Full Length Research Paper

Keeping religion out of a conflict: Learning from the Kenyan Church

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Religion can be argued to be back into the public sphere of society casting doubt on the secularization theories. Though religion is said to be largely ambivalent, when involved, it complicates conflicts. In our modern multi-religious societies, keeping religion out of the conflict can be of benefit. Kenya´s involvement in the war against terror in Somalia was initially against the militant group, Al- Shabaab but the conflict got complicated when the group started attacking churches in Kenya in retaliation. Their target was to cause animosity between Christians and Muslims in Kenya and draw a religious angle into the conflict. However, the Christian victims of the attacks did not fall into the trap of the terrorists by choosing not to retaliate. They chose not to be part of the conflict. Factors that helped the church achieve this tolerance include open channels of communication between the two religious communities, interreligious forums and communication, government intervention, religious leadership, faith based counseling and doctrine. This research article is based on a study done in Kenya on the response of the church to the Al Shabaab attacks.

Key words: Religious conflict, tolerance, terrorism, communication across borders, interreligious forums and communication, Al Shabaab, Kenyan church.

INTRODUCTION

In handling conflicts where religion plays a part, it has been argued that since religion is ambivalent, its positive attributes should be explored and the negative ones negated. This article explores the possibility of keeping religion out of a conflict all together as an option.

Soon after the Kenyan Army launched an operation against the terror group Al-Shabaab, it reiterated the incursion by bringing the war to the Kenyan soil and started attacking churches (Hansen, 2013:131). This happened especially in the Northern part of Kenya and some parts of Nairobi and Mombasa. Odhiambo et al,

(2013), in their article, *The Reprisal Attacks By Al-Shabaab Against Kenya,* have given a detailed account of the attacks that Al-Shabaab carried out in Kenya since the Kenya army started carrying out its operation in Somali in 2011.

It seemed like the conflict was being turned from a war on terror to a religious one. With the help of radical Muslim Clerics, Al-Shabaab used a tactic of using converts from Christianity especially from Christian dominated areas of Kenya to attack churches, killing people including a 9-year old boy attending Sunday

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school within church premises (Osanjo, 2013:14). Their claim was that the "Christian" Western nations were using the "Christian" Kenya army to fight Islam in Somali and convert the Somali people to Christians (ibid). This change of tact by the Al-Shabaab and potential transformation of the conflict largely depended on how the church reacted to the attacks.

This article looks at how the church reacted which mainly centered on keeping religion out of the conflict. It is based on a study carried out to find out how the church in Kenya responded to the Al-Shabaab attacks caused by the Kenya army´s operation in Somali. In the study, a total of nine interviews were carried out that involved 17 interviewees. The interviews were done in three different institutions: 2 churches and the National Council of Churches of Kenya, which is the largest umbrella organization of the mainstream churches in Kenya. The interviewees varied from victims, youth groups, and local lay and senior leaders in the churches and the national church leaders.

The first part of the article gives a brief review of the role of religion in our society today. This is followed by background information about the development of the conflict involving Al-Shabaab, Kenya and the Christian community in Kenya. The last part explores how the Kenya church responded to the Al-Shabaab in an attempt to keep religion out of the conflict. Finally there is a conclusion.

Role of religion is modern society

The theories of secularization predicted the decline of religion in the public space. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim declared that "the old gods are growing old or already dead" (Casanova, 1994, p. 18) and in this regard he was not alone. He was supported by other notable figures of sociology like Max Weber, Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer (Casanova, 1994, p. 17).

Religion was seen as anti-modern and the "enlightenment proclaimed the death of religion" (Juergensmeyer, 2003, p. 229). There was an expectation that since modernization made religion "invisible" in Europe, the same will happen as it spread to other parts of the world. China and Japan have proved that this may not be the case. Japan is highly modernized yet it has not fallen to westernization. It took its own path of modernization but still religion remains an important social force in the country (Blasi, 2011, p. 117). China has developed without the "western democracy" but it has an autocratic rule.

On the other hand, United States of America has maintained its religiosity visible at the same time being a super power. Other emerging economies like Brazil, South Africa and India are relatively religious. Perhaps those who predicted the decline of religion in public sphere in the face of modernization applied the western European case generally and too soon without taking into account the complexities of societies as they develop.

But today, many will argue, "Religion is back." The significance of religion in the society today can be said to be "increasing" thus casting a doubt at the secularization theory (Demerath, 2001, p. 6). The role of religion in the society today should not be taken for granted. The reality today is that the population of the world is generally religious (Koeng et al., 2012, p. 53). In many parts of the world today, religion acts as the anchor that holds life, defining individuals, communities and even nations. In such societies the definition of conflict and peace cannot exclude the religious understanding.

Al Shabaab and the Kenyan church

Stig Hansen, a Norwegian historian and expert on the conflicts in the Horn of Africa, describes in detail the development of the relationship between Al-Shabaab and Kenya (Hansen, 2013, p.126-132). His research puts 10% of the membership of Al-Shabaab to be of Kenyan origin. He traces the link between Al-Shabaab and Kenyan Islamic charities and radical clerics such as Sheik Aboud Rogo Muhamed to date back to mid-1990s. He further points out that sympathy, financial support and recruitment for Al-Shabaab were done through these charities and clerics who portrayed the Kenyan Government especially the police department as joining United States of America (USA) and European Union (EU) in fighting Islam all over the world. Al-Shabaab started recruiting youths from non-Somali origin and took them to Somalia for training. Most of the recruits were jobless youths who were promised scholarships and jobs in Somalia only to be forced into the group military training (ibid).

To make its influence felt, Al-Shabaab started cross-border attacks and kidnapping of European tourists and other foreign aid workers from the coastal and northern areas of Kenya, harming the Kenyan tourism industry, which is one of the main income earners of the country (International Crisis Group, 2012). This led to a decision by the Kenyan Government to deploy its army to secure the borders and interests of the country. In October 2011, the Kenya Army set foot on the Somali soil to pursue the Al-Shabaab militant group in an operation dubbed *Operation Linda Nchi* translated as `protect the country` (Gettleman, 2011). Though the Kenyan soldiers were initially fighting Al-Shabaab on their own, they later joined the African Union Mission in Somalia-AMISON (International Crisis Group, 2012).

Daley (2013) has written extensively about the question of the legality of the 2011 Kenya incursion of Somalia. His conclusion is that Kenya handled the case legally. He argues that the incursion as an initial step was permissible under the international law as a form of self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter, which was then followed by the Kenya army joining the UN, backed

AMISON forces later.

After the Kenyan army was deployed in Somalia, the Al-Shabaab declared jihad on Kenya that was accused of playing puppet to the western powers in their `global struggle against Islam` (Hansen, 2013, p. 130-131). This confirmed the worst fears of Kenyans of being targets of the religious extremists (Allison, 2013). Al-Shabaab attacks on Kenyan soil has since taken diverse faces which include killing police, abducting government officials, killing aid workers, attacking bus stops, restaurants and lately the Westgate Mall attack that killed over 70 people (Miller, 2013).

The author's interest developed when Al-Shabaab reiterated the Kenyan army incursion by bringing the war to the Kenyan soil and started attacking churches. This happened especially in the northern part of Kenya and some parts of Nairobi and Mombasa. Odhiambo et al. (2013) have given a detailed account of the attacks that Al-Shabaab has carried out in Kenya since the Kenya army started carrying out its operation in Somali in 2011.

A good number of the attacks were on churches. A grenade attack at Garissa´s Pentecostal Church on November 5, 2011 left two people dead and five seriously injured. One person was killed and 11 other hospitalized when God´s House of Miracles Church at Ngara Estate in Nairobi was attacked on 29th April, 2012. A simultaneous attack on two churches in Garissa on 1 July 2012 left 17 people dead and 50 injured. Those dead included nine women and 2 children. On July 21, 2012 police in Kitale (town in Western Kenya) arrested two terror suspects, who were on a mission to allegedly bomb the Umoja Catholic Church, a busy parish in the Eastlands area of Nairobi. On 20 September, a 9-year-old boy was killed when a grenade was hurled to Sunday school children at St Polycarp Anglican Church along Juja Road in Nairobi. It seemed like the conflict was slowly transforming from a war on terror to a religious one.

How the Kenyan church attempted to kept religion off the conflict

Our world is becoming increasingly interconnected and one thing that we cannot avoid is meeting and living with people from different religions. In their article, *Are religious tolerance and pluralism reachable ideal? A psychological Perspective*, Waillet and Roskam (2013) attempt to explain why religious tolerance is a more than welcome outcome in the world today and how it can be achieved. They start by distinguishing between pluralism and tolerance. They argue that pluralism is to acknowledge diversity and openly engage in a dialogue with it even if it means challenging and reconsidering one´s views. On the other hand, they see tolerance as "putting up with something that one disapproves of or is prejudiced against" (Waillet and Roskam, 2013, p. 71).

They identify four obstacles to religious tolerance and pluralism: developmental psychology, social identity, terror management and personality. They argue that though adults have cognitive capacities to understand these concepts than children, not all achieve them because of other factors including their cultural environment (Waillet and Roskam, 2013). Religion as part of culture gives people a sense of identity and discrimination against those of the out- group. Using the terror management theory of Solomon, Greenberg and Pyszczynski, they see religion as a real obstacle to tolerance because it gives people a world view to deal with fear of death and give meaning to life. Since this is core to life, people find it hard to embrace or take seriously those who hold to a different world view. Personality traits predispose people to varying degree of ability to change and be open to a different other.

In this light, the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Kenya can be said to be tolerance rather than pluralism. There is mutual respect and neither seeks to antagonize the relationship. They have learnt on how to put up with one another's differences choosing to focus on what unites them rather than what divides them. Respondents in the study observed that this has helped foster the mutual relationship, a factor that helped stop the conflict from changing from terror related to religious related.

The study also found out that open channels of communication between the Christian and Muslim communities helped foster unity when it was threatened by the terror attacks. For example, in one church, the youths had engaged their Muslim counterparts earlier in common games and picnics. They had even shared resources like borrowing chairs from one another during functions. When the terror attacks occurred, it was easier for the two communities to talk around the suspicions that one community was responsible. Through the talks they were able to discover that the attackers were coming from outside the community. Appiah´s (2007) concept of "Conversations across boundaries" in cosmopolitanism befits this narration. Different religious communities can agree to disagree on details of their respective faiths but lines of communications must be open especially on common areas. These are handy in drawing common understanding during potential threats to peaceful coexistence.

The case under study is a good example of tolerance in the face of a provocation into conflict. The Al-Shabaab failed in their attempt to cause animosity between Christians and Muslims in Nairobi mainly because of the way the Christians responded. Listening to the respondents, several factors were identified that contributed to this tolerance. These factors include interreligious forums and communication, government intervention, religious leadership, faith based counseling and doctrine and lastly spiritualization of the conflict. Below is a detailed discussion of the factors.

Interreligious Forums and Communication

The concept of multiculturalism seems to be a disaster in

Europe (Ivison, 2001) but in Kenya, people from more than 40 different ethnic communities confessing more than five different religions have lived alongside each other relatively well. The two largest religious communities are Christians and Muslims making up about 80 and 10% of the population respectively. The Muslims mostly dominate the coastal and northern parts of Kenya. The former Pope, Benedict XVI, encouraged people of different religions to have dialogue by advising that religions need "to learn to accept the other in his otherness and the otherness of his thinking" (Benedict XVI, 2012). Kenya is a good example of a country that has walked the path of the words of Sen "the promotion of diversity as a value in itself" (2006, p.150). Dialogue between the different religious communities in Kenya played a crucial role in calming tensions between Christians and Muslims during the Al Shabaab attacks on churches.

One of the respondents for the study was a representative of the largest umbrella organization of Christian churches in Kenya, NCCK. He shared his thoughts about the role of interreligious forums in promoting coexistence among the different religious identities in the country. NCCK is part of a forum called Inter-Religious Council of Kenya, which brings together all major faith communities in Kenya. Its purpose is "to deepen interfaith dialogue and collaboration among members for a common endeavor to mobilize the unique moral and social resources of religious people and address shared concerns" (IRCK, 2014). Members of this forum held a press conference immediately the churches were attacked and condemned them. They labeled the attacks as criminal acts not identifiable with any religion.

The fact that Kenyans and especially victims of the attacks were able to see united leaders from both Christian and Muslim communities together helped in calming the situation. Apart from making press statements, the leaders also visited the victims of the attacks in hospitals together and later on visited the affected churches in solidarity. These actions quelled the rumors that were spreading fast that the Muslim community carried out the attacks. The press conferences and visits clarified that not all Muslims were behind the attacks but only a terror group using the Islamic faith to justify and propagate their ideologies through violence. Though some respondents accused the interreligious forum of not doing enough to curb the terror attacks, they nevertheless agree and appreciate the role played by the quick action taken by the forum to calm the situation.

Government's intervention

When the churches were attacked, they chose to turn to the government to deal with the issue instead of taking the law in their own hands. According to the respondents in the two churches, the police responded swiftly and took charge of the crime scene after the attacks happened. They made preliminary arrests and opened investigations into the attacks to find out the perpetrators of the crimes. The government went ahead and assisted churches on training on how to secure their meetings.

The author has been following the terror attacks by the Boko Aram militants in Northern Nigeria, which has led to the death of more than two thousand people this year alone, destruction of properties especially churches and kidnapping of more than two hundred school girls (Associated Press, 2014). The people of northern Nigeria reportedly feel abandoned by their government. There are claims that the security forces were tipped that the Boko Haram was preparing to take hostage the girls but the Nigeria army did not take any preventive measures. There was worldwide outrage when it was reported that there were no attempts by the Nigerian forces to recapture the girls even after three weeks hence the international pressure dubbed, "bring back our girls" (Abubakar and Levs, 2014). Iro et al. reveal that lack of confidence by the citizens that the Nigerian Government can offer then adequate security has led to the rise of vigilante groups that take retaliatory attacks targeting the members and sympathizers of Boko Haram (Aghedo and Osumah, 2014). This has led to a cycle of revenge attacks, which have taken a religious angle.

In the Kenyan case under this study, it was noted that people's confidence in the government to deal with perpetrators of the violence greatly contributed to the prevention of retaliation attacks. Though most people interviewed had a perception that the attackers were from the Muslim community, they did not consider or agree with those who wanted to revenge. They rather called on the government to arrest and prosecute the attackers and scale up security. The fact that the churches took the attacks as criminal acts and allowed the government to deal with the situation helped prevent retaliatory actions. However, it is worthwhile to note that the respondents' confidence in the government security machine is declining. This is particularly since the investigation results have never been made public. The respondents expressed disappointment that they have not seen justice for the loss suffered.

The Kenyan Government needs to take measures to build on the citizens' confidence by being relatively transparent in its security operation and being keen in concluding investigations. One respondent noted that the government was holding back the results of the investigations for fear of singling out any group. The understanding was that the government feared that if it named the suspected Al-Shabaab militant group as the perpetrators of the violence, then people might find legitimate reasons to attack the Muslim community. This fear seems to have counterproductive effects. One respondent who was a victim of the attacks and was involved in the government criminal investigations of the attacks is still waiting for the report and looking forward to

see justice done. The fact that it was over one year since the attacks took place and there were no signs of the report coming out were frustrating him. It was hindering his healing process. Truth telling is a very important element is healing of memories, which are a prerequisite to sustainable reconciliation (Schreiter, 2008). The Kenya Government should not deny victims of the attacks their rights to know who hurt them and for justice to be done.

Religious leadership

Kenya is largely a religious country with over 80% of the population professing Christianity and about 10% professing Islam. Most of the other 10% affiliate to one or another religious group (US Department of State, 2010). Spiritual leaders are highly respected in the society especially in churches and mosques. Grant Ferret reported of a survey done in Africa that showed that three quarters of the people trusted their religious leaders compared to all other society leaders (Ferret, 2005). This gives them great influence in the society on decision-making. Religious leaders have a huge responsibility to give right leadership to their followers especially when it comes to relating to people of other faiths.

It is recommendable that the religious leadership in Kenya took a stand of unity in the face of the terror attacks on churches. Both Christian and Muslim leaders came together and condemned the attacks calling for calm and peace. They exposed the strategy of the attackers to cause religious animosity in the country. Back in the churches, the leaders urged their followers to be peaceful and allow the government to carry out investigations. They preached peace and encouraged their members not to revenge in any way. This exemplary leadership helped the victims and members of churches respond positively to the attacks. The religious leadership also made the members to understand that the attacks were not a war between Christians and Muslims.

Faith-based counseling

The church leaders also carried out counseling program immediately after the attacks to help victims and members of their churches to come into terms with what had happened. Most respondents expressed that these counseling sessions helped them particularly in their response to the attacks. Koenig et al., (2012) in their monumental work identify positives inputs of religions in people's lives point out that spiritual leaders usually encourage religious devotion and practice which not only benefits the spirit but also the general well-being of one's life. It brings joy, courage, peace confidence and other positive health attributes (Koenig et al., 2012, p. 56). They also note that professional counseling can be based on religion as a resource in coping with problems.

Another positive aspect they observe is the fact that all the main religions have a place for faith healings where people experience physical and emotional healings (Koenig et al., 2012, p. 57). Roemer also reports that in his study on religion and health in Japan, he found out that those that have a "devotion" to a religion reported higher levels of life satisfaction and happiness (Blasi, 2011, p. 122). According to the same report, religion helped the respondents in coping with life's challenges like unemployment and feelings of belonging to "low class".

By helping members make sense of the attacks, the church made them feel better about themselves thus avoiding negative thoughts about their attackers who they perceived to be Muslims. The church leaders also gave them a platform to express their frustrations, anger and opinions about the attacks. Misconceptions were corrected at this forums and anger rechanneled towards the individual attackers and not the Muslim community from where they were suspected to have come from. In one church, the Sunday school department ran a series of teachings about forgiveness. The children who were victims of the attacks were taught on how to forgive those who attacked them.

ROLE OF FAITH AND DOCTRINE

James Griffith, a professor of psychiatry and neurology argues that religion can be "either humankind's greatest gift or its greatest curse" (Griffith, 2010, p. 3). In his book, *Religion that heals, religion that harms: a guide to clinical practice,* Griffith (2010) discusses from a wealth of 38 years of experience the ambivalence of religion in psychological matters. He observes that it can harm or heal, damage and protect as well. He shares stories about how people's religiousness aggravated their illnesses. One prominent example is of one young woman who suffered depression to a point that even antidepressants could not help her. Upon keen observation it was discovered that the cause of the depression was her belief that God was angry and punishing her for her promiscuous teenage life (Griffith, 2010, p. 5). All she needed was to resolve issues with her God.

Attachment to God is an important factor in the life of religious people. Griffith discusses how people's relationship with God either draws them close or away from him when they are under stress (Griffith, 2010, p. 105). Those who cannot feel the presence of God in their ill health tend to be insecure, despair, feel lonely, dirty, "sinner" or under punishment, attributes that negatively impact their recovery. Kenyan Christianity especially in charismatic churches is highly sensitive spiritually. When something happens, people will always try to explain the cause in spiritual terms. The fact that the attacks happened in the church troubled some of the respondents. Some saw it as a message from God rebuking them.

One respondent confessed that before the attacks, she was not so strong in her faith but the attacks acted like a wakeup call for more commitment to religious life. On the other hand, this inward reflection in trying to make sense of the attacks helped some respondents become more tolerant. Their focus was not on the attackers and how to revenge but on themselves and their religious life. In one way, this response to the attacks contributed to the prevention of retaliation. Faith led the respondents to blame themselves for the hurt suffered instead of blaming others. The danger with this kind of response is that people may not physically express their feelings about the attacks but may manifest in other ways. Griffith also discusses the negativity of the suppression of one's feelings due to religious beliefs (Griffith, 2010, p. 147).

The author has interacted with many of my friends who belong to the so called "faith churches" that teach that confession of reality is lack of faith. For example, one will be having a sickness but if you ask them how he feels, he will say that he is well in Jesus' name. Such people easily avoid seeking medical attention or even admitting that they have problems. This may directly affect their health or indirectly build up stress within.

It was also notable from the respondents that church teachings and practices contributed greatly in shaping their response to the attacks. Most of them quoted the teachings of Jesus Christ from Luke 6 about not taking revenge when unjustly treated. In this passage Jesus taught his followers to give in to those who demand things from them without harboring hatred or trying to retaliate. This teachings together with other revolutionary teachings of Jesus like loving ones enemy (Matthew 5) and unlimited forgiveness (Mathew 18) helped respondents not consider revenge in the face of the attacks. The fact that Jesus forgave those who killed him even without them asking for forgiveness challenged the victims to emulate him. They were further challenged by their leaders to observe these teachings especially in this time of conflict. The Christian church has a long tradition of silent suffering in the face of persecution in following the example of their founder Jesus Christ who suffered without raising his voice. This became a rich resource for the victims to draw strength for tolerance in the face of the attacks.

Church symbols like Eucharist and regular worship services also helped Christians respond favorably to the attacks. In the Bible book of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul the author instructed the Corinthian Church that before they partook of the Holy Communion, they were to search their hearts. If they had anything in their hearts, they were to face it and solve it before taking part in the celebration. In the same manner, Jesus taught his followers that:

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you; leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-24 New International Version).

These two central teachings of the Bible played a critical role in shaping the respondents' response to the attacks. They attended church meetings at least twice a week and were confronted with these two cardinal teachings preceding the Christian rituals of Eucharist and offertory. They had to practice forgiveness of the attackers to have peace to join in the Christian celebrations. This clearly illustrates how Christian teachings and rituals play a role in peace and reconciliation. Since these are personal decisions, they helped the victims make individual resolutions on how to respond to the hurt influenced by the tenets of the community in which they shared identity, which was the church in this case.

Cecelia Clegg rightly pointed out that for sustainable peace to exist; individual's capacity to heal and embrace "forgiveness and compassion" must not be sacrificed at the altar of political or community peace deals (Clegg, 2008, p. 61-79). She continues to build her thesis that sustainable peace depends on the individuals "will to co-exist" as he quotes Harold Saunders who holds that it is "citizens who make or break peace". This is played out very well in the study. Many of the respondents who were victims of the attacks emphatically narrated how the faith as practiced through church teachings and rituals had helped them respond with love instead of hate for the attackers. The Islamic community who was suspected to housing the attackers also reciprocated accordingly. This created an atmosphere of tolerance between the two religious communities, a fact that helped calm the situation and prevent retaliation.

SPIRITUALIZATION OF THE CONFLICT

Most of the respondents turned to faith to make sense of the attacks in a reflected reaction. The most common reflected response to the attacks was the spiritualization of the conflict. Most of the respondents interviewed said that they saw the attacks as the work of Satan whose motive was to challenge the work of God. In this regard, they did not see the attackers as Muslim-affiliates but as ordinary men just used by Satan. Some respondents expressed their sympathy for them as being under illusion and need help. Spiritualization of the conflict on one hand helped calm the situation by preventing physical retaliation.

Peter (2011) proposes seven models in which spirituality can be used to promote unity in the society. One of them is the "wider-context model" in which he argues that if a conflict is viewed from its historical and cosmic context it "would start looking smaller and smaller, fostering a feeling of greater relaxation thereby giving us better opportunities at resolution" (Peter, 2011, p. 2). The study showed that the church was very instrumental in helping the victims of the attack in reflecting and

responding appropriately. They were able to put the attacks in a wider perspective of cosmic fights between God and Satan thus helping believers heal from hatred and avoid retaliation, which would have worsened the situation.

On the other hand, spiritualization of a conflict may possess the danger of ignoring the facts of the attack, the physical pain caused and holding responsible the perpetrators. This may hinder or corrupt the healing process. During the interviews, the author had an interaction with a group of youths from one church who were victims of the attacks. When asked about their response to the attacks, they all responded "spiritually" by telling how they saw the attack as a spiritual one and had left everything to God and moved on. Later on in the interview, they were asked whether they would be willing to meet the attackers if given opportunity and what they would say or do to them. One of them categorically said that he would not want to meet them and if by chance he met them, he would do something bad to them.

Rick Langer observed that there is "a dualistic tendency to value spirituality at the expense of the material world" mostly among the Christian evangelical movements that affects how they relate to the communities in which they are situated (Langer, 2012). The study was carried in two churches one charismatic and their other mainstream protestant. The observation was that the respondents from the charismatic church were quick to relate the attacks to the spiritual causes and effects compared to the other church. They were also quicker to express that they had forgiven the attackers and moved on with life. But on further probing, this was not explicitly expressed. For example, when asked if they would meet their attackers if given opportunity, their words did not seem to match their actions. Most of them expressed anger and bitterness.

The interpretation was that they were yet to enter the healing path. The spiritualization process may have hindered a true entry into the path of healing by suppressing feelings at the expense of being true to self. The respondents from the mainstream protestant church were more composed and in the path of healing. Their church had invested in professional counseling of the affected members and this was bearing fruit.

Conclusion

Violent conflicts are not new in the world but the late trend is that religious conflicts are on the rise. In Africa, conflicts in Central African Republic, the Sudans, Boko Haram menace in Nigeria, Somalia conflict, Al Shabaab attacks in Kenya, the religious motivated Lord Resistance Army menace in Northern Uganda and the crisis in Egypt all have a religious angle. Central governments need to strategize on how to deal with these religious conflicts. One of them is the promotion of the unity between the different religious communities. For example, the open communication channels and interreligious forums in Kenya were identified as a key factor that helped prevent the Christians turning against the Muslims as the Al Shabaab hoped.

The government ought to be a religiously neutral player and encourage dialogue among the religious communities and involve them more in the fight against terrorism. However, they should not compromise on issues of justice where atrocities have been committed. Criminal acts should be investigated and prosecuted without fear or favor irrespective of the religious background of the perpetrators. When citizens have confidence that the government is religiously neutral, they can trust it to deal with a potential criminality in a religious conflict. The recent violence in Central African Republic escalated because the government seemed to take sides (CNN, 2012). Some people of Northern Nigeria also accuse the government of not doing enough to stump the Boko Haram because of religious reasons (Premium Times, April, 2014). There is need to do more study on the role of government in religious conflicts especially in Africa.

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