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## A Religio-Theological Perspective of the Role of Religion in Conflict Resolution

<sup>a\*</sup> Tinkasiimire Therese

<sup>a</sup>*Department of Religion and Peace Studies, Makerere University, P.O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda, East Africa..*

<sup>a</sup>*Email: [ttinkasiimire@arts.mak.ac.ug](mailto:ttinkasiimire@arts.mak.ac.ug)*

### Abstract

The Christian religion has a mandate from Jesus Christ to spread the Good News in the world (Mt. 28:19-20), in the process it meets a lot of conflicts, wars and other misunderstandings in society. The philosophy of religion is to invite men and women to discover themselves as transcendent beings, in every dimension of their lives, including those related to social, economic and political contexts. Religion preaches love, justice, and human dignity but in the world we find that there is a lot of injustice, unfairness, hatred, corruption and other evils which religion has to contend with. The philosophy of the world is quite different from that of religion. Church Leaders such as Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador has played a major role in convincing the Roman Catholic Church to switch its traditional alliances with the wealthy and powerful to stand with the poor against injustice, thus living out the Gospel message portrayed in the Bible. [1]

In this paper, I would like to argue that it is the mandate of the Church to engage in conflict mitigation just as Cardinal Oscar Romero and other Church Leaders have done and are still doing. Another example is that of Pope John Paul 11 who wrote three Encyclicals which were compiled into a volume known as a “Compendium” of the social Doctrine of the Church. [2] This starts from the family, the smallest and vital cell of society. The Church’s work of mitigation starts from here and progresses to the community and to the entire society. I would like to find out whether the Church is faithfully fulfilling her mandate among the less fortunate citizens living in Kampala slums like Katanga and Kisenyi and in Northern Uganda where civil war has been raging on for over twenty years.

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\*Corresponding Author.

Email address: [ttinkasiimire@arts.mak.ac.ug](mailto:ttinkasiimire@arts.mak.ac.ug)

The people in northern Uganda have lost their social fabric due to the prolonged war which displaced them from their homes this has brought a lot of changes, in the area of values, culture and generally how people perceive the world today. In Uganda corruption is the order of the day. There is also instability, exploitation and even 'slavery.' Is the Church showing a preferential love for the poor? This represents a fundamental choice for the Church and is she ready to propose this for all people of good will? On the other hand, the well to do people, are threatened by lack of meaning in their lives, drug abuse, alcohol addiction, and HIV/AIDS. Is the Church ready to offer the Good News of peace to these people too? Is she ready to offer healing of body and soul to the world today? This is a big challenge, because the proclamation of Good News of salvation, love, justice, and peace is not readily received in the world especially in countries like Uganda which has been devastated by civil wars, poverty, injustice, and HIV/AIDS. Many people's hearts have been hardened by all these evils they need to hear this message in a new way. On the other hand there are some people in Uganda who have used religion to gain their own glory, such as Joseph Kony, Kibwetere and Alice Auma Lakwena.

**Keywords:** Conflict mitigation, Escalation, Islam and Christianity in Uganda, reconciliation.

## **1. Introduction**

There is a lot of conflict in the world today, starting from the family, the community, the national and international level. There is great need for peace, justice and love and healing in the world today. Who can give these? Does Religion have the answer as per mandate given to it by Jesus Christ (Mt. 28: 19-20)? [3] It is one of the challenges of religion to mitigate conflicts at all levels. Religion has a set of values which can be used to resolve conflicts but at the same time the same values can be used to escalate conflict. This is the dilemma religion has to contend with all the time. Conflict mitigation is defined as an approach applied to a range of strategies and activities undertaken in a situation of crisis, be it an immediate emergency or protracted crisis, to address causes of conflict and change the way those involved act and perceive the issues [4]. Those involved in conflict mitigation must ensure that their actions do not fuel tensions or exacerbate sources of violence they have to make sure that they seek to contribute to the transformation of conflict in a way that brings about long-term means of altering structures, behaviors and attitudes. Church mitigation of conflicts should always seek to do this in its pastoral work among people. Church mitigation can occur in or outside the Church membership. Within the Church, it is advised to follow the teaching of the Bible on how to treat the brother who has wronged the other and outside the Church one is to follow the law of love; love of God and love of neighbor as it is written in the Old Testament: Exod. 20:2-17 and taught by Jesus Christ in the New Testament: Luke 10:25-37. This is because every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. On the other side, religion can be a source of violence escalation.

We have the example of when Islam and Christianity were first introduced in Buganda at the Lubiri or Court of the Kabaka in 1844 and 1877/1879, first by the Arab traders, then by European Missionaries.

Kevin Ward, in his work, 'A History of Christianity in Uganda' says that in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century two world religions ---Islam and Christianity were both making significant impact in Uganda and were in serious competition, [5]. The two religions escalated conflict in the Buganda society. After that the two Christian Missionary groups became hostile to one another. In this case these two Christian groups did not follow the Lord Jesus' command of loving one another as brothers and sisters. We can easily liken them to the Christians in Corinth who had divisions among themselves (1Cor. 1:10ff). The Christian Missionaries who brought Christianity to Uganda brought with them a baggage of hatred and competition which they had in their mother countries, hence escalating conflicts in their new missions in Africa. This trickled down to the time of Independence when Ugandans formed political Parties they did it according to the different Christian denominations and even now this reality is still with us today. Although the new religious movements like the Pentecostals and others that have come into the country have neutralized this tendency.

## **2. Methodology**

The overall research design used was an exploratory descriptive study analysis using qualitative methods (focus group interviews and in-depth interviews). This method was better for the study because it enabled the researcher to actually learn more from the people. The questions posed needed ample time for elaboration. It was found out that some of the participants did not know how to read and write so the questions were read to them, and the answers were written by someone else. In-depth interviews and focus group discussion were a desirable form of data collection and the most suitable for this study. A semi-structured interview guide and focus group guide were used during the sessions to assure consistency of core questions and to allow new questions to emerge as the interviews proceed. This research design enabled the researcher to collect the relevant data and be able to analyze it in the available time she had at hand.

## **3. Conflict Mitigation in the Bible for members of the Church**

In the Scriptural text, found in Matthew 18:15, we see that Jesus teaches his disciples about the need for forgiveness and reconciliation among the believers. Jesus says that: "If your brother or

sister sins against you go and tell him/her his/her fault between you and him/her alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother/sister.” Commenting on this text, Brian Schwertle says that the Greek word for this is ‘hamarita’ which means missing a mark. The mark or standard missed is God’s holy law. If a brother/sister misses a mark or standard so that his/her conduct towards you is a violation of God’s holy law, then go and tell him/her his/her fault (in private). This means that Christians should not take offense over personality, cultural or socio-economic differences. Personal charges against a brother/sister must be objectively proved from the Bible. In this way believers are protected from legalism, subjectivism and all arbitrary human standards, [6]. This means that before one goes to his brother/sister to tell him/her one must make sure that the offense is real and not imaginary or a hearsay or rumor. To tell (elegyon) means to reprove or to show, or to rebuke so as to bring conviction. That is one is to rebuke so as to bring sin home to conscience, to awaken the person to consciousness of guilt. The purpose of this is to achieve a biblical reconciliation. If the offense is private then one must keep it so, but if it is going to cause a scandal in public then take it to other people within the Church community. This is because one does not want to expose a brother/sister to non-believers. Christians are not infallible, sometimes they error and faults must be dealt with so as to remain acceptable before God and the community. The reason why one has to bring in witnesses is to increase the power of persuading the brother/sister who has gone wrong to try and bring him/her back to acceptable behavior. To those outside the Church one has to use the law of love because every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. People will know that we are Christians or people of God by the way we behave, if we are kind and caring then we have kept the image of God’s goodness. But at the same time we have to see to it that justice is practiced in the world.

#### **4. The Church’s conflict mitigation at family level**

The Catholic Church has built a Church in Kisenyi area in Kampala city. The sole purpose of this is to reach out to the people who live in this place. Most people who live there are very poor and others are refugees from different places. When I visited that Church on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2012, I found out that many of the people in that area are refugees from Somalia or Somaliland. I talked to some of them. One young man called Hassan (not real name) was a Muslim and has lived in that area for five years. He usually goes to visit the priest at the Church who counsels him and advises him on many issues of life. He said that even if he is not Catholic he has found a

friend in that priest. When I met the priest on that same day, he told me that his sole purpose of accepting to staying in that parish is to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ, in so doing promoting peace in that area because there is a lot of conflicts in families, and in the community as a whole. There are people involved in drug trafficking and many youth use drugs which brings a lot of conflicts and instability in the neighborhood. Those people are faced with problems such as child abuse, domestic violence, hatred among different families, etc. all these bring a lot of conflicts in families and in the community as a whole. The parish has established a counseling center which has helped many people but not all people are interested in using the facility. The social teaching of the Church says that: the promotion of peace in the world is an integral part of its mission and a continuation of Christ's work of redemption on earth. The Church is a sign and instrument of peace in the world and for the world. Fr. Paul is perhaps following this teaching of the Church in aiming at establishing peace in that slum area of Uganda. We find that the promotion of true peace is an expression of Christian faith in the love that God has for every human being. Christians are encouraged to love one another, that is they have a mandate to love those people they worship with but at the same they must love all their neighbors and some of these maybe their enemies.

For example when I visited the Sisters of Mother Teresa of Calcutta who live in Kisenyi slum, they told me that there are people in that area who have tried several times to break into their house many times and these are the people they serve. They said that it was very difficult for them to forgive them. One of them called Mary (not real name) said that the Bible teaches us to forgive our enemies but it is easy to preach than to practice; one needs special power or grace from above to do that. Genuine forgiveness comes from the heart it is not an outward activity, or mere words but something that comes from deep within a person. This is what brings true peace within a person, community and entire human race. Without sincere forgiveness everything is artificial and baseless. In the Social Doctrine of the Church it said that 'Peace is a value and a universal duty founded on a rational and moral order of society that has its roots in God Himself,' [2]. God is the source of all peace.

I also visited the people in Katanga slum near Makerere University. The slum has reduced very much because some rich people have built huge Hostels like Akamwesi and others. Here I organized small groups of people and we had discussions on how the Churches have been

helping them in spiritual matters. I discovered that there are some people from U.S.A who have been paying school fees for their children but in the process persuade them to become born again Christians. When I asked them how many have been converted, some were not sure others said that they pray with these people because they want school fees for their children but they are not real convinced about the type of Christianity the Whites were presenting to them. They told me that some prefer going to the traditional doctors and medicine men and women like Maama Phina because this makes more meaning to them than the Christian faith. The God of Christians works very slowly in times of crisis, while traditional doctors medicine works there and then, very fast.

Another group told me that the Church has helped them in conflict resolution, especially at family level. They gave an example of a certain couple who got married in Church not long time ago and they got HIV/AIDS, the woman wanted to leave the man but the Church people counseled them and now they are still together. From that time they have become regular Church attendees. Another example they cited was that of a childless couple, the man wanted to leave the woman because he wanted to have a child badly. The Church members counseled them and they are still together up to now. Another couple was living in abject poverty, the man had lost his job and they could not even pay rent and were about to be chased away from the one-room house they were living in, the Church gave the man a job and at the time I visited the area, this couple was living happily in their one-room rental. The Church is trying to help the less fortunate people in the slum areas in Kampala city as it is also helping others in the other parts of the country. The Church in Uganda is walking in the footsteps of Archbishop Oscar Romero by putting in practice the Preferential Option for the Poor. Although the Church is helping the poor but has it approached government and reminded it to do its duty for its citizens?

### **5. The Church's conflict mitigation at national level**

I would like to use the example of Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC) at this level. The UJCC was formed in 1953 for the purpose of improving the ecumenical relations among the different Christian denominations in Uganda. There are several examples where this Council has mitigated conflicts. Here are some of those examples – the cross-border conflicts - In order to do this the UJCC mobilized the Teso-Karamoja religious Leaders to mitigate the cross borders conflicts. They started by giving the religious leaders training in peace building then these had a

dialogue,[7]. These were equipped with the skills to sensitize people of their areas. The leaders with the help of the UJCC formed committees whose work was to sensitize the communities. They trained 26 members from 9 Dioceses. The training included some non-UJCC members such as the Muslims and Pentecostal Church. The UJCC also decided to include the Members of Parliament from Pader to Kapchorwa that border with Karamoja with those of Kotido, Moroto and Nakapiripirit. The MPs were happy because these forums were being convened by the UJCC which is a neutral body. They were willing to join hands and advocate for peace and development and sustainable follow up to the disarmament for that region, their area.

The UJCC committee has also tried to monitor and advocate for disarmament in the across-border region of Southern Sudan, North Western Kenya and Eastern-Northern Uganda sub-region. They have mobilized and sensitized the religious Leaders in that area to sensitize the people of their areas about the dangers of small Arms. These religious leaders who have been trained have started holding dialogue with local people in their areas. This has been a big success because many people have given up on the use of small arms. Although there are still others who have remained stubborn in this practice because they benefit a lot from it.

Another area where the Churches through UJCC committee have been successful was in the Kibaale District Conflict. The conflict was between the Banyoro and the Bakiga locally known as the Basuhuki, over land disputes. The UJCC Resolution committee members met with the two Bishops of Hoima and Bunyoro Kitara Dioceses and discussed on how these two could jointly handle the Kibaale dispute that was taking on religious connotation. The two Bishops handled this conflict resolution by writing a joint letter to their congregations. They followed this with pastoral visits to all the parishes of the district. During these visits they sensitized their flock on the value of living together in peace and harmony. In this way the Bishops became the prophetic voice of the Church which denounces violence and bloodshed in order to safeguard human rights especially those of the weak. As the social doctrine of the Church proclaims: 'that violence is evil, it is unacceptable as a solution to problems, that violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of the Christian faith, the truth of our humanity.'<sup>1</sup> In fact violence destroys what it claims to defend, that is it destroys human dignity, life and the freedom of human beings. Violence brings about destruction and death.

The UJCC mitigation Team has taken its mission to Eastern Congo and Southern Sudan as well. When they heard that some ethnic clusters are selling arms to opposing tribes, they decided to send there some members to sensitize the people in those areas. The result of this effort was that the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative started a dialogue with the South Sudan Churches. From that time joint meetings and exchange visits started taking place. The purpose of this initiative was to establish peace and harmony among these communities. Other cross border initiatives in conflict mitigation took place between the Bishops of Kigezi in South Western Uganda and the Bishops of Rwanda. The Bishops from this region met the President of Rwanda, His Excellency the President Kagame and expressed their concerns of the insecurities at the border of Rwanda and Uganda. The President took this request seriously and worked on it. The Churches here played a vital role for the peace, harmony and security of that area. The UJCC has brought harmony among the different Church denominations in Uganda. The rivalry that used to exist has almost been eliminated. For example they hold public prayers together especially on Good Fridays, they have translated the Bible in many local languages together and they also speak with one voice when there are evil deeds in the country, like child sacrifice.

Another way of how the Church mitigates conflicts is through the mass media. For example some Church leaders point out how the youth, the women and generally the less privileged or the poor are being oppressed. For instance Reverend J.W. Katende, a priest in Kampala Archdiocese always gives comments on different issues which touch people's lives in the *New Vision*, Uganda's leading daily paper. In the paper of Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2012, he wrote on "Unemployment as a social evil" [8]. In his comment, Katende says that God wills the employment for everyone because God creates each person for a purpose. Every person is endowed with unique talents, and has a responsibility to develop those gifts. We develop our talents through work. In Uganda, there are many unemployed persons especially the youth. This brings about conflict because the redundant youth tend to fall prey to many bad habits like taking drugs, stealing or destroying other people's properties but even other unemployed people do the same. Katende says that, Unemployment is a result of human failure, which is a serious social evil. It demeans people by depriving them of their self esteem and a livelihood. In fact it increases dependency and deprived them the opportunity to contribute to society and to their own well-being.



I think that unemployment affects us all because even the people who are employed are unable to bargain for a fair pay of good working conditions because there are many people ready to work at a low pay. When people demand for a fair pay, the employers do not listen take the example of Makerere Staff, whenever they demand for a better pay they are ignored. They have staged several strikes but each time they have come out with empty handed. Katende suggests that the government is duty-bound to assist, support and coordinate the efforts of individuals, families and groups in society to ensure that each of them is oriented to the common good. In order to avoid this evil, efforts must start from the family level. There is need for parents to train their children to be hard working and not to despise any job available. The Government should put in place an education which is job-creating and not to train graduates who are job-seekers.

Another area where Church mitigation of conflicts is done is through Church Leaders' sermons in Services. For example, on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012, the Right Reverend Cyprian Lwanga, the Catholic Archbishop of Kampala Diocese said that 'calls for the Church to back off politics show "a complete misinterpretation of the scriptures" [9]. In the scriptures we read that the followers of Jesus Christ are the prophetic voice of God in society, (Mt. 28: 19-20) if the Church keeps silent then the people of God will not have clear guidance in the world. Besides that the Church Leaders are also citizens of Uganda, they have a right to talk about the good and the bad things that are happening in the country. They have the mandate tell people the truth. For example, Paul Ssemwogerere, the bishop of Kasana Luwero who presided over the celebration of the Service of the Uganda Martyrs at Namugongo on that same day admonished the Christians that the Church is the "conscience of society," therefore it cannot keep quiet amid an endless list of evil. He told the congregation to think about the many baptized Catholics who are involved in all manner of corruption and the plunder of national resources, acts of witchcraft, child sacrifice, domestic violence, vote stealing and neglect of parental responsibility. If the Church Leaders keep quiet who will remind the society about all the evils that are in society? Who will call people to repentance from these ills in the society? These are very things which bring conflicts in society. Jesus said that his disciples must keep on telling society the truth as we read in Luke's Gospel: "Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples,'... He said to them 'I tell you, if they keep silent, the stones will cry out,'" (Lk. 19: 39-40). If the Church Leaders keep silent then something else will cry out loudly! The Church Leaders have a mandate to keep on point out the evils in the world. They must keep on telling the truth to everyone in the

society including the political leaders. If the members of society could listen to this voice, then there would be fewer conflicts in the world

## **6. The role played by Religion in Conflict Escalation in Uganda**

Religion has played a vital role in conflict mitigation but at the same time religions have escalated conflicts in Uganda. Right from the time the Missionaries arrived in this country, conflicts have been part and parcel of the religions. The first Missionaries came from Britain and arrived in Buganda on June 30, 1877. They found the Muslim traders from Arabia who had arrived earlier on in 1844 and then conflicts began between these two. To complicate matters, two years after the arrival of English Missionaries the French also came in 1879. The three groups treated each other with suspicion and accused each other before the Kabaka or King of Buganda, at that time was Kabaka Mutesa I. There was a lot of competition between them trying to win the Kabaka's favor. It is said that the years 1885 and 1889 witnessed war between Muslims and Christians [10]. In 1890 after the Christians had vanquished the Muslim faction, Buganda now remained in the hands of Christians. At this time we would have expected the Christians to live in peace and harmony following the Lord Jesus' command that 'love one another as I loved you', (Jn.15:12). Christians are supposed to love one another and live in harmony so that they can spread the Word of God to the ends of the world bringing all people to Jesus Christ who is the true and good shepherd who leads all to the Father. Jesus said that he is the way, the truth and the life and he wants to share all these with all the peoples of the world.

The Missionaries who came to Uganda at that time did not fully fulfill this mandate because they were torn apart by rivalry and petty jealousies. This was because the two Missionary groups came from the countries in Europe which had been fighting each and were great enemies. The CMS from Britain and the White Fathers today known as Missionaries of Africa from France brought to Africa Christianity but also a baggage of hatred for one another. This has tricked down to the present day Christians in Uganda. This is well exhibited by the politics in the country. It is well expressed by Lugira who says that: 'The Anglican missionaries being English by nationality and the Catholic ones being French by nationality occasioned an animosity'[10]. Baganda followers of the English religionist taunted the followers of the French religionist calling them 'Bafalansa', while the latter taunted the former by name calling them 'Bangereza.' This is deeply reflected in the political parties that came to Uganda from Britain that is the

Imperial British Company. The two missionary groups were deeply drawn into the political affairs of the country. What made matters worse was that when the British took over political power in Uganda, the Anglicanism became the official religious denomination of the Uganda Protectorate. The Catholic became the religion of the common people. For example, all the heads of the local ethnic kingdoms like the Bunyoro Kitara kingdom, Buganda kingdom, the Ankole kingdom. This has been maintained to the present day. The existing ethnic kingdoms are still headed by the Protestants. In addition to this, the heads of the local government of the Uganda Protectorate and all the heads of sectional governments and all the heads of anything that politically mattered in the Protectorate were expected to be Anglican by religious profession. All those who were Catholics made up the civil society. It followed that most of the poor people belonged to the Catholics. It is said that in 1953 the Roman Catholic hierarchy was established in Uganda, that means that the creation of Kampala as the only one Metropolitan Archdiocese, at that time made the Catholic Church transit from being a Roman Catholic Mission to being an autonomous entity duly understood as being the Roman Catholic Church in Uganda. The same thing happened to the Anglican Church. On April 16, 1961, the Archbishop of Canterbury inaugurated an Anglican Church Province in Uganda. At that time the Native Anglican Church became autonomous.

Since the Anglican or the Native Anglican Church had a privileged position because of its close connection both to the local and the British administration. This became a bone of contention between the Catholics and the Protestants for quite a long time. The Anglican Church's close relationship with politics sometimes compromised her spiritual position. This was not like that for the Catholic Church because this Church' audience was the common people or those not involved in politics. A good example is illustrated by an incident of the deportation of Kabaka Mutesa II. Many Baganda believed that the new Anglican Bishop Leslie Brown was involved in the deportation of the Kabaka. This caused the Church loss of support for quite some time. This conflict between the Anglican Church and the Baganda traditionalists created a lot of resentment for the Church. This was unnecessary because the Church is supposed to be the prophetic voice among the people.

At this same time the Catholic Church was under attack by the Baganda Traditionalists because this was the time when the Catholics were getting involved in politics after a long time of being

passive in this area. At the time of preparing for Uganda's Independence, the Catholics became more active in politics. The Catholic hierarchy saw potential in the Democratic Party (D.P) as the only one which would take up the country's leadership. They encouraged all Catholics to support this Party. The other parties such as Kabaka Yekka, was for Baganda traditionalists and the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) was for the Protestants. As the Catholics and Anglicans were traditional enemies, they could not support the same political party. At that time the D.P party was being headed by the Muganda Catholic, Benedicto Kiwanuka and the Catholic Leadership trusted and supported him and most of the Catholics saw him as the one who would take up the country's political leadership, this was seen as Catholics leading Uganda. They say that politics is a dirty game, the UPC and Kabakka Yekka made an alliance so they won the election and DP and the Catholics lost thus entering Independence without any political power. This increased the resentment between the two Christian factions.

It is a well known fact that religion has remained a strong dividing factor in Ugandan politics. The Protestant- Catholic relations have always been strained because of this factor. Some Christians thought of a way how the different factions or denominations could work together in fulfilling their God-given mandate. The year 1963 saw the formation of the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC). This was a pioneer venture in creating ecumenical relations between the Catholics, Protestants and the Orthodox Church in Uganda. This Council has seen some successes. For example, there has been co-operation in joint Christian education, syllabuses for schools and in Bible translation.

These Churches have also worked together in assisting the people in the Northern part of Uganda during the Kony gorilla war. They have raised their prophetic voice together to the government of Uganda and also to Kony and his men and women who were disturbing the peace in the north. They have collected money and other material things and sent delegations to the suffering displaced people in camps. Besides this, Christians of these Churches have been united in a fellowship of suffering in that they have courageously witnessed to the truth at the cost of their lives- For example, during the time of President Iddi Amin Dada, many Christians were killed, like Archbishop Janani Luwum of Church of Uganda, Reverend Godfrey Bazira who was murdered at the Namugongo massacre of 1984, Fr. Clement Kiggundu the editor general of the

Catholic newspaper which was known as 'Munno'. All Christians were deeply touched by these untimely deaths and prayed together for peace to come back to Uganda.

On the other hand religion has been misused by some religious leaders to achieve their own ends. For example, Alice Auma Lakwena who was known as the Mystic-Priestess-Visionary-Warrior-Messenger, from Acholi land in Northern Uganda. She was a woman who inspired thousands of people into battle, using mere sticks and stones as weapons against the Uganda National Army-UPDF [11]. She used religion to convince her followers. She gave them a strict spiritual code, including the renunciation of witchcraft, remaining chaste, no smoking or drinking alcohol or quarrelling. She told them to renounce all sin in their lives and dedicate themselves to the work of purification for the Acholi people and the people of Uganda as a whole. She promised her followers that the bullets of the government soldiers would have no effect on them if they lived a life of spiritual purity and anointed themselves with water and oil (this is likened to the Maji-Maji rebellion of Tanzania) and that the stones used to fight the enemy would turn into grenades and explode killing their opponents, hence they would be victorious. What Lakwena told them did not happen instead the government soldiers' bullets killed them. In this particular instance religion did not solve the conflict because the spirituality used was not authentic. It is said that Lakwena used a combination of myth, voodoo, and traditional beliefs with her unique brand of Christianity. She inspired many people from Acholi, Lango in the north and other places in Eastern Uganda because she came at the time when people were in great need and despair so her vision took root and grew.

Why doesn't religion solve all conflicts? It has a set of values which would help the followers solve their conflicts and live in peace, but this has not happened over the years. Let us look at an example of Joseph Kony who considered himself quite a good Christian and wanted Uganda to be a Christian nation. He formed a resistance group called the Lord's Resistance Army, (LRA). He promised his followers that if they win the civil war, Uganda would become a theocratic nation with laws based on the Biblical Ten Commandments. When he started fighting he kidnapped more than 20,000 children, he used the boys for fighting and carrying luggage and the girls as sex slaves for his Army commanders and Officials, and the troublesome ones were killed off. In doing this, which one of the Ten Commandments was he putting in practice? He killed many civilians, cut off people's noses and lips and tortured many. Is this the way he wanted to

keep the Ten Commandments? Many people wondered on what Kony's strategy of establishing a religious nation was based on.

Another example of using religion to resolve conflict is that of Joseph Kibwetere, the leader of the Movement for the Restoration of the 10 Commandments and his assistants. Kibwetere and his assistants had told their followers that the Virgin Mary would appear to deliver a special message between March 16 and March 18, 2000. The followers believed that they were going to heaven and they needed to cleanse themselves of whatever sins they had committed [12]. They were told that the end of the world was near so they must be ready for it. When this did not happen the Leaders had to do something to resolve the conflict. It is said that on March 17, 2000 in Kanungu in Rukungiri District, Western Uganda, about 1,000 people belonging to the Movement for the Restoration of the 10 Commandments of God cult were killed. About 450 people perished in the fire that gutted the cult's church where people had gathered to receive the Blessed Virgin Mary and witness the end of the world. The rest of the bodies (550) were found buried in mass graves in different sites where the cult operated. The Prophecies of these religious Leaders were not fulfilled. In the Bible, prophecies of the true prophets sent by God came to pass, such as the Prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos, but those of the false prophets like Shemaiah and the others like him did not.

## **7. Conclusion**

The coming of the foreign religions that is Islam, and Christianity have been a great blessing to Uganda because they have mitigated conflicts from the family, community and national level hence pacifying the people of Uganda. But at the same time these religions have escalated conflicts in many ways. For example, from the time of the first European Missionaries, that is when the Anglican Missionaries came they found the Muslim traders at the court of Kabaka Mutesa, conflicts began. After a short while when the Catholics came from France, the conflicts increased. There were religious conflicts between the Muslims and the Christians, this ended in the war of 1890. After this the Muslims were chased away from Buganda, then the Catholics and the Anglicans conflicted. The conflicts between these two have been going on for a long time. In 1963 the Uganda Joint Christian Council was formed to help in the good relations of the Christian Churches in Uganda. This Council has done a lot in conflict mitigation for different

communities in the country, like the cross border conflicts, the Kibaale Banyoro-Bakiga conflict and the Kony conflicts in the Northern Uganda.

Besides this, the Church Leaders also mitigate conflicts through their preaching on Sundays and feast days, like what happened on 3<sup>rd</sup> June this year, both at the Catholic Shrine and the Church of Uganda, Archbishop Luke Orombe and Archbishop Cyrian Lwanga told the Christians what they ought to know and how to order their lives while still in this world. The Church Leaders are the Prophetic voice of God, telling people the truth as mandated by Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Matthew 28:19. They ought to bring people to God by showing them the right path and the way of salvation. The Church Leaders ought not to engage in religious conflicts but in bringing peace and harmony to the people of God.

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