

## CHRISTIAN ETHICS CHALLENGES: THE CASE OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION OF AFRICA

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### ABSTRACT

In some academic and professional circles, ethics is a topic that is often discussed as a brainteaser. In the Great Lakes Region of Africa, war has challenged Christian members', pastors, and church leaders' ethics. War has claimed about 10 million lives in that region in the past couple of decades. It has been sustained directly or indirectly around the world because of the benefit it brings to the world population at large. This paper presents findings of a phenomenological case study based on accounts from lived experiences of Christian, pastors, and church leaders of the Great Lakes Region. It presents challenges that these Christians have had to face, how they have dealt with them ethically, and better paths that can be taken to deal with the impact of war on Christians in this and other similar contexts.

**Keywords:** Qualitative research, Great Lakes Region of Africa, Christians, church leaders, pastors, war, mineral resources, genocide, ethnic cleansing, ethics.

### INTRODUCTION

For some people, Christian ethics is simply a matter of deep thought that may not have an immediate impact on their personal lives. When it is a matter of life or death, however, it becomes more than just a mental exercise for the people of the Great Lakes Region of Africa. It is about decisions that have a direct impact on human life and, of course, on the environment. This is the decision that many Christians have had to face in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, located mainly in central Africa. This region is where the past two decades have been dominated with war as the major highlight of the daily news headlines in several countries of that region.

In 2005, a story of forgiveness was told at a world event of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in the United States. An SDA woman had witnessed the slaughter of her husband in 1994, during the genocide in Rwanda. History reveals that almost one million lives perished in just 100 days in that small beautiful nation. This woman's husband was one of those who lost their lives.

The woman decided to be involved in the prison visitation program of her church. Many SDA churches have such programs around the world. Basically, such programs are meant to involve church members in visiting inmates to share the Gospel with them and sometimes help them with personal needs related to their food, health, and clothing. As this woman continued to participate in these church activities, one day she happened to meet the killer of her late husband. This was the beginning of a new chapter of her life.

How does such a widow give Bible studies to a young man who killed her husband? How does she take food from her home to give to this inmate who is behind bars because of killing her husband? Does she forgive him? Must she forgive him? Does he deserve her forgiveness? How does she deal with this situation as a Christian? The list of questions can go on. These

are not simple ethical questions like those found in academic ethics seminars, forums, and conferences. These are deep questions that go beyond most human principles or thinking.

In the video presentation of this woman, she indicated that she had suffered tremendously the loss of her husband. The trauma of seeing him being killed was too much. His absence at home was painful. She was definitely devastated to meet the killer. She prayed fervently for this situation. She confronted the young man. The young man confessed to her and asked for forgiveness. She forgave him. The young man accepted the truth from this woman's Bible studies. He stood up for the Lord and was baptized.

The story could have ended here. This could have already been a very beautiful story. The story continued to a level that only spiritual strength and power could act. The woman pleaded for this young man's release. The process was not easy. In fact, she must have been considered insane to do so. Well, this was not the end of the story. She finally secured his release. Then, to everyone's astonishment, she went on to adopt this young man as her own son. The video ended with beautiful scenes of this woman and her adopted son (killer of her late husband) walking and working happily together. This unique story gives a little glimpse of how complex ethical issues are in the Great Lakes Region.

This paper takes the readers to the Great Lakes Region where horrors of war have plagued the place for two decades. War is no longer predominant in Rwanda. But many countries in this region are going through consistent armed conflicts and wars. The paper gives a thorough look at ethical issues that church leaders, pastors, and Christians in the region face on a regular basis. Although few strategies are given about how war-related ethical issues are addressed, this paper intends to start some discussion among Church leaders about critical ethical issues in the Great Lakes Region. These ethical issues are actually not only found in that region; they are everywhere in the world. Yet, little is being published in religion journals and magazines about them. Maybe they are considered taboo topics. Yet, they are real issues that need real answers.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Literature is fairly scarce when it comes to the ethical issues related to war and Christian churches. To put things into perspective, it is important to keep in mind that the issue of war is not only in Africa and the Middle East, as the media seems to sway people's beliefs. In fact, a third of the world is currently at war.

According to *Wars in the World* (2013), all the continents have active and inactive armed groups today. In Africa, the following countries have some armed groups: Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan. In Asia, these countries have some armed groups: North Korea, South Korea, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Philippines. In Europe, Chechnya and Dagestan have armed groups. In the Middle East, these countries have armed groups: Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen. In the Americas, Colombia and Mexico have some armed groups. All in all, around 60 countries (or roughly a third of the world) are at war. Around 500 militia-guerillas and separatist groups are involved in these conflicts. Ethical issues related to war and Christianity can no longer be ignored. They must be addressed to help the work of Christian members, ministers, and organizations.

In this review, the focus is placed on the impact of war, the biblical view of war in the Old and New Testaments, and the different Christian views related to war ethics. While these foundations help in making the basis for this study, they present diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives. Freedom is left to the readers to decide which perspective fits well their belief systems.

### **Impact of War**

War has catastrophic effects on human life and the ecosystem. War causes economic challenges, security challenges, health and social challenges, and behavioral problems (Burton & John-Leader, 2009; Kirk & Cassity, 2007; Kirk & Winthrop, 2007; Wa-Mbaleka, 2012b). Just like everyone else, Christians and church leaders have to face the impact of war.

Once people are at war, economic challenges become unbearable. In refugee camps and camps of internally-displaced people (IDP) for instance, it is common for people to face dire poverty (Salisbury, 2006; Wa-Mbaleka, 2012a). Affording a meal becomes a daily struggle. Money to cover the basic needs becomes extremely hard to find. This challenge is even worsened by the fact that people in refugee/IDP camps can no longer be involved in their daily activities. They have no work. They have no source of income. As a result, extreme poverty sets in.

Security is a serious concern for people living in war-torn zones. The irony is that, even those who live in refugee/IDP camps are not exempt (Hadley & Sellen, 2006; Kim, Torbay, & Lawry, 2007; Kirk & Cassity, 2007; Westhoff et al., 2008). It is common to hear of horror stories of children being kidnapped from refugee/IDP camps to be forced into sexual slavery or as soldiers. Unexpected raids of rebels in refugee/IDP camps happen in different countries.

War also brings social and health challenges (Tillman, 2001; Ward & Vann, 2002; Westhoff et al., 2008). It brings quick moral decay as armed conflicts set in people's mind that violence is the preferred way to resolve conflict. It is not uncommon to see immoral practices of rebels injected in communities. Due to the evil nature of human beings, it becomes easy for communities, refugees, and IDP to imitate the ways of the rebels. Gender-based violence, rape, voluntary and forced prostitution, moral decay, and violence as a conflict resolution strategy are just some of the issues that the literature has presented as direct effects of war. Additionally, due to the lack of basic health infrastructures combined with dire poverty and moral decline, several people face health problems that could have otherwise been avoided.

Last, children are especially affected when there is war. Traumatic experiences sometimes affect them so much that they develop behavioral problems (Burton & John-Leader, 2009; Davies, 2008; Kaiser, 2006). Some of the children and young people have seen their parents, relatives or friends being killed. They have seen their churches or schools being burned. They have been victims of rape, mutilation, and other horrific situations. All these negatively affect their young lives, their education, and consequently their spirituality. Pastors and educators must deal with them and try to help them. Unfortunately, lack of financial, human, and educational resources (Burton & John-Leader, 2009) usually leads to undesired results.

While many Christian churches are involved in trying to help people affected by war, the challenges are so many that it seems to make the church contribution insignificant. On the level of dealing with ethical issues, church pastors and leaders do not have the needed

training. Yet, the problems are real and persistent; they need real reflection, real discussion, real plans, and real actions.

### **Theology of War in the Bible**

A close look at the Old and the New Testaments shows different perspectives on war. Both testaments show that war is the result of sin and that it originated with the Garden of Eden, as far as this world is concerned. In the first judgment ceremony of the world, enmity was put between man/woman and the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Sin in the human heart creates a human mind that is enmity to God (Rom. 8:7). In the Bible, wars are between God and Satan, and humans among themselves. The books of Kings, for instance, are full of different accounts of wars.

In the Old Testament, there are several occurrences of war with different perspectives. Three main themes seem to be recurring in the Old Testament as far as the ethics of war is concerned. First, it is clear that Civil Disobedience was a good practice in the Old Testament. This can be seen in the Israelite women disobeying the order given them to kill their children in Egypt (Exod. 1:15-20). Second, Deuteronomy reveals that when God's children had to kill, it was under God's command. When that order was ignored, usually there were negative results. This may be the foundation of the beliefs of those who kill in the name of a specific religion, claiming to have God's mission to kill the other human beings. In the same book, God Himself claims that the fight was His (2 Chron. 20:15). Last, God allowed war to teach Israel. For instance, when they went into captivity, it was for God to teach them a lesson whenever they were unfaithful to Him.

Southon (2012), while a theology student in Sydney, Australia, argued that "the wars of the Conquest were a specific event in God's salvation plan, and were intimately connected to the Land." He adds that they "were a function of Israel's faithfulness; when they were faithful then they won, when they were unfaithful then they were defeated." (Southon, 2012, para. 1). It was a direct order from God. It was all coordinated by God for the salvation of His people.

In the New Testament, a fairly different picture is presented in the Gospel of Jesus. In John 18:11, Jesus asked Peter not to use violence. Later in the same chapter, Jesus openly claimed that His Kingdom does not condone war (v. 36), even if He had the power to win the battle.

### **Commonly Held Opinions on War**

There seems to be two major camps of Christians when it comes to the involvement in war. First, some believe that Christians should simply never be involved in war activities. This group of Christians believe in nonviolence and non-combatant perspective on war. The other side believes in *just war*.

Those who believe in just war argue that there are times when Christians should play a combative role in an armed conflict if there is good reason for that. For Christians in this camp, people can freely enlist in the military service. They believe that Christians should help defend their country whenever the country needs them.

On the other side, Brattston (2012) did a thorough review of the literature of ethics on early Christianity and found no evidence for just war. As seen in the Old Testament, war was but

an “enactment of God’s justice” (Southon, 2012). Quite strong statements have been made on behalf of this perspective. Among them, this paper considers those from Hauerwas (2011) and from the SDA Church (Morgan, 2003).

According to Hauerwas (1991), Christ is the demonstration of justice. Humans should not kill each other because war denies the sacrifice of Jesus. Nonviolence should always be the standard for Christians. This view is also the original and still the official view of the SDA Church.

Morgan (2003) has effectively summarized the nonviolence position of the SDA Church. In 1862, one of the world leaders of the Church in the early days, James White, started the discussion of the involvement of its members in war. A year later, the Church received a clear message from Ellen White that a church member should not be an active man/woman in uniform. In fact, later on, the Church paid \$300 to the US government for every young member who had been requested to enlist in the army to prevent them from joining.

In 1865, the only official statement of the Church, which has never been officially changed until now, was issued in these terms: “we are compelled to decline all participation in acts of war and bloodshed as being inconsistent with the duties enjoined upon us by our divine Master toward our enemies and toward all man-kind”. This statement makes clear the stand of the SDA Church.

While this review of the literature may not be comprehensive, it presents some important background that makes the basis of the discussion of this study. Additionally, it is necessary to underline the fact that literature on issues of war is scarce, especially when it comes to ethics of Christian involvement in war. It is this scarcity that makes the purpose of this study: to explore the ethical issues that Christians and church pastors/leaders face in war zones. An effort is also made to try to recommend some ways to begin addressing these ethical issues.

In the exploration of ethical issues of Christians and church pastors/leaders in the Great Lakes Region, the following research questions were at the heart of the study:

1. What are the pressing ethical issues that church members and pastors have faced in war zones in the Great Lakes Region of Africa?
2. How have they coped with war-related ethical issues?
3. What should be done about these war-related issues?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study is a phenomenological descriptive case study. It explores the phenomenon of Christianity in time of war and the related ethical issues, focusing on describing the specific case of the Great Lakes Region of Africa. It is a phenomenology because it explores lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Halling, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014) of the research participants. It is a case study because it is based on a complex issue that did not seem to have any specific or clear delimitation (Yin, 2014) at the time of the data collection. Additionally, it attempts to give an understanding of the essence of Christianity in time of war.

## Setting

This study is focused on the Great Lakes Region of Africa. This region includes Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Tanzania. The ramifications of the wars found in this region extend to South Soudan and Kenya. It is common to find these two additional countries included in the discussion when issues of the Great Lakes Region are involved.

This region has plagued with several armed conflicts in the past several decades. In the past two decades, however, two major conflicts have marked the history of the region. These are the Rwandan Genocide (1994) and the subsequent conflict that has been called Africa's World War (Prunier, 2009), the one that took several years in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda's neighbor. It is called so simply because at a certain point, it involved several African states. While the genocide in Rwanda claimed almost 1 million lives in about 100 days, the World War of Africa claimed more than five million lives over the years, and counting.

This region is especially important for a study like this one because of a number of factors. It has some of the largest deposits of natural and mineral resources on the whole African continent. This factor plays an important role in fueling different conflicts. It has a large number of armed groups for power struggle. For instance, as of 2013, DRC alone had about 60 active rebel groups (Doctors Without Borders, 2014; Wars in the World, 2013). This region has the highest number of victims of rape used as a weapon of war. This region has some of the highest numbers of refugees in the world today (Wa-Mbaleka, 2012b). Last, because this region is in the heart of Africa, the impact of conflict there can easily affect most of the rest of the countries on the continent.

## Sampling

The target population of this study was the SDA church pastors, leaders, and members. Purposive sampling was used to select individuals who could provide the most important information (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014) about ethical issues in war zones in the Great Lakes Region. Selection was made initially from individuals already known to the researcher. Others were included from snowball sampling as suggested by Mitchell and Jolley (2004). All the participants belonged to the SDA Church because as the researcher, I was quite familiar with their SDA philosophy, teachings, and church structure. Additionally, it is because the SDA church claims to be based on sola scriptura principle.

## Participants

The study included ten participants. They were from Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda. Three were former church leaders but at the time of the data collection, they were completing their studies for a doctorate in ministry. Two were district leaders and holders of a bachelor's degree in theology. One was a doctoral student but a former conference president. Another one was a holder of doctorate in ministry and was an active president of a conference. Another one was an active president of a university and a holder of a doctorate in theology. One layman, leader of a church's laymen ministries, participated too. Last, there was one director of education of a conference who had a master's degree in education.

For readers who are not familiar with the SDA Church structure, a conference is a church structure subdivided into a number of districts. A district usually has several local churches. A conference president's leadership therefore extends over several local churches in quite a large territory. The president usually deals with the issues of the church at a fairly macro level within a country.

In the SDA Church, education is one of the major departments. Therefore, a director of education is also counted among church leaders. Laymen ministries are usually part of the church structure. Therefore, a director of lay ministries can be considered one of the church leaders.

### **Instrument**

Just like in most qualitative research studies, the interview guide for this study was researcher-made. It was an unstructured interview based primarily on two major questions: (a) What are the ethical issues that Christians and church pastors/leaders face in war zones in the Great Lakes Region? (b) What problem-solving strategies have Christians and church pastors/leaders used to address those ethical issues? Answers to these questions led to several follow-up questions to complete the interview.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection was done solely through five individual interviews and two focus group discussions. Data collection stopped after saturation was reached; that is, it stopped when the same themes started recurring in the interviews. With the permission from the research participants, audio-recording devices were used to record the interview and the focus group discussions. After each interview and focus group, and sometimes during these sessions, a few notes were taken primarily on emerging themes.

A thematic data analysis was the means used to explore the ethical issues related to Christian life in time of war. Although the data had other themes that are related to other challenges of war, the focus of the analysis was primarily on ethical issues. For ethical purposes, participants' names are not used in this report.

### **RESULTS**

To begin the presentation of the results of this study, it is important to hear the first-hand illustration from one of the participants.

You know, in D.R. Congo, in North-Kivu (province), there is violence that happens at school. And sometimes those rebels would come and pick up all those pupils. They took them into the forest. And they changed them into soldiers. And sometimes raped those young girls. And I know one who has experienced that problem. You find that, even though you can advise her to go to school, she cannot agree. She was raped. School has a negative connotation... We used to put on blue and white uniform. When she sees someone wearing blue, she can even cry... She cannot even talk. She doesn't want to talk. If she wants to talk, she can only cry, cry, and cry.

This story is just one of the many horrific stories that one hears everywhere when inquiry is made on the challenges that war brings. Similar and worse stories are common in a daily life

of people in war zones. Christians, pastors, and church leaders are not exempt from the consequences of these atrocities.

### **Common Consequences of War**

Ethical issues in war zones are related directly to common consequences of war that most people experience. While this is not the central focus of this study, it is important to present these consequences to help put things into a better perspective. Six major findings were evident in the data.

War leads to the loss of physical life, spiritual lives, churches, schools, houses, and finances. These are quite heavy issues that cannot be ignored in war zones. Basically, scores of populations lose everything they have. Every day, they live in a survival mode. Not only 100 people or 1000, but thousands and in some places, hundreds of thousands.

Because of war, the faith of many may either increase or decrease. From the interview, it was clear that the faith of many Christians goes to one of the two directions. Those who feel helpless begin losing their faith in God. They do not understand why they can continually pray for liberation and nothing happens. Sometimes, this situation of insecurity goes on for years in the Great Lakes Region. On the other side, there are those who believe that wars and rumors of wars are all part of the fulfillment of the prophecy. This perspective helps them increase their faith in a loving Savior who is about to come back to take them Home.

Destruction of communities was another importantly sad finding in this study. In many places, rebels or other armed groups simply enter villages and burn down schools, churches, and houses of peaceful citizens. People have only one thing in mind: to flee for their life, for those who can. Of course, a significant number of them are killed or taken captives.

The next finding, directly related to the previous one, is the intense perpetual fear that results from these threats. Uncertainty for people's security is the norm of everyday life. Public rape, sexual abuse, sexual slavery, mutilations, and draft in armed groups to save one's life are just some of the few practices that enforce fear in war victims. They are thus reduced to a level much lower than their potential because of perpetual fear.

Extreme poverty is next to the last finding. When all socio-economic activities are disrupted by violence, conflicts, massive migrations of communities, poverty is the direct result. This poverty leads to famine and sicknesses, as far as the physiological needs are concerned. Extreme poverty also leads to moral decay manifested in prostitution, robbery, crime, and sometimes other illegal business. Three interviewees shared how difficult it sometimes is for them to encourage their church members to give their tithes and offerings because they know too well that these church members are seriously financially struggling.

Last, when asked how people running for their lives survive, research participants mainly mentioned non-government organizations and a few laymen organizations. The intensity of the issue is so complex that the contribution of the church alone is almost insignificant.

### **Pressing Ethical Issues**

Christians, church pastors and leaders in the Great Lakes Region where war has been so rampant, face some of the most pressing ethical issues that need serious consideration from

world church leaders. These issues have not received as much attention as they should; yet, these issues are so complex that they can no longer be left to commonsense. In fact, commonsense does not work with these issues. Church leaders around the world need to have intentional discussions and plans to address them for the sake of the spirituality and salvation of the people of the Great Lakes Region.

These steps are very important because the lack of agreed-upon measures, policies, and guidelines can cause quite a lot of damage in the work of the church. Different pastors and church leaders may use different standards for the same issue, which can easily start confusion in the church. In the ethical issues presented below, it was evident that some research participants were on one side and the others on the other. They were divided on what is the right way of addressing the issue. Each one had some reasons behind their choice, which they thought was the right one.

### **Raped Women**

In this region, thousands of women have been victims of rape and some horrific sexual assaults that have ever been recorded in modern times. What is reported on this issue in that region is sometimes too gruesome to include in a paper like this one. If this was not enough, this problem brings a number of ethical issues. Some pastors struggle with whether these women, victims of rape, should be dis-fellowshipped. Do their husbands have the right to divorce them? Is the training given in the seminary or theology programs at the university adequate to help pastors deal with such cases? Cases that go unreported are many because rape victims in this region are afraid of the potential repression from the family, the community, the church, or even the rebel groups that are involved in such acts.

### **Christian Church Members Enlisted in Rebel Movements**

Some Christian church members are enlisted in rebel movements. Some voluntarily, others involuntarily. There are several ethical issues related to this matter. Should their names be kept on the church roll? Could they hold a position in the church? If they want to get married, could the church pastor officiate their wedding? Should active rebels be baptized and allowed to continue serving in their rebel movement? Should the church accept tithes and offerings coming from their looting? Should people forced into rebel groups to save their own lives be considered like those who willingly chose to belong to a rebel movement? Should a pastor who joins a rebel movement continue to be officially recognized as a pastor of his/her church? A few years ago, a rebel leader went out to the media to indicate that he was a pastor of a specific Christian church. Should his supervisor strip this status from him? For many of these questions, the some respondents answered positively while others answered no.

Maybe this is where the command of Jesus Christ makes the discussion even more complex. He said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy'. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:43-44). These are the words of the Lord who set the standard for humanity. World church leaders need to help their churches interpret these verses effectively in the context of war zones.

### **Difficult Meaning of Forgiveness**

One of the interviewees shared a story that made the concept of forgiveness quite challenging from human perspective. One day, as he and his family were going to town, rebels stopped

them. They slaughtered his mother, siblings, and some of his children in front of him. This massacre happened as part of the ethnic cleansing. When he went to church the next day, he found some of these rebels sitting in his church to attend the worship program. What does the pastor do in this case?

Other issues related to forgiveness include the church pastor ministering to the rebels, church members ministering to the ethnic group to which rebels belong, and living in peace and love in the same community with rebels who carried on atrocities on one's family, community, or ethnic group. While discussing issues like this one in an air-conditioned room, thousands of miles away from the scene may sound easy; it is not so when someone comes face-to-face with such a situation.

### **Living by the Loot**

When rebels control large territories, they usually impose their own rule. When they go to other cities or villages to cause desolation, they usually loot many things. To be able to make money from their loot, they control where people buy products for their basic necessity. Rebels are therefore the only ones who have the power to sell. While people may have not participated in looting, they end up purchasing products that were looted. If anyone decides to purchase somewhere else, they run the risk of losing their life. Does buying something looted make the buyer equally guilty? After all, this money thus gathered continues to support the rebels' activities. Should Christians avoid buying looted products and risk their lives by trying to buy somewhere else?

### **Allowing Rebels' Participation in Church Activities**

Some rebels create their own local congregations within the larger church. When the larger church organizes activities that bring together several local churches, the churches of the rebels want to send their own members to take part in those activities. In one case, one conference president shared a story where the church of the rebels sent a group of singers to sing during the larger church gathering.

The church leaders were in a dilemma. If they accepted to allow these rebel singers to take part in these programs, other denominations were simply going to suspect that whole larger church structure to be collaborating with the rebels. This situation could lead the government to see this denomination with suspicion. On the other hand, if they denied these singers to take part in these activities, these singers would feel judged and withheld from salvation. Additionally, this measure could be cause for repression from the rebel leaders.

### **Keeping the Faith in Difficult Situations**

Research participants shared some of the issues that church members face, which make it hard for them to keep the faith. Yet, most church organizations have no clear guidelines on how to deal with these issues. Every church member is literally left to decide for himself/herself. While this may be the ultimate goal of spirituality, some general guidelines from church leaders could help make an informed decision.

Two interviewees shared two similar stories of Christians who were asked, on a Sabbath day, to carry the loot for the rebels. In both cases, the church members refused to carry the loot on basis of their belief in the Fourth Commandment that requires everyone to rest on the Sabbath

day. In one of the cases, the person was shot dead. In the other case, the person's life was miraculously spared.

In some cases, Christians have been asked to choose between forced incest and death. Of course, incest is a sin. It is even considered illegal in the standard of secular authorities of this world. For those who happen to choose to be involved in forced incest in fear of death, should they be kept on the church's roll, even if they claim innocence based on the threat from the rebels?

### **Silence of World Church Leaders**

Probably, the worst case of ethical issues in this study was the silence of world church leaders about these war-related ethical issues. Church members and local church pastors are sometimes afraid of addressing war-related ethical issues because of the potential repression that can follow. Local church pastors individually make the decision on these matters, no matter what the consequences may come out. These decisions are often contradictory from one pastor to another. To make the matter worse, even though world church leaders are informed about war in war zones, they keep silent about the related ethical issues. It is unclear whether it is because of fear or simple indifference.

As far as the Great Lakes Region is concerned, this silence has been held for at least the past two decades. These issues cannot be solved by silence: world church leaders must take tangible, strategic, and visionary measures to address them. This would make the work of salvation more effective in the region. Real lives of God's children are at stake in war zones.

### **Coping Strategies**

Research participants were asked to share different ways Christians in war zones cope with daily challenges of life. They shared a few strategies that have been commonly used, whether or not successful. For counseling programs, pastors and some non-government organizations have provided the services. Pastors, however, do not feel well equipped to deal with the complex traumatic experiences of their church members. Additionally, organizations that provide such training or services are highly limited in number.

Non-government organizations provide some workshops on local development. They provide training on how to start income-generating activities to help people meet their daily needs. Additionally, church laymen organizations have provided urgent relief effort to internally displaced people. In other cases, the conferences have helped rebuild churches, schools, and health clinics that rebels destroyed. Last, different denominations have sometimes worked together to help rebuild a destroyed community.

In most cases, the effort is primarily on helping people meet their physiological needs. This is reflected also in the attitude of the Christian churches at the global level. Whenever they are involved, it is primarily and sometimes solely on the physical needs of the people. Yet, ethical issues presented here cannot be taken lightly.

### **The Way Forward**

Research participants were asked to give some recommendations about what needs to be done in trying to address the enumerated ethical issues that pertain to war. Four major

recommendations were proposed to begin with. Ramifications can be made from each one of them, as need arises.

First, the church leaders must intentionally address war-related ethical issues. These issues are so complex that they cannot be left to commonsense. White (2010) states, “those who have pity for the unfortunate, the blind, the lame, the afflicted, the widows, the orphans, and the needy, Christ represents as commandment keepers, who shall have eternal life.” She adds, “God will surely repay every kind of injustice, and every manifestation of indifference to and neglect of the afflicted among us” (pp. 511-512). Indifference to the ethical issues of people living in war zones must come to an end if people are serious about the soon Second Coming of the Lord of lords. World leaders need to understand that “any neglect of duty to the needy and to the afflicted is a neglect of duty to Christ in the person of His saints” (White, 2010, p. 524). This statement should be a wake-up call to church leaders who have not given center stage to the ethical issues discussed here.

Second, conference administrators must develop special departments to deal with these recurring issues. They need to have a special fund to help provide adequate training and services for the ethical issues discussed here. With such a department, some church members may receive proper training to help war victims in dealing with different types of ethical issues more effectively. Such a department could also organize some special training for local pastors and church members for better preparedness.

Third, the church needs to be more proactive in requiring the concerned governments to assume their responsibility of guaranteeing safety and security to all their citizens. While the church is busy educating their members with moral principles, the governments must be busy handling effectively lawless citizens who cause desolation to peaceful citizens.

Last, while praying for people in war zones is definitely important, the world church leaders need to devise specific means to deal better with issues of war victims around the world. This is especially important given that about a third of the world is currently on war. This is a serious issue that needs very intentional strategic measures.

## **CONCLUSION**

War in the Great Lakes Region has led to quite some challenging life situations. Some of the challenges are related to daily survival. These ones have been documented in several publications. Ethical issues, which are too complex, are rarely discussed and therefore hardly addressed. They all must be addressed, but not only locally. Local church pastors and leaders have been struggling to address these issues. While some minimal effort has been done in the training from the fields of psychology and counseling, little has been done in helping Christians spiritually when faced with these ethical issues.

Decision made individually on the ethical issues discussed above can make a difference between life and death in the lives of Christians in war zones. Even more importantly, their decision can have an impact on their eternal life. Church leaders that are interested in the mission of saving souls have the obligation to take these ethical issues seriously and try to address them from the wider perspective. World church leaders need to discuss such issues. New needs must be addressed with new strategies. Christian church leaders must develop their own theology of war. If they have one, it needs to be shared around the world, given that a third of the whole world is currently at war.

To end with, White (1905) suggests, "How little do we enter into sympathy with Christ on that which should be the strongest bond of union between us and Him—compassion for depraved, guilty, suffering souls, dead in trespasses and sins! The inhumanity of man toward man is our greatest sin" (p. 163). Keeping silent on such complex ethical issues, in addition to other human suffering presented in this study, is simply inhumane. This level of inhumanity is a great sin, according to White. The good news is that it is not yet too late to make a difference and continue the discussion that this paper has started.

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