Muslims and Christians in Nigeria: A Proposed Solution to Interreligious Violence

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Abstract

This article discusses religious violence in Nigeria, particularly the conflict between Islam and Christianity that has been ongoing for about a century. Various factors contribute to this violence, including socio-economic, political, and governance deficits, as well as disputes over religious beliefs or identities. Additionally, the ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity in Nigerian society plays a role in escalating the violence. This situation poses a threat to Nigeria's stability and territorial integrity, and the high number of casualties also impacts the country's economy. Numerous primary causes of religious violence in Nigeria include the agitation for the implementation of Sharia law, imbalances in the political and economic systems, extreme interpretations of religion, and external influences. To resolve this conflict, the author suggests several measures that can be implemented by religious leaders. First, they should strive to integrate religious institutions and faith-based organizations. Second, they must avoid conflicts among religious figures and institutions. Third, they should facilitate formal dialogue. Fourth, promote interfaith discussions. Fifth, establish local groups aimed at understanding each other among followers of different religions. And finally, organize conferences, seminars, and open discussions. Conferences and seminars can be held at national and international levels, while open discussions can be broadcasted on national television to reach various layers of Nigerian society,

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especially vulnerable individuals who could be used or targeted in interfaith conflicts.

Keywords: Muslims, Christians, Nigeria, Interreligious Violence, Religious Leaders.

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas tentang kekerasan agama di Nigeria, khususnya konflik antara Islam dan Kristen yang telah berlangsung selama sekitar satu abad. Berbagai faktor menyebabkan kekerasan ini, termasuk defisit sosio-ekonomi, politik, dan pemerintahan, serta perselisihan mengenai keyakinan atau identitas agama. Selain itu, keberagaman etnis, agama, bahasa, dan budaya di masyarakat Nigeria juga berperan dalam meningkatnya kekerasan. Keadaan ini mengancam stabilitas dan integritas teritorial Nigeria, sementara tingginya jumlah korban jiwa berdampak pada ekonomi negara. Beberapa penyebab dominan kekerasan agama di Nigeria mencakup agitasi penerapan syariah, ketidakseimbangan sistem politik dan ekonomi, interpretasi ekstrim terhadap agama, dan pengaruh eksternal. Untuk menyelesaikan konflik ini, penulis menyarankan beberapa pendapat yang bisa diimplementasikan oleh para pemimpin agama. Pertama, mereka harus berupaya untuk mengintegrasikan lembaga keagamaan dan organisasi berbasis agama. Kedua, menghindari perselisihan antara tokoh agama dan lembaga keagamaan. Ketiga, memfasilitasi dialog formal. Keempat, mengadakan diskusi antaragama. Kelima, membentuk kelompok lokal yang bertujuan untuk memahami satu sama lain di antara pemeluk agama yang berbeda. Keenam, menyelenggarakan konferensi, seminar, dan diskusi terbuka. Konferensi dan seminar bisa diadakan di tingkat nasional dan internasional, sementara diskusi terbuka bisa disiarkan melalui televisi nasional agar mencapai berbagai lapisan masyarakat Nigeria, terutama di kalangan awam yang sangat rentan menjadi alat bahkan sasaran konflik antaragama.

Kata Kunci: Muslim, Umat Kristen, Nigeria, Kekerasan Antaragama, Pemuka Agama.

Introduction

Religious violence is a global phenomenon in the contemporary time which has caused great pain in many hearts. The world is going through wars of different types with even advanced countries having their own shares, especially of terrorist attacks. The world is experiencing war with various thoughts and beliefs in religion; even developed countries have their part in dealing with this situation, especially the understanding of terrorism in their country.[1] The problem of religious violence poses a significant threat to the stability and overall order of the country, as Nigeria has experienced troubling incidents of such violence.[2] Some notable examples of religious violence in Nigeria include the incidents in Kasuwan Magani in 1980, Kafanchan and Lere in 1987, Zango Kataf and Gure-Kahugu in 1987, Ilorin and Jere in 1989, Tafawa Balewa in 1991, and another occurrence in Zango Kataf in 1992.[3] These incidents have had significant implications for peace and stability in the country.

Nigeria has been experiencing religious violence for more than a century, with Muslim-Christian violence being prominent, manifesting in terrorism both directly and indirectly. Nigeria is characterized by its religious diversity, with Islam and Christianity being the two most widely practiced religions in the country. The population of Nigeria is nearly equally divided between Muslims and Christians, with a small minority following traditional African religions and other belief systems. Notably, the Christian population is experiencing a decline due to a lower fertility rate compared to Muslims.[4]

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[1] The United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, *Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism* (New York: United Nations, 2008), 7–8.

[2] Ogege S.O., "*The Dynamics of Oil Exploration and Crisis in the Niger Delta*" (University of Ibadan, 2001), 23–26.

[3] Eniola, *Reflections of Religious Violence in Nigeria* (Ado-Ekiti: University of Ado-Ekiti Press, 2010), 77–81.

[4] Andrew McKinnon, "Christians, Muslims and Traditional Worshippers in Nigeria: Estimating the Relative Proportions from Eleven Nationally Representative Social Surveys," *Review of Religious Research* 63, no. 2 (2021): 303–15, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-021-00450-5.

Since the mid-2010s, the extremist group Boko Haram has caused widespread devastation in northeastern Nigeria, leading to a death toll of over 41,600 people, as reported by the "Nigeria Security Tracker" from the Council on Foreign Relations (as of October 2022). The group's attacks have forced millions of people to seek refuge in the south or major cities, including Maiduguri. Boko Haram has also targeted churches in its violent campaign. However, the "Muslims against Christians"[5] label does not fully encapsulate the conflict, as most of Boko Haram's victims have been Muslims, particularly in predominantly Muslim regions like Borno state in the far northeast. The group's killings of a significant number of Muslims, based on a broad interpretation of apostasy, resulted in its split in 2016.[6]

In a direct way, terrorist organisations have been wreaking havocs on Nigerians in order to take control of the Nigerian nation and indirectly, different riots and clamours or injustices and have made concerns to arise from people with the Fulani herdsmen militia wreaking havocs with impunity on Nigerians and going unchecked in different geo-political zones of the country. This is a subtle way of making people who own the land to vacate their premises and farms for them to rule over them.

As these attacks have been on the rise till the time of writing this paper, Christians and some Muslims in several places have thought of the solution to bring the violence to an end but it has been escalating daily. It is crucial to note that the Nigerian government has not taken effective measures to address and curb the menace in the nation. Therefore, there is need for religious leaders, especially Christian leaders to respond in a way that will broker peace among people of two major public religions in Nigeria. This researcher proposes that engaging in their ethical responsibilities in religious violence situation will forestall the negative aftermath of violence

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[5] Akinola Ejodame Olojo, *Muslims, Christians and Religious Violence in Nigeria: Patterns and Mapping (2006-2014)* (Leiden: Ibadan; IFRA-Nigeria, 2016), 99–111.

[6] John Campbell, "Conflict in Nigeria Is More Complicated Than 'Christians vs. Muslims,'" The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), 2019, https://www.cfr.org/blog/conflict-nigeria-more-complicated-christians-vs-muslims.

and cause peaceful coexistence in the nation. Therefore, this researcher will discuss the ethical responsibilities of religious leaders in religious violence situation by defining the concept of religious violence, causes of religious violence, ethical responsibilities of religious and leaders and give conclusion with recommendation.

The Phenomenon of Interfaith Violence in Nigeria

Religious violence encompasses situations where religion becomes either the subject or the object of violent actions. It involves acts of violence motivated by, or in response to, religious principles, texts, or doctrines of the ta, rgeted party or the attacker. This type of violence includes aggression directed towards religious institutions, individuals, objects, or events. Notably, religious violence is not limited to acts committed solely by religious groups; it also includes acts perpetrated against religious groups by other entities.[7]

The phenomenon of interfaith violence in Nigeria has been a growing concern in recent years. Religious violence has significant implications for peace and stability in the country.[8] The causes of religious violence in Nigeria are multifaceted and complex. The existing literature suggests that political, governance deficits, and socio-economic are significant factors contributing to such violence. Additionally, conflicts arise over religious beliefs or identity rather than territorial or resource disputes. Understanding the root causes of interfaith violence is crucial for developing effective strategies to address and prevent further escalation of conflicts.

It is imperative to mention that in the Nigerian situation; the nature of religious violence has been ethno-religious. For many years now, ethno-religious violence has caused destruction of some Nigerian communities. Scholars argue that the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-linguistic, and multi-cultural composition of Nigerian society may play a role in perpetuating such violence.

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[7] James Wellman and Kyoko Tokuno, "Is Religious Violence Inevitable?," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 3 (2004): 291, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2004.00234.x.

[8] Kamal-deen Olawale Sulaiman, "Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria: Implications and Options for Peace and Stability Order," *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2016): 85-103. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24805708

According to IDEA, "Ethnic culture is one of the important ways people conceive of themselves, and culture and identity are closely intertwined."[9] Ideally, this diversity should showcase the beauty of God's creation; however, in Nigeria, the uniqueness of ethnic cultures has been misused, leading to tribalism and manipulation of religious sentiments. The consequences of this exploitation, coupled with persistent social tensions and political instability resulting from ethnic divisions, have caused extensive violence and even posed a threat to Nigeria's territorial integrity.[10]

Over a decade now, the violence is in another form as the Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) insurgence that started their activities since its formation in Maiduguri. The group's activities have fueled interfaith suspicion between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, with each group striving to assert the dominance of their religious beliefs. The propagation of radicalized interpretations of religious texts and the manipulation of religious sentiments for political gain have also contributed to religious conflicts in Nigeria. The complexity of the issues surrounding the Boko Haram crisis highlights the need for comprehensive approaches that address both the ideological and political dimensions of interfaith violence.[11] In addition, the escalation of violence in Nigeria has evolved into a dangerous pattern that threatens the very existence of the nation. The country appears to be teetering on the brink of a precipice. The death toll from attacks carried out by various groups, along with isolated incidents in different regions, has reached unbearable levels. These violent acts are taking a heavy toll on the nation's economic strength, deteriorating it day by day. Recently, the Fulani-Herdsmen have also

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[9] J. Bayo Adkanye Hussaina Abdullah, Said Adejumobi, *Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing Dialogue(s) for Nation-Building (Capacity-Building)* (Stockholm: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), 2001), 87.

[10] *Ibid.*, 89.

[11] Michael Aondona Chiangi, "Nigeria: Religious Conflict and the Boko Haram Crisis," *SSRN Papers*, Issue 37, October 2021, 3-20, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3152819.

become part of the ethno-religious violence, claiming numerous lives on a daily basis.[12]

The Factors Contributing to Religious Violence

There are many factors contributing to violence in Nigeria, these causes will be examined in this section as: First, the enactment of Sharia law in some regions has also contributed to the escalation of religious violence in Nigeria[13]

Second, Religious Violence Arising from Ethnic Tensions: The connection between religion and violence becomes apparent when examining conflicts involving key stakeholders. For instance, in Plateau State, the Berom-Afizere-Anaguta (BAA) group, identifying as the indigenous people and practicing Christianity, clashes with the Hausa/Fulani settlers, who predominantly follow Islam. The latter often perceive themselves as disadvantaged, facing discrimination and exclusion from opportunities such as land access, education benefits, and participation in political institutions controlled by the 'indigenous' state governments.[14] Religious actors and institutions play a significant role in exacerbating conflicts, using religion to divide communities and incite religious-based attacks.

During the Catholic Bishops Conference in 2002, it was acknowledged that both religious and ethnic leaders have employed religion and ethnicity to advance their self-centered agendas.[15] Some religious leaders manipulate their vulnerable and uninformed followers for personal gain, portraying a distorted image of God that

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[12] Mevayerore Daniel Igbini, "Insurgency in Nigeria: The Prognosis and Its Effects on the Nigerian Politics," *Acta Universitatis Danubius. Relationes Internationales* 13, no. 2 (2020): 75–76, https://dj.univ-danubius.ro/index.php/AUDRI/article/view/542.

[13] Ziya Meral, *How Violence Shapes Religion Belief and Conflict in the Middle East and Africa*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 27.

[14] J. Krause, *A Deadly Cycle: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, Working Paper* (Geneva: Declaration Secretariat, 2011), 25–26.

[15] S.G. Best and K.N. Hoomlong, *Literature Review of Academic Publications and International Reports*, ed. Para-Mallam O.J. (Kuru: National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, 2011), 59.

fosters hatred and division instead of promoting justice and love.[16] There have been reports of 'religious militancy' involving both Muslim and Christian groups[17] in Plateau State, where mosques and churches are allegedly being utilized to store weapons.[18]

Third, Deep-Rooted Underlying Causes: Persistent political and economic imbalances pose significant barriers to effective conflict management and long-term transformation efforts. These longstanding issues have bred despair, dissatisfaction, and profound grievances, which easily ignite violence and further exclusionary acts.[19] Nigeria as a whole must shift away from merely attempting to balance religious dynamics in state-society relations and address the root causes of media insensitivities, marginalization, resource disputes, and development disparities more effectively.[20] In the case of Plateau State, feelings of inequality, favoritism, injustice, and uneven development underlie the conflicts, leading religious actors and institutions to focus on superficial problems and only provide temporary relief to conflict triggers and escalation.

Fourth, several other causes such as; extreme interpretations of religion can also be a factor in religious violence. Some groups that

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[16] Gwamna Dogara Je'Adayibe, *The Turning Tides of Religious Intolerance in Nigeria: TheExternal Connections and Internal Dynamics*, ed. Okpeh O. Okpeh Jr. Olayemi Akinwumi, Sati U. Fwatshak (Lagos: Unimark Ltd., 2007), 40.

[17] Philip Ostien, "Jonah Jang and the Jasawa: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Nigeria," *Muslim-Christian Relations in Africa* Online Pub (2009): 1–42, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1456372.

[18] Dorcas Ettang, Olusola Ogunnubi, *INTERROGATING THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND INSTITUTIONS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA*, ed. Dele Babalola and Hakeem Onapajo (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 193. A. Higazi, *The Jos Crisis: A Recurrent Nigerian Tragedy* (Nigeria: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2011), 19.

[19] Changes in government and political uncertainty can create situations that lead to conflict between religious groups. Indeed, some researchers propose that economic factors can also contribute to religious violence in Nigeria. Economic inequality between religious groups can create tension and conflict. Look: "2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Nigeria," https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nigeria/.

[20] T.D. Sisk, *Between Terror and Tolerance: Religious Leaders, Conflict and Peacemaking* (Washington DC.: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 7.

claim to represent a religion can use religious justification to carry out violent acts. The presence of extremist and militant groups in Nigeria advocating for radical religious ideologies can contribute to increased conflict between religious groups. Some militant groups, such as Boko Haram, which seeks to implement an extremist interpretation of Islam in Nigeria, have become a major source of religious violence. Also, disputes over religious issues, such as the construction of churches or mosques in sensitive areas, religious education in schools, and the implementation of religious-based laws, can also trigger conflicts and violence. Then, The government's inability to protect its citizens from violence and weak law enforcement against perpetrators of religious violence can create an atmosphere of insecurity and impunity. The other is external influences, some extremist groups in Nigeria may receive support and inspiration from organizations or individuals abroad who share the same ideology. This can worsen the situation and prolong the conflict.[21]

Ethical Responsibilities of Religious Leaders

The problem of religious violence is a social problem that the church and other religious leaders must not shy away from but must be embattled for peaceful co-existence. Since it is a social problem, a social ethical approach is germane to respond to such issue in the contemporary world, especially in the Nation Nigeria. Social ethics involves the organized contemplation of the moral aspects within communities, systems, social structures, and issues. It can be seen as a division of 'applied ethics,' where ethical reasoning is applied to address social challenges.[22] Individuals, especially religious leaders are accountable for fulfilling their civic duty, as their actions will

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[21] Nigerian Watch. (2012). The Causes and Effects of Religious Violence in Nigeria. Retrieved from https://nigerianwatch.com/the-causes-and-effects-of-religious-violence-in-nigeria/ and, International Crisis Group. (2012). Nigeria: In the Season of Bloodshed. Retrieved from https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/nigeria-season-bloodshed.

[22] D.D. Welch, *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics (Second Edition)*, ed. Ruth Chadwick, 2nd ed. (Netherlands: Elsevier Inc., 2012), 134–41.

benefit the whole of society.[23] After reflecting on multifaceted causes of religious violence especially in Nigeria, the researcher will give logical roles that are ethically right for religious leaders to engage in for peace to be established because the role of religion for national development can never be underestimated. Religious leaders should therefore: First, facilitate the creation of collaboration between religious institutions and faith-based organizations. When discussing the roles of religious institutions in crisis management, it is crucial to differentiate between religious institutions (such as churches and mosques) and independent Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs). Religious institutions primarily focus on imparting teachings, providing encouragement, and delivering messages of faith, divine purpose, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Religious leaders play a vital role as they are trusted figures in the community. Religious leaders exert a profound influence on the beliefs and actions of their followers. They play a crucial role in raising awareness about various political and social issues and are not hesitant to challenge political leaders. Furthermore, they actively participate in peacebuilding discussions, represent their religious communities in peace-related meetings, and take an active role in promoting peace within their congregations and local communities.

The significance of religious leaders and institutions in wider relief and assistance endeavors should not be overlooked. For example, a greater number of churches should participate in distributing essential supplies such as first aid, household items, medication, food, and clothing to displaced individuals. Church leaders should also offer counseling services to victims who have experienced the loss of family members, homes, and businesses. Moreover, churches with ample space can provide their premises as camps for those in need, while others can contribute resources to various local non-governmental organizations (NGOs).[24]

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[23] Team Pachamama Alliance, "Social Responsibility and Ethics," Pachamama Alliance, 2021, https://pachamama.org/social-justice/social-responsibility-and-ethics#:~:text=Social responsibility is an ethical,of people%2C and the environment.

[24] S.G. Best and K.N. Hoomlong, *Literature Review of Academic Publications and International Reports*, 159.

Religious congregations, under the guidance of their leaders, should extend psychological, spiritual, and material aid to victims of violence, especially to fellow members. Likewise, mosques have the potential to distribute clothing, offer sanctuary to displaced individuals, provide food and relief materials, cover the medical expenses of victims, use sermons to console those affected by violence, and support search and rescue missions. There is no doubt that religious leaders and institutions have become pivotal figures in peacebuilding and conflict management efforts. Despite the existence of inter-religious tensions and violence in the country, the collaboration between religious institutions and faith-based organizations demonstrates the efforts towards fostering positive relationships between Muslims and Christians.[25]

According to my opinion, the provision of support by the Church and Mosque in Nigeria should be governed by clear and well-defined rules to prevent cases of apostasy that could potentially damage interreligious harmony and national security. It is crucial for both religious institutions to collaborate with the government and relevant authorities in establishing strict guidelines concerning evangelism, proselytization, and other religious activities. With clear rules in place, such as determining who is eligible to conduct religious activities, where these activities can take place, and how to interact with followers of other religions, the risk of extremist movements and conflicts that may lead to apostasy can be minimized. Additionally, emphasizing transparency and accountability in the utilization of funds and resources by the Church and Mosque will help build trust between religious adherents and these institutions.

Beside that, as a country with diverse religious backgrounds, it is essential to prioritize tolerance and mutual respect among different faiths in Nigeria. Hence, it is crucial for the Church and Mosque not to engage in proselytizing or evangelism that is coercive or disparaging towards the beliefs of other religions. The support and services provided should be inclusive and promote values of

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[25] Dorcas Ettang, Olusola Ogunnubi, *INTERROGATING THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND INSTITUTIONS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA,* 193–94.

brotherhood among adherents of various faiths. Moreover, there should be mechanisms for objective monitoring and assessment to ensure that appointed preachers or imams possess accurate understandings and do not spread radical teachings that could incite apostasy. By upholding the principles of tolerance and controlled religious freedom, the Church and Mosque in Nigeria can play roles as agents of peace and reconciliation, fostering a safe and harmonious environment for all religious followers in the country.

Second, it is essential to make efforts to prevent discord among religious leaders and institutions. The lack of unity between Christian and Muslim leaders has, at various times, obstructed conflict management efforts. For instance, as reported by Smock, the initial interactions between leaders from both conflicting communities during the work of the Inter-Faith Mediation Centre (IMC) in Nigeria were tense and confrontational, making it more challenging to address the underlying issues. However, by the third day, both Muslim and Christian leaders apologized and sought forgiveness from one another.[26] Another aspect related to this issue is the lack of harmony and internal divisions within religions. In April 2010, Pandang Yamsat, President of COCIN, observed that the crisis in Plateau State continued partly due to the lack of consensus among Christian leaders.[27]

So, to prevent interreligious disputes among religious leaders in Nigeria, it is essential to organize seminars or workshops for religious leaders and even involve prominent figures from the community. These events can serve as platforms for fostering understanding, mutual respect, and dialogue among different religious groups. By bringing together religious leaders and influential community figures, the seminars can facilitate open discussions on sensitive issues, promote tolerance, and emphasize the shared values that unite the diverse religious communities in Nigeria. Such initiatives can help bridge gaps, dispel misconceptions,

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[26] S.G. Best and K.N. Hoomlong, *Literature Review of Academic Publications and International Reports*, 167.

[27] and J.M. Wuye M.N. Ashafa, *Religious Contributions to Peace-Making: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War*, ed. Smock D.R (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2006), 22.

and promote peaceful coexistence, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious and unified nation.

Third, arrange formal dialogues. Formal dialogues have become an established aspect of Christian-Muslim relations, especially since Vatican II and the establishment of entities such as the Secretariat for non-Christians, the Unit on Faith and Witness Dialogue with people of Living Faiths in the World Council of Churches, and the Islam in Africa Project. Such dialogues have occurred at different levels with varying degrees of success, with various types or categories being evident. In 2001, the state government formed an inter-religious council consisting of ten Christians and ten Muslims engaged in peacebuilding initiatives across Plateau State, which remains active in promoting interreligious dialogue between the two dominant religious groups in the region. This endeavor is a step towards achieving peaceful coexistence in both the state and the country as a whole.[28]

Fourth, organise interreligious discussions. Organising public friendly religious discussions is a right step if properly managed by religious leaders in the country. In contrast to the opinion of Von Sicard, he argues that open debates, in contrast to constructive dialogue, may be considered questionable and even potentially destructive in nature,[29] this researcher opines that discussions with friendly rules will create a good ground for freedom to analyse beliefs and make people decide. These discussions are above all symbolised by apologetic and polemic exchanges. The discussions create an opportunity to clarify misquoted and misunderstood sacred scriptures of both Muslims and Christians. These discussions often garner public and media attention, and the proponents and participants involved do not always follow a one-sided approach. Their primary focus is to present their own perspective, and unfortunately, they may not be open to listening and understanding

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[28] Dorcas Ettang, Olusola Ogunnubi, *INTERROGATING THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND INSTITUTIONS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA*, 193–94.

[29] Sigvad Von Sicard, *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Mbit*, ed. Jacob B. Altoona and Sulayman S. Yang (Berlin: Mouton De Gruyer, 1993), 278.

the views of the other side, as noted by Von Sicard.[30] Therefore, a discussion with good and friendly conditions have always ended well.[31]

Fifth, establish local groups to promote interreligious understanding. A significant number of fruitful dialogue groups have emerged locally across the continent. Some have formed in response to crisis situations where Christians and Muslims collaborated to address natural or other disasters. Others have been initiated by dedicated individuals from either faith community who recognized the potential value of sharing religious insights through dialogue to tackle challenges. These groups convene on a regular basis, typically monthly or quarterly, to discuss and exchange perspectives on agreed-upon topics. Initially, they often delve into economic, educational, political, or social issues before gradually moving on to religious and theological matters.[32]

Numerous Christians and Muslims may feel hesitant to openly discuss theological matters with each other, yet it is crucial to recognize that theological issues hold significant importance in life, especially in Africa. As people of faith, Christians and Muslims share a longing to engage in deeper levels of exchange. Moreover, dialogue groups have emerged within intellectual and academic circles, often resulting from research in comparative religion and a mutual eagerness among Christians and Muslims to delve into various aspects of their respective faiths.

Regarding the organization of conferences, they can be classified into different categories based on their scope, whether they are local, regional, or continental, and whether they were initiated at the local or international level. Some conferences are spontaneous, one-time events, while others evolve into recurrent series. It is crucial to distinguish between conferences that bring together Christians and Muslims and those that exclusively involve adherents of one particular tradition.

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[30] *Ibid.*, 278.

[31] Ebenezer Afolabi, *Making Apologetics Appealing to Africans: A Clarion Call to Defending the Christian Faith in Africa* (South Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 22.

[32] *Ibid.*, 23.

First, there are local and regional conferences, with notable efforts made by religious organizations in Northern Nigeria, where these conferences have become a tradition due to local initiatives. A similar trend is emerging in other countries as well.[33]

Within the domain of international conferences, there are several noteworthy examples of gatherings organized by different institutions. For instance, the World Council of Churches hosted a conference in Legon, Ghana in July 1974, with the theme "The Unity of God and the Community of Mankind: Cooperation between African Muslims and African Christians in work and witness." Similarly, in March 1986, a conference was held in Porto Novo, Benin, focusing on the theme "Religion and Responsibility." The Konrad Adenauer Foundation also took the initiative to arrange conferences, including one in Yaounde, Cameroon in February 1983, which revolved around the theme "Development and Solidarity: Joint responsibility of Muslims and Christians." Additionally, conferences organized by the Centre of Economic Studies and Research at the University of Tunis, Tunisia, have taken place, with one notable event in Tunis, Tunisia in November 1974, centered on "Muslim and Christian conscience in the face of development problems."[34]

Meanwhile, from Muslim circles, there have been many international seminars on peace and tolerance between religions aim to promote peace, understanding, and cooperation between different faith communities. One example of such a conference is the Religions for Peace International Annual Conference, which is committed to leading effective multi-religious responses to the world's pressing issues. The conference brings together leaders and representatives from different faith communities, including Christian, Hindu, Indigenous, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh, to explore the importance of multi-religious engagement and how it can create a more peaceful world. Another prominent example is the global awareness campaign by the Muslim World League, which aims to foster a better understanding of Islam and promote the religion's core values of

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[33] Sigvad Von Sicard, *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Mbit*, 280.

[34] *Ibid.*, 279–80.

peace. This initiative is designed to cultivate peace and enhance mutual understanding among diverse faith communities.[35]

These conferences and seminars provide a platform for Muslim leaders and scholars to share their thoughts, experiences, and solutions in promoting peace and tolerance between different faith communities. They discuss relevant issues such as extremism, Islamophobia, and interfaith conflict, and explore ways to build networks and cooperation between Muslim countries to achieve common goals in strengthening peace and tolerance. The conferences and seminars also aim to create a better understanding between different faith communities, reduce conflicts, and promote harmony and peace worldwide. The United Nations has also acknowledged the significance of interfaith harmony and has instituted the World Interfaith Harmony Week. This annual event serves as a platform to encourage harmony among all individuals, irrespective of their religious beliefs, fostering a spirit of cooperation and understanding.[36]

Conclusion

This article has discussed the ethical obligations of religious leaders in situations of religious crises to promote peaceful coexistence. It does so by defining religious violence, identifying its causes, and outlining various ethical roles that religious leaders should adopt to prevent or resolve such crises. Given that violence and conflict yield no positive outcomes, it becomes imperative to proactively prevent them, fostering an atmosphere of peace in Nigeria and globally. Peaceful coexistence is preferable to chaos,

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[35] Kiripost staff writers, "Muslim World League Promotes Peace Between Religions," on https://kiripost.com/stories/muslim-world-league-promotes-peace-between-religions. For more information, read on https://www.rfp.org/

[36] J. William Frost, "Why Religions Facilitate War and How Religions Facilitate Peace," on https://www.swarthmore.edu/friends-historical-library/why-religions-facilitate-war-and-how-religions-facilitate-peace. David R. Smock, "Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War," on https://www.usip.org/publications/2006/01/religious-contributions-peacemaking-when-religion-brings-peace-not-war.

making it crucial for Christian leaders, in particular, to consistently prioritize peace in all circumstances, while Muslim leaders collaborate to safeguard individual humanity, ensuring it is not violated under the guise of religion. The writer of this paper opines that Christians and Muslims can only coexist harmoniously through resolute engagement in dialogue and harmoniously discussions.

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