

# The Reconciling Role of Suffering within Sufi Muslim and Anabaptist Theologies of Nonviolence

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“Ami is in the hospital with a burn!” The message is from Ami’s father, Serigne Fallou,<sup>2</sup> and the next day we go to visit his daughter. In the hospital, we learn that Ami’s burn is healing and she will be OK. We also learn that Fallou and family had earlier moved to Texas to start a new business venture but are now back in Pennsylvania after having been cheated by the business partner. Fallou and his wife are far away from family and friends. It is clear they’ve had suffering and discouragement but that they also feel optimistic about the future because “it is in God’s hands” and they have the “blessing of Shaykh Bamba.”

I first met Fallou at the weekly farm market where he sells goods from Senegal, the country where my family and I were Anabaptist missionaries from 1999 to 2009. Fallou is a Murid, a member of a Senegalese Sufi order. He and his family became our friends. Like Fallou, many of our friends and neighbors in Senegal were Murids. Murids (Arabic for “disciples”) see themselves as disciples of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba. Anabaptists see ourselves as disciples of Jesus. These two communities in which Fallou and I participate have some similar experiences of and responses to suffering in their respective histories, yet ultimately their understandings lead to different missions. This article describes these similarities and differences as it explores the question, How might this West African Sufi<sup>3</sup> order enlighten Anabaptist self-understand of the reconciling role of suffering and the ways this shapes our mission?

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2 Ami and Serigne Fallou are pseudonyms.

3 See Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

## Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba: Founder of the Muridiyya

Most Murids are Wolof, the largest ethnic group in Senegal. They are disciples of Ahmadu Bamba, the founder of their Sufi order—the Muridiyya—the only Sufi order founded by a black African. Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba received a Qur’anic education under his Qadiriyya<sup>4</sup> father’s teaching and as a young man traveled to seek out additional teachers in Senegal and Mauritania. He eventually received multiple *silsilas* (chains of spiritual authority) linking him back to Muhammed spiritually<sup>5</sup> and qualifying him to take disciples and start schools. Upon his father’s death, he rejected the opportunity to become a judge in the court where his father had served, saying, “I do not have the habit of mingling with rulers, and I do not expect any help from them. I only seek honour from the Supreme Lord (God).”<sup>6</sup>

Bamba spent many days, over a period of years, seeking the location of the city he was to found, often traveling into the uninhabited Ferlo (a region of Senegal) for *khawla* (spiritual retreat). On one such trip, he felt a mysterious power and saw a burning bush that did not burn up. Nearby was a giant *Mbéb* tree (Gum-Plane). Praying under that tree, he saw a luminous vision of “the fish which upholds the world.”<sup>7</sup> The vision had a double connection to Moses—the burning bush of Exodus 6 in the Old Testament, and the fish in the story of Moses and Khidr in surah Al-Kahf, 18:60–82. He named the great tree Touba, after the tree Mohammed saw in paradise on his *miraj* (ascension) journey.<sup>8</sup>

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4 Founder ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166) preached about the struggle to overcome the evil desire of the inner self, calling it the *jihad al-akbar*, or, “the greater holy war.” See Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace: The Sufi Brotherhoods in Islamic Religious Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

5 Carl W. Ernst, *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), 122.

6 Cheikh Anta Mbacké Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853–1913*, New African Histories Series (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 59.

7 Fernand Dumont, *La pensée religieuse d’Amadou Bamba* (Dakar-Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africains, 1975), 48; Eric S. Ross, “Tübâ: An African Eschatology in Islam” (DPhil diss., McGill University, 1996), 56; Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 71; Fallou Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World: The Odyssey of Ajami and the Muridiyya*, Oxford Scholarship Online (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 79.

8 Today, the second largest city in Senegal is Touba, the city founded by Bamba at the Mbéé tree. It is the spiritual and geographical center for Murids, no matter where they travel in the world. (See Christian Coulon, “The Grand Magal in Touba: A Religious Festival of the Mouride Brotherhood of Senegal,” *African Affairs* 98, no.

Bamba's mystical experience was similar to the mystical quests undertaken by the founders of other Sufi orders and served to authenticate his spiritual authority.<sup>9</sup> The inferred connection to Khidr, for instance, symbolically linked him with a "potent [source] of mystical knowledge in the Qur'an."<sup>10</sup> As a Muslim scholar from a prominent Wolof religious family with Qadiriyya connections,<sup>11</sup> as a prolific author,<sup>12</sup> and as the founder of Islamic centers of learning, Bamba drew more and more followers.

### The Muridiyya: Bamba's Followers

In the 1880s, during the collapse of the Wolof kingdoms and the French colonial conquest of Senegal, Bamba's followership—the Muridiyya—began to grow rapidly.<sup>13</sup> The expansion of this Senegalese Sufi brotherhood attracted the attention of the French colonial authorities, who considered Bamba and his widespread connections a threat. The French authorities eventually exiled him to Gabon (1895–1902), then Mauritania (1903–1907), and finally placed him under house arrest in Senegal until his death in 1927.

The order Bamba founded<sup>14</sup> is unique in that it embraces a distinctly nonviolent philosophy,<sup>15</sup> and it validates and incorporates Wolof cultural values into its expression of Islam<sup>16</sup> while retaining the characteristics common to most Sufi orders. Until recently, most Murid self-understandings of theology and history have been inaccessible, hidden in oral traditions or written hagiography in Wolofal.<sup>17</sup> Thanks to recent work by linguist Fallou Ngom and historian Cheikh Anta Babou these traditions are now accessible.

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391 [1999]: 195–210). Ahmadu Bamba is buried in Touba, and his tomb is one of the pilgrimage sites for Murids who make annual pilgrimage to the city.

9 Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 72.

10 Ernst, *Sufism*, 38.

11 Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 44.

12 Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 21.

13 James F. Searing, *"God Alone Is King": Islam and Emancipation in Senegal: The Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol, 1859–1914*, Social History of Africa (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), xxii.

14 Today, the Muridiyya are a growing presence in the American Muslim community.

15 J. Spencer Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 227; Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 41.

16 Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 116.

17 Wolof written in a modified Arabic script.

## Called to Suffering and Nonviolence

Murid hagiography develops the idea that Bamba received a calling to sainthood and a mission of nonviolence<sup>18</sup> on the day of *Alastu*,<sup>19</sup> the same mythical day that Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and all the prophets received their callings. It was ordained, as part of Bamba's pact with God, that suffering was to be central to his mission; he must suffer and overcome to attain perfection and to fulfil his calling.

In Sufism, it is common teaching that the "human soul can only mature through suffering."<sup>20</sup> Fallou Ngom's translations of the Wolof poet Mousa Ka trace the many sufferings of Bamba and their cosmic meaning. Ka says that God revealed to Bamba ahead of time that the French would send him into exile and that they were serving God's purposes. Bamba's victory in suffering and his service to the prophet Mohammad mean that he can offer *baraka* (spiritual power, blessing; blessing as a tangible and transferable substance)<sup>21</sup> to his followers, those who submit to him completely.

Bamba is known as an "apostle of non-violence."<sup>22</sup> Primary contributors to the study of the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the Muridiyya<sup>23</sup> unanimously agree that he practiced and preached nonviolence. Of his own suffering in exile, Bamba said, "I have forgiven all my enemies for the Countenance of the Lord who turned them away from me forever, because I feel no resentment against them."<sup>24</sup> He had seen the effects of the internecine wars of the Wolof

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18 Murid hagiographers say that the conditions of Bamba's pact with God on the Day of *Alastu* forbade any violence. Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 45.

19 See Qur'an 7:172; Ernst (*Sufism*, 43–44) says, "Perhaps the most distinctive Qur'anic theme developed by the Sufis was that of the primordial covenant, the pact that God made with the unborn souls of humanity, prior to creation." Sufis understand that the prophets and saints received their respective missions from God on this day.

20 Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 137.

21 *Ibid.*, 82.

22 Dumont, *La pensée religieuse de Amadou Bamba*.

23 *Ibid.*; Cheikh Anta Mbacké Babou, "Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya: The History of a Muslim Brotherhood in Senegal (1853–1913)" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2002); Ahmed Pirzada, "The Epistemology of Ahmadou Bamba" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2003); John Glover, *Sufism and Jihad in Modern Senegal: The Murid Order*, Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora, v. 32 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007); Cheikh Seye, "Jihad, Peace and Non-Violence in Mouridism (1883–1927)" (MA thesis, Arizona State University, 2013); Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*.

24 Abdoul Aziz Mbacké, *Jihad for Peace: Exploring Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's Philosophy* (Majalis, 2009), 15, <http://www.majalis.org/masalik/pdf/Jihad1.pdf>.

kingdoms (exacerbated by the French), and as a youth, he and his extended family were forced to migrate and participate in a local jihad that eventually precipitated the deaths of his sister, uncle, grandfather, and mother.<sup>25</sup> Bamba's revulsion at the violence of this jihad planted in him the seed of rejection of violence.<sup>26</sup> He had also seen the injustice of the French colonial invasion of his nation, and the impracticality of fighting such an overwhelmingly superior force caused him to seek other forms of resistance.<sup>27</sup> On top of all this, Bamba had encountered all manner of sufferings himself. Below is a partial list<sup>28</sup> of his sufferings (in no particular order):

- imprisoned in a cell with sharp objects (*Ka poem*) that prevented him from lying down or doing his prayers
- threatened with execution by cannon
- put in a garden with a lion, prevented from praying
- exiled in Gabon (seven years) away from his family and community (in extremely difficult climate and conditions)
- exiled in Mauritania (four years) away from family and community
- falsely accused of many things from Wolof rivals and the French
- kept under house arrest until his death

Bamba's response to suffering—his own and that of the Wolof people<sup>29</sup> during war and colonization—was exceptional, a different way of facing the world; in the midst of injustice and suffering, he forgave his oppressors and placed his trust in God. He consistently turned toward forgiveness, nonviolence, and working for the betterment of his people. In doing so, he found a way to bring traditional Wolof values of peace and patience in suffering (*mēn*) into the Muridiyya's collective understanding of what it means to be Muslim.

Calling himself a “servant of the Apostle,” Bamba strongly identified with the suffering and nonviolence of Muhammed in Mecca.<sup>30</sup> His belief in nonvio-

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25 Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 42.

26 Ibid., 56.

27 Pirzada, “The Epistemology of Ahmadou Bamba,” 39.

28 Drawn from hagiographic and historical literature.

29 When three of his disciples were tortured by the Wolof King Teeñ Tanoor Goñ, for example, he instructed the disciples to forgive the king. Eventually this ruler was won over as a convert to the Muridiyya (Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 81).

30 In Mecca, from 610 to 622, Muhammad experienced strong opposition as he called people to leave their idols and worship the one God. The Meccans opposed and persecuted him and his followers. A few were killed. Muhammad sent some of his followers to Ethiopia to find refuge.

lence also came directly from his *tafsir* (exegesis) of the Qur'an. Using a hermeneutic of community well-being<sup>31</sup> to exegete the text, he found nonviolent interpretations even in verses understood by terrorists to command violent jihad, such as 9:111–12: “God has bought from the believers their selves and their possessions against the gift of Paradise; they fight in the way of God.”<sup>32</sup> In Bamba’s way of interpreting, “these two verses [were] sacred injunctions for Muslims to pursue ethical excellence in society.”<sup>33</sup> “All disciples of Bamba—the Murid faithful, leaders, and disciples—are expected to be generous, even to their adversaries. This . . . contrasts sharply with its militant understanding.”<sup>34</sup>

A hadith often associated with the Muridiyya states, “We have returned from the minor struggle (*jihad al-asbar*) to fight the major struggle (*jihad al-akbar*).”<sup>35</sup> Murids embrace the “major struggle” against the *nafs* (soul). Their collective understanding is that they have suffered and been victorious by virtue of the ethical and spiritual struggle of their saint, Ahmadu Bamba. His suffering and overcoming is understood vicariously as theirs if they follow his example. The baraka he earned is passed on to them by their submission to him,

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The later Medinan period is generally considered to abrogate the Meccan period. It is interesting that Murids and Ahmadu Bamba focus almost exclusively on the Meccan period as a primary point of reference. I attribute this to the fact that Bamba suffered injustice and naturally connected with the Meccan period. So far in my research, I have not found Murid sources that address the issues of abrogation or the Medinan period. Sufis freely appropriate the imagery and symbolism from many sources—Qur'anic, Islamic history, other Sufi traditions, and biblical stories as well as other religious traditions; this interweaving and borrowing of symbolic experiences is a strong characteristic of Sufism.

31 What I am calling a “community well-being hermeneutic,” author Fallou Ngom describes as interpreting the Qur'an with concern for practical society implications and the betterment of society.

32 A. J. Arberry, ed. *The Koran Interpreted: A Translation*, 1st ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

33 Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 87.

34 *Ibid.*, 88.

35 Pirzada, “The Epistemology of Ahmadou Bamba,” 39. Pirzada includes a footnote that reads, “Cited in al-Ghazāl, *Ihyg* `Ulwn al-Din, (Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1998) vol. 3, 7. Hadith narrated by al-Bayhagi, and it is *daif* (weak) according to Al-'Iraqi's analysis.” Additionally, I note that the validity of this hadith is highly contested; ibn-Taymiyyah says it has no sources (al-Furqan, 44–45), and the Ahmadiyyas quote it freely.

through submission to a *marabout*<sup>36</sup> who is a living descendent of Bamba. One becomes a Murid through the ceremony of *jebalu* (literally “to give over one’s life”), and this submission to one’s marabout opens the channel for baraka.

Murids in the United States compare Bamba to Martin Luther King, Jr. with his emphasis on peace and nonviolence, and to Malcolm X with regard to black pride and dignity.<sup>37</sup> They draw deeply on their traditional values and themes of peace and nonviolence to shape their identity<sup>38</sup> in post 9/11 America. At a recent<sup>39</sup> Murid event (a fundraiser for mosque renovations) in Harlem, New York, at Mt. Calvary/St. Marks United Methodist Church, I met an eighteen-year-old Murid named Soulayeman,<sup>40</sup> who quickly and succinctly told me the essence of being a Murid. Tall and thin, he wore a robe with wide vertical stripes and reminded me of my own self-assured, young-adult children as he stated his beliefs:

Ahmadu Bamba was all about peace and teaching people to have good character. There are four enemies of the soul: the world, the unrestrained self, lust, and Satan. Following the teaching of Ahmadu Bamba is all about character formation. Avoid the bad things of the world, especially ‘touching’ women other than your mother, sister, wife, or girlfriend. If you have good character, then you can get close to God.

Soulayeman identified parties and gangs as things that the teaching of Ahmadu Bamba helps a young man avoid. He also emphasized that Bamba taught forgiveness:

Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba tells us to never do wrong. If someone does wrong to you, forgive them. When you forgive, you are saved from doing wrong to the person, and now that person is in God’s hands.

It is interesting that this young man specifically touched on an example of what to do when wronged (a form of suffering). You forgive the person, placing them in God’s hands. Submission to one’s marabout, and thus to Bamba, promises victory over suffering because of the baraka earned by their saint.

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36 A term used in Senegal to refer to saints and men of religion, Arabic equivalents: *waliyu* or *murabit Babou*, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 7. There exist a few acknowledged women *marabouts* as well.

37 Zain Abdullah, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 127.

38 The Murid magazine, *Cultural Weeks Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba*, 2015 ed. had this title as its lead story, “Pacifist Jihad and the Economic Doctrine of a Great 19th-Century African Sufi.”

39 July 27, 2017.

40 Pseudonym.

Ngom agrees but warns that if a Murid fails, their faith and submission are called into question. Murid hagiographic literature contains

themes . . . of the victory and optimism of the sincere Murīds, who relied exclusively on Bamba and upheld the ethos of his ethics-centered doctrine. They also regularly emphasize the optimism and victory of sincere Murīds, successfully conveying to the masses the view that the resounding victories of Murīds occur in the context of daunting adversity and challenges. . . . [This literature has] no themes involving victimhood, defeat, or failure of Murīds. Murīds who fail in their endeavors are asked to “double-check the sincerity of their commitment in their hearts, for a sincere Murīd never fails in any endeavor. They are champions, just like The Master, Bamba.”<sup>41</sup>

Murids have a clear theology of patience in suffering, and their example is the suffering Bamba, whose eventual victory is tied to his suffering. Bamba earned this victory by his virtuous response to those sufferings and by his forgiveness of his enemies. Yet this does not seem to offer a word of hope to those who are struggling, suffering, or encountering difficulty in that those followers are told to check if they are sincere, the implication being that they are not for if they were, they would be “champions.” Material success in this life and paradise in the afterlife is often referred to by Murids as “paradise in the two abodes.”<sup>42</sup> Drawing on Murid hagiographic sources written in Wolof by Bamba’s disciples, Ngom says, “Bamba believed that the virtuous, those who have unwavering faith in God and demonstrate, for the sake of God, *jikko yu rafet* (beautiful/ethical virtues), would necessarily experience successes in this life that surpass their expectations as preludes to their reward of Paradise in the hereafter.”<sup>43</sup>

It is a simple fact, however, that some Murids around the world are failing in their endeavors. What about them? It seems the Murid answer is to try harder. How might Murids respond to the words of grace offered in an Anabaptist theology of suffering?

## Anabaptists and Suffering

Having described the Muridiyya, their founder Ahmadu Bamba, and their understanding of suffering, I now turn to my own Anabaptist tradition. As the Muridiyya are to the Muslim world, Anabaptists likewise are a tiny community

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<sup>41</sup> Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 185.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

when compared to the larger Christian community. Historically, Anabaptists have taken up various perspectives on suffering, even if a common approach can be identified. John Oyer summarizes this as follows:

For the Anabaptists, suffering was

- (1) being in Christ. Suffering denoted following Christ, . . . joy in participating with him in suffering, obedience to him including taking up the cross (Philippians 2:8). . . .
- (2) Suffering was also redemptive. It led them to a complete identification with Christ, not only in his suffering and death but also in resurrection with him. To Menno suffering was a sign of election . . . (“Of the cross of Christ,” 1556). . . .
- (3) . . . Suffering was also disciplinary. It led the Christian in the hard school of Christ, in discipleship to Christ, strengthening him for every test, hardening her to endure every rack and refute clever inquisitor. It turned the Christian toward obedience to Christ and the fellowship of believers, therefore disobedience towards the world. . . . resolute, hardened soldier(s) of the Lord, (Ephesians 6:13–20).
- (4) . . . Suffering was inevitable; Evil, willful people and social structures inevitably imposed suffering on those Christians who remained faithful to Christ. Christ’s injunction to take up the cross and follow him . . . made suffering as he had suffered a universal factual reality (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 2:21).
- (5) Suffering was avengeable. God would avenge his suffering people. Ultimately the righteous would be victorious and the . . . sinful persecutors would be defeated.<sup>44</sup>

## Murids and Anabaptists: Suffering, Nonviolence, and Salvation

### *Similarities*

Ngom says, “The spiritual significance of Bamba’s suffering and its lasting impacts on his movement is . . . one of the most important, but least understood, aspects of the Murīdiyya.”<sup>45</sup> This seems to be a realm offering fruitful

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<sup>44</sup> John S. Oyer, “Suffering,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Suffering>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

interaction between Anabaptist and Murid disciples who want to understand each other. How are suffering, salvation, and nonviolence connected in Murid thought? How are they connected in Anabaptist thought? How are these commitments reflected in the respective missions of Murids and Anabaptists? Murids and Anabaptists have similar experiences of and responses to suffering in their respective histories, yet their understandings of suffering ultimately diverge and lead to different missions.

Historically, both Murid and Anabaptist communities have suffered injustices and persecution, and they share some understandings regarding suffering. Recently I met Khadim Bouso, the Imam of the Muridiyya community in New York City, who described his community as “all about peace, nonviolence and forgiveness.” This prompted me to tell him the story of Michael and Margrit Sattler: their fresh rediscovery of the teaching of Jesus, their subsequent preaching of peace and nonviolence—even toward the Turks who were invading Europe—and their martyrdom. Imam Bouso’s response was, “We are the same!” Although his enthusiasm overstated the similarities, he had a good point. Both of our communities understand persecution and both promote a response that forefronts forgiveness, trust in God, peace, and nonviolence. This emphasis is something I deeply appreciate about the Muridiyya.

Both Murids and Anabaptists also regard suffering as part of discipline and maturity. Historically, Anabaptists have understood suffering as testing that calls disciples of Jesus to obey his commands, turn away from the world, and embrace the fellowship of believers. We have understood that God uses suffering to grow people to maturity. Murids would agree that suffering is a testing that must be overcome with good works and ethical responses—responses that reflect the values of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba.

And both communities agree that vengeance is God’s business—that people of sincere faith forgive their enemies, trusting that God will avenge the wrong. Soulayeman, my young Murid friend, illustrated this in his statement (above), “When you forgive you are saved from doing wrong to the person, and now that person is in God’s hands.” In similar fashion, as my friend Serigne Fallou described being cheated by his business partner (another Murid), he gave witness that the situation was now “all in God’s hands.”

Both Murids and Anabaptists believe that ultimately the righteous will be victorious and the persecutors will be defeated, although there is perhaps some disagreement about the timetable. Murids are more oriented to victory happening in this world and Anabaptists more oriented toward an eternal reckoning.

### *Differences*

Other aspects of suffering present areas of greater significant difference between Anabaptists and Murids. All the early Anabaptist leaders died martyrs' deaths and by any standard of worldly success were complete failures. This is starkly different from the path of Ahmadu Bamba, who suffered greatly but in his own lifetime saw his order grow, solidify, and begin to be accepted by other Sufi orders as well as by the colonial government. In addition, he died a natural death.

Anabaptists understand suffering as "being in Christ" and that following Jesus includes the joy of participating with him in suffering and obedience in taking up one's cross. Participating with Christ in his suffering also means conversely that Jesus is present with his followers in their suffering. This suffering is redemptive because Anabaptists identify with Jesus not only in his suffering but also ultimately in his resurrection.

The Anabaptist conviction of the inevitability of suffering if we are obedient to Christ would seem foreign to Murids. Their promise is that faithfulness will lead to victory. By this, they mean being faithful to Islam and to Bamba's teaching, and submitting to Bamba through one of his living descendants to ensure success and victory in this world and in paradise. Murids certainly allow for temporary setbacks on the way to ultimate victory, but faithful disciples suffering defeat and not succeeding in this world is unacceptable.

The Anabaptist understanding of suffering as redemptive is a notion that is not part of Islam or Murid understanding. In Islam, people are not redeemed by a savior; instead more emphasis is placed on personal effort. Bamba achieved victory over suffering by his patience and by his righteous deeds. His great, unrelenting effort is what perfected his soul and made him a friend of God and a source of baraka. Murids understand that by giving their life over to their marabout, they will receive baraka that will help them perfect their soul and then be loved by God. They hope that this baraka will give them "paradise in the two abodes." As Muslims, Murids stress instruction and right action that leads disciples to purity of soul and closeness to God. As Sufis, they stress the additional benefit of having the baraka of their saint, Ahmadu Bamba, who was appointed by God. The Anabaptist idea that God would come down in Christ and choose the suffering way of the cross is not a consideration for the Muridiyya. Bamba specifically says in his poem *Futzi*, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, "Thy son did not die on the cross, he ascended into heaven."<sup>46</sup>

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46 Melki Sedek So, *The Long Odyssey of Maat* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2015).

While Murids look to Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba, who offers the instructions of Islam and mystical baraka, to help them achieve success in the two abodes, their success is dependent on personal effort. Anabaptists are Christ followers and people of the cross. Jesus suffered and died for us and is Emmanuel—God with us—in our suffering. Jesus resurrected is our hope of glory. Herein lies the foundational difference.

## Two Invitations

Both the Muridiyya and the Anabaptists believe they have a mission to each other and to the world. Both communities promote good works, peace, nonviolence, and forgiveness of enemies. At the core, however, they look in different directions for the source and fuel for these activities, and the message they offer suffering people is different. The Murid invitation is, Come join the Muridiyya way of Islam and gain instruction (Islam) and baraka (from Ahmadu Bamba) to help you achieve victory over suffering in this world and paradise in the next. The Anabaptist invitation is, Repent and follow the way of Jesus our Lord and Savior, who is with us in our suffering now and will take us to be with him forever in paradise. Both are invitations to community, but the communities are different. One trusts that instruction, effort, and baraka from their saint will achieve material success and relief from suffering in this world and paradise in the next; the other trusts in a Savior who will walk with us in our suffering, rejecting the idea that material success is an indicator of God's approval.

## A Call to Mission

While camping with my wife's extended family, I listened as one of my brothers-in-law led a devotional on the love of God. Following a meaningful time of sharing, he asked us to sing "He (Jesus) came down that we may have love." As we joined voices together in this declaration of the incarnation, I was deeply moved. Jesus came down that we may have love, that we may have peace, that we may have joy as a free gift, not something we work to achieve. At the same time, I was disturbed, realizing that Serigne Fallou and Soulayeman can't sing this declaration; my Murid friends believe that the teaching of Islam and the baraka of their saint, Ahmadu Bamba, offer them the way to love, peace, and joy through their determined effort. A call to mission was reborn in my soul as I sat by the campfire singing this traditional song from Cameroon:

He came down that we may have love;

he came down that we may have love;

he came down that we may have love;  
hallelujah for evermore.

LEADER: Why did he come?

2. He came down that we may have peace . . .

3. He came down that we may have joy . . .

4. He came down that we may have power . . .

5. He came down that we may have hope . . .