

Imperative of Christian-Muslim Dialogue and Inter-Faith Sharing in a Sustained process of Peace Building

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Abstract

This paper explores the importance of Interfaith-sharing in a sustained peace building process in Northern Nigeria. Interfaith sharing or dialogue of faith sharing has the propensity to facilitate greater interfaith learning and enhance understanding between different religious groups and their adherents. Poor or complete lack of knowledge about the religious 'other' has continued to polarise and divide religious communities across the region with devastating outcomes. Hence, this article focuses on the religious theme of Mercy or *Ar-rahim*; mutual to both Islamic and Christian religious traditions as a common ground for continuous interfaith learning and sharing, in an attempt to foster harmonious interaction between different religious groups, identities and adherents. Since the need to foster tolerance, broadmindedness and interfaith erudition through interfaith sharing cannot be over emphasised, a deeper understanding of faiths remains critical for peace and religious harmony in a religiously diverse contemporary society. The methodical approach is to highlight the relationship between interfaith sharing and dialogue of faith sharing, analyse the notion of mercy within Islamic and Christian traditions and examine the centrality of mercy between the two traditions as a common ground for dialogue of faith sharing and end with conclusion and some recommendations.

1.0 Introduction

The value inherent in the need to promote better understanding, friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions cannot be over emphasised. This is fundamental because the world is ever becoming a global village and the phenomenon of migration means increased contact among individuals and communities of different socio-cultural, ethnic, political, economic and religious traditions. This reality challenges the religious understanding of one's faith, the dynamics of relations with the religious 'other' and the prospect of fostering harmony in a religiously diverse contemporary society (Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue, 2015).

In many parts of the world including Northern Nigeria and especially over the last few decades, we have not been without situations where coexistence between people of different religious background is difficult. Very often, unfavourable/poor political, socio-economic or ethnic policies and sequence; superimpose on cultural and religious differences, weighed down by misunderstanding and mistakes of the past have continued to generate suspicion, doubt and fear that have many times fuelled violent conflicts (Francis, 2013). Meanwhile, interfaith-sharing or education or dialogue of faith sharing is one of the basic ways to overcome such fears and uncertainties. Also, an encounter marked by friendship, respect and patient listening to the 'other,' enhanced by mutual willingness to learn from each other is vital in addressing issues of socio-religious differences. The task here is to identify and promote the common ground from which such interfaith sharing or dialogue of religious sharing can begin.

2.0 Theoretical Framework: Interfaith sharing or dialogue of faith sharing has the capacity to build and strengthen better understanding of religious beliefs of the 'other' and foster religious peace and harmony in society. This is because; diversity in culture, custom and religious traditions has always been part and parcel of every human civilisation, posing a challenge that must be confronted if such society is to attain its aspirations and goals. Moreover, people make up societies and civilisations. To sustain such, there must be the willingness to accept, face, and respect the difference there might be within a community. Only when such vision and understanding prevails can there be collective effort, vision and synergy towards peace, harmony and better cooperation. In the case of religious beliefs, individuals will continue to express and profess belief in different faith traditions. Sustainable peace and harmonious coexistence demands dialogue that seeks out common grounds for faith sharing, aimed at building friendship, mutual understanding, and trust in a sustained encounter.

3.0 Research Question: Are there common religious themes shared by both Islamic and Christian traditions? How can such themes become the bases on which interfaith sharing can begin and grow among adherents of Islam and Christianity in northern Nigeria. How can such dialogue of religious sharing and faith education be sustained?

4.0 Significance of the Paper: The discourse of interfaith dialogue and sharing is of paramount importance in (any religiously diverse society) northern Nigeria and ought to be nurtured; as religious and traditional institutions have coexisted, and have played, and continue to impact on varied-dynamic roles in the region. The institutions provide the cohesion and harmonies required to sustain the functionality, vitality and dynamism of our

local communities, and are relevant in our socio-cultural, religious, economic and politico-ethnic life as a nation. It is therefore critical to create an enabling environment for these institutions to interact, adapt and respond more efficaciously to emerging challenges of nation-building as well as the exigencies of mutual peace and security for a sustained harmonious socio-economic and political development (Abubakar, 2016).

5.0 Inter-Faith Sharing or Dialogue of Faith Sharing

Inter-faith sharing or dialogue of faith sharing refers to that constructive, cooperative, and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions. It is an important activity aimed at fostering community relations through encounter and religious sharing. It helps people of different social, cultural, political and religious traditions to come to a better understanding of each other's beliefs. Inter-faith sharing or dialogue of faith sharing can be defined as a conversation, a frank discussion or a discourse between two or more parties with the aim of learning from, and seeking to understand each other's point of view (Ikenga-Metuh, 1994). It is an analytical discourse on a common subject between two or more people with differing views, such that each participant learns and enriches the other (Swidler, 1983). Inter-faith sharing can be revolutionary when it fosters discipline, planning, continuous learning, diversity, conflict exploration/analysis, decision making, problem solving and responsible leadership (Glenna & Ellinor, 1998). Scholars and experts in the field of dialogue have clarified that inter-faith sharing is about expanding our or one's capacity for attention, awareness, learning with and from each other, while expounding and exploring what it means to be human in a pluralistic and (religiously) diverse environment (Glenna & Ellinor, 1988). They have further analysed that, Inter-faith sharing or dialogue of faith sharing is the patient listening to one another, at the same time; seeking to understand, and recognising the human and spiritual make-up of the other (Quattrucchi, 2002). Besides, the dynamics of religious encounter demands that dialogue be initiated to achieve cooperation between individuals, groups and communities who may differ in terms of religious, political, social or cultural ideologies, and thus the reason for inter-faith sharing and dialogue in general.

Interfaith-sharing or dialogue of faith sharing does not however, mean giving up one's own religious identity when one encounters the 'other,' nor is it compromising on one's faith or moral religious values. On the contrary, true faith sharing involves openness while remaining steadfast in one's deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one's own religious identity and being open to understand others, cognitive of the fact that dialogue of faith sharing mutually enriches both parties (Francis, 2013).

Dialogue of faith sharing ought to be proficient in the promotion of respectful human relations and forthright in upholding that; meeting with those who are of different religious tradition can be an opportunity for growth in fraternity, enrichment and in witnessing to one's faith. Meanwhile, religion remains such a powerful impulse in human existence and plays a paradoxical role in society. It has the propensity to link people emotionally, behaviourally and spiritually into a communion and thus a community (*Umma*) (Sacks, 2015). Moreover, religion has the meta-physical grounding for promoting and upholding the socio-political fabric of any society and has sustained groups more effectively than any other force in civilization (Sacks, 2015). It contributes significantly in shaping identities, the spiritual, socio-political and economic life of billions of people and has the capacity to foster and have nurtured civilisations, promotes cultures and at the same time be a source, cause and the basis for divisions, violent conflicts and wars (crusades- *Jihad*) in many parts of the world (Umaru, 2013). Religion it can be argued, from an evolutionary/anthropological perspective stems from human nature, custom, culture and tradition, and clearly has an adaptive value as it emerged with the dawn of civilisation, and has shaped and remained a central feature of almost every society (see. Sacks, 2015). Nevertheless, the need for an attitude of openness in truth and regard towards the 'other' must characterise the dialogue of faith sharing between adherents of different religions (Muslims and Christians), in spite of obstacles and difficulties prevalent. For this purpose, dialogue of religious sharing cannot be mutually exclusive, but must however, nourish and enhance both and (all) participants.

6.0 The Theme of Mercy or *Ar-Rahim* in both Islamic and Christian Traditions

What is Mercy or *Ar-rahim* (mercy in Arabic)? Mercy designates an attitude of Compassion, benevolence, forbearance, charity, pity, forgiveness, favour, grace, kindness, clemency or leniency. It means a compassionate or kindly forbearance shown toward someone, an offender, an enemy, or the other person in one's power. It is the disposition to be compassionate or forbearing, an act of kindness, compassion, or favour. It denotes something that gives evidence of divine favour, blessing, love, care and tenderness. **Besides, scriptures (Bible and Qur'an), Islamic and Christian religious traditions identify and elaborate the theological understanding (revelation) of the nature of God as a compassionate-merciful creator; which thus explains the role of mercy in the relationship between God and humans, who are both the beneficiaries and the witnesses to God's mercy in the world (cf. Psalm 130: 3-4; Matt 5:7; 18:23-35 (the story of the unmerciful servant) Lk 6:36; 15:11-31 (the prodigal son) and note; every Sura (chapter) in the Qur'an begins with: *In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful* ... It is therefore, not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality through which God reveals his love as that of a father or a**

mother, moved to the very depths of love for their children (Pope Francis, 2015). Moreover, mercy is a theme that is close to the hearts of Muslims and Christians alike, because both believe in a merciful God, who shows mercy and compassion towards all, and His mercy is manifested in a particular way, through the pardon of our faults; hence He is the One Who pardons *al-Ghâfir*, the One who pardons much and always *al-Ghafour* (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 2016).

7.0 *Ar-Rahim* or Mercy in Islamic Tradition

Islamic religion, tradition, spirituality and theological-hermeneutic professes the existence of only One true God (*Allah* in Arabic) and within the same theological belief, there are 99 attributes of God otherwise known as the 99 names of God (Cf. Asmâ Allâh ul Husnâ, 1995). *Ar-Rahim* or Mercy is one of the attributes or characteristics of God which describes the benevolence of God as Mercy (*Ar-Rahim*). This must be understood in the context of another attribute of God: AR-RAHMAAN i.e. God as the Most Compassionate, the Beneficent and the most Gracious. In Islam, the concept or the theme of mercy (*Ar-Rahim*) encompasses everything in the world and the Hereafter. The Quran (7:156) clarifies that God or Allah is most compassionate (*Ar-Rahmaan*) and most merciful (*Ar-Rahim*), and the prophet Muhammad was sent as mercy to the world (Quran 21:107). Consequently, God has commanded that mercy be applied in everything and in every action (Cf. Biblical corporal works of mercy Matt 25:31-46); even for instance, the slaughter of animals. Muslims are required to show mercy to the animal being slaughtered by enunciating 'Bismillaah,' meaning in the name of Allah (Islam Religion of Mercy, 2013).

Accordingly, *Ar-Rahim* or mercy within Islamic tradition and understanding is something innate, which God-Allah has placed into the hearts of all His creatures (men and women), including animals. That is the reason why the most ferocious of beasts are merciful to their young ones. Yet God-Allah is more merciful to His creation than a mother is to her child. Furthermore, Islamic tradition upholds that on the day God-Allah created mercy, Allah created one hundred parts to it. He left ninety-nine parts with Him, by which He (Allah) will show mercy to His servants on the Day of Judgment and sent down just one part of mercy to earth, which humans and animals share amongst themselves (Islam Religion of Mercy, 2013).

Consequently, God-Allah has thus named Himself *Ar-Rahmaan* (The Most Compassionate, the Beneficent the Gracious) and *Ar-Raheem*, so He is the Most Merciful of this world and the Hereafter (i.e. *Ar-Rahmaan*) and the Bestower and giver of mercy (i.e. *Ar-Raheem*). This is why God has commanded mercy in every place and in every situation. A Muslim begins his action by saying 'Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Raheem' (in the name of Allah, Most Merciful, the

Giver of Mercy) so that Allah can bless him in his action. Islamic spirituality teaches that every action that is void of mercy has no blessing in it, nor any good. Therefore, if the servants of God-Allah show mercy towards one another, such fulfils the reason why God-Allah in His infinite wisdom sent His mercy down upon all people. Moreover, the Prophet Mohammad witnessed that the Most Merciful God shows mercy to those who have mercy on others. Hence the reason to show mercy to those on earth, and the One above the heavens will show mercy to you.

8.0 The Theme of Mercy in the Christian Tradition

Mercy in the Christian tradition, liturgy, spirituality and theological hermeneutics, is a divine character, an attribute of God which encompasses the very essence of the Divine Nature. God within Christian scripture, tradition and spirituality is merciful. His nature is mercy, His essence is mercy, His love is mercy and compassion as expressed in His creation and in God's relationship with created reality especially humans. The Christian Scripture testifies to God as merciful. The Psalmist exalts the bounteousness of God as mercy in Psalm 99/100:5 “... *indeed how good is the Lord, eternal his merciful love*”. Moreover, the gospels are the revelation in Jesus of the mercy and compassion of a benevolent God (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994 and see for instance, gospel of Luke 15). Mercy can thus be described as the radiation of the love of God which takes into cognisance the weakness of His creatures (Dictionary of Biblical and general Catholic information, 1950, p. 159). Traditional Christian spirituality upholds that God is merciful and thus not indifferent to the pains, cries, sufferings and plight of humans. God always intervenes to save and inspires men and women to become mediators of mercy, capable of hearing the cry of suffering, and of working to intervene in favour of the oppressed. God is divine mercy, continually in the act of saving. Accordingly, the wonders of divine mercy, finds fulfilment in Jesus Christ, in that new and eternal alliance consummated with His blood. This makes us children of God, precious jewels in the hands of a good the merciful Father. We as sons and daughters of God; have the possibility of inheriting this goodness and mercy, such that with open hearts, to reach everyone through the works of mercy, which is the legacy we have inherited from God (Francis, 2016). However, the mercy we receive from God is not given to us as a private consolation; it rather enables us to become channels through which others receive the same gift. Therefore, living in the mercy of God makes us missionaries of mercy, and being emissaries of mercy abets us increasingly to grow in God's mercy towards others (Francis, 2016).

It is in this same streak that the holy Father Pope Francis in December 2015 declared a Jubilee year of mercy in which the faithful and humanity in general can experience the tender love of God's compassion, forgiveness and healing in a world bedevilled by violent conflicts, war, material poverty, starvation,

refugee/migrant crises, unbelief, secularism, power, control, domination, money, profit and insatiable desire for wealth and material possessions, and the seeming rise of terrorism fuelled by socio-political and religious (jihad) extremism, giving rise to uncertainty, insecurity and shatter of hope.

9.0 Common Grounds for Inter-Faith or Dialogue of Faith Sharing

Are there theological potentials for meeting and inter-faith sharing between people of different religious traditions? Can different religious traditions have common grounds or bases for mutual faith or dialogue of faith sharing? Are there common grounds for meeting, discussions, dialogue and interfaith sharing? What are those common grounds and theological possibilities for interfaith sharing or dialogue of faith sharing between Muslims and Christians? Could the themes of Monotheism i.e. Belief in the One God, Divine revelation, Sacred Scriptures, Prayer, Common ethic and Mercy or *Ar-Rahim*, God as creator of the universe, Prophets, final judgement, heaven, hell, fasting, justice and dialogue qualify as bases for mutual faith sharing? Yes! There are common grounds, and the mosaic of themes above and many more, provides the needed platform for interfaith sharing or dialogue of interfaith sharing between Muslims and Christians.

The Bible within the Christian tradition, theology and hermeneutics is the word of God, which can be described as a dialogue account between God and his people. This is, and remains the foundation for interfaith sharing and dialogue of faith sharing with people of other faith traditions. A critical study of the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels reveals that Jesus was in constant dialogue with the people around him. For example, Jesus is continuously engaged in dialogue with his disciples and individuals (e.g the Samaritan woman at the well (cf. Jn 4:1-30), the Canaanite woman (cf. Matt 15:21-28) and the Syrophoenician woman (cf. Mk 7: 24-30) and the Pharisees (cf. Matt 19; Mk 12:13; Lk 20:41). Moreover, in the first letter of Peter, Christians are admonished to be ready always to answer questions (dialogue) with respect, gentleness and reverence, while keeping a clear conscience (1 Pt 3: 15). Furthermore, Ecclesial tradition, pronouncement by various Popes and most recently the Second Vatican Council declaration in *Nostra Aetate* (no.2-3) and *Gaudium et Spes* (no.92) have continued to admonish Christians to dialogue with prudence and charity with members of other religions in an atmosphere of mutual esteem, reverence and harmony.

In the same vein, Islamic history, tradition and theology acknowledge diversity in culture, society and religion as an undeniable fact, hence, dialogue between Islam and other religions is first and foremost a necessary and vital technique for establishing contact with the world (Talbi,1999). Muslims are encouraged to engage in honest and respectful dialogue with the "People of the Book" who are

recognised by the Qur'an as fellow monotheists (Afsaruddin, 2009). Interfaith sharing or Dialogue is particularly encouraged with the People of other religions, or the People of the Book (Jews and Christians). The Qur'an says, O ye People of the Book, come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah (Q. 3:64). The Qur'an further clarifies: O people! Behold, we have created you from one single pair of a male and female, and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another (Qur'an 49:13). Thus, for Muslims the motivation for interfaith sharing (dialogue) is based on the imperatives of the Qur'an and the practice of Prophet Muhammad, who in the year 630 AD engaged in dialogue with a Christian delegation from Najran (Salih, 2010).

Accordingly, in recent times, Islamic scholars, leaders, clerics and theologians have advocated inter-faith sharing (dialogue) on a large scale, something considered new in a political sense, and or with a political twist by some analysts. The declaration of A Common Word of 2007, was an open invitation to the Catholic pontiff Pope Benedict the XVI and other world Christian leaders to come to dialogue with Islam. It was the first public call by Muslim leaders and Islamic scholars to engage with Christian leaders and scholars in trying to work out a moral common ground on many religious and social issues.

Moreover, we need a dynamic-comprehensive understanding of religious hermeneutics which does not solely rely on an age old discourse that may be unconnected to our contemporary experience of religious diversity (Ahmed, 2015). A shared religious exchange based on mutual knowledge achieved by our seeking to make clear our shared conviction, hopes and values, at the same time highlighting and circumventing our differences and that which may be our disagreements (Ramadan, 2004). Fittingly, Christians and Muslims can both draw from their rich-religious traditions and share with each other in an attempt to foster better understanding, which have the competence to weaken stereotypes, bias and conflicts in a way that builds a culture of mercy, based on the rediscovery of our encounter and inter-connectedness, a culture in which no one looks at another with indifference and discriminate or turn away from the 'other' based on their beliefs or otherwise (Francis, 2017). Otherwise, there is the danger that religious traditions could develop and intensify their religiosity without interaction or positive encounter with (adherents of) other faiths, and become fundamentally incompatible with our modern world of religious diversity (Peev, 2016).

10. The Centrality of Mercy in Inter-Faith sharing: Muslims and Christians

The centrality of mercy in Inter-Faith sharing denotes the fact that faith-sharing

stems from the willingness to listen to, and learn from the other based on respect, compassion and the sincere openness to encounter and engage with the 'other.' Besides, dialogue allows people to encounter, experience, know and understand each other's point of view and needs. It is a sign of great respect, as it inspires in people an attitude of listening that places them in the condition of recognising the best aspects of their interlocutor. It is an expression of charity, since it does not ignore differences. It can however help in seeking out and sharing the common good, as it invites us to place ourselves before the 'other,' seeing him/her as a gift from God, who calls, challenges and asks us to recognise in mercy (Francis, 2016). Further, it takes patience, humility and an open disposition to engage with the other. As Pope Francis, (2015) clarifies, the mercy we receive from God is not given to us as a private consolation, but rather it makes us missionaries and instruments to enable others receive the same gift (cf. 2 Cor 1: 3-7). Hence mercy in this sense upholds that we are interested in the other and are willing to learn from, and share our faith with the other.

Mercy in inter-faith sharing denotes our striving to build and sustain good relations in (and) dialogue between religious leaders, faith communities and individuals in a religiously diverse society. This demonstrates that mutual respect and friendship are possible, notwithstanding religious, socio-cultural, political or ethnic differences. Such friendship, as well as being valuable in itself, becomes all the more meaningful and important in a time of conflict and crisis for a sustainable peace process.

It can however be argued that the centrality of mercy in inter-faith sharing is further strengthened when we acknowledge the religious 'other' for who they are in all their integrity, with their conscientiously held beliefs. We ought to welcome and respect them for who they are, and work reverently with them (Tutu, 2011). This requires that we hold tenaciously to our own peculiar beliefs and not pretend that all religions are the same. Additionally, we must be ready to learn from one another, not claiming that we alone or a particular religious tradition possess all the truth about eternal salvation. Each religious tradition in humility should joyfully acknowledge that the divine reality we all worship in one way or the other transcends all our particular categories of thought and imaginations. And thus, we must seek to share all insights as we can, and be open to learn from and be enriched by the spiritual techniques/experiences of other religious traditions (Tutu, 2011).

Moreover, Muslims and Christians are the bearers of spiritual treasures of inestimable worth. Among these are some shared elements, though lived according to the traditions of each, such as the adoration of the All-Merciful God, reference to the Patriarch Abraham, prayer, almsgiving, and fasting-elements which, when lived sincerely, can transform life and provide a sure

foundation for dignity and fraternity among religious communities. Hence, recognising and developing our common spiritual heritage-through inter-faith/interreligious dialogue helps us to promote and uphold moral values of peace, harmony and freedom in society (Pope Francis, 2014). Therefore, our parochial parish churches, mosques and places of prayer ought to be places and centres of mercy, compassion and hope, where everyone is and feels welcomed, listened to, loved and forgiven (Francis, 2014).

11. The Importance of Interfaith Sharing for Religious Peace and Harmony in Society

Nigerian as a nation has experienced over the years recurrent violent socio-political, economic, ethnic and so-called religious conflicts, with the latest being the Boko Haram mayhem. However, in Nigeria the propensity for any form of conflict to transmute into a religious dispute is very high due to the paradoxical nature of religion in society and the role religion plays in the lives of many Nigerians. This phenomenon can be attributed to a number of factors including: ethno-cultural rivalries, political strife, prejudice and stereotypes, poor and inept development, material-economic poverty, unequal distribution of national wealth and resources, indigene versus settler disputations, and especially poverty of education cum poor religious-peace education, exacerbated by the seeming growth in fundamental-religious and political extremism.

It can be argued nevertheless, that the activities of insurgents (Boko Haram) in the North-East could have been averted if for example, quality education, skills and empowerment had been the thrust of advancement; and promoted in the locality. Besides, it would have been difficult to mobilise especially the youth for violence if they were or are educated; and are stake holders in society. Moreover, there is a subtle connection between illiteracy and insecurity. When people are educated and have acquired the necessary skills needed for positive engagement to build community, the chances are that they are not likely to be mobilised for violence. Hence to develop the capacity of (young) people by helping them nurture their talents and dexterity, creating for instance the opportunity for children and young people to acquire good and qualitative education, which stimulates innovation and the agility to implement such inspiring ideas, provides the prospect to achieve and live their dreams (Mali, 2014, pp.114-15). This goes a long way in helping especially the youths to become good and responsible citizens. Moreover, that is what education is about, adding value to the society. Achieving the above for me must be the goal of religious traditions through interfaith or dialogue of faith sharing and of course collaboration with the government and other agencies if we are to weaken stereotypes and conflict in the region and any diverse society (Opejobi, 2016).

12. Recommendations

Religion has remained a socio-politically divisive issue in contemporary Nigeria. Religion nevertheless provides a great opportunity for peace building within the same society. However, it must be noted that there are attitudes, behaviours, actions or inaction that can destroy, repeal and rescind interfaith or dialogue of faith sharing, for instance, the recent so-called blasphemous killings in Pandogary-Niger and Kano states. What should then be done?

Religious leaders, clerics and those in authority must be apt to vehemently condemn and publicly reprimand those who carry out such heinous acts. They would be doing Nigeria no good if they continue to be quiet and tolerate in their congregations persons who by their actions and utterances seek to coerce other people's consciences and force them to convert. Besides, a deliberate attempt by religious leaders to isolate vicious tendencies committed in the name of religion and those associated with them will go a long way in preventing such inclinations and douse the tensions and divisions they cause (Obi, 2016).

Religious leaders and other stake holders in society must do everything possible to promote the kind of religious education that uphold and support religious freedom. Because, freedom of religion and freedom of expression, when truly guaranteed to each person, will and can help friendship to flourish through dialogue and thus become an eloquent sign of peace and harmony (Francis, 2014).

It further impresses on governments, religious bodies, groups and identities in Nigeria to deliberately avoid and discourage acts capable of hurting religious sentiments, and intensify efforts to encourage dialogue for better understanding and religious harmony if peace must flourish. Moreover, Mercy is that force and virtue that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage and confidence to face the future with hope resilience and renewed optimism!

13. Conclusion

To acknowledge that other faiths ought to be respected and that they also proclaim profound religious truth is not the same thing as saying all faiths are the same. Faiths and religious beliefs are patently not the same. Each religious tradition is unique. However, the centrality of mercy in interfaith or dialogue of faith sharing means that, religious traditions have to proclaim the truth of their faith and beliefs honestly, truthfully, and consistently without compromise. Christians for instance; must unequivocally assert courageously that, we believe all religious truth, and that all truth and religious aspirations find their final fulfilment in Jesus Christ. In the same vein, we (Christians) must grant to others the same right to commend their faith without restriction (Cf. Tutu, 2011).

Consequently, the centrality of mercy in interfaith sharing has the capacity to deepen the understanding and appreciation of the many themes Christian and Muslims hold in common. Such a dialogue allows us to reflect sensibly and serenely on our differences, and thus present the opportunity to learn from each other. Undoubtedly, this can enhance the need to move forward patiently in the task of building lasting peace, based on respect for the fundamental rights and duties rooted in the dignity of each person. In this way, we can overcome prejudices and unwarranted fears, leaving room for respect, encounter, and the release of more positive energies for the good of all in our diverse societies. Mercy in inter-faith sharing means freedom, such that Muslims and Christian for example can see each other as brothers and sisters who are travelling the same path, seeking always to reject misunderstandings while promoting cooperation and concord.

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