Phenomenological Psychology as an Intelligence Tradecraft for the Church Ministering to Her Religious Neighbours in Nigeria

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Abstract. It is common knowledge that Africa as a developing continent has a lot to grapple with in the bid to making life bearable for the citizens socially, economically, and technologically. Intelligence and security reports have continually indicated that some countries in the continent are still confronted with inter-religious crises. Nigeria is one of such countries which continually wallow in inter-religious upheavals. The key religious neighbours who are regularly at one another's throat are Christians and Muslims. Yet, the Church needs to minister to the world as mandated by Jesus Christ, the head of the Church. This paper has therefore, examined the nature and ministry of the Church, and the way the Church has faced persecution. Strategies for cordial relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria are thereby recommended from a phenomenological psychological point of view as a tradecraft. Key among the recommendations is that the image of God in all human beings should be given prime of place while ministering to religious neighbours or handling religious differences.

INTRODUCTION

The church is known from the beginning to have faced persecution of all sorts and at different times. There is the example of Paul's experience of persecution in Acts 14:19-22. Paul was stoned by Jews from Antioch in Pisidia and from Iconium. This was an unfriendly world. After being resuscitated by the believers however, Paul and Barnabas went to Derbe the next day where they preached the good news and encouraged believers there. Africa in general is not exempted from the bitter experience of inter-religious imbrioglo. Nigeria in particular, which is the case study for this paper on inter-religious upheavals is known to be a multi-religious country (Makinde, 210:129) where religious persecution is a recurrent issue. Yet God has never repented of His mandate for

the church in the face of the severe persecutions especially in relation to Christian-Muslim upheavals in Nigeria (Anie, 2002:35). God continues to strengthen the church through the persecution because He still expects the church to keep ministering to the world, no matter how unfriendly the world may appear.

It must be mentioned at this juncture that one is not unaware of the difficulties involved in the church ministering to an unfriendly world. The reality of the experience of the must be faced so that the light and salt God makes her in the world may be effective. Therefore, attention shall be focused on the nature and tasks of the church, history of the persecution against the church, and the and strategies for ministering to an unfriendly world.

NATURE AND MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH
The Nature of the Church

The Church has been defined from various angles but with similar foci. Using the biblical imagery as found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Grudem described the Church as the body of Christ where Christ is both part and head (858). Briggar (1995) also gave an appealing description of the Church. To him,

> The Christian Church is that collection of human societies which is inspired by, and seeks to represent, the significance of Jesus. Hence, Paul's description of it as the 'body of Christ' (e.g. Eph. 1:22-23). Because Jesus was deemed by early Christians to be the epitome of Israel, the church is described in the New Testament as 'the people of god' (e.g. I Pet. 2:10). Further since it was believed to be the people among who God is present to an unprecedented and decisive degree, the church is referred to as 'the temple' of God's Spirit (e.g. I Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16) (229).

In other words, the Church is the body of Christ where the Spirit of God dwells whose head is Jesus Christ.

Similarly, as opined by Clouse (2006),

> The one church of God is not an institutional but a supernatural entity in process of growth toward the world to come. It is the sphere of the action of the risen and ascended Lord. All its members are in Christ and are knit

together by a supernatural kinship. All their gifts and activities continue Christ's work by the power of the Holy Spirit, originate from Christ, and are coordinated by him to the final goal" (182-183).

It should be noted that the nature of the church and her features are in relationship to God and to Jesus Christ who was also persecuted (Clouse, 2006:183).

The Ministry of the Church

The ministry of the Church is the ministry of Jesus Christ who is her Lord and Saviour. According to Erickson (1985), the Church to "carry on the Lord's ministry in the world- to perpetuate what he did and to do what he would do were he still here"(1051). The Church is to passionately show concern for those outside her fold. The gifts of the Spirit are distributed to believers to carry on the ministry of Jesus, the head of the Church. The Church is to bear witness to the gospel for the whole world to know God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit (Clouse, 189). In the whole work and witness of the Church, Jesus Christ is to be recognized as lord, the only 'King in Zion' (191). This is the crux of the matter. The world does not want Christ's Lordship and kingship to be recognized, hence the persecution is the strategy adopted to prevent this recognition.

PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The word **persecution** literally means **a pursuing.** In relation to the Church, persecution is "the systematic attempt to suppress or exterminate Christianity by social pressure to the point of violence"(Tenny,1988:403). This is fight for superiority where adherents of a religion want theirs to be set above others (Ukanah,2011:163-169) What then is the historical and contemporary nature of the persecution against the Church?

Early Persecution against the Church

There are enough evidence to show that religious persecution is not a new phenomenon in history. It is even regrettable that people hide under religion to persecute adherents of other religions. The reason is that, according to

Ukanah(2011), adherents of religions are "usually guided by some principles, doctrines and commandments believed to have been given by the supernatural being or his medium or prophets"(1). Historically, the Church began to face persecution as far back as the time of the Sanhedrin. This was directed against Peter and John because they proclaimed the resurrection of Christ Jesus (Acts 4:1-3, 5ff). The case of the stoning of Stephen was another one in which case the Christians in Jerusalem were forcefully dislodged and scattered all over (Acts 8:1-4) (Tenny,1988:403).

Regarding organized persecution by the state, Emperor Nero was the first to trouble Christians – though it was within a short period of time and was not spread wide. Under the Roman Empire were ten persecutions traditionally. They include: "Nero, A.D. 64; Domitian, A.D. 95; Trajan, A.D. 100; Antonius Pius A.D. 161-80; Septimius Severus, A.D. 197; Maximinus, A.D. 235; Decius, A.D. 249; Valerian, A.D. 257; Aurelian, A.D. 274; and Diocletian, A.D. 303" (Tenney, 403). It should be noted that there was no clear historical evidence for persecution during the rulership of Domitian. It is also noted that other persecutions were not of long duration but the ones under Decius and Diocletian were the most grievous. The Christians were exterminated while Christian literatures were confiscated and burnt. Diocletian burnt all the copies of the Scriptures he found and also demolished church buildings.

Furthermore, "The Christians were also misunderstood by the pagans, who considered them atheists, anti-social, and politically subversive" (Tenney, 1988:403). There was also the decline of the Roman Empire in the third century and the Christians were held responsible because the decline was viewed as a result of not worshiping the old gods. The reason being that, the worship of the gods was part of the state activity. So, the Christians who did not participate were viewed as unpatriotic and dangerous elements who should be gotten rid of in the population. In other words, persecution was the means through which heathenism was protesting "against the gospel in its spiritual and social manifestations" (403).

Contemporary Persecution Against the Church In Nigeria

It is no longer news that there is no cordiality as expected between adherents of Christianity and Islam in the northern part of Nigeria where virtually prominent ethnic groups are represented. It is even more disturbing that perpetrators of other crimes hide under religion to threaten, maim and kill innocent citizens in Nigeria. Some towns and cities are becoming abandoned by many residents as they escape for their dear lives – abandoning their immovable properties. The ongoing Boko-Haram saga in Borno State of Nigeria is a typical example of media through which the expected Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria is being eroded. Records also abound regarding upheavals between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

Major inter-religious conflicts have been properly summarized by Momodu and Edem among others in their joint article on "The Implications of Religious Conflict for National Security in Nigeria." It is revealed in this article that the Maitatsine uproar came up in the Northern Nigeria between 1980 and 1984. This has been corroborated by Marie Van Lear that the Maitatsine eruption spread through some key towns in the northeastern part of Nigeria. The menace occurred in 1981 in Kano; 1982 in Bulunkutu, Borno; 1984 in Yola; Gombe and Bauch in 1985 while attempts also were made in some other parts of the country (Van Lear, n.d.:19). Another threat to interreligious harmony in Nigeria occurred in the year 2004 when Sharia Law was demanded by Muslims in some Northern States starting from Zamfara to be entrenched in the legal system and recognized as parallel to the constitution of the nation. There was also the Kano riot of 1990, Tafawa Balewa crises of 1991, 1994, 1995 and 2001 and Shagamu imbroglio of 1999. One should not quickly forget Kafanchan riots of 1987, Funtua religious upheaval in 1993 and Kaduna interreligious bloodshed and property destruction of 1999 (Van Lear, 19).

Furthermore, records of sour relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria are evidenced in Yelwa uproars of 2004 in Jos, Maiduguri crises of December 11, 1998 and 2006. In the year 2007, was also Gombe crises and Numan crises of May 2003/2004. Popular, devastating and currently repeated is the Boko Haram saga which occurred in Bauchi, Borno, Kano and

Yobe States concurrently in July 2009 (Van Lear, 19).   It should be noted that the same Boko Haram crisis continues to spread like wild fire at present to the point that Abuja, the seat of the Federal Government of Nigeria is not spared at the moment. In the words of Moses O. Oladeji, "The frequent occurrence of religious riots in different parts of the North coupled with the usual recourse to burning of churches and killing and maiming of Christians has complicated the situation" (Oladeji, 2011: 105).

The above interreligious crises did not go without leaving their adverse effects on the social, economic, political and religious scene of the nation. For instance, loss of lives due to clashes in 1999 were more than 1000. In the year 2000, more than 2,000 persons lost their dear lives in Sharia-related crises. Available records indicated that as of the year 2000, more than 5,000 persons have been killed due to religious crises (Vanler, 19-20). In addition to killings, people have been displaced severally due to Christian-Muslim clashes. About 72 villages have been burnt down in Plateau State alone between year 2002 and 2003.   Again, nothing less than 57,000 people fled their homes following sectarian violence involving Christians and Muslims in Northern and Central Nigeria. More than 30,000 Christians have been displaced from their homes in Kano. A further 27,000 displaced people had sought refuge in Bauchi State in East Central Nigeria following the massacre of Muslims by Christian gangsters in the neighbouring Plateau State in May 2001. It means that the record of loss of lives as of today will be a heart-renting one.

As summed up by Ukanah in his quite revealing book, *In God's Name: The*

Story of Nigeria's Religious War and Its Brutal Killings,

> using Human Rights Watch estimate,it means between 1994-2010 Nigeria lost 184,000 people to religious crisis in the North! If we add the figure quoted by Sabo Bako, the figure climbs to 213,000…Two hundred and thirteen thousand is about a fifth of one million people killed during the Nigerian Civil war and probably more than AIDS killed worldwide   in the first year of its discovery…And because the 'virus' [religious riot]

killedmostly youth, children and middle aged men in their prime-the productive population with the most to live for in life we can say the victims are doubly dead in that they died so young (369).

Since the Church must continue to minister to the unfriendly world, some helpful strategies should be adopted. A view of these strategies are presented here from a practical psychological point of view.

STRATEGIES FOR CHURCH MINISTRY TO THE UNFRIENDLY WORLD

There is a helpful theory of religious relationship called phenomenological approach. Its emphasis is that there should be objectivity in considering other people's religious inclinations if there will be cordial relationship (Farmsworth, 1985:834-837; Scott, 2005:913). Below are some of the strategies that can be applied by the contemporary Church in ministering to the present unfriendly world.

1. The Need for Patience in Relationship: Drawing from phenomenological method of bracketing, Christians and Muslims in Nigeria need to refrain from using the 'heat-and-run' method while relating with one another. Having the goal of peaceful co-existence here on earth and in the world to come in mind should help them to suspend their religious biases till they will establish cordial relationship before utilizing their religious values to witness to one another (Lateju, 2002:46). It should be noted that some Muslims have good moral upbringing just like some Christians. It implies that demonstration of Christlike character of patience by both Christians and Muslims can cement relationship or Christian and Muslim brothers and sisters to be willing to live in peace with one another.

2. The Need for Readiness to Learn from One Another: Disciplined naivete is another method in phenomenological method which emphasizes willingness to learn from the person being observed since almost every experience brings new insight or perspective to issues (Van Lear 51). Christians should be teachable by their Muslim neighbours. Christians in Nigeria should

be willing to discipline themselves like children to learn what key doctrinal issues and religious practices mean to Muslims. Muslims should imbibe the same virtue. Willingness to learn will help Christians to enter into the phenomenal field of their Muslim neighbours and vice versa. Gaining insight into this phenomenal field which is the totality of what a person knows, his/her experience and perception, will help in relationship. Christians should know that it is not every doctrine or practice in Islam that is wrong and what one learns today can be used at another time to relate with Muslims insightfully. This may include short passages of Quran which can be easily recited or used in greetings(Olayinka, 913). Muslims should avail themselves with such practices.

3. The Need for Avoidance of Threat in Relationship: It is necessary for both Christians and Muslims to be aware of the fact that it is natural for a new idea to appear threatening to the learner. As noted by Collins (2007), "interpersonal tension often begins and escalates with people whose personality traits, attitudes, perceptions feelings mannerisms, and behavior create conflict and distrust"(319). Now that Muslims and Christians watch one another with suspicion, they should both demonstrate peaceable character in speech and action. This should be seen at the place of work, in the market and in the neighbourhood. When this is shown by these religious neighbours, they will find it easy to be open in relating with one another because fear would have been allayed to a large extent.

4. The Need to Recognize the Place of Phenomenal Self in Relationship: As presented earlier on, the way a person understands him/herself is the phenomenal self. Christians and Muslims should treat one another on the basis of perspective of self. It should however, be understood that self should be viewed as external characteristics that can enhance cordiality in relationship, depending on locality. Without being hypocritical, Christians can borrow statements of greetings commonly used by Muslims to make them feel good. Muslims should make use of simple Christian phrases that can enhance respect for one another.

5. The Need for Treating One Another as God's Image: Empathic and authentic self is key to peaceful relationship. This is the situation whereby

each person recognizes him/herself and other persons as real human beings created in the image of God. Christians and Muslims in Nigeria should demonstrate their understanding of the fact that every human person is created in the image of God. It is on this foundation they will lay the structure of their relationship. This will be built on love and obedience to God's word. This love has a compelling power that must characterize the lives of those who believe in God. In the opinion of Bonnke(1989), "on the lips of Jesus, the law becomes love. There are ten commandments, but the first and the only command to Him is 'Thou shall love the lord thy God', and the second is like unto it-'love thy neighbor as thyself'"(48). The love of Christ in the Christians should result in unquenchable concern for the adherents of other religious inclinations.

When Christians show the Godly character of empathy before crisis, it is believed to be capable of dowsing riotous ideation in some Muslims. This being so however, Christians should not yield to the temptation of being involved in Islamic practices that can injure their doctrinal stand. The same way should Muslims be empathic in handling relationship with Christians. They should not be influenced by those who view non-Muslims as less human beings.

6. The Need for Developing Target Friendship: Since it has been revealed that persons in the adolescent stage are more religious, Christians should focus more on this age group to establish relationship. This is necessary because, according to Beit-Hallahmi (2005), parents have influence on the religious life of their children (1006-1007). It means that if friendship is established with young Muslims, it is most likely that they will not poison their own children's minds against Christians when they become parents. This is a method of 'catching them young' which is believed to be capable of strengthening Christian-Muslim relationship in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

It is pertinent to conclude here that the Church is truly facing persecution continuously. It should be stated that the mandate given the Church must continue in the face of the ongoing persecution. Therefore, the Church should continue to witness to the unfriendly world in a friendly manner. This will be

possible if proper approach is taken towards ministering at this period in time because the Church has been given the mandate to bear witness to the gospel message. The practical psychological strategies recommended in this paper are believed to be capable of helping the Church to minister to the world impactfully, even in the face of persecution and unfriendliness.

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