

Factors affecting Muslim Evangelism: A Study of Free Pentecostal Church of Babati Council Town, Tanzania

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Abstract— The topic of this research is ‘Factors Affecting Muslim Evangelism: A Study of Free Pentecostal church of Babati Council Town, Tanzania in Babati Council Town-Tanzania. The purpose of this study is to listen and understand pastors and other key people explaining factors affecting Muslim evangelism, and how does preparation for evangelism to Muslims influence its success in Babati Council Town? What role does the training of evangelists at the Free Pentecostal Church play in the success of evangelizing to Muslims in Babati Council Town Tanzania? How does one’s Christian lifestyle at Free Pentecostal Church relate to their success in evangelizing Muslims in Babati Council Town? The study served as a reference to pastors, Churches, Christian non-governmental organizations, and outreach teams involved in Muslim evangelism in Babati and Tanzania at large. It is hoped to enhance mission work for those interested in evangelizing the Muslims in Tanzania and the rest of the world. It is significant to other researchers interested in factors hindering Muslim evangelism in different places of the world. The data collection was through interviews and participatory observation. The interviews were recorded. Church pastors and members in the church at Babati shared with the researcher their daily experience in Muslim evangelism. The study targeted 50 respondents. The data collection tools used were interviews and participant observation. The data analysis was done using Qualitative Data Analysis Miner Lite Version 2.0.7. The data presentation was through figures and tables. The results evidenced that there is a lack of training from all the five churches.

Index Terms— Factors, Muslim Evangelism, Free Pentecostal Church, Tanzania.

I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century presents enormous challenges to Christian evangelism among Muslims. The storm of secularism, the continued advancement of other religions, particularly Islam, cults, and the occult, place a more significant missionary task on the church. The church will either lose its ground and relevance or rise to the occasion with impeccable efforts, renewed strategies, and understanding of the fundamental role of reaching out to the lost with the love of Christ. The church must take up its mandate in this hour when new gates are opening, cities are expanding, populations are growing day by day, new tools and services in technology are obtainable, and Christians are desperate to be equipped for ministry.

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Witnessing Christ to Muslims is not a simple task. As Nkoko recounts,

On March 2, 2013, an unknown group of people pestered the house of the Anglican Church of Tanzania, Dr. Valentino Mokiwa. Furthermore, in April 2013, the police were obliged to use extra force to scatter more than 200 angry Christians who were determined to burn down a Mosque in the Southern part of Tanzania, demanding the right to slaughter animals and birds for public sale (Nkoko 2017,13)

This incident is still alive in the minds of both Christians and Muslims, even though it happened some years ago. It is always a thorn in the flesh against Muslim evangelism. As Muller attests, the factors affecting Muslims evangelism have been there since the pioneering missionaries:

During the 19th and 20th centuries, Protestants became interested in missionary work among Muslims, but before the 1960’s it seems that few Muslims converted. One reason, perhaps the most important one, for the early failure is that Islamic communities could use violence efficiently to stop the spread of ‘pollution’-a capacity currently being changed. Missionaries were not allowed to enter many areas if it was suspected that they would engage in Muslim evangelism, which was difficult and dangerous, both for the missionary and the potential convert (Miller 2014, 81)

A. The Entry of Muslims in East Africa

Islamic settlers first arrived along the coast of East Africa. From there, they spread towards the interior. Regarding their spreading in Tanganyika, it is observed that “Islam penetrated East Africa from the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. It gained the nomads of the red coast and the Eastern horn as communities, but inland south of the Somali, it did not begin to penetrate until the nineteenth century” (Trimingham 1962, 11). The spread of Islam in Eastern Africa focused on the Horn of Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In terms of Islamic penetration, these countries are placed in the Eastern African region. Trimingham discusses the spread of Islam in East Africa. He notes that the basic framework of the history of Islamic influence and growth in East Africa is an indispensable prologue to understanding Muslims. There were two stages of Islamization: the establishment on the coastal peripheral and off-shore islands of new African Islamic society, and the spread of the coastal Islamic culture so shaped into the interior, especially between 1880 and 1930

(Trimingham 1962, 10).

The East African coast has a long history of having an Islamic presence. Throughout history, Muslims traded along the beach. The slave trade has also related to the Islamic business on the East Coast of Africa. According to the Barnabas Fund:

Islamic merchants delivered on the stable slave trade from East African ports for a significant period. The earliest Muslims settled on the East Coast in Mombasa (Kenya) in the 11th century. Later, Zanzibar became a center for Islam and Islamic expansion into Tanzania, and Mozambique was launched from there. Some archeologists have found remains of early Muslim slave trade settlements several hundreds of kilometers inland from Mozambique's coast and even as far inland as Mozambique. There is still a powerful Islamic presence along the East Coast of Africa, and many East African countries have large Muslim communities (Barnabas Fund 2010, 23)

Historically, this is how Islamic influence grew from the coast to the rest of East Africa. The Barnabas Fund report emphasizes the presence and expansion of Mombasa's Coast to other countries. East Africa, particularly Kenya, is one of the first areas to be heavily influenced by Islam. Kenya itself has a significant number of Muslims, and they are aggressive in spreading their religion. According to Levtzion:

The first Muslim traders came to Shanga on the Lamu Archipelago. It is observed that there is a discovery of Islamic presence in East Africa at Shanga in the archipelago. A mosque and an Islamic cemetery dated between 780 and 850 CE. Since the discovery, the mosque in Lamu was refurbished, and the area expanded and became a Muslim dwelling community (Levtzion & Pouwels 2000, 252)

Levtzion is highlighting the historical aspects of a Muslim presence in East Africa. The occurrence of Muslim burial grounds is evidence that there was an Islamic community in that area. According to this author, Lamu, or the Kenyan coastal region, was the first entry of Muslims in East Africa. This entry point has been used by Muslims to get into East Africa. The coastal area has been a route for the establishment of the trade from Asia and Africa. The presence of Muslims in East Africa is older than the Independence of East African countries. Traders came from the Asian and Arab countries to trade with Africa long before they acceded to political independence (Rodhi 1729, 2).

The use of violence is still a weapon used by Muslims against Christians instead of following the way of peacefully living together. The presence of Muslims in Tanzania relates to the Island of Zanzibar. In his doctoral dissertation, Lee highlighted another challenge facing Christians in Muslim evangelism:

Another main factor of the Christian-Muslim conflicts is attributed to doctrinal propagations of Christian and Muslim preachers, including attacks on the beliefs of the opposing religions. Those attacks were received as a serious challenge by the opposing parties and consequently resulted in public debates and eventually violent clashes (Lee 2019, 23)

Tanzania has been a place of Muslim scholars and evangelists working in different countries of East Africa. They have been involved in Tanzanian internal politics and perpetual conflicts with Christians. The aspect of the conflict is still in their mind until now. It is a severe challenge.

B. Muslims in Tanzania

In the 'World Muslim Population about Tanzania: 1950-2020', Houssain Kettani wrote in 2010 that the Muslim population was 3,565,919. This figure translates to 30.12% of the total population of 45,039,573. In 2020, the Muslim growth projection was 17,901,545, with the same percentage without growth until 2020.

In contrast, the number of churches currently is twenty-nine, all denominations, with an entire church's membership of 31,000. In their thesis, Mlula Andrew J, Ruszkiewicz Mathew J. Shirey concerning Islam in Tanzania said: Tanzania, comprised of Zanzibar and mainland Tanganyika, is currently experiencing a youth bulge, especially within its Muslim population. The median age in Tanzania is 17.4 years, and the Muslim community is expected to increase by 44.71% from 2010 to 2030, rising from an estimated 13.4 million Muslims. A 2012 study points out that there was an estimated 900,000 youth coming of working age each year in Tanzania, while the market is only creating an estimated 50,000 new jobs per annum. Of those 900,000 unique working-age individuals, fewer than 5% have a secondary education level or higher. These statistics reveal a pool of young, unemployed, and under-educated Tanzanians who was an obvious target for radicalization (Mlula et al. 2015, 37)

These projections are significant and well explained. Unless Christians position themselves strategically, the young and unemployed Islamic radicalization is a ticking time bomb. The church will have to work extra hard to evangelize Muslim youth to narrow the radicalization sphere. The church has to know the history of Muslims in a particular area for making the right strategies in converting them to Christianity.

C. Muslims in Babati

As for Tanzania, particularly Babati, it is necessary to know how Muslims penetrated through and what cultural context can easily evangelize them. The first Free Pentecostal Church in Babati Council Town began in 1991 with twenty people.

Babati is in northern Tanzania and is a growing city with many hotels and guesthouses. Babati, since it became the main city of Manyara Region in 2002, it is experiencing problems to house its growing population in such job opportunities as states Simon:

Babati is a fast-growing town. Since it became Town Council and Head Quarter for Manyara Region in 2002, more people have moved to the town looking for work, and a lot of bureaucrats have also been transferred there. There are many challenges to a growing town. Housing, transport, and working opportunities are the primary concerns. But waste management is also a challenge. Babati is a small town in the Babati District of Manyara Region of Tanzania. It is the administrative capital of the district and even the

administrative capital of the Manyara Region. The new status boosted the town into rapid growth. Since Babati town received district and regional capital, the urbanization process and economic activities increased. Babati town is accessible from the main road between the larger cities Arusha and Dodoma, which enable the food supply, marketing, and retailing of processed and readymade foods from outside to Babati town (Simon 2014, 14-15)

Due to intense immigration from rural areas to the Manyara Region’s administrative capital, the economic activities are increasing. People tend to go to town for job opportunities. The researcher cannot authoritatively say that there has been successful evangelism to the Muslims in Babati. In May 2018, Africa International University (NEGST) School of Theology, Missions department, sent students to Babati for Mission for ten days. The researcher was among them. They saw a vibrant city with his colleagues, a melting pot city with different people from different backgrounds, and different faith beliefs. The presence of Muslims was visible. Lewis writes, “The Muslims of the coast naturally resisted any change of faith” (Lewis 1966, 291). In the Bible, Jesus asserts:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And indeed, I am with you always, to the very end of the age. This authority has been given to all Christians worldwide to be the witnesses of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20)

As common knowledge dictates, people do not give what they do not have. However, having received the good news, Christians are obligated to reach out and freely share the gospel with others. In light of this, Gibbs has written: “Our outreach to others must be the overflow of Christ’s life within us, or it cannot be lastingly effective, our growth in Christlikeness was the greatest contribution any of us make to the evangelization of our generation” (Gibbs 1986, 98). Babati District is administratively divided into four divisions: Babati, Gorowa, Mbugwe, and Bashnet. This research deals with only all divisions; the four branches were planted in Babati Town Council, by one branch by division area.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Free Pentecostal Churches of Tanzania have the obligation of being a part of the Great Commission. People from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds all live together in Babati. Myers, Yamamoni, and Luscombe affirm the need to reach out to the Muslim community and others within the church’s reach. They further narrate, “in our strategy, we must establish the idea of oneness in Christ, whereby people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds can worship together by prioritizing their identity in Christ over their ethnic and cultural heritage (Myers 1988,89).

Babati Council Town has many Muslims and more Mosques than churches; the number of Mosques today is 57, with approximately a population of 57,000 Muslims. While the membership numbers for Free Pentecostal church have

stagnated for almost 29 years, the entire church membership is about 1000; given the period in which the church has been in existence, ‘this slow growth of the church members is an indication that there is a need for evangelism to be done and this is the responsibility of the church members. It seems that the church has been receiving 34 new members every year for the last 29 years.

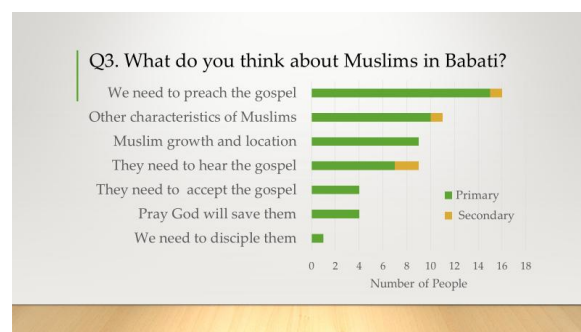
This study investigates factors affecting Muslim evangelism in the Free Pentecostal Church in Babati Council Town of Tanzania. The research explored the factors that affect Muslim evangelism in Tanzania. This study investigates the factors hindering Muslim evangelism in Babati, Tanzania. Secondly, the study contributes to finding new strategies to help local churches be more effective in their evangelism to Muslims. Thirdly, this study contributes to a better understanding of the noble work of Muslim evangelism. Fourth it increases academic knowledge about Muslim evangelism.

This study was limited to the four branches of the Free Pentecostal Churches of Tanzania Babati Council Town. The researcher interviewed pastors from the Free Pentecostal Churches of Tanzania in Babati Town and other church members in the Missions and outreach department.

The researcher met two significant limitations. Firstly, as a foreigner, he was not familiar with Tanzanian culture. Secondly, he encountered a language barrier since he is not conversant with Kiswahili, which is the dominant language of Tanzanians. To overcome this difficulty, the researcher hired a Tanzanian citizen and church member as his research assistant to overcome time and financial limitations.

III. FREE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH BABATI AND MUSLIM EVANGELISM

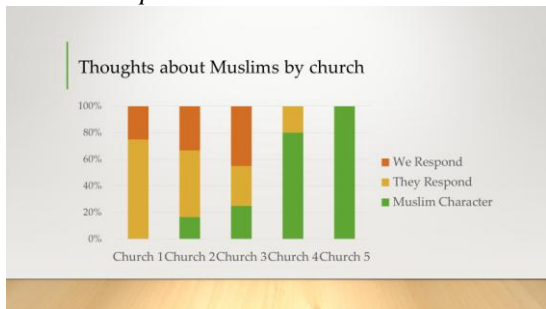
The most frequent response to the questions, “What do you think about Muslims in Babati?” was that Christians needed to tell Muslims about the good news of the gospel. In most of



these responses, the first word was “I” or “we,” recognizing their own or their churches’ responsibility. The fourth most frequent response was similar but introduced by the word “they” needed to hear or be told the gospel without any indication who had that responsibility. In between, nine people thought that the number and locations of Muslims in Babati were growing, and eleven mentioned other characteristics—conservative, friendly, business people, and kept to themselves. Four people said Muslims needed to accept the gospel, not just hear it. Four people said Christians ought to pray and believe that God will save them without indicating any further responsibility. One person said we needed to disciple or teach them to follow Jesus. The

following responses were included in these seven categories:

We Need to Disciple Them



- I think we can bring them from the Muslim way to church by sharing the gospel

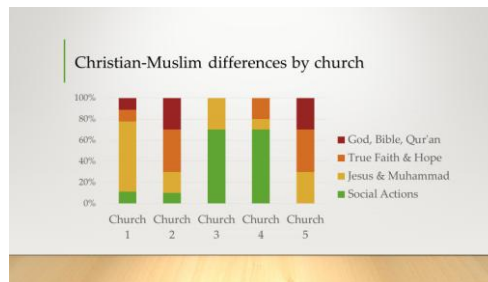


The people in the five churches answered the question very differently. Eight of the people in Church 1 responded primarily “they” needed to hear or accept the gospel and the other two said “we” need to do something to share the gospel. None of the people in church 5 gave these responses. They all mentioned the Muslims’ characteristics, growth, business people, being friendly, or keeping to themselves. People in church 3 were the most likely to indicate that “we” have a spiritual responsibility when they thought about Muslims. The age and gender of the respondents did not significantly affect their answers.

In “How would you describe the difference between Christianity and Islam?” Sixteen people mentioned observable social actions, such as what they eat, how they treat women, and how they interact with Christians. The next most frequently mentioned distinction (15 people) was the difference in beliefs about Jesus and Muhammad. Eleven gave responses to faith and hope with Christians having the true faith, hope, and live in light while Muslims have a false faith, cannot hope for heaven, and live in darkness. Smaller numbers than Christians and Muslims had different beliefs about the nature of God and that Christians followed the Bible while Muslims followed the Qur’an. Only one person interviewed said they did not know the difference. The specific responses that clustered into these categories are as follows:

The five churches differed in what people said about the differences between Christians and Muslims. People in Church 1 primarily focused on what the two religions thought about Jesus and Muhammad. Churches 2 and 5 were the most likely to say that Christians have the true faith, and Muslims are lost in darkness. Those in Churches 3 and 4 were most

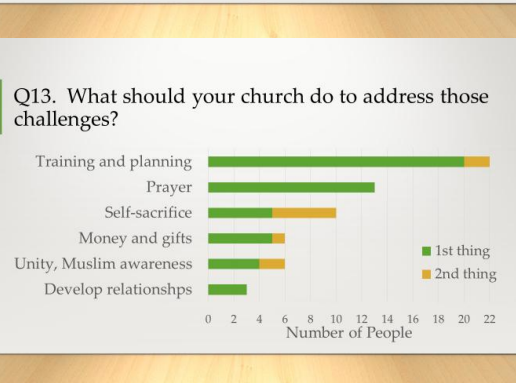
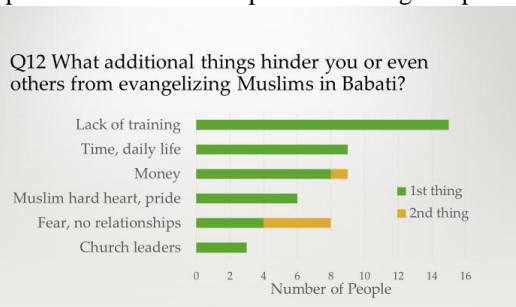
likely to see religious differences in the visible social actions—the food they eat, how they treat women, and being conservative or open. The age and gender of the respondents did not significantly affect.



Q11 What are the challenges in Babati in sharing Jesus with Muslims?



Sixteen of the 50 respondents felt the challenges were with Christians not knowing about Islam and how to approach Muslims (9 people) and not having fellowship with Muslims that would allow them to share Jesus (7 people). However, many more expressed the challenges in how Muslims reacted to any attempt to share the gospel. Eleven told that Muslims knew the Bible better than they did and liked to confront them. Seven said the opposite, that Muslims lacked knowledge and the truth but would not listen to them. Five answered that Muslims are united and don't love Christians. Four responded that Muslims are growing and dominating the area by their presence. Three thought Muslims were taught lies and hatred toward Christians and were ready to fight them. However, three had found some Muslims open to the gospel but could not accept it because of family pressure. The final response did not give specifics.



Church 3 is statistically different from the other churches in that no one expressed that the problems were with Christians

lacking knowledge of Islam and not having fellowship with Muslims. Its members were also most likely to see Muslims growing and taught to hate Christians. Only people in Churches 1 and 2 found Muslims open but hindered from accepting the gospel because of their families. There were no significant differences between men and women nor between younger and older church members.

Q12 What additional things hinder you or even others from evangelizing Muslims in Babati?

The most frequent response was the lack of training (15 people). Nine people mentioned the lack of time and being busy with the affairs of daily life. Money was also mentioned nine times, eight times as the more important thing and once as a second thing. Six people mentioned the hard heart and pride of Muslims. Fear of Muslims was the first thought mentioned by four people and was added as a secondary thing by four additional people. Three people mentioned be hindered by church leaders either directly or through a lack of example. More than half (80%) of the people in Church 1 said lack of training, 70% of the people in church 3 mentioned money, and 60% of the people in Church 5 mentioned time and daily life as hindrances. The three people who said leadership as a hindrance were older men in Churches 2 and 5. Otherwise, there was little difference in responses by gender and age.

Q13. What should your church do to address those challenges?

Almost half of the people responding said the church needed to train church members to reach Muslims and plan Muslims, either as the first thing to do (20 people) or as the second thing to do (2 people). The next most frequent was prayer, mentioned by 13 people as the first thing that needed to be done and five people added fasting to prayer. Self-sacrifice and placing Muslim evangelism above person interests were given by ten people, five times as the first-mentioned activity, and five times as the second activity following prayer. Six people thought the church ought to provide financial support to those doing evangelism and gifts to Muslims to show them love. Six also thought Christians should be aware of Muslims and their need for the gospel and be united in their evangelism efforts. Three thought the church needed to develop relationships with Muslims that would eventually open doors to sharing the gospel with them. Almost all (90%) of the people in Church 2 put prayer as their primary other things the church should do while those in Church 1 (50%), Church 4 (80%), and Church 5 (60%) put training as the primary other things. Half (50%) of the people in Church 3 felt self-sacrifice was the primary other things. Gender and age had little effect.

The verbatim comments are:

Training and Planning



Q14. What would you say are the costs of sharing the gospel with Muslims?

Four-fifths (20) of the people thought the cost of sharing the gospel would be high due to Muslims' characteristics. Most of the rest said there would be costs. Ten did not specify what these costs would be and frequently said that Christians must share the gospel. Eight, however, identified the cost would be in training and implementing a Muslim evangelistic program, and seven said the cost would be in overcoming fear. Five people said there would be no cost because their church doesn't reach out to Muslims. People in Church 1 were most likely to say the cost would be training and setting up the program (60%). People in Church 2 (60%) and Church 4 (80%) were most likely to say the cost would be due to the characteristics of Muslims. People in Church 3 were most likely to say the cost would be developing awareness and overcoming fear (50%). People in Church 5 gave the full range of answers. Gender and age had little effect on responses.

IV. CONCLUSION

The participants had a challenge in conducting Muslim evangelism as they lack the knowledge and skills to conduct Muslim evangelism. In terms of the Muslim's ultimate experience when conducting evangelism, some participants gave various challenges, such as hostility. However, when the researcher was on the ground, he did not observe any Muslim Evangelism in progress. This may confirm the researcher's conclusion that the church does not have much practical experience in Muslim evangelism.

The researcher established that church leadership is not committed to the course of Muslim evangelism. Sharing God's word with people from other faith, particularly Muslims, was not the church's priority. As the researcher observed, it is not a topic of daily conversation among church leaders and members.

The lack of training in reaching out to Muslims is a big challenge for Free Pentecostal Church. The researcher, having visited the Babati area and observed how the church is engaged in evangelism, discovered that the church is struggling to evangelize to the Muslim community using their basic knowledge. This means that they do not have formal training in Muslim evangelism. Despite the church trying hard to use the basic expertise in reaching out to the Muslims, the growth of Islamic religion is evident, thus diminishing the presence and impact of the Christian faith. Unless the church rises with new strategies to counter Islam, Christianity will soon fade away in Babati and its environs.

Further, the researcher assessed whether church training exists regarding Muslim evangelism and established that no such program is in existence. Also, the researcher investigated how the church applies its evangelistic training in the mission field. By exploring the three research questions, the researcher finds that the challenges faced notwithstanding, the church is not doing much to reach out to Muslims for Christ.

Future researchers would like to research the Muslim-Christian relations in Babati. Future researchers would like to investigate a few Christians from a Muslim background in the Free Pentecostal church in Babati.

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