

## CHAPTER 6

### SYNTHESIS

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter, I have put together entire components of the study of the transcendence of God in Islam and Christianity. In addition to revisiting the chapters, there are implications of the study and recommendations. The implications of the study on the Christian-Muslim relations are limited to the discussion within the scope of this study. The presentation of problem setting, aims and objectives, methodology, and hypothesis are simplified from chapter 1 for the effective presentation of how the study has accomplished its design. Other chapters are presented as part of the summary.

#### 6.2 PROBLEM SETTING

Jeremiah 23:23 poses the question: “Am I only a God nearby...and not a God far away?” This question has been a guiding principle throughout this thesis. I have tried my best to answer the question of transcendence and immanence of God in Islam and Christianity. This transcendence-immanence of God is an antinomy that has to be understood within its own religious context. The understanding of God’s relationship with mankind in this thesis has been focused upon that relationship in the lives of Adam, Abraham, and Moses of the Bible and the Qur’an. Both the Qur’an and the Bible present the account of the three foundational figures of Islam and Christianity in a similar manner. However, Islam maintains the absolute

transcendence of God while Christianity reflects both a transcendent and immanent God. Why is there a difference in the understanding of God? Is there a possibility that this different understanding might cause the differences in the theology and practice of Islam and Christianity? For the answer to those inquiries, I have focused the study upon the comparative understanding and implications of the transcendence of God reflected in Adam, Abraham, and Moses.

### **6.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate the transcendence of God in the Bible and the Qur'an. This was done through the study of corresponding relationship accounts of God with Adam, Abraham, and Moses and its implications upon the different aspects of the theologies and practices of Christianity and Islam.

The objectives of research are expressed through the following major research areas. These objectives are:

- to present an overview of the research as well as the various aspects of research methodology (chapter 1).
- to describe the similarities and differences in the Qur'an and the Bible and to present an appropriate approach to the exegesis of the elective passages (chapter 2).
- to establish the preliminary preparation of the study as well as to orient the readers to the theological issues of the transcendence of God (chapter 3).

- to investigate how God reveals his will in respect to the Qur'an and the Bible, particularly the Old Testament (chapter 4).
- to describe and analyse the transcendence of God revealed in the Old Testament and the Qur'an, within the limits of the parallel passages dealing with Adam, Abraham, and Moses (chapter 4).
- to find the cause of the differences between the corresponding episodes of the Old Testament and the Qur'an with regard to the transcendence of God (chapter 5).
- to analyse the implications of the transcendence of God with regard to the differences in Christian and Islamic theology (chapter 5).
- to conclude the study as well as to discuss any solutions for the Christian-Muslim conflicts and the necessity for further studies (chapter 6).

#### 6.4 METHODOLOGY

I have employed a comparative exegetical and literature study (chapter 4) as well as a comparative theological analysis (chapter 5) of both the Qur'an and the Bible to answer the questions of the transcendence of God. The major approach is to examine the transcendence of God as a theological theme in the light of the grammatico-historical approach. In the process of exegesis, I applied the inductive approach to the Scriptures and analyses of the theme, the transcendence of God. I treated three elements of the inductive study as the major outline of the study: First, I have **observed** the relative texts of the Qur'an and the Bible to see the difference and similarity. Secondly, the **interpretations** of the selected texts are presented with the above-mentioned different exegetical methods. Then, finally, I have

**applied** the result of the textual study to the comparative theological analysis of Islam and Christianity with additional applications to Christian-Muslim relations.

## 6.5 HYPOTHESIS

The following hypothesis for this study has been confirmed through the investigation of the transcendence of God in the Old Testament and the Qur'an with regard to the eclectic passages:

*The exegesis of the parallel passages dealing with Adam, Abraham, and Moses in the Old Testament and the Qur'an shows that the (ontological) transcendence of God in the Old Testament is due to the sinful nature of man. Due to the unholy nature of man, the Holy God cannot be with man, yet God uses his transcendent nature as a medium to approach man. On the other hand, due to the pre-understanding of the absolute transcendence of God, the Qur'an is redactionally written to propagandise against God's immanence in the Old Testament and thus maintains God's absolute transcendence from his creation.*

*The different concepts of the relationship of God with mankind shown in the exegesis of Adam, Abraham, and Moses may have been true to the entire Islamic and Christian faiths. Furthermore, they may have caused some of the major differences between Christian and Muslim theologies, with one allowing God's presence with man in Christianity while the other denying God's presence with man in Islam. In turn, the different concepts may also have constituted a root cause of Christian and Muslim conflicts. On the other hand,*

*delineating the different concepts of God's transcendence and its effect on the theology of Christianity and Islam may result in better Christian-Muslim relations by promoting understanding of the root cause of the differences.*

## **6.6 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH**

Significant differences as well as similarities between Islam and Christianity in the areas of the transcendence and immanence of God have been discussed in this thesis. In addition, there is a comparative study of systematic theology within the extent of the implications of the transcendence of God that influence Muslim and Christian theology.

The first chapter presents the rationale and overviews of the discussion of the transcendence of God in the Qur'an and the Bible. This is followed by a foundational discussion of the subject of the thesis in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 presents the revelations of the Qur'an and the Bible, focusing on the issue of the continuity and discontinuity between the two Scriptures. It concludes that there is both continuity and discontinuity between the Bible and the Qur'an with suggestions for mutual respect of the Scriptures. Chapter 3 depicts a comprehensive understanding of the transcendence of God in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity based on scholars like Graham, Zuesse and Crotty. The impact of the transcendence of the God in Judaism upon Islam results in belief in the absolute transcendence of God. On the other hand, the transcendence of God in Christianity has been influenced by both the "Wholly Other" and "Wholly the Same" of Judaism. It thus maintains the idea of the transcendence-immanence of God.

The main discussion of the transcendence of God unfolds in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 presents the exegetical-comparative studies of God's relationships with Adam, Abraham, and Moses in the Qur'an and the Bible within the scope of identical situations. In God's relationship with Adam, the discussion is focused on Adam's role in the God's creation, the spacio-relationship of God in the Garden, Adam's activities in the Garden, and the Fall of man. The discussion of the Qur'anic account of Adam reveals the transcendence of God from the beginning of the creation. The genesis of the transcendence of God is identified in the biblical account through the result of the Fall of man. However, there is the undeniable immanence of God along with the transcendence of God in the biblical account of God and Adam. The arguments of God's relationship with Abraham are based on Abraham's close friendship with God, God visiting the tent of Abraham, and the test of Abraham. Throughout the arguments, God's presence appears in the biblical account while the Qur'anic accounts indicate no presence of God with Abraham. The arguments for God's relationship with Moses also focus on his spacio-presence with Moses. Throughout the discussion of Moses and the mystic fire, the pillar of cloud, the Ark of the Covenant, and God at Mount Sinai, God is present in the biblical account while the Qur'anic account maintains the absolute transcendence of God.

Chapter 5 deals with the results of the discussion of the transcendence of God from chapter 4 to the theology of Muslims and Christians. In the argument of the theology of man, the main argument was based on man's fellowship with God. The absolute transcendence of God in Islam denies man's fellowship with God, while the image of God in man allows man to have fellowship with God in Christianity. In the Christian theology of salvation, the immanent-

transcendent God restores the relationship between God and man. In Islam, due to God's non-involvement in the salvation process as well as the denial of original sin, salvation is expressed in the welfare of the believers. The Holy Spirit in Christianity is one of the manifestations of God's immanence with man. In Islam, the Holy Spirit is interpreted as the Angel Gabriel, which is a result of treating God as absolutely transcendent.

In the discussion of the Scriptures, "transcendent revelation" in Islam and "historical-inspirational revelation" in Christianity summarize the discussion of bibliology. In ecclesiology, the *Umma* represents the transcendent relationship of God while the Church is proof of God's indwelling act among men. Because God cannot be with humans in Islam, Jesus in the Qur'an is simply man. In the Bible, Jesus is depicted as the theanthropic person (the God-man), who reflects the transcendence of an immanent God. The argument of the transcendence of God in theology proper concludes with the fact that the God of Islam and Christianity are identical in functional attributes but they are distinct with regard to the relational attributes of God.

## **6.7 IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH**

### **6.7.1 Implications for Christian and Muslim relations**

In this thesis, I have attempted to examine the echoes of the transcendence of God that can be detected in identical verses between the Qur'an and the Bible. I have found that the paradoxical transcendence-immanence of the God of the Bible conflicts with the absolute transcendence of the God in Islam. Consequently, there are conflicts in the practice of

Muslim and Christian theology and belief. Corduan (1998:46) confirms, “Still, despite the common origin, there are also some crucial differences between Muhammed’s understanding of God and the biblical one.” Furthermore, Singh (2001:316) says: “The conflict between Christians and Muslims is historic in that it goes back to the times of Mohammad with the Christians of his time. The nature of the conflict, unlike in the case of the Jew-Muslim conflict, was not political but dogmatic. It concerned the nature of God.” According to what Singh says, the understanding of God in Islam and Christianity and its implications are the basic cause of the religious conflict and hindrance to Christian and Muslim relations. Therefore, both Muslims and Christians must consider the different concepts of God in their relations to each other. They should consider the difference between the transcendent-immanent God of Christianity and the absolutely transcendent God of Islam. Otherwise, there will be continued conflict between Christians and Muslims.

The word “Islamophobia” represents the problem of the diverse understandings of God and its implications among Christians. Islamophobia is the fear of Islam developed from mixed concepts of racism and discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, gender, or skin colour (Larsson 2005:35). Tidiane (2008:20) uses the word “Islamophobia” to describe the raised hostility between the Islamic world and the West, while referring to the cartoons depicting Mohammad as a terrorist. Should Mohammad be considered as a terrorist or a prophet? No matter what the answer is, the fear of Islam has recently been greatly prevalent in the Western world.

McKechnie (1979:1884) defines “terrorist” as a person who practices or favours the “use of terror and violence to, intimidate, subjugate, etc.” However, Muslims understand it with honour in reference to Jihad (Holy War): “We are happy that the US put us on its list of



terrorists, a name given to pure Muslims who are strong and clear in their religious position” (*Daily Nation* 21 Mar 2008). The article, which makes the term terrorist and Jihad equal, is referring to Somalia’s Islamic Court Union’s youths who are celebrating their addition to the list of terrorists by the United States government. This understanding of terrorists is a reflection of the general population’s view of Islamic Jihad. However, Christians also generally treat Jihad as an act of terrorists.<sup>85</sup> The misunderstanding of the term is an unavoidable consequence of the conflict between the two religions because of different perceptions of God and the purpose of man.

In Christian-Muslim relations one should consider both the similarities and dissimilarities between these religions. As the concept of God differs from each other, conflict between the two religions is inevitable. Yet, by moving closer to the similarities of the transcendence of God, one can create harmony and agreement in Christian-Muslim relations. By focusing on the similarities of the transcendence of God, it will force both Christians and Muslims to remain within the range of agreement that results in lesser conflict. On the other hand, it is obvious that the more we, Christians and Muslims, deal with the dissimilarities, the more conflict will arise. However, the differences abide in the core beliefs of Christians and Muslims. Hence, it is important to know the differences in order to avoid conflict. One must carefully balance the subject of God when dealing with Christian-Muslim relations. Both Christians and Muslims should maintain that they agree with each other that God is transcendent from creation while Christians should not insist upon the immanent aspect of God before Muslims. Both religions should focus on what is agreeable from the fundamental basic root of theology and practice. The believers should not focus on the outcome of

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<sup>85</sup> Mvumbi (2008b:32) hints that not all Muslims are terrorists, but it seems that all terrorists are Muslims. See further discussion on terrorists in 6.7.2 and footnote 86.

theological thought that has already widened the gap between Islam and Christianity. By focusing on the similarities in the transcendence of God in Christianity and Islam, it will create a closer gap in the relationships between Christians and Muslims.

## **6.7.2 Suggestions to improve Christian and Muslim relations**

### **6.7.2.1 Introduction**

The subject of Christian-Muslim relations is a rather large subject and has many facets. The relations could be approached from various angles. The major trend has focused upon the historical and political relationship between Christianity and Islam (Bethmann 1961:259). However, I am looking forward to a new approach in line with the discussion of the transcendence of God.

When two fundamentally different religions come together, there will be conflict unless one side compromises some of its religious values or mandates. Any religion that can compromise its belief is not a true religion, and both Christians and Muslims will claim the authenticity of their religion. Then, conflict between the two religions is inevitable. Watt (1967:201) says “no matter what we try it would be premature to think of a union of religions, but in the foreseeable future Muslims and Christians might well come to accept one another as fellow-servants of God.” However, in this current trend of the relations, Muslims and Christians can never be brothers of one another. These suggestions to ameliorate Christian-Muslim relations are not the solutions for the problem but rather a contribution to improve the relations. The following discussion may improve the Christian-Muslim relationships.

### 6.7.2.2 Promote inter-religious studies

Bethmann (1961:259) describes the relationship between Christians and Muslims in one bold statement: “They do not know each other.” It is his explanation that Christians and Muslims know only that they are different. They hardly know how they differ and where they differ. Whether the reason for not knowing each other is negligence or religiocentrism, many suggest inter-religious studies in one way or another. For example Ida Glaser (1997:17) says “Reading the Old Testament alongside the Islamic material can lead us to recognize our fundamental assumptions, challenge us in our own thinking, and help us to understand and communicate with the various Muslim people amongst whom we live.” In a similar way, some Muslim commentators use the Bible for supporting Qur’anic exegesis such as Yusuf Ali (Glaser 1997:5). Poston (2000:9), based on his Christian mission perspective, states:

I agree that learning the beliefs of a Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or some other religious person is essential for Christians to deepen their understanding of the biblical view of God. Without such a comparative approach, most remain ‘greenhouse Christians,’ people who have grown up in a controlled environment and who have difficulty functioning in the world of a multiplicity of religious alternatives. It is our hope that the challenge of Islam will strengthen the commitment of Christians toward their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, as well as their appreciation for the plan of salvation set forth in the Bible.

Furthermore, Lawrence of Arabia, who made significant contributions to the understanding of Islamic culture, literature, and diplomacy, adheres to the process of knowing the other

through cultural adaptation: “If you can wear Arab kit when with tribes you will acquire their trust and intimacy to a degree impossible in uniform” (Belt 1999:40). Lawrence promotes the process of familiarisation which we can apply to Muslim and Christian theology by promoting the understanding of God. This can be done through inter-religious studies of the Scriptures.

Many have said that Islam is the third religion born out of the Old Testament and concluded that “Christianity and Islam are basically very closely related, that Muslims and Christians are indeed brothers” (Bethmann 1961:263). Bethmann continuously asks a question, “But why then, you will ask, have Muslims and Christians never come together and have often opposed each other?” The lack of peaceful Christian-Muslim relations is one of the signs that there is lack of inter-scriptural thinking, which promotes the studies that bring forth understanding and harmony.

Of course, we cannot expect to reach a balanced comparative understanding of the Scriptures from studies, but we can reach a certain level of knowledge and understanding of the other’s religious behaviour through the studies. As religions are interrelated to people’s customs and world views, the narrower gap (of understanding) between Islam and Christianity will be the better for Christian-Muslim relations. The promotion of inter-religious studies may bring better relations between Christians and Muslims.

### **6.7.2.3 Understanding Christian mission and Muslim *da’wah***

One of the major conflicts between Christians and Muslims is the pressure of missionary zeal. Syed Abedin (1992:5) says both Christianity and Islam are religions of outreach. Christians

take the Gospel to the ends of the world, believing it to be the Great Commission. Muslims hold *da'wah* (or call to Islam) as their duty to all believers. Both Christians and Muslims try to convert people to their religion based on their duty or call from God. When these two great calls meet, there will obviously be conflict.

Abedin (1992:5) considers possible peaceful relations without undermining the purposes of *da'wah* or mission: “This could be possible if each side concedes that although *da'wah* and mission are legitimate exercises in their own right, under the exigencies of certain situations (other than religious or spiritual) believers are constrained to come together in understanding and accord. The alternative would be common doom.” According to Abedin’s argument, it may be possible to have peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims. However, both regard the mission of their religion as a fundamental governing principle of religious life. Furthermore, for devoted believers, their belief of mission and life cannot be separated. Thus, conflict will not be avoided completely; it is further discussed in the next section in connection with peace and war.

Nevertheless, knowing the perception of other’s mission or *da'wah* (or Jihad) may restrain the conflict.<sup>86</sup> In the past, both Christians and Muslims have violated each other in the name of mission or Jihad. Even today, this pattern continues. Muslims persist in the Jihad while

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<sup>86</sup> In Surah 8:38-39, there are implications of *da'wah* from the definition of Jihad: “<sup>38</sup>Say to the unbelievers if (now) they desist (from unbelief) their past would be forgiven them; but if they persist the punishment of those before them is already (a matter of warning for them). <sup>39</sup>And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression and there prevail justice and faith in Allah altogether and everywhere; but if they cease verily Allah doth see all that they do.” This is the verse which permits Muslims to use violence (Jihad) on unbelievers in order to convert them to the religion of Allah (*da'wah*). Indeed the violence has been a means for conversion, right from the beginning of Islam (Mvumbi 2008b:33). This pattern of *da'wah* and Jihad continue today, both the peaceful approach of *da'wah* and violent approach of *da'wah* (Jihad) which the West calls terrorism.

Christians continue to send their missionaries among Muslims. It should be recalled that Christians generally think of Jihad as terrorists' action, while Muslims think of Christian mission as making "rice Christians." Furthermore, Islamophobia among Christians represents the misunderstanding of the Jihad of Islam. For Muslims, Shafiq (1992:68) presents the misunderstanding of the Christian mission: "Western Christian mission to the Muslim world has never been a mission of Jesus, but a mission of the Western figurisation of Christianity arrogantly asserted in words, hardly ever exemplified in deeds." Sarwar ([1938] 1960:69) agrees: "So far the record of Christian missionaries' efforts is very disappointing. Instead to follow Jesus' teaching, the missionaries go to the poor in the third world countries with their pockets full of gold and rice to seduce or coax them into Christianity." He called the result of such Christian mission activities as "the rice Christian," a real "offence against God." These two extreme misunderstandings of the Christian-Muslim mission will never bring peace among Christians and Muslims; nevertheless they are fulfilling their religious duties. Through the understanding of the religious call of the other's religion, the relationship between Christians and Muslims may improve from today's situation. Understanding of the other's religious world views will further clarify the issue.

#### **6.7.2.4 Understanding religious world views**

A world view can be defined as "A set of assumptions, held consciously or unconsciously, about the basic make-up of the world and how the world works" (Miller 1999:287). In other words it can be defined as the controlling principle of culture and way of life. For Christians and Muslims, the value or principle of religion is at the foundation of their world views. However, it is difficult to distinguish between religion and world view, for they intermingle to form the religious world view. It may be called syncretism from the philosophical

approach, yet it must be distinguished that, in this thesis, the focus is more upon God than upon man. Paul Hiebert (1983:371) compares world-view and religion: “A world view provides people with their basic assumptions about reality. Religion provides them with the specific content of this reality.” In the reality of life, Hiebert’s distinctions between the two are vague. Therefore, we can call the principle behavioural life of Christians and Muslims as religious world views. It is the biblical or Qur’anic principle of behaviour that controls the world view of believers and becomes part of a way of life.

The definition of peace and war, for example, has been selected here to offer a clear understanding of the two religious world views. Islam, being a religion of peace as its name is derived from *salam* (peace), looks forward achieving peace on earth by means of bringing the world into submission to God. When one submits to God, he achieves the peace (of God) for God is “Peace” (*al-salam*, S 59:23). On the other hand those who have not yet submitted to God are still in a state of war, for there is no peace without God. Therefore, when Muslims strive for peace in relation to the world, there is no peace in the process but only war, unless the target group submits to Islam without resistance. Chittick (1990:150) illustrates the Islamic concept of peace:

In other words, “Peace” or freedom from conflict lies at the centre of a circle; the centre is God Himself, while the circumference is as near to chaos as can be imagined. All creatures are situated on the radii. If they move centripetally, they travel closer to Peace, Unity, Bounty, Forgiveness, and Mercy; if they move centrifugally, they journey toward war, dispersion, harm, vengeance, and wrath.

This is the Islamic concept of peace and war in their religious world views. Because Allah is perfect in everything, there will be peace with God and war without God. Therefore, in Islamic Jihad, Muslims must make Allah known by all means to achieve the perfect state of peace on earth, including war against Christians. The war, including terrorist actions initiated by Muslims as defined by the modern Western world lately, is a means of consummating peace on earth.<sup>87</sup> As long as Allah remains the absolutely transcendent God to Muslims, there will never be peace on earth in relation to Muslims for Muslims must approach Allah in order to experience the peace of God.<sup>88</sup>

On the other hand, Christians can maintain peace with God as well as peace with fellow mankind for Yahweh is an immanent-transcendent God who allows himself to be known to man and establishes peace. For this reason, the ultimate achievement of peace on earth for Christians is the prevalence of the Gospel to restore the peaceful relationship with God. In the sense of achieving peace with God, the Christian concept of peace may agree with that of the Muslim concept. On the other hand, Christians can know God and make peace here on earth,

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<sup>87</sup> In Islamic theory, the ultimate objective of Islam is not war, but the establishment of peace and justice. For this reason Jihad is not instituted as sixth pillar of Islam for it was merely a temporary instrument to establish ultimate peace, rather than a permanent article of faith (pillar of Islam) (Köylü 2003:24-25). However, some Muslims include holy efforts in the cause of God (Jihad) as the sixth pillar of Islam (Braswell 1996:71).

<sup>88</sup> The implication of the Muslim's religious world views on peace and war may be seen in the lecture of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman from Al-Azhar University, the highest authority in the Islamic world: "There is a whole surah [chapter] called 'Spoils of War.' There is no surah called 'Peace.' Jihad and killing are the head of Islam. If you take them out, you cut off the head of Islam" (Gabriel 2004:8). Furthermore, Islam divides the world into two categories: the territory of Islam (*dar al-islam*) and the territory of war (*dar al-harb*). "In classical Sunni Islamic scholarship, the territory of Islam is viewed as the territory of justice and peace" (Braswell 1996:143). Therefore, engaging in Jihad is consummating the ultimate goal of Islam on earth, converting the world into *dar al-islam*. All acts of war are permitted in the *dar al-harb* (Ibn Warraq 1995:218).



for God is immanent. Furthermore, Christians endure suffering for peace while struggling for the Great Commission. Spiritual warfare is present in some Christian groups, but the Islamic concept of “war for peace” does not exist in the Christian religious world views. With proper understanding of the religious world views of Christians and Muslims, there will be less conflict, for conflict comes from misunderstanding and wrong expectations.

#### **6.7.2.5 Improving context of dialogue**

After the September 11, 2001 Islamic attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, publications on Islam and the talk of dialogue between Christians and Muslims have prevailed. However, much of these publications and dialogue seem to be informative materials for Christians (Gabriel 2004:214). For Christian-Muslim relations, there is a need of inter-religious dialogue much deeper than the informative level of publication to address the root cause of the Christian-Muslim conflicts. “Christian-Muslim dialogue, though extremely needed, is not an easy enterprise to undertake. It is pleasant and painful, tedious and risky, yet desirable and promising. One must face problems” (Danish 1990:58). Danish expresses that there are two faces of the process of inter-religious dialogue, “easy” and “difficult.” I assume that most of the “difficult” is due to the lack of understanding of other’s religious beliefs and practices. By promoting a higher level of information available to both Christians and Muslims better Christian-Muslim relations will result.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> See 6.8.2, “Recommendations for practical Christian-Muslim relations,” for different level of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

In Christian-Muslim dialogue, one must make every effort to avoid debate instead of dialogue. Dialogue brings positive results while debate results in devastating doom. Shafiq (1992:59) supports this: “Dialogue rather than debate should be encouraged between the followers of different religions to create common understanding and bring about normality in their relations.” Shafiq is correct. The understanding of the other’s religion will bring peaceful relations.

Furthermore, both Christians and Muslims must avoid involvement in the dialogue without understanding the other’s religious world views and Scripture. Ida Glaser (1997:16) presents the problem: “All too often, inter-faith dialogue can be carried out on the basis of each partner’s isolated reading of their own texts, and therefore with little mutual understanding. In the particular case of Christian-Muslim dialogue, it often seems that we do not even realize that we are misunderstanding each other.” Dialogue without understanding the other’s point of view is not dialogue but rather debate, which one should avoid. “As the first dialogue between God and mankind resulted in a covenant, likewise a dialogue between two faiths should reach some agreements and conclusions, ingenious and practical” (Danish 1990:56). It is true that a dialogue results in some sort of agreement, as Danish points out that the result of the first dialogue is a covenant. Likewise, searching for a peaceful covenant between Christians and Muslims will definitely improve the Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Aasi (1986:88-89) suggests a few principles to dialogue with adherents of other religious traditions:

1. to search after truth, and when it is evident, to submit to it and establish it;

2. to use and accept the self-evident truths established by reason, common sense—perception, intuition and the universal religious experience of man (e.g., man’s consciousness of one God and reality);
3. to be wise, and clear in arguments, goodly in exhortation and kind in the manner of presentation;
4. to avoid reviling anyone’s belief, no matter how abhorrent to reason it might be, and;
5. to use no coercion in matters of faith.

Aasi’s guidelines can be summarised with one word, namely “openness,” especially, openness to the other’s Scripture as the authority of dialogue comes from the Scriptures. However, does respect for the other’s Scripture result in compromising truth for peace? The answer to this question can be another section of the exegetical argument, but it is necessary to say “No” for the purpose of opening the door of discussion of the truth without violence between the two religions. For without respecting the different Scriptures, any disagreement in the dialogue will come to the conclusion that the other’s Scripture is not the work of God, and that moment will become a turning moment of dialogue into debate. As a conclusive remark, Warren (1969:111) opens up a key aspect of the dialogue: “In ‘dialogue’ I am primarily concerned to listen to what the other has to tell me about himself and what he believes and why. I want to discover the secret by which he lives. Should he then show some curiosity about me I will try to satisfy him....But ‘dialogue’ itself is not either a persuasive or a dissuasive. It is ‘meeting’ of two men who wish to be brethren.” Meeting of two great religions of the world with the heart of being brothers to each other will guide the way for establishing peaceful relations in the world.

## **6.8 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.8.1 Recommendation for further study**

The analysis of the transcendence of God presented in this thesis suggests a number of issues for further study. Questions to be addressed are as follows:

- What are the dimensions of God's spacio-revelation? Is it possible for God to dwell in space and does God limit himself in a space and confirm his presence on earth?
- How does the transcendence of God differ between Islam and Christianity beside in this thesis' context, such as in general revelation and the New Testament?
- How is the experience of the transcendence and immanence of God in the New Testament contrasted with that of the Old Testament?
- How does the biblical theophany differ from the discussion of the transcendence of God? Is there theophany in the Qur'an?
- How does the transcendence of God affect the customs of the people? Has the implications of the transcendence of God penetrated the lives of the believers?

Answers to these questions will further clarify the questions of the transcendence of God as well as ameliorate Christian-Muslim relations.

### **6.8.2 Recommendation for practical Christian-Muslim relations**

A plan of action presented by the Catholic Bishops of Africa and Germany at the end of their meeting in Akosombo, Ghana in October, 2004 provides a practical guideline for Muslim-

Christian relations especially in the African context (Mvumbi 2008b:169-170).<sup>90</sup> This is presented by Christians for Christians, yet the principle of the same practical guideline can be applied to Muslims as well. It is recommended to be modified into one's own context. I recognize that there cannot be a perfect solution for Christian-Muslim dialogue or relations as history has proven. However, with some trial and error these suggestions brought by the Bishops will be useful. Followings are the practical steps to an initiation of Christian-Muslim relationship:

*At the Parish Level* [Local Level]

- Visits to Muslims [Christians] and other forms of interaction.
- Common projects in the social and educational fields.
- Cooperation in the field of health care.
- Cooperation in fighting poverty.

*At the Diocesan level* [Territorial Level]

- In all interreligious work, clergy and laity must work together.
- Appointment of promoters of dialogue.
- Initiating and facilitating meetings of Christian and Muslim leaders, teachers, media people and academics.
- Aiming for objective knowledge of the other and building bridges of understanding.
- Platforms for discussing ethical, social, and political issues of common interest.

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<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, *Christians meeting Muslims: WCC papers on 10 years of Christian-Muslim dialogue* (WCC 1977) is highly recommended for practical Christian-Muslim relations and dialogue.

- Mixed bodies for peace monitoring and civic conflict management.
- Mixed bodies for enhancing honesty and transparency of local budgets.

*At the National Level*

- Episcopal commissions for interreligious dialogue.
- Centres of encounter and documentation.
- Establishment of official relations between Christians and Muslims in the academic field.
- Development of an ethical code for journalists.
- Multiplying efforts towards cooperation in specific health projects (HIV/AIDS, pre-natal and postnatal care for women and children).
- Continuing and strengthening interreligious cooperation in development projects.
- Exploring the possibility of programs fostering just relationships between men and women.
- Promoting projects fostering the rule of law in a democratic and pluralistic society.

*At the International Level*

- Exchange of experience, ideas and solutions from different regions in the field of Christian-Muslim relations.
- Organizing international consultative meetings of experts on Islam [Christianity] and Christian-Muslim relations.
- Production of pastoral guidelines in the field of interreligious relations.
- Publication of scientific studies.

- Making available relevant material by translation and adaptation.
- Continuing collaboration between SECAM, the German and European Bishop Conferences and other Conferences, especially from Asia and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.
- Interreligious advocacy work aimed at fighting poverty, structural injustice, blatant abuses of human rights and promoting peace as a fruit of justice.
- Creating and managing an interactive website in English, Arabic and French presenting the Church's current teachings on, and promotion of, Christian-Muslim relations and dialogue worldwide.

African scholar, Mvumbi (2008b:168) distinguishes the Christian-Muslim dialogue at four different levels: the dialogue of life, of common actions, of religious experience, and of truth which is practiced by experts. The above recommendation seems to correspond with Mvumbi's category of the dialogue: *At the Parish Level* (the dialogue of life), *At the Diocesan level* (the dialogue of common actions), *At the National Level* (the dialogue of religious experience), and *At the International Level* (the dialogue of truth). Out of these four categories, Mvumbi (2008a:13) states that there is an urgent need to find the way to reach doctrinal inter-religious dialogue (dialogue of truth) for theological reasoning can solve theological problems which in turn influence the overall aspect of Christian-Muslim relations.

Furthermore, the four levels of actions of dialogue can be summarised in one word, "education." Bondarenko (2004:443) testifies to the importance of education for Christian-Muslim relations based on his field research in Tanzania "*A rise in the standard of education level of both Christians and Muslims will rather contribute to an increase in tolerance in*

*Christian-Muslim relations in the country.*” Education, indeed, makes knowledge available to people and thus makes known the differences and similarity between Islam and Christianity. Therefore, the above practical guideline is highly recommended for Christian-Muslim relations as is or in modified form. Through the initiation of the actions, let the peace of God prevail among people for, “The LORD is peace” (Jdg 6:24; 1 Cor 14:33) and “God has called us to live in peace” (1 Cor 7:15). Finally, “Oh God, You are Peace, from you comes peace, to you returns peace. Revive us with a salutation of peace and lead us into your abode of peace” (Fiqh-us-Sunnah 5:66; Sahih Muslim Hadith 283; Prinz 2004:180). Indeed, the God of the Bible and the Qur’an are “Peace,” and for “Peace” we Christians and Muslims desire!

## **6.9 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the exegesis of identical passages concerning God’s relationship with man found in both the Qur’an and the Bible establishes that the Qur’an presupposes that God, who maintains absolute transcendence from creation, will not allow his immanent state with man. Thus, Muslims can only have a transcendent relationship with God, which diminishes their ability to know God. This reality closes the door to personal relationships between God and man. The lack of God’s personal relationship with man has been a key factor in shaping the theology of Islam.

In the Bible, on the other hand, God’s relationship with man is expressed in his transcendence and immanence. God first wanted his immanent state with man, but due to man’s sinful state the ontological transcendent relationship has been established. God, in turn, uses his transcendent nature as a method of his immanence with man. This transcendence-immanence of God is evident by means of the theology of Christianity. Therefore, the relationship of God



with humans in Christianity can be expressed as God's horizontal-vertical relationship compared to the vertical relationship of God in Islam.

Therefore, the study has demonstrated the hypothesis which can be abridged as: God's relation to humankind is fundamentally different as it is demonstrated by the investigation of the transcendence of God in the Old Testament and the Qur'an. The God of the Bible is an immanent-transcendent God while the God of Islam is an absolute transcendent God. This difference has affected the overall theology of Islam and Christianity. The study also provides a significant inside look at how the differences may cause conflict between Muslims and Christians with some suggestion and recommendations for better Christian-Muslim relations.