# Broken Morality: Reinventing a New Ethical Culture in Nigeria for Civic Righteousness1

**Authors & Affiliations**

## Philip Tachin

Faculty of Arts,
National Open University of Nigeria,
Abuja, Nigeria
Email: *ptachin@noun.edu.ng*

**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines Nigeria's ethical deterioration and proposes pathways toward sustainable ethical cultural renewal. The author argues that Nigeria has transformed from a once-respected nation in the 1970s to one facing severe moral challenges across public and private sectors. The research identifies key factors contributing to this decline, including corruption, weak enforcement of ethical standards, fragmented policies, and the failure of religious institutions to instill moral values despite Nigeria's deeply religious character. The paper analyzes how economic mismanagement and corruption have led to widespread poverty, forcing citizens to choose survival over ethical conduct. It draws historical parallels with the 16th century Reformation, particularly Calvin's transformation of Geneva, to demonstrate how ideological shifts can create positive ethical cultures with significant socioeconomic impacts. The methodology is qualitative, analytical, and comparative, relying on secondary data, thematic organization, and historical/contextual analysis rather than empirical fieldwork or quantitative surveys. The approach is suited to the paper's aim of diagnosing ethical problems and proposing high-level solutions for cultural renewal in Nigeria. The author concludes that reconstructing Nigeria's ethical culture requires a comprehensive approach: developing a new worldview, implementing strong leadership committed to ethical primacy, ensuring consistent enforcement of laws, and fostering collective responsibility. This renewal demands both institutional reforms and a societal commitment to ethical principles that can restore public trust and create a sustainable foundation for Nigeria's development.

**Keywords:** Morality, ethical culture, rule of law, corruption, leadership, religion

## Introduction

This paper investigates the deep-seated ethical decline in Nigeria and explores strategies for rebuilding a sustainable moral culture. The research traces Nigeria's transformation from a nation admired for its integrity in the 1970s to one plagued by pervasive corruption, weakened institutions, and a loss of public trust. The analysis identifies key drivers of this decline—including economic mismanagement, ineffective law enforcement, and the failure of religious and familial institutions to instill lasting moral values—despite the country's overt religiosity. There are regulatory agencies in Nigeria to enforce due process but most of them compromise, preferring to make benefits either from inefficiency or deliberate neglect of the laid down rules. So basically, we have all the policies and principles on paper but which are mocked practically.

As the nation faces increasing socioeconomic pressures, the struggle for survival often forces individuals to compromise ethical conduct, further entrenching a culture of short-term gains and impunity. The failure of traditional institutions—such as family, religion, and education—to instill and sustain moral values has exacerbated this decline, making a comprehensive and systemic response urgent.

How then, can Nigeria evolve a long term sustainable ethical culture? This paper argues for an ethical cultural renewal that informs every Nigerian to take a critical look at our present situation, question their roles in making a better environment and determining the right thing to do and collectively take responsibility. The paper's relevance is heightened by Nigeria's current ranking on the Corruption

Perceptions Index, which remains low and reflects ongoing challenges with transparency and accountability. Drawing historical parallels with the 16th-century Reformation and Calvin's transformation of Geneva, the paper argues that ideological and cultural shifts can foster positive ethical renewal with lasting socioeconomic benefits. Employing a qualitative, analytical, and comparative methodology, the study synthesizes secondary data and historical context to diagnose Nigeria's ethical crisis and propose high-level solutions. The author concludes that reversing Nigeria's moral decay requires a holistic approach: cultivating a new collective worldview, strong ethical leadership, consistent enforcement of laws, and societal commitment to integrity. Such comprehensive reform, the paper contends, is essential for restoring public trust and laying the groundwork for national development.

## I.  Background statement

Nigeria has metamorphosed into an undignified entity over the decades. The moral principles that made Nigeria a destination hub for countries like India, Singapore, Canada, and several other countries in the 70s have vanished. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the sins of Nigeria were still at a low ebb. Comparatively, the advancement of the southern part of Nigeria in the 1970s and 1980s opened up to more crimes than northern Nigeria. For instance, in the 1970s, Ishola Oyenusi was tagged "the king of robbers" in Lagos while Youpelle Dakuro was tagged "army deserter" (Nigerian Tracker, 2021). In the late 1980s, Anini rose to criminal prominence such that he could "numerous letters to media houses using political tones of Robin Hood-like words, to describe his criminal acts" (Nigerian Tracker, 2021). The Nigeria Police described the crime scenario in the southern part of Nigeria to be at "epidemic proportions" (Pike, 1998).

This unfortunate scenario was attributed to "worsening economic conditions and by the ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and corruption of police, military, and customs personnel who colluded and conspired with criminals or actually engaged in criminal conduct." (Pike, 1998). Eke. C. Chinwokwu blames this ugly development on "the Nigerian civil war of thirty months which spanned from 1967 to 1970 provided the environment which facilitated the breed and indulgence in violent crimes by criminals" (p.8). By the late 1908s into early 1990s, heavy violent agitations emerged in different parts of Nigeria such as the "Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and other militant groups like the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Jukun Militia, Igbo People's Congress (IPC), Ijaw Militia, and Itsekiri Militia began to take advantage of deteriorating socioeconomic, cultural shock, political disharmony and infrastructural decay to cry out for recognition and against marginalization (Guichaona, 2006; Onimajesin, 2011; Okechukwu, 2003). According to Agbaje (2002) the activities of this militia soon began to present a dangerous trend and dimension for the nascent democracy" (Chinwokwu, p. 8-9).

Mismanagement of resources and corruption have led to abject poverty. Consequently, the common people have lost confidence in the promises of political leaders to make the country better. They have, therefore, embarked on any means possible to survive. Ele succinctly captures this: "The struggle for survival and pursuit for wealth have eroded people's morality. Men are no longer guided by their moral conscience. From the above viewpoint, it is evident that the instinct to survive prompted by unfair distribution of the country's wealth has made many to play down on the moral values" (Ele, p. 109). For well-to-do families, the prompting towards ethical conduct might not be quite tough but for poor people preaching civic virtues might be difficult to germinate in their hearts. Thus the people have to choose between being nice and dying on the one hand, and getting into unethical things to survive. This forms a chain within the family and sometimes community setting. Having spanned decades of this ugly economic and social conditions, morality collapsed gradually over time.

According to the coupists of December 1983, corruption was massive which led to the federal and state governments' inability to pay salaries of civil servants and lack of social amenities. Buhari accused the politicians that Nigeria was "enslaved by a handful of people who had been sharing the wealth among themselves and who were determined to stay in office at any cost" (May, 1984, para. 3). And that "thuggery and bribery" became the order of the day (May, 1984, para. 4). The ordinary people lampooned the Shagari government. Though Buhari came to the helm of affairs two times and several other presidents also came, the

question is whether any meaningful development has been achieved in turning the ugly tide of corruption that Buhari first identified in the second republic. The situation has probably worsened. According to Transparency International, in 1996, Nigeria averaged 21.64 points in the ranking. In 2025, Nigeria ranks 104 out of 180 on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) (Adigun, 2025) which cannot make the citizenry proud of this kind of identity. This situation is escalating to a more hopeless situation.

## I.  Statement of the Problem

Nigeria has been under a developmental shackle mainly because of the effect of unethical behaviour that has submerged the entire country in every sector. Both the private and public sectors have suffered damage due to this phenomenon. In the private sector, owners of corporate organizations have worked hard to ensure ethical conduct which explains why private businesses are thriving. However, it is not the same with the public sector where there seems to be no code of conduct or the rule of law to regulate attitudes and behavior of citizens. For the public sector, the fundamental problem is the attitude that everyone believes in taking short-cuts towards everything they want to achieve. The necessary consequence of this unethical culture is that "A culture prioritizing short-term gains over sustainability can encourage unethical practices" (AccountingInsights Team, 2025, para. 2). This ethical problem that is so prominent in Nigeria is top-down in nature. On the negative side of the coin, it is globally factual that "Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping corporate culture. Ethical leaders who value transparency can instill similar principles in their teams. Conversely, leadership that engages in or tolerates unethical conduct normalizes such behavior" (AccountingInsights, 2025, para. 3). However, positively, "Leaders who prioritize ethics alongside financial objectives establish a foundation for integrity" (AccountingInsights, 2025, para. 4).

Some scholars have advocated moral education as a panacea for moral rebirth in Nigeria (Ede, 2023; Uche, Uche, & Nwodo, 2017; Osajie), while others emphasize moral reasoning (Killen, 2021) as an innate aspect of human nature that only needs to be ignited through education. The duo of Amunnadi and Ossai (2020) "called on the government to create National Ethics Committee which should be charged with promoting and sustaining quality control in the deployment of moral sanction as a developmental platform" (Amunnadi, C.A. & Ossai, A.B. 2020, p. 175). While this is a laudable suggestion, the question that this view fails to deal with is whether the members of such a committee have a moral reservoir from which they can give out to society. Both religious and secular ethics have common points of complementarity. However, when morals begin to crumble in a society, what is the hope of restoration?

This research is especially important and relevant now due to the escalating ethical crisis and pervasive corruption that continue to undermine Nigeria's development and public trust. Over recent decades, Nigeria has experienced a dramatic decline in moral standards across both public and private sectors, leading to widespread poverty, ineffective governance, and a loss of confidence in leadership1. The persistence of these issues—despite Nigeria's deeply religious character and the existence of legal and institutional frameworks—highlights a critical need for a new approach to ethical renewal1.

By proposing a holistic framework for ethical renewal that emphasizes leadership, consistent law enforcement, and a collective shift in societal values, the research addresses the root causes of Nigeria's moral decay. Its call for both institutional reforms and societal commitment to ethical principles is timely, as only a concerted effort can restore public trust and lay the foundation for sustainable national development. In a period marked by heightened awareness of corruption's detrimental effects and the urgent need for reform, this research provides actionable insights and a roadmap for rebuilding Nigeria's ethical culture.

## II.  Failure of religion and family values?

Nigeria is a deeply religious country, whether as Christians, Muslims or traditional worshippers but the question is whether or not this has any serious commitment and intention to please God in their lives. Nearly every family in Nigeria is a religious family. It is apparent that all the spiritual noises that are made have only one particular goal as the apostle Paul says, "their god is their stomach" (Philp. 3:19). The reality of things in Nigeria is appallingly contradictory to what should be the case. The failure of religious impact is a shouting embarrassment: "The orchestrated crusades, pilgrimages, holy grounds and edifices have not borne the corresponding requisite fruits of moral virtues in many citizens; and this explains the gross erosion of moral values in the society." (Ele, 2019, p. 109).

It is quite sad that the "Nigerian society of this 'religious' magnitude launches itself into self-destructive forces of moral degeneration as evidenced in the bizarre facts of indecent dressing modes, armed robbery/banditry, terrorism/extreme violence, drunkenness, sexual abuse, 419 syndrome/yahoo syndicates menace (duping of people), cattle rustling, kidnapping of people for ritual and/ or ransom purposes, self-kidnapping for ransom, to mention but these." Ele, p. 109). This is a comprehensive battered image of Nigeria as a nation. This is a mix of elements of civilization and primitive behavior which makes Nigeria a unique nation in the negative sense.

The institutions or instruments that could have helped in molding good character have all failed. Morality has crumbled in Nigeria due to various factors including family breakdown, globalization through the effect of science and technology, media, materialism, poverty, and collapse in discipline schools (Dick, C.J., Ede, V.I., Chiaghanam, O.F., 2020, p, 275-276). The expectation for a positive moral boost draws from religion where believers must exemplify their religion's moral codes. Most religious moral codes abhor criminal actions that can destroy social bliss. It is expected that as the codes are spiritual in nature, having been transmitted by God to humanity, there will be a spiritual impact that would manifest in the physical and moral dimensions.

The expression of these moral codes shows that those who truly have a strong connection with God would possess the spiritual enabling to abide by them and this will result in a decent society, even if there can never be perfection in it. Many have argued on the inseparable relationship between religion and morality such that "the destruction of religion will automatically lead to the destruction of morality" (Dick, Ede & Chiaghanam, 2020, p. 274; see also Agha, 2010). However, the motive for morality differs between religious and secular people: "The religious people observe their moral code as worship to God and service to humanity while non-religious people try to live morally right as an obligation to the society." (Dick, C.J., Ede, V.I., Chiaghanam, O.F., 2020, p. 275).

### III. Failed Attempts at Fight Against Corruption and Cultural Rebirth

Nigeria has a long history of battling ethical governance and public service challenges. During the military era, Buhari and Idiagbon's enforcement of cultural ethics (1983–1985) centered on the War Against Indiscipline (WAI), a nationwide campaign to eradicate corruption, promote social order, and revive traditional Nigerian values. The regime framed its policies as a revival of Nigerian cultural ethics, emphasizing honesty, integrity, and hard work. Public campaigns contrasted these virtues with the "moral pestilence" of corruption, which Buhari described as antithetical to national progress (Council on Foreign Relations, 2016; Wukari International Studies Journal, 2022). This initiative aimed to address systemic indiscipline through coercive measures and public re-education, though it faced criticism for its authoritarian methods. The WAI campaign targeted five key areas, each addressing specific societal issues: public orderliness, workplace discipline, national unity and patriotism, anti-corruption measures and sanitary drives.

While the WAI initially improved public order, its methods drew widespread condemnation. Critics highlighted human rights abuses, including arbitrary detentions and public humiliation, which eroded public support (Nairaland, 2010; Cjhiafulokoja, 2023). The regime's focus on superficial discipline, such as equating cleanliness with moral integrity, failed to address deeper economic inequalities ("War Against Indiscipline," 2024). By 1985, discontent over these measures contributed to Buhari's overthrow in a coup led by General Ibrahim Babangida (Council on Foreign Relations, 2016).

The anti-corruption structures in Nigeria are not very effective due to weak enforcement, lack of political will, inadequate autonomy and resources, and limited support from civil society. There is a notable gap between the design of anti-corruption laws and their practical implementation. While Nigeria has enacted several anti-corruption laws, the lack of effective enforcement strategies and oversight institutions has hindered their impact (Nwosu, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms that strengthen enforcement mechanisms, ensure agency independence, provide adequate resources, and foster greater public engagement (Nwosu, 2023; Waziri, 2010; IFRA-Nigeria, 2012).

Despite persistent issues, several concrete reforms and initiatives have, to a large extent, successfully promoted ethical standards and reduced corruption. These reforms include Asset Declaration and Transparency Initiatives (CCB), Anti-Corruption Agencies, (EFCC, and ICPC) Public Service Ethical Frameworks and Campaigns, Codes of Conduct and Training and the introduction of Civic Education and Public Participation in secondary schools. However, the anti-corruption agencies themselves have faced criticism regarding their effectiveness and internal integrity (Azeez & Ajibowu-Yekini, 2018; Abdulrauf, 2020).

## I. Understanding Culture: A New People with a New Mindset?

What is culture? When people talk about the African or Nigerian culture being rich, they look more at the variety of things including mode of dressing, dance, food, manner of speaking, worldview, family, housing styles, etc. However, what is usually not foremost in this consideration is the right ethical principles that make solid cultural practices. In other words, what we are known for in terms of character? The quality of a culture lies in its integrity and trustworthiness. This can make other countries respect and trust our nation and continent, and be willing to invest their businesses here. The rule of law can only be strong in a culture that runs on integrity and trustworthiness. Therefore, culture can be both rich and poor depending on its quality of ethical standards.

The concept of ethical culture can be cultivated at the micro and macro levels in a structured way that runs strategically in phases of national development. At the micro level, "Culture is an organization's superpower. The responsibility of ethics and compliance professionals is to guide and advance the organization's culture" (Ethisphere, 2024, p. 20). The behaviour in workplaces saturates the entire society. This means "we can create workplaces where ethical behavior thrives and business success is driven by strong moral principles" (Ethisphere, 2024, p. 3) and this can be done by boosting our "culture approach with communications, best practices survey content, action planning templates, and workflow tools" (Ethisphere, 2024, p.24). It is important to note that "Ethical culture matters – to employees, investors, and all stakeholders. Companies that have strong values-based cultures are better places to work and well-poised for long-term success" (Episphere, 2025, para. 3).

As a country, we need to foster a new ethical culture that takes us away from depending on foreign aid and focus on ourselves and how we can become a producing country, rather than a consumer one. Adesina stresses this truth when he debunks dependence on foreign aid, which yields no development (Adesina, 2025). This further means that Africa, and especially Nigeria should not outsource its health security but capitalize on our capabilities like during the Ebola outbreak to develop locally (Adesina, 2025). Adesina advocates achieving "sovereignty for Africa in producing its medicines and vaccines" (Adesina, 2025, p. 5). Nigerian leaders must take a deliberate step towards self-actualization and self-sustainability: "Africa must become 100% self-sufficient in the manufacturing of medicines and vaccines. In a world where it is becoming increasingly difficult to know allies, or where long-term allies suddenly shift their priorities, there is no substitute for self-reliance" (Adesina, 2025, p. 6).

This sense of direction is just one out of many. Our country needs to become a manufacturing society in other aspects as well, not just in health. It was a significant challenge to get our refineries operational due to internal sabotage. Our dependence on other countries should be in terms of mutual exchange since we cannot manufacture everything. However, Nigeria should focus on some critical infrastructure such as energy that has global markets which other countries can also import from Nigeria.

It is possible to build a new ethical culture in Nigeria that respects the rule of law, but it requires comprehensive reforms, strong leadership, and societal commitment. Current challenges-such as weak enforcement of ethical standards, fragmented policies, corruption, and lack of public trust-must be addressed through coordinated strategies targeting both institutions and societal values. Fundamentally, the leadership must imbibe "ethical primacy and ethical culture maturity" if the country is to earn its overall health (Vorster & Vuuren, 2022, 13). An ethical culture works effectively when socio-economic structures are fairly made and implemented as has been tested elsewhere: "Incentive structures significantly influence employee behavior. Thoughtfully designed systems drive productivity and innovation, but poorly structured incentives may reward short-term gains at the expense of long-term sustainability" (AccountingInsights, 2025, para. 7).

A recent research conducted in Brazil among employees on the impact of unethical behavior produced a result that "companies scoring higher in unethical culture are less profitable and that this relationship is likely to be economically relevant" (da Silveira, 2023, p.1). The situation in Nigeria is not quite different from what has been found in Brazil. It is widely known that "deterioration of moral values, ethical values; common manners, respect, civility and proper etiquette have impacted negatively on the individuals and modern society" (Rahman, 2018, p. 38).

What happens in individual organizations represents the larger society and if we take what happens in successful organizations and apply to the larger Nigerian society, there will be a national socio-economic rebirth. The purpose of every organization mirrors the purpose of the Nigerian society, and this purpose can be

actualized only if the same principles that apply to individual organizations that are flourishing such as Dangote Companies can apply to national existence. The seriousness of this view cannot be overstated:

It is critical to understand that the expectations of behaviour in each culture   already carry moral weight. This may include the behaviours that are rewarded   or   recognized, those that are punished or deterred, and those things the   organization does not react to at all (i.e., being silent on issues). In all these cases the   organization sends signals to its members about 'how we do things around   here' (Vorster and Vuuren, 2022, p.6).

At this point, it is worthy to question the management of the Nigerian entity by the authorities in terms of reward and punishment as well as silence on certain behaviours, whether they add value or deteriorate the purpose of our existence. The failure of rewards and punishment to make things right anchors on our corrupt mindset and fatal sentiments. This failure rings on ethnic, religious, socio-economic backgrounds and it becomes a general apathy. In Nigeria, unacceptable behaviours in successful private organizations face no punitive consequences in the public service. Though it is noted that not all organizations achieve their results through right ethical principles, as some only "build systems to maximize profits at the expense of certain stakeholder groups, which would in fact promote unethical conduct using the same systems of behavioural control" (Vorster and Vuuren, 2022, p. 9).

## II.  Reconstructing an ethical culture: an analytical framework

An enduring ethical culture must stand on the foundation of the rule of law. The rule of law in this case is not just the theoretical recognition but the actual implementation, which subjects all citizens under it irrespective of status. The rule of law serves as the cornerstone of cultivating a solid, stable culture within any society. It embodies the principle that all individuals, institutions, and entities are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced, and independently adjudicated (Tamanaha, 2012). This framework ensures fairness, equality, and justice, enabling citizens to trust that their rights and responsibilities are clearly defined and protected. A society grounded in the rule of law fosters respect for legal norms, discourages arbitrary use of power, and promotes social order, thereby creating a cultural environment in which individuals can interact predictably and securely.

Furthermore, the rule of law underpins cultural values by reinforcing ethical behavior and civic responsibility, which are critical for social cohesion and development (Friedman, 2018). It establishes a system where laws reflect the collective morality and aspirations of the community, guiding behavior and resolving conflicts in a manner consistent with shared norms. Without this legal foundation, societies risk descending into chaos, corruption, and mistrust, undermining cultural integrity and sustainable development. As such, the rule of law is indispensable not only for governance but also for embedding a resilient culture that nurtures growth, peace, and mutual respect. The rule of law becomes embedded in a culture and transforms into a culture of the people through a dynamic interplay between legal norms and the shared values, beliefs, and practices of a society. This process goes beyond mere enforcement of laws; it entails the internalization of legal principles such as equality, fairness, human rights, and accountability as core societal values that guide behavior and governance (*Bangjun*, D. (2019).

Embedding the rule of law in culture involves cultivating a legal consciousness where law is not an external imposition but an integral, accepted part of the social fabric, reinforced by education, societal values, fair institutions, and cultural legitimacy (Licht, 2004; Mautner, 2012). This is what Nigeria needs to do so that the rule of law is internalized and made so strong as to become part of the people's culture. It is only by doing so that Nigeria can truly turn a new leaf in its social construction.

All morality or ethical culture stands on a certain worldview that people evolve. Cultural revolution occurs through ideological shifts. When the practical reality of people's conduct goes unproductively contrary to the healthy growth of a society, it means there is a prevailing worldview that is debased and it calls for a thorough overhaul into a new godly worldview that can breathe a new leash of life in the society. Thus political and religious leaders in Nigeria have a great responsibility to think and act in a way that becomes exemplary in setting up a new ethical culture.

An ethical culture is what we do with the resources that God has created for our benefit. Though we acknowledge that all humanity is under the bondage of sin, for which reason we are more prone to misbehaving with God's resources within our custody, Christians,' ethical conduct should be different because "redemption changes people comprehensively, so that they carry God's wisdom into their workplaces: compassion and justice into government, meaning into art, truth into journalism" (Frame, 2010, p. x).

The above statement of fact has worked in some countries like Switzerland, America, the Netherlands, Scotland, and other parts of Europe where Calvin's ideas made great strides. If the Geneva experiment worked, why can it not work in Nigeria, given that the Christian population is huge? Is the power of redemption not active in believers in Nigeria? Corruption thrives under some Christians who possess some political powers as if they are no longer accountable to God and no higher authority over them. However, it is believed that "Redeemed people ennoble everything human" and while sin is still actively causing believers to fall, from a "wide historical perspective, we can see that through their Spirit-motivated efforts, culture does change for the better" (Frame, 2010, p. xi).

The world before the dawn of the 16th century Reformation was economically unproductive. The emergence of the Reformation showcased that cultural attitudes have a significant impact on human development. This is particularly evident in the legacy that Calvinism has left on Western society. According to Hall (2008), Calvin exerted a profound influence on Christian culture in Geneva, which grew tremendously into a global phenomenon. Calvin assumed leadership of the Reformation church in Geneva but his focus was not just the church but the betterment of the general society. Thus, Calvinism has affected many aspects of life but more particularly the capitalist economy. Calvin was able to change the cultural ethic through his teaching that a productive Christian life was a sign of being an elect of God (Weber, 1905; Hall, 2008).

Calvin held that every vocation has its "inherent dignity" which God vests in it and as such everyone who has a vocation should work it diligently in a manner that is accountable to God because "a person could serve God and glorify him in any area of labor" (Hall, 2008, p. 27; Hall & Padgett, 2010, p. ix.). The feasibility of this rests with people who truly know God and see their eternal destiny ahead and who are willing to discipline themselves, holding themselves captive to the will of God. The Genevans and indeed those who embraced Calvin's philosophy of life adapted themselves to this and the practical results became remarkable, and this legacy has grown in most Western countries, especially America. Calvin's ethical culture affected economics, politics, education, medicine, and all of scientific development.

For those who are Christians, it is necessary first to understand God's mission in the world and then to follow with actions that are guided by God's word. Foremost, God is the owner of the earth and all humanity inhabits it as tenants, and just as there are tenancy rules between landlords and tenants, so there are between God and all humanity especially as they are binding tenants (Wright, 2006). The earth was made beautiful for the benefit of humanity and this attests to the goodness of God. The earth has its intrinsic value that God bestowed upon it. Wright makes a great point about Christian motivation as we partake in the mission of God: "Another strong motivation is the *compassionate* response to the reality of human need – all the physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions of our fractured human condition. So we are motivated to tackle the destructive effects of sin in all those areas too, through medical, social, educational and economic action" (Wright, 2006, p. 416). As vice-gerents of God in managing the earth with its resources, we are required to show gratitude to God who made us and has given us such great and glorious opportunities in our actions by not only avoiding abusing the earth but we are expected to create a well-being atmosphere for all humanity to flourish.

However, sometimes, political and religious leaders in Africa and other less developed countries tend to pay more attention to issues of the natural environment like climate change, and the natural resources than the deplorable conditions of the human beings that they live with. Much of the underdevelopment in Nigeria and Africa, in general, owes to a lack of ethical cultural values that are guided by divine principles. Thus, the "ethical challenge to God's people is, first, to recognize the mission of God that provides the heartbeat of their very existence and, then, to respond in ways that express and facilitate it rather than deny and hinder it" (Wright, 2006, 357). If we truly are God's creation in his image, then we have to reflect his character in all our thoughts and conduct.

The 16th-century Reformation, particularly Calvin's transformation of Geneva, demonstrates how ideological shifts can foster positive ethical cultures with significant socioeconomic impacts (Weber, 2002). This historical lens suggests that Nigeria's challenges are not unique and that lessons from global history can inform local solutions. Despite the contextual variation and nuances involved in the growth of nations, the crux of this perspective is how ethical adaptation can make a real life change in any culture in the world. It is the belief and willingness of the people to have a self examination to choose the best life system that can bring overall health to the entire society.

The searchlight for a new Nigeria also turns on Muslims who believe that their religion is also true and a redemptive one. Islamic theology believes in the power of man to do good and given that many Muslims also take control of some political powers, is it not equally possible for their actions to bring transformative changes? If Islamic countries like the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have developed their countries so well holistically based on the ideologies that they believe in, why have their Muslim counterparts in Nigeria not been able to replicate the same belief in practice, yet they show more religious zeal by allowing killing of human lives and destruction of property in the name of religion? Corruption reigns within the ambit of their control. Both Christians and Muslims in Nigeria may have disappointed God terribly due to the failure to live the ethical culture that God desires to make his people happy. It sometimes appears as if sin and evil have made Nigeria their hub.

How should religious people who claim to be worshiping God live? Does God give ethical rules that would change human society for the better if they are applied? Proceeding from the biblical presupposition that the human mind is corrupt, it requires two dimensions to create a new situation: one internal and another external. First, it is the renovating power of the Holy Spirit to cause the mind to love God and fellow humans. Second, the application of the law to restrain human excesses adds to the internal restraining power of God and motivation to do good. This is what Calvin achieved: "Where Calvinism became thoroughly rooted, citizens saw economic growth. With the delicate combination of enhanced freedom and opening economies, Calvin's prosperity ethic would outlive him. The new work ethic fueled by the spirit of Calvinism changed the world" (Hall & Burton, 2009, p. 185).

There is a similarity of perspective among Islamists, Pelagians, and Arminians who believe that humans have the innate unaided ability to do good and bring about positive human transformation. Calvinism on the other hand recognizes the human inability to do good but underscores that God is the source of human goodness. Overall, whether God is the sole acting grace in human conduct or goodness is innate in human nature despite the fall, Paul obliges us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philp. 2:12). The human responsibility that Paul places here is as if God has entrusted our salvation into our hands so that we may not mess up our lives but live as responsible people towards the goal that is ahead of us. The Bible grants that despite the effects of sin, the human mind still possesses a knowledge of the moral principles, even though it tries to suppress the truth in ungodliness (Rom. 1:18f). Calvin admits this reality and affirms the common grace of God by which the secular people try to follow a certain order. This order derives from God who made the entire creation in order and set its natural laws to regulate all things.

As all religions claim eternal salvation with God eventually, working our salvation with fear and trembling would surely impact society positively. If Nigerian religious adherents believe in what they teach, then it is possible to usher in the national holistic transformation that we yearn for. God demands that all people should evolve a cultural mandate that brings his rule on the earth (Num. 14:21; Hab. 2:14). When Christ taught the "Lord's Prayer" he demands that God's kingdom be made actively present among us by acknowledging him and living rightly with one another (Matt. 6:10).

The genuine transformation of the human society begins in the human heart. If the heart is sick with evil, the result will be fatal. Therefore, the first point of a better society begins in the heart where the Spirit of God impacts God's word to bring about his kingdom rule. Humanity on its own volition alone may be too selfish to think of the common good of all which necessitates divine radar for our policy and ethical navigation in the right direction that God wants for all humanity that was created in his image. A political economy that works for the good of the citizens and takes the concerns of God into serious account will regulate an economy that removes the poor from taxes because "by increasing taxes, men are made poorer" (Hall & Burton, 2009, p. 218). All through scripture, God's heart is for good to thrive in human society but more especially for the poor, downtrodden, and vulnerable groups.

Therefore, the challenge of making Nigeria a better place is more critical now than ever before. We cannot expect God to come down here and start putting up economic and political structures that would work for us. God is not coming down to implement the rule of law in our country. God has given all humanity, the freedom, wisdom and ability to apply the ethical principles that he has set in his revealed scriptures. Governing the society in godliness in God's behalf is the basis for divine judgement, which all people will be held accountable. Those who want to be schooled in the matters of religion should know that "the fundamental notion of change for the better is an economic truism that accords with some business systems and practices more than others" ( Hall & Burton, 2009, p. 19). And if our religion is true, we should know that God "designed creation for growth, productivity, and maturation" as well as"orderliness" which are "features that God has woven into the fabric of human nature" (Hall & Burton, 2009, p. 20).

So how does sanctification factor into this matter? How can Christians who are sanctified by the Holy Spirit make a difference? Islamic theology also believes in the concept of sanctification but that happens differently from Christians. For Muslims, it is the practice of daily regular prayers and fasting. It is a comprehensive spiritual process aimed at transforming a believer's inner self from self-centeredness and immorality to purity and submission to God's will. The goal of *tazkiyah* is to cultivate spiritual awareness, abstain from sin, and embody ethical conduct, which is considered the essence and core of faith and the pinnacle of *ihsan, which is* excellence in worship and social responsibility) Jones (2020) and samirmahmoud.com. (n.d). In both cases, it is expected that believers in both religions can behave ethically different from unbelievers. However, does the population of Christians and Muslims in Nigeria attest to their sanctification in their socioeconomic and political engagement? The prevailing results of violence in the name of Allah for Muslims and corruption, though not in the name of God, in which Christians and Muslims are enmeshed raise more questions. Why are religious adherents more prone to criminal behaviour than godliness by demonstrating the love of God? Is it the failure of religion or the hypocrisy of the followers who only use religion to obtain the favor and trust of the people?

The failure of religion cannot be justified. In Christian theology, the biblical texts show God's condemnation of evil, wickedness, injustice, and corruption. Jesus Christ condemned the civil authorities in his time of valuing their ceremonial rites over and above the dignity of human lives when they imposed laws that targeted the poor and vulnerable groups, which didn't affect the wealthy people in the society. Notably, "Christian morality believes and teaches that there should be no contradiction between profession and practice. What we believe must influence behaviour, and creedal affirmation must harmonize with conduct and character" (Dick, C.J., Ede, V.I., Chiaghanam, O.F., 2020, p. 277). While achieving this phenomenal change is a multitasking effort as other scholars have outlined (Dick, C.J., Ede, V.I., Chiaghanam, O.F., 2020) the narrow focus of this essay is religion, which is the hub of divine revelation for human conduct and flourishing.

## I.  A Deliberate Political Leadership

Our leadership should focus on developing local content, including human and natural resources. It is rather unfortunate that the political leadership does not value its potential. The government has never shown significant interest in sponsoring research in specific areas that can promote national growth. The country has lost some of its best brains to advanced countries where opportunities are abundant and they are rather contributing greatly to those nations. This is a serious challenge to our cultural ethic.

The kind of leader that we need at this time must "above all have the skills, the capability, the proficiency, the political genius to use the circumstances of a concrete event to hit the right mark" (Bavinck, 2008, p. 264). To actualize this ideal, ethics, and politics have to be tightly interwoven so that in praxis, it will not only be the strongest that will be protected but the vulnerable too will enjoy the privileges and rights by laws that are not capricious. In this fair legal practice, the economic structure of the society will comprehend the "psychological, religious, philanthropic, ethical, and judicial" (Bavinck, 2008, p. 268). The human history especially from the Greek civilization shows that politics and ethics were never isolated from each other because the absence of one would render human society inequitable. Nigerian and African leaders should understand that "the task and purpose of the state is, therefore, the healing of the soul, a happy and virtuous life, and politics is, therefore, a component of practical philosophy, the application of ethics to the free citizens" (Bavinck, 2008, p. 268/9).

## II. Recommendations: Strategies for Building an Ethical Culture in Nigeria

### 1. Define Core Ethical Values

Organizations should begin by clearly defining core ethical values that align with their mission and daily operations. These values must be specific, actionable, and communicated consistently to all members (LinkedIn, 2024; C3 Workplace, 2025). Workshops involving employees and leaders can help refine these values and tie them to real-life behaviors.

### 2. Implement Customized Business Ethics Programs

Organizations should adopt comprehensive business ethics programs designed specifically for Nigerian businesses to address local challenges such as corruption, nepotism, and ethical dilemmas influenced by cultural norms. These programs typically include customized training, interactive learning modules, and continuous support to enhance ethical decision-making at all organizational levels (Novatia Consulting, 2024).

### 3. Strengthen Ethical Leadership and Accountability

Leadership commitment is critical. Leaders must model ethical behavior, admit mistakes, and demonstrate accountability. This sets the tone for the entire organization and encourages employees to emulate ethical conduct (LinkedIn, 2024; C3 Workplace, 2025; Plante, 2015). Leaders must model ethical behavior by demonstrating integrity, transparency, and accountability. They should commit to high personal and professional standards, placing organizational interests above personal gain. Leadership training should emphasize ethical decision-making and enforcing consequences for unethical conduct (Oparache-Nnebue, 2022; Novatia Consulting, 2024).

### 4. Integrate and strengthen the Enforcement Oversight of Ethical Governance Policies

Nigeria's ethical governance can be reinforced by harmonizing key policies such as the Nigerian Code of Conduct for Public Servants and the National Ethics and Integrity Policy. This integration provides a clear, culturally relevant framework for ethical behavior and accountability, supported by rigorous enforcement mechanisms and penalties for violations (Odeh, 2023). Integrating ethics into governance structures ensures that ethical considerations are part of strategic decisions and operational policies. Clear, enforceable policies help maintain consistency and fairness (LinkedIn, 2024; The Corporate Governance Institute, 2024). Enhance the capacity and independence of anti-corruption agencies and the judiciary to ensure violations are detected and punished, regardless of the offender's status. Establish comprehensive penalties for unethical practices and ensure consistent application.

### 5. Foster Organizational Cultures Aligned with Ethical Values

Trevino and Nelson (2021) emphasize that deliberately cultivating an organizational culture prioritizing ethical values such as honesty, fairness, diligence, and equity is essential for long-term success, employee engagement, and public trust. They note that aligning employee goals with management directives, supported by norms, rituals, and recognition systems, encourages ethical behavior at all organizational levels.

### 6. Provide Ongoing Ethics Training and Open Dialogue

Regular ethics training tailored to Nigerian socio-political realities helps employees and leaders navigate ethical dilemmas. Encouraging open discussions about ethical issues fosters transparency and collective responsibility. Whistleblower protections and clear reporting channels are essential to support ethical conduct (Oparache-Nnebue, 2022; Novatia Consulting, 2024).

### 7. Promote Civic Participation and Public Awareness

Building an ethical culture extends beyond organizations to society at large. When organizations prioritize ethical values, they set standards that inspire individuals and other institutions to act with integrity, contributing to social stability and collective well-being (Kernaghan, 2014). Public campaigns, inclusive civic engagement, and education about the benefits of ethical governance can cultivate a shared commitment to integrity and accountability (Odeh, 2023).

### 8. Utilize Ethics Champions

Identifying and empowering ethics champions within organizations can help promote, monitor, and enforce ethical standards. These individuals act as role models and advocates for ethical culture, helping to embed ethics into daily practices (Adeyemi, 2021).

### III. Summary and conclusion

This paper examines the severe decline in ethical standards in Nigeria, tracing the roots of the country's moral crisis to corruption, poor law enforcement, economic mismanagement, and the failure of religious and family institutions to instill lasting values. Despite Nigeria's deep religiosity, the study finds that moral conduct has deteriorated, with both public and private sectors suffering the consequences. The author draws historical parallels with the 16th-century Reformation, particularly Calvin's transformation of Geneva, to argue that major ideological and cultural shifts can foster ethical renewal. Using a qualitative and analytical approach, the paper critiques existing solutions and proposes a holistic framework for rebuilding Nigeria's ethical culture—one that emphasizes strong leadership, consistent enforcement of laws, and a collective societal commitment to integrity.

The paper concludes that reversing Nigeria's moral decline requires more than policy changes or moral education; it demands a comprehensive transformation of the nation's worldview and values. Through the rule of law Ethical renewal must be driven by exemplary leadership, robust institutions, and a society-wide embrace of integrity and responsibility. Only through such a holistic approach can Nigeria restore public trust, reinforce the rule of law, and lay a sustainable foundation for national development.

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