



TOWARD PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE: ISLAMIC TEACHINGS'S CONTRIBUTION TO CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM CONFLICT RECONCILIATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria is characterized by significant religious diversity, especially between Islam and Christianity, which has historically led to frequent horizontal conflicts influenced by religious, social, political, and economic factors. The tensions have been further exacerbated by religious conversion disputes, the enforcement of Sharia law in several northern states, socioeconomic disparities, and the rise of extremist organizations such as Boko Haram. This essay seeks to analyze the influence of Islamic teachings in promoting harmonious coexistence and explores the participation of Muslim youth in addressing Muslim-Christian disputes in Nigeria. This study utilizes a qualitative, library-based research methodology, drawing on primary Islamic texts (the Qur'an and Hadith), relevant scholarly literature, and documented of religious conflict and peacebuilding in Nigeria. The results demonstrate that Islamic teachings significantly prioritize justice, tolerance, compassion, discussion, and forgiveness as essential tenets for harmonious coexistence within religiously diverse communities. These ethical norms are both normative and provide practical guidelines for conflict resolution. Moreover, the study highlights the crucial role of Muslim youth in Nigeria as agents of peace through their involvement in interfaith discussion, community-based projects, peace education, and grassroots organizations that involve young individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. Their active involvement fosters the restoration of trust, diminishes bias, and interrupts cycles of violence among religious communities. This study suggests that the incorporation of Islamic ethical values and the proactive involvement of Muslim youth significantly contribute to sustained reconciliation and harmonious cohabitation between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria.

Keywords: Christian-Muslim Relation, Islamic Teachings, Peaceful Coexistence, Reconciliation, Nigeria

Abstrak

Nigeria merupakan negara dengan keragaman agama yang tinggi, terutama Islam dan Kristen, yang dalam sejarahnya kerap mengalami konflik horizontal bernuansa keagamaan, sosial, politik, dan ekonomi. Ketegangan tersebut diperparah oleh isu konversi agama, penerapan hukum syariah di beberapa negara bagian Nigeria Utara, ketimpangan pembangunan, serta munculnya kelompok ekstremis seperti Boko Haram. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran ajaran Islam tentang koeksistensi damai serta keterlibatan generasi muda Muslim dalam upaya rekonsiliasi konflik antara Muslim dan Kristen di Nigeria. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi pustaka dengan mengkaji sumber-sumber primer Islam (al-Qur'an dan hadis), literatur akademik, serta laporan dan dokumen terkait konflik dan perdamaian di Nigeria. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa ajaran Islam secara normatif menekankan nilai keadilan, toleransi, kasih sayang, dialog, dan pemaafan sebagai fondasi koeksistensi damai dalam masyarakat plural. Nilai-nilai ini tidak hanya relevan secara teologis, tetapi juga memiliki implikasi praktis dalam proses rekonsiliasi konflik. Selain itu, generasi muda Muslim di Nigeria memainkan peran strategis sebagai agen perdamaian melalui dialog lintas agama, kegiatan sosial bersama, pendidikan perdamaian, dan gerakan akar rumput yang melibatkan pemuda lintas iman. Keterlibatan aktif generasi muda ini memperkuat upaya rekonsiliasi dengan membangun kepercayaan, mengurangi prasangka, serta memutus siklus kekerasan antar komunitas. Dengan demikian, integrasi ajaran Islam tentang koeksistensi damai dan partisipasi generasi muda Muslim memiliki kontribusi signifikan dalam membangun perdamaian berkelanjutan antara Muslim dan Kristen di Nigeria.

Kata Kunci: Relasi Kristiani-Muslim, Ajaran Islam, Peaceful Coexistence, Rekonsiliasi, Nigeria

Background

The idea of peaceful coexistence has emerged as a “promising solution” amid the world’s growing diversity in terms of race, religion, nationality, and other social identities, particularly in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, when globalization has become a defining characteristic

of human interaction.¹ Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that various conflicts continue to occur in many parts of the world, including Nigeria. As a federal country with diversity in many dimensions, most notably religion, Nigeria has experienced horizontal conflicts for a considerable period. Religious conflict is not a new phenomenon in Nigerian society. The involvement of the two largest religious communities, Islam and Christianity, often leads to destructive acts of physical violence and, in many cases, loss of life. Political and socioeconomic factors further exacerbate this situation.² Conversion has become one of the most important and prominent issues within the framework of religion. Conflict and violence have proven difficult to avoid, particularly as aggressive Christian missionary activities originating from the southern and western regions have started to spread to the Muslim-dominated areas in central and eastern Nigeria. In addition, the application of Sharia-based criminal law in twelve states in northern Nigeria has also escalated tensions between Muslim and Christian communities.³ As a result, various methods have been employed to resolve conflicts and reduce interreligious tensions. Theoretically, various frameworks for conflict resolution and peacebuilding are essential. Within this context, the concept of peaceful coexistence can be a valuable framework, particularly in shaping a more inclusive understanding of religious communities and promoting harmonious coexistence. Even if “true

peace” cannot be fully attained, at the very least, this framework enables groups with the potential for conflict to comprehend the risks of the destructive effects of protracted, relentless battle.

Muslims, as one of the most important entities in Nigeria’s social landscape, given their population size and extensive influence, need to revisit the fundamental teachings found in their primary religious sources. Islamic teachings contain numerous ethical principles that emphasize harmony and peaceful coexistence. While these values also apply to other religious communities (i.e., Christians), this article focuses specifically on Islamic teachings. Ideally, for Muslims, adherence to Islamic teachings should not be limited to a collection of rituals, but should encompass ethical values that underpin everyday life. In this sense, religion is expected to be a practical moral compass and a comprehensive worldview, rather than merely a collection of doctrinal beliefs.

Islam offers a rich ethical principles regarding coexistence, with teachings on compassion, harmony, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence within diversity scattered throughout the Quran, the main reference book for Muslims. One notable example is found in Q.S. Al-Mumtahanah [60]: 8, which states: “Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes – from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward

¹ The concept of peaceful coexistence was first introduced in the context of international politics and law. See Nikita S Khrushchev, ‘On Peaceful Coexistence’, *Foreign Affairs*, 38.1 (1959), 1–18 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/20029395>>; Victor P Karpov, ‘The Soviet Concept of Peaceful Coexistence and Its Implications for International Law’, *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 29.4 (1964), 858–64 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1190698>>; Leon Lipson, ‘Peaceful Coexistence’, *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 29.4 (1964), 871–81 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1190700>>. Recently, this concept has also been applied to other dimensions of life, such as in a religious context, both within and between religions. See Md. Thowhidul Islam, ‘Peaceful Coexistence of Various Religious Groups in Islam’, *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 8.2 SE-Articles (2018) <<https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JITC/article/view/112>>; Joyson K Cherian, ‘An Interreligious Initiative for

Peace and Harmony’, *Transformation*, 36.2 (2019), 100–112 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26696448>>.

² Samuel M Nwaomah, ‘Religious Crises in Nigeria: Manifestation, Effect and the Way Forward’, *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology in Practice*, 3.2 (2011), 94–104.

³ Mamman A Lawan Yusufari, ‘The Application of Islamic Law in Nigeria’, *Yearbook of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law Online*, 4.1 (1997), 201–9 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/221129898X00099>>; Frieder Ludwig, ‘Christian: Muslim Relations in Northern Nigeria since the Introduction of Shari’ah in 1999’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 76.3 (2008), 602–37 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25484042>>; Hakan Çancı and Olatunji A Odukoya, ‘Ethnic and Religious Crises in Nigeria: A Specific Analysis upon Identities (1999–2013)’, *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 16.1 (2016), 87–110.



them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.”⁴ This verse underscores the importance of fairness and kindness in interactions with people of different faiths and highlights the need for Muslims to coexist peacefully with others, except in situations involving hostility or aggression.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also demonstrated principles of peaceful coexistence in his interactions with non-Muslims, particularly through the Charter of Medina. This treaty established a framework for cooperation and mutual respect among Muslims, Jews, and other religious communities in Medina, and serves as an early model of peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society. Beyond this period, historical experiences such as those in Baghdad⁵ and Andalusia⁶ further illustrate the practical implementation of coexistence across religious and cultural boundaries. These historical precedents are particularly relevant to the Nigeria context, where persistent interfaith tensions require dialogue, negotiation, and a shared commitment to peaceful coexistence.⁷

This article aims to study Islamic teachings pertaining to peaceful coexistence and their role in religious conflict reconciliation in Nigeria. As a library-based research, the literature review focuses on three main objectives: (1) investigating Islamic teachings concerning the notion of peaceful coexistence; (2) analyzing data on religious conflicts in Nigeria; and (3) correlating these two dimensions to assess the influence of Islamic teachings on reconciliation processes. This article draws on religious sources (the Qur'an), academic sources (books and scholarly journals), and general sources (reports and news coverage). The discussion begins with an overview of religious life in Nigeria, followed by an examination of major religious conflicts and crises,

their impacts, and finally, an exploration of the potential contributions of Islamic teachings on peaceful coexistence to the resolution of religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Common Background of Nigeria's Religious Life

Religion in Nigeria, as in other parts of the world, plays a significant role in shaping people's lives and cultural practices, despite the existence of legal restrictions governing religious activities. The nation is home to numerous religious traditions, with Islam, Christianity, and traditional African religions constituting the major belief systems. The country's religious population is made up of diverse indigenous communities, most of which are primarily Muslim and Christian. Islam is the predominant religion in northern Nigeria, and was introduced to the region through trans-Saharan trade routes at around the eleventh century. The majority of Muslims in Nigeria adhere to Sunni Islam and follow the Maliki school of jurisprudence. Moreover, the mystical tradition of Sufism is popular, particularly through the *Qadiriyya* and *Tijaniyya* orders. Ethnic groups such as the Hausa and Fulani historically inhabited societies shaped by Islamic norms, heavily mixed with elements of traditional African culture.⁸

During the fifteenth century, European missionaries introduced Christianity to Nigeria, but the expanded conversion from indigenous religions began primarily in the late nineteenth century during the colonial period. Christianity is prevalent in southern Nigeria and parts of the Middle Belt. Major Christian denominational groups include Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and other forms of Protestantism, such as Baptist and Methodist churches. Education and health services in Nigeria have benefited substantially

⁴ Saheeh International, *The Qur'an: Arabic Text with English Meanings* (Jeddah: Abul-Qasim Publishing House / Al-Muntada al-Islami, 1997).

⁵ See Justin Marozzi, *Baghdad: City of Peace, City of Blood—A History in Thirteen Centuries* (London: Allen Lane, 2014).

⁶ See Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002).

⁷ Kamaldeen O Sulaiman, 'Peaceful Coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria', *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture*, 4.2 (2016), 17–25.

⁸ Toyin Falola, *The History of Nigeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).



from Christianity because many schools and hospitals are founded by Christian missions.⁹ However, traditional African religions remain vital, particularly in rural areas and among ethnic groups such as the Yoruba, Igbo, and others. These belief systems emphasize ancestor worship, reverence for deities associated with natural elements, and ritual practices to maintain harmony and communal balance. In practice, many Nigerians integrate elements of traditional beliefs with Islam or Christianity, resulting in unique syncretic practices.¹⁰

Nigeria's religious diversity presents both advantages and challenges. On the one hand, religious diversity constitutes a great asset that affirms Nigeria's rich social cultural heritage. Religion, which essentially promotes noble values and moral goodness, is an important factor in national development, especially when interfaith collaboration can be maximized. On the other hand, despite instances of interfaith collaboration, tensions and conflicts have emerged and developed quite rapidly. These conflicts are often fueled by intersecting factors such as ethnicity, economic inequality, and political competition. As a result, the constructive role of religion in shaping Nigeria's social values, laws, and government is often reduced by the emergence of conflict.¹¹ Ideally, religious institutions and leaders, given their significant influence on social order, should ideally present public opinions and policy recommendations that strengthen national cohesion. However, in practice, certain religious interventions have caused public turmoil, including the debates surrounding the implementation of "Sharia law" in several northern states, which have provoked reactions from both Muslim supporters and Christian opponents."¹²

Advantages and challenges are unavoidable in a pluralistic society. Since the introduction of Islam in the eleventh century through northern trade routes and Christianity in the fifteenth century via European missionaries in the south, Nigeria has experienced considerable religious diversification. Overtime, both religions rose to prominence and dispersed throughout the region, creating new, varied forms that not only supplanted regional belief systems but also created new social configurations that persist to this day. Although local religions now account for a smaller proportion of religious adherence, they continue to be practiced, particularly in rural areas. Muslims remain predominant in northern Nigeria, while Christianity is more dominant in the south, with traditional religions often practiced alongside these faiths in rural regions. Nigeria's distinctive religious environment is thus deeply rooted in its historical development.¹³

Given this context, it is unsurprising that religious pluralism has been promoted a core element of Nigeria's national identities. The Nigerian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, allowing individuals to practice and spread their beliefs without coercion or persecution. This legal framework has allowed religious diversity to flourish, with various religious groups establishing places of worship, schools, and social institutions. However, religious pluralism also presents significant challenges, particularly in terms of interfaith relations and the pursuit of national unity.¹⁴

In the context of peace, coexistence refers to the ability of diverse groups to live side by side despite differences. Historically, Nigeria has become a place where such coexistence has flourished, with multiple religious traditions living

⁹ Rosalind I J Hackett, 'Religion and Development in Nigeria: Some Ethical Considerations', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 31.3 (2001), 259–84.

¹⁰ Falola, *The History of Nigeria*.

¹¹ John N Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World* (United States Institute of Peace, 2008).

¹² David D Laitin, 'The Sharia Debate and the Origins of Nigeria's Second Republic', *The Journal of Modern African*

Studies, 20.3 (1982), 411–30
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/160525>>.

¹³ Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria* (Spectrum Books, 1993); Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (University of Rochester Press, 1998); Ludwig, *Christian: Muslim Relations*.

¹⁴ Nigeria Inter-Religious Council, *Building Bridges of Understanding and Peace* (NIREC Publications, 2000).

alongside one another for centuries. While Islam remains highly prominent, Christianity has grown significantly, and local religions continue to exist. However, as is common in vulnerable pluralistic societies, tensions and conflicts can arise and escalate seriously. Obadare argues that conflicts initially driven by socio-economic and political issues, such as competition over resources, political power, and land disputes, quickly evolve into religious conflicts given Nigeria's complex social composition. Repeated violence in Jos, a city in the Middle Belt region, illustrates this dynamic, where competition between farming communities (predominantly Christian) and herding groups (predominantly Muslim) began as disputes over resources before escalating along ethnic and religious lines.¹⁵ Furthermore, the emergence of extremist groups within religious communities, such as Boko Haram, has significantly exacerbated the situation. Such groups not only target Christian communities but also attack Muslim populations, openly opposing coexistence and disrupting social harmony and stability in Nigerian society.¹⁶

The Emergence of a Religious Crisis in Northern Nigeria

Religious disputes have long been a persistent feature of Nigerian society, mostly involving the country's two largest religious groups, Christians and Muslims. These disputes are most pronounced in the Middle Belt and northern regions, where religious divisions intersect closely with ethnic and regional identities. While religion often plays a significant role, sociopolitical and economic factors typically intensify these conflicts. Because of the close intersections between religious affiliation and ethnic variety in Nigeria, conflicts that are rooted in political competition or ethnic

rivalry frequently take on a religious appearance. For instance, competition over land and natural resources has fueled recurrent clashes between predominantly Muslim Fulani herders and predominantly Christian farmers in the Middle Belt. These disputes have become increasingly acute as population expansion and climate change exacerbate resource scarcity. Local and national political leaders frequently politicize this dynamic by taking advantage of religious identities, exploiting these tensions to advance their own political interests.¹⁷

Economic inequality has also contributed significantly to the escalation of religious tensions. Historically, northern Nigeria, where Muslims constitute the majority, has lagged behind the southern regions when it comes to economic growth.¹⁸ This persistent disparity has fostered feelings of marginalization among many northern Muslims, leading economic grievances to be interpreted through the lens of religious prejudice. Conversely, in predominantly Christian areas, perceptions that Muslim elites control economic power have sometimes led to violence and hatred. These religious tensions are further rooted in Nigeria's colonial legacy. British colonial policies often favored a certain group over another, especially through the system of indirect control in northern Nigeria, which strengthened the power of Muslim elites while marginalizing non-Muslim communities.¹⁹ As groups fight for wealth and power in a world shaped by past grievances, this historical legacy still affects religious conflicts today.

Sociopolitical instability has been further exacerbated by the rise of violent extremism, most notably the Boko Haram insurgency. The extremist Islamist group Boko Haram has carried out widespread attacks in northern Nigeria, targeting

¹⁵ Ebenezer Obadare, *Pentecostal Republic: Religion and the Struggle for State Power in Nigeria* (Zed Books, 2018).

¹⁶ Justin George, Adesoji Adelaja, and Dave Weatherspoon, 'Armed Conflicts and Food Insecurity', *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 102.1 (2020), 114–31 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48601985>>.

¹⁷ Crisis Group, *Herders against Farmers: Nigeria's Expanding Deadly Conflict* (International Crisis Group, 2017) <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/252-herders-against-farmers-nigerias>>

expanding-deadly-conflict>; Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, 'Nigeria: Conflict in the Middle Belt', *Hearing before the House of Representatives, 115th Congress, 1st Session* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2017).

¹⁸ Philip Ostien, 'Jonah Jang and the Jasawa: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Nigeria BT - Muslim-Christian Relations in Africa' (Brill, 2009).

¹⁹ Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria*.



not only Christians but also moderate Muslims. The region's persistent poverty, lack of education, and government shortcomings, which fostered the spread of extremist beliefs, are partially to blame for the rise of Boko Haram.²⁰ Isaac claims that Boko Haram arose from a complex confluence of socioeconomic inequality, political marginalization in northern Nigeria, weak state governance, and ideological-religious motivations. Along with widespread humanitarian concerns such as mass displacement, social structure destruction, and degradation of the economy and education, this insurgency has also resulted in armed conflict.²¹

Impacts of the Religious Crisis in Nigeria

Nigeria's religious crises have had profound and wide-ranging effects on the country's social, political, and economic landscape. These crises, which are frequently characterized through violent battles between Muslims and Christians, have caused long-term sociopolitical instability as well as substantial material and human losses. Religious conflicts have resulted in the displacement of millions of people and the deaths of thousands. In the Northeast, for example, the Boko Haram insurgency has generated severe humanitarian crisis, claiming over 35,000 lives and displacing over two million individuals. Similarly, recurrent conflicts between Muslim herders and Christian farmers in the Middle Belt have caused considerable casualties and forced relocation of the population.²² Communities are upended by these conflicts, which also pose long-term difficulties for relocation and peacemaking.

According to reports by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), religious crises have also greatly undermined economic activities, especially in conflict-affected areas. Persistent violence in cities such as Jos, located in the Middle Belt, has weakened investor

confidence and constrained business growth and economic development.²³ In the countryside, clashes between herders and farmers have reduced agricultural productivity, resulting in food insecurity and the deepening of poverty. Religious conflict further exacerbates political instability by accentuating social divisions and undermining the state's ability to govern effectively.²⁴ Politicians frequently exploit religious differences for political gain, complicating policy formulation and implementation. In states such as Borno, where the Boko Haram insurgency remains active, these dynamics have severely limited the government's ability to maintain law, order, and public security.

Beyond their immediate consequences, religious crises have eroded trust and social cohesion among Nigeria's religious and ethnic communities, fostering deep-seated animosities that persist long after episodes of violence subside. This erosion of trust complicates efforts to rebuild communities and promote reconciliation. Religious disputes often reinforce stereotypes and prejudices, thereby perpetuating cycles of violence and mutual distrust. In cities like Kaduna, religious segregation and community isolation have further hindered collaboration and social interaction between Christian and Muslim groups.²⁵ Moreover, religious disputes in Nigeria are frequently accompanied by serious human rights abuses, including extrajudicial executions, torture, and gender-based violence. Both state and non-state actors have been associated with these transgressions.²⁶ Extremist organizations such as Boko Haram have been widely accused of crimes against civilians, while security forces have faced allegations of excessive and disproportionate use of force in responding to religious disputes. These infractions impede attempts to attain justice and responsibility in addition to causing immediate harm.

²⁰ Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*.

²¹ Issac Ilerhunmwuwa, 'Understanding the Emergence, the Impact, and the Countering of Boko Haram', *Journal of Global Faultlines*, 12.1 (2025), 61–81 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48828320>>.

²² Group, *Herders against Farmers*.

²³ UNHCR, *Nigeria Emergency*, 2021 <<https://www.unhcr.org/hk/en/emergencies/nigeria-emergency>>.

²⁴ Ostien, *Jonah Jang and the Jasawa*.

²⁵ Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* (Princeton University Press, 2016).

²⁶ Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria*.

In Nigeria, religious conflicts have also contributed to the deterioration of educational systems, particularly in regions affected by conflict. Boko Haram and other extremist groups have harmed teachers and students, leading to the destruction of schools and the prolonged closure of educational institutions. As a result, many children have been denied access to formal education or forced to rely on overcrowded and under-resourced temporary learning facilities. This disruption has led to declining educational standards and poses serious long-term risks to regional and national growth. Overall, the persistence of religious conflict continues to hinder the promotion of justice, accountability, and sustainable peace in Nigeria.²⁷

Islamic Teachings' Contribution to Christian-Muslim Conflict Reconciliation in Nigeria

Islamic teachings emphasize peaceful coexistence with people of all faiths, a principle that is especially important in Nigeria, a country marked by deep religious diversity. With nearly equal populations of Muslims and Christians, Nigeria's sociopolitical stability often hinges on the ability of these two religious communities to coexist harmoniously. Within this context, Islamic ethical principles provide an important framework for fostering peaceful relations, even in situations where religious tensions can sometimes lead to conflict.

Islam encourages Muslims to maintain peaceful relations with others regardless of their religious affiliation. The Qur'an and Hadith contain numerous references to justice, tolerance, and mutual respect as essential components of peaceful coexistence. For example, Q.S. Al Mumtaḥanah [60]: 8 states: "Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes –

from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly."²⁸ This verse highlights the importance of fairness and kindness in interactions with people of different faiths. Besides that, Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) life provides concrete historical examples of harmonious coexistence. A multi-religious community where Muslims, Jews, and other religious groups could coexist under a shared legal framework that acknowledged the rights of all communities was established by the Prophet's Charter of Medina.²⁹ This historical example shows that harmonious coexistence is both a practical model that may be attained in varied civilizations and a religious ideal.

Given Nigeria's long history of religious strife, Islamic teachings on peaceful coexistence are especially pertinent. Citing Islamic teachings as a foundation for communication and collaboration, prominent Muslim leaders and intellectuals in Nigeria have continuously advocated for harmony and tolerance between Christians and Muslims.³⁰ Through campaigning, education, and cooperation with Christian leaders, groups such as the *Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs* (NSCIA) have been instrumental in fostering peaceful coexistence. For example, Islamic leaders have frequently stressed the need for peace and reconciliation during times of religious tension, such as the ongoing conflicts in Jos or the Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria.³¹ They have pointed to the Qur'an and Hadith as guiding principles that encourage Muslims to seek peaceful solutions to conflicts and to treat others with justice and compassion. The most prominent figure is Imam Dr. Muhammad Ashafa, who has

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Nigeria: Events of 2019*, 2019 <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/nigeria>>; Amnesty International, *Nigeria: At Least 10,000 Civilians Died in Military Detention in Northeast*, 2021 <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/12/nigeria-older-people-often-an-invisible-casualty-in-conflict-with-boko-haram/>>; UNICEF, *Education in Emergencies: Nigeria*,

2020 <<https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/topics/education-emergencies>>.

²⁸ Saheeh Internasional, *The Qur'an: Arabic Text with English Meanings*.

²⁹ Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*.

³⁰ Sulaiman, *Peaceful Coexistence between*.

³¹ Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria*.



been doing it for more than three decades until he gained worldwide recognition for his efforts.³²

Despite these lessons, several obstacles to peaceful coexistence persist in Nigeria. Sociopolitical factors, such as resource competitiveness, ethnic divisions, and the governmental manipulation of religious identities, frequently exacerbate religious conflicts. Moreover, extremist groups such as Boko Haram have distorted Islamic teachings, further deepening divisions between Muslims and Christians. Nevertheless, in Nigeria's multicultural culture, Islamic teachings on peaceful coexistence provide a potent framework for promoting unity. By upholding these values, Muslims in Nigeria may help create a more harmonious and cohesive society by upholding the values of justice, tolerance, and respect for human dignity. Even if there are still obstacles to overcome, persistent attempts to spread these lessons can aid in healing rifts and stop religious disputes from getting worse.

In order for a peaceful and secure society to be created in Nigeria, there has to be a reconciliation between Muslims and Christians, especially given the long history of conflict between these two religious factions. The ethical principles of Islam, such as justice, compassion, forgiveness, and communication, can form a beneficial foundation for ensuring harmonious interreligious relations. Justice (*ʿadl*) is a cornerstone of Islamic ethics and a critical component of reconciliation. The Qur'an calls on Muslims to uphold justice in all circumstances, even when dealing with those of other faiths. The Qur'an calls on Muslims to uphold justice in all circumstances, and all the experiences of life provide human beings with opportunities to

embody virtues that emulate the Divine attributes, such as being compassionate to those in distress, giving generously to those who are needy, and advocating on behalf of the oppressed.³³ Q.S Al-Nisā' [4]:135 instructs, "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives".³⁴ In the context of reconciliation, justice requires addressing grievances fairly and ensuring that both Christians and Muslims are acknowledged and respected. By prioritizing justice, reconciliation efforts can help rebuild trust and foster lasting peace.

Compassion (*rahmah*) is another central ethical principle in Islam and plays a key role in reconciliation. The Qur'an frequently describes Allah as *ar-Rahmān* and *al-Rahīm* (The Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful), encouraging Muslims to embody these qualities in their interactions with others. Q.S Āli 'Imrān [3]: 159 highlights the importance of compassion, stating, "So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you."³⁵ In Nigeria's polarized religious environment, compassion can help bridge divides between Christians and Muslims by fostering empathy and understanding, both of which are essential for reconciliation.

Another important part of Islamic ethics that is necessary for reconciliation is forgiveness (*al-ʿafw*).³⁶ The Qur'an encourages believers to forgive people even when doing so is hard, to help bring about peace and harmony. Q.S. Ash-Shura [42]: 43 says, "And whoever is patient and forgives, that is truly one of the things that needs determination".³⁷ In Nigeria, where religious

³² The Commonwealth, 'Commonwealth Peace Prize Winners Celebrate 30 Years of Turning Conflict into Coexistence' (The Commonwealth, 2025) <<https://thecommonwealth.org/news/peace-prize-winners-celebrate-30-years-coexistence>>.

³³ Naveed Khan, 'A Sacred Duty: Islam and Social Justice', 2020 <<https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/a-sacred-duty-islam-and-social-justice>>.

³⁴ Saheeh Internasional, *The Qur'an: Arabic Text with English Meanings*.

³⁵ Saheeh Internasional, *The Qur'an: Arabic Text with English Meanings*.

³⁶ See more details in *Sin, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. by Lucinda Mosher and David Marshall (Georgetown University Press, 2016) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1c84cfk>>.

³⁷ Saheeh Internasional, *Saheeh Internasional, The Qur'an: Arabic Text with English Meanings*.

conflicts have caused a lot of sorrow, encouraging forgiveness can help both groups move beyond past grievances and work collectively toward a more peaceful future. Religious disagreements are widespread in Nigeria because people of different faiths have trouble accepting their differences and working together on shared values. A religion that seeks to control others, thinks itself as superior, and constantly attempts to convert people from other religions is not conducive to meaningful conversation.³⁸ Promoting forgiveness can also prevent the cycles of violence and revenge that perpetuate conflict.

Islamic ethics further stress the importance of dialogue and consultation (*shūrā*) in resolving disputes. The Qur'an encourages people to engage in dialogue and seek mutual advice when making decisions³⁹ as reflected in Q.S. Al-Shūrā [42]: 38. Dialogue is important to reconciliation because it enables open communication, mutual understanding, and peaceful problem solving. In the Nigerian context, structured interfaith dialogue can help Christians and Muslims address misunderstandings, ease tensions, and create mutual trust. Dialogue procedures aim to improve relations between individuals or groups by addressing the causes of conflict, promoting reconciliation, reaching agreement on new ways to handle shared problems, and creating a common vision for the future.⁴⁰

Interfaith dialogue represents one of the most effective ways to apply Islamic ethical principles to reconciliation efforts. Religious leaders from both Christian and Muslim communities in Nigeria have engaged in dialogue initiatives that emphasize

shared values and collaborative peacebuilding. Organizations such as the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) has been instrumental in promoting interfaith dialogue.⁴¹ Sermons, religious education, and community outreach initiatives often emphasize Islamic teachings on forgiveness. Such initiatives can inspire communities to forgive historical wrongs, thereby reducing the suffering brought on by religious disputes. For example, apologies may be requested through community outreach programs, and reconciliation rituals could be employed to reconfirm promises to peace. Grassroots initiatives inspired by Islamic ethics have also supported joint peacebuilding efforts that involve both Christians and Muslims.

This movement to promote peaceful coexistence also involves young people, who are crucial to Nigeria's future.⁴² Many young people, including Muslims, are actively campaigning for interfaith dialogue, even in conflict-affected areas. Initiatives such as Youth4Youth Africa's 2025 National Week reportedly mobilized more than 30,000 young people across 18 states, demonstrating the potential of youth-led movements to promote peaceful coexistence.⁴³ These efforts build upon the sustained work of older generations who have long promoted peaceful coexistence among young people.

Practical reconciliation initiatives often include joint community projects, such as rebuilding homes and schools destroyed by conflict, or cooperative economic ventures that benefit both communities. By working together on shared goals, Christians and Muslims can strengthen social trust and reinforce communal

³⁸ Friday I Ogbuehi, 'Critical Appraisal of Dialogue as a Strategy for Religious Conflict Resolution in Nigeria', *UNIZIK Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, 8.2 (2016), 158–74.

³⁹ See more details in Ahmad Al-Raysuni and Nancy Roberts, *Al-Shura: The Qur'anic Principle of Consultation* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2011) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvkc67gn>>.

⁴⁰ The Peace & Dialogue Platform, 'Dialogue Process', 2017 <<https://www.peaceinfrastructures.org/thematic/dialogue-process>>.

⁴¹ 'Nigeria Inter Religious Council (NIREC)' <<https://www.nirec.org.ng/>>.

⁴² 'Voices Against Violence: Young Nigerian Peace Ambassadors Changing Lives in Conflict Zones', *Peace News Network* <<https://peacenews.com/voices-against-violence-young-nigerian-peace-ambassadors-changing-lives-in-conflict-zones/>>.

⁴³ Samuel Anyanwu, 'Youths Are Critical in Promoting Peaceful Co-Existence – IPCR', *Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation* <<https://fmino.gov.ng/youths-are-critical-in-promoting-peaceful-co-existence-ipcr-2/>>; 'Youth-Led Ambassadors Reach 30,000 Nigerians in SDG Push', *RuralPostNG* <<https://ruralpostng.com/2026/01/06/youth-led-ambassadors-reach-30000-nigerians-in-sdg-push/>>.

bonds. Educational institutions and religious organizations also play crucial role by promoting Islamic values of cooperation, justice, and peace. To combat extremist beliefs and foster a more inclusive understanding of Islam, educational programs might concentrate on Qur'anic values that stress harmonious relations with people of other faiths. In Nigeria, Islamic principles offer a potent foundation for Christian-Muslim reconciliation.

Conclusion

Islamic teachings on peaceful coexistence remain highly relevant to efforts aimed at reconciling Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. Principles such as conversation, forgiveness, fairness, and compassion form the ethical foundation of these teachings, providing practical guidance for addressing religious conflict. By following the Qur'an's teachings that emphasize respect, fairness, and empathy, Muslims can contribute significantly to building a more peaceful and united society. In Nigeria, where religious beliefs often overlap with political and economic beliefs, embracing Islamic principles may assist deal with both the root causes and the signs of conflict. Islamic principles can help heal the rifts and bring about permanent peace between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria by promoting justice and forgiveness and encouraging discussion and understanding between religions. Finally, Islamic teachings on peaceful coexistence can play an important role in fostering social cohesion and improving life in Nigeria, as they encourage cooperation in building bridges of trust and collaboration.

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Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

Favour C. Uroko contributed to the study's conceptualization and design, theoretical framing, conducted fieldwork and data collection, performed data analysis and interpretation, and led the drafting of the manuscript. Khairul Amin contributed to the substantive and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and take full responsibility for its content.

Data Availability Statement

The data generated and analyzed during this study are publicly available.

Declaration of Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial or non-financial interests that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used **ChatGPT 5.2** and **Grammarly** to improve the clarity of the writing, visual design, and language editing. Following the use of this tool, the authors carefully reviewed and edited the content as required and take full responsibility for the soundness and precision of the published article.

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