

The Role of the Church in Nation Building: The Current Experience in Nigeria

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Abstract

The church is the body of Christ on earth, and the church in every nation represents God. The role of the church in building any nation cannot be overemphasized. Nigeria, as a nation, is blessed with a diverse church community, and her contributions to the nation's growth are significant. The church's responsibility to the state is to serve as a voice for justice, advocating for the masses, supporting the vulnerable, and contributing to the nation's socio-political dynamics. However, current challenges bedeviling the nations, such as poverty, corruption, bad governance, unemployment, insecurity, and incessant killing of Christians, are destroying the reputation of the nation and weakening the church to effectively contribute to the growth of the nation. The paper is descriptive in nature, and the author employs a qualitative research approach that involves a combination of literature review, biblical analysis, reports of the brutality of Christians, churches, and Christian schools in Nigeria to address the subject of discussion. The paper identifies the following roles of the church in building the nation: Public Proclamation of the Sanctity of Life and Dignity of the Human Person; Developing Moral Principles of Beneficence in every Church member, sustaining the identity of salt and light in the world, and empowering members, among others. The paper submits that the church, Christians, and denominational leaders of the Christian community must rise to address all challenges confronting Nigeria with all available resources, as the church

is the last hope for the masses, innocent children, and citizens in the nation.

Keywords: Church, current Nigeria experience, nation building, Role

Introduction

The church is the body of Christ on earth, and the church in every nation represents God. The church should be the voice of the masses and the helpless. The role of the church in building any nation cannot be overemphasized. Nigeria, as a nation, is blessed with a church of many denominations, and their contributions to the growth of the nation are very significant. The church's responsibility to the state is to serve as a voice for justice, advocating for the masses, supporting the helpless, and contributing to the socio-political dynamics of the nation. However, current challenges bedeviling the nations, such as poverty, corruption, bad governance, insecurity, and incessant killing of Christians, are weakening the church to effectively contribute to the growth of the nation.

These challenges have brought confusion in the country, and Nigeria is at a crossroads. This is evident in a number of protests that are coming out in the nation. In the midst of this confusion, the Church, as the salt and light of the world, is the hope and solution provider to the myriad challenges facing Nigeria at such a time. The paper submits that in the midst of this turbulent problem that befell the church and Nigeria as a nation, the church has moral and spiritual obligations to the nation to foster hope, unity, and progress, and the church and her leaders must not keep quiet or fold their hands, looking at the destruction and shedding of innocent blood in Nigeria of the nation. The paper examines the current challenges facing Nigeria and the potential roles of the Church in nation-building. The paper is descriptive in nature, and the author employs a qualitative research approach that involves a combination of literature review, biblical analysis, reports of the brutality of

Christians, churches, and Christian schools in Nigeria to address the subject of discussion. The paper argues that the church, Christians, and denominational leaders of the Christian community must rise to address the challenges that bedeviled the nation with all available resources; the church is the last hope for the masses, innocent children, and citizens in the nation.

Current Challenges facing Nigeria

Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and natural resources; it is usually regarded as the giant of Africa. Apparently, every state of the nation has a rich deposit of mineral resources and human resources. Nigeria has a rich deposit of crude oil. However, since her independence from colonial rule on October 1, 1960, the socio-economic structure of the country has been declining and is not healthy for the citizenry. Over the years, Nigeria has faced many challenges, including political instability, economic hardship, and insecurity, among others. The current challenges facing the nation have deeply impacted its fabric and are tearing the nation apart. The nation is confronted by these identified challenges on every side. The paper identifies poverty, insecurity, corruption, bad governance and political instability, economic hardships and unemployment as major challenges that are tearing down the walls of development and peaceful coexistence in the nation. The challenges are discussed below:

Poverty: Poverty is an enemy of growth, and the poverty rate is increasing daily in Nigeria. According to the World Poverty Clock, as of 2025, seventy-one million, nine hundred and seventeen thousand, two hundred and twenty-three (71,917,223) Nigerians are living in extreme poverty. The poverty rate in Nigeria is 31 percent.³⁸⁷ Nigeria is the 6th

³⁸⁷ World Poverty Clock, 2025 Report. <https://worldpoverty.io.map> accessed November 8, 2025.

country that exports crude oil to other countries. This makes Nigeria a wealthy country.³⁸⁸ Similarly, Nigeria has other natural resources that contribute to its survival. Yet the citizens are living in poverty. Poverty leaves many citizens in despair and makes life a survival of the fittest. Where life becomes a struggle for survival, social vices are likely to increase. Poverty is causing the nation to stand in confusion.

Insecurity: Insecurity is a serious challenge confronting the nation and it is tearing the nation apart. Jesutunwase states that the insecurity challenge is prevalent in Nigeria because of the country's economic downturn.³⁸⁹ Lisa Zangarini reported in Vatican News on April 17, 2023, that insecurity has been a persistent problem in Nigeria since 2009, and “52,250 Nigerian Christians have been brutally murdered at the hands of Islamist militants, 18,000 churches have been set on fire, and 2,200 Christian schools have been set ablaze.”³⁹⁰ This report was issued in 2023, and it is now 2025; the number of lives lost and property destroyed by now is alarming. Although people of other religions are victims of insecurity in Nigeria, the effects on Christians and churches are very significant and destructive. The surge of insecurity has put the nation in disarray and has led several companies to relocate to other countries, putting several Nigerians in a homeless situation. A sizeable number of technocrats, professionals, and youth had travelled out of the country, while some youth embarked on irregular migration in search of greener pastures. The Boko Haram insurgency,

³⁸⁸ Udo N. Ekpo, “An Analysis of the Economic Consequences of Nigeria’s Dependence on Crude Oil Exports,” *International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability* Vol. 10, No.6 (2022):49.

³⁸⁹ Jones Segun Jesutunwase, “Military and Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria,” *Anyigba Journal of History and International Studies (AJOHIS)* Vol. 1 No. 2 (2020):172.

³⁹⁰ Lisa Zangarini “Over 50,000 Christians Killed in Nigeria by Islamist Extremists” *Vatican News on April 17, 2023*, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2023-04/over-50000-christians-killed-in-nigeria-by-islamist-extremists.htm> accessed November 10, 2025.

banditry, Fulani herdsmen, and kidnappings are greatly affecting the growth of the nation, tearing apart the wall of development, peaceful co-existence, and security. There is killing of citizens in the country with the greater percentage of Christians, especially in the Middle Belt of Nigeria.

Corruption:

Corruption is evident in Nigeria and manifests as nepotism, bribery, and its variants, including mismanagement and contrived security threats to the state or the larger society, to obtain approval for the personal enrichment of public officers.³⁹¹ In the political sector, successive governments are becoming increasingly more corrupt than their previous counterparts.³⁹² Thus, corruption refers to the dishonesty of various kinds in governance and society, and unfortunately, some members of the church are not exempt. The language of money matters is pervading society, and this is also tearing the nation. The quick rich syndrome is causing some officers to compromise the standard, and their performance of their expected duty is based on a gift in cash or kind.

Bad Governance and Political Instability: Bad governance is evident in Nigeria. This leads to indiscipline in society, and this is evident in government officials conspiring with contractors to overcharge for government contracts.³⁹³ Sometimes the project will become an abandoned project. In the same vein, Nigeria's political system is experiencing instability due to a lack of

³⁹¹ Jones Segun Jesutunwase, Abubakar Audu & Barnabas Audu Ojile, "Church Responses to Security Challenges in Africa: A Study of the Nigerian Church," *Unizik Journal of Culture and Civilization* Vol. 2, No. 1 (2023):64.

³⁹² A. Onwumelu, "Corruption: Bishop Ezeokafor Warns of Repeat of End SARS Protests," <https://fidesnigeria.org/corruption-bishop-ezeokafor-warns-of-repeat-of-endsars-protests/> accessed on October 8, 2025.

³⁹³ Abdulrahman Adamu and Tativ Bem Elijah, "Bad Governance as the Bane of Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria" *Wukari International Studies Journal* Vol. 8 No. 10 (2024):232.

continuity in the project and policy of the incumbent government. During the campaign and election, one party will come up to raise the weaknesses of the government. When the party wins the election, the challenge of continuity with the project of the previous government will ensue. This manifests in political instability with attached consequences. This is responsible for several abandoned government projects in society. The political leaders are enriching themselves with different mansions and several material possessions at the expense of the masses and societal development.

Economic Hardships: This is a state of economic difficulty or struggle that manifests in high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality.³⁹⁴ On the very day of inauguration, May 29, 2023, the current administration announced the removal of subsidies on petroleum products. The removal of fuel subsidies leads to high inflation, unemployment, food insecurity, economic hardship, and a decline in living standards. The economic decisions of the current government in Nigeria are not friendly to the citizens and make life difficult for the people. Economic hardship has left many households helpless, going without food and other necessities of life. The health of some households has declined due to the lack of healthy nutrition, while some lives have been lost due to a lack of finances to seek medical interventions. Ikonne asserts that economic hardship is a significant decline in economic activity of the country, and it is one of the primary reasons for the constant migration of young people out of the country.³⁹⁵ The paper submits that the challenges of economic hardship in Nigeria affect the life expectancy rate of Nigerians.

³⁹⁴ Janfalan Yusuf Ishaya, Nanlir Kartim Napbut, Tolutope Oluwawole, and Rose Bulus Boyim, "Responses to Economic Hardship in Genesis 41:36: Lessons for the Nigerian State." *International Journal of Religious and Cultural Practice* Vol. 9. No. 4 (2024):26.

³⁹⁵ Ogadinna Ikonne . "An Inquiry into Governance and Economic Hardship in Nigeria: Implications for Migration," *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences* Vol. 6 No. 3 (2024):761.

Unemployment: This is another serious problem that is confronting the nation. Unemployment in Nigeria is an issue of concern that is drawing attention from the government, religious leaders, and researchers because of the attached consequences. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the unemployment rate among Citizens is increasing, and the unemployment rate by 2024 is 15.3 percent.³⁹⁶ The challenges of unemployment include increased crime rates, violence, and social unrest. Akindoyin and Obafemi, assert that the overwhelming unemployment rate in the country is capable of causing panic, which leads the youth to be involved in all forms of crimes, such as kidnapping, banditry, and even Boko Haram.³⁹⁷ The youth population in Nigeria accounts for More than 65% of the country's population. This group, aged between 15 and 40 years, constitutes the active working population of the country. Nigeria is one of the countries with a large youth population in Africa. These enormous human resources, however, are not well planned for by the government at all levels.³⁹⁸ One of the types of evidence of this problem is unemployment. The government is creating more tertiary institutions of learning with inadequate provision of job opportunities for graduates.

The Role of Church in Nation Building

The church, as the body of Jesus Christ, has roles to play in building the current Nigeria as a nation. There are existing

³⁹⁶ Agnes Isoje, "Richest Pastors in the World" Pulse August 21. 2025.

<https://www.pulse.ng/articles/lifestyle/richest-pastors-in-the-world-2025082115442318155> accessed November 10, 2025.

³⁹⁷ Dare Isaac Akindoyin and Akintomiwa Olaniyi Obafemi, "Evaluating the Impact of Insecurity on Nigeria's National Development since the Fourth Republic," *African Journal of Stability & Development* Vol 17 No. 1 (2025):96.

³⁹⁸ Olawale Y. Olonade, Tayo O. George, David Imhonopi, Mathew E. Egharevba and Adamu G. Kasa "Youths' Socio-economic Well-being in Southwest Nigeria: What Role can Empowerment/Poverty Reduction Programmes Play?" *Cogent Social Sciences* Vol. 8 (2022):1.

efforts in addressing the challenges facing the nation from different perspectives. Some of them include the EndSARS protest, youth protests, Labour Congress, TUC, the quest for a Yoruba nation, and the Biafra movement, among others. All these reactions are evidence that the citizens are suffering and the nation is at a crossroads. In the midst of this confusion, the church has a role in building a nation that will be habitable for its citizens and a blessing to the global world.

In the history of Nigeria, the role of the church from the colonial period to the present day has played a significant role in shaping the educational, political, social, and medical sectors of the nation. Beyond spiritual matters, the Church in Nigeria has played a pivotal role in education, healthcare, and politics. Mission schools laid the foundation for Nigeria's modern education system, producing many of the nation's leaders. In healthcare, church-run hospitals and clinics serve communities nationwide, providing critical services in rural and urban areas.³⁹⁹

During the 1970s and 1980s, military regimes, church leaders such as Archbishop Anthony Olubunmi Okogie and Rev. Matthew Kukah were vocal in their advocacy for human rights, democracy, and good governance.⁴⁰⁰ In the present day, the Church continues to engage in social issues, addressing poverty, corruption, and incessant killings of Christians, particularly in the Northern part of the country, where several Christians have been killed. The role of the Church in guiding a nation at a crossroads is examined from the perspective of moral obligations.

³⁹⁹ Mark Onuwuba, "Poverty in Nigeria: The Role of the Church," *Journal of Positive School Psychology* Vol. 6, No. 8 (2022):1257.

⁴⁰⁰ Ebenezer Obadare, "Pentecostal Presidency The Lagos-Ibadan 'Theocratic Class' & the Muslim 'Other,'" *Review of African Political Economy* Vol. 33, No. 110 (2006):668.

The roles are spelled below.

Pray for the Goodness of Nigeria (Psalm 122:6): The situation of Nigeria is not beyond the control of God the Almighty. One of the major roles of the church is to provide spiritual support for the government. President Tinubu, at one time, asked the citizens to pray for the nation. The Bible, in Psalm 122:6, encourages citizens to continue praying for the nation. The responsibility of the spiritual dimension of the nation rests solely on the Church. As the Salt and Light of the world, the Church offers a sense of hope, purpose, and direction in times of national challenges. Through prayers, counselling, and guidance, the Church helps individuals and communities navigate difficult periods and foster resilience.

Public Proclamation of the Sanctity of Life and Dignity of the Human Person: The church as the body of Christ has a responsibility to proclaim the sanctity of life in the nation. According to Clark, the sanctity of human life is made in God's image (*the Imago Dei*), and human life is a gift from God.⁴⁰¹ The life of humans is sacred, and it is a free gift from God, and it must be jealously protected. The value of human life in Nigeria is declining, and this is evident in the number of innocent lives that have been killed for no reason. The killing involves innocent children, pregnant women, ministers of the gospel, and other valuable citizens who are supposed to be assets to the nation. The ministers of the gospel, leaders of churches, denominational heads, and every Christian in the church are to use every opportunity to condemn the killings of Christians in Nigeria.

Rev. Joseph Hayab, Bishop Ephraim Gongden, Pastor Enoch Adeboye of Redeemed Christian Church of God, Revd Dr Israel Adeleni Akanji, among others, at different times, have publicly condemned the lack of values for human life. Recently, Revd

⁴⁰¹ Steve Clark, "The Sanctity of Life as a Sacred Value," *Bioethics* Vol. 37 (2023):33.

Ezekiel Dachomo, the Regional Chairman for the Church of Christ in Nations COCIN, in Barkin Local Government of Plateau State, Nigeria, publicly condemned the Genocide of Christians in Plateau State. He called on the International community for intervention. This is generating a lot of issues on Social Media. The head of the denominations, pastors, Christians, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and Christian Council of Nigeria at all levels are to speak out publicly to address injustice, bad governance, and violence against Christians and the Church in Nigeria.

For instance, Desmond Tutu, an Anglican Bishop in South Africa, fought apartheid through peaceful protest. Desmond Tutu believed that the best way to find peace is to strengthen your argument.⁴⁰² He used his religious position as a religious leader to protect the interests of his people. Desmond is no more today, but his active role in fighting against apartheid is still speaking. Thus, the religious leaders must not keep quiet in addressing the current challenges confronting Nigeria. The complacency of religious leaders in addressing the challenges confronting Nigeria contributes to the nation's indiscipline. The church must publicly proclaim the sanctity of life and the dignity of man in Nigeria. The paper submits that there is moral ground for any religious organization, Islamic extremist, terrorists and Boko Haram to dehumanize and slaughter fellow human beings. The dignity of every citizen must be well preserved in the nation. If the situation turns other ways round. The church and her leaders must rise as the hope of the masses and innocent citizens to publicly and peacefully address the matter. The church should use all platforms of media with integrity and professionalism to condemn marginalization, discrimination, and violence against the church and humanity.

⁴⁰² Vision of Humanity, "Desmond Tutu and the Triumph against Apartheid" <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/desmond-tutu-and-the-triumph-against-apartheid> accessed November 8, 2025.

Upholding Integrity for the Nation: Integrity is rooted in the biblical view of wholeness, consistency, honesty, and adherence to the law of God. It reflects the character of God in life all believers and Christian leaders. According to Trull and Carter, integrity sustains one in life and ministry, and it is essential for achieving success. It is evidence of Christlike qualities.⁴⁰³ Integrity makes actions and inactions show the identity of Jesus Christ in the lives of Christians. The Church should make additional efforts to instill in her members a strong value of integrity. This comes from the values of honesty, justice, love, peace, and compassion in private and public lives. This is believed to influence the nation's fabric. This can be achieved through the teachings and practices of integrity in the Church. When members of the churches embrace these values and practice them in their places of work, it will create a strong sense of responsibility, accountability, and mutual respect for developing a just and equitable society.

Developing Moral Principles of Beneficence in Every Church Member:

Beneficence is a fundamental ethical principle within various fields emphasizing the moral obligation to act for the benefit of others. Suhas Shetgovekar states that beneficence refers to actions related to mercy, kindness, and charity. It involves protecting the welfare and rights of others. It is the responsibility and duty of every individual to one another.⁴⁰⁴ The Bible provides a basis for this ethical principle, and this can be found in Matthew 22:39, where Jesus commands, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This directive underscores the importance of caring for others and acting with compassion and kindness.

⁴⁰³ Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Being a Good Minister in a Not-So-Good-World* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publisher, 1993), 15-16.

⁴⁰⁴ Suhas Shetgovekar, "The Ethic of Beneficence: A Critical Overview," *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* Vol. 6, Issue 4 (2018):121.

In Christianity, beneficence is a moral obligation, and this is evident in the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. This passage explains the obligations to help people in need, regardless of societal boundaries. Jesus died for all people, and in Matthew 9:36, when Jesus saw the multitude, he had compassion on them because they fainted and were scattered abroad. Every member of the Church should be taught and encouraged to treat other persons in an ethical manner, protect them from harm, and secure their well-being. Seeking the good of other people in the nation is capable of curtailing corruption, violence, and bad governance, which are the root causes of the current challenges confronting the nation.

Sustaining Identity of Salt and Light in the World (Matt. 5:13-14): Christians should not leave politics in the hands of some individuals who are using political power to extort the citizens, dehumanize the masses, and build financial walls for themselves. The consequences of leaving politics in the hands of some people are colossal and greater than participating in politics. Adeoye and Dauda state that Christians, as the light of the world, do not mean abandoning politics for some people, but Christians should participate in politics with a sense of responsibility to promote justice, compassion, and the values of the Bible.⁴⁰⁵

Church should sustain her identity as the Church of Jesus Christ in the World. The Church is the light and salt of the world, and the Church should reveal the moral standards of God to society. Thus, the Church should encourage and support its members to be responsibly involved in politics and governance. Bad governance in Nigeria has brought hardships to the people of God. An average Nigerian is hungry and finds it difficult to cope with the basic needs of life. Thus, the Church should encourage and commission her members to go into

⁴⁰⁵ Moses Adeleke Adeoye and Moses Aguma Dauda, "Biblical Injunction why Christians Need to Participate in Politics: An Exegetical Interpretation of Matthew 5:14-16," *ASEAN Journal of Religion, Education, and Society* Vol. 2 No. 1 (2023):27-28.

politics and clean the dirty nature of politics. Living governance in the hands of some people will add to the problem of this nation.

Avoiding Demands for Money from Politicians: The Churches and their members who make unnecessary demands on politicians should stop doing so. The Church should maintain her position as the spiritual body of Christ on earth. When the church and its members are free from the demands of politicians. They will have grounds for rebuking the corrupt politicians.

Advocating for Good Governance: To promote good governance, the Church needs to maintain a moral standing to encourage and promote good governance among the political leaders. Virtues such as accountability, transparency, and stewardship should be imbibed by the Church and advocated for by the various political leaders. The denominational leaders are to advocate for good governance, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) are to strengthen their voice and skills in advocating for good governance that is free of ethnic bias and seek justice for the nation.

Empowerment of Members: The church should empower her members with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to cope with the reality of the nation. Going out of the nation through illegal migration is not a solution to the problem. Empowering them will make them participate actively in the nation's economic, political, and social life. The church must not exploit its members, but rather empower them for nation-building. For instance, in 2025, three of the ten richest pastors in the world are Nigerian pastors, with significant net worth.⁴⁰⁶ Yet, poverty is still evident in their congregations. The leaders of the church

⁴⁰⁶ Agnes Isoje, "Richest Pastors in the World (2025)- See the Nigerians on the List," *Pulse*. <https://www.pulse.ng/articles/lifestyle/richest-pastors-in-the-world-2025082115442318155> accessed November 12, 2025.

should empower the church members with every available resource for their well-being.

Promoting Social Cohesion and Unity: For any nation to progress, unity and harmony among diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious groups are required. The Church should emphasize love, forgiveness, and reconciliation, fostering social cohesion. The Church should be at the forefront of advocating for tolerance and helping to bridge divisions within societies by promoting a collective identity rather than individual differences. This sense of unity is crucial for maintaining peace and stability, which will have a resultant effect on the nation's security issues.

Conclusion

The church, as a family of God, has a responsibility to build the nation because the church exists in the nation, and a peaceful atmosphere in the nation determines a peaceful environment for church worship experience. The current challenges threatening national security are enormous, and the church has a crucial role to play in providing solutions to these problems. Members of churches are in various sectors of the government, and if all of them serve as the light and salt of the world in their respective areas of assignment, the problems of Nigeria will be solved. The paper submits that the church of God in Nigeria must rise and build her nation with all available resources at her disposal. The Church is the last hope of the nation, and she must rescue the citizenry and masses from bad governance, corruption, poverty, and violence against Christians and society.

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