# The Influence Of The View Of Islam On Christian-Muslim Relations In Christian Theological Seminaries In South-West And Littoral Regions, Cameroon

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*Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine the influences of the views of Islam on Christian-Muslim relations in theological seminaries in Cameroon. The study employed the descriptive survey and phenomenology designs and a mixed method approach, using probability and non-probability sampling techniques. The study was conducted in the South-west (English region) and Littoral region (French region) in Cameroon. Five seminaries out of seven in the regions were selected. The study sampled students, lecturers, seminary graduates, curriculum developers, and Christian and Muslim adherents. Bartlett (2001) and Krejcie & Morgan (1970) sample size determination formulas were employed. Instruments for data collection were questionnaires and interview guide. The data collection method was the triangulation method and the embedded method of data analysis. The study was grounded on Allport's intergroup contact theory to examine the extent to which contact with Islam through Islamic studies has been able to contribute to the Christian view of Islam. From the findings it was established that, historical stereotypes and prejudices against Muslims is very strong among seminary students, lecturers and graduates. The findings also indicated that, seminary students evaluate Islam based on Christian teachings and doctrines. They therefore do not have an objective knowledge of Islam. The findings established that there exist an unguided Christian-Muslim relation with elements of syncretism and relativism. Islamic Studies in theological seminaries has not been able to significantly change the Christian traditional view of Islam, as a result, the contemporary importance of Christian-Muslim relations has not been given due consideration within the seminary communities which are the nurseries for religious leaders. The study recommends a review of the curriculum and curriculum implementation approach of Islamic studies in theological seminaries; a clear objective for Islamic studies in theological seminaries; qualified Christian Islamic lecturers to teach Islam; and the introduction of a course in Christian-Muslim relations alongside the course in Islam in all theological seminaries.*

*Keywords: Islam, theological seminaries, Christian-Muslim relations*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The reality of religious plurality has received considerable attention and more recognition globally in the twenty first century than before. Globalisation and its commensurate have accentuated this reality and have brought humanity and their cultures and religions in the living rooms of each other regardless of the different religious persuasions. The high need for global connectivity and interdependence of societies and communities are factors that are playing out strongly thereby, necessitating interfaith relations (Rehan, 2013). The academia and Churches within Christianity have began to question their views of other religions, Islam in particular.

The relational crisis between Christianity and Islam is not a new phenomenon, but as old as Islam. Christian-Muslim relations experience mixed feelings; misunderstandings about each other and negative perceptions from the inception of Islam in *Makkah* (Mecca-Arabia) 610 AD (Haafkeens, 1987).

Brown (1994) argues that from the very early beginnings of Islam, Muslims had a negative impression about the key doctrines of Christianity. On the same note, Lewis (1976) intimates that the traditional Christian attitude towards Islam has been that of suspicion.

Misconceptions between adherents of Christianity and Islam, couple with the effects of historical events such as the Crusades from 1095-1291, the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, the expulsion of Muslim from Andalusia in 1492, the Jihads in West Africa, and the colonial and missionary periods in Africa where the success of missionaries was to an extent attributed to colonial rule, continue to tailor their perceptions about each other (Nunn, 2010). The negative perception about each other has continued to influence their understanding about the other. As a result, adherents of both religions rely on historical prejudices and stereotypes to define their relationships with one another. Based on this reality, Christian organisations have called for a proper study and understanding of other religions in a bid to curb stereotypes and prejudices toward Islam.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) among others, have recongnised this need and argued that dialogue with people of other religions is part of Christian witness (WCC, 2011). The important of studying other regions in order to understand them and co-exist peaceful with them for the welfare of the society, takes precedence.

Despite the emphasis on the importance of studying Islam in order to understand the religion and the people for peaceful coexistence, Ondo (1995) notes the reluctance of Christian religious leaders in Cameroon to engage in Christian-Muslim relations as a result of ignorance about Islam and the importance of Christian-Muslim relations. In addition to that, seminary students in Cameroon still have negative perceptions about Islam, making it difficult to engage in fruitful Christian-Muslim relation which is a contemporary and contextual reality. How will the Church in Cameroon participate and contribute to national unity and interfaith relations for the development of the nation, when the formation houses (seminaries) and students have not imbibe the spirit of interfaith relations and hold negative views towards Islam? The future involvement of religious leaders remains a dilemma.

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to examine the influence of the views of Islam in theological seminary in Cameroon on their ability to engage in Christian-Muslim relations in order for the seminaries to have a relook on the objectives of Islamic Studies in Christian theological seminaries as well as the curriculum of Islamic Studies in Christian theological seminaries.

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Michel (1997) argues that the burden of history on both Christianity and Islam shape their views of each other. He notes the effects of the crusades, colonial injustices and post-colonial interventions to be some of the historical activities that have tailored Muslims relationship with Christians in the Middle East and Asia. On the hand, Michel, (1997) intimates that historical events such as the fall of Constantinople in 1455, the violence in the Mediterranean, which saw the forceful conversion of Christians to Islam, and the killing of Christians in Lebanon in 1861 equally shape Christians' view of Muslims and Islam. Chapman (2012) in the processes of analysis Christian-Muslim relations for a period of one hundred years, notes the strong presence of factors such as ignorance, fear and misconceptions along the religious divide. According to him one of the reasons why Christians find it difficult to relate with Muslims is because in Islam there is no separation between politics and religion (*din wa dawla ; religion and state*). In his view, ignorance about each other, and the politicisation of religion within Islam, makes some Christians uncertain about the Islamic religion, hence posing a challenge to Christian-Muslim relations. Mvumbi, (2007) argues that Christians lack an objective knowledge of Islam. What is known about Islam by Christians is subjective because Christians evaluate Islam on the basis of Christian doctrines. He intimates that, an objective knowledge of Islam is the starting point for a fruitful relationship with Muslims. According to him Christians should be open to study Islam in order to understand the religion and build and objective view of the religion and the people. Mbillah (2013) highlights the view of Islam by the entire Christian church. He blames this to the missionaries whom according to him, exported the attitude of regarding people outside Christianity especially Muslims as unsaved. The Christian church in Africa therefore inherited from the missionaries an attitude of converting every other person to Christianity. Muslims are perceived to be unsaved, unbelievers who must accept the gospel in other to receive salvation. Over the years therefore, Muslims have been viewed by Christians as people who need help from Christians. Christians have been living with the aspect of superiority complex over Islam. Azuma (2012) presents the views of the evangelical Christians in regards to Islam. According to them, Muslims have no salvation, any relationship with Muslims therefore suggest a validation of the Islamic religion. He noted the evangelical's argument that associating with Muslims will lead to theological relativism and compromise the uniqueness of Jesus Christ within Christianity. Vatican II, (1987) present a positive view of Islam by the Roman Catholic Church. The document; Declaration on the relations of the church to Non-Christian religions, *Nostra Aetate*, acknowledges the necessity for a relationship between Christianity and other religions. The document also recognises value of the Muslim faith and other religions and invites collaboration with Muslims. WCC (1979) Study Guide: *My neighbour's faith and mine,* suggest that Christians should seek new dimensions of their faith and consider on how to be a Christian around non-Christian neighbours especially Muslims. The text calls on Christians to live in unity with their neighbours of different faiths. The attitude of Christians towards non-Christians should be that which accommodates the other. The text therefore encourages peaceful co-existence among Christians and non-Christian

religions and creates a friendly environment where freedom of worship is encouraged.

The literature reviewed has provided the study with information on the development of Christian attitudes or views of Islam over the years. Most importantly, issues of violent historical event, doctrinal difference and ignorance about Islam have been discussed in the literature as factors influencing the Christian view of Islam. However, the literature has not presented an empirical study justifying that knowledge of Islam has been able to shape Christian view of Islam otherwise. The present study fills the gap by specifically looking at the view of Islam within Christian theological seminaries, where Islamic studies is carried out to ascertain the extent to which the study of Islam has influenced their views of Islam regardless of religious differences and historical stereotypes mentioned by scholars in the reviewed. The study equally looks at how the view of Islam has possibly impacted on Christian-Muslim relations.

INTERGROUP CONTACT THEORY OF ALLPORT, W. GORDON (1954)

Allport's theory states that contact between groups of people who are separated by conditions or situations, is likely to improve relationship by reducing stereotypes and prejudices. This also can be achieved by an objective knowledge of the out-group or the other group (Allport, 1954). This theory has guided the study to examine the extent to which contact through studying of Islam in Christian theological seminaries have been able to influence perceptions and prejudices against Islam and Muslims in order to improve relationships between Christians and Muslims for the holistic wellbeing and development of the human family in Cameroon.

## III. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed both descriptive survey and phenomenology designs. These designs have led the study to sample the opinions, behaviours and attitudes of respondents. The designs led to the collection of quantitative and qualitative data (Mathers, Fox, & Hunn, 2007). The above designs required a mixed method approach, where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Qualitative research is an in-depth study of a small group of people and the results are mostly descriptive (Hoyle, Harris, & Judd, 2002). Quantitative method on the other hand, quantifies the problem by way of generating numerical data (Mack, et al., 2005). A mixed method approach has provided a more comprehensive evidence of the research problem than either qualitative or quantitative method (Creswell, 2007).

The theological seminaries were selected from both the South-West and Littoral regions. The selection was based firstly on the fact that, there have been frequent reports on conflict between Christian religious leaders and Muslims faithful. Secondly, both regions provide the study with seminaries from different Christian denominations. In addition to that, both regions have a considerable number of both Christians and Muslims because of their agricultural and industrial composition. Five seminaries (5) out of seven (7)

were selected, leaving out two (2) minor Roman Catholic seminaries which do not offer a course in Islam. The seminaries include: the Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS), in Kumba, the Cameroon Baptist Seminary (CBSK) in Kumba, the Apostolic Bilingual Seminary in (ABSK) in Kumba, Faculte de Theologigue Protestante et des Sciences des Religions de Ndoungue (FTPSRN), and Grand Seminaire theologigue (Paul VI) de Douala.

The target population for this study includes students in the seminaries, graduates, lecturers, Christian Islamic lecturers and Curriculum developers. Christian and Muslim adherents within the regions were also selected in order to ascertain their views on their relationship with each other. This study has employed both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Cohran's 1977 formula for sample size determination outlined by Bartlett et al (2001) was used to determine the sample size of 231, for a target student population of 407, while Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size was employed to determine the sample size of 63, for a target population of 75 Lecturers.

The study employed the triangulation method of data collection, where both qualitative and quantitative data was collected from different groups of persons (Creswell, 2007). In this case, quantitative data was collected from the students and lecturers in the seminaries while qualitative data was collected from graduates, curriculum developers, Islamic lecturers, Christians and Muslims faithful. The study employed the embedding model of data analysis where, qualitative and quantitative data was analysed concurrently. In this case, the quantitative data was supported by the qualitative data (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative data analysis was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of the SPSS version 21.0, while responses from qualitative data were grouped thematically to achieve the set objective for the study.

| Target Group | Target population | Sampling Techniques | Sample Size | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Seminaries | 7 | Stratified | 5 | 71.4% |
| Students | 467 | Stratified | 231 | 49.4% |
| Graduates | 10 | Purposive | 10 | 100% |
| Lecturers | 75 | Stratified | 63 | 84% |
| Islamic Lecturers | 5 | Purposive | 5 | 100% |
| Curriculum / Dev | 5 | Purposive | 5 | 100% |
| Christians and Muslims | 4 | Purposive | 4 | 100% |

*Table 1: Sampling Matrix*

Table one above represent the sampling matrix of the study. the study employed the stratified sampling technique to select five seminaries out of seven in the regions. Both stratified and purposive was employed.

## IV. STUDY FINDINGS

The questionnaires geared towards examining how the opinions and myths associated to Islam within the seminary community plays out in their engagement with Muslims. Six (06) main questions were structured, all set in closed ended form. Out of these six questions, only 02 contained questions with equal ratings among which one had alternatives to be

selected while the other four (4) were ranked in a likert scale having varied response styles.

| Options | Seminary Students | | Lecturers | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| A religion like others | 74 | 38.7 | 27 | 55.1 |
| A religion of violence | 77 | 40.3 | 5 | 10.2 |
| A devilish religion | 17 | 8.9 | 0 | 0.0 |
| None of the above | 23 | 12.0 | 17 | 34.7 |
| Totals | 191 | 100.0 | 49 | 100.0 |

*Source: Field Data, 2017*

*Table 2: Respondents' responses on how they regard Islam*

An examination of what all respondents considered Islam to be was deemed necessary to ascertain their views. The findings on Table 2 above reveal that out of the 191 students, 77(40.3%) of them see Islam as a religion of violence, 74(38.7%) of them view Islam to be a religion like others, while 17(8.9%) of them see it as a devilish religion. On the other hand, 23(12.0%) of the students say to them Islam does not assume any of the above status. It is neither a religion like others, nor a religion of violence nor a devilish religion. Going by the percentage distribution mentioned above, most students after studied Islam see the religion to be a religion of violence.

On lecturers perspective, 27(55.1%) of them see Islam as a religion like others, 5(10.2%) of them say they regard Islam as a religion of violence, while 17(34.7%) of the lecturers do not see the religion to be one of violence, nor a devilish religion neither a religion like others. They do not have a precise way of describing the religion like the others. Comparatively, it is resolved that students have a different view of Islam from that of lecturers. While students see it as a violent religion, lecturers regard it as a religion like any other.

This disparity might be accounted for by multiplicity of factors. Firstly, the exposure and field experiences of some lecturers may have exposed them to consider Islam as a religion like any other. Meanwhile, students who may not have had relationships with Muslims, consider the religion to be violent base on the general evaluation made by other people. The conflicting views in the quantitative data also play out in the qualitative data. This was confirmed by a Student Graduate (SG 1) who declared:

I think it is important to study Islam which is very violent and killing many people. Students need to understand why Muslims behave the way they do and their justification for killing people. We also need to understand Muslims' strategy of attacking and killing Christians, since one must understand the enemy very well and know how to confront them. I very well know that some passages in the Quran encourage Muslims to be violent toward Christians.

Contrary to the views of the seminary graduate (SG1) was a Christian Islamic lecturer (IL5), who argued that, Islam is a religion like any other. According to him, selfish Muslims with individual ambitious have decided to misinterpret the teachings in the Quran and have presented Islam to be violent and dangerous. He noted that there are some passages in the Bible that will not require a literally interpretation because they suggest violence, but that does not mean that Christianity is violent. He concluded by saying that, not all Muslims are violent.

There is great disparity on the view of Islam within the seminary community regarding issues of violence in Islam. Respondents turn to look at Islam based on Christian teaching, present extremism within Islam, as well as the Quranic teachings. The above responses suggest that exposure to Islam through Islamic studies to a greater extend has not changed the traditional Christian view of Islam and Muslim as (people who require help from Christians in order to be saved) as highlighted by Mbillah (2013).

| Options | Seminary Students | | Lecturers | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Very good | 18 | 9.4 | 3 | 6.1 |
| Good | 76 | 39.8 | 26 | 53.1 |
| Not established | 47 | 24.6 | 10 | 20.4 |
| Bad | 26 | 13.6 | 7 | 14.3 |
| Very bad | 24 | 12.6 | 3 | 6.1 |
| Totals | 191 | 100.0 | 49 | 100.0 |

*Source: Field Data, 2017*

*Table 3: Respondents' responses on their past experiences with Muslims*

The study enquired about respondents' previous experiences with Islam in order to establish their perception of Islam. This was built on the notion that past experiences form basis to build present day judgments as well as future judgments. Michel (1997) confirms this in his argument that events in history shape the relationship among adherents of both faith traditions.

An examination of students' past experiences with Muslims presented on Table 3 above reveal that, out of the 191 students, only 18(9.4%) describe their past experiences to be very good. 76(39.8%) of them have had good experiences with Muslims as opposed to 26(13.6%) who say their former relationships with Muslims were bad and 24(12.6%) describe theirs to have been very bad. Neutral to these, a significant number of the students 47(24.6%) could not establish a proper description to the past experiences they have had with Muslims. Collapsing these to a three scale, it was noticed that almost half of the students 94(49.2%) had good past experiences with Muslims as opposed to 50(26.2%) who have had bad experiences, while 47(24.6%) did not know the nature of their relationship with Muslims in the past. Going by these, one could still conclude that though with many differentials, most seminary students have not had bad experiences with Muslims.

From lecturers' view points, 3(6.1%) of them indicated that they had very good experiences with Muslims, 26(53.1%) said their experiences were good while 10(20.4%) could not describe their experiences. On the other hand, 7(14.3%) had bad experiences further supported by 3(6.1%) who indicated that their experiences were very bad. This led to a similar conclusion made above; that lecturers had good experiences with Muslims since approximately half of the lecturers 29(51.2%) indicated that they have not recorded any serious confrontation with Muslims. The above analysis is in congruent with the qualitative data. This was buoyed by a Student Graduate (SG 2) who mentioned:

I have had a good experience with Muslims. I have been loved and catered for by Muslims. Although my studies in the seminary informed me a little about Islamic hostility, I have not experienced that hostility. We have related very well on

social grounds without talking much about doctrines and religions. Some of my Muslim friends including my relatives ask me in several occasions to remember them in my prayers.

This was bolstered by a Christian Faithful (CF 1) who confidently said:

I relate very well with my Muslim neighbours, we play football together and we also belong to the executive of our community youth committee. Among us, there are some Christians who are not happy because Muslims have been elected in the executive committee. The same situation applies in Muslim dominated areas, very few Muslims will want to have a good relationship with Christians, and majority will not want Christians to future in prominent positions in the community.

Nonetheless, the opinions of respondents with bad experiences could not be neglected, as one curriculum developer (CD2) lamented on his bad experience with Muslims. He recounted an incident of conflict with a Muslim preacher over the message he was presenting about Christianity a worshiping three gods. He also recounted an incident where he was attacked by a Muslim in a public transport vehicle because he preached the truth about Islam and Muslims as people who needs Christ in their midst. He narrated that the conflict between him and the Muslim extended beyond the Bus to the community. He concluded by saying that, he had his worst with Muslims especially as many Christians have died in the Boko Haram (Islamic extremist group) atrocities in Cameroon.

Likewise, respondents who indicated a neutral view could not be ignored also as their opinions reoccurred in the interview. According to a Student Graduate (SG 4) "My relationship with Muslims has not been bad but also not very cordial. I witness a case where a Muslim man maltreated his Christian wife and that incident made me very uncomfortable with Muslims."

By implication, despite the remarkable experience with Muslims, most of the respondents have a negative view of Islam. It was interesting to note that scepticism of relating with Muslims and the negative perception of Islam was largely not as a result of individual conflicts with Muslims. This justifies the argument made by Chapman (2012) that, scepticism about Islam is largely as a result of historical prejudices and stereotypes. However we will not neglect the fact that, some respondents considered the atrocities of Boko Haram in Cameroon as a bad experience with Islam.

| Options | Seminary Students | | Lecturers | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Not at all | 44 | 23.0 | 6 | 12.2 |
| Small degree | 66 | 34.6 | 39 | 79.6 |
| Moderate | 30 | 15.7 | 4 | 8.2 |
| High degree | 30 | 15.7 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Very High Degree | 21 | 11.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| **Totals** | **191** | **100.0** | **49** | **100.0** |

*Source: Field Data, 2017*
*Table 4: Respondents' responses on their engage in Dialogue with Muslims*

Apart from past experiences, respondents were also requested to indicate their opinions on their engage in dialogues with Muslims as a way of deducing their perception of Muslims and Islam in general. According to the results on the above Table, 44(23.0%) of the students, were not ready at

all to engage in any dialogue with Muslims. This was directly followed by 66(34.6%) of the students who said they can engage in dialogue with their Muslims only to a small extent. Conversely, 30(15.7%) of the students were ready to a high degree, further supported by 21(11.0%) of them who were ready to a very high degree to engage in dialogue with their Muslim neighbour. Neutral to this, were 30(15.7%) of the students who did not take a definite standpoint. As such, it was established that a substantial number of students 110(57.6%) have not engage in dialogue with Muslims and were not ready to engage in dialogues with Muslims.

With regards to lecturers opinions, 6(12.2%) of them clearly indicated that they were not ready at all to involve in any discussions with Muslims, this was further supported by 39(79.6%) of the lecturers. 4(8.2%) of the lecturers were neutral on their viewpoints. The view point of the lecturers is in agreement with the students in that they did not see the importance of engaging in dialogue with Muslims. The above quantitative data was supported with qualitative data from a seminary graduate and a Christian Islamic lecturer.

A Christian Islamic Lecture (SL2) observed that engaging in dialogue with hostile and unbelieving people will actually have no positive impact to the kingdom of God. According to him, Christians and Muslims are very different in every sphere of life and have no meeting point. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the whole discussion on dialogue with Muslims. He intimated that, he teaches Islam for students to understand the difficult and violent nature of Muslims. He argued that since Muslim have refused to embrace the truth found in Christianity, it will be better for Christians to avoid Muslims totally and not talking about dialogue with Muslims. "What are we talking about, Jesus or Muhammad" he asked.

The view of the Islamic lecturer (SL2) was buttressed by a student graduate (SG10) who noted that it is difficult to dialogue with Muslims because Muslims are good in talking and not good in listening. According to the graduate, dialogue requires both talking and listening, making it very difficult for Christians to dialogue with Muslims who are only talkers and not listeners. "How can you dialogue with someone who knows it all?" the graduate asked.

A curriculum developer (CD4) presented a contrary view on dialogue with Muslims. According to him students in the seminary who have studied Islam should be able to dialogue freely with Muslims. He noted that, the study of Islam presents the student with the reality of what Islam stands for. The objective of the course is for learners to understand Muslims, interpret the gospel message peaceful to Muslims and live in peace and communication with the Muslims. He argued that without a proper understanding of Islam, religious leaders will not be able to interact with Muslims and this will apply to the entire Christian community.

The above analysis suggests the absence of a clearly defined objective of Islamic studies in Christian theological education. Also, the capacity and objectivity of some of the Christian Islamic lecturers is in question. This analysis leaves us with the question that if the present and future leaders of the church do not see any rational of an interaction with Muslims, what then is the objective of Islamic studies; how do they intend to encourage peaceful community living?

| Options | Seminary Students | | Lecturers | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freque ncy | Percentage (%) | Freque ncy | Percentage (%) |
| Strongly Agree | 39 | 20.4 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Agree | 49 | 25.7 | 10 | 20.4 |
| Undecided | 20 | 10.5 | 10 | 20.4 |
| Disagree | 57 | 29.8 | 28 | 57.1 |
| Strongly Disagree | 26 | 13.6 | 1 | 2.0 |
| Totals | 191 | 100.0 | 49 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Data, 2017

*Table 5: Respondents' responses on tolerance towards Muslims*

Respondents' view on tolerance towards Muslims was examined in the light of accepting Muslims as they do with fellow Christians in their daily living. Tolerance was also found to be necessary in ascertaining respondents' view of Islam, their level of understanding Islam and their preparedness to engage in Christian-Muslim relations. As seen on Table 5 above, 39(20.4%) of the seminary students strongly agree that they have tolerated their Muslim neighbours. This was supported by 49(25.7%) of them who agreed, while a reasonable number of them 83(43.5%) refuted. On the balance, 20(10.5%) of the students remained undecided, that is, they neither agreed nor disagreed that they have accepted or relate with Muslims even when they do not agree with their belief systems.

Based on the above findings, it was noticed that the statistics stood at 88(46.1%) students ready to tolerate Muslims against 83(43.5%) not ready in any way to accept the Muslims. As such, it was very difficult to take a concrete stand point from the above figures given that despite their variations, the differences could be considered insignificant. Yet, considering the fact that most students earlier expressed their unwillingness to engage in dialogues with Muslims, it was logical to culminate this in favour of these respondents given that if they are not prepared to engage in dialogue with Muslims as indicated above, their level of tolerance is also questionable.

Considering lecturers' view points, it was noticed that none of them strongly agreed that they were willing to accept Muslims, though only 10(20.4%) of them agreed to this opinion. This was opposed to 29(59.1%), who thoroughly refused that they were not ready to tolerate Muslims, yet 10(20.4%) of the respondents did not take a definite decision. It was then settled that at the level of lecturers, majority of them were very sure of their non-readiness to accept Muslims as earlier indicated above in case of dialogue.

| Options | Seminary Students | | Lecturers | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freque ncy | Percentage (%) | Freque ncy | Percentage (%) |
| Strongly Agree | 114 | 59.7 | 41 | 83.7 |
| Agree | 39 | 20.4 | 5 | 10.2 |
| Undecided | 7 | 3.7 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Disagree | 21 | 11.0 | 2 | 4.1 |
| Strongly Disagree | 10 | 5.2 | 1 | 2.0 |
| Totals | 191 | 100.0 | 49 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Data, 2017

*Table 6: Respondents' responses on the importance of an Islamic course in the Seminary*

Furthermore, respondents' opinions on the importance of an Islamic course in the seminary were evaluated. Based on students' perspectives, a substantial number of them 114(59.7%) strongly agreed that the allocation of an Islamic

course in the seminary is very important. This was further supported by 39(20.4%) of them who agreed to this assertion. On the other hand, 31(16.2%) of the students openly declared that the study of Islam in the seminary is of no importance. As commonly noted, some students 7(3.7%) were not apparent on their opinions; they neither agreed nor disagreed.

Considering lecturers opinions, a corresponding trend of responses was also noted with that of students. Majority of the lecturers 41(83.7%) also strongly acknowledge the importance of an Islamic course in the seminary, supported by 5(10.2%) of them. Only a small portion of the lecturers 3(6.1%) differed with these opinions.

The above findings instigated a suggestion that respondents are aware of the dire need to study Islam in the seminary because of its importance, though they have a negative view of Islam that has affected their relationship with Muslims. This could be accounted for by the fact that they have not acquired adequate Knowledge of Islam necessary to build their capacity and confidence to face the challenge posed by Islam. This observation is in agreement with Asamoah-Gyadu (2010) argument on the neglect of Islamic studies when he says that "The widespread association of Islam with terrorism...calls for a more thorough response to the Islamic challenge than theological education have done in Africa…" (p. 7). The need for Islamic studies can also be as a result of mere curiosity for the subject and the need to clear uncertainties about the religion. However, Chapman (1993) disagrees with the view of studying Islam for mere curiosity. He argues that the study of Islam is to understand Islam and resolve the crisis of stereotypes and prejudices and help Christians appreciate the complexity of Islam and Christianity. This view finds credence in Ciftci's argument that education and knowledge of Islam should be able to significantly reduce negative sentiments (Ciftci, 2012).

| Options | Seminary Students | | Lecturers | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Strongly Agree | 46 | 24.1 | 30 | 61.2 |
| Agree | 61 | 31.9 | 6 | 12.2 |
| Undecided | 51 | 26.7 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Disagree | 12 | 6.3 | 7 | 14.3 |
| Strongly Disagree | 21 | 11.0 | 6 | 12.2 |
| Totals | 191 | 100.0 | 49 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Data, 2017

*Table 7: Respondents' responses on the possibility of Christian-Muslim Relations*

The last aspect examined was respondents' opinions on the possibility of establishing Christian-Muslim relations. When students were asked whether they view Christian-Muslim relations to be possible, 46(24.1%) of them strongly agreed to that and 61(31.9%) agreed while 51(26.7%) of the students were uncertain. Taking opposing views, 33(17.3%) of the students totally disagreed with this contention. According to them, it is not possible to establish Christian-Muslim relations. Summatively, about half of the students 107(56.0%) of the students are optimistic on the possibility of Christian-Muslim relations.

Similarly, about three quarters of the lecturers 36(73.5%) considered building Christian-Muslim relations, as opposed to a quarter of them 13(26.5%) who are pessimistic. This means

that though most respondents might not have relationships with Muslims at the moment because of multiplicity of factors, they recognise the importance of studding Islam and Christian-Muslim relations but not clear on the terms of this relationship. The quantitative data was supported by one of the seminary graduate (SG 1) who said that:

I am not against Christian-Muslim relations. I do understand that the world today is talking about relationships and dialogue among world religions for peace and development. I think it might be possible, though it will take a long time. It also requires a lot of education on both the Christians and Muslims because much of the problem is coming from the Muslims.

Another Student Graduate (SG 7) correspondent viewed the possibility of this relationship only when it would be geared towards fighting the disguised terrorist group operating under the name of Muslims, as he noted that "...Christian-Muslim relations are much needed especially now that we find more Christians and Muslims living together in the same community than before. We need to live together in peace, so that we can together fight the common enemy (Boko Haram) which is affecting both Christians and Muslims alike."

One of the Christians faithful (CF 2) reported his personal experiences with Muslims and his engagement in Christian-Muslim relations, which according to him Christianity and Islam are the same, since they all worship the same God. In his own words he said: "…I don't have any problem relating with Muslims. I invite them in my house and I also visit them in their houses. I share many things with them in common, however we are all children of God and we worship the same God. For me and members of my family, it does not matter whether you are a Christian or Muslim, any religion is a religion and God is one. I can decided to worship in a mosque on Friday and in a church on Sunday, I see nothing wrong in that…"

Despite these reassuring views, some respondents totally differed with them. They consider the two religions to differ in many ways as such it is impossible for their believers to agree. This was clearly indicated by a student Graduate (SG 6) who frowned bitterly:

I am very intolerant when it comes to Muslims. I don't need to tolerate them, because they don't tolerate any other person, not even among themselves. They are just like animals. I doubt if Christian-Muslim relations is not just theoretical. Whatever relationship that is going on is false because whenever any kind of disagreement arises, the Muslims will forget about any relationship.

Looking at the responses above, confirms a kind of theology emanating from the grass root which we term "down top theology". Most of seminary graduates and lecturers left the seminary without any zeal or motivation to relate with Muslims but regular contacts with Muslims in the field presents the opportunity to relate with Muslims. The theology on top (seminary studies) may not have presented this opportunity which was presented by the grass root theology "down top theology". In addition to that, responses from Christian and Muslim adherents, confirms this kind of grass root theology, which is not basically tied on doctrines or theological basis but on the lived experiences of the people based on their social interactions and common concerns.

Unfortunately, the inter faith relations theology from the grass roots turns to be relative and syncretism in nature because it is unguided. The fear posed by some theologians that encouraging Christian-Muslim relations may lead to theological relativism and syncretism is no longer tenable. Christians and Muslims are already faced with the reality of the presence of each other, and are ignorantly engaging in syncretism and theological relativism without any formal or official introduction to Christian-Muslim relations.

Also, doctrinal position held by the respondents has greatly affected their relationships with Muslims. This paradox justifies the argument that, though theological positions may hinder relationship with Muslims, the understanding of Christian theological position is essential for engaging in a relationship with Muslims. This connection between religious studies and theology is explained by Dunbar (1998) who argues that though interreligious dialogue is an area in the field of religious studies lauded by scholars of religion, it is also feared because its consolidation goes beyond the boundary that separates religious studies and theology.

This argument on non sectarian study of religions within religious studies and the influence of personal religious commitments with theological studies, may explain the reason why, Islamic studies in the universities has recorded a huge success; the proper understand of Islam and engaging in relationships with Muslims as reported by (Chapman, 1993 and Shitu, 2013). Although Christian-Muslim relations can be better attained from a sociological approach, Christian theological positions remain very vital, hence, religious leaders remain one of the main actors in this struggle.

## V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of the views of Islam on Christian-Muslim relations in theological seminaries in South-West and Littoral regions in Cameroon. From the findings it was established that, historical stereotypes and prejudices against Muslim is very strong among seminary students, lecturers and graduates. The findings also indicated that, seminary students evaluate Islam based on Christian teachings and doctrines. They therefore do not have an objective knowledge of Islam. The findings established that there exist an unguided Christian-Muslim relation with elements of syncretism and relativism. Islamic Studies in theological seminaries has not been able to significantly change the Christian traditional view of Islam, as a result, the contemporary importance of Christian-Muslim relations has not been given due consideration within the seminary communities which are the nurseries for religious leaders.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ A review of the curriculum and curriculum implementation approach of Islamic studies in theological seminaries to comprehend the reason why the knowledge of Islam has not been able to build a positive view and

understanding of Islam which is necessary to curb prejudices and stereotype toward Islam.

- ✓ A clear objective for Islamic studies in Christian theological education should be put in place in order to measure efficiency, impact and relevance of the course within Christian theological seminaries in Cameroon.
- ✓ Each theological seminary should employ qualified Christian Islamic lecturers, specialise in Islamic studies, this will help the students to obtain an objective knowledge of Islam.
- ✓ The study recommends the inclusion of a course on Christian-Muslim relations alongside the Islamic course in all theological institutions in Africa and Cameroon in particular. The prominent role of religious leaders in building relationships with Muslims cannot be ignored. As such, a course on Christian-Muslim relations will provide theological education the technicalities and strategies of relating with Muslims. This will help to resolve the problem of unguided relationships with elements of syncretism and relativism.

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