

PARADIGMS FOR RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE: COMPARING CATHOLIC LITURGY WITH GHAZALI'S ISLAMIC FAITH AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Religion is a potent force that binds the lives of many people across the world. Religion on the other hand can also divide many others through sectarianism and denominationalism. Vladimir Bakrac argues that every religion thinks it is the only and true carrier of the real truth. He further posits that all religions believe there are two truths; theirs and nobody's.² Whereas some people, for various reasons, convert from one religion to another, majority of religious people hold on to their religion. Unnecessary conflicts which often come with devastating consequences can be avoided if people who belong to different religions learn to mutually tolerate their differences. To lay a background for such tolerance and peaceful coexistence, this paper seeks to examine similarities in the faith and practice of Catholicism and Islam. The insight of Imam Ghazali on the deeper understanding of the faith and practice of Islam is compared with the Catholic liturgy. Data for the paper is mainly secondary using both Islamic and Christian resources. The main finding is that the names and details of religious practices may differ between Catholics and Muslims but the spirit and content are essentially similar and in some cases hardly different. Thus the practices of the two religions examined reveal that the form or vehicle through which religious life is expressed may differ from one religion to the other but the essential substance of caring for one another may be the same. The major recommendation the paper seeks to make is that with a deeper understanding of each other's faith and practices, Muslims and Christians have a lot more to unite than separate them. Thus they should be able to mutually respect, understand and coexist peacefully.

DEFINITION OF KEY WORDS

Faith is defined as a strong belief or trust in something or someone. In a more religious sense, it is defined as "the belief and trust in and loyalty to God" or "belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion".³ Bennett posits that "faith is a potent force in human experience: a shared faith that binds people together in ways that cannot be duplicated by other means".⁴ Therefore, faith is one of the key tenets of every religion and binds people together. This is why some religious people tend to be defensive sometimes causing conflicts when matters of their faith are questioned.

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² Bakrac Vladimir. 'The Importance of Dialogue and Tolerance in a Plural Society'. *European Journal of Social Sciences Education and Research*. vol. 3, (no.2), 2015, 29

³ Merriam Webster Learner's Online Dictionary

⁴ John K. Roth. *Private Needs, Public Selves: Talk about Religion in America*. Urban and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, (1997), 74

Pluralism is “a social organization in which diversity of racial or religious or ethnic or cultural groups is tolerated”.⁵ Pluralism is also defined as “the idea that people can and should live together without fighting, despite differences in race, religion, culture and politics.”⁶ Religious pluralism begins as a call to acknowledge the diversity of religious traditions and communities in the 21st century.⁷

Tolerance is “the willingness to accept behavior and beliefs that are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve of them”.⁸ It is also defined as “a fair and permissive attitude towards those whose race, religion and nationality differ from one’s own; freedom from bigotry”.⁹

Peaceful-Coexistence is defined as a “competition without war, or a policy of peace between nations of widely differing political systems and ideologies, especially between Communist and non-Communist nations”.¹⁰ Peaceful-Coexistence can also be defined as a policy of mutual toleration between states and groups having different beliefs or ideologies.¹¹

Roman Catholicism represents the continuation of the historical organized church as it developed in Western Europe, and is headed by the Pope. Distinctive beliefs of Catholics include the doctrines of transubstantiation and purgatory, and distinctive practices include veneration of saints and use of the rosary.¹²

Islam is derived from the Arabic root word “*salam*” which means “peace”, “salvation”, “submission” and “surrender”. Islam the religion revealed to the Prophet Muhammad between 610 and 632 AD teaches strict monotheism and has intimate relationship with Christianity and Judaism¹³

INTRODUCTION

The world has become pluralistic to the extent that there are multiple cultures, languages and religions. This multiplicity therefore calls for the realization that since there will not be any single culture, language and religion; human beings must find ways and means of leaving peacefully in this era of Religious Pluralism. Christians and Muslims have tried to live peacefully after World War II. Thus after World War II, Catholics and Protestants held several meetings such as the Vatican II (1962-1965) and the 1968 Uppsala Conference of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in order to begin ‘a new thinking’ with non-Christians especially Muslims. Since then, relationships between Christians and Muslims continue to build towards the Peaceful coexistence. This is why a comparison of the Catholic Liturgy and Al-Ghazali’s Islamic Faith and Practice is necessary to lay bare more reason for peaceful coexistence between the two faith communities.

John Hick argues that all religions are equal in the sense that they all achieve the same end; producing good moral people.¹⁴ According to religious pluralists, all religions including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism, are important and legitimate expressions of a unique cultural heritage. Thus, to reject any religion means one does not have a cultural heritage. Nonetheless, to accept religions and allow these religions the freedom of worship in a given community is therefore a positive means of promoting good and cordial relations among religious adherents. As a result, Religious pluralism eschews religious exclusivists since these groups of people uphold only their religion and look

⁵ www.vocabulary.com/dictionary

⁶ Macmillan English Dictionary, 2nd ed.

⁷ Peter C. Phan, & Jonathan S. Ray. *Understanding Religious Pluralism: Perspective from Religious Studies and Theology*. PICKWICK Publications: Eugene-Oregon (2014).

⁸ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>

⁹ Webster’s College Dictionary, 2010

¹⁰ www.dictionary.com

¹¹ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com>

¹² Catholicism, religion facts/catholicism.com

¹³ Cyril Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Revised Edition, EPP Books Services, 2005

¹⁴ John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faith*. London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1973, xix

down upon all others. This attitude of exclusivism does not in any way promote religious tolerance; peaceful coexistence and thus breeds religious intolerance with the potential for inter-religious conflicts¹⁵ If religious people must find a way to live together in the same homes, small villages, or town communities, work or study together in other structured and unstructured ways; then common religious practices are inevitably necessary in order to bring about total social cohesion for community¹⁶ and nation building. It is no doubt that “religion is like a double edged sword. It can, when rightly understood conduce to the common good. It can also cause havoc if badly conceived.”¹⁷ A proper understanding of Islamic faith and practice explained by Imam Al Ghazali with its parallels in Catholicism could contribute to peaceful coexistence in Ghana. This paper seeks to highlight the commonalities in these two faiths and underscore how peaceful coexistence could be attained with the observance of these practices by both followers.

IDENTITY AND THOUGHT OF AL-GHAZALI

Abudul Hamid al-Ghazali, also known as Imam Ghazali is generally considered as a *Mujaddid* (reformer) of Islam. He contributed to different aspects of Islamic theology, jurisprudence, mysticism and philosophy.¹⁸ Indeed the Prophet Muhammad prophesied that at the turn of every century, a *Mujaddid* or re-newer of the faith of Islam will arise. Throughout history, Muslim intellectuals, rulers, generals, and artists have tried and managed to rejuvenate faith among Muslims and further help them to deal with the challenges of the time. For each one of these great figures, a specific historical context was necessary for them to accomplish what they did.¹⁹ However, al- Ghazali was able to stand out among his compatriots due to his ability to study the prevailing classical philosophy of his time and to make important interventions in defense of Islam as well as re-examine Islamic teachings with a more philosophical and mystical approach. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali was born in 1058 in the city of Tus, in Iran. Born into a religious family, he was introduced to basics in Islam and Islamic law in his early days. He studied and gained much knowledge in theology, philosophy, logic and natural science. He was fluent in Arabic language in which he wrote his books. Ghazali is still unique in the history of Muslim religious and philosophical thought by three (3) standards: his breadth of learning, originality and influence. He has been acclaimed as the Proof of Islam (*hujjat al-Islam*), the Ornament of Faith (*zain al-din*) and the Renewer of Religion-(*mujaddid*).²⁰

Al-Ghazali’s ardent knowledge of Christian theology had greater impact in his contribution to Islamic theology. Al-Ghazali came to the realization that Philosophy, logic or science cannot prove the existence of God or the immortality of the soul; only direct intuition can assure us of those beliefs without which no moral order, and therefore no civilization, can survive. Al-Ghazali also remarked that:

“I have poked into every dark recess, I have made an assault on every problem...I have scrutinized the creed of every sect, I have tried to lay here the inmost doctrines of every community. All these have I done that I might distinguish between true and false, between sound traditions and heretical innovations. Therefore, I investigated the various kinds of knowledge I had, and found myself destitute of all knowledge with this characteristic of infallibility except in the case of sense perception and necessary truth. So I said, now that

¹⁵ Monzer J. M., Is John Hick’s Theory on Religious Pluralism Philosophically Tenable? Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, Georgia State University, 2007

¹⁶ Community in this paper refers to both Christian communities and Muslim communities (*Umma*) as separate bodies and the local community, which comprises all the religious communities together (See more in Nathan I. Samwini, “The need for and Importance of dialogue of life in community building: The case for selected West Africa Nations”, *Journal for Inter-Religious Dialogue (JIRD)*, Issue 6, 2010.

¹⁷ Ejiogu E. Amaku. *Philosophy and Social Life in Nigeria*. Enugu: Victojo Production Services, (2006)

¹⁸ W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, Edinburg University Press, 1962

¹⁹ A. W., Zuhfiri. *Makatib-i Imam Ghazālī (Letters of Imam al-Ghazālī)*, (Translated and Compiled), Karachi, (Urdu) (1949).

²⁰ D. B. Macdonald. “The Name Al-Ghazali.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. (1902); See Also: C. Brockelmann. Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal “The Deliverer from Error” (1889)

despair has come over, there is no point in studying any problem except on the basis of what is self-evident, namely, necessary truths and the affirmation of the senses”.²¹

ISLAMIC FAITH AND PRACTICES PARALLEL WITH CATHOLICISM

In his book, *Inner dimensions of Islamic Worship*, Al-Ghazali posits that worship in Islam is living one's entire life in obedience to God. He maintains that Prayer, Almsgiving, Fasting and Pilgrimage are not lived in isolation when it comes to one's relation with God and his community. According to him the worship rites are the key in the entire worship processes. His main focus is on the inner dimensions of the individual praying at the proper time, participating in congregational prayer, having a balanced outward movement in Prayer, discovering the right type of persons to give Alms, journeying for Pilgrimage with legitimately earned money and caring for animals on the way.²²

The above depicts that Ghazali's worship life as a Muslim is similar to the practice of the Catholic Church whereby prayer is considered as the bone of survival for the church and its adherents. Thus, the Catechism of the Catholic Church emphasizes that: 'Prayer is both a gift of grace and a determined response on our part. It always presupposes effort... We pray as we live, because we live as we pray...'.²³ Therefore, Catholics consider prayer as a way of life just as *salat* (prayer) is compulsory in Islamic faith and practice. Thus the conscious and practicing Catholic is expected to see his entire life as living in the presence of God. Hence the Catholic Catechism enjoins all adherents of the Catholic Church that 'living is prayer and prayer is living'.

Salat vis-à-vis Liturgy of the Hours

Islam encourages Muslims to observe *salat* (prayer) at least five times a day with sincerity and commitment. By so doing one would always be in tune with his or her maker. According to the Prophet Muhammad, "there are five prayers which God has prescribed for his servants. For those who perform them properly without disrespectful omissions, there is a guarantee that God will admit them into Paradise".²⁴ There are "Five Pillars of Islam" namely the *shahada* (confession of faith), *salat* (prayer) which is the central act of Muslim worship, *sawn* (fasting in the month of Ramadan), *Zakat* (alms-giving) and *Hajj* (Pilgrimage to Mecca). Muslims consider *salat* as the most excellent way of worship, since it is the pillar of their faith, and includes within itself the invocation of God, the declaration of His transcendence and gratitude to Him. *Salat* is mandatory Muslim prayers, performed five times each day by Muslims at specific times or hours in the course of the day.

These timely prayers spread in the course of the day in Islam is equally practiced in the Catholic Church. Aside Eucharistic celebration, which is commonly referred to as Mass and which could be said at any time without any laid down specific times or hours during the day, the "Liturgy of the Hours" are prayed within certain hours of the day by Catholic Church. 'Liturgy of the Hours' (or the Divine Office) is the public, daily prayer of the Church. The prayer comes mainly from Sacred Scripture, using the Psalms, Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) Canticles and Gospel Canticles.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum concilium*) states that clerics in major orders, but not bound to office in choir, "are bound to pray the entire Office every day, either in common or individually..."²⁵ Thus this prayer is meant for all members but more mandatory to the clerics.

²¹ M. Saeed Sheikh, M. A. *Al-Ghazali: A History of Muslim Philosophy*. Available at: <http://ghazali.org/articles/hmp-4-30.htm>, (Accessed on 19th February, 2018)

²² [Al Ghazali](#), *Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship*. Great Britain: Islamic Foundation, (1983)

²³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2725

²⁴ Al Ghazali. *Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship*. (1983), 2

²⁵ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum concilium*) n. 96 Constitution On The Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was Promulgated By His Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963

In the “Liturgy of the Hours” the Catholic Church fulfills the exhortation of Jesus Christ, to pray ceaselessly day and night. The Catholic Church engages in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the entire world, by reciting the daily prayers and reading of lessons seven times a day. In keeping with the ancient Christian tradition, the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God in accordance with the calendar. According to the Second Vatican Council in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, if this form of liturgy is well performed either as individuals or in the communal prayers led by priests adherents will always be holy as their Heavenly Father expects.²⁶

Time for Prayers

Christians and Muslims revere the hour of prayer as very important. Christians are admonished in I Thessalonians 5:17 to “Pray without Ceasing”. In Islam, the Qur’an in al-Nisa 4: 103 states that ‘Prayers have been prescribed for the believers at set times’.

This indicates that there are different times for specific prayers. Five prayers spread throughout the day begin from the dawn before the sunset and ends at night but before midnight.

In Catholicism, the Divine Office is known as the Liturgy of the Hours because it sanctifies the hours of the day just like the Apostles were doing (Acts 3:1, 10:3, 10:9, 16:25). Similarly, the five daily prayers of Islam (Fajr (the dawn prayer); Dhuhr (the noon prayer); Asr (the afternoon prayer); Maghrib (the sunset prayer); Isha (the night prayer) kept the Muslim in tune with God and also reminds the Muslim of his or her relationship with God. The table below shows the time within the day that prayers are offered by both Christians or Catholics and Muslims:

Liturgy Of The Hours / Divine Office	Salat Of The Muslims
1. Lauds – morning prayer at dawn-sunrise. (5.00am- Sunrise)	1. <i>Salat al-Subh or fajr</i> (morning prayer at dawn- sunrise)
2. Terce – Before Noon (9.00am)	2. <i>Salat al-Duha</i> (voluntary prayer during morning hours)
3. Sext - Midday Prayers (12.00 – 1.00pm)	3. <i>Salat al-Dhuhr</i> (midday prayer) (12.30 – 1.30pm)
4. None - Late Afternoon prayer (3.00pm – 5.00pm)	4. <i>Salat al-Asr-</i> late afternoon prayer (3.30-5.00pm)
5. Vespers - Evening prayer at Sunset 6.00pm	5. <i>Salat al-Maghrib</i> – evening prayer 6.15pm – 6.45pm
6. Compline – Night prayer (Before Sleep)	6. <i>Salat al- ‘Isha</i> – night prayer at (7.00pm – Before Sleep)
7. Office of the readings (at any time)	7. <i>Salat Tahajjud</i> - Non-compulsory but highly recommended nightly devotional prayers

Historically, the oldest and shortest form of prayer for the faithful was the Lord’s Prayer which was said three times a day. Since the Middle Ages, the saying of “Angelus” led devout Christians to participate

²⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963

in the prayer of the Church three times a day. It reminds the believers in the morning of the risen Christ, in the afternoon of the crucifixion, and in the evening of the incarnation. The practice of ringing of Church bells at sunrise and sunset was already very widespread, when in the thirteenth century, under the influence of Franciscans; the faithful were urged to say Hail Mary three times, at the ringing of bell as a fulfilment of the daily Office. Muslims use the *Adhan* (Call to Prayer) to announce the time for prayer, this Ghazali says should be a reminder about the ‘terror of the summons of the resurrection day’ and believers should prepare themselves inwardly and outwardly to respond promptly to it. The ringing of the Church bells, like the call of the Muezzin reminds people in the villages, farmers in the fields, the children in the class rooms and the house wives in the homes of prayer time. People offer their prayers in some few minutes and continue their normal work. Muslims differentiate between *Salat* (Compulsory, Canonical worship) which requires *wudhu* (performance of ablution) and recommended to be done in congregation and *du’a* (Supplication) which is personal prayers anytime and anywhere with or without ablution. In Christianity too, there are prayers done before and after meals said by almost all Christian families. These forms of prayers are short and in tune with modern man’s needs without using the official prayer books, with lengthy psalmody.

The “Liturgy of the Hours”, just like the Muslim congregational *Salat*, is an opportunity to perform it with other members of the Christian and Muslim community respectively. These prayers can also be connected with other forms of private or common prayers. The “Liturgy of the Hours” is the bedrock of Western Christian piety so together with the celebration of the Eucharist the common prayer of the Church forms a deep source of Christian piety.

Christians and Muslims are called to prayers, since prayer is an essential part of worship which they owe to God. Prayer is the most common element between both religions. Apart from the differences they have in their approaches to the divine mystery, prayer in Islam and Christianity has the same deep meaning of worshipping God and identification with His will.²⁷

Muslims and Christians organize their lives around the practice of regular prayer whereby, through invocation and thanksgiving, they integrate their time, their work, their joys and their sorrows into the exercise of sincere worship. By means of the daily cycle of prayers, Christians and Muslims make the events of their lives all of the important stages of human experience, from birth until death the focus for prayer and thanksgiving.

FASTING IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

Fasting is another ritual which is common in Christianity and Islam. From ancient times to the present, fasting has held a significant role in these religious traditions. Fasting in Judaism just like Christianity and Islam is a total cessation from all food and drink from dawn and concludes at darkness.²⁸ Muslims begin a lunar month of abstaining from food and drink during the day, as well as forgoing sex during Ramadan and increasing their acts of charity and devotion. In the month of Ramadan, Muslims wake up early each day before dawn for the *Sahour* (modest meal eaten to start the day’s fasting). According to the Qur’an (2:183-6), all Muslims who have reached puberty-with exceptions for pregnant women, the ailing and the elderly are expected to avoid food and drink until sunset. Water is then taken to break the fast; Prayers are said, and a complete meal is eaten.

According to Al-Ghazali, Islamic fasting is in three stages; ordinary, special and extra special. In the ordinary fasting one abstains from food, drink and sex. The second stage involves all part of the body where ear, hands, feet, tongue and eyes are involved in the fasting exercise. In this stage, fasting is reserved for the righteous since they are banned from seeing things which are displeasing to God, not speaking or telling lies nor backbiting, not listening to anything reprehensible, not committing sin but to continually

²⁷ Maurice Borrmans. *Guidelines for Dialogue Between Christians and Muslims*. Paulist Press, 1990

²⁸ Kevin Corn (ed.) *Fasting and Feasting in three Traditions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam: Interfaith Conversations*. University of Indianapolis, 2006,5

focus on Allah with fear and hope. The third stage is where the one fasting tunes his attention to the heart to God. This way of fasting was what the holy Prophet was engaged in most often.²⁹

The Qur'an in Surah 2:183, makes it clear that Fasting is not unique to only Muslims because it has been practiced for centuries by Christians and Jews as it was prescribed to develop God-consciousness. Fasting is observed by many Christian denominations. Lent just like Ramadan are the periods of reflection and abstinence for Christians and Muslims.

Many Christians fast during Lent,³⁰ although fasting is not a universal Christian practice. The Bible gives no specific instructions as to how Christians are required to fast. In Matthew 4:2, Jesus fasted 40 days in the wilderness, but Jesus' disciples are criticized for not fasting in Mark 2:18-20. Since all Christians look up to Christ as their model, they are expected to do what He did to be able to be classified as a good Christian or for one to gain his Salvation.

Many Christian denominations have various traditions regarding fasting. For example, the Catholics are obliged by the Catechism of the Catholic Church to abstain from the eating of meat on Ash Wednesday and on all Fridays during the season of Lent. "The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice".³¹

The Canon law which contains the laws governing the church's activities, both liturgical and social, also commands Catholics to fast on some days in the course of the year.

"Abstinence from eating meat or another food according to the prescriptions of the conference of bishops is to be observed on Fridays throughout the year unless they are solemnities; abstinence and fast are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and on the Friday of the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. All persons who have completed their 14th year are bound by the law of abstinence; all adults are bound by the law of fast up to the beginning of their 60th year. Nevertheless, pastors and parents are to see to it that minors who are not bound by the law of fast and abstinence are educated in an authentic sense of penance. It is for the conference of bishops to determine more precisely the observance of fast and abstinence and to substitute in whole or in part for fast and abstinence other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety".³²

Devout Catholics between 18 and 59 years of age are expected to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, but that is defined as eating only one full, but meatless, meal on those days. Two other meatless snacks may be eaten on those days but together they should not equal a full meal, according to the Catholic Church law.

Lent focuses on penitence and preparation for Easter. The climax of Lent is the Holy Week, which commemorates the last week of Jesus' life, including the Last Supper and the Crucifixion. The model of Jesus as suffering servant is held up for Christians to follow in Philippians 2:5-11.

Both Ramadan and Lent end in a joyous festival. Ramadan concludes with the Festival of Fast Breaking, *Eid ul-Fitr*. Muslims offer special prayers to God and give alms to the poor. Three days of festivities follow. Lent ends with Easter, the festival of the Resurrection and this celebrates new life in Christ.

Sincere faith is crucial for both Ramadan and Lent. The intention of the Muslim determines the validity of the Ramadan fast (Qur'an 2:184). Jesus teaches that true fasting is of the heart, not merely of outward action (Mt 6:16-18). Pope John Paul II wrote about Lent as he encouraged mostly Catholics that

²⁹ Al Ghazali. Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship. (1983),75

³⁰ Lent is a religious observance on the Christian liturgical calendar which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends some weeks before Easter Sunday. During Lent, Christians are supposed to fast and pray, repent from all sins and practice almsgiving.

³¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1438

³² Canon Law, No. 1251-1253

“the main current of Lent must flow through the interior man, through hearts and consciences”.³³ This is in line with what Al-Ghazali remarked that the Holy Prophet was used to as he explained the Extra-special Fasting.³⁴ Thus, during Ramadan and Lent Muslims and Christians are urged to worship God more and participate in personal acts of piety.

Despite their similarities, Ramadan and Lent operate in very different theological frameworks. But there is still deep resemblance between them. Both Muslims and Christians connect increased devotion to God with religious acts of purity and self-sacrificial service. Fasting is placed in a larger context of God’s gracious provision. For both, true worship is a matter of faithful and joyful commitment to God, not mere conformity to religious rules.

ALMSGIVING IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

Almsgiving is also another common practice in Islam and Christianity. As a Christian or Muslim, one is expected to lend a helping hand to others. In Islam, *zakat* (almsgiving) is one of the five pillars and much importance is attached to observing this pillar. According to Al-Ghazali, since almsgiving is one of the essential Pillars in Islam, Muslims must understand and be abreast with the reason for almsgiving. Al-Ghazali argues that wealth is a blessing from Allah hence it is mandatory to give alms as total love for Allah as the One who gives and Blesses. Al-Ghazali further explains that wealth should not become the center of attraction for the one who has it.³⁵

Catholics like all Christians are encouraged to give to the needy since whoever gives, gives to God who through His blessings has endowed, the giver.

‘When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others.... When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. ... When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting.’ Rather, almsgiving, prayer and fasting are to take place away from the public gaze - ‘and your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you’ (Matt 6:1-6, 16-19).

Similar to the above, al-Ghazali reiterates that a Muslim should give in secret and so as to avoid being a hypocrite.³⁶ Catholics are further made to understand that three things are to be observed in the course of one’s life time especially during Lent. These are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Thus the act of giving in Islam is similarly required of Catholics who have it that fasting and giving of Charity go hand in hand.

HAJJ – PILGRIMAGE

The last and fifth pillar of Islam is Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) which Muslims are enjoined to do at least once in their lifetime. Hajj can only be performed in the first 10 days of the last month of the Muslim calendar. The ritual involves going to the sacred mosque at Mecca, circumambulating the Ka’ba, which is believed to have been built for the worship of the one true God (Allah) by Abraham and Ishmael. Wherever Muslims pray, they face the direction of the Ka’ba. Even though pilgrimage is mandatory in Islam for all those who can afford it, it is not the same for Christians. However, many Christians do aspire to embark on voluntary pilgrimage to Israel or Rome which they consider as holy lands.

³³ Pope John Paul II, Homily Of His Holiness John Paul II on Wednesday, 28 February 1979 (Available at: <https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979>) (Accessed on 19th February, 2018)

³⁴ Al-Ghazali, Inner Dimension of Islamic Worship, 75

³⁵ Al-Ghazali, The Mysteries Of Almsgiving: Kitab Asrar al-Zakah of Ihya Ulum al-Din, Centennial Publications (1966)

³⁶ <https://ghazalichildren.org/books/the-book-of-almsgiving>

PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

Christianity and Islam have similar rituals and practices. These similar rituals and practices can serve as basis for mutual exchange of thoughts and ideas as well as for peaceful coexistence. These similar rituals that Muslims and Catholics share can also foster mutual respect, understanding and peaceful coexistence amongst them.

Since Christians and Muslims are adherents of the two major religions Christianity and Islam respectively, this makes them the primary interfaith partners. The world has now reached a point where Christians and Muslims live together and these religions have no option than to relate well for peace and development. In Ghana for example, Christians and Muslims live together as family members, neighbors, school mates or even work colleagues. Therefore, relations between members of these two faiths can only get better. In another instance, when the Muezzin wakes up to announce the Islamic time for the morning prayer, it becomes an opportunity time for other non-Muslims especially Christians to rise up and begin their daily morning activities. A devout Christian wakes up to pray every morning. Thus as both Christians and Muslims wake up to seek divine grace through prayer, both are basically communing with God even if the method of doing so differs.

Apart from prayer, religious or family feasts can be occasions for exchanges of visits or greetings between Christians and Muslims. Easter and Eid ul-Fitr are occasions where Christians and Muslims share meals with each other after a period of fasting. Charity is equally important for Muslims and Christians as they consider it meritorious to take care of people with disabilities, the needy and orphans. Christians and Muslims share these religious responsibilities of giving alms to people in the society.

Implications for Interfaith Relations

Interfaith relations with respect to the parallels of Catholic Liturgy and Al-Ghazali's Islamic faith and practice as paradigms for religious pluralism, is very central. However, the essence in this paper is to recognize not only the fact of plurality, but also the inherent value or potential value of more than one religious tradition living in peace.

Religious pluralism creates the moral and practical challenge of religious people finding ways and means to live together in peace, tolerance and mutual respect irrespective of the different religious backgrounds. John Hick, a theologian and philosopher, posits that all religions are equal because they all achieve the same end of producing good moral people. He further observed that all religions are different responses to the divine reality, and therefore all religious paths lead to the same reality.³⁷

According to Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, all religions are culturally conditioned responses to the same ultimate reality. In other words, the ultimate reality can be reached in diverse means but in whatever the means are/is, the ultimate reality still remains unchanged. Even though Hick's theory has encountered a lot of criticisms, his hypothesis can be upheld valid with a careful analysis on the above discussions.

As Semitic religions, both Christianity and Islam share significant practices and beliefs in common with the same goal even though practiced in different means. A critical analysis of the above parallels between Catholic Liturgy and Ghazali's Islamic faith and practices attest to this fact as hypothesized by Hick. This implies that interfaith relations especially between Muslims and Christians should be more mutual, allowing for a peaceful coexistence and harmonious living. Also, with a deeper understanding of each other's faith and practices, Muslims and Christians have a lot more to unite than separate them.

CONCLUSION

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are regarded to have a common root which is why they are known as Abrahamic religions. These three religions, despite certain internal doctrinal differences do share a lot in common. Among Christians, Catholics in particular have many practices which are similar to many Islamic practices. This makes issues of inter faith discussions possible and practicable among the adherents of both

³⁷ John Hick. *God and the Universe of Faith*. London: Macmillan. (1973), 136-137.

religious. Such interfaith discussions are meant to bring mutual respect and understanding despite their religious differences.

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