

## **Muslim Perception of Christians in History and its Effects on Current Christian-Muslim Relations in Kenya**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Christians and Muslims have a long history of co-existence with each other. In Kenya, the relationship between these two religions has been sometimes friendly while other times hostile to each other. The ground of difference borders on doctrinal and ethical issues. In the recent past, there have been killings in some places of Kenya such as in shopping malls, universities, and in public service vehicles. The Muslim communities have often come out strongly to defend or distance themselves from these unfortunate incidences of loss of life. Christians on the other hand more often than not felt suspicious of such heinous acts. But times of cooperation in community services have also been evident between them. This oscillating relationship has been very unpredictable and sometimes worrying. In this paper, the researcher looks into the history of how Muslims have perceived Christians ethically, theologically, and politically. How this relationship has affected their present relationship with each other has also been reviewed. The main objective is to develop approaches that will bring meaningful understanding between these two religious groups. The findings reveal that the difference between Christians and Muslims is due to their past experiences. It can, however, be resolved by bringing an understanding on each side about the need to appreciate the value of diversity. Research into elements that might make these two religions co-exist alongside each other uninterruptedly is highly recommended to be carried out.

Key Words: Christians, Muslims, History, Relations, Perception, Effects

### **Introduction**

Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, which are considered to have common roots, have existed for many centuries alongside each other. Their commonality can be traced to the promise God gave to Abraham that he will be the father of many nations (Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-6). This promise of God to Abraham was fulfilled by the birth of Ishmael and Isaac (Gen 16: 21). Whereas this promise was for the descendants of Isaac (the Jews) and the descendants of Ishmael (the Arabs), Christians are children of Abraham by faith as stated in the Bible. “Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7). The paradox is that whereas Christianity, Islam, and Judaism have Abraham as their father, history tells us that over the centuries to the present age there have been political, social, economical, and spiritual conflicts, which have never been resolved. The common ancestry roots shared by the three dominant religions have also been traced by various authors (Armour 2002; Braswell 1996; Goddard

2000; Jamieson 2006). Whereas the above-mentioned authors have also included Judaism, their main focus seems only to be on both Christianity and Islam. Kendu Bay in Western part of Kenya is where Christians and Muslims have existed alongside each other for years. The findings give a picture of what is happening in the rest of the country.

Christians and Muslims interestingly have existed well with one another for many centuries as Abdul-Haqq confirms that; “From the beginning, Christians have been neighbors of Muslims. Christian life and thought have influenced Islam from its very inception and through the early formative centuries” (Abdul-Haqq 1980, n.p). The focus of this study will be therefore to describe how Christianity and Islam have co-existed together, the perception of Muslims toward Christians, and its missiological implications for Christian witnesses. The researcher holds an assumption that even though human beings can express different worldviews and opinions, they can still respect each other, love, and live together as a people of God. Even though there was a time in history that Christians and Muslims could live together in peace, this was in most cases temporal. Register states the historical situation that existed between Christianity and Islam:

The history of relations between Christianity and Islam may be divided into three periods... In the first two periods, the relationship was more a confrontation than a dialogue. The first period began with the spread of Islam in the seventh century A.D and continued until the beginning of the crusades (c. 632-1095). The second period began with crusades and ended at the beginning of the twentieth century (c.1095-1906). A new approach of Islam began to emerge under the impact of the enlightenment. (1979, p. 10-11)

The problem that existed in the relationship between Christians and Muslims was that both sides were looking at each other with suspicion. Equally important was the fact that both parties were simultaneously on the offensive and defensive sides. Even though there was a period of enlightenment whereby Islam was given a new approach by some Christian leaders, it was a short lived one. Generally speaking, Christian-Muslim relations have been more of enmity than friendly as confirmed by Gaudeul. “For centuries Christians and Muslims have regarded each other as rivals and, very often, as enemies. Relations between them have been determined, not by friendship, but by force” (Gaudeul 1999, p. 21). In some places where the relationship was forced into existence, it ended up breaking sooner than expected. A good example is in the case of marriage. Forced marriages have ended up dissolving sooner than expected. The prevailing atmosphere of hatred and animosity between Christians and Muslims in their relationships has a great bearing on not only how Muslims perceived Christians not only in their early centuries of interaction but also today. In line with the Great Commission, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19), Christians have to work out their relationships with the Muslims despite the past bad history in such a way that would bring about the salvation of the Muslims. To bring about a good relationship that is conducive for gospel sharing, Christians must be ready to know and to evaluate what Muslims perceive of them in the light of God’s word. The researcher will therefore present the Muslims’ perception of Christians in history and how Christians can positively use such perceptions as bridges to evangelism. But before that, there is a need to provide a brief history of how Islam came into Kenya.

### **The Spread of Islam in Kenya**

Although Islam tends to have had an influence in the early centuries along the African Coast, it was Christianity that mostly penetrated the interior parts of Kenya in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, it was during that time that the earnest interest in Islam in the interior parts of Kenya began. As history puts it, the spread of Islam moved very first especially after the death of Muhammad in 632 A.D. The champions behind its spread to Asia, Europe, and Africa were the caliphs (Braswell 1996, 23-41). Ayoub, besides providing similar facts on the spread of Islam from Arabia to Africa, also provides the basis by which Islam thrived in Africa. He is more categorical than “Islam founds its roots in Africa due to its similar cultural practices with the African traditional religions” (2004, p. 97; cf. Kim 2004, p. 9). But on the other hand, Trimmingham credits the spread of Islam to trade (1964, p. 38).

Although the spread of Islam to various parts of Africa happened in different periods, of particular interest is how it spread to Kenya. Braswell while writing on the history of Islam and its basic pillars, recounts that the “Isma’ili branch of Shi’ite Islam came from India to plant large settlements of Muslims in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania and also in the Durban in the Natal” (1996, p.38). This partly concurs with Parrinder’s view that the “first Muslims in East Africa are said to have been Shi’a refugees who in the eighth century arrived from Southern Arabia, and they were followed in the next century by Orthodox Sunni Muslims from Shiraz in Persia” (1969, p. 195). From the above authors, it is quite clear that Shi’ites Muslims were fast to dominate the East African Coast. But since the majority of the Muslims present in Kenya today are the Sunnis, it could be that they overtook the Shi’ites and established themselves. Trimmingham calls Islam the religion of the Northern Sudan, Arabia, and the coastal region of Kenya (1976, p. 30). The coastal regions of Kenya that Trimmingham writes about are the Mijikenda (nine ethnic groups) communities. It was again from here that Islam further moved into other parts of Kenya such as Mumias and Kendu Bay.

Although Kenya is still a Christian-dominated country with eighty percent of its population professing Christian faith, Islam is fast growing in many of its towns and cities. The recent constitutional review that saw the inclusion of *Kadhi* courts into the constitution sparked up unrest and suspicion as far as Christian-Muslim relations are concerned in Kenya. The argument which was being advanced by the Christians as the basis of their suspicion on Muslims was that since Kenya is a secular state, there was no need to entrench *Kadhi* courts into the constitution. This was regarded as religious biases and discrimination against other religions. The influx of Muslims into various government positions has also been raising some eyebrows in the Christian camp. This paper deals with the Muslim perception of Christians in history and how that has affected their present relationship particularly in Kenya.

### **Muslim Perception of Christians in Kenya**

The relationship between Christians and Muslims was very close right from the time of Muhammad because of his marriage and friendship ties with Christians:

[Muhammad’s] first wife introduced him to her Christian cousin; one of his later wives had embraced Christianity in Abyssinia, and the most favoured of his concubines was a

Christian damsel from the Copts of Egypt. He was acquainted with ascetic monks and had dealings with learned bishops of the Orthodox Church (Ahmad 1988, p. 126).

Even though it can be said that through contacts with the Christians Muhammad was exposed to the Christian Scripture and their way of life, on the other hand, Christians did not recognize Muhammad as a prophet as Chapman explains that:

During the lifetime of Muhammad, Muslims were genuinely surprised by the fact that Christians and Jews did not recognize him as a prophet, and Muslims to this day remain puzzled by the reluctance of Christians to acknowledge Muhammad's prophethood (Chapman 1998, p. 22).

As Chapman argues, one of the reasons for conflicts and confrontations between Muslims and Christians which is still evident to date has been the failure of Christians to recognize the prophethood of Muhammad. It is appropriate for the researcher to argue that the Muslims' perception of Christians has always been on ethical, theological, and political grounds. Following this argument, the researcher will examine the perception of Muslims under three different categories as ethical, theological, and political perceptions. But while looking at these different categories of perception, it is important to point out that history has never changed. The Christian-Muslim relationship that exists today in Kenya has a lot of similarities with what history holds. This perhaps should provide both sides with the opportunity to examine the past to change the present. But if there is a set of people who should take the first step towards having a dialogue which is aimed at restoring a harmonious co-existence between the two religions, then it is the Christians.

### **Ethical Perception**

Apart from the fact that Muslims are hostile against Christians because Christians have failed to recognize Muhammad as the prophet, there are other several Muslim ethical perceptions towards Christians that the researcher wishes to explore. Christians in some cases were regarded as unclean by some sects of Islam as Elder puts it. "Among Shi'a Muslims, unbelievers are considered unclean and defiling. Even today a villager may refuse to shake hands with a non-Muslim, or decline to drink tea in a Christian home" (1978, p. 84). Elder has not clearly stated why Muslims perceived Christians as unclean but this can be attributed to the fact the Qur'an only recognizes a Muslim as a true follower of Allah and believes in Muhammad as his prophet. "Verily, your 'wali' is none other than Allah, His prophet and the believers-those who perform As-Salat and give Zakat, and they are Raki'un" (Sura 5:55). Therefore, according to the Muslims, anybody who could not follow the prescribed practices in the Qur'an was regarded as unclean. This Muslim belief is similar to what the Pharisees told Jesus about his disciples eating with unwashed hands (Mk 7:1-5).

Christians are also regarded as gluttons who cannot even skip a meal like the Muslims do during the period of Ramadan where they exercise self-denial and endurance in appreciation to God for his supply, as Cragg rightly explains that: "Christianity is often reproached by Muslim writers for its alleged renunciation of this world. It errs in asking too much of human nature and so remains either unsound or an unfulfilled, ideals" (1985, p. 106). This allegation comes from the fact that in Christianity there are no structures like Ramadan that they can learn to endure and

discipline the body but instead keep on wanting more and more of this world. Christians are also perceived to be part of western civilization, which has not only exploited the world but also dominated the world with her ideologies as Cragg further explains. “Many Muslim writers, past, present, upbraid Christianity for its failure to discipline and control western civilization. It has not checked imperialism or corrected exploitation. It is, on the contrary, implicated in aiding and abetting Western dominance in the world. Even its missions are seen as a form of religious imperialism” (Cragg 1985, p. 293).

In the mind of some Muslims, it is impossible to separate the West from the Church. President Bush's master plan of eradicating terrorism was widely perceived by Muslims to be the Christian master plan of eradicating Islam in the world. Christian principles of living have also been regarded by Muslims as impossible ideals hence Christians are simply pretending to follow those ideals. This is further expounded by Cragg who says that; “Christianity is absolved from positive implication by a contrasted charge of aloofness and withdrawal. It is a religion of high ideals and absolutist ethics, impossible of attainment in this world” (Cragg 1985, p. 293)

According to this theory, Muslims argue that Christians set standards, which are not only impossible for others to follow but even themselves they do not follow them. Muslims have been very keen on watching the lives of Christians to see if what they confess is true to their way of life. Indeed Christians have failed in some areas to produce the fruit which is in line with the faith they profess. Christians have been perceived by Muslims to be divided and sometimes such kinds of divisions amongst Christians split over in public to the disgrace of the Church. Cragg comments that; “Christians are still divided over too many issues for too little reasons” (Cragg 1985, pp. 300-1). Muslims also claim that Christians have never treated them well. This was more evident especially during the ninth century of the crusades, which truly traumatized the majority of Muslims. Muslims have practically demonstrated the worthiness of humanity in terms of helping the less privileged in society. This has rendered the Church powerless in terms of practical love which it should uphold as Cragg observes:

This is the inward tragedy, from the Christian angle, of the rise of Islam, the genesis and dissemination of a new belief that claimed to displace what it had never effectively known. The state of being a stranger to the Christ of Christians has been intensified by failures of love and loyalty on the part of institutional Christianity in the long and often bitter external relations of the two faiths through the centuries (Cragg 1985, p. 219).

One of the reasons why Muslims advocate to Islamize states is the belief that Christians who have been in leadership positions have failed to stop corruption and human injustice and given the chance, Muslims can restore justice in the nations of the world where they rule. Christians in the Muslim world such as in Kendu Bay were regarded as of low class compared to their Muslim counterparts as Goddard explains that: “Christians and Jews were seen as second-class citizens within the Islamic world, to be manifestly lower than Muslims in terms of prestige and social position” (Goddard 2000, p. 67). No Christian would be given a prestigious job because of the way they were perceived to be inadequate in such social circles. The perception of Muslims towards Christians was not only on the ethical ground but also theological.

## Theological Perception

Theological perception of Muslims towards Christians can be based on what Muslims claim to the subversion of faith by the white missionaries in the pretence of alleviating the human suffering and using dubious ways to convert Muslims to Christianity as Mohammed puts it:

It was the arrival of the Christian missionaries in the company of European colonizers that tensions developed. These tensions developed because the prime concern of the Christian missionary enterprise seems to have been the subversion of the faith that the fullness of God had appeared in Jesus Christ and convincing others of this by words and deeds of love, the missionaries engaged in unfair practices to convert Muslims to Christianity. For example, they targeted the poor, the sick, and the immature and offered them economic assistance, medical aid, and education. In the Muslim experience Christian mission was not something holy and noble (1999, p. 72).

Even today, many Muslims believe especially where there are white missionaries that they are teaching wrong doctrines about Christ and using money to win others to their Christian religion. They perceive that Christianity is a religion of the white man and that anybody who professes Christ has been given money to be a Christian. The researcher was once confronted by a Muslim during person-to-person evangelism who told him that he was evangelizing for the ‘Mzungu’ (a white) to give him money. Some Muslims also believe that the Bible is a white man’s book and therefore full of what pleases him only. Doctrinal issues concerning the meaning of the Church have not only divided Christians but also have become a point of defense of Muslims against Christianity. “The meaning of the Church is more often ‘caught’ than taught. Too many theologians and ecclesiastics have gone astray in the past seeking to locate the true Church, when they should have sought simply to be it” (Cragg 1985, p. 301).

Muslims understand Christians to be worshiping three gods every time Christians talk of Trinity as Riddell and Peter explain concerning the way Muhammad understands the Christian Trinity:

What he (Muhammad) seems to have found most objectionable in Christianity was its doctrine of the trinity, which looked to him like tritheism. It seems as though he thought of the Christian Trinity as Father; Mary and their son Jesus” (Riddell & Peter 2004, p. 75-6).

The Muslim understanding of the Christian Trinity is further exemplified in the Qur’anic Scriptures (Sura 4:171; 5:116). The Muslim perception of Christian worship of three gods must have come from the way the Church at that time was using the symbols of Mary in their worship as the mother of God. This is confirmed by Register who states: “The prominence of Mary in the worship and icons (images or pictures) of the Byzantine Church may have led to the assumption that she was on an equal basis with Jesus and being worshiped as a god with him” (1979, p. 28).

The understanding of Muslims that Jesus is the Son of God as Christians claim is mostly understood in the physical sense as Saal argues:

Most Muslims are convinced that Christians worship three gods. They commonly believe that the Christian Trinity consists of God the Father, the Virgin Mary, and Jesus. Muslims suppose that Christians understand Jesus to be the Son of God in a

human, physical sense. It is not unusual for Muslims to accuse Christians of believing that God had a wife, Mary and that Jesus was born as a result of their physical union. (1993, p. 64)

The birth of Jesus was a mystery that cannot be comprehended with the finite mind of man. Whereas Christians regard Muslims as unregenerate and in need of salvation, Muslims equally wish for Christian conversion to the Islamic faith which Muslims claim to be the only true religion. This was evident in what the leader of Libya, Muammar Qaddafi said during the Lebanese civil war between Christians and Muslims which lasted twenty years without a solution. He said that: "I hope there is a new generation of Lebanese Christians who will wake up one day and realize Arabs cannot be Christians and Christians cannot be Arabs, so then they will convert to Islam and be true Arabs" (Gabriel 2002, p. 84). The Muslims argue that Christians have corrupted the gospel so much so that the Christian gospel does not adequately address the issues surrounding the position of Jesus in terms of his prophethood as Cragg further explains that: "Islam, then, as Muslims see it, has arrived, whereas Christianity has fallen short. If therefore, we wish to know what the religion of the prophet Jesus was truly meant to be, we go, not to the existing Gospels, which are themselves corrupted by the disloyalty of Christians and the deviations of their impure faith, but to the Qur'an" (Cragg 1985, p. 219). The mission and the death of Jesus on the cross to bring salvation to mankind have been very controversial issues in Christian evangelism to the Muslims. Therefore the Church is perceived by Muslims to be misconstrued by these doctrines of Christ and salvation and therefore Islam as a religion works to correct these errors as explains Cragg: "Islam claims that in its historic faith the Church has misconstrued the mission of Jesus. In as much as these 'errors' involve the central points of the Christian understanding of Jesus-his incarnation and his death upon the cross-the issue admits of no reconciliation. The Muslim sees Islam as correcting Christian 'distortion' of Jesus and God" (1985, p. 219). The perceptions of Christians by Muslims are not only on an ethical and theological basis but also on political.

### **Political Perception**

The Western colonialists and Christians were regarded by Muslims as one thing. Christians were known to have strong political influence. This is also true in the contemporary world especially in countries such as Kenya where those who are in power have been mainly Christians. As Christians rule, Muslims are convinced of unfair distribution of natural resources and even being denied employment on religious grounds. The political perception of Muslims by Christians in the contemporary world is a projection of a long-standing assumption that the whites are against Islam and since they came to rule other countries, they came also with Christianity which can never be independent of political biases. Cragg sheds more light here when he says:

They (Muslims) tend inevitably to identify Christianity with the Lands where it was traditional and whence material and political domination came...The faith of the Christian Church, as Muslims have read it in the behaviour and the attitudes of western powers, western commerce, and western culture has been deeply and sadly obscured, sometimes entirely dimmed (1985, p. 240)

In the light of what Cragg has said, Muslims perceived Christians just in the same way they regarded western powers as people who are not out to spread Christianity but rather as exploiters and political masters. Christians were also perceived as people who have borrowed the western culture and used political power to impose their culture on everybody. Even though Muslims have very negative perceptions of Christians, the Qur'an, and even history tell us of instances where Christians were regarded as friends (Sura 5:82). Al-Masih, in his statement about Muhammad, states that:

Muhammad marvelled at the followers of Christ even in his hatred! As soon as Muhammad heard about the death of the Negus (a Christian) in Ethiopia he prayed the official prayer for the burial of Muslims for him which was meant only for faithful Muslims (1995, p. 138).

As has been outlined, the Muslim perception towards Christians is not negative. But while admitting that it would be impossible to erase such negative perception, Christians have a task in bringing about a harmonious relationship between them and Christians but at the same time not compromising on the ideals of their faith. Such ideals include the need to uphold the Great Commission but at the same time remain committed to peace and reconciliation building with other faiths.

### **Conclusion: Missiological Implications**

In response to how Muslims perceive them, Christians must first of all be willing to admit their failures in evangelism against the Muslims as Cragg puts it that:

It is a Christian principle to be radical with ourselves and to make the diagnosis of sin into religion itself with no areas of spirit or mind immunized from the reproach that calls to repentance. We must recognize what failure implies for the religion so failing, and not seek evasive exoneration in reprobating its confessors (1985, p. 294).

Cragg argues that Christians must be very sincere and open in confessing their sins to the Muslims since in their long history of co-existence; Christians acted brutally against the Muslims especially during the period of the crusades. Muslims have seen Christians in the past and even in the present to be divided. The claim by the Muslims about the divisions among Christians needs not to be denied but rather openly and sincerely accepted as a Christian failure as Cragg affirms that: "The interpreter's duty is frank honesty with what we have failed to be and a frank sincerity about our vocation among Muslims" (1985, p. 301). It is not enough for Christians to admit their failure in unity among themselves but also to take radical and positive steps towards demonstrating Christian unity in love just as Jesus commanded (John 15). When Christians begin to demonstrate true unity, the result will be the love of God to the Muslims of which without it, it becomes impossible to win the Muslims as Parshall comments that: "The Muslims and other non-Christians can only be won with love, not by force. Flies come to honey, not to vinegar" (1980, p. 255).

Other than engaging Muslims in arguments about the Christian faith and doctrine, Christians need to demonstrate through their practical living that they are indeed the true disciples of Jesus and this must surface everywhere and in every part of their lives. Our Christian

way of life in Christ will be in itself a testimony that will draw others to the same faith that we profess as Cragg explains:

Let us strive to conform our homes, our lives, our professions, our offices, our leisure, and our affairs, to the allegiance of Christ so that others may take knowledge of him in what we have allowed his grace to make of us. Though the Church must surely explain its concepts, the bearings of its life, its origins, and its nature, it will most surely communicate itself in the men and women in whose hearts its doctrines of grace have become personal hospitality to the needs and fears and hopes of their fellows. In this way, others take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus and that they are still in his company. In this way, the Church is discovered and in the Church all the rich meanings of God, the scripture, the cross, and the Christ, which constitute its life in history and compel it still into a mission to the world (1985, p. 301-20).

Our Christian relationships with the Muslims on a personal basis, inviting them into our homes and opening up our lives to them, obviously will draw a different picture of how different, loving, and caring we are as Christians. This will do well to clear their doubts and negative perceptions that they have against Christians. Gaudeul narrates a story of a Muslim man who had such an impacting experience with a pastor:

From day to day I found myself more drawn to the pastor, his love, his truthfulness, his pious life, his meekness, and his honesty affected me deeply. I used to listen to his conversations as many as came to him. I weighed every bit of it in the balance of reason. I could see how true his points were and how weighty his arguments were, but above all, his life was a decisive witness to what he said (1999, p. 129).

Christians are admonished in the Bible to remember where they have fallen and return to their first love (Rev 2:4-6). In the same manner, Christians in their relationships with the Muslims should remember where they have failed and restore the lost image with deeds of love as Cragg explains:

Among the factors contributing to the rise of Islam was the failure of the Christian Church. It was a failure in love, in purity, and fervour, a failure of the spirit. Truth, as often before and after, was involved to its hurt in the spirit of its trustees. Islam developed in an environment of imperfect Christianity and later by its inner force gathered such strength as to become, and remain, essentially at odds with the pure faith beyond the imperfection (1985, p. 219).

As Christians respond in love to the perceptions of Muslims towards them, theological issues that are sometimes misinterpreted and misunderstood by Muslims can be corrected in a dialogue process. Christians, therefore, need to have a working knowledge of the Qur'an so that in their dialogue with Muslims, they can prove facts from the Qur'an. One area that is greatly misunderstood by the Muslims is about Trinity. As much as Muslims express shock about God, Mary, and Jesus as three persons in the Trinity, in our Christian response, we should express the same concern and indicate the proper understanding as Register indicates that; "We too can agree

with Muhammad that Jesus never intended for us to believe in himself as two gods. God alone is to be worshiped, through Jesus Christ, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We must describe our understanding of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a personal way” (1979, p. 39). Regarding the birth of Jesus, Christians can show the Muslim friend the link as is explained in both the Qur’an and the Bible (Sura 19:35ff; cf. Lk 1-2; Matt 1-2). The Muslims understand the birth of Jesus in a physical sense based on Qur’anic scriptures such as Sura 4:171; 5:72-73; 5:116; 112:1-4; and 6:102. However, Christians should be quick to correct that misunderstanding as Saal points; “[T]hat understanding is also blasphemy to the Christian. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the Son from eternity, fully God and full man, born in human flesh by a miracle of the Holy Spirit, not by physical procreation” (1993, p. 69). Some Muslims are afraid to confess the Christian faith partly because of the cold response the new converts from the Muslim background have received in the past that have made many of them deny their Christian faith and as a result, have to go back to Islam. Christians, therefore, need to show hospitality especially to the new converts that supersede that one of Muslims as Gaudeul, explains:

Like every human being, converts need natural human friendship and hospitality. This is particularly the case with those who come from societies in which hospitality is the traditional expression of family and social bonds. It is therefore very desirable that converts find a group within the Church which is trying to live some kind of community ideal (1999, p. 290).

Many Muslims have observed that Christians have no ethical respect for their holy bible. In our Christian witness to the Muslims, the due respect we give to the bible in the way we handle it is in itself a living testimony to our Muslim friends that indeed the bible is a holy book that can be relied upon. Saal confirms this when he says that; “Muslims treat the Qur’an with utmost reverence, out of consideration that it is a heavenly book descended from God’s presence; they expect Christians to treat the Bible in the same way” (1993, p. 155). Instead of Christians arguing with the Muslims over the contentious doctrinal issues in the bible about the divinity of Christ and the Trinity and about the weaknesses of Muhammad which in many cases lead to quarrels and fights, Christians can use the good relationships they have with the Muslims to build them up by sharing with them biblical stories. Biblical stories make Muslims identify with the biblical characters and also draw them new to God as Saal further explains that; “You might introduce your friend to the gospel and the bible by telling an interesting story. This is an effective approach because it makes use of a common Muslim practice of clothing truth a parable or anecdote” (1993, p. 170).

Our Christian understanding of Muslims will enable us to appreciate them the way they are and not have a judgemental attitude towards Muslims even if they recently had a negative perception of Christians and their faith. Therefore, Challen is right when he says:

We must realize that even though they may have many misconceptions about the Christian faith, Muslims have been taught them from childhood. These ideas are therefore ingrained into their thought –patterns. As a result, their prejudices are very deep-seated. It is only as we appreciate them that they can only change these perceptions at great cost to their personal feelings of security, and even personal integrity, that we may begin to appreciate in some measure the immensity of our task (1988, p. 80).

There is no easy way to go about creating a harmonious relationship with Muslims. But as Paul puts it, Christians should make every effort (Eph. 4: 3) to ensure that history does not repeat itself. However, this should be done in a way that would compromise the gospel. Exposing people to the truth of the gospel and encouraging maximum participation in peace and reconciliation forums are other good grounds that the church can take the advantage of.

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