

Abstaining from Retaliation: A Story of Restoration Ministry-OEIL in Eastern Congo

¹Elias Kasereka Muhongya
World Christianity, Africa International University
Corresponding Email: eliasmuhongya@yahoo.fr

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Abstract

Reports of violence flow from everywhere. They make humankind look powerless in front of conflicts and seem inclined to a retaliation culture. Many people prefer to justify retaliation by euphemistic concepts like self-defense, counterattack, letting justice prevail, counteroffensive, etc. This is a mere application of the natural human principle of the *lex talionis*. In tumultuous zones like the African Great Lakes Region in general and Eastern Congo in particular, one might expect escalation of conflicts if retaliation is the only option. However, the advent of Christianity in our societies has strengthened a new culture of reconciliation among opponent groups as a way out of violent conflicts. In a world immersed in retaliation culture, a message about raising a culture of reconciliation by abstaining from retaliation sounds like naïveté or treason. This paper sets out to respond to this question: How does reconciliation become an antidote to retaliation in the Eastern Congo context? Using Case Study method, the objective of this study is to present biblical, ethical, and practical ways of breaking the circle of violence and building a culture of peace. In Eastern Congo, Restoration Ministry-OEIL is one of the Christian organizations that strive to promote reconciliation among ethnic communities. It raises awareness of the root causes of Eastern Congo crisis from their local, national, regional, and international dimensions. Therefore, its story constitutes historical evidence of the possibility of abstaining from retaliation despite the horrors of violence endured. Its peacemaking method is a good example of a contextual theology of reconciliation from indigenous practices.

Keywords: *Eastern Congo, Ethnic groups, Justice, Peacemakers, Reconciliation, Retaliation*

1. Introduction

Breaking news is often news of violence around the world. Ethnic retaliation may seem an attractive headline than ethnic reconciliation. From interpersonal clashes to interstate conflicts, many people are driven by a culture of retaliation covered under euphemistic concepts like self-defense, giving a lesson, counterattack, letting justice prevail, and counteroffensive. This is a mere application of the natural human principle of the *lex talionis* to which people are inclined by default. In tumultuous zones like the African Great Lakes Region in general and Eastern Congo in particular, one might expect an escalation of conflicts if retaliation is the only option.

However, the advent of Christianity in our African societies has strengthened a new culture of reconciliation among opponent groups as a way out of violent conflicts around the world. We are reminded of Matthew 5: 38-39 which says: “You have heard that it was said,

‘Eye for eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.” The shift from a retaliation culture to a reconciliation culture is not self-evident. While thinking of it as a difficult process, it remains a possible access. This paper sets out to respond to this question: How does reconciliation become an antidote to retaliation in the Eastern Congo context?

The objective of this study is to present biblical, ethical, and practical ways of breaking the circle of violence and building a culture of peace. Finding ways out of Eastern Congo crisis has attracted the attention of many researchers and practitioners from both secular and religious perspectives, (Ntamushobora 2009; Autesserre 2010; Leatherman 2011; Mbavu 2011; Stearns 2012; Nkinzo 2014; Kahindo 2016; Katongole 2017). I am joining this cohort by bringing to the table of knowledge a story of successful peacemaking work done locally by people driven only by their Christian faith and personal patriotism. This story is about Restoration Ministry-OEIL,¹ a Christian organization that strives to promote reconciliation among ethnic groups in Eastern Congo. Its story constitutes historical evidence of the possibility of abstaining from retaliation despite the horrors of violence endured. Its peacemaking method is a good example of a contextual theology of reconciliation in Africa.

Apart from the methodology section, this paper follows three axes: first, a brief presentation of the Eastern Congo multifaceted crisis that has built a culture of retaliation. The reflection here is around the possibility of uprooting such a deadly culture. Second, a short historical presentation of Restoration Ministry-OEIL. The focus will be put on its main programs as an outline of a peacemaking method that contributes to raising a culture of reconciliation from which one may draw a theology of reconciliation. Third, a quick critical analysis of refraining from retaliation as a way of putting an end to violence cycle highlights how successful is the Restoration Ministry-OEIL’s approach to reconciliation.

2. Methodology

Robert Yin finds that “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 2009:37). In other words, states Yin, you would use case study method because you wanted to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding encompassed important contextual conditions – because they were highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study (Yin 2009:38). There are five steps in case study research: designing a case study, preparing to collect case study evidence, collecting case study data, analyzing case study evidence and reporting case studies.

The Case Study method was used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context: the work of the Restoration Ministry-OEIL in Eastern Congo. This method contributes to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena (Yin 2009:25). It was chosen to gather and report the findings based on research conducted in 2022 through interviews and document analysis related to the Restoration Ministry-OEIL’s endeavor in Eastern Congo. The findings were reported to advance that Daniel as a concerned peacemaker endeavored through Restoration Ministry-OEIL to call people of different fighting ethnic groups to reconciliation, forgiveness, and restoration.

¹ OEIL is a French acronym for Organisation, Evangelisation, Intercession, Liberation.

3. Problem with Eastern Congo: Uprooting a Culture of Retaliation?

Despite wealth of its natural resources, including prophets and politicians' promises of security, unity, and development, Eastern Congo continues to languish under war and poverty. The multilayered character of its crisis is well expressed by many stakeholders. Some are known to the public, but many others choose to operate behind the shadows. The region is full of "fighters" driven by various motivations. The common ground for them is retaliation. It may sound like an exaggeration but there is truth in it when Laura Seay confirmed after her bad experience in crossing the Congo border from Rwanda: The Eastern Congo is a place where almost nothing works according to the norms of modern statehood and governance (Seay 2009:1), leave alone biblical principles of good governance (Mbandi 2019:72–82). Eastern Congo's socio-cultural context is characterized by many forms of human right violations. It makes many people live with emotional wounds and to be full of hatred. Most of the violence and injustice victims may not be informed about how to claim their basic rights. Observing their aggressors not sentenced – because of impunity – some victims or survivors choose revenge. This retaliation culture, sometimes in the form of *lex talionis* (Nabino 2016:34–37), results in the violence cycle, and conflicts are set up as a lifestyle in the region. One easy path to understanding the Eastern Congo conflict is to draw a pyramid of causes and stakeholders that had built a culture of revenge. The pyramid has some causes clustered into four dimensions.

Locally, there is personal insatiability, the struggles over land exacerbated by negative ethnicity and love of power (*libido dominandi*). Eastern Congo is a hotbed for militia groups. But why? While some have pullulated as ethnic auto-defense forces, "rival militia, some acting as proxy forces for sponsors in Rwanda, Uganda, and Kinshasa, others controlled by local warlords, continued their war of plunder, bringing yet more years of misery to a population desperate for peace" (Meredith 2005:544). Every affected person or ethnic group may seek retaliation in the name of self-protection. The armed groups evoked here are a tree that hides a forest because, as John Clark puts it, while some armed groups emerged organically from the realities of rural life, others were deliberately created by local politicians, and still others were exploited to serve the interests of urban businessmen (Clark 2002:8).

Nationally, the mismanagement of public resources, bad governance, and pursuit of self-quick enrichment expressed through the fight for political leadership control bring suffering. Congolese blame a lot of the legacy of colonialism in assessing the misfortune of the country, including the Eastern Congo crisis. For any change to take place, people are reminded of their responsibility to deal with colonial heritage: "While colonialism was devastating for Africa, it has become a convenient scapegoat for conflicts, warlordism, corruption, poverty, dependency, and mismanagement in the region. Africa cannot continue to blame her failed institutions, collapsed infrastructures, unemployment, drug abuse, and refugee crises on colonialism; but neither can these issues be understood fully without acknowledging the fact of Africa's past" (Maathai 2010:5). Congolese may have experienced paternalism, but it is no longer the only reason for all misfortunes and the crisis in Eastern Congo 63 years after independence.

Regionally, numerous African states, in interlocking alliances that often appear to be motivated by only one principle: "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," are involved in the Eastern Congo war. The borders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are the result and aftermath of the Berlin Conference when the European imperial powers sat at a controversial forum where Africa was partitioned into artificial geographical domains of European influence, exploitation, and expropriation (Adogame 2004:186). The Eastern Congo

crisis is thus linked to the African Great Lakes Region's political context of insecurity that has been for so long fueled by grievances about the drawing of countries' borders. Many ethnic groups found themselves divided on both sides of the demarcation line. The politics of protecting one's borders and combating the rebel factions from neighboring countries living in the DRC together with the illicit exploitation of mining sites and other forest products are the factors of endless battles in the region. Congo's neighboring countries fight for mining site control in Eastern Congo.

Internationally, Eastern Congo is in the collimator of developed countries because of its potential to provide raw materials for various industries including automobile, electronic, and nuclear. East versus West power influence is a major factor in understanding instability in this region. Competition in accessing these materials inclines multinationals and great powers to war. Some researchers thus call Eastern Congo crisis a "proxy war," given that multinational and western countries finance local fighters as they take intended minerals: "The eastern DRC [is] an area of uncontrolled extraction of raw materials, organized by local and regional interests operating with actors in the international market" (International Alert 2010:5). In this respect, Eastern Congo wars are not simply civil conflicts but wars of plunder and occupation by foreign nations and mercantile multinationals (Kahindo 2016:179). Unfortunately, since its independence and despite the renaming of the country, the DRC still operates by the law of plunder and greed (Katongole 2011:15).

Even if we do not have much space to describe the origin of the Eastern Congo crisis, one may get a big picture of the causes of war in this quote: "The complex of conflicts in Eastern Congo features the collusion of multinationals together with the neighboring states (including Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and Angola) and multitude of rebel factions and militaries in the illicit extraction of natural resources that has become integral to local war and sexual violence" (Leatherman 2011:122). Hence, many analyses of the causes of war in the DRC come to this conclusion: "the wars in the Congo have had less to do with inter-African tensions and more to do with the global appetite for Congo's resources" (Makekera Iyara 2015:2-3).

The Eastern Congo crisis provides fertile ground for a culture of retaliation. Such a culture needs to be uprooted and replaced by a culture of reconciliation. Where should we start the work of reconciliation? From a Christian point of view espoused in this study, reconciliation should better start at step 1 with the intention of transforming fighters into peacemakers. This is no longer a mere theory but a historical fact in Eastern Congo where Restoration Ministry-OEIL works towards bringing ethnic communities to abstain from revenge.

4. Restoration Ministry-OEIL in Action: Its History, Its Programs

"...We heard one testimony after another of how the message of healing and reconciliation in our workshops had changed hearts and caused warring factions to stop fighting. The local chief gave a speech and thanked us for helping to bring peace to their region..." (Lloyd 2021:8) This is the summary of what Restoration Ministry-OEIL does in Eastern Congo.

Restoration Ministry-OEIL was born in 2004 when the first workshop was held in Bunia, with Dr. Rhiannon Lloyd as the main facilitator. Lloyd's comment on the outcome of this workshop is revealing: "From the start, I could see that these people were serious about becoming peacemakers in their troubled land. They were so responsive, even starting to repent on day 2 though that was meant to be the message of day 3! In the end, they were convinced. 'With this message, we can stop this war,' they exclaimed. 'Money or no money, we will do it.'" (Lloyd 2021:195) Daniel M. Kasereka is the visionary and founder of this ministry. Since

then, he has been putting a team together to run its operations. Three criteria are common to team members of Restoration Ministry-OEIL: (1) Confession of their faith in Jesus Christ based on solid biblical grounds, (2) Good knowledge of the Eastern Congo region with its religious, economic, and sociopolitical issues and (3) belonging to one of the different Christian denominations in the region. With these criteria, the ministry is interdenominational, intercultural, and interethnic. It enjoys the trust and reliability of the ethnic communities in the region.

Daniel is very rigorous in choosing his ministry partners both locally and internationally because he strongly believes that what he is doing is far different from an NGO type of work rather a spiritual battle to widely spread the love of God that produces evident Christ's testimonies among reconciled ethnic groups. Lloyd bears witness to this fact when she reports:

A Christian relief organization approached them [the Restoration Ministry-OEIL workers], saying how impressed they were with the results of their ministry and offering to support them financially. This was very encouraging news until they added that, as some of their funding came from the government, they would have to omit anything that could be offensive. 'So please leave out the cross.' I [Rhiannon Lloyd] was so proud of them when I heard that they had smiled, saying, 'Thank you. You can keep your money and we will keep the cross.' There was no way they were going to attempt to run this workshop without the cross (Lloyd 2021:196–97)!

This seriousness in ministry comes from Daniel's inner qualities. Despite a partnership with international organizations like, "Mercy Ministries International," "Le Rucher Ministries," "Mending the Soul Ministries," and "Healing Hearts, Transforming Nations" which provide training (Lloyd and Nyamutera 2018:1) and some financial assistance together with "Mission Aviation Fellowship" that pledged to fly the team anywhere for free, as they could see the fruit of their work, Restoration Ministry-OEIL's endeavors are hindered by "the very high and persistent insecurity, the shortage of means to support run activities, as the 'change of mentality' is a costly long-term development process" (D.M Kasereka, 2022:3). Daniel Sekabo puts it this way: "we are currently going through suffering in the Ministry due to insecurity. The roads are no longer operational. It is not easy to leave North Kivu to go to Ituri. This road is completely blocked because of the ADF-NALU terrorists. We no longer travel for fear of ambushes and killings they might commit on us" (Sekabo. 2023:5). Coupled with insecurity and inaccessibility of the Restoration Ministry-OEIL's areas of action, this organization faces some financial shortage to run all the annual planned activities. It is also challenged by the resurgence of some rebel and militia groups in Eastern Congo for unclear determined reasons. Nonetheless, there are three major activities in which Restoration Ministry-OEIL invests its strength, time, personnel, finance, and material resources (Kasereka, 2022:2–3):

(1) Running seminars and workshops: during the 3-day sessions, the focus is drawn on the message of God's love, restoration through healing of inner wounds, reconciliation, and peaceful cohabitation among ethnic groups. One of the militia leaders in the region has testified about the impact of these workshops: "We are tired of fighting," he said, "and we have been sending spies into your workshops. You have the medicine that we need. Please would you run the workshop just for the militia, but they must be from both sides of the conflict"(Lloyd 2021:202). Individual people also give testimonies of transformed lives after the workshops: "I was a victim of the first ethnic war in Ituri. I lost my father and my mother. At the beginning of this ministry, during the very first seminar with Dr. Rhiannon, I was among the guests. I directly felt the impact of that seminar. The load of bitterness I had in my soul for the tribe that killed my parents was removed" (Sekabo 2023:2). For Restoration Ministry-OEIL, running a

workshop is a moment of evangelism targeting the conversion of hearts. Workers at Restoration Ministry-OEIL believe that this is the new way of restoring Christians in hope and, at the same time, impacting unbelievers for salvation grounded in change of life experience.

(2) Running community development training: during these sessions, activities are focused on teaching theories and practices of biblical principles of community development. The objective of this program is to help healed people regain hope by bringing them to realize that they are still creative and productive; and that God is still willing to work great things through them for the betterment of their Nation. The beneficiaries of this program are mainly the poor vulnerable people and the ex-militia combatants. They are trained to be ambassadors of peace and are given manual skills for their self-reliance and reintegration into society. In addition, the Training of Facilitators in Community Development program ensures the ministry's sustainability.

(3) Running intercessory prayers: Restoration Ministry-OEIL is committed to raising intercessors for the DRC. Various prayer groups in different denominations are brought together for training and corporate prayer for Eastern Congo. A network of more than 20,000 intercessors is wholeheartedly standing in the gap regionally for God's ministries and special grace from the Lord upon the Nation (Kasereka 2022:2). One of the core beliefs at Restoration Ministry-OEIL is that prayer activities are a way to fight the devil, the thief of souls from peaceful relationships, who discourages people to see God working with them through testimonies for their good. For instance, before holding the October 2005 Nyakunde workshop, it is reported that the workers organized "a continual chain of prayer day and night for three months, as the victory had to be won in prayer first" (Lloyd 2021:200). As the ministry grew, prayer had become one of its brand marks: "I learned so much from this team and cannot honor them enough. They taught me so much, especially about persevering and trusting God in very difficult circumstances and the absolute priority of prayer" rightly remarks Lloyd (2021:206-7).

From Daniel's perspective, the devastating physical war experienced in Eastern Congo is an expression of a spiritual war that is ongoing in the same region. For such kind of battle in the spiritual realm, Christians in Eastern Congo need an equal power encounter in using spiritual weapons to fight back. This has led Restoration Ministry-OEIL to focus on raising "an army of intercessors" in Eastern Congo, an army that "stand in the gap" (Lloyd and Nyamutera 2018:2). From the ministry's experience, intercessory prayer is the backbone of all activities from healing wounds workshops to community development seminars.

Restoration Ministry-OEIL's singularity lies in the fact that it is a Christian ministry to ethnic communities of all social strata on the one hand and the other, the ministry endeavors for the spiritual growth of intercessors active in different local churches, and who can better "stand in the gap" (Ezekiel 22:30) for the cause of the Church and of the whole Nation. The ministry develops as a team of volunteers whose members are equipped intercessors and peace activists, extending from the North-East to the South-East of the DRC for reconciliation through the churches and public structures both urban and rural in the region. The activities are carried out by these teams.

Looking back at what Restoration Ministry-OEIL has been doing, the founder ponders: "I can say today that God called me in His mysterious way, to be witnessing His love shown and manifested in the Gospel of Jesus-Christ towards the lost and especially "redeeming people from the suffering;" so that the wounded people find healing and restoration in the arena of eternal life through Jesus-Christ" (D. M Kasereka 2022:1). Restoration Ministry-OEIL is thus

focused on biblical contributions for the holistic restoration of human beings and various communities through the Church of Jesus Christ. Its vision was set in direct relation to the Eastern Congo crisis. In the researcher's sight, it expresses and conveys hope: "We see the DRC in peace internally and with neighboring countries and that people are continually being transformed through God's Kingdom values, whereof the Congolese nation is holistically restored by the renewal of churches and their mission" (D. Kasereka 2022:2). The reference to "neighboring countries" recalls the role of outsiders in the destabilization of this region. It also indicates the solution to live at peace with them. The restoration that this Ministry advocates for goes beyond Eastern Congo limits, but the first important step remains the transformation of Congolese. How does this transformation become abstention from vengeance?

5. On Refraining from Retaliation: Successful Peacemaking Method

In a world immersed in retaliation culture, a message about raising a culture of reconciliation by abstaining from retaliation sounds like naïveté, resignation, or even treason. However, the good news is that the shift from retaliation to reconciliation is a divine process that takes place in human hearts, process triggered by the Lord of justice. All the above activities of Restoration Ministry-OEIL are oriented towards this goal:

To conciliate peace in the region and facilitate the steady growth of transformation actions nationwide through ministering biblical healing of psycho-social wounds; and also promote holistic restoration through the renewal of churches (which are composed of more than [90%] of the population) in the DRC, by applying biblical principles of community development – that is also called Community Transformation – which also empowers people in the communities to express and live out their healing (Asiimwe 2012).

At the end of every activity, transformation is assessed. It takes place at the same time as the activity's execution by people's confessions and pledges to change or later in participants lives. For instance, the reconciliation session among ethnic groups follows but is not limited to this pattern drawn from the December 26 to 30, 2011 rally in Nyakunde where ex-combatants and surrounding villagers gathered for public confession and public forgiveness (Kasereka 2012):

- a) Prior to the rally (open-air evangelical campaign), the Restoration Ministry-OEIL team of volunteers took time to pray and speak to the oppressors and offended in both targeted communities like the Bira and Ngity tribes. From these sessions, a number of influential community leaders and violence perpetrators are prepared to give testimonies on their former actions that caused pain and suffering to the other community.
- b) The rally is organized with all precautions to make it successful in terms of dates, place, participants, finances, and all needed materials like sound instruments. After a moment of God's word shared through preaching, an altar call for repentance is made for those who want to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in their lives and those who want to repent from their bad deeds.
- c) A special time is assigned for representatives of the communities to confess by naming the harm, abuses, mistreatments, and wrongs done to offend others. A prayer is said to ask God to forgive, renew, and restore the confessing communities.
- d) The final step in this process consists of doing gestures of reconciliation like kneeling, embracing, handshakes, and weeping together. A solemn declaration of reconciliation and restoration is made, and the lands of both ethnic groups are declared

restored and blessed. The communities pledge to never again use violence to deal with their issues in the future. Life and peace, smiles, and working together come back from the rally day onwards.

This reconciliation pattern has helped many people, especially Christians to see hope in rebuilding the Congolese society and the betterment of the future of the whole Nation. Restoration Ministry-OEIL's runners point out that genuine participants in the reconciliation workshops experience healing of their interior wounds and spiritual life and can themselves become transformation agents in their communities.

At the heart of these sessions, there is forgiveness if reconciliation is to happen. Daniel has witnessed how hard it is to reach this only expected outcome. Difficulties begin with the failure to reconcile forgiveness and forgottenness. Being a very long debate that surpasses the scope of this paper, let us consider what Robert Seiple wrote quoting Miroslav Volf: "Forgetting the suffering is better than remembering it, because wholeness is better than brokenness, the communion of love better than the distance of suspicion, harmony better than disharmony. We remember now so that we may forget then, and we will forget then so that we may love without reservation. Though we would be unwise to drop the shield of memory from our hands before the dawn of the new age, we may be able to move it cautiously to the side by opening our arms to embrace the other, even the former enemy" (Seiple 2004:87).

Abstaining himself from giving figures, – figures displayed in the Ministry's Annual Reports on its website –, one respondent preferred to put it this way: "The impact of OEIL's activities is enormous. Many people have gone through difficult times that cause inner wounds. Restoration Ministry-OEIL, through its teachings, gives them hope. Thousands of lives are restored. Several families are reconciled. There are also surprising testimonies during seminar sessions. Several people testify that these teachings give them strength and audacity not to take machetes to perpetrate massacres as revenge against the killers" (Sekabo 2023:6–7). Abstaining from retaliation is no longer fictional; it is a historical fact in Eastern Congo today. For instance, this respondent is the victim whose parents were killed. After his encounter with Restoration Ministry-OEIL's approach to peacebuilding, he chose not to retaliate.

Most of the time, the impact of investing in people's lives, like working on changing their mentality is not perceived in a short period. However, people's engagement to change today is the only guarantee for a different future. During Restoration Ministry-OEIL's workshops, many participants testify to their healing; they express their gratitude to God, for having granted them the grace to take part in the seminars for the healing of interior wounds on the cross of Jesus Christ. Some have testified that these teachings go far beyond the donations of food they receive from the various NGOs because these teachings rebuilt in them hope and confidence in their ability. They regain hope to start new responsible lives because they are no longer under the pain of psychosocial wounds that held them back from thinking about the possibilities of a new life after the troubles and pains that kept them in parasitism and dependence on the NGOs (Musavuli 2022:2). Sexual violence is associated but not limited to war in Eastern Congo. Helping victims and fighting this horrible plague shows a contrast between Restoration Ministry-OEIL's approach and NGOs. Negura Katho discovered that thousands of dollars are invested in this cause channeled through NGOs or government sectors like the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Children. Financial and economic assistance to women and some appropriate actions regarding victims and perpetrators of sexual violence are provided. "Although such focuses are appreciated and valuable, especially the last," says Katho, "their efficacy is challenged and greatly diminished by corruption and is limited in reaching all victims and/or perpetrators" (Feli V. Katho 2018:4). However, Restoration

Ministry-OEIL endeavors to bring perpetrators to change of mentality through conversion, confession, and obedience to God's word and victims to regain their dignity.

Each of the three activities of Restoration Ministry-OEIL targets mainly three areas of life transformation: reconciliation, peacebuilding, and community development. Behind the execution of all these activities, there is a vision of a transformed society. This kind of transformation is a seed for bringing up a new generation of transformed leaders of the DRC. Restoration Ministry-OEIL gives food for thought to everyone willing to engage God's world through peacebuilding and reconciliation among conflicting peoples. Daniel believes that reconciliation among ethnic groups is a product of reconciliation with God. There is hope for change in the Eastern Congo crisis for reconciled Christians become *ipso factor* agents of change. From 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 we learn that being united with Christ also means accepting to be reconciled with God and to be in turn at the service of reconciliation. Paul calls Christians "ambassadors of reconciliation" (5:20). They are "extenders of Christ's reconciliation" (Fitch 2016:72). In the work of peacemaking, Tara Barthel and Judy Dabler have also come to this conclusion that our only true hope for reconciliation with others is our reconciliation with God: while we were yet enemies, he made us his friends. In response to his grace, our hearts are fixed on Christ, and his love enables us to bear with the people in our lives and forgive them – just as the Lord forgave us (Barthel and Dabler 2005:18). Christian community is then composed of persons reconciled with God, restored in Christ by recovering the divine glory lost by Adam. This new community cannot fall into division, conflict, exclusion, or ethnicity, which are antitheses to its priority mission: reconciliation (Nkinzo 2014:80). Robert Schreiter and Henning Wrogemann call such a reconciliation mission a "social reconciliation" in contrast with "individual reconciliation." It is social reconciliation because "a supportive community can help individuals to become reconciled people who are safely able to cope with suffering through the guidance and power of God. [But also] such people feel called to pass reconciliation forward and to become agents of reconciliation for others. Such people can then initiate and take charge of a process of social reconciliation. Here the point is to involve as many people as possible in the process" (Wrogemann 2021:72).

Reconciliation in Restoration Ministry-OEIL's perspective encompasses truth-telling, justice-seeking, forgiveness accorded, healing attained, and peace recovered. "Reconciliation therefore constitutes restoration of harmony by removing existing obstacles to peace and creating change from enmity to friendship," concludes Fredrick Amolo (2018:116). There is no difficult tribe or ethnic group in Eastern Congo that can resist the transformative love of God. Amazed at what reconciliation with God can do in our lives, Daniel asks a question: what else in all of life would ever motivate us to love our enemies or do good to those who hate us if it is not the experience of God's love in our lives (D. M. Kasereka 2022:2)? During interview, Daniel advanced the same truth as applied to the situation in Eastern Congo: "wounded people create drastic conflicts but only healed people regain hope and are ready to forgive their enemies" (D. M. Kasereka 2022:2). For this reason, Restoration Ministry-OEIL deploys a varied range of activities to bring ethnic groups to forgiveness (Hawk 2022:72) and reconciliation with God and among themselves for peace to prevail.

Finally, Restoration Ministry-OEIL focuses on the centrality of the Cross. There is nothing that cannot be forgiven when the oppressor and the offended meet at the Cross. Many people in Eastern Congo have gone through horrible experiences like rape and murder not because they are involved in the conflict but only because they belong to the opposite ethnic group in the area. Eastern Congo has few urban centers and large rural areas. Manifestations of the crisis are everywhere. There are no longer safe places because of insecurity. War's

itinerary is in both directions: from villages to towns and towns to villages. Sometimes it becomes hard to identify the stakeholders in an armed conflict: While trying to persuade fighters in villages, you notice that their commanders live in towns. The same happens when people are gathered in cities for dialogues but those fighting in bushes feel left out in the intended process towards a solution. Such kind of complex situation delays the end of hostilities in Eastern Congo and increases despair in all socioeconomic sectors. From Restoration Ministry-OEIL's experience, we draw that education is key to telling people to harmoniously live in cohabitation with innocent ordinary citizens be them come from the so-called enemy tribe. It is also true that, in the Eastern Congo context, tribal leaders are more influential to their communities than official leaders. Winning the chiefs to the cause of reconciliation opens doors to winning their ethnic groups. Nevertheless, because this is God's work of changing mentality, the Holy Spirit also allows the opposite direction: winning ordinary members of a community to winning their chief. The result is that love, peace, and serenity are back among the former antagonists.

6. Conclusion

Suppose that someone arrives at Restoration Ministry-OEIL headquarters in Beni, North Kivu, and knows nothing about this Christian organization. He/she finds women and men praying almost with unuttered words. Then curiously ask them: "What are you doing here?" One of that team, with a smiling face, would stand and say: "We are here for the rehabilitation of the soul bruised by mental and physical suffering following wars and other difficulties, as well as the awakening of the spirit to reacquire vigor" (D. Kasereka 2022:3). Restoration Ministry-OEIL launched since 2004 under the leadership of Daniel M. Kasereka, with its expected impact described in Isaiah 61,1-4.8, is about reconciliation, peace, and community development among ethnic groups. The Ministry endeavors to uproot a culture of retaliation by installing a culture of reconciliation in the problematic region of Eastern Congo.

Restoration Ministry-OEIL's story of peacemaking is a story of hope amid hardships on going in Eastern Congo and its surroundings. Considering its *modus operandi*, peacemaking covers all five dimensions: the pursuit of justice, wholeness and harmony in people's relations; seeking reconciliation with enemies and restoration both when we wrong others and when others wrong us; overcoming evil with good, that is, not returning evil for evil; avoidance to be a source of enmity; and sacrificially pursuing the good of others, sometimes at personal expense (Mbabazi 2014:106). In this respect, refraining from retaliation is not capitulating to injustices but it is finding a better way to ending violence. This paper presented a case study of Restoration Ministry-OEIL and its leader Daniel as a concerned peacemaker who endeavors through Restoration Ministry-OEIL to call people of different fighting ethnic groups to reconciliation, forgiveness, and restoration. Hope embodied in Daniel's and his coworkers' actions shows the possibility of reversing the Eastern Congo crisis: Healed men and women pledge to completely refrain from vengeance and perpetuation of killing the enemy tribes. Therefore, abstaining from retaliation sounds like an expression of the core belief of the International Association of Reconciliation Studies (IARS): "Peace can only be sustainable if conflicts are dealt with at their roots; peace should thus be qualified by reconciliation and, in the best case, *lead to the restoration of relations between all conflict participants* at different levels (italic added)."

7. Recommendations

The story told throughout this study gives food for thought to Christian church leaders, ethnic community leaders, and government leaders at all levels. They are recommended to

promote and support the Restoration Ministry-OEIL's vision of providing hope, forgiveness, and restoration among fighting tribes and affected wounded survivors of massacres. They will be joining the noble cause of uprooting a culture of retaliation by installing a culture of reconciliation in the problematic region of Eastern Congo. In the midst of endless cycle of war in Eastern Congo, there is a need to adopt refraining from retaliation as a lifestyle that might contribute to mutual consideration and foster a culture of peace among different ethnic communities. Nevertheless, the scholarly community is recommended to do longitudinal research that aims at assessing the impact of Restoration Ministry-OEIL's services on its former beneficiaries. The degree and perennity of healing would be determined in healed people.

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