

CULTIVATING SHALOM–SALAAM: Christian–Muslim Peacebuilding and Shared Ethical Values in Mindanao

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ABSTRACT

The conflict in the Southern Philippines continues to challenge reconciliation and sustainable peace. While earlier studies have affirmed the role of religious communities in justice and peacebuilding, a gap remains in the systematic articulation of shared theological and cultural values as foundations for Christian–Muslim collaboration. This study addresses that gap by asking: (1) What shared values from Christianity and Islam can help build peace? and (2) How can these values be mobilized in cooperative practices? Positioned within liberation theology and Islamic liberation theology, the research employs Boff’s (1987) framework of socioanalytical, hermeneutical, and practical mediation to analyze biblical and Qur’anic themes alongside Philippine cultural ethics. Findings highlight compassion (maayong buot), justice (katadlongan), and peace (katawhayan) as common foundations for healing (paghilom) and cooperation (bayanihan). Core values such as kapwa (shared humanity), paggalang (respect), pagtuo (faith), and pagpasaylo (forgiveness) demonstrate the potential for interreligious solidarity. The study contributes to peacebuilding scholarship by proposing a contextual theological framework that integrates religious traditions and Philippine cultural ethics, offering a covenant of Shalom–Salaam as a pathway toward reconciliation and social transformation in Mindanao.

Keywords: Shalom–Salaam; Interreligious Peacebuilding; Liberation Theology; Islamic Liberation Theology; Interreligious Ethics

INTRODUCTION

The decades-long armed conflict in the Southern Philippines—described by Tan (2003) as Southeast Asia’s most persistent—has claimed over 120,000 lives and displaced millions (South China Morning Post, 2026). It has also

damaged the country's global image, portraying the Philippines as unstable and violent. Rooted in the Moro people's struggle for autonomy since Spanish and American colonial rule, the conflict continues due to neglect, discrimination, and military offensives (Canoy, 1987), while structural injustices and the marginalization of Muslim Filipinos and Indigenous peoples further sustain the violence (Maboloc, 2025). The Moro conflict is not merely a religious war but a struggle for autonomy shaped by colonial legacies and systemic marginalization. Spanish and American colonization disrupted Moro sovereignty, while contemporary challenges such as poverty, clan rivalries, and weak governance continue to hinder durable peace.

Religion has often been instrumentalized as a tool of colonial and political control, from Spanish rule to modern church–state entanglements (Palatino, 2025). Christianity and Islam have at times deepened divides in Mindanao. Yet, both traditions also contain profound resources for peace—compassion, justice, forgiveness, cooperation, respect, and dignity rooted in the Bible and Qur'an. In this study, the term *Christianity* refers inclusively to both Catholic and Protestant traditions. This distinction is important in the Philippine context, where Catholicism has been historically dominant, but Protestant churches likewise play significant roles in interreligious peacebuilding. Clarifying this inclusivity responds to the historical shift noted by scholars: while “Christianity” in its earliest centuries referred simply to followers of Christ, later divisions between Catholic and Protestant traditions require careful usage. This study therefore affirms that both Catholic and Protestant perspectives are included in the covenant of Shalom–Salaam. Likewise, while *Shalom* is often associated with Protestant usage, its biblical roots extend across Christian traditions, including Catholic theology, where it signifies peace as wholeness and justice. Paired with *Salaam*, the framework underscores the convergence of Christian and Islamic values in cultivating reconciliation. Earlier studies, such as Narciso (2012), affirmed the role of religious communities in reconciliation and sustainable peace, and this study builds on that trajectory by highlighting shared theological and cultural values as foundations for interreligious solidarity in Mindanao.

More recent works highlight how interreligious dialogue and shared values can contribute to peacebuilding, but there remains a gap in the systematic articulation of these values within a contextual theological framework that integrates Philippine cultural ethics (Canete & del Castillo, 2022; Corpuz, 2025). Canete and del Castillo (2022) demonstrate how the Philippine value of *pakikipagkapwa* (fellowship) fosters dialogue, social cohesion, and resilience, even amid crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Complementing this,

Corpuz (2025) shows that religious-based movements in Mindanao act as mediators, cultivating mutual understanding, community-led initiatives, and collaboration among religious groups, policymakers, and civil society. Together, these studies suggest that integrating Philippine cultural values and ethics with interreligious theological frameworks can provide a transformative foundation for reconciliation and sustainable peace in Mindanao.

This study addresses that gap by explicitly asking two guiding questions: (1) What shared values from Christianity and Islam can help build peace in Mindanao? and (2) How can these values be mobilized in cooperative practices? In the context of liberation theology, Islamic liberation theology, and Boff's (1987) framework of socio-analytical, hermeneutical, and practical mediation, the study analyzes biblical and Qur'anic themes alongside Philippine cultural values. It highlights the ethical foundations for Christian-Muslim collaboration, including *kapwa/kaupod* (shared humanity), *paggalang/pagtahod* (respect), *pakikipagkapwa-tao/kagandahang loob* (shared humanity/compassion), *bayanihan/dagyaw* (cooperation), *pananampalataya/pagtu* (faith), *pagpapatawad/pagpasaylo* (forgiveness), and *kapayapaan/katawhayan/salaam* (peace). By situating these values within the broader literature on interreligious peacebuilding, the study contributes to ongoing scholarship by proposing a covenant of Shalom-Salaam as a contextual theological paradigm for reconciliation and social transformation in Mindanao. These guiding questions frame the analysis and ensure that findings are directly connected to both theological reflection and practical peacebuilding. Within interreligious dialogue and Philippine cultural ethics, this study supports the ongoing debates on whether theological values can be systematically mobilized for reconciliation, filling a gap noted by Canete & del Castillo (2022) and Corpuz (2025). This positioning ensures that the covenant of Shalom-Salaam is not only a contextual theological proposal but also a scholarly response to current questions in interreligious peacebuilding.

While Narciso (2012) affirmed the role of religious communities in peacebuilding, this study advances the scholarship by systematically articulating shared theological and Philippine cultural values within a contextual framework. Unlike earlier works that focused primarily on dialogue or institutional roles, this research integrates liberation theology, Islamic liberation theology, and Philippine ethics and values into a covenant of Shalom-Salaam, offering both theoretical clarity and practical pathways for reconciliation. This article contributes to ongoing debates in interreligious peacebuilding by offering a contextual theological framework rooted in Philippine cultural ethics and inclusive of both Catholic and Protestant traditions.

The following sections examine (1) Interreligious peacebuilding, (2) Historical roots and contemporary dynamics of conflict in Mindanao, (3) Christianity and Islam as partners in peacebuilding, (4) Limitations and gaps in religious peacebuilding, (5) Theological perspectives on liberation and peace, and (6) Shared values, cultural ethics, and pathways for peace, before concluding with recommendations for embedding Shalom–Salaam in practice.

INTERRELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING

Recent interreligious initiatives, such as the revitalized Mindanao Religious Leaders Conference (MiRLeC) in Cotabato, demonstrate that religion—when reclaimed through liberation theology and grassroots action—can be a force for reconciliation. As the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (2025) reported, the Faith and Peace in Action dialogue convened Christian bishops, Muslim ulama, Indigenous leaders, and civic actors to advance peaceful, inclusive, and valuesdriven participation in the first Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) parliamentary elections. This gathering affirmed that peace based on justice is an obligation, highlighting the growing potential of religionbased unity to counter electoral violence and systemic injustice. The dialogue underscored the importance of moral leadership (*amanah*), truth, and accountability in democratic transition, with leaders committing to nonviolence, dignity, and valuesbased voter education. Philippine cultural values such as *kagandahang loob* (inner goodness), *kapwa* (shared humanity), *bayanihan* (communal cooperation), and *paggalang* (respect) enrich this convergence, offering a common language of healing and hope. Christianity and Islam, therefore, need not be rivals but partners in building lasting peace, as interreligious solidarity and civic collaboration together chart a path toward reconciliation, integrity, and a participatory future for Mindanao.

This trajectory builds on earlier initiatives such as the BishopUlama Conference (BUC) and the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP). The BUC has long convened bishops and ulama to mediate clan disputes and promote reconciliation. At the same time, PEPP represents a coalition of Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical churches committed to peace advocacy and dialogue in the Philippines. In September 2025, PEPP organized the Day of Prayer for Just Peace at Saint Andrew’s Theological Seminary, where church leaders and peace advocates renewed their call for genuine peace talks and emphasized that peace is a presence of justice, dignity, and compassion in all lives (Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform, 2025). These efforts laid the groundwork for MiRLeC by demonstrating that interreligious cooperation

can move beyond symbolic gestures to address concrete issues such as electoral violence, corruption, clan feuds, and community displacement. The continuity of these initiatives shows that interfaith dialogue in Mindanao is not episodic but part of a sustained movement toward reconciliation, rooted in both theological conviction and civic responsibility.

Theologically, liberation theology and Islamic liberation theology provide the intellectual scaffolding for these initiatives. Gustavo Gutiérrez's (1988) emphasis on the preferential option for the poor resonates with Farid Esack's (1997) call for Qur'anic solidarity with the oppressed, creating a shared moral horizon for Christian and Muslim peacebuilders. Both traditions insist that faith must be lived out in justice, compassion, and resistance to structures of exclusion. When applied to Mindanao, these theological insights affirm that interreligious peacebuilding is not merely dialogue but a praxis of liberation—an embodied commitment to dismantling marginalization and cultivating solidarity across communities.

Practically, interreligious peacebuilding has produced tangible outcomes. Communitybased voter education programs, interfaith youth camps, and womenled reconciliation initiatives have translated shared values into lived practices. For example, *kapwa* and *bayanihan* have been mobilized in grassroots mediation efforts to resolve clan disputes (*rido*), while *paggalang* and *kagandahang loob* have informed civic education modules that promote respect and cooperation across religious divides. These initiatives demonstrate that shared values are not abstract ideals but practical resources for peacebuilding, capable of shaping democratic participation and community resilience.

Since the National Summit of Religious Leaders Toward a Culture of Peace (Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy, 2005) affirmed the importance of religious values in peacebuilding, scholars have asked whether Christianity and Islam can provide collaborative frameworks for bridging divides. This study builds on that issue by analyzing the historical roots of conflict, the sociopolitical and religious landscape, and the peacebuilding roles of major religionbased organizations. Drawing from liberation theology and Islamic liberation theology—especially the works of Gustavo Gutiérrez (1988) and Farid Esack (1997)—it identifies shared values that can anchor programs for justice and reconciliation. The convergence of biblical and Qur'anic ethics with Philippine cultural values highlights compassion (*maayong buot*), justice (*kataadlongan*), and peace (*katawhayan*) as common foundations for healing (*paghilom*) and cooperation (*bayanihan*). These values, when lived out, can drive economic renewal, social transformation, and a covenant of Shalom—

Salaam. The MiRLeC dialogues affirm that interfaith solidarity is not merely symbolic but can be institutionalized through collaborative programs that address exclusion and inequality (Rocamora, 2025; Lara & Schoofs, 2016).

In sum, these initiatives and theological insights show that shared values are not abstract ideals but practical resources for peacebuilding. When compassion, justice, and peace are articulated within both Christian and Muslim traditions and expressed through Philippine cultural ethics, they create a common moral ground for collaboration. This synthesis demonstrates that interreligious solidarity in Mindanao can move beyond dialogue into concrete practices—educational programs, civic participation, and community-led initiatives—that embody a covenant of Shalom–Salaam. Such a framework not only bridges divides but also offers a transformative pathway toward reconciliation and sustainable peace.

HISTORICAL ROOTS AND CONTEMPORARY DYNAMICS OF THE CONFLICT IN MINDANAO

The conflict in Mindanao is deeply complex, rooted in history, culture, and politics, and requires inclusive peacebuilding strategies. Centuries of colonization, poverty, and political injustice continue to shape the Moro people's struggle for dignity and self-determination (Tan, 2003; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2025). In response to marginalization and imposed state structures, the Bangsamoro people have sought autonomy, justice, and cultural recognition through democratic processes and moral governance (Bangsamoro Today, 2025). At the same time, unresolved grievances have fueled separatist tendencies and prolonged instability, prompting 57 Mindanao lawmakers to issue a manifesto affirming national unity and rejecting secessionist calls (Panti, 2024). Recent scholarship underscores that durable peace requires aligning economic, political, and security incentives with credible state commitments, while addressing grievances of self-determination, land dispossession, and exclusion through inclusive political and legal mechanisms (Navarro & Jacinto, 2025). These contrasting developments highlight the tension between movements for self-determination and efforts to preserve constitutional democracy, underscoring the need for inclusive governance that bridges divides and addresses inequality.

Tan (2010) notes that internal wars stem from deep-seated historical, cultural, and structural conditions, while immediate events act as triggers that ignite the violence. Applied to Mindanao, this framework shows how deep-rooted grievances and current injustices converge to sustain conflict. The Bangsamoro

struggle is rooted in centuries of political independence through sultanates and resistance against colonization, followed by marginalization within the Philippine state. Lingga's collected writings, *Advancing Bangsamoro Aspirations*, highlight this trajectory: from the Bangsamoro's historical sovereignty under sultanates, their resistance against Spanish and American colonization, and their opposition to annexation into the Philippine Republic, to their modern pursuit of self-determination through democratic and peaceful means. He underscores that while armed struggle emerged from the impossibility of regaining independence under the Philippine nation-state, civil society has consistently advocated for peaceful avenues such as referenda, inclusive governance, and international mediation. Lingga's analysis situates the Bangsamoro identity as both historically grounded and politically resilient, offering hope that genuine autonomy can be achieved through dialogue, structural reform, and justice-oriented peacebuilding (Lingga, 2025).

These historical preconditions intersect with precipitants such as Manila's recurring intervention in Bangsamoro governance. As Xu (2025) observes, the Marcos administration's unilateral reshuffling of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority reveals how autonomy remains conditional, subject to central patronage politics rather than genuine self-determination. The Philippine government has long upheld integration to preserve territorial integrity, while the Bangsamoro assert their right to self-determination. Constitutional changes may be necessary to meet these demands; however, Lingga (2025) emphasizes grassroots and community-based approaches to peacebuilding. Yet militarized responses have repeatedly displaced communities and entrenched corruption, benefiting powerful actors while deepening instability (UNDP, 2005; ABS-CBN News, 2025). The convergence of historical grievances, structural neglect, and Manila's hidden hand in Bangsamoro politics illustrates how both preconditions and precipitants perpetuate cycles of mistrust and violence, undermining the durability of peace agreements and the promise of genuine autonomy.

Internal divisions between nationalist and Islamist factions, such as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), have hindered unified action. Clan rivalries and elite competition further weaken cohesion, while land disputes, violent extremism, and *rido* (clan feuding) continue to destabilize Mindanao. Since 2021, conflict incidents in BARMM have resurged, driven by MILF fragmentation, radical splinter groups, and the persistence of armed clans, with electoral cycles intensifying violence. Recent findings by the Council for Climate and Conflict Action Asia (CCAA) confirm this trend, noting that clan feuds—now increasingly political

rather than land-based—remain the primary driver of violence, particularly in Lanao and Maguindanao. The CCAA's 2024 triennial report highlights how election periods sharply escalate conflict, with hundreds of violent incidents recorded in 2022 and 2023, raising fears of unrest in parliamentary polls. Sidney Jones of the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict further warns that killings linked to identity conflict are rising in Maguindanao, the MILF heartland, with armed clans and splinter groups exploiting electoral contests. Although government officials emphasize progress in decommissioning MILF combatants and the decline of extremist groups, skepticism persists over incomplete disarmament and the risk of election failure. These dynamics illustrate how unresolved grievances, armed patronage politics, and electoral rivalries converge to perpetuate instability, underscoring the fragility of peace in BARMM despite institutional reforms (Varsitarian Staff, 2024).

Maitem (2025) similarly highlights the fragility of the peace process, noting that of 40,000 MILF combatants pledged for decommissioning, 14,000 remain armed, raising fears of unrest during elections. Government exploitation of leadership fragmentation and uneven disarmament has reinforced old patterns of patronage and exclusion, undermining trust in democratic processes. The Moro conflict thus reflects a clash of nationalisms—Filipino and Bangsamoro—each with distinct narratives and solutions, but both trapped in cycles of mistrust and contested legitimacy (UNDP, 2005; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2025).

Conflict is not a religious war but a struggle of an oppressed minority against elites. Tan (2010) identifies roots of unrest: historical domination, political inferiorization, economic marginalization, and threats to Moro identity. Peace efforts such as the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) and the 2019 Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao have made progress. However, challenges such as clan feuds and rebel fragmentation persist. Religion-based groups like MiRLeC, the Bishop-Ulama Conference (BUC), and the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP) continue to play active roles in peacebuilding. Cardinal Orlando Quevedo, through initiatives such as the *Titayan* (bridge) 2: Bridging to Sustain Peace in the Bangsamoro forum, has convened government and MILF peace panels, civil society leaders, and election watchdogs to sustain dialogue during BARMM's transition and ahead of its first parliamentary elections. The forum underscores civil society's conviction that inclusive dialogue and multi-level participation are essential to address lingering challenges in CAB implementation, decommissioning, and trust-building among stakeholders (Arguillas, 2025; Gigje, C., 2024).

This historical and structural analysis shows that religious peacebuilding cannot be separated from broader socio-political realities. The persistence of injustice and marginalization requires that interfaith initiatives address not only symbolic reconciliation but also structural transformation. By situating Christian and Islamic values within this context, the study highlights their potential to contribute to justice-oriented peacebuilding in Mindanao. The convergence of historical grievances, political exclusion, and fragile institutions demonstrates that peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of fairness, dignity, and shared responsibility. While setbacks persist, the active engagement of religion-based leaders, civil society, and reform-minded institutions offers hope that the Bangsamoro can move beyond cycles of mistrust toward a future in which autonomy and national unity coexist within a framework of inclusive governance and moral solidarity.

CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM AS PARTNERS IN PEACEBUILDING

Christianity and Islam have both contributed significantly to addressing systemic injustices in Mindanao. Religious organizations—Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic—have responded to political marginalization, social injustice, and economic deprivation through interreligious dialogue and moral leadership. These efforts show that religious traditions, when mobilized for justice, can become powerful agents of reconciliation. The MiRLeC multi-sectoral dialogue in Cotabato City further illustrates this potential as it relates to elections. Religious leaders emphasized voter education, moral accountability, and the inclusion of youth, women, and indigenous peoples as essential to building trust in democratic institutions. Initiatives such as *khutbas* (sermons) on Islamic principles of governance, *fatwas* (rulings) outlining Quran-based criteria for candidates, and interreligious forums to scrutinize political aspirants highlight how moral and spiritual resources can counter vote buying, corruption, and political violence. By anchoring electoral participation in shared ethical values, MiRLeC demonstrates that religion-based leadership can transform dialogue into concrete action, laying the foundation for just and peaceful elections in the Bangsamoro (Rocamora, 2025).

Umel (2024) observes that while religious groups have made progress, uneven outcomes require deeper evaluation. Religion-based initiatives must be assessed for their ability to address structural roots of conflict, including exclusion and inequality. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID), the Ulama League

of the Philippines (ULP), and the Bishop-Ulama Conference (BUC) have consistently engaged in peacebuilding. Each brings unique theological and cultural perspectives to dialogue and grassroots engagement, but their effectiveness depends on how well they confront marginalization and disparity (CBCP News, 2024; PeaceGovPH, 2025).

The CBCP has long supported peacebuilding, launching initiatives such as the Year of the Two Hearts for Peacebuilding in 2009–2010, which encouraged lay participation in social change. More recently, Bishop Pablo Virgilio David condemned the Marawi bombing as a horrendous act of violence. At the same time, Archbishop Socrates Villegas praised the peace agreement between the government and the MILF as a courageous breakthrough. These actions underscore the CBCP's commitment to peace rooted in justice, compassion, and human dignity. Similarly, the NCCP promotes *shalom*—holistic peace that includes justice, equality, care for creation, and dignity—through interreligious groups like MiRLeC and the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (NCCP, 2025; NCCP, 2025).

On the Islamic side, ULP has resolved clan and ethnic disputes, preventing escalation into armed conflict, while also contributing to national peace summits and interreligious dialogues (Peace Insight, 2015, December). The ULP emphasized protecting life, dignity, and property—principles in Islamic law that support reconciliation (Umel, 2024). PCID has promoted democratic participation and empowered Muslim communities, especially women and youth, through initiatives like the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and deradicalization forums. Building on these efforts, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (OPAPRU) and Mindanao State University–Maguindanao have pioneered the integration of WPS education into the academic curriculum, launching Southeast Asia's first Diploma in Women, Peace and Security program. This groundbreaking initiative amplifies women's voices in peacebuilding, equips future leaders with ethical and inclusive frameworks, and demonstrates how education can institutionalize reconciliation and justice at the heart of Bangsamoro society (OPAPRU & MSU-Maguindanao, 2025; PCID, 2025; MSU-Maguindanao, 2025).

These organizations demonstrate that Christianity and Islam, despite historical tensions, share ethical commitments to compassion, justice, and reconciliation. Their collaborative programs, though uneven, provide a foundation for building trust among Christians, Muslims, and Indigenous peoples. The challenge remains to deepen grassroots participation and address structural inequalities so that interfaith peacebuilding can move beyond symbolic

gestures toward transformative change. Recent innovations, such as integrating the WPS agenda into academic curricula, demonstrate how education can institutionalize reconciliation and justice. This initiative amplifies women's voices, equips future leaders with inclusive frameworks, and bridges research with practice. It demonstrates that peacebuilding is not only the work of religious leaders and civil society but also of academic institutions that embed ethical values into instruction, research, and community engagement. In this way, Christianity and Islam, alongside state and academic partners, are shaping a holistic peace architecture in the Bangsamoro—one that seeks to transform dialogue into daily practice and ensure that reconciliation is sustained across generations.

LIMITATIONS AND GAPS IN RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING

Despite valuable contributions, religious peacebuilding in Mindanao faces significant limitations. A major concern is sectarianism, where programs remain focused within Christian or Muslim communities rather than fostering genuine interreligious collaboration. Earlier critiques of missionary activity in Mindanao highlighted how education and evangelization often carried conversion-oriented agendas. Gowing (1964), for instance, criticized the educational bias of mission schools, noting that curricula frequently ignored Muslim realities and left youth disconnected from their heritage. Such approaches reinforced perceptions of marginalization and weakened trust between communities. More recent scholarship, however, points to a significant shift. Garcia, De Venecia, and Aliposa (2024) found that religion-based civil society organizations (CSOs) now contribute to conflict mitigation rather than exacerbate it. These CSOs have evolved into inclusive peacebuilding actors, engaging people of different religious convictions and disciplines. While challenges such as mistrust, stereotypes, and unresolved historical grievances remain, their work demonstrates a move away from proselytization toward interreligious dialogue and holistic reconciliation. Kwuelum (2024) emphasizes that sustainable peace requires community-led, emancipatory, and compassionate interreligious approaches that prioritize local ownership and grassroots participation, while Köbrich and Hoffmann (2023) show through a systematic review that religious ideas can both foster and hinder peace depending on context, underscoring the need for conceptual clarity and inclusive frameworks. Together, these insights highlight the importance of moving beyond sectarian boundaries toward adaptive, evidence-based interreligious collaboration in Mindanao.

Another challenge in Mindanao's peacebuilding landscape is the imbalance

in representation and civic engagement. Steven Rood (2005) earlier observed that Christian organizations have historically dominated peace efforts, while Muslim civil society has remained underrepresented due to structural and historical barriers. This imbalance reflects deeper issues of marginalization and exclusion, which continue to hinder the full participation of Muslim communities in shaping sustainable peace initiatives. Islam's decentralized structure contrasts with Christianity's hierarchical systems, creating asymmetry in dialogue. This has led to distrust and skepticism among Muslim communities, weakening credibility and inclusivity. Strengthening Islamic organizations and empowering Muslim civil society are therefore essential for balanced participation. At the same time, testimonies from the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute's 2025 Annual Training highlight ongoing efforts to foster inclusivity and empower diverse communities, showing that peace is possible and practiced in everyday life (Marfa, 2025). Religious leaders at the Mindanao Religious Leaders Conference (MiRLeC) in 2024 reaffirmed their commitment to peace and justice, acknowledging challenges such as marginalization, extremism, and organizational rivalries that obstruct unity (Saludes, 2024).

Exclusion and political influence also hinder progress. Interreligious dialogues often remain elitist, excluding grassroots voices and failing to address everyday concerns (Rocamora, 2025). Clan politics and patronage further complicate the landscape, as political families dominate local governance and often mask private rivalries as civil war violence. The debate over the Reproductive Health Bill revealed deep theological and political divisions, with Protestant and Evangelical churches supporting it, while Catholic and Muslim groups opposed it (Saludes, 2024). Religious voting blocs demonstrated the strong political influence of religious groups in shaping national debates and peace processes. These divisions continue to limit unity in peacebuilding, echoing long-standing patterns of exclusion and elite dominance in Philippine politics. Grievances sustain ideology-driven conflicts in Mindanao and across the Philippines over selfdetermination, land dispossession, political exclusion, and socioeconomic inequality. Peacebuilding initiatives are most effective when economic, political, and security incentives are aligned, but uneven implementation and weak institutional coordination still pose risks to sustaining peace (Navarro & Jacinto, 2025).

Persistent mistrust also affects relationships among religious organizations. Concerns about sincerity and hidden agendas undermine credibility, with critics questioning the neutrality of groups like the BishopUlama Conference because of their ties to government and church institutions. At the same time,

some Muslim organizations face suspicion of extremist links. Theological reflections on dialogue emphasize that genuine peace requires transparency, humility, and a willingness to listen without preconceptions. As the Inter-Seminary Exposure Program in Midsayap, Cotabato highlighted, dialogue is meant to be a stream of meaning flowing among people in conversation, out of which new understanding may emerge. When dialogue is reduced to political maneuvering, its transformative potential is lost. Unless accountability is strengthened and dialogue is practiced with mutual respect and solidarity, genuine collaboration will remain elusive, and the culture of peace envisioned in both biblical and interreligious traditions will continue to be undermined (Bunda, 2023).

Finally, the lack of a unified peace agenda in Mindanao remains a pressing issue. Bunda (2023) notes that many religious peace efforts remain symbolic and reactive, with little impact on the deeper causes of conflict. For peace to last, grassroots communities—especially marginalized Muslims and Christians—must be empowered. Religious groups need to move beyond denominational boundaries and unite around a shared agenda rooted in ethical and theological values. The MiRLeC declaration in 2024, which affirmed that peace based on justice is an obligation, highlights the importance of shared values—love, justice, reconciliation, and respect—in building peace. Corpuz (2025) shows that religionbased movements can serve as crucial mediators in interreligious relations by fostering mutual understanding, facilitating communityled initiatives, and addressing sociopolitical challenges. His study concludes that sustained collaboration among religious communities, policymakers, and civil society actors is essential for transformative peacebuilding in Mindanao. This analysis shows that while religious organizations have made important contributions, their limitations—sectarianism, imbalance, fragmentation, exclusion, mistrust, and lack of unified vision—must be addressed if interreligious peacebuilding is to achieve transformative and lasting impact in Mindanao.

These limitations reveal that religious peacebuilding in Mindanao cannot succeed without structural reform, balanced participation, and genuine interreligious solidarity. Addressing sectarianism, mistrust, and exclusion requires moving beyond symbolic gestures toward institutionalized collaboration rooted in shared values. By confronting fragmentation and political influence, religious organizations can reclaim credibility and foster inclusive dialogue. This synthesis underscores that the covenant of Shalom–Salaam must be grounded not only in theological ideals but also in practical reforms that empower grassroots communities, strengthen

Muslim representation, and build trust across faith traditions. Only then can interreligious peacebuilding achieve its transformative potential in Mindanao.

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON LIBERATION AND PEACE

The longing for *katawhayan sa kabuhi* (peace in life) is deeply embedded in Philippine culture and resonates with the theological visions of both Christianity and Islam. In religious traditions, this peace is expressed as *shalom* in Hebrew and *salaam* in Arabic. It is more than quiet or safety; it is *kaginhawaan*—a life of abundance and dignity. Both Bathala and Allah (God) desire freedom from injustice for the poor, the orphan, and the widow—the least and forgotten.

Christian theology emphasizes God's kingdom as a peaceful rule that shapes history. Boff (1986) and Gutiérrez (1988) explain that God's kingdom is eternal and present in everyday life, responding to poverty and discrimination. The Exodus story portrays God as a liberator, bringing freedom to the oppressed. The covenant (*berith*) is a promise of lasting peace and justice (Gelim, 1955). Gutiérrez insists that peace cannot exist without justice, and salvation is not only about heaven but also about freedom from inhumane conditions. To follow Jesus means loving the poor and resisting injustice. The church, as a sign of God's kingdom, must stand with the poor in Mindanao and work for liberation. Reading the Bible in context shows God's kingdom as a force for justice in places of inequality. Scholars such as Hoyt Jr. (1977) and Washington (1986) affirm that God stands with the oppressed, while Ivory (1997) adds that resisting oppression is joining God's work in history. King Jr. (1959) reminds us that peace must be made real through social change that reflects God's vision. Recent studies deepen this vision. Christianity and Islam in Mindanao share theological and political values that can be harnessed for peacebuilding, emphasizing economic, cultural, and political transformation as essential for lasting peace. Demalon and Siddiq (2026) compare Muslim–Christian coexistence in the Philippines and Indonesia, showing that durable peace depends on historical justice, shared civic ideology, and sustained institutional dialogue.

Islamic thought also provides a rich framework for peace. Kirazli (2026) reconstructs the Prophet Muḥammad's ethics of war and peace by tracing the Meccan–Medinan trajectory of his life. This framework highlights three interrelated stages: nonviolent endurance under persecution in Mecca; constitutional governance and regulated defensive warfare in Medina; and a culminating ethic of reconciliation exemplified by the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah and the Conquest of Mecca. Within this arc, justice (*'adl*), mercy (*rahma*),

proportionality, and the protection of communal life emerge as central principles, showing that force is permitted only under strict ethical constraints and always oriented toward restoring peace and social order. Kirazli demonstrates that Islamic sources contain significant internal resources for limiting violence and prioritizing reconciliation, situating prophetic practice within global debates on just war theory and conflict resolution.

Similarly, Ashafa et al. (2026) emphasize Islam's commitment to social well-being and economic justice as catalytic forces for peaceful coexistence. Through the PRISMA (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses*) framework, they demonstrate that Islam's promotion of social welfare and distributive justice contributes positively to harmony across diverse regions. Their findings highlight that these values, when aligned with *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* (objectives of Islamic law) and the Five International Principles of Peaceful Coexistence—mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence—provide a robust ethical foundation for sustainable peace. By bridging Islamic tenets with universal frameworks, Ashafa and colleagues show that Islamic peacemaking is not merely defensive but deeply constructive, integrating restraint, justice, and reconciliation into a coherent moral vision. This vision resonates with contemporary efforts in interreligious dialogue, policy-driven discourse, and global peacebuilding, underscoring Islam's enduring contribution to advancing social harmony.

Mir and Anjum (2025) argue that *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* offer a universal ethical paradigm for peace, justice, and human dignity. Their study highlights how the *Maqasid*, rooted in divine revelation yet adaptable to changing contexts, emphasize justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), welfare (*maṣlahah*), and human dignity (*karāmah al-insān*) as foundational principles of coexistence. Using a qualitative, analytical–thematic approach, they demonstrate that these objectives provide a flexible and comprehensive framework capable of reconciling individual and collective interests, protecting vulnerable communities, and fostering inclusive global citizenship. The authors situate *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* within global ethical discourse, showing its relevance for interreligious dialogue, minority protection, and conflict resolution. They also connect these principles to modern initiatives such as the Marrakesh Declaration and the Amman Message, illustrating how Islamic ethics can engage contemporary human rights paradigms. Ultimately, Mir and Anjum contend that the universal ethical vision of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*—grounded in justice, compassion, and human dignity—offers a transformative model for global coexistence and moral renewal, bridging traditional Islamic ethics with

modern frameworks of peacebuilding and pluralism.

Contemporary liberation theology also continues to evolve. Havea's *Stirring Up Liberation Theologies: A Call for Release* (2024) calls for a renewed liberative praxis in response to global crises such as poverty, pandemics, and climate change. He argues that liberation theology must be stirred up and released from its illusions and assumptions in order to remain relevant in a world plagued by disease, ecological collapse, war, and systemic injustice. By gathering diverse voices from across the globe, Havea demonstrates that liberation theology today is not only about resisting oppression but also about reimagining freedom as release—a holistic liberation of both spirit and body from dehumanizing structures. This vision insists that as long as communities are broken by violence, hunger, and exploitation, liberation theology must continue to speak prophetically, confronting systems of domination while offering hope for healing and renewal. In this way, Havea situates liberation theology as a dynamic, global movement that responds to contemporary suffering with creativity, solidarity, and transformative praxis.

Panotto and Martínez Andrade's *Decolonizing Liberation Theologies Past, Present, and Future* (2023) situates liberation theology within postcolonial struggles, affirming its continuing relevance for the Global South. This volume underscores that liberation theology must remain contextual, intercultural, and responsive to structural injustice. The editors highlight how Latin American liberation thought emerged from the underside of history—spaces of marginalization, exclusion, and resistance—and how these de-centered centers of struggle continue to shape theological reflection today. By engaging themes of interculturality, borderlands, and in-betweenness, the book demonstrates that liberation theology is not static but dynamic, constantly interrogating societal projects that exclude vulnerable communities. In doing so, Panotto and Martínez Andrade call for a liberation theology that bridges past and present, confronting colonial legacies while offering transformative possibilities for pluralistic futures. Their work affirms that liberation theology must be decolonized to remain a living, global movement of justice, solidarity, and hope. This resonates with Santiago's (2026) Philippine decolonial feminist theologizing, where indigenous voices, poetic articulations, and embodied practices reclaim theology as both liberating and healing.

In a Philippine context, these insights converge: peace is the absence of violent conflict and the presence of justice, dignity, and shared humanity. Both Christian and Islamic traditions affirm that resisting oppression and working for liberation is joining God's work in history. Demalon and Siddiq (2024) show that in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, durable

peace requires structural redress for historical injustices, political autonomy, and institutional arrangements that protect vulnerable communities. Their comparative study highlights that while interfaith dialogue plays a role, sustainable coexistence in the Philippines depends on aligning justice, shared civic ideology, and institutional support. Thus, *katawhayan sa kabuhi* (peace in life) is a cultural longing and a theological mandate—an invitation to build communities where justice and peace embrace, rooted in both faith traditions and contemporary peacebuilding frameworks.

Islamic perspectives emphasize peace, justice, and freedom. The very word *Islam* derives from the root *s-l-m*, meaning peace and wholeness, reflected in verses such as Qur'an 25:63. The Qur'an also promotes tolerance, respect for prophets, and salvation for those who act justly (Qur'an 2:56; 4:150–151; 2:112). Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that Qur'ānic peace (*salām*) is inseparable from justice (*'adl*), mercy (*rahma*), and social rectification (*islāh*), forming a holistic paradigm that underpins interreligious ethics and the protection of human dignity (Akhtar, 2025). Paradise itself is described as a place of peace (Qur'an 33:44; 56:25–26), and the greeting *salām* reflects God's name *Al-Salām* and the believer's desire to share peace. As Bukhari, Memon, and Shoaib (2025) argue, justice and human rights are moral ideals and social requirements. Societies that uphold equality, dignity, and welfare naturally achieve peace, while those marked by oppression, exploitation, and deprivation cannot sustain it. Islam's vision of divine oneness and human unity, therefore, rejects exclusion and values diversity, providing a theological foundation for interreligious collaboration in contexts such as Mindanao, where communities long for reconciliation and dignity (Demalon & Siddiq, 2024).

These theological perspectives reveal that liberation and peace are inseparable from justice, dignity, and solidarity. Christian liberation theology insists that salvation must confront systemic oppression, while Islamic ethics highlight reconciliation, mercy, and social welfare as indispensable to peace. Both traditions converge on the conviction that peace is not passive but active—requiring structural transformation, ethical responsibility, and communal participation. The challenge lies in translating these theological visions into lived realities amid persistent poverty, historical injustices, and political fragmentation. Yet the convergence of Christian and Islamic thought in the Philippine context offers a unique opportunity: interreligious collaboration can become a moral and civic force for building communities where justice and peace embrace. This synthesis points toward a hopeful horizon in which *katawhayan sa kabuhi* (peace in life) is realized not only as a cultural longing

but also as a theological mandate—an enduring call to resist oppression, nurture dignity, and embody reconciliation. Ultimately, *Shalom–Salaam* is a theological covenant and a lived horizon of hope, where peace is experienced as a flourishing reality grounded in justice, compassion, and human dignity.

SHARED VALUES, CULTURAL ETHICS, AND PATHWAYS FOR PEACE

Building on the earlier analysis of historical roots and institutional challenges, this section highlights how shared values and cultural ethics can serve as practical pathways for reconciliation and peace education in Mindanao. Christianity and Islam, together with Philippine cultural ethics, offer powerful values that can help build lasting peace in Mindanao. These values should be integrated into peace education and community practice so that they are lived out daily in homes, schools, churches, mosques, and civic spaces. The convergence of religious conviction and culture provides a holistic foundation for reconciliation.

Kapwa/kaupod (shared humanity) reflects the biblical command to love one's neighbor (Matthew 22:39) and the Qur'anic call to care for the *ummah* (community)(Qur'an 49:10). It is not only a theological principle but also a cultural ethic that can be embedded in peace curricula and community dialogues. *Paggalang/pagtahod* (respect) honors elders, leaders, and sacred traditions in both religious convictions. At the same time, *pakikipagkapwa-tao/kagandahang loob* (compassion and kindness) resonates with Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) and Islam's emphasis on *rahma* (mercy) and *ihsan* (excellent conduct). *Bayanihan/dagyaw* (cooperation) reflects shared responsibility in Christian service and Islamic community life (Qur'an 5:2). Faith itself (*pananampalataya/pagtu*) is central, as Christian's trust in God's promises (Hebrews 11:1) and Muslims submit to Allah's guidance (Qur'an 3:159). Forgiveness (*pagpapatawad/pagpasaylo*) is equally vital, with Christianity emphasizing salvation through forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32) and Islam affirming Allah as the Most Forgiving (Qur'an 24:22).

Justice (*katarungan/katadlongan*) is a cornerstone of both traditions. The Bible calls for justice to roll down like a river (Amos 5:24), while Islam commands believers to uphold fairness (Qur'an 4:135). Peace itself—*shalom, salaam, kapayapaan, katawhayan*—is sacred across traditions, expressing wholeness, healing, and community well-being. These shared values, when embodied, create a covenant of *Shalom–Salaam* that transcends doctrinal boundaries while respecting religious distinctiveness. The covenant of *Shalom–Salaam* does not collapse differences but builds bridges through shared ethics, allowing

cooperation without erasure of theological identity.

Leadership also emerges as a shared ethical principle. In Philippine culture, the word *puno* (tree) symbolizes leadership that is humble, rooted, and life-giving. Christianity echoes this in Jesus' metaphor of the vine (John 15:5), while Islam compares a good word to a good tree that bears fruit by God's permission (Qur'an 14:24–25). Leadership, therefore, is not merely political but a sacred trust (*amanah*) requiring wisdom, humility, and service. As Al Naqbi (2024) explains, Islamic leadership is grounded in moral values that shape character and decision-making, with knowledge serving as a catalyst for enlightenment, humility as a unifying force, justice as an ethical compass, and accountability as a means of fostering trust and integrity. This convergence of Philippine, Christian, and Islamic leadership ethics suggests that moral leadership can be institutionalized through civic education, interreligious councils, and community-based governance models.

These shared values form not only a transformative agenda but also a practical roadmap for Mindanao's peace process. They can inform policy frameworks in BARMM, guide interreligious educational programs, and inspire grassroots initiatives that embody reconciliation in everyday life. They call for economic renewal through just systems, cultural affirmation through respect and cooperation, political reform through inclusive governance, and spiritual healing through forgiveness and compassion. Grounding peacebuilding in theological and cultural ethics ensures that reconciliation is not reduced to symbolic gestures but becomes a lived reality. Thus, shared values and cultural ethics are not abstract ideals but actionable resources that can be mobilized through education, governance, and community practice.

Ultimately, the covenant of Shalom–Salaam offers a vision of peace that is both contextual to Mindanao and universal in scope: a horizon where justice flows like a river, compassion heals wounds, and shared humanity flourishes as the enduring foundation of reconciliation. The implications of these findings are significant: they show that shared values can be institutionalized in peace education curricula, embedded in governance structures, and practiced in grassroots initiatives. This means that reconciliation in Mindanao is not limited to symbolic dialogue but can be sustained through concrete policies and community action rooted in theological and cultural ethics.

CONCLUSION

This study advances interreligious peacebuilding by proposing a contextual theological framework of Shalom–Salaam that integrates Christian and Islamic

liberation theology with Philippine cultural ethics. Rooted in the lived realities of Mindanao, it highlights shared values—compassion, justice, forgiveness, cooperation, and respect—as a common moral ground for reconciliation. These values, embodied in practices such as peace education, interreligious dialogue, and civic participation, show that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of dignity, solidarity, and justice.

By bridging theology and culture, the framework offers both a descriptive analysis of shared convictions and a prescriptive roadmap for embedding reconciliation into daily life. It contributes to scholarship by demonstrating how shared values can be systematically mobilized and by guiding communities toward lasting peace. In this way, the covenant of Shalom–Salaam becomes both a theological paradigm and a practical tool for transformation, ensuring that reconciliation is sustained across homes, schools, churches, mosques, and civic spaces.

The covenant of Shalom–Salaam can be operationalized through curriculum design, interreligious training, grassroots peace zones, and civic education in BARMM. Schools may integrate shared values into peace modules, local governments can establish interreligious spaces, and civil society can promote cooperation and forgiveness through community programs.

Lasting peace requires holistic reforms: 1) Economic renewal through fair resource distribution and livelihood opportunities, 2) Cultural affirmation by respecting diversity, recognizing Bangsamoro identity, and institutionalizing peace education, 3) Political reform through humbleleadership that breaks cycles of corruption and patronage, and 4) Spiritual healing by cultivating forgiveness, compassion, and solidarity. Grounded in Shalom–Salaam, these pathways transform peace from aspiration into lived reality, ensuring reconciliation that is sustainable, inclusive, and just.

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