

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON THE CONCEPT OF PRAYER IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Prayer occupies a central position in both Christianity and Islam as a major means through which believers communicate with God, express dependence, seek divine guidance, offer thanksgiving, confess shortcomings, and present personal and communal needs. Although both religions recognise prayer as an essential spiritual practice, they differ in their theological foundations, forms, patterns, language, frequency, and liturgical expressions. Christianity generally understands prayer as personal and communal communication with God, particularly through faith and the mediatory role of Jesus Christ. In contrast, Islam regards prayer as an essential act of worship and submission to Allah, expressed through prescribed ritual prayers and personal supplications. This study comparatively examines the concept and practice of prayer in Christianity and Islam within the Nigerian context, where the two religions significantly influence the spiritual, social, cultural, and public lives of the population. The study explores the theological understandings and religious foundations of prayer in both traditions and compares their forms, purposes, practices, and significance among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. It further identifies the major similarities and differences between Christian and Islamic concepts and practices of prayer and examines their implications for religious understanding, tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. The study adopts a comparative and analytical approach based on relevant theological, historical, and contemporary scholarly literature. It argues that, despite significant theological and ritual differences, Christianity and Islam share important values concerning devotion, dependence on God, moral responsibility, spiritual discipline, and concern for personal and communal well-being. The study concludes that a balanced understanding of both the similarities and differences in prayer can reduce religious misconceptions, promote interfaith dialogue, strengthen mutual respect, and contribute to peaceful coexistence among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria's pluralistic society.

Keywords: Prayer, Christianity, Islam, Comparative Religion, Religious Tolerance, Peaceful Coexistence, Nigeria.

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Introduction

Prayer is one of the common themes and the most necessary activity of the religious life. It is a dialogical encounter between God and Man in which man and God speak to each other and the divine respond appropriately. Some religions and scholars described it as the spiritual blood for the spiritual life. Prayer is a Divine imperative for human beings as revealed in the Christian Scripture (Bible). “Ask and thou shall be given, ..., (Mathew 7:7) and Al-Quran “Guard your prayers and the most excellent prayer, and stand up truly obedient to Allah (Al-Quran 2:238).

Prayers, though common to most religions, is carried out differently by the adherents of religions in compliance with their sacred scriptures.

Prayer occupies a central position in both Christianity and Islam, serving as a major means through which believers communicate with God, express dependence, seek divine guidance, offer thanksgiving, confess shortcomings, and present personal and communal needs. Although the two religions share a belief in prayer as an important spiritual practice, they differ in their theological understanding, forms, patterns, language, frequency, and liturgical expressions of prayer. Christianity generally emphasises prayer as personal and communal communication with God through faith and, in particular, through the mediatory role of Jesus Christ. At the same time, Islam regards prayer as an essential act of worship and submission to Allah, expressed through both prescribed ritual prayers and personal supplications. These similarities and differences make prayer an important area for comparative religious study.

In Nigeria, where Christianity and Islam are the two most influential religious traditions, prayer plays a significant role in the spiritual, social, cultural, and even public life of millions of people. Churches and mosques provide important settings for individuals and communities to participate in organised prayer, while personal prayer remains a major aspect of daily religious devotion. The Nigerian religious environment, therefore, provides a valuable context for examining how Christians and Muslims understand and practise prayer, as well as the ways prayer influences moral values, personal identity, community relationships, and responses to social challenges. A comparative analysis of the concept of prayer in Christianity and Islam in Nigeria is therefore essential for promoting a deeper understanding of both traditions, identifying areas of similarity and difference, and encouraging religious tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence within the country's pluralistic society.

The study seeks to explore the concepts and theological understandings of prayer in Christianity and Islam, with particular attention to the beliefs and religious foundations that shape prayer in both traditions. It also aims to compare the forms, purposes, practices, and significance of prayer among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify the major similarities and differences between the concepts and practices of prayer in Christianity and Islam, and to examine their implications for religious understanding, tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence among adherents of the two religions in Nigeria.

Concepts and Theological Understandings of Prayer in Christianity and Islam

Prayer is a central spiritual practice in both Christianity and Islam and represents one of the principal ways through which believers relate to God. In both traditions, prayer expresses faith,

dependence, worship, gratitude, repentance, and the desire for divine guidance. However, Christianity and Islam understand and practise prayer within distinct theological frameworks. These differences arise from their respective understandings of God, revelation, humanity, salvation, worship, and the relationship between the divine and human beings. A comparative study of prayer, therefore, requires attention not only to the outward forms of prayer but also to the theological assumptions that give prayer its meaning and purpose. Recent comparative scholarship continues to emphasise that, despite significant theological differences, prayer remains an important expression of spirituality and ethical formation in both Christianity and Islam (Pramenković & Pramenković, 2025).

The Concept and Theological Understanding of Prayer in Christianity

In Christianity, prayer is fundamentally understood as communication and communion between God and human beings. It involves speaking to God through adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, and intercession, while also cultivating an attitude of listening and submission to God's will. Christian prayer is rooted in the biblical understanding that God is personal, relational, and responsive to those who seek Him. The Old and New Testaments contain numerous examples of individuals and communities praying to God in times of worship, crisis, repentance, thanksgiving, and dependence. Thus, prayer is not merely the recitation of religious words but an expression of an ongoing relationship between the believer and God.

The theological foundation of Christian prayer is closely connected with the doctrine of the Trinity. Christians pray to God as Father and understand that they have access to God through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus occupies a central place in Christian theology of prayer because He is regarded as the mediator through whom believers approach God. Consequently, Christian prayer is often offered in the name of Jesus Christ, reflecting the Christian belief that Christ reconciles humanity with God. Contemporary theological scholarship continues to describe prayer as a relational and formative practice through which believers enter into a deeper relationship with God and are increasingly conformed to Christ (Rowlands, 2023).

Prayer in Christianity also has an important Christological dimension because Jesus Himself is presented in the New Testament as a model of prayer. The Gospels portray Jesus praying regularly, seeking communion with the Father, giving thanks, interceding for others, and submitting to the divine will. The Lord's Prayer is particularly important because it provides a model for Christian prayer, incorporating worship, submission to God's kingdom and will, petition for daily needs, forgiveness, and protection from evil. Christian prayer, therefore, combines personal devotion with concern for the wider community and the fulfilment of God's purposes.

Furthermore, Christian theology understands prayer as an expression of faith and spiritual transformation. Prayer is not simply a means of obtaining material or personal benefits but a discipline through which believers develop spiritual maturity and align their desires with God's purposes. Ahn's recent study of the theology of prayer emphasises prayer as a practical expression of faith involving gratitude, discernment, petition, and participation in a covenantal relationship with God through Christ (Ahn, 2025). Similarly, contemporary Christian theology increasingly

presents prayer as a formative practice that shapes the believer's character, understanding of Scripture, and relationship with God (Rowlands, 2023).

Christian prayer may be individual or corporate, formal or spontaneous, liturgical or informal. Christians pray privately in their homes and publicly in churches, while many Christian traditions also observe structured forms of prayer. The purposes of prayer include adoration, confession of sin, thanksgiving, petition, intercession, spiritual guidance, healing, and the strengthening of faith. Although Christians believe that God can answer prayer, contemporary theological reflection also cautions against understanding prayer merely as a mechanism for obtaining desired outcomes. Prayer involves humility, discernment, and openness to God's will, and it may require believers to critically examine the relationship between prayer, personal desires, and ethical responsibility (Cocksworth, 2023).

The Concept and Theological Understanding of Prayer in Islam

Prayer is the heart and centre of Islam as well as the expression that put a Muslim in relation with Allah in the simplest and most direct ways. Islamic prayers require the fulfilment of nine core conditions of being a Muslim; sanity, discernment, purification from impurity, removal of filth, covering of sensitive part of the body, observing the prayer time, facing the direction of the Kabbah in Makkah (facing the Qiblah) and intention (Niyyah) forming sincere intention.

Islamic prayers consist of the following;

1. The Five Daily Compulsory Prayers

The morning prayer (SALAT AL-SUBH), the noon prayer (SALAT AL-ZUBRI) the late afternoon prayer (SALAT-AL-AST). The sunset prayer (SALAT AL-MAGHRIB) and the night prayer (SALAT AL-ISHA), each of these prayers observe different RAKAHs (methods)

2. The Friday Prayer (Salat al-Jumu'ah)

This prayer is strongly rooted in the Al-Qur'an. It states "*O you who believe! When the call is given for prayer on Friday, then hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave business; that is better for you if you know. And when the prayers come to an end, then disperse in the land and seek the grace of Allah (Qur'an 62:9-10)*". The Friday prayer is compulsory only for a male Muslim but optional for female Muslim and it is carried out mostly in the Mosque even though Islam regard every part of the globe as sacred because God is the creator and sustaineth. It is not also compulsory for the sick, those on a journey, children, the aged, the blind, the slave, the oppressed and those who react to negative condition (Hot or Cold Weather)

3. The Two ID Prayers (Salat Al-Idayn)

These are important prayers of Id al-Fitr (Festival of Breaking the Fast) and Id al-Adha (the Feast of Sacrifice) or (Festival of Sacrifice). While the Id Al-Fitr take place at the end of the compulsory Ramadan Fast, the Id al-Adha is celebrated on the 10th of Dhul-hajji (Arabic) (Month of the Pilgrimage) during the pilgrimage in Mecca. Muslims celebrate these prayers in the best dresses in a festive mood.

4. The Prayer for the Dead (Salat al-Janazah)

This prayer is said after the corpse of a Muslim old, young and even a baby is given a ritual bath (Ghusl)

In Islam, prayer occupies a foundational position in the believer's relationship with Allah. Prayer is understood primarily as an act of worship, obedience, remembrance, and submission to Allah. The Islamic understanding of prayer reflects the central theological principle of *tawhid*, which affirms the absolute oneness and sovereignty of Allah. Muslims direct worship and prayer to Allah alone, recognising Him as the Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and ultimate authority over all creation. Prayer, therefore, expresses the believer's recognition of human dependence upon Allah and the obligation to live in obedience to His revealed will.

Islam distinguishes between several forms of prayer, particularly *salat* and *du'a*. *Salat* refers to the prescribed ritual prayer that practising Muslims perform at designated times each day. It is one of the fundamental pillars of Islam and involves specific bodily movements, recitations, and conditions of ritual preparation. *Du'a*, on the other hand, refers to personal supplication through which Muslims call upon Allah, seek forgiveness, request guidance, express gratitude, and present their needs. Scholarly studies of Islamic prayer emphasise that *salat* and *du'a* represent different yet complementary dimensions of Islamic spirituality: one is structured and ritualised, while the other offers a more direct and personal form of supplication (Pramenković & Pramenković, 2025).

The theological understanding of prayer in Islam is also closely connected with submission to the will of Allah. The term *Islam* itself is associated with submission and surrender to God, and prayer represents a practical expression of this religious commitment. During *salat*, the physical movements of standing, bowing, and prostration symbolically and spiritually express humility and complete submission before Allah. Thus, Islamic prayer involves both verbal and physical dimensions of worship. It engages the whole person and regularly reminds the believer of Allah's sovereignty and human beings' moral responsibility.

Unlike Christianity, Islamic theology does not accept the Christian doctrine of Christ as mediator between humanity and God. Muslims believe that individuals can call directly upon Allah without requiring a divine-human mediator. This direct relationship is an important theological characteristic of Islamic prayer. However, direct access to Allah does not imply the absence of structure or discipline. Rather, Islamic prayer is guided by the Qur'an, the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad, and the wider Islamic religious tradition. The prescribed nature of *salat*, therefore, demonstrates the importance of obedience and religious discipline in Islamic worship.

Prayer in Islam also has strong communal and ethical dimensions. The regular performance of *salat* connects personal devotion with membership in the wider Muslim community, or *ummah*. Congregational prayer encourages equality, unity, discipline, and collective worship, as worshippers stand together before Allah irrespective of social status. Recent comparative studies have similarly noted that Islamic and Christian traditions both recognise prayer as an important means of strengthening spirituality and encouraging ethical and moral behaviour, despite their differences in theological structures and religious practices (Pramenković & Pramenković, 2025).

Comparative Theological Perspective

The concepts of prayer in Christianity and Islam reveal both significant similarities and fundamental theological differences. Both religions affirm the existence of one supreme God and regard prayer as an essential means through which believers worship, seek divine assistance,

express gratitude, confess human weakness, and develop spiritual discipline. Both traditions also recognise the individual and communal dimensions of prayer and understand it as relevant to moral and spiritual formation. Comparative theological scholarship suggests that careful engagement with these similarities and differences can foster deeper understanding between Christians and Muslims while respecting the distinctive truth claims of both traditions (Hadden, 2025).

The major differences, however, are rooted in the distinct theological understandings of God and the divine-human relationship. Christianity understands prayer within Trinitarian and Christological theology, emphasising access to God through Jesus Christ and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Islam understands prayer within the framework of *tawhid*, emphasising direct worship of and submission to the one Allah. Christianity generally permits considerable diversity in the form and frequency of personal prayer. However, liturgical traditions maintain established patterns, whereas Islam prescribes *salat* at specific times and in accordance with established ritual requirements. These theological distinctions should not be ignored or minimised in comparative study because they shape the meaning, purpose, language, and practice of prayer in both traditions. Recent studies of Christian-Muslim theological engagement likewise stress the importance of acknowledging genuine theological differences while pursuing respectful and informed dialogue (Hewer, 2024; Hadden, 2025).

In the Nigerian context, these similarities and differences are particularly important because Christianity and Islam are the country's two most influential religious traditions. Prayer occupies a visible place in churches, mosques, homes, educational institutions, and public life. A proper theological understanding of how Christians and Muslims conceptualise prayer can therefore promote religious literacy and reduce misunderstanding. Rather than treating differences in prayer as automatic grounds for hostility, comparative study can enable adherents of both religions to appreciate the sincerity with which believers seek God while maintaining the distinctive theological convictions of their respective traditions.

Comparison of the Forms, Purposes, Practices, and Significance of Prayer among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria

Prayer occupies a central position in both Christianity and Islam and constitutes one of the most visible expressions of religious life in Nigeria. With Christianity and Islam representing the two dominant religious traditions in the country, prayer influences personal spirituality, family life, worship, moral behaviour, community relationships, and even public affairs. Recent scholarship also shows that prayer remains deeply embedded in Nigerian social and cultural life, functioning not only as a means of communication with God but also as an expression of identity, hope, resilience, and communal solidarity (Ossai, 2024; Ajedokun, 2025).

1. Forms of Prayer

In Christianity, prayer takes several forms, including adoration, worship, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, intercession, petition, lamentation, and spiritual warfare. Christians may pray privately or publicly, silently or aloud, spontaneously or through established liturgical forms. Nigerian Christians, particularly within Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions, frequently engage in expressive forms of prayer, including singing, clapping, fasting, declarations, vigils, and intensive

intercession. Mainline churches may combine spontaneous prayers with written prayers, liturgical responses, and congregational prayers. Recent studies of Nigerian Christian prayer also note that contemporary practices are often strongly shaped by social expectations, economic pressures, cultural influences, and the search for healing, prosperity, and divine intervention (Ajedokun, 2025).

In Islam, the major forms of prayer include *Ṣalāh*, the prescribed ritual prayers performed five times daily, and *du‘ā’*, which consists of personal supplication and invocation to Allah. Other forms include voluntary prayers such as *Tahajjud* and congregational prayers, especially the Friday *Jumu‘ah* prayer. Islamic prayer is generally characterised by a more clearly prescribed ritual structure involving specific times, bodily movements, Qur'anic recitations, orientation toward the *Qiblah*, and rules concerning ritual purity. Thus, while Christian prayer generally allows greater variation in form and expression, Islamic ritual prayer is more formally regulated. Nevertheless, both traditions recognise personal and spontaneous expressions of dependence on God. Comparative scholarship identifies this distinction between obligatory and voluntary, formal and informal, and individual and collective prayer as an important point of comparison between Christianity and Islam (Pramenković & Pramenković, 2025).

2. Purposes of Prayer

The purposes of prayer in Christianity include communion with God, worship, confession of sin, thanksgiving, spiritual growth, guidance, healing, protection, and intercession for others. Christians pray to express dependence upon God and to seek divine assistance in both personal and communal circumstances. Prayer is also associated with discipleship and the cultivation of a closer relationship with God. In Nigeria, Christians frequently pray concerning family challenges, health, employment, education, security, national development, and political leadership. Amaole (2025), for example, demonstrates that prayer is increasingly discussed in relation to civic responsibility and democratic development in Nigeria.

Similarly, prayer in Islam serves the purposes of worship, submission, remembrance of Allah, spiritual discipline, forgiveness, guidance, protection, and supplication for personal and communal needs. *Ṣalāh* particularly reinforces the Muslim's submission to Allah and provides a regular pattern of spiritual discipline throughout the day. *Du‘ā’* enables Muslims to present personal needs and concerns directly to Allah. Therefore, both Christians and Muslims pray for divine guidance and assistance, although their theological understanding of access to God and the nature of worship differ.

3. Practices of Prayer

Christian prayer practices in Nigeria are highly diverse. Individual Christians may pray privately at home, while churches organise corporate prayer meetings, prayer conferences, revival programmes, fasting and prayer sessions, all-night vigils, intercessory meetings, and special prayers for healing or national concerns. Prayer may be accompanied by music, preaching, Scripture reading, laying on of hands, fasting, and other devotional activities. Contemporary Nigerian Christianity, particularly Pentecostalism, has contributed to highly expressive and emotionally intensive prayer practices. Recent studies of African religious prayer further demonstrate that prayer can function as a public

and performative activity through which emotions, expectations, conflicts, and hopes are expressed collectively.

Muslim prayer practices are structured around the daily observance of Ṣalāh, requiring Muslims to pray at designated times. The practice normally involves ritual purification, facing the Ka'bah, standing, bowing, prostrating, and reciting prescribed Qur'anic passages and prayers. Muslims may pray individually, but congregational prayer is highly encouraged, particularly during Friday worship. Additional practices include fasting and intensified prayer during Ramadan, night prayers, and personal supplications for divine mercy and assistance.

The major difference, therefore, is that Islam places greater emphasis on the prescribed regularity of Ṣalāh. In contrast, Christianity generally offers greater diversity and flexibility in the methods, timing, language, and physical expressions of prayer. Both traditions, however, combine individual devotion with communal worship.

4. Significance of Prayer

Prayer is significant in Christianity because it strengthens believers' relationship with God and supports spiritual formation. It provides opportunities for Christians to express gratitude, confess weaknesses, seek divine direction, and intercede for others. Prayer also contributes to emotional resilience, hope, and communal solidarity. In the Nigerian context, prayer often serves as a response to insecurity, economic difficulties, illness, family problems, and national uncertainty. Recent research suggests that prayer remains an important component of public religious expression and social engagement in Nigeria.

In Islam, prayer is equally significant because it represents one of the principal means through which Muslims demonstrate obedience and submission to Allah. The five daily prayers organise the believer's day around regular remembrance of God and promote spiritual discipline and communal identity. Congregational prayer also strengthens social relationships among Muslims by bringing believers together in shared worship.

At the wider societal level, prayer contributes significantly to religious identity among both Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. It reinforces moral values, provides psychological and spiritual comfort, and creates communities of mutual support. However, because Nigeria's religious environment is sometimes characterised by competition and misunderstanding, differences in prayer practices may also become markers of religious identity. Recent research on Christian-Muslim relations emphasises the importance of studying areas of convergence and peaceful interaction between the two communities, especially in a country where both religious traditions have substantial influence (Akande & Olawale, 2023; Ossai, 2024).

Major Similarities and Differences between the Concepts and Practices of Prayer in Christianity and Islam

Prayer occupies a central place in both Christianity and Islam. Although the two religions differ in their theological understanding, forms, and ritual requirements, both regard prayer as an essential means of relating to God and developing spiritual and moral life. Recent comparative studies

particularly distinguish among formal and informal, obligatory and voluntary and individual and collective dimensions of prayer in both traditions.

A. Major Similarities

1. Prayer is a means of relating to God

Both Christians and Muslims understand prayer as an important means through which believers communicate with and express devotion to God. Prayer enables worshippers to acknowledge divine greatness, express dependence, and seek spiritual closeness. Although Christianity and Islam differ in their theological understanding of God and mediation, prayer remains central to the relationship between the believer and the divine.

2. Prayer involves worship and adoration

In both traditions, prayer is an act of worship. Christians worship God through praise, thanksgiving, and adoration, while Muslims worship Allah through *Ṣalāh*, remembrance (*dhikr*), and other devotional expressions. Thus, prayer is not limited to requesting material or personal benefits but also involves recognising God's greatness and authority.

3. Prayer includes thanksgiving and supplication

Christians and Muslims both pray to express gratitude for divine blessings and to present their personal and communal needs. Prayer may involve requests for forgiveness, guidance, protection, healing, provision, and peace. This shared emphasis demonstrates that prayer serves both devotional and practical spiritual purposes.

4. Both traditions encourage personal and communal prayer

Prayer may be performed individually or collectively in Christianity and Islam. Christians pray privately and in congregational worship, while Muslims pray individually and collectively, especially during Friday prayers. Consequently, prayer strengthens both personal spirituality and community identity.

5. Prayer contributes to moral and spiritual formation

Both religions associate prayer with spiritual discipline and moral development. Regular prayer is expected to influence believers' attitudes, conduct, self-control, and relationships with others. Recent comparative research identifies prayer as an important means of strengthening spirituality, ethical consciousness, and community engagement.

6. Prayer provides comfort and hope during difficulties

Both Christians and Muslims turn to prayer during periods of illness, insecurity, bereavement, economic hardship, and personal uncertainty. Prayer provides believers with hope, emotional strength, and confidence in divine assistance. In Nigeria, where religion remains highly influential in social life, prayer continues to function as an important source of resilience and communal support.

B. Major Differences

1. Difference in the theological understanding of access to God

One major difference concerns the theological framework through which prayer is understood. Christians commonly pray to God in the name of Jesus Christ, based on the Christian understanding of Christ's mediating role. Muslims pray directly to Allah and reject the idea of Jesus as a divine mediator. Therefore, although both traditions affirm direct dependence upon God, their theological understanding of mediation differs significantly.

2. Difference between obligatory and flexible prayer

Islam places strong emphasis on the obligatory performance of *Ṣalāh* at prescribed times each day. The five daily prayers constitute a central religious obligation and follow an established pattern. Christian prayer, however, generally provides greater flexibility regarding frequency, timing, and form. Christians are encouraged to pray regularly, but most Christian traditions do not impose a universal ritual requirement equivalent to the five daily *Ṣalāh*. Recent global research also shows the continuing importance of five daily *Ṣalāh* among Muslims, including Muslims in Nigeria.

3. Difference in ritual structure

Islamic *Ṣalāh* follows a carefully prescribed ritual structure involving preparation, specific Qur'anic recitations, standing, bowing, and prostration. Christian prayer, by contrast, may be spontaneous, written, liturgical, silent, sung, or spoken. Christian denominations vary considerably in their prayer traditions. Therefore, Islamic ritual prayer is generally more standardised, whereas Christian prayer exhibits greater diversity of expression.

4. Difference in prescribed prayer times

Muslims observe *Ṣalāh* at specific times during the day. These established times create a regular rhythm of worship and remembrance. Christian prayer may also follow established daily schedules, particularly within Catholic, Orthodox, and liturgical traditions, but Christians generally have greater flexibility in when to offer private and spontaneous prayers.

5. Difference in physical posture and ritual purity

Islamic prayer normally requires specific bodily postures and ritual preparation, including prescribed forms of purification before *Ṣalāh*. Christians may pray while standing, kneeling, sitting, raising their hands, or in other postures, depending on denominational and cultural traditions. Although bodily expressions are important in Christianity, they are generally less universally prescribed than the movements associated with Islamic *Ṣalāh*.

6. Difference in orientation and sacred direction

Muslims performing *Ṣalāh* face the *Qiblah*, the direction of the Ka'bah in Makkah. This orientation is an important feature of Islamic ritual prayer. Christian prayer generally does not require believers to face a particular geographic direction, although some Christian traditions attach symbolic importance to specific sacred spaces or directions.

7. Difference in language and spontaneity

Islamic ritual prayer involves established Arabic recitations, particularly Qur'anic passages, although personal *du'ā'* may be offered in other languages. Christian prayer is commonly offered in the believer's local language and may be highly spontaneous. In Nigeria, for example, Christian prayer practices may involve extensive verbal expression, singing, declarations, and emotionally

expressive forms of worship. Recent research notes that contemporary Nigerian Christian prayer is shaped by biblical traditions as well as local social, economic, and emotional realities.

8. Difference in emphasis on intercession

Christian prayer often places substantial emphasis on intercession, in which believers pray for individuals, communities, nations, and social concerns. Muslims also pray for others through *du‘ā*, but Christian theology frequently connects intercessory prayer explicitly with the example and mediating role of Christ. Thus, both traditions pray for others, but their theological interpretation of intercession differs.

9. Difference in contemporary worship expression in Nigeria

Christian prayer in Nigeria, particularly within Pentecostal and Charismatic communities, may include prayer vigils, fasting, healing prayers, prophetic declarations, and highly expressive congregational prayer. Recent Nigerian research has also noted the influence of economic pressures, expectations of healing, miracles, and prosperity on some contemporary Christian prayer practices. Islamic prayer in Nigeria, while also shaped by local religious organisations and cultural settings, remains strongly anchored in the ritual requirements of *Ṣalāh*.

Implications for religious understanding in Nigeria

The similarities and differences between Christian and Islamic concepts and practices of prayer have important implications for interreligious relations in Nigeria. A proper understanding of both the common elements and distinctive theological features of prayer can reduce prejudice, discourage religious stereotyping, and promote constructive relationships between Christians and Muslims. Recent Nigerian scholarship emphasises that sustainable coexistence requires both recognition of common values and honest acknowledgement of genuine theological differences (Bakare, 2025; Ojedokun, 2026; Ugwuishi, 2026).

1. Promoting Accurate Religious Understanding

Understanding the concepts and practices of prayer in both religions can reduce ignorance and misunderstanding. Christians and Muslims may recognise that, despite theological differences, both traditions consider prayer an important expression of devotion, dependence on God, moral responsibility, and spiritual discipline. Such knowledge discourages the tendency to misinterpret the practices of the other religion. For example, Christians can better understand the discipline and spiritual significance attached to the five daily *Ṣalāh*. At the same time, Muslims can better appreciate the diversity of Christian prayer, including spontaneous prayer, intercession, thanksgiving, and liturgical worship. Garba and Sarki (2026) argue that a deeper understanding of both shared religious foundations and genuine doctrinal differences provides an important basis for constructive Christian-Muslim engagement in Nigeria.

Implication: Religious education, theological institutions, churches, mosques, and schools should provide accurate information about the beliefs and practices of other religious communities.

2. Encouraging Religious Tolerance

Recognising differences in prayer practices encourages adherents of both religions to understand that religious differences do not necessarily constitute threats. The fact that Christians may pray in

spontaneous, diverse forms while Muslims observe structured and prescribed forms of *Ṣalāh* should be understood as expressions of different religious traditions rather than reasons for hostility.

Ojedokun (2026), in examining emerging religious tensions in Yoruba-speaking communities, including Ogbomoso, emphasises the importance of combining indigenous mechanisms of reconciliation and kinship solidarity with interfaith dialogue. Such approaches can transform religious tension into tolerance and constructive coexistence.

Implication: Tolerance requires more than merely allowing others to practise their religion; it entails accepting their right to hold and practise beliefs different from one's own, free from intimidation, discrimination, or violence.

3. Strengthening Mutual Respect for Religious Practices

A comparative understanding of prayer promotes respect for sacred practices and religious symbols. Christians and Muslims can learn to respect one another's prayer times, places of worship, fasting practices, sacred expressions, and devotional commitments.

Mutual respect is particularly important in Nigeria, where Christians and Muslims often live, study, work, conduct business, and participate in community activities together. Bakare (2025) observes that interfaith coexistence and historical accommodation remain important features of Nigerian society, particularly where communities have developed traditions of mutual recognition and shared participation in social life.

Implication: Respect for religious practices should be demonstrated in practice by avoiding ridicule, disruption of worship, derogatory language, and negative stereotypes about the prayer practices of other religious communities.

4. Providing a Foundation for Interfaith Dialogue

The similarities between Christian and Muslim prayer can provide useful entry points for dialogue. Both traditions emphasise worship, dependence upon God, moral responsibility, forgiveness, guidance, peace, and concern for human welfare. These shared concerns can form the basis for constructive conversations without requiring either group to abandon its distinctive theological convictions.

Ugwuishi (2026) argues that sustainable Christian-Muslim coexistence requires dialogue that moves beyond official documents into practical realities at the levels of law and politics, peace-building institutions, and everyday social life.

Implication: Churches, mosques, theological schools, universities, and community organisations should establish regular forums where Christians and Muslims can discuss their beliefs honestly, clarify misconceptions, and identify areas for cooperation.

5. Reducing Religious Prejudice and Stereotyping

Ignorance about another religion frequently contributes to suspicion and stereotyping. When adherents understand why Muslims pray at prescribed times or why Christians may pray spontaneously, loudly, silently, or collectively, they are less likely to interpret unfamiliar religious practices negatively.

Recent research by Sunday, Ibi, and Kwanchi (2025) identifies negative ethical, political, and theological perceptions between Christians and Muslims as significant obstacles to harmonious interreligious coexistence in Nigeria.

Implication: Religious leaders and educators should actively correct false information and discourage generalisations that associate the actions of particular individuals or extremist groups with entire Christian or Muslim communities.

6. Encouraging Peaceful Cooperation on Common Social Problems

The shared emphasis on prayer for peace, justice, protection, healing, and community welfare can encourage Christians and Muslims to cooperate in addressing Nigeria's social challenges. Rather than relating only through theological debate, religious communities can work together on issues such as poverty, insecurity, education, humanitarian assistance, youth development, and conflict prevention.

Ossai's study of peaceful Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria demonstrates that positive interfaith encounters have developed through practical cooperation, including conflict prevention, economic relationships, and responses to public and personal crises.

Implication: Interreligious peace is strengthened when Christians and Muslims engage in joint community-development projects and humanitarian activities.

7. Promoting Grassroots Peacebuilding

Understanding religious similarities and differences should not remain only at the academic or leadership level. It must influence relationships within families, neighbourhoods, markets, schools, workplaces, and local communities.

Mda-Asira, Tamunopekerebia, and Ilode (2026) identify grassroots dialogue, interfaith education, and collaboration among religious leaders, civil society, and government as important instruments for promoting tolerance and social harmony in Nigeria.

Implication: Local communities should develop practical peacebuilding mechanisms, including neighbourhood dialogue, joint youth programmes, mediation structures, and cooperative community activities involving both Christians and Muslims.

8. Discouraging the Political Manipulation of Religion

A better understanding of religious beliefs can help citizens distinguish genuine theological differences from conflicts generated by political interests, competition for power, ethnicity, land, or economic resources. Religious identity is sometimes used to intensify conflicts that have significant political or socio-economic causes.

Recent research on Christian-Muslim conflict management in Nigeria similarly indicates that conflicts involving land, insecurity, political interests, and historical grievances may become more severe when interpreted primarily through religious identity.

Implication: Religious leaders should discourage politicians and other actors from exploiting Christian-Muslim differences to mobilise hostility or gain political advantage.

9. Developing Responsible Religious Leadership

The comparison of prayer traditions reminds religious leaders that both Christianity and Islam attach importance to moral conduct, peace, compassion, and accountability before God. Religious leaders, therefore, have a responsibility to teach their followers in ways that promote peace rather than hostility. The 2026 Abuja interfaith initiatives similarly emphasised religious diversity, mutual understanding, rejection of extremism, and the responsibility of religious leaders to prevent religion from being used to justify violence.

Implication: Christian pastors and Muslim clerics should avoid inflammatory preaching and should use sermons, teaching, and public communication to promote responsible attitudes toward members of other religions.

10. Building Sustainable Peaceful Coexistence

Ultimately, understanding the similarities and differences between Christian and Muslim prayer contributes to sustainable, peaceful coexistence. Peaceful coexistence does not require theological agreement or the removal of religious differences. Rather, it requires the ability to maintain one's religious convictions while recognising the dignity and religious freedom of others. Recent scholarship emphasises that sustainable coexistence must operate at multiple levels: public institutions, peacebuilding structures, religious organisations, and everyday relationships. Ugwuishi (2026) particularly stresses the importance of translating interfaith principles from written declarations into practical social realities.

Implication: Christians and Muslims in Nigeria should pursue a model of coexistence grounded in religious freedom, mutual understanding, respect for differences, dialogue, justice, and cooperation for the common good.

Conclusion

Prayer is central to both Christianity and Islam as a means of worship, communication with God, spiritual growth, guidance, forgiveness, and the presentation of personal and communal needs. While both religions share important similarities, they differ in their theological foundations and practices. Christianity generally understands prayer as communication with God, particularly through faith and the mediatory role of Jesus Christ. In contrast, Islam emphasises prayer as worship, submission, and remembrance of Allah through prescribed *Ṣalāh* and personal *duʿāʾ*.

In Nigeria, where Christianity and Islam are the dominant religions, understanding these similarities and differences is important for improving interreligious relations. The study concludes that religious differences in prayer should not become sources of prejudice or conflict but should be approached with knowledge, dialogue, tolerance, and mutual respect. Churches, mosques, educational institutions, religious leaders, and government agencies should promote accurate religious understanding and constructive interfaith engagement. Ultimately, peaceful coexistence does not require Christians and Muslims to abandon their distinctive beliefs; rather, it requires respect for religious freedom and human dignity, and dialogue and cooperation for the common good.

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