

Christian and Muslim Borders: Bane or Blessing?

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Abstract

This paper addresses the WTD conference theme question: Are there borders which should separate Christians from people of other faiths? Notably, there some barriers separating Christians and Muslims, nonetheless interfaith dialogue is necessary and possible. Biblical and Qur'anic teachings on interfaith dialogue are addressed. Secondary and primary data is integrated to identify biblical and Qur'anic teaching on interfaith dialogue. Biblical teaching related to Christian-Muslim dialogue is looked at first, broadly examining issues such as socio-religious values, socio-economic dialogue as well as leadership and governance. It is noted that there is provision for explicit interfaith dialogue in the Bible. Thereafter it proceeds to exemplify Qur'anic teaching related to Muslim-Christian dialogue, also taking into consideration socio-religious values, socio-economic dialogue, and leadership and governance ideals. It is seen that in the Qur'an, Christians are presented as partners in interfaith dialogue. This is followed by a more focused discussion on divergent irreconcilable issues in biblical and Qur'anic teachings as they relate to interfaith dialogue. A survey of some cross-cutting issues in biblical and Qur'anic teachings on interfaith dialogue is also presented. It is revealed that Christian and Muslim informants in Kenya appear to agree that dialogue should not be confined to the corridors of persuading or interfaith competition, but accommodating each other. Furthermore, it is pointed out how impractical and insufficient it is to read other religious systems in the light of the assumptions of one's own. Similarly, Muslims and Christians could expand distinctive paths towards accommodation and dialogue by drawing inspiration from their specific interests and conditions taught in the Bible and Qur'an. Interfaith dialogue should transcend the hallways of academia and spread to the masses through education and other possible means of diminishing the Christian-Muslim border.

Keywords: *socio-religious values, socio-economic dialogue, Socio-Religious Grace, Socio-Religious Peace, Socio-Religious Trust and Reconciliation, Socio-Religious Holiness, socio-religious compassion and love, Socio-religious ummah, Sharia*

1. Introduction

The Bible teaches a principle of social and economic empowerment. Socio-economic empowerments raises human moral content to help and not hurt people, strengthen not weaken family life, as well as advance not diminish the quality of social and economic life of others. This raises both opportunities and responsibilities upon all people, whether Christians or Muslims. Christians should ensure that their socio-economic empowerment touches and protects human life. Christian socio-economic resources are to be used in strengthening relationships with Muslims. Biblical teaching on socio-economic empowerment explains the godly freedom and

self-responsibility of applying biblical economic principles in an honest and voluntary manner in a free-market exchange. A biblical economic principle produces free-market for economic exchange within the corporate society indiscriminately (e.g. Matthew 25:35-40, Luke 6:38).

Thereafter it proceeds to exemplify Qur'anic teaching related to Muslim-Christian dialogue, also taking into consideration socio-religious values, socio-economic dialogue, and leadership and governance ideals. It is seen that in the Qur'an, Christians are presented as partners in interfaith dialogue. This is followed by a more focused discussion on divergent irreconcilable issues in biblical and Qur'anic teachings as they relate to interfaith dialogue. A survey of some cross-cutting issues in biblical and Qur'anic teachings on interfaith dialogue is also presented. It is revealed that Christian and Muslim informants in Kenya appear to agree that dialogue should not be confined to the corridors of persuading or interfaith competition, but accommodating each other. Furthermore, it is pointed out how impractical and insufficient it is to read other religious systems in the light of the assumptions of one's own. Similarly, Muslims and Christians could expand distinctive paths towards accommodation and dialogue by drawing inspiration from their specific interests and conditions taught in the Bible and Qur'an. Interfaith dialogue should transcend the hallways of academia and spread to the masses through education and other possible means of diminishing the Christian-Muslim border.

These Bible portions teach that God is the causal-effect of all there is; people are but stewards. This implies that God owns all things but has given people a leeway to make their livelihood and be economically self-sufficient. In light of the above, the biblical and theological understanding for socio-economic empowerment allows Christians to share not only with Christians but also with all other people irrespective of their religious or spiritual orientation. Subjecting people to harsh social and economic conditions which lead to unemployment, underemployment, or dehumanizing conditions fails to meet the biblical teaching on dialogue. Prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes in job-related opportunities adversely affect the spirit of dialogue with Muslims and are biblically incorrect. Interfaith dialogue should open the doors for social and economic precedents even for less privileged Muslims. This paper therefore seeks to examine whether Christian and Muslim Borders are curses or blessings.

2. Christian and Muslim Borders: Bane or Blessing?

The paper covers the following sections: 1) biblical and Qur'anic teachings on interfaith dialogue, 2) Qur'anic teachings on Christian-Muslim dialogue and 3) divergent issues in Biblical and Qur'anic teachings on inter-faith dialogues.

2.1 Biblical and Qur'anic Teachings on Interfaith Dialogue

This first section considers: socio-religious values; human inter-social relationship, grace, peace, trust and reconciliation, holiness, socio-economic dialogue and leadership and governance.

2.1.1 Socio-religious Values in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

The Bible contains various principles which when given hermeneutical interpretation agitate for Christian-Muslim dialogue. These principles are discussed under the main theme of socio-religious values in Christian-Muslim dialogue. A number of sub-themes under socio-religious values include human inter-social relationship; socio-religious grace, socio-religious peace; socio-religious trust and reconciliation and socio-religious holiness. Let us discuss these issues a little bit more.

2.1.2 Human Inter-social Relationship

A human social relationship is a loving and cordial relationship with each other. It can be traced with the creation story, “created in the image of God” found in the book of Genesis. As Dunning et, al (1986) interprets “Created in the Image of God”, four areas of relationships are implied. These are relationship between human and God, humans and humans, humans and the earth, as well as relationship with self. Biblical teaching on creation calls for inter-human relationship. Humans are social beings capable of developing a loving and cordial relationship with each other regardless of one’s religious orientation. This human social aspect finds its basis in the biblical phrase, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.” Hence, a human being is intended to be a communal being, having personal fellowship with other humans indiscriminately. Created in the image of God in this setting equalizes all people of varying faiths, cultures, social status and traditions. Human social relationships, as a tool for interfaith dialogue has strong biblical support. Several verses offer an opportunity to reason and experience interrelationships (e.g. Genesis 1:27; Matthew 5:46-48; Galatians 3:28; Hebrews 2:14). These verses teach the aspect of healthy relationships with others, especially providing care and love. Healthy human relationship is a biblical principle. When cultivated and applied this supports interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Mutuality and reciprocity are essential components of ideal Christian-Muslim relationships. The agape love toward God and neighbor is an inseparable component in the process of living in unity and respect towards others. The Bible rebukes those who discriminate others in matters of race, gender or religion (Galatians 2:28). Though the main thrust in the Bible is relationship between Jews and Gentiles, there is a universal principle of inter-human relationship, Muslims included.

2.1.3 Socio-Religious Grace

Socio-religious grace is a term which refers to how Christians ought to relate to other people. Social grace is a subversive social value which requires individuals to give more to people than they deserve, irrespective of the cause of their need and without regard to national, cultural or religious boundaries. Social grace surpasses tolerance to include living joyfully according to a possibility rather than a demand or an obligation. Social grace is a skill which helps people to interact politely in social situations. Social grace includes factors such as manners, etiquette and

fashion. Social grace applied in a society implies that Christians are prepared to give to others what they really do not deserve, as taught in Matthew 18:22, “Jesus answered, “...I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” Matthew 20:1-16 says, “...Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.” Likewise regarding the wayward son in Luke 15:11-31, “...So he got up and went to his father” who was “...filled with compassion for him”. The impression raised in these passages is the aspect of unlimited provision of grace offered to all human beings irrespective of the cause of their distress and religious affiliation. Social grace raises the needed skills to interact politely and peacefully in social situations and gatherings as interfaith dialogue takes its course.

2.1.4 Socio-Religious Peace

Socio-religious peace refers to a biblical peace which produces peace of fellowship devoid of holding offenses towards others, and is used by theologians in reference to the biblical teaching of peace. Biblical peace (*shalom*) means soundness, health, prosperity, well-being and good relation to both humans and God. In its simplest form, peace is a state of untroubled tranquility, devoid of war, schism or intolerance. This peace of unity comes with oneness of mind and purpose, resulting to peace with others irrespective of their religious convictions and orientations. As Swindoll (1995) posits, “Whenever Christians sow and water their mind with the biblical teaching, a harvest of peace is realized not only among believers but other faiths too.” He adds, “On the contrary, fear, hatred, anger and malice lead to a harvest of discord, hurt feelings, failure to forgive, selfish ambition and intolerance, which disrupt social peace.” Jesus is the prince of peace and offers grace, mercy and peace.

Christians are encouraged to strive in preventing contention, intolerance and hostilities towards other people. Religious leaders and lay people have the God-given opportunity to promote social peace. The Bible teaches a cultivation and preservation of peace as a biblical principle. The gospel of Christ is called the gospel of peace. Jesus as the prince of peace calls people to preserve it in the analogy of the salt in Mark 9:50. Based on the biblical ideals of socio-religious peace, it should be underscored that it is the duty of Christians to cultivate peace with Muslims. This would mean that Christians should develop a Socio-Religious Peacebuilding (SRP) process which calls for activities and mechanisms that favor interfaith dialogue. An SRP approach recognizes the need for reconciliation, conflict resolution mechanisms, transformation as well as sustainable peaceful relationships among Christians and Muslims. A major key factor for SRP to succeed is education to orient the adherents on the need for peace and the common good of their members who are fragmented by religious ideologies and identities. Christians have a role to play in building lasting peace with Muslims.

2.1.5 Socio-Religious Trust and Reconciliation

Trust and reconciliation is a biblical facet for socio-religious dialogue. Trust and reconciliation aim at overcoming distrust and fear as people shift their perceptions to accommodate their differences, away from adversarial notions. Trust and reconciliation produce coexistence resulting in overcoming fear, stereotypes, negative perceptions and distrust (Raymond et al, 2002). A reconciled community leads to societal communication especially redefining their relationships in the process of bringing forth social and religious trust and reconciliation.

Trust and reconciliation engage the transformation of the relationships, interests, and discourses which endeavor to support the discontinuation of hatred and distrust. Transformed relationships serves as an antidote to negative perception which is hazardous to societal trust. Trust should lead to reconciliation and responsibility as people promote dialogue and conflict reconciliation among diverse and polarized racial, ethnic and religious groups. Trust building calls people to be responsible for spanning the great chasms created by religious intolerance and historical blindness (Corcoran and Kaine, 2002) This means that people should be engaged in building bridges to cross religious divides. Trust and reconciliation further produces a positive constructive attitude which deals with structural, behavioral and attitudinal aspects of intolerance. Interfaith dialogue would neutralize negative attitudes that hinder building of trust and reconciliation. Christians and Muslims ought therefore to start rebuilding societal trust and reconciliation in order to reestablish mutual confidence among their faithful. Rebuilt trust and true reconciliation are prerequisite pillars upon which Christians and Muslim relationships must be founded.

2.1.6 Socio-Religious Holiness

Socio-religious holiness is a Biblical principle which entails that Christian community is expected to live a life of social holiness realized and extended through societal life. According to Wesley, “Christianity is essentially a social religion; and to turn it into a solitary one is indeed to destroy it ... there was no holiness but social holiness.” (Dunning, 1986) As Jennings Theodore (1990) argues, the context of Wesley’s social holiness is Christian fellowship. Individualism normally ignores the need of the society and elevates structural realities of power relations, domination, greed, intolerance and violence. Christians are called to uphold socio-holiness as a scriptural base in order to meet the need of others within their society. Social holiness leads Christians to read the Bible contextually and engage the principalities and powers of racism, poverty, nationalism, ethnocentrism and systemic religious intolerance. The Bible says “...More important matters of the law” are “justice, mercy and faithfulness...” (Matthew 23:23). Furthermore, “Religion that God, our Father, accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”

(James 1:27). The biblical principle of socio-religious holiness encompasses doing well, offering justice and defending the destitute. Such services cannot bypass or exclude social responsibility to the Muslims as well.

2.1.7 Biblical Teaching on Leadership and Governance

The Bible urges the Church in general to seek biblical guidance in establishing effective servant-leadership and governance structures. A biblical approach to leadership develops accommodative servant leadership and governance structures which reflect the prevailing cultural diversity and religious plurality. There is need for accommodative leadership and governance in order to reduce schism among religious divides. The Bible encourages church leadership to govern the churches with diligence and offer seasoned leadership. Jesus says "...I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:14-15). The responsibility of church leadership envisioned in the Bible is to desist from poor governance and voluntarily comply and engage in leadership structures which promote human values and wellbeing. The next section examines Qur'anic teachings on Christian-Muslim dialogue.

2.2 Qur'anic Teachings on Christian-Muslim Dialogue

There are various Qur'anic passages in favor of interfaith dialogue. The Qur'an acknowledges the existence of previous revelation in the Jewish scriptures and the Christian Bible. There are also Qur'anic teachings such as socio-religious values, socio-economic teaching and leadership and governance have been discussed. Let us now examine these areas as presented by the study's informants and integrated with secondary data.

2.2.1 The Qur'an Commands Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Islamic faith developed in a milieu of religious tolerance which it encouraged. According to Qur'anic teaching, the foundational years of Islam depict a picture of its peaceful encounters and co-existence with Christians. The Qur'an asserts that there is no distinction between Christians and Muslims. The *Ahl al-kitab*, People of the Book, commonly referred to in the Qur'an are Jews and Christians. The term is mentioned in the Qur'an twenty-four times. The verses referring to *Ahl al-kitab* carry positive as well as negative connotations. For instance, Qur'an 3:113 praises the 'People of the Book' for their righteousness and good deeds and faith in the afterlife. But Qur'an 3:99, rebukes the 'People of the Book' for not following the way of God (Say, "O People of the Scripture, why do you avert from the way of Allah..."). Qur'an 3:64 is an invitation to interfaith dialogue (Say, "O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you..."). The Qur'an (5:82) further states, "...and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, "We are Christians." It positively shows intimate relationship with people of the book.

Interfaith dialogue for Muslims with Christians is thus commended and commanded in the Qur'an. The methodology of dialogue is also explained in the Qur'an. For instance, Qur'an 16:125 states, "Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with

them in the best way.” The Qur’an further insists that Muslims should not differentiate among the prophets of God or make distinction among any of them (Qur’an 2:136, 2:285, 3:84). Prophet Muhammad emphasizes the greatest interfaith call reasoned in these Qur’anic verses.

Islamic law explains the legal status of the ‘People of the Book’ in Islam, flowered with tolerance. Qur’anic teaching supports dialogue with “People of the Book.’ For example Qur’an 10:99 states, “If it had been your Lord's will, they would all have believed, all who are on the earth. Will you then compel mankind against their will to believe?” It further deduces, “To each among you have we prescribed a law and a clear way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but His plan is to test you in what He has given you; so strive as in a race in good deeds” (Quran 5:48). In all the above verses there is high indication that the Qur’an commends interfaith dialogue with Christians.

2.2.2 Qur’anic Teachings on Previous Revelation

Muslims believe that the Qur’an is an infallible transcription of God’s message to Muhammad. The Qur’an acknowledges the Bible referred to here as the previous revelation (Qur’an 2:136; 2:253; 3:3; 4:163). Some part of the Qur’an is reminiscent of parts of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. It talks of similar persons (Prophets) and tells people that they should pray, fast and provide to the needy people, among others. Muslim apologists do consent that every verse of the Qur’an has seven meanings, beginning with the literal sense, and as for the seventh and deepest meaning, only known by God (Murata and Chittick, 2007). As the messenger of God and seal of the prophets, Muhammad was charged with the responsibility of relaying this message to all believers. The Qur'an and the *Hadith* reign supreme in Muslim hearts as the most sacred of religious texts compared to the Bible.

Qur’anic teachings on previous revelation reveals that the verse serves as a creed of Muslims who are expected to believe in one universal God, to Muhammad and previous revelation, making no distinction among them. He intimated that the Qur’an affirms the existence of 24,000 prophets starting with Adam and culminating with Prophet Muhammed. There is a great reverence and esteem in which the Qur'an holds the earlier scriptures, the Bible in particular. In that regard, there is likelihood that the Qur’an is in favor of interfaith dialogue based on mutual respect of previous revelation – the Bible. This implies that Muslims have a duty to share their faith with Christians without demeaning or disrespecting their faiths as so taught in the Qur’an. Deliberate knowledge and respect among people through interfaith dialogue is repeatedly emphasized in the Qur’an.

2.2.3 Qur’anic Teachings on Socio-religious Relationships

The Qur’an teaches that Allah created Adam and Eve who are the progenitor of nations and tribes (Qur’an 49:13). Gender and ethnic differences are not license to despise others but should lead people to know, make use, learn and be challenged to compete with each other in doing good. The context of Qur’an 49:13 is gender based in that there is the general rule in social and

political life where participation and collaboration of males and female in public affairs is required. It is within this Islamic precept of morality that Muslims should always strive seeking to develop character that works within interpersonal relationship.

2.2.4 Qur'anic Teachings on Social Values in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

This section discusses three areas of Qur'anic teachings as they respond to socio-religious values. Some principles examined are compassion and love, *ummah*, and peaceful co-existence. Qur'anic teaching on socio-religious compassion and love are basic principles for advocating Islamic religious values of tolerance, love, equality, forgiveness, humility and compassion towards their families, communities and countries. Socio-religious love involves embracing diversity and the transcendence of self. Perhaps the most simple and effective form of interfaith dialogue is friendship; to approach the 'other' with an open mind and a spirit of genuine enquiry.

Socio-religious love and compassion is expressed to those who are downtrodden, wronged and less fortunate through the principles of courtesy, morality, uprightness, justice, fair-play, honesty and dignity (Qur'an, 2:177) (Yahya, 2011). The above principles call for the exercise of rational and free will in judging and exercising responsibility towards others. Engineer affirms that the Qur'an promotes love, harmony, brotherhood and compassion (Asghar, 2011). Qur'an 4:135 admonishes, "O ye who believe! Be ye staunch in justice, witnesses for Allah, even though it be against yourselves." This verse implies that Muslims are to inculcate virtues of justice and active listening as a way of showing love and compassion to others, Christians included. Genuine relationship between Muslims and Christians is elusive, but through love and compassion, it could be strengthened

The Qur'an teaches the importance and ideals of *ummah* (Qur'an 2:143; 3:103; 21:92). Socio-religious *ummah* stresses homogeneity where Muslims' lives are patterned and regulated by the *sharia*. The Muslim *ummah* (community of Islam) consists of more than one billion members worldwide. The Qur'an admonishes Muslim *Ummah* to remain united, not divided; they should not split up, or form sects out of the religion. Abul notes that the unity of the *ummah* is a primary goal that Muslims must strive for (Maudadi, 2007). Peoples' diversity of culture or race is not a recipe for divisions. Muslims are divided among mainstream of Sunni and Shiites, yet they all adhere to Qur'anic teaching.

Peaceful co-existence, referred to in this study as socio-religious peace, is well stipulated in the Qur'an (2:62; 2:226). Socio-religious peace comprises those activities which integrate religious beliefs with peace issues. Islam is a peaceful religion as stipulated in the greeting formula *Al-Salamu Alaikum* (Peace be on You). Muslims are required to salute other Muslims or non-Muslims with the word "peace". Muslims promote socio-religious peace and understanding among people of all faiths. This means that Islam prohibits all forms of violence towards other people as a basis for socio-religious peace. Deliberate acknowledgement of Qur'anic peace is the best way to avoid mistrust and overcome indifferences. In that regard, the Qur'an (16:125)

stresses the pre-eminence of socio-religious peace. Muslim religious leaders, parents or otherwise should endeavor towards promotion and sincere commitment to socio-religious peace towards Christians. One can argue that Prophet Muhammed had an interfaith mind, depicted on his call for socio-religious peace. This is made apparent by the Prophet's call for Muslims to call Christians to reason with them in wisdom and fair preaching (Qur'an 16:125; 29:40).

2.2.5 Qur'anic Teachings on Socio-Economic Principles in Reference to Christian-Muslim Relationship

Islamic socio-economic is generally about systems and trade. Qur'anic socio-economic systems are interconnected with Islamic ideology of faith and *sharia*. In Islam, *Sharia* is a constitutive and regulative rule for the creation of economic entities and systems. *Sharia* serves as a guide for all Muslims spiritually, socially and economically. There are five areas the *sharia* teaches Muslims on behavior: obligatory; recommended; permissible; discouraged and forbidden. The obligatory actions include the five daily prayers, fasting, articles of faith, obligatory charity and the *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca. Recommended behavior pertains to matters such as marriage, funeral rites and family life. The permissible matters entail behavior which is neither discouraged nor recommended, neither forbidden nor required. Discouraged behavior may not be sinful in itself, but may make a Muslim liable to criminal penalties under certain circumstances. Forbidden behavior is both sinful and criminal and is explicitly forbidden. These aspects regulate socio-economic systems within Islam. This regards charity, visitation, inviting Christians for dinner in Muslims homes and sharing free time which is important for building good relationship between them in the process of dialogue. In contemporary economies, it is difficult to imagine a business which detests interest. Nonetheless, the Qur'an demands fair trade without exploitative interest from Muslims or Christians.

2.2.6 Qur'anic Teaching on Leadership and Governance among Muslims

The Qur'an teaches Muslims to be good leaders, and governors are mandated by Allah. These entail consultation, justice and trust, and accountability and transparency. The Qur'anic precept on effective leadership and governance is meant to ensure human cooperation as a tool for positive growth and continuity. This precept of good governance embraced in the Qur'an (3:159; 42:38) is *shura* (consultation in decision making) within Muslims and non-Muslims in the affairs that affect the community. The Qur'an urges, "...And consult them in affairs (of moment)..." (3:159). Consultation is geared toward developing a solid relationship between leaders and people; this is a key issue in building interfaith dialogue. Early years of Islamic formation saw religion and politics intertwined, meaning there was religio-political consultation. Religious ideals and teachings informed the politics during the formative period of Islam.

Some Muslim countries in this contemporary period have adopted Islam as a state religion which informs political systems. Some of these countries include Syria, Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Oman. Islam, as a state religion, has led to inter-human cooperation in some of the countries where Islamic faith is practiced. Muslims have effective leadership and governance

which produces inter-human cooperation. Islam understands that Allah fashioned the nature of every human being in such a way that no one can survive alone. This implies that Muslims' leadership should be able to create social cooperation embraced in the Qur'an (43:38). In this way, they will be able to accommodate other peoples' interests in a given society. Such inter-human cooperation is guided by Qur'anic teaching and application of leadership and governance. Islam is a rule-based system where rules of governance, accountability and transparency are provided by the "Law Giver" - Allah. The Qur'an (10:62) teaches that Allah provides *walayahh* (unconditional love) to his creation. Muslims are required to be rule-compliant promoted by the core activity of *walayahh* to produce *karamah* (human dignity). Respect and commitment to people's rights within societies is a prerequisite to human dignity as inferred in the Qur'an. Transparency and leadership accountability provide avenues towards development of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-racial community.

2.3 Divergent Issues in Biblical and Qur'anic Teachings on Inter-faith Dialogue

Issues relating to biblical and Qur'anic teaching on interfaith dialogue have been discussed in the foregoing subsections. However, there are many theological values, perspective and religious practices upon which Christians and Muslims differ. Divergent issues between Christians and Muslims touch on scriptures and doctrine. Some of these divergences provoke conflicts between Christians and Muslims. The following section elaborates on some of these issues.

2.3.1 Difference between the Bible and Qur'an Scriptures

Christians and Muslims are characterized by hardline opinions on their religious books. The Bible or Qur'an is foundational to one's faith and practice. Any idea or concept that undermines that notion is negatively received. For instance, the Bible is a useful tool for teaching, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). On the other hand, the Qur'an holds a vital place at the very center of Muslim religious life and practice. Muslims affirm that the Qur'an is the culmination of revelation offered through Prophet Muhammed, the last in a series of prophets and messengers. Prophet Muhammed acknowledged that Allah through his messengers had sent earlier revelations culminating into the Qur'an. In light of the above, the Bible and Qur'an set an opposed pace between Muslims and Christians when carrying out dialogue.

2.3.2 Divergent Biblical and Qur'anic Teachings on Trinity

The doctrine of Trinity is a biblical principle which divides Muslims and Christians to a larger extent. The doctrine presents the God-head as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Trinity in Christian theology is a doctrine that God exists as three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who are united in one substance or being (Matthew 28:19; John 1:1; John 4:23; 2 Corinthians 13:14). The Bible affirms the existence of God in three Persons, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the baptism and Benediction formula. Cheetham and Pratt perceive that Muslims have an ambiguous view of Trinity as a doctrine of the Christian church (Cheetham and Pratt, 2014). Trinity as the doctrine of the Christian church is progressively revealed in the Bible and was finalized in the Council of Nicaea, 325AD (Gruden, 2006).

Muslims do not affirm the doctrine of Trinity. It is a grievous sin to associate Allah with other supreme beings beside him. Islam presents Allah who shares some similarities with the Christian God but has different identities and ultimately different standards. Muslims believe in God's One-ness, and reject as heresy the plurality of God. Muslims often identify Christian belief in the Trinity with Tritheism. The testimony of Islam states "There is no god but God" affirmed by the Qur'an (5:76 and 112:1). The Qur'an emphasizes that Allah is "absolute unity" (*tawhid*), for there is no distinction within the Godhead. In light of these teachings, a whole twist on trinity and unitary God between these two faiths is noticed. This creates a wide theological chasm between Islam and Christianity. The study found that Muslims ask Christians to refocus on the distinctive beliefs of *tawhid*.

With regard to Trinitarian controversy between Christians and Muslims, it is worth noting that the Bible teaches a progressive revelation. Trinity doctrine cannot be adequately expressed rationally but is a truth not graspable by the human mind given the limitations of the finite human reason. Rather than seeing Trinity as compromising the unity and transcendence of God, it is important for the religious leaders in both Islam and Christianity to dialogue in such an issue. It is only through dialogue that Christians can explain monotheistic God, manifested in three persons and still sharing one substance. Interfaith dialogue and theological interaction will overcome misunderstandings which surround the unity of God.

2.3.3 Divergent Biblical and Qur'anic Teachings on Christology

Christology is another divergent doctrine which offers difficulties between Christians and Muslims in interfaith dialogue. Christians tend to place enormous emphasis on Christology and the need to respond to the message of the gospel as a way of salvation in total disregard of other faiths. "Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The passage teaches exclusiveness of Christianity, superior to all other religions, including Islam. It is for that reason that Christians believe that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, the mediator between humans and God through the atoning sacrifice. On the contrary, Islamic Christology differs greatly from Christian Christology, where Jesus was spared the cross (Zahnise, 2017). The Qur'an calls Jesus "the Christ", and six times it refers to him as a sign, a mercy, a witness and an example. He is called by his proper name Jesus, by the titles Messiah (Christ) and son of Mary as well as by the messenger, prophet, servant, word and Spirit of God. Even with such assertion of Christology, there exist theological differences between the two faiths. The identity and ministry of Jesus Christ found in the Qur'an and Bible is different. Islamic Christology differs greatly with the Christian teaching on Jesus' divinity. In reaction to biblical and Qur'anic Christology, it would be impossible to reconcile the two.

Interfaith dialogue should not be confused with syncretism and universalism. Syncretism is the illegitimate integration of beliefs and practices that cannot be reconciled while, universalism is a religious faith incorporating many Christian tenets. Christians need to accept interfaith dialogue not as another form of syncretism and universalism but as legitimate search for common values

between Christianity and Islam. The study observes that there is need for a fuller theological examination of the deity of Jesus from a Christian view rather than from apocryphal or pseudo-gospels from which the Qur'an seems to have borrowed its Christological concepts. Theological divergence should not build walls of hostility but cultivate the spirit of dialogue.

2.4 Cross-cutting Issues in Biblical and Qur'anic Teachings on Inter-faith Dialogue

The preceding section has outlined major factors associated with divergent issues between Christians and Muslims. This section highlights crosscutting issues supporting interfaith dialogue: prayer and *salat*, creation mythology, human morality and eschatology. These factors reflect the desire for interfaith dialogue.

2.4.1 Cross-cutting Issues in Biblical and Qur'anic Teachings: Prayer and *Salat*

Biblical and Qur'anic teaching on prayer and *salat* serves as a crosscutting issue. Prayer within Christianity is a contemporary model of worship in which the worshiper connects with self and God without necessarily following some cultural or traditional modes. *Salat* on the other hand, within Islam, follows a prescribed tradition and cultural norms involving physical rituals. Christian and Muslim informants underlined the need for prayer and *salat*. They revealed that prayers and *salat* facilitated easy communication between God and human. Prayer and *salat* both from the Christian and Muslim perspective respectively can be conducted freely at any appointed time. The study deduced that the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) in the Bible and the first chapter of the Qur'an, "*Sura Al-Fatiha*" (Qur'an 1; 2:286) carry universal and somehow similar meaning.

2.4.2 Biblical and Qur'anic Teachings on Creation Mythology

The Qur'an and Bible share various crosscutting similarities: creation mythology, narratives, religious figures and teachings. The epitome of creation as taught in the Qur'an and Bible is creation of humankind; depicting Adam and Eve as the first parents. The following verses quoted from the Bible and Qur'an teach the role of God in creation in Genesis 1 and Qur'an 2:164; 6:1). Qur'anic mythology stories contain little detail as compared to the biblical stories. Engagement of some biblical and Qur'anic themes read together can illumine each other and send more light, especially on mythology.

2.4.3 Biblical and Qur'anic Teaching on Human Moral Perspectives

Christians and Muslims reinforce good morals to their followers as taught in the Bible and Qur'an/*Hadith*. The following *hadith* warns Muslims to be vigilant of good moral issues in the following terms: "By the one in whose hand is my soul! Either you command good and forbid evil, or Allah will certainly soon send upon you a punishment from himself, then you will call upon him, but he will not respond to you"(Ondigo, 2008). The above *Hadith* teaches that the world is full of all kinds of moral decadence. Surprisingly, most secular states have ignored condemning some of the moral evil attacking our human nature. Allah has responded by

allowing natural calamities and devastating diseases to strike the earth. Allah reminds people to take heed and embrace good moral issue. They both acknowledge that a faith devoid of practical actions in matters of morality is of no use. For example, James 2: 14-20 notes, “faith without action is dead.” The Qur’an (22:9-11) teaches that people should do good deeds which please Allah. There is firm conviction from both Christians and Muslims that irresponsible behavior causes disrespect to God and it is regarded as sin. Some of the irresponsible behaviors include acts such as murder, suicide, theft, lying, gambling, violence and other notable inhuman atrocities (Romans 1:18-27; Galatians 5:17-19; Qur’an 5:90-91; 17:32; 42:37). In light of that, it is important for Christians and Muslims to transcend their differences and focus on an interfaith dialogue supported by religious similarities of human morality.

2.4.4 Biblical and Qur’anic Teaching on Eschatology

The Christian and Islamic faiths concur on the concept of eschatology. The Bible and Qur’an teach about an end to this world. The study found that in Islam, Muslims are taught that Jesus Christ will return when the world ends and defeat Ad-Dajjal- false messiah. The Bible and Qur’an teach people that they will be recompensed according to their deeds on the Day of Judgment. The Bible says, “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life (Matthew 25:46).” The example of Paradise, which the righteous have been promised, is [that] beneath it rivers flow. Its fruit is lasting, and its shade. That is the implication for the righteous, and the consequence for the disbelievers is the Fire (Qur’an 13:35). Though there are differing perspectives of the Day of Judgment, the fact is eschatology remains a crosscutting issue, which can bring Christians and Muslims to the dialoguing table.

The presence of Jesus in the Qur’an speaks rounder in matters of dialogue. Prophet Mohammad never thought of himself as anything more than a messenger of Allah but he called Jesus the “Christ” (Qur’an 3:45-46) and admitted that Jesus was “strengthened with Holy Inspiration (Qur’an 2:87; 5:110) and given revelation from God (Qur’an 3:47-49). The Qur’an teaches that Jesus was born of a virgin (Qur’an 3:47-49) and is directly the work of God. According to Prophet Muhammad, Jesus was of great honor, righteous, a prophet (Qur’an 43:59), Allah's Apostle (Qur’an 4:157). According to Muhammad, Jesus healed the blind, healed lepers and even raised the dead (Qur’an 5:110). Qur’an (43:61) teaches that Jesus is alive and in heaven. Muslims are urged to have no doubt in Jesus’ coming as held in the Bible. As indicated in the Quran and hadith, justice will rule, oppression will be eliminated, and no fighting (War) will be needed. Hatred, jealousy, and grudge shall disappear in the coming of the Messiah, a belief held both within Christianity and Islamic teaching. Jesus’ advent is a sign for the closeness of the Day of Judgment (Quran, 43:61). The hadith notes, “I swear by Him in Whose hands is my life that soon there will descend among you Hazrat Isa Ibn-e-Mariam sees him as a Just Ruler; “so (he) will break the 'cross', kill swine and prohibit war!” (Muhsin, 1984). It further asks, “How will you be when the Son of Mary (i.e. Jesus) descends amongst you and he will judge people by the law of the Quran and not by the law of Gospel.” As Khan observes “A section of my people will

not cease fighting for the Truth and will prevail till the Day of Resurrection. He said: Jesus Son of Mary will then descend and their (Muslims') commander (Al Mahdi) will invite him to come and lead them in prayer, but he would say: 'No, some amongst you are commanders over some (amongst you).' This is the honor from Allah for this *ummah*." Ibn Abbas the Prophet said: "And there is none of the people of the Scriptures, but must believe in him before his death. And on the Day of Judgment, He will be a witness against them" (Quran 4:159). The doctrine of *eschaton* is vividly noted in the Bible and Qur'an and do agitate the need for interfaith dialogue.

3 Conclusion

This paper has explored biblical and Qur'anic teachings on interfaith dialogue. It has noted that there is explicit interfaith dialogue in the Bible. In the Qur'an, Christians are presented as partners in interfaith dialogue. This is clear from the various biblical and Qur'anic verses discussed in this paper. Christian and Muslim informants appear to agree that dialogue should not be confined to the corridors of persuading or interfaith competition, but accommodating each other. It is impractical and insufficient to read other religious systems in the light of the assumptions of one's own. Similarly, Muslims and Christians could expand distinctive paths towards accommodation and dialogue by drawing inspiration from their specific interests and conditions taught in the Bible and Qur'an. Interfaith dialogue should transcend the hallways of academia and spread to the masses through education and other possible means.

Under socio-religious dialogue several factors are considered which include: human social relationship; social grace; social religious peace; trust and reconciliation; and social holiness. Socio-economic dialogue underscores issues of social and economic empowerment and social economic services. The biblical teaching on leadership and governance from Christian perspective posit servant leadership and governance structures. The Bible encourages the clergy to offer good governance. Qur'anic teachings on social religious values in Christian-Muslim dialogue underline issues like human respect, compassion and love towards *ummah*, and peace which have been venerated in this paper.

Further, the discussion has highlighted on divergent and crosscutting issues embed in the Bible and Qur'an. The paper has shown some divergent doctrinal issues which cannot be ignored and which can become a foundation for dialoguing. Merging biblical and Qur'anic teachings may result in disloyalty to the spirit of interfaith dialogue. It is prudent to avoid extremes and allow each holy book to present its crosscutting truths without merging them.

Finally, the paper has examined that both the Bible and Qur'an, revealing both have teaching which can rationally be deduced to foster interfaith dialogue. Genuine exegesis of the various texts from the Bible and Qur'an would favor interfaith dialogue. It is, therefore, the role of Christians and Muslims to listen to their scriptures which promote interfaith dialogue. Theological dialogue should not be avoided or made secondary to more apparently pressing social concerns. Rather it should have sufficient maturity to be able to address points of

discrepancy as well as areas of convergence. Though there are verses that promote religious exclusivism, many Quranic verses leave room for openness toward interfaith dialogue.

The study therefore recommended the following: a) Christians should use social grace skills to interact politely and peacefully with Muslims in social situations and gatherings in order to present their faith in an acceptable manner; b) Interfaith dialogue should be encouraged as it would neutralize negative attitudes, intolerance, prejudice, discrimination, stereotypes and hostilities which hinder building of trust and reconciliation among different faiths; c) The Biblical principle of socio-religious holiness encompasses doing well, offering justice and defending the destitute, Muslims included; d) Church leadership envisioned in the Bible should desist from poor governance and instead voluntarily comply and engage in leadership structures which promote human values and wellbeing for all God's creation, Muslims included; e) Interfaith dialogue for Muslims with Christians is thus commended and commanded in the Qur'an; Muslims, should adhere to such teaching in the Quran; f) Genuine relationship between Muslims and Christians is elusive, but through love and compassion, it should be strengthened; g) Transparency and leadership accountability should provide avenues towards development of a seasoned multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-racial community embracing freedom of worship; h) Theological dialogue should not be avoided or made secondary to more apparently pressing social concerns. Rather it should have sufficient maturity to be able to address points of discrepancy as well as areas of convergence; i) Christian and Muslim dialogue should not be confined to the corridors of persuading or interfaith competition, but accommodating each other; j) Interfaith dialogue should transcend the hallways of academia and spread to the masses through education and other possible means.

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