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IS MEDIATION AN OPTION IN RELATION TO DISPUTE RESOLUTION IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES?

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Master of Arts (MA) in Dispute Resolution

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ACKOWLEDGEMENT

ABSTRACT

This dissertation provides a wide overview of Mediation as an Alternative to Dispute Resolution, conflicts, communities, religion and the relationship between mediation and religion. Although mediation for religions may involve many religious communities throughout the globe, the object for this research reflects primarily the vision of Christian communities throughout what the scriptures say about mediation, regarding its importance for believers, and practitioners of faith who many times face conflicts within their community and also for those who are not part of the community. The methodology and methods were structured for this research in the ontology, regarding the relativism since the research obtained subjective answers and literature reviews. The research paradigm defined the epistemology as emic, with inductive methodology and qualitative analysis to data collection.

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INTRODUCTION

This academic study aims to define Mediation – as an Alternative to Dispute Resolution (ADR), a very current subject that is evolving in many different areas and contexts, including Religion and Religious/Christian Communities, which will also be defined in this present work. To explore the relationship between Mediation and Religion and the appliance of this ADR within these communities in situations where faith is a strong component not only for the parties, but also through the process, the goals, and the conflicts.

Since the beginning of the times, it is possible to find reports of conflicts. For creational believers, it is easy to find in the Bible or in the Qur'an several examples of disputes, many of these conflicts ended up in separation, deaths, and war. In History also can be found reports of issues between nations, countries, or within the same population, but at the same time conflicts evolved with humans, so did the ways of solving them, such as litigation, negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, and mediation.

The specific research question is "How can mediation help with conflicts that arise within Religious/Christians communities? Has Mediation acceptance between members and does it show effectiveness?". The overall aim and objective of the research are to understand conflicts between religious communities and how mediation could be a tool to solve their disputes. The objectives of this research are:

    1. To identify the most common conflicts that arise in religious communities.

    2. To describe the importance of having a good relationship with the fraternity of Christian communities.

    3. To identify the relationship between mediation and Christianity.

    4. Understand mediation and its appliance as a tool to solve disputes between the fraternity of the church.

To suggest mediation to solve any conflict between members of a fellowship can help them to solve disputes and remain in the community instead of wanting to leave their

fraternity, from a place they can call home, so they can enjoy most of the relationship between members and experiences from sharing the same beliefs.

The achieve the results and fulfil the aim and objectives of this research, it was used an online survey with 18 questions to collect qualitative and quantitative data, in addition with the literature review of articles that address the related topic will be transcribed in chapter 1, which will briefly explain the concepts of conflicts, mediation, community, religion and the practice of mediation to solve conflicts within religious/Christians communities, proving the importance of Mediation as an ADR to help the community and facilitate the communication among members to find a solution for their issues.

Although the dissertation is an academic work of a scientific nature, willing to better understand the social context of those who call themselves religious/Christian, some biblical passages will be mentioned, for the bible is a book of laws, principles and concepts that guide Christians through a life connected with God, who govern their lifestyle.

Burton (1990) teaches that any multidisciplinary project, regardless of subject matter, is difficult to understand because each field has its own dialect. Every discipline has its practitioners, and most of them are less introspective than people would like them to be. In accordance with that, Singh (2018) states that language is generally significant in talking about and settling questions, and this is much more evident when religious convictions are involved.

When thinking about religious conflicts it is easy to associate with conflicts that happened between different religions instead of the conflicts within small communities. As examples of religious conflicts, there is the Thirty Years' War (1618 to 1648) where Catholics and Protestants wanted to rule over Europe and made up The Holy Roman Empire (Editors, 2009), and even the hostilities that happen in the Middle East and North Africa, which consist in various forms of religious intimidation or abuse and religious-related armed conflicts (Kish, 2016).

Although the relevance of the religious conflicts mentioned above has, this subject will not be included in this research because the aim is to discover conflicts inside the religious system as one and not about the distinctions religious. The focus is on

discovering whether and how mediation is applicable to members of the same religion to help and give an alternative to solve the disputes, giving the opportunity to satisfy humans' need for closure, contribute to peaceful environment, and to restore relationships, as Bush and Pope (2002) declare, parties frequently express a desire for "closure," or the ability to put their painful fight behind them and go on with their lives.

The research method will be inductive, regarding the ontology, relativism, since it considers participants' opinions of a survey. It also utilises bibliographic, being guided by specialized authors, articles, laws, as well as publications related to the theme of this dissertation.

It is a work of wide relevance, in view of the positioning of the great religions of the world, especially those of the religious people and scholars in the field of conflict resolution. It is a matter that affects every human being because conflict is inherent to humanity.

The present work will be divided into five chapters, where the first will address the concepts, as above mentioned, based on literature review. The second chapter is related to the research methodology and methods utilized for this academic work. The third chapter deals with the Presentation of the Data, the Fourth Chapter will examine the findings of this study, along with the themes that emerged. The Fifty Chapter will be the discussion chapter, regarding all the previous chapters, Describe the study's shortcomings and make recommendations for further research.

1. CONFLICTS, MEDIATION AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES – THE PRACTICE OF MEDIATION TO SOLVE CONFLICTS WITHIN RELIGIOUS/CHRISTIANS COMMUNITIES

1.1 UNDERSTANDING CONFLICTS AND MEDIATION

Before entering conflicts within religious communities and the appliance of Mediation as an Alternative to Dispute Resolution (ADR), it is important to understand the concepts of conflict, mediation, community, religion, and Christianity.

One thing humankind has in common is that regardless of nationality, gender, age, beliefs, or social group, conflict is always present and known as part of human history since the world exists. Examples of that are visible in History books, newspapers, the Bible, where many disputes are narrated, personal journals, movies, books, theatre, and so on.

Conflicts can arise from a lack of communication, different opinion, and positions, resulting in a moral clash, when culture, needs, and values aren't met. Regarding religious communities, focusing the Christians, despite their common beliefs and lifestyle, conflict is also present, since each person is unique and has different ways of learning, getting involved, processing feelings, and showing emotions.

In Genesis 11.1-9 (NIV) narrates the Babel Tower story, where the livings of that age were worried that God would make it rain and destroy the Earth again, as He had done before with the flood and Noah's ark, so they decided to build a high tower, to reach heavens, and God seeing that, decided to confuse their language, so they could not understand one another. "Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. […] Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

Burton (1990) defines culture as a simple context in which the human's life takes place, like a scrip or a role. It is known that culture defines and influences one's identity, it comes from where one was born, raised, and from the groups one belongs such as family, religion, nation, job, which build values and behaviours that are not only normal

but also expected within those who share and carry the same attributes and customs. It is indeed, as Jeong (2010) affirms that cultural norms represent a source of reference for communication and appropriate conduct patterns.

Nonetheless, because culture shapes character and becomes relevant, it is crucial to study and comprehend the cultural characteristics of people engaged in a disagreement. Furthermore, if culture is endangered or misconstrued, it may become the subject of stereotyping, hostile projection, and dispute.

Jeong (2010) declares that outsiders should not make assumptions generalising people, values, and attitudes, for collective feelings are reflected in a wide range of perspectives on the outer world. Nevertheless, mistakes happens when generalised assumptions are made, for example, it is known that Brazil is a Country of joy, samba, parties, and football but it is true that many Brazilians do not like or know how to dance or play soccer, or when assuming that in Ireland, Irish people only drink Guinness and eats potatoes.

According to Furlong (2005), conflicts are essentially attributed to the intrinsic nature of the other party, reflecting their culture, traditions, values, or unique characteristics instead of acting on a purpose.

Burton (1990) argues that it is essential to not ignore culture in conflict resolution but to understand how cultural differences impact disputes, and how they may be utilized to improve conflict resolution processes. Thus, religion is also important since individuals' beliefs may influence in which direction the conflict will lead them and whether the methods to resolve conflicts are suitable or not during a disagreement (Jones, Georgeakopoulos, 2009).

The good news about conflicts, which have always been a feature of human life, is that humans are always developing, establishing, and improving norms, methods, and techniques for resolving them and when it comes to a judicial conflict, a party has a variety of choices apart from going directly to litigation. One option may be Mediation – an Alternative to Dispute Resolution (ADR).

Although mediation has grown in popularity over the last five decades, it was only in the early twenty-first century that it was institutionalized (Moore, 2014).

There are several definitions of Mediation. Its main concept is within the Mediation Act 2017, and it determine mediation as a confidential and voluntary process, with the assistance of a mediator, aiming to facilitate a dispute where the parties are willing to solve the conflict by reaching an agreement that will mutually benefit both parties.

The mediator act as an impartial facilitator to resolution, the parties are always in the control of the outcome of the mediation process. The role of the mediator chose by the parties is to keep the process moving, identify and understand the keys issues, ask questions that will help the disputants to explain their points of view, and share their feelings in a safe and without judgment environment. Furthermore, the most crucial role of a mediator is to facilitate communication and thereby alleviate tension to establish an environment suitable to bargaining. By aiding with communication, third parties will create goodwill and trust in establishing fair agreements (Jeong, 2010).

Thus, mediation permits parties to keep dignity and respect and it prompts better relationships among the parties. In the long term it is a mutually beneficial arrangement for all since it constructs the abilities of parties so they will want to successfully deal with any future conflicts.

Frequently, mediators meet in private with the disputants to better explore and identify what could be hidden or even to protect each party when they are just fighting or interrupting one another in the main session.

According to Moffitt and Bordone (2005), the private session, called caucus session gives the mediator opportunity to obtain additional information from each party, which will be mentioned in the main session with the permission from each party, to respect the confidentiality of the process. The law determine how mediators should share the information reunited with the other disputant. Usually, the caucus session happens in the beginning, so each side can explain their point of view without interference or finger pointing.

Furthermore, to meet the parties individually in a premediation will contribute for them to feel safe and comfortable, giving the mediator a chance to better explore the parties' inner perspectives and needs.

For the matter of religious disputes, religious parties can have the safe place they need to express their personal perspectives about faith and conflict by effectively using caucus (Singh, 2018).

Usually, a mediation session starts with the mediator greeting the parties, acknowledging and encouraging them for their attendance, followed by the opening, where mediators will briefly explain what process mediation is, the stoned principles mediation follows, setting the ground rules, exploring the issues, creation of options and its analysis on practice, an agreement it is not necessarily mandatory and the closure (Orellana and Maassarani, 2021).

In order to assist parties in reaching a mutually satisfying solution to a disagreement, a mediator typically takes on a variety of roles such as organizing the disputants and being informative, reviewing negotiating techniques, interpreting, or translating information, aiding in comprehending, and functioning as supervisor, instructor, coach, coordinator, and conductor are just a few of the many responsibilities available (Moffitt, Bordone, 2005).

According to Singh (2018), the major world religion encourages spirituality-based methods of mediation as dispute resolution in its essence. As a result, introducing religion into mediation or other sorts of dispute resolution, it is rarely considered due to the separation of church and state. When people engage into conflict, they rely on their culture, which may include religion.

Parties' identities may also be shaped through mediators. Some mediators act with community groups that emphasize different identities, such as Orthodox Jewish mediation, Islamic mediation, and so on (Moffitt and Bordone, 2005).

1.2 UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

1.2.1 Understanding Community

Being part of a community that defends, believes in, and shares the same principles, faith, and understandings, not only bring people together, but it helps these people, with the common interests, to walk and live according to their lifestyle, giving support and guidance in their difficult times. It is also part of human nature to be connected with others, especially with those who shares the same goals. Maslow defined this concept as a need of affiliation.

According to Maslow's Pyramid, there are 5 levels of needs, since the most basic level to the more complex, and it is only possible to move to a next level once the previous needs was met. The 5 levels are: physiological, security, *affiliation*, recognition, and self-realization (The school of life).

The first level is the physiological needs, regarding to the vital, biological and survival needs, such as eat, drink, sleep, breathe, and vestments. The second level is the security needs, once the first level is fulfilled, humans seek for physical safety and defence against attack, that includes not only physically, but for any area of one's life. (). Parting to the third level of Maslow's Pyramid, it is found the need of affiliation, it reflects the need of love and to belong. In this level, individuals seek to have deep relationships and to build a social environment to be part of, establishing friendship, or a family by getting married, becoming a member of a community or social group, and so on. The fourth level is the recognition, where individuals are seeking for respect, freedom, to feel confident and a high self-steam. The fifty and last level is the self-realization, in this level, one will achieve the most potential in life, finding the purpose of their existence, reaching the development for the spiritual and moral needs (Wellwo, 2018).

For Christians, all the needs from Maslow's pyramid have biblical foundation, specially the third one – need of affiliation. From a few verses found in the bible regarding the third level of needs, one is essential to be mentioned, to understand what moves that

community and how they tend to live. In Psalm 133 of David (NIV), King of Israel[1], he says "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!". David was describing the intensity and importance of being united, in fellowship.

A person's dedication to Christ and his followers is manifested when they join a church. Fellowship is a method to fly the Christian flag and wear the t-shirt, by declaring to be a member of that local group of believers before God and others. With time, the community becomes a family.

Understanding the beliefs and religious texts of a faith-based community is one of the major advantages of belonging to one. According to Singh (2018), using same text as a resource of guidance and direction throughout mediation establishes credibility that encourages both parties. Furthermore, share religious beliefs and to be part of a community influences in how people see themselves and what life means (Moffitt, Bordone, 2005). Likewise, at the point when individual values are up for conversation, what somebody says can take on incredible importance and assist with uniting individuals — or divide them. The more contact the gatherings have, the more centred they can become around their disparities (Singh, 2018).

Despite of sharing the same interests, beliefs, and common goals, it is possible to notice conflicts arising within any community. Furthermore, Moffitt and Bordone (2005) affirm that anthropologists and sociologists are aware about the way that differences are settle and how it is influenced by contextual shared group identification features such as ethnic culture, dialect, and religious beliefs.

According to Mubashir and Vimalarajah (2016) the combination of these above-mentioned elements such as religion, faith, culture, values, and practices may act as an inspirational source for the numerous resources that initiated mediators rely on.

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[1] King David did not come from a royal family. He began his life as a poor shepherd, ascended to become the founder of a dynasty, and became a major figure in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Faced the giant Goliath on combat. (Isbouts, National Geographic, 2018).

1.2.2 Understanding Religion/Christianity and its relationship with Mediation

According to Singh (2018), for many followers of faith, religion is more than just a set of beliefs or practices; it is also a source of personal identity. Individuals are asked and justifies their actions, behaviours, according to their religion. For example, usually Muslins doesn't eat pork at all and only eat meat or chicken if the animal was killed in a sacred way to Allah, while Christians – evangelical, doesn't drink alcohol or how priests and nuns doesn't get married.

Therefore, religion is commonly thought to play a role in cultural decision-making, which justify religious' actions or lack of it, for it shapes people's essential beliefs, defines their morality, and motivates their behaviour in terms of how they view themselves, what they value, and how they treat others (Singh, 2018).

Nonetheless, a short passage on the Bible, in James 1.22 (NIV) says "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." The word refers to the Bible – word of God, and it says that followers must do as the word says. Furthermore, in the Gospel of Luke 9.23 (NIV) Jesus said to the crowd "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

According to Thomas (2005), Religion is as much an important component of human's life as any other of society or culture and it tend to legitimize many areas of life, and it is frequently important to address a conflict's religious dimensions to advance into a just and pacific resolution compatible with each side's religious principles (Malraux 2003).

Religion, as previously stated, can influence how disputants think and behave, but in terms of mediation, religion provides principles, dogmas, virtues, and narratives that inspire those involved in a dispute to play an active role, to truly listen for a better understanding, and to also express themselves genuinely and vulnerably, recognizing common ground while accepting their differences (Orellana and Maassarani, 2021).

Religious-oriented approaches for conflict resolution encourage religious dialogue and interaction between parties. Faith and shared beliefs are strong components that build a bridge between disputants in a conflict.

Thus, Hubbard (2015) affirms that Christianity has a long tradition of encouraging its followers to resolve disputes without resorting to litigation, and the Bible is the central text of the Christian faith, in which brings in both the Old and New Testaments various scriptures that advocate or model mediation. Furthermore, in the bible it is possible to find some principles of Mediation, such as confidentiality in Matthew 18:15 (NLT) "If another believer sins against you, go privately, and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back."

Although in this verse says "go privately and point out the offense" (here there is no need yet of a third part) two things happens, the hurt person has the opportunity to let the other part know that he or she said or made something that in the other's point of view somehow offended him or her, and the 'offender' can self-justify and if the case, apologise. This approach must be with kindness and humble. If to confront, yet repair someone, as Galatians 6:1 says, it must be with the compassion of healing a wounded bone. Avoiding public condemnation and generating rumours about that person (Corky, 2020).

In case of no solution, they can invite someone else, as the verse continues in the 16, saying "But if he won't listen, take one or two more with you, so that by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established. In his book, Sande (2004) affirms that these invited people to the discussion, called mediators, can make some questions, and advise the parties, but they can never force the disputants to accept a solution.

Singh (2018) testifies "In church conflicts, the central dispute often revolves around the clash of a shared worldview." In religion, individuals figure out how to shape examples of conduct. With such designs come assumptions for what is correct and what is off base, which will in general raise contrasts above these shared characteristics.

Other religions, such as Judaism and Islam, also encourage parties to use Mediation as a tool to dispute resolution, for peace is a major motif in Judaism, and it pervades all levels of the religion. For Muslims, Allah is watching everything, and they are responsible for maintain peace and resolution within their community.

Hubbard (2015) informs that mediation is heavily encouraged by Judaism and Islam as a means of resolving conflicts. Respectively Jewish law and rabbinical literature honour

those who can resolve their differences without resorting to litigation, but instead, when dealing with issues, Judaism consults the Bible and the Torah for instructions. As a result, norms that promote peaceful dialogue and collaboration emerge. However, Jews have a strong sense that any judgment enforced by a third party would merely prolong the disagreement, and that the parties may resolve the matter via mediation, because the agreement achieved via mediation is just and right.

Harmony involves a central position in Islam, and it regards three fundamental relationships, first with God, second with oneself and finally with one another. In the Islamic regulating system, peace should illuminate the disposition and the way of behaving regarding each Muslim, as they follow the Prophet Muhammad and one of his says is that "the genuine Muslim is the one with whom others feel in harmony and don't fear his/her tongue and hand" (Aroua, 2017).

The Qur'an, the Sunna, the Ijma, and the Qiyas are Muslims' sources, and all promote mediation as an alternative to litigation in the Islamic tradition, promoting peaceful dispute resolution both inside and between Islamic and non-Islamic groups. Several passages in the Qur'an deal with mediation ideas, aiming to restore harmony and unity, as well as the dignity and respect of people and communities (Hubbard, 2015).

Nonetheless, it is important to look to the history and context of what the world religions shows about how different faith traditions deal with internal conflicts as well as issues with other religious traditions that hold diverse or even contradictory views (Moffitt and Bordone, 2005).

Religion is generally perceived as a source of conflict in the contemporary world, however, commonality in religious, beliefs may be used to bring people together via mediation. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, as previously stated, these religions believe that in order to live in peace with one another, the problems must be addressed between the parties if at all possible. Leading the dispute to the legal system should be the absolute last alternative if an agreement cannot be reached (Hubbard, 2015).

Besides, for Christian's believers, Sande (2004) declares that leaning on God is the primary step settling disputes, since it will help to see things clearly and deal with conflict more sensibly when recalling His kindness and rely on His strength. It is

possible to significantly find better answers to difficulties this way. Simultaneously, it may demonstrate to people that there is a God who delights in assisting believers in doing things that could never be accomplished by oneself.

1.2.3 Appliance of Mediation to Solve conflicts within Religious/Christian Communities

Moffitt and Bordone (2005) states that according to the broad desire to improve how conflicts are handled, it is no surprise that researchers from a variety of fields have looked at the matter of dispute resolution. These findings were the outcome of various studies and analyses of approximately all curriculum in almost any field on a university campus providing multidisciplinary viewpoints with crucial insights to provide to individuals who care about conflict resolution.

Moreover, because conflict is usually complicated, understanding multiple mediation models can be beneficial when supporting parties in a dispute. Mediators must extract essential themes from parties in order to comprehend conflict, even if the dispute roots lead to a process that might be influenced by religion or spirituality (Jones and Georgakopoulos, 2009).

According to Mubashir and Vimalarajah (2016) mediation has been used to resolve disagreements from earlier civilizations by wise men, church/religious leaders, and it is still used in traditional civilizations. Modern mediation is a professionalized extension of the ancient technique of mediation, and it is commonly utilized in conflict situations. While traditional and faith-based peacebuilders serve in a variety of roles, the vast majority are still regarded as legal mediators.

According to Orellana and Maassarani (2021) religion may serve as a reference of common identity in a mediation, bringing parties together over dispute lines to participate in the process, while religious components, like as candles, blessings,

rituals, and texts, might inspire the parties to have an attitude of acceptance and sincerity of goal throughout a mediation session.

As previous stated, several religious writings explicitly state which guidelines are welcomed and valued during the mediation meeting. For religious, the sacred texts will serve also as a ground rule for the mediation session (Jones and Georgakopoulos, 2009), assuring the parties and the mediator a safe environment, especially if the mediation session is following something greater that rules the disputant's lifestyle.

Since at mediation discussions, parties are free to communicate their worries and sentiments openly or indirectly (Jeong, 2010), some individuals have discovered that conflict may be used to address common issues in a way that glorifies God and benefits all parties involved (Sande, 2004).

However, Singh (2018) states that even though for several religious practitioners, spiritually dispute resolution makes sense, it may not be a suitable decision for others, since it goes against the religious precepts of peace and peacemaking. Thus, even acknowledging that a disagreement exists may imply that the religious community has failed to preserve order and/or support others in keeping order. This internal discrepancy may jeopardize the group's essential cultural identity, making the disagreement harder to resolve.

On the other hand, Moffitt and Bordone (2005) declare that is by looking for similar interests and innovative possibilities, as well as deferring obligations, it's more probable that no potential benefit will be missed. Offering and inquiring about fairness principles and standards protects the mediators while also ensuring that the conclusion is informed by the community's knowledge acquired with similar challenges in the past.

Jeong (2010) affirms on that matter that the structure of interaction changes as communication models changes, allowing various approaches to issues and techniques of assessing possibilities to be explored. Thus, the unbiased, qualified, experienced, and skilled third party will know the appropriate method to take over time and based on what the parties reveal throughout the mediation.

Mubashir and Vimalarajah (2016) says that insider mediators, who are seen as a subgroup within a larger group of insider peacebuilders are considered to have a very

special role by acting directly and informally as mediators between the parties involved in the conflict. They are capable of fulfilling this position because of their in-depth understanding of the conflict's background, deep relationships with stakeholders, long-term dedication, willingness to take risks, and innate desire to end violence and promote peaceful coexistence.

As Moffit and Bordone (2005) states, mediation would not be as successful if it weren't for those who bring contributions from several fields: "We who focus on dispute resolution would not be as good at what we do, were it not for the contributions of different disciplines."

1.3 THE THEORY APPLIED IN PRACTICE

Understanding other people's experiences entails more than just knowing the facts or viewing the present situation through their eyes. It is essential to learn about the underlying mechanisms that make up their views on the world, the struggle, and their involvement in the larger themes of their life (Moffit and Bordone, 2005).

Furthermore, as Padilla argues, Christian mediators face a difficult position that demands a unique approach, which involves knowing biblical concepts and the formality of mediation. In addition to demonstrating commitment, they should show a genuine disposition and willingness to compromise, regarding to help the parties to a dispute in reaching an agreement.

In the following paragraphs, some practical examples will explain how mediation has already been used to resolve conflicts in religious communities.

Singh (2018) tells, in his article, some real experiences he had mediating between religious communities. Once two groups agreed to receive Singh as a mediator, each group had the same speech that they were right and the opposing group was wrong, according to their religious orientations. "*I recently mediated a dispute between two congregations in a large religious community. […] All attempts at conversation and resolution had failed. I started the mediation in a joint session with more than a dozen representatives from each side.*"

Despite of the time and the many disputants in the room, Singh learned that, in the presence of many parties, each participant wanted to be heard but not a single one wanted to listen. "*I spent days in caucus with the representatives from each congregation, listening to their stories, which (as so often happens) were intertwined with facts and emotional innuendo.*"

During all those caucus meetings, Singh saw what was at stake: each group was rejecting the other's religious worldview, and each was feeling tremendous disdain and distrust because of the other's previous words and behaviour. The fact that numerous members of both groups had been injured added to the complexity of the situation. *"In order for this mediation to succeed, I needed to convince everyone involved, not just the majority of the representatives, to listen to the other side."*

Singh also mentioned that in another case, the disputants of the same side were disputing among themselves because the dispute went against their core convictions. They were divided, part of them were worried about defaming the religious community in case the dispute went to court, others wanted to solve the dispute amicable, as their religion teaches, to keep the fellowship alive.

One of Singh's lessons from his experiences as a mediator in religious communities was that regardless of the case or religion, to effectively help the parties, he needed to know about their stories and their beliefs.

Thus, Hubbard (2015) states that by addressing to people's basic principles and values, mediators can utilize religion as another tool to assist members achieve an agreement. This instrument, however, should be utilized with prudence since it has the potential to create an unneeded point of conflict rather than a source of agreement. When used appropriately, such beliefs may be an effective tool for mediators in assisting parties in achieving an agreement.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

2.1 Introduction

According to Neville (2007) despite of research be a scientific, rigorous, and ethical process of inquiry and study that can assist solve real issues and expand knowledge, research is one of the most exciting aspects of any degree program because it allows students to have some independence over the chosen topic, for It allows the evaluation, to understand, investigate and even uncover new facets of the subject. Research has its importance not only to the scientific field but also to the non-scientific.

Elaborating a relevant topic to a specific area and its appliance is the beginning for any research. In addition to that, the research brings a question in which is the aim of this research to answer.

The present academic work brings the following research question, despite of being an area that is still not much explored, is believed to be of great relevance to the comprehensive area between many areas of conflict resolution: Is Mediation an option in relation to Dispute Resolution in Christian communities?

Conflicts within religious people are narrated since the book of Genesis (the beginning, the first book of Bible) until the very last one, Revelation. It is also common to see conflicts within the religious gatherings, in the many different churches. It can arise from different aspects, such as misunderstandings, gossip, judgment, but mostly involves relationships as marital, friendships, memberships and so on. Once these conflicts are not solved, members tend to avoid their religious environment, so they don't have to face or be around people who hurt them. In Christians communities, each church has segregations, departments, and ministries, where volunteer members provide services for the development of the Services and for the entire community. When members have conflicts, they don't want to be involved with the church or the people anymore. Conflicts hinder the development and growth of the church as a whole. The united-body view of the church becomes distorted, for the church supposed to help people in their

difficult times through faith, not only by faith, but also with by going after individuals in a dispute, have a conversation, show the love, respect, and the importance that person has and even recommend a mediation session, explaining that is a voluntary and confidential process, aiming to solve the problem if the parties agree to do so.

It is possible to find in the bible some pioneers ideas of mediation, in Exodus 18.13-26 (NIV), where Moses is advised by his father-in-law, Jethro, to delegate and establish responsible tribal leaders to mediate between the people who were leaving on the Desert instead of solving by himself. *"When they have a disagreement, they come to me, and I am the one who settles the cases between those who are in conflict. I keep the people informed of God's decrees and convey his instructions to them."*

Despite of the subject seems to be something new, not really well explored, with challenges to be accepted or not, by Mediation within religious community and it tends to be more relative, since it parts from what is important for a specific community.

The application of the inductive approach to find and identify the most common conflict in disputes within religious/Christian communities will be one phase of this research.

The chosen methodology approach for this research was the Inductive approach, for it starts by observing and looking forward to finding the conflicts and acceptable resolution patterns within these communities. The findings, though are related to the participants contexts.

According to Neuman (2014) a few assumptions and broad orienting notions are used to start inductive approach. As evidence are collected and evaluated, theory emerges from the ground up. Theory arises gradually in each field, idea by concept, proposition by proposition. Relationships emerge quickly, and knowledge from several research into a more abstract idea are created.

While the technique for collecting data to address the research question is critical, every research project, including a master's dissertation, must be properly planned to accomplish it. Saunders (2019) created a diagram with an onion structure (Figure 1), earning the label of "research onion". In the middle of this onion states Data collection and Data analysis, and around that, there are layers that have to be peeled one by one from the outside of the onion to the centre.

The above-mentioned layers are research phases that must be specified prior to data collection in order to provide the task with greater consistency via the establishment of an appropriate methodology.
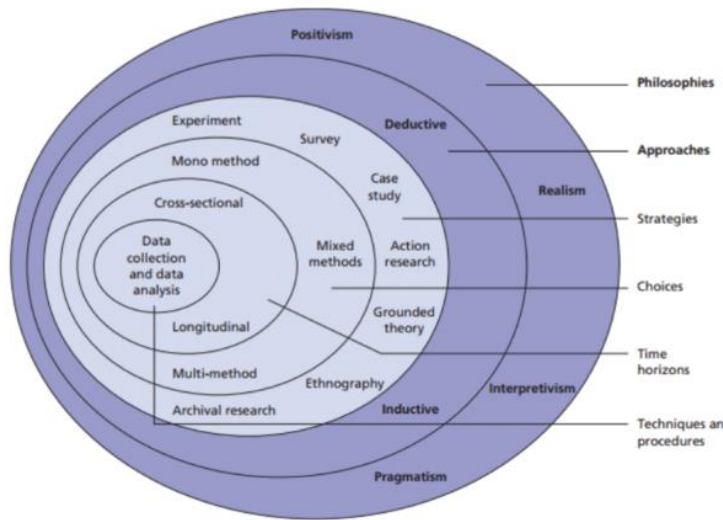

Figure 1. The research onion (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009)

2.2 Philosophies and Approach

The research philosophy, according to Saunders (2019), will be characterized by a set of beliefs and assumptions, which may be classified as epistemological, ontological, or axiological. Ontological and epistemological form the basis of research methodology.

The ontology defines the epistemology. While ontology is concerned with reality, epistemology is concerned with the researcher's connection with the research and comprehending both paradigms can help the researcher conduct a solid and relevant research.

The ontology that is the most suitable for this research is the relativism. According to Neuman (2014) the question of what exists, or the underlying essence of existence, is addressed by ontology. When doing research, assumptions are formed about what will

be investigated and where it will be studied in the world. The realist and relativist are the two basic perspectives in ontology. The reality of the world, according to a realism, exists regardless of humans and their perceptions of it. According to Neuman (2014) humans never properly encounter a world corresponding to the nominalist, but they encounter with what the actual world shows, which are always filtered via a lens or a system of interpretations, as well as interior subjectivity. What individuals perceive and how they experience reality are influenced by personal opinions. Interpretivists use a relativist ontology whereby a single reality can have various interpretations rather than a single truth that can be discovered by a measuring method (Pham, 2018).

As this research involves discovering and understanding the behaviour of religious, especially those of the Christian category, subjectivity, the cultural context, the form of language, are shown to be intrinsic characteristics, as they reflect how they act, think and live. In this way, Christian communities that follow these standards have a system and environment driven by a single faith and doctrines established by the Bible, and because of that treating dispute resolution within Christians, for example, mediation and mediators would have a different approach or views.

This research has epistemological assumptions, regarding the relationship between the researcher and the research, the interpretivist research was adopted, which is concerned to the subjectivity of the knowledge. The chosen approach is the Emic which relies on the interaction of people to classify truth.

According to the philosophy chosen, the inductive approach would be the best option for developing a theory, identifying a pattern of the main causes of conflicts between members of religious communities, with a focus on Christians, demonstrating that conflicts are a natural occurrence that can occur anywhere, regardless of common beliefs or religiosity, and demonstrating the importance of mediation.

2.3 Research Design and Methods

The data collection obtained by a survey, designed by the researcher on the SurveyMonkey website which was sent via WhatsApp groups, to the master's degree in

Dispute Resolution students at Independent Colleges of Dublin, Religious communities in different churches, such as Snowball Church Ireland, International Grace of God South Africa, Portugal and Brazil, and Ebenezer Baptist Church. The participants' population was mostly Christians who usually are part of a Christian community.

Following the literature review on the subject, and observing authors who explored Religion and Mediation, additional information was searched to explain main concepts. Thought data collection in the questionnaires accounting the hypothesis. Graphics settled to investigate, religion, gender, opinions about conflict within religious communities, all to measure the probabilities, also the most common conflicts that arise in their community, to better understand the religious scenarios.

Another stage of the research onion is related to the methodological choice, where Saunders (2019) classify how it will be proceed the data collection, and it could be in the following ways: *mono-method qualitative or mono-method quantitative, multi-method qualitative or multi-method quantitative, mixed methods simple and mixed methods complex.*

A multidisciplinary approach to qualitative research is qualitative analysis. It may be used to a variety of researches and professions, including anthropology and sociology, which are sometimes charged with having the last word when investigating the human experience. This method takes into account all of the numerous ways in which human social life may be viewed or experienced, and then uses that information to uncover patterns and themes, as for this research, mediation and religion. The qualitative analysis was chosen for being a method of research when a particularly tough question concerning how the religious community deals when facing conflicts with their own members and how they view mediation as a tool for dispute resolution.

3 PRESENTATIONS OF THE DATA

Finding a diversity of academic articles or bibliographic books that deal with mediation as an alternative for resolving conflicts between religious/Christian communities was not an easy task. With the diversity of subjects, religion ends up not being a first option for researchers, but it was not impossible to find some good material, reliable and relevant, which brought conditions to structure and safely explore the chosen theme.

To introduce mediation as an ADR in religious communities is important to identify what conflicts are more common within religious members and what they think about the subject. To do so, open questions were allocated on the survey that will be analysed in this academic work.

After elucidating all the main concepts for this research in the first chapter and narrating some real cases of religious conflicts solved by mediation and organising the second chapter about research methodology and methods, it was time to prepare the online survey. From 18 questions (Appendix 1), three was subjective. Participants were asked (Q8) which are the most common conflicts existents, in their opinion, within Religious/Christians communities; In case of positive answer to have experienced – lived or seen – conflict in their religious community, participants were asked to voluntarily, because this question was not mandatory, describe (Q13), how was this conflict that they experienced, like what happened and if or how the situation was solved and how did they feel.

The last opened question (Q16) intended to collect reports of participants' experiences that perhaps have had a role as a mediator between fellowship members, by giving a general idea about the case without breaking any confidentiality and to describe how their experience was.

Despite the importance of all the answers, so that it does not become an exhaustive and repetitive reading, some open answers will be selected and perhaps followed by comments/analysis. To identify the participants' answers, their words will be in italics or even in quotation marks, but no name or numbering will be added to identify them.

The survey was sent to Brazilians, Mexicans, Irish, Portuguese participants and because some of them does not speak English well, ended up answering the open questions in Portuguese, which will be selected, transcribed, and translated to English in the following chapters.

Regarding the closed questions, will be transcribed and analysed via figures of graphics in the following chapters.

4 DATA ANALYSIS/FINDINGS

The survey was sent over to 200 people from different part of the world, but only 95 participants answered. The survey contained 18 questions in total, with 3 opened questions, with the first opened question optional, as a complement to the previous question. Data collection was carried out between 04/27/2022 to 05/15/2022.

Figure 2 – Percentage of gender category.

Q1 What is your gender?
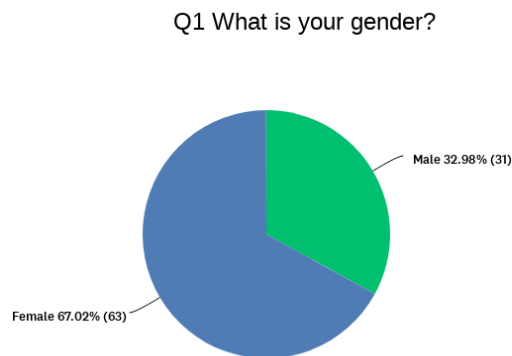
The Figure 2 shows the percentage of each gender category (Male, Female, other, I prefer not to say). Despite having all these options, participants marked their gender as male or female. Among 95 participants, only one skipped this question. it is possible to visualize on the Figure 1, by the graph as by the percentage that the majority of participants were female, with 67,02%, while male participants represent just 32,98%. No one selected other answer for gender criteria.

Figure 3 – Percentage of general belief category.

Q4 Do you have any religion?

No 11.58% (11)

Yes 88.42% (84)
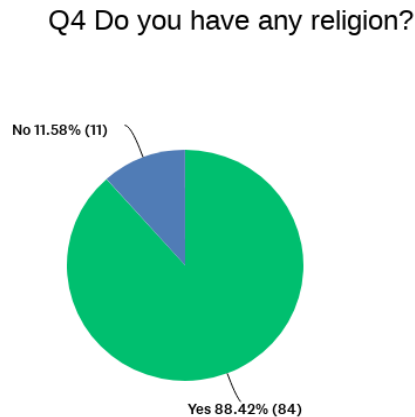
The Figure 3 shows the percentage of beliefs category. The question was only if the participants have any religion, without specifying which. The result shows that 88.42% does have a religion and 11.58% does not have any religion.

Figure 4 – Percentage of specific religion category.

Q5 Are you Christian?

No 13.68% (13)

Yes 86.32% (82)
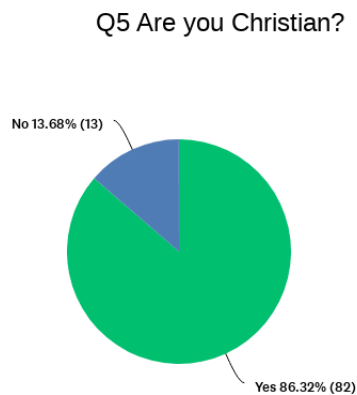
Figure 4 shows the percentage of an especific question, aiming to find the approximate result of Christians participants. The question has only two options, yes or no, and on the figure 3 it is possible to see that 86.32% answered yes, declaring that they are Christians and 13.68% answered no, stating to not being Christians. Comparing the results from the Figure 3 and Figure 4, question 4 and question 5, from a total of 84 participants who has any religion, 82 participants claim to be christians.

Figure 5 – Percentage of attendance to religious church or community gathering

Q6 Do you regularly attend any religious church or community gathering?
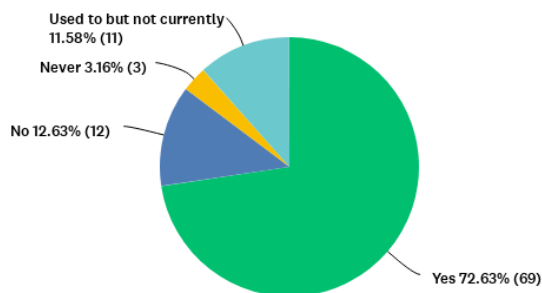
Figure 5 shows the percentage of each category for the participants' who frequently attend to church or religious gathering. The closed question had 4 options *(Yes, No, Never, and Used to but not currently)*. From the total of 95 participants, 69 said yes to the question number 6, in percentage, that represents more than half, with 72,63%. While 12,63% said *no* and 3,16% had *never* attended to religious gathering, 11,58% confirmed that they *used to but not currently.*

Despite of a failure to better investigate if the reason why these 11 participants who used to attend to religious gathering was related to any conflicts, the following two figures succeed to prove, by participants' views and their experiences that indeed conflicts exists in religious/Christians communities, and a few examples of the most common conflicts that arises in these spiritual environments.

Figure 6 – The percentage of the conflict existance in religious communities

Q7 Does conflicts exist in religious communities?

No 15.79% (15)

Yes 84.21% (80)
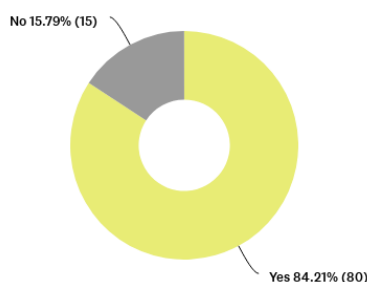
The Figure 6 shows the participants' opinion about the existence of conflicts in the religious/Christians communities. The closed question had two options (*Yes or No*). It is visible on the graphic that the majority selected *Yes* to that question, with 84,21%, while 15,79% selected *No.* With that, the research has a reason to proceed, since it confirms that there is, indeed, conflicts in religious/Christians communities, maybe not in every single church, chapel, or temple.

Figure 7 – Cloud derived from words that describe the most common conflicts

Q8 What are the most common conflicts that arise in religious communities?

others power know talking believes community Different diferentes
conflicts respect people church Gossip wanting
religion judgment different opinions religious Misunderstandings

The Figure 7 shows a small cloud of words derived from the number of words participants wrote in an opened question about the most common conflicts within religious communities. It is possible to see that some words are bigger than others, this means that the longer the word, the more it was repeated, like *gossip* and the shorter the word, the less it was cited, like *power*.

Participants gave a variety of examples of conflicts they saw or experienced, which, while maintaining discretion and confidentiality, will be cited below for enrichment and validation of this work. The most relevant answers will be in *italic,* followed by comments.

Respect between people, always – In any relationship, respect is fundamental, and a lack of it can generate a misunderstanding, upset someone and, as a result, can cause a conflict. For some, the church is not just a four-walled building that people go to, but becomes a welcoming place where members become family. In this regarding, a participant said that *"Conflicts related to different opinions or regular issues that exist in every kind of relationship. What I believe is different when talking about a Church is that we are a family, so we spend lots of time together, which may lead to some conflicts here and there."*

Considering, then, church as a family system, the conflicts would be similar as well, specially the members' behaviour, like in a Christmas dinner, with all the family gathered: "*In my community, the biggest conflicts are people wanting to be holier than others, talking to each other, pastors passing a vision that they don't make mistakes, pastors putting heavy judgments on the flock of God, people provoking people and among other conflicts…"*

Single words came along as well, such as *pride, hate, friendship, work, miscommunication, competition, power, ego, selfishness, gossip, marital, misunderstood, prejudice, confrontation, exclusion, politics, wars, divorce, relationship, intolerance, judgment, different beliefs, vision, opinion, theories, identities and positions,* and others in sentences, like *family issues, difficulty in following the religion rules, people who wants to be powerful, holier, better than others, people who leave the church because someone said something they didn't like, sexuality issues, misunderstanding the bible/scripture, emotional conflicts, caring more for religious than Jesus and talking about subjects considered taboos by the community.*

The conflicts involving the membership *"People from their own community fighting each other, wanting status, not accepting leadership"* can also involve who has a certain type of power or is ahead of the fellowship. *"I could observe in my life conflicts between*

leaders and people from the church about judgment, strong bias about certain subject as relationship among young people, power abuse may be the most common." And if inside wasn't enough, unfortunately persecutions still exist to other religions. *"African ancestry religions are the most frequent targets, indicating that religious intolerance is a question to face great challenges in society."*

Figure 8 – The percentage of the negative effect conflict brings to religious communities

Q14 Conflicts within religious communities have a negative effect that can set people apart from going to religious gatherings.
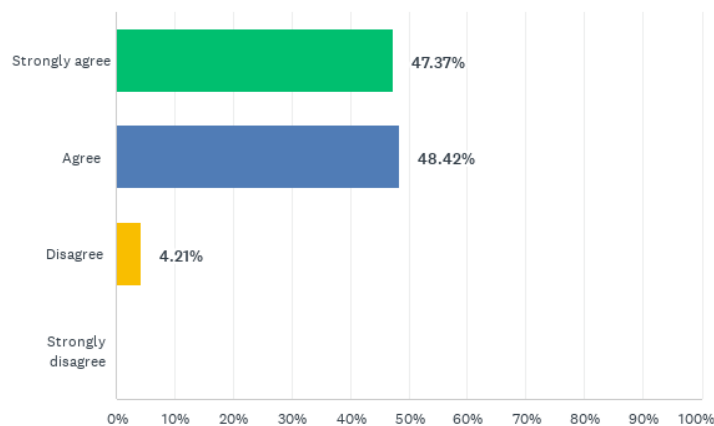
Figure 8 shows how participants indicated if they agreed or disagreed (it was used the Likert scale) with the ad of the statement that says conflicts within religious communities have a negative effect, which can set people apart from attending the gatherings. The percentage of participants who indicated the option *strongly agree* was 47,37%, with 1,05% less than *agree* indications, which gathered 48,42%. Only 4,21% *disagreed* and no one indicated *strongly disagree.*

Figure 9 – The percentage of participants who had faced or seen conflict within religious community category

Q12 Have you seen or lived through any conflict or dispute that arose in a religious community?
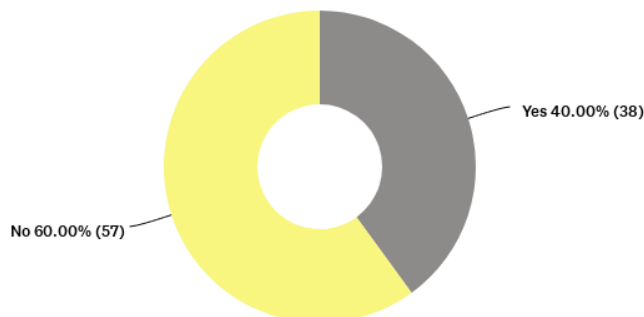
The Figure 9 shows that 40% of participants have seen or lived a conflict in a religious environment, while 60% haven't.

It was asked to these 40% who said yes to the question on the Figure 9 to briefly describe how was this conflict that they experienced, what happened and if or how the situation was solved, how did they feel and, and surprisingly some answers came out. In this opened question, some answers came in Portuguese, but because of its importance, it will be translated to English. The confidentiality of the participants and their safety remain.

One participant had a conflict regarding to a relationship, caused by a slight *misunderstanding*, solved *through communication* "At first we feel annoyed, but it brings relief when one is solved."

Another said that specially about culture, dressing code and accessories *"if how we dress please God or not, the better way of solving this conflicts is by showing the scriptures the truth written." ["em particular usos e costumes, se a vestimenta e acessórios que usamos são de acordo com a vontade de Deus ou não, a melhor forma de resolver esses conflitos é demonstrar na palavra a verdade escrita."]*

In fact, the judgment about how people get dressed is something that causes discomfort to religious people or visitors. As a cultural respect, some churches, chapels, duomos does not allow entrance of visitors wearing shorts or with uncover shoulders.

Pastors, leaders or Priests has a fundamental role regarding the members and anything that may happen within their communities. They take care personally of the flock and when needed, they have to intervene, mediate, correct or even expel people from the membership. "*I've seen a disagreement happen between two people, where it was necessary for the pastors to intervene and talk to the two people, so that the conflict was resolved.*" "*It was mediated by a 'pastora'. I feel good.*" In this case, the participant said that the conflict was mediated by a pastora. Pastora is the female pastor, for Portuguese speakers.

"I felt that a church leader didn't like me, because even though we worked together in the same ministry, we couldn't connect, seemed that was always against me. So, the Pastor, as a mediator, heard both of us separately, and showed us to leave the impressions, the pre-concepts we created about each other, and then sit together to have a real talk. Listening without judgment, but with empathy. Since then, our relationship changed for the better." In this answer, it is possible to see at least 3 characteristics of a potential conflict mentioned in the previous opened question. Misunderstanding, judgment, and emotional issues. The pastor who spoke with both parties, kind of used the caucus session to help two people who were having difficulties to talk with each other, especially because they served in the same ministry, so it was of high importance the existence of dialogue between them.

Another word that was mentioned many times was gossip. One participant described an experienced conflict faced because of gossip in her/his community. *"Gossip can destroy a friendship but when we bring the truth and the light of Jesus everything is solved, and it make us happy."*

Another participant said *"Often members do not agree with the Bible and attack pastors or the Bible itself when they don't want to change their character, so they start with verbal attacks, defamation and virtual attacks against the church, pastors, and Christians, injuring their right to care. The mediator would serve as someone to put a*

limit and not further hurt the person with a lawsuit." Regarding to the role of mediator be a facilitator, it wouldn't create a limit on people, but it would help to maybe end the conflict right there, by giving access to a safe place for disputants to talk and understand one another.

So many lived examples of conflicts unsolved, resulted in emotionally wounded people and distancing others from the church, not to mention the bad impression that was made and the marks that were left on people who were confronted, insulted by people from the same *family*, or by the abuse of power. *"I had not lived any conflict experience. But regards me, my husband's had and it is an example, once he started a relationship with a girl from the church, but the leaders did not agree with and they started to say that he was being influenced by the evil because he did not agree to finish the relationship and this conflict that involves bias, religiosity, power abuse resulted in one person wounded." "People was gossiping about my actions and saying they'd talk to the leader of the church. I felt sad and betrayed. I talked personally with my leader and at the end I stopped going in that church." "Someone didn't respect the beliefs of the other, and for that, he was so aggressive and rude." "I think dictating what it is a sin or not based on dress code or tattoos, piercing. Making exception (bully) exclusion. Rules to be able to serve in some of the ministries but not of them."*

Situations involving politics and civil war were mentioned as well. "*I have seen conflict in religions about politicians. Some politicians used the religious speech to convince the community about what is the best politicians." "The "troubles" in Northern Ireland, it was a civil war for years between the British / Protestants and Irish / Catholics. The Good Friday Agreement worked in mostly solving this conflict for a long time, but it still exists unfortunately.*"

Despite of the bad and sad experiences described by some participants, it is possible to confirm that at the end of the tunnel may have a light and hope. Some other participants stated about the use of mediation to solve disputes and help Christian's disputants*. "As I said, conflicts happen all the time in a family setting. I've felt hurt or hurt people, but we always seek resolution. As a what you call a "spiritual leader" within the church I've also seen and helped people settle their conflicts with the help of mediation." "Emotional*

conflicts are very common as people come from another country and they will face lots of difficulties. My church deals with this kind of problem constantly and we try to help people do not give up."

Since this academic work is seeking to identify the conflicts and the need of mediation in religious communities, also to find a relationship between religion and mediation, having pastors, leaders, or a specific team of mediators to care of inside disputes and because the church is a place where it should be peaceful and equal, following the bible and God, as mentioned before, the bible gives lessons of mediation, one person described an experience of a conflict faced in the Christian community with friends and love involved, and the peacemaker, according to this person, was God Himself. It is an interesting tale, even though it was written in Portuguese, some quotes will be translated to English.

"When a new guy arrives in a church, it will always call the attention of girls. November, 2018 a guy was transferred to my church and many girls were interested on him, but for me nothing had changed. He started getting close with me, we were always talking, as friends, but both developed feelings for one another. I had few friends I could trust, and I told them all about this guy. They all approved, saying that we were going to be a good couple. This guy wanted to talk with me and he told he had feelings for me, we decided we were going to pray about this for the Lord confirms and bless us. My feelings for him was growing each day, we were sharing great moments, especially with the youth group of our church and he opened his heart to me, saying he had feelings and wanted to be more than friends […] my "friend" advised me to wait more, that was too early to make a serious commitment and I trusted her, because I couldn't imagine evil inside the church friends, never crossed my mind she had bad intentions. I decided to private myself of my mobile for one month and when the time was gone, I have got my answer from God, but this 'friend' confessed to him she was in love with him, they got closed during that month and when I spoke with him, saying that God had spoken to me he was without reaction. He apologised, but I felt betrayed, and I was heartbroken. I even spoke with my pastor, who said it wasn't meant to be and that I should praise the Lord. At the church everyone knew, it was horrible. […] Until I saw on Instagram, they had made it

public. I couldn't believe my friend did that with me. I quit church, until the stay away weekend, when God spoke to me about forgiveness. I remember it as if it were today, I was shaking so much, God acted in an extraordinary way. The retreat is over, I came back renewed. After a week, I met with them again, we took a walk with friends, we talked normally. That was the last time I saw them. God made a transformation in my life, and I understood that that boy was not for me. I thank my God immensely for everything. I spoke with my friend, and I forgive her, but I never saw her again."

"Quando um novo garoto entra na igreja, sempre chama muita atenção e interesse entre as garotas da igreja. Novembro de 2018, um garoto entrou na minha igreja, várias garotas ficaram interessadas nele, mas para mim nada tinha mudado. Ele começou a se aproximar de mim, começamos a conversar, mas como bons amigos. Em dezembro fiz uma viagem, ficamos um tempo sem nos falar, quando voltei nos aproximamos muito, nessa altura já havia interesse de ambas as partes. Eu tinha algumas amigas de confiança na igreja, que contava sobre minha vida, comecei a contar sobre esse garoto, todas gostaram, falaram que combinávamos, que formávamos um belo casal. Certo dia esse garoto me chamou para conversar, já tínhamos divididos muitos momentos, principalmente no grupo de jovens da nossa igreja. Ele se abriu, falou que gostava de mim além da amizade, meu sentimento por ele só aumentava a cada dia. No decorrer dessa conversa, decidimos fazer um proposito e buscar uma resposta do Senhor. Marcamos para conversar com nosso pastor, nesse dia ''minha amiga'' estava, ficamos mais de 1 hora esperando nosso pastor, durante essa espera, ''minha amiga'' fez minha cabeça, falando que não era hora de termos essa conversa com nosso pastor, para eu esperar mais um pouco, escutei o conselho dela. Contei para minhas amigas, todas ficaram felizes, ao certo uma amiga. Mas não coloquei maldade, na minha cabeça não existia fura orelho dentro da igreja. Durante o proposito decidir ficar 1 mês sem celular para buscar uma resposta de Deus. Enquanto eu buscava uma resposta, o garoto e ''minha amiga'' se aproximaram muito, e eu não sabia de nada. Mateus 7:7-8. Busquei e Deus me respondeu. Deus me confirmou 3 vezes a mesma palavra: Provérbios 4:23. Já tinha minha resposta, faltava conversar com o garoto, voltei com celular e chamei para termos uma conversa. Ele me contou o quanto se aproximou da ''minha amiga'', e ela tinha se declarado para ele. Naquele momento contei toda minha experiencia com Deus, contei sobre a resposta, ele ficou sem reação, pediu desculpa por tudo que tinha feito. Nossa conversa acabou por ali. Mesmo Deus me mostrando a resposta, me senti traída, meu coração estava em pedaços, não queria acreditar que ''minha amiga'' tinha feito aquilo. Me afastei muito da igreja, do grupo de jovens, não tinha mais contato com aquela ''amiga''. O garoto foi embora para outra cidade. Ficou um clima horrível na igreja, nessa altura todos já estavam sabendo o que tinha acontecido. Minhas férias chegaram, viajei como sempre fazia. Dia 24 de dezembro, abro meu Instagram, vejo uma publicação da ''minha amiga'', se declarando para ele, assumindo o namoro. Não tive reação. Voltei das férias, não era a mesma na igreja, todos já tinham percebido, então decidir conversar com meu pastor, contei toda história, único conselho que escutei foi: agradeça a Deus, Ele sabia que aquele garoto não era para você. Depois daquela conversa sair com coração leve e grato. Se passaram meses, e começaram os preparativos para o retiro dos jovens, eu

não queria ir, sabia que eles estariam lá. Ele ainda morava em outra cidade. Decidir ir de última hora. Logo quando cheguei dei de cara com ele, fiquei normal, porque minha relação com ele eu tinha aceitado, eu estava magoada com ''minha amiga''. No segundo dia do retiro à noite, Deus falou muito comigo. Deus me fez ir até ela e pedir desculpa, aquele momento Deus estava limpando meu coração, tirando toda mágoa. Lembro como se fosse hoje, eu tremia tanto, Deus agiu de uma forma extraordinária. O retiro acabou, voltei renovada. Depois de uma semana, encontrei com eles novamente, fizemos um passeio entre amigos, conversamos normalmente. Essa foi a última vez que os vi. Deus fez uma transformação na minha vida, e eu entendi que aquele garoto não era para mim. Agradeço imensamente ao meu Deus por tudo."

Figure 10 – Percentage of the vision of mediation for religious communities
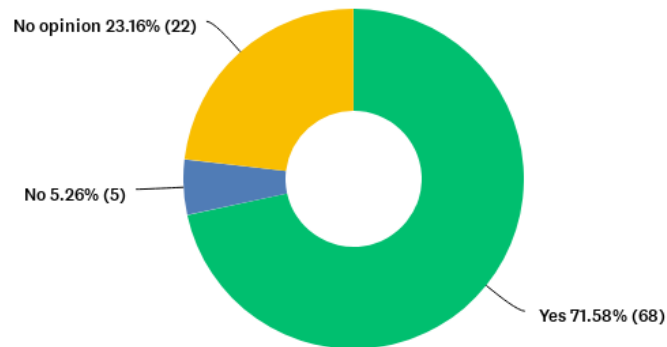
The figure 10 shows the rate for the question 10 of the survey, regarding if the participants' opinion of mediation being a helpful tool to solve conflicts within the religious communities. The options was *yes/no/no opinion.* The percentages of those who believed that mediation is helpful was 71,58%, where 68 participants said *Yes,* against 5,26% who said *No*, while 23,16% selected the *no opinion* option.

Figure 11 – percentage of the relevance of mediation for religious/Christians communities

Q18 In your opinion, how relevant it is to have mediation as an alternative of dispute resolution to solve conflicts within members of religious communities including Christian Communities:
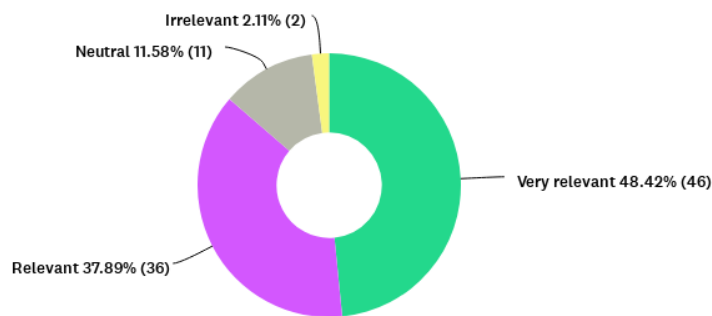
The Figure 11 shows how relevant participants consider, in a Likert scale, starting with *very relevant,* followed by *relevant, neutral, irrelevant* measures. From the total of 95 participants, 48,42% considered to have mediation in relation to dispute resolution in religious/Christian communities *very relevant*, and 37,89% considered *relevant.* Respectively, the percentage of those who considered themselves *neutral* or consider mediation to be *irrelevant* for religious conflicts were 11,58% and 2,11%.

Table 1 – Specific question of criteria for data collection and analysis

Mediation as an Alternative to solve conflicts in Religious Communities   SurveyMonkey

	AGREE	DISAGREE	NOT SURE	TOTAL
members of religious communities tend to seek for help when facing a conflict	62.11% 59	5.26% 5	32.63% 31	95
living in peace with one another is fundamental for religious communities including Christians	95.70% 89	1.08% 1	3.23% 3	93
it is possible to identify a relationship between mediation and religious communities including Christianity	75.53% 71	2.13% 2	22.34% 21	94
mediation could help to solve dispute between members of religious communities	71.58% 68	7.37% 7	21.05% 20	95
religious communities could have a trained team just to solve disputes in withing their communities or fellowships	73.40% 69	1.06% 1	25.53% 24	94

The Table 1 shows the percentage contents according to participants' opinions, aiming to investigate how the religion system works and interact with dispute resolution, for the purpose of this academic research. On the question 15 of the survey, the majority of participants agreed with the following sentences, regarding their religion and the reality of their communities. From a total of 95 participants, 59 agreed that *"Members of religious communities tend to seek for help when facing a conflict".* Of 93 participants, 89 agreed that *"Leaving in peace with one another is fundamental for religious communities, including Christianity."* 75,53% of 94 participants agreed that *"it is possible to identify a relationship between mediation and religious communities including Christianity"* and 71,58% of the totality of 95 participants agreed that *"Mediation could help to solve dispute between members of religious communities"* while the sum up of those who disagreed or was not sure was 27 participants. While 73,40% agreed that *"Religious communities could have a trained team just to solve disputes in within their communities or fellowships"* against 1,06% who disagreed and 25,53% who was not sure.*

The last opened question on the survey was related to their experiences as mediators. It was given a briefly concept of the role of a mediator, which is to facilitate the conversation between the two parties in a dispute, acting as a third neutral party, followed by asking if they had experienced, acted as a mediator between their fellowship members in a conflict, in case of positive answer, it was asked them to give a general idea about the case, preserving the confidentiality of the matter and how was to experience that. A few answers were vague and less than few was complete, some others were completely random, and the main ones it is transcribed and translated below. Many participants haven't ever experienced a role of mediator, and because of that, answers as *"no, none, never, I haven't, N/A, I never had experience as a mediator in my church"* were find. One participant even said, *"I can't say"* and other said that it was great.

Despite of the different approaches, formalities and understanding of mediation and the role of a mediator, each participant who experienced being a mediator, had their own way to do so. *"Yes, was hard at the beginning, because were two different opinions, but I did show both sides, and asked them to understand each other side, and in peace, we tried both ideas and we found out the best." "Yes. I feel really good doing this."*

"I was a mediator for a lady who had to make a decision in her family, and she was the main person that could take a medical decision for her mother. The family was against her, but I served as a neutral party to help her in her decision. It is a though experience to stand in a place where you need to have partiality." "English: Yes, especially in matrimonies – Portuguese: sim, principalmente em matrimónios."

"The housemates couldn't agree about some aspects of the house. So, as a mediator, I helped them to listen and consider the other's points of view. Helping them to understand that they're not living alone but sharing a house. So to have a nice environment, shouldn't be only about their wishes, but what would be good for everyone. I felt good for being able to help, and also to learn from that situation, to not make the same mistakes." Indeed, with everything it is possible to acquire some

learnings and experiences. *"Yes, I have in a lot of cases. Couple's fights, disagreement between members of the same ministry, jealous, etc. This is a big challenge but when you can realise that you could help as a mediator, it makes us satisfied." "We have pastor. I think the people sometimes have 'many' problems and put 'their' frustrations in other people in the form of fights and meaningless. I believe that if they look at the author of life, everything will work out." "Mediation between family members with opposite views" "Yes. Conflicts happen, but as Christians, love, repentance, and forgiveness are central - in fact, mandatory - to our relationships. I've been able to help family members forgive and understand one another better. The themes of understanding and honour come up a lot, especially in parent-child relationships." "Yes. There both didn't know each and even that they were always fighting. So I acted like a mediator between them and could solve at least some points which help them to stop fighting" "Yes, conflicts are often because people don't want to forgive the others."*

It is interesting to notice that with or without specific knowledge of dispute resolution or techniques, when a conflict arise, the parties reach out their leaders or pastors, usually people who has a life according to what they preach, with power, authority and deep experience with spiritual/God relationship – within members of religious communities – they are finding ways to solve disputes.

With this "door opened", attempted to dispute resolution, mediation would be an effective tool to solve conflict

The findings are consistent with what was expected based on the literature and the responses provided by the participants, confirming that the information gathered is subjective in nature and based on the participants' and authors' personal experiences, and thus cannot be applied to the entire religious population.

5 DISCUSSIONS

The main research goals were to discover which are the most common conflicts within religious/Christians communities, to describe how important it is for Christians to have a good relationship within the gathering, to identify the relationship between mediation and Christianity, and to understand mediation and its appliance as a tool to solve disputes between the fraternity of the church.

Regarding the objectives, the results show that 88.32% of the people who answer the survey are Christian and 72.63% attend church, while 11.58% answered that they used to attend, but not anymore. Furthermore, 95.70% of participants agree on the importance of living in peace with each other in religious/Christians communities. When asked if conflicts exist in religious communities, 84.21% answered "yes", characterizing the majority, in relation to the existing options and 71.58% of the participants believe that Mediation is helpful for religious communities. It's about the benefits of mediation within the religious community, both for those who practise and for those who don't.

Mediation can be an effective tool of resolving any kind of disputes in any environment if people are willing to set aside their need to win, if they separate the problem from the person, as it is in any succeeded resolution. The parts must choose a neutral third party as a mediator, and work together from there. In fact, religious communities have been using mediation for centuries because it defends the ideals of impartiality and religious autonomy that these communities hold.

In His speech, Christ said that *"blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God"* (Matthew 5.9, NIV). Jesus' followers who want to be blessed build their selves according to their Mestre' teachings. The relationship between Mediation and Religion, for Christians, is Jesus Christ Himself, regarding what He said about being called "children of God".

Furthermore, as Hubbard (2015) affirms, when dealing with disputants who either attend the mediation knowing that their religious views would be discussed or who bring up religion on their own during the mediation, the use of religious beliefs in mediation

appears most acceptable. When it comes to religious convictions, mediators must tread carefully.

In today's society maybe because of all the facilities and ways to obtain information, the daily rush and multitask abilities, it is possible to consider that some people may have their own terms and beliefs, tending to act and thinking individually. Some other people, who belong to the same religion, by sharing the same faith may agree with one another, it is a possibility. While this may be true for some religions, there are many others who disagree on certain topics, even inside the same community, as the above-mentioned findings, some people tend to think they are better than their own peers, going against what the bible says in Philippians 2:3 (NIV) *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves."*

A more precise measure would be ideal for future studies to further analyse this topic. Especially regarding the training for leaders or selected volunteers, with characteristics similar to reliability, easy going but firm person, someone who has knowledge of the Law and of the Scripture, someone who has empathy and knows how to listen without judgment, finger pointing or interference to be the mediators in their communities.

Regarding some experiences shared in the survey, the research failed by not investigated what measures the Church took related to those who faced a conflict situation in this scenario and left the community.

The findings are consistent with what was predicted based on the literature, indicating that much of the data was derived from participant testimonials and academic articles.

The findings also revealed that most conflicts are caused by gossip, misunderstandings, persons in positions of power and authority who try to impose their will on others, ideological differences, biases, intolerance, and relationships.

CONCLUSION

In a mediation session, many things can happen, including the solution of the dispute. Meanwhile, mediators have a path to walk and guide the parties, but to do so, the mediators need to interview the parties, talk to them and the more they understand the surroundings in the parties' life and head, better they can help. Sometimes people do not know how to express themselves to the other, especially when the emotions are high and all the contextual situation, having to see and talk, face to face with the other disputant can be a challenge, indeed.

Moffitt and Bordone (2005) argue that mediation, as an alternative to dispute resolution is a field which has a crucial mandate. It demands of mediators to act with equivalence, it is necessary to follow the path, follow the process, without rushing to reach the result, because it is in the process that many things are discovered and explained, it has to "walk the talking", because it is where the opportunity to acquire knowledge is found and not only to get the chance to learn with each other, but also to teach one another and to apply the new knowledge concurred with these different interactions. The whole mediation process is a greater result within itself.

On top of all the usual expertise, abilities, and perceptions that other mediators require, meditating in the religious communities will be required caring, loving, and compassion. The fundamental goal is to assist individuals in healing from suffering and sorrow, to move from a destructive relationship to a new constructive state of mind (Bush and Folger, 1996).

Religion mediation seeks to restore healthy and lasting relationships, whenever it is possible and appropriate. The main goal of resolution is to promote harmony and peace. Furthermore, mediation within religious communities is an alternative to keep disputes in private, since it brings a sense of bonding, understanding, for sharing the same beliefs.

Religious and Christian communities are social constructs that function as society builders. They link people through a shared belief-system and teach people to behave and function as responsible community members, for the work and services the

religious/Christians communities promote to help people from and in many different aspects (Padilla).

The objectives of this research were:

1. To identify the most common conflicts that arise in religious communities.
2. To describe the importance of having a good relationship with the fraternity of Christian communities.
3. To identify the relationship between mediation and Christianity.
4. Understand mediation and its appliance as a tool to solve disputes between the fraternity of the church.

The most common conflicts found in this research was gossip, war, abuse of power, misunderstandings, and differences in various aspects. Well, differences is a cause of any conflicts, as described on the first chapter.

For Christians and according to Maslow's Pyramid theory, being part of a community, to have the knowledge and feeling of belonging are part of human's need and to be part of something, rules are applied, every system, city, country, nation has its own culture and rules that define the convivence, in order to keep peace and harmony stable.

The relationship between mediation and Christianity is regarded to what God says, His ordinance to love the neighbour, to seek to live in peace with one another and look to resolve the disputes instead of going to court. The institute of mediation is a great alternative to solve conflicts and it should be adopted not only in the Christians communities, but in any religious community. For these communities, the faith aggreged with mediation techniques could bring heavens to earth.

To do so, volunteers would have to be trained to serve with this purpose the community, but how that would be, is a subject for further research, the will it was shown by participants' answers they have and they are finding the way to do it, the Word they also have, so.

REFLECTION

Why is mediation necessary for religious communities, especially in the case of Christian communities? Before answering this question, I would like to share a verse of the Holy Bible.

The bible says in 1 Corinthians 12.21-26 (NIV) "The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it."

In many cases, when conflicts arise in the Church, some people give up of their faith because someone got this person hurt, and with that, they get disappointed with the Church, the members, the pastors and leaders and they give up from God, Jesus, and they stop attending the fellowship, praying, or reading the Bible.

I was born and raised in the church, learning, getting to know, and getting involved in this environment, with people who share the same faith as, and we bound as a family. Over the years, I could observe that some people ended up moving away from the church because of gossip, confrontations, different opinions, break up of relationships, falsehoods and so on. For seeing this happening, even with people close to me, and hearing them saying that even though they miss communion because they were hurt and upset, they could not go back to church or even face the people who emotionally hurt them, although they hoped to return one day, when feeling better or after receiving an apology, to receive that apology, they would have to speak and open up, telling what happened and give the other part the opportunity to regret and apologise. Still, they fear

being judged by community members. One of the biggest mistakes of the church is to not go after the wounded ones and try to reconciliate, after wall, it is a biblical ordnance.

I had an experience myself of conflit. It was in 2012, I was 19 years old, and I used to be part of a youth group of my church in Brasília, the capital of Brazil. I was studying Law and my schedule was tight, for I had classes in the morning and during the night, and my youth group's leader was trying to convince me to do a course that were happening at the church every Thursday night, but it was impossible for me to attend, for college reasons.

While I was trying to explain my reasons to him, he was being energic and interrupting me all the time, and his behaviour started to annoy me, I felt like he was pushing me and in front of others present there, he said to me to shut up and I stormed out of the room, I felt lost and humiliated.

Another brother, from my community, came to me and pacifically he asked me how I was feeling, and after hearing me, he framed my leader's points of view to me and returned with my point of view to my leader, who apologised. Simple as it sounds, without any properly mediation's techniques, that conflict in potential was solved.

In many cases, possible in all churches around the world, brothers, and sisters – how we call each other, this "intervention" or mediation attempt does not happen very often, even though this is a specific biblical ordinance for the church.

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