





# Toward an Activated *Convivencia*: A Practical Theological Reflection on Muslim-Christian Relations in Ghana

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana through the dual lenses of historical inquiry and practical theology, proposing a contextual model of *activated Convivencia*, a framework of intentional and dialogical coexistence rooted in Ghana's indigenous values and interfaith practices. Drawing from qualitative methods, including historical-critical analysis and practical theological reflection, the research engaged both secondary data and the lived experiences of the authors to assess interreligious dynamics across educational, political, and communal domains. The findings revealed that, while episodic tensions occur, Ghana exhibits a robust culture of peaceful interfaith engagement, supported by traditional values such as *abusua* (kinship), *nkonim* (communal achievement), and *ahobrease* (humility). Significant findings include the integrative role of religious education, the political practice of religious ticket-balancing, and grassroots interfaith collaborations, all of which sustain a functional pluralism. The study critiques theological exclusivism while proposing practical theology as a tool for deepening inclusive and transformative interfaith encounters. Ultimately, this research contributes to global discourses on interreligious dialogue by presenting Ghana as a viable model for pluralistic societies seeking peace through theological and civic coexistence. It recommends the institutionalization of interfaith education and the development of indigenous theologies of dialogue grounded in everyday Ghanaian realities.

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### Publication History

Received: 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2025  
Accepted: 4<sup>th</sup> November,  
2025  
Published online:  
29<sup>th</sup> December, 2025

### To Cite this Article:

Sarbah, Cosmas Ebo, and  
Manson Anane Adjei.  
"Toward an Activated  
*Convivencia*: A Practical  
Theological Reflection on  
Muslim-Christian  
Relations in Ghana." *E-  
Journal of Religious and  
Theological Studies* 11,  
no.12 (2025): 627-638.  
[https://doi.org/10.38159/  
/erats.202511124](https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.202511124).

*Keywords:* Muslim-Christian relations, practical theology, *Convivencia*, interreligious dialogue, Ghana

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Muslims and Christians in Ghana has been shaped by centuries of coexistence, marked by periods of harmony and tension. With Islam and Christianity as the two dominant faiths, Ghana's religious diversity provides a unique context for exploring interreligious dynamics. Historically, both groups have shared social and cultural spaces, directing their differences with varying degrees of cooperation.<sup>1</sup> This interaction is particularly significant in a global context where religious conflict often dominates discourse. Yet, in Ghana, the narrative is one of coexistence rather than confrontation, informed by traditional communal values that emphasize collective well-

<sup>1</sup> Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana: A Model for World Dialogue and Peace," *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 21–32.

being and social cohesion. This paper examines the evolving dynamics of Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana through historical and practical theological lenses, seeking to uncover lessons that might apply to other pluralistic societies.

The concept of *Convivencia*,<sup>2</sup> rooted in medieval Spain's history of interreligious coexistence among Muslims, Christians, and Jews, offers a compelling framework for analysing Ghana's interreligious interactions.<sup>3</sup> During the *Convivencia* era, diverse religious communities coexisted within shared cultural, economic, and political spaces, fostering mutual respect and collaboration despite doctrinal differences.<sup>4</sup> While not without challenges, this period exemplifies how diverse faith communities can live in relative harmony. Drawing inspiration from this historical precedent, this paper explores whether a similar ethos can be identified or cultivated in Ghana. By examining the historical and contemporary factors that shape interreligious relations, the research investigates how a Ghanaian form of *Convivencia* might respect religious distinctiveness while promoting collaboration on shared social issues.

Using Practical Theology<sup>5</sup> as a methodological tool, this study delves into key areas such as everyday community life, political engagement, and educational frameworks that influence Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana. It highlights how these interactions have fostered peaceful coexistence over the years, serving as a potential model for other nations grappling with interreligious tensions.

The study also included limitations of what Ali Mazrui terms "dialogue of the deaf."<sup>6</sup> Ghana's relatively successful model of coexistence challenges global failures, emphasizing the importance of lived experiences, cultural integration, and mutual respect. Ultimately, this paper seeks to contribute to the global discourse on interreligious harmony by showcasing how Ghana's unique interreligious landscape, rooted in traditional values and practical engagement, might inspire broader efforts toward peace and cooperation.

The historical and contemporary dynamics of Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana offer a unique model of peaceful coexistence, influenced by shared cultural values, political cooperation, and practical theological engagement. By drawing on the concept of *Convivencia*, there is a need to explore how Ghana's diverse religious landscape, rooted in traditional values and mutual respect, fosters interreligious dialogue and collaboration. There is a further need to examine the potential of these dynamics to serve as a model for promoting interreligious harmony in other pluralistic societies, despite doctrinal differences.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design that integrated historical-critical analysis and practical theological reflection to explore Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana through the lens of *activated Convivencia*, a model of intentional coexistence rooted in Ghanaian sociocultural and religious frameworks. Data were gathered from a wide range of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed academic literature, government reports such as the 2021 Population and Housing Census, national educational curriculum documents like the Religious and Moral Education (RME) guidelines by the Ghana Education Service (GES), and theological texts from both Christian and Islamic traditions. Additionally, the study incorporated autoethnographic elements drawn from the second author's personal and professional experiences across educational, communal, and religious settings spanning from 1994 to 2024.

The historical analysis focused on pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial developments that have shaped Muslim-Christian encounters, particularly examining policies on missionary education, religious pluralism, and urban Zongo integration. The practical theological dimension applied

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Back Bay Books, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*.

<sup>4</sup> Manson Anane Adjei, "Weekly Reflection: Medieval Christian and Muslim Theological Polemics: Ibn Hazm (d. 456 AH / 1064 CE) and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728 AH / 1328 CE)" 5 (2024).

<sup>5</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology, The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444345742>.

<sup>6</sup> Ali A Mazrui, "The Black Woman and the Problem of Gender: An African Perspective," *Research in African Literatures* 24, no. 1 (1993): 87–104.

interpretive frameworks from thinkers such as Karl Rahner, Justin Martyr, Ibn Hazm, and Ibn Taymiyya to engage doctrinal stances, exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, as they manifest in Ghanaian interfaith discourse. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring motifs of tolerance, doctrinal negotiation, and interreligious collaboration in schools, family systems, and political structures. While no formal interviews or statistical instruments were employed, the study relied on thick description, contextual interpretation, and participant-observer insight to analyse everyday interfaith practices and tensions. Ethical considerations were upheld by anonymizing sensitive cases and respecting religious identities. Although limited by the absence of quantitative metrics, the study's depth of contextual analysis enables a rich understanding of the theological and cultural aspects of Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana.

The study used the following abbreviations: GES (Ghana Education Service), RME (Religious and Moral Education), and BECE (Basic Education Certificate Examination).

## **Historical Context of Muslim-Christian Interactions in Ghana**

### ***Overview of Pre-Colonial Religious Coexistence***

The introduction of Christianity to Ghana dates back to the 15th century when European navigators, particularly the Portuguese, arrived on the coast and began trading.<sup>7</sup> Christianity initially gained a foothold in the southern regions, where it spread primarily due to the presence of European traders and missionaries. The introduction of Christianity to the northern areas of Ghana, including Navrongo, came much later, in 1906, through the efforts of Christian missionaries.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Islam made its way into the northern territories of Ghana in the late 16th century, primarily through trade routes, as Muslim merchants from northern Nigeria and Mali sought new commercial opportunities.<sup>9</sup> These early interactions between Muslims and Christians were marked by coexistence, especially in the northern regions, where Islamic traders and local Ghanaian communities began to integrate.<sup>10</sup> Islam was introduced in a relatively peaceful manner, with Muslim communities blending into the local society, especially among the northern ethnic groups like the Gonjas, where Islam became intertwined with local governance and culture.<sup>11</sup> Despite these early religious exchanges, the historical record suggests that both religious groups largely respected each other's presence and practices, establishing the foundation for future peaceful coexistence in Ghana.

### ***Influence of Colonial-Era Religious Policies on Interreligious Dynamics***

The colonial era in Ghana, then known as the Gold Coast, had a significant impact on the dynamics between Muslims and Christians. As British colonial authorities imposed their own cultural and religious norms, both Christianity and Islam became deeply embedded in the cultural, educational, and political structures of the country.<sup>12</sup> The British gave preferential treatment to Christian missionary schools, which were established to further both the colonial administration's control and the spread of Christianity.<sup>13</sup> This resulted in the marginalization of Muslim education, particularly in the southern regions of Ghana, where Christian influence was most prominent.<sup>14</sup> However, in the northern regions, where Islam was already established, the presence of Muslim schools, particularly those of the Ahmadiyya movement, allowed for the continued education of Muslims within their religious

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<sup>7</sup> Cosmas Justice Ebo Sarbah, "A Critical Study of Christian-Muslim Relations in the Central Region of Ghana with Special Reference to Traditional Akan Values" (University of Birmingham, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Eric Oduro Wiafe, "Christians and Muslims in Ghana: A Case Study of Togetherness," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 9, no. 9 (September 8, 2023): 417–28, 420. <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.2023991>.

<sup>9</sup> Nathan Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*, vol. 7 (LIT. Verlag Münster, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Cosmas Ebo Sarbah, "Interrogating the Approaches of Christian-Muslim Encounters in West Africa," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 51, no. 3 (2016): 366–85.

<sup>11</sup> Wiafe, "Christians and Muslims in Ghana: A Case Study of Togetherness," 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Justina Akansor, "Missionaries and British Colonial Education for Females in the Gold Coast," *Education in Ghana: History and Politics*, 2023, 119.

<sup>13</sup> Wiafe, "Christians and Muslims in Ghana: A Case Study of Togetherness."

<sup>14</sup> Cosmas Ebo Sarbah, "Religion, State, and Constitution in Ghana: Disputed Realms of Neutrality," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 58, no. 3 (2023): 376–98.

framework.<sup>15</sup> The British colonial government also fostered economic policies that encouraged migration from the north to the south, leading to a growth in Muslim populations in urban centers like Kumasi and Accra, where they formed distinct communities known as *Zongo* settlements.<sup>16</sup> These policies, which facilitated both the religious and economic expansion of Muslim communities, inadvertently led to greater integration and interaction between Muslims and Christians, especially in urban areas.

During this period, both religious communities also grappled with the challenges of maintaining their cultural and religious practices amidst colonial pressures. The role of Islam in the political and administrative spheres, especially in northern Ghana, gave it a degree of legitimacy and influence that helped maintain Muslim identity and autonomy. On the other hand, Christianity's alignment with the colonial authorities led to the dominance of Christian institutions in many parts of the country. Despite these tensions, the period marked a critical stage in the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Ghana, as both religions adapted to the changing political and social landscape. This adaptation helped to lay the groundwork for the religious coexistence that continues to characterize the country today, as both communities found ways to negotiate their identities within the broader framework of Ghana's multicultural society.<sup>17</sup>

In conclusion, the historical context of Muslim-Christian interactions in Ghana reveals a complex relationship shaped by early encounters, colonial-era policies, and the strategic role both religions played in the country's cultural and political development. The peaceful coexistence that began in pre-colonial times continued to evolve during the colonial period, and though tensions arose due to colonial policies, both communities adapted in ways that allowed for ongoing interaction and mutual influence, and this is underpinned by the African Indigenous religion, which is also the foundation of the cultures of the people.<sup>18</sup> African Indigenous Religion is receptive and does not attach to other religions or cultures, which was and is the genesis of this coexistence experience before and now. Today, Ghana's religious landscape reflects the historical interplay between these two major faiths, as both Muslims and Christians continue to contribute to the nation's development in various sectors of society. They constitute over 91% of the total population in Ghana: 71.3 % Christians and 19.9% Muslims.<sup>19</sup>

### Doctrinal Dialogue and Debates

In multireligious societies like Ghana, the theology of religions offers a critical framework for understanding interfaith coexistence, not merely as doctrinal divergence but as lived engagement. Interreligious dialogue in this context cannot be fully appreciated without examining how prominent theological positions, exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism are interpreted, contested, and embodied within Ghana's socio-religious landscape.<sup>20</sup> These paradigms, while rooted in Western theological discourse, have been adapted in Ghana through the lens of lived communalism and practical theology.

Exclusivism posits that salvation and truth are exclusive to one's religious tradition, as seen in Catholic doctrines like *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church, there is no salvation) and the Protestant belief that without Jesus Christ, there is no salvation.<sup>21</sup> Such an approach underscores a belief in the supremacy of one's faith over others, which can foster tension in multicultural and multifaith settings. In contrast, inclusivism acknowledges that while one's faith is the ultimate path to salvation, adherents of other religions may also be saved, albeit through indirect means, such as the divine presence within their traditions. This view is exemplified in Christian concepts like the *anonymous Christians* (Karl Rahner), *logos spermatikos* (Justin), and the *preparation evangelii* and

<sup>15</sup> D.V. K. Afetorlom, "Preventing Violent Conflicts: The Case of the Bawku Conflict in Northern Ghana," 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Sarbah, "A Critical Study of Christian-Muslim Relations in the Central Region of Ghana with Special Reference to Traditional Akan Values."

<sup>17</sup> Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*.

<sup>18</sup> Cosmas Ebo Sarbah and Manson Anane Adjei, "The Akan Indigenous Concepts of Religion and Nyame (the Supreme Deity) and the Promotion of Inter-Religious Relations in Ghana," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 10, no. 2 (2024): 23–33.

<sup>19</sup> Ghana Statistical Service, "Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census General Report," 2021.

<sup>20</sup> A. R. Yakubu, *Christian Engagement with Muslims in Ghana: A Study of The Christian Council of Ghana and Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference*, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015).

*demonstratio evangelii* (Eusebius),<sup>22</sup> which suggests that God's grace can reach beyond the boundaries of explicit Christian belief.

Pluralism, however, contends that no single religion holds a monopoly on truth, and salvation is equally attainable across all faiths. The pluralist approach reinterprets Christianity, particularly the uniqueness of Christ, as universally applicable rather than absolute, emphasizing coexistence over exclusivity.<sup>23</sup> This shift raises philosophical and theological dilemmas regarding truth claims, particularly in societies like Ghana, where religious diversity is prevalent.

The doctrinal debates within Islam, especially those championed by figures such as Ibn Hazm and Ibn Taymiyya, provide additional insights into how religious traditions shape and are shaped by the theology of religions.<sup>24</sup> Ibn Hazm's rationalist critique of Christianity, for example, revolves around fundamental doctrinal differences, such as the concept of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the authenticity of the New Testament. His approach is rooted in rational analysis, challenging these core Christian doctrines by arguing that they contradict the absolute oneness of God (*tawhid*), a foundational principle in Islam.<sup>25</sup> His scepticism regarding the Christian scriptures echoes concerns still relevant in modern theological dialogues, particularly in interfaith discussions between Christians and Muslims in diverse contexts like Ghana. The philosophical and theological challenges raised by Ibn Hazm, especially regarding scriptural coherence and divine attributes, invite broader reflection on the interpretation and application of religious texts. In contemporary Ghana, such doctrinal debates, often fuelled by the uncritical appropriation of classical polemics, lead to societal dynamics that result in social division, conflict, and even violence. A notable case is the 2019 controversy involving Rev. Isaac Owusu Bempah's prophecy regarding the death of the National Chief Imam, Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu. Though swiftly denounced by both Christian and Muslim leaders, the incident revealed how theological claims can incite social unrest when not grounded in dialogical respect.<sup>26</sup>

A second instance involves the 2022 controversy at Wesley Girls' Senior High School, where Muslim female students were prohibited from fasting during Ramadan. While the school's administration cited health concerns, the incident ignited national debates on religious freedom, especially within Christian-dominated educational institutions. Muslim organizations viewed the ban as an infringement on Islamic practice and an example of theological insensitivity within a supposedly pluralistic society. This scenario echoes Ibn Taymiyya's rigid stance on religious obligations yet stands in contrast to Ghana's broader ethos of coexistence and tolerance, highlighting the tension between institutional doctrine and societal harmony.

Ibn Taymiyya was a prominent Islamic theologian who took a more rigid stance on interreligious relations, advocating for a strict adherence to Islamic law. His position on blasphemy, for instance, rejected any flexibility in religious observance, leading to contentious interpretations of what constitutes an offense to Islam. His assertion that "Worship God alone, worship according to God's laws, and reject anything else" provides a framework for understanding his confrontational approach to religious diversity.<sup>27</sup> Such a rigid theological stance can lead to exclusionary practices, as seen in the case of blasphemy laws in regions like Northern Nigeria, where accusations of blasphemy have led to violence. This doctrinal inflexibility, which prioritizes doctrinal purity over social cohesion, contrasts sharply with the Ghanaian experience, where religious pluralism and social cohesion are often emphasized. Ghana's approach to religious coexistence, though with its challenges, underscores the need for a more flexible approach to doctrinal differences, one that allows for respectful engagement across faith traditions.

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<sup>22</sup> Volker Kuester, "Who, with Whom, about What? Exploring the Landscape of Inter-Religious Dialogue," *Exchange* 33, no. 1 (2004): 73–92, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1572543041172666>.

<sup>23</sup> Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity*.

<sup>24</sup> Ghulam Haider Aasi, *Muslim Understanding Of Other Religions: An Analytical Study Of Ibn Hazm's "Kitab Al-Fasl Fi Al-Milal Wa Al-Ahwa' wa Al-Nihal"* (Temple University, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Halim, and Thomas F Michel, "A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's Al-Jawab Al-Sahih Studies in Islamic Philosophy and Science TA - TT" (Caravan Books, 1984).

<sup>26</sup> Wiafe, "Christians and Muslims in Ghana: A Case Study of Togetherness," 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Anane Adjei, "Weekly Reflection: Medieval Christian and Muslim Theological Polemics: Ibn Hazm (d. 456 AH / 1064 CE) and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728 AH / 1328 CE)."

A third case comes from interreligious tensions in the Zongo communities of Kumasi and Accra, where doctrinally motivated disagreements have emerged over the use of loudspeakers for Muslim prayers, especially during Ramadan. In some urban areas, Christian residents have lodged formal complaints, citing noise disturbances. Muslim leaders, however, argue that such practices are integral to their religious observance. These disputes, while seemingly mundane, underscore the fragility of peaceful coexistence when theological practices intersect with public space. They point to the need for ongoing dialogue and mutual accommodation, guided by a practical theology that privileges coexistence over confrontation.

In Ghana, the comparison of these theological debates with the local context highlights the importance of doctrinal flexibility in fostering social cohesion. The Ghanaian religious landscape is one of great diversity, with Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous beliefs coexisting peacefully, despite the doctrinal differences between them.<sup>28</sup> The Ghanaian context thus provides a fertile ground for exploring the compatibility of exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist theological frameworks. While exclusivist stances may create tensions in religious dialogue, the inclusive and pluralistic approaches encourage a deeper understanding of shared values across faiths.<sup>29</sup>

In all three cases above, doctrinal rigidity, whether theological, liturgical, or institutional, has posed challenges to interreligious peace. Yet, the Ghanaian context also reveals robust responses rooted in indigenous values of *abusua* (family), *nkonim* (communal victory), and *ahobrease* (humility), which help mediate tensions. Scholars such as Nathan Samwini and Mustapha Abdul-Hamid highlight how Ghana's interfaith stability is sustained less by theological agreement than by cultural mechanisms of mutual respect, everyday cohabitation, and shared civic responsibilities.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Ghana presents a compelling case for a contextual theology of religions, one that does not abandon doctrinal integrity but reorients it toward serving peaceful and prophetic dialogue in a pluralistic society.

### **Convivencia and Practical Theology**

The concept of *Convivencia*, introduced by Américo Castro in his 1948 work **España en su historia: cristianos, moros, y judíos**, refers to the coexistence of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities in medieval Spain, marked by significant cultural interaction and exchange.<sup>31</sup> Castro's analysis highlights how the blending of these three religious traditions between the 11th and 14th centuries contributed to the development of a unique Spanish cultural identity. He observed that Andalusian Muslim and Jewish cultures profoundly influenced Castilian language, literature, and societal structures, with the cult of Santiago *Matamoros* exemplifying the impact of Spain's proximity to Islam. Castro also highlighted a form of Muslim tolerance that had a positive influence on later Christian populations. Yet, he identified a contradiction within Spanish identity: while Islamic and Jewish cultures were admired, Christian dominance during the Reconquista resulted in expulsions, the Inquisition, and suppression of intellectual progress. This ambivalence, according to Castro, left a lasting mark on Spain's national character, making *Convivencia* both a product of coexistence and a site of complex tension.<sup>32</sup>

Maria Rosa Menocal further explores the concept of *Convivencia*, particularly during the Umayyad period in Andalusia, where tolerance was not formally guaranteed but rather emerged from an "unconscious acceptance" of cultural differences.<sup>33</sup> This tolerance created an environment where religious and intellectual boundaries were porous, allowing for the integration of diverse cultural elements. The cross-pollination of ideas during this time, particularly through the contributions of figures like Samuel ibn Nagrila, Petrus Alfonsi, and Thomas Aquinas, demonstrates that *Convivencia* was more than just peaceful coexistence; it was a vibrant exchange of knowledge and creativity that

<sup>28</sup> Sarbah and Adjei, "The Akan Indigenous Concepts of Religion and Nyame (the Supreme Deity) and the Promotion of Inter-Religious Relations in Ghana."

<sup>29</sup> Yakubu, *Christian Engagement with Muslims in Ghana: A Study of The Christian Council of Ghana and Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference*.

<sup>30</sup> Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*; Abdul-Hamid, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana: A Model for World Dialogue and Peace."

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Baxter Wolf, "Convivencia in Medieval Spain: A Brief History of an Idea," *Religion Compass* 3, no. 1 (2009): 72–85.

<sup>32</sup> Wolf, "Convivencia in Medieval Spain: A Brief History of an Idea." 72-74.

<sup>33</sup> Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*.

transcended religious divisions.<sup>34</sup> Menocal's insights offer a valuable framework for understanding contemporary interreligious relations, particularly in regions like Ghana, where religious pluralism is prevalent. The dynamics of *Convivencia*, characterized by cultural blending and intellectual exchange, offer valuable lessons for fostering mutual enrichment and cooperation in contemporary settings where diverse religious communities coexist.

In Ghana, the possibility of fostering constructive engagement between Muslims and Christians, among other religious groups, is not only a theoretical idea but a lived reality. As noted by scholars like Bediako, Christianity and Islam have met on relatively equal footing in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in Ghana, where both religions have a shared missionary history.<sup>35</sup> This equal footing provides an opportunity for mutual respect and dialogue, enabling constructive engagement. Ghanaian society, deeply rooted in family values, often allows for peaceful coexistence among Muslims, Christians, and adherents of African Indigenous religions. People of different faiths share common aspirations and work together within familial and community settings, exemplifying a type of *Convivencia* that echoes the historical model of Andalusia. The pluralistic nature of Ghanaian society, where multiple religious identities can coexist,<sup>36</sup> sometimes, even within the same individual, creates fertile ground for interreligious dialogue and collaboration.

The theological and practical implications of *Convivencia* offer valuable lessons for fostering interreligious respect and shared values in Ghana. As in medieval Spain, Ghanaian religious communities embrace the idea that cultural and religious differences need not lead to division but instead be sources of mutual enrichment. Practical theology, which engages with real-world challenges and seeks to foster understanding,<sup>37</sup> can serve as a tool for promoting religious tolerance in Ghana. Just as Menocal highlighted the creative exchanges that emerged from Andalusia's cultural openness,<sup>38</sup> practical theology in Ghana can encourage dialogue and collaboration that draws on shared ethical and spiritual values, promoting peaceful coexistence. For instance, collaborative efforts between Christian and Muslim leaders in addressing common social issues, such as corruption, poverty, or education, can serve as practical expressions of *Convivencia* which they have been doing.

One salient example of *Convivencia* in the Ghanaian context is the integration of Islamic and Christian practices within public educational institutions, where school assemblies frequently begin with either the *Fatiha* or the *Lord's Prayer*, depending on the institution's religious orientation. A case in point is drawn from the second author's experience at St. James Minor Seminary and Senior High School in Abesim-Sunyani, a Roman Catholic institution that, during the early 2000s, enrolled students from various Christian denominations and Muslim backgrounds. Despite the school's overtly Catholic ethos, evident in daily Mass attendance and routine recitation of the Rosary, students from other faith traditions actively participated in these practices without resistance or perceived coercion. Muslim students, for instance, were familiar with the structure of the Mass and could recite Catholic prayers, while mutual respect and accommodation characterized the interfaith atmosphere.<sup>39</sup> This form of religious integration is further reinforced by Ghana's national Religious and Moral Education (RME) curriculum, which includes teachings on Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions.<sup>40</sup> Such curricular pluralism cultivates early interfaith literacy and fosters an educational environment conducive to mutual understanding, echoing Menocal's conception of porous intellectual and religious boundaries that enable shared identity and coexistence.<sup>41</sup> Beyond educational spaces, religious leaders in Ghana have also demonstrated practical expressions of interreligious cooperation.

<sup>34</sup> Wolf, "Convivencia in Medieval Spain: A Brief History of an Idea."

<sup>35</sup> Yakubu, *Christian Engagement with Muslims in Ghana: A Study of The Christian Council of Ghana and Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference*.

<sup>36</sup> Sarbah and Adjei, "The Akan Indigenous Concepts of Religion and Nyame (the Supreme Deity) and the Promotion of Inter-Religious Relations in Ghana."

<sup>37</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, "Contextual Theology as Practical Theology," in *Essays in Contextual Theology* (Brill, 2018), 30–46.

<sup>38</sup> Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*.

<sup>39</sup> Manson Anane Adjei, personal communication based on lived experience at St. James Minor Seminary and Senior High School, Abesim-Sunyani, early 2000s.

<sup>40</sup> Ghana Education Service, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, "Religious and Moral Education Curriculum: Common Core Programme for Basic 7–10" (Accra, 2020).

<sup>41</sup> Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*.

The Christian Council of Ghana and the Office of the National Chief Imam have issued joint communiqués during critical national events, such as electoral cycles and the COVID-19 pandemic, calling for peace, civic responsibility, and adherence to public health measures.<sup>42</sup> These collaborative interventions embody a practical theology wherein shared ethical commitments, such as the sanctity of life, justice, and communal responsibility, supersede sectarian boundaries, thereby actualizing *Convivencia* as a dynamic ethos of cooperation rather than mere tolerance. Furthermore, Ghana's longstanding political practice of religious ticket balancing, exemplified by partnerships such as President John Agyekum Kufuor and Vice President Aliu Mahama, or President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo and Vice President Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, institutionalizes interfaith inclusion at the highest levels of national leadership. This political custom conveys a powerful message to the broader society: religious pluralism is not a liability, but a strategic asset for national cohesion and governance. Collectively, these instances demonstrate that practical theology in Ghana extends beyond theoretical discourse and is embodied in tangible expressions of solidarity, institutional collaboration, and inclusive public engagement, ultimately providing a viable and contextually grounded model for interreligious peacebuilding in pluralistic societies.

Moreover, practical theology, when applied to interreligious engagement in Ghana, offers a framework for fostering mutual learning and respect among diverse religious traditions through grounded, community-based initiatives. This is evident in national and local programs that emphasize shared values such as compassion, justice, hospitality, and communal responsibility. Educational institutions, in particular, have become vital arenas for cultivating interfaith understanding. The recent initiative by the National Peace Council to promote religious tolerance in high schools, through the formation of peace clubs and the training of interfaith ambassadors, underscores the transformative potential of education in shaping youth perspectives on religious diversity.<sup>43</sup> These efforts move beyond mere tolerance toward a deliberate praxis of *Convivencia*, where differences are not merely endured but engaged with constructively. Just as María Rosa Menocal highlighted the reciprocal intellectual and cultural exchanges among Muslims, Jews, and Christians in medieval Spain, Ghanaian religious communities today can draw upon their theological and spiritual inheritances to address societal challenges collaboratively.

These collaborations, ranging from joint religious observances and shared service initiatives to interfaith curricula, are not imported ideals but are organically embedded in Ghanaian cultural consciousness. As we argue, these patterns already exist within the Ghanaian socio-religious fabric; the task is to conscientize and intentionally activate them through practical theological engagement for the common good.

Ultimately, María Rosa Menocal's vision of *Convivencia* as a dynamic engagement with cultural and religious contradictions finds a potent analogue in Ghana's interreligious landscape. Rather than viewing doctrinal divergences and ritual differences as impediments to unity, the Ghanaian context illustrates how these very tensions can catalyze deeper mutual understanding and civic solidarity. Drawing from indigenous frameworks of communalism and practical theological insights, Ghana demonstrates that pluralism, when anchored in lived experience and mutual respect, need not devolve into conflict. Instead, it becomes a resource for innovation in addressing shared societal challenges such as education, governance, and moral formation. In this light, *Convivencia* is not a nostalgic ideal from medieval Spain but an ongoing, contextually grounded ethos in Ghana, a framework wherein Christian, Muslim, and African Traditional Religious communities collaboratively contribute to the common good. Such a model challenges global narratives of religious polarization and offers a compelling blueprint for interfaith engagement rooted in both theological integrity and social praxis.

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<sup>42</sup> Vincent Kubi, "Peace Council Fights Religious Bigots," <https://Dailyguidenetwork.Com/Peace-Council-Fights-Religious-Bigots/>. (Daily Guide Network, 2023).

<sup>43</sup> Fauzu Masawudu, "Peace Council to Boost Religious Tolerance in High Schools," Accra: Citi Newsroom, 2025.

## Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities in Ghana's Interreligious Dynamics

Religion in Ghana plays a central role in shaping individual and collective life, with Islam, Christianity, and traditional indigenous faiths being the dominant systems of belief. As William S. Pollack notes, religion provides a framework through which individuals interpret their experiences, align with social norms, and engage in rituals that define their relationship with the sacred.<sup>44</sup> Despite this generally harmonious picture, contemporary Ghana continues to experience episodic tensions that test the resilience of its interfaith relationships, such as the 2000s conflict between Pentecostal Christians and the Muslim community.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, public incidents such as the 2019 controversy surrounding a prophecy by Reverend Isaac Owusu Bempah about the Chief Imam's death also highlight the tensions that occasionally flare up between Muslims and some Christians in the country.<sup>46</sup> These dynamics create a complex environment where religion serves as both a source of peace and potential conflict.

A significant challenge in Ghana lies in the occasional rise of religious extremism, often fueled by misunderstandings and abuses within interreligious relations. Notable incidents, such as the 2019 prophecy controversy and localized conflicts like the one at Adisadel College, where a Muslim student lost his life, as well as the 2022 situation at Wesley Girls Senior High School, where a student was prevented from fasting during Ramadan, serve as reminders of the delicate peace between religious communities in Ghana.<sup>47</sup> However, it is important to emphasize that these incidents have not led to widespread, prolonged violence. Ghanaians frequently demonstrate resilience through continued peaceful coexistence, despite these challenges. For instance, prominent figures like former President John Dramani Mahama (who is president-elect for a second term in the 2024 elections), whose family is Muslim, and journalists such as Fentuo Tahiru (a Sports Journalist with MultiMedia Company, JoyNews), who is a Muslim married to a Catholic, exemplify the peaceful blending of religious identities in both public and private spheres. Similarly, the aunt of one of the authors is a Methodist and has been married to a Muslim for nearly forty years. They have lived together as a respected family within the community. The author learned how to perform ablution from his cousins whenever he visited their family. His parents never objected to his accompanying his uncle and cousins to the mosque. While he never saw his aunt entering the mosque, she never criticized the faith of the Muslims either. These partnerships are more than symbolic; they institutionalize the logic of *Convivencia*, wherein collaboration across religious lines becomes a normative expectation rather than an exception.

Despite the challenges, there are ample opportunities for strengthening Muslim-Christian collaboration in Ghana, rooted in shared values and a long history of political and social cooperation. The theory of the dialogue of life emphasizes that everyday interactions between people of different faiths create organic opportunities for mutual understanding and peace.<sup>48</sup> This theory holds particularly true in Ghana, where people of different religions regularly meet in schools, markets, and public spaces. The integration of Christian and Muslim practices in public schools, where students from both faiths participate in religious rituals such as the Lord's Prayer and the recitation of the *Fatiha*, further reinforces this cooperative spirit. These shared experiences help foster respect and camaraderie among religious groups, which is vital for maintaining peace in the country.

Ghana's educational structure has long served as a foundational platform for fostering interreligious literacy and peaceful coexistence. Through the Religious and Moral Education (RME) curriculum, learners from primary through junior high levels are introduced to the three major religious traditions in Ghana: Christianity, Islam, and African Indigenous Religions. This structured engagement fosters familiarity with the fundamental tenets, ethical values, and devotional practices of each tradition, laying the groundwork for mutual respect and coexistence. Reflecting on his formative years, the second author recounts achieving an Aggregate 1 in the national Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), attributing part of this success to the practical and inclusive nature of religious instruction. An exam question on Islamic ablution, a topic discussed and demonstrated in class,

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<sup>44</sup> William S Pollack, "No Man Is an Island: Toward a New Psychoanalytic Psychology of Men" (Basic Books/Hachette Book Group, 1995).

<sup>45</sup> John Azumah, "Muslim-Christian Relations in Ghana: Too Much Meat Does Not Spoil the Soup," *Current Dialogue* 36 (2000): 5–9.

<sup>46</sup> Wiafe, "Christians and Muslims in Ghana: A Case Study of Togetherness," 2023.

<sup>47</sup> Wiafe, "Christians and Muslims in Ghana: A Case Study of Togetherness," 2023.

<sup>48</sup> Azumah, "Muslim-Christian Relations in Ghana: Too Much Meat Does Not Spoil the Soup."

exemplified how interfaith content had been internalized, not merely as academic material, but as lived experience. This underscores the RME curriculum's contribution to experiential interreligious understanding, particularly in multireligious classrooms.

Beyond educational spaces, Ghana's political culture fosters interfaith cooperation through deliberate religious balance, particularly in presidential and parliamentary structures. Since the return to constitutional democracy in 1992, political parties, particularly the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), have institutionalized a tacit commitment to religious inclusivity by selecting presidential and vice-presidential candidates from different religious backgrounds. This practice, evident in both the Kufuor–Aliu Mahama administration (2000–2008) and the current 2024 electoral ticket of a Muslim-Christian pairing, sends a powerful signal about the nation's commitment to unity through diversity. While these selections are often strategic, they also reflect Ghana's social ethos: religion is not to be weaponized but harmonized for national development.<sup>49</sup> These political arrangements, although occasionally criticized as tokenistic, have functioned as stabilizing mechanisms in a region where religious polarization remains a persistent threat.

To deepen these gains, we propose that practical theology, especially its emphasis on contextual engagement, be harnessed to sustain and expand Muslim-Christian collaboration. Interfaith dialogue should be advanced not only in formal ecclesial or mosque settings, but also through everyday social encounters, in markets, neighbourhoods, family units, and on digital platforms. These unconscious moments of convivial engagement, when nurtured, can evolve into intentional spaces of theological reflection and mutual transformation. Religious leaders must leverage their moral authority to champion messages of tolerance, while theological institutions should incorporate interreligious perspectives into their curricula to form ministers capable of prophetic, pluralistic witness. Ultimately, Ghana's interfaith harmony is not a utopian ideal, but a practical reality rooted in its cultural material, an expression of what we are calling an "*activated Convivencia*," which is already present in Ghanaian society and awaiting conscious theological articulation and social enactment.

### **Sustaining *Convivencia* through Practical Theological Engagement**

The evolving dynamics of Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana reveal a pattern of coexistence that, while punctuated by moments of tension, is primarily characterized by mutual respect, shared ethical values, and a strong civic culture of pluralism. Through historical negotiation and cultural adaptation, rather than violent confrontation, Islam and Christianity have coexisted in Ghana for centuries. Islam, introduced primarily through trans-Saharan trade and governance structures in the north, and Christianity, disseminated by European missionaries in the south, have been shaped by traditional Ghanaian values that prioritize communal harmony over doctrinal dominance. These indigenous frameworks have cultivated a form of *Convivencia*, an ethos of living together in difference, which remains central to the Ghanaian religious experience. Despite sporadic conflicts, such as those involving Pentecostal-Muslim tensions in the early 2000s or the 2019 prophetic controversy involving Rev. Isaac Owusu Bempah, such incidents have not escalated into widespread religious violence. Instead, they have often served as catalysts for renewed dialogue and reaffirmation of national cohesion.

Colonial policies that privileged Christian institutions did contribute to structural imbalances, especially in education and public administration, but these disparities did not prevent Muslims and Christians from integrating into Ghana's shared national identity. Today, Zongo communities, interfaith neighbourhoods, and urban centers such as Kumasi, Cape Coast, Sunyani, Techiman, and Accra serve as microcosms of religious coexistence. This integration is further reinforced by Ghana's political tradition of religious balancing in leadership, where presidential and vice-presidential candidates often reflect different faiths. The John Kufuor–Aliu Mahama partnership in 2000 and the Muslim-Christian ticket in the 2024 elections are emblematic of this strategic yet meaningful inclusion. Likewise, Ghana's educational system, particularly through the Religious and Moral Education (RME) curriculum, offers an institutional framework for nurturing interreligious understanding from an early

<sup>49</sup> Abdul-Hamid, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana: A Model for World Dialogue and Peace."

age. Students are introduced to Christianity, Islam, and African Indigenous Religions, not as conflicting systems, but as coexisting belief structures within the Ghanaian civic sphere. The authors, drawing from their personal experiences as both teachers and students, recall how interfaith familiarity, such as answering exam questions on Islamic ablution or observing religious diversity within extended family settings, became formative experiences that shaped their interreligious consciousness.

To deepen and sustain this model of *Convivencia*, we are proposing a set of policy and theological recommendations grounded in both praxis and scholarship. First, interfaith dialogue must be institutionalized not only within religious councils but also in grassroots spaces such as schools, marketplaces, and local governance units. These everyday environments, where religious communities naturally intersect, provide fertile ground for informal but transformative dialogue. Religious leaders must also assume a more active role in promoting tolerance, using their platforms to discourage exclusivist interpretations and highlight shared moral imperatives such as hospitality, compassion, and justice. Theological institutions, including seminaries and Qur'anic schools, should incorporate interreligious studies into their curricula, equipping future leaders with tools for constructive engagement. A contextual theology that takes both doctrinal fidelity and relational openness seriously is essential for the formation of leaders who can navigate religious plurality with wisdom and humility.

Moreover, Ghana's political model of religious inclusivity should be safeguarded and, where possible, codified as part of the country's commitment to democratic and cultural pluralism. Political parties should be encouraged to continue their practice of faith-balanced leadership as a public witness to national unity in diversity. Simultaneously, interfaith civil society organizations must be supported in their efforts to organize shared religious celebrations, collaborative community service, and theological forums that emphasize the richness of each tradition. These engagements can counteract reductionist portrayals of religion and build public trust across faith lines. Finally, scholars and practitioners of theology should critically reflect on the lived expressions of interreligious coexistence already evident in Ghanaian society. Concepts such as **abusua** (extended kinship), **nkonim** (communal achievement), and **ahobɔɛse** (humility) provide indigenous frameworks for articulating a theology of the "everyday encounter" one that is both academically robust and contextually grounded.

## CONCLUSION

Ghana stands as a remarkable, albeit imperfect, example of what an *activated Convivencia* can look like in a religiously plural society. Its model is not a theoretical abstraction but a lived reality supported by its history, its politics, and its people. The challenge moving forward is to consciously preserve and deepen this coexistence through intentional policy, robust theological formation, and grassroots civic engagement. As this article affirms, the continued flourishing of Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana depends on making visible and theologically reflective what is already organically practiced: a shared life of respect, cooperation, and hope.

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