

# THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS ON HUMANITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The impact of Christian ethics on humanity and economic development in Nigeria is the centrality of focus. Ethics is derived from the Greek adjective ethikos which comes from ethos, a noun which in the singular means character, and in plural manners or customs, even customs which are prescribed by laws. The term Christian emanated from Antioch, the ancient capital of Syria in the New Testament era (Acts 11:26) as a nomenclature given to the disciples of Jesus Christ. Christian ethics consist of ethics which is firmly based on Christian faith and truth. It can also be seen as the systematic study and evaluation of human conduct from the point of view of Christian faith. Christian ethics is rooted in love, compassion, and integrity which has significantly impacted Nigerian society, influencing both humanity and economic development. This research gave a clear definition of Christian ethics, sources of Christian ethics and the characteristics of Christian ethics. The impact of Christian ethics on humanity is found through education, healthcare, moral reformation, fight for justice and show of love and harmony. Also, its impact on economic development in Nigeria via economic empowerment, promotion of legitimate business, encouragement of productivity and innovations, preaching and initiating good governance are discussed. In using analytical method and the utilization of books, journal articles, internet sources, etc. in this research, positive results are expected in Nigeria via Christian ethics. This research recommends amongst others that churches should emphasis more on building human capacity that will be economically viable and independent as a way of building a better Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Christian, Development, Economic, Ethics, Humanity.

## 1. Introduction

Christianity is a religion which was established by Jesus Christ and his followers passionately preached his gospel to shift away from Judaism with its cardinal anchor on love for God and neighbours. The primary and final authority for Christian ethics is found in the life, teachings, ministry and death of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God. He clarified the ethical demands of a God-centered life by applying obedient love or agape to all human situations, both personal and social, and earthly as well as eternal, and required our best actions amid the relativities of the present world. Show love, forgiveness, compassion, and respect in the same manner that you desire such things to be shown to you. But remain separate from this world and its wicked ways.

Christian ethics is also derived from the Bible which is a higher authority in ethics than tradition, reason, experience, expected results, or subjective perceptions of guidance. Christian's ethical standards and morals are built around its core beliefs and core values. People expect Christians to operate with a high degree of integrity and respect those who live up to their ethics of Christianity.

It is expected that Christian politicians in Nigeria should genuinely embrace godly spiritual mandate and apply biblical teachings to governance and contribute to the renewal of Nigeria's political culture. The above acts will foster good governance, restore public trust and promote the flourishing of all citizens.

The Church, as an agent of socialization must be at the forefront of rebuilding our nation and making individuals imbibe economic

moral principles. In the church's evangelical and spiritual mandates, she must boldly speak against corruption in our society which is a tool in the hands of our leaders for impoverishment of the citizenry. Nigeria is bedeviled by acts of social crimes such as embezzlement, armed and pen robbery, indolence, dishonesty, bribery and corruption, cheating, profiteering and fraud. This attitudinal pattern has resulted in severe social developmental neglect and decay within every stratum of society, cutting across status, gender, and religious affiliations. Christian ethics will bring about change of attitude of our corrupt political, judicial, legislative leaders, etc. in Nigeria and enhance economic development and empowerment through the fear of God.

### **Definition of Christian Ethics**

Christian ethics is understood as both lived experience and academic study reflecting upon practice, deploying moral norms, engaging present-day issues, and more. Consideration is paid to the powerful role of the Bible in the everyday lives and decision-making of Christian people.

Persistent emphases include God's bias to the poor and how God's gift of the earth to all in common requires human beings to ensure that those things necessary for life are available to all, including future generations. Christian ethics is shown to be distinctive because it follows from belief in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, and capable of argumentation without direct reference to revelation, (Esther, 2024).

Christian ethics as an academic discipline uses scriptures and traditions in developing and critiquing ethical norms and theories and applying them to ethical issues. Most Christian ethicists agree that the sources for doing ethics include revelation (scripture) and tradition, as well as human reason and experience, (St. Olaf, 2020). According to Georgia (1957), Christian ethics is defined as the systematic study of the way of life set forth by Jesus Christ applied to the daily demands and decisions of human existence.

In defining Christian ethics, Quinn (2022) states: If you were to compare Jesus' moral teachings with Greek moral philosophy, the closest relations are with virtue theory, very

similar to that of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Virtue theory focusses on doing good to be a good person for one's own psychological well-being, Jesus focusses on being a good person to do good for one's relationship with God. In both virtue ethics, social good is secondary and a result of personal good. Jesus is also a little more specific with what virtue is considered the highest, that being non-romantic (sometimes called Platonic) love, first for God, then for others. By cultivating an attitude of love, virtuous actions and good consequences follow for all ones' relationships.

Barry (2025) posits that the fundamental difference between philosophical and Christian ethics is that philosophical ethics are validated by a variety of different factors that can vary from one philosopher to the next, but which generally include such things as: our innate sense of empathy that lets us recognize other people as fellow human beings. An understanding of how certain rules have helped society run smoothly in the past, thought experiments of how society would function if people didn't agree to act in certain ways. Christian ethics, on the other hand, are validated in only one way: "God said so." The problem with this, of course, is that there are so many different Christian denominations with different translations of the Bible all interpreting different passages in different ways, and what it really ends up being is something more along the lines of: "This is what I believe God meant when he said something in the Bible, according to how my particular church taught me it should be interpreted."

### **Sources of Christian Ethics**

#### **Natural Morality**

Quarreling shows that the behaviour of the other is wrong and that the other party is right. In the view of Wilkinson (1988), this knowledge of right and wrong, of good and evil, and the sense of obligation to do the right rather than the wrong is the basis of natural morality. The standard of behaviour provided by natural morality has traditionally been called Natural Law.

#### **Biblical Ethics**

The Bible is the supreme rule of faith and conduct for the Christians. Although the Bible is not a textbook of ethics, it has more to say on ethics and that is why we have biblical ethics. Some ethical teachings in the Old Testaments times may or may not be applicable in our modern sophisticated civilization. The Bible is clear and unequivocal on ethical requirements connected to the daily life of the Christians in the modern world. For instance, the requirement not to commit murder or adultery, and not to steal or give false evidence. Also, holiness, righteousness, mercy and love are found in both the Old and New Testaments with confirmation in the words of Christ (Matthew 5:17-18).

### **Christian Experience**

The gap of many centuries which separates us from the close of the biblical canon is full of human experience in general and Christian experience in particular which produces Christian ethical knowledge and wisdom available in the individual Christian and the church. Anderson (1930) said "Christian experience and wisdom, such as canon law sought to codify and tradition to preserve, have their place as a source of ethical guidance for the Christian". The individual Christian experience and the Christian community have been and still continue to be informed and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

### **Benefits of Christian Ethics**

Considering the beneficial characteristics Christian ethics, Wayne (2018) listed the followings:

#### **Christian Ethics teaches us how to live**

Christian ethics reveals what the whole Bible teaches us, about acts, attitudes, and personal character traits that receive God's approval and which ones do not. This means that Christian ethics teaches us how to live. It is important to study Christian ethics so that we can know God's will better, and so that each day we can "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him" (Col. 1:10).

#### **The Ultimate Basis for Christian Ethics is the Moral Character of God**

God delights in his own moral character, which is supremely good, unchanging, and eternal. His moral standards for human beings flow from his moral character, and therefore they apply to all people in all cultures for all of history (although the Bible also contains many temporary commands intended only for specific people at a specific time). God is love, so he commands us to love (1 John 4:19). He is holy, and he commands us to be holy (1 Peter 1:15). He is merciful, and he commands us to be merciful (Luke 6:36). He is truthful, and he commands us not to bear false witness (Titus 1:2; Exodus 20:16).

#### **Christian Ethics teaches us how to live to the Glory of God**

The goal of ethics is to lead a life that glorifies God ("do all to the glory of God," 1 Cor. 10:31). Such a life will have (1) a character that glorifies God (a Christ-like character), (2) results that glorify God (a life that bears abundant fruit for God's kingdom), and (3) behavior that glorifies God (a life of obedience to God, lived in personal relationship with God). Understanding obedience correctly requires that we avoid the opposite errors of legalism and antinomianism.

#### **Christian Ethics teaches us Dimensions of any Action, and Possible Sources of Information**

Christian ethics is not concerned only with our right and wrong actions. We are complex people, and life itself is complex. Therefore, in studying Christian ethics, God wants us to consider not only (1) the action itself but also (2) a person's attitudes about the action, (3) the person's motives for doing the action, and (4) the results of the action.

In seeking to know God's will, sometimes we must make a decision instantly, with no time to ponder the situation (see the story of Joseph in Genesis 39:12). But at other times, we are able to ponder a decision at some length. When we have more time to ponder a decision, we can consider as many as nine possible sources of information and guidance: (1) the Bible, (2) knowledge of the facts of the situation, (3) knowledge of ourselves, (4) advice

from others, (5) changed circumstances, (6) our consciences, (7) our hearts, (8) our human spirits, and (9) guidance from the Holy Spirit. We need wisdom from God in order to evaluate these factors rightly in making a decision.

### **The Impact of Christianity on Humanity Education**

The role of religion that is very germane to socio-economic development of Nigeria is on the educational sector. Churches have been involved in this right from the time of the early missionaries who came preaching their gospel and alongside, they brought western education. This was later expanded by the native missions to Nursery/Primary, Secondary, Adult Education, Sabbath and Sunday School Classes, etcetera. The efforts of Christian religious groups paid off through the products they turned out who were/are leaders of Nigeria politically, economically and religiously. Many of these Christian religious bodies also took steps further to establish tertiary institutions in many localities to ease the tension of many students who could not be accommodated in the public tertiary institutions for lack of space and facilities, (Moses, 2019). The view of Moses above appears differently in our contemporary era as mission schools are very expensive for the poor masses and even members to attend.

According to Colorado Christian University (2025), Christian education is designed to provide a holistic approach to learning by prioritizing a high-quality education along with spiritual, moral, and personal development. The connection of intrigued godliness and deep intelligence will affect the rest of the lives of students, their families, their workplaces, their churches, their neighborhoods, and ultimately the world. Christian education strongly emphasizes cultivating integrity, compassion, and humility. These qualities are essential for effective leadership and responsible citizenship.

### **Healthcare**

Christianity has impacted humanity through healthcare by providing a moral and ethical framework for compassionate care, establishing hospitals and clinics, and emphasizing the importance of both physical

and spiritual healing. Christian missionaries have founded medical facilities worldwide, including those providing care to the poor and marginalized, and have pioneered medical practice.

The Catholic Church has long been the largest custodian of not-for-profit healthcare facilities, established by religious orders with a mission to care for the sick, often under tremendous hardship. Originally led and staffed by religious sisters and brothers in service of others through Christian charity, the latter half of the twentieth century challenged Catholic hospitals with changes in the economic landscape that increased the financial and organizational pressures on their sense of mission, (James, 2020). James maintained that:

*A Catholic healthcare response puts human dignity at the center of its work without compromise.*

*It responds to the needs of the poorest of the poor and is offered and opens to all, regardless of socio-economic status, race, religion, or creed.*

*As a ministry, it is rooted in a local call to service within the community, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. Due to its conviction to the Gospel, a truly medical witness remains independent of the influences of public or corporate payers which can hold sway over the way it carries out its mission of evangelization and healing.*

Throughout the ages, their commitment to love and serve those weaker than themselves, as Christ did, placed Christians at the forefront of advancing standards of clinical medicine and patient care, (Rosie, (2025). Christianity gives men and women a new perspective and allegiance; their lives are spent in joyful, grateful service of the God who has redeemed them. In many ways, Christianity and medicine are natural allies; medicine offers people unique opportunities to express their faith in practical caring for others, embodying the command of Christ: 'whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me', Matthew 25:40.

### **Moral Reformation**

Morality is the act of rightness or pureness of behaviour of an individual which

reflects in his or her conduct. Caxton (2020) states that that morality deals with how we ought to behave in the society. Morality means a system of moral values against which human conduct is judged and ordered of a balanced living. According to Sibani and Haruna (2021), morality can be seen as the rightness or wrongness of something as judged by accepted moral standards. The ultimate standard of morality is God. Good philosophical principles are all realisations of the dignity that God has reposed in man as His image.

A person with good moral is not likely to be involved in cheating, dishonesty, fraud, armed robbery, drug abuse, disrespect for oneself, disrespect for authority, disrespect for colleagues or age mates, disrespect for elders as well as disrespect for other man's rights. Christians are expected to make their character worthy of emulation, by teaching good moral in schools, at homes, in offices, and in the society, (Ilori, 2002).

Christianity has impacted humanity through moral reformation by shifting the emphasis to compassion, charity, and the inherent dignity of every individual, which challenged existing social structures. Through teachings, missionary work, and historical reform movements, it has promoted the end of harmful practices like slavery and human sacrifice, fostered social justice, and influenced the development of ethical systems, the rule of law, and concepts of human rights.

Arun (2024) states that in the Jewish context, Jesus' reformation efforts were multifaceted. He sought to dismantle the exclusivity and elitism of the Jewish religious hierarchy by promoting inclusivity and compassion towards marginalized groups, including Samaritans, Gentiles, and sinners (Luke 10:25-37). Christianity has played a significant role in shaping Nigeria's moral landscape. Missionaries actively opposed practices such as slavery, the killing of twins, and human sacrifices, advocating for human rights and social justice (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Christians reflect on the incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ; it is a good time to remember that Christianity has massively

contributed to good in world history as well. Other religions have done so, too, and Christianity's effects are impossible to disconnect from the Jewish tradition from which it sprang. Christianity, however, is arguably the greatest engine of moral reform and cultural riches that the world has known, (Thomas, 2019).

### **Fight for Justice**

In our world today, Christians fight for justice through activism, charity, and advocacy. Christianity has a deep-rooted commitment to fighting for justice, grounded in biblical teachings about God's concern for the oppressed and the mandate to "love your neighbor". This involves taking action against injustice, caring for the vulnerable, and seeking to uphold righteousness and the flourishing of all people. Christians fight for justice through prayer, personal involvement, and acts of compassion, recognizing that while God is sovereign, individuals are called to be agents of change in the world, (Thomas, 2019).

Christians have a responsibility to stand up for the defenseless and those who are downtrodden. The Christian approach to justice is different from seeking revenge. It is a path of righteousness that begins at the cross. Justice is a fundamental attribute of God. The Bible declares that "righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne" (Psalm 89:14). Followers of God are called to reflect this character by fighting for justice on Earth.

Jesus's life and ministry are models for pursuing justice. He consistently showed compassion for the marginalized, such as the sick, the poor and social outcasts. He condemned hypocrisy and injustice, and his sacrifice on the cross is seen as the ultimate act of justice. Isaiah 1:17: "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow". The early church: The first Christians practiced distributive justice by sharing their possessions to ensure no one among them was in need. They were a "contrast society" that opposed the unjust values of the Roman Empire, (Jason, 2022). Following Jesus (2025) states that Hebrew law codes were designed to protect the poor. They include:



*Requirements that allow the poor to glean the fields after harvest.*

*Dedicating the tithe, a 10% tax on agricultural production, to feed the poor every third year.*

*Wages must be paid to the working poor before nightfall.*

*Cloaks taken as collateral on loans must be returned before nightfall.*

*No interest may be charged on loans to the poor.*

*The Sabbatical Year codes require that all financial debts are to be forgiven every seven years.*

*They also require that all Hebrew debt slaves must be released every seven years.*

*The Jubilee Year law codes require that the land, the economic capital in an agricultural economy, must be redistributed every 50 years.*

*The law allows for special temple sacrifices for the poor, and expects that the community will provide them with equal access to religious festivals.*

*And the codes demand that merchants use just measures in weight, quantity and length in dealing with the poor.*

Together, we can create communities that embody the transformative teachings of Jesus and work for justice and peace in the world. Discover how his life and teachings can inspire a life of purpose, compassion, and change. Walter Brueggemann (cited in Following Jesus, p.4, 2025) posits "Justice is to sort out what belongs to whom, and to return it to them." Evidently for the biblical writers, the fundamental contour of justice is something different. For them, the just society is the society in which the weak and voiceless ones have been brought into the community so as to enjoy its goods. The contour of biblical justice is providing the poor with access to the means of life.

### **Show of Love and Harmony**

In a related strand in this view of redemption, Jesus frees us from sin through love and regeneration. St. Ignatius writes:

*Who is able to explain the bond of the love of God? Who is equal to the telling of the greatness of His beauty? The height to which love lifts us in unutterable. Love unites us to God. Love covers a multitude of sins. Love endures all things, is long-*

*suffering in everything. There is nothing vulgar in love, nothing haughty. Love makes no schism; love does not quarrel; love does everything in unity. In love we are the elect of God perfected; without love nothing is pleasing to God. In love did the Master take hold of us? For the sake of the love which he had for us did Jesus Christ our Lord, by the will of God, give His blood for us, His flesh for our flesh, and His life for our lives. St. Ignatius 11 (cited in St. Olaf, p.67, 2020).*

Demonstrating love in our society imply the care for one another and ensuring that the needy, poor and the rich are treated alike. There is no room for revenge but forgiveness in Christocentric love principles.

### **Christian Ethics Impacts on Economic Development in Nigeria**

#### **Promotion of Legitimate Business**

The ethics of economic life covers the Christian vision of property, work and vocation, and economic justice, all stemming from the position that all things belong to God and we are to be faithful and loving stewards in managing God's world and ourselves in it, (Georgia, 1957). The Lord detests differing weights and dishonest scales do not please Him (Pro.20:23). These practices are categorized as theft (Deut.25:25). The Bible further admonishes that right conduct based on honesty should be demonstrated in business (Lev.19:26). Christians in all vocations should be mindful of this because doing so will keep the Christian in a healthy relationship with his God (Ps. 15:1-2), producing a better society.

According to Julius (2023), the question of justification of extortion on the grounds of delayed salaries and inadequate pay by holders of public offices, John the Baptist's position suffices here, "don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely; be content with your pay." (Luk.3:14). Although soldiers were the direct object of John's admonition, other categories of public officers, like tax collectors and court officials, were known in the New Testament times to be engaged in extorting money from the people. For instance, Zaccheaus became very wealthy through commission from extortion in his tax collection business. In contemporary Nigeria, it would be expected of professing Christians to behave as

Zacchaeus did when Jesus came into his life. He promised to give half of his possessions to the poor and to repay four times the amount he collected by extortion to those he had cheated (Lk. 19:8).

### **Encouragement of Productivity and Innovations**

Socio-economic development is a process in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are in harmony and enhance both current and the future potentials to meet the human needs and aspirations. These developments include: physical development which includes man made goods produced by the use of technology and personal development (Agha, 2003, 67).

Potential impact is hindered when Christian ethical values are neglected by both leaders and followers, leading to issues like corruption that obstruct sustainable development. Shields (2004) opines that everything a Christian does is to be done with a view to glorifying God (I Corinthians 10: 31). Work must surely be included in this because in it, the Christian serves Christ as well as his employer; he must go beyond the call of earthly duty and seek to please the Lord. That means he must always seek to produce work of the highest quality. He knows that he is accountable to God for all he does and thus, from the quality of the service he renders or the goods he makes (Ephesians 6:5-8, Colossians 3:22-24).

For any nation to develop, the labour force must be diligent. However, Nigerians lack the sense of industry. There is poor attitude to work in both public and private sectors. The civil service is worst hit because civil servants see the work as not 'my father's work'. Therefore, lateness to work, absenteeism and abscondment have become the guiding principles, (Olumuyiwa, 2019).

### **Preaching and Initiating Good Governance**

The high level of corruption currently being witnessed in Nigeria society gives cause for alarm. Some of the culprits are Christians and as such, one begins to ask questions such

as where is the integrity expected from the Church. Lack of integrity was responsible for leaders diverting public funds and properties which they have sworn to an oath of allegiance to protect. It is time for church leaders, individuals and institutions, to be an active participant in the fight. The Church is an important influential institution in our society should be a role model. (Ajayi & Oluwasegun, 2022).

As one of the two dominant religions in Nigeria, Christianity plays a vital role in shaping the conscience and character of individuals, including those who ascend to political leadership. Given its emphasis on justice, accountability, compassion, and service, Christianity inherently advocates for the principles of good governance (Nanlir, Tolutope, & Rose, 2025). They stated further that Christianity has the potential to shape good governance in Nigeria through its ethical teachings, institutional resources, and prophetic role. However, for this potential to be realized, Christian politicians must embody the principles of their faith in tangible and consistent ways. The Church must also rise beyond institutional survival and reclaim its prophetic mandate to serve as a beacon of justice, truth, and compassion. By doing so, Christianity can significantly contribute to a more just, peaceful, and accountable Nigerian society.

Lami (2025) avers that promoting godly governance in Nigeria demands a multipronged approach that involves the Church, political institutions, educational systems, and civil society. The Church must embrace its prophetic role by speaking truth to power, confronting injustice, and advocating for policies that reflect biblical values. Church leaders should move beyond the pulpit to engage in national conversations on governance, policy-making, and human rights. Onaiyekan (2014) argues, "Silence in the face of corruption and bad governance is complicity; the Church must stand as the conscience of the nation".

Christians must be encouraged to participate actively in politics—not as power seekers but as agents of moral renewal. The Church should mentor and support credible,

value-driven individuals to run for political office, while also educating congregants on their voting rights, responsibilities, and the ethical implications of their political choices (Akomolafe, 2016). Ultimately, godly governance is not only possible but essential for Nigeria's sustainable development, national unity, and spiritual renewal. By anchoring political life in the values of the Kingdom of God, Nigeria can move toward a more just, equitable, and compassionate society—one that truly reflects the will of God for human flourishing.

## 2. Recommendations

The following are recommendations for a better humanistic development through Christian ethics:

*Christian ethics should be practice and promoted in the educational institutions in Nigeria to enhance good morals in our society.*

*Our leaders in Nigerian politics should embrace Christian ethics to develop moral conscience and good leadership devoid of corruption but seek the good of others.*

*The pulpit should be avenue to educate adherents and the society via prosperity messages and good ethical principles for successful business and economic empowerment.*

*The church should continually adopt advocacy for justice for the poor,*

*oppressed, and the underprivileged in Nigerian society.*

## 3. Conclusion

Christianity has impacted humanity for moral and economic empowerment via Christian ethics in Nigerian society. There is therefore the need for church leaders to place more emphasis on teaching integrity so that Christians can begin to influence their environment and the society at large more positively. Corruption is very pervasive and it is affecting financial stability of the poor masses. It is a systematic problem in our society and thus should from the root, stem and branches. To curb it, everyone must be empowered financially and to distinguish between rights and wrongs. The church should return to the teaching of moral principles to empower adherents with the spirit of stewardship and high moral integrity. This will engender exemplary lives reflecting truth, kindness; healthy competition; dignity in labour; integrity and good governance in Nigeria. It is time for church leaders, individuals and institutions to be active in Christian ethical practices. The Church as an important influential institution in our society should be a role model to Nigerians and proffer remedies to her problems through moral, ethical and attitudinal change and positive orientation.

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