

# PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN OGBOMOSO

Adeniran Olusola ADEPOJU

*The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Nigeria*

**ABSTRACT :** *Ogbomoso in Oyo State, Nigeria, is a great location in Africa, with peculiar ethnic groups and a multi-religious cultural setting, including Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religion. This article examines the crucial roles expected of pastors and religious leaders in fostering peaceful coexistence and sustainable development. This article argues that peaceful coexistence, rather than correcting the partition, is a panacea for sustainable development. Specifically, peaceful coexistence enhances sustainable development. Religion that is supposed to keep people together in love should not turn into a pillar of enmity among the religious adherents in Nigeria.*

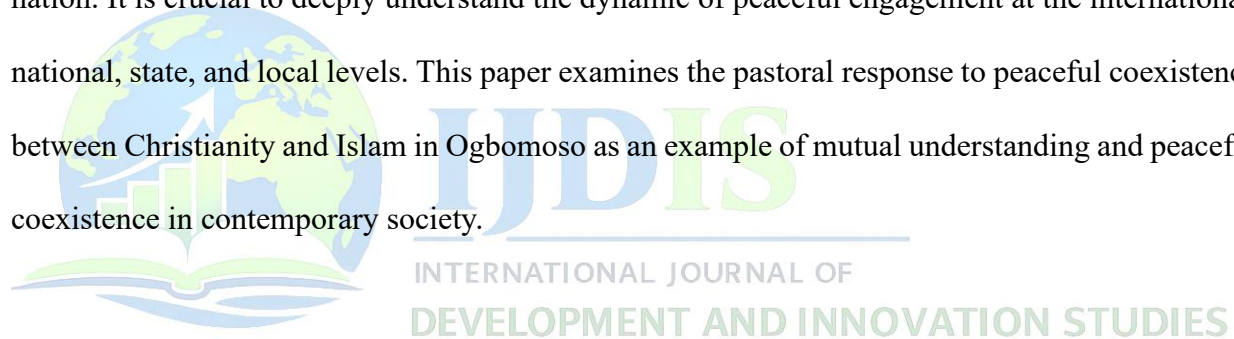
**KEYWORDS:** *Interfaith dialogue, pastoral response, peaceful coexistence, religious intolerance, and tolerance.*

## I. Introduction

Peaceful coexistence refers to living together in peace rather than in constant hostility. Peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance imply the capacity of individuals with diverse cultural and religious orientations to live together in harmony without ongoing hostility. Similarly, Ajala described peace and tolerance as an education that shapes all norms, values, and attitudes, fostering an environment conducive to human life [1]. Onimhawo and Ottuh remark sedately that religious

tolerance is a phenomenon that supports the establishment of civil society: It is clear that religious tolerance is essential to building a civil society and the establishment of rules, pluralism, democracy, freedom of belief, acceptance of differences in opinion, thought, and human culture, the appreciation of national charters, respect for the rule of law, strategic decisions, and human values [2].

Olayinka (2023a) describes peaceful coexistence as a state of harmony among people or groups free from strife [3]. Peace is something that individuals need to adopt in society to build a healthy nation. It is crucial to deeply understand the dynamic of peaceful engagement at the international, national, state, and local levels. This paper examines the pastoral response to peaceful coexistence between Christianity and Islam in Ogbomoso as an example of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence in contemporary society.



## **II. Overview of Christian – Muslim Beliefs in Peaceful Coexistence**

Ogbomoso is a multi-religious town that allows citizens to practise a religion of their choice. Ogbomoso is well known as a ‘pace-setter,” where people of different religions relate mutually and seek peace to settle their conflicts. Churches and mosques are found in every nook and cranny of the country, and those who have the privilege of holding key posts in the nation’s affairs mostly practice either of the two religions. This view conveys that Islam and Christianity are major

religions that shape the thinking and values of a significant portion of the city's population. However, the religious situation in the country today calls for urgent dialogue to foster peaceful coexistence among all.

At this juncture, the author observes the perspectives of Christians and Muslims on tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

#### **i. Peaceful coexistence according to Christians**

Christianity incorporates the principle of tolerance. According to Jesus' teaching in the Gospel, Luke 6:29-30 (NIV) reads,

If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

According to Christians, the foundation for religious tolerance and coexistence is expressed in Matthew 6:14-15, "your heavenly father will pardon you if you pardon others when they transgress against you. However, your father will not pardon your faults if you do not pardon others," while Colossians 3:13 and Ephesians 4:32 instruct Christians to forgive their offenders. Other relevant biblical texts include Mark 18:21, Mathew 18:21 and Luke 23:34. These biblical texts form a good picture of the principles of tolerance. At times, it presents a picture of tolerance that seems beyond human ability. The texts prove that a divine religion must seek peace at all cost.

#### **ii. Peaceful coexistence in the light of the Sunnah**

Adekunle states that the moderation preached by Islam, as found in Islamic literature, has led scholars and jurists to exercise their intellectual capabilities and categorize friendship-keeping with non-Muslims into four levels [4]. These are: Al-Mawaddah, Al-Mudarat, Al-Muwasat, and Al-Mu'amalat.

Al-Mawaddah refers to a close, personal relationship, as well as intense, heartfelt love and affection. The Qur'an stressed this, pointing to this kind of relationship in the following *أَكْمَمْ نَ مَ نَمِ نَ كُؤَا نُونِ مَدْنُ مَالِ مَهْمُ مَ لَنَ مَ نُونِ اُكْ مَ اَلْكَ نَ مومَلْنِ نَ دُو كُمْ اَمُو نِي وَ نَعْدُكَ نَ وَ اَعْدُكَ مُكْ اَمُكْ* *"O you who have believed, do not treat your enemies and My adversaries as allies, showing them love when they have rejected the truth that has been revealed to you...."* (Quran 60:1).

Al-Mudarat refers to outwardly displaying love and friendship without inwardly loving one's beliefs. It is merely the first stage's (al-Mawaddah) external manifestation. Therefore, it involves treating non-Muslims with kindness, courtesy, friendliness, and pleasantness. It also entails acting civilly, politely, and with good manners toward other people. Since it is reserved for all people, this type of interaction with non-Muslims should be promoted among faithful Muslims.

Al-Muwasat: This means helping, assisting, and rendering benefits to non-Muslims. Charity, assistance, support, condolences, consolation, and preventing harm—such as providing food to a hungry person or water to a thirsty non-Muslim—are all included. Except for those who are directly at war with Muslims. Qur'an 60:8 points to the fact above *مَهْمُ : مَ لَنَ مَ مَ كُؤَا اُ كُؤُ مَمْنُوكُمْ مَنُ نَبِنِ يَ نَ مَ*

Contemporary Christianity still expresses love to neighbours as indicated in the Quran cited above,

and is committed to learning, and they would expect a reciprocation of such love within the community where they live, a challenge to non-Christians to meet up to.

Islamic texts that indicate the legality of coexistence with non-Muslims, as found in the Sunnah, are highlighted below.

- a. AbūDāwūd said in al-Sunan that injustice towards those with whom there is a covenant and the dhimmis is prohibited. The Prophet (PBUH) said: Whoever hurts a dhimmi or burdens him with the which he cannot manage, or takes his property without his permission, I will dispute with him on the Day of Resurrection [5].
- a. Al-Bukhārī affirms peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims through loans. May Allah be pleased with her, the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) died, and his shield was pledged to a Jew for thirty sacks of barley [6].
- b. Al-Bukhārī believed in honouring the dead, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. Jābir ibn Abd-Allāh, may Allah be pleased with them, reported: a funeral procession passed by us, and the Prophet (PBUH) stood up, so we followed suit. We said, O Messenger of God: it is the funeral of a Jew. He said: If you see a funeral, then stand. Al-Bukhārī narrated it [7]. Also, AbdAllāhibn Abī Layla said that Sahl ibn anīf and Qaysibn Saad were sitting at al-Qāḍissiyah when a funeral procession passed by, so they stood up. It was said to them: It is from the people of the land, meaning the dhimmis. They said it was a funeral that passed by the Prophet (PBUH), so he stood up. He was informed that it was a Jewish funeral. He said, “Are they not human beings?” Al Bukhārī narrated them [8].

In practical terms, the Madinah accord, which served as the constitution, governed the people of Madinah, who were of different religions (Islam, polytheism, and Judaism). Regarding ethnicity from Qahtān, al-Adnān, and Jews, it gave equal public rights and duties to all, including being good and just to neighbours and the duty of protecting the city, in what can be termed in contemporary jargon as citizenship rights. The Islamic State maintained the rights of dhimmis (protected non-Muslim people living in Muslim-populated areas, such as Christians) and covenanters in their entirety. AbūHalālah suggested that dhimmis were appointed to certain senior government positions (Dawah), including ministries and other roles [9]. Durant asserted, “Dhimmis were treated with a degree of tolerance that cannot be found in the Christian countries of today. They were free to exercise their religious convictions and celebrated in their Churches and temples.” [10]. In today's world, the notion of strong protection and abundant job opportunities appears to have diminished. Reports from certain regions of Egypt and the Middle East highlight the distressing mistreatment of non-Muslim low-wage workers, particularly those employed in domestic service roles.

### **III. Religion as Root and Cause of Intolerance**

Numerous factors are responsible for the conflict between Christians and Muslims. It varies from place to place, depending on people's understanding of the area and its history. These factors include illiteracy, tribalism, impatience, selfishness, ethnicity, poverty, the influence of foreign rivals, and religion. Some conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Ogbomoso have recently been reported, attributed to intolerance. There were open confrontations and disruptions of Christian Sunday worship services attributed to some Muslim boys' disturbance. Deliberate act of

provocation to cause distress on either side must be discouraged and leaders being at the for front to manage this. This might help Ogbomoso, which was known for its peaceful Christian-Muslim relations, return to its peaceful golden days.

Some academics contend that a religion's teachings are more significant than a believer's connection to it. For instance, Herek's research indicates that a religious person's propensity for tolerance depends less on internal or external focus and more on whether or not their religion promotes tolerance [11]. Coward seems to concur with Herek's conclusions. "It is also true that one can receive the kind of moral and truth-based foundation that is necessary for true tolerance from the teachings of the great religions" [12]. Coward does, however, also draw a link between bigotry and doctrine.

Similarly, Awoniyi raises essential topics in his discussion of religious conflict in Nigeria that could help clarify the link between intolerance and religious unity [13]. He points out that religious communities excel in creating ties of fraternity. These links often lead to physical, tangible, and emotional allegiances that may clash with those of other religious groups. People from religious majorities and those who hold extreme interpretations of their religious texts make up the majority of those who engage in offensive and intolerable behaviours. The concept of religious intolerance encompasses more than just verbal or physical abuse.

For instance, John supersedes the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction by postulating that tolerance depends on how people interpret their faith [14]. He contends that people either lean toward

“religious fundamentalism” or “quest.” According to Olayiwola, worshippers who identify as quest-oriented are more tolerant of people of different religions and more sceptical of their own religious convictions. On the other hand, fundamentalist religious adherents are confident that their views are valid in all respects; this thinking has been connected to intolerance in the form of prejudice and right-wing authoritarianism [15]. Further empirical studies could, however, be carried out on honest fundamentalism, fanaticism, or radicalism.

#### **IV. Practical Steps Toward Religious Tolerance Between Muslims and Christians**

The relationship between Christians and Muslims in Ogbomoso has served as a model for other cities in southwestern Nigeria. The historical stages of the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Ogbomoso can be summarised as follows:

Just as dialogue between Muslims and Christians has been going on both on official and unofficial levels and in different areas, so there have also been several levels at which everyday tolerance by Muslims and Christians has been happening. Olayinka (2023b) observed peaceful coexistence at the local level; Muslim–Christian relations are driven by a mutual desire to address life’s burning issues. According to Olayinka, this can be seen in joint community projects, social activities and ceremonies, and burials; these have always been avenues for everyday activities among Muslims and Christians [16].

Moreover, Ayegboyin affirms that social ties exist between Muslims and Christians, as does Olayinka (2023b). Family ties, friendship, and political affiliations have created situations that

make an alternative to cooperation between Muslims and Christians incomprehensible and unimaginable [17]. When God wanted to create man, as recorded in the Holy Bible, He said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” (Genesis 1:26).

A critical examination of the Trinitarian formula reveals that God has long sanctioned dialogue. God started the conversation and wanted it to continue in love. In the Quran, it is said, “Our God and your God is one, and to Him, we have surrendered.” (Quran 29:46). So, what is the basis for the tension between Muslims and Christians?

The means to foster the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Ogbomoso have gone so far as to establish a football team, a sports-oriented initiative, with a cultural centre, social significance, and philosophy. The city’s king introduced the idea of a sports centre named “The Federation of Ogbomosho - Crown football cup” in all the city’s zones. This football team is one of the most significant factors in unity updates and an exemplary model of relations across all sectors of society. This initiative seems strange to other closed towns, but it is a practical reality. The club, also known as the Federation of ‘Ajilete’ football team, has become a reality. The team’s goals and objectives are many. Perhaps most notable is the peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in the city, a prime example of tolerance and mutual respect between the two religions [18]. The name ‘Ajilete’ or Crown football team of Ogbomosho is a platform for religious coexistence between Christians and Muslims and for uniting the followers of the two religions in a single frame. It also envisioned its contribution towards developing the local community through sports and social development. Based on the players’ and management’s

confidence, the current goal is to maintain the team's legacy. The team is confident that it will be a competitive national team.

The management of the team consisting of Christians and Muslims works towards forming well-rounded personalities concerning sports, society, and culture through deepening the spirit of loyalty and national belonging among members. They encourage physical education through culture, society, and religion and facilitate the means to invest the leisure time of members in practice [18].

Alade used coexistence in Ogbomoso as a motivation, with several teachings on peaceful coexistence held twice a year. The people of Ogbomoso's elaboration on concepts, values, and cultures has contributed to greater understanding between Muslims and Christians. Alade insists that educational talks at primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions were held to foster peaceful relations rather than resort to rupture, confrontation, or war, the trials the city's people experienced in their history crystallised ideas of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The tolerance among religious leaders led to the acceptance of the other as an integral part of the self and of **existence**." [18]. Religious tolerance led to increased values and concepts of humanity and morals, forming a trend in societal strongholds and security around the city. Safety and security helped to overcome their differences and accommodate one another through mutual understanding and establish tolerance within their community.

Most importantly, the motives, religious tolerance, and humanitarian principles of the people of Ogbomoso helped achieve peaceful coexistence in the land. This peaceful coexistence followed tyrosinated steps. First, they recognised differences in nationality, colour, thought, and religion. Among the laws of God is the fact that people differ in their religious beliefs, ideas, ideologies, and perceptions. There are many ideas, religions, perceptions, schools of thought, and orientations in all aspects of life. This diversity was willed by the Ogbomoso leaders' forum [19]. Secondly, Bello remarked on the unity of religions that they have a single origin, the divine. Therefore, all followers of revealed religions must believe in God's prophets, apostles, and their scriptures [20].

Thirdly, tolerance is necessary and a hallmark of the city. As Malla said, it should be highlighted that religious tolerance is required. Existence has deemed it essential for humankind to form distinct human clusters. Although these clusters are united by their single origin, their mutual need to group ensures their survival, their desire to meet basic needs, and their willingness to establish urban centres and develop over the years. They nevertheless vary in their unique attributes, such as ethnicity, religious convictions, environment, and culture [21]. Nwanaju supports Malla, saying that these typical differences exist so that every individual and community can live as they please. We note that the purpose of the diversity between peoples, tribes, cultures, and civilisations is to constitute a reason for getting to know each other and not to remain ignorant of each other, to coexist, not to conflict with each other, to cooperate, not to fight one another, and to integrate and complement each other, not oppose and conflict. In light of this, it is clear that religious tolerance is necessary for the maintenance of existence [22].

Religious tolerance in Ogbomoso is characterised by mutual respect. Balogun boasted that respect for one another's ideas and religion has been achieved. The value of religious tolerance manifests in its acknowledgement of differences, acceptance of diversity, and recognition of changes. It respects that which distinguishes individuals psychologically, emotionally, and mentally. It values the unique attributes of each community regarding its culture, which is a mix of the old, the present, and its vision for the future. This is the reason for its survival and identity and the source of its pride [23].

Fifthly, religious tolerance is reflected in the absolute acceptance of others' rights. People have the right to determine their own beliefs, behaviours, and practices. If one community is allowed to exist, the other is allowed to live. If the sanctity of one person's religion is preserved, the sanctity of the other's religious beliefs must be maintained. If one community's unique culture cannot be violated, then the other's cannot be violated either. It does not rescind its commitment to accept any form of alienation or bargain in these matters. These tolerance factors are an active factor in building a civil society in Ogbomoso and encourage the enforcement of its rules, Balogun remarked [23].

## **V. Pastoral Response Towards Religious Tolerance**

Christianity is prominent in the south of the country, yet there is a large population of indigenous northern Christians. In Nigeria, religious violence has been a recurring problem since the early 1980s, particularly among Muslims and Christians. Christian-to-Muslim interfaith discussions have not produced fruitful outcomes. Therefore, by bringing their followers to order, the writer of

this paper believes that religious leaders are better positioned to discover a long-term solution to the issue.

Christian leaders should respond to acts of religious violence in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ. The contributions of Christian leaders in fostering harmony during religious riots cannot be undervalued. As Christ warned the disciples in Matthew 5:43, they must fulfil their priestly duties by praying for the nation, teaching their followers the principles of Christianity, and proclaiming a message of forgiveness and love.

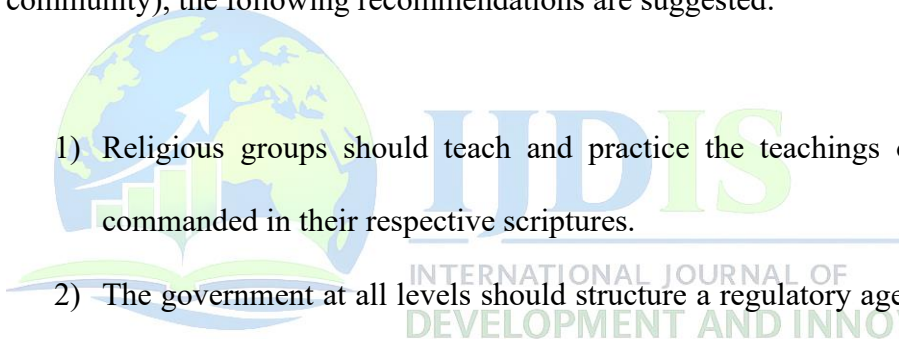
Christian leaders should also practice what they preach to influence their audience's behaviour. They must genuinely love everyone in the country, regardless of their religious beliefs, and preach forgiveness, violence prevention, and love for the country. They must actively participate in mediation and arbitration processes to resolve disputes. Christ actively participated in conflict resolution while on earth, such as stepping in when the adulterous woman was caught while the crowd requested her to be stoned, as indicated in the Law of Moses. Jesus' intervention saved the woman's life, and possibly stopped such way of living. Consequently, what Christian leaders say during a riot may assist in ending the religious crisis.

## **VI. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Coexistence among Christians, Muslims, and other religious communities is achievable. It starts with mutual trust and respect, and the desire to cooperate for the good of humanity in areas of common interest, which will lead to the establishment of advanced knowledge-based civil societies

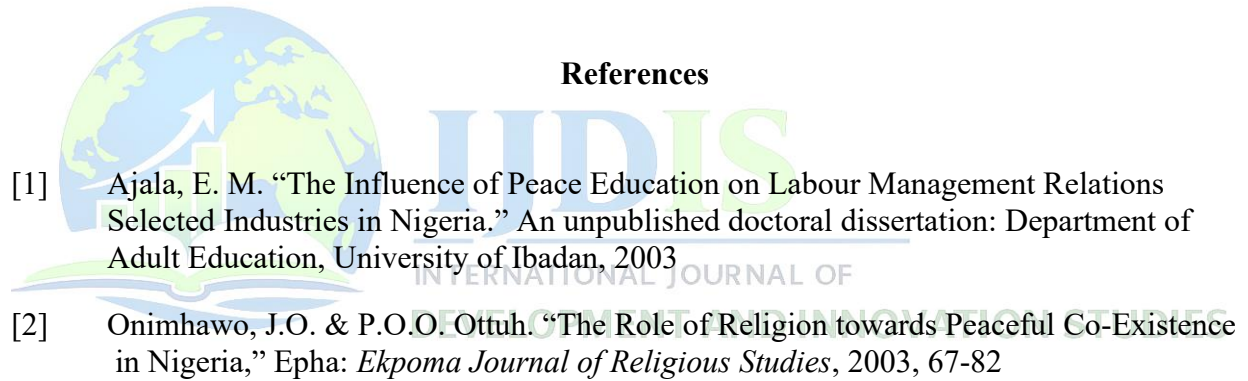
that put the higher interests above all else, not fanaticism. Conflicts along Nigeria's boundary have hindered progress toward sustainable development. The Nigerian civil war (in history), the recent Islamic insurgency, and the role played by some of Nigeria's neighbours, especially Cameroon and the Benin Republic, proved to Nigeria that her subsistence is tied, will-nilly, to the nature of her relationships with her immediate neighbours. Consequently, peaceful coexistence should be the cardinal objective of Nigeria policy.

Hence, from the observations and findings of this article, and to achieve the desired results (in any community), the following recommendations are suggested:

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- 1) Religious groups should teach and practice the teachings of peaceful coexistence as commanded in their respective scriptures.
  - 2) The government at all levels should structure a regulatory agenda for all religious bodies to attain peace for individuals and Nigerian society.
  - 3) Contemporary religious leaders should strictly teach the peace elements of their religions for the peaceful coexistence of their communities.
  - 4) Leaders in their respective places of worship should advocate for mutual respect for individual religions among adherents.
  - 5) All people should be educated and enlightened on religious matters. Hence, the proscription of fanatic groups, such as taking them to court and meting out just judgment, will serve as a mirror for other bad elements in society.

- 6) Religious bodies that cause troubles, damage properties, or inflict pain on people should be forced (by law) to pay compensation for damages done and be prosecuted by law.
- 7) Police and other security agencies in the country should provide prompt intervention and act against fanatic groups. Security agencies should not be biased in their actions towards any particular religion but should respond promptly to requests for intervention whenever any religion requests protection.

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