



Jews Have no Dealings With Samaritans: A Study of Relations Between Jews and Samaritans at the Time of Jesus Christ

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ABSTRACT

Relations between Jews and Samaritans were at the level of conflicts during the time of Christ. These conflicts are reflected especially in the Gospels (see John 8:48; Luke 9:53-54). Understanding the nature of the relations between these two groups will therefore assist students and interpreters of the New Testament appreciate and comprehend the negative signals emitted by these biblical texts. The work is a historical-critical method of study applied to biblical texts in their synchronic forms. It implies an inquiry into who the Samaritans were; what their beliefs and practices were and why there was such enmity between them and the Jews. The study identifies the non-recognition of the Jewish origin of the Samaritans as the basis for the conflicts. It also identifies the intricacies of religion and politics in the diversification of the conflict, highlights some instances of class distinctions and religious conflicts in modern society as contemporary equivalents of the Samaritan-Jewish conflicts. It recommends respects for the dignity of the human person, emphasis on, and widening of the borders of kinship and the encouragement of multi-culturalism as the foundations for building a less discriminatory society.

Keywords: Samaritan, Jew, Samaritanism, Judaism, Class distinction, Religion, Politics.

INTRODUCTION

Relations between Jews and Samaritans constitute a significant theme in the Gospels. The Gospels testify to a less friendly atmosphere of encounter between the two groups. Though, originally of the same provenance and of the same religion with the Jews, Samaritans in the course of time became estranged from the Jews. As at the time of Christ, both groups had ideologically interpreted their religion in a manner exclusive of the other.

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While the Samaritans represented themselves as real Jews with the authentic worship of Yahweh, the Jews insisted on the status of Samaritans as foreigners. It was a situation of conflict which as history reveals had degenerated to the point of each seeking to eliminate leaders in the opposing camps.

The interpreters of Gospel passages in which Samaritans are mentioned must always be conscious of the logic of the conversations, parables, discourses or narratives involved. In other words the interpretative framework for confronting every Samaritan passage in the Gospels must always imply this conflict. It is only an understanding of the fact that Samaritans have been in disagreement with the Jews right up to the time of Christ that the sense and message of these passages can emerge. This situation of conflict is best captured by the Johannine expression: 'Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.' It is the fourth evangelist's comment in John 4:9 on the consternation of a Samaritan woman at Jesus' request for a drink. It was a racial conflict which became religious and political and led up to the tendencies of class distinctions and inequality at the level of social interactions. Exploring the basic religious beliefs and practices of the two groups helps expand knowledge of the conflict. Reviewing some cases of modern forms of discrimination and religious conflicts reminds contemporary men and women of the persistence of discriminatory tendencies in their own societies and the fact that they are not immune to it.

The review therefore encourages efforts at appreciating the human person beyond physical appearances, continents, religious affiliation, political orientations, culture and race. The Samaritan Jewish conflict thrived and modern forms of discriminations continue to thrive because of inadequate consideration for and emphasis on the dignity of the human person. Respect for the dignity of the human person is the principle that stands at the basis of every form of social relations and interactions. It is the principle for the flowering of multi-culturalism in the contemporary context of globalization wherein it has become increasingly difficult for societies to remain homogeneous. A homogeneous society nurtures the tendency to emphasize the otherness of people and consequently provide the basis for acceptance or non-acceptance and discriminations. Heterogeneous societies with their consequent multicultural dispositions make it easy to recognize and interact with others and thus diminish the probability of homophobia.

Samaritans: Jews or Non-Jews?

The Samaritans are the people said to have inhabited Samaria in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Samaria was located in the New Testament times between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south. Though the name as indicated is a designation for the inhabitants of Samaria those identified as Samaritans associated their names over and against the geographical labelling with the term *šamērîm* "keeper [of the law]" (Coggins, 1975: 10-12).

The Samaritans sustained that they were descendants of the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh who survived the Assyrian destruction of Samaria and the deportation in 722 B.C.E. The information contained in 2 Kings 17 which represents the Jewish version of the Samaritan origin sustains that the Samaritans were the descendants of the people brought from various Mesopotamian communities: Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser to settle in the region of Samaria after having deported its Israelite inhabitants to Assyria. These foreigners were predominantly deportees from territories conquered by Assyria. They are said to have been introduced to and assisted in the practice of the Jewish religion by an Israelite Priest sent back to Samaria by the Assyrian king. The attempt led to a Samaritan deceptive Judaism in which the people worshipped Yahweh and also served their national gods (2 Kings 17:27-34). This Jewish version is supported by the Jewish historian Josephus who reports that the Samaritans were descendants of the deportees from foreign lands brought into Samaria by the Assyrian king. Josephus points to this history as the basis for the Jewish identification of the Samaritans in Hebrew as Cutheans. Cutheans was the name of the foreign nationals who inhabited Samaria. According to Josephus, the label Samaritan is Greek (Antiquities of the Jews 9: 277-291).

These views from both Jews and Samaritans regarding the origin and status of the Samaritans are therefore opposed to each other; there is however, a basis for convergence. There is a support for the view regarding the remnants sustained by the Samaritans from the inscriptions of Sargon II. According to the annals only a relatively small proportion of northern Israelites were deported; about 27,290 (Ancient Near Eastern Texts [ANET], 284-285). This independent record supports the hypothesis of the remnants and thus makes room for the supposition that a considerable proportion of northern Israelites remained in Samaria. Those who made up that population in no doubt identified themselves as Jews. It is thus certain that people of the Northern Kingdom were deported and that foreigners were brought in to settle in their land Samaria. It is equally likely that some Israelites survived the deportation and were therefore not taken away to foreign territories. There were therefore intermarriages between the remnant Israelites of the Northern Kingdom and the foreigners; the Samaritans would therefore be the products of these intermarriages and are consequently, the descendants of this assorted population in Samaria. They were a mixed blood of remnant Jews and foreign deportees/settlers in Samaria and had as much pure Jewish blood as the Jews who later returned from the Babylonian captivity.

The foreign worship said to have been brought by the foreign deportees appears not to have lasted for long; it gave way with time to an uncompromising monotheism based strictly on the worship of Yahweh alone in line with the Torah. It explains why amidst the tension and hostilities between the Samaritans and the Jews, there are no indications of the

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Samaritans being accused of worshipping foreign gods by the Jews (Mckenzie, 1965: 765).

Samaritan beliefs and practices

The religion of the Samaritans at the time of Jesus was strongly Mosaic and quasi-Sadducean; it was however, evocative of anti-Jewish trends. The earliest extant Samaritan literature (Torah, Targum, Memar Maqar and their liturgy) represented the Samaritans as strictly monotheistic. They are said to have believed in one God, one Prophet, one Holy Book, and one Holy Place. Recent summary of their creed reads thus: “We say: my faith is in Thee, YHWH; and in Moses son of Amram, Thy servant, and in the Holy Law; and in Mount Gerizim Beth-El and in the Day of Vengeance and Recompense” (Montgomery, 1907: 207). The first three articles agreed with what was obtained in the Judaism practised by the Jews while the fourth regarding the place of worship constituted the basis for the division or schism between the two groups. The article on ‘the day of vengeance and recompense’ is thought to be a later addition to the creed and explains why in some cases the first four articles appear alone. A brief survey of the contents of the creed is therefore necessary.

Monotheism

The Samaritans believed in the uniqueness and oneness of Yahweh, and their theology and worship were shaped by this concept which was viewed as supreme and sacrosanct. Yahweh fills the whole world but no place contains him, there is nothing like him, nothing before or after him. They made regular use of the tetragrammaton, YHWH and like the Jews were less receptive to the making of images and hardly applied the anthropomorphic concept of “Father” to God because they saw him “as the ineffable and incorporeal creator and sustainer who has entered into unique covenant with Israel” (Anderson, 1992: 946).

Torah

The Torah was received by the Samaritans as part of the covenant and its verses were painstakingly copied by hand on parchments, carved in stones and on amulets. The verses carved on amulets were used as personal protection while those carved in stones were used to decorate synagogues. The interpreters of the Torah and the priests were accorded pride of place as authorities and their strict adherence to the Torah was evident in their insistence on positioning the altar and offering services on it according to the requirements of the Torah. The Samaritans recognized only the Pentateuch with slightly different texts as their Bible; the Law of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) which they regarded as authoritative. They did not recognize the Writings and the Prophets as divinely inspired. They sustained the authority of oral tradition in the

interpretation of the law and claimed to be the more faithful observers of the Torah which in their hands was true, original and faultless. In their interpretation of the Torah emphasize was often placed on its moral dimension; an approach influenced by the Haggada method of reading the text.

Moses

Moses was revered as the mediator of the Torah and the medium of God's revelation. He was seen as the one through whom the ultimate revelation was made to God's chosen people and through whose merits prayers were answered. His position as the receiver of the Law from God is used to identify him as the Lawgiver and the evangelist of God. He is the third object of the Samaritan faith; "one whose origin is often held to be mysterious, who now lives to make intercession for his brethren, who will appear effectually for the saints at the last days" (Montgomery, 1907: 225). He was regarded as the confidant of God with whom God talked face to face and was represented as the greatest and last of all prophets through whose merits prayers and blessings were offered. They sustained that Moses was glorified by God on the holy mount and is greater in heaven than the angels. The midrashic account of his history makes frequent reference to his transfiguration based on the episode of Exodus 34. Beliefs in his origin included the sphere of pre-existence wherein he was represented as having had an ideal pre-existent being before he was clothed with humanity. Essentially Samaritans and Jews agreed on the prominent position of Moses in the relations between God and his chosen people. There was, among others, one recognizable area of disagreement however. As evident in the Jewish canon, Moses is represented in Judaism as the first among the successive list of prophets. Samaritans on the other hand depicted Moses as the last prophet and personification of all prophecies.

Mount Gerizim

Mount Gerizim was presented by the tradition of the Samaritans as the oldest and highest mountain in the world whose peak survived the flood of Noah's era. It is the naval or centre of the world and was held as the place where Abel built the first altar and on which God asked Abraham to offer Isaac in sacrifice. The Samaritans sustained in their version of Deut 27:4 that Moses commanded the building of an altar on Mount Gerizim; the Massoretic text however has Mount Ebal. This instruction was included in their version of the Decalogue after Ex 20:14 and Deut 5:18 as a commandment that an altar be built for sacrifice on Mount Gerizim. By this appeal to the authority of Moses they underscored the sanctity of the Mount and regarded it against Jerusalem as the most appropriate place for the worship of Yahweh. It is the Mount of blessing and therefore a blessed Mount; a view retained even in the Massoretic text of Deut 11:26. Series of altars and sanctuaries were built at three strategic points for the celebration of their numerous festivals. It is the

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house of God: Beth-el and the great chosen place and mount of inheritance. By this position the Samaritans represented Mount Gerizim as the place where the first altar for the twelve tribes of Israel was built and therefore held on to it as the authentic place of worship. They traced their priesthood to the lines of Levi the descendants of Aaron.

Nature of the Samaritan-Jewish relationship

The tensed relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans dates back to early Israelite history and reflects the intrinsic lack of unity that existed between the Northern and Southern kingdoms or Israel and Judah. Even before the kingship of David and Solomon there were political and religious divisions between Judah and the other tribes which extended into the establishment of the kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam I. Following the division between Judah and Israel in 1Kings 16: 24 king Omri of Israel bought the hill which belonged to Shemar, fortified and made it into a city which he named Samaria after the owner Shemar. The valley which hosted the primary road between Jerusalem and Galilee was under the control of Samaria. It however fell into the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BCE and was made the headquarters of the Assyrian province of Samaria

When the Jewish community that returned from the Babylonian deportation of 600 BCE attempted to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple under Zerubbabel and Joshua after the edict of the Persian ruler Cyrus (538 BCE) the Samaritan community in the district of Samaria welcome them back and expressed their desire to participate in the project. The southern region was then governed from Samaria by Sanballat, a native ruler appointed by the Persian authority. Their overture was rejected by the Jewish community and in return the Samaritans made various attempts through political hostilities to delay the project and make it unsuccessful as is indicated in Ezr 4:1-6. They thus undermined the rebuilding of the Southern Kingdom whose renaissance was perceived in Samaria as a threat. The construction of the Jerusalem walls was resisted with armed opposition and represented before the Persian authority by the Samaritans as an act of rebellion on the part of the Jews; they attempted to assassinate Nehemiah (Ezr 4:7-24; Ne 4; 6: 1-13). Even the advent of the Roman Empire witnessed the antagonism between the two groups and the Roman officials took advantage of the situation and used each group to suppress and persecute the other (Steinberg, 03/04/14). Thus walls of bitterness were erected on both sides; while the temple conflict represented a religious tension, the construction of the city walls represented a political division. These perennial conflicts worsened relations between the two communities throughout the Persian period and made it impossible for them to come together as a united force against the Persians.

Tension over place of worship

The construction of a temple to Yahweh on Mount Gerizim as an outright rejection of the temple in Jerusalem by the Samaritans renewed and sealed the schism best described as Jerusalem versus Mount Gerizim. It was constructed at the instance of Sanballat who was the governor of the province of Samaria. Eliaship the grandson of the high priest had married the daughter of Sanballat; he was accused of defiling the priesthood by marrying a non Jew and driven out of Jerusalem by Nehemiah. Josephus notes that Sanballat himself a worshipper of Yahweh therefore built a temple on Mount Gerizim to enable his son-in-law Eliaship continue to function as a priest. This exclusive preference for Gerizim over Jerusalem as the place of worship constituted the definitive prospect of a long process of withdrawal (occasioned by series of events) from mainstream Judaism by the Samaritans. It remained the most physical evidence of the religious difference between the Jews and the Samaritans. On the part of the Jews other important elements characteristic of the estrangement were the Samaritans' intermarriages with foreigners, the earlier syncretism that was brought into their worship and their rejection of the post-Pentateuchal Scriptures.

The Samaritans allied with the Seleucid forces during the Maccabean wars, and in the brief period of the Jewish independence under the Hasmoneans, the Jewish ruler John Hyrcanus who represented a typical expression of Jewish deepest bitterness towards the Samaritans marched against Shechem and destroyed the Samaritan temple in 128 BCE. Documentary or archaeological evidence do not necessarily provide satisfactory clue to the building of a temple by the Samaritans; the Samaritans' stress was more on the place, and any structure built in the form of a sanctuary was however modest. According to Josephus a group of Samaritans on the other side desecrated the Jerusalem temple by scattering bones of dead persons in the sanctuary during the time of Herod the Great (ca. AD 6). The Samaritans were generally excluded from the inner courts of the Jerusalem temple and their offerings treated as coming from the Gentiles. They were not permitted to pay the Temple tax, make bird offerings, sin offerings or guilt offerings (Jeremias, 1969: 356). while they in turn considered the temple as a false cultic centre and equally would not allow the Jews access to their cultic centre.

Summary of basic religious and theological differences

The basic religious and theological differences between the Samaritans and the Jews can be summarized thus: the Samaritans did not recognize the Jerusalem temple as the proper place for the worship of Yahweh. They insisted that it was at Gerizim that Joshua built the first tabernacle when

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Israel entered Palestine. Gerizim remained, according to them, the centre of all Israelite worship until the renegade priest Eli set up a rival sanctuary at Shiloh creating thus two sanctuaries and two priesthoods. The actions of Eli laid the foundation for the religious division (McDonald, 1964: 17). They therefore saw Judaism as an extension of the heresy of Eli through Samuel, Saul, David, the Judean Monarchy and Ezra with the rival cult moving from Shiloh the first venue for the counterfeit sanctuary to Jerusalem (Brindle, 1984: 53). They prided themselves as the preservers of the authentic ancient Israelite faith traceable to the pre-monarchical practice at Shechem.

The Samaritans held to the priestly line of Phinehas who was of the Eleazar family and insisted on it as the authentic line of priesthood traceable to Levi against that of Eli (a descendant of Ithamar) who, out of jealousy, used his riches to snatch the high priesthood away from the young legitimate incumbent Uzzi (The Samaritan Pentateuch 88:1). They claimed to be the more faithful observers of the Torah and in possession of the more authentic wordings of the Torah against the adulterated versions of the Jews. They claimed to be the true children of Israel.

The Jews on the other hand insisted that the Samaritans were not Jews. They regarded Samaritanism as a heresy derived from the corrupt worship of Yahweh mixed up with the worship of the foreign gods brought into Samaria by the foreign settlers during the Assyrian deportations. They avoided contacts with the Samaritans for fear of ritual contamination and thus did not use vessels or dishes used by the Samaritans. Samaritans were not allowed into the inner court of the Jerusalem Temple and marriages with them were forbidden.

In spite of the differences it is to be noted that the Samaritans were Israelites, and with the Jews worshipped Yahweh, regarded the Pentateuch as sacred and observed the Torah. Like in Judaism they believed in the coming of the Messiah identified as “the Restorer” linked to the tribe of Levi based on Deut 18:15.

Socio-cultural effect of the squabbles

The extent of the hostility is depicted in Sirach (ca.200 BCE) where the Samaritans are described as the foolish people who dwell in Shechem (Sirach 50:26). This hostility continued right into the time of Christ and is reflected in the New Testament where the term Samaritan is used as a curse word in John 8:48. Josephus sustains that pilgrims travelling through Samaritan towns from Galilee to Jerusalem were often attacked and denied access. Jesus and his disciples were prevented by the Samaritans from passing through a Samaritan town on their way to Jerusalem (Luke 9:52) while the disciples in return threatened to destroy the inhabitants of the town (Luke 9:53). Social relations between the two groups were greatly restricted and all forms of marriages were forbidden, even Jesus’ disciples were restricted from preaching in any Samaritan town (Matt 10:5) and this explains the

observation in John 4:9 on Jews having no dealing with Samaritans. Above all, it explains the reason for the Samaritan woman's consternation in John 4:9 over Jesus' request for a drink from her. It is suspected that the apparent circumlocution from the lawyer in Luke 10:37 reflects a probable prohibition among the Scribes against mentioning the name Samaritan.

An Old Rabbinic purification law of about AD 65 sustained that "the daughters of the Samaritans are menstruants from their cradle" (Mishnah Niddah 4.1). This law was a codification in time of views and tendencies prevalent prior to AD 65 for which every Samaritan woman was suspected of being in a state of uncleanness (Daube, 1950: 137). There were times when those in the state of purity were advised to abstain from eating with menstruants for fear of contamination because even the spittle of menstruants was considered contaminating (Tosephta Shabbath 1.14; Tosephta Niddah 5.3; Babylonian Niddah 33b). These restrictions applied by implication to Samaritan men because they in turn were in contact with their women. Consequently, every Samaritan was to be avoided as a carrier of uncleanness and this was therefore a case of religious, cultural and social segregation and implied disregard for the dignity of the Samaritans who, in turn, were antagonistic towards Jews and equally avoided contacts with them. One group considered itself superior to the other; while Jews were first class citizens, Samaritans were looked at as second class. The two groups were brothers and worshipers of the same Yahweh but with walls of bitterness erected on both sides Samaritans and Jews made it evident that "it is not the person from the radically different culture on the other side of the world that is hardest to love, but the nearby neighbour whose skin colour, language, rituals, values, ancestry, history, and customs are different from one's own" (Hatred between Jews and Samaritans, 03/04/14). McKenzie remarks that "there was no deeper breach of human relations in the contemporary world than the feud of Jews and Samaritans, and the breadth and depth of Jesus' doctrine of love could demand no greater act of a Jew than to accept a Samaritan as a brother" (1965: 766).

Modern parallels

Modern society today is not any less divisive than the rift between Jews and Samaritans, the implied category of first and second class citizens evident in the Samaritan-Jewish relations equally abounds in modern society. Blacks were represented as second class citizens in America up until the civil rights act of 1964; a reality overcome by modern America but which still persists as a tendency. Recent incident of August 9, 2014 at Ferguson: Missouri in the USA where a young black teenager Michael Brown (18 years) was shot dead by a white police and the resultant racial bickering are instances of the still unhealed racial divide in the USA (Barman, 24/08/14). The situation of 'Apartheid' was obtained in South Africa right into the early part of 1990 when with the formation of a democratic government in 1994 blacks regained

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their status of full citizenship. The Japanese in America during the Second World War were seen as second class, Jews in their exiles and spread across different nations suffered the pains of being looked at as second class citizens. Jews equally experienced the humiliation of being represented as sub-humans and therefore subjects to death in the hands of the Germans during the holocaust of 1939-1945.

The Osu Caste system in Igboland is an indigenous example of discriminatory practices not quite different from the Samaritan-Jewish divide. The Igbos are Nigerians found predominantly in the South-eastern and South-central Nigeria. The term Osu is the general name used to refer to the lower caste groups among the Igbos. It is used to refer to members of families whose ancestors are thought to have been at the service of the deities and who were therefore special properties of the gods. Consequently, they were to be avoided by others for fear of punishment from the deities. They have been described as 'cult slaves' 'living sacrifices,' 'untouchables,' 'outcasts,' 'owners' cult,' 'slaves of the deity,' and 'sacred and holy beings' (Duke, 18/08/14). This tradition still in practiced today has led to various forms of discrimination against all those considered to be Osu. They can only be married to other members of the community identified as belonging to the Osu caste.

The current crisis between Israel and the Palestinians remains a consistent challenge to the inability of two brothers or sisters to coexist and a challenge to a sincere fellowship among nations. It is a conflict identified widely as the world's most intractable conflict which dates back to the mid-20th century and revolves around the questions of mutual recognition, borders, security, control of Jerusalem, water rights and the West Bank settlements, Palestinian refugees and the freedom of movements for the Palestinians (Rowen, 24/08/14). There are in the conflicts claims and counter claims about the indigenous settlers in and owners of the land and on the ownership of Jerusalem and the temple mount (Palestinian-Israeli Relations, 24/08/14). The cultural affinity between the two is greater than their religious and political differences which, heightened by ideological differences beyond their borders and often times enhanced by the hypocrisy of international diplomacies have created situations of engraved hatred between the two groups and have led to many meaningless wars. The recurrent lack of understanding between Sudan and South Sudan, the hatred between Serbs and Muslims in Modern Bosnia and the enmity between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland built around politics and religion are other instances of modern emphasis on the otherness of people within the same society.

The Moslem-Christian misunderstanding in Nigeria and other countries of the world is a reality that reflects lack of tolerance for the other and the struggle for superiority in an effort to expand and conquer. Generally, Some Muslims and Christian leaders have made sincere efforts and progress on the path of peaceful dialogue and cooperation. However, Christian southern

settlers in Northern Nigeria and the northern born Christians are sometimes viewed with suspicion and resentments by the indigenes who perceive the settlers as contributing less to the culture and values of the Northern territories other than the acquisition of wealth. Occasionally some Muslims have shown grievances against the Christians in Kano, Kaduna and in other parts of Northern Nigeria and the Middle belt. The adoption of the Sharia criminal code in Zamfara State in October 1999 and the consequent establishment of the Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN) led to suspicion by the Christian south of an attempt by the Muslim north to establish an Islamic theocratic state. Over one thousand persons died between February and May 2000 in Kaduna in the course of the riot that followed the introduction of the Sharia. This led to reprisal attacks and killings of many ethnic Hausas in the south-eastern Nigeria. Inter-religious /communal conflicts across Jos, Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa between September and October 2001 led to the dead of over two thousand persons (Nigeria Christian/Muslim Conflict, 25/08/14). Plateau State especially has recorded in recent past frequent occurrences of conflicts between Christians and Muslims which have triggered reprisal attacks in other cities of Nigeria with thousands of Christians and Muslims losing their lives right up to the year 2004. Attempts have been made to resolve these conflicts, but like previous pre 1999 attempts, Christians in the north and Muslims in the south live perpetually in fear because the probability of a repeat of these conflicts are imminent. These conflicts sometimes come under cover of communal clashes but in reality are religious conflicts perpetuated for political purposes. The Boko Haram saga is itself the present face of this prolonged conflict which has claimed victims both from the Christian and the Moslem end of the borders.

CONCLUSION

The basis of conflict between Samaritans and Jews is the non-recognition of Samaritans as Jews. This was one of the reasons for the Jewish refusal to allow Samaritans participate in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the Temple. To this point the conflict was a racial one; but the Samaritans' consequent view of the reconstruction of Jerusalem as a Jewish revival and therefore threat to Samaria introduced and gave a political twist to the racial quarrel. It was this political interpretation and approach to the rejection that informed the Samaritans' representation of the reconstruction of the Jerusalem wall as an act of rebellion by Jews against the Persian authority. The Persians and the Romans after them took advantage of the situation and used the conflict as a political tool in the enforcement of their control over the region.

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The attribution of the status of foreigners to the Samaritans also led to the non-admission of Samaritans into the inner court of the temple, the emergence in principle of two temples at Jerusalem and Gerizim and the consequent unhealthy rivalries regarding the orthodoxy of both worships and worship sites and line of priesthood. This struggle for superiority between Samaritanism and Judaism introduced a religious bent to the squabbles and consequently led to the destruction of the Samaritan temple by John Hyrcanus and the consequent desecration of the Jewish temple by the Samaritans. The relationship between Samaritans and Jews during the time of Christ was therefore an embittered one conditioned by racial, religious, cultural and political conflicts which on the whole made interactions between the two groups difficult. The beginning of the first century AD saw Samaritans classified and treated like Gentiles on cultic and ritual matters.

The expression 'Jews have no dealings with Samaritans' is therefore a summary representation of these racial, social, religious and cultural divides which existed up until the time of Christ. It is an expression used by the author of the fourth Gospel to represent how deeply divided Samaritans and Jews were in their dealings with each other. This understanding of the hostility between the two groups consequently reveals the mind of Christ and the early Christians regarding Jesus' request for a drink from the Samaritan woman in John 4:7. It was an attempt by Jesus himself to heal the wounds of the hostility through his emphasis on the content of worship over and against places of worship. The content of worship is Yahweh who is the Creator and Father of both Jews and Samaritans and constitutes the basis of oneness and fraternity between the two groups. His use of a Samaritan as model of neighbourly love in Luke 10 and of gratitude in Luke 17 is a representation by Jesus of the fact that the term enemy is a concept and a mask often used over the humane in every human person. When removed, the human in the person rises above the concept and comes out of the mask and becomes the natural and spontaneous subject of friendship and love. When human beings emphasize their common humanity above all else, the categories of distinction dissolve such that even an enemy becomes the most needed friend. It also provides the background for understanding the choice of Samaritan cities and their dwellers in Acts 8 by the early Jewish Christians as worthy recipients of the message of salvation and as their safe havens during the Jerusalem persecution. The various instances in the Gospels wherein Jesus makes frequent overtures toward Samaritans were therefore attempts by early Christians to build bridges and normalize relations with their Samaritan brothers and sisters. They are reflections of attempts by early Christian Jews to confront the realities of Samaritans and Gentiles embracing the Gospel of Christ.

The Samaritans in their form of religion and the interaction between politics and religion in their confrontations with realities reflect, in relation to the Jews, "the cosmopolitan nature of Palestinian religion and politics before and at the time of Christ" (Brindle, 1984: 48). The 'Samaritan-Jewish'

relations and the modern cases of discrimination, divisions and conflicts briefly outlined above indicate the danger of racism, ethnocentrism and religious fundamentalism. They show the extent to which religion and politics can be forces for benign or malignant enterprises. Only when used with a more inclusive rather than parochial intentions can they yield their best results as forces for good rather than evil. Every religion has something fundamentally good in it and on which the principle of neighbourliness can be built. Politics in practice imply bipartisanship; when carried out in an inclusive rather than exclusive manner challenging issues of divisive tendencies are often resolved. There are instances in which political ideologies appear unrealizable and barren in the face of contemporary practical problems. Members of different parties are therefore made to appreciate the possibility and necessity of sometimes reaching out across the aisle to members of other parties.

The embittered relationship between Samaritans and Jews which persisted during the time of Jesus and challenged the mission of the early Christians is an acknowledgment of the possibility of conflicts and divisions among humans in contemporary societies. But divisions come basically because of misunderstandings and at worst because of the lack of readiness by men and women to understand. Conflicts and divisions therefore constitute avenues for a review of human relations and an assessment of what makes for mutual co-existence founded essentially on respect for the dignity of the human person. Human beings must never, therefore, think of having exhausted all avenues of quest for peace and reconciliation. The 'Samaritan-Jewish' experience may be for today a warning against allowing relations to degenerate to the point of enmity. It is an invitation to recognize the dynamism of religion and consequently a warning against using religion as the index for creating borders within societies. It is also an invitation to be courageous in taking advantage of every situation of conflict as opportunity for reconciliation and peace. It is a stimulus to break modern walls of discrimination, the courage to propagate respect for the dignity of all human beings and consequently the promotion of multi-cultural societies in the contemporary mission to facilitate global kinship.

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