

**THEATRES OF LOVE & THE NEXUS BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY & ISLAM: THE  
CASE OF GHANA**

**ABSTRACT**

Christianity and Islam have been locked up for centuries in a constant battle for land and souls. This struggle for turf has been responsible for countless wars that have resulted in huge losses, both human and material. For faiths that claim to represent peace, this is ironical. Fortunately, ever since the Second World War, there has been a lull in these battles for souls and supremacy, at least on a global scale. However within countries, there continues to be outbreak of hostilities between adherents of these faiths. This paper posits that there are enough grounds for adherents these faiths to live together in peace and harmony in spite of their competing truth claims. Using Ghana as an example, this paper explores the practical ways in which adherents of these faiths have managed to live together in love, peace and harmony. This paper concludes that there are areas of life, (which this paper designates as theatres of love) which make it easier for us to show love towards one another rather than animosity and hostility.

**Introduction**

Both Christianity and Islam purport to be religions of love. The Bible states in John 15:17 that “These things I command you, that ye love one another.” S.S Smalley stipulates that expressions of love like this are not to be limited to known and familiar believers but are commended and

encouraged when they are demonstrated toward strangers (traveling missionaries) too (Smalley:1978:12). Romans 13:10 confirms this non-discriminatory nature of Christian love when it states that “Love works no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” In the same vein, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should not hurt (trouble) his neighbor..." (Bukhari Vol That is why the Qur'an stipulates that the compulsory alms tax (*zakat*) shall be for the wayfarer and strangers in need too" (Q: 9:60).

In spite of these claims however, adherents of these faiths have not always shown love to each other. Both traditions assert the truth and validity of their teachings over the other. All who do not come under the saving grace of Jesus Christ are doomed to destruction, so states the Bible. “I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except by me” (John 14:7). In Islam God is believed to have perfected Islam as a religion for humankind generally and therefore “who so desires any other religion, other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter he will be among the losers” (Q: 3:85) The posture of these religions has led in the words of John Hick, to the creation of “rival ideological communities.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus the goal of these religions is to win converts into their fold. This desire for making converts of other people has often led not to the use of words and persuasion, but to the use of armor with the goal of subduing the other and gaining territorial advantage. Thus the Christian world has been to war severally with the Islamic world in what has become known as the crusades. Today the word crusade is used in relation to a Christian's evangelizing mission, especially to outdoor

events, in which a preacher makes manifest the saving grace of Christ through healing and other miraculous acts. Thus as a theological imperative, the swords of the crusaders and jihadists have largely been beaten into plough sheds. This notwithstanding, there are still huge numbers of Christians and Muslims who believe that the evangelizing principle in these faiths is very much alive and should be executed by every true believer of the faith, whether through words or swords.

Conflicts between Christians and Muslims are therefore very much alive in many parts of the world, especially in West Africa where politics tends to exacerbate these tensions. In Nigeria for example, hardly a year passes without a major clash between Muslims and Christians. In Ghana, the relationship between Christians and Muslims had been largely cordial and peaceful until the 1990s, when the upsurge of evangelization activities by both Christians and Muslims led to a few clashes in areas such as Kumasi, Sekondi and Walewale.<sup>4</sup> In Kumasi in 1995, a group of irate Muslim youth attacked and disrupted the preaching session of one Pastor Ahmed Adjei for in their view, misinterpreting the Qur'an. In Sekondi and Walewale, some churches were attacked for alleged acts of insubordination towards the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>5</sup>

For nearly two decades since these clashes took place, there has been relative calm as far as the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Ghana is concerned. This paper therefore examines the factors that have been responsible for this lull in hostilities between Christians and Muslims in Ghana. Certain areas of life have made co-operation and living together between Christians and Muslims inevitable. In other words there are certain areas of life that are staging

posts for love and friendship rather than for hatred and acrimony. These are the areas of life that I refer to as “theatres of love.” This is because they offer both Christians and Muslims the opportunity to demonstrate their common humanity and to show that “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). Within these theatres of love Christianity and Islam dissolve into one essence where Christians and Muslims acknowledge in deed rather than in words, that “we make no distinction between one and another...and we submit to Allah (God)” (Q:2:136).

### **Theatres of love**

The theatres of love that I have selected for this paper are in the areas of health care or healing, mosque or church activity, marriage and politics. Health is life. It is said that the most important requirements for human existence are food, air and water. But essentially, what these do is that they give us health and enable us to live. In other words, the essence of life is health. Therefore the prime concern of humans is to stay healthy. Thus humans will go to all lengths to obtain remedies for their maladies. The process of seeking remedies and the remedies that they actually get is what is generally termed as health care. According to Bonsi, health care practices, regardless of a society’s level of sophistication, are carried out within the context of the values and beliefs of that society.<sup>6</sup> Malcolm MacLachlan asserts that in health delivery, the care giver must acknowledge and give credence to the subjective experience and personal construction of the patient and his or her problems.<sup>7</sup> In this paper we shall see how health facilities as theatres of love, can acknowledge and give credence to the subjective experience and personal construction of patients (both Christian and Muslim) and their problems.

Churches and mosques are theatres of love. According to Dunn, the church is a place of fellowship and to him, people fellowship with one another by affirming their common bond in offering to one another and also to others as beneficiaries of their communion. This may be in the form of hospitality, welfare or some kind of support both spiritual and physical. In reverse form, it could also be related to enjoying or accepting some share of common support offered to people from a religious community.<sup>8</sup> When Prophet Muhammad migrated to Madina, the first edifice he built was a mosque.<sup>9</sup> Attached to the mosque, he built his place of residence and also a living quarter for the poor and destitute who had no homes to live. The church and the mosque are therefore avenues for the show of love and affection and this paper shall demonstrate how in Ghana the churches and mosques have been used for such expression of love towards one another.

Indeed there is no better forum or theatre for the expression of love than in marriage. The Qur'an has this to say about marriage. "And one of His signs is this, that He has created wives for you from among yourselves that you may find peace of mind in them, and He has put love and tenderness between you. In that surely are signs for a people who reflect" (Q:30:21). The Bible admonishes us to live joyfully with our wives whom we love all the days of our lives (Ecclesiastes 9:9). Therefore this paper shall examine how through Christian-Muslim marriages, the theatre of love is staged within the Ghanaian community generally.

According to Abdul-Hamid, "the politics of a nation is a major indicator of how well that nation is organized or perhaps disorganized."<sup>10</sup> An organized nation is one which has an inclusive

political culture that does not discriminate against its citizens on the basis of their identities, ethnic or religious. Al-Farabi asserts that a democratic nation is one that brings together the groups; both the base and the noble that hitherto existed separately.<sup>11</sup> Indeed in Ghana politics has become to a large extent, a theatre of love in which Christians and Muslims participate and in which their identities as Christians and Muslims are dissolved into the major political identities as either New Patriotic Party (NPP) or National Democratic Congress (NDC). In other words, within the various political traditions, there is huge solidarity and show of love between Christians and Muslims. Indeed all over the world today, Ghana is touted as a successful political model.

This paper shall demonstrate in practical terms, how Christians and Muslims demonstrate love towards one another in the theatres of health care, churches and mosques, marital homes and in politics. It is basically experiential in the sense that its point of reference is the writer's daily experience and encounter with Christians and Muslims as they go about their ordinary duties and expressing their common humanity rather than their identities as Christians or Muslims.

### **Relevance of this study**

Thus study is important especially for Africa because, peace is essential for development. Wars in Africa have left in their trail, only mayhem and destruction. Therefore if there is a community or nation of Christians which has managed to live in peace and harmony in spite of the

competing truth claims, that nation ought to be raised as a model for the rest of the world community.

The Qur'an actually states that you will find the nearest to the believers (Muslims) those who say "we are Christians... because amongst them are men devoted to learning and monks and because they are not arrogant" (Q: 5:82). The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that "both in this world and in the hereafter, I am the nearest of all the people to Jesus, the son of Mary..."<sup>12</sup>

It must therefore be a matter of concern, especially to scholars of religion, that adherents of these faiths are constantly locked in deadly wars for assertion and even sometimes for mere aggrandizement. In Madina, the Prophet fashioned out a charter that recognized the adherents of the Jewish faith resident in Madina, allowing them their freedoms and liberties. The Madinan charter even made room for adherents of the two faiths (Islam and Judaism) to assist one another in case there was an attack on one of them. If therefore Christians are described as the nearest to the Muslims, there must be a lesson in mutual co-operation and existence that can be learnt from the Madinan era. Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana certainly provide a model that virtually relives the Madinan experience.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The framework within which this study has been carried out is the dialogue of life theory. According to Samwini;

Dialogue of life in simple terms entails coexisting peacefully with “the other” in spite of obvious religious differences...in dialogue of life, people from different religious traditions live and interact in their everyday lives. Dialogue of life is a direct challenge to religious people, non-religious individuals, towns, and communities to accept one another no matter their differences in beliefs or practices.<sup>13</sup>

Dialogue of life according to Akinade is the everyday interaction that goes on between people of different faiths as they go about their normal duties. He avers that,

In many parts of southern Nigeria, there is a form of life that operates on practical and day-to-day terms. Christians and Muslims live next to each other, mingle freely in all aspects of human endeavour, meeting in the market place and on the streets, in schools and other institutions. Both Christians and Muslims are awakened every morning by the strident voice of the muezzin from the minaret of the mosque...Christians receive Christmas and Easter greeting cards from their Muslim friends...In this dialogue of life, Christians and Muslims are enriched by each other’s experience and spirituality, and strengthened by certain features of the faith of the other.<sup>14</sup>

Everybody lives within a community. Aristotle posits that “he who is without a city through nature rather than chance is either a mean sort or superior to man; he is without law, without hearth.”<sup>15</sup> Thus as we go about our activities in our cities, as we go to the market places, football parks, lorry stations and such other public places to conduct our daily businesses, we meet and interact with people of other faiths. That interaction builds camaraderie and understanding. It is this understanding on a personal everyday level that will ensure the peace between people of different faiths rather than yearly conferences. This is what the Ghanaian people have demonstrated over the years and that is what this paper now explores.

### **Health care**

Health is life. Therefore people would go to any lengths in order to get remedies for their maladies. Many Muslims in Ghana and perhaps elsewhere view western medicine as inherently Christian. Indeed in the northern parts of Ghana which is predominantly Muslim, all the specialist hospitals are mission hospitals and some of the doctors are priests. The Presbyterian Hospital in Bawku (in the Upper East Region) is a specialist hospital for eye care. There is the Baptist Medical Center in Nalerigu in addition to other specialist hospitals in Damongo and Saboba in the northern region.

In spite of this perception, patronage of the predominantly Muslim population of these hospitals is high. But this paper shall focus on one such private clinic in Tamale (the capital of the

northern Region) which typifies my thesis that when it comes to the quest for health and well being, the health facility becomes essentially a theatre of love. This private hospital is called the Shekhina Clinic. Its founder and director is David Abdulai Choggu. Attendants to this private facility are about 90% Muslim, yet Dr. Choggu as he is affectionately called has gone the extra mile to even incorporate and accommodate the religious sentiments of his patients into his medical practice. Dr. Choggu neither attempts to proselytise to his patients nor prevent them from expressing or practising theirs.

Thus, his Muslim patients have even put up a small mosque where they observe their Islamic prayers in congregation without any hindrance from the doctor or any other person. The patients' quarters or settlement is made up of round huts roofed with thatch. This is the traditional architecture of the Dagomba people of northern Ghana. Those coming from distant places as well as those requiring intensive care take residence in these houses.

People from towns whose citizens patronise the Shekhina clinic a lot have put up a number of these huts on which the names of the towns are written, so that patrons from those towns know that these are the huts in which they have to stay. Writing on medical practice in Dagbon,<sup>16</sup> Zakaria Seebaway makes the following statement about the Shekhina clinic;

no fees are charged for attendance, treatment or even surgery. Prescription drugs are also supplied free of charge. Furthermore Dr. Choggu, a product of the University of Ghana, who for several years served at the Mission

Hospital in Damongo, often dresses like any local Afa or Muslim clergy by wearing a zallabia, a long robe (corruption of the Arabic *jalbab*). He demonstrates by this that although he is a Christian he still values the culture of the vast majority of his people. He even has the Qur'anic inscription: "In the name of Allah the compassionate and the merciful" written across the front wall of his dispensary. Indeed, Dr. Abdulai has captured the hearts of all, especially mad people in Tamale, whose medical needs he attends to, in addition to feeding them regularly on a balanced diet.<sup>17</sup>

Whiles Muslim patients do not fail to patronize the services of the Christian Dr. Choggu, Christian patients also do not fail to seek succor from the Rashidiyya Islamic Clinic also in Tamale, whose proprietor and director does not discriminate between his Christian and Muslim patients. The Free Press Newspaper of September 3-9 1997 reported that Peter, a nineteen-year old student, had gone berserk with madness, and so, his father took him to the Rashidiyya Islamic Clinic for treatment. Peter was the son of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Tamale. Reporting on this incident, Seebaway states,

"because of his sudden violent behaviour that was posing a danger to everybody around, Peter was chained before being taken to Imam Rashid (the director of the Rashidiyya Islamic Clinic). No sooner had Imam read some Qur'anic verses and blown some air over him than he regained his self

composure. He was sent back home normal, without chains. He continued with the prescribed *Ruqya* and incense treatment at home and reported a week later for review, without any traces of the madness.”<sup>18</sup>

Ghana, like most African countries is awash with Christian faith healers and miracle workers. These faith and miracle healing sessions are patronised by both Muslims and Christians. Rev. Ebenezer Opambuor Yiadom is one of the popular faith healers in Accra and his healing sessions on the Spintex Road is patronised by both Muslims and Christians. Thus when it comes to seeking for health and well being, the place of healing, whether or not a Christian or Muslim is in charge is inconsequential and indeed whether or not the place of cure is a church or mosque is inconsequential.

### **Church or Mosque activity**

The voice of the *muezzin* wakes the Muslim at dawn, just as it does the Christian, reminding each of them that “prayer is better than sleep.” Perhaps in other parts of the world, a mosque in the middle of a predominantly Christian town where loud speakers echo unintelligible words five times a day will be considered offensive. Indeed it would be a potentially explosive matter. It is not so in Ghana.

At each Christian anniversary, be it Easter or Christmas, Christians host Muslims to reception in their homes, where they all share in the joy of the birth, death or resurrection of Christ. Christians pay their Muslim friends reciprocal visits during the Id festivities.(Id refers to the annual Muslim celebrations that follow the end of the Ramadan fast and the celebration that commemorates Abraham's abortive attempt to sacrifice his son Ishmael in obedience to God's command). Because of the dominance of Christianity in Ghana, most schools have adopted Christian liturgical practices as part of their morning and afternoon assembly rituals. Muslim children faithfully recite the Lord's Prayer at school before the start of classes and at the close of the day. For most schools in Ghana, church services are a weekly practice, to which both Muslim and Christian children attend. Muslim parents do not find this offensive and it has never been the source of disagreement between Muslim parents and school authorities.

Most of the public schools in Ghana are run under the various religious institutions, both Christian and Muslim. There are schools under the Catholic Education Unit, Presby Education Unit, Methodist Education Unit, Anglican Education Unit and Islamic Education Unit. In schools which are also run under the Islamic Education Unit and Senior High Schools run by Islamic institutions like the Ahmadiyya Movement, the *fatiha* is recited in lieu of the Lord's Prayer. *Fatiha* is the first chapter of the Qur'an and the most recited verse in Muslim ritual prayer. It is the equivalent of the Lord's Prayer in Islam. For Christian parents too, this has never been

reprehensible. At every gathering, congregation or meeting, opening and closing prayers are alternated between Christians and Muslims; if a Christian says the opening prayer, a Muslim says the closing and vice versa.

Recently, the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) celebrated its 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The ICGC is arguably the biggest charismatic movement in Ghana. The headquarters of the ICGC is at Abossey Okai in Accra. It is situated about 300 metres from the Nation's Central Mosque where the National Chief Imam Shaykh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu worships. To commemorate the anniversary of the church, Pastor Mensah Otabil, the founder and overseer of ICGC sought permission from the National Chief Imam to renovate the Central Mosque which had known no painting or renovation for so long. The National Chief Imam gave his consent and the ICGC renovated the Central Mosque.

A few Muslims raised eye brows about this matter but the National Chief Imam defended his action in the following words:

“I want after I am gone (dead) to leave a legacy of love, co-operation and goodwill between Christians and Muslims in this country. Besides, we are all descendants of Abraham and believe in one God. Furthermore, Christians pay for Muslims to go on the hajj (pilgrimage to Makka) each year; they give us food for our Ramadan fast; so what is the difference?

This gesture will help us maintain the cohesion and peace of our nation and  
I don't regret it nor do I owe anyone an apology."<sup>19</sup>

If there is any proof that the church and the mosque can be theatres of love, then this is it.

### **Marriage**

As has been stated already, perhaps the best and the obvious theatre of love is the institution of marriage. Both the Bible and the Qur'an state the purpose of marriage as love. Marriage is undoubtedly one of the instruments through which stability can be maintained in society. The Qur'an permits marriage between a Muslim man and a Christian woman.

This day are all things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. Lawful unto you in marriage are not only chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before time, and when we give them their dowers, and desire chastity, not lewdness, taking them as lovers..." (Q: 5:5).

This verse therefore envisages a situation where Christian-Muslim marriages can be lovely and fruitful. Indeed in Islam, the family is the bedrock of society. Thus if we have sound families, we would have a sound and peaceful society. Christian-Muslim marriages can therefore serve as a basis for creating a peaceful society of co-existence. The fact that we accept to marry somebody supposes that we commit to respecting their beliefs and that we commit not to put their rights, including their right to practice their religion in jeopardy. In a recent study on Christian-Muslim marriages in Ghana, Kuyateh dealt with 45 of such marriages in six suburbs of Accra alone. This shows that the incident of Christian-Muslim marriages in Ghana is rife and this certainly accounts for the peaceful co-existence of Christians and Muslims in Ghana. As to why they manage to live in peace and love in spite of their obvious religious differences, the respondents among other points mentioned the respect that they have for each other's beliefs, allowing the children to choose which religion they want to belong to and placing the love that they have for each other and their common humanity above what most of them described as "petty religious considerations."<sup>20</sup>

In the majority of these families, the girls follow their mothers to church, while the boys are Muslims with their fathers. The beautiful symmetry that this generates and radiates is better felt than told about. The institution of marriage is obviously a theatre of love through which healthy Christian-Muslim relationships can be nurtured.

## **Politics**

In Nigeria where Muslim and Christian conflicts are rampant, politics and politicians have often been blamed for fuelling these tensions and conflicts. In seeking to win the allegiance of adherents of one faith, politicians are said to incite them against the other. Thus political conflicts also assume religious dimensions. In Ghana, politics has for a long time rather served as the vehicle that has promoted inter-faith harmony between Muslims and Christians. In early 1954, the Muslims of Ghana formed a political party called the Muslim Association Party (MAP). Even though its battle cry was 'Islam!' "Islam!", the MAP welcomed two important and well educated Christians into its leadership. This obviously was meant to cure the deficit in education that the leadership of the MAP had. These were Bankole Awoonor Renner and Cobbina Kessie.<sup>21</sup>

Since then, the alliance between Muslims and Christians has permeated the dealings of all political parties in Ghana. For the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) and its antecedent parties there is an unwritten rule that guides them in the selection of their Presidential Candidates and running mates. Since 1979, parties of the Danquah-Busia stock have always chosen a Muslim as Vice-Presidential Candidate anytime a Christian has emerged as Presidential Candidate. In the 2000 Presidential and Parliamentary elections, the NPP actually won the

election and ruled for eight years with John Kuffuor (a Catholic) as President and Aliu Mahama (a Muslim) as Vice President. In 2008, its Presidential Candidate, Nana Akufo-Addo (a Methodist) chose Mahamadu Bawumia (a Muslim) as his Vice Presidential Candidate.

Defending the wisdom of that choice, the presidential candidate, Akufo-Addo argued that “if there is to be a major eruption in our country, it will certainly come from the Muslim north where poverty is rife. Thus it is important that the people (the Muslim north) are factored seriously into every political equation in order to maintain the unity and cohesion of our nation.”<sup>22</sup>

Even though Nigeria recently adopted this model as a way of maintaining the balance of power between its mainly Muslim north and Christian south, it failed to produce the desired harmony. President Olusegun Obasanjo and his Vice-President, Abubakar Atiku were not even on talking terms in the latter part of their second four year rule. Thus this power sharing formula will not necessarily guarantee peace, dialogue and stability except the parties involved are genuine and sincere. It will seem that sincerity is quite a scarce vocabulary in Nigerian political discourse.

In Ghana, anytime a Presidential Candidate is chosen for any of the political parties, he or she (so far there have only been men) partakes in both Muslim and Christian thanksgiving services. This was amply demonstrated recently when the NPP elected its Presidential Candidate for the 2012 polls. On Friday August 13 2010, the candidate, Akufo-Addo and the national officers of the party took part in the Friday Muslim worship at the Abossey Okai mosque, where they asked

for prayers from the National Chief Imam. This was followed by a Christian thanks giving service at the Ridge Church in Accra the next day, Saturday August 14 2010.

In most of the developed world, a lot of talk goes on about religious freedoms, but there is underneath this talk an inherent phobia for anything Islam or Muslim. In the 2008 electioneering campaign in the U.S, Republican campaigners spared no effort in reminding Americans that Barack Obama was also a Hussein. Indeed what they meant was that his father was a Muslim and perhaps that a leopard cannot completely shed its spots. The fact that Saddam Hussein had also become the demon of America made the name Hussein the more terrifying. One can only imagine what would have happened to Obama's political fortunes if on his campaign tour of Washington, he took time off to worship in the Washington mosque as an Akufo-Addo will comfortably do in the full view of television cameras in the central mosque in Tamale (Ghana). His presidency would have been gone with the *salaam* (the salutation that signals the end of Muslim ritual worship).

### **Obstacles to peace and dialogue**

Theatres of love in themselves cannot guarantee peaceful co-existence amongst adherents of Christianity and Islam. Adherents of these faiths must themselves work actively in spite of these theatres of love if total peace and harmony is to be achieved between adherents of these two

great religious traditions. In doing this however, adherents must beware of tendencies that can scuttle the intention to achieve peace and dialogue.

First of all, Muslims must themselves re-examine Islam as a political ideology. In the Madinan era, the *ummah* was almost exclusively Muslim. Even under those circumstances, the Prophet still found it expedient to cater for the interest and well being of non-Muslim communities, to the extent that the Madinan constitution guaranteed them the right to practice their faith and to be governed by laws other than Islamic ones. The insistence of Muslims in certain areas of the world, especially in Nigeria that Islamic law (*sharia*) must be the state law in a pluralistic African society is against the grain of dialogue. Muslims need to make adjustments regarding the universality and certainty of Islamic law. The bulk of what we call Islamic law (*sharia*) is the product of human reason (*ijtihad* and *qiyas*) rather than divine instruction. The fact that the Qur'an acknowledges the creation of humans into different communities for the sake of knowing one another presupposes the divine acknowledgement of our differences, which the Qur'an assures will be settled on the day of judgment. What it means is that it is not our business as Christians or Muslims to settle differences of faith.

Sincerity on the part of both Christians and Muslims is important for the promotion of dialogue and peace amongst adherents of these faiths. Most of the time those who profess to be promoting dialogue and peace between adherents of these faiths are themselves suspicious of the motives of their counterparts on the opposite side of the divide. M.A Bidmos in his book titled "Inter-

Religious Dialogue: The Nigerian Experience” had this to say about the motives of Christians in the dialogue process;

In Nigeria for instance, it was the missionaries who sponsored education which was for the dual purpose of conversion and provision of technocrats for the colonial rulers. The missionaries pursued their mission under the supervision and full support of the colonial rulers. Now that Africa and the rest of the Muslim nations have gained partial independence (otherwise known as political independence) Muslims are not sure whether the missionaries are coming back to Africa with another formula known as inter-religious dialogue. Is it not a possibility that the missionaries intend to use inter-religious dialogue as a bait in their characteristic manner as agents to deceive and lead unsuspecting Muslims into another round of slavery?<sup>23</sup>

Attitudes like this, rather than promoting dialogue and peace, divide and accentuate the differences. It is important that parties to Christian-Muslim dialogue come to the dialogue with genuineness and openness rather than with suspicion.

Perhaps it is important to end with the so-called “Islamophobia” that has gripped the world, especially since September 11 2001 when Islam and terrorism have become synonymous. Most of this phobia is misplaced and unnecessary. Every legal regime has a penal code. Therefore to single out the penal code of Islam as the basis to be terrified of Islam and all Muslims promotes

the gulf between these faiths rather than bringing them together. Especially so because most of what is bandied around as Islam is the patriarchal interpretation that male exegetes of the Qur'an have placed on it. They are as I have stated already, products of *ijtihad* and *qiyas* rather than the primary stipulations of the Qur'an and Sunnah (standard practices of the Prophet Muhammad).

### **Conclusion**

There is more that unites Christians and Muslims than divides them. In this paper I have tried to glean some of these uniting factors. What is interesting and gratifying is that these factors of unity are with us on a daily basis in our homes and communities. We need only to leverage these factors to ensure that the love of God which both faiths profess, and which does not discriminate, will transcend our communities. However love will not be ignited automatically within these theatres of love. Rather, love will be ignited if the adherents of these faiths adopt the openness and liberality that will allow these theatres of love to function as such. Muslims must re-examine the *sharia* in a world of plural values. Christians must shed the phobia about Islam and understand that every legal regime has a penal code and that *sharia* does not literally and automatically mean the cutting of heads and limbs. More importantly, adherents of these faiths must approach one another with a purity of heart and a sincerity that is devoid of suspicion and mistrust.

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