Resolving Conflicts in Churches: Towards a Theology of Conflict Resolution in Burundi

Angélique Kanyange
Email: kanyangeangelique@gmail.com

Abstract

Burundi underwent a great deal of intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts and civil wars from 1993 to 2005. The inter-ethnic conflicts occurred between the majority Hutus and minority Tutsis. However, 2005 marked a new era with the beginning of multiparty democracy and general election. Since then, the efforts undertaken to address Burundi's historical experience of conflicts and civil wars included the establishment of the National Commission of Truth and Reconciliation in 2014. Although there have been gains to unite people, these intertribal tensions persist, even within Burundi church communities. Based on 2017 statistics, 93.9% of the population claimed to be Christians: Catholic (58.6%) and Protestant (35.23%). This article examines the nature of church conflict in Burundi and proposes a theology of conflict resolution. The church in Burundi needs a theology (based on love and forgiveness) that helps manage conflicts and maintain peace among congregations. The study employs a critical contextualization method rooted in the pastoral cycle.

Keywords: Church Leadership; Burundi; Conflict in Churches; Conflict Resolution.

Introduction

Burundi has passed through perpetual conflicts, which have also affected churches. This article examines the nature of conflict in the church in Burundi with an aim to propose a theology of conflict resolution. It articulates a responsive theological strategy for conflict resolution amongst the contemporary evangelical churches in Burundi. Conflict represents a state of dysfunctional relationships and social disorder, which is a theological and spiritual problem that goes against God's plan to live in peace with all people. Conflict has been a characteristic of Burundian history since its formation as a modern state, especially the socio-

political tensions between the majority Hutus and minority Tutsi.[1] Each ethnic community wanted to lead and to have all the power and economic privileges; as a result of this situation, many people were killed, and others exiled out of their country. To ignore resolving a conflict at its initial stage leads to dire consequences, including: "loss of lives; destruction of property; retrogression in the qualitative and quantitative growth of the church; separation and breakdown of families; infliction of physical, social, psychological and spiritual wounds; and ultimately, the disqualification for the eternal life, the ultimate goal of our Christian life."[2] Conflicts deny humanity the opportunity to enjoy God's reign on earth to the maximum and, by extension, Christ's promised abundant life (John 10:10).

The conflicts in Burundi are the outcomes of historical injustice that marked Burundi's political system.[3] But many churches also experienced conflicts of different natures. A lack of internal conflict resolution structures and frameworks has compounded this scenario. As a result, when churches experience conflicts, they seek intervention from government institutions and the courts instead of resolving them biblically. By implication, a church in conflict can hardly fulfil its mission to the world because conflict is a barrier to reaching the unreached. Such a church fails to become an instrument of peace and harmony or a model for unsaved people to emulate.

Biblically, at the core of every conflict is sin. The Bible talks about the consequences of sin committed by Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:17–18. They were holy at the point of their creation (Gen 1—2). However, man and woman, created in God's image, committed sin, resulting in their separation from God. Due to the fall into sin, human beings and creation continue to suffer.[4] The fall led to a fractured relationship between God and humanity, humanity and creation. Thus, a conflict situation can't glorify God; a church in a conflict fails to live out its identity and mandate.

In Burundi, there are cases of imprisonment of some who claim to be "servants of God" or "church leaders" because of causing disorders. For instance, in Ngozi province, four Seventh Day Adventist Church church leaders were imprisoned for two years with additional

[1] Westein Warren, *Historical Dictionary of Burundi* (New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 2006).
[2] Allan I. Muhati, *The Role of Reconciliation Theology in Socio-political Healing and Development*, in Thomas Schirrmacher, et al, eds., *Evangelical Review of Theology: The Word Evangelical Alliance's Journal of Theology and Contemporary Application, vol 44 Number I January 2020* (Preston Farm: Paternoster, 2019), 33.
[3] Martin Meredith, *A House Divided. The State of Africa*: *A History of Independence* (Free Press, 2011), 197.
[4] Michael Ray, https://www.britannica.com/topic/original-sin, January 25, 2023, Article History. (Accessed September 20, 2023). *Report on International Religious Freedom.*

fines for each to pay. The four were guilty of assaulting a new church leader during a prayer session.[5] This disgraceful misconduct is quite concerning. A similar incident happened in Cibitoke Province, as cited by the US Department of State,

> The Minister of Interior met with a delegation of the East-Central Africa Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to address the continued imprisonment of the Church President and other matters related to leadership issues within the church, including approving a transitional leadership team. In February and May, police briefly detained the leader of Life Church and other pastors from the church. In October, the government closed two Free Methodist churches in Cibitoke Province following clashes between the churches' leadership and congregations. Consequently, In July 2020, the government announced the suspension of requests to register new religious groups until further notice, citing the need to design new registration procedures.[6]

When church leaders are entangled in leadership battles, it becomes hard to model what discipleship is. The critical question is, how is the church accomplishing the missional mandate of forgiveness, peace-making, reconciliation, justice distribution, truth-telling and practising genuine love? Due to these concerns, a theology with the potential to contribute towards the church's missional mandate of conflict resolution is inevitable.

While commenting on the effects of conflicts, Paul Jegede states, "The unending conflict continues to brew a toxic environment in the church's life and by extension the societal life, especially at economic, psychological, political, and social levels."[7] Conflict breeds a dysfunctional environment, especially if it is excessive or involves personal attacks or underhanded tactics. Conflict occurring in Burundi's churches has resulted in social, physical, economic, psychological and spiritual wounds. It is true that "Churches are like hospitals, full of wounded and sick people, but in the church, the sickness is sin, and the wounds are those we inflict upon ourselves and one another because of sin."[8] Sins committed in the church, including hatred and discord, greediness and lust, anxiety and fear, self-centeredness and pride, oppression and injustice, have bred conflict resulting in mistrust, divisions, fighting, demotivation, demoralization, stress, decreased levels of productivity, teamwork, and cooperation.

---

[5] Bonesha Radio, Tribunal de Grande Instance et Parquet de Ngozi, December 28th, 2021, 6 p.m.
[6] US Department of State, 2020: Burundi, Office of International religious Freedom, May 12, 2021.
[7] Paul O. Jegede, Implications of Religious Conflicts on Peace, National Security and Development in Nigeria. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol.9 No1, 20, pp.53-70
[8] GotQuestions.org, *What is the Cause of Church Split? How can Healing Occur after a Church Split? Accessed September 30, 2023.* https://www.gotquestions.org.

Methodology

This research proposes a theology of conflict resolution for the church in Burundi. The study employs the critical contextualization method (Pastoral Cycle). This method features four steps or moments described by Henriot: The first step is experience; the second is social analysis; the third is theological reflection; and the fourth is an action or response.[9] The study is structured based on these four stages.

The participants expressed their feelings and the impact of conflict on their lives. Most different kinds of social sins that cause conflicts in the church are determined; in the social analysis, the study looked for the linkage between social sins and social conflicts and tried to understand the effective action for change. The theological reflection looked into the role of the Bible and the church. Finally, the study looked at the possible action or response. This response is about the new ways of living and acting. The study proposes ways to prevent and resolve conflicts in Burundi's contemporary church communities.

Literature Review

This section discusses the sources and consequences of conflicts within the church and how they can be resolved.

Causes of Conflicts in the Church

In Burundi, conflicts are diverse; some are based on land, leadership succession, marriage, and heritage. The paragraphs below highlight some sins that generate conflicts in the church.

Hatred and Discord

Proverbs 10:12 states, "Hatred stir up dissension, but love covers up over all wrongs" (NIV). Hatred is "the extreme dislike or disgust; hate is ill or resentment that is usually mutual prejudiced hostility or animosity."[10] Discord means "discordancy, conflict, dissension, dissonance, division, inharmony, disharmony, schism, strife, warfare, disunity,"[11] or a lack of agreement or harmony. 1 Corinthians 1:10 addresses the problem of division with the body of Christ. Paul encourages the church to be united in the name of Jesus.[12]

[9] Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Orbis Books, 1980).
[10] Merriam-Webster.com, *Hatred Definition and Meaning*, (accessed August 12,203).
[11] Merriam-Webster.com, "Discord" (accessed January 8, 2024).
[12] Blomberg, Craig. "Commentary on 1 Corinthians" in *NIV Application* Commentary: 1 Corinthians, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994)34

Greediness and Lust

Proverb 28:25 states, "A greedy man stirs up dissension, but he who trusts in the Lord will prosper." Maxwell defines greed as " the inordinate, insatiable desire to accumulate money, power, and security to such a degree that it supersedes moral integrity and even spiritual integrity."[13] Thomas Aquinas wrote: "Greed is a sin against God, just as all mortal sins, in as much as man condemns."[14] Conflicts increase when these acts of sinful nature control believers.

Anxiety and Fear

Anxiety is considered the father of fear, and critical anxiety is a mysterious force. It seems to take its rise out of the very capacities of liberty and self-transcendence that distinguish man from the instinctive. Eduard wrote: "A destructive anxiety has one convinced mark as it leaves a person with indeterminate goals."[15] Brian Borgman defines fear as "the emotion of serious distress which is aroused by impending danger, evil, or pain, whether real or imagined."[16] It brands us abandoned and forcefully repeats to us we are not in control and that there is nothing we can do about it. But there is a good fear: fear of the Lord, which is the heart of godliness (Prov 1:7,9:10). This helps people to live in peace with others.

Vernick sees fearful and anxious people as destructive toward themselves and others because they cannot love well; "Those people may pretend, placate, and please, or threaten, manipulate, and abuse others, in the hope that, if they can successfully control others or live, their deepest fears won't come true.[17] Those kinds of people cause conflicts in the church.

Self-Centeredness and Pride

The Bible identifies Self-centeredness and pride as sins (Prov 13:10; Gal 5:2; 1 John 2:16). According to Scott D. Allen, selfish ambition or pride is "the deadliest sin." He calls this "the master principle" of Satan. He considers this as the root of everything wrong with the world. On the contrary, humility and sacrificial service are the master principles of God's Kingdom;

[13] Paul Maxwell, Bible Verses about Greed and Wealth. http://get.tithe.ly Accessed 30th, 2023.
[14] Thomas Aquinas, *Suma Theology August* 20th2023 (Accessed August 25, 2023) https://en. Wikipedia.org/wiki/ seven deadly-sins#cite-re.
[15] Eduard John Carnell, *The kingdom of Love and the pride of Life* (United States of America, Wm B. Eerdmans, 1960),81.
[16]Brian S. Borgman, *Feeling and Faith, cultivating Godly Emotions in the Christian life (Illinois, Crossway Books,* 2009), 124-127.
[17] Lesile Vernick, *the Emotionally Destructive Relationship, Seeing it, Stopping it, Surviving it (*Oregon, Harvest House , 2007),109.

"We need a guide to help us pursue humility in our personal lives, families, church and working place."[18] Proud people, either leaders or church members, cause conflicts in the church. Chuck sees pride as a disease which is easy to identify but difficult to cure. And he continues to say that "our humble actions are not genuine. Even our humble behavior is prideful."[19] According to Eduard John Carnell, a proud person has trusted power for so long that he finds it difficult to believe he has missed the way.[20]

Grain states: "People frequently have selfishness, ego, and pride; when a person feels that life is about him, he takes things individually. Self-centeredness causes one to experience hurt feelings easily."[21] The Bible tells us that the cause of quarrels and fights among people is their passions and the war within them (Jas 4:1). Conflicts come in different forms, as discussed below.

Relationship and Information Conflicts

The occurrence of strong bad feelings causes these kinds of conflicts. Chuck states, "Jealousy, suspicion, and hatred are created from insights, poor communication, typecasts, and so on. These relationship conflicts fuel quarrels, causing them to escalate."[22] Relationship and value conflicts relate to internal bases of conflicts, and they are more difficult to resolve. Gary Rosberg states, "The relationship is nonnegotiable. Anything other than the Bible is open for discussion, but the relationship itself is not open for negotiation."[23] He shows the importance of relationships and proposes the ingredients of a restored relationship: Obedience, courage, and humility. Relationship conflicts are bound to arise in contemporary churches; some occur when people have personal goals and want to influence the church members for personal gain.

In the church, information conflicts arise when persons have dissimilar or inadequate data over a matter. When there is a communication breakdown, misunderstandings are likely

[18] Chuck Foreman, *The Deadliest Sin: A Penetrating Look at the Poison of Pride in a Leader*, (USA, West Bow Press rev, 2012), 57.
[19] Chuck Foreman*, 58*.
[20] Eduard John Carnell, *The kingdom of Love and the Pride of Live* (USA, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1960), 83.
[21] Chris Crain, *Seven causes of Church Conflict, Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, August 27, 2020* AccessedAugust 25, 2023. https://www.Bmbaonline.org/blog/2020/8/27 seven-causes-of-church-conflict.
[22] Dispute Resolution office, *University of Regina*, Four Major Types of Conflicts, April 2, 2022 Accessed August 10, 2023. https://med.libretexts.org/ Bookshelves/Nursing/Leadership.
[23] Gary Rosberg, *Choosing to Love Again, Restoring Broken Relationship* (Colorado Springs, focus on the family, 1972), 134-135.

to occur; thus, "Allowing sufficient time to be heard in a respectful environment helped by an impartial person can allow parties to clear up information gaps."[24]

Structural and Interest Conflicts

Oppressive forms of social relations cause structural and interest conflicts. These forms remain frequently moulded by external forces to the people in disagreement. Vilendrer states, "The limited resources or opportunity, as well as organization structures, often promote conflict behavior. The parties may well benefit from negotiation since the forum will help neutralize the power imbalance."[25] The church creates inequality in its members through its structure, and this causes conflict as the structure is constituted to favour some people.

Alfred Poirier expresses, "Conflicts concern the problems of how to allocate funds in the church budget, whom to hire, what program to eliminate, which curriculum to select, and the other myriad problems that face us each day."[26] Many times, there is a wrong belief that to please their own needs, those of their adversary must be sacrificed. The Bible instructs that we should think about the interests of others(Phil 2: 3-4); in this way, conflict of interest will be stemmed in churches.

Value Conflicts

These kinds of conflicts arise in our contemporary churches and are produced by people's perception of how they give meaning to life and describe what is the perception of people on how they give meaning to life and explain what is good, bad, right or wrong. These conflicts arise when people attempt to force one's values on another or exclusive value systems which do not permit different views.

Values are fundamental in one's personal life and society; "Value or moral conflicts are results of various principles or codes of discipline we live by. They are mostly difficult to resolve because when such an attitude is formed, they are very steady, and their protection becomes part of our social and political identity. They frequently are principles we deliberate worth fighting for."[27]

---

[24] Vilendrer Law P C, *The Five Main Cause of Conflict and How a Mediation Can Resolve Them*. July 28, 2020, (Accessed August 17,2023).
[25] Ibid.,
[26] Alfred Poirier, *The Peace-Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books 2006), 159.
[27] ADR Times, *Values Conflicts Explained,* February 17, 2023, accessed August 19, 2023 https://www.adrtmes.com/value-conflicts.#Misunderstanding.

In the church, people have various values, but they need to know that their values must be under the biblical values as they have to bring peace and harmony to the congregation. Values come from different sources, depending on individual values and conditions. The most considered sources are: "our culture, especially individualism vs collectivism, our upbringing, our religion or personal philosophy, our political beliefs, our education, our profession, and our life experience."[28] Collectively, the church has to present a social framework where the church members are protected to protect and care for other members. This could help to avoid value conflicts presented in our churches.

Conflict Resolution in the Old Testament

The Bible contains many examples of conflicts, showing how they were resolved according to their natures and causes. Contemporary churches must be careful about resolving their conflicts and follow biblical principles of resolving conflict to fulfil God's mission for His church.

The Conflict between Abraham and Lot (Genesis 13)

Abraham and Lot were relatives, living together in the same section of town, and both were wealthy. Their riches were so much that the land where they were residents could no longer support them with all their flocks and people. Too many animals for the available pasture brought conflict between Abraham and Lot's herders. It became necessary to work separately.

Abraham proposed to Lot: "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left. And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar (This is was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah)" Genesis 13:8–11, ESV.

Abraham resolved the conflict peacefully. He did not send his nephew away. He proposes Lot's first choice in dividing the land between them; "From this, God reveals that a person is walking in faith when he or she submits to others."[29] He had used different approaches to resolve conflict. First of all, Abraham had the right attitude when he talked about the conflict with Lot. He discussed the case. This is called the principle of discussion in

[28] ADR Times, *Values Conflicts Explained*.
[29] Enduring World Bible Commentary Genesis Chapter 13.

conflict resolution.[30] Even for believers, the first step that should be taken should be to discuss the problem between the aggrieved parties (Matt 18:15). Abraham was willing to discuss with Lot even though he was older and was his uncle. He exhibited great humility, a virtue that is essential for conflict resolution. Even if one party in the conflict is unwilling to come to the table and talk, as believers, we should take the initiative and exhibit godly understanding by calling for a talk. Frequently, conflict arises simply due to a lack of communication. It is good to encourage all parties in conflict to talk through their problem, especially if you suspect that they have failed to communicate effectively up to the point.

Abraham resolved conflict as partners rather than opponents; he suggested to Lot that the fighting between their men has to stop. He didn't like to let a rift develop between their clans. Abraham was a man of faith and humility, telling Lot to choose whatever party he liked. Erik states: "Abraham's language was clear, firm and polite… Lot accepts the peace deal for the partition of the land and chooses the area of the plain of the Jordan, in the area including Sodom, and the story ends with Abraham and Lot separately settling in different areas of the Land" (Verses 10–12). Below are lessons we can learn from the way Abraham resolved this conflict. Erik Jones describes these in three points:

First, Abraham's priority was peace. As the older person in the family and the one who had helped raise Lot, Abraham could have pulled rank on Lot and dealt with the issue in a manner that would have benefited his needs first. Instead, he dealt with the issue in a way that prioritized peace between Lot and himself. Jesus Christ taught that being a peacemaker (Matt 5:9) is essential to a faithful Christian. The Bible implores believers to pursue peace with all people (Heb 12:14). Second, Abraham used gentle words to prevent an escalation of the issue. Abraham's words to Lot were not harsh and confrontational. They were gentle and kind. He emphasized that they were family and that strife should not exist between family members, and he offered a solution that minimized the chance of conflict escalating. Thus, Christians are expected to demonstrate gentleness and patience when dealing with other people (2 Tim 2:4; Tit 3:2; Rom 12:18). Third, Abraham was willing to take a loss for the sake of peace. Abraham's solution to bring peace involved giving Lot the first choice of where to settle. Taking advantage of Abraham's kindness, Lot seized the opportunity to take the best land.

[30] Amos Ikheloa Ashmore, *Biblical Conflict Resolution: A case Study of Abraham versus Lot*. November 22, 2017. Accessed September 12, 2023 httpas://www. Linkdin.com> pulse> biblical-conflict-resolution.

Abraham had to take the less fertile land because of his offer to maintain peace. One of the aspects of godly wisdom is being willing to yield (Jas 3:17). Sometimes, it is necessary for us to take loss. In other words, sacrifice for the sake of having peace with others.[31]

Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the New Testament

The following paragraphs highlight one of the conflict resolutions in the New Testament that could serve as an example of conflict resolution for contemporary churches.

Conflict Caused by Inequalities

Acts 6:1–7 records conflicts between Grecian Jews and Hebraic Jews; the Grecian Jews complained that their widows were overlooked in food distribution. Luke, also the Gospel writer,[32] records that as the church grew in numbers (Acts 2:41), the church faced numerous challenges. According to Acts 4:34, there was no needy person among the congregation because they shared their belongings. The section below analyzes how this problem was resolved.

Understanding the Problem

The event was the first cross-cultural conflict among Christians in the early church. Montgomery Boice believes it was "a problem of administration" caused by the church's rapid growth."[33] While others suggest it was "the problem of supply and demand that growth had created,"[34] K. Barrett thinks it was "A minor deficiency in administration."[35]

However, other scholars find this differently. They think the nature of the problem was greater than just a matter of administration. Scott Spencer points to some Jewish scriptures that stress "God's special role as the father of orphans and protector of widows in the vacuum created by absent or abusive males."[36] At the same time, Young Lee Hertig considers it an economic-political struggle based on the cultural differences between the Hellenists and the

[31] Erik Jones, *Abraham and Lot Separate. Life, hope & Truth*. Accessed August 18, 2023 htts://lifehopeandtruth.com>bible. blog.
[32] Holman Illustrated, Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee 2012.
[33] James Montgomery Boice, Acts*: An Expositional Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, Mich. Baker 1997), 112.
[34] The New Interpreter's Bible 2002, 110.
[35] Barrett, C. K. Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles. Vol. I. Eds. John Emerton, Charles *Cranfield, and Graham Stanton. The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments Series*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1994), 303.
[36] Spencer F. Scott. *Journeying through Acts: A Literary-Cultural Reading*. (Edinburgh: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004),75.

Hebrews.[37] Peter Wagner suggests, with examples, that the nature of the problem was cultural and political.

In summary, some scholars view the problem as administrative or religious, while others see it as cultural and political. The comparison of the Hebraic and the Hellenistic groups seems appropriate to articulate the nature of the conflict. Hebraic Jews looked down on Grecian widows. These two groups of early Christians are differentiated by religious background, language, culture, degree of cohesiveness, access to a decision-making process, and unequal treatment. There was a problem of discrimination and selfishness.

Relevance

The conflicts faced by churches in Burundi have dimensions similar to those faced in Acts 6:1–7. At the surface level, the problems are caused by family, ethnic and regional differences. However, at the deeper level, conflicts in the church are caused by sins where people hate and exclude others because of their family background, their regions, their resources, their ethnicity and even their educational level. Selfishness and pride rule in the hearts of people, thus complicating relationships. Just like the apostles in the early church who had to learn that "those from the second culture could become part of their church and peacefully accept their leadership."[38]

Conflict Resolution in Acts 6:1–7

The apostles successfully resolved the conflict peacefully, as seen in verses vv 2–4, "And the twelve summoned the full number of disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."[39] Conflict resolution came when the apostles looked at the bigger picture of the church's mission. Unresolved conflict hinders one's spiritual life, and it can break friendships, bring nations to war, break marriages, and split churches.

[37] Hertig, Young Lee. *Cross-cultural Mediation: From Exclusion to Inclusion. Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context.* Eds. Robert Gallagher and Paul Hertig, 59-72. Maryknoll N.Y: Orbis Books. 2004.
[38] Peter, C. Wagner, 1994, 143.
[39] Acts 6: 2-4, English Standard Version.

Acts 6:1–7 provides lessons that could be learned for church organization (taking the church as a multicultural organization). First, church organizations must be sensitive and aware of their unconscious assumptions. An appropriate cultural assumption in place may face the challenge of modification in a different context. If members of a cross-cultural organization do not detect this, the organization will likely be in danger. Second, the church leader must encourage members to express their thoughts and feelings and create an environment to express their emotions and thoughts. All this without imposing their views or the organization's policy upon the other churches. Third, leaders should consider making changes as swiftly and willingly as possible if they are likely to bring harmony and effectiveness to the team without compromising the truth. The changes must reflect and respond to members' grievances and incorporate voices from other cultures.

Fourth, leaders of church organizations may learn from the twelve disciples concerning their views of the newly-elected Hellenist leaders. Barrett argues, "The Seven were somehow different from the twelve, but the difference could be adequately stated in that the one group was made of Hellenists, the other of Hebrews."[40] Considering all these points, the apostles accepted the seven as leaders of the early church who could better assist and address the problems the Hellenists faced."[41] This new wineskin for new wine strategy effectively handled the cross-cultural situation and evangelism (Acts 6:7). Chung-Kim noticed a few essential components of resolving conflict. The apostles saw the potential for specific conflicts within the church to affect the entire church adversely. In addition, the first thing they did was to put the localized conflict beside the God-ordained mission of the church to create perspective. They then called upon the entire church to be part of the solution. Finally, they offered wise, practical steps for conflict resolution, which the church embraced. The seven men, including those from the offended party, were not given positions of leadership and responsibility.[42]

Towards a Theology of Resolving Conflict in the Church

This section proposes the theology of forgiveness and love as critical elements of conflict resolution.

[40] Barett, C.K., *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles,* 1994, 305.
[41] Dollar Harold, *St. Luke's Missiology: Across-Cultural Challenge* (Pasadena, Calif: William Carey Library, 1996),67.
[42] Ester Chung-Kim and Todd R. Hains, eds, *Acts. Reformation Commentary on Scripture. New Testament, Vol. VI*. (Downer Grove,IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2014), 73.

Forgiveness Theology

Forgiveness is a vital element that could stop multiple problems in the church. When imperfect people get together, disagreements, hurt feelings, and misunderstandings are unavoidable. If our expectations of others are too high, disappointment is inevitable, resulting in hurtful feelings and anger; "Our response to one another should be to forgive one another in kindness and compassion" (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). Scott remarks, "Religious peacebuilding is taking shape on the ground; it has to avoid local communities' violence."[43] The church has to be a model of forgiveness. Looking at twentieth-century history, Torpey states: "The influence of holocaust consciousness is a factor contributing to the forgiveness discourse."[44] Donna adds, "Forgiveness can play a role in conflict resolution when the parties accept that the conflict is a relational phenomenon and is the result of failed interaction, that both sides have a role in reconstructing the relationships, and in so doing, reconstructing identities, which results in the restoration of the humanity of both."[45]

In church, Christians must be in healthy relationships as they share the same identity. Forgiveness as a virtue has led to managing conflicts in relationships. The church cannot have sustainable peace without social healing of the wounds caused by the conflicts. Joseph Montville opines, "Healing and reconciliation in violent and religious conflicts depend on a process of transactional contrition and forgiveness between aggressor and victims."[46] He further states, "When there is no forgiveness, the church stays the same way; people look for revenge. Desmond Tutu wrote, "There is no future if there is no forgiveness."[47] Therefore, the church should reflect on Jesus' forgiveness which restored human relationship with God. Donald Shriver argues that "the process of asking for and giving forgiveness presupposes the recognition of commission of an evil act by one agent against another, the willingness of offenders to acknowledge their offences, continued memory of immorality, the hope of

[43]Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation* (Lanham. MD: Rowman and Littlefield 2000), 7.
[44] John C. Torpey, *Introduction: Politics and Past on Repairing Historical Injustice* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 1-36.
[45] Donna Hicks "The Role of Identity Reconstruction in Promoting Reconciliation", in Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L Peterson (eds.), *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy and Conflict* (Radnor PA.: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002) p 143.
[46] Joseph V Montville. "The Healing Function in Political Conflict Resolution." In Dennis J. D. Sandole and Hugo van der Merwe, eds *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice Integration and Application* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 112.
[47] Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999).

relation repair, forbearance, a step back from revenge and some degree of empathy with the one who has committed the wrong."[48]

Forgiveness theology comes from the death of Jesus Christ, who died as a sacrifice for human sins to restore human relationship with God.[49] Christian forgiveness is costly, and Jesus paid the cost; similarly, Christians "must make sacrifices for reconciliation and forgiveness. We might have to sacrifice our right to be right."[50]

Theology of Love

Theology of Love is an essential element in Christianity as it covers a multitude of sins, followed by an augmented commitment to serve one another (1 Peter 4: 8–11). People will see each other's differences in a new light once they are committed to forgiving, loving and serving one another. God Himself says he is love. Therefore, we cannot say we know God if we do not love each other. George Verwer sees love as a basic ingredient in the church's life, "I believe, a basic ingredient which is largely lacking in Christianity today, and the lack of it is the source of most of our problems."[51] He compares the lack of love in the church to a cancer that destroys the church slowly, but this cancer is visible. Love is one of the essential signs of people who are born again. Love is a new command.[52] The Christian community must show Jesus's love by resolving conflicts for peace and God's blessings to prevail. Love goes together with generosity, truth and justice. When love is considered a part, it remains unconcreted.[53] Where there is generosity, justice and truth, the sins of self-centred and hatred are absent.

Conclusion

This paper dealt with conflicts within the church, their causes, their consequences and how they can be resolved. Burundi has experienced many social upheavals, which caused many people to flee from the country and created hatred among people either because they hardly belong to the same ethnic group or the same region. In the past, the church has also grappled

[48] Donald W. Shriver, *An Ethics for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[49] Wilbur O. Donovan, *Introduction to Biblical Christianity from on African Perspective* (Kwara State: Nigeria, 1999), 89.
[50] James Nkansah-Obrempong, *Foundation for African Theological Ethics* (Carlisle, Cumbria, Langham, 2013), 264.
[51] George Verwer, *A Revolution of Love and Balance* (USA, Kansas City, Walt Erick, 1977), 6.
[52] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *a Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids Michigan, Library of Congress, 2009), 240.
[53] Samuel M. Powel, A Theology of Christian Spirituality. (Nashville, Library of Congress, 2005), 170.

with conflicts which taint its identity and image. These conflicts are caused by hatred and discord, greediness and lust, anxiety and fear, self-centeredness and pride, oppression and injustice, divisions and infightings. The church should examine the Scriptures to learn how conflicts can be resolved in church communities. The apostolic church offers insights that can help the church communities in Burundi to solve conflicts and be the lights of the world in reconciling communities to one another and God. The study proposed the theology of forgiveness and love as the panacea to the situation in Burundi.

Bibliography

ADR Times, *Values Conflicts Explained*, February 17, 2023, Accessed August 19, 2023, https://www.adrtmes.com/value-conflicts.#Misunderstanding.

Aghemore, Amos Ikheloa, *Biblical Conflict Resolution: A Case Study of Abraham versus Lot*. November 22, 2017. Accessed September 12, 2023 httpas://www. Linkdin.com> pulse> biblical-conflict-resolution.

Barrett, C. K. Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles. Vol. I. Eds. John Emerton, Charles Cranfield, and Graham Stanton. *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments Series*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1994), 303.

Boice, James Montgomery, *Acts: An Expositional Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich. Baker 1997.

Borgman, Brian S., *Feeling and Faith, Cultivating Godly Emotions in the Christian Life* Illinois, Crossway Books, 2009.

Carnell, Eduard John, *The Kingdom of Love and the Pride of Life,* Wm B. Eerdmans, 1960.

Chretien J.P., *Burundi: L'Histoire a Retrouvee.* Paris: Karthala, 1993.

Chung-Kim, Ester and Todd R. Hains, eds. *Acts. Reformation Commentary on Scripture. New Testament, vol.VI*. Timothy George, gen, ed. Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014.

Coltri, Laurie S., *Conflict Diagnosis and Alternative Dispute Resolution*. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004.

Crain, Chris, *Seven Causes of Church Conflict*, Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, August 27, 2020. Accessed August 25, 2023. https://www.bmbaonline.org/blog/ 2020/8/27 seven-causes -of-church-conflict.

Culture, devotional. *He That Soweth Discords among Brethren*, (Accessed August 13, 03 https://www.tn-biblecollege.edu/o4/he-that-soweth-discord-among-brethren, April 30, 2020.

Dispute Resolution Office, University of Regina, *Four Major Types of Conflicts*, April 2, 2022 Accessed August 10, 2023. https://med.libretexts.org/ Bookshelves/Nursing/Leadership.

Erik Jones, *Abraham and Lot Separate. Life, Hope & Truth*. Accessed August 18, 2023 htts://lifehopeandtruth.com>bible.blog.

Foreman, Chuck, *The Deadliest Sin, A Penetrating at The Poison of Pride in a Leader*. USA, West Bow press rev, 2012.

GotQuestions.org, https://www.gotquestions.org. *What is the Cause of Church Split? How Can Healing Occur after a Church Split? Accessed September 30, 2023.*

Harold, Dollar,. St. Luke's Missiology: *A Cross-Cultural Challenge*. Pasadena, Calif: William Carey Library, 1996.

Henry, Eduard. Manning, *Sin and Its Consequence*. (Accessed August 15, 2023). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven-deadly-sins#cite-re.

Hertig, Young Lee. Cross-cultural Mediation: From Exclusion to Inclusion. In *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context*. Eds. Robert Gallagher and Paul Hertig, 59-72. Maryknoll N.Y: Orbis Books. 2004.

Hicks, Donna "The Role of Identity Reconstruction in Promoting Reconciliation", in Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L Peterson (eds.), *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy and Conflict.* Radnor PA.: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002.

Holland, Joe and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*. Orbis Books, 1980.

Holman Illustrated, *Holman Bible*, Nashville, Tennessee 2012.

Jegede, Paul O., *Implications of Religious Conflicts on Peace, National Security and Development in Nigeria. Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol.9 No. 1, 2019, 53-70.

Köstenberger, Andreas J., *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids Michigan, Library of Congress, 2009.

Meredith, Martin, *A House Divided. The State of Africa*: *A History of Independence*. Free Press, 2011.

Merriam-Webster.com, *Hatred Definition and Meaning*, (accessed August 12,203). https://www.merriam-webster/dictionary/ hatred.

Montville, Joseph V. The Healing Function in Political Conflict Resolution. In Dennis J. D. Sandole and Hugo van der Merwe, eds *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice Integration and Application* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 112.

Muhati, Allan I., The Role of Reconciliation Theology in Socio-political Healing and Development, In Thomas Schirrmacher et al., eds., *Evangelical Review of Theology: The Word Evangelical Alliance's Journal of Theology and Contemporary Application,* vol 44 Number I January 2020.

Nkansah-Obrempong, James, Foundation for African Theological Ethics. Carlisle, Cumbria, Langham, 2013.

Poirier, Alfred, *The Peace-Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict.* Grand Rapids, *Baker books, 2006.*

Powel, Samuel M., *A Theology of Christian Spirituality*. Nashville, Library of Congress, 2005.

Ray, Michael, https://www.britannica.com/topic/original-sin, January 25, 2023, Article History. (Accessed September 20, 2023). *Report on International Religious Freedom.*

Rosberg, Gary, *Choosing to Love Again: Restoring Broken Relationships*. Colorado Springs, focus on the family, 1972.

Scott, Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation* Lanham. MD: Rowman and Littlefield 2000.

Scott, Spencer F., *Journeying through Acts: A Literary-Cultural Reading*. Edinburgh: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.

Shriver, Donald W, *An Ethics for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Torpey, John C., *Introduction: Politics and Past on Repairing Historical Injustice*. Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

Tutu, Desmond, *No Future Without Forgiveness*. London: Rider, 1999.

US Department of State, 2020: Burundi, Office of International Religious Freedom, May 12, 2021.

Vernick, Leslie, *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship, Seeing it, Stopping it, Surviving it* Oregon, Harvest House 2007.

Verwer, George, *A Revolution of Love and Balance*. Kansas City, Walt Erick, 1977.

Vilendrer, Law PC, *The Five Main Causes of Conflict and How Mediation can Resolve them*. (Accessed August 17, 2023). https://www.vilendrerlaw.com.five -main -causes-conflict-mediation-can-resolve.

Wagner, Peter. *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, (Ventura, Calif: Regal 1994), 141.

Westein, Warren, *Historical Dictionary of Burundi.* New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 2006.

Wilbur O. Donovan, Jr, *Introduction to Biblical Christianity from an African Perspective.* Kwara State, Nigeria, 1999.