Eclectic Discourse On Peace

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Abstract:

The concept of peace is as old as humanity itself and one phenomenon today in our world that is well sought after by all and sundry. Peace has been viewed differently by great thinkers such as Einstein, Tolstoy, Kant and others. While some thinkers see peace as the absence of war, others see it as calmness or tranquility in the face of hostilities and war. The existential realities of humans such as fear, dread, death, anguish, absurdity, necessitate the contemplation of peace. Because of the outcry everywhere in the world for peace, this paper seeks to join the foray of persons and institutions whose search for a lasting peace in our world has reached its crescendo. The eclectic posture of this work adopts various postulations from different philosophers who have written on the subject of peace. The approach on the issue of peace here is from a philosophical perspective using the postulations of these peace philosophers to proffer ideas on understanding the nature of peace.

1.Introduction

Humans have always reflected on issues or phenomena that seem puzzling and perplexing such as the mystery of death, birth, the cosmos, pains, sorrow, happiness, pleasure and so forth. These they do in other to understand their environments and proffer explanation to some of these phenomena. But it is on record that the first people that documented the results of their reflections/inquiries were the early Ionians, the Milesian cosmologists (O'Connor, p.1964:3).

Traditionally, philosophizing was done under branches such as ethics, aesthetics, social and political philosophy, epistemology or theory of knowledge, metaphysics or the study of being and reality, logic or the study of the structures and relationships of arguments or science of reason (Ogbinaka, 1995:p.12-13).

Philosophy, however has no univocal definition, but for the purpose of this work, we shall make do with Joseph Omoregbe's definitions viz:

- Philosophy is a rational search for answers to the questions that arise in the mind when we reflect on human experience.

- Philosophy is a rational search for answers to the basic questions about the ultimate meaning of reality as a whole and of human life in particular, (1990:p.3).

Some of the tools which philosophy employs in its task are conceptual analysis, speculation, reflection, logic conjecture and refutation. In discussing about peace for instance, a philosopher will first of all conjecture questions such as "Is peace an absolute reality"? What are the immediate and remote causes of war? Is peace to be found in the face of war? What is the nature or ontology of peace? Is war man made or natural? Does man's instinct for self preservation promotes conflicts and hostility? As we begin to proffer answers, refuting the answers as well, we would come to understand the riddles surrounding the subject matter better, thus, peace, war, hostility, conflicts all falls within the domain of philosophical reflections. But this reflection is not haphazardly done. They follow a careful investigation using philosophical method as outlined in the aforementioned (Hutten, 1962:p.35).

In this paper, emphasis will be placed on understanding the concept of peace and the application of it. We shall also mention in passing at least one figure in the ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary epoch that made a proposal for peace. Thereafter, we shall apply our findings on peace to creating awareness in our minds by way of

prescriptions which if adhere to, has the capacity to bring us out of the conundrum of hostility we often find ourselves as a people.

2.Reflection On Peace

Like the subject matter of philosophy, peace has no univocal definition because of its different shades and conceptions. Peace is a word that is uttered almost frequently as truth, beauty and love. It may be just as elusive as these other virtues. Common synonyms for peace include amity, friendship, concord, tranquility, truce, pacification and neutrality. Likewise, the peacemaker is the pacifier, mediator, intermediary and intercessor, while some of these descriptions are appropriate, they are still quite limited in describing both the nature of peace and peacemaking. We must therefore address those conditions which are favourable to their emergence. Freedom, human rights and justice are among such prerequisites. Also included are pro-active strategies such as conflict resolution, non-violent action, community building and democratization of authority.

Reardon (1988:p.16) sees peace as the absence of violence in all its forms – physical, social, psychological and structural. But this, as a definition, is unduly negative in that it fails to provide any affirmative picture of peace or its ingredients (Copi and Cohen, 1994:p.195).

In its most myopic and limited definition, peace is the mere absence of war. The subsequent suppression of mutual hostile feelings is not taken into account by those who define peace so simply. Their stance is that as long as people are not actively engaged in overt, mutual, violent physical destructive activity, then peace exists. This of course is just another way of defining cold war (Copi and Cohen, 1994:p.194). We also have hot war, cold war, cold peace and hot peace. But for space constraint, we would not proffer definition.

For Einstein (1968:p.371), peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order; in short, of government. Towing the same line as Einstein is Russell (1916). He opine thus:

> Echoes of crisis of pains, children in famine, victims
> tortured by oppressors, helpless old people, and a hated
> burden for their sons and a whole world of loneliness,
> poverty and pain made mockery of what human life should

be. I long to alleviate this end, but I cannot and I too suffer

(p.13).

Woolman (1985:p.8) refers to peace as the absence of war, as negative peace. The idea is Johan Galtung positive peace in contrast to a pattern of cooperation and integration between major human groups (Kane, 1992:p.4). Reardon (1988:p.26), places global justice as the central concept of positive peace and asserts that justice, in the sense of the full enjoyment of the entire range of human rights by all people is what constitutes peace. Furthermore, peace is a state of well being that is characterized by trust, compassion and justice. Peace is also defined as awareness that all humans should have the right to a full and satisfying life.

From the forgoing, proper definition of peace must include positive characteristics over and above the mere absence of war belligerence. It must include those positive factors that foster cooperation among human groups with ostensibly different cultural patterns so that social justice can be done and human potential can freely be developed within democratic political structures. Thus promoting social justice/freedom by democratic means will almost certainly require more selfless concern at all levels, less narrow national self interest. We now turn to some philosopher's of different epoch and their prescriptions for peace.

3.Some Thinkers On Peace

Essentially, philosophical epoch is divided into three namely: the ancient, medieval, modern/contemporary. In the ancient period, Epicurus (341-270 B.C) founded his philosophy on happiness and pleasure. According to him, wanting or desiring things you couldn't have leads to sorrow; therefore one should not desire things that are unattainable. It is closely akin to the stoic philosophy which is about finding inner peace and moderation of enjoyment in life. Though for Epicurus, pleasure was the first good, he did not refer to sensual pleasure nor did he mean short term pleasure, but long term, spiritual and intellectual pleasures (Uduigwomen,2001:p.28).

Pleasures should not be deliberately sought, for too many desires make frustration inevitable. Epicurus encouraged friendship which is conducive to happiness. Since individual happiness is goal living, the wise man will refrain from politics because it disturbs the peace of mind and thereby renders happiness impossible. He praised the life that escape's men's notice. His famous maxim was "live unknown".

In the medieval period, St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430A.D) maintained that man is made in such a way that when his eyes sees an object, the mind can form an image of it provided the object is bathed in light. Similarly, the soul (mind) is capable of seeing eternal objects provided that they are bathed in their own appropriate light. Just as we cannot see things in the world without the light of the sun, the human soul requires illumination if it is to see eternal and necessary truths (Edet, 1999:p.62).

For Augustine, to achieve happiness, men must go beyond the natural to the supernatural. He expressed this view both in religious and philosophical language. In his book, The Confession, as quoted in Rex, (1963:p.31), he made the following confession: "Oh God, Thou has created us for thyself so that our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee". Moral evil, Augustine says, arises when a man or woman turns away from God and makes an evil choice by virtue of their freewill. Thus, God is not the creator of moral evil, conflicts and hostility.

In the modern period, Thomas Hobbes main works on politics were The Elements of Law, De Cive, and Leviathan. Leviathan presents Hobbes political ideas, and especially an extended treatment of the relation between religion and politics, along with an account, from which these ideas are derived of human nature building his ideas on methods, on causes closely akin to that of his friends Harvey and Galileo, (Hobbes, 1962:p.87). Hobbes considered what men are like and more particularly, what they will be like if all the restraints of law and society were removed.

Without the constantly operating curb of social restraints, man who is restless, contentious and a grasping creature would be in a perpetual state of war: hence, it cannot be denied that the natural state of man, before they entered into society, was a mere war, and that not simply, but a man of all men (Hobbes, 1962:p.93).

In Hobbes, this idea of a pre-social state of nature is primarily a fiction of analysis and is not to be taken as a would-be historical concept. However, the Hobbessian state of nature is not a matter of what has in fact occurred but of what would occur if government were to be removed. The purpose of Hobbes concept is, anatomical to display the function of the state, by working out what would happen if there were no state.

A further point is that its basic evil, and the source of all the others, is insecurity. A law of nature is a percept or general rule, founded on reason, by which a man is forbidden, to do that which is destructive of his life or takes away the means of preserving the same, and to omit that by which he thinks it may be best preserve (Hobbes, 1962:p.97). Some laws of nature outlined by Hobbes are the law of self-preservation which men can agree

to give up and confer all their power and strength upon one man on assembly of men to bear their person; and every one to own, and acknowledge himself to be author of, whatsoever he that bears their person shall act, or cause to be acted (Hobbes, 1962:p.104).

Immanuel Kant could make the list of contemporary peace philosophers in our excursus because of his celebrated pamphlet, Perpetual Peace (Gallie 1978:p.8). It is unique among Kant's writings in that it was written for a wide public, and its publication can be regarded as a political act. These are articles opine Kant if honestly adhered to, might well have maintained peace between any powers which agreed to them.

They pledge the signatories to abjure all secret treaties, the acquisition of any state by another through inheritance, a purchase or gift, the maintenance of standing armies, the incurring of a national debt for military purposes, any interference with the internal constitution of another state, and the use of assassins, subversion, and so on which makes future peaceful relations between states virtually impossible (Gallie, 1978:p.10).

Three definitive articles would provide not merely a cessation of hostilities, but a foundation on which to build a peace. They are: the civil constitution of every state should be republican; the law of nations shall be founded on a federation of Free states; the law of world citizenship shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality.

Martin Buber's I and Thou (I und Du), presents a philosophy of personal dialogue in that it describes how personal dialogue can define the nature of reality. Buber's major theme is that human existence may be defined by the way in which we engage in dialogue with each other, the world and with God.

According to Buber, human beings may adopt two attitudes toward the world. I – thou or I – it. I – thou is a relation of subject-to-subject, while I – it is a relation of subject-to-object. In the I – thou relationship, human beings are aware of each other as having a unity of being. In the I – thou relationship, human beings do not perceive each other as consisting of specific, isolated qualities, but engage in a dialogue involving each other's whole being. In the I – it relationship, on the other hand, human beings perceive each other as consisting of specific qualities, and view themselves as part of a world which consists of things (Buber,1971:p.1-3).

I – thou is relationships of mutuality and reciprocity, while I – it is a relationship of separateness and detachment. Little wonder today, the place of dialogue in peace talks or negotiation cannot be over emphasized.

4.Some Lessons On Peace Theorizing

Theorizing on how best to order our private/individual and collective life, is not without gains or merit. Man seems to be at the centre stage in that rational exploration. Existentialism, a 20th century philosophy is centered on the analysis of existence and of the way humans find themselves existing in the world. The notion is that humans exist first and then each individual spends a life time changing their essence or nature. In simpler terms, existentialism is a philosophy concerned with finding self and the meaning of life through freewill, choice and personal responsibility. The belief is that people are searching to find out whom and what they are throughout life as they make choices based on their experiences, beliefs and outlook. O' Connor (1964) aver that "personal choices become unique without the necessity of an objective form of truth" (p.510).

Existentialism takes into consideration the underlying concepts of: human freewill; human nature chosen through life choices; a person is best when struggling against their individual nature; fighting for life; decisions are not without stress and consequences; there are things that are not rational; personal responsibility and discipline is crucial; society is unnatural and its traditional religious secular rules are arbitrary; worldly desire is futile.

Analyzing the findings of peace from the philosophers already discussed, beginning with Epicurus, we discover that excessive quest for pleasure by man is what causes conflicts most time, especially the negative sensual kind of pleasure. Epicurus calls for a simple living that will guarantee peace of mind. To him virtue is necessary for happiness and moderation is important.

The lessons from St. Augustine are also very instructive. Our soul requires illumination if it is to see eternal and necessary truth from the supernatural. Thus, if we have a correct perspective on the meaning of life, we would strive to make the best use of every opportunity. The world seems to be too religious even though our religion has not so much affected our soul. That is why we have all manner of crisis that erodes our peace. True peace comes when our soul is interlocked with the deity of our religious profession, and the mark of true religion is the preaching and working towards peace.

Thomas Hobbes conjectures that a society without government leads to all forms of vices due to men's instinct for self preservation. But this instinct for self preservation can be conferred upon one man or assembly of men. In other words, the experience of man in the state of nature should be different where there is a civil government in place. Here

government should be able to protect lives and properties in the face of violence while the citizens should also cooperate with the government in maintaining peace and order in the community. The Leviathan must be one who has all it takes to lead others in terms of character, charisma and knowledge.

Also, from Immanuel Kant's Perpetual Peace, we can glean acts that will lead to lasting peace. The most important of all his postulation is that no treaty of peace shall be held valid in which there is already reserved matter for a future war. This is very important to finding lasting peace in any crisis ridden part of the world. The agency or organization set out to look for a lasting solution to the crisis must ensure that they matter is resolved without any room for future war.

Lastly, Buber admonishes us to adopt the attitude of "I and thou" relationship which is a subject to subject relationship which has a unity of being. If we see others as ourselves sharing similar characteristics and traits as humans, then we will be tolerant and accommodating in the face of provocation thereby preventing hostility, violence and war.

5.Conclusion And Recommendation

The concept of peace requires a painstaking analysis owing to the various connectives that surrounds it. It is important at this juncture to state that there is no absolute peace situation however hard we try. Conflicts are bound to arise even in the smallest micro unit of the family. What is instructive here is how these issues are managed and eventually resolved, and this can only be achieve if we approach the issue of peace from the stand point of man and his existential challenges. That is what we have attempted to do in this work. We must go back to our cultural setting and learn from the theorizing of our forebears on matters that deals with fostering peace and unity. To this end, we would be making sense of our existence through the instrumentality of good thinking as practiced in every milieu and epoch.

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