

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN AFRICA: A REFLECTION ON JOHN DONNE'S POEM: "NO MAN IS AN ISLAND" AND J P. CLARK'S "THE CASUALTIES."

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is inevitable, and is as old as the history of mankind. Conflict forms bulk of our local, national and international news headlines. Just like the Eastern and the Western parts of the globe; Africa as a continent is also bedeviled by lots of conflicts, ranging from internal to external ones. This paper has implored a phenomenological approach to conflict resolution in Africa with Nigeria as a microcosm; hence, conflict has defied several empirical approaches. John Donne's "No Man is An Island" and J P. Clark's "The Casualties" are engaged in this paper to demonstrate the interrelatedness of man and the effects of conflicts in human societies; especially in a multilingual and multicultural society like Nigeria. This paper submits that, conflict could be constructive as well as destructive; depending on how it is handled. And that we all are victims of conflicts, either directly or indirectly. The paper ends with a wakeup call for tolerance and mutual peaceful co-existence amongst the different religious bodies, ethnic groups and races as the best alternative to conflict management; without which an enduring peace remains a mirage in the face of global terrorism.

INTRODUCTION

Why Conflict? Do conflicts achieve their intended objectives? Is conflict the only remedy to human society in terms of religious or ideological divide? Who are the beneficiaries of conflict? And above all, is conflict inevitable in human society? These are the profusions of questions that hunt the entire mankind. This paper shall as a matter of necessity answer the foregoing questions by trying to clarify the operational concepts: conflict and phenomenology. This discourse revolves round conflict, conflict resolution via phenomenological approach as a panacea to conflict management in Africa and the world at large. John Donne's poem: "No man is an Island" and J P. Clark's "The Casualties" will be cited as touch stone to illustrating the dependability and relatedness of all races, tribes and tongues, as well as religions of the world et al. And how the lost or death of one man diminishes the other; and how everyone is a part of the "Continent." Nigeria's political history has been characterized by crises and conflicts of various forms all prompted by religious, tribal or ethnic sentiments. From 1960 to date, Nigeria's political or socio-economic conflicts have religious and ethnic undertones. For instance, the post independence conflicts such as: the Western Regional Crisis, the Census Crisis, the 1962 – 64 crisis in the Tivland, the 1967 – 70 Nigerian civil war, the Matatsine religious crisis in Maiduguri and Kano state; the Niger Delta militant group, the 1992 Zango Kataf crisis, the Sayawa and Hausa/Fulani crisis in Bauchi State, and the recent Jos North and Plateau crises as well as the Boko Haram insurgences are all not unconnected with the web of religion, politics and ethnicity.

It is also instructive to point out that the phenomenon of conflicts especially in the later part of the last century in Africa (like Nigeria) took worrisome dimension with much causality. Bwala in Ezeme (2007:310) observed in a port titled "Torn by Ethnic Violence" that

"Peace seems to have taken flight from states in the North while some communities acquire sophisticated aims and import mercenaries executing ethnic religious and communal wars, others are fighting back with barbaric technique in an aid to subdue their opponents..."

Reasonably, the consequences of these worrisome conflicts are immensely negatively for reaching. Dare to say, the theatre of operation have increased and enlarged the legion of widows, orphans, homelessness and the incidence of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria.

In Burundi, like elsewhere in Africa, conflicts of severe character occurred living scores of deaths. An international inquiry into human rights violations revealed that neighbors, the huts and tutsis killed themselves in

about equal number. According to Rene-Lemarched in Dowden. (2009:231), wrote a treatise in response to the reports of the inquiry: "Burundi Ethnic Conflicts and Genocide" thus in this way;

A blind rage suddenly seized Frobedu and peasants alike in almost every province, and they killed every Tutsi in sight... the picture that emerges is one of unaltered savagery. In one commune after another, scores of men, women and children were hacked to pieces with machetes, speared or clubbed to death, or doused with kerosene and burned alive (Rene-Lemarched in Dowden, 2009:231).

Frankly speaking, conflicts have left the country in need of development rather having more casualties, being productive young men and women, "no one knows how many died, maybe 200,000 may be more" (Dowden, 2009:224). This is because the victims cannot speak, the perpetrators will not tell the truth and a witness who survived would not dare" (Dowden, 2009:225). Evidence of psychological casualties which stirs truth in the face of unbeliever.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Conflict to Atkinson et al (1995:249) is "inevitable as people interact with one another. They come with different experiences, expectations and interests that have to be lived with or resolved in everyday life." While Carr et al (n.d.67) see it as "opposition between impulses or desires that produces emotional tension. Conflict may be social, interpersonal or intrapersonal. Social conflict for instance, occurs where different factions in a society have interests that are deeply opposed to one another." Mohiddin [sic] as quoted in Sunday (2012), views conflict "as ensuing when parties disagree about distribution of material or symbolic resources and act on the basis of these perceived incompatibilities." Stressing further, conflict is used in some cases to connote debate or contest; a struggle or confrontation, a state of unrest, turmoil or chaos. Phenomenology refers to a term.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper has as its theoretical base for discussion "Phenomenology," phenomenology has to do with the observation and description of phenomena. It is a means of reaching absolute essences through the analysis of living experiences in disregard to scientific knowledge. It is a philosophical discipline which conducts a descriptive inquiry into the fundamental structure of our experiences into the essences which are most immediately present to our consciousness (National Teachers Institute Cycle 4:119).

THE DISCOURSE

From the foregoing, conflict is inevitable in human interaction and it can be motivated by different variables. Conflict could be social, interpersonal or intrapersonal; it can be perceived; or expressed in behavioural terms. It could simply mean a debate or contest; a disagreement or state of unrest as the case may be. The term conflict is also relative in perception. What may be seen as conflict in one society may be different in another society. And what may constitute a spark for a conflict varies from person to person. To buttress the aforementioned postulation, Mill, H. (1992) intones that:

Conflict may only exist where the participants perceive it as such, a clear difference of opinion exists regarding values, interests, aims or relations and the outcome of the conflict must be considered extremely important by the parties. What constitutes a reason for the genesis of conflict is one area which might be regarded as a normal way of life in other society.

For instance, the 6th March, 1987 Conflict between the Muslim and the Christian students of the Kaduna State College of Education in Kafanchan, that escalated beyond the shores of Kaduna state to affecting the nation at large resulted in the wanton destructions of lives and properties on the pretext that Rev. Abubakar Boko, a Muslim convert to Christianity during his preaching made references to the Koran in clarifying certain points in his sermon (Kukah, 1998:188); and consequently, became the scaffold for the conflict or crisis between the two faiths. While in some societies of the world, making reference to other religious doctrines in order to clarify some point is highly upheld and commended as being scholarly and objective; but the reverse is the case in a multilingual and a multicultural milieu like Nigeria where one's actions and inactions are interpreted along religious or political divide or sentiments cum ethnic inclination. We could go on and on to give several examples to attest to this fact.

Anyacho, (2003) posits that "the term coined by the Swiss-German mathematician and Philosopher Johann Heinrich Lambert in 1764 from two Greek words "phenomenon" and *logos*, whose combined meaning was the setting forth of articulation of what shows itself. Anyacho, (2013), he used the word to refer to the illusory nature of human experience in an attempt to develop a theory of knowledge that distinguishes truth from error. On the other hand the term Phenomenology of Religion was coined by the Dutch Scholar, P.D Chantipie de la Sausaye in 1887, when he proposed in his 'Handbook of the history of Religion:' that the state of the historical study of religious traditions needed to progress towards a phenomenological study of the inner essence of religious experience.". However, "Gerardus Van der Leeuw (1890-1950) according to Madu, (1997:36), became the chief proponent of the phenomenological approach to the study of religion."

The term Phenomenology of Religion was initially used to describe the study of religious traditions one by one. It is a method used for universal manifestation of religion such as sacred places, sacred objects, rituals et cetera. Each manifestation is separated from its context, to be studied in relation to other manifestations. Phenomenology of Religion is still in use in other countries like Holland, Germany and Scandinavia by religious scholars. He further maintained that it has always been the contention of phenomenologist's that the extent of value judgment could distort a philosopher's method, warning that no distorting factor like value judgment should be allowed to come between the investigator and the investigated (Anyacho, 2003:47).

Phenomenology on the other hand as quoted by Adega from (National Teachers Institute, cycle 4:119:1-2) "refers to the observation and description of phenomena. It is a method of arriving at absolute essences through the analysis of living experiences in disregard to scientific knowledge. The concept phenomenology. It is from the noun phenomenon refers to things that appear or are perceived by the sense. Similarly, it connotes a remarkable thing happening. Furthermore, when something is said to be phenomenal, it is an adjective, referring to a thing recognized by or experienced by the senses rather than through or intuition, something extra ordinary or unusual. Therefore, phenomenology is the philosophical discipline which conducts a descriptive inquiry into the fundamental structure of our experiences, into those essences which are most immediately present to our consciousness. That is, those thing which appear in different and various senses. Phenomenology in essence, deals with the religious features as they are without prejudice to any religion or its paraphernalia on an objective stance; observing those phenomena as they are.

Adega, (2010:1) further articulates that "phenomenology of Religion is a discipline in the field of religions which seeks to present an objective view of the phenomenon of religion. In order words, phenomenology of religion is not subjective in its assessment of religions but presents the phenomena as it is without distortion or biases. Phenomenology of Religion concentrates on the different forms that many religious traditions seem to share. It tries to find out the typical patterns that show up repeatedly across the full range of a religious data. For example, sacred people appear in most religions, East or West, Monks and Ascetics, have generated great veneration. One can distinguish among these categories of holy people, they share an orientation away from worldly affairs, towards contemplation and self discipline. Thus, Phenomenology of religion tends to stress the sameness of certain structural features, providing the basis of how Hindu Yogi differs from Christian Monks. Since each religious tradition for instance has beliefs, cults and morals, phenomenology of religion sets out to make analytical description of these in religions and then tries to compare where they separate and converge in different religious tradition."

Imperatively, with set tenets of objectivity in minds, Phenomenology of Religion encourages, peaceful co-existence hence it presents religious phenomena as it is without passing any value judgment on it. It therefore means that with Phenomenology of Religion, society would not witness religious skirmishes as it is today in Nigeria and by implication, dialogue as a tool for resolving these conflicts would not be needed at all.

Phenomenology of Religion when applied in times of conflict will achieve the following aims and objectives amongst others as postulated by Madu, (1997:58): "It makes an analytical description of data presented by different religious traditions in order to find out where they converge or separate. Keenly, it also enable scholars of religion to see that which show itself (namely the phenomenon), by removing, as far as possible concealments, distractions and whatever else might prevent the scholar from seeing the phenomenon as it actually gives itself." This is because of the sensitive and delicate nature of religion globally. The threatre of operation of this discourse is a implored a phenomenological approach, the methodic dimension of exploring this treatise to handling or managing of conflicts; either in religious, political or ethnic in character in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large.

In Nigeria and elsewhere this treatise acknowledges that in most cases conflicts are avoidable and in some cases they are inevitable. Conflicts are neither good nor bad. Conflict is just conflict, but what one makes out of conflict shows whether it is good or bad, harmful or helpful to a milieu. This paper, like other papers or research in trying to find a lasting solution to conflict in Nigeria and by extension the world at large, has used John Donne's poem: "No Man is an Island" as well as J P. Clark's "The Casualties" as yardstick for its analysis:

No man is an Island, entire of itself;
everyman is a piece of the Continent,
a part of the main.
If a cold be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less,
As well as if a promontory were,
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
or of thine own were.
Any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind;
and therefore never send to know
for whom the bell tolls;

it tolls for thee.

In the above poem, John Donne tries to show us that we are interrelated. As human beings we are “a part of the main.” We are all a part of mankind; and that no man is an island exclusively indispensable; we all need each other. The rich need the poor, the poor need the rich; the weak need the strong and the strong need the weak. The Muslims need the Christians and the free thinkers and so on; hence we are all created by one God for different purposes. For instance, God would not have created the blacks, if they were less important or inferior to their white counterparts. It is interesting to note from this poem that if “a cold be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less,” that is, if a piece of dirt is washed away by water, Europe is the less. If Europe here is “the less” by implication Africa or Nigeria is also the less by the death of a Christian or a Muslim.

For instance, if a Christian dies, the Muslim is the less because John Donne asserts that “any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind;” so how do you feel when a Christian dies, or when a Muslim or a pagan or a free thinker dies? Do you feel good, happy? Or do you feel bad and sad? The Christian is diminished by the death of just one Muslim brother or sister; and so is the Muslim diminished by the death of a Christian brother or sister; or even a pagan as the case may be. Knowing that we are all connected and are all dependent upon one another helps us to be more thoughtful of other people, tribe, race, religion and ideological Stand J P. Clark’s poem, “The Casualties” on the other hand answers the question on who the victims of conflict are below:

The casualties are not only those who are dead;
They are well out of it.
The casualties are not only those who are wounded,
Though they await burial by installment.
The casualties are not only those who have lost
Persons or property, hard as it is...
The casualties are not only those led away by night;
The cell is cruel place, sometimes a haven,
Nowhere as absolute as the grave.
The casualties are not those who started
A fire and now cannot put it out. Thousands
Are burning that that had no say in the matter.
The casualties are not only those who escaping
The shattered shell become prisoners in
A fortress of falling walls.
The casualties are many, and a good number well
Outside the scenes of ravage and wreck; ...
The drums overwhelm the guns...
Caught in the clash of counter claims and charges
When not in the niche others have left,
We fall.
All casualties of the war,
Because we cannot hear each other speak,
Because eyes have ceased to see the face from the crowd,
Because whether we know or
Do not know the extent of wrong on all sides,
We are characters now other than before
The war began, the stay-at-home unsettled
By taxes and rumours, the looters for office
And wares, fearfull everyday the owners may return,
We are all casualties,
All sagging as are
The cases celebrated for kwashiorkor,
The unforeseen camp-follower of not just our war.

The above poem captures Clark’s view on who the casualties of war are with a particular reference to the 1967-70 Nigerian Civil War. It is very glaring from the foregoing lines that “we” are the casualties of the war, and not only those who have lost persons or properties during the war or those who await burial by installment or those who are led by night; but rather, we are all casualties of the war. All Nigerians are victims of war irrespective of tribe, religion or political divide. The Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Birom, Bajju, Aytap, Ikulu, Tiv, Jikun, Igala, Bassa Komo, Bassa Nge and Idoma etc are all casualties of the war; including the international community: “The unforeseen camp-follower of just our war.”

CONCLUSION

The place of these poems in the 21st century is very timely and relevant; especially in the face of the myriads of religious, political and socio-economic crises or conflicts that confront the entire universe on a daily basis. Now, what underscores this discourse is not whether or not conflict exists, but the ability to manage or handle it. Conflict is an integral part of humanity; it is found in marriage and family life. It exists in schools, churches, mosques, markets and even within an individual (intrapersonal conflict). Conflict is therefore everywhere.

Effective conflict management is expedient at this moment; and it is only realizable in an atmosphere of love and mutual trust for one another. Where the dignity of human life and opinions are cherished and respected above religious or tribal sentiments as well as political affiliations or any form of parochial views. And until we begin to see ourselves as Nigerians or Africans, or as a part of the whole globe; where the Muslim, Christian, pagan and the freethinker co-exists as brothers and sisters; the dream-Nigeria which Achebe, C. (1983:5) foresaw: “a Nigeria in which an Easterner might aspire to be premier in the West and a Northerner become Mayor of Enugu.” Where the death of one diminishes the other, and where all of us are the casualties and victims of conflicts and wars; and where no one is a victor or a loser. Until these and other measures are put in place, that dream-Nigeria will still be illusive even at the 53 independence celebrations.

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