

Folk Muslims' Presence in Ghana and its Missiological Implications for Pentecostals¹

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Abstract

This study examines the presence of folk Muslims in Ghana and explores the missiological implications for Pentecostals. Historically, Ghana was viewed as a stronghold against Islam in Africa; however, this resistance has diminished, as evidenced by the significant presence of Islam in the region. While Christian-Muslim relationships in Ghana are generally amicable, tensions, misunderstandings, and conflicts can arise when Christians share the gospel with Muslims or attempt to proselytise using local mission approaches. This research aims to raise awareness of the Muslim community in Ghana and highlight areas of misunderstanding and ignorance. By doing so, it illustrates how Pentecostals, who represent the fastest-growing segment of Christians in Ghana, can effectively and respectfully engage with Ghanaian Muslims in the context of sharing the gospel. This study integrates findings from intercultural studies, Islamic studies, Pentecostal missiology, church history, cultural anthropology, and biblical theology. A comprehensive descriptive and analytical review of existing literature illustrates that the majority of Ghanaian Muslims identify as folk Muslims—individuals who have retained certain elements of African Traditional Religion (ATR) alongside their Islamic beliefs. As a result, these folk Muslims exhibit a power-oriented disposition akin to that found in Pentecostal communities, as both groups are deeply influenced by a shared spiritual heritage rooted in ATR practices. The paper posits that this common ground presents significant opportunities for Pentecostals to engage with Muslims regarding the gospel. It delineates four distinct types of engagement: (1) theological engagement through truth encounters that emphasise grace, love, and respect, (2) relational engagement through acts of service that meet existential needs, (3) power engagement through experiential encounters that address spiritual and practical needs, and (4) discipleship engagement that highlights the transformative and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit.

Keywords: Folk Islam, Pentecostals, Christian-Muslim, Power Encounter, Missiological Implications

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Introduction

Christians and Muslims in Ghana have historically enjoyed a largely harmonious relationship, during which Ghanaian Christians typically refrained from engaging in evangelism targeting Muslims. Three key elements have contributed to maintaining peace between these two communities in Ghana: cultural community, cooperative education, and political alliance. For most Ghanaians, ethnic or tribal identity takes precedence over religious identity. Hence, Ghanaians tend to view one another as brothers and sisters bound by a shared national identity before acknowledging their specific religious affiliations. This prioritisation of communal identity is consistently reinforced in the public sphere—at markets, farms, funerals, and cultural celebrations—creating a solid foundation for Christians to build healthy relationships with Muslims within their communities.

In the context of institutional dynamics, Ghana's cooperative education system brings together Muslim and Christian students in the same high schools, where they are all introduced to African Traditional Religions (ATR), Christianity, and Islam. This inclusive environment fosters shared understanding and helps to mitigate interreligious tensions. Additionally, the practice of appointing both Muslims and Christians to elite government positions has significantly contributed to the peaceful coexistence of different faith communities in Ghana, thereby preventing conflicts that could arise from one religious group exerting political dominance over the other.

Despite the generally peaceful atmosphere fostered by societal mechanisms, tensions between Christians and Muslims continue to emerge in Ghana, particularly as both faiths seek to attract converts and as Islam experiences rapid growth in the region. The central thesis of this work posits that a shared spiritual heritage rooted in ATR has created meaningful intersections between the practices of Pentecostals and folk Muslims. When these intersections are properly understood, they can serve as effective bridges for Pentecostals to share the gospel with folk Muslims. This research aims to raise awareness and mitigate misunderstandings stemming from ignorance in Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana, while also developing a mission strategy for Pentecostals to engage folk Muslims with the gospel.

This study presents a comprehensive descriptive and analytical examination of the literature, revealing that Ghanaian Muslims are primarily folk Muslims—individuals who have retained many traditional African religious (ATR) practices even after converting to Islam. As such, folk Muslims share a power-oriented mindset similar to that of Pentecostals, with both groups drawing from the rich spiritual heritage of ATR practices in Ghana. This common heritage offers a foundation for Pentecostals to effectively engage with Muslims through the gospel. The study outlines four specific avenues for engagement: theological discussions (truth encounters) approached with gentleness and respect, acts of loving service that address existential needs, power

encounters that fulfil experiential needs, and pathways for discipleship that emphasise the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit.

The Historical Development of Christianity in Ghana and the Influence of Pentecostalism

Before the arrival of Western missionaries and the introduction of Christianity in January 1842, the people of the Gold Coast (now Ghana) held a religious worldview that emphasised the concept of a supreme God and salvation from harm, or the punishment lesser gods could inflict.² In light of this, the evangelistic efforts of early Western missionaries could not effectively address the spiritual needs of the people of Ghana despite their success in offering socio-economic development. Therefore, the quest for spiritual solutions that align with the African spirituality and worldview resulted in the rise of African revival movements, which eventually led to the establishment of African independent churches, paving the way for Ghanaian Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements. The ministries of William Wade Harris, John Swatson, and Sampson Oppong introduced the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements, which significantly contributed to a nominal Christian practice centred around prosperity gospel teachings.³

The centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted to the Southern Hemisphere, primarily driven by the Pentecostal movement. Allan Heaton Anderson describes Pentecostalism as the fastest-growing religious movement globally, leading the charge in worldwide Christian outreach in the twenty-first century.⁴ By the mid-twenty-first century, the most populous Christian regions are expected to be in the Southern Hemisphere, particularly in Africa and South America.⁵ According to Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, the remarkable growth of Christianity and its transformation within Africa can be attributed to the influence of Pentecostalism.⁶ However, it is important to note that the increase in the Christian population in the Southern Hemisphere does not necessarily correlate with a decline in the Muslim population, as one might anticipate.

² Dieudonne Komla Nuekpe, *Lived Islam in Africa and Its Missiological Implications for Pentecostals*, (Cumbria: Langham Publishing, 2023), 25.

³ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra, Ghana: Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, 2015), chap.1, Kindle.

⁴ Allan Heaton Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

⁵ Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 9.

⁶ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Pentecostalism and the Missiological Significance of Religious Experience: The Case of Ghana's Church of Pentecost," *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 12, no. 1, (July/December 2002): 30.

The Church of Pentecost (CoP), one of the local manifestations of African Pentecostalism, has emerged as the largest Protestant church in Ghana, boasting a robust missionary presence orientation.⁷ With adherents constituting almost ten percent of the overall Christian population, the CoP holds a significant position within Ghana's religious landscape.⁸ The church is distinguished by its vibrant liturgical practices, extensive community engagement programmes, and steadfast dedication to spiritual development, thereby reinforcing its role as a significant spiritual hub in the nation. Ghanaian Pentecostalism has significantly influenced the growth of Christianity in Ghana. A key factor contributing to the rise of the Church of Pentecost (CoP) is the emphasis on pneumatic phenomena – highlighting the Holy Spirit's role in mission, signs and wonders, and power encounters during evangelism. The success of the CoP is primarily based on “conversional” growth through soul-winning and evangelistic efforts.⁹

While the Muslim population in Ghana continues to expand, the Pentecostal community has struggled to engage effectively with Muslims due to a lack of sufficient awareness and effective evangelistic practices. Given their considerable contribution to Christian growth in Ghana, a deeper understanding of Islam and the adoption of appropriate engagement methods will enable Pentecostals to witness more effectively to Muslims with the gospel.

The Development of Islam and the Nature of the Christian-Muslim Relationship in Ghana

During the early spread of Islam in Africa in the mid-seventh century, it was geographically confined to North Africa.¹⁰ Samuel Zwemer has observed that Islam has not emerged victorious but vanquished,¹¹ a religion that was on the brink of extinction because, from its inception, it contained “the germs of death.”¹² However, rather than its anticipated decline, Islam has undergone a resurgence and rapid growth that has made its presence felt globally and in Ghana. This expansion of Islam in Africa, particularly in Ghana, is an undeniable reality. Although John Spencer Trimingham once described Ghana as a “resistant belt” to Muslims' influence in Africa,¹³ it did not remain as observed. Ghana's resistant belt has gradually eroded, as

⁷ Ghana Evangelical Committee, Ghana Evangelical Committee, “Survey of Churches,” Facing the Unfinished Task of the Church in Ghana (Accra: Assemblies of God Literature, 1989), 122.

⁸ CoP, Chairman Apostle Eric Nyamekye, State of the Church Address, 17th session of the Extraordinary Council Meetings, Pentecost Conventions Centre, Gomoah-Fetteh, May 4, 2021.

⁹ Ghana Evangelical Committee, “Survey of Churches,” Facing the Unfinished Task of the Church in Ghana (Accra: Assemblies of God Literature, 1993), 23.

¹⁰ Nehemiah Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels, eds, *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 2.

¹¹ Samuel Zwemer, *The Influence of Animism on Islam* (New York: McMillan, 1920), 18.

¹² Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Disintegration of Islam* (New York: Chicago, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1916), 7.

¹³ J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 19.

evidenced by the increasing number of mosques in the capital city, Accra. John Azumah has observed that there is scarcely a village in Ghana today where one cannot find Muslims, whether as a minority or a majority.¹⁴

The collapse of this resistance belt carries significant missiological implications for Christians in Ghana. One of the primary motivations that led Christian missionaries to West Africa in the early fifteenth century was their desire to curtail the spread of Islam in Africa.¹⁵ This objective was reiterated at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, which emphasised that the “whole strategy of Christian mission in Africa should be viewed in relation to Islam.”¹⁶ If an appropriate awareness is not cultivated among Ghanaians, a country once regarded as a Christian stronghold may transition toward becoming a Muslim nation. This awareness is particularly crucial for Pentecostals, given their fervent approach to evangelism and their shared historical and spiritual connections with folk Muslims.

An evaluation of the growth of world religions by country from 1900 to 2050 indicates that the number of Muslims is projected to increase from 0.2 billion to 2.5 billion people. During this period, the global population is expected to grow nearly six-fold, while the Muslim population will grow more than twelve-fold.¹⁷ In comparison, Islam has significantly outpaced Christianity in growth, largely due to the trends in family size; Christians in Western countries tend to have fewer children, resulting in lower birth rates compared to Muslim families, which typically have larger families. Moreover, conversions to Islam through marriage, persuasion, or personal conviction contribute to only about ten percent of its growth, with nearly ninety percent of the growth attributed to higher birth rates.¹⁸

The influence of Islam is evident across various sectors in Ghana. In recent years, Muslims have actively pursued a secular agenda aimed at implementing Islamic education systems, leading the Ghanaian government to progressively establish Islamic education units that oversee government-funded schools teaching both English and Arabic. Since Ghana’s independence, the international Muslim community has shown a strong interest in the country, strategically supporting Islamic initiatives through government loans and various aid to Muslim NGOs. They have also contributed to Ghana’s agricultural and health sectors, among others. Notably, for the first time in 1996, the Parliament of Ghana granted two statutory

¹⁴ John Azumah, “Controversy and Restraint in Ghana,” *Transformation* 17, no. 1 (January 2000): 23–26.

¹⁵ K. B. C. Onwubiko, *History of West Africa, Book Two* (Accra, Ghana: Africana Publishing, 1985), 199.

¹⁶ Onwubiko, *History of West Africa*, 199.

¹⁷ Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends, and Possibilities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 40.

¹⁸ Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church*, 40.

holidays for Muslims—*Eid-al-Fitr* and *Eid-al-Adha*—highlighting the increasing influence of Islam in the nation.¹⁹

As of 2002, the Coalition of Muslim Associations (CMA) reported that the Muslim population in Ghana comprised forty-five percent of the nation's 21 million population.²⁰ Although this figure was contradicted by the Ghana Statistical Service's census conducted in 2000, the widespread distribution of Muslims across the country—particularly their significant presence and influence in the northern regions—supports the CMA's assertion.²¹ Since the year 2000, Ghana has seen the election of two Muslim vice presidents under the New Patriotic Party. The influence of Islam in Ghana is increasingly evident, demonstrated by the active participation of Muslims in politics and various government ministries. All Ghanaians are expected to contribute to nation-building and engage in political processes. It is important for Christians to consider the implications of their involvement in this context.

In the 2008 parliamentary elections, Muslims secured twenty-one seats, which ultimately enhanced their political influence and provided them with greater capacity to promote their doctrinal beliefs and gain acceptance among the populace.²² According to the Pew Research Center's 2010 religious demographics, Christians accounted for 74.9 percent of Ghana's population, while Muslims represented only 15.8 percent. By 2020, the Christian demographic had decreased to 73.6 percent, whereas the Muslim population had grown to 17.5 percent. Projections for 2050 suggest that the Muslim population may significantly rise to 22.3 percent (approximately 11,030,000 individuals), while the Christian population is expected to decline to 67.8 percent (around 34,490,000 individuals).²³ Despite various efforts by Christian groups to engage with Muslims, Islam continues to expand in Ghana, often leading to tensions during outreach attempts by adherents of both faiths.

The Nature of Islam in Ghana

Zwemer observes that "Islam in its contacts with animism has not been the victor but rather the vanquished."²⁴ Over seventy per cent of Muslims are influenced by the folk

¹⁹ Elom Dovlo and Alfred Ofori Asante, "Reinterpreting the Straight Path: Ghanaian Muslim Converts in Mission to Muslims," *Exchange* 32, no. 3 (July 2003): 216.

²⁰ Elom Dovlo and Alfred Ofori Asante, "Reinterpreting the Straight Path: Ghanaian Muslim Converts in Mission to Muslims," *Exchange* 32, no. 3 (July 2003): 216.

²¹ Dovlo and Asante, "Reinterpreting," 32, 216.

²² Mohammad Saani Ibrahim, "The Decline of Sufism in West Africa: Some Factors Contributing to the Political and Social Ascendancy of Wahhabist Islam in Northern Ghana" (PhD diss., McGill University, Montreal, October 2011), 2. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

²³ Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections 2010-2050," (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2016), accessed April 8, 2021, http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/ghana#/?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2050®ion_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2016.

²⁴ Zwemer, *Influence of Animism*, quoted in Twumasi, "Understanding Folk Islam," 49.

culture of Islam,²⁵ and its practices create opportunities for engagement between Christians and Muslims. Many people perceive Muslims as a monolithic group, with a fixed image of Islam deeply ingrained in their minds. However, the private lives of Muslims reveal a reality that goes beyond rigid orthodoxy. Across the globe, Muslims seek a practical form of Islam that addresses their everyday needs—one that transcends mere cognitive guidelines and practices, filling the gaps in their spiritual lives rather than leaving them empty.²⁶ Musk summed up the practices of folk Islam as follows:

Popular Islam has added a whole life-way of animistic beliefs and practices. The use of the rosary for divining and healing, the use of amulets and talismans, the use of a hair-cuttings and nail-trimmings, the belief and practice of saint-worship, the use of charms, knots, magic, sorcery, the exorcism of demons, the practice of tree and stone worship, cursing and blessing these and many other animistic practices belie the gap between the theological religion and the actual religion.²⁷

Although all Muslims participate in the ritual practices of the five pillars, Ghanaian folk Muslims ascribe different meanings to these general practices and view them as instruments for liberation. The diverse practices reflect the felt needs of folk Muslims. As Musk describes,

The ideal [orthodox] Islam has few resources for dealing with the everyday concerns and nightly dreads of ordinary Muslims; popular Islam, on the contrary, knows an abundance of remedies. Each local community recognizes practitioners who can provide the charms or ceremonies necessary to effect peace of mind and to restore equilibrium. It operates in the realm of human beings with needs and fears that inform and are informed by their outlook on life.²⁸

The fear of the evil eye, the unknown, malevolent spirits, and the powerlessness against the influence of jinn reflect the insecurities felt in the face of an uncertain future among folk Muslims. This struggle is intertwined with a desire for healing and strength to overcome these perceived evil forces, alongside a profound sense of the meaninglessness of life itself. Regardless of the various expressions of Islam, these sentiments are often deeply rooted in the specific African cultural heritage of the community. For instance, Sufi Islam is often referred to as “African Islam” because it has integrated numerous elements of African Traditional Religion (ATR).²⁹ Although

²⁵ Philip L. Parshall, *Bridges to Islam: Christian Perspective on Folk Islam* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 3.

²⁶ Parshall, *Bridges to Islam*, 3.

²⁷ Parshall, *Bridges to Islam*, 2.

²⁸ Musk, *The Unseen Faces of Islam: Sharing the Gospel with Ordinary Muslims*, 238.

²⁹ D. Westerlund and E. Rosander, eds., “African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounter Between Sufis and Islamists” (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997), 1-4.

the Wahhabi form of Islam has gained traction in certain regions of northern Ghana, particularly in Tamale, due to sociopolitical factors, Sufism remains the dominant expression of Islam in Ghana.³⁰ Its practices closely resemble those found in folk Islam. Sufism, often described as “Muslim mysticism,”³¹ embodies the pursuit of understanding deeper truths and communion with the divine through intuition and contemplation.³²

Christian-Muslim Relations

Many Christians tend to have a negative reaction towards Muslims, as seen throughout history. With a significant number of Evangelicals, particularly Pentecostals, now residing in Africa, it is crucial for African Christians to develop effective strategies for winning and discipling Muslims. The Protestant mission movement was inspired by William Carey’s challenge to Protestant churches to take action.³³ Pentecostals in Ghana need a similar challenge to become aware of the influence of Islam in Ghana and in neighbouring countries like Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire. Christians must not wait until Islam takes over with suicide bombers before they rise up to evangelize Muslims. If the battle must be won and the next generation saved from the dangers of Boko Haram, ISIS, and civil wars (religio-political wars) that others have already faced, then a mission to Muslims must be taken seriously now.³⁴ In light of the above, this author aims to raise awareness of Muslims’ influence in Ghana and develop an effective method of engaging Muslims with the gospel.

Jesus instructed the disciples, “Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit” (Jn. 15:1-2). Pentecostalism, along with the Church of Pentecost (CoP), which embodies the local expression of Pentecostalism in Ghana, represents a branch of the vine actively producing fruit in its mission to reach the world. To increase its fruitfulness, the CoP must undergo “pruning” through a deeper understanding of Islam and the refinement of effective mission practices designed to engage Muslims with the gospel.

Despite occasional tensions arising from attempts by Muslims or Christians to convert each other, the two faith communities have largely maintained a cordial relationship in Ghana. Christianity first made its way to the upper northern regions of the country from Burkina Faso in 1906. Meanwhile, Muslim communities in Ghana did not begin

³⁰ Mohammad Saani Ibrahim, “The Decline of Sufism in West Africa: Some Factors Contributing to the Political and Social Ascendancy of Wahhabist Islam in Northern Ghana” (PhD diss., McGill University, Montreal, October 2011), 6. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

³¹ Eric Geoffrey, *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2010), 2.

³² Geoffrey, *Introduction to Sufism*, 2

³³ Johnstone, Patrick, “Look at the Fields” in Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit*, 33.

³⁴ Dieudonne Komla Nuekpe, *Lived Islam in Africa and Its Missiological Implications for Pentecostals*, (Cumbria: Langham Publishing, 2023), 14.

their interactions with Christian ministry until 1912, facilitated by the Basel Mission, and later in the 1930s through the Assemblies of God Mission.³⁵ Until 1952, Christians in Ghana did not engage Muslims in fervent evangelism.³⁶ The *da'wah*—Islam's equivalent to Christian evangelism—is carried out with significantly greater effectiveness than Christian missions. As noted, Islamic missions have established schools and mosques throughout the country and provide various welfare services to villages, particularly in the northern regions, using these initiatives as a means to spread the Islamic faith. However, this proactive approach is often overshadowed by negative perceptions, as some view it through a derogatory lens, equating it with terrorism. Such negative attitudes toward Muslims foster mistrust and lead to numerous missed opportunities for evangelism.³⁷

The conflict between Muslims and Christians in Ghana is rooted not only in religious differences but also in political, international, and external factors. Countries such as Iran, Libya, and Saudi Arabia, while ostensibly providing financial support to various Muslim organisations, have also introduced their own Islamic political and religious rivalries into the nation. This interference contributes to divisions, as illustrated by the Tijaniyya-Qadariyya controversies in Ghana.³⁸

Three mechanisms have been instrumental in sustaining interfaith harmony between Christians and Muslims in Ghana: cultural community, cooperative education, and political alliance.³⁹ Historically, Ghanaians have embraced an integrated communal lifestyle, which facilitates the establishment of positive relationships with the Muslim population. A significant aspect of this dynamic is the prioritisation of national or tribal identity over religious affiliation, enabling Ghanaians to identify first and foremost as brothers and sisters before considering religious distinctions.⁴⁰ This emphasis on shared communal identity manifests prominently in various social contexts, such as markets, agricultural activities, funerals, and traditional celebrations, effectively fostering social cohesion. Notably, the call to prayer from the *muezzin* serves as a unifying auditory cue, rousing both Ghanaian Christians for their morning devotions and Muslims for the *fajr* (dawn prayer), further illustrating the interplay of religious practices within the broader cultural framework.

³⁵ Yakubu Rahman, "Ghana," in *The African Christian and Islam*, ed. John Azumah and Lamin Sanneh (Castle: Langham Monographs, 2013), 307.

³⁶ Dovlo and Asante, "Reinterpreting," 32, 218.

³⁷ Nuekpe, "Muslim Christian Encounter in Ghana," *Torch Trinity Center for Islamic Studies Journal* 12, no. 2 (September 2019):195.

³⁸ Patrick J. Ryan, "The Mystical Theology of Tijani Sufism and Its Social Significance in West Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 30, no. 2 (May 2000): 2010.

³⁹ Nuekpe, "Muslim Christian Encounter," 12:195.

⁴⁰ Yakubu Rahman, "Ghana," in *The African Christian and Islam*, ed. John Azumah and Lamin Sanneh (Castle: Langham Monographs, 2013), 80.

In some families, members may adhere to different faiths; while one may attend the mosque, another might go to a Christian chapel. Ghanaian Christians often host their Muslim neighbours during significant occasions such as Christmas, Easter, weddings, naming ceremonies, and child dedications. Similarly, Muslims graciously invite their Christian counterparts to celebrate festivals like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*. It is not uncommon to see Muslims attending church during the ordination of a priest within their community. Participation in these events tends to be influenced more by tribal or communal identity than by religious affiliation. Ghana's cooperative education system allows both Muslim and Christian students to attend the same high schools, where they are exposed to African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity, and Islam alike.⁴¹ This also helps reduce religious tensions between Christians and Muslims in Ghana. The Ghanaian practice of including both Muslims and Christians in elite government positions has greatly contributed to the peaceful coexistence of these two groups.⁴²

Methods for Sharing the Gospel with Folk Muslims

Historically, there have been various approaches to sharing the gospel with Muslims. One such approach is the direct method, which involves a non-confrontational proclamation of the gospel message. This method necessitates an attitude shift that embraces understanding, respect, and empathetic consideration towards Muslims. On the other hand, the indirect approach utilises truths found in the Qur'an as a bridge for dialogue.⁴³ This strategy encourages the use of these truths to foster a connection between Muslims' understanding and the biblical perspective on the birth of Jesus, his nature and sonship, his crucifixion, death, resurrection, and his anticipated return.

Pentecostals have the ability to identify and address the theological needs of folk Muslims. This includes an understanding of God's self-revelation as the one God and the concept of *tawhīd* (the oneness of God), as well as the similarities and differences in the portrayal of Jesus in both the Qur'an and the Bible. While Muslims do not accept Jesus as the Son of God, they hold him in high esteem as a prophet. Consequently, a deep understanding of the Qur'anic perspective on Jesus, including his birth and life, is essential for meaningful engagement with folk Muslims. Just as many Christians around the world misunderstand the Bible, so too do many Muslims lack clarity about their own Scripture. Although Muslims reject the crucifixion and death of Jesus, there is no consensus among Islamic scholars on these events. This open-ended nature of the discussion presents a valuable opportunity for Pentecostals to connect with folk Muslims and share the core message of the gospel.

⁴¹ Abdul-Hamid Mustapha, "Christian-Muslim Relationship in Ghana: A Model for World Dialogue and Peace," (Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies 1, no. 1 (June 2011): 21-32.

⁴² Nuekpe, "Muslim Christian Encounter," 12.

⁴³ Sam Schlorff, *Missiological Models in Ministry to Muslims* (Upper Darby, PA: Middle East Resources, 2006), 19.

Nonetheless, a theological understanding of Jesus Christ holds significance for folk Muslims only when he is presented in a manner that resonates with their cultural context. Furthermore, given the contentious interpretation of the Spirit in the Qur'an and the limited understanding among Muslims regarding the Holy Spirit and His works, the Holy Spirit can serve as a productive entry point for engaging Muslims with the gospel.

The Qur'an advocates for the recitation of God's revelation (Qur'an 13:39). Proclaiming the truth of God's word audibly to the ears of people has the power to inspire conviction: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). The Word of God, unlike the Qur'an, is not just a revelation from God but is God incarnate (Jn. 1:1). It carries divine authority and has the ability to deeply inspire listeners (Heb. 4:12). For example, Saint Augustine recognised God speaking directly to him through the hearing and reading of the Word of God:

While agonizing in his garden over his moral failure, he heard a child in a nearby house repeat[ing] in a sing-song voice the refrain, *Tolle lege* ("Pick up and read"). There was a book on the letters of Paul on a bench and Augustine picked it up and read, "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh" (Rom. 13:13-14).⁴⁴

Augustine's conversion and baptism serve as a powerful example of the transformative potential of the Word of God. Similarly, sharing the unadulterated message of God with folk Muslims can lead to profound conviction, personal transformation, and a commitment to follow Jesus. The Word carries with it the inherent power of God to save. However, because Ghanaian folk Muslims tend to be power-oriented, they require more than just this message to be open to the gospel. Charles H. Kraft emphasises that power-oriented individuals seek compelling evidence of power, rather than relying solely on reasoning or academic knowledge.⁴⁵ Folks Muslims in Ghana are driven by a desire for power, making power encounters an effective method for sharing the gospel with them. The religious beliefs and practices of Ghanaian Muslims are significantly influenced by religio-magical traditions rooted in African Traditional Religion (ATR). While they observe the five pillars of Islam like all Muslims, Ghanaian Muslims interpret these practices differently, viewing them as pathways to liberation from evil forces. Often grappling

⁴⁴ Everett Ferguson, *Church History*, vol. 1, *From Christ to the Pre-Reformation: The Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 270.

⁴⁵ Charles H. Kraft, *Power Encounter in Spiritual Warfare* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 2.

with fear and insecurity regarding an uncertain future and malevolent powers, they seek healing, empowerment, and blessings to navigate these challenges. As a form of protection, they worship saints and ancestors and often rely on charms, amulets, and the guidance of *malams*.

The Qur'an encourages Muslims to honour the earlier Scriptures, including the New Testament (5:44-47).⁴⁶ Consequently, the miraculous works in the life of Jesus serve as a pathway for folk Muslims to gain an understanding of salvation through Him. Pentecostal practices such as healing, deliverance, prayer, and fasting—rooted in biblical teachings—can address the experiential needs of folk Muslims. In a post-pandemic context, power encounters focused on healing and deliverance may provide an effective means to share the gospel with folk Muslims, especially given their ongoing pursuit of healing.

Pentecostals in Ghana can undoubtedly utilise the gifts of the Holy Spirit and power encounters to share the gospel with folk Muslims. These gifts are not solely controlled by individuals to wield at their discretion; rather, they manifest as God sovereignly permits, serving to edify the church and glorify Him. While power encounters remain a highly effective method for evangelising Muslims, Christians must continually depend on the written Word of God to cultivate a deeper relationship with Him. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that folk Muslims are sustained and delivered from evil.

Grace and love are key avenues for sharing the gospel with Ghanaian folk Muslims. Biblical truth must be conveyed with grace and love, founded upon the Scriptures:

But in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

Sharing the gospel with grace and truth entails “being all things to all men.” This means engaging with the culture of folk Muslims, dining with them (Gal 2:11-16), honouring them (1 Pet 2:17), considering them better than oneself (Phil 2:3), serving them as Christ served the world (Gal 5:13), and taking no offence at them (1 Cor 10:32). Becoming all things to folk Muslims (1 Cor 9:22) does not suggest abandoning the core values of the gospel; rather, it places a responsibility on the proclaimer of the gospel to willingly enter into the lives and circumstances of others. In the context of folk Muslims in Ghana, particularly those from the northern regions, this suggests that

⁴⁶ David W. Shenk, *Journeys of the Muslim Nation and the Christian Church: Exploring the Mission of Two Communities* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 107.

Pentecostals from the south who aim to engage with them should consider exchanging a toothbrush for a chewing stick, a Kente cloth for a northern smock, and Coca-Cola for kola nuts – elements that are integral to the cultural identity of folk Muslims.⁴⁷ Furthermore, it may involve observing fasting and prayer during the month of Ramadan to seek divine intervention for spiritual revival, transforming everyday encounters into powerful experiences.

The exemplary lifestyle of the witness is essential for effectively sharing the gospel with folk Muslims. The character of the gospel presenter is as significant as the message they present. Therefore, embodying a Christlike character is crucial for those who wish to evangelise among folk Muslims. Christians must clearly demonstrate that they possess the light that dispels darkness and corruption in the world. When folk Muslims observe Christians leading transparent lives in politics, church, business, and family, they will be drawn to the Jesus that Christians profess.

Conclusion

This research indicates that Ghanaian Muslims possess distinct characteristics shaped by the local cultural context. They represent a group of non-orthodox Muslims who remain closely connected to their original beliefs rooted in African Traditional Religion (ATR), thus identifying as folk Muslims. The shared spiritual and cultural heritage with Ghanaian Christians, particularly Pentecostals, serves as a foundation for Christians to engage in gospel sharing with Ghanaian Muslims. Culturally and politically, these two communities coexist in harmony and peace, supported by their collective cultural framework, cooperative education initiatives, and an integrative political alliance that includes followers of both faiths. However, tensions can arise when Christians attempt to proselytise Muslims, using traditional methods of polemic evangelism.

This work has contributed to the identification of the existential, experiential, and theological needs of folk Muslims, illuminating the convergences and divergences in a Christological context. It demonstrates the potential bridges that Pentecostals can utilise to engage folk Muslims with the gospel in a respectful and non-confrontational manner, fostering peaceful coexistence between these two missionary faiths. Crucially,

⁴⁷ Dretke, *Christian Approach*, 148; Kente cloth is a special textile made from hand-woven strips of silk and cotton. Historically, it was used in the south, particularly in the Ashanti region of Ghana, during funerals and various festivals. The smock is a garment worn by both men and women in Ghana, especially in the northern region. The kola nut is the fruit of the kola tree and is primarily used in traditional and cultural ceremonies among those in the northern region. Chewing sticks were traditionally employed to remove plaque from accessible areas of the teeth before toothbrushes became common in the cities of Ghana.

the findings indicate that both direct and indirect confrontational approaches are generally ineffective in reaching folk Muslims. Instead, employing conversational and apologetic methodologies that prioritise the development of friendships tends to yield more favourable outcomes in gospel sharing.

Meeting the existential needs of folk Muslims presents a valuable opportunity to share the gospel with them. Christians should identify the loving services they can offer to folk Muslims and take practical steps to address their needs. Given that Ghanaian folk Muslims have a strong orientation towards power, engaging them through power encounters that fulfil their experiential needs is essential. The influence of darkness is prevalent in their worldview; thus, this work elucidates how power encounters can effectively reach folk Muslims within the Ghanaian context. However, it is important to note that power encounters should serve as a starting point for engaging folk Muslims with the gospel; they are not the ultimate goal but rather a means to achieve it.

This research sought to identify a specific approach for engaging folk Muslims in Ghana with the gospel. However, it is essential to understand that proclamation should not be regarded merely as an act of humans but as the work of the Holy Spirit, who leads individuals to conviction and conversion through God's grace. The engagement of Christians with Muslims serves as a means of proclaiming the gospel and demonstrating the true worth and nature of Jesus. While proclamation is a human endeavour, conviction and the resulting conversion to Christianity are ultimately acts of God. I, therefore, cannot sincerely propose a single approach as the definitive method for winning Ghanaian Muslims to Christ. The ways of God are distinct from human ways (Isa 55:8), and the most effective strategy for reaching one individual may differ from another due to various factors, such as specific cultural differences, the spiritual maturity of both Muslims and Christians and their respective knowledge of the Qur'an and the Bible. Ultimately, the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit is what preserves folk Muslims in their relationship with Jesus, regardless of whether they experience healing, deliverance, or face material hardships.

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