

# Christian “Grace” and Muslim “Dīn Al- FiṬrah”: Implications for Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Ghana

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## ABSTRACT

*Christian-Muslim dialogue has been taking place in Ghana under various his-torical, theological and philosophical underpinnings. The Christian “Grace” and Muslim “Dīn al-fiṭrah” are inclusivist theological positions which attempt not only to grant some level of authenticity to other religious traditions but also to include their adherents in matters of salvation. It is argued in this paper that these much criticised Christian and Muslim inclusive positions, though respec-tively offer partial or secondary authenticity to the other religious traditions, are necessary steps in the right direction which offer critical implications for Chris-tian-Muslims exchanges in Ghana.*

## Introduction

The general claim that Christianity and Islam are exclusivist religions have some merits because some verses of the Bible and the Qur’ān have clear exclusivist tendencies which present Chris-tianity or Islam as the only means to salvation. In the Christian Bible, especially the New Tes-tament, there are fundamental verses whose interpretations buttress this assertion. For instance, in John 3:16-18 reads:

God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, so that eve-ryone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life...For God did not send his son into

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into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God.

The belief in Jesus as the only son of God is depicted in above verse as necessary for salvation. This verse is reinforced by Jesus in his declaration to apostle Thomas in John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father." As Jesus is the only way and truth, salvation then can be achieved through no one else, and no other name under heaven is given to the human race by which they are to be saved (Acts 4:12). These verses and their theological interpretations claim fundamentally that Jesus and so Christianity is the only path to the ultimate goal of salvation. Based on these verses, theologians and biblical scholars, Catholic and Protestant alike have argued extensively to the effect that salvation (or being accepted by God) is realised only through belief in Christ Jesus and membership of the Christian community.<sup>2</sup>

At the Second Vatican Council,<sup>3</sup> the fathers also made two statements which together reinforce Christian exclusivist claim. First, the council fathers reaffirmed the centrality of the Catholic Church in God's plan of salvation: "The Church...is necessary for salvation. For Christ, made present to us in His Body, which is the Church, is the one Mediator and unique Way of salvation" (*Lumen Gen-tium 14*). The Church is the Catholic Church and all in communion with it. Second, the Council clearly established the possibility of salvation outside the Catholic Church and recognises other Christian denominations such as the Orthodox and the Protestant churches as members of the people of God: "The Church...is linked with those who, being baptised, are honoured with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter" (*Lumen Gentium*

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Barth. "Christianity and non-Christian religions", in *Theological Reflections*, 5 (London: Darton, Long-man& Todd, and Baltimore: Helicon Press), 1966.

<sup>3</sup> The Second Vatican Council was one of the most important mission conferences of the twentieth century for the Roman Catholic Church.

15). The two statements reiterated the Christianity's unique position both in matters of authenticity of its deposit of faith and salvation.

The Muslim scripture, the Qur'ān, also contains verses which depict a significant leaning to exclusivity both explicitly and implicitly. For instance, the Qur'ān condemns explicitly polytheism and so calls it "*shirk*" meaning, "associationism" (the act of attributing associates to Allah). Polytheists are referred to *asmushrikūn*, meaning "associationists". The error of the polytheists is that they associate other deities with Allah, which is the worst sin any human being could commit. Allah is One and has no partners (Sūrah 4:48; 4:116). Thus, the Qur'ān does not accept Polytheism as a true religion; it is the complete opposite of the true religion. And so, the Qur'ānic verses consistently call polytheists to repentance and to embrace the right path as it teaches. Polytheists have completely erred and must come to the absolutely true message of its prophet (Sūrah 9:33; Sūrah 41:34). Explaining the exclusivist tendencies of these verses, Jacques Waardenburg contends that the Qur'ān accuses polytheists on two main grounds in which cases idols are the objects of worshipped: first, of attributing a child to God (Sūrah 17:111); second, of worshipping man-made gods (Sūrah 25:3)<sup>4</sup>. Allah is the true and only God who deserves worship and not idols.

Arguing in the same line of Waardenburg, W. Montgomery Watt observes that the Qur'ān, in some cases, seems implicitly to make no distinction between Polytheism, Christianity and Judaism. All these traditions according to Waardenburg and Montgomery Watt have committed the same error of assigning partners with God. In line with this thought, Christians commit the sin of "associationism" just like the polytheists by believing in the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Waardenburg. *Muslim Perspective of Other Religions* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 56.

<sup>5</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *The Christianity criticized in the Qur'ān*, *Muslim World*, 57 (1967), 197-201.

The Qur'ān condemns the Trinity (Three in one God): “And when Allah saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah? ”(Sūrah 5:116). Here, Mary, the mother of Jesus is considered, probably, the third person of the Trinity. The Incarnation is also seen in the same light: “It befitteh not (the Majesty of) Allah that He should take unto Himself a son” (Sūrah 19:35). Allah has no son and so Jesus is not the Son of God. He is a mere human being (Sūrah 3:52) and a servant or prophet of God (Sūrah 43:59). The Jews are also accused at times of associationism: “And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of Al-lah, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouth. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (himself) fighteth against them. How perverse are they!”(Sūrah 9:30). Agreeing with Waardenburg and Montgomery Watt, Iqbal S. Hussain regards the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and

Incarnation as being incom-patible with the Divine Unity.<sup>6</sup> By adopting these doctrines the religious communities are associating partners with God and so could be placed at the same level with or are comparable with the polytheists.

These exclusivist verses and their theological interpretations notwithstanding, describing Christianity and Islam wholly in terms which completely exclude the other religion is restrictive because there are certainly other important historical and theological points of view which de-pict these traditions also as inclusivist. For the purpose of this work Christian “Grace” and Mus-lim “*Dīn al-ḥiṭrah*” are respectively highlighted in support of that claim that the “Non adherents” of Christianity and Islam also could have a place in matter of salvation.

## **CHRISTIAN “GRACE”**

### **Catholic Union of all People**

The Second Vatican Council aimed among others at opening the doors and windows of the Church for fresh wind to blow through the Vatican. In line with this objective the council fa-tthers to a critical reflection of other religions. The Council toned down the Church’s earlier ex-clusivist position and spelt out an inclusivist stance on the Church and its relations

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<sup>6</sup> Iqbal Hussain, *Beyond Science & Philosophy: The Qur’ān and Modernism* (Lahore: Adabistan, 2000), 124.

with other religious traditions in some of its documents: *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate*. In these documents, the council fathers also took a giant step towards acknowledgement in, general, of non-Christians as capable of salvation and affirms its high respect, in particular, for Muslims. In the first place, the Council asserts that non-Christians, and in particular Muslims, are connected in various ways to the Church:

But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day. (*Lumen Gentium*, 16)

Those also can attain to everlasting who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. (*Lumen Gentium*, 16)

Underlining these two statements of Vatican II is the Church's belief that Christ Jesus calls all people to Catholic (universal) union as a family with one creator God. Two implications could be drawn from this position of catholic union. First, the catholic union of all people stems from notion of the Supreme Deity as the source, creator and ruler of all. Second, this Catholic union of family is not available to only catholic faithful or even only Christians. The union is also available to non-Christians and in particular Muslims.

### **The Role of the Holy Spirit**

The catholic union of all people under one creator and ruler notwithstanding, John Paul II, in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, keenly observes the human obstacles which have prevented certain people from direct embrace of Paschal Mystery of Christ Jesus:

But it is clear that today, as in the past, many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the gospel revelation or to enter the Church. The social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit this, and frequently they have been brought up in other religious traditions. (*Redemptoris Missio*, 10)

However, these human obstacles in other religious traditions cannot be a lasting blockage for such people. For, salvation reaches the non-Christians by virtue of grace. This grace which emanates from Christ Jesus through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit engages the non-Christian in "...a non-formal, mysterious relationship to the Church." Grace enlightens the non-Christian in accordance with their spiritual and material circumstances while offering them the possibility of sharing in this Paschal Mystery of Jesus in a manner known to God alone (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22; *Redemptoris Missio*, 10). The World Council of Churches in its landmark document "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct" affirms to Christians that while it is their responsibility to witness to Christ, conversion is ultimately the work of Grace through the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:7-9; Acts 10:44-47). The document recognises that the Holy Spirit blows and operates where the Spirit wills in ways over which no human being has control (cf. John 3:8)<sup>7</sup>.

### **Acknowledgement of Positive Values of Other Tradition**

Thus, in spite of the social and cultural impediments of other traditions, the Vatican Council II recognises other religions cannot be entirely or wholly wrong. They, certainly, have some values which have made positive contributions to human development in general. In view of these positive values *Ad Gentes* acknowledges the presence of "seeds of the word" and points to "...the riches which a generous God has distributed among the other nations" (*Ad Gentes*, 11). Again, *Lumen Gentium* makes reference to the good which is "found sown" not only "in minds and hearts" but also "in the riches and customs of other people" (*Lumen Gentium*, 17). Making its own the vision and terminology of some early Church Fathers, *Nostra Aetate* apart from recognising the presence in these traditions of "...a ray of

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Aware of the tensions between people and communities of different religious convictions and the varied interpretations of Christian witness, the Pontifical Council for Inter religious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and, at the invitation of the WCC, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), met during a period of 5 years to reflect and produce this document to serve as a set of recommendations for conduct on Christian witness around the world. This document does not intend to be a theological statement on mission but to address practical issues associated with Christian witness in a multi-religious world. The participants of the third (inter-Christian) consultation met in Bangkok, Thailand, from 25-28, January, 2011 and finalised this document.

that Truth which enlightens all”, goes further to enumerate some of the positive elements of Islamic tradition:

The church has a high regard for Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his Virgin Mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgement and reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting. (*Nostra Aetate*, 2)

Pope Benedict reiterates, in his post synodal letter, *Africae Munus*<sup>92</sup> that Christians witness to their own faith and way of life, and acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with their life and culture.” He further calls upon the Church, in every situation, to persist in esteem for Muslims. These few references suffice to show that the church openly acknowledges the presence of positive values not only in the religious life of individual believers of other religious traditions, but also in the religious traditions to which they belong. The document attributes these positive values to the active presence of God through his Word, pointing also to the universal action of the Holy Spirit: “Without doubt,” *Ad Gentes* affirms, “the Holy Spirit was at work in the world before Christ was glorified” (*Ad Gentes*, 4). These elements, viewed as a preparation for the Gospel (*Lumen Gentium*, 16), have played and do still play a providential role in the divine economy of salvation. It is this recognition which propels the Church to enter into “dialogue and collaboration” (*Nostra Aetate*, 2; *Gaudium et Spes*, 92-93).

The statements issued on Islam by the Second Vatican Council and the

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<sup>8</sup> Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, 2; cf. *Propositiones* 3 and 13.

<sup>9</sup> Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* of his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, 95.

World Council of Churches which highlighted the role of the Holy Spirit by grace though consistent with their traditions are signs of real change of attitudes. These statements espouse a new inclusive attitude towards other religions particularly Muslims and Islam. They counteract the Christian attitude, which fitted Islam into the Jewish-Christian frame of reference and so classified Muslims as Christian heretics. Islam, then, is considered a religion in its own right. But the Vatican Council II's refusal to use the term "Islam" in these statements raises eye brow. Its failure to refer to Muslims by the name of their religion could be seen as its unpreparedness to acknowledge Islam as a religion. But, the Vatican Documents would be much more appreciated when analysed in terms of the spirit behind the words which accords due respect to non-Christians and provides a really good beginning along the difficult but necessary path to inter-religious relations.

## MUSLIM "DĪN AL-FITRAH"

### Islam as the Original Religion

Muslims have two main notions of the term "religion" whose critical comprehension could help to espouse the religion's inclusivist claim. These notions are: the original religion and the historical religion. The original religion, the *Dīn al-ḥiṭrah* (*religio naturalis*), is religion understood in the generic sense, which every one (both Muslims and non-Muslims) possesses by birth. It is this original religion:

God hath ordained for you that religion which he commanded unto Noah, and that which he inspire in thee (Muhammad), and that which We commanded unto Abraham, Moses and Jesus, saying: Establish the religion and be not divided therein. (Sūrah, 42: 13)<sup>10</sup>

behave Christianity to show goodness as it will be the proof of goodness in the good news. The cry of those who suffer, need to be heard and if they are In the light of the original religion, Muslims believe that each human being is born a Muslim.<sup>11</sup> The historical religion, however, refers to the religious traditions of history, which are products of the original religion and

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<sup>10</sup> This and all Qur'ānic verses are from the Pickthall translation.

<sup>11</sup> It is the parents and the environment which make the person a non-Muslim.



traditions of history, which are products of the original religion and containing within them var-ying degrees of *dīn al-fiṭrah* (*Sūrah*, 2:135; *Sūrah*, 4:123). According to Isma‘il Al-Faruqī, Mus-lim assertion that every human being is born a member of the original religion is based on the belief that what Allah has implanted in human nature, namely the recognition of His transcend-ence, unity, holiness and ultimate goodness, is prior to any religious tradition and significantly remains with the person for

<sup>12</sup> life. The possession of the original religion by every human being, regardless of the religious tradi-tion or culture in which he or she was born or nursed, defines his or her humanity and casts up-on him or her very special dignity. It also entitles each human being to full membership in the religious community of humanity and the universal brotherhood under

<sup>13</sup> Allāh. By this explanation, according to Al-Faruqī, a person will always have with him or her or be included in the original religion irrespective of religious traditions.

This inclusivist understanding of religions attributes religious differences from *dīn al-fiṭrah* to historical circumstances, which include place of birth, time, culture, leadership and other particular conditions. In other words, Islam therefore accepts that religious traditions par-ticularly Christianity are religions of God, issuing from and based upon *dīn al-fiṭrah*, and repre-

<sup>14</sup> senting differing degrees of acculturation with history. As a result, the people of other religions (especially Jews and Christians) have either gone astray or have angered Allah as the first *sūrah* indicates: “Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help. Show us the straight path. The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor those who go astray” (*Sūrah*, 1:5-7). “Those who thou hast favoured,” refers to the new Muslim community. “Those who earn Thine anger,” and “Those who go astray,” would be the people of other religions. The original religion approach offers some level of authenticity to other religions particularly Christianity and Judaism.

Consequently, the Muslim community of today is not a new religion; it is

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<sup>12</sup> Isma‘il Al-Faruqī, *Islam and Other Faiths* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1998), 139.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Dammen McAuliffe. *Qur’anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern exegesis* (New York: Cam-bridge University Press,1991).

one and the same original religion. The Muslim community is the true religion (*dīn al-ḥaqq*). It identifies itself completely with it, subjecting

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self totally to its principles and dictates. The Muslim community is the pure monotheistic community that is in line with the religion of Abraham: "Say (unto them, O Muhammad): No, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters" (Sūrah, 2:133). Thus, Abraham, widely considered as the father of the three monotheistic religions, was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was a monotheist (haqq).

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who submitted to God/Allah. The Qur'ānic verses call on Jews and Christians to revert to the true monotheistic faith: "And if they believe in the like of that which ye believe, then are they rightly guided. But if they turn away, then are they in schism and Allah will suffice thee (for defence) against them" (*Sūrah*, 2:2-4). This is what Waardenburg refers to as "...returning to the pure monotheistic religion of Abraham which now takes

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shape among the faithful Muslims". In the light of this, one wonders what this "...returning to the pure monotheistic religion" actual-ly means. Is this call an invitation particularly to the people of the book (*ahl al-kitāb*) to leave and join the Muslim community of today or to merely concentrate on the traces of the original religion already embedded in their traditions? This question is critical especially when the new community is commanded not only to be a model for humankind but also ensure that good pre-vails: "And there may spring from you a nation who invite to goodness, and enjoin right con-duct and forbid indecency. Such are they who are successful" (*Sūrah*, 3:104)

## Prophethood in Islam

Muslim tradition also presents a rather unique inclusivist approach to other

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The new community is different from the communities of the people of the Book (Christians and Jews) though they still have some significant traces of the original. Thus, new religion, because of its originality, is su-perior to all previous religious communities. Within this Muslim community, the fullness of revelation subsists.

<sup>16</sup> McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 54

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*Hanīf* (pl. *hunaḥā'*) refers to a group of Arabs whom Muslims believe had abandoned polytheism even before the advent of Islam. These seemed to have followed a monotheism which differed from the monotheistic reli-gions which were present in Arabia, notably Christianity and Judaism (Hoyland, 2001:54).

<sup>18</sup>

Waardenburg *Muslim Perspective of Other Religions*, 7.

religions which preceded it in its understanding of the concept of Prophethood. It considers its prophet, Muḥammad, as one of a line of biblical prophets which dates back to Adam and reaches forward through Abraham and Moses, David and Solomon, until it reaches Jesus (*Sūrah*, 19:30). Some of these prophets received messages: Prophet Mūsā (Moses) received *at-Tawrāt* (the Pentateuch), Dāwūd (David) received *az-Zabūr* (the Psalms) and ‘Isā (Jesus), *al-Injīl* (the gospel) and finally Muḥammad

received *al-Qur’ān*.<sup>19</sup> In line with this, the Qur’ānic verses laud the messengers of the Christian and Jewish communities and their message. However, Prophet Muḥammad had predecessors but will have no successor. He is the seal of the prophets: “Muhammad is not the rather of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the seal of the prophets; and Allah is ever aware of all things” (*Sūrah*, 33:40) Muḥammad is not just a messenger of God but also the last of the prophets.

The advent of the Prophet Muḥammad and the Qur’ān were necessitated by the inability of previous religious communities to keep to the covenant God made with them through their prophets (*Sūrah*, 5:13). The previous religious communities are “People of the Book” (*ahl al-kitāb*) which consists, specifically, of the Jews and Christians who according to the Qur’ānic verses, received revealed Scriptures just as the Muslims received the Qur’ān. Their error was their inability to keep the revelations they received intact. They partly corrupted the revelations and fabricated new doctrines which denied the complete truth of the right path to the Supreme

Deity.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the Qur’ān came as the final and perfect expression of God’s will: “And this Qur’ān is not such as could ever be invented in spite of Allah; but it is a confirmation of that which are before it and an exposition of that which is decreed for mankind-Therein is no doubt-from the Lord of the Worlds” (*Sūrah*, 10:37).

In the light of *Dīn al-ḥiṭrah* the Muslim concept of prophethood all previous revelations are not completely wrong. They certainly contain within them some elements which are true. Thus, any verse in the revelations through previous prophets which are incompatible with the Qur’ān pre-scription is

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<sup>19</sup> Ahmad Galwash, *The Religion of Islam I* (Doha, Qatar: Modern Printing, 1973), 179-181.

<sup>20</sup> Ahmad Galwash, *The Religion of Islam I*, 179-181

untrue. In other words, the Qur'ān corrects the portions of other scriptures which contradicts it. The communities of other religions such as Jews and Christians are therefore re-ferred to and treated as the *ḍimmi*, people who were variously protected.

Thus, all the portions of the Word of God, which were distorted, deliberately or not, are believed to have been safeguarded in the Qur'ān and Islamic religion.<sup>21</sup> The content of the Qur'ān is the ultimate, complete, eternal and immutable revelation. The Qur'ān itself attests to this: "Say: Verily, though mankind and the *jinn* should assemble to produce the like of this Qur'ān, they could not produce thereof though they were helpers one of another" (*Sūrah*, 17:88). The superiority of the Qur'ān to previous scriptures is herein indicated. So through the Prophet Muḥammad God's guidance to humankind has reached completion and perfection. It is in support of this that Rahman writes: "...there has been an evolution in<sup>22</sup> religion, of which Islam is the final form". The Prophet Muḥammad is the seal of the prophets and the revelation he received is the only straight path and the community he has formed (the community of Muslims) is the fully and rightly guided.

### **Implication for Christians and Muslims in Ghana**

#### **Christian "Grace" and Muslim "Dīn al-Fiṭrah": As Obstacles to Dialogue?**

Though the positions of Christian "Grace" and Muslim "*Dīn al-fiṭrah*" are largely seen as inclusive and bold initiative, many are those who continue to view them as only steps in the right direction which still fall short of expectation in the contemporary environment. Thus, these bold steps are still considered inherently discriminative, presenting one religious tradition as authentic and its community the sacrosanct religious community. The one religion and its scripture become the measure of true religion and scripture of which all other religious traditions are deviations of the original religion. Consequently, the claims of Christian "Grace" and Muslim "*Dīn al-fiṭrah*" are positions which could themselves be obstacles

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<sup>21</sup> McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 68.

<sup>22</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 81.

which could themselves be obstacles to dialogue in that they still contain some negative attitude to other religions. Among the critics of the Christian and Muslim positions is John Hick. In his article 'The Non-Absoluteness of God' John Hick argues that all religious traditions must rather be put on the same pedestal for proper dialogue to take place. He contends that none of them should consider itself superior arguing that every religious tradition contains within it what he calls "valuable and harmful elements".<sup>23</sup> The internally highly diverse nature of these religions contain aspects which promote human good and others damaging the human family. In the face of these complexities, Hick asserts that no religious tradition has contributed a more favourable balance of good and evil, than others. Hick finds unacceptable the various explanations given to defend the roles of Grace and the original religion in inter-religious dialogue by both Christianity and Islam respectively.

Despite the rather negative reception by scholars and religious commentators the inclusive models offered by Muslims and Christians have positive implications for the Ghanaian Muslims and Christians as they dialogue with each other.

### **The Supreme Deity as the Focal Point of Deliberations of Dialogue**

All the three major religions in Ghana-Indigenous religion, Christianity and Islam-have a com-mon understanding of the Supreme Deity as the only One, the Creator and the Ruler of the uni-verse. This belief puts the Supreme Deity at the source of all activity and the initiator, the potent force behind religiosity and the catholic union of all people. In view of this, deliberations re-garding issues of Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana cannot be adequately handled without the fundamental belief in the Supreme Deity as the source, creator and ruler of the universe. The vertical relationship thus established between the Supreme Deity and His human creatures, Muslim and Christian alike, calls for a horizontal relationship of a catholic or universal union of all people.<sup>24</sup> As human creatures of one

<sup>23</sup> John Hick. "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity", in John Hick & Paul F. Knitter (eds). *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Maryknoll:Orbis Books, 1987), 17.

<sup>24</sup> The concept of the Supreme Deity remains a central belief among the African people and the Muslim Akan and Christian Akan of Ghana for that matter.

Supreme Deity, all people are closely related to each other irrespective of their cultural and religious backgrounds and are called upon to deepen and strengthen the relationship.<sup>25</sup> Since the Supreme Deity created the universe, it is subsequently dependent on Him for its continuity and harmony. In view of this, the Supreme Deity is the ruler of the universe and His plans covers non-Christians as well.

That there is only one God for all Ghanaians is indisputable. For instance, the oneness of God is depicted in a religious and social environment of the Akan people of Ghana where Christians and Muslims use the same indigenous names and attributes of the Supreme Deity such as *Nyame*, *Nyankopon* and *Odomankoma* for God and Allāh respectively. Akan proverbs and symbols about *Nyame* and his other names are used by Christians and Muslims in their speeches, wax prints, “High-Life” songs and indigenous art works. By the use of these names Christians and Muslims are acknowledging, in no uncertain terms, that the *Nyame* of their ancestors is the same God or Allāh they are worshiping now as Christians and Muslims, a fact that has been crucial in efforts at ensuring a harmonious co-existence and relations between the two great traditions. Since the use of the indigenous names is not a problem for Christian Akan it should not be for Muslim Akan even as the Qur’ān encourages Muslims to “... Call upon Allāh or call upon Ar-Rahmān: by whatever name ye call upon Him, (it is well) For to Him belong The Most Beautiful Names” (*Sūrah*, 17:110; *Sūrah*, 59:23; *Sūrah*, 2:255). The utilisation of indigenous names and attributes for the Supreme Deity, however, is not new in Christian and Islamic traditions. Arabs of pre-Islamic era used the name “Allāh”, the Islamic name of essence for their Supreme Deity. In view of this, Christian Arab use the term “Allāh” for the ‘Christian God’ to the extent that God is even translated Allāh in the Arabic version of the Bible. The reason, Christian Arab argue, is simply that the term is not originally Islamic but Arab.

#### The Need to Place Due Prominence on Core Values

The inclusivist positions spelt out in the Christian “Grace” and Muslim

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Robert Fisher, *West African Religious Traditions: Focus on the Akan of Ghana* (New York: Orbis Book, 1998). Also see Abdul Kalam M. Azad, *Basic Concepts of the Qur’ān*, Syed Abdul Latif (ed.). (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2003).

“*Dīn al-ḥaqq*” indicate that both Christian and Muslim traditions have core and periphery values. The core values of these traditions are believed to be supernatural and are often referred to as the revealed aspects of the belief systems. They are unalterable, universal and so indicate permanence. The periphery values are ephemeral aspects of religious and moral principles which are temporary. In other words, periphery values are of human origin and so are subjective. In line with this, Kwesi Wiredu classifies the tenets of every society particularly Akan religious and moral values into cultural universals and cultural particulars. In Wiredu’s view, cultural universals are intransient, common norms and moral imperatives on the bases of

<sup>26</sup> which intercultural communication and dialogue are always feasible. These intransient beliefs relate to the core values of every society. Cultural universals are predicated on common biological identity of human beings <sup>27</sup> as “a species of bipeds” and also as social animals. In other words, cultural universals are norms that are absolutely essential to human communities. The core values are essential values which enhance communal interests and promote welfare of the individuals. They include societal treasures such as love, truth, mercy, humility, forgiveness, reconciliation, justice, peace, cooperation, etc. The periphery values are not so essential values such as dress code, eating habits, rites of rituals and other acts and concepts which exhibit or tend, invariably, to promote disrespect towards other religions. Acknowledgement of core and periphery virtues of communities and indeed every society has decisive implications for Christian-Muslim encounters and exchanges. It proposes to people of all cultures unique way to inter religious and cultural exchanges which dwell on core, essential codes of societies. The individuals and societies become highly praised as human communities as they lay due emphasis on the mainstay values that build them into better people and society. Thus, it demonstrates that the replacement of core values with ephemeral ones by adherents of various religious traditions do takes place and often leads to social anarchy and chaos which ultimately hinders intercultural and religious encounters. For instance, there are many instances when in missionary endeavours of Islam and Christianity periphery values are unfortunately packaged and presented as the core

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<sup>26</sup> Kwesi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

message to the mission-ary target. When these periphery, non-essential values and the cultural particulars are wrongfully and sadly adopted and made to function as core, central, essential values and as such “cultural universals” society and individuals eventually plunge into chaos because these superficialities tend to rob society of peace and continual survival. Hence, the need for Muslims and Christians to major on majors and minor on minor values of their religions for peaceful social and religious environment.

### **The Acknowledgement of Differences**

The Christian call for a universal union of all people irrespective of religious traditions and the Muslim belief in a common union even from birth demonstrate that all human beings are not only wired to Allah/God but also to one another. Despite the obvious commonalities of union between the two traditions, Christians and Muslims of Ghana should note that both Christian “Grace” and Muslim “*Dīn al-fiṭrah*” approaches also acknowledge striking differences between the traditions which have to be respected. These differences are not only noted in their historical origins and developments but also in the contents of their moral, legal and religious values. For instance, the dissimilarity between the Muslim belief in Jesus as a prophet and the Christian claim of him as God is not superficial. While the Muslim Jesus is not worthy of worship the Christian Jesus is the subject of worship. Thus, in many ways, the differences are real. However, the obvious variations thus acknowledged between Christianity and Islam ought not only be seen solely a liability but also an asset. The differences between the two religions are not meant to generate competition amongst them but to foster cooperation for human advancement. The two concepts, in their own ways, suggest the possibility of a common platform for engaging each other for mutual benefit/enrichment.

### **Salvation “Possible” for Non adherents too**

The Christian “Grace” and Muslim “*Dīn al-fiṭrah*” also leave salvation in the hands of God/Allāh and so offer non-adherents of their respective traditions the possibility of salvation. Christians and Muslims ought to eschew all forms of extreme interpretation of their religious beliefs which apart from limiting salvation to members of their particular tradition also entirely demonise the membership of others. These theological positions



also depict that religious traditions do not only have exclusivist stance but they also have inclusivist ones. This means that the adoption of either exclusivist or inclusivist attitude by Muslims and Christians is more a matter of personal temperament or choice than the only acceptable religious position or interpretation of their traditions. This calls for a certain restraint in wild characterisation of the other religion as lacking authenticity and so incapable of bringing about salvation to their adherents.

### **Conclusion**

The Christian “Grace” and Muslim “*Dīn al-fiṭrah*” are inclusivist theological positions which attempt to include the “non adherents” and their religious traditions in matters of salvation. Inclusivist position is one of the several approaches to the understanding of the relationship between religions, which asserts that while one set of beliefs is absolutely true, other sets of beliefs are at least partially true. It holds that salvation is made available through only one religious tradition and that this should be understood inclusively, so that members of other religious communities may be saved. This stance has become all the more important because on the whole missionary endeavours have achieved little positive outcomes in the light of the fact that the great majority of people still hold on to the religion into which they were born. Between Christianity and Islam there have been little more than rather rare individual conversions. Even in Africa where both Christianity and Islam seem to be making inroads the greater part of the conversions have been from the adherents of traditional religion. Conversion from Christianity to Islam and Islam to Christianity has been insignificant despite the huge effort and time invested in the project. It is argued in this paper that these inclusive Christian and Muslim positions on inter religious relations though respectively offer partial or secondary authenticity to the other religious tradition are required steps in the right direction which have practical ramifications for Christian-Muslims encounters in Ghana.

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