

The Practice of Theological Engagement in Interreligious Dialogue: The Need for a Clarification

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I would like to first begin by expressing my appreciation for the invitation to participate in this timely event. There is an African proverb that says, “*One who has family and friends is not caught in the darkness of the road.*” There is perhaps no time more important than this in the history of America to identify and engage the need for better human understanding, particularly in matters of religious difference. In a society as socially diverse, multicultural, and multireligious as ours, we find ourselves, in spite of our technological and scientific advancements and our belief that capitalism and the economy will save us, stumbling in the dark when it comes to engaging in healthy and wholesome human dialogue and human relationships. As a society, we have not yet learned how to cross the boundaries of difference to appreciate pluralism and to affirm diversity — social, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious — as a natural state of global order.

Introduction

This presentation is based on the premise that participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue is the enactment of religious values that reflect both an internal concern for religious authority and a related external need to address a community’s survival and flourishing. Therefore, more clarity will be gained when attention is given to the diversity of theological models that actually exist. This study will address this challenge by responding to the four key themes raised in the letter of invitation: (a) the nature of my experience in Muslim-Christian dialogue/interaction, and the extent that my identity (age, gender, ethnicity, profession, and class) has been a factor in the conversation;

(b) what I consider the most important prerequisites for a successful conversation between Christians and Muslims in the context of America; (c) the fruitfulness of 'theological' engagement, and the kinds of preparation that might be needed for this; and (d) whether the classroom itself affords opportunities for interfaith dialogue or interaction.

My responses are framed by a concern for relevant and authentic urban theological education that prepares leaders to not only tolerate religious diversity, but to embrace it as a normal condition within a religiously diverse society. As I address the first two themes, my response to the third concern (the fruitfulness of theological education) will emerge as the heart of my presentation, and in the closing statement, I affirm the results or benefits that are afforded when not only the classroom itself provides opportunities for interfaith dialogue or interaction, but also the seminary or theological school community as a whole.

The Nature of Experience and Personal Identity

Beginning with my first ordained Christian ministry experience 25 years ago, when I lived in the majority Islamic context of the Sudan and served as a member of the Sudan Council of Churches, I have been interested and involved in Muslim-Christian interreligious dialogue on various ecclesiological and cultural levels. While the context of the Sudan was, and continues to be, one of religious violence and violent discrimination, I have also have the opportunity to work in another context of dynamic religious diversity, the Republic of Cameroon. There, in a very different setting, Muslim-Christians relations were marked by cooperation, mutual respect and an appreciation for the unique contributions of each faith community. When I returned and settled in the United States, I did so with a different awareness and a new set of lenses with which to view Muslim-Christian relations, and with which to view the changing religious dynamics that I saw unfolding in America, in both the African American community and the nation as a whole.

In the U.S., two significant urban experiences of interreligious dialogue and involvement have shaped my commitment to find appropriate ways of engaging in Christian-Muslim dialogue. The first took place in Atlanta during the episode of the "Missing and Murdered Children in Atlanta" (1981) while I served as an urban community minister,¹ and the second in Los Angeles during the time of the Rodney King event (1992), when I was a pastor seeking to help religious communities address issues of community violence. Because this was conducted in Southern California from 1988 to 1994 on the growth of Islam and the reluctance of many American Christians to appreciate Islam, and with a concern for theological education, I have been able to write, engage, and reflect on the need for strengthening interreligious dialogue on various levels:

congregational (especially in the area of pastoral care); community outreach and partnership, addressing the need for economic development, drug abuse prevention and conflict transformation; and national networks strengthening and enabling national Muslim-Christian interreligious dialogue, such as the National Council of Churches, the Presbyterian Church USA, and Bi-National Service.

Since coming to theological education, a primary and ongoing concern for me has been the importance of contextualization, or doing theology in context. By focusing on the specific cultural and theological models that frame Muslim-Christian encounters and dialogue, I have gained a new awareness of how the discourse of varying theological models may enable more effective or successful theological interreligious dialogue. This can be demonstrated with three illustrations of concern: women's leadership, changing forms of religious identity, and the need to address poverty and other issues affecting the poor in local communities.

(1) *Women's Leadership*: With a concern and respect for human spirituality, common life in community, and the need for transformation (individual and communal), I am encouraged by the fact that women from very different religious communities, Muslims and Christians, can form a basis for mutual, shared theological reflection across the boundary of difference. Several years ago I presented an essay at the AAR/SBL in which I stated that it would be primarily through the development of a womanist approach to religious diversity that the church would become empowered to respond to the challenge of religious plurality.² Womanist theologians, and religious women across faith lines, have already demonstrated their ability and willingness to allow space for the discussion of religious pluralism. I identified four fundamental concerns as indicators of women's ability to contribute to more effective interreligious dialogue. First, an "ethic of risk." At this juncture in the history of religious plurality, it is critical to be willing to risk entering an unfamiliar religious landscape, and to risk the possibility of criticism that usually ensues. Second, an "ethic of responsibility" and commitment — personal and communal. Third, an affirmation of religious diversity as an opportunity for "creative conflict." and fourth, a comprehension of the importance of interreligious or interfaith dialogue as integral to both Christian mission and Islamic *daw'ab*.

Unlike models that focus primarily on commonalities in an all-encompassing hegemonic discourse, women can develop a new approach that starts from the margins of the debate where analysis of who we are helps us understand the differences and concerns between dominant discourse, individual perceptions, and self-representation. When Christian and Muslim women invite reflection on the relationship between resistance and complicity

in ways that emphasize women's experience as a historical process, we are better able to understand the womanist notion that religion is personal, social and political. Womanist hermeneutics, for example, may be developed using the sacred texts of the Bible and Qur'ān to recover silenced and liberating texts, and offer alternative perspectives on texts that have been interpreted in ways harmful to women. Discourse on issues such as these will allow Muslims and Christians to understand how both the Bible and the Qur'ān have functioned in the construction of worldviews, not only against women, but against one another.

(2) *The Changing Forms of Religious Identity*: I am persuaded that throughout the U.S. there are people who can encounter God and experience God's love and concern through interreligious activism known as Muslim-Christian dialogue. Women, men, children, youth — as individuals with their own unique challenges and as members of the family unit, the basic core of both society and the church, need to hear anew and experience the truth, hope, mercy, justice and forgiveness of God as revealed in interreligious dialogue. The movement of persons as religious seekers from Christianity to Islam and from Islam to Christianity, the development on the part of some of a dual identity as both Christian and Muslim, and the accompanying practices indicate the searching for God, religious truth, and a relevant faith community. The need for understanding this kind of movement is highlighted when we consider the public role of religion in our civil society and the low representation of religious persons who are willing to look across the boundaries of religious difference and work toward transformation.

(3) *Issues of Poverty*: As the economic gap between the poor and the non-poor continues to widen, the question of what difference religion can play becomes critical. There is a need for Christian-Muslim dialogue to address issues of poverty as they exist in local communities and to engage in joint teaching and learning: What is poverty? Who are the poor (not a homogeneous category) and the homeless who could best benefit from the collaborative efforts of interreligious dialogue? What is the meaning of poverty to children, youth, women and men and how could they gain from an interreligious effort toward common action? A dialogue of theological and religious views that influence our various understandings of poverty (as human deficit, as social entanglement, as lack of access to social power, as disempowerment and as freedom to grow)³ has the potential to foster Muslim-Christian dialogue in ways that make a visual impact in local communities where such work is most needed.

A number of factors involved in the process of self-identification and self-differentiation have shaped the nature of my worldview and journey in Muslim-Christian dialogue and interaction. While Sulayman S. Nyang is correct

in stating that in American culture, [Muslim] religious identity exists in four concentric circles (cultural, ethnic/racial, political, and linguistic), his analysis is inadequate due to its inherent patriarchy. Muslim and Christian womanist theologians such as Jacqueline Grant, Katie Cannon, and Debra Mubashshir Majeed are correct when they insist

Black women must do theology out of their tri-dimensional experience of racism/sexism/classism. To ignore any aspect of this experience is to deny the holistic and integrated reality of Black womanhood. When Black women say that God is on the side of the oppressed, we mean that God is in solidarity with the struggles of those on the underside of humanity.⁴

Briefly stated, the five most significant factors that have influenced my worldview and perspective toward Muslim-Christian dialogue are ethnicity, age, gender, professionalism, and class (including politics).

I grew up in an extended family and a church that placed value on the Black ethnic heritage and experience, the lessons learned from it, and the need to build a strong community. We valued the knowledge and experience of the historical and experiential importance of defining and shaping responses (cultural, political, social and religious) in the African American community, not as objects of history, but as subjects of it. Every Sunday (rain, shine, or snow) my parents would drive us to my grandparents home, and the children would learn much from overhearing adult conversation. My grandfather talked about “the old country” (Africa) and what was practiced there; my uncle often spoke about his involvement with Malcolm X’s movement; a brother-in-law was a Muslim, although his wife would not join the mosque; yet the majority of my family members were devout Christians. Utilizing our theological and religious resources, we were nurtured to love family and friends beyond religious boundaries.⁵

Age factors into the equation because I am among that generation of African Americans that was greatly affected by the Civil Rights movement as a lived experience. As a result, our sense of mission and purpose in life was filtered through the values of liberation, equality, justice and freedom as preached by both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. The vision I embraced of liberation and equality in America would not allow or enable discrimination, not even religious discrimination.

Although I am still challenged in my understanding of gender politics, I have benefited profoundly from womanist theologians and ethicists. The ‘womanist’ perspective, as developed by Black women scholars, has helped to facilitate an appreciation and inquiry into Muslim women’s communities, and the various subgroups within the larger Islamic communities.⁶ What is

important to remember is that because of their social location, the interreligious dialogue that takes place among Muslim and Christian women (immigrant and indigenous), often does so from the periphery of American dialogue and therefore does not echo and reflect mainstream goals, dreams and aspirations.

In terms of professional status, the fact that I claim both “Reverend” and “Doctor” as titles indicates my commitment to both ministry praxis *and* the religious academy. My identity as a professor of Missiology and Religions of the World signals a commitment not to traditional mission studies, but to the development of 21st century missiology as interreligious dialogue. I affirm that the dynamic presence of another religion must be considered as a formative factor in theological education. Theological students, religious leaders and scholars will be better able to respond positively as they find themselves in a world where co-existence with other people of faith is unavoidable and the engagement in interreligious activism known as interreligious dialogue is viewed as a necessary task of the public theologian. I, therefore, am committed to challenging seminarians and faculty who are intellectually stagnated or limited by not seeing Islam and Muslims as formative factors in Christian theology, and challenge them to accept the coexistence of different faiths, and to do so not grudgingly, but willingly.

The issue of class is one that must be given more attention from those involved in Muslim-Christian dialogue. For a poignant discussion on the topic, Beverly (now Aminah) McCloud has conducted a study of African-American Muslim Women⁷ that corresponds with my personal experiences of class issues as they impact and are impacted by interreligious dialogue. It is my suspicion that is what is true about poor African-American women, the role of Islam in fulfilling the value of “somebodiness” as described by McCloud, will also prove to be true about Hispanic women who are converting to Islam. Because religion appeals to both the spiritual and social aspects of life, we can no longer continue to ignore, silence or oppress the “religious other,” with whom we share social and geographical space, especially those considered to be “the least of these,” the poor and marginalized of society.

On the basis of my experience and personal identity, it is my conviction that Muslims and Christians must engage one another in both formal and informal interaction, and we must do so with integrity, in ways that allow cooperation without compromise that support the uniqueness of individual faith claims.

Prerequisites for Successful Interreligious Dialogue Between Christians and Muslims

Given the hegemony of Christianity in the North American context, I believe that one of the most important prerequisites for successful dialogue is

seeking understanding. Without this willingness to learn about other religious persons and what they value, it is extremely difficult if not impossible to dialogue. A second and equally important prerequisite is clarity of purpose. I have been in far too many interreligious dialogues where Muslims and Christians talk ‘at’ one another, and not ‘to’ one another simply because the purpose and intent of the specific interreligious dialogue was not made clear. I have found the typology of Marcello Zago O.M.I. helpful. According to him, every form of dialogue has cultural implications (“there can be no worthwhile interreligious dialogue that is not simultaneously intercultural dialogue”⁸). While dialogue may be expressed in a wide variety of ways, Zago identifies five distinct forms or expressions of interreligious dialogue: the dialogue of life, cooperative dialogue, dialogue of religious experience, theological dialogue, and official dialogue among religious authorities.

The reality of many and diverse expressions of Muslim-Christian interreligious dialogue has caused many, including myself, to reflect on our own set of values. What sort of theological student do we want to nurture, and what type of society do we want to live in? Those of us in theological education need to remember that our teaching must not be concerned just about the classes we teach, the subject matter, but also with the kinds of character that we influence. Character building (the centrality of ethical studies) cannot and must not be separated from theology and the theological basis for mission understood as interfaith dialogue. By recognizing the public character of the words “Islamic *daw’ab*” and Christian evangelism and mission, and the public nature of interreligious dialogue, we in fact call attention to the important role of those engaged in interreligious dialogue as public theologians.⁹

Theological Engagement and Preparation

I believe not only that theological engagement is fruitful, but that it is essential for advanced dialogue among Muslims and Christians. However, more research is needed on the appropriateness of the various models of theological inquiry utilized by Muslims and Christians in interreligious theological dialogue.

While it is true that the complexity, interconnectedness and the depth of many of the issues facing theologians and ministry leaders in religiously diverse communities seems daunting, a closer examination of the various models of theological interreligious dialogue will advance an understanding of the value of theological education in developing full human beings who may be intellectually, morally and spiritually enriched or challenged by engaging in interfaith dialogue. There is a need to provide theological faculty, seminarians, civic and congregational leaders with informed perspectives, attitudes, and

skills to appreciate the “messiness” that has characterized the actual many-layered multi-faceted dimensions of the relationship of interreligious dialogue in public life. Such a thematic focus would assist in addressing problems faced by (1) congregational and community leaders in the midst of communities of religious diversity, sometimes communities in conflict, who are committed to human and community development; (2) seminarians who may be frustrated by the church’s seeming inability to provide strong leadership in the face of a growing and challenging Islamic faith community; (3) seminarians who because of conservative biblical beliefs are unable to view any type of dialogue with Muslims as viable; and (4) seminarians and faculty who have a limited appreciation of interreligious dialogue.

Following are five models of theology in context, models of contextual theology that may be useful to consider. While every religious faith community must engage in theology in its own context, there is more than one way of engaging in theological inquiry. If we are to be more effective in the task of “theological engagement,” we can best prepare ourselves by understanding the key theological resources of religions tradition, sacred scripture, culture, and social change, and by understanding which ones serve as the focal point for initiating the specific dialogues we undertake. Each starting point represents a distinct model of theological engagement. Although developed from a Christian perspective and with a Christian audience in mind, I have discovered that when considered generically, these models have profound implications for effective interreligious dialogue.¹⁰

The Translational Model of Theology

The translational model of theological inquiry is clearly the most popular in our interreligious dialogical settings, whether initiated by Muslims or Christian. The emphasis of this model is on capturing, maintaining, and nurturing religious identity. The leadership of this particular model is committed to missional goals and strategies that are formulated and presented in a manner consistent with historical orthodoxy and orthopraxy. As the mosque or congregation struggles with key community issues, they do so with a keen desire to preserve the theological tenets that have been passed down throughout a specific understanding of history.

Theological educators, however, recognize the limitations of such a model. It is concerned with the communication of a religious faith based on the presupposition that there is a “supra-cultural” religious message that has been recorded in sacred scripture (Qur’ān or Bible), and handed down in the tradition of European Christian interpretation or Arabic Islamic interpretation. It can be critiqued, however, on the grounds of cultural specificity and theological inclusivity. Humans cannot have access to a religious message

apart from some kind of human formulation developed in a particular culture, and therefore the preconceived 'classical' theological understandings of God/Allah must be open to critique. More and more Islamic scholars have acknowledged the limitations of theological thinking without proper criticism of the Arabic culture in the face of Islam as a universal mission religion. Certainly the same holds true of Christianity as it finds itself interacting in various cultures worldwide.

The Anthropological Model of Theology

On the opposite end of this continuum is the anthropological model of theological reflection. Instead of looking to historical theological understandings as its starting point for theologizing, this particular model begins with the people ['the anthros'] who are theologizing and the questions they bring to the human-divine relationship. This type of leadership seeks to utilize a worldview that is deliberate in deconstructing and reconstructing a theological and interfaith perspective based on an understanding of God and the meaning of life. For Muslims, its goal, as defined by the process, is to produce a North American Muslim, not a Muslim in North America.¹¹

Within the Christian community, an example of the anthropological models is the desire to produce an African American Christian rather than a Christian African American. While the difference seems small, it is significant in terms of self-understanding. Rather than producing a formal understanding of mission and witness, this theological model motivates the members of the faith to express theological commitments in ways that take seriously those forms and meanings that are important to people in their contexts of daily theologizing. Rather than correspondence with a particular message, the more general human categories of life, wholeness, healing, and relationship become the standards by which genuine religious expression is judged to be sound.

The anthropological model, as with all models, has its limitations as well. While it regards human reality with utmost seriousness, starting where people are, it falls prey to cultural romanticism, and can impede the process aimed at discovering religious claims emerging from a particular culture.

The Praxis Model

The praxis model is based on the intentional connection of ethical behavior with theological reflection. It has formally emerged historically in the last half of the twentieth century, and is a common method of engaging in religious theological reflection by marginalized and consciously constructed communities of faith. Liberative theologies throughout the world utilize the praxis model of contextual theology that focuses on the identity of the religious person within a culture as that culture is understood in terms of social

change (such as the event of September 11, 2001, for instance). It is clearly a dominant model of ministry utilized by African American Christians within the U.S., historically and currently, and much data is available on it. Four critical aspects characterize this model. First, it is a never-ending process that gets its power from the recognition that God is present not only in the 'fabric' of culture. Second, it recognizes God as acting in history. Third, it is informed by knowledge at the level of reflective action. Lastly, it is about discerning meaning and action related to social change. I have discovered that this model, which is common in some African American communities (not only of the Nation of Islam), takes its inspiration from present realities and future possibilities, and is grounded in both expressions of words and actions.

The strength of the praxis model is its methodology, its attention to epistemology and ontology, and its commitment to action. In various places around the globe, the praxis model has been shown to be a powerful expression of Christianity. While the critique of the model within Christian circles by all indications is very positive, some Muslims also see its value as a corrective to theological hermeneutics (Arab and Eurocentric based) that are too general and pretend to be universally relevant.

The Synthetic Model of Theology

The synthetic model of contextual theology seeks to balance the religious message and tradition on the one hand, and culture and social change on the other. It acknowledges all four sources of theological reflection as instrumental starting points, and uses them in the development of intelligent interreligious action and reflection. Because this model of Muslim-Christian interaction is often developed in response to social crisis ministries, the focus is on religious tenets that evoke a sense of social responsibility and demand that attention be given to the concrete situations in which women and men live. Synthetic refers to that which is human-made, the intentional and conscious construction of that which is deemed usable and of value. Attention to issues of hunger, poverty and imprisonment, as they relate to both spiritual and material well-being, are what mandate the daily mission and witness (Islamic *da'wa* and Christian evangelism) of such intentional public actions. These religious and social actions are often non-traditional, promote creativity, and encourage new forms of being in community, found often in the urban contexts.

Taking their model from exemplary religious figures who worked with the poor or marginalized, practitioners of the synthetic model seek to bring a visible message of hope to those who have lost hope. According to persons who labor from such a vision, they construct theological models of interreligious dialogue and action that address human needs, and offer help in a way that conveys respect for human dignity and potential. In addition, they

usually seek to cultivate and challenge people's own inner strengths, that they may in turn help others. With a keen sense of God's calling and self-consciousness, such expressions of Muslim-Christian encounter attempt to exist in a relevant, creative and authentic manner to free imprisoned minds, expand horizons, and introduce new religious and faith experiences. Further study of its uses within North American contexts is required. However, this is a very demanding model to implement, and requires the ability to rethink theology in context without compromising either the core religious belief (Islamic or Christian) or the concern for those who engage in the process of theological reflection.

The Transcendental Model

The transcendental model proposes that the task of constructing a contextualized theology is not about producing a particular body of any kind of texts; rather it is about attending to the "affective and cognitive operations in self-transcending subject."¹² Based on Immanuel Kant's use of the term "transcendental," this model turns attention to the person as the subject of the theological inquiry and historical consciousness as the place in which reality and truth are known and experienced.

Instead of beginning with the conviction that reality is 'out there,' existing somehow independently of human knowing, it suggests that the knowing subject is intimately involved in determining reality's basic shape. One needs to begin one's quest for knowing what 'is' by attending to the dynamic of one's own consciousness and irrepressible desire to know.¹³

While evidence of this model is observed and articulated among religious leaders who raise questions that cause Muslims to consider what it actually means to be a Muslim, and Christians what it means to be a Christian, the call is for a radical shift in perspective: What does it really mean to be a religious and spiritual person in today's society? Theologizing begins not by focusing on the essence of either the biblical or Qur'anic message or on traditional understandings, but rather by being concerned with one's religious experience and the need to experience oneself as an authentic religious and spiritual person. What this might look like from the context of interfaith dialogue has yet to be revealed; yet it has possibilities as a useful and promising model of doing theology that emphasizes theology not in terms of theological content, but rather as the actual activity or process of seeking understanding as an authentic believer and cultural subject.

Each of these models needs fuller examination and assessment, including strengths and limitations, so that we are better able to not only identify the

theological and ethical foundations necessary to encourage more effective theological engagements, but also to gain a better appreciation of the various models, and their appropriateness.¹⁴

Benefits of Interfaith Dialogue or Interaction in the Classroom, and Beyond

Without a doubt, with the proper planning, development and consideration of key curricula concerns, opportunities for dynamic interfaith dialogue and interaction can be afforded in the classroom setting. The model I recommend is one that promotes the historical, social, interdisciplinary, comparative and critical study of religions in light of the rich diversity of religious traditions evidenced within the local communities in which the actual theological education occurs. Whether responding to writings (official and popular) by Muslims on the nature of interreligious dialogue, viewing videos and lectures by and with Muslims and Christians on specific topics, or listening to presentations by Muslims and conversing with them, mine is not a model in the sense of being an end product, but rather is a process of missiological inquiry that joins the other dimensions of theological education in an effort to rethink, recreate, and revision life in community in response to the presence of religious diversity.

In a number of theological education settings, both conservative and liberal, I have led theological students in reexamining Muslim and Christian interactions both within and beyond the classroom. My pedagogy/androgyny is to broaden the learning context by claiming the urban setting as a classroom and lead students in taking advantage of both structured and unstructured learning opportunities to engage in interfaith dialogue and interaction. The intentional institutionalization of an annual interfaith dialogue within the life of the theological institution itself, both the theological community and the surrounding public learns to value Muslim-Christian dialogue. For instance, the first historical formal dialogue between Minister Ava Muhammad and Imam Warith Deen Mohammad took place on the campus of the Interdenominational Theological Center (Atlanta 2000), emphasizing the role and place of theological education institutions in a multireligious context. Sisters United in Human Service, Inc., has given strong support to ITC's annual interfaith dialogues. Because theirs is a human service organization of Muslim women working in the spirit of sisterhood to promote support, uplift and serve human concerns, their vision includes networking with others of faith in service that advances the oneness of God and the oneness of humanity. As a result, the larger community of Atlanta knows that there are religious organizations and institutions committed to furthering interreligious dialogue as an integral aspect of religious missiology, both Christian and Muslim.

Conclusion

It is important for both the individual and society that educational and ministry leaders be expected to teach (in word, deed and lifestyle) about how we should treat one another and what we consider morally permissible behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this presentation has been to encourage a more nuanced awareness of the divergent expressions of interreligious dialogue, and the theological constructs that undergird them. The need for a clarification related to the practice of theological engagement in interreligious Christian-Muslim dialogue will lead us to a more effective knowledge of human behavior in the context of religious diversity.

The need and the willingness to cross the boundary of religious differences and to enter into interreligious dialogue grows more crucial every day. Interfaith dialogues broaden our capacity to experience how to live together in our pluralistic society by operating from that which gives life meaning and value. It also provides us with an alternative way of being with those who are different, sometimes running the risk of being unpopular. So again, to Hartford Seminary and to those who have gathered in the spirit of that proverb, “*One who has family and friends is not caught in the darkness of the road.*” I express appreciation for those who see value in Muslim-Christian activism known as interreligious dialogue, and are willing to travel together toward the future down a road that is familiar but so unlike any other, yet one we must travel in order to be made whole.

Endnotes

1. For a theological analysis of this event, the opportunities afforded the Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta (CCMA) to engage in appropriate interreligious response, and alternative Christian responses see “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: The Implications of Religious Pluralism in the City,” in *God So Loves The City: Seeking a Theology for Urban Mission* (editors, Charles Van Engen and Jude Tiersma, Moravia, CA: MARC, 1994).
2. See “Mission as Witness to African American Muslims: A Womanist Approach” by Marsha Snulligan Haney in *Gospel Bearers, Gospel Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century*, Dana L. Robert editor, (New York: Orbis, 2002).
3. *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* by Bryant L. Myers (New York: Maryknoll, 2002), although written from the perspective of Christian organizational transformation, Myers makes a significant contribution in presenting an intercultural perspective on the nature of poverty as relations and as spiritual that may foster an interreligious perspective on the subject of poverty and the impact of interreligious dialogues.
4. Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, (Scholars Press: Atlanta, 1989), 209.
5. This is not to suggest that the process is an easy one. One cousin's journey which is accurately described by Aminah McCloud in her description of the character Peaches in

“African-American Muslim Women” is most apropos. While her arranged marriage to a Muslim immigrant has worked out well for her, our grandmother continues to raise questions, as she did at the last family reunion, by asking “Why is it necessary to wear your religion?” referring to my cousins’ black dress and *hijab* in 90 degree August weather.

6. Marcia K. Hermansen, “Two-way Acculturation: Muslim Women in America Between Individual Choice (Liminality) and Community Affiliation (Communitas)” in *The Muslims of America*, edited by Yvonne Y. Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

7. Beverly Thomas McCloud, “African-American Muslim Women” in *The Muslims of America*, edited by Yvonne Y. Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

8. See Marcello Zago, O.M.I., “Mission and Interreligious Dialogue” in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 1998. While he identifies major expressions of dialogue, he also points out that the dialogue of cooperation and dialogue of religious experience are often times integrated and foster the dialogue of life, 101.)

9. A closer investigation into this topic reveals two pressing issues that have not yet been adequately addressed related to interreligious dialogue: one is the acknowledgement of the continuous development of an Islamic missiology, especially as related to the institutionalization of Islam in the Western context post September 11, 2001. It is just as important and challenged by contemporary culture as is Christian Missiology. The second concern is the need for both internal religious and external interreligious dialogues to focus on understanding the specific purposes (and consequences) of interreligious dialogue. Sincere persons in both the Christian and Muslim communities ask if there really is a purpose to interreligious dialogue beyond Islamic *da’wa* and Christian mission and evangelism. Larry Posten provides a critical discourse on the subject matter in his essay entitled, “*Da’wa* in the West” in *The Muslims of America*, edited by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (New York: Oxford, 1991), which emphasizes the challenge.

10. See *Models of Contextual Theology* by Stephen B. Bevans, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996) which contains helpful maps of the five models of contextual theology mentioned in this paper. It is helpful to be reminded that while every theological model utilizes each of the four primary resources (religious message, tradition, culture and social change) in the theologizing process, what distinguishes each model is the specific resource used as the point of departure within the process. Also while Bevan’s intended audience is the Christian community, I have broadened his intentions to speak to interreligious contexts of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

11. The same concern has been discussed in several discourses related to the challenges facing both Muslims and Christians in the U.S. The discourse on Africentric Christianity, and assimilationist and simulationist Muslims are the same. For more information on the latter, the essay “Convergence and Divergence in an Emergent Community: A Study of Challenges Facing US Muslims” by Sulayman S Nyang in *The Muslims of America*, edited by Yvonne Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

12. Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 97.

13. Ibid, 98. An advantage to this model is that it lifts up a concern essential to interreligious theological dialogue, and that is the issue of divine revelation. Bevan states: “God’s Revelation is not ‘out there.’ Revelation is not in the words of scripture, the doctrines of tradition, or even hidden within the labyrinthine of networks of culture. The only place God can reveal Godself truly and effectively is within human experiences, as a human person is open to the words of scripture as read or proclaimed, open to events in daily life, and open to values embodied in a cultural tradition,” 99.

14. There is an additional model, that of the counter-culture, that I have not included because it is not applicable for Muslims who have intentionally migrated to the US in pursuit

of the “American Dream,” that is, freedom and equality. While some fundamental and conservative Christians and Muslims have much in common in terms of emphasis on family values and moral issues, their theological and doctrinal perspectives toward one another do not encourage or embrace the desire for interreligious dialogue. See “Doing Theology in North America: A Counter-Cultural Model?” in *The Gospel and Our Culture* (Holland, MI: Western Theological Seminary, 1993) for one critique of this model.