

JESUS RESPONSE TO ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE IN AFRICAN CONTEXT

Ikyernum Sachia Ephraim

(B.A (Hons) Religious Studies, BSU, M.A New Testament, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. Provost, Kingdom of God Evangelical Bible College (KOGEBIC), Ibadan
ephraimikyernum@gmail.com, +2348142136603

ABSTRACT

Various individuals, scholars and ecumenical organizations have made attempts at addressing the issue of religious conflicts; a situation that has resulted in the killings of innocent people in the name of faith affiliations. While some chose the comparative dialogue method to expose to adherents of various faiths that what they are practicing is the same, but in a different approach, others chose the use of ecumenical centres such as Inter-religious Dialogue Commission, Liberian Council of Churches and Islamic Study Group of Nigeria (ISGON) among others to advocate for peace. However, the Jesus approach to solving religious conflicts has often been neglected or not properly looked into. This is the gap created that this paper intends to fill. Using the secondary sources of data collection, this paper will use the evaluative method of important scriptures to expose to readers and concerned peace brokers that this is the mind of Christ on religious crisis cum conflicts in the African context. The paper recommends that the issue of peaceful co-existence with different religious faiths lies with the relationship with one's neighbour as revealed by Christ, when he said in Mathew 22:29: And the second is like it 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself 'δὲ δευτέρα ὁμοία αὐτῇ Ἀγαπήσεις σου πλησίον ὡς σεαυτὸν'

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INTRODUCTION

Before the coming of Christianity and Islam into the African continent, the region was relatively peaceful, owing to the fact that each tribe or ethnic group had their own religious affiliation that had no concern with winning converts from other territories to their own faith. The mode of worshipping God was unique and peaceful and each clan or dynasty was more concerned of achieving harmony with God and the ancestors, who in return will pour blessings on their family, livestock, crops and trade. But as soon as Islam and Christianity emerged into the African region, the struggle for converts especially among the gentiles and even among themselves became so intense that this resulted in various religious disharmony, crisis and killings and destruction of lives and properties.

In the attempt to bridge peace and restore order, various concerned individuals, scholars and ecumenical centres among adherents of Christianity and Islam were therefore set up in a bid to resolving the crisis, however, the Jesus approach to solving religious conflicts has often been neglected or not properly looked into. This is the gap created that this paper intends to fill. This

paper will therefore start by looking at the various approaches to Religious harmony by other individuals, concerned scholars and organizations before looking into the Jesus response to religious harmony and finally the conclusion.

VARIOUS APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS HARMONY BY OTHER INDIVIDUALS, CONCERNED SCHOLARS AND ORGANIZATIONS

- **The role of Comparative Religious Scholars:** in an attempt to bridge peace among various religious faiths within the African region, certain scholars from comparative studies decided to compare and contrast the various practices of Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion; bringing out their similarities and advocating that there is need for peace because their belief system is actually the same. Among the points they highlighted includes:
 - i. **The Belief in God:** That; all the three religions belief in the Supreme Being. In African Traditional Religion, there is a belief in the concept of God; but is attributed with different names from their diverse ethnic groups (Awolalu, 1995). They believe that God is the all powerful. This reality of the Supreme Being is also found in Islam who call God *Allah*, the sustainer and creator of mankind. This means that *Allah* is only one, the singular cause and initiator of all planet and everything, living and non-living that are on them (Shittu, 2015). Christianity as well belief in the supremacy of God who is accorded with different names like *Yahweh*, *Elohim*, among others. They believe he has no beginning and will have no end, for he is eternal. He possesses all knowledge and power. And that he created all things, seen and unseen (42)
 - ii. **Religions of Peace:** That, the three religions emphasize on peaceful coexistence. African Traditional Religion enjoin people to live at peace with one another especially those of the same family and clan. That's the reason why their worshippers have been able to welcome other foreign religions like Christianity and Islam with open arms. In fact cases of religious violence appeal more to adherentsof Islam and Christianity than African Traditional worshippers. Christians on the other hand cannot afford to be unfriendly to their neighbors. It is the matter of fundamental principle in Christianity. For instance the Bible says “ thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself “ The concept of love in Christianity is all embracing, as it transcends members of the Church to cover non-members.. This instance is demonstrated in the parable of the good Samaritan, where Jesus shows the meaning of love of a man who picked up and assisted an unknown dying soul (Bidmos, 2016). So also is the Islamic belief that they are a religion of peace, as such people who go about killing non-believers are not carrying out the true tenets of Islam.
 - iii. **Doctrinal Similarities:**
 - a. That, the three religions belief in the stories of creation, where according to Boafo a common ground can be found in the area of how the Universe came to be (Cosmology). Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions have stories of creation and all of them attribute it to the handwork of the almighty God. That even in most African Traditional Religions

the Supreme Being dwelt close to humanity until humans offended God. The offended God departed and choose to dwell far away from the rich of humanity (Ajiki, 2011)

- b. Another similarity in doctrine is the belief in the spirit realm. That, the three religions belief in the world beyond the natural realm. They claim that the universe is inhabited by spiritual beings. These spirits are both good and bad. In addition to the Supreme God, both religions acknowledge the existence of the head of evil spirits who is a personal opponent and is notorious for rebellion and destruction ([Http://www.afrikaworld.net/atrc.com.html](http://www.afrikaworld.net/atrc.com.html)).

Life after death is another doctrine that the three religions share. The African Traditional worshippers hold this concept in high esteem, the origin of death is unknown, and as such many myths were introduced. Death to them came because the messengers failed to carry out their given tasks. There is no myth on how death will be removed from the world. On the other hand, in the hereafter, there's no break between life and death. When someone dies his body is destroyed but his spirit lives on. The spirit receives his body which is identical to his earthly body, so that he can move around as spirit (Comparative Religion,[Http://www.academia.edu/comparative Religion](http://www.academia.edu/comparative%20Religion)). This similar belief is found in Christianity and Islamic religions too. The Bible in Christianity teaches that there are two different places where the spirit of a person goes after death. It goes to hades if the person was an unbeliever or heaven if the person was a Christian, (Lk 16:19-31:41, Rev 20:11-15). The Muslims too that there is a life after death, where in the last day or the day of resurrection, the dead would rise from their grave in obedience to the Lord of host, to face accountability (Shittu, 47).

- c. Veneration of Ancestors: That, in African Traditional Religion, ancestors are the spirits of the departed fore-fathers and mothers. They believe that they have gone to the other world to intercede for them (Comparative Religion,[Http://www.academia.edu/comparative Religion](http://www.academia.edu/comparative%20Religion)). Similarly, the religious practices of the Christians and Islam, the Christians refer to ancestors as saints or the faithful departed (especially the Roman Catholic). They are believed to be in heaven with God because of the Godly and exemplary lives. They include Abraham (both Islam and Christians venerate him). Others are Mary, St Augustine, St. Thomas, St. Thancy and the rest. Many Christians especially the Catholic ask these saints on their behalf. (<http://www.bc.edu/boisi/pdf/bc/papers>). Muslims as well accord a special honor for their patriarch Abraham and prophet Muhammed who is believed to be the root of their faith. They also venerate such people as Mariam, Isah and others.
- d. Prayers: That, all the three religions adopt the medium of prayers as the major way of appeasing, petitioning or communicating with the Supreme Being. That prayer is one of the fundamental principles of Islam. The Muslim in prayer submits himself to God and looks forward to his favor. Therefore he perseveres in obeying his commands (Ojebode & Ajayi, 2012). Christians as well belief in a personal God who listens to individuals prayers (<http://www.bc.edu/boisi/pdf/bc/papers>).
- e. Sacrifice: All the three religions belief in this practice, African Traditional Religion as it is in Christianity and in Islam. Sacrifice is the act of offering the life of animals or human beings to divine power or powers (Hornby, 2000). It entails the attempt of the mortals to invite the attention of the divinity to their problems. Christian's belief in the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. That he died once and for all, thereby for the

redemption of mankind. As such Christ sacrifice is the seal of all sacrifice. African Traditional Religion on the other hand offer animals and food items for sacrifice (Fola *et al* 2012). In Islam, sacrifice is carried out during Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. On the 10th of Dhul-Hijja and after the Morning Prayer, the pilgrims move to the sacred monument (al-Mash aril-Harram) remain there till the bright light in the sky. After which they throw stones at the Devil. Then the pilgrims perform their sacrificial offering. Thousands of sheep, goats and camels are kept ready in Mina for sacrifice. Then Muslims all over the world offer their sacrifice and celebrate the Id of al-adha (the Great Bairan) A rock at the west end of the valley is prepared for the sacrifice (Ojebode & Ajayi, 2012).

- f. Divine Messengers: All the three religions belief that the Supreme Being has Messengers that carry his intentions and messages to man and vice versa. In Christianity and Islam, they have a belief in angels. The Quaran and the Bible describes angels as supernatural and states that such is their real nature. That they do not appear in the material world generally, but only by divine command. Their functions are concerned with spirits and souls. They are believed to carry God's revelation, his orders, his messages to hid people for the people (90). They have this strong belief that at various times, God sends his angels to deliver his messages to man. One of such popular angels is Gabriel, who is also recognized as the one who delivered the Quaran to prophet Muhammed in Islam. African Traditional Religion on the other hand also belief that God delivers his messages to man through his divine messengers, such as the gods, spirits and ancestors (Awolalu, 1975).
- g. Codes of Conducts (Moral Teachings). All the three religions has set of ethics guiding their worship and also on how to behave in the society. Islam and Christianity have rules and regulations that are codified and contained in their revealed books or oral circulations (Bidmos, 2006). African Traditional Religion on the other hand also has sets of codes and conducts guiding their worshippers in all ramifications. These set of rules is what is known as taboos (Hornby, 2000). Others are enshrined in proverbial sayings, customs, folklore, legends, myths, tales, song and lyrics. All these project the tremendous richness of African Religious moral values or ethics (Abe, 1993).
- h. Custodians. The three religions have Custodians who stand as a guide to the worshippers on the rules, regulations, divine commands, beliefs and practices of their religions. In other words, they are known as the religious leaders. For instance, the Christians priest, Bishops, Arch-Bishops and Patriarchs, the Pope, pastors, ministers, deacons and evangelists. These people are faced with responsibilities of ensuring that Christians serve God in the way that is appropriate. In Islam, you have such examples as the Imams and the Ulamas, who are the Custodians of the Hadith, the Quaran and the activities in the Mosque as well as Islamic tenets of faith (Manus, *et al*, 2016). In African Traditional Religion these Custodians include: the Priest, rain makers, ritual elders, diviners, medicine men, kings and rulers (<https://www.bc.edu/comparative-religions/>).
- i. Symbols. The three religions have special symbols that throw more light on the whole complexity of the beliefs and practices connected with their use. They provide a wealth of information about the past and present religious beliefs of the people. In African Traditional Religion, they are made of wood and sculptures and are usually placed in Shrines and

family alters (Fola, 2012). In Christianity, these symbols include the water, the cross, (signifying the death of Jesus Christ on the cross) the dove symbol representing the Holy Spirit and purity, anchor, fish, alpha and omega and the Chi Rho. In Islam, they include the Mawhid, Ashura crescent, minarets and the name of Allah in Arabic. The moon and the star (signifying dignity) as well as the black stone in Mecca (Manus, *et al*, 2016).

- j. Rites and Rituals. All the three religions seem to exhibit certain sacred rites and rituals. The Christians carries out two basic rites to include baptism of water on a new convert to confirm his state of repentance from past sins. Another is the Holy Communion known as the Eucharist (William, 67). Islam on the other hand have these three basic rites they observe. Especially during prayers: one would see a Muslim wash his hands and feet, his face and every major part of the body. They belief is not correct without the purification from the major impurities (Ojebode & Ajayi, 2012). African Traditional Religion has also basic rites and rituals which they observe. This includes rites of passage: They are further subdivided into birth rites, puberty rites and marriage rites as well as death or funeral rites among others. (Fola, 2012).

Observation of Festivals. The three religions have similar but unique special celebration of Festivals peculiar to them. In Christianity these festivals include Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Sundays, and Easter Mondays (Galilee). (William, 67) Islam on the other hand celebrate such festivals like Eid-el-Fitr, Eid-el-Adaha, Eid-el-Matud and the Holy month of Ramadan ([http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Ed-el adaha](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed-el_adaha)).

- k. In African Traditional Religion too, festivals have a place in their beliefs and practices. One of such is the new yam festival (*iwaji*) practiced among the Ibo traditional worshippers and other African countries. *osu-osogbo* festival among the yorubas, etc (George & Amusa, 312).
- l. The Sacred and Profane. The three religions have both reserved special days, objects and places of worship as sacred. As Christians reserve Sundays for Church services and Fridays for Jumia prayers respectively as the days of worship, so also is the African Traditional Religion. Most Africans also meet on Fridays in shrines for worship. Nsimbi M. B notes that the Bangada revere Wednesdays which they attribute to god Mukasa as a resting day for gods and most Shrines are closed on that day. Moreover just like Christians and Muslims have rosaries, African Traditional Religion worshippers also have cowries, shells, coffee, beans, coconut and beads (Qtd in Ahmed, 2013).
- m. Pilgrimage. This is accorded a special feature in Islam and Christianity, as they embark on this journey to the Holy cities of Mecca and Medina as well as Jerusalem respectively to visit famous *kabba* stone and the empty tomb where Jesus was buried among other things to offer prayers and celebrations. So also is African Traditional Religion. African Traditionalist also has their holy places for Pilgrimage. Basonja visits Bujagali falls near the source of river Nile, Baganda, Banyoro and Banyam Kore visit Nakayima in mubede. Abandawula culture makes periodical Pilgrimage at Buwaali (Qtd in Ahmed, 2013). All these comparative analysis have relevant roles to play in the efforts to overcoming religious conflict within Nigeria as suggested by comparative religious scholars. Next is the role of ecumenical centres.

- **The role of Individuals/Ecumenical Centres**

a. **The Educational Institutions.** M.A Bidmos suggest that in all tertiary institutions where religious studies are offered as an academic discipline, cross fertilization should be instituted. This is a situation where a student offering Christian studies as his major would have to offer some courses in Islamic studies and those who major in Islamic studies also offer some courses in Christian studies. With such an exposure, parochialism and narrow mindedness, which breed misperception and misinterpretation among youths, could be nipped in the bud. Cross fertilization in terms of course offerings in religious studies is a potent instrument of engendering tolerance (Bidmos, 2006)

b. **Individual And Corporate Efforts:** Certain individuals especially, the prominent ones, adopted various methods such as their teaching methods, syllabus design and public lectures. They design many programs that would bring Muslims and Christians to face-to-face discussions on several occasions. Some individuals like Professor Ismail Balogun, formerly of the University of Ilorin are already involved in some of the suggestions mentioned above, yet there is need for more (Balogun, 1978).

Corporate have also been formed to address the issues of religious conflicts. Bodies like; the Islamic Study Group of Nigeria (ISGON), organized by Professor Abdul Kareem Hussein. The group does not address itself exclusively to the Muslims and Christians. For example, in 1983, the group organized a national seminar to which Christians were invited as co-participants to examine the menace of alcohol which was and still is threatening the stability of the Nigerian society (The Resolutions, 21st, May, 1983)

At the Grassroots, in the early nineties of the last century, a Jos based Christian organization, known as Lutheran Church of America, under the leadership of Arch Bishop Emeritus, Dr. David L. Windibiziri floated an Inter-religious outfit called Christian – Muslim mutual relationship. The outfit holds biennial conferences to promote Muslim /Christian relations inform of interaction and mutual understanding. Eventually, the outfit metamorphosed into association of Christian /Muslim mutual relations in Nigeria (The fourth International Conference on Christian/Muslim mutual relations, 1999).

Another gesture of Inter-religious relations in Nigeria is the Roman Catholic attempt under the banner “Inter-religious Dialogue Commission – Catholic Arch diocese of Lagos. Conferences are frequently held there in their Seminaries and Churches in the Country, with themes revolving around sanitizing the religious atmosphere in the country. More so, considering the national crisis that surrounded the Liberian nation, a country made up of different religious faiths. And the failure of the international community to intervene, the Liberian Council of Churches (a Christian organization) made the determination to intervene in the war as peace makers. These Christian leaders were hopeful that given their traditional influence in Liberian politics, the worrying parties would be amenable to intervention and ultimately accept their proposals for ending the mayhem. Accordingly, the religious leaders devised two major peace plans and undertook other complementary peacemaking activities that were ostensibly designed to end the war, and its attendant adverse human and material consequences. In the end, their intervention influenced greatly in bringing peace to the region (George, 2009).

Furthermore, during the crisis in Sudan, (1972), South Africa (1990) and Mozambique (1992). Certain Christian organizations made remarkable efforts in restoring peace in the regions. For instance, the World council of Churches and the African Conference of Churches mediated the short lived 1972 peace agreement in Sudan. In South Africa, various Churches were at the vanguard of the Struggle against apartheid and the peace transitions. The most dramatic and most frequently cited case is the successful mediation, the Rome-based community of Sant' Egidio achieved to help end the civil war in Mozambique in 1992 (Hume, 1994).

At the International Level ecumenical movements offered the oldest formal structure of Inter-religious relations in modern times. According to the sacred Vatican council, Christians are supposed to engage in conversation with others. They are to be educated in the ecumenical spirit and duly prepared for the fraternal dialogue with non-Christians (Borrmans, 1990). The following are some of the efforts taken by this international Christian bodies in ensuring peace among inter-faith relations.

- **The Vatican Gesture.**

The year 1964 marked the beginning of the new era of relationship between Muslims and Christians as the Vatican appeared to be more anxious in forging a cordial relationship with non-Christians in general. A special unit in the Vatican known as the secretariat for non-Christians was set up through the initiative of Paul VI. The task of the initiative is to,

Reach for the methods and ways of opening a suitable dialogue with non-Christians. It should strive in order that non-Christians come to be known honestly and esteemed justly by Christians can adequately know and esteem Christian doctrine and life (Arinze, 1990).

One of the instruments designed by the secretariat to carry out its task is the organization of conferences and meetings with Muslims scholars and theologians in different parts of the world. The themes and venues of the Conferences are illustrative of an apparently good intention. Here are a few examples of the Conferences.

Theme	Place	Date.
Family in the Muslim and Christian traditions	Jordan	1983
Religion and Peace	Nairobi	1984
Spirituality in Islam and Christianity	Rome	1985.
Spirituality in Islam and Christianity	Tunis	1986
The quest for human understanding and corporation	Lebanon	1972
The unity of God and community of mankind	Sri Lanka	1974

- **Unification Church.**

Unification Church is synonymous with Rev. Sun Myung Moon. The Church was set up initially to break all types of barrier among the Christian denominations. Having worked for many years for the Unification of all Christians, Rev Moon is now pursuing vigorously the issue of corporation of all world religions. His approach is to set up working committees at the levels of youths, theologians, Professors, politicians and women.

Each group is given terms of reference and instruments to work with. The group activities include workshops, seminars, conferences, youth camps and trade centers, etc. The emphasis at every meeting is on inter-communication among adherents of different faiths. Some of the groups include, the Inter-religious federation for world peace, inaugurated in August, 1991 and the Council for World Religions, inaugurated in 1985. Rev Moon's organizations spreads its tentacles all over the world with its major centers in USA, South Korea and London (Unification Movement Newsletter, 1992).

- **Statements.**

Positively, there had been a wide range of statements by Christian Churches, in response to a number of issues and conflicts that have arisen. There has been lively intra Christian debate within the Churches in most countries, with the presence of Islam being an energizing factor in such discussion. More Christians are willing to engage with Muslims and other faiths at all levels. These include the academic level and inter-faith dialogue. They include common actions-events, demonstrations for peace, etc. They also include working together in the issues of life, the dialogue of life (Wingate, 2011)

- **Exchange Programmes.**

This have become more frequent. An example is between EKD, Germany and Iran and between the Church of England and Iran. There are a range of joint programs related to Israel/Palestine. The Anglican Church has a joint programme with Al-Azhar in Egypt. Many groups have been to Turkey to visit holy sites, for example, a Muslim – Christian group from Leicester, Indonesia has also been involved in such programs and there have been student exchanges with Algeria. There are also University faculty contacts between countries (20).

- **Training Opportunities**

Initiatives in training have increased for lay people perhaps more than yet for clergy. For instance, the Government of Hungary has a scholarship program for young Christians in citizens of, Egypt, Lebanese Republic, Republic of Iraq, State of Israel, Palestine, Islamic Republic of Pakistan Syrian Arab Republic, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Nigeria. The core mission of the scholarship programme is to provide the possibility of studying in Hungary for young Christian students living in the crisis regions of the world and/or being threatened in their country because of their faith. After completing their studies, the scholarship holders will return to help their home community with their gained knowledge and thus will participate in the reconstruction of war destroyed countries and contribute to improvement of social situations and preservation of culture of Christian communities (Jennifer, 2017).

c. Dialogue

Dialogue especially in the Inter-religious perspective is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and corporate with each other in in spite of their differences. Inter-faith Dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes practical

human interaction and relationships. Dialogue seeks to increase mutual understanding and good relations. It identifies causes of tension in Christian Muslim relations for instance and helps to build understanding and confidence to overcome or prevent the identified tensions. Finally it breaks down the barriers and stereotypes which lead to distrust, suspicion and bigotry (Forde, 2103). J.K. Ayantayo also notes the need for accepting the equality of religions owing to the fact that all religions are equal in terms of the origin of the world, man and the hereafter (Ayantayo, 2018). There is also need for identifying and accepting religious pluralism, whereby everyone will come to accept the fact that there are many other religions in the society aside from the one being practiced by individual or group of individuals (34).

These solutions as proffered, however fail to address inter-religious crisis, to bridge peace and harmony among them, a reason that necessitated the Jesus approach, which the researcher belief would bring about a lasting solution to adherents of various religions, especially by Christians. The next section therefore discusses the Jesus response to ecumenical dialogue.

THE JESUS RESPONSE TO ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

In the time of Christ, while he was still on earth, there were also religious conflicts. This conflict existed within Judaism and the Gentiles. In the formal, there was a serious doctrinal conflict, concerning the interpretation of the laws of Moses and the prophets. This argument became so intense that it split Judaism into sects such as the Pharisees (they belief in the resurrection), Sadducees (they did not belief in the resurrection), Essence and Zealots. In the latter, there existed an intense hatred among the Jews against the Gentiles and vice-versa. This hatred existed long before Christ came and even when he was around. One of those instances could be cited when Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink. The woman responded that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans (John 4:9). Yes, it is true that history has it that a certain foreign king had invaded the Northern Israel and carried away captives of the Israelites to a foreign place and brought aliens in exchange to dwell in the land of Israel. This brought about a mixed race in that region. As such, the pure race of the Jews never had anything to do with this mixed race anymore. They regarded them as gentiles. Even in the time of the Jews who returned from exile in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, those Jews who inter-married with the people of other nations and faith were sent or better still, purged away from their camp without hesitation (Ezra 10:18-19).

How did Jesus respond to these crises above? First, he ignored the sects that had split up within Judaism. He never made attempt at calling them together on a round table to resolve their various doctrinal belief and differences. Thus, it is futile for those calling for dialogue among adherents of Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion to sit on a round table to dialogue. The efforts of ecumenical centres will therefore not yield much fruits. It would rather end up in a heated controversy that will result into another violent tune of crisis. One of the reasons is because none of them will accept to shift ground for the other in matters of doctrinal differences. Even the bible warns of arguments (2Tim 2:23). What Jesus did in the time of the sects that existed in his domain was to rather clarify their confusion in certain matters that they brought up. For instance, when the Pharisees questioned why he ate at the same table with sinners, he responded that 'those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who

are sick (Mathew 9: 10-12). When they saw Jesus disciples plucking heads of grain to eat on the Sabbath, they condemned it, but Jesus replied that even King David and the priest both profaned the Sabbath but were not condemned. He concluded by saying that the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath. When he healed a man of a withered hand on the Sabbath and the same Pharisees condemned it, he replied that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Mathew 12:1-12). Even when the Sadducees', who do not believe that there is a resurrection, asked him a question about marriage after the resurrection, Jesus replied that in resurrection, there is neither marriage or giving in of marriage (Luke 20:35). Other doctrinal conflicts that Jesus also clarified when these sects met him were about marriage and divorce (Mathew 19:1-12), whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar (Mark 12:14-17) among others.

Secondly, Jesus handled the issue of inter-denominational conflict when John complained to him about someone who does not follow them, was casting demons in his name. That he forbade him because he does not follow them. But Jesus rebuked John immediately, saying 'he who is not against us is on our side' (Mark 9:38-40). This, Jesus meant by warning those churches today that attach so much importance to their denomination. They are quick to deal only with those who attend their church, while those who are not their members but belong to another church denomination are neglected. This could be seen in terms of a job vacancy, a political appointment, scholarship, palliatives, etc. There is a life experience by the researcher concerning his mother. When the latter fell ill in the night and a certain pastor from a church called 'Abiding Grace' was invited to pray for her in that emergency hour. The pastor declined to do so, on the ground that my mother is not a member of his church.

Thirdly, in living in harmony with people of other faith, Jesus took his time to teach the believers about the concept of 'neighbourhood' (πλησίος). Knowing fully well that a believer will live in an environment with others who are not practicing the same faith with them, he re-defined who one's neighbour should be. When he was asked who your neighbour is, he cited an instance of a certain Jew who was attacked on his way between Jerusalem and Jericho by armed robbers; By chance; a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side, likewise a levite. But a certain Samaritan (not being in the same religious affiliation with him) saw him and had compassion on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine and set him on his own ass. He even paid an inn keeper to tend to his wound. So the question Jesus asked was 'which of these three do you think was a neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?' and the questionnaire replied 'He who showed mercy on him'. Then Jesus said to him, 'go and do likewise' (Mathew 10:29-37).

With this scenario, one would see how Jesus in clear terms suggested to believers and to those who care for peace among adherents of different religions on how to behave in issues of living in harmony with one another. He believed that one should love his neighbour as oneself, when he said in Mathew 22:29: And the second is like it 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself 'ὁ δευτέρου ὁμοία αὐτῇ Ἀγαπήσεις σου πλησίον ὡς σεαυτὸν'

To him, this is the second greatest commandment. Since religious crisis often begin with people of the same environment before escalating to global riot and subsequent killings and destruction of lives and properties, Jesus focused his attention on the neighbour, believing that if a believer will strive for peace with his neighbour at all cost, to the extent that even if the

neighbour chooses to be his enemy by any means, Jesus said that even in that instance, one should bless them that curses you, do good to those that hate you and pray for them that spitefully uses you and persecute you (Mathew 5:44). To even make it worse, Jesus uses the yardstick of how one treats his neighbour to even being a pre-requisite on the Day of Judgment. That when he was in prison, you did not visit him; neither helped him when he had no food nor clothes. Then, the accused will ask when he was in need of all these things and he did not pay attention? Then, Jesus would reply that since you did not do it to this little ones', so also is me. How one treats his neighbour (πλησίον) according to Christ thus hinges on love. The concept of love in Christianity is all-embracing as it transcends members of the Church to cover non-adherents. This is also evident in the epistle of Paul to the Corinthians in which he emphasizes the importance of love for good human relations. Paul compares a Christian without love to a mere noisy gong. (1Cor.13:1-13) (Bidmos, 2016). The cordial relationship that should exist between Christians and adherents of other faiths is further explained as Jesus called his followers the salt of the earth. In Math, 5:13, he says "You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men"

The concept of love and salt clearly describe the presumed position of the Christians among their neighbours in the world. The implications of the concepts are both interesting and instructive. First the love of the creatures of God is subsumed in the love of God himself. In other words, the true love of God cannot exclude the love of what he has created, especially human beings. The Christians love for God must by extension, be reflected on his creatures, i.e other religious communities. Secondly, for Christians to act as Salt is to dwell in peace or harmony with others around them. Salt in essence is complimentary; it cannot be taken on its own as a meal. Its value becomes appreciated only when it is added to other ingredients with which it makes a good meal. Christians cannot be an Island unto themselves and be called salt (Bidmos, 2016).

Moreover, another scripture demonstrating the fundamental teachings of Christianity on the need for unconditional love, justice and tolerance is exemplified in Gal, 3:26,28, where the principles of the Church emphasizing the need to avoid all forms of conflicts based on ethnicity, Nationality and racial differences. And it is a basic Christian missionary duty to proclaim to all, the way of salvation in Jesus Christ. "You are all the sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.... There is neither a Jew nor a Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus, (Acts 2:38, 1Cor 1:17) (Kahumbi, 2016).

Christian principles expound on the principles of human rights including: ideals of reconciliation, love, sympathy, forgiveness, justice, peace and compassion for fellow human beings even when they are aliens. (Ex 23:9, Lev 19:33-34, 1 Cor 1:15, 2Cor 4:4). Also the covenant between God and Abraham was for the benefit of all peoples, as the "nations" played in the salvation history. This is shown in the missions and teachings of Jesus whose life, respect for the faith devotion of others was respected. Jesus demonstrated that no one is excluded from the kingdom of God, whether sinners or the righteous; a Samaritan, Roman Centurion, or a Judean Pharisee can all enter the kingdom of God when they turn to the Lord (Borrmans, 1990).

And therefore United as a church (community of Christians) it is the responsibility of Christians to witness to all humanity about the Good news of the kingdom of God.

Jesus tells the disciples, 'blessed are the peace makers' (μακάριοι ειρηνοποιοι), for they shall be called sons of God "To make peace and create good relationships is part of the Christian responsibility towards others. This entails a strong advocate on reconciliation and peaceful living in times of crisis. The trinity (Math 28:19) involves pluralism. Faith in God the Holy trinity can therefore provide dynamic and rational models for how dissimilar human beings can live together as one. Belief in the Holy trinity implies that principles such as openness, friendship and egalitarianism should govern our relationship with other people and it gives us the confidence to take people of other faiths seriously (Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, 2008.) The Bible teaches that humans were created in the image and likeness of God (Gen, 1:26). This commits Christians to treating all humans as brothers and sisters. As such there is bound to be a relationship between Christians and the others.

CONCLUSION

Jesus clearly responded to how religious crisis, (be it intra or inter) should be handled. He based his solutions on the love for one's neighbour, not minding who that should be; whether he or she is a Christian, a Muslim or a pagan. He believes that if this love is really extended, then this will end crisis as the neighbour, who is the receiver of the love will not be that inhuman to return love for hate, murder or war. It is so unfortunate that those making efforts to bring about religious peace, be it at the individual level, scholarship, corporate and dialogue levels do not relate with their neighbours properly. Most of them are quick to pick up a fight with them, not loving them as themselves, but are always in a haste to organize religious dialogue, bringing different faiths on a round table, just to bridge peace. Not knowing that peace among adherents of various faiths begins with the neighbourhood.

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