

Biblical Concept of Peace and Harmony in the Context of Yoruba Traditional Values for Peace Building in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the convergence between the biblical concept of peace (*shalom/eirēnē*) and the Yoruba traditional value of peace (*àlàáfià*), with the goal of advancing culturally grounded peacebuilding in Nigeria. The problem addressed arises from the persistence of violent conflicts in Nigeria, often exacerbated by neglect of indigenous frameworks of peace in favour of foreign models that lack contextual resonance. Drawing from a comparative and qualitative methodology, analyzing biblical texts alongside Yoruba cultural proverbs, practices, and values, the study highlights the shared emphasis on justice, righteousness, reconciliation, and communal well-being in both traditions. Key findings reveal that *shalom* embodies covenantal wholeness, divine presence, and eschatological hope, while *àlàáfià* stresses health, harmony, moral integrity (*omolúàbí*), and cosmic order. Both perspectives reject peace as a mere absence of conflict and instead define it as holistic well-being rooted in divine initiative and sustained by ethical responsibility. The significance of this study lies in its demonstration that aligning biblical and Yoruba peace frameworks can strengthen locally owned and spiritually enriched peacebuilding strategies. The paper concludes that integrating these traditions provides a practical and theologically informed framework for addressing Nigeria's conflicts while honoring its cultural heritage.

Keywords: Yoruba, Culture, Religion, Values, Peace, Peacebuilding

Introduction

The complex task of peacebuilding in multicultural settings calls for an advanced understanding of diversity, conflict dynamics, and reconciliation procedures. The cohabitation of various ethnicities, religions, languages, and cultures in societies is a proof that multiculturalism is rising in today's interconnected world. For peacebuilding initiatives, this phenomenon offers both possibilities and difficulties. A complex strategy for managing diversity is necessary when there are several cultural groups living inside one social structure in order to establish lasting peace. The need to resolve underlying tensions and conflicts resulting from cultural, religious, or ethnic differences is one of the main obstacles in multicultural peacebuilding. Odu states that according to Kaldor, if these conflicts are not resolved, they frequently result in bloodshed and instability. Therefore, tools for addressing and resolving such issues in a culturally sensitive manner are essential to effective peacebuilding initiatives. The value of inclusive communication and involvement in peacebuilding initiatives in multicultural settings is emphasized in scholarly literature (Odu, 2024). Nigeria has seen ongoing social and ethnic conflicts in spite of its rich cultural legacy and strong religious convictions. Tension is frequently caused by the discrepancy between religious views and traditional values, particularly in multiethnic settings. Traditional Yoruba values, which place a strong emphasis on community and resolving conflicts, provide insightful information for peacebuilding. However, more foreign peace frameworks especially those without indigenous contexts often take precedence over these values.

Beyond lack of conflict, peace is a profound sense of calm, harmony, and wholeness that can only be attained through a connection with God. According to the Bible, believers are urged to nurture peace in their lives because it is a gift from God, the outcome of His grace, and a fruit of the Spirit (Wylie, n.d.). The Bible provides deep insights into the complex nature of peace and is a foundational document for millions of people worldwide (Digital Bible, n.d.). This study looks at how biblical concept of peace and Yoruba traditional values can work together to improve social

harmony and offer a more culturally integrated approach to peacebuilding in Nigeria. In order to provide a coherent framework for peacebuilding in Nigeria. It aims at investigating the connection between biblical concept of peace and the indigenous ideals of harmony held by the Yoruba people. This study contributes towards sustainable peacebuilding approaches that are in line with Nigeria's distinct cultural setting by investigating how these values might guide and enhance conflict resolution and promote unity.

Biblical Concept of Peace

Old Testament Perspective on Peace

The focus of Christians concerning the theology of peace is typically on the New Testament, particularly the gospels. It would appear that majority of Christians believe that the Old Testament offers little or no solution to the problem of violence and war. From the beginning, the Old Testament provides a vision for peace, describing not only its great worth but also its form and methods of attainment. According to the creation account, God created harmony and order out of chaos. However, this harmony is a gift rather than a forceful order. Humanity is empowered to participate in God's job of cultivation in this new world that God created as a result of the harmony. According to the creation account, harmony between people and God as well as between people is the basic human situation. God's decision to continue with humanity and his vow to refrain from responding with such violence in the future mark the conclusion of the story's retributive response after discord entered it. In summary, God intended to mend the shattered creation by creating a people who would understand God's peace, live in its light, and serve as a messenger of peace to all earthly families (Grimsrud, 2011).

God's promises to make peace are at the heart of the primary act of salvation that comes to characterize Old Testament faith. Joseph's family moved to Egypt after he saved them from hunger. The Hebrews were held as slaves by the Egyptians for many years. In their trauma, they let out a cry. In recollection of God's promise to create a strong nation that will bless all families on earth, God heard their prayers and took action to free them from slavery. Because of its horrific aspects, many people have been troubled by the work God conducted to bring about this liberty (the EXODUS). A closer examination, however, reveals important components that disprove state-centered, interhuman conflict. The Hebrews did not use the sword to regain their freedom. The story of violence is obviously a result of the systemic violence of Egypt's culture of slavery and Pharaoh's insistence on the continuation of oppression. The purpose of the Exodus events is to break free from the brutality. The Torah, was given to the Hebrews in the wilderness and the core of the commandments may undoubtedly be described as a concern for שָׁלוֹם “shalom”, or “peace,” which is a broad concept of social completeness. The welfare of every individual in the community should be the primary focus of society, according to the Torah (Grimsrud, 2011).

Shalom (שָׁלוֹם) in the Old Testament

According to the Hebrew and English lexicon of the Old Testament, *shalom* is a Hebrew noun meaning “completeness, soundness, welfare, peace.” (Brown 1975). First and foremost, the word shalom means an interlude of safety from the ravages of warfare. The insecurity that comes from war over years had made enormous mark on the Hebrew people. They were involved much in warfare and many times they suffered defeat, the climax of which was the exile of 586 BC. They looked for the day when the swords would be beaten into plowshares (Micah 4:3). Here prophet Micah describes a theocracy, with the lord as the sole ruler over the world. In this reign of peace, instruments of war will be superfluous; therefore, they will be converted into agricultural implements (King, 1977).

Shalom means much more than the absence of war or the cessation of violence and hostility. There is considerable difference between peace and truce. Peace is not wholly made at the council table or by treaties, but in the heart of men. There is no single English word that can truly convey the richness of the meaning behind the root letter shalom. The general meaning behind the root letters - שלם - is of completion and fulfillment and thus of entering into a state of wholeness and unity

(oneness) signified by a restored relationship especially wholeness of the relationship between a person and God. Shalom signifies a sense of well-being and harmony both within and outside, health, happiness, quietness of soul preservation, prosperity, tranquility, security, safety, and it includes all that makes life worthwhile (Ugwueye 2010).

Shalom stands as a key theological theme in the Old Testament. In historical narratives it often denotes freedom from conflict, but in the Psalms and Prophets it conveys a fuller sense of wholeness and well-being that flows from Yahweh's presence. It is Yahweh who grants shalom, as seen in His promise to David (1 Chr. 22:9–10), where peace is linked with calmness, rest, and quietness. Beyond this, shalom functions as both a greeting and an inquiry about one's welfare, expressing not only a desire for the absence of harm but also for the presence of every good. To live in shalom is to be complete, happy, and rightly related to God, humanity, and creation. More than a social custom, shalom is a covenant term, arising from Yahweh's covenant activity and producing righteousness (Isa. 32:17). In most of its uses, it refers to the state of fulfillment created by His presence, especially in references to the "covenant of peace" (Num. 25:5; Isa. 54:10; Ezek. 34:25; Mal. 2:5) with the Aaronic priesthood and the Davidic monarchy. It also characterizes reconciliations and agreements, such as those between Isaac and Abimelech (Gen. 26:29) and between God and Abraham (Gen. 15:15). Thus, in biblical theology, shalom encompasses harmony, covenant faithfulness, and the fullness of life under Yahweh's blessing (Ugwueye 2010).

Shalom obviously formed part of the words used in offerings such as the Peace offering. It was one of the blood sacrifices of which the shed blood was the atonement on which reconciliation and peace were based (Leviticus 3; 7: 11). In the Peace offering this restoration of fellowship between God and man, broken by sin, but now atoned for by the shed blood, was indicated by the fact that every blessing, temporal and spiritual, is included in restoring man to that peace with God which was lost by the fall. One of the great names of the Messiah was to be "prince of peace" (Isaiah 9:6). He is the messianic prince who brings wholeness, but he is also Yahweh's last word, the concluding sacrifice that brings peace and redemption to mankind. This somehow denotes a strong eschatological element present in the meaning of shalom. The messiah's city, Jerusalem, also means peace. The first part of the word (Jerus-) means foundation while the second part is a cognate of the word shalom. Thus, Jerusalem is variously translated in modern evangelical references as city of peace, possession of peace, foundation of peace, founded peace, and city of wholeness (Ugwueye 2010).

Shalom (שָׁלוֹם) represents more than a biblical term; it embodies a theological vision of wholeness that resonates with Yoruba values of *àlàáfià*. While the Old Testament portrays shalom as completeness, security, and covenantal well-being seen in texts like Micah 4:3 where weapons of war are transformed into tools of cultivation, or in Isaiah 32:17 where peace is the fruit of righteousness; this vision aligns with the Yoruba understanding of peace as health, harmony, and communal flourishing. Just as shalom signifies restored relationship with Yahweh and the community, *àlàáfià* emphasizes moral character (*omolúàbí*), reconciliation, and right living as the basis for societal harmony. Both traditions reject a superficial notion of peace as mere absence of conflict; instead, they ground peace in divine initiative, covenantal faithfulness, and holistic well-being.

New Testament Perspective on Peace

There are over 250 instances of the word *shalom* (שָׁלוֹם) in the Hebrew Bible, and in these contexts, it connotes much more than the absence of conflict. At times it denotes harmony in relationships (Gen. 26:29), at others it signals covenantal well-being and divine blessing (Num. 25:5; Ezek. 34:25), or inner wholeness and tranquility rooted in God's presence (Ps. 29:11). In prophetic writings, *shalom* often carries an eschatological dimension, pointing to a future order of justice and flourishing under God's reign (Mic. 4:3; Isa. 9:6). Thus, in the Old Testament, peace is relational, covenantal, and holistic embracing harmony with God, with others, and with creation. However, in the New Testament, a Greek term with nearly identical meaning emerges: *eirēnē*. Like *shalom*, it is used in everyday greetings, but it also takes on deeper theological significance in light

of Christ's redemptive work. The New Testament therefore presents peace in two dimensions: positively, as the wholeness and reconciliation brought through Christ, and paradoxically, as a peace that may provoke conflict with the world's false notions of harmony.

Positive Understanding of Peace

εἰρήνη (*eirēnē*) is used in the Greek New Testament in about 90 instances, and it is used in most of the same ways as shalom in the Old Testament. But as a term that is now defined by what God has accomplished for humanity through Jesus Christ, it takes on a new taste. The good news is the message of peace in many of the gospel's chapters. In the New Testament, the term "*eirēnē*" has great power. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *eirēnē* among those whom he favors" is how the angels proclaim the birth of Jesus. The "gospel of peace" is the primary message of the New Testament. According to the New Testament, God is the embodiment of love and peace. Christ is the path to peace, the peaceful monarch, and peace itself. The Hebrew *shalom*, which represents peace, is summed up in Jesus' teaching. One fundamental principle that resonates in the teaching of Christ is the principle of peace and harmonious living, which is the hallmark of humanity (Omosor, 2020). Christ brings about the world's healing, sustenance, and rejuvenation, the emancipation of the oppressed and impoverished, and the reconciliation of people with God and with each other. He offers wholeness and fulfillment, the most profound meanings of peace, and he fulfills the prophets' prophecies of peace and the promise of the messianic kingdom. Jesus' appeal to "love your enemies" and his Sermon on the Mount and Sermon on the Plain sum up his teachings on promoting peace. It becomes part of the standard greeting of most letters in the New Testament.

The Paradox of Peace in the New Testament

There are also some unexpected passages in the New Testament. When Jesus declared, "Do not think that I have come to bring *eirēnē* on earth; I have come to bring a sword, not *eirēnē*," why is he known as the "Prince of Peace"? Matthew 10:34. A few New Testament passages do, in fact, sound rather militaristic when they speak of peace: The God of Eden will soon crush Satan beneath your feet. (Romans 16:20). Additionally, according to Ephesians 6:13–15, the "gospel of *eirēnē*" is a component of God's entire armor, which allows one to "withstand in the evil day." It is important to retain that, *eirēnē* therefore contains not only the earliest meanings of shalom, such as the opposite of war, security, order, harmony, and a greeting or farewell, but it also takes on all the meanings of healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and wholeness that Jesus taught was the new meaning of the kingdom. The various meanings of *eirēnē* in the New Testament can be divided into four groups: first, in texts used to describe the flourishing condition of the church and its salvation; second, peace among all the members of a community brought about through the conversion of individuals and linked through the Holy Spirit; third, the kingdom of God itself and the inner disposition of those who keep the Covenant in love and grace; and fourth, reconciliation with God that is both the gift of God and the fruit of that gift, what theologians call justification. By reconciling humanity with God, Christ brings unity, the healing of division, the end of the Old Covenant and the creation of a new humanity in short, and "peace." (Djomhoue, 2011)

Almost every book in the New Testament has used the term *eirēnē*, except 1 John. In the epistles it either used in the salutation, in the final greeting or both in salutation and in final greeting. In the Gospels, apart from the teachings of Jesus, it is used for greeting or as departing salutation. The *Pax Romana* of Roman Empire had promised peace. Irenaeus says, "The Romans have given the world peace, and we travel without fear along the roads and across the sea wherever we will." But the most important question is, did Rome really guarantee peace to her subjects? If peace was prevalent in the Greco-Roman world of first century A.D., then, why did the angels say (perhaps sang) "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men of good will?" (Lk. 2:14). What kind of peace has Jesus promised to the world? The heavy taxation and the military subversion of smaller powers had created unrest rather than peace in the Greco-Roman World. Vijayaraj (2020) agrees with C. Swaim as he states that "The Romans sought peace by conquering the world, crushing all 'lesser breeds,' with legions trampling the streets where Jesus lived," according to Swaim. The average people, like the shepherds, desperately needed peace, but the Romans may have

given it to the elites. A Savior who will "lead our feet into the way of peace" was born for them. In Matthew 10:34, Jesus states, "I have not come to bring peace," what does he mean? The statement could suggest that the loyalty and allegiance to Jesus will bring conflict and sharp social division. Plausibly, Jesus had warned against the world's false tranquility. True peace is the absence of internal turmoil as well as the silence on the outside. Luke did not prioritize nonviolence and peace over social justice and liberation. Luke asserts that forgiveness is the only way to find peace - "You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ he is Lord of all," (Acts.10:36). According to Luke, the message of Jesus Christ's gospel is one of peace. Because "He is Lord of all," this peace is for everyone, even if it was sent to Jews. The broader framework of "Gentile mission" should be used to interpret the entire concept of reconciliation in Luke-Acts. The human-made distinction between Jews and non-Jews was one of the biggest obstacles in the Gentile mission. Through his death, Jesus reconciled the two tribes and united them into a single new humanity.

According to Paul, "The blood of Christ has now brought you who were once far away in Christ Jesus closer." He is our peace because he has united both groups in his flesh and destroyed the barrier that separates us—the animosity. He is able to create in himself a new humanity (or "one new man" in Greek) in place of the two, thereby putting an end to the hostility (Eph. 2:13-16). Once "far off" in their relationship with God, the non-Jews were brought "near" by "the blood of Christ" and "in Christ." Now, they are in a fundamentally different place before God. This "costly peace" has brought two formerly divided groups back together and restored their relationship with God. Paul not only resolves the issue of non-Jews being admitted into God's family, but he also resolves the question of how both Jews and non-Jews can become God's people. But then how did Jesus bring peace? It is through the death of Jesus on the cross. Anything (people or human institutions) that further divides people will be subject to God's judgment if Christ Jesus' sacrifice on the cross had eliminated the law that separated people from one another. Today the human made casteism, regionalism, and classism create gulf in our societies and in our churches. The church is called to keep the unity in bond of peace (Eph.4: 3). The New Testament concept of peace embraces the totality of a person social and spiritual. However, in this interim the social aspect of peace may not be fully realized. Christians are called to make peace in the world and in the church (Vijayaraji, 2020).

Peace and Harmony in Yoruba Value System

The Yoruba People

According to Britannica, the Yoruba people, a prominent West African ethnic group, primarily reside in southwestern Nigeria, with significant populations also found in Benin Republic and northern Togo. In Nigeria, they constitute approximately 21.4% of the country's population, totaling around 45.6 million individuals, mainly concentrated in states like Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun. In Benin Republic, they represent about 12.2% of the population, numbering approximately 1.5 million, extending from southern Nigeria into the Atakpame region (Britannica, 2025). Historically, the Yoruba diaspora was significantly shaped by the transatlantic slave trade. Descendants of the Yoruba people were transported to various parts of the New World during the 18th and 19th centuries, including the United States, Britain, Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Trinidad, and Puerto Rico. It is estimated that around 1.2 million Yoruba slaves were taken across the Atlantic, with a peak period from 1826 to 1850. Large concentrations of Yoruba descendants are particularly noted in the Bahia province of Brazil, as well as in Cuba and Saint-Domingue (Haiti). Beyond the Americas, Yoruba communities also exist in other West African nations such as Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Sierra Leone. The Yoruba identity itself has a rich history, with accounts of migration and state formation, and a sense of unity often traced through common descent from *Odùduwà* (Udo, 2020). The Yoruba is known for her richness in cultural values in relation to behavior, politeness, patience, diligence,

respect, ideal society, communal life expressed in the term *omoluwabi* and all values point towards peaceful co-existence.

The Concept of Peace (Àlàáfià) in Yoruba Culture

According to the Yoruba proverb, "*B'émíí báwà, ìse kótán*" (If there is still breath, there is no end to acts or achievements), leading a well-lived life involves several things, but the first is having *emí* (breath of life) within oneself. In the meantime, no one admires a life that is just defined by breathing. Beyond the breath that sustains life, a good existence is characterized by a number of desired elements. As a result, "the Yoruba associate life with good health, prosperity, longevity, peace, and happiness when they think or speak of it with reference to a person or society." However, *àlàáfià*, or peace, is the most fundamental component of a good existence and wellbeing. The requirement for all other human endeavors and accomplishments, after *emí*, is *àlàáfià*. The Yoruba people feel they have everything when they have a combination of *emí* and *àlàáfià*. However, the main goal that people should seek with their *emí* is *àlàáfià* once they obtain it. In all human endeavors, the Yoruba steadfastly adhere to the proverb *alaafia lo ju* meaning "peace is supreme," which embodies this belief. In Yoruba, the term "*Àlàáfià*" denotes the absence of conflict or illness. A community or an individual lives in *àlàáfià* when there is little or nothing to worry about. It is also the same word used for health. Talking about *àlàáfià* in terms of the absence of illness, Yoruba use it as a perfect synonym of the word *ilera* (health). The use of *àlàáfià* in terms of the absence of illness is not limited to physical health; it also refers to emotional and psychological wellness. In this sense, *àlàáfià* is used interchangeably with the phrase *ibale okan* (peace of mind), which is experienced when a human soul is satisfied with elements of life such as prosperity, longevity and happiness. To stress the significant place of peace (regarded in terms of health) in human life, the common parlance goes: *ilera* (i.e. *àlàáfià*) *l'òògùn orò* (peace is the potent charm for wealth). This proverb has a similar implication with the English saying, "Health is wealth". As such, for Yoruba people, *àlàáfià* is the foundation for human prosperity (Adegbile 2020).

The names *isòkan* and *irépò* have a connotation related to *àlàáfià*, which is the lack of conflict or turmoil. The translation of the word *isòkan* is "producing oneness" (*ise-okan*), while the translation of *irépò* is "friendship." On the other hand, *irépò* can be interpreted as oneness, but *isòkan* can be simply translated as harmony. Thus, when relationships are friendly and everyone is working toward the same goal, there is *àlàáfià* among people. Despite its association with human harmony and oneness, *àlàáfià* has an impact on both the physical and spiritual worlds. *Àlàáfià* also implies cosmic order, which entails that nature around, seen and unseen, must exist and operate in manners that do not raise any alarm or worries. This is depicted in the saying, *Kí eku máa ké bíí eku, kí eye máa ké bíí eye* (That the rat squeaks like a rat, and that the bird chirps like a bird), which indicates the necessity of harmonious life in the natural environment. The Yoruba perception of *àlàáfià* as the absence of conflict or chaos also entails a harmonious relationship with the spiritual environment. The Yoruba environment, like that of most African communities, is made up of the ancestors, deities and *Olódùmarè* (the Supreme Being). Meanwhile, *Olódùmarè* is at the centre of the spiritual environment. A relationship with Him can be maintained through the intermediary role of the deities and ancestors. This, therefore, entails that the human community maintains a relationship with the three entities of the spiritual environment. When this happens, the environment enjoys *àlàáfià*. Peace is one of the core values that derive from the deeply entrenched principle of communitarianism in Africa. Unfortunately, this humanistic value is being eroded by invading civilisations that promote individualism against communitarianism (Omosor, 2020). For Yoruba people, peace is wellbeing. It is practically defined by elements such as joy, happiness, increase in prosperity and longevity. The idea of peace as wellbeing in Yoruba traditional thoughts does not imply that there is no longing for material prosperity at all. However, so basic is the Yoruba perception of material wealth that it is believed that "*Bí ebi bá kúrò nínú ìsé, ìsé bùse*" (If hunger is out of one's struggle against poverty, poverty is already conquered).

How to Ensure Àlàáfià in the Yoruba Community

Odù Ifá, a literary corpus utilized in the worship of Ifa, the Yoruba deity of wisdom, is the source of the statement "*Àímo ìwàá hù ni kò jé k'áyé gún*" "Cosmic chaos is as a result of human failure in the areas of good character." This suggests that one important element in guaranteeing *àlàáfià* in Yorubaland is having good character. This is due to the fact that, as the adage suggests, when people lack moral integrity, society will descend into anarchy. In the Yoruba moral system, *omolúàbí* is a cultural idea that emphasizes the value of good behavior. He translates *Omoluabi* as "the baby begotten by the chief of iwa". Such a child is thought of as a paragon of excellence in character and describes that an *Omoluabi* is one who combines all virtues (Olanipekun, 2017). The idea is that individuals should become models of all moral behavior. In Yoruba culture, an *omolúàbí* is the ideal person who upholds all moral principles and shows reverence for the gods, ancestors, and *Olódùmarè* (Fawenu & Abodunrin, 2021). He welcomes *ìwà rere* (good character) and rejects all *ìwà láabi* (bad characters). As Olanipekun (2017) correctly observes, "a well-ordered society is possible with everyone imbibing *omolúàbí*'s attributes." Therefore, *àlàáfià* will be unavoidable when the society has all or many of its members as *omolúàbí*.

For Yoruba to ensure *àlàáfià* in the society, the elders advocate that *E jé ká seé bí wón tií seé, k'ólè baàrí, bíí seéri* (Let us do it the way it is usually done, so that we may have the usual result). This saying implies that cosmic and social order are the result of doing the right thing. Everyone must do the right thing by staying committed to *àsà àti ìse* (culture and custom); they must do the right thing by not violating the *èèwò* (taboos) of the community. *Àsà àti ìse* are strongly believed to be handed down by the ancestors. This is why it is said that *àsà àti ìse àwọn baba wa* (culture and custom of the ancestors). *Àsà àti ìse* are the laid down rules as to what things must be done and how they must be done. It is also believed that taboos are given by the deities. They are the set of things that must not be done. This is why it is said that *èèwò ni, aki í seé* (it is a taboo; therefore, it is forbidden). The *àsà àti ìse* and *èèwò* in Yorubaland are believed to be of divine origin. This is because they originated from the ancestors who, according to tradition, had a rapport with *Olódùmarè* in their days. As such, *àsà àti ìse* and *èèwò* are handed to them by the *Olódùmarè* who intends that people do things in the right way so that the result will be as it has always been for the ancestors in their lifetime.

According to Adelowo (1990), the statement *E jé ká seé bí wón tií seé, k'ólè baàrí, bíí seéri* (Let us do it the way it is normally done, so that we may have the customary result) is widely employed in regard to traditional ceremonies. This emphasizes how important it is that rituals be performed correctly, by the appropriate people, and at the right time (Adelowo, 1990). Hence, any act of negligence in traditional rituals to the gods and *Olódùmarè* will result in chaos in the society. Meanwhile, the reason for traditional rituals is so that people atone for their sins before the gods, and ask for their protection and blessings. From our examination of the two proverbs above, it becomes clear that wrongdoing is a critical factor that disrupts *àlàáfià* in society. In general terms, all wrongdoings are regarded as sin. Hence, we can submit that sin is the enemy of *àlàáfià* of an individual or society. In the Yoruba's mode of dealing with sin, it is believed that every individual has their roles to play. Likewise, the community and its head have their roles to play. For the individual role in dealing with sin, it is held that, *Owó ara eni làáfí tún ìwà ara eni se* (An individual person builds his/her character with his/her own hands). The communal role in dealing with sin entails that members of the community hold their neighbours accountable for their actions. For instance, it is said that *Bí ará ílé eni bá n je aáyán, e kilò fun* (Sound a note of warning to a neighbour who eats cockroaches). It is believed among the Yoruba that whoever eats a cockroach will soon suffer from severe stomach ache. When one's neighbour suffers from stomach ache, his screams in the night will prevent neighbours from having a peaceful night's rest. This is why it is a neighbour's responsibility to sound a note of warning to whomever he/she finds eating a cockroach. The proverb is also an indication that when someone violates *àsà àti ìse* and *èèwò* in the community, not only the defiant will suffer from the consequence of the violation, the entire community will.

The most important thing in human life is *Àlàáfià*. When people fail to follow the instructions that the Supreme Being has given them from their forefathers, they are engaging in sinful behavior. Upholding moral and ethical standards is therefore essential to ensuring *àlàáfià* in

society. Respecting moral and ethical principles, on the other hand, is a spiritual obligation since it is an act of obedience to divine guidance. Consequently, making sure *àlàáfiá* is a two-dimensional endeavor that is both spiritual and socio-physical (Adegbile, 2020).

The Role of Elders in the Maintenance of Peace in Yoruba Community

Indigenous law among the Yoruba is primarily based on traditions and conventions. Literacy was fundamentally linked to verbal art and remembering as much as to written language. Despite being mostly unwritten, the Yoruba legal traditions were preserved and survived through performance, which made them engaging and simple to understand. In other words, the Yoruba people derived their sources of adjudication from the wisdom and traditional knowledge of their forefathers, which were always dramatized, because the traditional society offered an environment that was favorable for long-lasting performance (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014). Olaoba (2001) confirmed that, the elders sit under a tree, and talk until they agree as the force behind order or decorum in traditional society. This indicates that elders, within the culture of the Yorubas, are the power house of wisdom and knowledge (Olaoba 2001) cases of fighting among adolescents or young people were in the past accorded an impromptu settlement by the passers-by who normally ensured restoration of peace and harmony. There existed various community associations and guilds saddled with the responsibility of maintenance of peace and order in marketing operations include, stealing, debt and fraud. In certain circumstances, gods and ancestors (the living dead) are called upon, their spirit invoked and every one especially the disputants are reminded of the aftermath of their wrath if they refuse to say the truth. In the markets, and the palace (court) spirit is present. The spirit could be malevolent / benevolent.

The Role of Elders (*Agba*) in Peacebuilding in Yoruba Culture

In the Yoruba community, the term "*agba*" can refer to an elderly person as well as specific distinguishing characteristics in any person, regardless of age. *Agba* are known for their wisdom. There is the living *agba* and the dead *agba* "ancestors". In this context, intelligence encompasses more than just reading and writing skills; it includes the capacity to correctly follow data, recognize connections between data, draw sound conclusions from a variety of premises and propositions, and apply those conclusions to solve real-world issues. The capacity to recall specific prior events that have relevance to the current topics being discussed is another aspect of intelligence. Along with moral traits like honesty, selflessness, kindness, and patience, there are also emotional traits like courage and tolerance. Within indigenous and even contemporary Yoruba society, a person who possesses these attributes is referred to as *agba*. Consequently, *agba* is a leader in the Yoruba society.

However, we have to note here that the *agba* of our model is not the elders of our present world that have been influenced by the prevalent consumerist societies. The attributes of *agba* in our model can be likened to Obafemi Awolowo's notion of the regime of mental magnitude, which is supposed to characterize good leadership. Bamikole states that according to Awolowo, good leadership involves self-conquest; and self-conquest is attainable only by cultivating, as a first step, the regime of mental magnitude. For Awolowo, the regime of mental magnitude is cultivated when we are sexually continent, abstemious in food, abstain totally from alcoholic beverage and tobacco, and completely vanquish the emotions of greed and fear. The reason why these attributes are important for leadership is also connected with Plato's belief in many of his Dialogues that emotions have the tendency of blurring the vision of the mind to reflect the Forms, which is the domain of wisdom and all things that are excellent as cited by Charlton (Charlton, 2008).

One further observation which Awolowo made, which is also applicable to our model, is the Aristotelian aphorism (Dienstag , n.d.) that "Let him (her) that would move the world, first move himself (herself)." As applicable to our model, we can as well say that "Let the *agba* who wants to resolve conflicts first of all put his/her own house in order." House here may stand for family, community, nation, or region. In other words, if an *agba* wants to mediate in conflict at the community level, he/she should put his/her family in order. This is in consonance with the Yoruba wise saying that *ile lati nko eso rode* (charity begins at home). An elder who wants to resolve

conflicts at the national level should also put his/her community in order; likewise, an elder who wants to resolve conflicts at the regional level must put his/her own nation in order; and lastly an elder who wants to reconcile differences at the world level should have put his/her own region in order. *Òkú òrun* (ancestors) can also be regarded as *agba*. This is based on the Yoruba (African) belief that the old and dead members of the family are still alive, so to say, and that is an ongoing communication between the living and the dead. The ancestors come in the event where living *agba* are unable to resolve the conflict due to the dissatisfaction of one or both of the persons that are in conflict. Here it is believed that ancestors can be appealed to because they are on the other side of the world and as such, they are wiser, having undergone the experiences of both the world and the thereafter (Bamikole, 2013).

Reflection of the role of *agba* in Yoruba tradition are the three levels or stages of conflict resolution. The political divisions that comprise the community are represented by these tiers. A *Baale* is in charge of the smallest unit, known as the *Idile* (Nuclear family). The next group is the *Ebi*, which is an extended family led by *Mogaji*, who is typically the oldest or most powerful member. Any individual with blood ties is considered an extended family. The quarter, the final tier of the units, is made up of multiple family compounds and is led by a *Baale*, who serves as both the head of household and the chief of the ward or quarter. It is the duty of *Baale* to ensure peaceful co-existence in his household and warn members of his household to desist from making any trouble (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014).

Comparison of Biblical and Yoruba Concepts of Peace and Harmony

Similarities

Both Biblical and Yoruba cultures place a high value on peace and harmony. They share common grounds in the following areas:

ASPECT	BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE	YORUBA PERSPECTIVE
Divine Origin of Peace	Peace is a divine gift, stemming from God's creation and redemptive work.	Peace (<i>Àlàáfià</i>) is considered a divine gift, bestowed by <i>Oladumare</i> (the Supreme being).
Importance of Justice and Righteousness	Biblical justice is linked to righteousness, both essential for peace.	The Concept of <i>omoluabi</i> emphasizes moral uprightness and righteousness living for societal harmony.
Community-Centered Approach	Peace extends beyond individual well-being to the flourishing of the community.	Communal harmony is prioritized, emphasizing social cohesion and cooperation.
Emphasis on Reconciliation	Reconciliation involves forgiveness and restoration in biblical peacemaking.	Yoruba traditions include rituals and practices to resolve conflicts and restore harmony in communities.

Differences

While the two cultures share common ground, there are also significant differences in their understanding and pursuit of peace:

ASPECTS	BIBLICAL	YORUBA
Cosmological Framework	Monotheism; focuses on a single God who is the source of all things.	Diffused Monotheism; involves a pantheon of deities and spirits with <i>Oladumare</i> as the Supreme being.
Concept of the Afterlife	Presents Judgment and eternal reward or punishment.	Involves a complex, understanding with ancestral spirits playing significant roles

		in daily life.
Social Structures and Governance	Hierarchical structures with leaders and authorities appointed by God.	Organized into kinship and lineage systems with traditional rulers and elders in key roles.

Points of Synergy for Peacebuilding: A Comparative Analysis

The Biblical and Yoruba perspectives on peace and harmony, though rooted in distinct cultural and religious contexts, share significant common ground. This shared understanding offers valuable insights for contemporary peacebuilding efforts.

Shared Values and Principles

- Divine Origin of Peace:** Both traditions recognize that peace originates from a higher power. In the Bible, it stems from God's creation and redemptive work, while in Yoruba culture, it is seen as a divine gift bestowed by Olodumare.
- Importance of Justice and Righteousness:** Both traditions emphasize the importance of justice and righteousness as prerequisites for peace. The Biblical concept of justice is linked to righteousness and is essential for a just and harmonious society. Similarly, the Yoruba concept of *Omoluabi* emphasizes moral uprightness and righteous living, which contribute to societal harmony.
- Community-Centered Approach:** Both cultures prioritize the well-being of the community. The Biblical concept of peace extends beyond individual well-being to the flourishing of the entire community. The Yoruba emphasis on communal harmony highlights the importance of social cohesion and cooperation.
- Emphasis on Reconciliation:** Reconciliation is a central theme in both traditions. The Bible emphasizes forgiveness and restoration as essential components of peacemaking. Yoruba traditions often involve rituals and practices aimed at resolving conflicts and restoring harmony within families and communities.

Synergistic Applications for Peacebuilding

- Moral and Ethical Foundations:** Both traditions provide strong moral and ethical foundations for peacebuilding. By drawing on these shared values, peacebuilders can promote ethical leadership, accountability, and the rule of law.
- Community Engagement and Participation:** Both cultures emphasize the importance of community involvement in peacebuilding. By involving community members in the peacebuilding process, peacebuilders can foster a sense of ownership and empower local communities to address conflict.
- Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** Yoruba traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as mediation and negotiation, can be adapted to contemporary peacebuilding contexts. These mechanisms often emphasize dialogue, compromise, and consensus-building, which are essential for sustainable peace.
- Spiritual and Religious Dimensions:** Both traditions recognize the spiritual dimension of peace. By incorporating spiritual and religious practices into peacebuilding efforts, it is possible to address the deeper psychological and spiritual needs of individuals and communities.
- Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation:** Interfaith dialogue can help to bridge cultural and religious divides and promote understanding and cooperation. By drawing on the shared values and principles of different faith traditions, peacebuilders can create more inclusive and effective peacebuilding initiatives.

Findings

Findings demonstrate that biblical and Yoruba concepts of peace, though arising from distinct cultural and theological contexts, converge significantly in ways that can inform peacebuilding in Nigeria:

- Biblical Shalom and Eirēnē:** The Old Testament concept of shalom (שָׁלוֹם) encompasses completeness, security, covenantal faithfulness, and flourishing in right relationship with God, humanity, and creation. The New Testament deepens this vision through eirēnē (εἰρήνη), which centers on reconciliation and wholeness achieved through Christ. Both stress peace as a divine gift, not human achievement.
- Yoruba Àlàáfià:** The Yoruba worldview defines peace as well-being, health, harmony, and communal prosperity. Àlàáfià is inseparable from good character (*omolúàbí*), respect for elders and ancestors, adherence to communal customs (*àsà àti ìṣe*), and reconciliation practices. It extends to spiritual harmony with *Olódùmarè*, deities, and ancestors.
- Convergence:** Both traditions highlight peace as relational, covenantal, and holistic rather than a temporary truce. Each underscores the centrality of justice, righteousness, and moral responsibility for sustainable peace. While the biblical tradition roots peace in Yahweh's covenant and Christ's redemptive work, Yoruba tradition situates peace in moral order, ancestral wisdom, and divine will.
- Significance for Peacebuilding:** Integrating biblical and Yoruba insights provides a culturally relevant and theologically grounded peace framework. Such integration emphasizes reconciliation, justice, community engagement, and spiritual depth principles which are critical for addressing Nigeria's ongoing conflicts.

Conclusion

Biblical and Yoruba perspectives on peace and harmony, though rooted in distinct cultural and religious traditions, offer rich, complementary insights that are invaluable for contemporary peacebuilding efforts. Both perspectives emphasize foundational values, such as justice, righteousness, community, and reconciliation, albeit from unique viewpoints that reflect their respective origins. From the Biblical perspective, peace is not merely the absence of conflict but an active pursuit of justice and righteousness as the basis for true harmony. The Old Testament uses the concept of shalom, which encompasses well-being, completeness, and a profound sense of interconnectedness with God and others. Similarly, the New Testament stresses reconciliation, both with God and among individuals, as central to the Christian mandate. The teachings of Jesus and the apostles encourage believers to seek forgiveness, practice compassion, and engage in actions that build and restore relationships. This peace transcends the individual, aiming to transform communities and even entire societies.

On the other hand, Yoruba traditional values on peace and harmony are deeply embedded in communal living and the concept of Omoluabi, which refers to a person of good character, respect, and accountability. Yoruba philosophy posits that true peace arises from collective well-being and the balanced relationships within a community. Elders, as custodians of wisdom, play a significant role in conflict mediation and resolution, drawing upon customs that prioritize forgiveness, respect, and mutual understanding. The Yoruba concept of peace also involves a harmonious relationship with the spiritual realm, with ancestors and deities believed to influence human affairs. By drawing upon these shared values; justice, righteousness, community, and reconciliation peacebuilders can forge a more holistic approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Both perspectives stress the importance of addressing underlying injustices, fostering reconciliation, and nurturing a culture of mutual respect and understanding. Integrating Biblical and Yoruba principles can help develop peacebuilding strategies that resonate on both spiritual and cultural levels, encouraging individuals and communities to work collaboratively toward enduring peace and harmony. This synthesis provides a culturally attuned framework that honors

Nigeria's diverse heritage, while addressing contemporary social challenges, ultimately supporting the creation of sustainable, peaceful societies.

Recommendations

Fostering interfaith dialogue and cooperation can help bridge cultural and religious divides, promoting understanding and collaboration between different faith traditions. Empowering communities to take ownership of peacebuilding processes leads to more sustainable and locally

relevant solutions. Incorporating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as mediation and negotiation, provides valuable tools for addressing conflicts peacefully. Promoting ethical leadership and accountability helps create a more just and equitable society. Recognizing the spiritual and religious dimensions of peace addresses the deeper psychological and spiritual needs of individuals and communities to address the deeper psychological and spiritual needs of individuals and communities.

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