

# **The Role of the Christian Faith in Minimizing Corruption and Tribal Consciousness in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

Integrity and truth, which are to savour and illuminate God's ways, which alone can preserve and guide humanity are the needs of the moment in Nigeria. Christianity goes far beyond private spirituality. It also involves a believer's public life, particularly through work, right relationships, and participation in society positively. Scholars have discussed integrity and truth in Nigeria without linking them to the void in the heart of an individual, which the gospel alone fills. This alone leads to the upliftment of moral and spiritual values that will give life to society. Therefore, there is still the need to investigate the concept of integrity and truth as it relates to minimizing corruption and tribalism in Nigerian society, especially for Christians both in the private and public domains. This paper intends to highlight the Gospel's expectation of the faith and testimony of Christians of integrity, truth, and selfless service to society and one another. Tribes, ethnic groups or the use of resources is not the problem but prejudice and greed. In this paper, a qualitative research methodology has been used, to explore the depth and breadth of the role of Christians in minimizing financial corruption and tribal consciousness or tribalism in Nigeria. Qualitative research, using a primary source like the Bible and secondary sources, aimed to obtain first-hand information about the perceived underlying factors causing financial corruption and tribal consciousness in both males and females in all works of life in Nigeria, practices, experiences of participants, their perception and how they are expected to function in the country. The prevalent rates of high-risk corruption and tribal consciousness are high in Nigeria-and the situation is unlikely to change in the near future unless Christians, who are high in population, choose to give God glory and practice their faith. Therefore, the paper

makes recommendations for Christians to be mindful of the responsibility both to God and to the society-as the salt and light of the world.

**Key Words:** Integrity, Christian faith, Catalyst, National Peace and Development.

## **Introduction**

Corruption, widening tribal consciousness, apathy, and ignorance present challenges for all Nigerians, and Christians should counter, rather than contribute to these problems. Financial Corruption in Nigeria appears to be ubiquitous and takes many forms: from massive contract fraud to petty bribery; from straight-up embezzlement to complicated money laundering schemes; from pocketing the salaries of nonexistent workers to steering plum jobs to relatives and friends. Some officials enjoy perquisites so excessive that they are widely seen as a form of legalized corruption<sup>1</sup>. Christianity calls people to live at a higher level both in character and conduct than the rest of the world and its systems. The Gospel is the answer to all the ills that have afflicted mankind throughout history from the fall. And it is true, whether you think of these ills in a physical sense or a spiritual sense. Christ is the answer<sup>2</sup>.

Politics and religion are two different entities that help in the growth and development of human existence. Even though both have parallel practices, they share some common goals which are beneficial to mankind<sup>3</sup>

The values of the Kingdom are to be “salt” and “light” in every society that the church exists. Integrity is crucial to Christians’ responsibility to be “salt” and “light” of the world. Christians need to behave honestly, have biblical and strong moral principles and moral uprightness as a lifestyle. There is so much compromise in this age and in one way or another, you might be tempted to compromise your character, to get something done for you. Coming to think of it, a character is the only thing that will sustain you in the long run where your gifts, fame, power will not<sup>4</sup>.

Why does it seem that the collective fabric of Nigeria's society has been unravelled amid the revelations of lust, greed and immorality in high and low places? What has been happening and where is the country headed?

Has there ever been a more critical time in history when Nigeria needs people of integrity? Steven C. Riser said Integrity is the basic element of Christian character. It is the first characteristic of those welcomed into God's presence (Psa. 15:2). It is the first characteristic that distinguishes godly leadership: "So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands" (Psa. 78:72).

A former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon Dogara Yakubu said, for you, trailblazers who carry the burden and the promises of a generation that must not fail, if you are ever going to get there, it must be on the wings of discipline that produces character. This is because without character, you cannot be men and women of influence and without influence, you cannot change anything; character means that you cannot be separated from your word, a quality no godfather in history has ever possessed. "Character is not only that your word is your bond but that you are actually what you pretend to be. While godfathers always pretend to be something other than what they are; leaders do not<sup>5</sup>.

Response to the tension created by the continued presence of evil alongside Jesus' ministry and the Church was one of the aspects of the Church's existence that was most productive in New Testament theology. Paul and other early Christians believed that with the resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the new age had dawned, but secretly, during the old age, causing overlapping of the ages (Rom. 8:18, 23; 1 Cor. 15:20; Eph. 1:13–14; 2:4–7). This balance or tension between what has already happened and what is still expected determines the attitude that Christians are to bear toward this world (Col. 3:1–4). The emphasis on present fulfilment or on future expectations varies according to the situation being confronted.<sup>6</sup>

The personal contribution makes and prospers a Country.<sup>7</sup> Christians can get political without hurting the Gospel message and practice.<sup>8</sup> The impact of the Christian faith in establishing a functional Nigeria is crucial. At independence in 1960, as a result of missionary training, the young nation, Nigeria inherited a civil and public service, staffed and led by some men and women who possessed the requisite skills, techniques, knowledge and attitudes to achieve the objectives of government by transforming paper plans into real practical services<sup>9</sup>. Thus missionary

training succeeded in providing the intellectual, political and skilled manpower for nation-building. It is essential to bear in mind, not only that this preceded the establishment of British rule, but also that it was undertaken in the belief that direct British rule was unlikely and that whatever social, political and economic changes considered necessary in the country would have to be achieved by encouraging a new class of Nigerians themselves to reconstruct their environment<sup>10</sup>

Displaying integrity and decorum in all facets of life and participation in politics is a catalyst for peace and development in Nigeria. However, ineffective Christian faith in most of Nigeria's 60 years of existence as an independent country has not only hindered the nation's development but continued to threaten its peace and stability. While it is widely believed that underdevelopment and crisis or violence is prevalent in autocratic and oligarchic systems, it is evident now that ineffective Christian faith does exist much more in democracies.

Therefore, this paper analyzes the dual concepts of effective Christian faith and participating effectively in politics; addresses the nature of Christian faith offered by the Church; and its effects on national peace and development. Using both primary and secondary data, the study revealed that, unethical practices, immorality, selfishness, corruption and underdevelopment which pervade public offices are products of ineffective Christian faith and apathy to politics. The study further revealed that ineffective Christian faith and apathy towards politics in Nigeria has brought about unemployment, poverty, crimes, internal violence, insurgents activities, and diseases, loss of lives and properties, and underdevelopment of the country. The study reveals that until proactive steps are taken by individual Christians for effective faith lifestyle and effective participation in politics, peace, stability, as well as development, will continue to elude the nation. Beyond this, the corporate existence of the nation remains threatened.

### **Financial Corruption**

Corruption in Nigeria is a product of self-centeredness and complacency. When public office holders put their greed before the needs of the people, depriving them of amenities and infrastructure amongst other necessities, the consequences would be damning. Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs (2017) reported that it has been estimated that

close to \$400 billion was stolen from Nigeria's public accounts from 1960 to 1999 and that between 2005 and 2014 some \$182 billion was lost through illicit financial flows from the country.<sup>2</sup> This stolen commonwealth in effect represents the investment gap in building and equipping modern hospitals to reduce Nigeria's exceptionally high maternal mortality rates.

Chatham House<sup>11</sup> went to report that corruption tends to foster more corruption, perpetuating and entrenching social injustice in daily life. Unfortunately in Nigeria, moral laxity is prevalent in all strata of our society. It is impractical to hold people who are led to laws that are abused by leaders. Such an environment weakens societal values of fairness, honesty, integrity and common citizenship, as the impunity of dishonest practices and abuses of power or position steadily erode citizens' sense of moral responsibility to follow the rules in the interests of wider society.

Most Nigerians seem to know what is wrong. Most have proffered solutions and sounded grave warnings over the years but, it seems we have only become worse.<sup>12</sup> Corruption is rooted far deeper than that. According to Falade and Falade, the main focus of socialization in the African traditional society is character training, and that, all the agents and processes of socialization aimed at providing individuals who are truthful, hospitable, respectful, honest, skillful, obedient, and patriotic<sup>13</sup>. Chief Justice Mustapha maintained: Nigeria is a nation at war with itself. The path we are treading is a threat to the continued peace, unity and prosperity of this land we call our home ... This is not the Nigeria we inherited from our predecessors; this is not the Nigeria we envisioned as young men. Favouritism, nepotism and tribal sentiments have made it impossible to run a merit driven system. Hard work, brilliance, honesty and integrity in our dealings are no longer rewarded. Rather, we celebrate mediocrity soaked in the corruption we claim is our common enemy. I am scared and deeply worried. The situation is grave<sup>14</sup>. These excerpts and many more gives the impression Nigerians know what's at stake and what should be done. How then have we considerably gone down spiral?

Before Independence, corrupt practices among leaders were being investigated. In 1956, the Colonial government set up the Foster-Sutton

tribunal. Several decades after, corruption still subsists as one of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria. The existence of this phenomenon in virtually all aspects of the nation's socio-economic life is said to be one reason why the poverty level remains high irrespective of her position as the six highest suppliers of oil in the world, and a possessor of numerous other human and natural resources. A recent attempt by the Federal Government of Nigeria to curb this societal ill led to the establishment of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices & Related Offences Commission (ICPC) among other bodies<sup>15</sup>.

Before the enactment of the Act that established EFCC and ICPC, other laws dealt with corrupt practices in the country. These included:

- The Criminal Code (applicable in the Southern states).
- The Penal Code (applicable in the Northern states).
- The Recovery of Public Property (Special Military Tribunal Act Cap. 389, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990 (as amended in 1999)).

The Failed Banks (Recovery of Debts and Financial Malpractices in Banks), 26Decree 1994 (as amended in 1999),<sup>16</sup>.

### **Tribal Consciousness**

Christians have so much to do in bridging ethnic and religious divides in Nigeria. Nation-building is the primary target of every nation especially, the developing states. To achieve this goal effectively, the collaborative effort of every citizen is required. This is a position shared by Amara M, U and Kanayo Louis Nwadiakor who said, it is obvious that Nigeria is a heterogeneous society with multi-ethnic groups and religious affiliations. The peculiarities of each ethnic group and religious ideology as unique as they appear, if properly harnessed and harmonized could foster nation-building<sup>17</sup>. Observations have shown that ethnic tensions and religious divides are banes that confront Nigeria's nation-building. It is, therefore, the interest of this paper to bridge ethnic and religious tension in Nigeria by stimulating greater self-consciousness of the nation's unity in diversity

using Paul's religious principle of unity "in Christ" as upheld in Galatians 3:26-29.

The memories of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War is yet to be overcome. Nigeria, still, is plagued by vestiges of corruption, political instability, bad governance and worrisome enough is the intensity of ethnic and religious tensions hence crippled national growth and development. The level of ethno-religious unrest is so intense that the seeming efforts toward tackling socio-economic and political challenges in Nigeria appear elusive. Of about 250 ethnic groups that made up the Nigerian State, each is jostling for recognition and every possible means is sought to sway through. Some of the measures employed oftentimes pose threat to the corporate existence and development of the nation<sup>18</sup>.

Aquiline T S J opined, and the writer agrees with him that ethnicity affects directly or indirectly, our understanding of the common good. While ethnic sentiments may undercut the nationalistic approach, they may also be a force that enhances any sense of nationhood and the common good. Despite the rhetoric of national unity, the typical African's understanding of common good, solidarity, and community remains limited to the circles of particular opportune ethnic groups who are in power. This situation shows that important issues such as how to form a nation based on traditional values and political consensus were not addressed sufficiently after independence. African leaders remained stuck in the political ideology of Uhuru (freedom). They did not know that the political struggle of Uhuru was a temporary ideology. He went on to say:

The involvement of an ethnic group in a bigger group like a State should be understood from the perspective that enables each ethnic group to develop deliberative powers and a sense of purpose in search for the common good. In this context, access to a multiplicity of groups promotes a diversity of experiences and interests and enables each group to participate fully in the common structure laid down by consensus. The

idea of political consensus can articulate new perspectives and preferences which will eventually enter into the balancing process, dissolving political conflicts, and creating local institutions that guarantee fairness<sup>19</sup>.

To remedy tribal consciousness in Nigeria, the words of Zagore are apt: The missionary continues: "Tribalism is in no way a characteristic of the Church of Jesus Christ. The only value remains the desire to serve God by submitting to His will; a will that is detected in terms of love and living together. Like Christ, we must categorically refuse to let ourselves be chained by the intertwining of tribal and ethnic bonds, we must be open to the universal, to every man and every woman, regardless of their cultural, racial or ethnic origins. As St. Paul says, "in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is no male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

### **The Nexus between Christianity and Corruption**

Being salt to the earth and light to the world is the essence of the church in the world. The church is where integration of work, faith, practice and public life is crucial. Thus Christianity and Corruption are two opposing concepts. The Bible condemns various practices, which amount to corruption. Every act of corruption is seen as a violation of God's covenant relationship with his people<sup>20</sup>. Sadly, Christians are involved in corruption in Nigeria. Corruption in Nigeria appears to be ubiquitous and takes many forms: from massive contract fraud to petty bribery; from straight-up embezzlement to complicated money laundering schemes; from pocketing the salaries of nonexistent workers to steering plum jobs to relatives and friends. Some officials enjoy perquisites so excessive that they are widely seen as a form of legalized corruption<sup>21</sup>.

These Christians are also not aware that by accepting that corruption is the norm and willfully participating in it (telling themselves after all "*wetin man pickin go do*"), they are neck-deep in idolatry – trusting in human strength, human powers and corrupt acts to provide for their material needs, rather than trusting in the Almighty God to do so. Such people are involved in acts of corruption because they claim that they



have no other choices – rather than explore the God-given talents and creativity that they have to overcome the temptation of corruption, find alternatives to corrupt practices and take a stand against corruption. They succumb and fuel the new norm that one cannot make it in our society without being corrupt<sup>22</sup>.

Corruption is not just a crime by law; it is also an affront against God's Commandments. The will of God is that his children should live holy lives, shunning evil and doing good. To combat this scourge of corruption, Christians must obediently observe God's Commandments and teach others to do so. This means making efforts to live lives of integrity. For instance, in a paper, *An Assessment of Corruption in the Public Sector in Nigeria: A Study of Akure South Local Government Area, Ondo State*, Osimen et al said, the issue of corruption in Nigeria has been a major concern to all and sundry in the society. The upsurge of this social menace in Nigeria in recent times is disturbing and it seems the menace has defied all kinds of treatment and the damage it has caused to national life cannot be quantified.

Looking around us and evaluating the attitude of the Church to corrupt practices in Africa today, it is like the Church has relinquished her exalted spiritual position to embrace the materialistic stand of the society in which she found herself. The Church now appears to be in the world and love with the world against the Scripture. The book of I John 2:15 say: “Do not love the world or the thing in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”. This is why Abiodun S I is of the view that the materialistic concept of the ordinary society has been transferred into the Church economic ethics. As a result of the acquired normative values in the society, those in places of authority in the Church in Africa do not feel responsible for the unfortunate conditions of their followers. Some Church leaders have been seriously infected with the corruption virus. Prosperity preachers today preach that to prosper is to be in a state of abundance, to be in mighty finances where one continues to have more and more. They claim that the real evidence of the blessing of God depends on the amount of material a person possesses. The commercialization of the gospel has overtaken salvation messages. These “cash and carry Pastors”, “freelance preachers”, “Pastors for hire”,

“emergency Pastors”, “hungry Pastors” (and so on) have given the Church a bad name. They live flamboyant lifestyles like the politicians. They own and maintain private jets ably financed by their Church members who are government workers, peasants and artisans among others. Money bags and favouritism have taken over the Church. Donors of a huge amount of money irrespective of the source(s) are being applauded in the Church and given special seats. Small donors are not recognized; they are being alienated and marginalized. This is another form of corruption similar to terrorism operating in the Church<sup>23</sup>.

### **The Role of Christianity in Minimizing Corruption and Tribal Consciousness**

There are many Christians throughout history who made an enormous impact in the world, most, several years before we came to be, yet we’re living with the results of their work. These weren't just people who ended up having a religious experience and preached to the members in the church, they had a deep experience and encounter with God and went out and changed the world in which they lived.

Practising Christians are needed in all facets of life in society. For instance, Dag Hammarskjold, former Secretary-General of the United Nations because of his Christian belief had prayed for years for God to give him a "life-defining task." That prayer was answered in 1953 when the United Nations General Assembly elected Hammarskjold's as the Secretary-General of the intergovernmental organization. Hammarskjold used his time in such a prestigious position to be a "champion for the underdog," advocating for nations seeking independence from colonial powers during the 1950s. In the 1950s and 1960s the world was going through a tremendous change where many "3rd world" countries were declaring independence from the former colonial powers and becoming sovereign nations, and being accepted into the United Nations. These countries looked at Dag as kind of their voice and their champion, someone who would look out for them.<sup>24</sup>.

Faithful Christians are needed for instance, in the health delivery institutions more than ever before. Our hospitals and health delivery outlets need to be much safer places to seek medical help. For instance, Louis Pasteur, a French chemist was one Christian who knew what the

world would be like today without his life-saving scientific discoveries in the 1800s.

He is most known for discovering the principles of vaccination, microbial fermentation (germs, viruses, and bacteria) and pasteurization, which later led to medical breakthroughs that have since made hospitals a much safer place to seek medical help.

"He stated in a letter to a friend that he felt like he was on the verge of discovering great mysteries and that he always would pray in his laboratory and would pray for God to grant him wisdom and understanding and insight,"<sup>25</sup>.

Joseph Lister was a British surgeon and a pioneer of antiseptic surgery. It is on record that during Lister's time in the 1800s, sterilization standards were not high in hospitals. Doctors would wear their blood-spattered frock coats around as if they were a badge of honor and rarely wash their hands or tools they used on the last patient when dealing with a new one. Of course, there is no wonder that many patients who went into hospitals with one problem would end up dying from another, as bacteria and viruses were unknowingly shared. Thanks to Pasteur's discovery, Lister was able to figure out why so many patients died in hospitals and helped lead an effort to increase health standards. He saw to it that nurses and doctors did a better job cleaning so they didn't spread viruses and bacteria among their patients.

William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was a politician and abolitionist. He was born into a wealthy family and could have chosen to enjoy his privilege but instead opted to use his Christian influence to fight for a single cause, the abolition of the slave trade.

Once elected to parliament he campaigned against the grotesque injustice of slavery. This was so deep-rooted and perpetuated in the trading network of goods. Slave owners were making themselves incredibly wealthy while ordinary people enjoyed cheap goods arriving from the Americas. It was a whole system that brought benefits to many vested interests but at such a terrible human cost.

Spurred on by his deep Christian conversion and conviction, he had a new understanding of his whole social and moral outlook and his determination to act out those convictions. He fought the good fight and eventually, that change came in 1807 with the eradication of the slave

trade. This was followed by the abolition of slavery some twenty-six years later. Though, days after the Slavery Abolition Act was assured to pass through parliament, Wilberforce died. His was a life solely dedicated to pursuing the most important human rights cause of the age. The result was the liberation of millions and their descendants<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, few Christians in Nigeria could as well take the fight on corruption, insecurity, diplomacy, and help in our health institutions among other sundry areas of national challenge.

## **Conclusion**

Important matters of this life are not those of money, statuses, locality or race; but those that concern a right attitude of spirit and a right relation with God. Christian belief, influence and discipleship is the main issue at stake. For instance, William Wilberforce, a deeply religious man dedicated his life and his work to acting on his beliefs, because of the discipleship of Isaac Milner and John Newton.

William wrote in secret to Newton:

Sir, there is no need for an apology for intruding on you, when the errand is religion. I wish to have some serious conversation with you... the earlier the more agreeable to me. I have ten thousand doubts within myself, whether or not I should discover myself to you; but every argument against doing it has its foundation in pride. I am sure you will hold yourself bound to let no one living know of this application, or of my visit, till I release you for the obligation...(anonymous).

To be an effective influencer, Christians need both substance and style in their belief. Without a solid foundation of credibility, even the most interpersonally adept Christians will fall short. On the flip side, highly credible people can struggle with influence if they don't understand the interpersonal dynamics at play<sup>27</sup>. Interpersonal dynamics play out most in politics. Webster dictionary defines politics as, "the science of government; that part of ethics which has to do with the regulation and government of a nation or state, the preservation of its safety, peace, and prosperity, the defence of its existence and rights against foreign control

or conquest, the augmentation of its strength and resources, and the protection of its citizens in their rights, with the preservation and improvement of their morals."

Christians can salt the earth and light the world by living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in obedience to Christ, thereby inevitably influence the world for good, as salt has a positive influence on the flavour of the food it seasons. The difference between the Christian and the world must be preserved; therefore, any choice on our part that blurs the distinction between us and the rest of the world is a step in the wrong direction. This can happen either through a choice to accept the ways of the world for the sake of comfort or convenience or to contravene the law of obedience to Christ (Logos Bible Software).

The paper suggests about five steps Christians can influence the Nigerian society. They are: Christians need to understand their influencing power and style. It all begins with Christians' need to know who they are and the God they believe in. They must have confessed their sins and have placed their faith in Jesus Christ (1John 1:9). Christians need not assert, convince, negotiate, bridge, but inspire their society.

Secondly, Christians need to recognize their situations. Who are the critical stakeholders they need to influence to achieve an objective or overcome an obstacle? They need to walk in the light of God's word (1John 2:4-5). Thirdly, Christians need to identify their foe. Fourthly, they need to master discipleship and studying the word of God to develop the needed strength to combat their foes (2Cor.6:14-18). Fifthly, they need to practice their faith. Beginning with small steps – low-stakes situations where they can test out their new influencing approaches (James 4:1-12).

Being effective in politics that results in a good society is more than a political or legal judgment. It requires God acting in Christ to make a Christian right in politics and being a productive member of society. God acts when he is given residence in a believer's heart in the person of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, the matter rests on imitating Jesus Christ. Jesus had a goal to reach and He lived a prioritized life. Christians should be

guided in their behaviour not by their knowledge of the rights they have, but by their consideration for the glory of God and the well-being of their fellows and the good of the society (1Cor 10:31–32). This is the way Paul lived, and he urged the Corinthians to follow his example, just as he followed Christ's (1 Cor. 10: 33–11:1),<sup>28</sup>. Christians must not live in ignorance or complacency or fear. Christians should imitate Jesus Christ and influence their society for good. Christians need a biblical understanding of human dignity, Christians should be committed to the common good, Christians need a correct understanding of the Kingdom of God, and Christians must "remember our history.

True faith in God produces a change in attitudes, character and conduct. Christians would be partners in the gospel when the gospel is embraced to effect lifestyle changes. Christians should not receive the grace of God in an empty way, bereft of purpose. Fellowship with darkness, filthiness of the flesh and insensitivity to financial needs around us are all inconsistent with the grace of God. Christians motivated by the gospel must couple their outer zeal with an inner heart for God's love and justice, showing attitudes God desires to see in our lives and serving him in our world.

## ENDNOTES

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