



Research Paper

The Concept of Forgiveness in Christianity And Islam As A Tool For Christian Muslim Relations In Eastleigh Nairobi

AUTHOR

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of forgiveness in Islam and Christianity as a tool for interreligious relations in East Leigh, Nairobi Kenya. Three objectives were formulated i.e. to assess forgiveness in Christianity and Muslim theology, to analyze indicators of forgiveness in Christian-Muslim relations, and to examine the use of forgiveness as a tool for Christian-Muslim relations in East Leigh, Nairobi County. The study adopted descriptive research design. The target population was 125000 residents in East Leigh Nairobi Kenya who included both Christians, and Muslims. Through the study the observation was that, acceptance of forgiveness would reduce mistrust, violence, and increase the culture of tolerance among their followers. The research used case study design for it would allow the researcher to interact regularly with the person or people studied. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis were used to analyze the data. Quantitative analysis was carried out using statistical packages (SPSS V.21), qualitative data was analyzed thematically, and the findings were presented by the use of tables and figures. The process of data collection sailed through administration of questionnaires, observations, and in depth interviews. Descriptive technique was done on data analysis and findings presented. It was established that it was by mutual encouragement of Christian and Muslim to promote forgiveness that led to determine peace, trust, and their relational growth among their followers. The researcher suggested that more studies needed to be carried out on concept of government policy, community, and culture to investigate their effects on Islam and Christianity as a tool for interreligious relations in East Leigh Nairobi Kenya.

Key words: Forgiveness, Bible, Quran, Religion, East Leigh, Inter-faith relations

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I. Introduction

Christians and Muslims have coexisted for centuries, as it is, none can wish out the other. They are monotheistic in character and because they were established through patriarchal tradition of Abraham from the Old Testament. This monotheistic religion feature God as the sole creator of the universe who is transcendent and the source of morality. They believe in paternal authority, judgment, life after death, and that nature and human beings are subordinate to God. These religions also believe that God rules, reveals, loves, judges, punishes, and forgives. (Jonathan; 2016, p87-89).

Christians, and Muslims comprise nearly half of the world's population; the nature of these communities is of considerable significance for the welfare of human family. According to Pew (2018) more than a quarter of the world's countries experience a high incidence of hostilities motivated by religious hatred, mob violence related to religion terrors, and harassment of women for violating religious rules. The spike in religious violence is global and affects virtually many religious groups in the world. There have been mass killing and harassments increasing in countries that are affected by religious related wars. In 2018, more than 50 countries, most reported lethal incident involving Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. From some Christian literature, produced by Christian theologians (Ammah 2007, and Mwakimako 2007), Christians, and Muslims are presented as related to each other in particular settings in Africa, but sometimes as blocs with clear boundaries where interactions overtime are investigated. Kenya is a predominantly a Christian country with Muslim counting about 11% of its population. Despite the terror attacks on Christian establishments, the country has never experienced inter-religious war after the terror in 1998 on the American embassy in Nairobi, the Kikambala attacks, and the Westgate mall. The 2014 Mpeketoni, Lamu attacks, and the 2015 outrage at the university in Garissa where over 140 students mostly non-Muslim were

killed further deteriorated the Christian-Muslim relationship (Martin Orlando <https://www>). The numerous killings of non-Muslims by Muslim Jihad groups in Kenya have fueled ethno-religious tensions manifested in hatred and anger against the entire Muslim community. However, anti-Jihad Muslims have rightly condemned the targeting of non-Muslim country men by the jihadists. The Christian leaders have not been satisfied by their counterpart's internal self-criticism. There are suspicions from Christians that all Muslim are the same and posing a threat to peace in the country (Martin; 2017), especially in East Leigh, Nairobi Kenya.

The objective of this study was to investigate the concepts of forgiveness in Islam and Christianity as applied in fostering good inter-religious relations among Christians and Muslims in East Leigh Area, Nairobi, Kenya. The study focuses specifically on assessing the teachings of forgiveness in Christianity and Islam, analysis of the indicators of forgiveness and anti-forgiveness in the Christian-Muslim relations, and examination of utilization of forgiveness in ensuring good Christian-Muslim relations. Forgiveness is an act that has huge ramifications on the inter-religious relations, particularly Christians and Muslims. The rising tensions between Christians and Muslims in Kenya necessitated this study to be carried out. East Leigh area was chosen since it is the region within Nairobi that has huge numbers of Muslims matching the Christian population. Forgiveness is considered a powerful tool in fostering good relations between Christians and Muslims who share a geographical location.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

This particular study was done in East Leigh Nairobi Kenya, which is located in the eastern part of Nairobi city, a place within Kamukunji Sub County, of Nairobi County. East Leigh is a business hub, but it can be unstable because of tensions between the Somali Muslims and Kenyan Christians. According to 2019 census, East Leigh population is about 125200. Christian account for 61% while Muslim account for about 30% of the population (<https://documents.hants.gov.uk>). Though Christians and Muslims live together in this area, they do not interact much except while doing business transactions. The study covered different groups who are inhabitants of East Leigh from both Christians and Muslims. Nairobi's East Leigh neighborhood hosts one of the biggest ethnic Somali communities outside Somalia composed of Kenya Somalis as well as Somali nationals whose numbers have swollen since the collapse of their state.



Figure 1: Location map of East Leigh, Nairobi, Kenya.

Data collection and analysis

There sampling techniques were used to collect data for this study i.e. random sampling, cluster sampling, and convenience sampling. A total of 125 respondents were targeted for the study. For equality in the

number of respondents, 50 Christians, 50 Muslims, 10 sheikhs, and 10 clergy were interviewed. Additionally, 5 chiefs of the five locations in East Leigh were also interviewed to get the perspective from the national government leadership regarding the research topic. Random and cluster sampling were applied to get the 50 Christians and 50 Muslim respondents without bias. Convenience sampling was used to access the 10 Sheikhs, 10 Clergy, and 5 chiefs. Data collection was done using well-structured uniform questionnaires with specific questions to ensure that a reliable variability in responses was obtained. In addition to questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussions were used to collect information. Focused group discussions were conducted on the Sheikhs and Clergy who were well-versed with the theological teachings of the two religions. These being the religious leaders representing Islam and Christianity respectively had more information to give that was better obtained via the focused group discussion.

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis were used to analyze the data obtained from this study to reach meaningful interpretations and conclusions. Qualitative data analysis was used to make inferences from responses obtained in the questionnaires, interviews, and focused group discussions. Quantitative data analysis was used to make statistical analysis of the respondents who supported or did not supported each of the study's hypotheses.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the response it was established that out of the 50 questionnaires issued to both Christian and Muslim respondents 49 and 35 were duly returned respectively. This indicated a 98% and 85% response rate thus indicating that the returned questionnaires were sufficient for analysis. With regards to age, majority of the people considered for this study were aged between 21 and 55 years. This comprised of a 64% of the total respondents. This was a good indication that the study got reliable information since a bulk of it was obtained from adults with a good understanding of forgiveness with respect to each religion. With regards to gender, a slightly higher number of men were interviewed compared to women. There was however no significant difference between the male and female respondents. About 80% of the respondents in this study were married. This was an indication that both Christians and Muslims living in East Leigh area embraced the family unit. An observation in the marriage patterns was made indicating that there were very few Muslim women married to Christian husbands but Christian women were freer to get married to Muslim husbands. Majority of respondents representing 64% had only reached at the primary school level of education. An additional 24% had reached secondary school level. This indicated that cumulatively about 88% of the respondents had only attained secondary school level of education. The population of East Leigh is predominantly a business community and hence most of them turn to business immediately after completing primary and secondary education.

Assessment of the teachings on forgiveness

The teachings of forgiveness in both Christianity and Islam were assessed inclusive of what one religion thought of the other's teaching on forgiveness. About 55 % of the respondents agreed that Christianity taught forgiveness as part of their religious teachings. Comparatively fewer respondents – about 32% agreed that Islam taught about forgiveness in their religious teachings. This variation in the opinion on whether Christianity and Islam taught forgiveness arose from experiences with majority of the Christianity that their Muslim counterparts never forgive them. The Christian respondents who disagreed with whether Islam teaches forgiveness cited the extreme arrogance, temperament among their Muslim colleagues as a sign that probably these fellows were not taught about forgiveness in the Mosques. Many Christians further felt that majority of the Muslims always sought revenge when wronged, hence this was another indication that there was a high possibility of Islam not teaching forgiveness. There is also the popular narrative that Islam views non-Muslims as "kafaras" and hence they do not treat them as they treat their Muslim brothers and sisters. While Muslims agreed that they taught forgiveness, it was in the context of their fellow Muslims. From their holy scriptures, both Christianity and Islam teach about forgiveness. In the Bible, Jesus taught his disciples to forgive in order to be forgiven by God. This was even included in the Lord's Prayer. Similarly in the Quran, Islam teaches that Allah is merciful to forgive all those who forgive their fellow human beings who have wronged them. These Islamic teachings of forgiveness were however not considered to be practiced by the Muslims who live in East Leigh, Nairobi. Many respondents indicated that it was quite difficult to forgive and forget as taught in the Bible. Even worse were the Muslim respondents who indicated that they found it difficult to forgive Christians especially when it came to matters of defending their faith. The response from the Muslims was an indication of the deep disdain Muslims have on Christians. This unwillingness to forgive was basically due to differences in religious beliefs.

The use of forgiveness among Christians and Muslims in East Leigh Nairobi

The findings from the questionnaires and interviews were categorical that more people agreed that Christianity taught about forgives more than Islam. However when it comes to the practical application of the

teachings on forgiveness there was a significant decline in the number of people who believed that these teachings were followed. Many Muslim respondents disagreed that majority of their Christian colleagues actually practiced forgiveness. They cited experiences from their daily interactions quoting that they had met Christians who vowed not to forgive them. From the findings it was established that the perspective on application of forgiveness changed on whether a Christian or a Muslim was questioned. The Muslims stated that they applied forgiveness among themselves but found it difficult to forgive Christians. Similarly Christians stated that they forgave one another including their Muslim colleagues.

Table 1: Respondents opinion regarding teaching of forgiveness in Christianity and Islam

Teaching on forgiveness	Rating				
	Frequency	Agree		Disagree	
		Number	Percentage (%)	Number	Percentage (%)
Christians	70	68	54.4%	2	1.6%
Muslims	55	40	32%	15	12%
Total	125	108	86.4	17	13.6%

The utilization of forgiveness as a tool for Christian-Muslim relations

Most of the respondents in this study confirmed that they believed that forgiveness would enhance better relationships between Christians and Muslims within East Leigh. They all agreed that forgiveness was taught in their religious teachings and hence they should find it easier to forgive one another. Forgiveness as taught in the bible involves forgetting what wrong was done against you. Application this form of forgiveness in daily interactions with their Christian and Muslim neighbours would enhance good relationships. The Quran teaches Islamic faithful to forgive forgiveness as a way of honoring Allah and his mercies. This way, they shall also be forgiven by Allah on the judgment day. Forgiveness yields peaceful coexistence and hence if both Christians and Muslims practice forgiveness genuinely, they would have better relations and promote peace within East Leigh area in Nairobi. Since both religions taught about forgiveness, it is evident that their faithful have confidence in the importance of forgiveness in fostering peaceful relationships between their members despite the existing differences in faith.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Majority of the respondents acknowledged that both Christianity and Islam taught forgiveness in their religious teachings. Both religions held forgiveness at the core of the relationship between humankind and God/Allah. They therefore believed that forgiveness was paramount for a peaceful coexistence and excellent relationship between Christians and Muslims living in East Leigh, Nairobi. They however admitted that forgiveness was rarely practiced especially when it came to Muslims forgiving Christians and vice versa. This was occasioned due to the existing differences in beliefs between Christians and Muslims. The failure to practice forgiveness had led to high tensions, mistrust, and occasional outbursts of violence between Christians and Muslims in East Leigh, Nairobi. The following recommendations were made from this study:

- Religious leaders should teach their followers the concept of forgiveness with regards to members of other religions in order to promote inter-religious forgiveness between Christians and Muslims.
- Both Christians and Muslims should drop the religious prejudices they hold against believers of other religions apart from theirs. This would enhance forgiveness and peaceful coexistence
- Religious leaders from both the Christian and Muslim sides should organize inter-religious seminars, and workshops to teach their followers about forgiveness from each religion’s perspective.

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