

Dialogue as a Means of Improving Ties Between Christians and Muslims



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ABSTRACT

Today's religious quandary globally suggests little doubt as to whether religious fanaticism and differences in religious ideologies are to blame for catastrophes such as war, violence, hatred, conflicts and many others. One would think that religious peace is one way to build a peaceful world but others do not perceive it as such. This study is intended to analyze and discuss scholarly views pertaining to religious dialogue. A qualitative research methodology is used to, collect primary data through observations and secondary data from many published materials on the subject matter. The findings indicated that dialogue requires a collective effort between Christians and Muslims. It allows Christians and Muslims to discover one another, as well as the positive dreams and peaceful ambitions that are all too often hidden in their hearts. Indeed, it is necessary to underline the current situation of Christianity and Islam in terms of dialogue modalities and shared values and beliefs. They will assist both religions in nurturing a welcoming attitude, openness, acceptance, respect for human dignity, and freedom, regardless of one's beliefs or religious convictions. The author recommends that despite their differences, Christians and Muslims should respect one another and use dialogue as a technique or mechanism for conflict resolution. This piece will contribute positively towards the fight against religious intolerance, particularly between Christians and Muslims, as well as individuals of other faiths.

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INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that religious fanaticism and disparities in religious ideology are responsible for some of the tragedies such as war, violence, hatred, conflicts, and many more. One may presume that peace among religions is one of the methods to achieve a peaceful world. The Society of Missionaries of Africa, popularly known as the (White Fathers), believe, like any other religious congregation or society, that the wind “blows where it wills” (Jn 3:8). That is to say, as missionaries, they acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is working in various Christian denominations and other religions such as Islam around the world. As a result, they consider dialogue to be vital to build and strengthen better relationships with Muslims, and that it “is necessitated by a deep regard for everything that the Holy Spirit has brought forth in human beings.”¹ It necessitates openness, listening to one another, and the rejection of any prejudice and intolerance.

¹ John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter “Redemptoris Missio” on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate* (7 December 1990), (Boston: St. Paul Books 1990), 56.

Living the purpose of dialogue between Christians and Muslims fully and honestly necessitates a welcoming attitude, openness, acceptance, respect for human dignity, and freedom, regardless of one's beliefs or religious convictions. In the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood, Christians must share their desire and reasons for seeking to live together in harmony and aspiring for peaceful coexistence.

Numerous values are shared by both Christianity and Islam. It is not surprising that Muslims, like Christians, place a high value on the word of God. Both worship the same one God, but Muslims understand the oneness of God in a way that is different from the Christians. And so, both Christians and Muslims need to set aside the various differences and work together to make the world a better place for the current generation and the future. A world free of religious misunderstandings that lead to wars is what everyone wishes for. A world free of hatred and violence, but full of joy, harmony, and tranquillity is crucial for development.

In light of the above, as missionaries, they are inspired to encourage dialogue, particularly between the Christians and Muslims, inspired by their founder, Cardinal Charles Lavigerie, and the “*Nostra Aetate*” document (Declaration on the relation of the Church to Non-Christian religions). This provides a challenge to many people who still believe that their faith is the best and is superior, while all others are inferior. In this article, the author seeks to discuss dialogue as a means of improving relations between Christians and Muslims, taking into account a variety of factors. This study is intended to assist in analyzing and discussing published or scholarly information pertaining to the subject area under study. The study summarizes and examines other people's arguments as regards to dialogue being one of the means of improving ties between Muslims and Christians. This article will not only highlight the current state of Christianity and the need for dialogue, common values between Islam and Christianity, and modalities of dialogue, but would also provide a Catholic – Christian perspective. To help in improving and relating new ideas to existing knowledge, the study utilizes an inductive approach. The author employed a qualitative research methodology by collecting primary data through observations and secondary data from many published and internet resources on the subject matter.

Dialogue: Christians and Muslims or Muslim - Christian Dialogue

There is a need to define the term dialogue and also provide a brief description of who Christians and Muslims are, as they will be used frequently in this article.

Dialogue

Dialogue is derived from the Greek word “*dialogos*,” which means “conversation”.² According to O'Collins, dialogue is “a courteous discussion between individuals or (denominations) who have differing opinions with the goal of attaining or at least drawing closer to a consensus”.³

In this context, dialogue is characterized as a collaborative effort between Christians and Muslims. It provides a way for Christians and Muslims to discover one another and the positive hopes and peaceful ambitions that all too often lie concealed in their hearts. As a result, this is what Christians, particularly Missionaries of Africa, are asked to accept in order to create excellent relationships with Muslims and reach amicable resolutions.

Christians and Muslims

Christians are people who are followers or adherents to Christianity. In short, Christians believe in God through the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Bible, whereas Muslims are adherents who practice Islam. Muslims believe in Allah (God) through the teachings of Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'an and his traditions (*Sunna*).

Forms of Dialogue between Christians and Muslims

Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is essential. It necessitates friendship with persons who hold

² Brill E., “Dialogue”, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Michigan-United Kingdom-Boston: University of Michigan press 1999), 839.

³ Gerald O'collins., Edward G. Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, (Edinburgh: T and T Clark Publishers 2000), 63.

opposing views and the avoidance of biases. “Encounter and Dialogue with Muslims is composed of presence, the witness in daily life, of human contacts and the sharing of human values”.⁴ This conversational activity can take several forms, as illustrated below:

Dialogue of Life

This type of dialogue is a broad category that comprises most of the interactions, structured and unstructured, between individuals of diverse religions and traditions. That is, it entails living in harmony with one another. It is through the dialogue of life that “believers of different religions bear witness before each other in daily life to their own human and spiritual values, and help each other to live according to those values in order to build a more just and fraternal society”.⁵ Actually, at this level, both Christians and Muslims endeavour to value the life of the other and respect each other because, regardless of faith or denomination, they all consider themselves as created in the image and likeness of God. And so, they have to come together to establish a beloved community full of life as well as their nations as a whole.

Furthermore, this dialogue of life takes place at any moment, in any place. Its goal is to foster friendly relationships among individuals of different faiths. And it all starts when people try to interact with one another and participate in daily life activities such as participating in each other’s life experiences, having festivities together such as marriages, naming ceremonies, celebrations of life, birthday celebrations, and picnics.

Dialogue of Deeds

This dialogue involves common social concerns between Christians and Muslims. Both Christians and Muslims cooperate in service and human promotion. For instance, if in a given community there is a problem of water shortage, everyone will be involved in looking for the solution. The problem becomes everyone’s responsibility regardless of their religion.

Not only is there a need to work together as a community to address water issues, but all other social issues must be addressed as well, such as the breakout of the new pandemic known as COVID-19, which has ravaged the world. COVID-19 has afflicted a large number of people around the world. It makes no distinction between attacking Christians and Muslims. And so, in order to alleviate it, all must work together to brainstorm ideas and see how the pandemic can be eradicated by involving all scientists, as will be discussed further below in the dialogue of specialists. At this level, all people must endeavour to come together, regardless of religion, to explore ideas for how to fix the problem and other difficulties in the community. In short, religious differences must be set aside and all factions must work together to create and sustain an equitable society.

Dialogue of Specialists

This group of people are referred to as specialists since this dialogue involves intellectuals debating religious issues. Specialists from both Christians and Muslims gather to share information and discuss commonalities and contrasts concerning nature, revelation, and a variety of other concerns. And, at the end of the day, come to conclusions that strengthen connections and help in bonding as brothers and sisters of different faiths. Before engaging in this level of dialogue, the Missionaries of Africa, for example, aim first and foremost to comprehend the various religious perspectives and to appreciate the spiritual values of others.

Dialogue of Religious Experience

This entails praying together. It aims to establish and nurture communication channels between the Christian and Muslim communities. Both sects are to impart the spiritual riches of their religions. This spiritual richness can be manifested in the prayer life and reflection, both faiths and ways of seeking God, as well as the truths. Learning about other people’s faiths will eventually lead to the realization that fighting or criticizing one

⁴ Society of Missionaries of Africa, *Capitular Acts: XXVII General Chapter*, (Rome: General Council of the Society 2010),30.

⁵ John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter “Redemptoris Missio” on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate* (7 December 1990),(Boston: St. Paul Books 1990), 57.

other is a waste of time, energy, and resources. The White Fathers have had a very positive experience though not fully with this dialogue of religious experience. In fact, their clothing style was influenced by that of the Muslim brethren, notably those in Niger. Additionally, it has been discovered that every time there is an engagement in this religious experience, there is a profound shift in behaviour and view on life

Scholarly views on Religious Dialogue

When engaging in discussion with Muslims and Christians there is a need to look at the Christology that appears to be shared by both religions, among other things. When it comes to Christology, the most difficult question to ask in order to evaluate the understanding of Jesus through literature or experience is always: who is Jesus for both Muslims and Christians? This question transcends philosophy because it impacts the faith of Muslims and Christians who regard Jesus as a prophet and a mediator, respectively. Thus, for both Muslims and Christians, the belief in Jesus is the most important doctrinal question. According to Frederic N. Mvumbi: “there are many doctrinal and controversial issues among Christians and Muslims, but it is believed that the identity of Jesus is the center of the controversy. As recorded in history, right from the time of Muhammad in Medina to this present time, the identity and the role of Jesus not only divides Christians and Muslims but also cause conflicts among them”.⁶

Aside from that, there are a plethora of texts in both the Qur’an and the Bible that attempt to explain various facets of the relationship. According to John Renard, among the Scriptures in general, “‘It is He [God] who sent down [revealed] to you the Book, confirming in truth all that preceded it; and before that He had sent down the Torah and the Gospel as guidance to humankind...’ (Qur’an 3:3). But there are numerous other more specific connections as well (such as) ‘the frequent allusions to familiar tales of Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon, Jesus and Mary’”.⁷ This indeed challenges invariably all readers of the Qur’an and the Bible, but it was the display of self-centered stubbornness that caused the initial disagreements.

God’s nature, too, is far beyond man’s finite understanding. All believers know, however, that there is only one God who is never far from his people. David W. Shenk and Badru D. Kateregga contribute by saying “‘We are nearer to him than his jugular vein (Qur’an 50:16)’ and that ‘Allah is one, and only He is God. He is the only one worthy of worship. [...] There is only One God. So, of me, Me only, be in awe (Qur’an 16:51)’”.⁸ This is the same belief the Christians have. That which was commanded to be taught to their children (Deut 6:6-9). Kateregga and Shenk continued quoting the Bible that “‘The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might (Deut 6:4; Mk 12:28-30; Ex 20:4-6).’”

Apart from the Abrahamic faith’s common bond, which is the belief in one God, both religions must embrace mutual tolerance and accommodation. Why is this so? Because people live in communities together. They face common issues in daily, thus practical themes, such as interreligious marriages, education, and rights, to name a few, are at the heart of communal living.⁹

The Contemporary Situation of Christianity and the Necessity for Dialogue

The Christian faith is currently under a huge challenge as a result of the growing number of Muslims and the strength of Islam. A positive dialogue with Muslims wherever feasible has become a necessity. A few years ago, Pope Francis in his address called Christians to “more intense dialogue among the various religions, particularly with Islam”. He further went on to say: “his wish is that the dialogue between us should help to build bridges connecting all people, in such a way that everyone can see in the other not an enemy, not a rival, but a brother or sister to be welcomed and embraced [...] (in order) to intensify outreach to nonbelievers,

6 Frederic N. Mvumbi., *The Identity of Christ in Islam: From the Perspective of Thomas Aquinas*, (Paulines Publications Africa 2008), 14.

7 John Renard., *Responses to 101 Questions on Islam*, (Better Yourself Books 2005), 116.

8 Badru D. Kateregga., David, W. Shenk., *Islam and Christianity: A Muslim and A Christian in Dialogue*, (Uzima Press Limited 1980), 1-84.

9 Cf. Jamal Malik, “Christian-Muslim Dialogue”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* Volume 33, Issue 1 (2022): 1-6, accessed on January, 15, 2022, https://www.totetu.org/assets/media/paper/j015_129.pdf

so that the differences which divide and hurt us may never prevail”.¹⁰ In contrast to this mentality, the author had a conversation with some of his Muslim and Christian friends about how to foster better relationships despite the differences that exist, but some of them pointed out that “it seems many of us are not interested in dialogue. It is a new phenomenon that we have created. We don’t believe there is a need for dialogue”.¹¹ This was their response to a query concerning Muslims’ and Christians’ attitudes toward dialogue.

In any case, the author disagrees with their response because, “Muslims, for their part, know that their Qur’an has encouraged them from the very beginning to practice dialogue with the believers who were their associates”¹² as it is written in the Qur’an: “dispute not with the People of the Book, except in a way that is best” (*Surah* 29:46). The prophet was told: “Call thou (people) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and good admonition and dispute with them in the way that is best” (*Surah* 16:125). Furthermore, Salim Abdullah pointed out that: “The Qur’an clearly states that encounter with other human beings is a divine task which has to be fulfilled unconditionally by both the individual Muslim and society”.¹³ The Qur’an advises everyone, Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, not to live in misunderstanding and denial, but to bear witness to God’s unity by validating the pre-Qur’anic prophets.

However, just as there are various Christian denominations, there are several branches of Islam. Dialogue with some of these groups, particularly Muslim extremists, is difficult since they feel that other religions should not be tolerated. Some Muslims are primarily motivated to convert as a means of countering Christian evangelism attempts.

Living the purpose of dialogue between Christians and Muslims fully and honestly necessitates a welcoming attitude, openness, acceptance, respect for human dignity, and freedom, regardless of one’s beliefs or religious convictions. In the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood, Christians must share their desire and reasons for seeking to live together in harmony and aspiring for peaceful coexistence.

Common Values and Disparities between Islam and Christianity

Numerous values are shared by both Christianity and Islam. It is not surprising that Muslims, like Christians, place a high value on the word of God. Both worship the same one God, but Muslims understand the oneness of God in a way that is different from the Christians. The articles of faith, as stipulated in the following verse bear a close resemblance to the teachings and beliefs of Christianity: “O you who have believed, believe [...] in Allah and his Messenger and the Book that He sent down upon His Messenger and the Scripture which He sent down before. And whoever disbelieves in Allah, His angels, His books, His Messengers, and the Last Day has certainly gone far astray” (*Surah* 4:136; comparable to John 3:16ff). Indeed, the accounts of Cain and Abel (*Q* 5:27-32) strictly follow the narrative in the Bible (*Gen* 4:1-16), Noah and the flood (*Surah* 71:1-28) has a corresponding narrative in the Bible (*Gen* 6:9-9:17), and Abraham’s call and conversion to monotheism (*Surah* 37:104-105) corresponding to *Gen* 12 and 22. About monotheism itself, it is read in the Bible and its corresponding verses in the Qur’an: “Thus says the Lord, Israel’s king, it’s redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first, I am the last; there is no God but me” (*Is* 44:6, *Mk* 12:29 which corresponds to *Surah* 112:1) respectively.

Besides Christianity, Islam is the only religion on the planet that acknowledges Jesus’ miraculous birth. The Qur’an mentions Jesus 25 times. Not only do Christians believe that Jesus will return from heaven and that a day of judgment will occur in which people will be judged for the lives they live on Earth, but they also believe that an Antichrist will arise before the end of the world and that Jesus will return and defeat him. Muslims also revere Jesus as a great prophet, honour the Virgin Mary, and acknowledge the Angel Gabriel’s annunciation to Mary about Jesus’ incarnation, as stated in the Qur’an: “Behold! The Angel said: ‘O Mary! Allah hath chosen thee And purified you chosen you above the women of the worlds [...] his name will be

¹⁰ Elisabetta Povoledo, “Pope Francis Urges for More interreligious Dialogue”, *The New York Times*, Saturday Nation – March 23 (2013): 1-4, accessed May 30, 2021,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/23/world/europe/pope-francis-urges-more-interreligious-dialogue.html>

¹¹ Views of some Muslims and christians on the topic of dialogue among religions.

¹² Maurice Borrmans, *Interreligious Documents I: Guidelines for Dialogue Between Christians and Muslims. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, (New York: Paulist Press 1990), 28.

¹³ M.S.Abdullah, *What Shall be the Answer to Contemporary Islamic Fundamentalism?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books 2009),77.

Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the hereafter [...]” (cf. Surah 3:42-45). In reality, in addition to the written accounts about Mary in the Bible, Muslims have accorded Mary, the mother of Jesus, the highest female esteem. As a result; the Qur’an dedicates an entire chapter (*Surah 19*) to Mary, called “Mariam.”

Furthermore, Muslims, like Christians, value moral living and worship just one God through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. There are several parallels that may be drawn, but this article will be limited to the ones listed above to demonstrate that there is no reason for members of both religions to continue living in fear of one another.

Despite shared values, there are significant disparities in beliefs and practices. Islam’s integration of the religious and political communities usually produces challenges, especially when Islam is the majority faith. Extremists tend to want to enforce Islamic law (*Shariah*) in a variety of ways. Christian radicals, equally, are prone to do the same. As a result, it becomes a fifty-fifty game, with the winner becoming stronger. Why can’t both sects appreciate and practice each other’s religions and practices without entering into conflict with one another? There is a need to allow Muslims, as well as Christians, to freely practice their faith.

Author’s Personal Experience of Prejudice Against the Islamic Religion

Having grown up in a mostly Christian neighbourhood with Muslims as a minority, from childhood, we were attracted to the teachings from the Gospel of John which say: “For God loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). As a result of this, along with many other Christian beliefs, adherents of other religions, particularly Muslims, have, in my opinion, gone astray. Besides, we grew up believing that Muslims are bad people who should not be associated with. Many people, as a result of their negative interactions with some Muslim brothers and sisters, have come to regard Muslims as adversaries who one should not frequent. All of this was due to a few fundamentalists among them who interpreted the Qur’an incorrectly.

We considered Muslims as the totally other, and Islam in particular as a terrible religion with nothing to do with peace, and as a mother who gave birth to all sorts of violence in the world. These thoughts arose as a result of the environment in which we grew up, where stories were told that included various forms of prejudice towards Islam and our Muslim brothers and sisters. In reality, we mistakenly believed that Christianity contained all of the truth about God, and we were unaware that it is God who gradually reveals himself to people. By the grace of God, all will be saved according to their deeds and faith.

Having grown up with this mindset, we often wonder if it has changed. Due to the countless acts of terrorism frequently connected with Islamic radicals, such as the agonizing destruction of the twin towers in the (United States of America) on September 11, 2001, countless suicide bombers in the Middle East, and violent groups in many Islamic and Christian nations, it is difficult for me to dismiss everything we have heard about Islam, especially through the influence of fanaticism, as false. However, this is not a different case with certain Christian Fundamentalists who claim to be peace lovers yet are not peacemakers. Always at the forefront of inciting violence, hatred, and wars are those to whom we have delegated the authority to make the world a better place to live. Thank God, the Church, via congregations such as the Missionaries of Africa, has helped me see the difference and overcome my biases against my Muslim brothers and sisters. We are all children of the same Almighty Father in Heaven.

Dialogue from a Catholic - Christian Perspective

After declaring its doctrine on the Church, the Sacred Council moved its desire for the re-establishment of harmony with non-Christian religions. Because of this goal, the Sacred Council debated and issued the declaration on the Church’s Relationship with Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*). The Council hoped to eliminate barriers between Christians and members of other faiths, including Muslims, in order to advance the Church closer to the unity that Christ desired for the Church. This Declaration went into force on October 28, 1965.

After reading the document “*Nostra Aetate*” and considering his few years of experience with the Missionaries of Africa in the Church, the author finds himself strongly challenged and encouraged to continue on the right path of seeing that people of other religions, particularly Muslim brothers and sisters, have a lot to contribute to his journey of faith. Islam as a religion is not as awful as has previously been believed and heard. In terms of the Church, there is no need for her to despise Islamic religion or other faiths because “through dialogue, which is part of the Church’s evangelizing mission, the Church seeks to uncover the ‘seeds of the Word,’ a ray of that Truth which enlightens all people”.¹⁴ *Nostra Aetate* also emphasizes emphatically:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlighten all men. Yet she proclaims and is duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2Cor. 5: 18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life (*Nostra Aetate*, 2).

This viewpoint, along with many other beneficial characteristics from other Christian faiths, has helped to reverse some Christians’ negative attitudes toward Muslims. Muslims, like Christians, are on a pilgrimage of faith, seeking answers to some of humanity’s most perplexing problems, such as the meaning of existence and the supreme God, as the Sacred Council has noted:

The church has also 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.¹⁵

The Sacred Council’s concept challenges Christians’ attitudes and convictions about Muslims: “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”.¹⁶

As a result, the Church asks all Christians to acknowledge, safeguard, and participate in discourse and collaboration with followers of other religions while witnessing to their faith and way of life. As a Missionary of Africa, a society that values dialogue with Muslims and people of other faiths, the author has benefited from being assigned to places where Muslims predominate. His first assignment was in Ghana, where he worked with young people and Muslim families. Their welcoming spirit, kindness, and charity assisted him in discovering a new side of Muslims. He discovered that some Muslims were just as good as some Christians.

Based on the issues raised above, as well as the author’s own experience, it can be said that most of the prejudices he had heard about Muslims are completely false. In fact, at the end of the day, Christians and Muslims are both members of God’s family: “This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people of the entire earth (cf. Acts 17:26) and also because they all share in a common destiny, namely God”.¹⁷

The Outcome of Dialogue

When two people, or Christians and Muslims, engage in dialogue, the outcomes are unexpected. The consequences can be either beneficial or detrimental to either one of the parties or the other. The article at this point will not linger on the negatives, but rather on the positive conclusion of the dialogue. Well, most of the time, dialogue produces beneficial outcomes and brings people together. The author believes in the

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter*, 55-56.

¹⁵ Austin Flannery, ed., *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions), Second Vatican II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, (Bombay: St. Paul’s Publication 1975). 3.

¹⁶ Pontifical Council For Interreligious Dialogue, “*Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)*”, (Boston: Pauline Books and Media 1997), 105.

¹⁷ Flannery, *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

coming together of Christians and Muslims:

Our engagement in [...] dialogue offers us the opportunities to move beyond the world of our respective confessions, to come to see the 'other' with the eyes of the 'other' their concerns, their hopes, their beliefs, and yes, also their complaints.¹⁸

Dialogue can lead to agreement. When Christians and Muslims engage in dialogue, previous differences are no longer seen as divisive, but rather as something to respect in one another. At the end of the day, dialogue helps Christians and Muslims settle on the oneness they both seek. Pope John Paul II stated: "dialogue leads to inner purification and conversion which, if pursued with docility to Holy Spirit, will be spiritually fruitful".¹⁹

Again, dialogue can bring to light the fact that both sides do not have to take opposing perspectives, but rather that both are confronted with an open question. Both Christians and Muslims benefit from dialogue in terms of better understanding their faith. Furthermore, by dialoguing, a new theological style is born. Brill defines this theology as: "'dialogic' and is distinct from positional"²⁰ because everyone tends to imitate, appreciate, and discern what is wonderful in each theology.

Examples of occasions where dialogue between Christians and Muslims resulted in favourable outcomes include a situation in Nairobi where gangs of youths organised themselves and went to a Roman Catholic Church called "Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish" on December 1, 2000, and set fire to the church and smashed the windows. The Church was burnt down to ashes and only a few pews were saved. This happened a day after another group burned down a mosque in a land dispute. This was one of the situations where dialogue succeeded. It was not a religious case, but when the Muslim community learned about it, it became religious. So, before the whole thing expanded to other towns, there was some kind of dialogue between the two parties, Christians and Muslims, to reconcile for the deed done and it worked out well.

Terry Jones can also be regarded as an example. Terry Jones, a pastor of the Christian Dove World Outreach Centre in Gainesville, Florida, claimed in July 2010 that he will burn 200 Qur'ans on the 10th anniversary of the September 11th attacks. He received widespread media attention, culminating in an international uproar over his plan and calls from world leaders to cancel the event. Jones's threat spurred protests across the Middle East and Asia, killing at least 20 people. Jones cancelled the event in early September 2010 and vowed not to burn a Qur'an.²¹ In this situation also a call for dialogue was crucial in resolving the disagreements. There are several examples of religious confrontations between Christians and Muslims that could be listed here, but there is a need to focus on just a few mentioned above. However, the examples provided do not imply that violence must be encouraged in order to engage in dialogue.

Last but not least, dialogue allows Christians and Muslims to uncover the real values contained in their religions in order to purify and elevate them by introducing positive principles that do not jeopardize the faith or livelihood of the other. In this way, Christ will be presented to non-Christians as a new creation rather than a stranger, and Christians will learn something from the other religions. To engage in dialogue is so to participate in God's ongoing work among Christians and other religions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The author makes some suggestions to help Christians and Muslims respect one another despite their differences. To begin, there is a need to intensify communication day by day rather than waiting until the matter is absolutely out of hand before discussing dialogue. Religious tolerance is required between Christians, Muslims, and people of other faiths. There is also a need for youths to be educated on how to promote interfaith discussion for brotherly living as they mature. When there is an interfaith gathering, it is possible to encourage and explore shared religious ideas. Not only is it necessary to move the interfaith conversation from an academic perspective or level of academia to contextual reality, but political leaders

¹⁸ Michel F. Thomas, *A Christian View of Islam: Essays on Dialogue*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books 2010), 9-10.

¹⁹ John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter*, 56.

²⁰ Brill, "Dialogue", *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 841.

²¹ Terry Jones, "We will not burn the Quran" msnbc.com and NBC News, September 11 (2010): 1, accessed on September , 30, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/39113743>.

and religious leaders of both Christians and Muslims must also be at the forefront of fostering meaningful interaction between Christians and Muslims. There should also be a shift in leaders' attitudes and perspectives toward the ambitions of all. Rather than fighting, the two groups should coexist and employ dialogue as a strategy or mechanism for conflict resolution. There is the need to set aside the various differences and work together to make the world a better place for the current generation and the future. A world free of religious misunderstandings that lead to wars is what everyone wishes for. A world free of hatred and violence, but full of joy, harmony, and tranquillity is crucial for development. The current generation has the key to the future. Therefore, fighting and killing one another is not going to assist in nation-building since all they will bring the current and future generations is sorrow. It is therefore expedient to always look for the image of God (Allah) in others. The author is of the view that it is past time for both religions to see each other as brothers and sisters rather than adversaries. In actual fact, both Christians and Muslims believe that practicing their faith is beneficial in the here and now since it is expected to assist in fostering peace and harmony among all people in general, as well as bring blessings in the here-after.

CONCLUSION

There is a need to respect and appreciate people of other religions. Christians and Muslims alike have the responsibility to promote the spirit of mutual understanding through dialogue. Violence is a phenomenon that is prevalent not only among Muslims but also among Christians. This agrees with the fact that the current division between Christians and Muslims is merely a symptom of what is rooted in the human heart, which is the meeting point of so many opposing forces²² and must be disarmed by the seed of love and the good news of both religions of loving one's friends and enemies.²³ To this end, dialogue is crucial as a tool for dismantling preconceived notions and artificial obstacles.

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²² Cf. Austin Flannery, ed., *Gaudium et Spes*, (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on December 7, (1965), Second Vatican II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, (Bombay: St. Paul's Publication 1975). 10.

²³ Cf. Mt 5:43-47.

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