Nwokoro, CO 2024, 'Jesus's Encounter with The Samaritan Woman as a Model for Christians Engaging in Interreligious Dialogue', *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 29-48

Jesus's Encounter with The Samaritan Woman as a Model for Christians Engaging in Interreligious Dialogue

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Abstract

This article proposes a model for interreligious dialogue that might have more promise than previously applied models. This model uses Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman as an example. In this context this article encourages everyone, especially Christians, to take Jesus's approach as a new model for interreligious dialogue. Such a reading of this narrative counters those who interpret the Gospel of John as anti-Jewish. Prominent among them is Adele Reinhartz who believes that the text embodies and teaches interreligious hatred (2002). The first major section reviews different scholars 'views on the anti-Jewish interpretation of John. Next the critical issue of the history of the strained relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans is discussed. Then follows a look at the person of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, which highlights him as an example of interreligious dialogue. After that, the place and the kind of people needed for successful interreligious dialogue are outlined. The penultimate section looks at Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman in some detail. The article ends with a recommendation that invites everyone, especially Christians, to always be open to dialogue with other religions.

Introduction

In his inaugural address as president of Nigeria in 2015, Muhammadu Buhari made the compelling statement 'I belong to everybody, and I belong to nobody '(Ezeanya 2015). This statement was assuring that no one will be

discriminated against, thus providing a backdrop of thinking and ascertaining the oneness of everyone irrespective of their ethnicity, culture, tribe, and religion. Though coming from a particular region, culture, and religion, Buhari sees himself as one who is for the good of everyone despite their backgrounds. This seems to resonate with how Jesus was set to relate with the Samaritan woman who shared neither religious nor cultural background with him. The resonance is particularly apparent when one considers the patriarchal society of Jesus's time, the strained religious and cultural relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans, and the disciples looking to Jesus as an example. However, I think Jesus would rephrase Buhari's statement to say, 'I belong to everybody, and I belong to somebody'. This extraordinary character of the personality of Jesus transcends every religion, culture, background, and gender. This is the reason his encounter with the Samaritan woman makes a significant difference as a model of both interreligious and intercultural dialogue. This narrative contradicts the view held by some scholars that the Fourth Gospel promotes anti-Semitism. Conversely, the gospel shows Jesus as extraordinary, as some scholars point out. Representing these scholars, Harold W. Attridge (2019:21) said: 'The Gospel expresses their claims about the extraordinary status of Jesus', which is revealed in his miraculous works and significant encounters with people. He references Bultmann in support. Bultmann describes the Fourth Gospel as a collection of miracle stories that celebrated the power of divine man, whose discourses entirely defined his message that the revealer was the revelation (Attridge 2019:24).

It is within this framework that the gospel contradicts the position of some scholars who argue that the Fourth Gospel has an exclusive character. The most prominent voice among them is Adele Reinhartz, whose work *Befriending the Beloved Disciple* constructs different readings of the Fourth Gospel. She finds that a compliant reading of the Fourth Gospel identifies Jews as nonbelievers, thus excluding them from a relationship with God and the salvific grace of God/Jesus (Reinhartz 2002:99). Against this position, using a chapter from the Fourth Gospel,[1] I will attempt to deconstruct the idea that this gospel has an exclusive character that promotes the alienation of non-Christians. Through *Nostra Aetate*, the Roman Catholic church supported an irenic

[1] It might be fair to argue that what we find in John 4 represents the entire Johannine corpus.

approach to relating to non-Christian religions. Pope Paul VI in *Nostra Aetate* would encourage the church to relate to other religions in a more significant and pragmatic way that reflects the way Jesus would relate to people of other faiths and cultures. Within this framework and context, the Catholic church reveals a similar inclusive attitude to what we find in the Fourth Gospel and sets Christians an example. Considering this, the church further proclaims, and ever must proclaim, that Christ is 'the way and the truth and the life '(John 14:6, NIV), in whom humans may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to himself. To this effect, the Catholic church calls its sons and daughters to be the bearers of this truth when engaging in dialogue with other religions. The above quote from *Nostra Aetate* reflects all that Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman represents.

Jesus's initiation of the dialogue by requesting water from the Samaritan woman (John 4:7), and Jesus's endurance despite her initial reticence (4:9b),[2] reveal his character to us. Rather than taking offence, he stayed in the conversation and, eventually, a change of narrative ensued. He did not concern himself with the strained relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans or society's general attitude towards women, especially those considered to have low moral character. Peter F. Ellis (1984:69-70) calls Jesus's actions boundary-crossing:

> Jesus, as his manner of acting here indicates, is not concerned with rules of uncleanness (cf. Mark 7:1–15). Nor is he concerned about the impropriety of speaking with a woman—a matter that surprises His apostles (John 4: 27–28 NIV). As the Savior of the entire world, He is concerned with all men and women, regardless of social distinctions.

The phrase 'Savior of the whole world', with which Jesus is known in the Fourth Gospel (1:29), makes John 4 a veritable resource for Christians dialoguing with others.

[2] 'How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?' (John 4:9b).

From another perspective, Jesus's reaction and attitude give this encounter a theological character through the content of this conversation (Ellis 1984:70-71).

> If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. (John 4:10)

At this point, Jesus reveals himself as the source of God's living presence to all persons, despite their backgrounds. Thus, he establishes himself as a saviour and God of all, as John's prologue also claims. In this narrative, Jesus leaves us an example for interreligious dialogue: to appreciate, value, and love one another. With this, let me turn to the issues raised here, beginning with the anti-Jewish narrative in the Fourth Gospel.

Anti-Jewish Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel

Scholars debate whether the Fourth Gospel has an anti-Jewish character or not. For some, its salvific point of view is exclusive, while some argue that it has an inclusive character. These two views are in opposition. Those who claim it has an anti-Jewish character point to chapter 8 of the gospel, where Jesus is allegedly referring the Jews as children of the devil (John 8:44). However, other scholars disagree with this by referencing the fourth chapter of the gospel to counter their position, as it highlights that salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22).

Unfortunately, some scholars did not see this as substantial enough to counter the perceived anti-Jewish character of the Fourth Gospel. At this point, it must be understood that most of these scholars have been influenced by Culpepper's contention that the Gospel creates a dangerous potential for anti-Semitism (Bieringer, Pollefeyt, and Vandecasteele-Vanneuville 2001:13). In its detailed discussion, the editors of the book *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* pose five questions to substantiate Culpepper's claim. In doing this they try to convince the reader that denying the anti-Jewish element of the Fourth Gospel is impossible. They believe that the text of John's Gospel is 'intrinsically oppressive', that is, 'human sinfulness has in some way touched the core of biblical texts '(Bieringer, Pollefeyt, and Vandecasteele-Vanneuville

2001:13,18,32). Secondly, the texts are not revelatory, and thirdly, they reject the idea that a later redactor inserted the anti-Jewish text (Bieringer, Pollefeyt, and Vandecasteele-Vanneuville 2001:32). However, they are of the opinion that the gospel should not be reduced to its anti-Jewish elements, as 'the text projects an alternative world of all-inclusive love '(Bieringer, Pollefeyt, and Vandecasteele-Vanneuville 2001:37).

However, Dunn (2001:59) suggests an approach that is a shift from the positions of both schools of thought. According to him what we have is not an anti-Jewish polemic in the Fourth Gospel but an intra-Jewish polemic, in the sense that the fourth evangelist was warning his fellow Jews not to follow what was emerging as the dominant view of Judaism. In agreement with J. Louis Martyn, Culpepper (2001:81) further states that the Johannine anti-Jewish element is rooted in the historical conflict between the 'Johannine community and the Jewish synagogue', thus finding John to be thoroughly Jewish and trenchantly anti-Jewish. Diametrically opposed to all this is Motyer (in Köstenberger 2005), who believes that the destruction of the temple forms the basis for the Fourth Gospel. In the aftermath of this destruction, John presents Jesus as the 'locus of the presence of God in Israel and the focus of the means of atonement '(Köstenberger 2005:214).

This shows that among scholars there is by no means any agreement regarding the anti-Jewish polemic of the Fourth Gospel. But given the model of interreligious and intercultural dialogue I am proposing in this article, I think Motyer (Köstenberger 2005:214) has made a significant point that reveals Jesus as a distinctive character on whom everyone, including Jews, should focus their attention. This implies that, after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, Jesus is the living temple through whom the entire universe can worship God. Therefore, if Jesus has become the locus of God's temple worship, it implies that the *Ioudaioi* (Jews) in the Fourth Gospel should be understood in the context of history, where Palestinian Jews rejected Jesus as the messiah. The gospel recounts the escalating conflicts between the historical Jesus and the Jewish authorities of his day. Considering this, it would be wrong to present the text as anti-Jewish, though the gospel claims that there must be a recognition of Jesus as the messiah before the Jews can enter the kingdom of God. It should be noted that Nicodemus is a reference point. Nicodemus, who recognised Jesus as the rabbi who performs signs that show

that God is with him, was told by Jesus himself that no one can enter the kingdom of God except if he is born again (John 3:1-3,5).

This brings us back and affirms what I highlighted earlier: Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman is a manifestation of God's presence among his people. Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman affirms that everyone belongs to God. Next, I will briefly highlight the history of the strained relationship between the Jews and Samaritans to help readers to appreciate how revolutionary this encounter was, and to understand why this remains a model to follow, especially for Christians.

The History of the Strained Relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans

If someone reads this passage without its background, they might be left wondering why the Jews and Samaritans hated each other. This strained relationship has its equivalents in the modern world. Some examples include the hatred between Serbs and Muslims in contemporary Bosnia, the hostility between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, and the feuding between street gangs in Los Angeles or New York City. From a historical perspective, Gary Knoppers, using 2 Kings 17 as a key source, responds to the above question by saying that the ordinary understanding has been that Samaritans were taken to be foreigners. 'The Jews claimed that Samaritans were of foreign origin or at best had a mixed pedigree '(Knoppers 2013:3).[3] However, Knoppers says the poor relations between Jews and Samaritans have nothing to do with the Samaritans 'observance of their religious rituals or with genealogy, history, and blood (2013:3).

Josephus, the first-century AD historian, suggested that the Samaritans were Cuthites, the descendants of one of the five peoples presumed to have been imported into the land by the Assyrian authorities from Kuta in southern Babylonia (2 Kings 17:24). Knoppers observed that 'in rabbinic times, a minor tractate, *Kutim*, was devoted to the subject of the Samaritans '(2013:3). Using

[3] An idea that held sway for a long time was that the Samaritans were descendants of the polytheistic foreigners whom the Assyrians resettled in Samaria in the late eighth century BC to replace the departed Israelites.

the story of 2 Kings 17:25-28, some scholars have cited another rabbinic expression they say referred to Samaritans. The Samaritans are called 'lion proselytes 'as opposed to 'genuine proselytes'. According to Knoppers (2013:4),

> the usage plays on the story in which YHWH sends marauding lions among the foreign immigrants settling in Samaria because they did not worship [literally, fear] YHWH.[4]

This means that the foreign settlers did not voluntarily convert to Yahwism. Therefore, this circumstance casts some aspersions on the circumstances of their conversion. Considering this, Knoppers insists that one must apply rabbinic material, following the observation of Schiffman that the rabbinic dispute about lion converts, as opposed to true converts, is an Amoraic creation in reference to earlier Tannaitic disputes (Knoppers 2013:4).[5]

Some scholars, however, believe that the final rift between these two nations came about in the second century BC, with the destruction of the temple of Samaria by John Hyrcanus. His action demonstrates hatred and contempt for the whole Samaritan community, hence excluding them from Judaism (Bourgel 2016:506). Thus, it is easier to understand the backdrop of the strained relationship between the Jews and Samaritans in the time of Jesus. Given this background, it is important to discuss the person of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel to help the readers always strive to imitate his character as manifested in the event of his encounter with the Samaritan woman.

The Person of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel

A discussion about the person of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is necessary to inspire and challenge the readers, and Christians in particular, on how to dialogue with others. As noted earlier, the Fourth Gospel paints a clear picture

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[4] For more insight on this, see Knoppers's (2013:4) analysis of y. Git. 43c; y. Qidd. 65b; b. B. Qam. 38b; b. Nid. 56b; b. Qidd. 75a-76a; b. Sanh. 85b.

[5] *Amoraic* refers to the Amoraim period of about 200-500 AD during which Jewish scholars conveyed the Oral Torah. They were primarily located in Babylon and Palestine. The Amoraim succeeded the Tannaim and their legal discussions and debates are codified in the Gemara.

of the kind of person Jesus was. Jesus's self-revelation is driven by his salvific mission and exhibits his divine power and authority. The prologue of the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as the *Logos* that was in the beginning, was God, was with God, and through whom all things were made (John 1:1-4). The Fourth Gospel has a heightened Christology, clearly portraying Jesus as divine.

Within the framework of symbolism and signs, Paul Tillich (1962:301-303) stated that the Gospel of John conveys transcendence by using figurative language drawn from the nature of human experience. However, as argued by Dorothy A. Lee (2018:2), religious symbols convey a sense of divine mystery making it a realm that is indescribable. Symbolic significance portrays a reality that is beyond the capacity of everyday language to articulate, revealing and unfolding Jesus's glory and identity (Schnackenburg, 1968:1.82). When the symbols manifest themselves, they make the one who encounters them achieve some faith and understanding. Hence, they can be identified as the manifestation of miracles which John calls signs, thus making signs and symbols closely identical. Lee (2018:7) corroborates this as she claimed that signs (*semeia*) are evident in the miracle stories, which form the 'backbone of Jesus 'public ministry'. She further adds that the 'Semeia point to the central Johannine theology of glory revealed in the flesh, and they lead to faith ' (2018:9).

As these signs point to the revelation of the glory of Jesus in the flesh, they bring us to the 'I am 'sayings of Jesus, by which he draws every reader's attention to his identity. With these, he presented himself with concepts identifiable by human senses but that still manifest him as divine. When contemplating Jesus's divinity, one can understand that his encounter with the Samaritan woman marks the beginning of a new way of doing things, especially for Christians.

> If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. (John 4:10)

Thus, it could be argued that 'if you knew the gift of God and who it is 'implies something new that breaks away from the old order, thus establishing a new

way of relating and winning the heart of the other in the event of misunderstanding, or argument.

Highlighting the person of Jesus in such a way that reflects his divinity and transcendental character in relation to this investigation points to what Jesus expects his followers to do. Jesus, though divine, had to humble himself, showing his followers the way to go when it concerns the unity of all persons created by God. We are to imitate the character of Jesus that he reveals in his treatment of the Samaritan woman. The next section will discuss the Catholic church's attempt at imitating Jesus when it comes to interreligious dialogue.

The Nature of Interreligious Dialogue

The work of dialogue has become important given the many frictions, controversies, disagreements, and altercations going on in our world today. The world needs dialogue politically, culturally, and religiously, though the religious dialogue seems to have raised greater concerns. Through interreligious dialogue, all religions can come to terms with each other and respect each other and so ensure unity and peace among religions. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism have been prevalent in interreligious dialogue. They are all considered Abrahamic religions since they all trace their lineage back to Abraham. For many centuries they have assumed superiority over each other. Against this backdrop, many thought leaders and religious bodies have engaged in interreligious dialogue at various times and places. Those worthy of mention include Nicholas of Cusa and Saint Francis of Assisi. However, the Catholic church officially opened formal dialogue with other religions on October 28, 1965, with Pope Paul VI's address *Nostra Aetate*.

In *Nostra Aetate*, the Catholic church speaks of Christianity as having a lot in common with Judaism and Islam. To that effect, she proclaims they should be recognised as those belonging to God's family, as part of the Abrahamic lineage. This document states:

> In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love

> among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship. (Paul VI 1965:1)

The church, by this position, establishes the reason for dialogue as recognition of others as those created by God and so calls for unity of all (Paul VI 1965:2). Considering this, it invites its members to always be ready to enter dialogue with other religions.

> The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men (Paul VI 1965:2)

This position of the church speaks of her obedience to God through Jesus. The church has shown this committed obedience in diverse ways. Still, the most prominent among them is the establishment of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1988. This stemmed from the Secretariat for Non-Christians, which was instituted on Pentecost Sunday in 1964 by Pope Paul VI.

Another outstanding commitment of the church is seen in Pope John Paul II's World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi on October 27, 1986. It has become a yearly affair that brings leaders of all religions together in Assisi for a day of prayer for peace in the world. The church by all this has shown commitment to recognition and respect for others, as Jesus exemplified during his encounter with the Samaritan woman. Let me turn to discuss Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman to help the readers understand why this model should be adopted in interreligious dialogue.

Jesus's Encounter with the Samaritan Woman: A Model for a Christian Interreligious Dialogue

In his encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus showed that as the incarnate *Logos*, he had an interest in the entirety of humanity from the start. This is clear from his initiation of the dialogue. 'When a Samaritan woman

came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink? '"(John 4:7). In *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope John Paul II stated:

> From the beginning, it has been a characteristic of God to want to communicate. This he does by various means. He has bestowed being upon every created thing, animate or inanimate. He enters a relationship with human beings in an exceptional way. In many and various ways, God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days, he has spoken to us by a son (Heb 1:1–2). The Word of God is by nature word, dialogue, and communication. He came to restore, on the one hand, communication and relations between God and humanity and, on the other hand, that of people with one another. (1995:71)

This gives support to the idea that the mission of Jesus Christ, among other things, is to restore the lost friendship between God and humans and to reconcile them to one another. And in doing this, everyone can benefit from this mission. This gives us a clue why the structure and culture of the time did not deter him. With his actions, Jesus sets a new tone of dialogue, a new way of doing dialogue, and a new law that should guide our dialogues. At this point, let me highlight some virtues that emerged from this encounter.

Humility

Anyone with status like Jesus in a world that privileges patriarchy would find it difficult to speak with an insignificant and immoral person such as the Samaritan woman. However, he showed that everyone has a dignity that cannot be taken away, despite their cultural and religious differences. This is part of what the theology of the incarnate *Logos* in John's prologue means. Jesus left us an example to emulate. Recall that in the Gospel of Matthew he asked his disciples to learn from him for he is meek and humble in heart (Matt. 11:29). If they let go of their egos, Christians will assert themselves as the salt of the earth and the light of the world which Jesus demands them to be (Matt. 5:13-14).

Jesus, being God, did not need anyone to give him water, but because of his mission to restore humanity to God, he engaged with the Samaritan woman.

In humility, he emptied himself (Phil. 2:6-11) and came to dwell among us (John 1:14). Joseph Kuaté (2018:36) surmises that

> God humbles (lowers) God-self, not only to the level of creation, but also to the level of an interlocutor who is full of cultural, racial, and even sexual prejudices to make the dialogue fruitful.

Jesus showed that dialogue requires a huge sacrifice, self-emptying, and unreserved recognition and respect for the other's dignity. It is a course that he expects Christians to champion in our world today.

Patience

The Samaritan woman's reaction towards Jesus when he requested water indicates pre-existent tribal, cultural, and religious issues, as earlier pointed out.

> The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink? '(For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) (John 4:9)

This reaction was heavy enough to constitute an obstacle to the mission of Jesus. But, because he holds every soul in high esteem, he did not give up. This shows that every person is precious in his sight and thus deserves salvation. Instead of getting offended, he lovingly continued to dialogue with the Samaritan woman. He cut across cultural and historical barriers. Only people who are patient and enduring can overcome the challenges emanating from religious and cultural differences. If we do this what differentiates us can become a guide to establishing a fruitful dialogue. Mahmoud Ayoub (2007:118) understands this when he says that what separates us should serve as a beacon of light that guides us to God. At this point, Jesus's patient and enduring approach should be a guide and inspiration to everyone, especially Christians, to make a meaningful stride in dialoguing with others. This is a challenge for Christians engaging in dialogue.

Value

Jesus shows that he values all humans through his encounter with the Samaritan woman. This attitude is in stark contrast to the sense of superiority

that might arise in the event of Christians dialoguing with other religions. One might also be able to use this to argue against the alleged anti-Jewish element of the Fourth Gospel, though it might not be sufficient. Jesus patiently engaged the woman:

> The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water. 'He told her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' 'I have no husband, 'she replied. (John 4:15-17)

Leaning on this, Christians are expected to look beyond appearances and superficialities in the event of interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Christians in this way can inspire their dialogical partners and may end up sharing their faith. Pope John Paul II lends credence to this in *Redemptoris Missio* when he says 'Faith is strengthened when it is given to others '(1990:2). This resonates well in Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman.

Women in Dialogue

This is the most remarkable breakthrough in this encounter. It was obvious that Jesus stepped on the toes of many people, especially his disciples, as this encounter took place in a highly patriarchal society. 'Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman '(John 4:27). Jesus went against the religious and cultural expectations of the time. He did allow inequality between males and females but opened the way for the accommodation of both sexes in formal dialogic activity.

Unfortunately, people, especially Christians, have not been faithful to this. Women were consciously and inadvertently excluded from formal dialogue in our world, including for four decades at the Henry Martyn Institute of Hyderabad, India. During her informal get-together with a fellow member of this institute, Diane D'Souza raised this question: 'What if […] we created space for women to share what interfaith means from their perspective? '(Frederiks 2012:1). This advocates for women's inclusion in a formal dialogue. Considering this, Helene Egnell, who conducted her PhD research at the institute, stated:

> We wondered who set the boundaries […] we saw building interfaith relationships as 'crossing boundaries audaciously.' And as we struggled, I couldn't help but reflect that in four decades of dialogue meetings organized by men, no one had spent time questioning, challenging, or expressing their discomfort with the founding categories themselves; most accepted them as the very entry point of interfaith dialogue. It was here that I began to catch a glimpse of the new insight women would bring through their very way of being and knowing and doing. (2006:100)

From the precedence, Christianity is challenged to advance a dialogical meeting that is inclusive in a manner that suggests that everyone has a spark of divinity and humanity. This corroborates Pope Francis's advice to people to avoid the economy of exclusion (1990:53).

The Place and Participants of Interreligious Dialogue

It is necessary to give some thought to the place of dialogue and the people who will engage in dialogue. This is important since the aim of the dialogue is not anything less than peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding, and reconciliation. To this effect, the dialogue might not hold in an agitated environment or in the presence of those who are not open to engaging in dialogue. For instance, the reaction of the disciples of Jesus when they came back from where he sent them gives an idea of why Jesus sent them away before initiating a conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4:7,27). Thus, the fruitfulness of dialogue relies so much on the place of dialogue and the people involved. In the case of this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, the conversation takes place at the well. I can recall in traditional African villages how a well is a meeting place for many people, where information is exchanged. So, one can imagine why Jesus headed to the well at the time he encountered the woman. There was no interference or interruption during the conversations.

Given this scenario, a dialogue will be fruitful when it takes place in a peaceful environment and at the same time when those with liberal minds are involved. Therefore, one important lesson this encounter has is to be conscious of the

place where dialogical meetings take place, and the kind of people that engage in the dialogue. Religious fanatics and intolerant fundamentalists are not fit for a dialogue. To allow such people is to risk expressions of superiority. In her book *Christians, Muslims, and Mary: A History*, Rita George-Tvrtković hinted at the possibility of ensuring fruitful and efficient dialogue, using Middle Eastern religious issues to corroborate this claim (2018:143-144). At the time, she recommended Lebanon as a place where an interreligious dialogue should take place since it is the site of great religious diversity.[6] This, for me, is an excellent example of thinking about a place of dialogue and the people expected to engage in the dialogue.

Our Responsibility: My Recommendation.

Adele Reinhartz, in her work *Befriending the Beloved Disciple* (2002), constructed different reading approaches to the Fourth Gospel (compliant, resistant, sympathetic, and engaged), through which she provided us with models of engaging in dialogue. From what she espoused in these approaches, it was clear that compliant and resistant methods would frustrate any thought of dialogue, while sympathetic or engaged readings are sure to be fruitful when dialoguing with other religions, traditions, and cultures. She says,

> In constructing a compliant reading, I have come face to face with the gift of the Beloved disciple and its life-transforming implications for my own life. But I have also faced the possibility that accepting the gift exacts an ethical price. Accepting the Beloved Disciple's gift entails the denigration of and hostility

[6] In this work, George-Tvrtković (2018:143-144) highlights important places where Christians and Muslims shared devotions in different shrines of Mary across the world to establish that Mary can be a bridge that can connect the two religions in the project of dialogue. She points out how Lebanon is an exceptional country among the Middle Eastern nations for its high religious diversity. It has Shi'a Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Maronites, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Protestants, and Druze who, despite all their differences, made the Feast of Annunciation (March 25) a national feast. On such a feast day, you find all these religions celebrating this feast together in Harissa, near Beirut, at the shrine called Our Lady of Lebanon. Lebanon, by this, becomes a perfect exemplar of a good place for dialogue and the people, a good model of those expected to engage in dialogue.

> toward those who fail to accept the gift. […] A resistant reading creates another Other- Beloved Disciple- by denying the validity of the worldview that he espouses. As a sympathetic reader, I focus on the matters that might unite the Beloved Disciple and myself while ignoring for the time being those that might separate us […] for the time being, a final attempt at friendship by naming and addressing the major issues that stand between the Beloved Disciple and myself. (Reinhartz 2002:99,131)

Reinhartz is not denying the relevant message contained in the Fourth Gospel, but she is just raising important questions that can drive a theological debate or conversation that might douse tension surrounding alleged anti-Jewish narrative in the gospel. Thus, in her work *Cast out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John* (2018), Reinhartz evolves a principle that aims at highlighting the core message of the gospel. She developed this alongside the implied author, of an implied reader, Alexandra. However, without denying the authorial situatedness of Reinhartz, the implied reader is appealed to to understand that the network of the gospel's ideas and language is not part of an abstract and contingent intellectual system (Lieu 2020:134). In light of this, the text becomes for the readers, an 'intentional act of persuasion', which has as its goal to help the readers recognize their own longing for life and freedom, which is met through the person and work of Jesus and through the appropriation of the offer of life and the transformation of self that follows. (Lieu 2020:134)

Bringing this into conversation with Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman, it becomes clear that the encounter aimed at not only dialogical achievement, but establishing a missionary strategy that will help those encountered to discover the extent of their relationship with God and work towards the transformation of self.

Given this context, the third and fourth reading which Reinhartz suggested in *Befriending the Beloved Disciple* (the sympathetic and engaged readings) provides a model that will challenge every Christian to sacrificially engage with other religions and cultures to establish a relationship with them, leading to fruitful dialogue. This approach is taken based on the humility, love, perseverance, patience, and consciousness of the other's background and

culture that Jesus showed when he encountered the Samaritan woman. So, adopting these third and fourth readings, and at the same time seeing them resonating in Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman, I would like to recommend that readers always pay close attention to such approaches as these in the work of interreligious dialogue. The preceding backdrop implies that for a dialogue to be fruitful, the participants must have such character traits as patience, perseverance, and humility, and must be ready to see themselves in the other. When there is friendship with others, the dialogue will be easy – this is what Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman represents in all its ramifications. Considering this, it becomes a paradigm for Christians dialoguing with other religions.

Conclusion

Having come to this point, I wish to reiterate that the world still needs peace, even though various dialogical meetings have taken place at various times across the globe. Therefore, my position in this article is that in every dialogue, if we want it to be fruitful, we must learn from Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman. Therefore, while I present it as a model, it implies that Christians, more than the adherents of other religions, are expected to adopt this approach. As followers of Jesus, they are called to make sacrifices for the sake of peace and the redemption of souls in the event of dialogue. This encounter does not only provide a model for a successful interreligious and intercultural dialogue, but it also provides a way for peaceful coexistence and compatibility to continue in a multireligious society. To this end, this encounter with the Samaritan woman proclaims a message to the world, especially to Christians: 'A new command I give you '(John 13:34). This suggests a new way Christians should follow in the event of dialogue with other religions.

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