

Augustinian Theology of Peace and Justice: An Ethical Framework for Religious Conflict in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Religious conflict continues to undermine peace and social cohesion in Northern Nigeria despite numerous political, security, and interfaith interventions. While existing studies have largely focused on the political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions of these conflicts, limited attention has been given to the application of Augustinian theology as a framework for sustainable peacebuilding. This study examined the relevance of Augustinian theology of peace and justice in addressing religious conflict in Kano, Kaduna, and Jos. A mixed-method research design was adopted, using structured questionnaires and document analysis of Augustine's theological writings, relevant literature, and selected peacebuilding initiatives. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data from open-ended questionnaire responses and documentary sources were analysed thematically. The findings indicate that religious extremism, injustice, poor governance, socio-economic inequality, and mutual distrust are major drivers of religious conflict. They further demonstrate that Augustinian principles of justice, love, reconciliation, and the common good provide a practical ethical framework for strengthening peacebuilding and interreligious dialogue. The study recommends integrating these principles into peacebuilding policies and initiatives to promote sustainable peace in Northern Nigeria.

Keywords: Augustinian Theology, Justice, Religious Conflict, Peacebuilding, Northern Nigeria.

Introduction

Religious conflict has remained one of the most enduring challenges confronting Nigeria's socio-political and religious landscape, particularly in the northern region where violent confrontations between religious communities have persisted for several decades (Urama, 2020; Sakupapa & Adehanloye, 2025). States such as Kano, Kaduna, and Plateau have experienced repeated episodes of violence arising from religious intolerance, political manipulation of religious identities, socio-economic inequalities, ethnic rivalries, and competition over scarce resources. The consequences of these conflicts have extended beyond the immediate loss of lives and property to include displacement of communities, disruption of economic activities, weakened social cohesion, and increased insecurity, thereby posing significant threats to national development and peaceful coexistence (Nkwachukwu, 2019; Sakupapa & Adehanloye, 2025).

Various governmental interventions, security operations, peace commissions, and interreligious dialogue initiatives have sought to mitigate these recurring conflicts. While these efforts have recorded varying degrees of success, the persistence of violence suggests that existing approaches have not adequately addressed the deeper moral, theological, and ethical dimensions underlying religious conflict (Urama, 2020; Sakupapa & Adehanloye, 2025). Much of the existing literature explains the phenomenon from political, economic, historical, or sociological perspectives, often overlooking the potential contribution of classical Christian theological traditions to contemporary peacebuilding. Consequently, there remains a need to explore theological frameworks capable of complementing existing conflict resolution strategies through the promotion of justice, reconciliation, and the common good.

Among the influential Christian theologians whose writings continue to shape contemporary discussions on peace and justice is Augustine of Hippo. Through works such as *The City of God*, Augustine developed a comprehensive understanding of peace founded upon rightly ordered relationships, justice, love, reconciliation, and the pursuit of the common good (Augustine, 1958). Rather than perceiving peace merely as the absence of violence, Augustine conceived it as the harmonious ordering of society under justice, moral responsibility, and love of neighbour (Nweke & Onwuatuegwu, 2019). His reflections on justice, ethical leadership, and the moral obligations of political authority continue to offer important insights for addressing contemporary conflicts characterized by religious division and social fragmentation.

Despite the increasing scholarly interest in religion and peacebuilding in Nigeria, relatively little attention has been devoted to examining how Augustinian theology can be contextualized as a practical framework for addressing religious conflict in Northern Nigeria. Existing studies have largely emphasized the historical evolution, causes, and consequences of religious violence or evaluated secular conflict management mechanisms, leaving a significant gap regarding the contextual application of Augustinian principles within contemporary Nigerian peacebuilding efforts. Addressing this gap is important because religious beliefs continue to influence social relationships, political behaviour, and community identity throughout Northern Nigeria.

The main objective of this study is to examine the relevance of Augustinian theology of peace and justice as an ethical framework for addressing religious conflict in Northern Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the major causes and patterns of religious conflict in Northern Nigeria.
2. Assess the applicability of Augustine's principles of peace and justice to contemporary peacebuilding efforts in Northern Nigeria.
3. Evaluate how Augustinian theological principles can strengthen interreligious dialogue and promote sustainable peace in selected conflict-prone communities.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the major causes and patterns of religious conflict in Northern Nigeria?

2. How applicable are Augustine's principles of peace and justice to contemporary peacebuilding efforts in Northern Nigeria?
3. How can Augustinian theological principles strengthen interreligious dialogue and promote sustainable peace in selected conflict-prone communities?

Against this background, this study examined the relevance of Augustinian theology of peace and justice as a framework for addressing religious conflict in Northern Nigeria. Guided by the foregoing objectives and research questions, the study employed a mixed-method research design involving questionnaires, document analysis, and comparative analysis of peacebuilding initiatives to provide empirical and theological insights into the role of faith-informed approaches in conflict transformation. By integrating classical Christian theology with contemporary peacebuilding discourse, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations on religion, justice, and sustainable peace while offering practical recommendations for policymakers, religious leaders, and peace practitioners working towards lasting peace in Northern Nigeria.

Literature Review

Religious Conflict in Northern Nigeria

Religious conflict has remained one of the defining security and socio-political challenges in Northern Nigeria, where religious identity frequently intersects with ethnicity, politics, economic interests, and historical grievances. Although Christianity and Islam have coexisted in many communities for decades, the relationship between adherents of the two faiths has periodically been disrupted by violent confrontations that have resulted in loss of lives, destruction of property, displacement of populations, and weakened social cohesion. These conflicts have not only affected interreligious relations but have also undermined governance, economic development, and national stability (Urama, 2020).

The roots of contemporary religious conflict in Northern Nigeria are closely connected to the region's historical and political evolution. Colonial restructuring, the incorporation of Northern Cameroons into Nigeria in 1961, and subsequent political developments reshaped the country's religious demography. Following Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, the adoption of Sharia law by several northern states generated renewed debates over constitutional secularism and intensified tensions between religious communities (Ozden & Ousmane, 2020; Sakupapa & Adehanloye, 2025). Earlier events, including the Maitatsine uprisings of the 1980s (Ojo, 1985), the Kafanchan crisis (CAN Kaduna, 1987), and subsequent communal disturbances in cities such as Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi, and Jos, further entrenched patterns of mistrust and periodic violence that continue to influence contemporary conflicts (Salkida, 2025; Bodi et al., 2021).

The persistence of religious violence cannot be attributed to theological differences alone. Rather, it arises from a complex interaction of political, social, economic, and ideological factors. Historical injustices, unequal access to political power, competition over land and other scarce resources, widespread poverty, unemployment, poor governance, and socio-

economic inequality have created conditions that make communities vulnerable to manipulation by political and religious elites. In many cases, religious identity serves as a mobilising tool through which deeper grievances relating to marginalisation, identity, and resource allocation are expressed. Ignorance of authentic religious teachings, extremist interpretations of sacred texts, inflammatory preaching, hate speech, misinformation, and deliberate campaigns of religious intolerance have also contributed significantly to the escalation of violence (Ozden & Ousmane, 2020; Sakupapa & Adehanloye, 2025).

Religious conflict in Northern Nigeria manifests in several forms. Some conflicts occur within the same religious tradition, particularly among competing Islamic sects or reform movements, while others involve confrontations between Muslim and Christian communities. In addition, anti-establishment extremist movements such as Boko Haram have transformed local religious disputes into broader insurgencies with regional and international dimensions. Although these forms of conflict differ in their immediate causes, they often overlap with ethnic divisions, political competition, and struggles over citizenship rights, making them difficult to classify as purely religious disputes. Urban centres with diverse populations including Kaduna, Kano, Jos, Maiduguri, and Bauchi have experienced repeated outbreaks of violence because of the convergence of religious diversity, ethnic plurality, migration, and political contestation (Sulaiman, 2016).

The actors involved in these conflicts are equally diverse. They include extremist religious organisations, militant groups, political elites, sectarian movements, ethnic associations, youth groups, criminal networks, and, at times, security agencies whose responses have occasionally intensified tensions (Salkida, 2025; Sakupapa & Adehanloye, 2025). Contemporary conflicts have increasingly involved terrorist organisations such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), as well as armed bandits and violent herder groups operating across parts of Northern Nigeria. Their activities have expanded the nature of religious conflict beyond communal violence to include terrorism, kidnappings, attacks on places of worship, and targeted assaults on religious leaders and civilians, thereby deepening insecurity across the region (Canci & Odukoya, 2016; Sakupapa & Adehanloye, 2025).

The instruments through which religious conflicts are prosecuted have also evolved over time. Earlier confrontations were characterised by communal riots, demonstrations, and attacks using rudimentary weapons, whereas recent conflicts have involved sophisticated firearms, improvised explosive devices, coordinated terrorist attacks, media propaganda, and digital communication platforms used to spread misinformation, incite hatred, and recruit supporters. These developments have increased both the scale and complexity of religious violence while making conflict prevention and peacebuilding considerably more challenging (Salkida, 2025; Sakupapa & Adehanloye, 2025).

Beyond their immediate humanitarian consequences, religious conflicts have produced profound social, economic, and political effects. Communities have become increasingly segregated along religious lines, mutual trust has deteriorated, economic activities have been disrupted, educational opportunities have been reduced, and public confidence in

state institutions has weakened. The recurring cycle of violence has also displaced thousands of people, reinforced fear and suspicion among religious communities, and hindered sustainable development across many parts of Northern Nigeria. Consequently, addressing religious conflict requires approaches that extend beyond military responses to include justice, inclusive governance, socio-economic development, ethical leadership, interreligious dialogue, and sustained efforts to rebuild trust among affected communities. Such an integrated understanding provides the necessary foundation for evaluating the relevance of Augustinian theology of peace and justice as a framework for sustainable peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria.

Augustinian Theology of Peace and Justice

Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD) ranks among the most influential figures in Christian theology and Western political thought. Born in Tagaste, North Africa, he was educated in rhetoric before embracing Christianity and later serving as Bishop of Hippo until his death (Markus, 1999). His extensive writings, particularly *The City of God* and *Confessions*, profoundly shaped Christian doctrines on peace, justice, governance, and the moral responsibilities of individuals and political authorities. Beyond his pastoral ministry, Augustine played an active role in mediating disputes, defending the oppressed, and promoting social harmony, making his theological reflections highly relevant to contemporary discussions on conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Augustine, 1958).

Augustine's understanding of peace extends far beyond the absence of violence. He conceived peace as a state of rightly ordered relationships in which individuals, communities, and governing institutions exist in harmony under God's moral order. Genuine peace is sustained by justice, love, and obedience to divine truth rather than by political stability alone (Heller, 2007). Although earthly societies may attain a measure of social order through laws and governance, Augustine argued that complete and lasting peace can only be realized when human life is directed toward God, who is the ultimate source of justice and the highest good. Consequently, social peace depends not merely on institutional arrangements but on the moral transformation of individuals and communities (Burnell, 1993).

Central to Augustine's theology is the concept of the two cities: the City of God and the earthly city. These do not represent geographical locations but two contrasting orientations of human life. The City of God is characterised by love for God, humility, justice, and service to others, whereas the earthly city is driven by self-interest, pride, and the pursuit of temporal power. Although both communities coexist throughout history, they embody different moral commitments and ultimate destinies. Augustine employed this framework to explain that social conflict arises when individuals or societies become governed by selfish ambition instead of the love of God and neighbour (Augustine, 1958). Justice occupies a foundational place in Augustine's theology because it provides the moral basis for authentic peace. While classical philosophers largely understood justice as giving each

person what is due within civil society, Augustine reinterpreted this tradition through a Christian lens by grounding justice in love for God and neighbour. For him, justice is inseparable from charity (*caritas*), requiring individuals to seek the welfare of others while remaining faithful to God's will. A society cannot claim to be truly just if it neglects moral responsibility, compassion, or the common good, regardless of its political or legal achievements (Nweke & Onwuatiegwu, 2019).

Augustine further maintained that the legitimacy of political authority depends on its commitment to justice and the common good. Civil laws serve an essential purpose in preserving order within a fallen world, but they derive their moral authority only when they reflect the principles of eternal justice (Sabine & Thorson, 1973). Governments therefore exist not merely to exercise power but to protect human dignity, uphold justice, restrain wrongdoing, and create conditions that enable peaceful coexistence. Although Augustine acknowledged that political authority may sometimes employ coercive measures to maintain public order, he insisted that coercion should never replace moral persuasion, ethical leadership, or the pursuit of justice (Boulding, 2008).

Another significant dimension of Augustine's thought is his understanding of the common good. He viewed human beings as inherently social and believed that communities flourish when individuals subordinate selfish interests to collective well-being. Love for God naturally expresses itself in love for one's neighbour through compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation, and service (Dodaro, 2004). Consequently, social justice is realised when citizens, leaders, and institutions work together to protect the vulnerable, promote fairness, and strengthen communal solidarity. Augustine therefore regarded ethical leadership and responsible citizenship as indispensable to peaceful societies because both contribute to relationships founded on trust, mutual respect, and shared responsibility (Chabi, 2015). Augustine's reflections on family and civic life further reinforce his vision of peace and justice. He regarded the family as the first community where individuals learn obedience, responsibility, love, and mutual care. Domestic harmony, in his view, provides the foundation for civic peace because societies are strengthened when these virtues are cultivated within households and extended into public life (Augustine, 2022). Similarly, he advocated cooperation between religious and civil institutions, arguing that while the Church and the state perform distinct functions, both share responsibility for promoting justice, social order, and the common good. Productive collaboration between these institutions enhances peace without compromising their respective responsibilities (Brown, 1964).

Although Augustine is widely recognised for articulating the foundations of just war theory, he did not glorify warfare. Rather, he viewed war as an undesirable consequence of human sinfulness that may only be justified under exceptional circumstances, particularly when undertaken by legitimate authority for a just cause and with the objective of restoring peace and protecting the innocent. Even in such cases, justice and reconciliation remain the ultimate goals, underscoring his conviction that peace, not violence is the proper end of political and social action. The enduring significance of Augustinian theology lies in its

integration of moral responsibility, justice, reconciliation, ethical leadership, and the common good into a coherent vision of peaceful social order. Rather than relying solely on legal, political, or military responses to conflict, Augustine emphasises the transformation of individuals, communities, and institutions through love, justice, and moral accountability (Augustine, 1958). These principles provide a valuable theological framework for examining contemporary religious conflicts and offer practical insights for strengthening peacebuilding, interreligious dialogue, and sustainable coexistence in Northern Nigeria.

Existing Peacebuilding Approaches and the Research Gap

The persistent nature of religious conflict in Northern Nigeria has led to the development of various peacebuilding initiatives by government institutions, faith-based organisations, civil society groups, and international partners. These initiatives employ strategies such as interreligious dialogue, mediation, conflict resolution, civic education, reconciliation, and community engagement to promote peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. Their collective efforts reflect the recognition that sustainable peace requires collaboration among religious communities, public institutions, and local stakeholders rather than relying solely on security measures.

One of the leading faith-based organisations is the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC), founded in Kaduna by Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa following their personal reconciliation after years of religious violence. The IMC has become a widely recognised model of interfaith peacebuilding, using scriptural teachings, mediation, leadership training, early-warning systems, and grassroots reconciliation to prevent and resolve communal conflicts. Through partnerships with government agencies, international organisations, and local communities, the Centre has expanded its peacebuilding activities across several conflict-prone states in Nigeria and beyond (Shaibu & Praise, 2025).

At the national level, the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) provides an institutional platform for dialogue between Christian and Muslim leaders. Through consultations, advocacy, and policy engagement, the Council promotes religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence (NIREC, 2025). Complementing these efforts are organisations such as the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP) (IDFP, 2025), which focuses on youth engagement, deradicalisation, and anti-hate campaigns, and the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace (COFP) (COFP, n.d.), which equips emerging African leaders with practical skills in mediation, conflict transformation, and interreligious dialogue. Together, these initiatives have strengthened interfaith cooperation, enhanced community participation, and contributed to reducing religious tensions in several parts of Northern Nigeria.

These interventions demonstrate the growing role of interfaith collaboration in promoting peace and preventing violence. By encouraging dialogue, reconciliation, and community participation, they have improved relationships among religious communities and

established important mechanisms for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. However, the continued recurrence of religious violence across Northern Nigeria suggests that existing approaches have not fully addressed the deeper ethical, social, and theological factors that sustain conflict. This limitation highlights the need for complementary frameworks capable of promoting not only conflict resolution but also moral transformation, justice, reconciliation, and the common good.

Despite the notable contributions of peacebuilding initiatives in Northern Nigeria, several challenges continue to limit their effectiveness in achieving sustainable peace. Most existing interventions have focused on conflict management through dialogue, mediation, reconciliation, capacity building, and early-warning mechanisms. Although these approaches have reduced tensions and strengthened cooperation between Christian and Muslim communities, the recurrence of religious violence suggests that they have not sufficiently addressed the deeper moral, social, and structural factors that sustain conflict. Government-led initiatives have provided important platforms for engagement among religious and traditional leaders. Likewise, faith-based organisations have promoted interfaith dialogue, youth engagement, conflict mediation, and leadership development. Collectively, these organisations have made significant contributions to peaceful coexistence by encouraging communication, trust-building, and cooperation among diverse religious communities.

Nevertheless, many of these approaches remain largely dialogue-centred and institution-driven. While dialogue is essential for reducing hostility and improving mutual understanding, it is often insufficient to address issues such as injustice, poor governance, political manipulation of religion, socio-economic inequality, and the erosion of ethical values that frequently underlie religious conflict. In many cases, peacebuilding efforts have concentrated on resolving immediate disputes without adequately transforming the attitudes, behaviours, and moral foundations necessary for lasting reconciliation.

Another limitation is the limited integration of theological ethics into contemporary peacebuilding models. Although religion is recognised as a significant factor in both conflict and peacebuilding, existing studies have devoted greater attention to political, economic, and sociological explanations than to the practical application of classical Christian theological thought in addressing contemporary religious violence. Consequently, the moral and spiritual resources available within Christian theology remain underutilised in many peacebuilding frameworks. This study argues that Augustinian theology of peace and justice provides an important perspective for addressing this gap. Augustine understood peace not merely as the absence of violence but as the harmonious ordering of human relationships through justice, love, reconciliation, and the pursuit of the common good. His emphasis on ethical leadership, moral responsibility, and social justice offers a framework that complements existing peacebuilding initiatives by addressing both the structural and moral dimensions of religious conflict.

Although previous studies have examined interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution strategies in Northern Nigeria, limited scholarly attention has been given to the contextual

application of Augustinian theology as a practical framework for sustainable peacebuilding. This study therefore fills that gap by examining how Augustine's principles of justice, reconciliation, ethical leadership, and the common good can strengthen existing peacebuilding initiatives and contribute to lasting peace in Northern Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method research design combining questionnaire survey and document analysis to examine the relevance of Augustinian theology of peace and justice in addressing religious conflict in Northern Nigeria. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered physically and electronically via Google Forms, and through document analysis of Augustine's *The City of God* and relevant peacebuilding literature. The questionnaire comprised demographic questions, closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale, and open-ended questions. The reliability of the instrument was established through Cronbach's alpha analysis, with all questionnaire items producing coefficients above 0.80, indicating high internal consistency. The closed-ended items assessed respondents' perceptions of the causes of religious conflict and the applicability of Augustinian principles of justice, love, reconciliation, the common good, and *jus ad bellum* to contemporary peacebuilding. To facilitate respondent comprehension, these theological concepts were operationalised into simple, contextually relevant statements. The instrument was developed from the study objectives and subjected to expert review to ensure content validity. The reliability of the instrument was established through Cronbach's alpha analysis, with all questionnaire items producing coefficients above 0.80, indicating high internal consistency.

A total of 100 respondents were selected through stratified random sampling from Kano (34), Kaduna (33), and Jos (33), with stratification based on geographical location and religious diversity to ensure representation of both Christian and Muslim communities. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained in accordance with institutional ethical research guidelines. A pilot administration was conducted to assess the clarity and suitability of the questionnaire before the main survey.

Qualitative data from the open-ended responses and documentary sources were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. The coding framework combined deductive codes derived from Augustinian concepts of justice, peace, love, reconciliation, the common good, ethical leadership, and *jus ad bellum* with inductive codes emerging from respondents' perceptions of religious conflict, political manipulation, poverty, intolerance, and peacebuilding initiatives. The resulting themes formed the basis for interpreting the findings in relation to Augustinian theology and contemporary peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Below is the analysis carried out using percentages.

Age bracket	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 30 years	57	57.0 %
31 – 50 years	35	35.0 %
Above 50 years	8	8.0 %
Total	100	100 %
Sex (Gender)	Frequency	Percentage
Male	58	58.0 %
Female	42	42.0 %
Total	100	100 %
Occupation ⁸	Frequency	Percentage
Student	49	49.0 %
Civil Servant	22	22.0 %
Self-Employed	18	18.0 %
Applicant	3	3.0 %
Clergy	8	8.0%
Total	100	100 %
Highest Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
FSLC	4	4.0 %
SSCE	24	24.0 %
NCE/ND	26	26.0 %
HND/BA/BSC	40	40.0 %
PHD	6	6.0%
Total	100	100 %

Table 1

Likert Scale: SA – Strongly Agree

A – Agree

N – Neutral

D – Disagree

SD – Strongly Disagree

Examining Augustinian Theology of peace and justice In Proffering Solution To The Issue Under Study

Data Presentation for the Questions Asked

No	Statement	Likert Scale					Total
		SA	A	N	D	SD	
1	Religion can play a significant role in resolving conflict.	50	22	10	7	11	100

No	Statement	Likert Scale					Total
		SA	A	N	D	SD	
2	Religious teachings or ideologies can contribute to Peacebuilding efforts in conflict-prone regions like Northern Nigeria.	35	30	10	11	14	100
3	Extreme religious teachings, beliefs, and ideology can destroy peacebuilding efforts.	37	29	20	11	3	100
4	Promoting inter-faith dialogue and community engagement is essential for fostering peace and justice in Northern Nigeria.	32	34	13	18	3	100
5	The use of force and violence is necessary to maintain peace and end conflict.	32	33	15	16	4	100
6	Augustine's <i>jus ad bellum</i> (the condition under which states may resort to war) prescripts enjoin that wars can be initiated justly only on the basis of a just cause.	33	32	17	10	8	100
7	Implementing Augustine's <i>jus ad bellum</i> will help reduce the rate of religious conflict in Northern Nigeria.	39	31	9	13	8	100
8	Peace cannot be achieved outside of oneself. It is impossible to lead others to peace until one is at peace themselves.	28	30	14	17	12	100
9	Religious leaders take advantage of their followers' devotion to cause conflict and damage properties in the name of religion.	58	24	9	4	5	100
10	Love also serves as the unifying factor in the strictly voluntary society of the religious community.	23	30	18	15	14	100
11	Justice is the virtue which accords to each and every man what is his due.	28	36	22	12	2	100
12	Human conflicts arise from people's self-serving demands and desires for greater financial possessions, honor, power, or pleasure.	30	26	17	16	11	100
13	A father's role to correct an unruly child is not just a sign of affection but also a religious obligation that maintains social harmony and domestic peace.	34	28	20	13	5	100
14	According to Augustine, compliance is essential for maintaining domestic harmony and establishes the groundwork for resolving disputes and upholding civil peace.	27	28	17	20	8	100
15	To build a community where peace reigns, family heads have roles to play in building peace in their homes which eventually extends to the community and society at large.	30	26	20	9	15	100
Questions		A	B	C	D	E	F

No	Statement	Likert Scale					Total
		SA	A	N	D	SD	
16	How can communities in Northern Nigeria be encouraged to engage in meaningful dialogue and cooperation across religious lines?	29	17	21	17	14	2
17	What, in your opinion, are the primary causes of religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria?	21	18	19	24	15	3

Table 2

For proper computation, the responses of the respondents are streamlined (collapsed) into three categories.

- (Strongly agree) and (Agree) collapsed as "People that agreed"
- Neutral as "People that were indifferent."
- (Disagree) and (Strongly Disagree) as "People that disagreed".

Hence, the table obtained thus;

Data Presentation for the Collapsed Responses

S/N	Statement	Response of respondents			Total
		Agreed %	Neutral %	Disagreed %	
1	Religion can play a significant role in resolving conflict.	72	10	18	100
		72%	10%	18%	100%
2	Religious teachings or ideologies can contribute to Peacebuilding efforts in conflict-prone regions like Northern Nigeria.	65	10	25	100
		65%	10%	25%	100%
3	Extreme religious teachings, beliefs, and ideology can destroy peacebuilding efforts.	66	20	14	100
		66%	20%	14%	100%
4	Promoting inter-faith dialogue and community engagement is essential for fostering peace and justice in Northern Nigeria.	66	13	21	100
		66%	13%	21%	100%
5	The use of force and violence is necessary to maintain peace and end conflict.	65	15	20	100
		65%	15%	20%	100%
6	Augustine's <i>jus ad bellum</i> (the condition under which states may resort to war) prescripts enjoin those wars can be initiated justly only on the basis of a just cause.	65	17	18	100
		65%	17%	18%	100%
7	Implementing Augustine's <i>jus ad bellum</i> will help reduce the rate of religious conflict in Northern Nigeria.	70	9	21	100
		70%	9%	21%	100%

S/N	Statement	Response of respondents			Total
		Agreed %	Neutral %	Disagreed %	
8	Peace cannot be achieved outside of oneself. It is impossible to lead others to peace until one is at peace themselves.	57	14	29	100
		57%	14%	29%	100%
9	Religious leaders take advantage of their followers' devotion to cause conflict and damage properties in the name of religion.	82	9	9	100
		82%	9%	9%	100%
10	Love also serves as the unifying factor in the strictly voluntary society of the religious community.	53	18	29	100
		53%	18%	29%	100%
11	Justice is the virtue which accords to each and every man what is his due.	64	22	14	100
		64%	22%	14%	100%
12	Human conflicts arise from people's self-serving demands and desires for greater financial possessions, honor, power, or pleasure.	56	17	27	100
		56%	17%	27%	100%
13	A father's role to correct an unruly child is not just a sign of affection but also a religious obligation that maintains social harmony and domestic peace.	62	20	18	100
		62%	20%	18%	100%
14	According to Augustine, compliance is essential for maintaining domestic harmony and establishes the groundwork for resolving disputes and upholding civil peace.	55	17	28	100
		55%	17%	28%	100%
15	To build a community where peace reigns, family heads have roles to play in building peace in their homes which eventually extends to the community and society at large.	56	20	24	100
		56%	20%	24%	100%

Table 3

From table 3 above, it can be seen that

- 72 out of 100 respondents (72%) agreed that more broadly, Religion can play a significant role in resolving conflict.
- 65 out of 100 respondents (65%) agreed that religious teachings or ideologies can contribute to Peacebuilding efforts in conflict-prone regions like Northern Nigeria.
- 66 out of 100 respondents (66%) agreed that Extreme religious teachings, beliefs, and ideology can destroy peacebuilding efforts.
- 66 out of 100 respondents (66%) agreed that promoting inter-faith dialogue and community engagement is essential for fostering peace and justice in Northern Nigeria.

- 65 out of 100 respondents (65%) agreed that the use of force and violence is necessary to maintain peace and end conflict.
- 65 out of 100 respondents (65%) agreed that Augustine's *jus ad bellum* (the condition under which states may resort to war) prescripts enjoin those wars can be initiated justly only on the basis of a just cause.
- 70 out of 100 respondents (70%) agreed that Implementing Augustine's *jus ad bellum* will help reduce the rate of religious conflict in Northern Nigeria.
- 57 out of 100 respondents (57%) agreed that Peace cannot be achieved outside of oneself. It is impossible to lead others to peace until one is at peace themselves.
- 82 out of 100 respondents (82%) agreed that religious leaders take advantage of their followers' devotion to cause conflict and damage properties in the name of religion.
- 53 out of 100 respondents (53%) agreed that Love also serves as the unifying factor in the strictly voluntary society of the religious community.
- 64 out of 100 respondents (64%) agreed that Justice is the virtue which accords to each and every man what is his due.
- 56 out of 100 respondents (56%) agreed that Human conflicts arise from people's self-serving demands and desires for greater financial possessions, honor, power, or pleasure.
- 62 out of 100 respondents (62%) agreed that A father's role to correct an unruly child is not just a sign of affection but also a religious obligation that maintains social harmony and domestic peace.
- 55 out of 100 respondents (55%) agreed with Augustine that According to Augustine, compliance is essential for maintaining domestic harmony and establishes the groundwork for resolving disputes and upholding civil peace.
- 56 out of 100 respondents (56%) agreed that to build a community where peace reigns, family heads have roles to play in building peace in their homes which eventually extends to the community and society at large.

Investigating How Adopting the Augustinian Theology of Peace and Justice Can Be a Panacea for the Primary Causes of Religious Conflict in Northern Nigeria

Q17. What, in your opinion are the primary causes of religious conflict in Northern Nigeria?

A	-	Ethnic and Religious Diversity	-	21 (21%)
B	-	Political Factors	-	18 (18%)
C	-	Socio-Economic Factors	-	19 (19%)
D	-	Historical Grievances	-	24 (24%)
E	-	Extremist Ideologies	-	15 (15%)
F	-	Others	-	3 (3%)

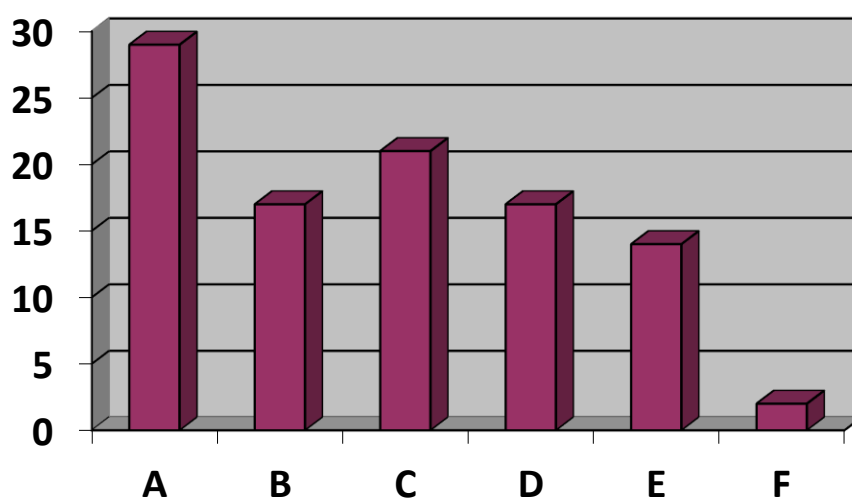
From the above, the high percentages in responses of the interviewers (with 24%, 21%, 19% and 18% for D, A, C and B), which are primary causes of religious conflict, presented a notable influence of at least 82%.

It, therefore, can be concluded that "Historical Grievances" and "Ethnic and Religious Diversity" are the primary causes of religious conflict in Northern Nigeria.

Examining How Communities in Northern Nigeria Can Be Encouraged to Engage In Meaningful Dialogue

Q16. How can communities in Northern Nigeria be encouraged to engage in meaningful dialogue and cooperation across religious lines?

A	-	Education and Awareness	-	29 (29%)
B	-	Political Injustice	-	17 (17%)
C	-	Interfaith Dialogue Forums	-	21 (21%)
D	-	Human Rights Abuses	-	17 (17%)
E	-	Building Relationships	-	14 (14%)
F	-	Others	-	2 (2%)



From the above bar chart, it can be seen that "education and awareness" and "interfaith dialogue forums" (29% and 21%, respectively) are higher than all other ways communities in Northern Nigeria can be encouraged to engage in meaningful dialogue and cooperation across religious lines.

Investigating if Adopting the Augustinian Theology of Peace and Justice Can Be a Panacea for Religious Conflict and Terrorism in Northern Nigeria

Below is the table of the fifteen questions (Q1 – Q15) based on the respondents' opinions.

A reliability test was carried out using a statistical package SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

OPINIO N	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Q 9	Q ₁ 0	Q ₁ 1	Q ₁ 2	Q ₁ 3	Q ₁ 4	Q ₁ 5
SA	50	35	37	32	32	33	39	27	58	23	28	30	34	27	30
A	22	30	29	34	33	32	31	30	24	30	36	26	28	28	26
N	10	10	20	13	15	17	9	14	9	18	22	17	20	17	20
D	7	11	11	18	16	10	13	17	4	15	12	16	13	20	9
SD	11	14	3	3	4	8	8	12	5	14	2	11	5	8	15

Table 4

Cronbach's Alpha Test: Test of Reliability

This is used to measure internal consistency (reliability). It is commonly used when one wishes to determine if the scale used for a questionnaire/survey is reliable. It simply provides an overall reliability coefficient for a set of variables (e.g., questions). A score that is above 0.7 shows a high internal consistency.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.980	.989	15

From above, we can see that Chronbach's alpha is 0.980 (approximately 1), which indicates a high level of internal consistency (that is, it is considered very reliable).

Item-Total Statistics					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q1	280.00	23431.000	.845	.	.980
Q2	280.00	24791.000	.927	.	.977
Q3	280.00	24066.500	.965	.	.976
Q4	280.00	24378.500	.926	.	.977
Q5	280.00	24479.500	.956	.	.977
Q6	280.00	24529.500	.981	.	.976
Q7	280.00	23897.500	.970	.	.976
Q8	280.00	25865.000	.927	.	.978
Q9	280.00	21906.500	.878	.	.983
Q10	280.00	26481.000	.839	.	.980
Q11	280.00	24575.000	.854	.	.978
Q12	280.00	25777.500	.996	.	.978
Q13	280.00	24692.000	.964	.	.977
Q14	280.00	25917.500	.892	.	.979
Q15	280.00	25867.000	.884	.	.979

Table 5

The above shows that Cronbach's Alpha is greater than 0.8 and approximately 1 (having a high level of correlation) for all questions. This implies that all the questions are valid for this analysis.

Also, analyzing further using the ITEM-TOTAL STATISTIC. It can be observed that the corrected Item Total Correlation with least values 0.839, 0.845 and 0.854 (Q10, Q1 and Q11 respectively) infer that love also serves as the unifying factor in the strictly voluntary society of the religious community and religion can play a significant role in resolving conflict.

Conclusively, justice is the virtue which accords to each and every man what is his due.

Item-Total Statistics					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
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Q2	280.00	24791.000	.927	.	.977
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Q5	280.00	24479.500	.956	.	.977
Q6	280.00	24529.500	.981	.	.976
Q7	280.00	23897.500	.970	.	.976
Q8	280.00	25865.000	.927	.	.978
Q9	280.00	21906.500	.878	.	.983
Q10	280.00	26481.000	.839	.	.980
Q11	280.00	24575.000	.854	.	.978
Q12	280.00	25777.500	.996	.	.978
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Q14	280.00	25917.500	.892	.	.979
Q15	280.00	25867.000	.884	.	.979

Table 6

Resulting from the ITEM-TOTAL STATISTIC above, it can be seen that Cronbach's Alpha If Item Deleted (that is, if the questionnaire excludes those questions) with least values 0.976, 0.976, and 0.976 (Q3, Q6 and Q7 respectively) infer that; Extreme religious teachings, beliefs, and ideology can destroy peacebuilding efforts and Augustine's *jus ad bellum* (the condition under which states may resort to war) prescripts enjoin those wars can be initiated justly only on the basis of a just cause.

Hence incorporating Augustine's *jus ad bellum* will help reduce the rate of religious conflict in Northern Nigeria.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study in relation to the research objectives. Rather than reporting the survey results sequentially, the findings are organised thematically to reflect the major issues emerging from the quantitative and qualitative data. The discussion integrates the empirical findings with Augustinian theology and relevant literature to demonstrate the implications of the study for peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria.

Nature and Drivers of Religious Conflict

The findings indicate that religious conflict in Northern Nigeria is driven by a complex interaction of historical, political, socio-economic, and religious factors rather than by theological differences alone. Historical grievances (24%) emerged as the most significant perceived cause of religious conflict, followed by ethnic and religious diversity (21%), socio-economic factors (19%), political factors (18%), and extremist ideologies (15%). These findings suggest that contemporary religious violence is deeply rooted in longstanding social and historical tensions that have been reinforced by political competition, economic inequality, and identity-based divisions.

Further analysis suggests that several root causes that sustain conflict across the region. More than half (56%) agreed that human conflict arises from self-serving desires for power, honour, wealth, and personal advantage, while 66% agreed that extremist religious teachings and ideologies undermine peacebuilding efforts. Furthermore, a substantial majority (82%) indicated that some religious leaders exploit the devotion of their followers to incite violence and destruction in the name of religion. These findings indicate that religious conflict is often fuelled by the manipulation of religious identities for personal, political, or ideological gain rather than by genuine theological concerns.

The analysis further identifies the major actors involved in religious conflict. While extremist groups and radical religious movements remain visible participants in violent confrontations, religious leaders, political actors, and community influencers emerged as significant factors that contribute to the escalation of tensions. This finding supports existing literature which argues that religious violence in Northern Nigeria frequently emerges through the interaction of political interests, elite manipulation, and communal grievances rather than through religion alone. Scholars such as Ozden and Ousmane (2020) and Salkida (2025) similarly observe that political actors often mobilise religious identities to pursue broader political and economic objectives.

Regarding conflict patterns, the findings reveal recurring cycles of mistrust, radicalisation, retaliation, and communal polarisation. The strong support for interfaith dialogue and community engagement (66%) suggests that respondents perceive the absence of sustained interaction between religious communities as a factor contributing to recurring violence. The findings therefore corroborate previous studies that describe religious conflict in Northern Nigeria as multidimensional, involving overlapping religious, ethnic, economic, and political grievances. Consequently, sustainable peacebuilding requires

approaches that address not only immediate security concerns but also the structural and moral conditions that perpetuate hostility between communities.

Augustinian Theology as a Framework for Peacebuilding

The findings indicate substantial support for the application of Augustinian theology as a framework for addressing religious conflict in Northern Nigeria. Augustine's emphasis on love, justice, the common good, reconciliation, and the ethical use of force emerged as themes that resonate strongly with respondents' perceptions of sustainable peace.

Love

Augustine regarded love (*caritas*) as the foundation of peaceful human relationships and social harmony. The survey findings reflect this perspective, with 53% of respondents agreeing that love serves as a unifying force within religious communities. Although the percentage is lower than that recorded for justice and conflict resolution, it nevertheless suggests that respondents recognise the importance of mutual respect, compassion, and concern for others in promoting peaceful coexistence. The significance of love becomes particularly evident in societies characterised by religious diversity and historical mistrust. Augustine argued that social disorder arises when human relationships are governed by pride, selfishness, and the pursuit of domination rather than by love of neighbour. This understanding aligns with the survey finding that self-interest and the pursuit of power contribute significantly to conflict. Consequently, the cultivation of love as a social virtue provides an important foundation for reducing hostility and rebuilding trust between religious communities.

Justice

Justice occupies a central place in Augustine's understanding of peace. For Augustine, genuine peace cannot exist where injustice persists because peace is fundamentally rooted in right relationships and moral order. The survey findings strongly support this principle. 72% of respondents agreed that religion can play a significant role in conflict resolution, while 64% affirmed Augustine's conception of justice as giving each person what is due. These findings suggest that respondents view justice as an essential condition for sustainable peace. This perspective corresponds with existing scholarship which identifies injustice, exclusion, poor governance, and unequal access to resources as major drivers of religious conflict in Northern Nigeria. Augustine's insistence that political authority must serve justice and protect human dignity therefore offers an important corrective to systems that perpetuate marginalisation and inequality.

The Common Good

Another important dimension of Augustinian thought is the pursuit of the common good. Augustine maintained that societies flourish when individuals and institutions prioritise

collective wellbeing over personal interests. The survey findings support this position. 62% of respondents agreed that maintaining discipline and responsibility within families contributes to social harmony, while 56% believed that family leaders have an important role in promoting peace within the wider community. These findings highlight the importance of local social structures in peacebuilding. They suggest that sustainable peace cannot be achieved solely through governmental interventions but requires active participation from families, communities, religious institutions, and civic organisations. Augustine's emphasis on the common good therefore provides a framework for strengthening communal responsibility and social cohesion.

Just War

Augustine's contribution to just war theory remains one of the most influential aspects of his political theology. While Augustine did not glorify warfare, he recognised that force might be necessary under exceptional circumstances to protect the innocent and restore justice. The survey findings reveal a similar perspective. 65% of respondents agreed that the use of force may sometimes be necessary to maintain peace, while an equal percentage agreed that war can only be justified when undertaken for a just cause. More importantly, 70% believed that implementing Augustine's *jus ad bellum* principles could help reduce religious conflict in Northern Nigeria. These findings indicate that respondents distinguish between indiscriminate violence and the legitimate use of force governed by moral principles. In the context of Northern Nigeria, where terrorism and violent extremism continue to threaten civilian populations, Augustine's just war framework provides ethical guidance for balancing security responses with the pursuit of justice and peace.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation represents the culmination of Augustine's vision of peace. The survey findings reveal strong support for peacebuilding approaches centred on dialogue, education, and community engagement. 65% of respondents agreed that religious teachings can contribute positively to peacebuilding, while 66% emphasised the importance of interfaith dialogue and community engagement. Furthermore, respondents identified education and awareness (29%) and interfaith dialogue forums (21%) as the most effective means of encouraging cooperation across religious boundaries. These findings reinforce Augustine's conviction that peace is achieved not merely through the cessation of violence but through the restoration of damaged relationships. Reconciliation therefore requires sustained dialogue, mutual understanding, forgiveness, and the rebuilding of trust among communities that have experienced conflict.

Implications for Peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria

The findings highlight the need to move beyond security-centred approaches towards peacebuilding strategies that address the ethical, structural, and relational dimensions of religious conflict. The persistence of violence in Northern Nigeria suggests that military

responses and dialogue initiatives alone are insufficient without addressing underlying issues such as historical grievances, socio-economic inequalities, weak governance, and the manipulation of religious identities. In this regard, Augustinian theology provides a valuable ethical framework for sustainable peacebuilding. Augustine's concept of *tranquillitas ordinis* (the tranquillity of order) understands peace as the product of rightly ordered relationships grounded in justice, love, reconciliation, and the common good rather than merely the absence of violence. This perspective broadens contemporary peacebuilding by emphasising moral transformation alongside institutional and political reforms.

The findings further suggest that integrating theological ethics into existing peacebuilding initiatives could strengthen efforts by organisations such as the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC) and the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC). By promoting justice, ethical leadership, and reconciliation, Augustinian principles complement existing dialogue and mediation initiatives while addressing the deeper moral and social conditions that sustain conflict. Consequently, the study demonstrates that Augustinian theology offers a practical ethical framework capable of enriching contemporary peacebuilding strategies and promoting sustainable peace in Northern Nigeria.

Limitations of the Study

This study should be interpreted in light of certain limitations. First, the empirical component was based on a relatively modest sample of 100 respondents drawn from Kano, Kaduna, and Jos. Although these cities were purposively selected because of their historical experiences of religious conflict and respondents were selected through stratified sampling to enhance representation, the sample may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives across Northern Nigeria. Consequently, the findings should not be generalised to all conflict-affected communities within the region.

Second, the study relied partly on self-reported questionnaire responses. Such data are subject to respondents' personal perceptions, recall limitations, and the possibility of social desirability bias, particularly on sensitive issues relating to religion, conflict, and peacebuilding. The findings therefore reflect respondents' perceptions rather than objective measures of conflict dynamics.

Finally, the study focused on examining the applicability of Augustinian theology within three selected urban centres. While the integration of empirical evidence with document analysis and thematic interpretation strengthens the analysis, future studies could employ larger samples, additional conflict-affected states, and longitudinal or mixed qualitative approaches to enhance the generalisability and contextual depth of the findings.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Religious leaders and faith-based organisations should integrate Augustinian principles of justice, love, reconciliation, and the common good into sermons,

discipleship programmes, peace education initiatives, and interfaith engagements. Given the finding that some religious leaders contribute to the manipulation of religious sentiments, faith leaders should instead promote ethical leadership, mutual respect, forgiveness, and peaceful coexistence across religious communities.

2. The Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC) and the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) should strengthen structured interfaith dialogue programmes by incorporating ethical and theological principles that emphasise reconciliation, justice, and the common good. Such initiatives should particularly target communities with recurring histories of religious violence and encourage sustained engagement among religious and traditional leaders.
3. Policymakers and government agencies should complement security-based responses with community-centred peacebuilding strategies that address the underlying socio-economic and political drivers of religious conflict identified in this study. Policies should support interfaith education, youth empowerment, equitable governance, and mechanisms that promote justice and social inclusion.
4. Educational institutions and theological seminaries should incorporate Augustinian ethics of peace and justice into theology, religious studies, peace and conflict studies, and civic education curricula. Equipping future religious leaders and practitioners with these ethical principles will strengthen their capacity to contribute constructively to conflict prevention, mediation, and reconciliation.
5. Civil society organisations and community-based peacebuilding initiatives should collaborate with religious institutions to implement grassroots programmes that encourage dialogue, reconciliation, and community participation. Such partnerships should prioritise trust-building, social cohesion, and collective responsibility for promoting the common good within conflict-affected communities.

Conclusion

This study has shown that religious conflict in Northern Nigeria cannot be effectively addressed through security measures or interfaith dialogue alone. Sustainable peace requires an ethical framework that addresses the structural, relational, and moral dimensions of conflict. By examining Augustine's principles of love, justice, the common good, just war, and reconciliation, the study demonstrates the continuing relevance of Augustinian theology to contemporary peacebuilding. It argues that Augustinian theology is not merely a historical theological tradition but a practical ethical framework that complements existing peacebuilding initiatives by promoting justice, moral responsibility, and reconciliation. In doing so, the study contributes a contextual theological perspective for strengthening sustainable peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria.

Future research should extend this inquiry by undertaking comparative studies across additional conflict-affected states in Northern Nigeria and other regions of the country to

examine the contextual applicability of Augustinian theology in diverse socio-religious settings. Longitudinal and mixed-method studies are also recommended to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of Augustinian-informed peacebuilding interventions and their contribution to sustainable interreligious dialogue, reconciliation, and social cohesion.

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