

PHENOMENOLOGICAL ETHICS IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS SOCIETY: Nigeria as a Case Study

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Abstract: Multi-religious societies are prone to conflicts because of several factors that create room for divisiveness. Nigeria has been witnessing religious conflicts, especially between Muslims and Christians. It consequently appears as if religious conflicts in Nigeria and other multi-religious societies have defied the logic of conflict resolution. This breeds the problem of entrenching peace among religions with seemingly opposing doctrines and varying perceptions of the Supreme Being. Employing the methods of analysis and phenomenology, this essay argues that phenomenological ethics as a presuppositionless method of determining what is right or wrong is a better approach of not only resolving conflicts but also preventing them. It concludes by positing that a comprehensive teaching of phenomenological ethics in different religions can translate the method into an attitude which inculcates in one's psyche oneness as the ultimate goal of every religion, culminating in peaceful co-existence.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Ethics, Co-existence, Religion, Muslims, Christians, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The idea of religion leaves one not just with the relationship between man and a higher being, often supernatural, but also with certain fundamental values that guide the actions of the

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individual religious practitioners. The essence of those values is primarily to foster peace and harmony for the purpose of engendering development in the society. The general parlance of 'the more the merrier' unreservedly portends that the practice of many religions in human societies would definitely translate to the abundance of the positive effects which religion tends to promote in the society. Paradoxically, our societies with their multifarious religions have remained enmeshed with different dimensions of conflicts and disasters. Often times, these conflicts which appear intractable and irreconcilable are considered inter-religious simply for the reason of differences in religious beliefs and views. The fact that every religion has a supernatural being at the apex of their ontological ladder who seeks unity with individual human beings through certain universal religious values such as peace, tranquility of the mind, respect for the sacred, oneness among human beings, kindness among others take the back stage when engulfed in these needless conflicts.

The conflicts which are characterized as inter-religious range from wanton destruction of property, maiming and killing of fellow human beings, kidnapping of persons of certain faiths to terrorism. Nigeria as our case study is a perfect example of a society with different religions but often times lacks the positives which religion promotes and promulgates. As a nation, Nigeria has been bedeviled with religious crises which reached their crescendo in kidnapping, banditry and terrorism. All of these conflicts and crises seem to defy the values and principles of the various religions which ordinarily are parameters for peaceful and harmonious co-existence of the different religious practitioners. We argue that religious dogmatism which culminates in a 'holier than thou' and 'superior to thou' attitude respectively across various religions is a foundation of the conflicts. It is the objective of this essay therefore to seek an alternative ethical parameter which is not specific to a religion and would be unbiased in handling conflicts across different faiths whenever and wherever they occur in Nigeria. The relevance of this objective is encapsulated in the fact that it exposes all stakeholders to varieties of perspectives to issues without bias and prejudices in order for each faith to acknowledge

the principle of equality and freedom of opinions and doctrines that promote peace and harmony in human existence.

2. Methodological Framework

This study is founded on the principles of phenomenology, wherein phenomena are regarded as immediate appearances in our consciousness. Agidigbi aptly characterizes phenomenology as a "presuppositionless description of the given facts of experience" (6). Husserl aims to employ the phenomenological method to reveal concealed realities by allowing objects to manifest themselves, steering clear of misinterpretation merely for the purpose of opposing those with differing opinions. By adopting this method to analyze and address crises, individuals cultivate an objective perspective, transcending their personal viewpoints and considering the perspectives of others. This approach aims to mitigate dogmatism and absolutism.

3. Phenomenological Ethics

Phenomenology as a method of philosophy has the privilege of being capable of combining with a wide range of concepts and theories in different disciplines and human endeavours. This accounts for why it is found in multidisciplinary researches. So, it is nothing strange to find it attached to the word 'ethics'. However, in order to understand better what this section is all about, it becomes very pertinent to separately rehash the meanings of ethics and phenomenology respectively. According to Mackinnon, "ethics or moral philosophy, asks basic questions about the good life, about what is better and worse, about whether there is objective right or wrong, and how we know it if there is" (3). From another perspective, Ekwealo defines ethics as the systematic study of the fundamental principles of morality. As a study, it is a critical examination of values with a view to having qualitative way of living and conduct. It examines the rights and wrongs in human conduct and the society. It prescribes, instructs and exhorts human beings on what to do, what not to do and what ought not to do (1).

In spite of the positive intentions embedded in the definitions above, ethics itself in its abstract justifications has been the

foundation of most religious practitioners' negative attitudes towards religions that are outside of theirs. This is explored by religious practitioners because of the varieties of principles found in that field of study; each religion setting isolated ethical principles for advancing its own tenets, even if such tenets are antithetical to peaceful co-existence with other religions. The intended good life in ethics has turned to the good life of isolated groups of persons, according to belief systems.

Man ought to possess rationality which helps him to engage in self-reflections in all his actions so that he would be able to differentiate between what is appropriate for him and what is not, which he should carry out as an action. This application of rationality is necessary because whatever his action is, a man's action will be judged with certain criteria so that such actions could be said to be wrong or right. Ethics has been said to be related with religion in the advancement of a positive minded individual and the society. Religions which have their own morals and practitioners are also judged by those ethical standards set by each of the religions. Rationality, which is the fulcrum of ethics, seems to be thrown away by religious practitioners exploring certain ethical principles like relativism. Rather than coming to shore up the impacts which religious values have on their adherents, ethics has now become a basis for justifying certain principles that constitute disagreements among religious sects and practitioners.

Turning to phenomenology, this essay seeks an expansion of what Husserl takes it to be, as has been highlighted above. Phenomenology comprises two concepts: phenomenon and logos. According to Unah, "phenomenon, primarily and mainly, is that which shows itself as it is in itself, the *manifest*. But phenomenon can sometimes show itself as it is not, the *semblant*" (12). The showing of phenomenon therefore can both be positive and negative; the negative showing being what is regarded as privative display. But the privative showing is not the interest of this work and so the import of the positive showing will be necessary for the discussion of what phenomenology is all about. It is in the light of this that Unah further defines phenomenon as "that which shows itself precisely as it is in profiles, not which

appears and is objectified with a hidden double which in itself does not appear” (13). On the other hand, logos “means the same thing as to show, that is, to make manifest what one is talking about in one’s discourse” (Heidegger 56). Logos therefore has the same character as phenomenon and that is the attitude of showing itself or letting something been seen by pointing out what the thing is. Heidegger defines Phenomenology as follows:

that which shows itself to be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself. ...we are expressing nothing else than the maxim ... ‘to the things themselves’ ... To have a science of phenomena means to grasp its objects in such a way that everything about them which is up for discussion must be treated by exhibiting it directly and demonstrating it directly (58-59).

It is the same view above that Qutoshi sees phenomenology as not showing one’s knowledge of presuppositions and prejudices while giving room to phenomena to freely show itself the way it really is (218).

When all the arguments above are juxtaposed with that of Edmund Husserl, the notion of phenomenological ethics becomes clearer. It is not an ethics that is traditionally identified among ethicists and ethical theories and principles. It is rather a method of examining actions and carrying out acts which themselves are subsequently subjected to moral examinations and judgments. It is a kind of ethics that engages certain values which would make one to act right and refrain from making wrong judgments. In clear terms therefore, phenomenological ethics is both a method and an attitude, and could be seen as a moral approach which discountenances assumptions, prejudices, prior knowledge, biases, inclinations and affiliations of whatever form while letting situations, events, doctrines and values expose themselves the way they are in themselves without interference from individuals. As a method, it enables individuals themselves get rid of bespectacled opinions on issues and engenders in individuals same attitude devoid of dogmatism and fixation. The application of this method in a multi-religious society like Nigeria where religious values themselves have seemingly failed and defied rationalization is the crux of this essay.

In place of the failed religious values and ethical principles, certain values such as tolerance, flexibility, togetherness (live and let's live), cooperation, honesty and openness among others have now become very relevant in phenomenological ethics. When all of these principles are put together, we can resolve most of the issues confronting us in our multi-religious societies. A brief examination of some of these values would suffice.

4. Values of Phenomenological Ethics

Tolerance as an ethical value has been variedly misconceived, especially on the basis of the three key concepts of objection, acceptance and rejection. In Forst's view, these concepts are necessary for the understanding of tolerance. In the first, an action must be bad in order to be tolerated. For the second, in spite of the bad nature of the action, there is still something that will make it to be embraced; that is the stage of acceptance. The third concept of rejection shows that such an action is so bad that it should not be associated with; that is rejection. It is so discussed because it cannot be accepted (283).

Tolerance does not mean an idea is repulsive, that is, false or bad as Forst opines. As an ethical value, it is rather the ability of the receiving mind to accept a perspective that is not in tandem with his own conviction, which may even be rational. The recipient may be convinced of his perspective for different reasons and factors which may include culture, training, background and even religion which is the focus of this essay. Whatever the source of the contrary perspective opines becomes meaningless because of the factors and reasons listed above, no matter how justified the opposing view is. It is at this point that this value becomes significant. Although, the phenomenological approach to it is such that it combines the value of the openness of mind so that any prior knowledge of the issue in focus does not hamper objectivity. When all individuals allow issues to positively display themselves the way they are, they will most likely see the issues from various standpoints. And this will definitely facilitate the inculcation of tolerance as an attitude.

Flexibility though directly not an ethical concept as such, Cheng and Koszalka opine that it refers to how much a person

adapts to strategies that will culminate in novel and evolving circumstances (1). The virtue of flexibility is akin to bending to emerging situations which one was not initially acquainted with and which ordinarily would not have made meaningful significance. Another strand of flexibility is the possibility to make one's opponent appreciate one's weaknesses. In such instances, the appreciating mind through the phenomenological attitude becomes empathetic, having transcended himself and realizing that before other sets of individuals, he can be described with similar weaknesses but such weaknesses do not permit his extermination. They only show that there is need to provide succor for humanity whenever it is needed.

Cooperation is seen here as togetherness and collectiveness. The taken-for-granted idea of cooperation is that individuals work together because they pursue a common goal. This is why Zagumny says that cooperation as an act entails the behavioral activity of two or more individuals sharing together in order to achieve a purpose that is rewarding to all persons involved (2). This view is too simplistic to reflect the idea of phenomenological ethics in this work since there must be a scenario of conflict or rivalry which would consequently necessitate the idea of phenomenological ethics itself in which cooperation is considered an ethical value that is employed to address a crisis situation in a multi-religious society. It is in the bid to explain the relevance of the corollary situation of cooperation that scholars introduced the classical cooperation-competition social interdependency theory of Deutsch.

Cooperation and competition are seen as complementary ways of interacting among people with certain goals in mind (Katz et al 2). But each of the two acts is a choice to be made by individuals; either to cooperate and get the goals collectively achieved together or to compete and achieve the goals independent of the other(s). Toppe et al in clear terms explain cooperation more by looking at its opposite which is competition. While the former is an activity that entails individuals having unity of goal; incurring losses and enjoying winning together, competition also involves at least two individuals who have

opposing goals with each outdoing each other such that one is aiming to gain while making the other lose (14).

This classical relationship between cooperation and competition also does not explain cooperation as a value of phenomenological ethics because individuals are not presented with conflict and crisis situation as a choice which they freely make. Crisis situations are generated from their possible differences in world views, traditions, backgrounds and beliefs among others. The occurrence of conflict is not therefore viewed as complementary to competition. Cooperation as a phenomenological ethical value can be borne out of a conflict situation where all stakeholders have purged their minds of their previous biases and have come to find out perhaps that working together can become more instrumental to greater success than engaging in conflicts.

Honesty is also a value in both ethics and religion, both of which we have said have not really succeeded in ensuring that people with different religious orientations and values co-exist peacefully. Its phenomenological interpretation is quite helpful in our thesis in this essay. Beyond its general understanding as truth telling, it also entails the unearthing of facts which appear hidden for the purpose of entrenching happiness and harmonious relationship in the society. This principle has so much attachment to the phenomenological orientation because it is not just someone giving accurate accounts of events that have occurred in the past in his presence which he refused to conceal but it also involves dispassionate *unconcealment* of issues whose (mis)understanding can possibly lead to conflicts and disharmony in the society. In this ethical act, an individual is just, fair, sincere, reliable and trustworthy. As a phenomenological ethical principle, it is appropriate that individuals of different faiths in a multi-religious society imbibe it as it could, at any time, become very instrumental to forestalling crises or managing them if they have already occurred.

5. Nigeria as a Multi-Religious Society

A multi-religious society is simply defined as a society which comprises diversities of religious faiths, and in such a society, the

adherents of such different religions could be under the administrative governance of a secular government but are definitely under different religious codes and creeds. The government itself does not promote one religion over the others, irrespective of the religious faith of those in power. A multi-religious society has no place for the superiority of a particular religious faith; all faiths are considered equally and enjoy equal, fair and just privileges from government whenever government decides that certain privileges be made available to religious faiths in such a society.

Nigeria as a country has been popularly described in terms of its multi-religiosity to have three most commonly recognized religions: Islam, Christianity and African Indigenous Religion (Aluko 292). Among these three, Islam has a relatively low noticeable multiplicity of denominations, doctrinal differences and classification and are perceived as the most united but the reality is that within the Islamic faith, there are also multifarious groups. It is these differences which Marshall identifies in her position that the Islamic community in Nigeria are made up of the Shiites and Sunni communities with subgroups like Salafis and Sufis (3). She further identifies Boko Haram as a small Islamic group that enjoys support from international players with orientation of extremism for violence. Other Islamic groups in Nigeria include the Maitatsine, those who call themselves the ‘Neutral Muslims’, the Yoruba Islamic Groups and the Quraniyyan (Marshall 4). Among the Christians, there is the practice of Catholicism as different from Protestantism. There are also the African initiated Christian denominations and a few of those that consider themselves as not being identified with any of these three. Of the Christian religious classification, Marshall again says Christians are split into Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, African Christianity as well as some marginal and unattached Christians which include the Jehovah Witnesses. In terms of population, Protestantism comes first, followed by African Christians, Roman Catholics and other groups which can be rightly termed unaffiliated.

The adherents of the African Indigenous Religion also find themselves in different groups. For instance, some practice *Ifa*,

especially among the Yoruba people of the South-West. Others like the Urhobo of the South-South practice the *Igbe* cult. Some others access the Supreme Being by venerating their ancestors through their *ofo/Ndiche*- this is predominantly among the Igbo people of the South-East and the *Ukwuani* of the South-South. The import of all these identified delineations is to establish that the multi-religiosity of Nigeria as a country is not only inter-religious but also in intra-religious.

Of the three notable religions in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam are more officially recognized in government circles than the African Indigenous Religion. This does not in any way undermine the African Indigenous Religion. As a young Nigerian carrying out the mandatory one-year National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme at graduation, I (one of the authors of this essay) was involved in the rigorous camp training for 3weeks and every morning, there were morning devotions which involved prayers from only the adherents of the Christian and Islamic faiths before our physical fitness trainings commenced. After a week in camp, one morning after the prayers from both faiths, a colleague of ours drew the attention of the camp officials to the fact that his religion was being neglected and not always included in the morning prayers. There was so much curiosity as everyone wondered whether there was anyone who is neither a Christian nor a Muslim in Nigeria. Surprisingly, when the young man was given the opportunity to say his prayers, a great number of our colleagues at the end of his prayers chorused *ise*, which means Amen! That marked the beginning of the prayers from the adherents of the African Indigenous Religion for the remaining 2weeks of the camping exercise. As the camp officials would later explain, the two western religions have depleted the numerical strength of the indigenous religions to the extent that Nigerian and African worshippers generally are not bold enough to identify with their own indigenous religions. Hence, the omission was inadvertent; no one had ever shown up in the past with such identity. There are no regions of the country where there is no presence of the adherents of African Indigenous Religion but the lack of organization like the other two religions is one of the reasons not much attention is paid to the practitioners.

The geographical spreads of the two that enjoy attention from the Nigerian populace have been discussed widely by scholars. According to Ogunbadejo:

One can conveniently argue that the Islamic faith preponderates in the northwestern and northeastern parts of the country (comprising of Sokoto, Kano, Kaduna, Zamfara, Borno, Yobe, Katsina, Kebbi, Jigawa, Bauchi, Taraba, Gombe and Adamawa states). On the other hand, Christianity is more prominent in the South-East and South-South geographical zones (comprising Imo, Enugu, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Delta, Edo, Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross River and Akwa Ibom states). The South-West and North-Central zones (comprising Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun, Niger, Plateau, Nassarawa, Benue, Kogi states and the Federal Capital Territory respectively) have a reasonably balanced numbers of Muslims and Christians (110).

What Ogunbadejo continued explaining was the relationship between the geographical locations of the various adherents of the two religions and the extent to which each has its own worshippers. This is due to the obvious fact that there are more Muslims in the North than there are Christians while there are more Christians in the South than there are Muslims. In all, the goal of this section which is to establish the multi-religious nature of the Nigerian society has been achieved.

6. Conflicts in Nigeria’s Multi-religious Society

Many of the challenges in Nigeria today whether social, economic or political, can be traced to the multi-religious nature of the country. In the introductory section of this essay, a few types of conflicts which Nigeria as a multi-religious nation is confronted with were highlighted. For the purpose of this section, the conflicts and others are recounted as follows: kidnapping, terrorism, banditry, wanton destruction of property (including places of worship) and killing of fellow human beings among others. The two religions traditionally involved in these inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria are Islam and Christianity. Recently, the clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and local farmers, especially in the Southern part of Nigeria and the North-Central region as well have brought in the perspective of an inter-religious conflict between the Fulani herdsmen (who are

predominantly Muslims) and the local farmers who are mostly adherents of African Indigenous Religions. In fact, in Ondo State in the South-Western part of Nigeria, it was reported that indigenous metaphysical dimensions were introduced in the whole conflict when the herdsmen could not explain the mysterious deaths of their cattle. The same situation was reported at Uwheru town in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State in Nigeria's South-South.

All of these inter-religious conflict situations have been attributed to social, economic, political, religious and ethnic causes. As captured by Uwadi et al, the specific causes include non-dynamism, conflicting religious doctrines, methods of conversion, unguided utterances from religious elites who should be role models, irrational mix of religion with politics, provocative use of religious signs and symbols, fight for dominance among others (3-4). Chidi comes from the perspective of ethno-religious conflicts and sees the causes of those conflicts from the respective angles of ethnicity and religion. Among the various causes advanced by him, the two causes related to the religious perspective are political recognition and religious intolerance (271-272). Beyond these causes, scholars have also suggested solutions to mitigate the effects of the conflicts. Despite these suggestions and measures put in place, the crises and conflicts do not seem to abate. And the reason is as a result of abandoning the metaphysical nature of the problems, which phenomenological ontologists call the *being nature* of the problems. This is what we call, following Heidegger's lead, the "metaphysic spirit which is the hub spirit that drives the narrow conception" (141) of being. It brings about narrow-mindedness in the conception of reality, which smacks of absolutism. It is like saying 'the way I understand my world is the way it is and I expect others to understand it the same way in order to avoid any form of crisis from my own end'. All of the categories of the conflicts listed above are traceable to this metaphysical thinking where anything outside the matrix of one's thought should be rejected as false and non-existent. If *A* who is a Muslim tendentiously holds to a religious view, *B* who is a Christian cannot hold a contrary position without conflicting with *A*. The

same thing happens when *B* holds a religious view and *A* holds an opposite view. This spirit of absolutism which does not allow for differences in opinions is at the heart of the crises and conflicts prevalent in multi-religious societies, Nigeria as a case in point, and that is the metaphysical foundation of conflicts in a multi-religious society.

A few illustrations of how this narrow-mindedness towards reality that culminates in conflict situations works will suffice. For instance, the Boko Haram set whose basic view is that Western education is sacrilegious has been up in arms with the Christians whose acceptance of their faith emanated from Western education. In this scenario, no hair-splitting analysis is required to project a crisis situation between the two faiths. The terrorism, armed banditry, killings and destruction of churches witnessed since the unfortunate birth of Boko Haram are attributed to these seeming ontological differences in religious orientations. Foyou et al capture such atrocities thus: “the violent attacks experienced thus far in Nigeria’s Northern States has now spread to the South in terms of banditry and farmers-herders’ violent conflicts” (70). The other causes of conflicts in a multi-religious society which amount to the stifling of being are provocative utterances from religious leaders, conflicting doctrines from the different religious faiths, methods of conversion and the assumed superiority of one faith over another. Ogunbadejo succinctly exposes the picture of this superiority and inferiority contest thus:

Christians argue that their religion is the only religion and not Islam or Traditional religion. Muslims counter the claim by boasting that Islam is the only true religion. The two of them lay claim to some passages of their scriptures and religious traditions to prove their arguments. Christians refer to the following passages of the Bible:

John 14:6: “Jesus said to him: “I am the way, and the truth, and the light. No one comes to the Father, except through me”

Acts 4:12: “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”.

ITim.2:5: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”.

On the contrary, Muslims often quote the following portions of the Qur’an:

-Surah 3:19: “Truly, the religion with Allah is Islam”

-Surah 3:85: "And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him and in the hereafter, he will be one of the losers"

-Surah 48:28: "He it is who has sent His messenger with guidance and the religion of truth". (110-111)

These scriptures from the two religions are indicative of the fact of the foundations of crises being prepared by the religions themselves. No one religion would be pleased to be so undermined to the extent that it would be seen as nothing. Even the dogmatism that is inculcated by the adherents of the religions is a recipe for crisis. The room given for such religious indoctrination is capable of making adherents degenerate to the level of perpetuating violence at any modicum of provocation.

The narrow-mindedness of the different religions has gone from the level of 'metaphysical foundation' to an erection of 'total edifice' of conflicts. This submission is made here because what began as differences in creeds and codes have now become the specific ways of life of conflicts and violence for the different religions. The cultures which are rooted in the minds of the adherents have now grown to become the identities of the respective religions. This is the reason a view not in tandem with a particular religion is perceived as attacking the identity of the religion. Anyone who perceives his identity is threatened would most likely respond negatively. All of what have been identified as causes of religious conflicts have their roots in this 'metaphysic spirit' which should be addressed if the social, political, economic, ethnic and religious cause are to be properly addressed.

7. Phenomenological Ethics and Resolving Conflicts

Phenomenological ethics is a method that employs the different approaches and terminologies used by phenomenologists in the examination of issues in order to ensure that dispassionate outcomes are arrived at. Specifically, any human action that is adjudged to be wrong or right must have gone through the crucibles of presuppositionlessness, *epoché* and *eidetic* reduction, almost in the manner adopted by Husserl. Phenomenological ethics is a method at the level of its engagement in resolving conflicts but it is also an attitude that must be inculcated for the

purpose of preventing them. A phenomenological ethically minded individual would dispassionately and without any emotional attachment to his religion display an attitude that reflects peace and harmony between him and individual adherents of other religions, even in the face of extreme provocation. When adherents of different religions cultivate this phenomenological ethical mind, then the goal of achieving religious peace and harmony would be realized. Where there is any religious disagreement between or among different faiths, resolution of such becomes less cumbersome.

Phenomenological ethics, whether as an attitude of the mind aimed at preventing crisis or as a method of resolving crisis, recognizes that for it to be successful in the entrenchment of a multi-religious society defined by peaceful co-existence, the two stages of the phenomenologist's natural attitude (Qutoshi 217) and the phenomenological attitude must be observed and brought to bear in conflict prevention or resolution process. The natural attitude is a stage in which the vagaries of the world define our understanding of the situation under focus and prevents us from getting at the reality of such a situation. This is the situation adherents find themselves in when they are confronted with conflicts. They, at this stage, depend on the deceptive attributes of the situations and have the confidence that they are right on their respective thoughts and orientations. Owolabi (1996) says:

The natural attitude or the stage of the *Lebenswelt*, to use the exact German word, is the pre-logical standpoint, the attitude of everyday life ... It is the belief of the ordinary man on the street, the assumption that all things are in order ... this attitude is borne out of naïve realism. It is ... an attitude of unclarified presuppositions which when thoroughly verified will turn out to be disappointing (287).

This is the position in which adherents of religions find themselves when they are confronted with the protectionist attitude of their respective religions. They become uncritical of whatever is sold to them as the reasons they should defend their religions even if it takes violence to do so. As a phenomenological ethicist, one can transcend the stage of the natural attitude to the

phenomenological attitude where both the *epoché* and *eidetic* reduction are applied. With the *epoché*, an individual brackets his mind from the presuppositions and prejudices that characterize the natural attitude while *eidetic* reduction depicts transcending the uncritical attitudes that bring retrogression to our cognition of reality. Once individuals adopt these practical steps, then preventing and resolving conflicts becomes realizable.

8. Conclusion

Phenomenological ethics is considered in this essay as very fundamental in the prevention and resolution of conflicts in a multi-religious society like Nigeria. It is a normative approach that transcends the natural attitude of religious practitioners in order to ascertain what action is right or wrong. Clearly, actions that are carried out at the level of our natural and uncritical attitude would be adjudged to be wrong while those that go through the phenomenological stage of critical transcendence of our religious dogmas and indoctrinations would be taken as right.

An important aspect of phenomenological ethics is that at the stage of *eidetic* reduction, there is also what Unah calls *eidetic* abstraction (210) which aids the phenomenological ethicist in arriving at what is essential to all religions so that practitioners of different religions would realize that the gulfs created among them are both artificial and imaginary. In reality, there are commonalities and essences that unify the religions and make for a more peaceful and harmonious society in spite of the multi-religious nature of the Nigerian society. For instance, all “religions offer solutions to the existential questions on the meaning of life...” (Ottuh et al 436). It is therefore necessary for religious leaders to imbibe this attitude and ensure that using it as a method, it is taught as an essential part of their various religions so that their followers would subsequently imbibe it as an attitude and see the oneness in all religions.

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