



The Role of Religion in Ensuring Peace and Harmony in Society: A Case of Selected Churches in Lusaka District, Zambia

Chanda Chansa Thelma¹, Enock Mutepuka² & Edwin Vinandi Phiri³

¹Rockview University, Lusaka, Zambia

²Institute of Distance Education, University of Zambia

³P.O Box 440091, Isoka, Zambia

ABSTRACT:

Religion refers to the belief in and worship of a superhuman power or powers, especially a God or gods. On the other hand, religious education entails an instruction in religion as a subject of a general education. Religious education contributes dynamically to children and young people's education in schools by provoking challenging questions about meaning and purpose in life, beliefs about God, ultimate reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human. Therefore, the study focused at evaluating the role of religion in ensuring peace and harmony in society at some selected churches in Lusaka district, Zambia. The study employed both the qualitative and quantitative methods and a descriptive research design that sampled pastors, church elders, choir members and community members. Data was obtained from the respondents by means of interviews and questionnaires. Frequency tables, graphs, figures and pie-charts were used to analyze the qualitative data. Quantitative data was analyzed by the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 26) and Microsoft Excel (version 16). The findings showed that religion plays a vital role in society from the following responses; uniting divided societies, facilitating a dialogue about virtues for shaping a better society, providing reconciliation which is based on Gods own reconciliation with sinful humanity, imposing equality among all humans without any facial discrimination, providing the sanctity of human kind and necessarily calls for equality and controlling deviance by means of ensuring peace in the society. The study also recommended that religious leaders must denounce all forms of fanaticism and racial discrimination based on religion, race, class, ethnicity, or descent. Additionally, the government must encourage religious leaders to cooperate with all relevant local institutions and authorities to highlight the true image of religions in their right conception.

Keywords: *Belief, Discrimination, Education, Religion, Religious Education and Society.*

INTRODUCTION

Religion is arguably one of the single most significant causes of warfare and turmoil in human history. In evaluating the success of societies and nations in achieving harmony and religious tolerance one must also consider the increasing secularization of societies in the industrial and post- industrial eras. As societies have become more rationalist and materialistic, religion has become less important; in some societies so have ethnic differences. Throughout the ages, the church has been involved in the life of humankind, in making of nationhood, building of culture, structuring of society with its functions and institutions and in shaping the form and quality of political systems (Carmody, 2019). On the contrary, there have been increased cases of disruption to peace and harmony in the world today despite the church teachings of peace as stipulated by Jesus Christ. This was the heart of this research to investigate the role of the church in ensuring peace and harmony in the society. They have their own proper sphere. In many ways it parallels other institutions, like governments or schools. The beginning of the Church in Zambia was slow and arduous, but persistent as the results of the missionaries who courageously made their way into the hinterland to bring the light of Christian faith in Zambia. In addition, the Church's social doctrine sheds light on authentic human values; it allows Christians to make right decisions that promoted peace in the society. The social doctrine does not only help men and women discover the truth, but also encourage Christians to "bear witness with a spirit of service to the Gospel in the field of social activity" (Chapman, 2013). Church participation in peace building should be such that enhanced her influence on the sociopolitical and economic order without jeopardizing her more spiritual and evangelistic vision and mission. This involved her confronting and challenging every unjust, oppressive and exploitative structure with Christian values and ideals.

The Christian tradition has made significant contributions to world peace at a number of different levels. Among these are public statements by Church leaders, programs of action at local and international levels, organizations dedicated to bringing about peace, courses of study and commemorative days. In recent decades, Church leaders have frequently made statements in support of peace. In some cases, these statements have been specific appeals for peace in particular circumstances, however, on other occasions they have also published more comprehensive statements on the need for peace and the means of achieving it (Francis, (2015). The teaching of Christianity which is guided by the dictates of the bible (word of God) has constantly encouraged the members to ensure peace and harmony in the society. Christian leaders have always publicly stood for societal peace and harmony and against violence. It is now widely accepted that violent conflict is the major hindrance to the development of the African continent. It inflicts human sufferings

through death, destruction of livelihoods, constant displacement and insecurity. Violent conflict disrupts the process of production, creates conditions for pillage of the country's resources and diverts their application from development purposes to servicing war (Aldunate, 2019).

With many civil wars and conflicts erupting around Zambia neighbors like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambian political history has been relatively stable since it gained independence in 1964 (Carmody, 2019). It can be asserted that Zambian politics is based on system patronage. Leaders have seen to reward their supporters with contracts, employment and a good life in order to buy their loyalty as well as influence and power base which in turn uses and wastes public funds and tax payers' money for private fulfillment. Again Zambia has witnessed political insecurity whenever there is a change of government since it is generally based on establishment of new patronage networks and the necessary disruption existing ones. Fearing prosecution, those on their way out are always reluctant. Currently political stability rests on a fragile foundation with widespread poverty and glaring social inequalities simmering underneath the surface. Assefa, (2012), political and social harmony may not be sustainable in the long term without a genuine and determined effort to promote political and social justice. This is why it is important to investigate the role of the church in ensuring peace and harmony in society. Peace is a universal phenomenon that everyone desires and wishes to enjoy endlessly. Traditions, cultures, religions and societies do have different prescriptions to attaining and enjoying peace. Wherever there is peace there tends to be development and longevity is enjoyed to this end.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The religious churches have always been known to preaching and teaching about peace and harmony to the members on the act of non-retaliation as taught by Jesus which helps to absorb violence instead of escalating it, hence every cycle of violence provoking revenge, which in turn provokes more violence is broken by the simple act of tolerating the violence and avoiding retaliation (Norris, 2011). Despite the church having a mission of peace and reconciliation and being predominant, conflicts, especially ethnic conflicts continue to escalate in various parts of the country. With this mentioned, it is not possible to ignore the various inter and intra political conflicts that have continued to take place. If ignored such conflicts are a sure recipe for disaster as they have the potential to erupt into wider violent clashes (Tanner, 2010). Therefore, this study was much needed in a country like Zambia especially as we held 12 August 2021 general elections, it was important to note the influence of the churches as they take up key initiatives to hold political party leaders accountable to their pledges towards a peaceful election regardless the outcome. Hence, this study focused at evaluating the role of religion in ensuring peace and harmony in society at some selected churches in Lusaka district, Zambia.

1.3. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the role of religion in ensuring peace and harmony in society at some selected churches in Lusaka district, Zambia.

1.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Examine the role of religion in ensuring peace and harmony in society in Lusaka district.
- Analyze the relationship among the church, peace and harmony in society in Lusaka district.
- Offer recommendations on how best peace and harmony can be maintained in societies through churches.

1.5. Conceptual Framework

The institutional development was used in the conceptual framework of the research study due to the fact that in the institutional Development the conceptual framework can work, this is where stable institutions allow for peace to be secured institutions that guarantee democracy, justice, equity and peace. The church has a way of influencing policymaking in many countries. Some policy areas are generally more important to religious groups than others. These include socio-economic policies, such as welfare systems and the development of social security institutions. Others include socio-political policies. Abortion, education, stem-cell research, and gay-rights are some of these issues (Fink, 2019). Gifford (2015) explains how institutions such as the church have the ability of changing the attitudes from being violent to peace. The church could be seen as an institution that is developmental in nature and aims to bring peace and as well as not afraid to speak out to the general public. This is important as the studies have shown that religion plays a vital role in maintaining Peace and harmony in the societies. Peace and harmony are very important in Zambian societies and to ensure that there is peace and harmony in society, the Churches as institutions has their own purposes and plans, their own structure and officers, and their own mission (Hayman, 2012).

1.6. Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of this study would contribute positively to the understanding of the role played by religion in ensuring peace and harmony in the societies. Additionally, the study findings would help examine the role of the church in ensuring peace and harmony in society, determine the advantages and disadvantages of churches in providing peace and harmony in societies and lastly offer recommendations on how best peace and harmony

can be maintained in societies through churches. In Zambia the relationship between the church and the state is characterized by the governments close identification with Christianity dating back to 1991. The leaders in Zambia have had very strong personal association with the church. Therefore, the findings of this study would be useful for the government policy formulation and bring to light why despite all the efforts and initiatives by the church, Zambia still continues to experience unnecessary violence in some parts of the country especially during elections. Hence, the findings of this study would assist the government, the governed and other stakeholders have a mutual understanding during this period thereby ensuring peace and harmony in the society and as a country at large. The research findings would also serve as a resource base to other scholars and researchers.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study Design

Due to the nature of this study, a mixed-methods approach which combines both the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms was adopted. The use of two methodologies was found to enhance research findings by providing a well-rounded understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. The mixed methods approach allowed the researcher to not only ensure validity of the findings, but also collect rich information from different perspectives. This mixed methods approach was used because it enabled the researcher to collect both quantified and personal verbatim which was of good help in furthering understanding of responses from the intended respondents.

2.2. Research Site

The research was conducted in Lusaka district in Zambia at some selected churches from which respondents were also sampled.

2.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population for the study comprised of pastors, church elders, choir members and community members. The target population was 1000. The sample size involved a total of 100 respondents which included five (5) pastors, one from each selected church. Ten (10) church elders, two from each selected church. Twenty-five (25) choir members, five from each selected church and sixty (60) community members. The study employed both purposive and simple random sampling on different participants from the selected schools. Simple random sampling was used on the choir members and community members. On the other hand, Purposive sampling was used on the pastors and church elders.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed qualitatively as the semi-structured interview schedules were used as data collection instruments. Thematic approach was used, where data analysis started with the categorization of themes from the semi-structured interview schedules. The data gathered was analyzed according to the themes of the study and the order of the research objectives. Data generated from the questionnaires was analyzed manually by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 26) and Microsoft Excel (version 16) to come up with frequency tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

2.5. Ethical Issues

Permission from Rockview University and the council chairperson for Lusaka district was sought in carrying out this study. Interviews were not conducted on one-to-one basis; instead, participants were grouped and identified using their titles. An informed consent was sought before collecting information from the informants and guaranteed them with security of the information they provided. Furthermore, the main objective of gathering such information was made clear to the respondents. The researchers avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. Alternatively, permission consents, assents were obtained from respondents involved in the research and the research topic was strategically selected to ensure that there was no harm whatsoever to the research respondents. In this study, the researchers were fully conscious of the need to abide by the ethical rule of respecting the privacy of individuals taking part in the research. In the same way, all the respondents of the study were to remain unidentified to the public as all their valuable views, opinions and perceptions were only known by the researchers for use only in the research and participant's identities will forever remain hidden.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

3.1. Role of Religion in Ensuring Peace and Harmony in Society

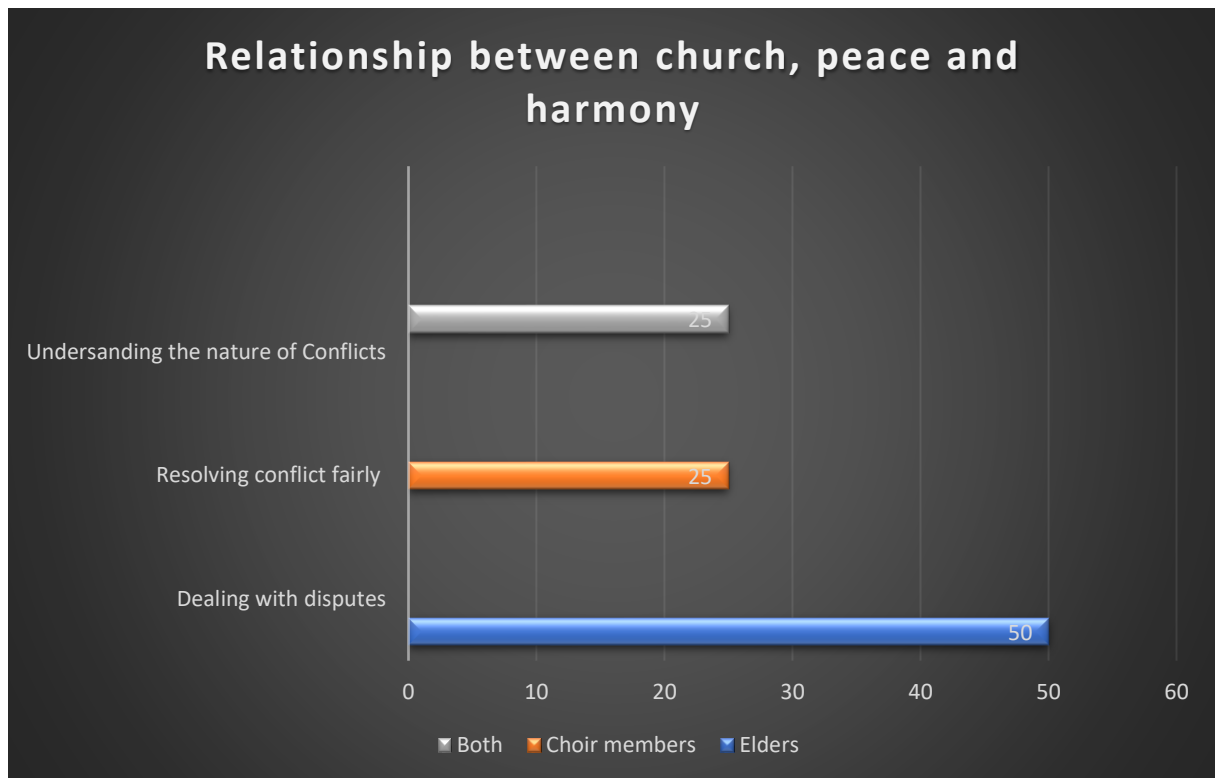
Six items were used in the questionnaire to assess respondent's attitude towards the role of religion in ensuring peace and harmony in society. To achieve this objective, the study sought to inquire whether respondents considered the church as a unit that plays a role in ensuring peace and harmony in society. The findings are presented below;

Table 1: Role of Religion in Ensuring Peace and Harmony in Society

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Uniting divided societies	10	16.7
Facilitating a dialogue about virtues foe shaping a better society	7	11.7
Providing reconciliation which is based on Gods own reconciliation with sinful humanity	20	33.3
Providing the sanctity of human kind and necessarily calls for equality	3	5
Imposing equality among all humans without any facial discrimination	15	25
Controlling deviance by means of ensuring peace in the society	5	8.3
Total	60	100

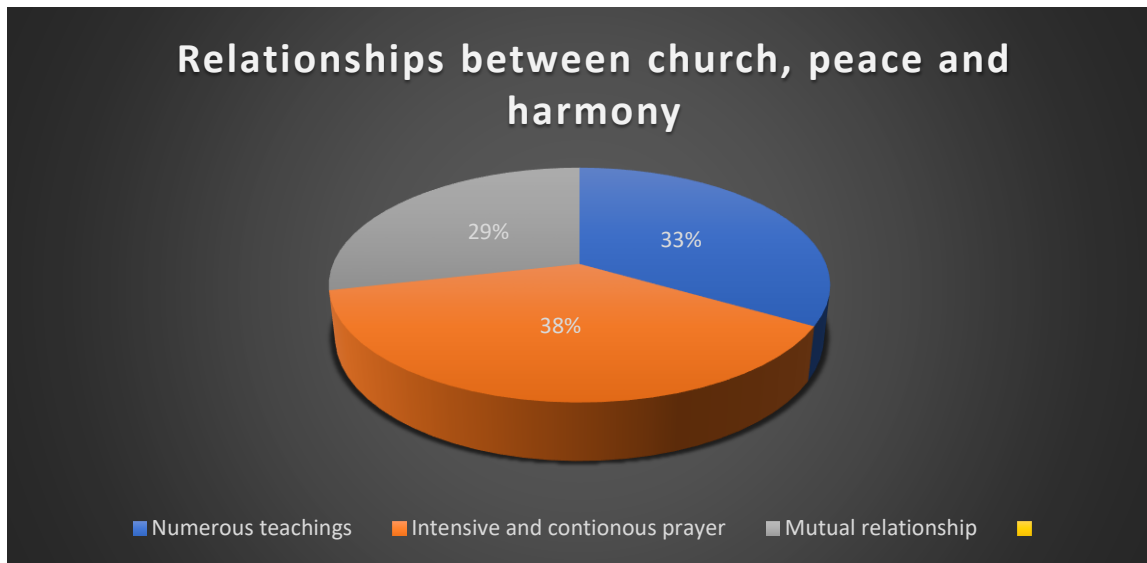
From the table above, it can be said that the ambivalence of the sacred, emphasizes that ethics and ethical convictions, as expressed through religious beliefs, are main drivers for peace. Regardless of which religion may be prevalent, the ethical power of religion can help to unite divided societies. For Nash (2010) too, religion has a role to play, especially as it can facilitate a dialogue about 'virtues' for shaping a better society. However, while acknowledging this and the useful characteristics of faith-based networks and NGOs, he warns against a reductionist approach, in which an instrumentalist perspective of religion and a logic of problem-solving prevail while the need to address other issues and involve other actors is downplayed or discounted.

3.2. Relationship among the Church, Peace and Harmony

Figure 1: Relationship among the Church, Peace and Harmony According to Church Elders and Choir Members

50% representing both respondents outlined dealing with disputes, as a response. 25% (choir members) indicated resolving conflicts fairly whereas 25% (elders) of the respondents mentioned cultivating an understanding of the nature of conflicts as a relation between the three.

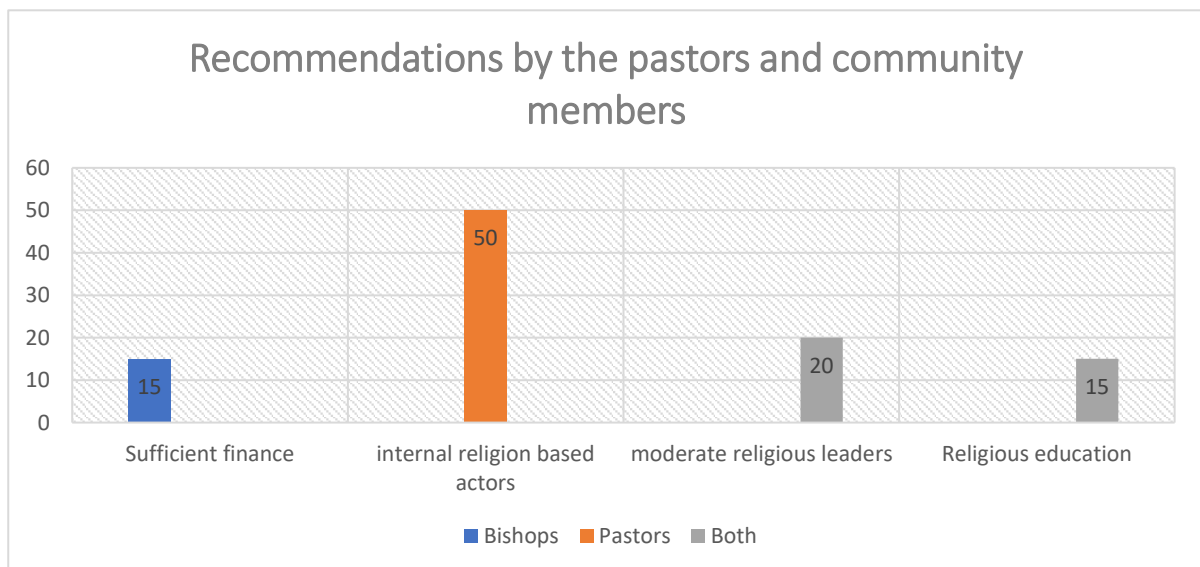
Chart 1: Relationship among the Church, Peace and Harmony According to Pastors and Community Members



The above chart illustrated the information gotten from the pastors and the community members. Intensive and continuous prayer was represented by 38%, numerous teachings was represented by 33% and the state to re-in state mutual relationships and recognition between separated people was represented by 29%. The findings indicated that the church, peace and harmony evaluate faith-based dialogue programmes. These provide a good assessment of practical challenges to such dialogue and point to the need for additional research. This can be related to the studies by Lincoln, (2013) in his report, *What Works? Evaluating Interfaith Dialogue Programs*, which was an attempt to provide a rigorous analysis of how such programmes can enhance religious tolerance and transform societies. Religious dialogue programmes need to include religious dimensions at all stages of the project. From the research findings, it was seen that the church, peace and religion furnish a human being with a climate suitable for self-harmony and harmony with the outside world. This essence, signifies the act of submitting one’s will to God. Therefore, individuals assume their responsibilities and fulfill their real duties. This can be seen from the studies by Baum (2011), who in his study showed that church, peace and harmony help individuals to have faith and trust in the divine providence and, hence, overcome all difficulties and obstacles. He alluded in his studies that, peacemaking is a reality.

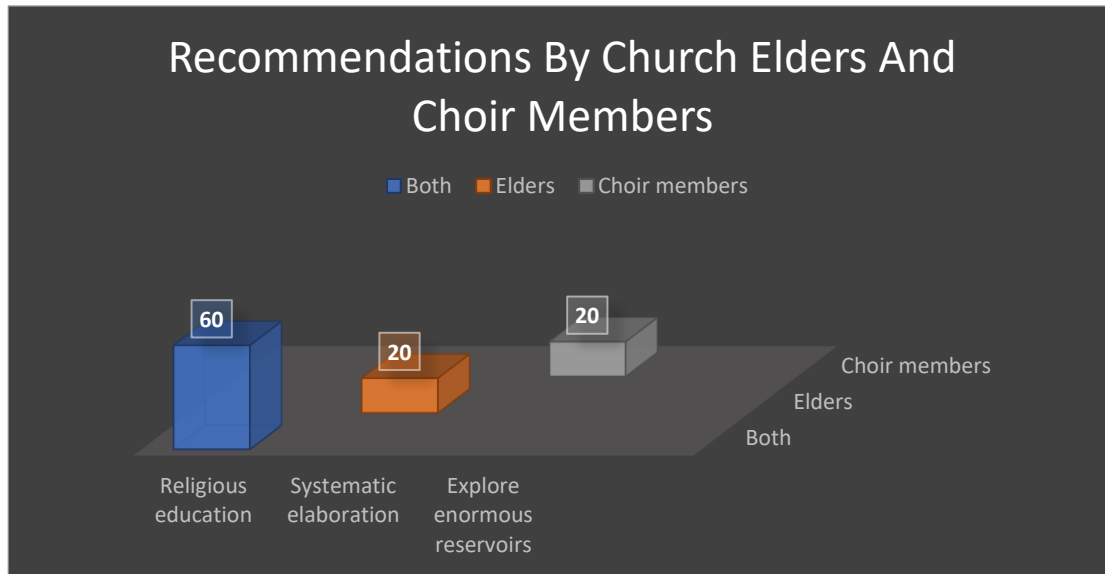
3.3. Recommendations on How Best Peace and Harmony Can Be Maintained in Societies Through Churches

Figure 2: Recommendations by the Bishops and Pastors



From the research findings, pastors and community members gave the following as responses; (30%) highlighted that religion-based actors needed sufficient finances, (20%) technical and human resources for expert training, (50%) need for internal religion-based actors and (20%) moderate religious leaders need to be supported.

Chart 2: Recommendations by Elders and Choir Members



The figure above showed the research responses given by the church elders and choir members. The respondents recommended the following to maintain peace and harmony in society through churches; (60%) religious education, (20%) provision of a systematic elaboration and (20%) international leaders should explore the enormous reservoirs of experience that are presented by religions. The research findings from the study in chapter four showed that religious education should focus on the positive aspects of religion. Whereas religious 'analphabeticism' (or illiteracy) does not lead to conflict religious education that focuses predominantly on the confrontational and violence supporting elements of religion can be exploited by political and religious leaders to promote violence and foil peace processes. Thus, this same view can be seen in the studies by Hayman. (2012), who in his study discovered that education on the peaceful elements of one's own religion and of those of other people can be a strong factor for building resilience against violence he linked to the US State Department and the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office which have already been taken up this recommendation, and set up training programmes on religious literacy for their personnel, even though participation in both schemes is on a voluntary basis.

The study also recommended that moderate religious leaders need to be supported. The crucial role played by moderate religious leaders has been widely acknowledged. This can be seen by the studies by Zartman (2019) who believes that the international community should support these leaders early on and that their role as partners in dialogue and cooperation should be strengthened to counteract fundamentalist tendencies in religion. Recommending support for moderate religious leaders, however, deserves some critical consideration because of some inherent hidden downsides. First, it may prove very difficult to identify such leaders, partly because of shifting alliances that they may develop and because it may be a challenge for the layperson to establish the criteria by which a religious leader can be categorized as 'moderate'. Second, a focus on leaders is likely to ignore the voice of women as most organized religions are structured along patriarchal lines, but women have proven to be important actors, often operating on the domestic level both in promoting peace and in condoning violence. Third, when governments or diplomats interfere in the religious sphere and start sponsoring particular faith groups or individuals, the autonomy and legitimacy of the latter often become tarnished in the eyes of their own religious communities.

Further, the study also calls upon international leaders to explore the enormous reservoirs of experience that are presented by religions. The studies emphasized that the insights of religions can help societies to judge political developments since religions provide a toolbox to promote peace; 'their comparative advantage is their transcendence perspective. This can be seen in the studies by Gopin (2011), who believes that different religions can be used to address different forms of violence. Buddhism, for example, provides perspectives on how to address direct violence; Islam can be used to fight against structural violence. However, more research needs to be done to fully understand the lessons that can be learnt from different religions.

4. CONCLUSION

It can be said that there are a lot of literature produced on the role of religion in ensuring peace and harmony in the society. However, much work needs to be done especially with regard to Zambia. The report had successfully highlighted the role of religion in ensuring peace and harmony and an analysis was done too. The findings of this study are important as they contributed positively on the understanding of the role played by the religion in ensuring peace and harmony in the societies as it examine the role of the church in ensuring peace and harmony in society, investigate the relationship between church and peace and harmony and lastly offer recommendations on how best peace and harmony can be maintained in societies through churches. In

Zambia the relationship between the church and the state is characterized by the government's close identification with Christianity. Dating back to 1991, the leaders in Zambia have had very strong personal association with the church.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings of this study:

- The Government must encourage religious leaders to cooperate with all relevant local institutions and authorities to highlight the true image of religions in their right conception.
- Religious leaders must denounce all forms of fanaticism and racial discrimination based on religion, race, class, ethnicity, or descent.
- Religious international leaders should explore the enormous reservoirs of experience that are presented by religions.

REFERENCES

- Aldunate. J. (2019). **"The Christian Ministry of Reconciliation in Chile**. Gregory: Christian association press.
- Assefa. H. (2012). **Peace and Reconciliation a Paradigm: A philosophy of peace and its Implications on Conflict, Governance and Economic Growth in Africa**.
- Baum. H. (2011). **The Reconciliation of Peoples, Challenge to the Churches**. New York: Cambridge University.
- Carmody. B. (2019). **Education in Zambia, a Catholic Perspective**. Lusaka, Book world Publishers.
- Chapman. B. (2013). **Religion and Reconciliation in South Africa**. Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Fink. S. (2019): **"Churches as Societal Veto Players: Religious Influence in Actor**.
- Gopin. M. (2011). **World Religion as a Source of Conflict and Conflict Transformation in International Relations**. London: United Nations.
- Gifford. P. (2015). **The Christian Churches and the Democratization of Africa**. Leiden: Brill publishers.
- Hayman. K. (2012). **Religion and politics in the contemporary**. Kenya: European Scientific.
- Francis. D. (2015) **Peace and Conflict in Africa**. London: Zed Books Ltd, 7 Cynthia Street.
- Lincoln. B. (2013). **Holy Terror, Thinking about Religion**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nash. J. (2010). **National Political Influence and the Catholic Church**. Res Public - Journal of Undergraduate Research.
- Norris. P. (2011). **Sacred and secular religion and politics worldwide**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tanner. F. (2010). **Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution**. New York: Orbis Books.
- Zartman. I. (2019). **Ripe for Resolution**. New York: Oxford University Press.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Chanda Chansa Thelma, specializes in Civic Education and has taught Civic Education at university level for seven years now. Currently, she is lecturing Civic Education, Political Science, Religious Studies, Social Sciences Research Methods and Educational Research at Rockview University in Lusaka, Zambia. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Civic Education, Master of Arts in Civic Education, Bachelor of Arts Degree; Civic Education & Religious Studies, Diploma in Education and several Educational Certificates. Currently, she is a Coordinator for Open Distance Learning at Rockview University.

Enock Mutepuka, Specializes in Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry. He is Currently pursuing a PhD in Environmental Toxicology at the University of Zambia. He Holds a Master of Science Degree in Environmental Management with interest in Environmental Toxicology and Public Health research methods, Bachelor's Degree in Education with Chemistry and Environmental sciences. He has good knowledge of both quantitative and Qualitative research methods, Data analysis and interpretation using SPSS and Excel. Currently, he offers Consultancy in Proposal writing, Dissertation/Thesis writing, and Data Analysis and is a tutor of chemistry at Kapasa Makasa University in Chinsali District, Zambia

Edwin Vinandi Phiri, specializes in Natural Sciences, Adult Education and Education Management and Administration. He has taught in Secondary Schools for the past 17 years of which 14 years has been spent in Administration. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Education, Master's Degree in Education, Bachelor's Degree in Education and a Diploma in Education.