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A Response to Joseph K. Koech

Wafik Wahba

Christians have a responsibility to extend God's love and acceptance to the hurting and broken communities in today's world. Koech's chapter on missions to Muslims provides an insightful presentation on the mandate of Christian missions from a biblical perspective while highlighting the current challenges in reaching out to Muslims in Kenya. He presents several practical and helpful tools related to understanding both the current context and the church's role in ministering among Muslims in the face of increased terrorist activities.

Throughout the modern history of Kenya, Christians and Muslims coexisted relatively peacefully. However, the terror attacks carried by al-Shabaab have had a ripple effect on Christians across the country. Violence, such as the Garissa University massacre of April 2015 that left 148 university students dead and hundreds of others wounded, has created anger and fear among both Christians and Muslims.⁴⁴³ While Kenyan Muslim leaders condemned terrorist attacks, Christians are becoming suspicious of Muslims who might express feelings of sympathy with such horrendous acts. This fear of Muslims poses a serious threat to Christian outreach to Muslims.

In response to the complex issues facing the contemporary world, and missions in particular, Christians have a responsibility to understanding the current dynamics of Christian-Muslim relationships in general as well as addressing the issue of injustices that often result in increased fanaticism. The level of hostility between Christian and Muslim communities is growing in Kenya and around the globe due to misinformed communication and political tension. Religious differences are often used to fuel such hostilities; however, establishing mutual respect and common friendship with Muslims can often minimize the mistrust and hostility between the two communities. A better understanding of Islamic religious beliefs and worldview might help Christians in forming better relationships with Muslims based on understanding differences as well as mutual concerns. Christians and Muslims strive to live in peaceful communities and to enjoy healthy relationships. However, differences in religious beliefs and worldviews should not be used to ignite tensions. Therefore, proper training of Christian leaders on Islamic theology, history, as well as on current social and political issues is paramount.

St. Paul University's Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations in Nairobi presents an encouraging model for future relationship between the two communities. The "diapaxis" model that provides "dialogue in practice" where Christians and Muslims work together in overcoming stereotypes while attaining a better understanding of their historical, religious, and cultural differences is vital for establishing healthy encounters.⁴⁴⁴

Facing hostility, mistrust, and even persecution, Christians in other African countries have demonstrated the capability for extending forgiveness and reconciliation. For instance, Kenyan Christians may well want to look northward to the Coptic experience in Egypt for direction. In response to several attacks by jihadists where hundreds of Christians were massacred and numerous churches were burned during the last five years, many Egyptian Christians responded by extending forgiveness to those who committed the atrocities. They wrote the words "We Forgive" on the ruins of their homes and churches. Such a response created significant respect and affinity between Christians and the larger Muslim community, while alienating the terrorists. This is not to suggest that terrorist attacks will cease or that jihadist atrocities will not occur again; however, the Christian

response won the friendship of much of the larger Muslim community. And because of those positive relationships, Christian witness and mission will hopefully have a better chance of being realized.

The Egyptian experience also reminds Kenyans that the Christian experience of redemption, reconciliation, and mission includes suffering. Through his suffering on the cross, Christ brought redemption to humanity; Christians are also given the privilege of suffering with Christ in order to extend God's forgiveness to humanity (Phil 1:24). In the midst of the present turmoil in Kenya, Christians need to keep these truths in mind.

443. *BBC News*, "Kenya Attack: Garissa University Assault Killed 147," 2 April 2015.

444. Dr. Joseph Wandera, one of this volume's contributors, is the director of this center.