humans and the rest of creation (more so the ground), started when the first humans disobeyed God, yielded to temptation and fell into sin (Gen 3:16–19). From then on, the blissfulness of the original inner peace within and among humans was greatly affected and turmoil and violence set in.

The first recorded violent human-to-human conflict happened in Genesis 4:3–16 when, for some divine reasons that are not revealed in the Genesis record, God accepted Abel's offering and disapproved Cain's offering. As a result, Cain was filled with jealousy

and hatred for his brother and finally murdered him. John simply says that Cain murdered his brother because he (Cain) belonged to the devil, and that he murdered him because his own deeds were evil and his brother's deeds were righteous (1 Jn 3:12). From that first fatal exercise of hatred of Cain (the offender) for his brother (the victim) in the original human family, as people increased in number, Adam's offspring continued worsening in corruption (wickedness) before God and they filled the earth with violence against one another (Gen 6:11). Doing violence against others is the opposite of doing good and living at peace with them.

Although sometimes people hate and commit violence against others for what they term as 'legitimate reasons,' most of the times people hate and commit violence against others for no apparent reason. It is as if after the fall violence became an automatic natural instinct in human beings. Baseless violence has been witnessed in people from infancy to adulthood. David was alluding to a situation in which some wicked and deceitful people were against him without any reason, when he wrote, "They have surrounded me with their hateful words, and they have fought against me for no reason" (Ps 109:3). Envy and selfishness of the culprits are some of the undeniable causes of violence against the victims. Also, some wicked people derive pleasure from causing harm to others.

A sinful person cannot have true peace of mind and heart. Someone who does not have peace within cannot promote peacefulness between self and others. It is possible to fake and pretend that one has peace within self and between self and others. It is also possible for someone to deceive themselves or be deceived by others that he or she has peace, but reality proves otherwise. Feinberg says, "The prophet Isaiah pointed out repeatedly that there will be no peace for the wicked (Isa. 48:22; 57:21), even though many of the wicked continually seek to encourage themselves with false peace (Jer. 6:14)" (Feinberg, 1984, p. 833). Such people cannot plan, initiate and sustain genuine peacebuilding because they do not have true peace

within themselves. A peacebuilder can build only from within himself or herself. There is no alternative or shortcut to that. That is true for all God's people in OT and NT times.

Although it sounds pessimistic, the reality is that, as long as there is sin in the world, before God creates and ushers in the new heaven and the new earth in which every person will be righteous (Isa 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev. 21:1), violence and lack of peace will remain among humans and the rest of creation. Nevertheless, before the second coming of Christ to the earth, the mandate of the redeemed people of God is to work against the currents of violence by believing in and doing what is right before God and is beneficial to self and to others. In reference to the ongoing civil war in Darfur, western Sudan, since February 2003, Dixon says, "Dealing with conflict is more like a continuous battle, with some forces working against peace, and the need for us [Christians] and others to be constantly working on the side of peace" (2009, p. 121). That is not easy at all but it is doable. Although Paul said it in reference to a different context, with God's enablement, it is possible to do all things (Phil 4:13). It is therefore possible to live at peace with all people (Rom 12:18).

### **Peace in the New Testament Era: Christ the Prince of Peace and Master Peacebuilder**

In the OT, it was prophesied about the coming Messiah that his name would be, "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, *Prince of Peace*" (Isa 9:6, *italics for emphasis*). When he was born in Bethlehem, the angels who announced his birth to the shepherds in the wilderness sang glorifying God and declaring peace on earth upon people whom God favours (Lk 2:14). The prophecy about the coming of the Prince of Peace made much sense to the Israelites because at the time of Isaiah's prophecy they were going through much turmoil under oppression by the Assyrian Empire. Similarly, when Jesus was born the angels proclaimed peace on earth among people whom God favours. It is paradoxical that when the Prince of Peace was born the Jewish nation, it suffered under the dominance of the Roman Empire. But the proclamation of the angels made much sense and brought joy to the

Israelites because they thought that it gave them hope of rescue from the Romans. The province of Judea (home of the Israelites) was also under the rule of the corrupt Herodian dynasty which was of non-Jewish Idumaeon (Edomite) descent, that was working under and in collaboration with the oppressive Roman Empire. Therefore, the promise of a King of Peace through prophecy, and the declaration of peace to all people was most welcome news to the Israelites, just as it was to the rest of the people who were living under those explosive and unstable conditions.

In Jesus' human life, although he was born and lived in the violent Roman Empire times and under the violent Herodian rule, when he was a little child God protected him and his parents. Thus, they remained peaceful although at one time they had to flee to Egypt for safety of his life (Matt 2:13). But as Jesus grew up and reached the age of responsibility, he chose to be peaceful. It is on record that he "grew both in stature and in wisdom, and *in favour with God and people*" (Lk 2:52). His humility, obedience, and non-violent character played a key role in earning him favour with God and people. The writer of Hebrews wrote that, although he was the son of God, "he learned obedience through the things he suffered" (Heb 5:8). Although he himself was never disobedient, because he was representing a disobedient humanity, God must have disciplined him (just as a parent disciplines a child) to the point of becoming obedient on behalf of humanity. Paul wrote about the humility and absolute obedience of Christ to the point of dying on the cross for us (Phil 2:8). Humility and obedience to God's will are crucial ingredients for peaceful living and peacebuilding.

In his famous 'Sermon on the Mount,' among the many important virtues that bring eternal blessings that he emphasized at the beginning of the sermon is peacebuilding. In Matthew 5:9, he stated, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." Peacebuilding was very dear to him and that is what brought him to the world, to reconcile people with God through his life, teaching, and death on the cross. He came from

heaven deliberately to bring salvation and peace to the world. In Romans 5:1, Paul wrote that the first benefit that we get as a result of justification by faith is that “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Having peace with God means that we have a “reconciled relationship with him” (Stott, 1994, p. 139). Ironically, Jesus’ life on earth from birth to death was full of turmoil from the people that he had come to seek and save (Lk 19:10). Though hated and rejected by his own people, he remained peaceful and encouraged others to be peaceful.

Later, James, one of Jesus’ human brothers, stated something that resonates well with what Jesus said about peacemakers. He wrote, “Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness” (Jam 3:18, NIV). The *New Living Translation* (NLT) renders the same verse as, “And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness.” The goodness that peacemakers reap is both for those that they make peace with and for themselves. It is both in this time-limited natural world and the next supernatural world that is eternal.

Jesus had a loving and forgiving heart. He was never revengeful. That virtue was seen clearly during the time of his death on the cross. When he was about to die, he pleaded with God the Father to forgive his tormentors and killers. As recorded in Luke 23:34, he prayed, “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.” Earlier on, during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had taught his disciples and the other audience that was listening to him that they should forgive people when they sinned against them. Because of forgiving others, they themselves would be forgiven whenever they sinned against God (Matt 6:12, 14–15). Therefore, Jesus set a very powerful example to his disciples, to those who had crucified him, to those who were near the cross, and to people in all ages who would hear about his forgiveness, that forgiveness should be given to all, including those who do not ask for it. Stephen, the most famous deacon in the first church in Jerusalem, must have learned and

emulated Jesus' example of forgiveness even to people who do the greatest harm to us. When he was about to die from stoning, "he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them'" (Acts 7:60). Forgiveness is always a powerful antidote against violence and lack of peace. It is a crucial foundation for peacebuilding. Most violence comes from people who refuse to forgive. For powerful and lasting peacebuilding, the church of Christ needs to have the heart of forgiveness among its own members, and for those outside the church.

### **The Church and the Mandate for Genuine and Lasting Peacebuilding**

Although before his death and resurrection and ascension to heaven Jesus gave his special heavenly peace to his disciples (the first church) (Jn 14:27), there still is human responsibility to pursue and maintain it. The author of the book of Hebrews wrote, "Pursue (*strive or make effort for*) peace with all (people) and holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Feinberg also states, "Peace is so pleasing to the Lord that the godly are enjoined to seek it diligently (Ps. 34:14; Zech. 8:16, 19)" (1984, p. 833).

It is a proven fact that it is much easier to destroy something than to construct it. Just as it is easier to destroy a physical building than to put it up, so it is with building peace. Just as it takes much time and dedication to plant a tree and nurture it to maturity, so it is with planting and nurturing peace among people. It requires deliberate decision, careful and dedicated planning, and use of time and resources to build it. That is why Paul wrote to the believers in the church at Rome that they should "make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Rom 14:19). The church at Rome was composed of believers of various races and levels of faith and disposition. Although when Paul wrote to them to live at peace with all people, he was specifically admonishing believers who were strong in faith to live with understanding and tolerance with those of weak faith, such as in matters of clean

and unclean foods, his admonition could be applied to all interpersonal relationships.

Summarizing Paul's teaching in Romans 14, Ratz says,

Though the 'weak' were too scrupulous [conscientious or careful] in this matter and the 'strong' had no such scruples, Paul instructs them to live peaceably. The 'weak' are to be treated with tolerance by the 'strong,' or more enlightened. All should treat each other with charity, and forbear from condemning one another, whether Jews or Gentiles, since Christ had received both in His favour as their common Lord (1966, p. 160).

Also commenting on Paul's zeal to encourage Jewish believers to live at peace and unity with the non-Jews in the church at Ephesus, Walvoord and Zuck state that, "God's willingness to accept Gentiles, set apart by the work of the Holy Spirit, shows His plan in the Church Age is to unite Jews and Gentiles in one body (Eph. 3:6)" (1983, pp. 496–497). Paul exhorted the Ephesian believers to "make every effort in maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Likewise, fostering the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome was one of Paul's main purposes for writing the epistle to the Romans. The same could be said about the Galatian church, where there was apparent hostility between Jewish and non-Jewish believers, between slave and free believers, and between male and female believers (Gal 3:28), and the church at Philippi where there were divisions between two prominent Christian women in the church (Euodia and Syntyche, as stated in Philippians 4:2).

Like the church in Rome, many church congregations in Africa, more so in urban settings, are composed of believers from various ethnic backgrounds. Peaceful co-existence of the members in some of the mixed churches has sometimes been a challenge. For example, in Kenya, in the disgraceful 2007 and 2008 post-election violence, although believers of the various ethnic divides were generally friendly to each other and helped those in danger of harm, some participated in the violence either directly or indirectly. For example, in Eldoret

area in North Rift Valley region of Kenya, some of the church leaders were pushed out of their acquired or inherited property and the property was taken over by people of the dominant ethnic community, including believers who knew the church leaders. Even one of the vernacular Christian radio stations in the area was accused of spreading hate messages against members of the communities that were regarded as enemies.

One of the church leaders who lost their land and everything in it and had to move from Eldoret to Naivasha was Rev. Dr. Isaac Wanyumu. He and his wife had lived and served in that area for many years, serving in churches whose members were of mixed ethnic communities. He and his family were known by many believers in the area. Yet they had to escape due to hostility from some members of the dominant community, the majority of whom are Christian. They were not safe and at peace living there because they belonged to a community that was viewed at that time as political enemies of the dominant community in the area. The two ethnic communities, and various others, had lived at peace and harmony for many years, but their peaceful co-existence was disrupted and broken down within a very short period.

It is good that the enmity was somehow appeased by the mediation of a renowned non-Kenyan diplomat, Kofi Annan, a former Secretary General of the United Nations. Peace and unity of the two main warring communities was enhanced further by an alliance between two frontline political leaders from the two communities. It is lamentable that many believers and church congregations or the larger Christian denominations in the area were not involved in any tangible ways advocating for peace among the estranged communities. That could have been partly caused by the fact that some that attempted to help members of the enemy communities were viewed by their fellow community members as traitors of their community. Even one of the churches that offered shelter to members of one of the communities that was viewed as enemies was locked from outside and burned down with all

the people who had found shelter in it. From that time until today, although some peaceful co-existence has been restored, there always are apparent tensions among members of the various communities that were affected by the occurrences of that time. It is commendable that the church finally somehow awoke from the indifference of that time and laid down some strategies for practical peacebuilding among the antagonistic communities not only for the current situation but also for any potential threats to peace in the future.

### **Practical Ways of Peacebuilding by the Church**

Immediately before Jesus was taken up to heaven in the sight of the original apostles, he promised them, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Just as they would be witnesses for Christ beginning from where they were at that time (their current local space) after being empowered by the Holy Spirit, in the same way the peacebuilding mandate of the church begins where the individual members or local congregation as a group are located in any given time. In John 14:26–27, when Jesus knew his time for leaving the earth, he promised the coming of the Holy Spirit and gave his special peace to them. That way, he empowered them with the necessary inner tools for peacebuilding.

The true church of God that operates in love for God and his people is wise, peaceful, and peace-loving. The members of such a church are “reasonable, full of mercy and good deeds, impartial, and without hypocrisy” (Jam 3:17). The members of that church abide by the greatest commandment of loving God sincerely and with all that they are and have, and loving their neighbours as they love themselves (Matt 22:36–39). Based on that commandment, they look out for the interests of others rather than solely their own interests. That is what Paul guided the Philippians in 2:3–4 to do nothing out of selfishness or

deceitfulness, but in humility consider others better than themselves, and that, each should look out not to their own interests only, but also to the interests of others.

The natural instinct of each person is to look out for one's own benefits. Secular society everywhere in the world teaches everyone to pursue what is good for themselves. It is therefore not easy and it takes considerable effort to meet the needs of others in the same way as one looks out for one's own needs. The difficulty includes viewing and treating even close relatives as better than oneself. God's special grace is needed to enable one to obey the Greatest Commandment. When someone loves and deliberately and decisively looks out for the interests of others, that enables that person to deliberately lay down concrete plans to do every good deed that is beneficial to all, including making every effort to live at peace with all of them.

Starting with the simplest things that we are already able to do to other people without much effort leads to doing great things that we may have never thought we are capable of doing to them. I love a simple definition of Quaker in an old English-Chinese dictionary. It says that a Quaker is, "a member of the Society of Friends who believes in living a simple peace-loving life" (Fung, 1973, p. 452). For example, the spirit of sharing as was in the Early Church (Acts 2:44-47) is a powerful tool in peacebuilding. It is in keeping with Jesus' teaching in Luke 3:11, "The one who has two coats should share with the one who has none; and the one who has food should do likewise." It is not the big things that make a difference as the secular world has influenced the African church and the general society to assume as valuable and practice.

The good deeds that we do to others should not be done because we get any benefit or because we will be paid or rewarded for doing them. According to Seneca, the renowned Stoic philosopher of ancient Rome who lived at the same time and even outlived Jesus Christ's earthly life (from 4 BC to 65 AD), good deeds were to be done not with the view of

self-profit, such as for the pleasure that someone would get from doing them. For him, they were to be done for the sake of the deeds themselves; simply because it was good to do them (*Seneca III* translation by Basore 1989, IV.I.2–3). Seneca’s rationale for doing good was markedly different from Jesus’ teaching about doing what is good in that, the peace that the church is asked to seek and build should be primarily in love, reverence, and obedience to God and for the benefit of those others. It is also true and satisfying that the peace builder also correspondingly benefits from the good deeds.

If each Christian in Africa would obey the Greatest Commandment and comply to the Golden Rule in the Bible, that would transform many communities beginning with the local area where each one lives or is situated at any given time. The Golden Rule states, “Therefore, in everything, do to others as you would want them to do to you; for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 7:12). If based on our love for God we all would do what we wish others would do to us, that would be fulfilment of the Greatest Commandment as elaborated by Paul in Romans 13:9–10. That would result in enabling a more peaceful world than what we have currently.

Jesus’ main purpose for coming to the world was to reconcile humans with God through his divine life, his teaching ministry, and his death on the cross. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that had huge internal divisions that God had reconciled believers to himself through Jesus Christ, and that he had given the believers the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). Although it is mainly the spiritual reconciliation that Paul was writing about, social reconciliation was in the picture as it is a by-product of spiritual reconciliation. Every truly born-again Christian in Africa is an emissary or ambassador of peace.

The church in Africa can come up with practical projects of promoting peaceful co-existence and development deeper than that of the secular American Peace Corps agency that

was launched at the University of Michigan by President John F. Kennedy on March 1, 1961. American volunteers of the agency in Kenya work in various communities “on locally prioritized projects in Education and Health sectors” (Peace Corps, 2023). Of course, education and health are some of the needs of Africa that contribute to peaceful life for many. Ojighoro observes that the main causes of violence and conflict are: socio-economic resources (such as increasing populations and dwindling income sources), political reasons (such as boundary disputes, political corruption, and institutional failures, for example, the not-very-effective African Union), religious values (such as differences in faith affiliations), ethnicity, and industrial and labour matters (2021, pp. 6–10).

The biblical view about the cause of conflicts and lack of peace is expressed clearly in James 4:1–4 where it is said that quarrels and fights among people are caused by the fact that we want things but we do not have them because we do not trust and ask God for them. It also says that when we get what we want we use it selfishly for sinful pleasure. We make friendship with the sinful world and become haters of God (and his people). That way, even if we get what we want, it cannot and does not give us peace.

Identifying one of the many causes of animosity among individuals and communities in Africa, namely, the socio-economic factor concerning use of dwindling natural resources, the church may teach by example how to harness the available resources, and how to increase and use them equitably in love, without selfishness. The spirit of simplicity, love, and contentment, as was exemplified by Jesus himself and as was practiced and taught by Paul when he said he had learned to be content whatever circumstances he found himself in (Phil 4:11–13). Also in 1 Timothy 6:6–8 Paul said, “But godliness with contentment is great gain.<sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.<sup>8</sup> But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” If all of us Christians in Africa did our best in doing what is good and beneficial to ourselves and to others, and if we were contented

whatever situation we find ourselves in, that would accomplish much in peacebuilding in our troubled local spaces.

Based on Chinyowa, whose view is not outrightly meant for the church as such, another possible way that the church can adopt to help people to identify and resolve causes of conflicts among them is by use of syncretic (or hybridised) theater as is done in Zimbabwe. He describes that method as ‘making theatre with the people’ as opposed to ‘taking theatre to the people.’ In that methodology, the church can meet,

the need for critical objectivity by staging fictionalised stories that illuminate the specific conflicts affecting target communities. As a means of ‘waging conflict non-violently’, such theatre creates space for critical citizens to assess their problems objectively, to try out theatrically staged options for resolving conflicts and transfer these alternatives to real life (2012, p. 67).

That is a very effective method that has been used by some church groups in Kenya, such as during youth camps by Word of Life interdenominational organization, by the Africa Inland Church, and by other church organizations. Many other methods of peacebuilding are also available and waiting to be implemented for people of all age groups.

### **Conclusion**

The reality is that it is possible to have peace in most, if not all, parts of Africa, even in the most troubled places. For peace to be found in all communities, it should begin with the individual believer and spread out to those closest to them and so forth to the farthest scope of the believer’s influence. To Christians, true peace begins with assurance of justification by God through faith in Jesus Christ. It comes from God’s saving grace. Nevertheless, just as the initial blessing of objective sanctification by God should be followed by progressive subjective sanctification by the believer, daily building and maintenance of

subjective peace involves the deliberate pragmatic effort of each believer individually and corporately. It is not easy but it is doable with God's enablement.

The God of peace has been sustaining and promoting peace from OT times after the fall, in the NT times, in the current times, and to eternity. Okambawa's view is that, "The God of peace is the condition of possibility of justification and salvation. He extends his peace to the believer in a triple step process: acceptance of the message of reconciliation, justification by faith, and sanctification and redemption" (2020, p. xi.) In the current times, as we wait for the time when "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9), where all people and all creatures will live in absolute peace and harmony, with God's enablement we should be doing whatever we can in the given sinful and violent earth. In the NT, that blissful paradisaical era is the Millennial Kingdom which will be a thousand peaceful years of Christ ruling with the saints on earth (Rev 20:1-6).

After the one thousand years of the Millennial Kingdom, there will be another period of cataclysmic trouble from the dark world. But that will be short-lived before the long-awaited time of eternal peace is ushered in (Rev 20:7-10). That is the redemption time that Paul said in Romans 8:19-25 that creation is eagerly and patiently waiting for. That is the eternal peaceful time that all Christians are looking forward to.

Just as the church is mandated and empowered to make disciples in all the earth (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8), it is also mandated and empowered to make peace with everyone everywhere (Rom 12:8; 2 Cor 5:18). The church has all the necessary tools for peacebuilding, beginning with personal salvation in Christ and God's peace, and the Holy spirit who teaches us what to do and empowers us to do it. Therefore, no Christian has any excuse not to be a peacebuilder. Starting with the simplest resources that we have we can accomplish the seemingly impossible tasks and meet the toughest needs in peacebuilding. Although Jesus expressed, "with God, all things are possible" (Mk 10:23-27) in the context of the seeming

impossibility of salvation and entering the Kingdom of God for the rich people, the truth of what he said can rightly be applied to the tough task of peacebuilding in the current world.

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