Purity in the context of Islam in East Africa
Introduction

Purity and impurity are words found in every religion. Each has its way of upholding each practice. Worshipers are expected to live in a certain way in order to meet the demands of purity in their religion. As Ryle observes, “purity in religion encompasses patience and long-suffering” (2003, 14) as one does the right things for right reasons. Mary Douglas in her classical text “Purity and Danger” explains the need for purity as the need for order in the following way “…ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience” (1966, 13) She further explains that in the formal relationships human beings have with spirit beings, especially God, this system serves to determine the rules by which they communicate, relate and affect each other. God is seen to be pure and holy and so human beings must find ways of purifying themselves so as to relate with him in terms acceptable to him and avoid his wrath.

Purity in Islam

Purity ‘taharah’ and impurity ‘najasah’ are very important words in Islam because they are always linked with barak ‘spiritual blessings’ and pepo ‘eternal rewards’. According to Sahih Muslim (2:432), which is widely understood to be a reliable hadith, Muslims regard purity as half the faith of a believer that serves two purposes: spiritual purity and general cleanliness [seen as physical purity] (see Ayub 2010, 27-77). Muslims take purity serious because it is one of the religious matters discussed in the Qur’an. It does not matter the state of civilization a Muslim is in when it comes to meeting the purity requirement. Purity can never be taught or
lived by those who are “petty, prejudiced, contentious, or unresponsive to the needs of their fellowmen” (Adeney 2007, 18).

The Qur’an “sets forth the acts and views of purity in all the stages of civilization, from wandering nomads to dwellers in cities” (Daud, 2007, 7). The Qur’an describes how the believers should uphold the issues of purity and gives some indication of punishment to befall those who are impure. This becomes a big issue to Muslim women because according to Islam, women are physically impure almost more than half of their life time, the most being the issue of bleeding during birth and menses leading to spiritual impurity. During this time of menses, the woman is denied participation in religious activities such as attending Mosque prayers, reading the Qur’an, traveling to Mecca, and fasting (Qur’an 2:222; 4:43; 5:6; Sahih Muslim 2:433, 435; see Ayub 2010, 28). These religious activities mean a lot to Muslims in earning spiritual blessings. They also determine one’s fate in life after death.

According to Naila, purity has a general meaning (2002, 6). Thus it may mean, on one hand, physical cleanliness which is the purity from perceptible filth or ritual purification. On the other hand, it may also mean spiritual purity which is the purity of the self from vices, sins and abandoning disobediences, and getting used to good deeds and words. No wonder, Allah’s messenger admonished those who neglected physical purity which is considered a prerequisite for validity of certain devotions, like prayer, touching or holding the Holy Qur’an, etc. As narrated by Abu Hurairah (Footnotes on the Holy Quran)
“Ten acts are demands of true nature, namely: clipping the moustache, letting the beard grow, brushing the teeth with Miswak, snuffing up water in the nose, clipping the nails, washing the finger joints, plucking the hair under the armpits, shaving the pubes, and cleaning the private parts with water (after call of nature) The narrator said: I have forgotten the tenth, but it may have been rinsing the mouth.” (Quranic Footnotes)

In indicating the importance of purity in Islam, Abdul claims that the messenger of Allah had often mentioned that people would come with white faces and arms and legs owing to ablution, and they would arrive at the cistern (the basin from which the Prophet gives his followers fresh water to drink on the Day of Judgment) before them. Then while at it, some people would be driven away from the cisterns if they are found not pure.

Joy Loewen tells of her encounter with Muslim women in the United States of America where she made friends with them and sought to learn about their world as Muslim women. She found that the moral purity of Muslim women also had national implications.

In 2006 a “Miss Muslim” contest was held in Tatarstan, much like Miss America. Yet unlike Miss America, the competitors could not wear swimsuits, they had to be modestly dressed and wear hijabs. The goal of the pageant was to show that beauty does not have anything to do with nudity or immodesty. It was a contest to reveal intelligence and religiosity. The contest included memorization and recitation of the Quran, as well as cooking and sewing. Contestants were graded based on how they brought honor to their families, countries, religion and Allah.
young virgin from Tatarstan won the contest. As this contest proved, beauty, purity, and morality are family and national values in Muslim countries. (Loewen 2010)

As a consequence, in some instances, a Muslim woman’s sense and expression of purity is understood in terms of being communal property to be used as bargaining power, cementing relationships or abused in war. A woman’s purity reflects on her family, community and nation. In strict Islamic observance the purity of a virgin bride must be established by both families before marriage otherwise her value and impending wedding is jeopardized. This is established in at least two ways. The girl's aunties frequently check whether the girl's private parts are securely closed by the advance sewing through what is commonly called FGM (female genital mutilation). At the onset of the wedding negotiations, her bride-price value is established in part by the in-laws women visiting the girl and checking on the purity of her private parts. On the wedding night, the sheet used by the new couple is returned to the families for evidence of fresh blood signifying that this is the first time she has had sexual intercourse. This is celebrated as a cementing of the relationship between the two families because the purity of the marriage has been established.

In contrast, there does not seem to be the corresponding rule for men. There is no real way of establishing male purity before marriage. A keen family will have to rely on word of mouth assessments by all known to the couple to establish his character. Virgin Muslim girls therefore run the risk of contracting life-threatening diseases through marriage. Cervical cancer, sexually transmitted, HIV and AIDS are common diseases from which women suffer because of this discrepancy. Conversely, the family of a virgin girl married to a promiscuous man is free to seek divorce by asking for their bride-price wealth called “talaka”. Unfortunately, this is rarely enough action to prevent health problems from affecting the woman. In
addition, once the woman has children, divorce is not final as the children are still linked to their father whether the mother’s welfare remains important. In folk Islam, the two parents though divorced continue to maintain loose relationships especially because men are allowed to marry up to four women. For this reason, in the absolute sense of the word, the importance put on purity in the Islamic society is not necessarily for the welfare of women in their relationship with Allah but as long as their outward performance is acceptable, how they live in private may not be deemed as important.

Another way in which Islam seeks absolute purity in its practice is in the concept of Islamic or “sharia” banking, by following strict Islamic borrowing and lending rules based on teachings in the Qur’an and the Traditions, which carry authority as ‘Allah’s instructions’. This practice has permeated the banking practice of major banks around the world such as Barclays. The rules stipulate that there shall be no payment or receipt of interest (‘riba’) charged in the lending and accepting of money. This is why the accounts are called “La-Riba accounts because they are against interest charges or income on deposits. The basic premise is that profit should be derived from the investment of the funding by the bank, while it holds it on behalf of the client and not from just holding the money. This is advantageous to Muslims because it enables their businesses to be established, and flourish under easy credit terms that are not a burden to the account holders. This approach has gained popularity with the frequent failure of banks to manage “the payments of deposits” away from their “portfolio activities” showing the Islamic approach to be more stable. (Rabbi’al Awwal 1438 H)

Contemporary African Islam sees itself as defined by having an anti-Western outlook. It sees Western culture as corrupt, sinful, without shame or decorum. This is what gave rise to movements such as Salafism that inspired the rise of militant
groups such as Boko Haram and Al Shabaab. Terje Ostebo in his discussion on “Islamic militancy in Africa” traces the genesis of this destructive militancy by stating that,

Salafism has always had an ambiguous view of politics and political power. In general, it has held a rather xenophobic attitude, fearing that political engagement would compel Salafis to cooperate with secularists and non-Salafis, threatening their religious purity. While Salafis in principle favor the establishment of an Islamic state, their political ideology for doing so has not been well defined and they have instead usually devoted themselves to da’wa and teaching their religious precepts. (Østebø 2012)

Islam also teaches that purity is key to entering paradise. If a person purifies himself and then meets Allah in the hereafter he will enter paradise without obstacles. However, in case he does not purify himself in this world, that is, “if his impurity persists, like the disbeliever, he will not be allowed into paradise; but if his impurity is transient, he will be allowed to enter paradise after he is purified in Hell of that impurity for a period of time” (Abdul 1997,61).

It becomes clear that physical impurity prevents Muslims from carrying out their basic religious duties such as prayer, fasting and even reading the Qur’an. On bodily purity, the Muslims must gain purity by performing ablutions. All bodily fluids must be cleansed from the body with water. According to Muslims, water is good because it cleans effectively. Urine, excrement and other discharges from the body such as pre-semenal fluid must be cleansed with water until the unclean matter is removed.
Sad to say, women are seen to be much more defiled than men (Naila 2003, 16). This is related to emissions that come from their bodies in form of gas or menstrual fluid. For instance, when Somali women are in the company of other women experiencing their menses, they frequently exclaim “oof, oof loosely translated “dirty or smelly” to express their discomfort at this experience. The question here is, how can Muslim women maintain purity and yet they have their monthly share of impurity? As Abdul observes, in order for a Muslim woman to remain pure, she must be in constant purification process and remain allergic to impurity (1997, 52).

**How do Muslims attain purity?**

In the Islamic perspective, there are several ways in which the believer may obtain purity. Firstly, purity is acquired through cleaning specific body parts with water. This act is referred to as ablution. It is a prerequisite before one gets into obligatory or voluntary prayer. The Prophet said, “The prayer of none amongst you would be accepted in a state of impurity till he performs ablution....”(Abdul 1997, 26) According to Daud, if a Muslim purifies himself in accordance with Allah’s commandments and the Prophet’s instructions, his prayer will purify him of sins (2007, 14). The description of purity given indicates that for one to be pure the mouth and nostrils, the face, the hands and arms up to the elbows are to be thoroughly rinsed before prayer. In addition, the believer must wipe the head and the feet up to the ankles. It is believed that in doing so, all the sins would be washed away (Daud 2007, 12).

Kaleem Abbas and Dr. Taj Afsar in their comparative study between Islamic and Hindu concepts of ritual purity (Abbas and Asfar 2014, 2) distinguish between different ‘sorts of water” Clean and pure water comes from the sea, rivers, rain that comes through pumps, springs, lakes and valleys. Clean but impure water is clean.
water that has been polluted by any impurity, especially blood contamination. Impure water is that water that after flowing then “changes in taste, color, and smell after it has been infected with uncleanness” such as stagnant water. (Abbas and Asfar 2014, 3). Ritual purity can in Kaleem Abbas’s view be attained through three methods only: Wudu (ablution), Ghusl (bath) or Tayammum (purification with dust). Wudu or ablation is the most important of them all in Islamic practice. The process consists of the recalling of Allah’s name at the beginning of the Wudu; brushing of teeth; rinsing of mouth; inhalation of water (through the nose); wiping of ears; combing out of the beard and fingers; washing the parts thrice; intending purification; and wiping the head as a whole (Abbas and Asfar 2014, 5).

The second way in which purity is acquired is by placing the face on the ground in prostration to Allah. When a Muslim does that, he/she is said to purified of all sins and be as pure as he/she were on the day of birth” (Abdul 1997, 15). This act accompanies the five daily prayers that devout Muslims perform at home, at the mosque, airport, airplane, street and just about anywhere a space can be found. It has become a powerful proselytization method because it is an outward religious act that can be viewed by all non-Muslims in the vicinity.

Thirdly, it is established by mentioning the name of Allah before and after prayers. According to Abdul, the act of mentioning the name of Allah earns the believer a lot of marks in terms of purity (1997, 27). For this reason, the term Allah punctuates all conversation, is embedded in most words, Quranic script and slogan. Popular phrases such as “Allahu akbar” (“Allah is greater”) serve as calls to the defense of Islam in religious protest or interfaith dialogue. Names such as “Abdullah” (which means servant of Allah) or “Abdul Rahman (which means servant of the merciful) are common among Muslims. Muslims will frequently exclaim
“Allah!” when excited, fearful or frustrated to denote their instinctive reverence for “Allah” in all matters important to them.

Fourth, reading the Quran is another means in which purity is said to be acquired. In some Muslim communities, the complete reading and recitation of the Quran during Ramadhan is said to bring great blessing not only to those who read but to their whole families. If this reading is done in the mosque, even more blessings are acquired. Frequently, none-practicing Muslims will rely on the devotion shown by their aging parents and relatives to cover for their own weak faith and so conversely, the aging parents may feel quite compelled to do sufficient acts of faith to assure the eternal safety of their wayward family members.

However, penalties for touching the Quran when one is unclean and in the infraction of law are severe and swift when in the public sphere. In private, it is sufficient for one to place the Quran at the top most shelf in the house, especially the living room or room used by the heads of family. On the contrary, as Islamic scholars observe, the touching of the Quran brings purity. In one instance, Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn Amr said, “The Prophet wrote a letter to the people of Yemen which read: “Nobody is allowed to touch the Qur’an unless he is pure.” (Daud 2007, 41) Devout Muslims will be seen touching the Quran to their foreheads and speaking out Allah’s name for added blessing. Islam is seen here to be a religion of extensive and detailed acts of devotion for the maintenance of a right relationship with Allah.

During Ramadhan, and for some Muslims every Monday and Thursday of the week all year round, fasting is another act of devotion that denotes purity before Allah. The larger the crust on the lips shows everyone the level of purity of the fast observed. Fasting in Islam is a very difficult exercise for many as the body has to deal with the intake of large amounts of food at night while during the day, even the swallowing of saliva is prohibited. This makes some people sick and so certain foods
are seen to be easier on the stomach and are preferred to others. In some homes, milk, couscous and dates are eaten at night while the “samosas” and dates are served at the “Iftar” (fast-breaking meal in the evening) for all family members and passersby to take. Some people find fasting so difficult that they have been said to prefer to pay the amount required in its place rather than go through it. Outwardly, however, they will seek to maintain the appropriate outward appearances so as not offend others. It has been said that the amount of food eaten during Ramadhan is more than the regular intake and so some people are seen to gain weight rather than lose it.

**Female Genital Mutilation and the perception of female purity in the Kenyan context**

“28 Too Many” is an international organization that has been championing the human rights of girls and women in the area of female genital mutilation (FGM). In their recent report they summarize Kenyan law in the matter by stating that the Kenyan constitution does not allow anyone to compel anyone to undergo the rite or to undergo early marriage. The Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2012 criminalizes all forms of FGM, regardless of the age or status of the girl or woman (Wilson 2016). Some progress has been made to curb this practice but it still persists in contravention of the law. Case study research done by the Population Council among the Kisii and Kuria shows that:

Evidence from the Kenya Demographic and Health Surveys (KDHS) shows that the overall prevalence of FGM has been decreasing over the last decade. In 2008/9, 27% of women had undergone FGM, a decline from 32% in 2003 and 38% in 1998. Older women are more likely to have undergone FGM than younger women, further indicating the prevalence is decreasing. However, the prevalence has
remained highest among the Somali (97%), Kisii (96%), Kuria (96%) and the Maasai (93%), relatively low among the Kikuyu, Kamba and Turkana, and rarely practiced among the Luo and Luhya (less than 1%). (Oloo, Wanjiru, and Newell-Jones 2011)

In many communities, it is considered taboo for women to fail to undergo FGM because “It is believed that the removal of the clitoris and labia contribute to the cleanliness and beauty of women. In such societies an unmutilated woman is considered dirty and polluted” (Moges 2003). The value of a woman before marriage is closely tied to her FGM status and so fathers wanting to gain the most from bride price payments are insistent that their daughters should undergo this process. The World Health Organization has done extensive research on this subject. “Reasons used to sustain the practice relate to religious obligation, family honor, and virginity as a prerequisite for marriage” (WHO 2017).

Conversely, promiscuity among men and rape of women is not prominently featured on the list of taboo practices among traditional communities that protect the practices of men who prefer to have many wives or forcefully have sexual intercourse with a woman without serious consequences. Among the Kuria, this practice is highly valued as shown on the newspaper report in 2016 where, “Public ceremonies celebrating the illegal “season” of female genital mutilation (FGM) have been allowed to take place unchallenged by the authorities in some areas of Kenya, it has emerged. Two campaigners in Migori county, close to the border with Tanzania, report that over the past month hundreds of girls belonging to the Kuria tribe have undergone FGM, and they witnessed groups of men, some armed, going door-to-door harassing the families of uncircumcised girls”. (Horner 2016)

It has taken an alliance of efforts of organizations such as 28 Too Many, the Women of Vision group of World Vision in Kenya (Vision 2013), Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), Kongelai Women’s Network (Dillon 2016) and the
Kenyan government to keep this campaign strong against the cultural reasons communities give for the practice. The Maasai assert that lack of circumcision brings death to the family and yet circumcision itself is responsible for the death of many women due to excessive bleeding, obstruction during child-birth and sepsis due to use of unclean instruments. These causes of death are seen to be secondary in importance to the preservation of communal purity laws that seem to be formulated specifically to thwart the move for change on this difficult issue.

**Christian concepts of purity**

The phrase “cleanliness is next to godliness” has often been touted as Biblical scripture though it is a humanistic statement aimed at encouraging Christians to present themselves well outwardly as an expression of their inner convictions. The care one takes over the physical body is seen to be an expression of faith in God and gratitude for the life that God created for his own pleasure and service. In particular, the avoidance of body harming substances such as drugs and excessive use of alcoholic beverages and substances is seen as an outward act of keeping the body pure before God.

In Christianity, purity is an attribute of God (Hebrews 7:27) synonymous with holiness. God who is holy and pure promised to remove the impurities of sin from Israel (Isaiah 1:25). God promised to purify them so that they can then present offerings of righteousness before him (Mal. 3:3). In their purified state they will be willing to obey the Lord’s commands (Deuteronomy 30:8). Purity therefore is a precursor for active and continual obedience before God.

Since the fall to sin of Adam and Eve, there has been need for a sufficient penalty or cost for that sin that brings about impurity. The Bible teaches that only the acts of a holy and pure God are sufficient to atone for the sins of mankind for
everyone born since Adam and Eve inherit the sinful nature of this first family. Initially, God instructed the Israelites to offer a sacrifice of a spotless lamb as an atonement for the sins of the people. It is written,

Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement. Purify the altar by making atonement for it and anoint it to consecrate it. For seven days, make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. Then the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will be holy. This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly on each day: two lambs a year old...Sacrifice the other lamb at twilight with the same grain offering and its drink offering as in the morning - a pleasing aroma, a food offering presented to the Lord....Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might make a dwelling among them. I am the Lord their God. Exodus 29: 36-45

This practice was instituted by God for the nation of Israel, before the time of Christ as a means of purification for them to put right relationship with God. It was very ritualistic in nature but was sufficient for that dispensation of God's redemptive plan for mankind. Purity for the whole nation of Israel was achieved through these ritual acts on their behalf, by the priests from the tribe of Levi, who God set apart for this purpose. Today, God calls us all a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9) through the acceptance of Christ as Savior and Lord. We are all therefore not required to go to a priest for this ritual but to approach the throne of God on our own and in private for daily cleansing.

Perhaps the question here is “how do we gain true purity”? Is purity only a matter of maintaining a balance between sophisticated, intellectual information and principles of the Gospel and the Quran? Again, what is more important, the inner or the outer purity? In trying to answer this question in a conversation with a Muslim, the writer argued that not only is the outer purity important, but even the more the
inner. The outer is good because people can see and respect you. It gives its adherents good positions, great praise and recognition which only the world could give as they are considered better and pure through the eyes of men. However, the inner is even more beautiful because although people may not identify with it, God can and can reward the pure in heart. As the Bible states, “the heart of man is utterly wicked…” (Jeremiah 17:9). All uncleanness is found in it. And just as the most stubborn stains are removed by a detergent, the heart as well needs a cleansing detergent. To acquire purity therefore, we not only need water but also a detergent that is able to cleanse from deep within. But how is that possible? Is there any detergent that can purify our hearts? Would this be what is referred to us the circumcision of the heart (Adeney 2002, 61).

Circumcision was used in early Biblical times to purify the nation of Israel and make them presentable before God. In Romans 2:28 and 29, it is written that “A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No. A person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is circumcision of heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God. This teaches that the outward expression of circumcision is used to symbolize the inward expression of worship to God in all ways. This means the complete alignment of personal will to the will of God as creator, leader, Lord and judge. This utter abandonment to the ways of God will cause God to reward the person privately. Such a person will not want or require the praise of others to live a pure life but will be introspective in character. The outward expression of the circumcision of the heart will be the manner in which this person will interact with others and with the environment that houses the resources that God created and gave so generously to humankind. This will be visible to others as
behavior to emulate, causing others to look up to the person as a role model of devout living before God.

The purification of the people of Israel, through their obedience to the words of God taught them about the holiness and purity of God and their need for purity in that relationship. This practice of purification would then be replaced by the ultimate act of purification through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who became on behalf of all humanity the perfect lamb of God, sacrificed once and for all on the cross for the purification of all who would believe in and follow him. This purification comes by faith in the shed blood of the crucified, dead, buried and risen Christ who alone is pure and holy enough to save mankind from sin (Revelation 5:12)

In the time of Jesus, the Pharisees practiced the strict form of the law that prohibited the eating with unwashed hands. In Luke 11:37-54 the gospel account is written telling of how Jesus was invited by Pharisees to eat with them after finishing speaking to the people. They observed that he did not do the ceremonial washing of the hands prescribed in Jewish teaching. He responded to them by challenging their ritual washing of hands similar to the washing of the outside of the cup and dish while their insides were full of greed and wickedness. He called them foolish for thinking that God who made their bodies did not know what their hearts were like- impure on the inside while striving to present purity on the outside. He challenged them to seek purity by being truly generous to the poor, upholding justice and love God. He advised them to shun the important seats in the synagogues and to resist the respectful greetings in the market-places and to stop loading people with ritual burdens they were unable to carry, reminding them that their sinful attitudes led to actions that saw the killing of God’s prophets of old. Internal purity should be expressed outwardly by kindness, justice, fairness, care of the
vulnerable and humility before a holy God. Ritual acts of cleanliness are insufficient to rid the body, heart and mind of uncleanness.

In the Bible, it is written that God’s word is pure and holy (Psalms 12:6). It is dependable in its truth, consistency and power. In this way, it is useful for training in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16) This is a powerful purification method for Christians, through the study and practice of Biblical teaching that seeks to confront personal character faults for realignment with God’s will. Purity is an ideal, a goal to seek after. In Christian teaching, it is never completely achieved in this life but it is meant to continuously motivate and train us to do better. The hope and expectation is that human purity will finally be achieved completely at the return of Christ in the second coming when Christ’s own purity will be the means through which all believers in Christ will get safe passage to heaven. (Revelation 3:4)

Even though purity is therefore the gift of God through the saving work of Christ, who appeased the demands of a holy God through his death and resurrection, disciples of Christ are required to strive hard to attain purity in all the facets of their lives. Ephesians 1:4 teaches Christians to be holy and blameless in God sight. Christians must strive continuously to use God given wisdom and understanding to achieve this. Through practice, pure thoughts and actions become our habit, thus pleasing God. Hebrews 12:14 teaches that without holiness, no-one will see the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 teaches that it is God’s will that we should avoid sexual immorality, learning to control our bodies in a way that is holy and honorable, avoiding lust... for God did not call us to impure but pure but holy lives. The rejection of this word of God is the rejection of God himself (vs. 8).
Conclusion

Muslims have been taught ritual purity because Islamic teaching requires them to follow strict guidelines in their expression of faith before God. Concerning purity, they must use pure water for washing, and must do comprehensive washing of their public and private body parts. These rituals are reminders of God’s requirements for purity in their lives and are seen to earn them many blessings and forgiveness of sins. Purity as a value is shared in the family and community and determines relationships and harmony. For that reason, sexual purity for virgins is a very important prerequisite for honorable marriage and the beginning of harmonious family relationships between in-laws. Purity is also expected in their business practices because sharia compliance is importance to their obligations before Allah.

Purity or holiness in Christian teaching is the gift of God to humanity through the sacrificial life of Christ, death and resurrection, applied through disciplined living on their lives. Purity must be attained for the right relationship with God to yield the blessings that humanity yearns for. As a gift, it takes the burden of proof from humanity but retains their requirement to grow in the disciplines of holy living. Christians, like Muslims, will one day stand in judgement over how they led their lives and practiced the tenets of their faith. Christians and Muslims have much to appreciate from each other in their different interpretations of God’s requirements for his relationship with humanity. They can also grow in their understanding and mutual appreciation of each other’s faiths through dialogue, true sharing in community living and protection of each other's right to practice purity in their prescribed forms.

Humanity strives to live in purity to attain a holy relationship with a holy God. The challenge of assuring that women live pure lives, not only as an expression of
their own holiness before God but also on behalf of their communities, is great. Purity as an act of worship can be demonstrated and inculcated by elders to the young as they are mentored in the ways of their community. It should result in the wellbeing of the women so that they live in appreciation of their traditions and not be maimed by it. Purity is not just a state of physical being but a mental and spiritual way of living that is comprehensive in its expression.

Christians and Muslims both have an opportunity, based on their scriptures, to demonstrate the purity of God’s welcoming heart to people of all religious persuasion. In these turbulent times around the world due to forced migration caused by conflict, drought, floods and poverty, their response to need by sharing and welcoming can go a long way to teaching everyone what purity is all about—the fair, sacrificial and welcoming attitude that brings back peace in this world.
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