

# Friendship and Conversion in Interreligious Contexts

## Exploring Perspectives Beyond Religious Orthodoxy

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**Abstract:** This academic paper explores how friendships between Christians and Muslims in Norway influence their views on conversion. Christian participants grapple with the tension between their desire to convert their Muslim friends and maintaining genuine friendships. Muslims show less interest in converting Christian friends, but some express happiness at the prospect. The article also highlights creative approaches to conversion, such as incorporating elements of the other's faith. Ultimately, it underscores the primacy of friendship and love over conversion, emphasizing how close relationships can transform religious perspectives.

**Keywords:** Christian-Muslim relations, Norway, interviews, interfaith friendships, Great Commission, conversion, challenges in interfaith relationships.

**Sammendrag:** Denne vitenskapelige artikkelen utforsker hvordan vennskap mellom kristne og muslimer i Norge påvirker deres syn på konvertering. Kristne deltakere viste en ambivalens mellom ønsket om å konvertere sine muslimske venner til den kristne tro og opprettholdelse av ærlige vennskap. Muslimer viste mindre interesse for å konvertere kristne venner, men uttrykte også glede over muligheten for at deres venner kunne bli muslimer. Artikkelen avdekker også kreative tilnærminger til konvertering, som å integrere troselementer fra den andre religionen. Til slutt understreker den viktigheten av vennskap og kjærlighet framfor konvertering, og hvordan nære relasjoner kan endre religiøse perspektiver.

**Søkeord:** Kristen-muslimske relasjoner, Norge, intervjuer, interreligiøse vennskap, Misjonsbefalingen, omvendelse, utfordringer i interreligiøse relasjoner.

## Introduction

This academic paper delves into a pivotal aspect of my doctoral thesis, “Transforming Friendships”,<sup>1</sup> which investigates the impact of friendships on the perceptions of religion within an interreligious context. Drawing upon interviews with a cohort comprising eight Muslims and eight Christians residing in Norway, this study explores the extent to which their interfaith friendships have influenced their religious outlooks. Notably, the theme of conversion emerged as a salient issue, eliciting profound responses from both Christian and Muslim participants. This paper begins by elucidating the distinctive ways in which Christian and Muslim respondents approached the subject of conversion, subsequently highlighting the intersections and similarities in their perspectives.

## Christians Grappling with the Issues of Friendship and Conversion

The Christian respondents displayed a penchant for extensive contemplation on the concept of conversion, which manifested in two principal paradigms. Initially, a majority of Christian interviewees admitted to harboring an inclination to convert their religiously different friends, especially at the onset of their interfaith relationships, as evidenced by their narratives. However, as these relationships deepened, many found themselves grappling with the tension between this desire for conversion and the authenticity of their friendships.

For instance, *Hilde*<sup>2</sup>, a former missionary with experience in Africa, found herself entangled in what she termed a “missionary dilemma”<sup>3</sup> when considering her wish to convey the Gospel to her Muslim friend. She felt that using her Muslim friend solely as a vessel for her faith rendered the friendship disingenuous, saying that “the friendship is not real”<sup>4</sup> as it implied an underlying agenda beyond the pure camaraderie. Hilde’s struggle lay in reconciling the objective of nurturing genuine friendship with her inclination to share the Gospel with her friend. Similarly, *Berit*, a member of an international interfaith women’s group, expressed similar reservations. She conveyed the notion that befriending Muslims “only so they can be saved”<sup>5</sup>, which she considered

1 Torstein Try, *Transforming Friendships: Christian-Muslim Friendships and Religious Change*, PhD Dissertation (Stavanger: Totaltrykk AS, 2020).

2 To maintain the anonymity of my interviewees, I have changed their names. However, for transparency purposes, their exact ages are provided in the footnotes. Since the quotes are taken from my unpublished PhD monograph, the paragraph headings are given as references instead of page numbers.

3 *Hilde* 57 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Conversion as an Obstacle to Interfaith Friendship”.

4 *Hilde* 57 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Conversion as an Obstacle to Interfaith Friendship”.

5 *Berit* 50 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Conversion as an Obstacle to Interfaith Friendship”.

an external motivation for proselytizing, would be ethically misguided. She viewed it as “completely wrong” to perceive friendships in such instrumental terms.

In an article on friendship between Christians and Muslims, Alex Hughes articulates a fear that Muslim friends may unwittingly only become tools for Christians’ self-interest. Interfaith friendships, he posits, could potentially devolve into investments of time aimed at securing conversions. Hughes further contends that friendships predicated upon the expectation of religious conversion are fundamentally flawed.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, my own research yielded parallel insights concerning the intricate interplay between friendship and conversion among several Christian informants.

Secondly, in addition to the concern that their friendships might become instrumental in advancing their conversion agenda, several Christian informants harbored apprehensions that revealing their intentions to convert their Muslim friends could jeopardize these friendships. *Kristin*, for instance said that she did “not want to push her away because of this”<sup>7</sup>, pointing to her eagerness to convert her Muslim friend. She feared that broaching the subject might put a strain on their relationship. *Harald* also worried that any perceived pressure to convert could ultimately “be a thing that destroys our friendship”<sup>8</sup>, potentially leading to the avoidance of contentious religious discussions. Across the board, Christian respondents grappled with the challenge of reconciling their interfaith friendships with their fervent desire to convert their Muslim acquaintances. *Kristin* and *Harald*, in particular, were troubled by the prospect that their efforts to persuade their Muslim friends to embrace Christianity could ultimately erode the foundations of their friendships.

*Berit* addressed the conversion dilemma by emphasizing that a friendship could not be considered genuine if it was primarily employed as a vehicle for promoting one’s faith. Through her reasoning she admitted that she had, to some extent, utilized her friend as a subject of her religious convictions. Similar to *Berit*, *Hilde* acknowledged that her initial motivations during the inception of her friendship with a Muslim were driven by missionary zeal. Despite the ethical dilemmas posed by this missionary impulse, it remained a compelling force among many of the Christian respondents.

### **Solving the “Missionary Dilemma”**

Nevertheless, while grappling with these challenges, several informants found ways to navigate the complex issue of conversion without forsaking their zeal altogether.

6 Alex Hughes, Fear and Friendship: Conversation or Conversion. In Frances Ward and Sarah Coakley, eds. *Fear and Friendship. Anglicans Engaging with Islam* (London: Continuum, 2012), 14-15.

7 *Berit* 50 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Conversion as an Obstacle to Interfaith Friendship”.

8 *Harald* 26 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Conversion as an Obstacle to Interfaith Friendship”.

For example, *Kristin* had decided to, after developing a deeper understanding of her Muslim friend *Inaam's* unwavering faith, recalibrated her approach. Getting to know her Muslim friend *Kristin* had come to realize that “to her it is very important to have great security in her own faith”,<sup>9</sup> redirecting her proselytizing efforts toward “other, more secular Muslims, who are more rootless”<sup>10</sup> lacking a secure faith. Her evolving perspective, shaped by insights gained through her friendship, led her both to try to convert other Muslims and to pray for her friend to convert later, because as she told me: “I do believe that Jesus works in many ways”.<sup>11</sup> prioritize prayer for future opportunities to discuss matters of faith with *Inaam*, rather than immediate conversion attempts.

*Berit*, on the other hand, drew inspiration from the biblical account of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well,<sup>12</sup> saying that “it is not only me who is to give something, but I can experience those whom I meet giving something to me as well. And maybe start with just that”.<sup>13</sup> She recognized the need for reciprocity in her interfaith friendship, understanding that if she wished to offer her Muslim friend “the living water” of Christianity, she, too, needed guidance and assistance from her friend. This reciprocity, according to *Berit*, epitomized Jesus' “real love”<sup>14</sup> for the religious other.

*Tore* took a similar subtle approach to his Muslim friend *Hamid*, by saying that “I pray that they should experience Jesus entering their lives, this is my prayer, I admit” (...) “However, I am not at the stage that if they do not become believers (I would abandon them)”.<sup>15</sup> By entrusting the matter to God, he could approach his efforts to convert his Muslim friends with greater ease and relaxation.

*Signe* had a comparable attitude, hoping “that those things about Christianity come gradually”,<sup>16</sup> an attitude that helped her to prioritize friendship above all else. She hoped that by fostering a strong and enduring friendship with her Muslim friend *Jasmin*, Christian faith would naturally permeate their relationship over time.

The various responses from Christian informants reflected a desire to mitigate the urgency of proselytization within interfaith friendships, opting instead to embrace their Christian faith as a means of accommodating and enriching their relationships

9 *Kristin* 30 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

10 *Kristin* 30 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

11 *Kristin* 30 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

12 See John 4:5-43

13 *Berit* 50 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Christians Inspired by Christianity to Befriend Muslims”.

14 *Berit* 50 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Christians Inspired by Christianity to Befriend Muslims”.

15 *Tore* 56 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

When relating to “they” and “them” *Tore* talks about *Hamid* and his family.

16 *Signe* 65, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

with their Muslim friends. These instances underscore how interfaith friendships can transform the perspectives of Christian respondents, prompting them to seek alternative ways to engage with their Muslim friends that go beyond mere conversion.

## Muslims and the question of conversion

In contrast to the Christian respondents, most of my Muslim participants did not seem to face the same level of difficulty regarding the issue of conversion within their friendships. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that potential biases may have arisen due to my Christian background as the researcher, possibly influencing the way Muslim respondents contemplated the issue of conversion. Additionally, being immigrants in what they perceived as a predominantly Christian country, some Muslims may have considered themselves newcomers and thus exhibited restraint in adopting missionary stances towards Christians. This restraint may be evident in the way several Muslims responded by stating that they did not give the issue much thought. However, it is also possible that their lack of extensive reflection on the issue stems from genuine disinterest.

Nonetheless, some Muslim respondents did express nuanced views on the topic. For instance, *Inaam* put it like this: “No, I do not think about it. But if *Kristin* were to become a Muslim, I would be happy”,<sup>17</sup> so even if she did not attach much importance to conversion, she would be pleased if her Christian friend *Kristin* converted to Islam. Similarly, *Basiima* expressed a comparable sentiment, emphasizing her happiness if her friend chose to convert.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, numerous Muslim informants, including *Basiima*, expressed the sentiment that converting their Christian friends to Islam would be highly beneficial for them. *Basiima* stated, “It would have been very good for me, it is a good thing if I do it.”<sup>19</sup> It will be written on my good side if I do it.” This underscores the belief among these informants that such conversions would result in spiritual advantages in the afterlife.

Another recurring perspective among Muslim interviewees was the idea that people cannot be forced to believe and must think for themselves, as *Hamid* put it: “everybody knows their own way, we cannot force them”.<sup>20</sup> *Hamid* added another interesting dimension talking about the lack of knowledge in connection to the question of converting their Christian friends: “And I cannot invite someone to become a Muslim.

17 *Inaam* 41, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Muslim Respondents’ Views on the Relevance of the question of Conversion”.

18 *Basiima* 39, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Act of Converting the Other as Merit, Obligation and Hospitality”.

19 *Basiima* 39, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Act of Converting the Other as Merit, Obligation and Hospitality”.

20 *Hamid* 46, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Implication of Religious Knowledge for the Question of Conversion”.

No! It is too much, and I am too ignorant. I do not have enough knowledge”,<sup>21</sup> a sentiment shared by several other Muslim informants. Like the Muslim couple, *Warda* and *Talal*, who thought that they were “not clever enough ... to explain all about Islam”,<sup>22</sup> or *Jasmin* who answered that she “didn’t have a strong grasp of religion”.<sup>23</sup> Several Muslim informants felt that they lacked significant religious knowledge to effectively convert their Christian friends to Islam. They appeared to view the task of converting a Christian friend to Islam as daunting and beyond their capacity as ordinary Muslims.

Notably, among the Christian interviewees, *Kristin* was the only one who shared a similar view about her lack of knowledge concerning converting the religious other: “I wish I could use words to argue in such a way that she would come to understand and know Jesus, but I can’t do that.”<sup>24</sup> However, she expressed trust in divine guidance in such matters, when she later uttered that she got “wisdom to follow what the Holy Spirit tells you in such situations”.<sup>25</sup> The Muslims may have held similar views, or as indicated by *Jamila*, who instead advised me to talk to an imam about the religion of Islam.<sup>26</sup> It may be that they believed that such religious delicate matters as conversion should be handled by Islamic specialists in their mosque.

Interestingly, some among their Muslim acquaintances expressed suspicion that their Christian friends may harbor ulterior motives and merely sought to convert them. In all instances, however, these suspicions were countered by their personal knowledge of their Christian friends, as affirmed by *Talal*: “we did not listen to them, because we started to get to know them, and we discussed religion and culture and that kind of thing in a very good [way]”.<sup>27</sup>

## Comparative Analysis

From the presented findings, notable differences emerged in how most Muslim respondents discussed conversion compared to their Christian counterparts. Firstly, Muslims emphasized conversion as a religious duty and a means to accumulate good deeds, while Christians contemplated conversion more complexly. Secondly, Muslims

21 *Hamid 46*, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Implication of Religious Knowledge for the Question of Conversion”.

22 *Warda 47 and Talal 45*: *Talal*: “But we are not clever enough to...” *Warda*: “...explain...” *Talal*: “...explain all about Islam.” *Warda*: “It is hard to explain very well.”

23 *Jasmin 41*, English translation from the original transcribed interview.

24 *Kristin 30*, English translation from the original transcribed interview.

25 *Kristin 30*, English translation from the original transcribed interview.

26 *Jamila 55* firstly misunderstood the aim of my interview, thinking that I wanted to discuss religious matters with her, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, in the presentation of the informants.

27 *Talal 45*, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Muslim Respondents’ Objections to Suspicion from Other Muslims”.

frequently downplayed the issue of conversion, suggesting it was of minimal concern to them. Thirdly, they perceived themselves as lacking the necessary knowledge to convert others effectively. Fourthly, many Muslims affirmed the idea that individuals must make their own choices regarding faith and religion, and thus, they refrained from pressuring others to convert.

However, two noteworthy similarities occurred between Christian and Muslim respondents. Firstly, both groups expressed happiness at the prospect of their friends converting to their respective faiths. Secondly, neither group believed in pressuring or forcing their friends into conversion.

### **The Primacy of Friendship Over Conversion**

Despite the challenges posed by the issue of conversion in the context of interfaith friendships, certain findings suggest that various aspects associated with the intimacy of these relationships served as effective countermeasures against the complexities of conversion, both for Christian and Muslim participants.

To illustrate the impact of interfaith friendship on the intricate issue of conversion, I will present a dialogue between *Berit* and *Basiima*. Throughout most of the interview with *Basiima*, *Berit* was present. When the topic of conversion was broached, *Basiima* expressed her viewpoint that she couldn't compel *Berit* to convert, but she would naturally be delighted if *Berit* chose to do so. *Berit's* response shed light on how intimate friendships could alter perceptions and clarify challenging religious matters:

*Berit*: “Yes, I am also thinking like that ... faith in Jesus means so incredibly much to me, so naturally I would have wanted all my friends, including you, to believe in Jesus as the path to salvation or eternal life. ... Because you want to share the best you have with those you love. But I also believe that you can never force anyone to do something.”

*Basiima*: “No.”

*Berit*: “And I want to be your friend no matter what.”

*Basiima*: “No matter what, yes, yes!”<sup>28</sup>

*Berit's* reflection on this matter, in the presence of her Muslim friend *Basiima*, indicated that the existence of a close friendship could potentially bring about transformations and clarifications in the realm of intricate religious controversies. Importantly, *Berit's* discussion on conversion in the company of her Muslim friend diverged from her previous discussions with me. Firstly, *Berit* associated her desire for *Basiima's* conversion with her love for her friends. Secondly, she reiterated her commitment to maintaining their friendship regardless of whether *Basiima* embraced Christianity or not. In turn,

28 *Berit* 50 and *Basiima* 39, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Conversion and Religious Dialogue”.

*Basiima* strongly affirmed that she held similar sentiments regarding the issue of conversion. Their friendship was founded on a basis beyond shared faith.

When *Hamid* discussed conversion, he articulated the essence of interfaith friendship. He interlinked concepts of love, charity, and conversion while distinguishing between friendship and the religious labels of “Christian” and “Muslim”:

*Hamid*: “Oh ... I am contemplating love, how do we find love? Love, the Bible talks about it, we have to act on it! Find it! It isn't enough if I said I was a Christian, or I became a Christian, or if I am a Muslim, it is not enough! We have to be helpful, we have to help each other, we have to show the way, we have to explain.”<sup>29</sup>

*Hamid* emphasized that religious identity alone was insufficient to sustain a meaningful friendship. He turned to the Bible to underscore the significance of love in their interactions. His depiction of love as a countermeasure to unilateral conversion efforts echoed *Harald's* perspective that Christians were not “called to love people because they are to convert” but “called to love people just to love people”.<sup>30</sup> *Hilde* also shared this religious motivation, highlighting that her primary incentive for spreading the message of Jesus was rooted in His love for her and all humanity.<sup>31</sup>

Several Muslim respondents extended their discussions on conversion to incorporate themes of hospitality towards those from different religious backgrounds. *Warda*, for instance, recounted her warm reception of *Elisabeth* in this way: “If you can, you are welcome to become a Muslim!”,<sup>32</sup> inviting her to consider converting to Islam and thus becoming part of the Muslim community. *Basiima* drew inspiration from a narrative portraying the Prophet Muhammad's hospitable treatment of a Jewish neighbor who ultimately converted to Islam due to the Prophet's kindness during times of need.<sup>33</sup> These accounts aimed to underscore how their friendships had inspired them to embrace love and hospitality, transcending religious boundaries. They depicted a vision in which hospitality, love, and friendship superseded religious affiliations to become universal traits.

These examples collectively demonstrate how the intimacy and love inherent in friendship could mitigate potential challenges associated with differing faiths.

29 *Hamid* 46, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Muslim Respondents' Views on the Relevance of the Question of Conversion”.

30 *Harald* 26, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

31 *Hilde* 57, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

32 *Warda* 47, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Act of Converting the Other as Merit, Obligation and Hospitality”.

33 *Basiima* 39, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Act of Converting the Other as Merit, Obligation and Hospitality”.



Concerning the matter of conversion, some respondents even introduced innovative religious solutions to what can be termed the “missionary dilemma”.

## Conversion and Religious Creativity

Some respondents exhibited creative approaches to conversion, embracing the idea that religion and culture could be connected. *Tore*, for instance, put it like this: “when ‘Muslim’ is written in the passport it is about the whole life, in a way, it is like a cultural thing, and everything is intertwined.” He would be careful not to “remove something from them” by his eagerness to convert his friends. He proposed that Muslims could continue to identify as such while incorporating Christian beliefs about Jesus into their faith: “He may be a Muslim who is a Jesus-believer”.<sup>34</sup> Among Muslim respondents, similar innovative approaches emerged. *Warda* and *Talal* proposed that their Christian friends, *Elisabeth* (67) and *Hans* (75), might earn a place in heaven due to their dedicated care for a severely disabled foster daughter. *Talal* posited:

If you take in a handicapped individual, provide care for many years, especially when they have no parents, Islamic tradition states that you will enter heaven for such a noble act. However, I am uncertain about the status of Christians who engage in similar acts.<sup>35</sup>

These instances reflect how interfaith friendships can inspire religious individuals to seek alternative pathways for their friends’ salvation that do not necessitate a complete religious conversion.

The reflections of my informants highlight how interfaith friendships can significantly alter the perspectives of individuals regarding the issue of conversion. This unique way of viewing people of different religious backgrounds through the lens of friendship finds resonance in other narratives as well.

For instance, Peter C. Phan recounts a story of a young Buddhist student attending a Catholic school. His Catholic friends reassured him that he, assuring him that he need not worry about the prospect of going to hell because, as their friend, he was destined for heaven.<sup>36</sup> This anecdote underscores the idea that when individuals develop close friendships with those of different religious faiths, it becomes more challenging to reconcile the notion of a divine being who would condemn a close friend to eternal

34 All the quotes come from *Tore* 56, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Respondents’ View on Conversion and Innovative Religious Solutions – some findings”.

35 *Talal* 45 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Respondents’ View on Conversion and Innovative Religious Solutions – some findings”.

36 Peter C. Phan, “A Friend and a Scholar” in James L. Fredericks and Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier (eds.), *Interreligious Friendship after Nostra Aetate* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 173.

damnation. In this context, individuals like *Tore*, *Talal*, and *Warda* seem to be actively seeking religious justifications for their friends' salvation without necessitating a complete conversion to their own faith.

The discussions surrounding conversion within the framework of interfaith friendships evoke the observations made by Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, who posits the existence of a missionary undercurrent in many interreligious friendships. Given that both Islam and Christianity lay claim to representing the universal truth, it is natural for adherents of both faiths to assume that eventually, all humans will come to understand and embrace this truth.<sup>37</sup> In her work Deanna F. Womack explores two contrasting approaches adopted by Christian churches in the United States when interacting with Muslims. One approach involves “embracing the objective of fostering Christian-Muslim friendships,” while the other entails “depicting Islam as a competitor”.<sup>38</sup> This discourse is not confined solely to the United States but resonates in various segments of the global Christian community. In the context of discussions surrounding interfaith relationships, Volf and McAnnally-Linz have identified a noteworthy challenge stemming from the Biblical ‘Great Commission.’ This commission, deeply embedded in Christian doctrine, calls for the conversion of all humanity to become disciples of Jesus, potentially complicating the maintenance of meaningful friendships between Christians and individuals of other faiths.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, as some of my informants have demonstrated, religious beliefs in general, and the concept of religious conversion in particular, can occasionally disrupt the harmony within these friendships.

On the other hand, certain interviewees presented evidence suggesting that friendship has the potential to reshape conventional missiological perspectives regarding individuals of different faiths. James L. Fredericks cites Louis Massignon, describing Christian-Muslim friendships as “sacred hospitality” characterized by the sole purpose of welcoming and serving, with no intention to convert the other party.<sup>40</sup> Although Massignon's concept is premised on a non-proselytizing stance, it is apparent from my own findings that there remains the possibility for transformation within interreligious friendships. Fredericks contends that it is impossible to remain

37 Rowan Williams, “Afterword”, in Frances Ward and Sarah Coakley, eds. *Fear and Friendship. Anglicans Engaging with Islam*. (London: Continuum, 2012), 147.

38 Deanna F. Womack, *Neighbors: Christians and Muslims Building Community* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 118.

39 Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, “A Christian Perspective on Interreligious Friendship” in: Alon Goshen-Gottstein (ed.), *Friendship Across Religions: Theological Perspectives on Interreligious Friendship* (pp. 45-67) (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 51.

40 Louis Massignon quoted in James L. Fredericks, “Introduction” in James L. Fredericks and Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier (eds.), *Interreligious Friendship after Nostra Aetate* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3.

unchanged in such relationships, as they are imbued with genuine love for the other.<sup>41</sup> However, the change that occurs is not an active attempt to alter the religious beliefs of the other but rather a personal transformation driven by a growing desire to receive and serve one's friend.

## Conclusion

Upon analyzing the experiences and resolutions related to the issue of conversion within interfaith friendships, it becomes apparent that ambiguity characterizes these relationships. While interfaith friendships may initially pose challenges concerning the desire for conversion, they simultaneously offer solutions to these challenges. Love, charity, intimacy, empathy and hospitality inherent in these friendships often supersede the urgency to convert the religious other. Consequently, respondents began to perceive friendship itself as the primary objective, with conversion becoming a secondary consideration. Nevertheless, they did not entirely abandon their hopes of conversion, holding onto the belief that their friends might eventually choose to convert. Furthermore, some respondents displayed religious creativity, suggesting alternative perspectives that allowed their friends to retain their religious identities while embracing elements of the other's faith. This demonstrates the transformative potential of interfaith friendships, where love and friendship take precedence over conversion, fostering greater understanding and harmony among individuals of different religious backgrounds.

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