



Religious Leaders as Peacebuilders: Assessing the Role of Christian and Muslim Clergy in Conflict Prevention in Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

Despite numerous Christian-Muslim dialogue initiatives in Southwest Nigeria, religious conflicts persist, leading to loss of lives, property destruction, and displacement of people. This is the aim of the study, which examined the effectiveness of Christian-Muslim dialogue in promoting peace-building in Southwest Nigeria. The study uses a qualitative approach, involving a review of relevant literature on the impact of interfaith dialogue initiatives on building trust, resolving conflicts, and fostering peaceful coexistence among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. The study's findings indicated that Christian-Muslim dialogue has significantly contributed to reducing tensions and improving relationships between the two religious groups. Initiatives to promote dialogue have made it easier to comprehend, empathise with, and work together, which has decreased violence and enhanced conflict resolution techniques. However, challenges persist, including prejudices, political manipulation, and limited institutional support. The present study highlighted the need for sustained and inclusive dialogue efforts, involving religious leaders, policymakers, and grassroots communities, to consolidate gains and promote sustainable peace in Nigeria. The study's findings have implications for peace-building initiatives in other conflict-affected countries like Nigeria, with religious diversity.

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa. Its population is diversified, with a mix of ethnic and religious groupings. Islam and Christianity make up the majority religions, with Muslims making up 53.5% of the population, Roman Catholics making up 10.6%, and other religions making up 6%¹. Tensions and disagreements between followers of these two major

¹ Sanders, J. (2022). *Gender Inequality: an Examination of the Islamic Religious Affiliation and Female Infant Mortality Rates among Muslim Wives in Nigeria*. Walden University.

religions have long existed in the country and have occasionally resulted in violence and bloodshed. In Nigeria, there is religious conflict between Christians and Muslims, but there is also ethnic, cultural, and political strife². Factors such as competition for resources, historical grievances, and manipulation by political elites have fueled animosities and mistrust between the two religious communities. There have sometimes been violent skirmishes between Muslims and Christians in the country's primarily Muslim north that have left casualties and damaged property³.

Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is a vital tool for understanding, reconciliation, and peaceful coexistence. It allows individuals from both religious communities to engage in respectful communication, exchange perspectives, and address conflict causes. Dialogue challenges stereotypes and misconceptions, fostering common ground and promoting understanding⁴. Peace-building efforts in Nigeria have increasingly emphasised the role of interfaith dialogue in promoting social cohesion and fostering sustainable peace. By bringing together religious leaders, scholars, activists, and grassroots communities, dialogue initiatives seek to build bridges of trust, promote empathy and understanding, and create spaces for collaboration and mutual support.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study uses a qualitative approach, involving a review of relevant literature on the impact of interfaith dialogue initiatives on building trust, resolving conflicts, and fostering peaceful coexistence among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through dialogue, opportunities for joint advocacy, conflict resolution, and social development can be explored, thereby contributing to the building of a more inclusive and harmonious society⁵. On this note, this study aims to assess the impact of Christian-Muslim

² Onapajo, H. (2012). Politics for God: Religion, politics and conflict in democratic Nigeria. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4(9), 42-66.

³ Yusuf, H. B. (2007). Managing Muslim–Christian conflicts in Northern Nigeria: A case study of Kaduna state. *Islam–Christian Muslim Relations*, 18(2), 237-256.

⁴ Ghatas, I. M. (2022). Engaging with Muslims through dialogue. *Muslim-Christian Encounter*, 15(2), 7-41.

⁵ Abdul-Haqq, N., & Adienge, B. (2016). Effective Inter-Religious Action in Peacebuilding Program (EIAP).

dialogue on peacebuilding in Southwest Nigeria, with a focus on exploring the dynamics, outcomes, and challenges of interfaith engagement in the region.

Theoretical Framework: Interfaith Dialogue Theory (IDT)

The book "Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic," written by Hans Kung in 1991, it is credited with helping to shape the interfaith dialogue theory, which holds that interfaith discussion and peace between states are essential to interfaith harmony⁶. The theory emphasizes the importance of fostering understanding and cooperation between different religious groups to promote peace and harmony⁷. It is based on the idea that dialogue can help bridge the divides and misunderstandings that often lead to conflict. By engaging in meaningful conversations and exchanging ideas, individuals from different faith traditions can learn to respect and appreciate each other's beliefs, leading to a more peaceful coexistence⁸. This theoretical framework will provide a solid foundation for analysing the impact of Christian-Muslim dialogue on peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria.

Interfaith Dialogue Theory (IDT) suggests that interfaith dialogue involves mutual learning, respect, and understanding among individuals from diverse religious institutions. Through open and honest communication, participants in these dialogues can work towards finding common ground and building bridges of tolerance and acceptance. Fostering a culture of empathy and cooperation can break down community barriers, leading to a more harmonious society⁹. The goal of interfaith dialogue between the two prominent religious institutions in Nigeria (Christianity and Islam) is to foster unity and solidarity among diverse religious groups, thereby fostering a more peaceful and inclusive society for all.

Historical Background: Overview of the history of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria

Christianity and Islam have long histories in Nigeria, dating back to the 11th and 13th centuries, respectively, and were introduced by European missionaries and Portuguese explorers

⁶ Michaelides, P. E. (2009). Interfaith dialogue in global perspective and the necessity of youth involvement. *Asia Europe Journal*, 7(3), 449-462.

⁷ Pope, E. M., & Nicolaidis, A. (2021). Becoming Thou as transformation in interfaith dialogue. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 40(2), 115-128.

⁸ Orton, A. (2016). Interfaith dialogue: seven key questions for theory, policy and practice. *Religion, State & Society*, 44(4), 349-365.

⁹ Andrabi, A. A. (2020). Interfaith Dialogue: Its Need, Importance and Merits in the Contemporary World. *International Journal of Academic Studies*, 2(3), 264-271.

during the colonial period¹⁰. Subsequent missionary activities by British, French, and German missionaries led to the spread of Christianity among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. British, French, and German missionaries' subsequent activities in Nigeria contributed to the spread of Christianity among various ethnic groups¹¹. Islam, on the other hand, was brought to Nigeria through trade routes and the influence of Islamic scholars and merchants from North Africa and the Middle East. Over the centuries, “both Christianity and Islam” have become “major religions in Nigeria”, with sizable populations of followers across the country¹². “Islam is more common in northern Nigeria”, where it is practised by Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri populations, whereas Christianity is more common in southern Nigeria, especially among Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups.

Historical, social, political, and economic variables have all interacted in complicated ways to shape Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria. The Sokoto Caliphate, which formed a strong Islamic state in northern Nigeria in the 19th century, is one of the major events that affected these interactions. The British colonisation of Nigeria in the early 20th century further deepened religious divides, as colonial policies favoured Christian missionaries and marginalised Muslim communities. Increased ethno-religious tensions and “violent clashes between Muslims and Christians” were observed in Nigeria after independence. A hardline Muslim group led the Maitatsine rebellion in the 1980s, which claimed a large number of lives and destroyed a lot of property. Communities already divided and distrusted were further exacerbated in the early 2000s when Sharia law was introduced in many northern states¹³.

Colonialism and post-colonialism have had a profound impact on interfaith dialogue in Nigeria. During the colonial period, British policies of indirect rule and Christian missionary activities favoured the spread of Christianity, leading to resentment and marginalisation of Muslim

¹⁰ Aderibigbe, I. S. (2015). Religious traditions in Africa: An overview of origins, basic beliefs, and practices. *Contemporary perspectives on religions in Africa and the African diaspora*, 7-29.

¹¹ Vaughan, O. (2016). *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*. Duke University Press.

¹² Kitause, R. H., & Achunike, H. C. (2013). Religion in Nigeria from 1900-2013. *Religion*, 3(18), 45-57.

¹³ Hashim, Y., Kew, D., & Walker, J. A. (2017). Nigeria: Frustration, polarisation, and violence. *Peacebuilding in Deeply Divided Societies: Toward Social Cohesion*, 215-244.

communities. This imbalance in religious representation and resources created tensions and entrenched divisions between Christians and Muslims¹⁴.

In the post-colonial era, the legacy of colonial rule continued to influence interfaith relations, as political elites exploited religious identities for power and control. The manipulation of religious differences for political gain exacerbated conflicts and undermined efforts at reconciliation and dialogue between Christians and Muslims¹⁵. Moreover, the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and social services based on religious affiliations further deepened socio-economic disparities and heightened interfaith tensions in Nigeria. The historical legacy of colonialism and post-colonialism has had a lasting impact on Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria, shaping the dynamics of interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding efforts in the country¹⁶.

Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria

Undoubtedly, there has been a long history of tensions and disputes between the two major religions in Nigeria, which are the result of a complex interplay of social, political, economic, and religious forces. Nigeria is a multireligious nation where the bulk of the population is made up of Christians and Muslims, who are distributed equally. There are several ethnic groups in the nation, each with unique cultural and religious customs¹⁷. The roots of Christian-Muslim tensions in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial period, when the British Empire imposed its authority on the different ethnic and religious groups of the region. The colonisation process often pitted Christians and Muslims against each other, as these groups competed for power and influence in the new political order¹⁸. This legacy of colonialism continues to shape “the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria” today¹⁹.

¹⁴ Izu, S. J. (2023). *Decolonisation of African Christian Music in Selected African Instituted Churches in South-Western Nigeria* (Doctoral dissertation, Kwara State University (Nigeria))

¹⁵ Mlambo, H. V., & Ogunnubi, O. (2022). Post-Colonial Relations in Africa and the Emergence of Religion as an Instrument for Inter-State Diplomacy. *Religion and Global Politics: Soft Power in Nigeria and Beyond*, 35.

¹⁶ Emerson, S., & Solomon, H. (2018). *African security in the twenty-first century: Challenges and opportunities*. Manchester University Press.

¹⁷ Dowd, R. A. (2016). Religious diversity and religious tolerance: Lessons from Nigeria. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 60(4).

¹⁸ Jegede, O. P. (2019). Implications of religious conflicts on peace, national security and development in Nigeria. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, 9(1), 53-70.

¹⁹ Abar, E. (2019). *Islam, Christianity, Traditional Religions, and Power Politics in Northern Nigeria since the Pre-Islamic Period*. Andrews University.

One of the key flashpoints in “Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria” is the issue of religious extremism and violence. Over the years, Nigeria has experienced several violent conflicts between Christian and Muslim communities, particularly in the northern region of the country. Islamist groups such as Boko Haram have carried out attacks on Christians and churches, while there are also unconfirmed rumours that Christian militias have also targeted Muslims. These conflicts have fuelled mistrust and animosity between the two religious groups²⁰. In years past, efforts have been made to promote interfaith “dialogue and understanding between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria”²¹. The Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) was established in 1999 to facilitate communication and cooperation between religious leaders from different faiths. The council has worked to promote peace and harmony between Christians and Muslims and has played a role in mediating conflicts between the two groups²².

Despite these efforts, tensions between Christians and Muslims persist in Nigeria, and incidents of violence and discrimination continue to occur²³. Factors such as poverty, political instability, and competition for scarce resources have exacerbated these tensions, further complicating the relationship between the two religious groups²⁴. Fostering a culture of tolerance, mutual respect, and understanding will be crucial in improving Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria. Interfaith dialogue, educational initiatives, and grassroots efforts to promote peace and harmony between the two religious communities can help to build bridges and promote reconciliation. Building a more inclusive and pluralistic society in Nigeria will require a concerted

²⁰ John, O. K. (2022). *The threat of insurgency to peace and security in West Africa: Nigeria in perspective* (Doctoral dissertation, School of International and Area Studies, GOA University).

²¹ Bamai, Y. D. (2019). *The Prospects of Interfaith Dialogue in the Light and Teachings of the Second Vatican Council: Contextual Implications for Christians and Muslims in Nigeria* (Doctoral dissertation, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth).

²² Williams, D. U. (2023). Interfaith Dialogue, Peacebuilding, and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: A Case of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC). In *The Palgrave Handbook of Religion, Peacebuilding, and Development in Africa* (pp. 553-568). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

²³ Akpanika, E. N. (2017). Religious and political crises in Nigeria: A historical exploration

²⁴ Ashafa, A. M. (2015). Prospects, Possibilities and Challenges of Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Centre for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology Journal*.

effort from religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society organisations to address the underlying causes of conflict and promote a culture of peace and coexistence²⁵.

Examples of Effective Christian-Muslim Dialogue Initiatives in Southwest Nigeria

In Nigeria, there have been several successful Christian-Muslim dialogue initiatives that have aimed to promote interfaith understanding, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence. These initiatives have brought together leaders and members of both religious communities to engage in dialogue, exchange ideas, and work towards building trust and mutual respect. Here are some specific examples of successful Christian-Muslim dialogue initiatives in Southwest Nigeria, inclusive:

The Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) is a voluntary association formed in 1999 by representatives of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. Its primary goal is to promote interaction between religious leaders and traditional rulers, establishing foundations for sustainable peace and religious harmony²⁶. The Federal Government has supported NIREC since 2007, holding meetings in six geopolitical zones to promote religious tolerance, peaceful co-existence, ethical values, and good governance. NIREC collaborates with Anti-Corruption Agencies, the National Action Committee on AIDS, and the African Union Commission to address issues like insecurity, poverty, corruption, unemployment, and diseases. Annual meetings include quarterly general meetings, youth seminars, and meetings for eight sub-committees²⁷.

In southwest Nigeria, NIREC has successfully implemented various programs aimed at promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding among different religious groups²⁸. Through these initiatives, NIREC has been able to foster a sense of unity and cooperation among communities, helping to prevent conflicts and promote peace²⁷. The organization's efforts have been instrumental in creating a more harmonious and inclusive society in the region, setting an

²⁵ Yabiliyok, J. A. (2019). *Ethno-Religious Conflicts: The Role of Religious Education in Enhancing Justice and Peace for Muslim-Christian Relations in Kaduna State* (Doctoral dissertation, Fordham University).

²⁶ Iweze, D. (2022). The Role of Religious Leaders in Fostering Inter-Faith Dialogue Amid Boko Haram Insurgency in Kano, Northern Nigeria. *Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies*, 2(1).

²⁷ Oluwafemi, B. L., & Suriadi, A. (2024). Promoting Interfaith Peaceful Coexistence among the People in Ekiti State. *Matondang Journal*, 3(2), 87-96.

²⁸ Iweze, D. O. (2021). Boko Haram Insurgency, Interfaith Dialogue, and Peacebuilding in Kano: Examining the Kano Covenant. *African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review*, 11(1), 32-54.

example for other areas to follow in building a more peaceful and tolerant society. For example, NIREC organized a series of youth seminars where young people from Christian and Muslim backgrounds came together to discuss their beliefs and learn about each other's religions peace²⁷. Also, the organization facilitated meetings for sub-committees focused on specific issues such as education, healthcare, and community development, bringing together representatives from different faiths to work towards common goals²⁹.

The Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC): The IMC is a non-governmental organisation based in Kaduna State that works to promote “peace and reconciliation between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria”²¹. The organisation organises interfaith dialogue sessions, peacebuilding workshops, and community engagement initiatives to foster understanding and cooperation between the two religious communities³⁰. The IMC has successfully mediated conflicts, promoted religious tolerance, and built bridges between Christians and

Muslims in Southwest Nigeria and beyond. “By bringing people of different faiths together”²¹, the IMC has been able to create a platform for open communication and mutual respect. Through their efforts, they have helped to reduce tensions and promote harmony in areas where religious differences have previously caused division and conflict. The work of the IMC serves as a beacon of hope for a future where people of all faiths can live together in peace and unity³¹.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA): CAN and NSCIA are national bodies that represent Christian and Muslim interests in Nigeria, respectively³². In Southwest Nigeria, these organizations have engaged in dialogue and collaboration to address issues of mutual concern, such as religious freedom, social

²⁹ Esman, M. J., & Telhami, S. (Eds.). (2019). *International organisations and ethnic conflict*. Cornell University Press.

³⁰ Haynes, J. (2018). The United Nations Alliance of Civilisations and Interfaith Dialogue: What Is It Good For?. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 16(3), 48-60.

³¹ Saleh, M. U. S. A. (2020). Influence of Interfaith Mediation Centre in the management of conflict in Bauchi State Nigeria: 1960-2015. *Unpublished M. A Thesis Submitted to School of Social Science, Kenyatta University*.

³² Anyia, A. (2017). Muslim organisation and the mobilisations for Sharia law in northern Nigeria: The JNI and the NSCIA. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 52(1), 82-102.

justice, and interfaith relations³³. By working together, CAN and NSCIA have been able to promote peace, harmony, and understanding between Christians and Muslims in the region³⁴.

The Youth Interfaith Forum. This is a grassroots initiative that brings together young people from Christian and Muslim backgrounds to engage in dialogue, community service, and social activities. The forum aims to build bridges between youth from different religious backgrounds, promote tolerance, and foster friendships. By involving young people in interfaith dialogue, the Youth Interfaith Forum helps to shape future leaders who are committed to peaceful coexistence and understanding³⁵

Key Issues and Challenges in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Christian-Muslim dialogue is essential for promoting understanding, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence between the two major religious communities worldwide²⁴. However, several key issues and challenges can hinder effective dialogue between Christians and Muslims. These challenges often stem from historical, theological, social, and political factors and require careful consideration and effort to address. Some of the key issues and challenges in Christian-Muslim dialogue include:

- 1. Theological Differences:** One of the fundamental “challenges in Christian-Muslim dialogue is the theological differences between the two faiths”. Christians and Muslims have distinct beliefs about God, the nature of Jesus Christ, the authority of scripture, and practices such as prayer and worship. These theological divergences can create barriers to meaningful dialogue and understanding, as they represent core aspects of each faith's identity³⁶.
- 2. Historical Conflicts and Misunderstandings:** Historical conflicts and misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims, such as the Crusades, colonisation, and more recent violent

³³ Olowo, A. F. (2021). *A Discourse on Inter-Religion Tension in a Pluralised Nigeria: Examining the Role of Interfaith Dialogue as a Panacea* (Master's thesis, Hamad Bin Khalifa University (Qatar))

³⁴ Toki, T. O., Gambari, M. A., & Hadi, M. I. (2015). Peace Building and Inter-Religious Dialogue in Nigeria. *Journal of Islam in Nigeria*, 1(1), 104-116.

³⁵ Barnas, T. J. (2022). *The Effectiveness of Interfaith Dialogue in Countering Religious Intolerance: A Phenomenological Study of Interfaith Youth Program Alumni*. New Jersey City University.

³⁶ Pratt, D. (2015). Theology after Dialogue: Christian–Muslim Engagement Today and Tomorrow. *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 26(1), 89-101.

conflicts, have left deep scars on interfaith relations. These historical grievances can create distrust, resentment, and fear, making it challenging to engage in dialogue and build trust³⁷.

- 3. Political and Social Context:** The political and social context in which Christian-Muslim dialogue takes place can also present challenges. In some regions, political instability, extremism, discrimination, and social inequality can exacerbate religious tensions and hinder efforts for dialogue and cooperation. Governments or extremist groups may exploit religious differences for political gain, further complicating interfaith relations³⁸.
- 4. Interpretation of Scriptures and Texts:** Both Christianity and Islam have sacred scriptures that are open to interpretation. Differences in interpretation of these texts can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, as certain passages may be interpreted differently by Christians and Muslims. Addressing these differences in understanding and interpretation is key to fostering dialogue and mutual respect.
- 5. Cultural and Societal Norms:** Cultural norms, traditions, and societal expectations can influence how Christians and Muslims interact with each other. In some communities, cultural biases, stereotypes, and prejudices based on religion can impact interfaith relations and hinder genuine dialogue and collaboration³⁹.
- 6. Lack of Trust and Communication:** Building trust and effective communication between Christians and Muslims is crucial for successful dialogue. Miscommunications, stereotypes, and a lack of understanding can create barriers to open and honest dialogue. Overcoming these challenges requires patience, empathy, and a willingness to listen and learn from each other⁴⁰.
- 7. Power Dynamics:** Power dynamics, such as perceived or real imbalances in influence, resources, or representation, can impact the dynamics of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

³⁷ Sirgy, M. J., Estes, R. J., El-Aswad, E. S., Rahtz, D. R., Sirgy, M. J., Estes, R. J., ... & Rahtz, D. R. (2019). Jews, Christians, and Muslims: Historical Conflicts and Challenges. *Combating Jihadist Terrorism through Nation-Building: A Quality-of-Life Perspective*, 25-49.

³⁸ Weldu, A. H. (2022). *Christian-Muslim dialogue for sustainable peace and development in the Oromia region Ethiopia from 1991-2022* (Doctoral dissertation, Tangaza University College).

³⁹ Edwards, S. (2017). Intergroup Dialogue & Religious Identity: Attempting to Raise Awareness of Christian Privilege & Religious Oppression. *Multicultural Education*, 24(2), 18-24.

⁴⁰ Mohamed, A. H. (2017). *The Role of Religious Leaders in Countering Violent Extremism in Mandera and Mombasa Counties* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).

Addressing power differentials and ensuring that all voices are heard and respected is essential for creating a level playing field for dialogue and fostering a culture of equality and inclusion⁴¹.

The role of Government and Civil Society in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Southwest Nigeria

The role of government and civil society organisations in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Southwest Nigeria is crucial for fostering peace, understanding, and cooperation between the two major religious communities in the region³⁴. Both government institutions and civil society play a significant role in creating an enabling environment for interfaith dialogue, addressing religious tensions, and promoting religious freedom and tolerance. Here is an in-depth look at the impact of government and civil society on Christian-Muslim dialogue in Southwest Nigeria:

The government can play a crucial role in promoting religious harmony and protecting the rights of all religious groups by setting policies and regulations that promote religious tolerance and prohibit discrimination based on religion⁴². Government institutions, such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs or interfaith committees, can mediate conflicts between Christians and Muslims, preventing conflicts and promoting peace. They can also support initiatives promoting interfaith education, awareness, and understanding among religious communities. Incorporating interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance into education curricula can combat stereotypes, promote empathy, and foster positive interfaith relations among young people⁴³. Government policies should be inclusive, respecting the rights and freedoms of all religious groups, and promoting a secular state that ensures equal opportunities for all citizens, fostering a more inclusive and pluralistic society⁴⁴.

⁴¹ Hassan, J. N. (2016). *Mission as prophetic dialogue in Christian-Muslim encounters in Northern Nigeria* (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University).

⁴² Bagir, Z. A. (2018). The politics and law of religious governance. In *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Indonesia* (pp. 284-295). Routledge.

⁴³ Saleh, M. (2022). Role of interfaith mediation centre in managing conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Bauchi State, Nigeria. *Journal of African History, Culture and Arts*, 2(2), 110-123.

⁴⁴ Sajir, Z. (2023). A Post-Secular Approach to Managing Diversity in Liberal Democracies: Exploring the Interplay of Human Rights, Religious Identity, and Inclusive Governance in Western Societies. *Religions*, 14(10), 1325.

Civil society organisations can promote religious freedom, dialogue, and cooperation between Christians and Muslims by raising awareness and challenging stereotypes⁴⁵. They can facilitate interfaith dialogue initiatives, such as dialogue sessions, workshops, and community events, fostering trust and understanding between the two religious communities. They can also mediate conflicts and promote reconciliation by providing a neutral platform for dialogue. They can also build the capacity of religious leaders, community members, and youth to engage in interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding activities⁴⁶. By providing training, resources, and support for dialogue initiatives, civil society organisations empower individuals to become peace champions and agents of change in their communities. This approach helps bridge divides, promote empathy, and foster cooperation between the two religious communities.

Impact of Socio-Political Factors

Christian-Muslim dialogue and peacebuilding in Southwest Nigeria are significantly and intricately impacted by socio-political issues. Socio-political variables like as political marginalisation, economic inequality, identity politics, and ethno-religious differences have historically contributed to religious tensions, disputes, and bloodshed in the region⁴⁷. To promote interfaith discourse, establish peace, and create a more harmonious community in Southwest Nigeria, these factors must be understood and addressed. The following are some significant socio-political elements and how they affect Christian-Muslim communication and peacebuilding:

1. Political Marginalisation: Religious tensions can be heightened, and the political marginalisation of particular religious or ethnic communities can exacerbate sentiments of exclusion and discrimination. In Southwest Nigeria, a small number of elite groups frequently control most of the political power and resources, which causes marginalised populations to feel alienated and resentful. This might sabotage attempts at communication and healing and serve as a fertile foundation for interfaith strife⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ Smith, J. I. (2007). *Muslims, Christians, and the challenge of interfaith dialogue*. Oxford University Press.

⁴⁶ Khalid, A., & Lopez, M. (2023). Interfaith Dialogue and Peace building: Exploring the Role of Religious Institutions. *International Journal of Religion and Humanities*, 1(01), 1-13.

⁴⁷ Çancı, H., & Odukoya, O. A. (2016). Ethnic and religious crises in Nigeria: A specific analysis upon identities (1999–2013). *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 16(1), 87-110.

⁴⁸ Liman, B. M. (2015). *Conflict and identity in Nigeria: an emerging culture of conflict in northern Nigeria* (Doctoral dissertation, SOAS University of London).

- 2. Identity Politics:** In Nigeria, the politics of ethnicity and religion frequently result in the exploitation of religious feelings for political ends. Politicians may make use of religious differences to divide communities, rally support, or instigate violence. Identity politics has the potential to divide religious communities and thwart initiatives for interfaith collaboration and communication³³.
- 3. Ethno-Religious Divisions:** Nigeria is a multiethnic and multireligious nation, and these differences may act as trigger points for hostilities. Deeply ingrained and historical ethno-religious divides can be obstacles to productive communication and collaboration between Muslims and Christians. Intersecting religious and ethnic identities can make peacebuilding efforts more difficult and necessitate all-encompassing strategies that take into account these many facets of identity⁴⁹.
- 4. Security Challenges:** In Southwest Nigeria, insecurity, which includes problems with terrorism, banditry, and intercommunal violence, can present serious obstacles to Muslim-Christian communication and reconciliation. Security risks have the potential to increase religious hostilities, foster mistrust, and obstruct attempts at interreligious cooperation. It is imperative to tackle security issues and foster stability to provide a favourable atmosphere for communication and peacebuilding endeavours⁵⁰.

CONCLUSION

While there are many obstacles to overcome in the way of Christian-Muslim dialogue, such as political manipulation, historical grudges, socioeconomic inequality, and theological disagreements, it can also foster mutual understanding, tolerance, and collaboration across religious groups. Despite these challenges, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, religious authorities, and residents have made admirable attempts to promote peace in Southwest Nigeria via conversation, mediation, and reconciliation programmes.

The study recommends that: 1) Government institutions should enhance interfaith dialogue initiatives by promoting religious tolerance, inclusivity, and peacebuilding, and collaborating with

⁴⁹ Okafor, P. (2021). *Solidarity in Ubuntu Philosophy and in Honneth's Struggle for Recognition: Contribution to the Resolution of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria*. Westfaelische Wilhelms-Universitaet Muenster (Germany).

⁵⁰ Obodoagha, F. C. (2015). *Breaking Barriers that Divide Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and Building a Redemptive Relationship*.

civil society organisations to enhance their effectiveness. 2) The promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue should prioritise local community engagement, involving grassroots participation, capacity-building, and leadership development for sustainable community impact. 3) Dialogue initiatives in Southwest Nigeria should tackle socio-political, economic, and identity-based factors contributing to religious tensions, promoting social justice, economic empowerment, and inclusive governance for sustainable peace. 4) Integrating educational programs into schools, religious institutions, and community centres can foster interfaith understanding, tolerance, and respect, enhancing dialogue and fostering a culture of peace.

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