

## **The Morality of War and its Impact on Sustainable Development in Nigeria: A Christian Ethical Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

War is a state of crisis and absence of peace which involves the use of ammunitions and the destruction of lives and properties. The morality of war is predicated on the justness and wrongness in war. Is war morally right? Why is God or the supernatural interested in war or seen as a man of war? However, war is seen as the last resort when peace cannot be reached. War has done more harm than good in Nigeria. This review focuses on the foundation of just war theory, biblical foundation of war, the Christian foundation of just war, alternatives to just war theory, and the impacts of war on sustainable development in Nigeria with a focus on the Nigerian civil war. This review went further to discuss the Christian ethical analysis of the morality of war. This research made use of historical and analytical methods of research as well as the utilisation of books, journals, and internet material. It therefore recommends, amongst others, that war is inimical to progress, development, peace, and tranquillity, hence humans must intentionally abrogate anything that calls for war no matter how just it may look.

**Key Words:** *Morality, War, Sustainable Development, Christian and Ethical*

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Morality can be seen as the rightness or wrongness of something as judged by accepted moral standards. The ultimate standard of morality is God. Good philosophical principles are all realisations of the dignity that God has reposed in man as His image. The Decalogue says in Exodus 20:13 that we should not kill. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights

(UNDHR) provides in article 3 that all life should be respected, while article 18 presupposes legislation against forceful inclusion in military service. Godly morality is the foundation of civic rules, laws, and rights but these are not the same. How can morality be employed in war, which not only decimates people but also leads to untold crimes against humanity?

War is an organized violent conflict which is characterized by intense aggression. War appears destructive and horrendous in nature. It creates room for killing and implausible misery. War defies the UNDHR by failing to respect human dignity. War breaks out when several years of patience and extreme tolerance cannot hold anymore and it can last for years. Unfortunately, the gruesome effects of war often trickle down to decades if not centuries. Examples abound in the United States-Vietnamese War (Indochina War); United States-Iraq War; Germany Global War and the Biafra-Nigeria Civil War.

War has a huge paralysing effect on the development of nations, communities, families, and households. Development is the gradual advancement or growth through a series of progressive changes. It is a state in which improvement, enlargement, refining, and expansion of the economy takes place. It is an act of making some areas profitable, productive, and useful for habitation (Sirico, 2000, p. 180). The Old Testament in the bible has many instances of war that resulted to many deaths though Christianity outlaws sins that may lead to ending human lives, including war. The sixths commandment states that “thou shall not kill.”. Obviously, Christianity is a religion founded by Christ meant to point humanity to God. Christians are practitioners of the Christian faith built on the law and the prophet but enshrined in love for God and humanity.

Some people hold strong objections against any moral ground of taking people’s lives. However, others believe that in some circumstances, this belief is overtaken by other morally imperative considerations. Jefferson (2014) is of the view that the choice of lesser evil over a higher one exists in human society. Can war stand as an

exception to the rule against killing? What moral grounds justify the permission to go to war and how would the evil against humanity be checked during wars? These are the two fundamental questions which moralists attempt to answer in order to give some adequate account of moral justification of wars: Is it always morally right to embark on war which ordinarily appears a great evil? And what is ethically allowed to do in war? These are asked about the term or theory called just war.

## **2.0 The Bedrock of the Theory of Just War**

War was the normal way of life in old territories like Egypt, Babylon etc due to taxation. By so doing, these territories established themselves in the days when violent behaviour was approved by deities. Israelites took into custody the people of Canaan under the directives of God and they embarked in a continuous holy war. The Greek city states brought in diplomacy and mercy to soften their deadly rivalry, but this existed only among equals. The wars often led to deaths and destruction (Walzer, 1977). Research reveals that Aristotle is the originator of the just war theory (Maritain, 1967). The concept of just war emanates from a well-organized government as orchestrated by Cicero who argued that only states and soldiers should engage in war to forestall consistent tension (Wasserstrom, 1970).

**Bible-Based Foundation of War:** The fundamental biblical regulations concerning war are prescribed in the book of Deuteronomy 20. Biblical teachings brought about a new note of a person’s duty to war; it was no longer an affair of the state alone. Individuals exercised the freedom of joining the army or not.

<sup>5</sup>The officers shall say to the army: “Has anyone built a new house and not yet begun

to live in it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may begin to live in it.<sup>6</sup> Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else enjoy it.<sup>7</sup> Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else marry her.”<sup>8</sup> Then the officers shall add, “Is anyone afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his fellow soldiers will not become disheartened too.” (Deuteronomy 20:5-8).

The battle is the Lord's and not just the people. The people serve as the Arrows of God. God commands who should be killed since he is the author and finisher of life (Revelation 21:6). Before those in the military engage in battle, the priest will address the troops. He will encourage them not to be afraid to fight and assure them of victory (Deuteronomy 20:2-4).

The Jews were not allowed to engage in battle on the Sabbath. Any town that accepted them (Jews) in peace was to serve Israel under forced labour, but any town found recalcitrant was to be destroyed. Women, children, livestock, and other belongings were to be spared and the spoils from their enemies were to be enjoyed (Deuteronomy 20:10-17).

The necessity of war is therefore to make peace. War should not exceed the confines of making peace and saving the lives of the greater populace that would have been destroyed by an aggressor. Consider ‘the just anger’ of the Lord by driving away merchants with a whip from the sanctuary (John 2:13-17). This is also covered in Romans 13: 4.

### **3.0 Christian Foundation of Just War**

Early Christians were completely pacifist in approaching war basing their stance on the message of the Sermon on the Mount that those who are peacemakers are blessed and regarded as sons of God (Matthew 5:9). However, when Emperor Constantine made the Church an establishment from a sect, the early Christians ceased to be pacifists. They rose to defend the Christian empire from the barbarians. St. Augustine had to build on the principles of Aristotle, Plato, and Cicero - the proponents of the just war ideology in the philosophy of Christianity. Just war must be carried out with love (Ziedlers, 1984).

Augustine's theory was not really kept. During the crusade, it was turned into war of aggression with a license for many excesses. This is deemed by some as the dark paradox of religious faith, which claims to bring the peace and truce of God. During the World War II, there was more devastating effect than absolute pacifism. Thus, theorists believe that the just war theory is not related to the nuclear contemporary world (Rubenstein, 2016, p. 55).

#### **Morality of War**

**1. Legitimate Authority:** Just war theorists agree that the state has the legitimate authority to define and initiate wars. Modern theorists give room for individual involvement in the initiation of wars. Thus, any president who goes to war without the consent of his council or any military general and orders soldiers to engage in warfare without the consent of his civilian superiors is guilty of not adhering to the dictates of the just war theory (Kemp, 1990, p. 18).

**2. Just Cause:** This is to make sure that war is carried out in a justifiable way so as to repeal certain wrongs which occurred previously or on-coming evil. The following

are the rationales for a nation to engage in a justifiable war:

(i) a grave wrong has been done by the nation to be attacked, i.e., to save from harm guiltless life, to safeguard circumstances essential for upright human exercise and to shelter fundamental human rights, (ii) when there is no alternative to correct a wrong, (iii) option for war will not be more disparaging than correcting the wrong if ethically worth, and (iv) certain prospect abounds in correcting some anomalies when opting for war (Boulging, 2013, p. 71).

**3. Last Resort:** The measure hints at responsibility to see that preventable wars are avoided, but also a duty to see that non-violent alternatives are presented even in the course of the war. However, for peace to reign, there must be war. At the end of the war, those contending nations will judge for themselves the superior nation and the winner.

**4. Proportionality:** This principle targets the use of the right weapon for realisation of the set goal connected with war as well as not creating more damage to humanity. For instance, the use of “smart bombs” to attack a limited target that can cause death even to civilians is prohibited. Also prohibited is the use of biological warfare and the unspeakable nuclear warfare. “Sometimes waging war will cause more destruction than righting the wrong” (Freire, 2015, p. 49).

**5. Prospect of Victory:** This is intimately associated to proportionality. Jesus said in Luke 14:31 that a king going to war against another would not dream of that except first strategizing with his counsellors whether their military of ten thousand is physically powerful and sufficient to overcome the twenty thousand military that are coming against him. War strategies are highly needed for success to be achieved.

**6. Right Intention:** Intentionality is a spiritual property of a person. It is an inner disposition and as such cannot really be

measured. This is the case why some modern theorists do not include it. However, this depicts that humans waging war do it not for peace or fairness, but rather for rancour and bitterness which is the wrong cause for war.

**7. Just Conduct:** This principle imposes three restrictions – on targets, weapons (natural weaponry, some kinds of diminutive weapons and chemical weapons) and on tactics.

**8. Target Restrictions:** This involves the principle of immunity of civilians, and the safety provided to ex-combatants. This involves allowing medical personnel and chaplains to attend to the injured and the weak; not inhibiting some types of natural resources (e.g., water supply); as well as not destroying cultural property (e.g., art museums and architectural monuments).

**9. Discrimination:** The principle is based on an understanding that justifies killing strictly those making an attack in order to stop the assault. This does not justify killing another person close or dear to the attacker. In war, it is called *non-combatant immunity* since combatants are the only legitimate objects of the attacks. While some theorists base this principle on the fundamental human rights of the non-combatants, some base it on consequences of such acts.

Also, the issue of war mongering private citizens brings up the discussion of exceptional and absolute application of the principle. Are they also targets, or should the judgment be on the merit of the situation? (Wakin, 1989, p. 82). Kemp (1990) widens the horizon of the principle to include the disabled and shipwrecked, who should not suffer any more direct attack. “It is a crime against civilians and soldiers when the ethics that govern war are not taken into cognizance: for instance, killing of civilians, random bombing, and the utilisation of forbidden weaponry and

extermination of helpless military personnel” (Ratner, 2008, p. 3).

#### **4.0 Alternatives to Just War Theory**

**Permissivism:** War is said to have no morality or that moral principles do not really apply to war because it is a necessity. Since war is a necessity, the state has the permission to engage in war anytime and to conquer. Kemp (1990) summarizes the positions of permissivism as follows:

1. Any state can choose to engage in warfare whenever it wants as well as to win.
2. The legality that justifies going to war abounds only when those conditions are met. Any nation is expected to put machineries in place for victory during war.
3. A nation has the capacity to go to war but must be guided by rules and moral limits on ways to win the war.

**Pacifism:** Here we have absolute and limited pacifism. Absolute pacifism says that there should be no shedding of blood. This is to say that going to war or homicides is never morally permissible. Sibani (2019) avers that limited pacifism rejects the former and holds that it is never morally permissible. Limited pacifism holds that it is necessary at times to use force in order to stop the wrongful acts of others who breach the peace of humanity. This is the view held by the just war theory.

#### **5.0 Impacts of War on Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Focus on Nigerian Civil War**

Civil war in Nigeria had a great effect on sustainable development in the country between the years 1967-1975. Between 1967 and 1970, war broke out in Nigeria which affected the Nigerian state. The Biafrans engaged in warfare of freedom and self-governance led by Chukwuemeka “Emeka” Odumegwu-Ojukwu, but the federal government contested and fought against it.

On sovereignty of the region, Ojukwu, on 30 May 1967, proclaimed the Republic of Biafra. However, Yakubu “Jack” Gowon, the Nigerian political and military leader who served as the head of state of Nigeria from 1966 to 1975, opposed the pronouncement which threw Nigeria into disarray for 30 months (Akinferinwa, 1999).

Chuka and Ikenna (2009) hold that “socio-political factors and constitutional reasons gave rise to the Nigerian Civil war” (p. 241). The Nigerian state is shrouded with serious challenges as she subsists. The entire nation experienced war which went beyond anticipation and was much bloodier than expected (Okpeh, 2003). More than a million civilians and soldiers died prior to the closing stages of the war in January 1970. Gunfire and bombing in addition to hunger, undernourishment and ailments were the contributing factors to the high deaths during the war (De St. Jorre, 1972, p. 2).

The Nigerian Civil War led to slaughter of thousands. Hence: The 1996 massacre greatly affected the Igbos and other Eastern Nigerians from the north. The refugees told stories of horror: how they were hunted from one place to another, the raping of their daughters and wives in their presence, how fathers and husbands were chopped to death in the presence of their children and wives, how pregnant women were disembowelled, and unborn babies killed (Ezeani, 2013, pp. 95-96).

Market places, hospitals and churches were regularly bombed which led to the death of thousands of civilians in the Biafran territory. It is obvious that a lot of the development made by Nigerian people in science and technology was wasted during the civil war. For Nigeria to make economic and technological advancement, she has to

learn from the Biafran experience which had a huge negative impact on the nation's development. In a society where war consistently persists, peace and development will be lacking (Okonkwo, 2002, p. 45).

Today Nigeria is engaged in war with a terrorist group called Boko Haram and the group's infiltration into communities especially Benue State. As a result of this war, high incidences of famine and huge loss of agricultural produce have been witnessed but there fears that the war is being fought with political biases.

## **6.0 Christian Ethical Analysis in Relation to Morality of War**

The social teaching of the Catholic Church which dates back over one hundred years borders on justice and peace. The theology of non-violence stands on peace, the challenge of peace, and other recent statements on war and violence (Vatican Council II, 1975, p. 862). Peace goes beyond non-existence of war (see Isaiah 32: 15). Sin has destroyed the nature of man; the attainment of peace needs a steady endeavour to have power over the passion and interminable alertness by a legally recognised authority. Peace is the produce of love that transcends justice. According to the Catholic Social Teaching and Gospel Non-violence (2013), "Christians are growing further than or above ancient just war theory towards the good news of peacefulness" (p. 27).

Thomas (2010) raised the question of peace and disarmament and invites humanity to re-examine its recourse to war. Taquest (2016) expressed bitterness against war and categorically states, "No more war! War never again" for humans to embrace peace (p. 106). The Vatican Council II (1975) contains a condemnation of nuclear war. War, with its resultant effects, has

contributed to hardship and anxiety. The Vatican Council maintains that recent wars have created enormous material and moral mayhem and prolonged battles all over the world. Modern science weapons are utilised in war and it is a threat to combatants and those in the environs affected. In many cases, terrorist methods are regarded as new strategies of war.

As long as humans exist, there will continue to be war. When all efforts have failed, government will continue to engage in warfare to ensure that peace exists. A nation cannot be defenceless when war comes knocking on the national door (Sibani, 2019, p. 8). Humans must be accountable for their actions so as not to promote war in any given society. In as much as there are still people sponsoring war, it will be difficult to stop armed conflict in our present world. Responsible humans have always pleaded for peace and non-violence in the world (Healy, 2001).

## **7.0 Recommendations:**

This research recommends thus:

- 1). Since the negative impacts of war are very devastating to lives and property, the government of Nigeria should, as a matter of urgency, put away ethnic sentiments and ensure that those beating the drums of war in Nigeria are prosecuted.
- 2). Inter-marriage, business, education, and internal migration has made Nigeria a unified force; therefore, the military should be continually active and should be placed in states and communal borders to forestall the breakout of preventable wars.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

It is seen that there has been no uncompromising stand against war that has been consistent with the history of humanity. This is so because of the diversity of human cultures which impede on

understanding justice and peace. The sinfulness of man threatens and causes war and until forgiveness and right attitudes are embraced, war will continue to persist. The hazard of war will never be entirely detached until humans seek the Son of God as the author of Peace. It is certain that humans are pacifists but their methods to achieving peace differ. War is death and should not be an option since it destroys human lives.

History is an account of human growth which is filled with ups and downs but geared towards a universal brotherhood of all humans and indeed creatures as Isaiah 2:4 says: The Lord will settle international disputes. All the nations will beat their sword into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. All wars will stop, and military training will come to an end. Come, people of Israel, and let us walk in the light of the Lord!

This is to say that war is evil because it is morally wrong. Here, humans are meddling

with a divine gift; life, and nobody has the authority to do that. There may be “just war” but it remains a moral evil. This is understood since justice invokes a certain human reasonableness in ordering the society. It has to do with laws and rights of the nation which human beings should survive for. However, there is a principle of morality which urges one to make a choice of great evil so as to avoid a greater one. Just war is just a great evil compared to the greater evil of the onslaught from an aggressor. The utilisation of arms does not give humans the impetus to indulge in evil. Therefore, war should be avoided. The earlier humans learn to shelve war in the archives and strive for non-violent means of world justice, the faster would the human history reach its perfect state of love and peace. Obviously, war in Nigeria has negatively affected the Nigerian state in terms of sustainable development. Peaceful co-existence is needed for development to thrive in Nigeria.

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