Faith in Flux: The Nigerian Baptist Convention and Ethno-Religious Conflict in Northern Nigeria

Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6837-0310
University of the Western Cape,
South Africa
tsakupapa@uwc.ac.za

Oladele Peter Adehanloye
https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2176-7611
University of the Western Cape,
South Africa
3906660@myuwc.ac.za

Abstract

Ethno-religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria continue to pose serious threats to peaceful coexistence among its multi-religious and ethnically diverse communities. These tensions are intensified by the ambivalent role of religion, functioning both as a driver of division and a resource for reconciliation. This article examines how the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) has responded to such conflicts in recent decades through an exploration of the theological, institutional, and practical dimensions of its conflict transformation efforts. Methodologically, this contribution adopts a historical-theological and interdisciplinary approach drawing on secondary sources to analyse the NBC's evolving strategies aimed at conflict transformation. By foregrounding an African ecclesial response to ethno-religious crisis, this article contributes to broader discourses on the role of religion in peacebuilding in pluralistic contexts.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine how the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) has responded to the challenge of ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria. In the context of Nigeria's complex religious landscape, the role of religion in conflict transformation remains both significant and contested. Northern Nigeria, in particular, has witnessed persistent ethno-religious tensions, often resulting in violence, displacement, and strained intercommunal relations. These tensions, predominantly between adherents of Christianity and Islam, have escalated since the 1980s, exacerbating national insecurity and undermining peaceful coexistence (Gofwen 2004). Given that Muslims and Christians each constitute approximately 46% of the population, with 7.7% adhering to African Traditional Religions and a small percentage professing other or no faith (Labeodan 2016), the religious plurality of Nigeria presents both a challenge and an opportunity for peacebuilding.

While there is substantial literature on religion and conflict transformation in Nigeria, little research focuses on the Nigerian Baptist Convention and ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria. Analyses of NBC's role in conflict transformation are either marginal or absent. Most studies focus on its institutional history rather than its engagement in a religiously plural context. For example, Ray (1970) examined Baptist Mission policies from 1850–1960; Ayanrinola (1999) critiqued inherited mission strategies; Bamigboye (2000) highlighted a pioneer trader's church planting role; Ajayi (2010) traced NBC's development into a national church; and Adedoyin (1988) and Atanda (1988) provided historical overviews of its growth.

Afolabi's (2018) *Church Conflict and Its Management* focuses on strategies for managing internal conflicts within local Baptist churches under the NBC, without addressing broader ethno-religious dynamics. Other works on the NBC explore themes such as history, liturgy, and church autonomy. While valuable, these studies largely overlook the NBC's role in conflict transformation. This gap is notable given the pressing challenges of ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria and the NBC's mission presence in the region.

Against this backdrop, this contribution examines the role of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in conflict transformation efforts in Northern Nigeria. As the country's largest Baptist denomination, established in 1914 and comprising over 7,000 churches nationwide, the NBC provides a compelling case for evaluating the theological and institutional responses of Christian organisations to ethno-religious conflict. Although the NBC is numerically stronger in Southern Nigeria, its activities and challenges in the predominantly Islamic north remain understudied (Audi 2019). Since the 1980s, ethno-religious conflicts have reshaped the religious landscape in Northern Nigeria and compelled significant shifts in the NBC's mission practices, including the relocation of congregations, redefinition of worship spaces, and institutional adaptation in the face of insecurity (Adehanloye 2024, 11–12).

Therefore, drawing on the conceptual framework of conflict transformation, this contribution explores how the NBC interprets and engages its mission within a context marked by religious violence and social fragmentation. Methodologically, the study entails a critical literature analysis and draws on the empirical findings of research conducted by one of the authors of this article. Building on scholarly recognition of the ambivalent role of religion in conflict (Appleby 2000), this research adopts a historical-theological and interdisciplinary approach to assess the NBC's engagement in peacebuilding. It is also motivated by the pressing need to address the socio-political implications of religious conflict in Nigeria, particularly its impact on nation-building, national security, and human dignity. Furthermore, the personal experience of one of this article's authors as a long-serving clergy member within the NBC informs a critical and insider perspective on the evolving role of the church in conflict-prone regions.

Statistical data on religious demographics in Nigeria indicates that the population of Muslims and Christians in Nigeria is roughly equal at 46% each (Labeodan 2016). Southern Nigeria is predominantly Christian, while the northern part of Nigeria is largely Muslim. The Christian demographics can be further described in terms of the various Christian denominations. This comprises Protestants (Anglican 10%, Baptist 8%, Methodist 5%, and Lutheran 5%), the Catholics (15%), the Evangelical Church of West Africa (2%), Jehovah's Witnesses (5%), and a myriad of other local (Church of the Lord [Aladura], Cherubim and Seraphim, Celestial Church of Christ [20%]) and Pentecostal churches (30%) (Osaghae and Suberu 2005, 11). Baptists make up 8% of the Christian population, and about 3% of this total Baptist membership is accounted for by Baptists in Northern Nigeria (Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson 2020, 405–408).

A Brief History of the Nigerian Baptist Convention

The origins of the NBC can be traced to 1850 owing to the efforts of the Southern Baptist Convention of America (hereafter, SBC). The SBC sent the Rev. Thomas Jefferson Bowen to undertake missionary work in Nigeria (Bamigboye 2000, 23). According to Ayandele (1968, 70), part of the motivation of the SBC to undertake mission in Nigeria included their desire to spread the gospel in what they considered to be a land of "savagery and barbarism." Three missionaries from the SBC, namely, Henry C. Goodale, Robert F. Hill, and Rev. Thomas Jefferson Bowen, played a significant role in the early period. These three are thus regarded as pioneering missionaries for what would become the NBC. The year 1950 marked a turning point for the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC. According to Ajayi (2010, 188), the SBC leadership met and desired that "the ultimate responsibility for all phases of Baptist work should be assumed by the indigenous people as quickly as possible." This marked the beginning of the indigenisation of their foreign mission work, and a transition committee was tasked with the responsibility of making recommendations to the mission board regarding the issue of handing over the responsibility and leadership of mission work to qualified Nigerians. Since 1950, when the drive towards indigenisation commenced, an unprecedented rate of church planting within the NBC was undertaken at the hands of local people.

The NBC's organisational structure comprises four levels, namely, the local church, Baptist associations, conferences, and the general convention. The local church is categorised as either organised or unorganised. It is organised if it has a trained pastor and at least 20 baptised members in good standing per NBC doctrine (Nigerian Baptist Convention 2022). It is considered unorganised if it consists typically of preaching stations led by pastors without formal theological training. The NBC upholds the autonomy of the local church. Baptist associations are groups of geographically contiguous churches formed for mission and evangelism, meeting quarterly (Nigerian Baptist Convention 2022). Conferences are similar to regional associations cooperating with the NBC, led by a president and convening as needed (Nigerian Baptist Convention 2022). The general convention, presided over by the president who also serves as the chief executive officer (CEO), consists of messengers from member missionary Baptist churches and adheres to convention-approved principles and practices (Miller 1968; Nigerian Baptist Convention 2022).

The NBC is a member of the All-African Baptist Fellowship (AABF) and the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). It also partners with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) on various matters, most notably on mission and evangelism through the SBC's International Missions Board (IMB). Within Nigeria, the NBC is a member of both the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN). The CAN comprises all the registered Christian denominations in Nigeria while the CCN is an ecumenical body of mainly historic mission churches. Internationally, the NBC holds membership in ecumenical bodies such as the All-Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Given the strategic importance of theological education (Ajayi 2010, 126), the NBC runs the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary in Ogbomoso, which was originally established in 1898. In its current establishment and structures as discussed above, the NBC finds expression through its various local churches with a membership of about one million across the country. Numerically, the NBC has larger membership among the Yoruba ethnic group and is most established in the southern part of Nigeria. Given the focus of this study on Northern Nigeria, it is necessary to mention that within the religious landscape of Northern Nigeria, some consider the NBC to be a religious minority given the large Muslim population in the region (Crampton 2004). Historically, the NBC in Northern Nigeria may be traced back to the large movement of Baptist laity in early 1914. These were mostly traders and civil servants from the south, who moved to such towns as Zungeru, Kaduna, Zaria, Kano, Jos, Minna, and environs after the amalgamation of the North and South in Nigeria in 1914 (Ajayi 2010, 128).

Ethno-Religious Conflict in Northern Nigeria

The history of Northern Nigeria includes episodes of violent conflicts. Little wonder that the NBC in Northern Nigeria has engaged in its mission work within a context that is largely characterised by ethno-religious conflicts. These conflicts have been characteristic of Nigeria's recent history since the 1980s. Following Egwu (2011, 49),

the term "ethno-religious conflict" will be used to refer to "a form of conflict supposedly generated based on real or imagined 'difference' rooted in ethnic and religious identities." As many studies show, the notion of ethno-religious identity suggests "the mutually reinforcing relationships between ethnic and religious identities" (Egwu 2011, 49; cf. Ikenga-Metuh 1987, 1994, 74). In Northern Nigeria in particular, ethnic identities are often predominantly of one of the two main religious groups, namely Christianity and Islam. As such, a religious conflict can easily assume an ethnic dimension and vice versa.

In the vast literature on conflicts in Nigeria, several conflicts meet the above characterisation of ethno-religious conflict. These include the Maitatsine religious crisis in Kano in 1980 (see Otite and Albert 1999), a conflict in 1982 that ensued as a result of the laying of the foundation of a Christian church, and the conflict in Kano in 1991 where Muslims attacked Christians for allegedly inviting Reverend Reinhard Bonke to conduct evangelistic campaigns in the area (see Otite 1999). In 1988, there was conflict amongst students at Ahmadu Bello University when it turned out that a Christian candidate for the presidency of the students' union would likely win the elections (Egwu 2001). In 2000, a religious conflict broke out in Kaduna due to the introduction of Sharia law (Eniola 2010; Paden 2006). In 1994 and 2001, Jos was a site of religious conflict that was triggered by the appointment of a Muslim politician as local coordinator of the federal programme to fight poverty (see Mgbemere 2001). Furthermore, the hosting of a Miss World beauty contest by Nigeria in 2002 led to conflict in the north of the country (see Nwanaju 2005). It may be further argued that the emergence of a religious group called Boko Haram in 2000 introduced a new dimension to religious conflict in Northern Nigeria.

Several reasons have been advanced to account for conflicts in Northern Nigeria, including political (Ibrahim 2012), economic (Egwu 2001), and religious (Toure 2003) factors. These issues are nevertheless also interconnected in that one can include in this list competition for resources, quest for power, conflicting values, and identities as causes of conflict that may be subsumed in more than one explanation. Amongst others, this is illustrated by Mohammed and Idonor (2012) who argue that incessant ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria has economic implications. Therefore, while arguing that a confluence of causes may be underlying the conflict in Northern Nigeria, our focus is on the religious dimension. As observed by Victor (2001), "ethnic and religious disputes are common currency in the volatile northern region" of Nigeria.

Religion and Conflict in Northern Nigeria

Rising scholarly attention to ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria indicates the pressing nature of the issue. This concern was recently heightened in light of the worldwide attention on the Boko Haram group in Northern Nigeria. From the historical perspective, studies by Toyin Falola (1998) and Peel (1996) are instructive. Falola traces the history of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria to religious violence and secular ideology since Nigeria's independence. Peel (1996, 607), on the other hand, locates the

problem of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria in the amalgamation process in which the system was programmed to favour one religious group over the other. Similarly, sociologist Rotgak Gofwen (2004) examines the chronological causes of religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria and their impact on individual rights in modern Nigeria.

Several scholars highlight how religion fuels conflict in Northern Nigeria through its social and political deployment to advance sectarian and ethnic agendas (Egwu 2001; Kukah 1993). Kukah (1993) argues that Muslim elites have used Islamic discourse to dominate Nigeria's political landscape, advocating for Christian groups like CAN to adopt similar strategies. However, his view narrowly frames CAN's role as one of religious competition. Similarly, Egwu (2001) shows how religion and ethnicity are manipulated for political gain, contributing to recurring violence in places like Jos. Many studies link religious fundamentalism to Northern Nigerian conflicts. For instance, Albert (2001) attributes the Hausa-Igbo clashes in Kano (1953–1991) to religious intolerance. Others propose a "manipulation theory," suggesting that elites exploit ethno-religious divisions for personal gain (Ibrahim 1991; Salawu 2010; Usman 1987).

Others such as Ibrahim (1991, 134) argue that Nigeria has witnessed more religiously rooted crises rather than of a political, ethnic, or economic kind. For Gwamna (2010, 45), "the increasing levels of poverty typified in joblessness and deteriorating infrastructure create conditions for conflict to thrive." Other scholars articulate notions of colonialism to make sense of conflicts in Northern Nigeria (Enwerem 1995). For instance, in his discussion of conflicts among the Hausa and Fulani, Saleh (1999) argues that their conflict is partly an expression of internal colonialism of the Hausa-Fulani on the so-called indigenous population.

For other scholars such as Oduyoye (2000), Lemu (2001), Yakubu, Kani, and Junaid (2001), and Onaiyekan (2001), religious competition between Muslims and Christians is the single most significant political issue in Nigeria. In this vein, they point to the re-introduction of Shariah law in some parts of Northern Nigeria from 2000 to illustrate how the ethno-religious dimension has further aggravated conflict, mistrust, fear, and anger between Christians and Muslims. In the view of Onaiyekan (2010, 238), "the Shariah law is a perfect example of a political agenda parading as religion." He argues that Shariah law has become a matter of great controversy mainly because of its political dimension.

Theological Discourse on Conflict Transformation in Northern Nigeria: An Overview

Scott Appleby (2000) has discussed the ambivalent relationship between religion and violence. Analyses of this sort characterise religion as part of the causes and dynamics of conflict but also as a resource to address such conflict, thus underscoring the "ambivalence of religion in conflict." As such, Solomon Mepaiyeda (2019) has argued

that religion has played a dual role in Nigerian society. It has been used as a "catalyst for building up as well as an instrument for demolishing the peaceful coexistence of the citizens of the country" (2019, 20).

Many faith-based organisations exist to promote dialogue and to resolve conflict through religious traditions. One example is the Project for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), established in 1959. Its core aim is to foster understanding between Christians and Muslims by engaging Islam and drawing on African traditional worldviews (Ellingwood 2008, 72). It also emerged from the need for churches to educate their members to responsibly engage with their Muslim neighbours and promote interreligious understanding.

PROCUMRA provides a platform for Christians and Muslims to engage in theological dialogue and collaborate on joint projects. Although it has not eliminated all interreligious prejudice, it emphasises the need to shift from rivalry to "life-in-community" (Ellingwood 2008, 82). Other faith-based organisations promoting social tolerance, democratic pluralism, and conflict management include the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), established in 1973 and 1980, respectively. CAN came to prominence particularly during the mid-1980s. CAN's Directorate of Interfaith and Ecumenism fosters interreligious dialogue (Adiele 2001, 2), while the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) promotes peaceful coexistence (Omonokhua 2012, 67).

Christian theological analyses often move quickly to conflict-resolution recommendations without adequate social analysis—a tendency Emmanuel Katongole (2011) calls "prescriptive haste." In the context of Nigeria's ethno-religious conflicts, scholars have proposed various responses (Agbiboa 2013; Paden 2008; Salawu 2010), often exploring themes such as ecumenism, ecclesiology, and theologies of peace and reconciliation. These include reflections on Christianity's relationship with other religions, such as Richard's identification of "exclusivist," "inclusivist," and pluralist views (cited in Akanji 2021, 255).

The Ecumenical Movement in Nigeria and Conflict Transformation

Ecumenists argue that broad ecumenical dialogue can open pathways for multi-faith engagement. Zambian theologian Teddy Sakupapa (2017, 21) highlights the WCC's peacebuilding role through its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), noting its collaboration with the AACC. To address religious conflict in Nigeria, the WCC's "Dialogue with People of Living Faiths," in partnership with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, held meetings in Ibadan in 1974 and 1991. As Umaru (2013) notes, these included conferences, lectures, and dialogue sessions with Muslims and others. The WCC published *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* in 1979, later updated in 2003 as *Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue*.

In Nigeria, the need for unity among Christian churches and collective action remains a key concern (Adiele 2001; Kukah 1993; Nwanaju 2005). The Christian Association of Nigeria provides a platform for addressing religious and political disparities. As Mbachirin (2006, 267) notes, CAN has led efforts to resolve religious violence and advocate for Christians. Ecumenism promotes both intra-Christian unity and interfaith dialogue, fostering mutual understanding and respect. Akanji (2021) emphasises dialogue as a crucial tool for building harmonious relations and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria, highlighting the ongoing relevance of ecumenism.

The NBC and Ethno-Religious Conflict in Northern Nigeria

Given the involvement of religious leaders in conflicts, a shift from state-centric analyses to examining the roles of specific groups in Northern Nigeria is essential. As Basedau and de Juan (2008, 7) note, identity-based frameworks in peace and protracted social conflicts have gained prominence. It is thus important to explore how the NBC has responded to these dynamics. Audi (2019) highlights how Boko Haram has damaged the church's image and disrupted mission work, prompting some Nigerian Baptists to adopt violent responses. While insightful, Audi's study underscores the need for deeper analysis of the NBC's engagement with ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria.

The NBC's role in conflict resolution and reconciliation must be understood in light of its distinct theological convictions and policies. As Osuigwe notes, key Baptist distinctives include the authority of Scripture, the lordship of Christ, regenerate membership, believer's baptism, soul competency, congregational polity, local church autonomy, religious liberty, and the separation of church and state (Osuigwe 2014, 519).

NBC Strategies for Interfaith and Conflict Engagement

In an empirical study by Adehanloye (2024), it was found that NBC's approach to addressing conflict matters by involving local churches and facilitating dialogue was affirmed. The findings presented in this section are drawn from Adehanloye's study (2024), which explored the role of the NBC in addressing ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria. Adehanloye (2024, 126–130) adopted a qualitative case study research design and utilised multiple data sources, including interviews, questionnaires, observations, and archival records, to gain a nuanced understanding of the NBC's strategies and impact. Accordingly, purposive and multilevel sampling were used to select interview participants and questionnaire respondents, respectively (Adehanloye 2024, 129–131). The overall question explored by Adehanloye (2024, 12) pertained to how NBC has addressed the challenge of ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria in its history between 1980 to 2020. To answer this question, the study further undertook to find out the NBC's self-understanding in conflict transformation in Northern Nigeria. Secondly, Adehanloye (2024) also enquired into factors that may account for the ways in which the NBC understands and addresses ethno-religious conflict.

It was found that the NBC has a dedicated department for interreligious issues or ecumenism. The majority of respondents (approximately 59%) affirmed the existence of such a department within the NBC, suggesting that the Convention has institutional mechanisms in place to address interfaith matters and contribute to conflict resolution efforts. A smaller proportion (about 16%) disagreed, indicating either a lack of awareness or scepticism about the effectiveness of such structures (Adehanloye 2024, 174). Furthermore, seminary education within the NBC emerged as an important aspect that contributes towards the efforts of the NBC to address ethno-religious conflict (Adehanloye 2024, 153). Participants in the study consistently emphasised that theological training, especially the courses in comparative religion and interfaith dialogue, equipped pastors with the knowledge and sensitivity to engage constructively across religious divides. As Adehanloye (2024, 153) observes, "comparative religion courses, in particular, were highlighted as an effective way to promote interfaith understanding and peaceful coexistence." By fostering an informed understanding of Islam and promoting non-contentious engagement, seminary education was found to play an important role in cultivating a culture of peaceful coexistence. The NBC positions its theological institutions, such as the Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary, not merely as academic centres, but as key agents in NBC's broader response to religious conflict. This underscores the importance of theological education in fostering understanding, dialogue, and effective responses to societal challenges. Nevertheless, some participants pointed out the need for the re-appraisal of the curriculum on theological education to foreground interreligious dialogue and wider ecumenism (Adehanloye 2024, 154).

Interreligious or interfaith dialogue is unarguably significant for enabling religious leaders and communities to work together towards a common goal, fostering trust and solidarity, and enhancing the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts (Adehanloye 2024, 159). It enables individuals from diverse religious backgrounds to engage in constructive conversations, fostering mutual respect, understanding, and tolerance. As Ige (1991) argues, interfaith dialogue can be a means to address religious crises by promoting understanding, tolerance, and cooperation. However, it must be acknowledged that dialogue is often met with indifference, suspicion, or even resistance. Such hesitance is often rooted in exclusivist theological convictions that perceive interfaith or ecumenical engagement as compromising doctrinal purity or truth claims. As the World Council of Churches (WCC 2003) insightfully observes, "In dialogue and relationships with people of other faiths, we have come to recognize that the mystery of God's salvation is not exhausted by our theological affirmations." This recognition challenges rigid theological boundaries and opens space for mutual learning and relational openness. To cultivate dialogue as an ecumenical ethos, we argue that it is imperative to embed a dialogical orientation not only within the context of formal theological education for the clergy but also through the Christian formation of laity. This entails reimagining curricula for theological education and becoming more intentional in pastoral efforts within congregational life in ways that prioritise dialogical competencies, intercultural literacy, and an ethos of hospitality (Adehanloye 2024, 197).

Adehanloye's (2024) study further found that the NBC's response to ethno-religious conflict in northern Nigeria includes promoting dialogue and providing training for conflict resolution. On promoting dialogue, the NBC has, within the broader framework of its response to ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria, adopted a multi-layered strategy that engages both intra-faith and interfaith networks. For example, at the intra-level, the NBC actively collaborates with ecumenical bodies such as the CAN to articulate collective Christian responses and perspectives on ethno-religious violence (Adehanloye 2024, 158). This collaboration serves not only as a channel for advocacy but also as a mechanism for solidarity and coordinated public witness of the church. As Mbachirin (2006, 267) notes, CAN plays a crucial role within the Nigerian Christian community, not merely as a representative body, but also as a mediator in situations of religious violence. Its work goes beyond merely being seen as a symbol of Christian unity to include strategic advocacy. This is done through the issuance of communiqués, facilitating interfaith dialogue, and interfacing with state institutions through structured negotiation with state actors. In this way, CAN has positioned itself as both a moral voice and a religious institutional actor in shaping Christian responses to Nigeria's recurrent ethno-religious tensions (Ibrahim 2012; Kukah 1993). Therefore, the NBC leverages this network in its efforts towards conflict transformation.

Additionally, NBC's engagement with the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) highlights its commitment to fostering collective ecclesial responses to the socio-political and theological complexities arising from conflict. This demonstrates an intentional ecclesiological praxis that seeks to go beyond denominational boundaries. This positions the NBC as a moral voice on societal issues and promotes peaceful coexistence. The study further examined what this looks like at the congregational level. Over half of the respondents (around 53%) reported that local churches are actively involved in such dialogue, working to bridge divides within their communities. However, a significant number (41%) did not perceive this engagement to be taking place, highlighting a potential gap between denominational intentions and local-level implementation (Adehanloye 2024, 175).

Further, it was found that the NBC raises awareness campaigns on ethno-religious conflicts. Adehanloye (2024, 175) reports that the majority of participants (approximately 56.1%) affirmed that the NBC conducts conflict transformation initiatives and organises seminars to raise awareness about the dynamics and resolution of conflicts. These efforts include training for individuals and groups engaged in peacebuilding, as well as support for internally displaced persons (IDPs) through the provision of relief materials and financial aid (Adehanloye 2024, 176; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2021).

The above strategies of the NBC have been to a greater extent shaped by a number of factors. These include, its Baptist orientation, the role of theological education through seminary training, and the Baptist approach of church-state separation. The findings demonstrate that the NBC has played a significant role in conflict transformation

through its promotion of peace, love, and nonviolent engagement. This aligns with Bimba Thomas's (2016) findings, namely, that religious leaders and institutions serve as key intermediaries in conflicts, facilitating communication and imparting conflict-resolution skills.

Conclusion

This article has examined the NBC's evolving role in responding to the persistent ethno-religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria, particularly through the lens of ecumenical and peace studies. By situating the NBC's interventions within broader historical, theological, and socio-political frameworks, the article has sought to highlight both the potential and the limitations of Christian institutions in responding to ethno-religious conflict.

The article demonstrates that the NBC has adopted multifaceted strategies to promote peace, dialogue, and reconciliation. These include seminary-based theological education, ecumenical and interfaith collaborations, community-level engagements, and practical responses such as relief for internally displaced persons. As Adehanloye's (2024) empirical study reveals, these interventions are not merely reactive but are grounded in the Convention's theological convictions, institutional ethos, and evolving self-understanding in the face of protracted ethno-religious tensions. The NBC partnerships with organisations such as the Christian Association of Nigeria and the Christian Council of Nigeria underscore the Convention's commitment to ecumenical collaboration to address societal issues. Nevertheless, the article also reveals internal gaps. For example, there is a gap between denominational intentions and local implementation. Further, while interfaith dialogue and ecumenism are affirmed in principle, resistance remains due to exclusivist theological orientations and the historical reticence of Baptist ecclesiology towards structured ecumenism. These complexities invite a more sustained reimagining of Baptist theological education, ecclesial praxis, and public witness within religiously plural and conflict-prone contexts.

Ultimately, the role of the NBC in Northern Nigeria's conflict landscape underscores the ambivalence of religion: It can be both a catalyst for division and a resource for reconciliation. This duality calls for an ongoing commitment to theological reflection, interreligious engagement, and institutional innovation. As Nigeria continues to grapple with the intersection of faith, identity, and violence, the NBC and similar faith communities are challenged not only to bear prophetic witness but also to become transformative agents of peace rooted in justice, hospitality, and hope.

References

Adedoyin, Isaac. 1998. *A Short History of the Nigerian Baptist: 1850–1978*. Ibadan: Baptist Bookstore.

Adehanloye, Oladele. 2024. "The Role of Religion in Conflict Transformation in Northern Nigeria: A Case Study of the Nigeria Baptist Convention." PhD diss., University of the Western Cape. https://hdl.handle.net/10566/20423.

Adiele, Nnanna, ed. 2001. *The Anglican Church in Nigeria: Trends, Issues, and Activities*. Ikot Ekpene: Cleanhands Productions.

Afolabi, Oluwaseun. 2018. "Church Conflict and Its Management: The Experience of the Nigerian Local Baptist Churches." *African Notes: Bulletin of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan* 42 (1 and 2): 179–194.

Agbiboa, Daniel Egiegba. 2012. "Ethno-Religious Conflicts and the Elusive Quest for National Identity in Nigeria." *Journal of Black Studies* 44 (1): 3–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934712463147.

Ajayi, Ademola. 2010. *Baptist Work in Nigeria (1850–2005): A Comprehensive History*. Ibadan: BookWright Publishers.

Akanji, Israel. 2021. *Towards a Theology of Conflict Solution: Understanding Religious Conflict in Contemporary Nigerian Society*. Abuja: Elis Associates.

Albert, Isaac Olawale. 2001. *Introduction to Third-Party Intervention in Community Conflict*. Ibadan: John Archers Publisher.

Appleby, Scott.2000. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

Atanda, Joseph, ed. 1988. *Baptist Churches in Nigeria, 1850–1950*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.

Audi, Moses. 2019. "Missions and Insurgency in Nigeria: A Historical Survey of Nigerian Baptist Convention Work, 1980 to 2020 and the Future of World Christianity." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 61 (2): 185–199.

Ayandele, Emmanuel. 1968. *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842–1914: A Political and Social Analysis*. London: Longmans, Green and Company.

Ayanrinola, Isaac Durosinjesu. 1999. "The Mission Program of the Nigerian Baptist Convention: Analysis and Recommendations, 1850–1997." PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

Bamigboye, Ezekiel. 2000. *The History of Baptist Work in Northern Nigeria (1901 to 1975)*. Ibadan: Powerhouse Press.

Barrett, David, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson. 2020. *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*. 3rd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Basedau, Matthias, and Alexander De Juan. 2008. "The 'Ambivalence of the Sacred' in Africa: The Impact of Religion on Peace and Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa." GIGA Working Paper No. 70. Hamburg: German Institute for Global and Area Studies. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/50224/wp70.pdf.

Crampton, Edmund Patrick Thurman. 2004. *Christianity in Northern Nigeria*. Bukuru: African Christian Textbooks.

Egwu, Samuel. 2001. *Ethnic and Religious Violence in Nigeria*. Jos: St. Stephen Inc. Bookhouse.

Egwu, Samuel. 2011. "Ethno-Religious Conflicts and National Security in Nigeria: Illustrations from the 'Middle Belt.'" In *State, Economy, and Society in Post-Military Nigeria*, edited by Said Adejumobi, 49–83. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230117594_3.

Eniola, Samuel. 2010. "Reflections of Religious Violence in Nigeria." In *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies: The Nigeria Perspectives*, edited by A. Kunle, 77–81. Ado-Ekiti: University of Ado-Ekiti Press.

Enwerem, Iheanyi. 1995. *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria*. Ibadan: IFRA-Nigeria. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.ifra.400.

Falola, Toyin. 1998. *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

Gofwen, Rotgak. 2004. "Religious Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: Implications for Sustainable Democracy." *Journal of Social Science* 9 (3): 227–233.

Gwamna, Dogara. 2010. *Religion and Politics in Nigeria*. Jos: African Christian Textbooks.

Ibrahim, Jibrin. 1991. "Religion and Political Turbulence in Nigeria." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 29 (1): 115–136.

Ibrahim, Azhar. 2012. "Contemporary Islamic Thought: A Critical Perspective." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23 (3): 279–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2012.676781.

Ikenga-Metuh, Emefie. 1987. "The Shattered Microcosm: A Critical Survey of Explanations of Conversion in Africa." In *Religion, Development and African Identity*, edited by Kirsten Holst Petersen, 11–27. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

Ikenga-Metuh, Emefie. 1994. "Two Decades of Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: A Recipe for Peace." *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 6 (1): 69–93.

Ige, Joseph Abodunrin. 1991. "Interfaith Dialogue as an Antidote to Religious Crisis in Nigeria." Bachelor's diss., University of Jos.

Ikenga-Metuh, E. 1987. "The Shattered Microcosm: A Critical Survey of Explanations of Conversion in Africa." In *Religion, Development and African Identity*, edited by Kirsten Holst Petersen, 11–27. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. 2021. *Global Report on Internal Displacement*. Accessed September 9, 2025. https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2021/.

Lemu, Abdullahi. 2001. *Remote and Immediate Causes of Religious Crises in Nigeria*. Minna: Islamic Education Trust.

Katongole, Emmanuel. 2011. *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.

Kukah, Mattew. 1993. *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.

Labeodan, Helen Adekunbi. 2016. "Christianity in Nigeria." In *Anthology of African Christianity*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri, Kennedy Owino, Dietrich Werner, Chammah J. Kaunda, 668–675. Oxford: Regnum Books International. https://www.ocms.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/African-Anthology-whole-7.pdf.

Mbachirin, Terumbur. 2006. "The Responses of the Church in Nigeria to Socio-Economic, Political and Religious Problems in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)." PhD diss., Baylor University. https://baylor-ir.tdl.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b8addf18-b40b-467c-8994-584fbe966664/content.

Mepaiyeda, Solomon. 2019. "Religion and the Nigerian State." *Biblical Studies Journal* 1 (1): 20–33. https://biblicalstudies.in/index.php/pub/article/view/9.

Mgbemere, Obinna. 2001. *Religious Intolerance: The Nigerian Experience*. Owerri: Grace of God Publishers.

Mohammed, Absulsalam, and Daniel Idonor. 2012. "Nigeria: Kano Bombings Claim 162 Lives—More Attacks Coming—Boko Haram Spokesman." *Vanguard*, January 12. http://allafrica.com/stories/201201220041.htm.

Nigerian Baptist Convention. 2022. *Constitution and Regulations of the Nigerian Baptist Convention*. Accessed September 9, 2025. https://www.nigerianbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Nigerian-Baptist-Convention-Constitution1.pdfm.

Nwanaju, Isidore. 2005. *Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria*. Lagos: Free Enterprise Publishers.

Oduyoye, Modupe. 2000. *The Shariah Debate in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Sefer Books.

Omonokhua, Chukwuma 2012. "The Need for Inter-Religious Dialogue." *The Guardian*, July 2.

Onaiyekan, John. 2001. "Shari'a in Nigeria: Issues from a Christian Perspective." In *Understanding Shari'a in Nigeria: Proceedings of the National Seminar on Shari'a*, edited by Mahmood Yakubu, A. M. Khānī, and M. I. Junaid. Ibadan Nigeria: Spectrum Books.

Onaiyekan, John. 2010. "Dividends of Religion in Nigeria." Unpublished public lecture presented at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

Osaghae, Eghosa, and Rotimi Suberu. 2005. "A History of Identities, Violence and Stability in Nigeria." Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE) Working Paper, No. 6. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08c9840f0b652dd00141e/wp6.pdf.

Osuigwe, Nkem. 2014. *The Ideal and Heritage of the Nigerian Baptist Convention: Analysis and Critique*. Ogbomoso: Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary

Otite, Onigu. 1999. *Ethnic Pluralism and Ethnicity in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Shaneson.

Otite, Onigu, and Isaac Olawale Albert. 1999. *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.

Paden, John. 2006. *Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution: The Challenge of Democratic Federalism in Nigeria*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Paden, John. 2008. *Faith and Politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Peel, John. 1996. "The Politicisation of Religion in Nigeria: Three Studies." *Africa* 66 (4): 607–611. https://doi.org/10.2307/1160939.

Ellingwood, J. 2008. "The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA): An Evolutionary Perspective." *Muslim World* 98 (1): 72–94.

Ray, Stanley E. 1970. "The History and Evaluation of Baptist Mission Policy in Nigeria, 1850–1960." PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Sakupapa, Teddy Chalwe. 2017. "Ecclesiology and Ethics: An Analysis of the History of the All Africa Conference of Churches (1963–2013)." PhD diss., The University of the Western Cape. https://hdl.handle.net/10566/10127.

Salawu, Bashir. 2010. "Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for New Management Strategies." *European Journal of Social Sciences* 13 (3): 345–353. https://www.gisf.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/0071-Salawu-2010-Nigeria-ethno-religious-conflict.pdf.

Saleh, Dauda. 1999. *Ethnic Minority Conflict and Violence in Tafawa Balewa Area of Bauchi State*. Zaria: Tamaza Publishing Company.

Thomas, Bimba. 2016. *Role of Religion and Religious Leaders in Farmer-Pastoralist Conflict in Plateau State: An Inter-Religious Peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria (IPNN) Qualitative Research Report*. Mercy Corps Nigeria. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/IPNN%20Research%20Report_final.pdf.

Umaru, Thaddeus Byimui. 2013. "Toward Christian-Muslim Dialogue and Peace-Building Activities in Northern Nigeria: Theological Reflection." PhD diss., University of Glasgow. https://theses.gla.ac.uk/4249/1/2013UmaruPhd.pdf.

Usman, Yusufu Bala. 1987. *The Manipulation of Religion in Nigeria, 1977–1987*. Zaria: Yusufu Bala Usman Institute.

Victor, Eghosa. 2001. *Democracy and Political Life in Nigeria*. Zaria: ABU Press.

WCC (World Council of Churches). 2003. *Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions*. Geneva: WCC Publications.

Yakubu, A., A. M. Kani, and M. I. Junaid, eds. 2001. *Understanding Shariah in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.