

“Uninformed” Religious Orientation Can Lead to Violence in Any Given Community: The Case of African Independence Churches in South Africa

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Abstract : Introductory Statement: Religions are necessary as they offer and teach something to their adherence. People in one religion may not have a complete understanding of the Supreme Being (Deity) in a certain religion other than their own. South Africa, like other countries in the world, consists of various religions, including Christianity. Almost 80% of South African population adheres to the Christian faith, though in different denominations and sects. Each church fulfils spiritual needs that perhaps others cannot fill. African Independent Churches is one of the denominations in the country. These churches arose as a protest to the Western forms and expressions of Christianity. Their major concern was to develop an indigenous expression of Christianity. The relevance of African Independent Churches includes addressing the needs of the people holistically. Controlling diseases was an important aspect of change in different historical periods. Through healing services, leaders of African churches are able to attract many followers. The healing power associated with the founders of many African Initiated Churches leads to people following and respecting them as true leaders within many African communities. Despite its strong points, African Independent Churches, like many others, face a variety of challenges, especially conflicts. Ironically, destructive conflicts resulted in violence.. Such violence demonstrates a lack of informed religious orientation among those concerned. This paper investigates and analyses the causes of conflict and violence in the African Independent Church. The researcher used the Shembe and International Pentecostal Holiness Churches, in South Africa, as a point of departure. As a solution to curb violence, the researcher suggests useful strategies in handling conflicts. Methodology: Comparative and qualitative approaches have been used as methods of collecting data in this research. The intention is to analyse the similarities and differences of violence among members of the Shembe and International Pentecostal Holiness Churches. Equally important, the researcher aims to obtain data through interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, among others. The researcher aims to interview fifteen individuals from both churches. Finding: Leadership squabbles and power struggle appear to be the main contributing factors of violence in many Independent Churches. Ironically, violence resulted in the loss of life and destruction of properties, like in the case of the Shembe and International Pentecostal Holiness Churches. Violence is an indication that congregations and some leaders have not been properly equipped to deal with conflict. Concluding Statement: Conflict is a common part of every human existence in any given community. The concern is when such conflict becomes contagious; it leads to violence. There is a need to understand consciously and objectively towards devising the appropriate measures to handle the conflict. Conflict management calls for emotional maturity, self-control, empathy, patience, tolerance and informed religious orientation.

Keywords : African, church, religion, violence

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