

A TRAINING MANUAL ON PEACE AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

A Property of the African Christian Youths Development Forum

By Engr. Emmanuel Ande Ivorgba,

Executive Director

The purpose of the Manual:

Conflict is normal and natural and cannot be avoided. It is an integral element of human existence. As Conflict cannot be eliminated in our lives, so also is our desire for peace. Every human being naturally desires to live in peace, and yet we find ourselves constantly in conflict. The source of conflict is our diversity. Human beings look differently, create differently, make different choices and decisions even on the same issues, and have conflicting interests, ideas, needs, beliefs and interests. A number of scholars view conflict in terms of an inevitable aspect of human interaction, an indispensable concomitant of choices and decisions, arising from that process in which the capacity of actor to gain his end depends to a large extent, on the choices and decisions of others.

This training Manual is a result of three years of study and research in the area of peace and conflict transformation, and is intended to provide practical answers and solutions to some of the problems of human existence. It is a guide and is supposed to help us discover what truly constitutes conflict, peace and social harmony.

Introductory Remarks:

Peace means much more than the control of weapons, environmental friendliness and awareness, cultural exchanges, conflict resolution, among others. Significant as they are to the entire peace building process, without a proper knowledge and comprehension of the true essence of our inner nature as human beings, our goal or vision for global peace and harmony will not be actualized. It is necessary that all peace efforts or works should commence at the point of learning to understand the interior working of ourselves, as we learn to purify our heart and render it burning with charity so that we can recognize the essence of peace within and relate harmoniously outside ourselves.

Sacred Scripture tells us that, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. God made them all, formless and empty. Precisely, after six days of serious creative action, the sky, water, land and sea, the celestial bodies like the sun, moon and the stars, living and non living objects such as the birds, fish, many animals and trees, etc, were created. Interestingly, we are told that God was impressed and happy with the work of his hand. Interestingly too, despite all the monumental work, no two creatures looked exactly alike, right from the beginning of creation. This is very evident even in our day. No two human beings are exactly the same, even if they have the same parents. This in itself is a gift, but it is also the source of conflict. My way of doing things and my perception of life is not always the same, and will never be the same as yours. One man's meat, it is said, is another man's poison. Each of us is important. My life is very important, so also is the life of my neighbor. God has made us differently for some very good purpose. Variety, it is said, is the spice of life. We need our differences and diversity to live and grow well.

The Neutrality of Conflict:

The fact that Conflict can have a negative and very destructive impact on our lives, while it can also lead to growth and development indicates that Conflict itself is neutral and harmless. What matters is our response to conflict and conflict situations. Conflict is always an indication that somewhere, there is a problem or an issue that requires attention and proper action. Joyce Abarbanel compares conflict to pain. But pain, she says is the body's way of getting our attention. Pain tells us in very clear terms that something is wrong somewhere, and that we must act responsibly. Conflict is therefore, like the pain discussed above, a warning signal in our lives. Conflict gets our attention so we can diagnose and heal the real problem. It is the "visible symptom of a deeper problem". Conflict is a great privilege that we have to make changes. However, our response or reaction to conflict very often determines the consequences of the conflict. In conflict or during conflict situations, we can choose how we want to react. It is our reaction to conflict that results either in positive or negative consequences. In conflict, we each see only parts of the truth. It is like the story we were taught in Primary School of the five blind men who went to see an elephant. One touched the tail and concluded that the elephant was a rope. The other touched the trunk of the elephant and insisted it was a snake. The third blind man went for the ear of the elephant and decided it was a fan. The fourth came in contact with the leg and said it was the trunk of a tree, while the fifth blind

man touched the huge side of the elephant and announced to his colleagues that the elephant was a large wall, and insisted that all the others were wrong in their conclusions. In conflict we have different interpretations about our idea of who is right and who is wrong, but in most cases we believe that we are right while every other person, as far as we are concerned must be wrong.

Reactions to Conflict Situations:

Many people have different opinions on many issues. This is not a crime or a wrong. God made human beings that way. That we disagree on certain issues is not sinful. Sin comes in at the point of our reactions. Some of the ways different people react to conflict situations include the following:

Conflict accommodation:

A number of people respond to conflict or conflict situations by attempting to accommodate the conflict. They try to conceal their anger in the face of conflict by trying to show people that all is well. Experience shows that people who respond to conflict in this way are afraid of losing something. By so doing, they are willing to abandon their interests and accept other people's positions, even when it is obvious that they do not agree with such positions. The reason for such actions is the preservation of relationships and interests. When eventually they lose out in the process, they become resentful and angry with other people. One good reason for accommodation however is that, when we refuse to agree, the anger and the crisis refuse to go away. We cannot remain at a distant all the time.

Competition in Conflict:

A number of people become competitive or resort to aggressive strategies when responding to conflicts. They confront conflicts with their lives and would want to win at all costs. By so doing, they force others in the conflict to accept their own positions and way of doing things. The problem with this position is that forcing people to accept our positions and making them lose out, is not the best in conflict resolution. Competitors in conflict are always willing to lose their relationships with others, and do not show any concern for the needs and interests of other people.

Avoidance of Conflict:

There are some people who believe that conflict resolution or transformation is not realizable. Therefore, when confronted with conflicts, they become helpless, afraid, nervous and scared, because they have no idea on how to improve or better the situation. They respond to conflict by avoiding it or trying to run away completely. They are sometimes, mistakenly referred to as “**Peacemakers**”. Experience shows that we do not solve problems by escaping or running away. When we run away from problems, they will continue to pursue us. When we escape conflicts, we miss the opportunities for dialogue, consultation, and so we make no contributions to resolving the crisis.

Negotiation in Conflict:

This involves collaboration; a situation where some people seek to satisfy their needs and interests while at the same time seeking to maintain relationships with others. People in this condition are of the opinion that all parties can achieve what they want. This is an open and sincere way of dealing with conflict, because it involves negotiation in order to arrive at the best way possible, of resolving the conflict. In this situation, everybody involved in the conflict adds up something, so that everybody becomes a winner at the end. A good example can be seen in the resolution of the crisis arising from the Bakassi Peninsula between Nigeria and Cameroon. There are some people who choose to compromise when confronted with conflict. Their understanding is that both parties in the conflict must lose or give up something in order to achieve peace.

Conflict Transformation:

Because conflict is normal and natural, it is inevitable. Many Psychologists have insisted therefore that, rather being resolved, conflict can be transformed. This means that conflict can be changed or transformed into something positive, useful and good. Though conflict can be a major source of destruction, death, violence and disease, conflict also provides opportunities for positive changes and development. When we properly respond to conflict, we come closer and enter into more profound and more meaningful relationships with fellow human beings. Conflict teaches us about others and opens up new approaches to life, which we never thought about before. Conflict also helps us to change our way of life, including social structures, in order to make our society better and more habitable.

Experts in conflict transformation have demonstrated it over the years that conflicts are not always bad. Fire, even though it kills, it is also very useful to man. Conflict is like fire. When not properly used, fire can be destructive, but that will not stop us from making good use of fire. How then can conflict be transformed? Below are few of the ways that have been tried and tested with success in many countries.

1. Mediation and Facilitation in Conflict:

When it is difficult for parties in conflict to meet and dialogue eye to eye as a consequence of very high emotions and resentments, mediation or facilitation becomes a very useful option. In the process of mediation, a third party is required to assist the parties in conflict in presenting and discussing their problems, difficulties and fears and finding solutions that will be acceptable by all. The Facilitator or Mediator in the Conflict must however be very neutral, frank and sincere in assisting the parties to also present their positions openly. The Mediator must be someone who is trusted and who must be trusted by both parties.

2. Conflict Transformation by Negotiation:

This is a situation whereby parties in conflict try to agree on the solutions after discovering the basic causes of the conflict. This can also be regarded as a bargaining process. At the end of the negotiation, no party comes out a winner and no party also loses. The interesting thing at this point is that the parties in conflict themselves decide to come together and negotiate.

3. Conflict Transformation through Dialogue:

Dialogue takes place when the parties in conflict decide to come together and discuss and talk about the needs and fears for the purpose of finding lasting and acceptable solutions. Dialogue however requires very good, non-violent and acceptable communication skills.

4. Arbitration:

This process is judgmental. It is a situation whereby a third party is assigned to study the conflict and propose a solution. Such a third party is usually an authority, and it does matter whether he is accepted by the conflictuants or not. The third party assigned as an arbitrator acts in the same way as a referee in a football match. An example of this can be seen in the transformation of the crisis in Sierra Leone and Sao Tome and Principe recently by the Nigerian Government. It is interesting to note that sometimes, the arbitrator may be a stranger to those in conflict, but recently, especially in the developing world, the arbitrator is usually someone who is well known and trusted by both parties.

5. The Use of Force in Resolving Conflict:

Force, though sometimes applied in separating two enemies, this approach does not always get to the root of the conflict. There are different forms force. Force can be violent, non-violent, moral, civil force or force of prayer, among others. Experience has shown over the years that violence does not lead to conflict transformation. Many communities in the world are now beginning to resort to non-violent means of conflict resolution. We see very good examples of active non-violence from the Ghandi of India, Luther King Jr. in the USA and more recently from the Dalai Lama in his non-violent struggles in Tibet against their violent and forceful occupation by China. The Dalai Lama observes that though violence can achieve certain short-term objectives, but it can not obtain long-lasting ends.

6. The Team-Building Method:

This is the process of helping people in conflict to build bridges of trust, create good partnerships and generate intimacy. This method is good and it encourages the establishment of relationships of cooperation, understanding, trust and love. One efficient and effective way of team building is by bringing people together for fun activities or service projects. This method is said to be very reliable and helpful, especially when dealing with young people and religious groups.

7. Reconciliation:

Reconciliation is an indication that relationships have been restored. When this happens, the parties begin to show interest and demonstrate concern for the needs and welfare of the others. When we are reconciled, our interest goes beyond just trying to live together, but we are more concerned with the wellbeing of the other person.

The Conflict Cycle:

Violence, it is said, always attracts more violence. Conflict has a way of growing and producing even greater conflicts, especially when not properly handled. Psychologists have explained this using the Conflict Cycle. All conflicts commence with the way we see and comprehend the world. The beginning point of conflict is our interests and needs. Peace therefore must begin with each one of us. Peace is a continual process of observation and purification of self until one is able to experience true inner peace. This then becomes our guide and our inspiration that allows us to move out to the world in harmonious relationship with others and with everything. At this point there is the need for Peace education or the education of the human heart. Doing this will help us to not only understand and master the various functions of our minds, bodies and emotions, but will assist us to effectively relate with others. The Dalai Lama writes that inner peace, which is true peace, is deeply rooted in concern for others and involves a high degree of sensitivity and feeling for others. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught that we must do to others what we desire done to us. This is what today is known as the “Golden Rule”. The great German metaphysician, Immanuel Kant referred to it as the “Categorical Imperatives”, while Martin Buber and Soren Kierkegaard described it in terms of the “I-Thou”. No matter the name we give it, what is important is that, in all issues and at all times, human beings must be constantly treated with love, respect, justice and dignity.

Every man (and woman) is important in God's action. We are all instruments of God's action. Each of us is an equipment for the realization of the plan of the Creator. It is in this sense that Scripture calls us “Temples” or dwelling places of the most high God. At the beginning he created us, in his own “image and likeness”. This means that every human being, whether tall or short, black or white, educated or illiterate, rich or poor, Christian or Muslim, traditionalist or Buddhist, each of us is a picture of God. Therefore, when you look at your neighbor, what you are looking at is God. To see God, look at your fellow human being and look at yourself. Many of us profess to worship and respect God. To show that we truly know and mean what we say, we must respect others, and if we respect others, we must respect their views and opinions about life, even when they do not agree with us. This is very good for us and for our world.

Towards a Peaceful and harmonious world:

A lot of people have argued that a peaceful and harmonious world is not realizable and possible, since conflict is normal, natural and inevitable. This understanding limits peace to the absence of conflicts in terms of crisis, wars, poverty and disease, among others. This kind of peace is not real and does not last and is achieved through terror, threat, intimidation, the changing of environment, development of conflict resolution skills, negotiation and disarmament, etc. Lasting peace, which is real, true and unchangeable comes first from within, and involves a long process of dealing with the self and with relationships. Conflict may or may not lead to any of the above.

What then is peace and where can peace be found? Real Peace is firstly and most importantly a condition of the heart. In the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, it is much “ more profound than a fragile equilibrium based on mutual hostility” and depends above all “on the resolution of internal conflict”. Real peace is not found in the pursuance and accumulation of wealth, power or education. It is a gift. True peace is like happiness and as such, it is a condition of the human heart which 'persists inspite of ups and downs and occasional intermissions'. Real peace is not found in earthly power. If this were so, many of the powerful men on earth today would be the happiest. But experience has shown that they are in fact among the saddest of people on earth today. True peace, like happiness does not come from having many women around. If this were the case, many of the flamboyant men today would be reckoned among the happiest. But they are not, because in the end they all cry and regret. Genuine peace, being an inner reality, is not found in wealth or material acquisition. If this were so, some of the wealthiest men we have around here would be among the happiest. But we all know the many of them, who in the midst of abundant wealth have continued to weep, search and beg for peace and happiness. Peace is also not achieved through the barrel of the gun. If this were possible, the Middle East region would be the most peaceful habitat on earth. But this also is not. Peace is not achieved from pleasure. This is often a gateway to suffering. In their pursuit for peace, meaning and happiness in life, millions of people around the world have experimented with various philosophies, ideologies and religions of the world. Young people particularly, have been searching for peace and happiness through mind-altering drugs and numerous philosophies of the moment. Many of these have only helped to produce drug addicts and promiscuous youths, accelerating society's downward slide into moral confusion. The Dalai Lama speaks about peace as a state of tranquility founded on the deep sense of security that arises from

mutual understanding, tolerance of others' point of view, and respect for their rights. Peace includes, but is much more than the mere absence of war. Lasting peace does not reside in the number of academic degrees one acquires. No man ever finds peace just by reading all the books in the world. Though studying or reading improves a man, in terms of increased knowledge and wisdom, it is not there. So where is peace, now that at least, we have an idea of what it is not.

According to the Stoics, peace is found from within. The others say that peace is found without. I agree with both positions. Peace resides in the human heart and soul, because the heart and soul of man constitute the center and pivot of divine activity. God relates with men through the soul and the heart and also the mind. Peace also resides in the world outside us. God is in the world, present and active in his creatures. But peace comes only from God, both from within and without. The moment we discover God, at that point we experience peace that is not only unchangeable, it is perfect and incorruptible. Nowhere in the world can true peace be found except from the Creator Himself. One of the greatest tragedies confronting humankind today is that we have all failed to seek for peace from the genuine source. What we get as a result is man made peace that is short, deceptive, problematic and pregnant with trouble. Man made peace is comparable to a time bomb ready to explode. It is selfish, avaricious and exploitative.

The way to peace is love. Here again, we are talking about love that is selfless, sacrificial and unconditional. The love which must be at work in us is part of the whole momentum of life that God Himself has breathed into the world, from that of the most minute organism, through the multitudinous animal and plant forms, up to that of man. Love is one experience, which makes everyone feel completely at home. It provides us with a new vision of reality, enabling us to change in order to find fulfillment, peace and joy in life. Love makes us more tolerant, more accepting and more acceptable. It is more powerful than kingdoms and empires. In love, we accept others and ourselves irrespective of our weaknesses and limitations. Nothing seems impossible for anyone who truly loves, for love is master over all the trials and dangers of this world. "Love", as Wittgenstein puts it, "cannot be said, but can only be shown". Love God, love yourself, and love your neighbor and the things that God has so beautifully created. This is the only way to find and live in peace now and forever.