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## **Concept of Relationship Theology**

*Joas Bainomugisha Kahesi*

### **Introduction**

After almost eighteen years of experience involved in Christian-Muslim Relations (CMR) and interfaith-relations, I have come to realize that in order to Promote interfaith dialogue what we need is not convergence, that is, unity in belief and practices but an openness to building relationship; restoring kinships or bonds with all people no matter who they are and to what particular religion they belong.

### **Word Term Meaning: Relationship**

Probably it's much better to look on the word term meaning of relationship. Does this word 'relationship' used as a key word in the development of this theology mean?

In common parlance to relate means among many other things "to connect". Interestingly the word also meant, "to bring back" or "to restore". I am using the word 'relationship' to mean the state of being connected or related, or to be in friendly terms with someone.

My understanding of the nature of relationship is very much drawn from much relationship I have had with a large number of people. Being a Christian who studied into countries of different culture and different religions, e.g. Pakistan, India, Germany and Denmark. I have come to know and accept the fact that even being black or white, Christians, Hindu, Buddha, Sikh or Muslims does not make us one, though we are enriched grown and changed but still we remain different. What is true in developing relationship on a purely human level is also true in matters relating to faith: unconditional acceptance of the other as other wills all the beauty and also the limits the other possesses.

### **Theology of Relationship**

How do I define a theology of relationship? How is it different from many theologies mentioned i.e., (Liberation Theology, Black Theology...)? How is for example liberation Theology different from the theology I set out to develop? Theology of relationship is a contextual theology.

A theology of relationship is more concerned with relations among the people. Through direct involvement in and commitment to build relationship where they do not exist, healing relationship where they are broken, deepening where they are weak; a theologian involves a theory that place God in the center and ponders what God would do or want him to do.

While doing theology his/her concern is to find concrete life giving, love-generating principles which can be easily molded into action.

Let us look an example from one place where a large number of Muslims live with minority Christians. Periodically there have been conflicts between Muslims and Christians resulting in riots, which has left indelible scars in the hearts and minds of people across both communities. People live under constant tension.

This hatred filled environment raised questions that were a challenge to many faiths: where is God in all this? What would Christ do if He were to come now and be present to the situation created by violence? What would God, the most compassionate and compassion giver to use Qur'anic language do in this situation of suffering? How do I a Christian bring my faith to bear upon and become an effective agent of reconciliation?

How could I bring healing to people of both sides? These genuine challenges led to the starting of various projects into different countries to bring Muslims and Christians together by having or provide space for meeting, for working together on common concerns, for transcending boundaries erected in the name of religion.

### **Our Role in Theology of Relationship**

My role or our role in the mentioned theology must be to inspire us to bring healing to the victims of oppression because God has already heard their cry of pain and hurt. However we cannot neglect the oppressor. In a healing theology, concerned with building broken relationships, concern for the oppressor is equally important. The theology of relationship includes both since the brokenness affects both and both need healing.

We as Christian theologians we need a theology that can direct and give shape to action; which will prevent conflicts by bringing the broken relationship and bring peace.

Our theology must inspire us to bring healing to victims of oppression because God has already heard their cry of pain and hurt.

Our task must be to involve and commit us in building relationship and changing the oppressive structures in a conflict prone area. We can only theologize credibly if it is done with those who suffer, giving voice to the suffering.

I believe that much of the suffering in the world today is due to wrong relationships. Theology of relationship consists in focusing on what God might worry about when God gets up in the morning. For we as a theologians, our concerns has to be how to engage ourselves in healing those who are hurting because they have lost their dear ones, their houses are destroyed, are hatred for the other because the other has been so cruel.

I believe that God's primary concern for the creation is very much relational. What I mean by this is that the purpose of God's revelation is directed towards building relationship.

As we read different scriptures from Hindu, Muslim, Christianity, we may find that many of them contains stories that illustrates this point.

For example:

The theory of '**avatars**' according to Hindu belief God takes various forms at times even animal form and descends to the level of human beings because some parts of God's creation is pain and it needs mending.

In Islam the Prophet Muhammad was called and sent out to warn the people of Mecca not only because of their idolatry but because of their many sins of injustice such as swindling the property of the orphans and widows. Muslim mystics often refer to tradition according to which Abraham once asked God why he created the world and everything in it. God replied by saying "I was hidden treasure, unknown and unloved, I desire to be known and love. And so I created the creation"

According to this tradition God was craving in horrible pains so to say because there was no one or nothing to whom God relate, that is no one who God could love and be loved by in return.

In the book of Genesis when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and eat the forbidden fruit God seems to be hurt more because Adam and Eve hide themselves, cutting off their relationship with God than by sin of disobedience. All these diverse examples are metaphors illustrating the point I made above, namely that God is God of relationships. Building relationship is the key term in an exploration of kind of theology I am talking about.

It's the time that we need to take moving from thinking theology to doing theology. What we are called to do is to stop creating theories about matters that have very little relevance to day-to day life and involve ourselves in action, which aims at transforming the world. From the above idea it is also mean that for any theology to be relevant it must begin with praxis. It begins with committed involvement with people in the context of their oppression and marginalization.

A theology of relationship is firmly rooted in the theologian's ability to transpose his/herself into joys and sorrows of the other empathetically. Interfaith relations basically mean relating to the other as others. Such relating has to be done not on a superficial level but as concerned for the wholeness of creation, as committed to healing and establishing peace.

In a theology of relationship involvement and commitment are essential for any healthy relationship.

Theology of relationship is also a theology of reconciliation because it is while relating to the other as other. I discover that I am united to the other, my brothers or my sisters from other faith or race, caste by for more things than that, which divides us. As we know reconciliation means to restore broken relationships, or to be one again, and to come together. By this I do not mean that we have to be agreeing in every thing when we come together, that we have to see the world around or even God with the same lenses that our lives have to be lived in one particular way or even worship God in one specified manner.

### **Conclusion**

May be we should ask ourselves how do we apply this theology to our contexts? What would it mean in actual practice? Will it be possible for us in our countries to walk together and climb the hill hand in hand in spite of our differences?

How can we broaden the vision of those who erect boundaries around their particular religion, caste, color, and ethnicity and refuse to relate to the other as other?

The task ahead of us is a challenging but a joyful one of affirming our common humanity and common obligation to bring wholeness to our nations and creation.

I believe this is a divine call and is patterned according to God's creation. There is diversity in God's creation so also in God's revelation. Can we accept this as a God given God desired fact or plan for creation? Can we collaborate with our neighbor in such a way that all our brothers and sisters make part of God-ward climb no matter to what religion, continent, caste, creed or gender they belong?