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**CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS CHRIST IN
RELATION TO THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH TOWARDS
MUSLIMS**

Supervisor

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of a Master's Degree in
Theology**

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DEDICATION

To my family, my parents, Mr. Baby M.T and Mrs. Leelam Baby, my brothers, Jineesh and Saneesh, my sister in law, Jismin Jineesh and my niece, Liss Maria, the Society of the Missionaries of Africa, my team-mates [Fr. Willey Schoof, Lawrence Tukamushaba, Daniel Kabuya, Venancio Echeverria, System Chiluba and Clement Kpatcha] and to all people of good will who tirelessly still, work for the Interreligious Dialogue between the Church and *Ummah*.

To all of them, I say thank you for your contribution!

EPIGRAPH

“May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so perfect in unity that the world will recognize that it was you who sent me and that you have loved them as you have loved me” (Jn 17: 21-23).

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of a Master's Degree in Theology. This work has never been submitted to any institute of learning for academic grading. All information from other sources and work consulted has been cited and acknowledged.

Signed:

Name of Student:

Date:

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed:

Name of Supervisor:

Date:

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This work is the result of a couple of encounter experiences with the Muslim community in Savelugu, Northern Ghana and with my Muslim friends in my home village Mangalam Dam, Kerala, India. Honestly, most of these experiences have been a challenge, helping me to look beyond our different faiths. I express my thanks to my parents who brought me to faith in Jesus Christ in order to share it with others and to the Society of the Missionaries of Africa whose charism has helped me to deepen my desire to encounter Muslims and Islam. I am also grateful to all Missionaries in the world who, despite the difficulties and challenges involved in this mission of the Church, remain still faithful to their religious values, beliefs and cultures. These people strive to foster a peaceful co- existence not only among Muslims but also with the entire family of the People of God.

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ABBREVIATIONS

1. BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Rom	Romans (the letter of St. Paul to)
Col	Colossians (the letter of St. Paul to)
1Cor	Corinthians (the first letter of St. Paul to)
Eph	Ephesians (the letter of St. Paul to)
Heb	Hebrews (the letter to)
Jn	John (the gospel of)
Lk	Luke (the gospel of)
Mk	Mark (the gospel of)
Mt	Matthew (the gospel of)
I Thes	Thessalonians (the first letter of St. Paul to)
Gn	Genesis

II. DOCUMENTS OF THE CHURCH

AG	<i>Ad Gentes Divinitus</i>
DH	<i>Dignitatis Humanae</i>
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i>
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
NA	Nostra Aetate

UR *Unitatis Reintegratio*

III.DOCUMENTS OF THE PONTIFICAL MAGISTERIUM

EN *Evangelium Nuntiandi*

ES *Ecclesium Suam*

RM *Redemptio Missio*

EG *Evangelii Gaudium*

IV.OTHER ABBREVIATION

DM Dialogue and Mission

DP Dialogue and Proclamation

DI *Dominus Iesus*

Q Qur'an (Islamic Sripture)

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CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS IN RELATION TO THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH TOWARDS MUSLIMS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

0.1 Background of the research

Encounters between people of different religions are part and parcel of the socio-religious context in the world today which is inevitable in any society. The experience that I acquired gave me a deep desire to promote interreligious dialogue among people of different religions, especially in the field of Christian – Muslim relations. Undoubtedly we can say that it is God who inspires one to engage in dialogue through encounter for one finds one's origin in God. It is said that, "At all times and in every race, anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to him. He has, however, willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness. He therefore chose the Israelites to be his own people and established a covenant with them. He gradually instructed this people...All these things, however, happened as a preparation for and figure of that new and perfect covenant

which was to be ratified in Christ...the New Covenant in his blood; he called together a race made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit” (Cf. CCC,741). In fact, it is so evident that Jesus had a couple of encounters with gentiles in his public ministry. And those encounters did not just happen by chance but were well planned in the salvific mission for all humanity. These encounters are well immersed into the mission of Jesus including all humanity, regardless of religions, traditions, tribes and gender. Obviously, Jesus had a great concern towards gentiles and the encounters he had created a new dimension of relationship between Jesus and those gentiles. This led eventually to a total transformation.

Today the Church is called to carry out the same mission of Jesus Christ towards other religions, especially, with Muslims with the same spirit of Jesus; a mission that considers encounter as an inevitable element and a threshold to open up dialogue with Muslims as far as the mission of the Church is concerned. It is only through encounter and dialogue that the Church can create a better relationship with Muslims. Jesus in the gospel seemed to have created a good relationship with Gentiles. The encounters he had with them eventually led him to engage in dialogue. Therefore, the aspect of encounter and dialogue is the principal foundation for evangelization as far as the mission of the Church is concerned towards Muslims.

In this long essay, we would like to make a comparative study between the encounters and dialogues of Jesus that are found in John’s Gospel and the encounter and dialogue mission of the Church today towards Muslim. To see how the encounter of Jesus influenced the mission of Church today towards other religions, especially Muslims, and shaped the perception of the Church by Muslims as far the mission of the Church is concerned. Having had enough encounter and dialogue experience with my Muslims friends during my two years of pastoral period in Northern Ghana, I am prompted to write this long essay on this theme based on that experience

in my life. This long essay has helped me to prepare to live an authentic missionary life in relationship with Muslims everywhere in the world, as foreseen by our founder Cardinal Charles Lavigerie and later redefined by the Society of Missionaries of Africa. I am confident that this effort will surely bare sufficient fruits in order to enrich my understanding of relationship with Muslim. And we are sure that this work will enlighten all those who are interested in this area.

0.2 Methodology

The materials for this long essay were obtained from both written and non-written sources. The non-written sources come mainly from my pastoral experiences with the Muslims in Northern Ghana together with other encounter experiences with Muslims acquired in my missionary life. Most of these non-written materials will be shared indirectly in the last Chapter.

0.3 The Content of the Research

My long essay contains four chapters with short introductory and concluding sections. The general introduction presents the background of the long essay and the methodology used. Besides these, it gives an overall idea about the various topics treated in each chapter in a comprehensive way. The first chapter will show how Jesus Christ Incarnate Son of God, is the foundation of the Mission of the Church and also its implications in the mission of the Church towards Muslims. The second chapter will give us the important role of the Second Vatican Council in making the paradigm shift in the mission approach towards other religions. The Church's special concern about Islam in connection with her evangelizing mission will be pointed out in this chapter, as well as the significant contributions of the Late Pope John Paul II.

The third chapter will draw our attention to the concept of mission in Islam and its different implications within and without Islam religion in relation to Jesus Christ, the unique saviour for entire humanity. The fourth and last chapter will explore the importance and relevance of having interreligious dialogue between the Church and *Ummah*. Different theological foundations being used by the Church as main criterion in the dialogue with Muslims will be exposed in this chapter before ending it with sufficient ideas and information on the fruits of dialogue between the Church and the *Ummah*. Thus, this long essay will help us realize that the search for universal human values such as peace, justice, trust and love urge us to commit ourselves to engage in and promote interreligious dialogue between the Church and *Ummah* so as to have a better harmonious relationship between them. The general conclusion will be a synthesis of our study.

Chapter I

Christian Understanding of the Mission of Jesus Christ

1.0 Introduction

In this first chapter, I would like to talk about how Jesus the incarnate Son of God the core faith of the Church, accomplished his redemptive mission for the whole of humanity, believers and non-believers. He took the form of a human being through the Incarnation and lived in this world becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like human beings (Ph.2:7-8). The whole Church believes that Jesus was truly God and truly human. The Catechism of the Catholic Church asserts on it by saying; “belief in the true Incarnation of the Son Of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith.” By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God” (Cf.CCC, 463). Jesus the son of God was sent to this world with a specific mission of his Father. God sends his only son because he loves this world so much. Jesus as an obedient son to his Father fulfilled the mission of his Father for salvation of all.

The salvific mission of Jesus was inclusive, regardless of age, gender, race and cultural barriers. Through his public ministry Jesus proceeded slowly but surely, with his redemptive mission drawing people closer to God the Father, unveiling various attributions of God to people. Having fulfilled the redemptive mission through the crucifixion he dismantled the clutches of sin which enslaved the entire humanity and opened the streams of salvation to all. He became the universal Saviour for all humanity through whom we are all saved.

The salvation which Jesus granted to us is meant for all and therefore all those who have faith in Jesus and are members of the Church through baptism are participants of the mission of Jesus and obliged to make known this salvation to all those who have not heard of Jesus. All Christians are called to witness Jesus in their ordinary faith-filled life situations to others who have not heard of Jesus and thus all get the chance to experience the salvation God the Father offered to all through His Son Jesus Christ. The paramount mission of the Church is to proclaim this good news of salvation to all through her mission. Christians by doing this will not only be making Jesus and his salvation known to others but they will also be deepening their faith in Jesus through a constant contact with him.

1.1 Jesus the Incarnate Son of God

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ is the perfect expression of God's love towards the whole humanity. "The word Incarnation suggests the whole biblical message about the person of Jesus Christ."¹ He is the Son of God and he took human flesh in the incarnation even though he was God (Ph 2:5-11). As a matter of fact, the Incarnation remains a mystery for us and we believe it as a mystery in which God became a human being just like us. "The Incarnation remains a

¹F. FRANCIS, *What is the Incarnation?*, Hawthorn Books, New York, 1962, 17.

mystery for the human mind in that the immutable and Eternal Being who transcends our powers of understanding unites to Himself a changeable and temporal being which alone is knowable to us.”² This mystery of Incarnation surpasses our mind and power of understanding because, in a real sense, it is a mystery of the transcendent God Himself. “We all know that the one and only divine purpose for the Incarnation given in the scripture is our redemption from sin and death by the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross.”³ However, in our modern world thinking, it is very difficult to conceive and comprehend the Incarnation that is God entering human history to save it rather than using his mighty power as he is believed to be omnipotent. In this sense, Rene Latourelle statement is so much relevant here:

He wants to be convinced that God has really entered history, and that Christ is really the manifestation of this God in human flesh. For if faith is complete surrender of the self to God, it is not an abdication of the self into unconsciousness, leaving man deprived of his nature so that he has to fall back on fideism, unable to establish the human rightness of his choice.⁴

The important question here is how can we understand and explain the Incarnation in a reasonable, sensible and acceptable way? If I believe in the Incarnation then, how do I reconcile my faith in the Incarnation and the understanding of it so as to convince others about it? Though the answers to these questions are left to each individual who believes in Jesus Christ and his Incarnation, it still remains a divine mystery. “There are mysteries which cannot be known unless they are revealed and that even when they are revealed and received in faith, they remain obscure in some way.”⁵ What is however important to mention, according to Hans Urs Von Balthasar, is that the Scriptures show the importance of the Incarnation and logically links it to

²F. FRANCIS, *What is the Incarnation?*, Hawthorn Books, New York, 1962, 13.

³F. FRANCIS, *what is the Incarnation?*, Hawthorn Books, New York, 1962, 29.

⁴R. LATOURELLE, *Christ and the Church, Sign of Salvation*, 4.

⁵Cf, “*Mystery*” in *the Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 691.

the passion of Christ. The Scripture teaches that in sending his Son into the world to die for us the Father manifested the wonder of his love for us: “for God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten son, so that those who believe in him may not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). According to St. Athanasius; “for this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world.”⁶

According to St. Leo the Great; “If man made in the image and likeness of God had preserved the honour of his nature; if, imposed on by the cunning of the devil, he had not brought upon himself the ravages of concupiscence from the law which had been imposed on him, the Creator of the world would not have been made a creature, the Eternal Being would not have been born in time, the Son of God, equal with the Father, would not have taken the form of a servant and likeness of the flesh, but because by the envy of the devil, death has come on our earth and because human captivity could not be ended if God had not espoused our cause, he who, without loss to his majesty, became a man and alone was free from the contagion of sin, was offered in the work of our redemption.”⁷

According to Karl Barth; “In Jesus Christ.... God activate and proves his Godhead by the fact that he gives himself to the sufferings and limitations of the human creature. The presentation of the self-giving love of God as supremely revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ, an event in which there was no superhuman element at all. He was, indeed, incarnated to be a human just like any of us. Thus the essence of the divinity is revealed in that which is completely human.”⁸God full of grace and truth is shown in the Word made flesh, and the flesh is the essential and indispensable medium of revelation. And that is what seen in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. St. John used the word ‘flesh’ in the remarkable formula of the mystery of the

⁶A.T. HANSON, *Grace and Truth; A study in the Doctrine of Incarnation*, London SPCK, 1975.

⁷A.T. HANSON, *Grace and Truth; A Study in the Doctrine of Incarnation*, London SPCK, 1975.

⁸A.T. HANSON, *Grace and Truth; A Study in the Doctrine of Incarnation*, London SPCK, 1975.

Incarnation in the prologue to his Gospel: “The Word was made flesh, and came to dwell among us”(Jn 1:14).With these words St. John puts before his readers the Word of God in the completeness of the human nature he took from himself, with its human ways of acting as well as its human limitation and frailties.

“The doctrine of the Incarnation expresses, so far as human words permit, the central belief of Christian that God himself without ceasing to be God has come among us, not just in but as a particular man, at a particular time and place.”⁹ That was what Jesus Christ, who was born in Nazareth in the historical context. “The Incarnation concerns God’s dealings with us, now and for all time. He identifies himself with our human estate in order to draw us to His Father. The purpose of the Incarnation was to establish a new relationship between the whole humanity and God. But the Incarnation is not itself a relation between God and Man. “It includes that, admittedly, and Jesus’ relation to the Father is the model for all divine-human relation.”¹⁰ But the main point of the Incarnation is not a matter of relation at all. It is a matter of identity with God the Father. Jesus is God incarnate-for our sake and for our salvation.

Our faith involves everything, including our body and mind. “In Jesus- and in many other ways- God has been among us in the flesh.”¹¹“Our relationship with God is not just words; it is the real life of embodied beings.”¹² We are made in God’s image, and God enters into human flesh. “We enter into this relationship with minds, hearts, souls and bodies.”¹³ This is the way God loves us and the way we love God. The miracle of the Incarnation is about God the Father who was distant and came close to His children in Jesus. “The Word existed from the beginning,

⁹M. GOULDER, *The Debate Continued, Incarnation and Myth*, Ed, SCM Press, London, 1979, 6.

¹⁰M.GOULDER,*The Debate Continued, Incarnation and Myth*, Ed, SCM Press, London, 1979, 11.

¹¹J.L.BERQUIST, *Incarnation*, United States of America, 1999, 17.

¹²J.L.BERQUIST,*Incarnation*, United States of America, 1999, 24.

¹³J.L.BERQUIST, *Incarnation*, United States of America, 1999, 36.

and in Jesus the Word is made flesh in order to live among God's people in glorious fashion."¹⁴ Jesus is the Word made flesh. Jesus is God incarnate, the very embodiment of God himself which is visible for us, so that we may behold God's glory, grace and truth. "God lives in Jesus and through the events of Jesus, God lives among humans for a time, choosing an embodied, enfleshed existence that is like humanity and that is in humanity's midst."¹⁵ For John, the Incarnation is no longer a matter of God's being with us in the body, but rather it is all about God's taking a human body to live like one of us for our salvation.

"In the Incarnation, we learn of God, and God learns of us. There is depth to the knowledge of each other that we get in Jesus and that we continue to build as we work together as God's purpose."¹⁶ The work that we needed to do together was seen clearly in Jesus life. After having encountered with Jesus Christ who revealed his loving Father we cannot claim that we do not know how to live in God's world of love, mercy, compassion and peace. Likewise, we must admit that we know exactly what the cost will be for God loves us so much that he gave his only Son. The love for God that empowers this relationship is not something that the world will accept easily. "The more deeply we express this love and the more that we implement God's plan for human life, the more opposition we will find."¹⁷ Jesus' Incarnation was to mark the beginning of God's reign in this world visibly. "In Jesus, we have heard the announcement of God's reign; we have seen God's plan begin to take form; we have learned how to embrace more nearly the God whom we love; and we have experienced the utter joy of life together with God."¹⁸

¹⁴J.L.BERQUIST, *Incarnation*, United States of America, 1999.

¹⁵J.L.BERQUIST, *Incarnation*, United States of America, 1999.

¹⁶J.L.BERQUIST, *Incarnation*, United States of America, 1999.

¹⁷J.L.BERQUIST, *Incarnation*, United States of America, 1999.

¹⁸J.L.BERQUIST, *Incarnation*, United State of America, 1999.

The great mystery of the Christian religion is the fact that Christ “was manifested in the flesh”(1 Tim3:16); the eternal Son of God became man, Jesus of Nazareth, who lived the concrete realities of human existence, at once as a man and as the Son of God. The loving God whose wonder and love beyond imagination (Cf, 1Thi6:16) wished to become visible and close to humanity, so in due time God spoke through his only Son (Cf, Heb1:1-3). He is “Emmanuel” God –with-us (Mt 1:23). The Incarnation of Jesus is the revelational presence of God in our humanity. In the words of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council:

By his Incarnation, he the son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man, He worked with human hands, he thought with human mind. He acted with human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things excepted sin (GS, 22: Cf, Hb 4: 15)

Vatican II teaches that, “the Word of God, through whom all things were made, was made flesh so that as a perfect man he could save all men and sum up all things in himself” (GS,45). Ultimately, the doctrine of the Incarnation is an extraordinary mystery that surpasses all human imagination, inviting us to ponder on the saving act of God with a renewed faith and spirit. The divine mystery and essence of Jesus’ incarnation is that Jesus is true human and true God. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man”(Cf.CCC, 464). Jesus Christ is the Word of God. St. John states it very clearly in the beginning of his gospel: “In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (St. Jn 1:1-3).

1.1.1 Jesus, Word of God

The Word of God is the name, identity, title, and honour given to Jesus in the NT (Cf. Heb 4:12; Rev 19:13). The ‘Word’ however has OT roots and we see the role that the word plays right from the first page of the Bible. “Creation itself is already intimately linked to the effectiveness of the Word. God said, ‘Let there be light’ and there was light” (Gen 1:3). The notion of the word features prominently in the legacy of the Psalms. The psalmist puts it clearly: “by the Lord’s word the heavens were made; by the breath of his mouth all their hosts....for he spoke and it came to be, he commanded and it stood in place” (Ps 33:6-9). Then the ‘word’ finds expressions in the prophetic literature and indeed in the whole OT history (Cf. Is 55:10-11, Is 9:7, Ps 147:15).

The characteristic of the Word in the OT, now finds expression in the person of Jesus “the Father’s one, perfect and unsurpassable Word” (GDC, 40). The prologue of St. John explicitly refers to Jesus as the Word of God: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that, “through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one utterance in whom he expresses himself completely” (CCC.102, Cf. Heb 1:1-3). Through him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible (Cf. Col 1:12-20). Bernard Cooke believes that, “Jesus exists and acts as God’s embodied Word,” for “the Word that the Church proclaims is precisely the Word of God made man, who is himself the subject and object of this Word. The Good News is Jesus Christ” (EA, 60). (PG 19, Jesus Christ the sacrament of God).

1.1.2 Jesus: Truly God, Truly Human

One of the greatest controversies that have ever marked the Christian faith is the [faith in the] doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, which is about the exact meaning and implication of him being truly God(divine nature) and truly man (human nature) at the same time. Various heresies falsified this doctrine. Gnostic Docetism denied not so much the divinity of Christ but his true humanity; Nestorianism regarded Christ as a human person joined to the divine person of God's Son; Monophysites affirmed that the human nature had ceased to exist as such in Christ when the divine person of God's Son assumed it (Cf.CCC, 465-4670).

Against this background of heresies, the Church had to defend and clarify this truth of faith, especially during the first centuries of Christianity. Various Ecumenical Councils made efforts to correct these heresies: the first Council of Nicea in 325 dealt with Gnostic-docetist heresy; the third council of Ephesus in 431 dealt with Nestorianism; and the fourth Council of Chacedon in 451 dealt with the Monophysite heresy(Cf. CCC, 465-469). Today the Church teaches about Jesus Christ as True God and True Man and to conclude this section I quote again:

The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part Man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man (Cf.CCC, 464).

1.2 Jesus and His Mission

The mission of Jesus is very evident and is clearly mentioned in John's gospel. His mission is very much integrated with his life which was proclaiming the good news of God. This message

was well manifested in his life in line with all the activities of Jesus mentioned in the Gospel as the Incarnated son of God whom God sent to this world to save humanity. The message of God's love, compassion and forgiveness was reflected in the life of Jesus. The universal salvific will of God was in Christ as he is the Son of God. John 3.16 says that "God loved so much this world that he gave His only son to be sacrificed". The classic text for the universal salvific will of God is found in 1 Tim 2:4-6 as it says; "God desires all humans to be saved and to come to the knowledge of Truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the human being Jesus Christ, who gave himself as ransom for all, the testimony to which was born at the proper time."

In the Gospel accounts, we see Jesus always in deep communion with his Father (Mt 15:13, 18:35, 7:21; Mk 8:38; Lk 10:22, 23:46; Jn 5:17). In reaching out to those in need and preaching the Kingdom of God Jesus was aware that this was his Father's wish for him to do (Lk 4:18-20). According to Cook, "this was his mission, to be the expression in people's lives of his Father's love. The core content of his mission was to show the love of his father had for all humanity. We may broadly categorize Jesus' public ministry, which is a means to fulfill his mission, in two dimensions: his healing ministry and his preaching and teaching ministries. In all these "he acted for God in meeting people's need."¹⁹

Obviously, Jesus' healing ministry was so impressive and touching. It was a ministry of immense interest in people and a living concern for their needs. He did everything to bring joy to their lives and made them understand that God his Father is compassionate and forgiving. Through his healing ministry he touched the ordinary hopeless and helpless reality of their lives and thus he drew people closer to his Father with hearts of repentance, humility and gratitude so as to experience His love in its fullness.

¹⁹B.COOK, Sacraments and Sacramentality, Paulines Publication, 1991.

Jesus Christ as part of his mission, preached about God's compassion, mercy, forgiveness and love. All these qualitative elements are well reflected and visible in the Kingdom of God. The centre of this announcement is the message that God's Kingdom is at hand and this announcement is the actual core of Jesus' words and works. Jesus proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom as the urgent and definitive intervention of God in history. "To this Kingdom, he devoted his entire life, he made known the joys of belonging to the Kingdom, its demands, its *magnacarta*, the mysteries which it embraces, the life of fraternal charity of those who enter it and its fulfilment" (GDC, 34). "Jesus message is a message of Joy: God's final and definitive offer of grace."²⁰ In the next topic we will see the uniqueness and importance of the Kingdom of God Jesus preached.

1.3 Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

The paramount mission of Jesus on earth was to proclaim the Kingdom of God which is all about God's love, forgiveness and compassion. All his mission works were triggered towards that kingdom of God. Everyone is called to enter the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom of God which welcomes everybody regardless of differences was well portrayed in the attitude of Jesus towards others. Jesus had a big room in his heart for everyone. He included everyone and even involved the gentiles to participate actively in the mission of His Father. There was no discrimination seen between his own people to whom he was sent and the Gentiles as far as his mission approach was concerned. He had room for everyone. He received everyone with great care and hospitality. One of the main aspects that dominated Jesus' life is his concern for the 'Kingdom of God' which is meant for all. To enter it, one must first accept Jesus word:

²⁰W.KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, Paulist Press, New York London, 1976.

The Word of the Lord is compared to a seed which is sown in a field; those who hear it with faith and are numbered among the little flock of Christ have truly received the kingdom. Then, by its own power, the seed sprouts and grows until the harvest.”(LG, 5).

The phrase ‘Kingdom of God’ is the biblical expression that articulates the nature of Jesus’ mission. While Jesus does not define precisely what the term ‘Kingdom of God’ means, his life, deeds and words together, tell us what it is. As Senior remarks; “Jesus’ parables about a gracious God, his fellowship with the outcasts and women, healing and exorcism, his conflicts over interpretations of law, all of these become a cumulative definition of what the Kingdom of God meant.”²¹

The synoptic gospels summarize Jesus’ mission in the phrase: “This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15, Mt 4:17, Lk 4:43). Jesus does not only proclaim the Good News about the Kingdom of God but he is himself the Good News. He embodies God’s plan for salvation and his person manifests the fullness of the Kingdom of God. As John Paul II confirms: “The Kingdom of God is before all else a person with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the Invisible God” (RM, 18). This Kingdom of God which Jesus proclaimed is all about his loving Father who reigns in our world. The present Pope Francis says in his apostolic exhortation: “The Kingdom, already present and growing in our midst, engages us at every level of our being and reminds us of the principle of discernment which Pope Paul VI applied to true development: it must be directed to all men and the whole man.”²²

Jesus describes membership of the Kingdom of God and its demands (Cf. Mt5:3-12). This Kingdom is both a gracious gift from God and a task for all human beings. The Kingdom is the ‘already and not-yet’ reality, which is essentially open to all and meant for both sinners and

²¹D.SENOIR, “*The Foundation for Mission in the New Testament*”, *The Biblical Foundation for Mission*(1984), 146.

²²POPE FRANCIS I, *The Joy Of the Gospel*, No 181, 28.

righteous (Cf. Mt13:24-30). It aims at transforming human relationships, and grows gradually as people learn to love, forgive, and serve one another and build up a just and peaceful society. Thus, conversion is the main requirements for membership of the Kingdom of God. And that can be achieved only through a profound faith in Jesus Christ with deep conviction and with the help of his Spirit.

The content of Christian mission is Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Christians respond to it by participating in its building through a life of witness to Christ in love for all. As Dupuis writes: "The focus of the Church's mission of evangelization is the building up of the Kingdom of God and therefore, wider than we needs to find completion in it and in the world to come."²³. According to Dupuis the Church is at the service of the Kingdom. He writes:

The Kingdom of God creates the Church, works through the Church, and is proclaimed in the world by the Church. There can be no Kingdom without the Church- those who have the acknowledged God's rule- and there can be no Church without the Kingdom; but they remain two distinguishable concepts: the rule of God and the fellowship of men.²⁴

The Church serves the Kingdom by establishing communities and guiding them to mature faith and charity in openness to others for the service of all humanity. As a matter of fact the Christian mission is three fold: Firstly, to proclaim that the Kingdom of God has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth; Secondly, to offer and witness to Christ's life as a proof that the Kingdom is present and universally operative to all. Thirdly, to challenge some social structures within the society and cultivate the basic principles of the Kingdom: justice, peace, unity and freedom.

1.4 Jesus Christ, the Universal Saviour According to the Teaching of the Catholic Church

²³J. DUPUIS, *Towards Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York,1997, 366

²⁴J. DUPUIS, *Towards Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York, 1997, 366.

One may ask oneself here, is Jesus Christ the universal Saviour? Or is he the Saviour for Christians only? What is his role as far as the salvation of all humanity? Where is Christ placed when dealing with other religions and the salvation they offer? Can we speak of Christ as the Universal Saviour or rather as Unique Saviour or both? To answer all these questions we need to look at them from the Church's perspective in line with her fundamental faith and teaching and the approaches and the reactions of other religions toward this matter. The Church affirms that the divine and redeeming will, unique and final, meant for all humans, has Jesus Christ in its centre. "God has so much loved the world that he has given His only son so that all who believe in Him, would never be lost but may have eternal life" (Jn3:16).

The 2nd Vatican Council teaches that the Son of God, by his incarnation, has been united in a certain way, to every human being. Therefore, Christ has a very unique relationship with the whole humanity. This does not diminish the role of other religions in salvation. Supporting the theological statement of Karl Rahner, the Church views other religions as "possible, or probable, "ways of salvation"-instruments by which God draws people to God's self."²⁵ Therefore "through the sincere practice of what is right in their religious traditions and following the directives of their conscience the members of other religions respond positively to the call of God and receive the salvation of Jesus Christ even if they do not recognize Him as the Saviour."²⁶ However, the Church looks at other religions as 'preparation for the Gospel'. In the words of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: "Whatever goodness or truth is found among them [the religions], it is considered by the Church as preparation for the Gospel" (LG 16).

²⁵P.F.KNITTER, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, Maryknoll, New York, 2002.

²⁶<http://www.vindialogue.org/the-theological-foundation-of-the-interfaith-dialogue/>.

The Church continues to affirm that: “It is only Jesus in whom people find fullness of religious life and through whom God reconciled all things to Himself” (2 Cor. 5:18-19), (NA, 2). The religions can find their fullness only in Christ. It is in this context that “Christianity presents Jesus Christ is not only as foundation of Christian mission but also as the universal Saviour and the unique revealer of God. This means that it is only through this person that humanity attains salvation” (Ac 13:32-33). However, on what do Christians base their theological claims? For them this teaching has God as its foundation. According to Karotemprel:

The uniqueness of revelation-salvation in Jesus Christ is not an invention of the first disciples of Jesus Christ nor later triumphal Church. It is God who revealed himself uniquely in Jesus Christ. In his teaching, miracles and most of all in his death, the disciples gradually came to recognize that God was revealing himself in Jesus of Nazareth: this revelation was for their own salvation and the salvation of all peoples.²⁷

In fact, this uniqueness is only attributed to Jesus Christ and not to Christians. “For there is one God, there is one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:5-6). However, to assert and believe this one needs the help of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul sounds very relevant here as he says; “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). Christians affirm this reality as truth not only for themselves but also for everyone, for “there is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved” (Ac. 4-12). According to Dupuis:

For the Christian, however, it is the mystery of Jesus Christ himself, and not his message, that is at the very centre of faith. The message and the messenger blend into one. Christianity is the religion of a person, the Christ.²⁸

²⁷S. KAROTEMPREL, ed., *Following Christ*, 52.

²⁸J. DUPUIS, *Jesus at the Encounter of World Religions*, New York, 1991, 93-94.

As a matter of fact, Christ the person, who is the Son of God, is the core and the foundation of Christian faith. It is through the Christ-event, Christian's experience the 'Kingdom of God' manifested as God's definitive reign in Jesus and as God's community of all people in Christ Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross is the supreme expression of humanity's total self-surrender to God and self-giving to others, and hence, it is a perfect example for all. Thus, Jesus Christ provides the necessary means for the salvation of all humankind beyond the confines of religions. Supporting this Vatican Council II states:

All this holds true not only for Christians, but also for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For since Christ died for all, and since the ultimate vocation is in fact one, and divine, we ought to have everyone the possibility of being associated with his 'paschal mystery' (GS,22).

The universality of Christ is a living reality whereby our daily life is sustained. The universality of Christ is not a matter of pride and boast as some would think but rather, it is a call to all towards self-emptying in order to receive the newness of life which comes from God (Rm6:3) and reaches out to the people. It is universality of Christ which makes the whole humanity united as children of God the Father. Christ's universality is not meant to exclude other religions. Rather, it calls all people to live as Jesus Christ did and become living examples by witnessing and proclaiming the values of the Kingdom of God to all. In this way, Christianity challenges people of all religions to lead an exemplary life (Cf. *DP*, 79). The fact that Christianity has not always achieved this goal does not deny the universality of Jesus Christ as Saviour.

Furthermore, the Christian religion does not exclude "shared forms and degrees of mediation"²⁹ of other faiths because they too are 'ways' of salvation for their members. These

²⁹C.F. J.A. SHERER, *Gospel, Church and Kingdom; A Comparative Study in World Muslim Theology*, Minneapolis, 1987, 67.

respective faiths are also gifts from God, which according to the Christian faith, acquire their full meaning only from Christ. Christ's mediation leads them to the highest point which, according to Dupuis, "does not do so by substituting or by replacing but by confirming and fulfilment."³⁰ Thus, if non-Christians will be saved by Christ, this will be because of their "sincere practice of what is good in their religions and the exercise of their conscience" (*DP*, 29), even if they do not directly recognize Christ as the only Saviour. Thus, according to Dupuis, "the most urgent Christological task today consists in demonstrating the universal significant and cosmic dimension of the Jesus Christ event, with Christ as the pinnacle of salvation history as the history's sharpest formation."³¹ And the Church teaching regarding this affirms:

Whatever saving presence of the Spirit or real revelation we may find in other religions, it's there because of Jesus Christ. That means it both comes from and leads to Jesus, the Gospel, and the Church. Jesus remains the criterion for whatever truth there is in other religions and the only and final end where this truth can be fulfilled. Whatever good there might be in other religions, it is there as a preparation for Christ.³²

This makes Jesus Christ so unique; the good elements found in other religions link to Christ in a profound way as a preparation for Christ. And thus, he becomes the universal saviour in a very unique way. "The fact that this unity [of God's plan] has been manifested to us in Christ....means that Christians will look for such convergence- a convergence of all religions in Christ and in Communion with the triune God."³³

1.5 Universal Mandate

³⁰J. DUPUIS, "One God, One Christ, Convergent Ways", *Theological Digest Vol.47 No: 3* (2000), 218.

³¹J. DUPUIS, *Jesus at the Encounter*, 104.

³²P. F. KNITTER, *Introducing Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll, New York, 2002.

³³P. F. KNITTER, *Introducing Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll, New York, 2002.

The Theological basis for the Christian mission is the universal mandate of Christ: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”(Mt28:19-20). This missionary mandate has three aspects: Firstly, God’s exceptional desire to save all people; secondly, Christ’s explicit desire to carry the Gospel to every nation; and thirdly, the Christian’s obligation to give glory to God by leading all people to His love.”³⁴

Christians have an inevitable role to play in the process of evangelization in so far as they are believers of Christ through baptism. They are to support each other in faith and proclaim it to others; “It is upon the Church that there rests, by divine mandate, the duty of going out into the whole world and preaching the Good News to every creature” (*EN*,59). The preaching of the word as the way to Christian faith is necessary for our salvation. The word “introduces man into the mystery of the love of God, who invites him to enter into a personal relationship with himself in Christ, and to open the way to conversion” (*RM*, 44).

Christ’s final command to his apostles before he ascended to his Father was clear: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations”(Mt 28:19-20). By this command, Jesus entrusted his apostles with the mission and the power to proclaim to humanity what they had heard, what they had seen with their mortal eyes, what they had looked upon and touched with the hands, concerning the word of life (1 Jn 1:1). Indeed “they went forth and preached everywhere” (Mk 16-20). This is in fact, the mission of the Church, to make known to all people the Gospel of the unique salvation found in Jesus.

The apostles were explicitly directed to evangelize the world and share the Gospel of Salvation to all people, as is made crystal clear especially in Mt 28:16-20; Mk 16:15-20; Lk 24:45-48.” In this respect, Peter Sarpong makes an interesting observation in this regard “when

³⁴J. POWER, *Mission Theology Today*, New York, 1971, 37.

the Lord asked his disciples to go and preach to all nations, (Mt 28:19), he meant just that, they were to preach to all peoples in the concrete situations of life they found themselves in.”³⁵ By Jesus’ command to preach the Gospel to the whole creation (Mk 16:15), didn’t he have in mind the ability of every culture and every people to welcome and make sense of the Good News of Salvation? Therefore, the great commission of universal love to make disciples of all nations provides an even clearer theological basis for inculturation, the basic theological truth being that the “Kingdom of God is meant for all peoples” (*RM*,14). All peoples are called to become members of the Kingdom and thus receive the salvation God the loving Father has prepared for all humanity in Jesus Christ.

All baptized members of the Church are called to participate in the mission of Jesus. The mission which Jesus Christ accomplished for the glory of his Father still needs to get its fulfillment in accordance with his Father’s plan. And therefore, we who believe in Jesus are called to continue the mission of Jesus for the salvation God the Father prepared for all. In line with dialogue and proclamation the Church says: “Announcing the Good News to all, witnessing, making disciples, baptizing, teaching, all these aspects enter into the Church’s evangelizing mission, yet they need to be seen in the light of the mission accomplished by Jesus himself, the mission he received from the Father.”³⁶

“The Christian faithful are those who, inasmuch as they have been incorporated in Christ through Baptism, have been constituted as the people of God” (Cf. CCC, 871) and for this reason all those Christian faithful are called to proclaim the Love of God manifested in Jesus for the salvation of all which the Father has prepared. Therefore all the Christian faithful should have a

³⁵P.SARPONG, *Peoples Differ*, 23.

³⁶*Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflection on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel*, Paulines Publication Africa, 1996.

missionary motivation that comes from Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms it regarding this as:

It is from God's love for all men that the Church in every age receives both the obligation and the vigour of her missionary dynamism, for the love of Christ urges us on. Indeed, God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, that is, God wills the salvation of everyone through the knowledge of the truth. Salvation is found in the truth. Those who obey the prompting of the Spirit of the truth are already on the way of salvation. But the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them the truth. Because she believes in God's universal plan of salvation, the Church must be missionary" (Cf.CCC, 851).

Ultimately, by the reception of baptism one becomes a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. By being a member of the Church, he or she is bound to the mission of the Church. The ultimate mission of the Church is to make known the salvation received in Jesus Christ which the Father has prepared for humanity without any differences and discriminations. "The ultimate purpose of the mission is none other than to make men share in the communion between the Father and the Son in their Spirit of Love" (RM,342). The Lord's missionary mandate is profoundly and deeply rooted in the eternal love of the Most Holy Trinity which was manifested to the whole world through the life of Jesus. All those who believe in Jesus by the reception of baptism are participants in this mission.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly,"the Church teaches that the belief in the true incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith" (Cf. CCC,463). Taking up St. John's expression, "The Word became flesh", the Church calls Incarnation the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it" (Cf.CCC.461). Jesus, as we have seen already, through his public ministry, fulfilled the plan which God the Father entrusted to him. In

proclaiming the Kingdom of God he imparted the message of God: love, compassion, forgiveness, patience, humility and reconciliation to all humanity.

Jesus' redemptive death for the sins of all humanity fulfilled the plan of God in Jesus. This is clearly mentioned in the gospel of St. John, "The Son of God, came down from heaven, not to do his own will but the will of him who sent him" (Jn 6:38). "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:5). The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms it as follows:

From the first moment of his incarnation the Son embraces the Father's plan of divine salvation in his redemptive mission: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work." The sacrifice of Jesus "for the sins of the whole world" expresses his loving communion with the Father. "The Father loves me because I lay down my life," said the Lord, "[for] I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father." (Cf, CCC. 417)

The mission of Jesus continued through the apostles: "As the Father sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21), which is the universal mandate that Jesus had entrusted his apostles. Having the legacy of the Apostles, "the whole Church is apostolic, in that she remains, through the successors of St. Peter and the other apostles, in communion of faith and life with her origin: and in that she is "sent out" into the whole world. All members of the Church share in this mission, though in various ways." (Cf.CCC,863) And today, the Church continues that mission of Jesus through her faithful members.

The Christian members are those who, inasmuch as they have been incorporated in Christ through baptism, have been constituted as the people of God" (Cf.CCC, 871). For this reason, we are obliged to continue the mission of Jesus, which was handed over to us by the apostles and other disciples until the end of time. In the second chapter we are going to see how the Church carries on the mission of Jesus wholeheartedly with the realization of that mission as Pope Paul

VI said in his exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: “The presentation of the Gospel message is not optional for the Church. It is her duty, by command of the Lord Jesus, so that people may believe and be saved.” (*EN*).

Chapter II

The Mission of the Church towards Other Religions

2.0 Introduction

We have seen already in the last chapter about Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God being inaugurator of the mission of God which is the Kingdom of God. The same mission of Jesus Christ has been continued by the Church today for the “Church is missionary by her very nature, for Christ’s mandate is not something contingent or external, but reaches the very heart of the Church” (RM, 62). In this Chapter, I would explain the vital role of Second Vatican Council as the foundation for the paradigm shift in the Mission approach of the Church towards other religions. The Church recognizes the role of other religions in the salvation for their believers. Provided that the believers follow faithfully the teachings and morals of their own religious faith, they will be able to obtain salvation. However, while the Church respects other

religious doctrines on salvation, undoubtedly the Church also affirms that the fullness of Salvation can be found only in the Church.

The Church's mission towards other religions is a continuation of the mission of Jesus. Jesus says to His disciples, "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Gospel to all creation" (Mk 16: 15). "The Church's mission is to proclaim the Kingdom of God established on earth in Jesus Christ, through His life, death and resurrection, as God's decisive and universal offer of salvation to the world."³⁷ For this reason "there is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed" (EN, 22).

As a continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ, the Church is "the seed and beginning" of the Kingdom" (Cf. LG, 5). As part of the continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ the Church strongly believes that encounter and dialogue with other religions are essential in the evangelizing mission of Jesus today. We will see in this chapter the different new elements being introduced by the Church in order that her mission be more effective and fruitful. It is her duty and call to be at the service of this Kingdom and to be witnesses to it i.e. "witness to faith in Christ, the Saviour, since this is the very heart of the Church's own faith and life."³⁸

2.1 The Mission of the Church Entrusted by Jesus

It is very clear that the mission entrusted by Jesus to the Church has to be carried out by all means. Christ has established the Church as a universal sacrament of salvation, as a sign of

³⁷*Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflection on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel*, Paulines Publication Africa, 1996, 25.

³⁸*Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflection on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel*, Paulines Publication Africa, 1996, 26.

the salvation that God offers to all humanity unconditionally. Jesus, when teaching the necessity of faith and baptism, affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church (*LG*,14). The Church has to manifest and reflect the message of Jesus' life in all the activities the Church is undertaking. The Church was instituted by Jesus Christ to continue the mission of Jesus which was the plan of God's salvation for all humanity in the fullness of time.

The Church's teaching emphasizes that, 'the Church's mission is to proclaim the Kingdom of God established on earth in Jesus Christ, through His life, death and resurrection, as God's decisive and universal offer of salvation to the world.'³⁹ For this reason "there is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed" (*EN*, 22). "The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the reign of God, promised over the ages in the scripture" (*LG*, 5). To fulfill the Father's will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church "is the Reign of Christ already present in mystery" (*LG*, 3). "The ultimate purpose of the mission of the Church is none other than to make men share in the communion between the Father and the Son in their Spirit of Love" (Cf. *RM*, 23). There is a strong continuity between the Kingdom preached by Jesus Christ and the mission of the Church insofar as it is centered on Christ.

The Church strongly believes that, "continuing the mission of Jesus, the Church is "the seed and beginning" of the Kingdom" (Cf. *LG*, 5).As for the 2nd Vatican Council, the Church is related to all humanity. "All men are called to this Catholic unity of the people of God, this unity that announce and promote the universal peace, and to this unity are related in many ways, the catholic believers, the others who have faith in Jesus Christ, and finally all men who are called to

³⁹*Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflection on Dialogue and Proclamation of the Gospel*, Paulines Publication Africa, 1996, 25.

be saved by the grace of God (LG,13). *Dominus Iesus*, a declaration from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, asserts that the Church is the universal sacrament of Salvation, as it recounts: The Lord Jesus, the only Saviour, did not only establish a simple community of disciples, but constituted the Church as a salvific mystery: he himself is the church and the church is in him (Cf. Jn 15:1ff; Gal 3:28; Eph 4:15-16; Acts 9:5).

Today, the Christians having received the grace from Jesus Christ are convinced that the mission of Jesus will continue and culminate in the proclamation of the Word of God with genuine openness to others. This conviction is based on God's love, experienced in Jesus Christ, that embraces the whole humankind (Cf. Mt 5:45). According to Michael, "speech does not become constructive and fruitful without love. Speech and love are the true means of communication. The only perfect speech is that spoken in love."⁴⁰ Certainly, the reality of this aspect or idea Jesus has showed in his life. This is a spring of inspiration for the Church to continue her active participation in dialogue with other religions rooted in the love of God the Father manifested in Jesus (Cf. Jn 3:16).

2.2 The Second Vatican Council and the Shift in Mission towards Other Religions

The Second Vatican Council in fact, brought radical changes in the Church as far as her mission and all its implications are concerned. The change or shift brought by the Second Vatican Council indeed renewed the whole mentality and concept of the Church's mission towards other religions. It removed a great amount of prejudices and misunderstanding that existed between the Church and other religions. Consequently, this shift brought enlightenment and new spirit to the mission of the Church towards other religions and enabled her to create a better relationship with

⁴⁰T. MICHEAL, "Christianity and Islam Reflections on Recent Teaching of the Church," Encounter Vol No: 112 (February 1985), 17.

other religions. Second Vatican Council opened the road towards a more positive evaluation of other religions mainly through its documents such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, and *Nostra Aetate*. In fact the latter paved a way for dialogue by providing some theological basis and new strategies in relating to other faiths.

The Council continues to proclaim that God gives his grace to all, which means God's saving will, is universal. "Then there is a possibility of salvation for those who seek God with a sincere heart, and by his grace they are ready to do his will which is a response to their conscience" (*LG*,16). "That those who without their own fault have not any explicit knowledge of God, through the grace of God can strive to live a good life" (Cf. *LG*). *Gaudium et Spes* 22 mentions that "if Christ died for all then it is necessary that the Holy Spirit gives to all the possibility of entering into His mystery of death and resurrection" (*GS*, 22). The values of holiness and truth can be recognized in other cultures and thus good is sown in minds and hearts, rites and customs of all people. *Nostra Aetate* No 2 is explicit on the paradigmatic shift in the Catholic Church's attitude towards other religions:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and life, those rules and teachings, which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all human persons (*NA*, 2).

The Second Vatican Council affirms that there is a need to recognize within all religions "elements of truth and grace" (*AG*, 9) and "a ray of that truth which enlightens all men" (*NA*,2). The Council affirms that not only are individuals saved by following the movements of the Spirit (*GS*, 11), but also religions themselves in their rites can have elements of truth and goodness (Cf. *LG*, 16). Their goodness comes insofar as they manifest a sincere answer to God's call. God has always been speaking to all of us in the context of daily events and experiences. He calls

believers of different religions to salvation in a manner we cannot understand because God's ways are not the same as ours.

The Church believes undoubtedly that it is Jesus Christ who revealed to us God the Father. The Second Vatican Council's most authoritative teaching on revelation is from its dogmatic constitution on divine revelation *Dei Verbum*. "It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will" (Cf. Eph 1:9). His will was that men and women should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature (Cf. Eph 2-8; 2Pet 1:4), and (*DV*, 2). It emphasizes in its explanation that the most ultimate truth which this revelation gives us about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of Revelation (*DV*, 2). By supporting this Second Vatican Council states that:

Finally, those who have not yet received the gospel are related to the people of God in various ways.[....]. But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day (LG 16).

In line with the Church's teaching, "to pose the problem of the signs of revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ is equivalent to posing a problem of interpretation, to posing indeed the first and most important of Christian hermeneutics, that of the very meaning of Christianity."⁴¹ The Church teaches that Christ is fully revealed in the Church. The Church through her teaching promotes an attitude of profound respect and love toward all religions of this world (Cf. *AG*, 10) through interfaith dialogue (Cf. *NA*, 2). This attitude of the Church was never seen before the Second Vatican Council. The Council affirms that it is the Spirit of God which is the principal agent of dialogue to animate us all.

⁴¹R. LATOURELLE, *Christ and the Church, signs of Salvation*, 3.

As the Second Vatican Council writes: “we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God” (*GS*, 22). The purpose of dialogue is to recognize the Spirit of God wherever it is at work. The Council also urges all believers “to forget the past and to work toward mutual understanding as well as toward the preservation and promotion of social justice, moral welfare, peace and freedom for the benefit of all [hu]mankind” (*NA*, 3). Christians are in a special way, however, “bound to proclaim without fail Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, in whom all people find their fulfilment” (*NA*, 2).

2.2.1 The Church and Other Religious Cultural System

According to Karl Rahner, “Christianity is the one absolute and universal religion to which all members of the human race are called. However, until the Christian Gospel actually enters a historical situation and thence into the consciousness of the individual, the latter can adhere lawfully to a non-Christian religion, fulfilling the obligation to worship God socially and culturally”.⁴² They enjoy openness to God and to his self-revelation which is bestowed by God and which is the core of their faith. As religious people having been invited to believe in the Good News of Jesus Christ that we proclaim, we don’t intend to separate them from their culture or from the truths contained in the religion to which they adhered before and which are expressed in terms of their own culture. Furthermore, by inviting them to believe in the Gospel we are also asking them to contribute to Christianity from the riches of their own religious and cultural traditions.

It is well summed up by the Fathers of Vatican II: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for their manner of life and

⁴²A. SHORTER., *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, Great Britain 1988, 39.

conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is in her duty bound to proclaim, without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2Cor5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life”.⁴³

“The Church therefore urges her sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, and also their social life and culture”.⁴⁴It is important to know that each religion has its own revelation rooted into the culture and tradition ethnicity i.e., something that is well accepted by the people as part of their life. Any other revelation, therefore, will find it difficult to be accepted in a different situation and that’s where we see the importance of inculturation which enable us to immerse in the knowledge of other religious revelations and faiths. As a result, we will be able to understand the relationship between revelation in Christianity and other World Religions.

2.3 The Church’s Encounter with Other Religions

“The Second Vatican Council taught that the Church urges her sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non- Christians, together with

⁴³A. SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, Great Britain 1988, 56.

⁴⁴A. SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, Great Britain 1988, 47.

their life and culture.”⁴⁵“Inter-religious dialogue is founded on the theological truth that all human beings have the same origin, namely, the supreme God who at the same time is the single destiny towards which man strives”⁴⁶ “All human beings have the same redeemer, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is present and operative in all human beings without exception.”⁴⁷

Encounter and dialogue are not merely anthropological but they have at the same time theological implications too and therefore they are not inseparable. It is as if God by way of incarnation opted to enter into dialogue within humankind so that all may be saved. And therefore, the Church must take as its vocation, to enter into dialogue with the entire world, with other religions, and their ideologies, with other Christian Churches and finally within herself.

“The Church is called to continue the dialogue of God who right from creation until today has been in constant dialogue with humankind.”⁴⁸ And therefore, Inter-religious dialogue played a central role in numerous encyclicals, exhortations and letters of different Popes of our time. “Indeed, all our contemporary Popes have been at the forefront role models in promoting dialogue as the most effective means for Christian to relate among themselves and with other people of other religions.”⁴⁹ Pope Paul IV and John Paul II were so much in favour of the idea of interreligious dialogue and they made enormous contributions during their papacies.

Before entering into a dialogue with other religions, the Catholic Church positions herself on a premise that, “dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but it is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements, and dignity” (*RM*, 56). This conviction of the Church is very necessary in making known her stand towards other religions without any

⁴⁵ Cf. J. DUPUIS, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York, 1978, 241.

⁴⁶ Cf. J. DUPUIS, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York, 1978, 97.

⁴⁷ Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, Nairobi, 1978.

⁴⁸ Cf. Petit Echo, *Fullness of Life*, 138.

⁴⁹ Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, Nairobi, 1978.

compromise. In addition, it is important for understanding that the manner of life and doctrines of other religions are different from that of the Catholic teaching.

The prompting reason for the Church to commit herself to interfaith dialogue is “not merely anthropological but primarily theological” (*DP*, 38). This means that God is the foundational reason who in fact, revealed himself in Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word; this is our witness to interfaith dialogue and unity in mission. Jon Paul II states, “Interreligious dialogue is part of the Church’s evangelization.... The Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue.”⁵⁰ The statement of Brian Hebblethwaite is also very relevant for this context as:

Christians must cease to think of their faith as bearing witness to God’s final and absolute self-revelation to man. Rather, they must learn to recognize their experience of God in Christ to be but one among many different saving encounters with the divine which have been given to different historical and cultural segments of mankind.⁵¹

Paul Knitter, a prominent Catholic theologian, has made a remarkable comment in line with this as follows:

Other religions may be just as effective and successful in bringing their followers to truth, and peace, and well-being with God as Christianity has been for Christians;... these other religions, again because they are so different from Christianity, may have just as important a message and vision for all peoples as Christianity does. Only if Christians are truly open to the possibility that there are many true, saving religions and that Christianity is one among the ways in which God has touched and transformed our world, only then can authentic dialogue take place.⁵²

⁵⁰ L. BYRON, SHERWIN, K. HAROLD, *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1996, 48.

⁵¹ L. BYRON, SHERWIN, K. HAROLD, *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1996, 33.

⁵² L. BYRON, SHERWIN, K. HAROLD, *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1996, 51.

Undoubtedly, we can admit that since the Second Vatican Council took place, the Church moves in line with this. It is visible in her attitude towards other religions as the Church engages herself into deep dialogue with them as her important mission of evangelization. It is evident that the Church is convinced that believers apart from Christianity can obtain the salvation. The Church's document *Nostra Aetate* profoundly states that and supports that, "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and life, those rules and teachings, which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all human persons" (*NA*, 2).

2.4 John Paul II and Other Religions

One of the key persons of the contemporary time of the Church who remarkably contributed to strengthening the relationship between the Church and other religions was the late Pope John Paul II (1978-2005). He was very much in favor of this new shift in the mission approach towards other religions, particularly to Islam and contributed enormously to deepen the relationship between the Church and other religions. During his pontificate, John Paul II encouraged people from various religions to promote and foster dialogue as way of reading the 'signs of the times' about which Jesus spoke. The Pope urged all Christians to get involved in dialogue. He considers interfaith dialogue not only as a part of the Christian mission but also as a path towards realizing the Kingdom of God. He writes: " Just as interreligious dialogue is one element in the mission of the Church, the proclamation of God's saving work in our Lord Jesus is another [...] There can be no question of choosing one and ignoring or rejecting the other."⁵³

⁵³ F. GIOIA, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue*, 610.

One might really ask as to what really prompted him to promote interreligious dialogue? The fact is that “John Paul II seems to be convinced that interreligious dialogue is a path that can promote respect among members of different religions and help to bring peace and harmony to a world torn by conflict and war, poverty, and the destruction of the environment, a world that is captivated by materialism and secularism, in deep need of finding significant existence.”⁵⁴

As a matter of fact, one of the most important initiatives in the history of the Church as far as the interreligious dialogue is concerned is that John Paul II once invited representatives of all religions for a ‘Day of Prayer for Peace’, held in Assisi, in October 1986. This invitation was outstanding and it simply manifested the Catholic Church’s desire to bring peace and harmony among all religions. He urges thus:

We are here [...] to examine ourselves before God concerning our commitment to peace, to ask him for this gifts, to bear witness to our shared longing for a world of greater justice and solidarity. We wish to do our part in fending off the dark clouds of terrorism, hatred, armed conflict [...] For this reason, we wish to listen to one another. We believe that this itself is already a sign of peace [...] The hatred can only be overcome through love.⁵⁵

He also urged the leaders who participated in the meeting to witness to fraternal spirit during their prayer: “Let us see in it an anticipation of what would like the developing history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another toward the transcendent goal which God sets for us.”⁵⁶ John Paul II was more engaging with Muslims than any other Pontiff before him. This was manifested by his numerous pastoral visits to Muslim countries and his concerns for Christian-Muslim relation. He strongly remarked:

⁵⁴ L. BYRON, SHERWIN, K. HAROLD, JOHN PAUL II and Interreligious Dialogue, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1996, 93.

⁵⁵ *Pontifical Council of Religious Representatives, Day of Prayer of Peace at Assisi* (Rome 2002), 89.

⁵⁶ B. L. SHERWIN- H. KASIMOW, *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue* (New York 1990), 209.

Christians and Muslims in general... have badly understood each other, and sometimes, in the past, have opposed and even exhausted each other in polemics and in wars. I believe that today God invites us to change our old practices. We must respect each other in good works on the path to God.⁵⁷

His concern for Muslims was, at the same time, socio-politically open and theologically conservative. He urged all those involved in dialogue to share common religious values. In fidelity to his faith, he held that salvation is only through Jesus Christ, the true saviour. He encountered Muslims as spiritually rooted people. He called for respect among religions despite our religious differences. He saw dialogue as the only true method to reach out to Muslims and people of other faiths.⁵⁸

2.5 Newly Introduced Elements for an Effective Mission

Inculturation, and Encounter and Interreligious dialogue are inevitable factors in the Mission of the Church today. The terms Inculturation and Encounter and Interreligious dialogue are mentioned in the Second Vatican Council. They are effective elements in the Mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Evidently, these two elements have become parts and parcel of the mission of the Church in her efforts to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

2.5.1 Inculturation

As a matter of fact, inculturation is the core element of evangelization and it is the light of the mission of the Church. Inculturation is the process through which the Christian faith is incarnated into a culture and this is bound by its nature to the proclamation of the Gospel. It is rooted in the incarnation of the word of God. When we look at the foundation of inculturation in the mission of the Church, it's obvious that the incarnation is the theological basis of

⁵⁷B. L. SHERWIN, -H. KASIMOW, *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue* (New York 1990), 185.

⁵⁸B. L. SHERWIN, -H. KASIMOW, *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue* (New York 1990), 200.

inculturation. Jesus was born into a culture. He lived that culture and used it to announce his message of salvation. “Through inculturation, Jesus Christ adopts new forms and new approaches in carrying out his saving mission to the world and thus it becomes the theology of inculturation.”⁵⁹ Pope John Paul II says, “inculturation is the incarnation of the Gospel in the native culture and also introduction of the culture into the life of the church.”⁶⁰ According to him, “inculturation clearly functions as a means of implementing the missionary mandate of the Lord Jesus Christ to his Church to go and evangelize all peoples, all cultures and all nations.”⁶¹

The theological aspect of inculturation demands thinking out carefully the relation between the mystery of Christ’s incarnation and the mystery of his being sent which is in fact the foundation of His Church. “Inculturation is the process of encounter between a given culture and the gospels, between the gifts of human values inherit in every culture and the gift of faith, between a people within the context of their traditional heritage and the Church.”⁶² Ultimately, inculturation is about the relationship between culture and faith, and God and man. And therefore, “as such, inculturation is not just one aspect of the missionary activity of the Church; it ought to be the chief concern for evangelization.”⁶³

2.5.1.1 Inculturation and Jesus Christ

The subject matter of Inculturation is Jesus Christ through his incarnation in a particular cultural context. Jesus Christ as a divine truth even now inhabits this centre and reaches out to its fullness of truth in the incarnate word proclaimed by Christians. The Christ who took human flesh is the word in whom all has been created and thus he becomes the heart of all human

⁵⁹Cf. A. SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 263.

⁶⁰Cf. O. A. OLIVER, *Theory and Practice of Inculturation (An African Perspective)*, Enagu, 1992. 17.

⁶¹Cf. O. A. OLIVER, *Theory and Practice of Inculturation (An African Perspective)*, Enagu, 1992. 38.

⁶²Cf. O. A. OLIVER, *Theory and Practice of Inculturation (An African Perspective)*, Enagu, 1992. 11.

⁶³L. MAGESA, *Anatomy of Inculturation*, 174.

cultures. He is responsible for whatever is true and good in them and that he makes them channel of salvation. “Christ is already present in Non-Christian religious traditions such as Hinduism and Islam before the Gospel is explicitly proclaimed.”⁶⁴

“The incarnation of Christ is merely a further and final step in Christ’s solidarity with human culture.”⁶⁵ The Christ who was born and died and was raised to life for us is the foundation for the dialogue between Gospel and culture is rooted in created human nature itself. Pope John Paul II says: “The Church encounters different cultures and becomes involved in the process of inculturation. The need for such involvement has marked the church’s pilgrimage throughout her history”⁶⁶, even though inculturation is not a new experience in and for the Church.

Certainly the “ways known to God alone” are those that the Holy Spirit accomplishes in the hearts of men and women and in the structures of salvific mediation that other World Religion can have. This means that Christianity is open to an appreciation of non-Christian religion and to recognizing the authentic good they have been able to give to their people, cultures and traditions for centuries. As a matter of fact, John Paul II describes inculturation in term of incarnation. He writes “inculturation is the incarnation of the gospel in native culture and also the introduction of the culture into the life of the Church.”⁶⁷ According to him “inculturation clearly functions as a means of implementing the missionary mandate of the Lord Jesus Christ to his Church to go and evangelize all peoples, all cultures and all nations.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴Cf. O. A. OLIVER, *Theory and Practice of Inculturation (An African Perspective)*, Enagu, 1992, 13.

⁶⁵Cf. O. A. OLIVER, *Theory and Practice of Inculturation (An African Perspective)*, Enagu, 1992, 66.

⁶⁶Cf. O. A. OLIVER, *Theory and Practice of Inculturation (An African Perspective)*, Enagu, 1992, 71.

⁶⁷ Cf. O. A. OLIVER, *Theory and Practice of Inculturation (An African Perspective)*, Enagu, 1992, 59.

⁶⁸Cf. O. A. OLIVER, *Theory and Practice of Inculturation (An African Perspective)*. Enagu, 1992, 48.

2.5.2 Encounter and Dialogue

Since the Second Vatican Council the Church with full conviction, started applying encounter and dialogue as the most fundamental elements in her mission towards other religions. These two are inseparable and complement each other as they go hand in hand. Perhaps, the Church drew the inspiration and conviction of these two elements as exemplified by Jesus Christ in the Gospels where he engages into dialogue with Gentiles through an encounter. Jesus' encounters with gentiles often began with an ordinary situation of life as we find in the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-42). Often it leads the other person into conversion as well as salvation. According to the Church concept on it, "Interreligious dialogue at its deepest level is always a dialogue of salvation, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with Mankind."⁶⁹

As far as the Church and her evangelization are concerned in line with the Gospel message of Jesus, Encounter and Dialogue are necessary and essential for evangelization and they enable the Church to reach out to other faiths and other Christian denominations. This allows all sides to get a fuller understanding of each other. Dialogue begins from an encounter experience with the 'other'. Initially, it is not necessarily a religious discourse, but rather the exchange or expression of the fundamental values of being human i.e., created in the "image and likeness of God" (Gn 1:29). It is a mission of companionship according to the example of Jesus Christ himself who welcomed all in his kingdom. His encounter with the Samaritan woman leads into a dialogue to the extent that she finds the truth in Jesus and this remains in front of us as a challenge (Cf. Jn 4:7-42).

⁶⁹ L. BYRON, SHERWIN, K. HAROLD, *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1996, 74.

Encounter is a threshold for dialogue. Before one enters into dialogue not only one should have a deep experience and conviction of one's faith but also at the same time, one should possess the openness to an encounter with other religions so as to engage into a deep dialogue, learning from the others and respecting their strengths and weaknesses. Hence, it helps in the understanding of other faiths especially their theological views. In effect, it would facilitate in appreciating the norms of the faith of others and as a result it could bring harmony and peace among the people. This also helps in reducing the confusion that exists between the Church and other religions. Looking at this, we can say that indeed, interreligious dialogue is very important for the Church.

The late Pope John Paul II obviously had a deep conviction on dialogue as he realized its importance for the mission of the Church. Addressing the 1984 plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the late Pope declared, "(Interreligious) dialogue is fundamental to the Church, which is called to collaborate in God's plan with her methods of presence, respect and love towards all persons." He went on to call attention to a passage from

Ad Gentes:

Closely united to men/women in their life and work, Christ's disciples hope to render to others true witness of Christ and to work for this salvation, even where they are not able to proclaim Christ fully. He prefaced this by saying: dialogue finds its place within the Church's salvific mission; for this reason it is a dialogue of salvation. In this dialogue of salvation, Christians and others are called to collaborate with the Spirit of the risen Lord who is universally present and active.⁷⁰

He deeply realized the importance of encounter and dialogue in the salvific mission of the Church. "In this dialogue of salvation, Christians and others are called to collaborate with the Spirit of the risen Lord who is universally present and active. In dialogue Christians and others

⁷⁰*Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflection on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel*, Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, 18.

are invited to deepen their religious commitment, to respond with increasing sincerity to God's personal call and gracious self-gift which, as our faith tells us, always passes through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the work of His Spirit.”⁷¹

Conclusion

At the end of this Chapter, we have come to know the importance of the mission of the Church entrusted to her by Christ Jesus. The Church, despite facing so many difficulties and struggles, still remains faithful in carrying out this mission of Jesus. Also, we have seen that the Second Vatican Council discovered and realized that it was necessary and vital for the Church to change her perception and attitude towards other religions so as to make her mission more effective in recognizing and accepting the goodness of other religions and the elements of salvation found in them. With the arrival of the Second Vatican Council, a paradigmatic shift in the Catholic Church's attitude towards other religions took place. She realized slowly but surely, that other religions have elements of truth and grace, which facilitates and are instrumental for their adherents to attain salvation. According to *Nostra Aetate*, “The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions” (NA, 2). This is a tremendous discovery and realization of the Church concerning the view on salvation of those ‘outside’ the Church.

The Church could work in collaboration with other religions towards unity. Putting aside all prejudices, ignorance and negligence, she with a great openness, welcomed all other religions into dialogue and engaged herself into dialogue with other religions. This special mission of the Church in interreligious dialogue still continues. Despite facing many challenges, she

⁷¹*Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflection on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel*, Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, 19.

remains convinced of its importance. Jesus Christ is the foundation and the inspiration to engage herself into dialogue with other religions. The Church believes that:

Against this background it becomes easier to see why and in what sense interreligious dialogue is an integral element of the Church's evangelizing mission. The foundation of the Church's commitment to dialogue is not merely anthropological but theological. God, in an age-long dialogue, has offered and continues to offer salvation to humankind. In faithfulness to the divine initiative, the Church too must enter into a dialogue of salvation with all men and women.⁷²

We also have discovered in this chapter that the late Pope John Paul II had contributed in strengthening and highlighting the importance of interreligious dialogue with other religions. He himself was involved in many different forms of interreligious dialogue like meeting with different religious leaders, and by visiting different predominantly Muslims countries and meeting their leaders. He put into writing the values of this mission of the Church in her evangelization today and finally by inviting all Christians to engage in this mission of dialogue in their ordinary life situations. Another point that we have discovered in this chapter is the new effective elements in the mission of the Church today. The Church recognizes undoubtedly the value of different cultures. As a result, elements of inculturation, encounter and dialogue became part and parcel of her evangelizing mission in the present time. Her emphasis on this point is stated as follows:

The Christian message supports many values found and lived in the wisdom and rich heritage of cultures, but it may also put in question culturally accepted values. Attentive dialogue implies recognizing and accepting cultural values which respect the human person's dignity and transcendent destiny. It may happen, nevertheless, that some aspects of traditional Christian cultures are challenged by the local cultures of the religious traditions. In these complex relationships between cultures and religion, interreligious dialogue at the level of cultures takes on considerable importance. Its aim is to eliminate tensions and conflicts, and the potential confrontation by a better understanding among various religious cultures of any given region. It may contribute to purifying cultures from any dehumanizing elements, and thus be an agent of transformation. It can also help to uphold certain traditional cultural values which are under threat from modernity and the levelling down which indiscriminate inter-nationalization may bring with it. The

⁷²*Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflections on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel*, Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, 18.

sincerity of interreligious dialogue requires that each enters into it with the integrity of his or her own faith.⁷³

What we have seen above remains as an ongoing challenge for all those who involve themselves in this mission. Living the Gospel values exemplified by Jesus Christ faces varied challenges in the context of grounding to different cultures and traditions. However, those words of the late Pope John Paul II remain so relevant and give new hope to those who are involved in interreligious dialogue despite the various challenges awaiting them. He says:

The fruit of dialogue is union between people and union of people with God, who is the source and revealer of all truth and whose spirit guides men in freedom only when they meet one another in all honesty and love. By dialogue, we let God be present in our midst, as far as we open ourselves in dialogue with one another, we also open ourselves to God.⁷⁴

May the Spirit of God lead both Christians and Muslims into a proper understanding of dialogue with its ultimate aim is the fruit of dialogue that is union between people and union of people with God. Next Chapter will give a comprehensive idea about the foundation and background of mission in Islam which is the sustaining factor as far as their attitude is concerned with other religions, especially, with Christianity.

⁷³*Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflection on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel*, Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, No. 46.

⁷⁴JOHN PAUL II, "To Representatives of the Various Religions of India, Madras, February 5, 1986," 326.

Chapter III

The Concept of *Da'wah* in Islam

3.0 Introduction

In the last chapter we have already seen the role of the Church in the Mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through whom the Kingdom of God is manifested. In order to fulfill the command of Jesus “Go therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28: 19) the Church has brought a paradigm shift in her mission approach towards other religions since Second Vatican Council in order that the mission entrusted by Jesus Christ may be fulfilled. This Chapter will explain the real concept of mission in Islam and its significant and fundamental relation to the Quran and the faith of Muslims. It will also discuss how *da'wa* has become part of their daily life journey of faith. All these will be remarkably elucidated here and how it has become an integral part of their daily life based faith. This Chapter will also explore the important position of Prophet Muhammad the last

prophet according to the Qur'an and the founder of Islam. Lastly, we will also look into the position of Jesus Christ in the Qur'an and in the faith of Muslims.

It will be interesting to know the implications of the way Muslims look at Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus as the way to holiness and the standards of demands required of one who has faith in him. We will discover in this Chapter, the attitude of Islam towards other religions and how they look at the idea of dialogue with other religions. Has the Qur'an mentioned anything in this line? Did Prophet Muhammad speak in favor of this idea? Well, we will come to know all these questions in this chapter. The Muslims desire for guidance is summarized in the opening Chapter (*al-Fatiha*) of the Qur'an, It reads:

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Owner of the Day of Judgment, Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help. Show us the straight path. The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not (the path) of those who earn Thine anger, not of those who go astray (Q 1: 1-7).

The essence of this prayer will be the seen in the different topics that we are going to deal with in this Chapter.

3.1 The Mission of Prophet Muhammad

“There is no way that we can talk of Islam without the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad (Ca. 570-632).”⁷⁵“This is because the Qur'an is the final evidence of the divine origin of the Prophet's mission.”⁷⁶ The core of the Qur'an is essentially the Islamic faith: the oneness of God and the mission of Prophet Muhammad, his messenger (Cf. Q 4). As Gardet puts it, “At the centre of Islamic faith is the inaccessible mystery of one God, at the centre of its moral code is

⁷⁵ Cf. L. GARDET, *Muhammedanism*, New York, 1961, 19.

⁷⁶W. E. PHIPPS, *Muhammad and Jesus: A Comparison of the Prophets and their thoughts*, New York, 1996,9.

the obedience to the divine Word.”⁷⁷ Thus Prophet Muhammad’s important mission was to proclaim the oneness of God (*Tawhid*) to all, as it is said in the dialogue between Timothy, the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church (8th c) and Caliph al-Mahdi:

Al-Mahidi: What do you say about Muhammad? Timothy: Muhammad is ‘worthy of praise’ and ‘walked in the path of the prophets’ because he taught the unity of God; he taught the way of good works; he opposed idolatry and polytheism; he taught about God, His Word and His Spirit; he showed his zeal by fighting against idolatry with the sword; like Abraham he left his kinsfolk rather than worship idols.⁷⁸

Muhammad’s mission was not only to bring every creature to submission to one God (Q 4:168-173) and His will, but also to establish a new world order (Cf. Q 57:25). In the footsteps of Muhammad, Muslims too bear witness to the same Qur’anic truth that “There is no God and Muhammad is his Prophet” (Q 2:163). The first part of the *Shahadah*- “There is no god but God,” is one of the main elements of the Muslim’s mission (Cf. 23:52-53). Bearing witness to the *shahadah* is sufficient to ensure their membership within the Muslim community.

The acknowledgement of the mission of Muhammad, who received revelations directly from Allah, follows as a matter of course. Muslims have also to follow the teachings of the *Hadith*.⁷⁹ The call of Allah to submission is based on the themes of “*Dawah* and of *Jihad*.” These two themes guide Muslims in their response to Allah’s will. Muslims strive to embrace Allah’s will because Islam is “at one and the same time and inseparably a religion, a legal and political entity and a culture.”⁸⁰ This is because Islam is not only a “simple system of doctrines

⁷⁷L. GARDET, *Muhammedanism*, 172.

⁷⁸Quoted by D. A. KERR, “*The Prophet Muhammad in Christian Theological Perspective*,” *Encounter* Vol. 17 No: 106 (June 1984), 10.

⁷⁹E. TAPIERO, *The Dogma and Rites of Islam Through the Texts*, Trans. M.L Fitzgerald, Rome, 1995, 19.

⁸⁰L. GARDET, *Muhammedanism*, 65.

and religious practices; it is much more than that, it is a complete civilization.”⁸¹ And it is based on the message the prophet Muhammad, “the seal of prophets,” received from the angel Gabriel.

3.1.1 Muhammad- the Seal of Prophets

According to Qur’an “He is neither God nor His son, but just the last prophet of God who has been sent to show guidance to all mankind.”⁸² The Qur’an says:

Say (O Muhammad): O mankind! I am the messenger of allah to you all-(the messenger of) Him unto whom belongeth the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. ... So believe in Allah and His messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write,... and follow him that happily ye may be led aright (Q 7:158).

However, Islam teaches convincingly that the Prophet Muhammad is the last of God’s prophets. The archangel Gabriel appeared to him in a vision and gave him the almighty God’s message. Thus, he became the Prophet of Allah. Among all of Allah’s messengers such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus (Isa), Muhammad is the highest and the perfect one for he is the ‘seal of prophet’ (Q 33:44). His message reaffirms the eternal will of Allah already given to previous prophets. So, “there is no need of another one since his message contains necessary guidance for everybody from now to the end of time. This guidance contains all the essential principals for all creatures to be in total submission to Allah.”⁸³ Thus, whoever refuses to adhere to truth revealed by Allah through Muhammad deprives oneself of valuable guidance and thus is not a true Muslim.

⁸¹E. TAPIERO, *The Dogma and Rites*, 5.

⁸²B. KATEREGGA, D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, “a Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue”*, 1980, 46.

⁸³C.f. M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue*, 50.

3.2 Islamic Understanding of *Da'wa* (Mission)

The word *Da'wa* was derived from the Arabic root word, 'd' w, whose basic meaning is 'call'. As such, "the word can describe preaching, theological-political campaigning or propagating and calling others to Islamic faith."⁸⁴ Here we define *Da'wa*, as any effort by a Muslim to propagate, protect, or preserve a version of the Islamic faith, either to other Muslims or to non-Muslims."⁸⁵ This call expresses the Muslims' effort to invite others to the path of Allah: "Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious" (Q 16:125). Every Muslim is expected to be a *Da'i*, a preacher-worker and missionary for Islam."⁸⁶ "This mandate involves the propagation of the Islamic faith through witness to the Muslim way of life to all humankind."⁸⁷ Muslims are not only called to go back to the purer form of religion practiced by Prophet Muhammad within the Islamic *Ummah*, but they are also called to strengthen the Muslim community and invite others to join them.

Da'wa is slowly taking on a new dimension. "*Da'wa* has become the foundation for social, economic, political and cultural activities as well as domestic and foreign policy strategies; [...] and a call to membership in the righteous Islamic community."⁸⁸ Thus, to a certain extent *Da'wah* can be compared to Christian 'missionary activity'. Some Muslims, however, do not welcome this comparison, since they maintain that nobody can understand *Da'wah* outside the totality of the Islamic faith. As Ali Murrad remarks: "*Da'wah* among non-Muslims cannot, and should not be treated as an isolated phenomenon [...] we will not

⁸⁴Cf. T.M JOHNSON – D.R SCOGGINS, "Christian Mission and Islamic *Da'wah*: A Preliminary Quantitative Assessment", International Bulletin of Missionary Research Vol. 29 No: 1 (January 2005), 9.

⁸⁵T.M JOHNSON –D.R SCOGGINS, "Christian Mission and Islamic *Da'wah*, 9.

⁸⁶The term "Islam" derives its root from an Arabic *silm/salam* referring to Peace.

⁸⁷W. Wagner, "A Comparison of Christian Mission and Islamic *Da'wah*," *Missiology: An International Review* Vol. 31 No. 3 (July 2003), 345.

⁸⁸J. L. ESPOSITO, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, 64.

understand it properly unless we recognize its proper place at the centre of the Islamic life that we as Muslims live.”⁸⁹ However, his fellow Muslim Mawdudi cautions;

Muslims in their enthusiasm for Da’wa (mission work) should never be carried away to the extent that it degenerates into debate and discussion to attack the beliefs of non-Muslims and to abuse of their leaders and their God because this will, instead of bringing them closer to the truth, push them from far way (Cf. Q6:108).⁹⁰

With the Islamic faith, *Da’wah* is now being interpreted as a universal invitation to join *Ummah* rather than only proselytizing non-Muslims. As Goldsmith remarks: “ The work of *Da’wah* is fulfilled not only by direct preaching, tract distribution and personal persuasion, but also by the more subtle approach of cultural exhibitions and the mass media presentation about Islamic art and culture.”⁹¹ This explains why some countries consider *Da’wah* as both a national and individual responsibility.

3.3 Islamic (*Ummah*), a call to Universal Brother/Sisterhood

The Muslim community is called the *Ummah*. “The profession of faith in the Oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad is that which constitutes a person a member of the Islamic community (*umma*).”⁹²“The *umma* does not take its name from the founder or an event but rather it is a community of Allah.”⁹³As a matter of fact, in practice, all Muslims together form a trans-national *Ummah* where they find the structure, which educates and sustains

⁸⁹Cf. W. WAGNER, “A Comparison of Christian Missions, 340.

⁹⁰R. LABONET – Y. R. MARY, “Muslim and Christians Share Experience at Islamic University in Uganda,” Together Magazine Vol. 2 No. 4 (July 2002), 21.

⁹¹M. GOLDSSMITH, *Islam and Christian Witness*, London, 1982, 13.

⁹²F. T. MICHEL, I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam, Essay on Dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010, 62.

⁹³B. KATEREGGA, D. W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue*, 1980, 48.

them, fosters and maintains them, gathers and binds them together, supports them and exalts them.”⁹⁴ The *Ummah* refers to ‘community’ or ‘nation’ and is derived from umm, mother. In the Qur’an it refers to an ethnic or religious community (Cf.Q10:470). It also designates the ‘people of Islam’ and the perfect community of the Prophet. This is the body of believers and was foreshadowed by the group of Muhammad’s companions. The *Ummah* is divinely established by God, as the Qur’an witness: “And there may spring from you a nation who invite to goodness, and rejoin right conduct and forbid indecency. Such are they who are successful” (Q 3:104).

The Islamic community is religio-political in nature and is governed according to Islamic law. This nature and governance give its members political and religious affiliation certitude in this world and the next. As Gardet writes:

One of the deepest sentiments derived from membership of *Ummah* is the certitude, not indeed of one’s personal perfection, but of the perfection of the state of a believer in which one has been placed by God and which brings with it in this life the advantage of belonging to the ‘best possible people among men’, and, in the life to come, if one is faithful, the reward promised by the Lord.⁹⁵

The *Ummah* gives the members a sense of belonging and does not allow them to stay outside the fold of Muslims community nor does it permit anyone to embrace the teachings of other faiths. Muslims hold that “A Muslim who abandons Islam whether or not he or she subsequently embraces another faith is guilty of the crime of apostasy, which is punished by death under sharia law.”⁹⁶ Nevertheless, this Islamic *Ummah* potentially embraces all humankind. As Dharmaraj writes:

⁹⁴B. KATEREGGA, D. W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue*, 1980, 48.

⁹⁵L. GARDET, *Muhammedanism*, 68.

⁹⁶G. E. DHARMARAJ – J. S. DHARMARAJ, *Christianity and Islam*, 54.

As Islam spread, the *Ummah*, which was essentially based on Islam law, was quickly transformed from an Arab *Ummah* into a universal Muslim *Ummah*. It is not surprising that the *Ummah* extended very quickly, after the Prophet's death, far beyond the confines of the Arabian Peninsula. In the process, it brought together, peoples of different cultures, races, and nation to form one great *Ummah*.⁹⁷

The call to universal brotherhood is clearly understood when *Ummah* is viewed as the totality of individuals bound to one another irrespective of their culture, race or religion by their submission to one God (Cf.Q 23:52-54). The role that Muhammad plays for the Islamic community today is well summed up by the recommended prayers at his tomb in *Madinah*. The Sunni prayer reads:

I bear witness that you are the Messenger of God. You have conveyed the message. You have fulfilled the trust. You have counseled that community, enlightened the gloom, shed glory on the darkness, and uttered words of wisdom.⁹⁸

The prayer of *Shi'a* is even more invocative and it reads:

I bear witness that you have conveyed the Lord's message and declared His command. You have borne hardship in His cause and summoned people with wisdom and proper exhortation to His way. You have carried out that which entrusted to you. You have been compassionate to believers and harsh to stubborn unbelievers. You have worshiped with a single-heartedness that brought you total certitude. To me you are as [as below as] father, mother, my own self, property, as my own child."⁹⁹

The place of Muhammad in the hearts of Muslims goes far beyond to the extent that he is not simply the messenger who brought the Qur'an but rather remains a bond of unity and the inspiration for mission in Islam community.

⁹⁷G. E. Dharmaraj- J. S. Rarmaraj, *Christianity and Islam*, Delhi, India, 2006, 55.

⁹⁸F. T. MICHEL, I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam, Essay on Dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010, 185.

⁹⁹F. T. MICHEL, I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam, Essay on Dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010, 185.

3.4 The Mission of Christ from the Islamic Perspective

Just like Christianity, Islam upholds the faith that Jesus was conceived by a Virgin called Mary through a special intervention of God himself. It is said as follows:

Jesus' birth was announced to Mary by the Spirit, who 'assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man' and announced that her son would be 'a revelation for mankind and a mercy for us' (S19:17-21) [...]. To describe the mystery of Jesus' origin the Qur'an employs two main narratives of the annunciation and one of the Nativity (S 19:17-21; 3:42- 47; 19:22-23). For Jesus God had formed the plan to 'teach him the scripture and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospels (S 3:48).

The Qur'an tells Muslims that they have the duty to believe in the prophets as Jacques Jomier puts it. "Believe, have faith in God and His messengers, in the Book that has revealed to His messengers, and in the scripture He formerly revealed. He that denies God, His angels, His scriptures, His messengers and the Last Day, has strayed far from the truth."¹⁰⁰ It is in this sense, as Borrmans says, that dialogue is possible with Muslims from the human aspect of Jesus. The reason given by Borrmans are as follows: Jesus is the prophet of God's love, his goodness and mercy towards men, he is the prophet of charity that Qur'an calls goodness (*ihsan*), the seal of holiness and model not only for Christians but also for Muslims especially those who see in him the way to the reality that is *shari'ah, Tariqa, Haqiqa*. He added that "to accept Jesus is a fundamental pillar of Islamic faith and no Muslim can undervalue or defame Jesus or any other prophet of God."¹⁰¹ From this perspective one could say that Jesus played an important position in the faith of Islam as a prophet.

¹⁰⁰J. JOMIER, *How to Understand Islam*, 38

¹⁰¹J. JOMIER, *How to Understand Islam*, 34.

In Islamic faith, the end of Jesus Christ (Isa) (PBUH), or Prophet Isa's earthly life is blanketed with total mystery. Muslims prefer not to go beyond the explanation given in the Qur'an. However, on this issue the Qur'an says that:

That they said (in boast); we killed Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of God! But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but it was made to appear to them; and those who differ, therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow. For surely, they killed him not. Nay, Allah raised unto Himself; and Allah is ever Mighty wise(Q 4:157-158).

“According to the true belief of Islam, it would seem most in-appropriate for the Messiah to die through a shameful crucifixion.”¹⁰² Also Muslims believe that Allah saved the Messiah from the ignomy of crucifixion much as Allah also saved the Seal of the Prophet from the ignomy following *Hijra*.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Islam does not identify with the profound Christian conviction that man needs to be redeemed through Jesus Christ the Son of God. “The Christian belief in the redemptive sacrificial death of Christ does not fit the Islamic view that man has always been fundamentally good, and that God loves and forgives those who obey His will.”¹⁰⁴

3.4.1 Jesus as the call to Holiness

Muslims believe that Jesus as the call to holiness. Omar has described holiness as:

Holiness is liberation, and if we seek earnestly to know the truth, the truth shall set us free (Jn 8:32). The truth, or *al-haqq*, is God. Thus, to know the truth is to know God. But to know God truly is to walk in his ways of peace, holiness, and righteousness. To know God is to participate in His holiness through prayer, enjoining the good and dissuading from evil, sharing God's merciful gifts with the needy and seeking the pleasure of God and his mercy.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²B. KATEREGGA. D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 140.

¹⁰³B. KATEREGGA. D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 140.

¹⁰⁴B. KATEREGGA. D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 141.

¹⁰⁵I.A.OMAR, ed., *A Muslim View of Christianity*, 77.

This definition of holiness goes close to the life of Jesus as St. John puts it; “I am the Way; I am the Truth and Life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father too” (Jn 14:6-7). *Nostra Aetate* affirms that Christians and Muslims worship the same one living God through prayer and it is therefore, the same God who sanctifies.

“The source and model of holiness for both the individual and society is God, who alone is absolutely holy.”¹⁰⁶ Jesus Christ is the Son of God as the Church believes. But for Islam Jesus is one of the prophets, the Messenger of God. There are differences between Christianity and Islam regarding belief in Christ Jesus. Most often each tend to overemphasize the differences at the expense of the similarities. But one should not forget that Jesus was holy as Bormans puts it:

These differences notwithstanding, Christians should consider positively the degree to which the figure of Jesus in the Qur’an provides a striking analogy with the affirmations of their scripture, and they should welcome the great interest which Muslims show, even at the present time, in the person of the Messiah, the holiness of his life and the sublimity of his message.¹⁰⁷

3.4.2 Jesus as the way to Salvation

Christians believe that Christ is the Saviour for all humanity and all will be saved through him. Muslims on the other hand, do not agree on the common acceptable belief of Christians for Jesus. As a matter of fact, “Islam does not identify with the Christian’s conviction that man need to be redeemed.”¹⁰⁸ According to Islamic faith, “Man has always been fundamentally good, and that God loves and forgives those who obey His will.”¹⁰⁹ According to Islam, Salvation is the reward of good works, and all those who produce good works will attain that reward:

¹⁰⁶L.A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Christianity*, 73.

¹⁰⁷M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Interreligious Documents I, 55.

¹⁰⁸B. KATEREGGA. D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 141.

¹⁰⁹B. KATEREGGA. D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 141.

Islam not only acclaim the good works wherever and by whomever they are done, it regards them as the only justification in the eyes of God and warns that not an iota of good work or mischief will be lost on the Day of Reckoning. The non-Muslim has the public record of works he has done to justify him in Muslims eyes: to establish him as a man of great piety and saintliness. In Islam, good deeds earn merit with God regardless of the religious adherence of their authors. Salvation consists of nothing more than such merit as the good works earn. The act of faith is a work which is added and whose inclusion affects the whole.¹¹⁰

For Muslims, Jesus Christ, the Prophet Isa (PBUH), like many prophets before him performed miracles. “He did these miracles by Allah’s will and they were meant to serve as proof of the truth of his mission.”¹¹¹ “The important role bestowed on the Prophet Isa (PBUH) did not make him ‘son of god’ or single him out as the only savior for mankind.”¹¹² In fact the Prophet Isa (PBUH) was only a servant and messenger of Allah. Islam is the way of peace. “The Muslim view, which is in total contrast to the Christian experience, is that man experiences peace through total submission to God’s guidance and mercy.”¹¹³

“It may be that the Christian and the Muslim view of the crucifixion of Christ is more close together than it appears on the surface.”¹¹⁴ The Gospel affirms that Jesus Christ the Messiah gave His life for all humanity. He said thus: “I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father” (Jn 10: 17-18). Unarguably we can say:

The crucifixion of Christ is a drama of supreme self- giving. The Messiah Himself gives His life; no one can take it from Him, for certainly no one can slay the eternal Word of God. And although He gave Himself unto death on the cross at the hands of evil men, they, nevertheless, could not destroy Him, for He arose from the grave. Certainly Christians would agree that death cannot be triumphant over the Messiah. In His resurrection, He has triumphed over death.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰T. F. MICHEL, I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam, essay on dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010.

¹¹¹B. KATEREGGA. D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 140.

¹¹²B. KATEREGGA. D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 140.

¹¹³B. KATEREGGA. D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 141.

¹¹⁴B. KATEREGGA. D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 141.

¹¹⁵B. KATEREGGA. D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 141.

Indeed, it was his death on the cross that made us to obtain salvation as free gift. This gift of salvation is meant for all humanity.

3.5 Islamic Encounter and Dialogue with Christians

By virtue of revelation itself, Islam is, by definition, open to dialogue. As a matter of fact, from the Qur'anic point of view, Islam recognizes religious pluralism. This view is seen in some references made by the Qur'an to the "People of the Book"¹¹⁶ with regard to their sacred Scriptures, shared faith and history (Cf. Q 2: 62, 3: 84). The Qur'an, for instance acknowledges Christianity and Judaism as revealed religions and part of the *Ummah* in two ways: Firstly, Islam acknowledges the religious practices (Cf. Q 5: 5). Secondly, it accepts that they too will attain salvation (Cf. Q 2: 62, 5: 69). This Qur'anic inclusivism of "the people of the Book" is the basis of Islam's acceptance of religious pluralism and thus it leads them to dialogue with other religions. From the Church perspective of looking at Muslims:

The Church has also high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and mighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humankind. Since in the course of centuries not a few conflicts and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding, to preserve and to promote together for the benefit of all social justice and moral values and peace and freedom (NA, 3).

Ever since the Second Vatican Council, the relationship between the Islam and the Church has improved incredibly. Both sides made remarkable efforts to understand and to know each other that result in having a better relationship between the two. As a matter of fact, Qur'an

¹¹⁶The "People of Book" includes all adherents belonging to monotheistic religions especially Christianity, Judaism and Sabianism (Cf. Q 9: 29-30).

has encouraged Muslims from the beginning to practice dialogue with the believers who were their associates: “Dispute not with the People of the Book saves in the fairer manner” (Q 29:46). The Prophet himself was told, “Call thou (people) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and good admonitions and dispute with them in the better way” (Q 16:125). This text gives us clear and concrete indication that Islam and the rules of its faith are not against the idea of dialogue, rather they encourage their believers to engage in it. Obviously, in recent years we can see that there are a lot of initiatives among the Muslims with regards to encounter and dialogue with Christians. Regarding this T.F Michael stated:

Muslims believe that God had not granted any special status to any person or group. His love, providence, cares for and judgment of all men is one. All people- Muslims and non-Muslims- stand to God in identically the same relationship, i.e. they are judged objectively by the same law. The Divine will is knowable directly through revelation or indirectly through science. We are both equal members of a universal religious brotherhood. Both our traditional religions are *de jure* for they have both issued from and are based on a common source, the religion of God which He has implanted in both of us equally.¹¹⁷

According to Mohamed Talbi, “What dialogue can and should do in the initial stage is to help the communities to communicate with one another, to become open to each other.”¹¹⁸ However, Islam has a different view in the way they encounter and facilitate dialogue with Christians. They see “a Christian as a perfect creature capable by himself of achieving the highest righteousness.”¹¹⁹ In fact, Muslims have a wider view even if they feel tension existing in relation to “Christian theology of religions between an absolute claim to truth enclosed within a

¹¹⁷T. F. MICHEL, I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam, essay on dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010, 39.

¹¹⁸T. F. MICHEL, I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam, essay on dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010, 43.

¹¹⁹T. F. MICHEL, I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam, essay on dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010, 48.

single revelatory tradition and an existential awareness of divine salvific activity outside that tradition finds a parallel in Muslim attitude toward Christianity.”¹²⁰ For Muslims:

All religions teach the reality of God and obedience to the will of God which translate as good will and peace among men.... Peace and justice are indivisible. Who can understand this better than the true votaries of the great religions which keep the love of God and the love of man in their hearts?¹²¹

They believe that both Christians and Muslims are called to mercy and forgiveness by their faith. Both the Qur’an and the Bible are filled with exhortations to compassion, pardon, and acceptance of the others. What Muslims and Christians can accomplish together by living together in harmony and cooperating for the good of all is too important to be thwarted by old grievances and suspicions.” What the Second Vatican Council has stated is very relevant here and it echoes:

Although in the course of centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all humankind, let them make a common cause of safe-guarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace, and freedom (NA, 3).

Conclusion

In this Chapter we have seen the mission concept (*Da’wah*) from the Islamic point of view and in the manner it relates to the ordinary life of Muslims. It has given us a clear idea that

¹²⁰T.F. MICHEL, I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam, essay on dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010, 73.

¹²¹T. F. MICHEL, I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam, essay on dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010, 40.

Muslims have a concept of mission based on their Scripture Qur'an and all Muslims are called to this mission without any compromise. Also we have seen the important role of Prophet Muhammad as the last prophet of Allah. He has the most important position in Islam religions as he is the one who received the message of Allah from the archangel Gabriel. These messages eventually have become their Scripture Qur'an. "As mentioned previously:

God has revealed His commands by sending His Books of Divine guidance through His Messengers. The Qur'an, as the last revelation, is the final criterion of truth, and all Muslims must submit to its Divine authority. The Muslim experiences peace in grateful submission to the marvelous will of God as revealed in the Qur'an.¹²²

We have seen different essential elements in their religious faith such as the universal call to brotherhood and sisterhood (*ummah*) and its influence over the entire Islam religion. In addition to this, we have seen the place of Jesus Christ (prophet Isa) in Islam and how he is perceived by Muslims in their life in a way the Qur'an presented him. Jesus is being considered as a Messiah in Islam. This is, however, different in the way Christians look at Jesus Christ especially in the belief that Jesus is the way to holiness. We have learned that the Qur'an is in favor of dialogue with other religions. In effect, the Qur'an encourages all Muslims to engage into dialogue even from within their ordinary life situations. This is something to be emulated and could serve as an inspiration for other religions to have dialogue with Islam. In the next Chapter, based on this reality, we are going to see the deeper side of the dialogue between the Church and Islam and of its fruits so far.

¹²²B. KATEREGGA. D.W. SHENK., *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and Christianity in Dialogue*, 1980, 27.

Chapter IV

Inter-religious Dialogue

4.0 Introduction

We have seen in the previous chapter the concept of mission in Islam and its implication in the aspect of dialogue with other religions, especially with Christians. The place of Jesus Christ as one of the prophets in their scripture Qur'an does not justify to see Christ as a universal Saviour as the way Christians believe. However, what is important is that Jesus is one of the important prophets of Allah according to the Qur'an and it is the love of Allah which prompts the Muslims to engage in dialogue with other religions unlike the Church. In this chapter we will study in a deeper way the understanding of interreligious dialogue, especially between Christians and Muslims. "The word "dialogue" has become a keyword for Catholic literature, particularly in writings on mission."¹²³

¹²³ Cf. M. MOLONY, *Dialogue with Islam*, Nairobi, 1997, 21.

“Whenever the Pope speaks of mission, he always refers to three terms: Proclamation, Inculturation and Dialogue.”¹²⁴ These statements implicate that dialogue has a vital role to play in mission. It was God who took the initiative to begin a dialogue which we are called upon to respond and engage in it. It is an art of communicating spiritually. “Dialogue is a key-word of present day missionary awareness and it is not a preliminary step towards evangelization but the spirit of every mission.”¹²⁵ And from the Church’s point of view “Dialogue has a place within the salvific mission of the Church. In this chapter, we will see different fundamental and significant dimensions of interreligious dialogue. We will see to a great extent as to how encounter and interreligious dialogue complement and support each other in the mission of the Church directed towards the *Ummah*.

This chapter will begin with the etymological understanding of the word “Dialogue”. This will give us exclusive insights on interreligious dialogue with special emphasis on the importance of encounter which stands as the gateway to dialogue. In addition to this, it will unfold different forms of dialogue and the theological foundations of dialogue and their significance and the different but vital role that they play. The fruits of Christian- Muslim dialogue will be explained at the end of this chapter. It will be the key area of focus in this chapter for it will show us how important it is to encourage and promote dialogue between the Christians and the Muslims today.

4.1 Etymology

“From its very etymological roots dialogue denotes an in-depth conversation between the two interested individuals or groups aimed at knowing one another and each other’s standpoint

¹²⁴ Cf. *Petit Echo, Fullness of Life*, 124.

¹²⁵ Cf. J. DUPUIS, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York, 1978, 43.

wherein uncovering previously unrecognized bonds of unity and community.”¹²⁶ It is the starting point of the conviction to shift from seeing the world from my own perspective and trying to expand my grasp of reality by accommodating the other’s knowledge of reality based on his/her own perspective, which I cannot see from mine. When this conversation extends to the level of religious matters, it becomes Inter-Religious Dialogue.

Interreligious dialogue is part of the Church’s mission on evangelization according to Pope John Paul II. The Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue. The Pope has stated many times, in different contexts, that dialogue does not only lead to understanding the other, but is a path that deepens our self-understanding. It is in such occasion that the Spirit leads members of different faiths to a mutual feeling of affection and compassion. Such spirit directs those involved in creating harmony and peace and it is clearly mentioned as follows:

All partners must respect the value of the other. Learning these, they grow in mutual knowledge and enrichment. At the same time they must avoid all forms of fundamentalism and separated divisions. “God is for everyone, in its interior life and external mission, the Trinity provides the bases for attitudes and works of dialogue with everyone while always retaining one’s own identity which is the full acceptance of God’s gift.”¹²⁷

4. 2 Encounter Stands as Gateway to Dialogue

According to Vorgrimler, “the witness to the events of Christ’s life, his dealings with human beings, show how much he was in his very person, a ‘sign,’ a making-visible of the presence of God.”¹²⁸ Therefore, we must see Christ’s whole life, all the events that marked it, as a real symbol of the concrete presence and reality of God. In essence Jesus Christ, in other words

¹²⁶ Cf. M. MOLONY, *Dialogue with Islam, Nairobi*, 1997, 12.

¹²⁷ Cf. F. J. EILERS, *Interreligious Dialogue as Communication*, 27.

¹²⁸ H. VORGRIMLER, *Sacramental Theology*, 30

“could be called the icon, the image of God pure and simple (Cf. 2 Cor4:4; cf. Col 1:15), the visible epiphany of the invisible essence of God” (Cf. Heb 1:1-2; cf. 1 Jn 1:1; Jn 14:9).¹²⁹ And it is the same Jesus who brought us the salvation which God the Father has prepared for the whole humanity. Therefore, “It is by all that we are that we must bear witness to what Christ brings for the harmonious development of human society and of every individual.”¹³⁰

Our presence must be an occasion of an encounter with Christ. To proclaim the Gospel is to establish a relationship. And what is needed in fact is the whole theology of human relationship with all they are supposed to be intimate with. In this way Christ is encountered in a personal and practical manner. This is equally true in Sub-Saharan Africa where human relationships like friendship take into account the friendly and neighborly atmosphere in which both Islam and Christianity have sprung up and often open up ways for a deeper inter-religious dialogue.

4.3 Forms of Dialogue

There exist different forms of interreligious dialogue. In general, there are four different forms of dialogue. “It may be useful to recall those mentioned by the 1984 documents of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.”¹³¹ Each form has its own nature and style although each one of them is somehow interconnected and leading in to the same target and aim. These recognized and well accepted forms of dialogue are: dialogue of life, dialogue of deed (action), dialogue of religious experience and dialogue of specialists (theological exchange).

¹²⁹H. VORGRIMLER, *Sacramental Theology*, 31

¹³⁰ Cf. *Petit Echo, Fullness of Life*, 123-126.

¹³¹ Cf. *Bulletin Secretariatus pro non Christianis*, 1984, 56, n. 28-35.

4.3.1 Dialogue of Life

It is where people strive to live in a conducive environment with a neighborly and friendly spirit in sharing their joy and sorrows, their problems and difficulties. From this point of view, when people of different religions are staying together in one place, share daily life activities rooted in their respective religious faith. This scenario lead to a great extent, leads to what is termed as a dialogue of life. However, it does not only lead to peaceful coexistence but rather it is taking the challenge to live with our fundamental Christian faith amid believers of other religions. This includes the need to reflect the love of God and to manifest Christ through our deeds and words. To be Christ-like in the way we live life. This in fact, is a challenge and to achieve this we need to have a firm and fervent faith in Jesus.

The mystery of Christ's presence in the Catholic Church and in Islam, as we have seen already in the third chapter, prompts both Church and Islam to engage into inter-religious dialogue. There is that possibility which assumes that if at all it is possible then it is not meant for all peoples in both religions but it is a domain limited to the few. These few may be educated people, religious leaders, theologians and specialists. However, "we cannot restrict the encounter between Christians and Muslims to circles of specialists or a visit by the leaders of communities. Dialogue includes all aspects of life and can be found in every place where Christians and Muslims live and work together, love, suffer, and die."¹³² These attitudes are necessary in the relationship between Muslims and Christians. It doesn't require any academic programme but it is closely associated with one's ordinary life situation. "For most Christians, that form of shared

¹³²M.BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Interreligious Documents I*,29

life to which we are called is often termed the ‘dialogue of life.’¹³³ It does not require any special means or equipment.

The tools needed in the dialogue are very simple yet so essential that it always depends on the person who is engaged or interested in the dialogue. “It is enough to be people of faith and hope, of good will and practical charity. In that way all are called to dialogue, since all are taught and confronted by His Spirit.”¹³⁴ Pope John Paul II describes it as:

The dialogue between ordinary believers, a harmonious and constructive sharing in the situations of daily contacts. This is truly a basic form of dialogue, and one which lays the foundation for other more specialized encounters. Dialogue requires, on the part of Christians as well as of the followers of other traditions, a balanced attitude. They should be neither ingenuous nor overly critical, but open and receptive.
¹³⁵

4.3.2 Dialogue of Deed(Action)

There is a dialogue of deed where people from different religions collaborate and work together for the integral development and freedom for people beyond the religious barriers. It is in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. John Paul II’s, address to the participants in the Annual meeting between the Secretariat for non-Christians and the WCC sub-unit on Dialogue follows that:

Dialogue requires from both partners a balanced attitude, which avoids being ingenious or overcritical. Both enter into it with the integrity of their own faith; both must be open to truth. Christians as individual have no guarantee that they already possess the fullness of truth, they must be ready to learn and receive from others the positive values of traditions". In this process, they have to give up prejudices and their faith will not be weakened but purified and deepened through dialogue (Cf. *DP*, 47).

¹³³T.F. MICHEL, *A Christian View of Islam, Essay on Dialogue*,19

¹³⁴M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Interreligious Documents I*,29

¹³⁵ Cf. F. GIOIA, *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, 664.

John Paul II further says that both Christians and Muslims leaders should encourage people to live and work together especially, on issues concerning their social life. This will certainly enable them to tackle various unresolved issues in the society which could hinder a society to flourish in justice, peace, harmony and integral social development. This can be possible only if both Christians and Muslims establish a better relationship and collaboration not only among the ordinary people but also among the leaders. “*Dialogue and Mission*” says that this level of dialogue is that of deeds and collaboration with others for goals of humanitarian, social, economic, or political nature which are directed towards the liberation and advancement of mankind” (NA, 31).

4.3.3 Dialogue of Religious Experience

It is when individuals along with their convictions of their faith together with their rich religious experience, share deeply their experiences with regard to prayer, faith, concept of truth and the God of their particular religion. This helps in deepening their knowledge of those outside their religious order. By doing so one is able to broaden their concept of God by the light of others sharing about their God. The important aspect here is the profound faith of a person in the state of life. This dialogue takes the form of communication of religious experience, prayer and meditation. Recollection, silence, fasting and other forms of exercises for self -mastery, pilgrimages, experience of God, contemplation and mysticism are also areas of sharing between deeply committed believers. It is a profound communion beyond the level of words led by the Spirit of God rooted in His love. The words of John Paul II are very relevant here:

Contacts in daily life and common commitment to action will normally open the door for cooperation in promoting human and spiritual values; they may also eventually lead to the dialogue of religious experience

in response to the great questions which the circumstances of life do not fail to arouse in the minds of people. This in turn can enlighten experiences and encourage closer contacts rooted in love and trust (Cf. NA, 2).

Exchanges at the level of religious experience can give more life to theological discussions and this in turn can enlighten experiences and encourage closer contacts.

4.3.4 Dialogue of Specialists (Theological Exchange)

This is where the specialists seek to deepen their own religious heritage and appreciate each other's value. One is expected to deepen one's own religious experience first before making an attempt to have an exchange of faith experience. It helps one to go beyond the frame of one's own shell in tuning into the right perception of God in other religions. It also enables one in creating better relationship and deeper understanding in resolving prejudice. It is through patience in the steady efforts to overcome prejudices in which specialists can encourage people and thus set opportunities for dialogue. One is required to have sufficient knowledge on his/her own religion. The person must be deeply religious, one with great conviction in his/her faith embodied in the way the person lives.

Speaking on interreligious dialogue John Paul II says; "The sincerity of interreligious dialogue requires that each enters into it with the integrity of his or her own faith."¹³⁶ The importance of dialogue for integral development, social justice and human liberation has to be stressed without any compromise and it should be done in the light of faith rooted in the Gospel values. It is a call for all and he reminds us that:

¹³⁶Cf. *Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflection on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel*, Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, 21.

There is a need to stand up for human rights, proclaim the demands of justice, and denounce injustice not only when their own members are victimized, but independently of the religious allegiance of the victims. There is need also to join together in trying to solve the great problems facing society and the world, as well as in education for justice and peace.¹³⁷

4.4 Theological Foundations of Inter-religious Dialogue

Christ has established the Church as a universal sacrament of salvation and this salvation is shown as a sign of God's love and compassion: an offer for all humanity. The ultimate aim of the theological foundation of dialogue is to share this offered salvation in an effective way with all humanity.

“Inter-religious dialogue is founded on the theological truth that all human beings have the same origin, namely, the Supreme God who at the same time is the single destiny towards which man strives.”¹³⁸ “All human beings have the same redeemer, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is present and operative in all human beings without exception.”¹³⁹ Dialogue is not merely anthropological in character but theological too. It is as if God by way of incarnation opted to enter into dialogue with humankind so that “all may be saved”. And therefore, the Church must take as its vocation entering into dialogue with the entire world, with other religions and ideologies and with other Christian Churches and finally within herself. “The Church is called to continue the dialogue of God who right from creation until today has been in constant dialogue with humankind.”¹⁴⁰ “For this reason, Inter-religious dialogue played a central role in numerous encyclicals, exhortation and letters of different popes of our time.”¹⁴¹ “Indeed all the popes since

¹³⁷ Cf. *Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflection on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel*, Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, 20.

¹³⁸ Cf. J. DUPUIS, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York, 1978, 51.

¹³⁹ Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, Nairobi, 1997, 16.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *Petit Echo, Fullness of Life*, 138.

¹⁴¹ Cf. POPE PAUL IV (*Gaudium et Spes, Ad Gentes, Nostra Aetate*) and POPE JOHN PAUL II (*Redemptoris Missio*) and, POPE BENEDICT XVI (*Missio Dei*).

the Second Vatican Council have been at the forefront to be role models in promoting dialogue as the most effective means for Christians to relate among themselves and with other people of other religions.”¹⁴²

“It is not common for religious believers in the struggle to discover that they have moved in common, theologically speaking, with comrades from different religious traditions that they have with members of their own communities who are not involved in the struggle. This religious commonalty in the struggle demands a theological framework, which can give it expression and explain it” (Cf. *LG*). And thus the theological foundation of dialogue is inevitable for the mission of the Church as far as the salvation for all is concerned. There are a couple of theological foundations on which the dialogue is done in the Church such as “One God, Creator and Saviour, Mystery of Unity, Jesus Christ the Universal Saviour, The Universal Action of the Spirit of God and the Universality of the Reign of God. These theological foundational elements are vital and therefore, they are indispensable in the mission of dialogue from the Church perspective. Each of them will be well explained one by one.

4.4.1 One God, Creator and Saviour

“There is only one God and he is the creator of all human beings, whether they are Christians or Jews or Muslims or Hindus or Buddhists. All are created in the image and likeness Of God.”¹⁴³ It shows that all human beings are in the divine plan of creation and the final destiny of men to be saved and reach the truth, because God is unique as well as the mediator between

¹⁴² Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, Nairobi, 1997, 11.

¹⁴³ <http://www.vindialogue.org/the-theological-foundation-of-the-interfaith-dialogue/>

God and humans, Jesus Christ who became a man himself, and who has sacrificed himself for our sake (1 Tim2:4-6).

4.4.2 Mystery of Unity

According to the Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra Aetate*, "Humanity forms but one community."¹⁴⁴ "This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth and also because all share a common destiny, namely God."¹⁴⁵ Sure enough, we are created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all humanity. It is from this reality that we all remain sustained by His mystery of unity which is slow but sure. These are aspects that can be discovered through dialogue.

4.4.3 Jesus Christ the Universal Saviour

The divine and redeeming will, unique and final, meant for all humans, has Jesus Christ in its centre. God has so much loved the world that He has given His only Son so that all who believe in Him, would never be lost and gain eternal life (Jn3:16). The Second Vatican Council teaches that the Son of God, by His Incarnation, has been united in a certain way, to every human being. However, "through the sincere practice of what is right in their religious traditions and following the directives of their conscience the members of other religions respond

¹⁴⁴<http://www.vindialogue.org/the-theological-foundation-of-the-interfaith-dialogue/>

¹⁴⁵<http://www.vindialogue.org/the-theological-foundation-of-the-interfaith-dialogue/>

positively to the call of God and receive the salvation of Jesus Christ even if they do not recognize Him as the Saviour.”¹⁴⁶

4.4.4 The Universal Action of the Spirit of God

“That the Spirit of God is universally present and operative in the religious life of other’s and in the religious traditions to which they belong, just as among Christians in the Church, would also be a post-conciliar rediscovery.”¹⁴⁷ The importance of such a vision for the theological foundation of interreligious dialogue is not only reconcile but also brings harmony and peace among the different religions existing in this universe. “God gives his grace to all, which means God’s saving will is universal. Then there is a possibility of salvation for those who seek God with a sincere heart, and by his grace they are ready to do his will which is a response to their conscience” (LG, 16).

4.4.5 The Universality of the Reign of God

As a matter of fact, “in pursuing the theological foundation of interreligious dialogue, emphasis must also be given to the reign of God, in which members of other religious traditions are fully members and in which they participate with Christians.”¹⁴⁸ The reign of God, universally present in the world, would represent the universal presence of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ. “That all are therefore, co-members in the reign of God means that all share in the same mystery of salvation in Him.”¹⁴⁹ And this can be made known to all humanity

¹⁴⁶<http://www.vindialogue.org/the-theological-foundation-of-the-interfaith-dialogue/>

¹⁴⁷<http://www.vindialogue.org/the-theological-foundation-of-the-interfaith-dialogue/>

¹⁴⁸<http://www.vindialogue.org/the-theological-foundation-of-the-interfaith-dialogue/>

¹⁴⁹<http://www.vindialogue.org/the-theological-foundation-of-the-interfaith-dialogue/>

only through a proper and genuine interreligious dialogue which is well rooted in the theological foundations.

4.5 The Importance of Inter-religious Dialogue in the Mission of the Church

Addressing the 1984 Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the Pope John Paul II declared: “(Interreligious) dialogue is fundamental to the Church, which is called to collaborate in God’s plan with her methods of presence, respect and love towards all persons.”¹⁵⁰ He went on to call attention to a passage from *Ad Gentes*; “closely united to men/women in their life and work, Christ’s disciples hope to render to others true witness of Christ and to work for this salvation, even where they are not able to proclaim Christ fully (AG, 12). “All men are called to this catholic unity of the people of God, this unity that announces and promotes the universal peace, and to this unity are related in many ways, the catholic believers, the others who have faith in Jesus Christ, and finally all men who are called to be saved by the grace of God” (LG, 3). This is the spirit that stimulates the Church to participate actively in the dialogue with other religions.

“I call upon the Church, in every situation, to persist in esteem for Muslims, who worship God who is alone, living and subsistent; merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity.”¹⁵¹ “If all of us who believe in God desire to promote reconciliation, justice and peace, we must work together to banish every form of discrimination, intolerance and religious fundamentalism.”¹⁵² In her social apostolate, the Church does not make religious distinction. In this way she bears witness to the love of God, creator of all, and she

¹⁵⁰Cf. *Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflection on Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel*, Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, 18.

¹⁵¹P.F. KNITTER, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, Maryknoll, New York, 2001, 117.

¹⁵²P.F. KNITTER, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, Maryknoll, New York, 2001, 93.

invites the followers of other religions to demonstrate respect and to practice reciprocity in a spirit of esteem. I ask the whole Church, through patient dialogue with Muslims, to seek juridical and practical recognition of religious freedom.

4.6 Christian-Muslim Dialogue

In order to have a better relationship between the Christians and Muslims in the whole world, both Christians and Muslims are not only encouraged but also invited to organize more dialogue in the ordinary life situations. It is realized that the importance of having regular dialogue created in the ordinary life situations is needed much in this modern world where people are no longer hesitant to kill others in the name of religion. "The Christian foundation for dialogue is love, God's love which embraces the whole mankind (Cf. Mt. 5:45), but which is made manifest in a perfect way in Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 4:9)."¹⁵³ It is to this free gift of love that Christians are called to bear witness. This is what in a real sense, inspires the Christians to have dialogue with Muslims. Christians believe that:

The Church is a sign of the Kingdom of God which broke into human history through Jesus Christ and the Pentecost event when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the believers. They believe that the mission of the Church is to be a sign and witness among the nations of the presence of the Kingdom of God among men. As we have mentioned, the Church becomes a sign of the Kingdom by continuing the work and ministry which Jesus Christ began: this includes fellowship, service, and witness.¹⁵⁴

From the perspective of Islamic faith, Islam is a religion of witness (shahada). "It is by pronouncing the shahada, the formula of witness to the unity of God and the mission of

¹⁵³M.L. FITZGERALD. R. CASPER, *Signs of Dialogue, Christian Encounter with Muslims*, Silsilah Publications, Zomboanga City, Philippines, 1992, 94.

¹⁵⁴D. KATEREGGA, D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 167.

Muhammad, that one becomes a Muslim.”¹⁵⁵ “The Muslim witness is that the Qur’an is God’s final and definitive revelation of His perfect will to mankind. The Christian witness on the other hand, is that Jesus the Messiah is the Living Word of God in human form.”¹⁵⁶ In fact, both Christianity and Islam agree that God is merciful, that he loves. “In Islam God’s mercy is supremely expressed through the revelation of perfect love. In Christian faith God’s love is supremely expressed in the suffering, redemptive love revealed in the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.”¹⁵⁷

Both religions deal with the most fundamental questions of the profound meaning of human existence. Therefore, “there is no way that a Christian and a Muslim can honestly proclaim that these differences are irrelevant or insignificant.”¹⁵⁸ Certainly, it is this love of God which is the foundation of Christian-Muslim dialogue. For this reason we must learn to know one another as children of a merciful God and friends. We must pray to God asking Him to help us cultivate bridges of love between ourselves. And eventually, we must learn the conversation of love, forgiveness, respect, good neighbourliness, listening, and witness.

4.7 The Fruits of Inter-religious Dialogue between the Church and *Ummah*

One can certainly say that through dialogue both Christians and Muslims can walk together hand in hand into the fullness of truth in the light of mutual understanding and appreciation of each other. This would remove the prejudices existing between the two religions,

¹⁵⁵M. L. FITZGERALD, R. CASPAR, *Signs of Dialogue, Christian Encounter with Muslims*, Silsilah Publications, Zamboanga City, Philippines, 1992, 88.

¹⁵⁶B. KATEREGGA, D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 169.

¹⁵⁷B. KATEREGGA, D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 170.

¹⁵⁸B. KATEREGGA, D.W. SHENK, *Islam and Christianity, a Muslim and a Christian Dialogue*, 1980, 170.

by tackling them objectively and carefully. “Dialogue provides believers with an opportunity to examine together these religious identity and behavior.”¹⁵⁹

Speaking to Muslims in Brussels, May 19, 1985, late Pope John Paul II with great conviction and hope for the fruits of the dialogue between Christians and Muslims, exhorted; “all believers, Christians and Muslims, to come to know one another better, to engage in dialogue in order to find peaceful ways of living together and mutually enriching one another.”¹⁶⁰ Mutual enrichment is one of the essential fruits of dialogue. According to John Paul II, “It is this type of mutual emulation which can benefit the whole society, especially those who are in need of reasons for living.”¹⁶¹ In reality:

Religious encounter enriches both Christians and the followers of other religions when it is carried out unselfconsciously in the context of shared life. This should not be surprising, for when those who are giving their lives to God through the world’s various religions extend their daily worship of that God to include being, acting, discussing, and reflecting with followers of other faiths, the most active participant in the encounter is always God’s Holy Spirit.¹⁶²

The principal agent of interreligious dialogue is the Spirit of God who animates those who are involved in it. The spirit is at work on both sides, the Christians and the Muslims. It is a mutual process whereby both religions will not only give but also receive. It is only then, “one can say in all certainty that dialogue helps both Christians and Muslims to walk together towards truth.”¹⁶³ Proper dialogue will help both religions to win an enrichment of their won faith. Through the experiences and testimonies of the other, they will be able to discover at greater depth certain aspects and dimensions of the divine mystery that they have received and

¹⁵⁹T. F. MICHEL, I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010, 17.

¹⁶⁰T. F. MICHEL, I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010, 27.

¹⁶¹Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Address to Muslims*, Brussels, May 19, 1985.

¹⁶²T. F. MICHEL, I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010.

¹⁶³Cf. Secrateriat for Non-Christians, *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, n. 13.

communicated by their own religious traditions. “The proper end of the interreligious dialogue is the common conversion of both in their respective religious traditions to the same God.”¹⁶⁴

Dialogue begins a new process of mutual recognition and acceptance, mutual help and support. In dialogue, we make space and world for others. It educates people in peace and trains them in ways of harmonious living. Dialogue also helps to eliminate the prejudices against others. In reality, “dialogue helps us to gain better knowledge of ourselves as we are understood by the members of other religions.”¹⁶⁵

Both *Redemptoris Missio* and *Dialogue and proclamation* asserted mutual knowledge and enrichment as the goal of true dialogue. “Both sides must be prepared to be “questioned,” “purified,” “challenged,” and “transformed” toward a “deeper conversion of all toward God,” John Paul II spoke similar words to thousands of Muslims youths gathered in a sport stadium in 1985 in Casablanca:

Christians and Muslims: we have many things in common as believers and as human beings. We live in the same world. It is marked by numerous signs of hope, but also by many signs of anguish. Abraham is the model for us all of faith in God, submission to his will and trust in his goodness. We believe in the same God, the one and only God, the living God, the God who creates worlds and brings creatures to their perfection.¹⁶⁶

“The proper end and fruit of interreligious dialogue is ultimately the common conversion of Christians and the members of other religious traditions to the same God – the God of Jesus Christ – who calls them together with one another, challenging them through each other.”¹⁶⁷ This reciprocal call, a sign of God’s call, is surely mutual evangelization and it will lead us to the

¹⁶⁴Cf. J. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 383-384.

¹⁶⁵V. SEKHAR, *Practice of Interreligious Dialogue*, 78.

¹⁶⁶Cf. *The text is cited from Origins* 15, no. 11 (August 29, 1985): 174ff.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. J. DUPUIS SJ, *Lecture to Annual General Meeting of the Catholic Missionary Union on Monday 20th of September 2004*, St. Vincent’s, Carlisle Place.

perfect love of God. “It builds up, between members of various religious traditions, the universal communion which marks the advent of the Reign of God.”¹⁶⁸

Conclusion

After the Second Vatican Council, there were tremendous changes in the understanding of the Church regarding other religions. The new understanding and openness towards other religions, meeting them so as to understand them is the need of the hour for the mission of the Church today. It is a commitment to be accomplished with sincerity of heart and purity of intention. When one understands dialogue, then consequently one is able to dedicate one’s life and share one’s love towards the others whose beliefs are different from theirs. When love is shared among persons, a new humanity, the goal of dialogue, becomes a reality. We have seen in this chapter the importance of encounter and dialogue in the mission of the church towards Muslims. Encounter and dialogue are indispensable elements in the mission of the Church. They have certainly changed the whole dimension of the mission and brought a holistic approach to it.

It is in this holistic dimension, that the relevance between the different forms of dialogue and theological foundations of dialogue are seen as inseparable. These different forms of dialogue in a given situation help people engage into dialogue with proper understanding of the theological foundation and its implications. This chapter has disclosed that through these different forms of dialogue all Christians can become participants making their life situations as a means of creating possibilities for dialogue with other religions. But at the same time we are reminded of knowing the importance of the theological foundations of dialogue. Thus, it is

¹⁶⁸ Cf. J. DUPUIS SJ, *Lecture to Annual General Meeting of the Catholic Missionary Union on Monday 20th of September 2004*, St. Vincent’s, Carlisle Place.

helpful for Christians to be on the right track without compromising their faith in Jesus Christ. Moreover, we have learnt from this chapter that kind of attitude and approach that we should possess to get into dialogue. This attitude will of course, lead to bear fruits. The fruits of the dialogue highly depends on the openness on both sides. Those engaged must be able to give and receive and to learn from each other. In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II indicates just how broad a compass dialogue embraces:

A vast field lies open to dialogue, which can assume many forms and expressions: from exchanges between experts in religious traditions or official representatives of those traditions, to cooperation for integral development and the safeguarding of religious values; and from a sharing of their respective spiritual experiences to the so-called “dialogue of life,” through which believers of different religions bear witness before each other in daily life to their own human and spiritual values, and help each other to live according to those values in order to build a more just and fraternal society.¹⁶⁹

What the late Pope said is exactly what we have seen in this chapter. The ultimate fruits of Interreligious dialogue with Muslims are being able to build a more just and fraternal society. It is definitely in such a society that we shall experience the love of God regardless and irrespective of our religious identity.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. T. F. MITCHEL, S.J., I. A. OMAR, ed., *A Christian View of Islam Essay on Dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2010, 18.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The first chapter has explained well about Jesus Christ who is the Incarnate Word of God, the foundation of the faith of the Church. It is based on this faith, that the Church and her faithful participate fully in the Mission of Jesus Christ who is truly God and truly human. All Christians are entrusted with a fundamental duty of participating in the mission of announcing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The essence of announcing the Gospel is the Kingdom of God manifested in Jesus Christ which is the love of God meant for all humanity. “It is from God’s love for all men that the Church in every age receives both the obligation and the vigour of her missionary dynamism, for the love of Christ urges us on” (Cf. CCC, 851).

The second chapter has focused on the mission approach of the Church towards other religions, especially Islam. The Church’s relationship with the Muslims is described as; “the plan of salvation includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day” (LG, 16; Cf. NA, 3). This realization indeed helped the Church to change her mission strategy towards Islam and considers all goodness and truth found in this religion as “preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life” (Cf. CCC, 843). We have seen how the new elements such as inculturation, encounter and dialogue have made huge impact in the mission of the Church to be more effective in the dialogue with the *Ummah*. It is evident that these elements are very effective and important in the mission of the Church today.

The third chapter present to us a comprehensive idea about *Da’wah* in Islam. Muslims have a complete different understanding from the Church about the concepts of their mission. For Muslims, the mission is all about creating and establishing a community based on love and

unity. Unlike for Christianity, for them it is not proclaiming the kingdom of God manifested in Jesus Christ. Therefore, there is a big fundamental difference when it comes to mission for Muslims. Their mission concept is well reflected in *Ummah*, the Islamic community that calls to universal brother/sisterhood. *Da'wah* in Islam is an invitation to join in this community so as to live in love, peace and harmony. The profession of faith in the Oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad is that which constitutes a person to be member of the Islamic Community, namely *Ummah*. However, the call to universal brotherhood is clearly understood when *Ummah* is viewed as the totality of individuals bound to one another by their submission to one God, irrespective of their cultures, race or religion (Cf. Q 23: 52-54). It is in this perspective, the Muslims are engaged in dialogue with Christianity as far as *Da'wah* is concerned.

The last chapter has taken us in to the world of interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims. The theological foundations of dialogue are seen indispensable for the Church in her mission of dialogue with the *Ummah* in this chapter. The challenges and difficulties faced in the dialogue between the Church and the *Ummah* have clearly been mentioned in this chapter. But also, this chapter has shared with us the fruits of dialogue between the Christians and the Muslims. This in fact, has given us lots of hope and motivation to engage and promote interreligious dialogue between Christianity and Islam. This is surely an opportunity for all of us to reconsider our mission strategies whether we are Christians or Muslims. Also to see in them a call to a journey of encounter with Muslims based on faith and in a spirit of dialogue, tolerance and mutual respect. Let mutual tolerance, respect and understanding be our way of life towards a greater cooperation for true peace, love and progress in our world and society today. Dialogue is possible, even if it is difficult and the results are not seen so much on the ground.

We all believe and affirm that God the Almighty is present in all people regardless of religious affiliation whether one is a Christian or a Muslim. It is my hope that this essay has somehow created an awareness of who we are as children of God and brothers and sisters of another. My hope too is that it will have developed a desire to grow in that universal love through our daily life rooted in faith of each one. This does not mean that we imposing our faith on others to convert them. Rather, together, we learn how to turn towards the One Supreme God, Creator of us all. This is possible only if we learn to trust, respect each other and open ourselves to the religious richness of each other's faith. This is surely an opportunity for us all to reconsider our mission strategies and see in them a call to a journey of encounter with the Muslims based on faith and in a spirit of dialogue, tolerance and mutual respect. Thus, I conclude with Dupuis's words: "More than ever before, they [religions] must speak to, learn from, and work with each other, in order to maintain their identity and vitality,"¹⁷⁰ for a better world through true dialogue between the Christianity and the Islam.

¹⁷⁰J. DUPUIS, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, Maryknoll, New York, 1993, 1.

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