

30

“TREAT HIM LIKE A TAX COLLECTOR” MATT. 18:17: A CHRISTIAN’S RESPONSE TO SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The history of the world has remained a history of peace, escape, and uneasy calm. No one is sure of tomorrow. Nigeria is not an exception. Nigerians are anxious about the future of their nation due to the menace and threats from radical Islam under the common term, “Fulanization”. It is the belief of an average Nigerian that there are perilous plans to Islamize Nigeria by force, a concern heightened by the recent invasion of the Christian-dominated eastern part by Fulani herdsmen. In our local church, the story is not different. These days, priests are attacked. Rectories and churches are burgled. Many parishes are in tumult. There are doctrinal and pastoral problems ad intra and ad extra. Over and above the menace of incessant division in Christendom, leading to Catholicism, Protestantism and Pentecostalism, the perilous advances and growth of the so-called traditional religion adherents, especially among the youths, remain a matter of grave concern. Prayer mongers claiming special divine call and gift seem to eat up the veracity of the gospel of Christ. The uneasy calm created by these is too obvious to be neglected. This paper believes that Matt 18:17 offers us a solution in order to have peace of conquest without conflict. It focuses on the worrisome conflict caused by religious extremists in Nigeria and then posits tolerance and forgiveness as a solutions to the avoidable conflicts in Nigeria engineered by these extremists and exaggerated stories. It employs an exegetical lens to interpret Matt 18:17 from the backdrop of historical facts to project it as a solution to the resolution of conflicts, especially in the face of dangers posed by the great divide of creedal walls. The result of the research, if adopted by all, is the restoration of peace and stability in our local Church, in Nigeria as a nation and in the world at large. Describing Fr. B.A.C Obiefuna as a harbinger of peace, the paper concludes by positing him as an angel of peace of conquest even in the face of grave danger.

Keywords: Tax Collector, Conflict, Resolution, Christianity, Intolerance and Extremism

Introduction

The Nigerian nation has been bedevilled by recurrent socio-religious conflicts. The conflicts, no doubt, gravely hamper the development and growth of the nation as discrimination, hatred, disunity, and suspicion of one another seem to be the order of the day. This paper believes that Matt. 18:17 offers us a solution in order to have peace of conquest without conflict.

Comprehension of some biblical texts is as challenging as they seem inconsistent with what one considers the general tenet of the scriptures, especially the New Testament. Matt. 18:17 is one of those texts. The text is even more taunting and problematic because just a few verses later, Jesus replied to Peter that one must forgive seventy-seven times (Matt. 18:22). Jesus frequently taught about forgiveness. He departed from the tit-for-tat provision of the Old Testament and the rabbinic teaching that one forgives three times (3x) to insist that one must forgive as often as one is offended (Matt 18:22). He even gave it as a condition for one to be forgiven by God (Matt 6:14-15). It is also a *conditio sine qua non* for answered prayer (Mark 11:23-25). He expressed it as the key to our relationship with

God (Luke 11:4). He did not just teach it: he practised and demonstrated it while on earth. One can see this in the paralytic lowered on a mat through the roof (Matt 9,2-8); the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11); the woman who anointed his feet with oil (Luke 7:47-50); Peter for denying he knew Jesus (John 18:15-18; 25-27; 21:15-19); the criminal on the cross Luke (23:39-43); the people who crucified him Luke 23:34). Other New Testament writers maintained the same idea that we should always forgive (Eph. 4:26-32; Col. 3:12-13).

The big problem is understanding why Jesus would teach his followers to treat one as a tax collector if he had consistently taught them to forgive very often. It is possible that the text is influenced by a social situation in which it was written. Probably, some members of his community became so intransigent and troublesome that excommunication was considered the last option. It is also possible that the author/redactors got the text from a source and just inserted it, forgetting what he wrote in other passages. That the text is a teaching on social control and settlement of cases between members is still another probability. It is too early for this paper to take a position. Saldarini (1994) observes that the gospel of Mathew is a complex text and the most Jewish of all gospels because it refers in a sustained and serious way to the bible, to specific Jewish customs and beliefs, and to the general Jewish cultural and religious thought world of the first century.

Human Rights Related to Freedom of Religion or Belief and Acts of Violence Based on Religion

Concern for conflicts instigated by religious belief is a universal phenomenon. The United Nations has given it thoughtful attention. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 18, 19 and 20 could be described as ‘articles on freedoms and rights’. Freedom of religion and belief is one of the rights to freedom enshrined in the Declaration. This shows that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is against all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. It advocates for open, constructive and respectful rubbing of minds as well as interreligious, interfaith and intercultural dialogue at all levels: local, national, regional and international, as ways of combating religious hatred, incitement and violence. It also believes that the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and full respect for the freedom to seek, receive and impart information can play a positive role in strengthening democracy and combating religious intolerance.

Despite the United Nations intervention and Human Rights Declarations, intolerance, atrocities and violence are yet to be abated. There are continued religious-based acts of intolerance and violence against individuals, tribes, minorities and sects. In fact, the rate is on the increase. It is because of this that the General Assembly adopted a resolution setting out a day to honour victims of religious-based violence. The resolution is titled “International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief”. It comes every 22 August. The day comes right after the International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, 21 August. The member states have unequivocally and strongly condemned continued violence and terrorism based on religious extremism in all its forms and manifestations, wherever and by whomsoever, irrespective of the motivation.

However, it is sad to note that despite this declaration, the story is yet to change in most parts of the world, Nigeria in particular. In Nigeria, it is one gory story every day, and mostly in the name of religion.

Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Causes and Adverse Effects

Religious Conflicts

Boer (2003) rightly notes that religion can create peaceful co-existence and strengthen social relations. Unfortunately, Carke and Hackett (1987) observe that experience has shown that religion has ended up dividing mankind leading to destruction of the civilization that mankind has built in years. This is because, according to Graham (1960) violence and intolerance characterise religious motif contrary to the unity every religion purport to preach. He observes that more wars have been fought and more persecutions initiated and executed in the name of religion. Indeed, Nigeria since independence till date have witnessed myriad religious crises leading to wanton destruction of lives and properties and affecting the national economy negatively (Odikpa and Emeje, 2020).

The crisis in Nigeria goes back to independence but on tribal and regional levels motivated by the desire to take over the political heart of Nigeria. With time the religious consciousness became acute especially in the North and Middle belt of Nigeria (Alagbu and Tanko, 2007).

Lately, the crisis has gone nation-wide. It has always been between Christians and Muslims. In 1980, it was in Zaria; Bulumkutu in Maiduguri in 1982; Rigasa, Gombe, Jimte-Yola in Adamawa had theirs in 1984. The infamous registration of a secular state like Nigeria in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986 by the Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida administration became an incubator leading to more gory stories. In 1987, Christian and Muslim students clashed in Kafanchan College of Education. It eventually escalated to the entire Kaduna. In 2002, it was the Maitatsine riots led by a Cameroonian Islamic cleric, Kukah alias Maitatsine. The riots led to loss of lives, torching of churches and mosques, and business premises in Kano (Atanda, 1989).

In 1990, Nigeria woke up one morning to be greeted by a martial music. There was a coup, the Gideon Okar coup. It was later foiled. However, it was given a religious tone leading to excising of some northern states: Kano, Borno, Katsina, Bauchi, and Sokoto populated by Muslims of Hausa-Fulani and Kamuri origin from the Nigerian federation.

In the year 2000, the move to introduce Sharia law in Nigeria led to serious clashes between Muslims and Christians (Okoye, 2000).

2002 witnessed a gory uprising by the Muslims against the hosting of the World Beauty Contest in Nigeria, leading to a clash between Muslims and Christians. Lives were lost, and properties were destroyed.

In 2004, many lives and properties were destroyed in the Muslim North, just the claim that the Quran was desecrated in Makarfi Local Government Area.

Causes

There could be other possible causes like political and economic issues but the researcher limits his purview to intolerance, fundamentalism, and extremism as the most prominent causes.

Some people think that their religious sect has a monopoly of the truth, and so see people of other faiths as unworthy of living. They find it difficult to cohabit with people of other faiths. They see them as infidels condemned to die and to hell fire. They, therefore, presume to help God do His work. Gofwen (2004) avers that intolerance is a notable cause of religious violence in Nigeria.

Religious fundamentalism or fanaticism is another malady that breeds religious violence. It is a form of religious intolerance. It seeks strict adherence to religious doctrine and doctrinal originality and abhors modernism. It admits of no change from the status quo. It emphasizes the right doctrine and the necessity of organized warfare against the forces of modernism (Joseph, 1987).

The extremists have the common belief that others would be damned if they do not follow their creedal line. They, therefore, abhor other faiths and resort to violence to stop them and enforce repentance.

Adverse Effects

Odikpa (2020) documents that the catalogue of events or religious conflicts between 1980 and 2000, even beyond, in Nigeria can be best summarized as the quagmires which have threatened to destroy the fabric upon which the entire nation rested. It has necessitated a disruption of the socio-psychological and economic sanity of Nigerians.

The feeling of uncertainty and insecurity on local and foreign investors is another effect. Nigeria is a growing economy. She needs investors for her economy to survive. With the feeling of insecurity and uncertainty, many local and foreign investors get discouraged leading to more economic depression. Gofwen (2004) sadly notes that religious violence in Nigeria has led to the destruction of many public facilities, utilities and services which could have helped in improving the living standard of the people. It has led to people competing for basic social services, facilities, for placement in schools, medical treatment, access to clean water and the few available jobs. It has also led to the destruction of infrastructures put in place by successive governments and the burning of shops, petrol stations, houses, etc., thus interfering with the quotidian economic activities of society.

Socially, citizens get more estranged from one another due to mistrust and discontentment accruing from religious violence. The repercussion is uneasy calm, retardation in education and economic activities in Nigeria (Gomos, 2014). It poses a great threat to human rights irrespective of colour, gender, sex, religious affiliation and health status.

Akpanika (2018) rightly observes that Nigeria is multi-cultural and multi-religious country with two major religions: Christianity and Islam, with each competing and claiming superiority and dominance over the other. This claim of superiority as well as dominance has served as the foundation for religious intolerance and several socio-religious crises and violence that have bedevilled Nigeria since Independence on 1 October, 1960. Though sometimes concealed in political garment, it is usually motivated by religious bigotry, and thus, gives way to ethnicism, nepotism and great geopolitical divide. Azumah (2008) explains that socio-politically, Islam poses a challenge to Christian doctrine and values. This is so because according to him, Christians, regard religion as a matter of personal faith, and view the Church's past involvement in and use of temporal power as a serious aberration. Muslims on the other hand, reject any attempt to relegate religion to private sphere as a violation of Islam principle. For Muslims, Islam is a complete way of life and there can be no separation between private and public, hence, they make every effort to lay claim of the public space while Christians tend to retreat. In fact, in Sura 33:27 adherents of Islam are taught to see themselves as heirs to lands, houses and goods of so-called unbelievers and people of the book. Christians, on the other hand, are taught to strive for heaven and to store up treasures for themselves in heaven (Matt. 6:33).

This little pedagogical brief underscores why differences in religious belief have remained a remote cause of political and social upheavals in Nigeria and ipso facto, a cog in the wheel to her sustainable development. Apart from the ever-regrettable genocide otherwise called Nigeria civil war (1967-1970), Boer (2003) documents that from 1980 to 2010 Nigeria has witnessed about 40 major religious crises, if not more and has claimed well over a million life and properties worth over a billion naira. It is as if the citizens are yet to learn from the awful experiences of the war. The recent Fulani herdsmen menace and destruction of lives and properties is also worthy of note. The fact that people at the helm of affairs in the governance of Nigeria hardly comment or take any decisive measure against the perpetrators of the mayhem make it even more worrisome.

In the area of distribution of infrastructure and development in Nigeria, the story is not different. The recent construction of railway lines in Nigeria is a laudable feat, but the siting of the railway lines shows obvious evidence of marginalisation. The apparent marginalisation and the thoughtless unconcern of our political leaders and some citizenries have led to the increasing gory stories in Nigeria. It is no longer simply religious bigotry and hatred. Frustrations, suspicions and brainwashing have led to degeneration among our youths. This degenerateness is evidenced in increase in crimes, drugs, kidnappings, robbery and extra-judicial killings. Obviously, the issue of sustainable development would be a fulfilment in breach until these issues are handled. One straight way out of this quagmire is clear in Matt. 18:17. To understand this, a look into the facts about tax collectors in the time of Jesus is *ad rem*.

The Tax Collector: An Excursus

During the time of Jesus, Israel was divided into various territories that were governed by the descendants of Herod the Great, but Judea was an Imperial territory governed by a Roman procurator and the *taxes* were very high there. Wealthy Jews would bid for the position of tax collector and get even richer by adding a substantial fee above whatever was owed.

There is no one hated by a nation quite as much as an enemy collaborator. The tax collectors in Israel at the time of Christ were the leaches that sucked the financial blood out of the hard-working labourers of Israeli society, and subsequently, transferred it into the coffers of the ruling Roman Empire, taking as much as they could for themselves. They were never popular especially in the first Century C.E among the Jews residing in Galilee and Judea. The tax collector made a sizable living. But part of his pay was the derision, disgust and isolation from his community. In rigid defiance, he plodded through the condemning faces, the whispers, the threats and rage, multiplying his wealth and the emptiness of his soul. The Jews so resented taxation by the Roman authority such that additional taxes erupted rebellion. Example is the uprising referenced in Acts 5,37 about Judas the Galilean. The Jews saw payment of taxes as subjection to foreign powers and rendering Jewish nation a vassal state.

Apart from subjection to a foreign power, the Jews also disdained and hated payment of taxes and tax collectors because of the system with which taxes were collected and the resultant abuses. Imperial officers were responsible for collecting polls and taxes. Authority to collect taxes on exports, imports and mercantile taken through a country was by highest bidder system on public auction. In this case, the rich usually got the authority as highest bidders. They were known as publicans. In their collection of taxes, they made profit that

often exceeded the amount of their bid. Again, they always sublet part of their territory to subcontractors to collect taxes. The subcontractors, in turn, were in charge of other men who personally collected the taxes. Zacchaeus, for example, appears to have been the chief over the tax collectors in and around Jericho. (Luke 19,1-2) And Matthew, whom Jesus called to be an apostle, was one who did the actual work of collecting taxes. Matthew, also known as Levi, apparently had his tax office in or near Capernaum (Matt. 10:3; Mark 2:1.14).

A tariff decree of Palmyra dating from 137 C.E. illustrates some of the abuses to which the tax system was subject. Its preamble states that in earlier (first century) times, the rate of tax was not fixed. Charges were made by custom, often according to the whim of the tax collector. This frequently gave rise to disputes. The disputes were because of the dishonesty of the tax collectors. They were understood as having dubious moral qualities. They were seen as extortionists putting fictitious tax values on goods and then offering to lend money (with high interest rates) to those unable to pay.

With stick in hand, and brass plate displayed prominently on their chest, they would stop caravans and demand that everything be tumbled out upon the ground for inspection. Thereafter, they would take whatever suited them, frequently leading away the well-fed beasts of burden and substituting inferior ones. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Jewish tax collectors were held in low esteem. They, being in the service of a foreign power, Rome, and in close contact with “unclean” Gentiles, their very presence was resented. The other Jews generally avoided voluntary association with them. (Matt. 18:17) Tax collectors were classified with persons known to be sinners, including harlots (Matt. 9:11; 11:19; 21:32; Mark 2:15; Luke 5:30; 7:34). To cheat a tax collector was not considered a sin among the Jews. The Talmud classified tax collectors with murderers and robbers, and their gains as acquired by deceit and violence, unfit even to be accepted for charity.

In conclusion, the tax collectors were seen as disloyal Israelites hired by the Romans to tax other Jews for personal profit. They became symbols for the worst kind of people (Matt. 9:10-11; 11:19; 18:17; 21:31; Mark 2:14-16; Luke 5:30; 7:25-29,34; 18:11-13).

Reasons Why Tax Collectors Are Hated

Our study of the historical excursus into the collection of taxes in the time of Christ and the views of most NT authors about tax collectors, the researcher deduces there are reasons for the low view of tax collectors in the NT.

The first reason is that no one likes to pay taxes especially if there is no clear-cut evidence of accountability of the tax payers’ money. It is even worse if the government is oppressive like the Roman Empire of the first century C.E. The natural tendency is to transfer the aggression against the agents used by the government in collecting the taxes.

In the Bible, the Romans were seen as colonial masters by the Jews. Thus, the Jews used by them to extort taxes from their fellow Jews were seen as traitors to their own countrymen. Rather than joining hands with the other Jews to fight the Romans, they became agents of extortion used by the Roman oppressors and even enriched themselves at the expense of their fellow Jews.

Their gross dishonesty and cheating by hook or by crook made them odiously repugnant. Everyone believed that every tax collector was a cheat making dishonest gains. In Luke 19:8, Zacchaeus confessed his past dishonesty.

The Jews also hated paying taxes because part of the money went to maintain the pagan temples and to finance the luxurious lifestyles of Rome's upper class. Payment of taxes was therefore interpreted as participation in idolatry.

The tax collectors were rich people, and so, were separated from lower classes who repudiated them. The ostracism they faced amongst their own people made them form their own clique leading to further separation from the rest of the society.

Matthew as a Man of Hellenistic Jewish Christian Mission

Most gospels originally circulated anonymously including the Gospel of Matthew. Its ascription to Matthew is on the hope that having an apostle and eyewitness as the author will add to its authenticity and credibility. Perrin (1974) indicates that "the fact the gospel makes very extensive use of the gospel of Mark, building on it as a foundation, makes it impossible that it should have been written by a disciple and eyewitness" (p. 169). The author reveals himself to be a man who stands in the Hellenistic Jewish Christian mission tradition. His gospel, undoubtedly, is climaxed by the Mandatum Magnum of Matt. 28:19 (poreuthentes oun mathēteusate panta ta ethnē), yet his concern tends to focus sharply on the mission of the Church to the Jews. He develops his understanding of the tenets of Christianity but with constant dialogue with the proceedings in Judaism of the time.

Possibly, the gospel was written at a time of shattered hopes for the Jews – Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed by the Romans during the Roman/Jewish war. The experience was like a dwindling of hope for both the Jews and Christians. For the Jews, it implied a termination of the Temple worship and a closure of the door to knowing God in the world. The pilgrimage centre and place of Passover was gone. The experience resulted in a shift of power and influence among the various active sects in Judaism before the war, namely, the Pharisees, Sadducees and Zealots.

Of these three groups, only the Pharisees survived the onslaught of the Roman/Jewish war. The Zealots who were the primogenitors of the war were extirpated during the war. The Sadducees lost their pride, power and the foundation of their existence with the destruction of the Temple during the war. They even lost the confidence of the people because of their compromise with the Roman dominion. The Pharisees, on the other hand, because of their insistence on the Law, practice of piety outside the Temple, they survived the holocaust. With the Temple gone, the synagogues became their recourse. Perrin (1974) observes that the Pharisees rose to the challenges of shattered Judaism by setting up a new centre at Jamnia, in the remote northwest of the ancient territory of Judah, and there they began to settle the canon and text of scripture, to codify the interpretation of the Law, and in general, to systematize matters of belief and practice.

The Gospel of Mathew is written with constant dialogue with the developments going on at Jamnia. For Perrin (1974), the Church he writes for is closely related to a synagogue "across the street" in any gentile city with a strong Jewish element in its population. Since Mathew's gospel also has connections with specifically Palestinian Christian traditions, the city probably was in Syria. Isolating Palestinian Christian traditions in Mathew from dialogue with Judaism is the work in form of criticism outside the purview of this paper.

Like other New Testament authors, Mathew wrestles with the problems of his time. The problems are external and internal. The external included explaining the delay in the Parousia, destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, dialogue with Judaism. Internally, he

grapples with the nascent movement becoming a church, a self-conscious entity with policies to guide it. The text of Matt. 18:17 tend to provide solution to one of the internal problems facing the new movement, namely, settlement of misunderstandings between members.

Matt. 18:17 and Conflict Resolution in the Church

Matt. 18:17 is part of a larger section spanning vv. 15-20. It deals with Jesus' guidelines for dealing with those who sin against us. The reader of this text must note that they are meant for Christians not unbelievers; for sins committed against you and not others; and conflict resolution in the context of the Church, not the community at large. Matthew's presentation is not meant to be a license for a frontal attack on every person who hurts or slights us. They are not a license to start a destructive gossip campaign or to call for a church trial. They are designed to reconcile those who disagree so that all Christians can live in harmony. The Church is the final port of call for settlement because the church is the body of Christ and so exercises temporal and spiritual authorities over its members. To disobey her is to disobey Christ and *ipso facto*, God (see Matt. 18:18). Willoughby (1907) contends that the church is the society of Disciples of Christ who dwell in any place. The Christian disciple who refuses to be reconciled to his fellow Christian is to be regarded as no true member of the society. Thus, Matt. 18:17 is best seen as part of the community regulations spanning Matt. 18:15-20. Perrin (1974) sees verse 15-20 as an expansion of a saying from Q source (Luke 17,3) by adding references to the need for witnesses to the church, to the authority of the Church (18,18) and to the promise of the presence of the risen Lord in the church. All seen in Matt. 18:15-20 is a major Mathean statement about the Church. In verses 21-22 Mathew reproduces a regulation concerning the necessity for reconciliation within the community from Q (cf. Luke 17:4). The position of this paper is that the solution to conflicts in the Church as provided in Matt 18,17 can be extended to the society at large in resolving religious conflicts.

Matt. 18:17 as a Panacea for Resolution of Religious Conflicts

Abdul-Raheem (2021) is optimistic that religious intolerance and violence could be managed for the sake of peaceful co-existence and the consequent development of any nation. Matt. 18:17 brings to our disposal one of the ways we can manage this cancer that has not done any good to humanity. The teachings of Jesus on how to correct an erring believer give us an immediate antidote to religious intolerance and violence.

On the backdrop of Matt. 18:17, it is undeniable that although Nigeria is socio-religiously sick, her malady is not incurable. All she needs is to hearken to the diplomatic solution proffered in this biblical text, which is confronting one another in dialogue to resolve our differences. This is another way of calling on the different geo-political zones and main religions in Nigeria to have a round table conference, open up to each other, point out areas of differences and take a firm resolution on how best to run Nigeria as our only country. Once this is done, the issue of corruption and nepotism will be ameliorated and development in Nigeria will not only be accelerated but sustained.

Thus, in as much the onus lies primarily on the state to protect populations from atrocity crimes, as well as their incitement and in as much it is doubtable that enforcement of human rights violations is primarily the responsibility of the people at the helm of state affairs, the influential role by the religious leaders is a fact that cannot be neglected. This is

because, they have the potential to influence the behaviour of those who follow them and share their beliefs.

Again also, given that lots of violence and human rights violation witnessed in Africa have always been carried out under the canopy of religious extremism, it is vital that religious leaders from all faiths show leadership ingenuity in matters concerning actualization of policies that would ameliorate violation of human rights, especially as enshrined in the decisions of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. The researcher submits that most religious leaders have failed in their responsibility of pushing to see that the decisions are actualized, as proven by their inexplicable silence in cases of untold atrocities and gory stories perpetrated in the name of religion. It is the submission of this paper that until Matt. 18:17 is hearkened to, the dream of stopping religious violence in Nigeria and Africa as a whole will only remain a mirage and mere *flatus vocis*.

Rev. Fr. Prof. B.A.C. Obiefuna and His Legacy of Peace of Conquest

There is no doubt that for this erudite scholar, as for Paul, there is no Jew or Gentile. No tax collector or sinners. No catholic or protestant. He is a friend of all without bias of prejudice. Yet, he does not tolerate half measures. He does not believe in peace of escape which the world gives. He believes and upholds peace of conquest. He does not pretend to overlook ills just so as not to let one feel offended. He confronts you gently and yet firmly and makes sure that every matter is settled amicably. This is a legacy he lives for. It is a legacy that must be emulated if the world will know religious peace.

Evaluation and Conclusion

It must be noted that the concern of the author of the gospel of Matthew is not so much with ill-treatment of an offending member as to conflict resolution. His primary motive is to see that conflicts are resolved. The intransigence and incorrigibility of the offending member to the extent of a snobbery attitude against every level of attempt to a resolution of conflicts makes it clear that his Christian profession is a mere word of mouth. He does not really belong to the new people of God. If he does, he would have at least listened to the Church, regarded by Matthew as endowed with divine authority (vv. 18-20). To disregard even the Church is to disregard God, and thence, makes oneself equal to an unbeliever. Since the offender is logically an unbeliever, the author believes that he should be treated as one. He does not actually imply antagonism in the sense of fighting the offender. *Estō soi hōsper ho ethnikos kai ho telōnēs* is another way of telling the members that if one snobs the Church, he is not actually a member of that church and not really a believer, and should not be seen as one. He is not what he pretends to be. He is a hypocrite. He is not to enjoy the privileges of church members but must however, be tolerated. He is not to be killed. Every faith must therefore, in the same understanding, see the human in the other and treat him as such.

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