Perspective on Religious Pluralism and Tolerance between Christians and Muslims in Kenya

Abstract

Kenya is a country of religious pluralism. Indeed, the presence of some of the main world religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and African Religion, expresses religious pluralism and diversity in the country. Followers of these religions have co-existed for eons and continue to co-exist peacefully and to tolerate each other. In spite of the religious pluralism and diversity, the country has not experienced any religious wars. In this pluralist religious milieu, Christians and Muslims are the majority. However, any discourse on the relations between Christians and Muslims has invariably tended to concentrate on the obvious and common narratives of suspicions, hatred and conflicts between the two faith communities. This ranges from Muslim state relations, spatial competition engendered by such mundane issues as education and political representation; constitutional debates and public preaching (mihadhara), to Islamophobia, and religious radicalism and extremism. This paper demonstrates the other perspective, which more often than not, is ignored in the discourse on Christian – Muslim relations. This perspective largely underscores the recognition and efforts towards religious pluralism, ecumenism and tolerance between Christians and Muslims in Kenya. It is argued that the ideals and teachings of Christianity and Islam, in the bible and Qur’an respectively, lay the fundamental basis for religious pluralism and tolerance between Christians and Muslims. These teachings could foster dialogue between the two faith communities.

1 Population data of Christians and Muslims depend on the sources. Christian sources portray a large number of Christian vis-à-vis Muslim and the converse is true. Oliana (a Catholic Christian), says that Muslims constitute 6% to 10% while Christians constitute 70% (Oliana 2010, 11-12). Oded citing Muslim sources give a Muslim population of 35% (Oded 2000, 11). The latest population census of 2009 put Christians at 80% to Muslims 10%).