

REVIEW ARTICLE

MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS IN AFRICA REVISITED

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Christianity is often perceived in connection with Europe as a European or “Western” religion, which played an essential role in the formation of European culture and life, and can be identified as an important and formative part of European civilisation. It is often forgotten that early Christianity became a source for diverse Christian traditions and at the time Christianity was spreading in Europe and was moulding the life and culture in different parts of the continent, at the same time or earlier, often long before the firm establishment of the Christian faith in many parts of Europe, Christianity was a part of life and society in Africa and distinctive African traditions of Christianity had emerged in Egypt, Nubia or Aksum. African Christianity is as old as Christianity itself, Africa had some of the oldest forms of Christianity, which in Egypt, the Maghrib, Nubia and the Aksumite kingdom in the present-day Ethiopia predated Christianity in most of Europe. Also in the vast region east of Jerusalem, in the countries where Aramaic was the lingua franca – Syria, Jordan, and Iraq, the majority of people had by then become Christians, and the new Christian faith was carried further east to ancient Persia and along the Silk Road into Central Asian countries of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, reaching by the seventh century India and even China. This early or “Eastern” Christianity of

late Antiquity was the form with which Islam most profoundly interacted in the early era of relations, in the Mediterranean, to the east of Jerusalem as well as in Africa.¹

Both Christianity and Islam in Africa can be seen as African religions that had originated outside Africa but entered the African continent during the earliest days of their existence, spread, were incorporated within the historical process of the development of African societies and have been during the processes of Christian and/or Islamic conversion adapted in many different ways to suit many different contexts. Since the arrival of both religious traditions in Africa, the impact of Christianity and Islam have been of fundamental importance in much of the continent and Christian-Muslim-African encounters have shaped the history of Africa. Viewed from the perspective of "The Clash of Civilisations", the notion first advanced by Bernard Lewis² and then elaborated and popularized by Samuel P. Huntington,³ and in most debates about Christians-Muslim relations and co-existence, Christians and Muslims have been viewed as the major antagonists with a long record of bloody encounters involving many violent conflicts, crusades and jihads.

To understand the dynamics of African Christianity and African Islam and the subtle interplay of Christian-Muslim interactions in Africa demand a definition of the basic terms Christianity – which Christianity? Islam – which Islam? Africa – which Africa? In what time period?⁴ A thorough analysis and assessment of the history of Christianity and Islam in Africa and of African Christians' interactions with African Muslims and with African "non-believers" or, better to say, adherents of traditional African religions reveals a much deeper-dyed and nuanced image of Christian-Muslim encounters than has been customary among the generality of historians specialising in Christian-Muslim relations outside the continent. To quote Benjamin Soares, "...the boundaries between Muslims and Christians have not always been rigid, fixed or unchanging. In contrast to their relations in some other places in the world, Muslims and Christians in Africa have often lived side by side, have sometimes

¹ VOLL, John African Muslims and Christians in World History: The irrelevance of the "Clash of Civilizations", In SOARES, Benjamin F. (Ed.) *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, p. 22.

² LEWIS, Bernard The Roots of Muslim Rage. In *The Atlantic Monthly*, pp. 47–60. Also LEWIS, Bernard *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*.

³ HUNTINGTON, Samuel P. The Clash of Civilization? In *Foreign Affairs*, pp. 22–49, also his *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

⁴ VOLL, John African Muslims and Christians in World History, pp.18–20.

converted to each-others' religions, have shared much in the way of culture in its anthropological sense, and have learned, appropriated and borrowed from each other."⁵

The history of Christian-Muslim relations and encounters in Africa is very long and in some parts of Africa can be traced to the first years of the Islamic era. From the early days when a group of the first adherents of Islam persecuted in Mecca, were sent by Prophet Muhammad to seek refuge in the Christian kingdom of Aksum in present-day Ethiopia and were granted asylum, Christians and Muslims have encountered each other in different parts of Africa and in different settings, their encounters have been multifaceted and changing and they have interacted in all sorts of complex and changing ways. They have lived amicably side by side, sometimes clashed, sometimes crossed religious boundaries, learned and borrowed from each other, converted to each-others' religion and intermarried. The famous episode in the hadith of the first Christian-Muslim encounter in Africa is an important and often quoted affirmation in the Muslim tradition of the common roots and basic similarities between the two religions sharing a basic repertoire of religious concepts and symbols of Middle Eastern monotheism.⁶

The history of Christians and Muslims in Africa reveals a broad pattern of interactions over the centuries. Within a few years of Muhammad's death Arabs had advanced with an amazing rapidity from Arabia north, east and west, invaded and in 640 conquered Egypt. The occupation of Egypt was comparatively easy due to the co-operation of local Christians who were so disgusted with Byzantine cruelty and oppression that they offered little opposition and willingly accepted a separate peace treaty. It was not until Muslim Arabs started to spread across North Africa farther west to the Atlantic that they came up against local opposition. Due to the advent of Islam and to the slow Islamisation and Arabisation of the local societies, the ancient Churches in the Northern part of the African continent, in Maghrib, and the Roman Province of Africa and Africa Nova,⁷ gradually declined and by the twelfth century

⁵ SOARES, Benjamin F. Introduction. Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa. In SOARES, Benjamin F. (Ed.) *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, pp. 2–3.

⁶ In 615 nearly a hundred of Muhammad's followers migrated to Abyssinia. According to the oft cited traditional historical narrative, the Christian ruler questioned both the Muslims and their persecutors, and decided that the Muslim faith and Christian religious tradition are virtually the same. The traditional account is narrated by Ibn Ishāk in his *The Life of Muhammad*, translated from Arabic into Slovak by Ján Pauliny; Ibn Ishāk *Život Muhammada Posla Božieho – Ibn Challikán: Zprávy o synoch času*.

⁷ Arabs used the term Maghrib to refer specifically to present-day Algeria referred to as al-maghrib al-awsat and present-day Morocco or al-maghrib al-aqsā. Present-day Tunisia and Libya were known to the Arabs as Ifriqiya.

disappeared completely. Thanks to a specific treaty – the Baqt, which was concluded by the Muslim rulers of Egypt with Christian Nubians and which maintained peace between them for centuries, Christianity in Nubia survived the arrival of Islam. Christian kingdoms on the Nile – Nobatia, Makuria and Alwa or Alodia⁸ could develop and flourish, especially between the eighth and twelfth centuries. Christianity became the dominant feature of Nubian history and culture for almost a thousand years, but for a number of reasons Christianity eventually started to lose ground, the Christian identity of the kingdoms in the Nile Valley was gradually changed and by the fifteenth century the last of the Christian kingdoms had disintegrated and disappeared. Christianity slowly succumbed to Islam. Islamisation and Arabisation of Egypt was also a long-term process, by the fifteenth century the Christian Coptic population of Egypt was reduced to a minority of some fifteen percent, but Christianity has survived both in Egypt and Ethiopia, and continued up to the present day.

The study of both Christianity and Islam in Africa reveals a complexity in the conversion patterns and the processes of conversion, which can be distinguished everywhere in Africa or in sub-Saharan Africa. Africans were not passive recipients of new faith traditions. Becoming adherents of Christianity or Islam, they created distinctive synthesis of religious elements and experiences. Conversion patterns or models in Africa can be likened to a mosaic of elements of different religious faiths, traditional African religions, Islam and Christianity, all possibly at times co-existing and at other times intermixing, leading to a variety of religious and cultural syntheses as well as the pluralistic character of both Christian and Islamic development within this region. In Africa, Islam was becoming a dimension of particular local African cultures, Islamised societies represented a synthesis that was both distinctively African and Muslim.⁹ African Christianity or Christianity in Africa reflects a similar transformation and there has been a significant Africanisation of modes of expression of faith and the emergence of distinctively African traditions of Christianity of “late Antiquity” and the modern era.

The entry of Islam into most regions and into most societies in Sub-Saharan Africa was through trade carried along major trade networks, by the establishing of Muslim commercial communities in the midst of local African societies and through the growing presence of Muslim teachers and scholars. A gradual blending took place between African and Islamic elements. Rulers and the local nobility of the states in the Bilad al-Sudan (West Africa) and along the East African coast, where the interaction was between Islam and local African faith traditions, tended to adopt Islamic rituals and practices, to become nominal

⁸ In the seventh century Makuria would undergo a political union with Nobatia.

⁹ VOLL, John op. cit., p. 26.

Muslims and adopt a middle position between the Muslim minority and the majority of the population who stuck to their traditional religion. In Nubia, the Nile Valley and present-day Ethiopia, where the interaction was between Islam and local modes of expression of Christian faith, Christian rulers stuck firmly to their faith, but the basic similarities between the two religions allowed for gradual religious change and the slow assimilation of Islamic religious elements within the process of conversion from Christian belief to Islamic religion. Conversion to Islam on the African continent can be viewed as a phased process involving different stages of religious change and assimilation of older religious elements within the process. In other words, Islam meshed with pre-existing religions in Sub-Saharan Africa in many different ways rather than necessarily confronting them.

In the African context, Islamisation refers to both the religious change and the accompanying cultural change allowing for numerous local interpretations of Islam once the core requirements of the faith were fulfilled. The introduction of Islam meant many changes involving religious belief and concomitant changes in the material sphere, economy, society and politics. There has been a debate for quite some time over the nature of African Islam. Africa has been often viewed as passive, simply receiving Islam and not as a contributing source or as an active ingredient in the construction of Islam.¹⁰ The persistent tendency in the authoritative academic literature to perceive Sub-Saharan Africa as being outside of normative Islam and marginal to the Islamic world to the extent that serious academic consideration of African or Black Islam has been lacking in most general studies of Islam has been criticised by many students of Islam in Africa.¹¹ Despite the volume and quality of empirical work on Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa and successful attempts to compile a comprehensive history of Islam in Africa, the studies that purport to include African Islam into current syntheses of the history of Islam have been rare and less than satisfactory, making only passing reference to African Islam.

In the 1960s African history in general and the history of Islam and Christianity were recognised as academic disciplines in their own right and an impressive corpus of literature have been produced on both Christianity and Islam in Africa. It was a founding age for African studies. A new research agenda moved from past European perceptions of Christianity and Islam in Africa and by posing new questions attempted to present a meaningful history

¹⁰ E.g. J.S. TRIMINGHAM in his numerous works on Islam, perceived Africa as marginal to the Islamic world. See e.g. his *Islam in West Africa*, *A History of Islam in West Africa*, *Islam in East Africa*, or *The Influence of Islam upon Africa*.

¹¹ INSOLL, Timothy *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*, pp. 7–12, also ROSS E.S., *Africa in Islam. What the Afrocentric Perspective Can Contribute to the Study of Islam*, In *International Journal of Islamic and Arabic Studies*.

of the two religions and portray the religious experience of African Christians and Muslims over time and space.

New African journals were started and continued to multiply. A milestone in the study of African religions was the inauguration in 1967 of the *Journal of Religion in Africa* and the publication of a great number of well-researched books that shifted from missionary history to African Christian history and by placing emphasis on African Christian identity, African initiatives, and African independent churches tried to study and describe the religious experience of African Christians. The scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s was enriched by a series of important conferences devoted to new themes and new approaches to the study of religion in Africa, including attempts "to instill a stronger and more critically exacting historical dimension into the whole subject of African religious studies".¹² African Christian studies have flourished ever since by embracing a multitude of major themes, including a revival of missionary history. Current interests and concerns have been reflected in the pages of the *Journal of Religion in Africa*. A rich and varied literature on African Christian history and the anthropology of Christianity in Africa has appeared written by historians, scholars of religion, anthropologists and social scientists. To a long stream of many important and stimulating case studies and articles, local and national histories of Christianity on the African continent produced in past decades, several massive one-volume histories of African Christianity could be added, written by Bengt Sundkler, Adrian Hastings and Elisabeth Isichei respectively.¹³

Since the 1960s the study of African Islam has also flourished and an impressive and influential corpus of literature has been produced by historians on Islam in Africa as well as on the anthropology of Islam in Africa.¹⁴ However,

¹² The historical study of African religion was initiated and pioneered by Terence Ranger. For a survey of the evolution of African Christian studies, of major themes, conferences, institutions and personalities, see HASTINGS, Adrian *African Christian Studies, 1967–1999: Reflections of an Editor*. In LUDWIG, Frieder – ADOGAME, Afe, ed. *European Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*, pp. 265–274.

¹³ SUNDKLER, Bengt & STEED, Christopher *A History of the Church in Africa*; HASTINGS, Adrian *The Church in Africa 1450–1950*; ISICHEI Elizabeth *A History of Christianity in Africa. From Antiquity to the Present*.

¹⁴ John Spencer Trimingham has greatly contributed to the study of Islam in Africa with his extensive surveys of Islam in different parts of the continent, e.g. TRIMINGHAM J.S., *Islam in West Africa* or TRIMINGHAM J.S., *Islam in East Africa*, TRIMINGHAM J.S., *The Influence of Islam upon Africa*. For a summary and an assessment see TAYOB, Abdulkader John Spencer Trimingham (*1904) on Islam in Africa: Integrative or Isolationist? In LUDWIG, Frieder – ADOGAME, Afe, ed. *European Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*. See also SOARES Benjamin, S. Notes on the

contrary to Northern and Western parts of Africa that have been well researched and documented, the history of Islam in Eastern and Southern Africa has lagged behind and has not been until recently well studied. The production of a comprehensive one-volume survey edited by Nehemiah Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels, which treated the history of Islam in Africa on a continent-wide scale, attempted to redress the balance between West and East and South Africa.¹⁵

African studies, African history, African Christian studies as well as the study of Islam in Africa, have been to a great extent dominated and even defined by non-African scholars.¹⁶ To shift the focus and create ample space for Africa-based scholars to present results of their researches the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) based in Istanbul has in the past years managed to organise, in collaboration with the scholarly institutions in different parts of the African continent, several large-scale academic events and international conferences devoted to the history and the socio-cultural heritage of Islam in Africa. The main objective was to contribute to the existing reservoir of knowledge on the history and socio-cultural heritage of Islam in Africa south of the Sahara Desert and of the religious and cultural impact of Islam on the region. The first of the series of large-scale international symposia that brought together a number of well-known scholars and distinguished researchers affiliated with universities, international organisations and cultural and educational institutions from around the world was organised by IRCICA in Dakar, Senegal between 27 and 30 December 1996, on the theme "Islamic Civilisation in West Africa".¹⁷ It was followed by an International symposium on "Islamic Civilisation in Eastern Africa" which was organised jointly by IRCICA and the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) and held in Kampala, Uganda between 15 and 17 December 2003. The last symposium aimed to build upon and expand the legacy of the two previous academic events was on "Islamic Civilisation in Southern Africa" and was held in Johannesburg, South Africa between 1 – 3 September 2006.¹⁸

Anthropological Study of Islam and Muslim Societies in Africa. In *Culture & Religion*, pp. 277–285.

¹⁵ LEVTZION, Nehemia & POUWELS, Randall L.(Eds.), *The History of Islam in Africa*.

¹⁶ This is not to claim that the research is not carried in Africa and there are Departments for the Study of Religions at most African universities. Many universities and research institutions in Africa, however, suffer from the lack of funding.

¹⁷ The academic event was organised under the patronage of His Excellency President of Senegal, Abdou Diouf.

¹⁸ Proceedings of the International Symposia were published by IRCICA as *La civilisation islamique en Afrique de l'ouest*. Communications du Symposium

The multidisciplinary collection of eleven historical and ethnographical case studies from across the African continent entitled *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa* was published as the sixth volume in Brill's "Islam in Africa" series, designed "to present the results of scholarly research into the many aspects of the history and present-day features of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa". Editors of the "Islam in Africa" series are three renowned Islamic scholars, John Hunwick, Rüdiger Seesemann and Knut Vikór. Most of the essays contained in the volume were originally presented to a colloquium 'Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa' which was held in May 2003 at the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA) of Northwestern University in Evanston, co-founded some years back by John Hunwick and Sean O'Fahey.

According to the editor, many important and influential studies of African Christianity and African Islam have been produced in past years and decades but much less has been written on Christian-Muslim relations and interactions, one notable exception being the work of Lamin Sanneh, an African Muslim convert to Christianity.¹⁹ The production of academic books tend to take an exclusivist approach, and focus on one religion or religious community, either Christian or Muslim, making only passing reference to the other religion and devote little space to the discussion of actual interactions and encounters between adherents of the two world religions, Christians and Muslims, in Africa. He mentions in this connection Adrian Hastings' magisterial study of five hundred years of the history of Christianity in Africa and on the side of Islam the recent attempt at a comprehensive history of Islam edited by Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Pouwels.²⁰ There has been a lack of studies, he claims, considering and analysing Christians and Muslims together and trying to show that Muslim-Christian encounters in Africa have been multifaceted and

International tenu les 27–30 Décembre 1996 Dakar, Sénégal, ed. par Samba DIENG. Istanbul, IRCICA 1999; Proceedings of the International Symposium on *ISLAMIC CIVILISATION IN EASTERN AFRICA*, Kampala, Uganda 15–17 December 2003. Istanbul, IRCICA 2006. The Proceedings of the last International Symposium held in Johannesburg in 2006 have not as yet been published.

¹⁹ See e.g. SANNEH, Lamin Translatability in Islam & in Christianity in Africa: A Thematic Approach. In BLAKELY, Thomas D. – van BEEK, Walter E.A. – THOMSON, Dennis L. (Ed.) *Religion in Africa. Experience & Expression*, pp. 22–45; also his *Piety & Poer: Muslims and Christians in West Africa*. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books 1996 or his "The Christian-Muslim Encounter in Africa". In BEST, Kenneth (Ed.) *African Challenge*, pp. 101–110.

²⁰ HASTINGS, Adrian *The Church in Africa 1450–1950*, op. cit.; LEVTZION, Nehemia & POWELS, Randall L. (Eds.), *The History of Islam in Africa*, op. cit.

changing over time, and even the *Journal of Religion in Africa*, widely acclaimed by scholars in religion as the leading journal in the field, has published almost no articles on Christian-Muslim encounters in Africa.²¹

This is not to say, and the editor openly admits it, that Christian-Muslim relations have been ignored in the academic studies or that there have been no attempts to approach the topic of the meeting of Muslims and Christians in Africa at different times and in different places and address issues of Christian-Muslim “understanding” and interfaith dialogue. On the contrary, there have been many projects actively involved in promoting inter-religious dialogue and ecumenical ideals and objectives advanced by both Christian and Muslim theologians as well as academics. Among the oldest and long-running interfaith organisations in the continent of Africa is the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa or PROCMURA, a programme originally established by the Churches in Africa in Ghana in 1959 as the “Islam in Africa Project” and since then dedicated to promote peace and peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims in Africa for the holistic development of the human person.²²

Both Protestant and Catholic theologians have been trying for several decades to advance and promote their ecumenical objectives. The World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva has been involved in a variety of inter-religious dialogue projects and initiatives over many years, and between 1965 and 1976 published a journal *Study Encounter* devoted specifically to Christian-Muslim relations.²³

On the Catholic side, the second Vatican Council’s statements advocating in *Nostra Aetate* ecumenical objectives and ideals and interfaith dialogue brought about or were supposed to bring about a major change in Christian-Muslim relationships.²⁴ More recent but significant was the Muslim initiative,

²¹ SOARES Benjamin F. (Ed.) *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, Introduction, pp. 5–7.

²² See the PROCMURA website. A central office is now located in Nairobi, Kenya, and three regional coordinators oversee three different regions of Africa including: the Francophone West Africa region, the Anglophone West Africa region, and the East/Southern Africa region. In July 2009 sixty religious leaders from ten West African countries met in Accra, Ghana, for a conference organised by PROCMURA, on Religion, Conflict Prevention, Peace Building and Reconciliation. Case studies on joint peace initiatives by Christians and Muslims from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire and Nigeria. Sadly no reports appear to have been carried by non-religious media. See the PROCMURA website.

²³ PRATT, Douglas The World Council of Churches in Dialogue with Muslims: Retrospect and Prospect. In *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, pp. 21–42.

²⁴ On January 25, 1959 Pope John XXIII announced his intention of calling an ecumenical council *Humanae Salutis*. On December 25, 1961 the council was formally

which brought together religious leaders from around the world and across Islam's often fractious sects. In October 2007 a hundred and thirty-eight Muslim clerics and scholars issued a letter entitled *A Common Word between Us and You*, asking for a dialogue between Muslims and Christians. It was a breakthrough invitation, compared by some to the Vatican II statements in *Nostra Aetate*, which, however, got scant attention on the Christian side and news of this important initiative has been little reported. In Africa itself, Muslim leaders from Nigeria concerned with Christian-Muslim understanding and advocating harmonious relationships and interfaith dialogue on the continent were together with religious leaders from North Africa among the initial signatories of the 2007 declaration *A Common Word*.²⁵ The Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome has since 1975 been publishing an annual journal *Islamochristiana* and since the 1970s also an English-language publication *Encounter* dealing with documents for Muslim-Christian understanding and dialogue. A biannual refereed journal *Encounters. Journal of Inter-Cultural Perspectives* has also been published by Islamic Foundation in London "to promote a spirit of dialogue and mutual understanding between people of different religions and persuasions".²⁶

In January 1983 the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in Birmingham, England (BICMURA), started to publish the Bulletin on Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa. It was continued as a quarterly journal *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (ISMR) launched in June 1990 to provide a forum for the academic exploration and discussion of the religious tradition of Islam, and of relations between Islam and other religions, and some studies specifically devoted to Christian-Muslim relations in contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa have been published there.²⁷

The aim of the volume *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa* was "to move in important ways beyond some of the existing studies of Muslims, Christians, and religion in Africa more generally" and discuss actual interactions of Christians and Muslims in Africa within the same analytical

summoned by the Apostolic Institute. The second Vatican council was solemnly ended in 1965. For *Nostra Aetate* see Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian religions... http://vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/do...

²⁵ Muslim leaders from Chad, Gambia, Sudan and some other African countries have since then signed the declaration. See FREDERIKS, Martha Th. "Let us understand our differences: Current trends in Christian-Muslim Relations in sub-Saharan Africa." http://www.edinburgh2010.org/fileadmin/files/edinburgh2010/files/docs/1._Martha.doc.

²⁶ See the Islamic Foundation, London website.

²⁷ It is edited by members of the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK.

frame.²⁸ "Until recently, many of the studies of Muslims and Christians across space and time, including some in missiological and theological studies, have looked at what they have tended to call 'Christian-Muslim relations'...and "employ a decidedly outmoded social model that assumes that the 'normal' state of affairs is one of peaceful coexistence or mutual tolerance of Muslims and Christians. While such attempts to understand and possibly even to promote religious 'tolerance' are perfectly understandable in a world where conflict between members of different religious communities seems increasingly prevalent, interactions between Muslims and Christians, in Africa or elsewhere, cannot be understood as simply existing at a point on a one-dimensional continuum that runs from coexistence to conflict."²⁹ The contributors to the volume adopted the notion of encounter as a central organising trope for their studies of different religious communities on the African continent. Rather than trying to understand the relations between Muslims and Christians or between Islam and Christianity in Africa, the contributions in this collection attempt to study encounters, since the word encounter in current usage in the study of Africa captures a broader and subtler range of meanings of the complex phenomena.

After a stimulating introduction *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa* written by the editor B. Soares, John Voll takes on with a masterful overview essay on *African Muslims and Christians in World History: The Irrelevance of the "Clash of Civilizations"* (Chapter One). The main focus of the volume is then reflected in several important regional case studies exploring the multiple ways Christians and Muslims have over time encountered each other in different countries, Egypt and Sudan, Ethiopia, Northern Nigeria, East and South Africa, and analysing changes in Christian-Muslim encounters in past decades. Most essays are fine examples of the new approach to the topic. The volume is enriched by Ralph Austin's essay examining the ecumenical Muslim perspective on Christianity proposed by one of Africa's most celebrated Muslim intellectuals, Amadou Hampâté Bâ.

Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa is a useful and welcome book in its own right and an incentive for further research in the field reminding us that African Christian-Muslim relationships must be seen against the multi-faceted background of their long history on the African continent. Religious plurality and diversity has always been a part of the African reality. Changes in the geopolitical map of the world, the increased polarization of relations between Christians and Muslims in the world has led in the past decades also to

²⁸ SOARES, Benjamin F. (Ed.): *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, Introduction, op. cit., pp. 1, 5.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 1, 2.

the increased polarisation of adherents of Christianity and Islam. The influence of the fundamentalist and other radical groups could be seen on both sides. The radicalisation of religion, the Pentecostalisation of Christianity and the rise of charismatic and evangelical Christian communities on one side and the radicalisation of Islam and the call for application of the Shari'a in parts of Africa threaten to create tension and destroy the peaceful co-existence between the two faith communities. The problem of polarisation of Muslims and Christians is endemic in Nigeria and the Sudan. In many parts of Africa, Christians and Muslims have encountered each other, interacted with each other and often lived side by side amicably for many centuries. By taking into account long periods of the apparently peaceful coexistence between the two faith communities on the continent and historical and regional diversities it is vital to learn from history and highlight the riches and promises of a "shared living" and the primacy of the "dialogue of life".

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