

## **Pauline Paradigm for Peace in Multi-Religious Society: An Interpretation of Romans 12:13-15**

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### **Abstract**

*The consistent eruption of religious insurgency and animosity in a multi-religious society has been a longstanding and prevalent issue in numerous societies worldwide. Recently, it has become evident that religion has been exploited by certain religious followers and stakeholders as a means of societal disintegration, rather than as a tool for fostering peace and social unity. Given that peace is a crucial catalyst for unity, its examination has garnered international attention due to the fact that its absence leads to hostility, discord, and even warfare, to name just a few consequences. The main aim of this research is to delve into the interpretative and contextual implications of Romans 12:13-15 as a remedy for promoting peace in a multi-religious society. This research holds significance as it represents a timely endeavour to tackle the escalating issue of ethno-religious conflicts in contemporary societies. It underlines the interpretative and contextual importance of Romans 12:13-15 as a model for religious conduct in a multi-religious setting. Employing the exegetical method of textual analysis to decipher the text and utilizing the hermeneutical method of research inquiry to contextualize the text for modern religious practices, the research discovered that peace is an essential tenet in Religion, thus necessitating that all religious adherents be fervent in advocating for it within their respective societies. Furthermore, peace fosters concord and social cohesion, as its presence cultivates a conducive environment for social, political, and infrastructural development within the society.*

**Keywords:** *Society, Peace Building, Conflict Management, Sustainable Society, Religion*

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## Introduction

In our increasingly interconnected global society, marked by diverse cultures and advanced technologies, the discourse surrounding peaceful coexistence among individuals of varying ethnicities, religious affiliations, and backgrounds has emerged as a matter of paramount importance. Achieving peace and unity within multi-religious communities is a multifaceted and arduous task. In light of this challenge, Paul's guidance to the church in Romans 12:13-15 provides profound insights for contemplation. It offers a biblical viewpoint on fostering peace and encourages followers to "bless those who persecute you," "not to repay evil with evil," and to "live in harmony with all." However, the true essence of this passage can be fully grasped through a comprehensive exegetical and contextual examination. This study delves into the exegetical and contextual implications of Romans 12:13-15, revealing the underlying theological and cultural influences that inform Paul's message. By delving into the historical and literary context of the passage, as well as its linguistic and thematic elements, we can establish a solid foundation for promoting peace and unity within multi-religious societies.

The primary objective of this study is to delve into the teachings of Paul found in Romans 12:13-15 and explore how they can be applied as a means to promote peace. By establishing a strong biblical and theological basis, this research seeks to highlight the importance of unity, empathy, and collaboration among people with diverse religious beliefs, values, and backgrounds. Through a detailed examination of the scripture, the goal is to contribute to the continuous efforts towards achieving peace, unity, and reconciliation in our increasingly diverse and interconnected global community. Ultimately, this study aims to shed light on the timeless wisdom and guidance that can be derived from the teachings of Paul, offering valuable insights for fostering harmonious relationships and understanding among individuals of all walks of life.

## Interconnection Between Religion and the Notion of Peace.

In today's ever-evolving social and cultural landscape, the dynamics between religion and peace are intricate, interconnected, and multifaceted. Throughout history, religion has often been associated with conflicts and tensions, yet it also serves as a source of beliefs, moral codes, and values that foster solidarity, empathy, and harmonious coexistence among individuals. Noteworthy scholars such as John (2018), David (2018), Atala (2018), and Jonathan (2019) have extensively explored the diverse and nuanced connections between religion and the promotion of peace within societies. Their research delves into the complexities of how different faith traditions can either contribute to or mitigate conflicts, highlighting the importance of understanding and harnessing the positive aspects of religious teachings to cultivate a more peaceful world.

1. Religion imparts teachings of tranquillity, with many faiths around the world highlighting the significance of peace, affection, and non-violent dispositions among their followers. For example, Christianity instructs its believers to "love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12:31) and to "bless those who persecute you" (Romans 12:14). Similarly, Islam greets adherents with the phrase "peace be upon you," known as "As-salamu alaykum," while Hinduism's principle of Ahimsa, meaning "non-harming," promotes compassion and non-violence.

2. Sacred texts play a significant role in numerous religions, serving as a source of spiritual

guidance and wisdom. These texts often contain teachings on practices like meditation, prayer, and contemplation, which are designed to cultivate inner peace, serenity, and mindfulness. By engaging with these practices, individuals can develop a more tranquil demeanor and approach to life, allowing them to navigate challenges with grace and clarity. According to Scott (2000), the profound impact of these spiritual practices can lead to a profound transformation in one's outlook and behaviour, fostering a deeper connection to the divine and a more harmonious existence.

3.

Religion plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of community and belonging among its members. This sense of belonging not only creates a supportive environment within the faith community but also extends to society at large, promoting peace and security. In addition to community-building, religion also provides ethical codes of conduct and moral guidelines that aim to promote peaceful behaviour. One such example is the "Golden Rule," which emphasizes treating others as one would like to be treated. This principle, as proposed by Herman (2019), encourages individuals to act with compassion and empathy towards others.

Furthermore, many religions worldwide advocate for reconciliation and forgiveness as essential components of their teachings. These religions place significant emphasis on the importance of forgiveness, reconciliation, and restorative justice. By practicing these principles, conflicts can be resolved, and peace-building can be advanced, especially in an interfaith setting. The act of forgiveness not only heals relationships but also paves the way for understanding and cooperation among different religious communities, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious and peaceful society.

Promoting interfaith dialogue is a fundamental aspect of religion, as emphasized by Exposition (2008). One of the main goals of religion is to encourage participation in interfaith dialogue and to develop an understanding of the diverse perspectives and values of different religions. This initiative helps to establish connections and foster peace among individuals from varying faith backgrounds, ultimately contributing to social unity and cohesion.

Peace activism is a widely pursued objective among religious individuals and groups, as they actively work towards promoting peaceful conflict resolution and advocating for social justice. Peace activists primarily focus on nurturing inner peace and personal growth. Religions play a role in transforming individuals by assisting them in achieving inner peace and harmony with others through spiritual development and reflection on religious principles and teachings (Scott, 2000). Through these efforts, religious organizations and individuals aim to create a more peaceful and harmonious society based on mutual respect and understanding.

In addition to the points mentioned earlier, John (2008) discusses how religious rituals and symbols play a crucial role in reminding individuals of peace and unity. For instance, symbols like the Christian cross and the Islamic crescent moon serve as powerful representations of these concepts. It is evident that many world religions promote values such as peace, compassion, and understanding through their principles, traditions, and beliefs. Nevertheless, the interpretation and implementation of these core values can be complex and sometimes lead to conflicting perspectives. Overall, the significance of religious symbols and rituals in fostering

tranquillity and solidarity cannot be underestimated, as they serve as constant reminders of the importance of these ideals in our lives.

### **Causes of Religious Conflict in Diverse Societies.**

In a pluralistic society, various factors that contribute to religious conflicts, as outlined by Karlsson (2003), include: misunderstandings and misinterpretations of beliefs. The lack of knowledge and misconceptions surrounding the values and beliefs of other religions can foster fear, suspicion, and ultimately conflict. Another factor, as highlighted by Appleby (2000), is the divergence in religious beliefs and practices. He emphasizes that the distinct variations in religious doctrines, rituals, and traditions can potentially create friction and conflict, particularly when one religious group perceives itself as superior to others. Furthermore, the competition for resources, influence, and followers among different religions, along with the pursuit of funding and political support, can escalate tensions and result in religious conflict. Building upon these factors, Fox (2004) identifies historical grievances and unresolved traumas as key variables that have the potential to exacerbate religious tensions and conflicts within a pluralistic society. Additionally, the exploitation of religious differences for political or economic purposes, as noted by Huntington (1996), may precipitate situations of conflict and violence. Moreover, Klen (2007) argues that cultural and social disparities among various religious groups can incite religious discord, as each religion upholds distinct cultural and social norms that are cherished. When these norms are disregarded, conflicts and even warfare may ensue. Moreover, Marty and Appleby (1991) emphasized that the radical interpretations and enforcement of religious beliefs by extremists and fundamentalists have the potential to incite intolerance and violence among different religious groups in society. Additionally, Gruen (2018) pointed out that territorial disputes stemming from unhealthy competition for sacred spaces, land, or territory by religious factions contribute to religious discord. Another contributing factor to religious disharmony is the zeal for conversion and proselytization of members. As each religion seeks to expand its followers, some view attempts to convert others as a threat to their existence, often resulting in vehement disagreements and tension (Heeffner, 2004; Haynes, 2005).

Furthermore, the lack of meaningful dialogue, ineffective communication of religious values, and absence of empathy all play a role in fostering religious unrest in a multi-faith society. Additionally, conflicting political and religious ideologies, such as religious nationalism or secularism, can exacerbate religious rivalries (Panikkar, 1983). Gruen (2018) strongly asserted that social media is being utilized to disseminate false information and propaganda, further inflaming religious tensions and violence. To address these issues effectively, it is crucial to foster understanding, empathy, and open communication among the diverse religious groups coexisting in society, while also addressing underlying social, economic, and political challenges.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, ethnicity and unemployment also contribute to religious discord. The various cultures and ethnicities have been negatively impacted by religious conflicts and intolerance, leading to them becoming instruments of division and

manipulation. This has resulted in an increase in ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Discussing religious conflicts and internally displaced persons in Nigeria, Gwamna (2010) highlighted that the recurring religious violence in Jos can be attributed to ethnic considerations, specifically the competing claims of ownership of land by the main indigenous ethnic groups such as Birom, Naraguta, and Afizere. The intersection of land disputes with religious differences reinforces ethnic divisions and fuels conflicts, particularly in the North Central region of Nigeria where most of these crises occur.

Provocative rhetoric and incendiary discourse can exacerbate conflicts. Language, as a potent tool of communication, holds the power to either cultivate or dismantle relationships, contingent upon its application. Dul-fatah (2009) posited that a thorough examination of the interaction between Islam and Christianity reveals that rather than leveraging their shared interests to promote mutual understanding, the leadership of both faiths, particularly the intellectual elite, invest a significant portion of their efforts in literature and sermons to instigate animosity and hostility among their adherents. This is exemplified by the assertion of Ayotollah in 1984, as cited by Ali (1999), that the proliferation of Islam will be facilitated through the perpetuation of crises, illustrating a classic case of incitement by religious figures. Consequently, religious violence has been on the rise since 1984..

### **Background of the Book of Romans**

Warren (2007) asserted that the Epistle to the Romans was penned by Paul, who was previously known as Saul of Tarsus, a Jewish rabbi and a Pharisee. Some sources suggest that the letter was written between 50 and 60 C.E. The purpose of the book of Romans was to unify the fragmented Christian community in Rome and to use the Roman church as a base for his mission to venture further west, possibly reaching Spain. Rhomas (2018) posited that the historical context of the Epistle indicates that the events described took place predominantly during the Greco-Roman empire, and the letter was probably composed during Paul's third missionary journey. Thomas (2018) reiterated that the book highlights God's gift of salvation through Jesus, demonstrating God's power in fulfilling his promises to Israel and uniting the diverse Church.

Regarding its structure, Frank (2028) suggested that the Epistle to the Romans can be divided into four main parts. Chapters 1-4 introduce the necessity of human redemption, while chapters 5-8 focus on the formation of a new covenant community through Jesus. Chapters 9-11 describe God's unwavering commitment to his covenant people, and chapters 12-16 discuss how love promotes healing and unity among the followers of Jesus. Additionally, Frank noted that according to another scholarly perspective, Acts 18:1-2 indicates that the church in Rome had been established for some time and comprised both Jewish and non-Jewish believers. The crisis within this community began when the Roman emperor Claudius expelled all Jewish individuals from Rome. Upon their return five years later, including many Jewish followers of Jesus, they found that the church had adopted non-Jewish customs and practices. This clash of cultures led to significant tension, with the Roman church divided over theological debates, particularly concerning the observance of the Sabbath and circumcision among non-Jewish Christians.

### **Peace in Romans 12:13-15 - Exegetical and Contextual Analysis**

Emphasizing the crucial importance of peace, Jerald and Raph (1993) posited that the concept of peace encompasses a multifaceted call for:

1. Concordant relationships: Peace (εἰρήνη, eirēnē) in this context denotes "living in harmony with others, especially within the Christian community of faith" (v. 13).
2. Generosity: Demonstrating love and benevolence towards strangers, travelers, and those in need regardless of their social, cultural, or religious backgrounds (v. 13).
3. Bestowing blessings upon persecutors: Offering blessings, not curses, to adversaries and those who persecute (v. 14).
4. Triumphing over malevolence with benevolence: Frank (2018) suggests a way of life that involves "overcoming evil with positive actions, rather than responding with evil" (v. 15).
5. Emulating God's communicable attributes of love, forgiveness, tolerance, and holiness: A noteworthy aspect of the Christian vocation is the mandate to "embodying God's nature, who bestows blessings and extends kindness to the ungrateful and wicked (Luke 6:35)" (Douglas, 2018).

In the same vein, Douglas (2018) elaborated that Paul penned this epistle to the Roman church, a diverse congregation comprising Jewish and Gentile believers, amidst societal strife and persecution. Paul underscores the significance of peace, love, and unity within the community as a testimony to the world and a reflection of God's character. Robert (2020) asserted that peace goes beyond the mere absence of conflict, instead representing an active pursuit of harmony, love, and reconciliation, deeply rooted in the nature of God and exemplified through the teachings and actions of Christ. Jerald and Raph (1993) pointed out that peace also holds a significant role in a diverse society, as mentioned in Hebrews 12:13-15. Similarly,

In the study conducted by Thomas (2018), it was brought to light that Hebrews 12:14 emphasizes the importance of seeking peace with everyone, aligning with the central theme of peace and harmony. Gerhardus (2010) further elaborated on this by explaining that peace is closely linked with holiness, encouraging believers to consistently work towards peace and mutual growth (v. 14). The value of peace plays a crucial role in promoting unity and understanding among individuals from different religious traditions. Moreover, the passage warns against holding onto bitterness and discord in one's heart, as it can lead to division and strife within the Christian community and, subsequently, among diverse religious groups in society (v. 15). Additionally, Garland (2003) stressed the importance of forgiveness and empathy in the pursuit of peace, allowing individuals from various religious backgrounds to coexist peacefully and build relationships. It is evident from these discussions that the pursuit of peace is not only a personal endeavor but also a key factor in fostering harmony and cooperation among people of different faiths.

Regarding the significance of peace in a diverse society, Barrett (1991) revealed that by actively seeking peace and living harmoniously, believers showcase God's love and grace to a diverse society, serving as a testament to the world (v. 15). Therefore, Frank (2018) posited that within a heterogeneous society, the maintenance of peace is paramount for the following reasons:

1. Encouraging interfaith dialogue and promoting empathy and reverence among diverse religious communities.
2. Peace serves as a catalyst for cultivating a ethos of forgiveness and

reconciliation, demonstrating to the global community the profound impact of love and benevolence (Robert, 2020). 3. An additional pivotal element of peace within society is the creation of a harmonious and all-encompassing atmosphere that allows every individual to thrive (Barrett, 2018). By embracing peace, we can cultivate a society where diverse religious beliefs coexist harmoniously, and individuals collaborate for the collective welfare of society.

### **Promoting Peace in a Multi-Religious Society.**

Emerging from the aforementioned scenario, David (2018) and Jonathan (2019) asserted that it is the duty of every religious follower to foster peace and harmony in society by ensuring the following:

1. Facilitating interfaith dialogue: Engaging in open and respectful discussions to comprehend and value different beliefs and practices.
2. Promoting educational awareness: Acquiring knowledge about various religions and cultures to dispel misconceptions and stereotypes.
3. Encouraging collaboration and cooperation among members: Working together on common social and humanitarian endeavors for the betterment of all.
4. Additionally, Scott (2018) emphasized that religious adherents should "respect differences in opinions, beliefs, and practices, embrace unity in diversity, and acknowledge the rights of other faiths."
5. Furthermore, Exposon (2008) articulated that the essence of religion calls for the cultivation of inclusivity of values from other religions, advocating for equal opportunities and participation regardless of religious affiliation. He stressed that adherents are required to promote shared cultural and religious values, emphasizing common ethical and moral principles such as compassion, justice, and kindness.

Moreover, Jonathan (2019) deemed it the responsibility of adherents to promote religious literacy, teach the peaceful tenets of their own religion, support peace initiatives, and engage in community service and projects alongside members of other faiths. Atala (2018) also highlighted that peace can be promoted through collective acts such as praying and meditating together, sharing spiritual practices like almsgiving, and praying for peace and unity. Celebrating the diversity of virtuous qualities, organizing interfaith events and festivals to enhance cross-cultural understanding, and encouraging critical thinking to combat extremism and misconceptions were emphasized by Scott and John (2010) as ways for religious followers to foster peaceful relationships. Additionally, promoting women's empowerment and integrating women's roles in peace promotion and interfaith understanding were identified as crucial peace-building mechanisms. Lastly, David (2018) suggested that encouraging youth involvement in interfaith activities and peace-building initiatives is vital for promoting peace in a multi-religious society. From an educational standpoint, the promotion of peace can be achieved by integrating peace education into both religious and secular institutions.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study emphasizes the critical importance of maintaining peace within a diverse religious community as a means of fostering harmony among different faiths and societal groups.

This responsibility falls on the shoulders of every individual, regardless of their religious beliefs or societal status. It is clear that the absence of peace can act as a barrier to significant progress and development. Furthermore, the moral values and spiritual guidance provided by various religions should be seen as valuable tools for promoting peace and unity within the community. The text highlights the importance of Christians embodying peace and refraining from contributing to societal discord. It proposes that religious leaders delve into the spiritual and moral teachings of diverse world religions to advocate for peace, social justice, reconciliation, and harmony in society. It is essential for religious stakeholders to act as mediators during conflicts, urging their followers to engage in dialogue, embrace non-violent approaches, and seek reconciliation. Religious doctrines should emphasize a shared commitment to fostering positive relationships and guiding adherents in cultivating a mindset centred on peace-building.

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