

Implications of the Moral and Socio-Ethical Teachings of Jesus Christ for Nigeria's Contemporary Socio-Political Challenges: A Christian Response

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Abstract

Nigeria today finds itself at a crossroads, grappling with deep-rooted ethical challenges, corruption, leadership failures, social injustice, and the gradual erosion of communal values. Although Christianity remains a major influence in the country, its moral teachings, especially those of Jesus Christ, seem to have lost practical significance in the everyday lives of many Nigerians. This study explores how the moral and ethical teachings of Jesus, centered on love, justice, truth, compassion, and servant leadership, can be meaningfully applied to address Nigeria's socio-political crises. Using a descriptive survey design, the research draws insights from 300 participants, including clergy, church workers, and lay members (both young and old, male and female) across selected churches and Christian communities in Nigeria. Data were collected through structured questionnaires. The findings show that while Jesus' teachings are widely acknowledged as relevant to societal challenges, there remains a significant gap in their practical application, particularly in civic engagement and leadership ethics. The study calls for intentional efforts to integrate Christian moral values into everyday life and public service. It concludes that national transformation must begin with a moral renewal grounded in the ethical vision of Jesus Christ.

Keywords: Christian ethics, Jesus' moral teachings, Nigeria, socio-political challenges.

Introduction

Nigeria is widely known for its deep religiosity. From city streets to village squares, the presence of churches, mosques and religious gatherings is unmistakable. Christianity, in particular, plays a prominent role in public life, with millions attending services, listening to sermons and openly professing their faith. Yet, for all this visible spirituality, Nigeria remains plagued by widespread corruption, injustice, insecurity and a general decline in moral standards (Oladipo, 2020; Ehusani, 2011). This contradiction between intense religious devotion and the country's persistent ethical crises raises a troubling question: Why hasn't Christian teaching, especially the moral example of Jesus, translated into real change in public and private life?

At the heart of Christianity is the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. His message was one of love, justice, humility, forgiveness and truth. These were not abstract ideas but lived principles, demonstrated through his interactions with the poor, the marginalized and even with the corrupt systems of his day (Wright, 2010). He called for a radical kind of moral awareness, a sense of responsibility to do what is right, even when it is unpopular. In Jesus, we find a model of moral agency, someone who embodied the very values he preached. The question is: Can these values still shape how Nigerians engage with leadership, politics and social responsibility today?

Many scholars and theologians have argued that Nigeria's core problems are not just political or economic but moral at the root. Ehusani (1996), for instance, describes the national crisis as one of moral collapse, where people act without conscience or accountability. Okolo (2005) similarly warns that any attempt at progress without moral depth is bound to fail. This perspective suggests that if we are serious about transforming Nigeria, we must start by confronting the ethical failures that have become normalized in both public service and everyday life. Despite the strong moral content of the Christian faith, there is often a gap between what is taught and what is practiced. Many Christians are quick to

speak about faith but slow to act on its ethical demands. Christian Religious Studies (CRS), a subject meant to guide young minds toward moral reasoning and upright living, is often reduced to rote memorization of scripture without real-life application (Adesina, 2019). Similarly, many church leaders avoid addressing social injustice or political malpractice, preferring to focus on personal salvation and prosperity.

The intersection of Christian moral teachings and socio-political engagement in Nigeria has been widely discussed by African scholars and theologians. Many agree that while Christian ethics are deeply rooted in personal behavior, their influence on broader societal structures remains limited. Ojo (2005) argues that moral instruction lies at the heart of Nigerian Christianity, especially within Pentecostal movements where ethical themes like honesty, integrity and personal responsibility are commonly preached. His research shows how churches have, over time, shaped believers' ethical outlooks through regular teaching, thus reinforcing values like compassion, forgiveness and upright living. However, Ojo also notes that despite this moral emphasis, the practical outworking of these values in public life often falls short. Building on this, Kalu (2007) observes that African Christianity tends to emphasize personal holiness over social or structural reform. He points out that believers may be passionate about their private moral conduct but remain disconnected from civic or national transformation. This insight is crucial for understanding why many Nigerian Christians in the study were aware of Jesus' teachings on love and compassion but less attuned to His message of confronting systemic injustice. The gap between private piety and public engagement is further explored by Orobator (2005), who describes a persistent tension in African Christianity between belief and action. According to him, many African Christians uphold strong moral convictions, but these convictions often remain within the realm of personal life. Orobator attributes this divide partly to fear, partly to cultural pressure and partly to a theology that does not fully equip believers for social responsibility.

Gifford (1998) introduces the concept of a "credibility crisis" in the African Church. While acknowledging that churches continue to preach ethical messages, he critiques the institutional Church for failing to model these values, especially in the areas of leadership, transparency and accountability. This mismatch between preaching and practice undermines the Church's moral authority and limits its impact on societal reform. Complementing this critique, Ilo (2019) argues that the Nigerian Church retains strong influence over its members' ethical choices, even though it sometimes appears silent or cautious in matters of social justice. He emphasizes the need for prophetic engagement, where the Church boldly challenges corruption, injustice and the abuse of power, following the model of Jesus' own ministry.

Ter Haar and Ellis (2004) also offer valuable insight into how religion interacts with politics in Africa. They argue that while religion plays a central role in shaping identity and behavior, it often has limited impact on political decision-making or governance structures. This disconnection, they suggest, stems from the fact that religion is seen as a private affair, separate from the political domain. Their analysis supports the idea that many Christians in Nigeria may prefer to live out their faith quietly, avoiding public or political confrontation. Iroegbu (2005) frames this challenge as the "privatization of morality." According to him, Christian ethics in Nigeria are often confined to church sermons, personal decisions and family life, with very little influence on public institutions. His work calls for a broader vision of moral agency—one that empowers believers to bring ethical convictions into every sphere of life, including politics, governance and civic action.

Together, these scholars highlight a shared concern; while Christian moral teachings are widely accepted and practiced on an individual level, their application to societal structures remains weak. This literature sets the stage for the present study, which seeks to understand how Nigerian Christians perceive and live out Jesus' teachings on moral responsibility and social justice within a complex and often corrupt socio-political environment.

This study sets out to explore how the teachings of Jesus on moral agency and social ethics are being received, understood and lived out. It asks: Are these teachings merely academic, or do they shape behavior and decision-making in meaningful ways? By engaging real voices and lived experiences, this research aims to understand whether the moral vision of Jesus is still relevant in confronting the ethical challenges facing Nigeria today. Ultimately, the goal is to bridge the gap between belief and action. If the values that Jesus taught, like compassion, justice, integrity and selfless leadership, are taken seriously, they could help redirect the country's moral compass. But that transformation begins not with abstract theory, but with personal and collective moral commitment. This paper therefore contributes to the

broader conversation on how faith can and should inform ethical practice and national development in today's Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

It is no longer news that Nigeria is caught in a moral and socio-political crisis that threatens the fabric of its national life. Despite being one of the most religious countries in the world, with Christianity and Islam dominating public and private spaces; the nation continues to struggle with deep-rooted issues such as political corruption, social injustice, youth restiveness and growing distrust in institutions (Oladipo, 2020; Onapajo, 2012). Many public officials openly profess religious faith, yet their actions often betray the very values their religions uphold. This troubling gap between faith and conduct has sparked widespread concern among scholars, faith leaders and citizens alike. Within the Christian tradition, the teachings of Jesus offer a clear ethical framework grounded in love, truth, justice, compassion and responsibility. These teachings are not simply spiritual ideals; they speak directly to how people relate to others, how leaders serve their communities and how societies are built on trust and accountability (Wright, 2010). Yet, there appears to be a disconnect between these values and the lived realities in Nigerian society. The question arises: if Christian teachings are so widely taught, preached and professed, why do they seem to have so little influence on ethical behavior in public life? The situation becomes even more perplexing when one considers the role of Christian Religious Studies (CRS) as both an academic and moral formation subject in Nigerian schools and tertiary institutions. CRS is designed not only to impart biblical knowledge but to shape moral reasoning and social responsibility among students. However, studies have shown that many students and educators approach the subject more as an examination requirement than a guide for ethical living (Adesina, 2019). In the same vein, churches and seminaries that should be cultivating moral leaders often shy away from confronting political immorality, focusing instead on personal blessings and prosperity (Ehusani, 2011; Gaiya, 2002). What is urgently needed is a deeper reflection on how the ethical teachings of Jesus can be reclaimed and applied to the Nigerian socio-political context, not in abstract, theological terms, but in ways that influence real decisions, policies and everyday conduct. Yet, little empirical research has been carried out to explore how CRS educators, clergy and theology students, the very people entrusted with transmitting these values, understand and practice the moral teachings of Jesus in relation to Nigeria's current challenges.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill that gap. It investigates how Christians interpret and engage with Jesus' model of moral agency and social ethics. It also explores the extent to which these teachings influence their worldview, social engagement and ethical choices. By doing so, the research aims to contribute to the broader effort of aligning Christian moral teachings with the urgent need for national transformation in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to explore how Jesus' teachings on moral agency and social ethics are being interpreted, embraced and practiced by clergy, church workers and lay members in Nigeria. These individuals occupy strategic positions in transmitting moral values and shaping the ethical imagination of future generations. By focusing on this group, the study hopes to uncover how Christian ethics, as taught by Jesus, can serve as a meaningful response to Nigeria's ongoing socio-political challenges.

Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine the level of awareness and understanding of Jesus' teachings on moral responsibility and social justice among clergy, church workers and lay members
2. Investigate how these teachings are applied or perhaps neglected, in the professional, personal and public engagements of clergy, church workers and lay members, particularly in the face of Nigeria's moral and political crises.
3. Explore the clergy, church workers and lay members perceptions of the relevance of Jesus' moral teachings in addressing the country's socio-political issues.
4. Identify the structural, cultural, or institutional barriers that hinder the practical expression of Christian ethical values in Nigerian society.

Research Questions

To guide the study, the following research questions are explored:

1. How do clergy, church workers and lay members understand the teachings of Jesus on moral responsibility and social Justice?
2. In what ways do they apply these teachings in their professional, personal and public engagements?
3. What are the clergy, church workers and lay members perceptions of the relevance of Jesus' moral teachings in addressing the country's socio-political issues?
4. What are the structural, cultural, or institutional barriers that hinder the practical expression of Christian ethical values in Nigerian society?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design, suitable for gathering empirical data on people's beliefs, values and behavioral patterns. The descriptive approach allowed the researcher to explore how Nigerian Christians interpret and apply the moral teachings of Jesus in their everyday lives, particularly in the context of the country's ongoing socio-political crises. This design was appropriate because it provides insight into real-life attitudes without manipulating any variables, thereby preserving the natural context of moral decision-making

The population of the study comprised adult Christians across selected urban centers in Nigeria, namely Abuja (North Central), Lagos (South West) and Enugu (South East). These locations were chosen due to their religious diversity, high concentration of Christian denominations and active socio-political engagement. Using purposive sampling, 300 participants were selected from various church denominations, including Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches. The sample included clergy, church workers and lay members (young and old, male and female), ensuring a balanced representation. Out of the 300 distributed questionnaires, 267 were returned and found usable, giving an effective response rate of 89%.

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was divided into five sections:

Section A: Demographic data (age, gender, education, denomination)

Section B: Knowledge of Jesus' teachings on moral responsibility and social Justice.

Section C: Application of Jesus teachings to real-life engagements (e.g., workplace ethics, political engagement, family life)

Section D: Perceptions of the Church's role in promoting social ethics

Section E: Structural, cultural, or institutional barriers that hinder the practical expression of Christian ethical values in Nigerian society

To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in Christian ethics and educational research. A pilot test was also conducted with 30 respondents from a non-sampled church in Jos, Plateau State, leading to minor revisions in question clarity and structure. Data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics as frequency and percentage scores. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the research and assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. No identifying information was required on the questionnaire. Respondents were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point without consequences.

Results

The results of the study are presented in the Tables below as guided by the research questions based on the analyzed data from the 267 valid responses.

Table 1. Demographic data (age, gender, education, denomination)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	145	54.3%
	Female	122	45.7%
Age Group	18–25 years	48	18.0%

	26–35 years	72	27.0%
	36–45 years	69	25.8%
	46–55 years	47	17.6%
	56 years and above	31	11.6%
Educational Level	Secondary School Certificate	37	13.9%
	Diploma/ND/NCE	58	21.7%
	Bachelor's Degree	91	34.1%
	Postgraduate (PGD/Master's/PhD)	81	30.3%
Denomination	Catholic	78	29.2%
	Anglican	54	20.2%
	Pentecostal	92	34.5%
	Baptist	17	6.4%
	Other (e.g., Methodist, ECWA, etc.)	26	9.7%

The demographic breakdown of the 267 respondents provides insight into the diversity and representativeness of the sample. The sample is relatively balanced, with 54.3% male and 45.7% female, suggesting broad gender representation in views about moral teachings and social ethics. Respondents span across age groups, with the largest proportion between 26–35 years (27.0%) and 36–45 years (25.8%), indicating a strong presence of adults in their prime productive years, likely to be active in both church and societal roles. A majority of respondents possess tertiary education, with 34.1% holding a Bachelor's degree and 30.3% having postgraduate qualifications. This suggests a relatively educated population, capable of thoughtful reflection on ethical and societal issues. The Pentecostal (34.5%), Catholic (29.2%) and Anglican (20.2%) churches make up the bulk of participants, while other denominations like Baptist and ECWA/Methodist are also represented. This mix highlights the cross-denominational relevance of the topic under study. Overall, the demographic profile affirms that the study draws from a diverse, educated and fairly balanced group of Nigerian Christians, enriching the validity and scope of the findings on moral agency and social ethics.

Table 2: Awareness of Jesus' teachings on Moral responsibility and social justice

Statements	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	% Agree
1. Jesus taught compassion for the poor and marginalized	249	11	7	93.3%
2. Jesus emphasized justice and fairness in dealing with others	238	20	9	89.1%
3. Jesus condemned hypocrisy and religious injustice	229	21	17	85.8%
4. Jesus promoted forgiveness as a moral obligation	245	14	8	91.8%
5. Jesus taught about servant leadership and humility	236	19	12	88.4%
6. Jesus spoke against corruption and dishonest gain	217	31	19	81.3%
7. Jesus emphasized love for one's neighbor regardless of social class	251	10	6	94.0%
8. Jesus was concerned with structural injustice (e.g., unfair systems)	198	43	26	74.2%
9. Jesus taught that truthfulness is a mark of moral uprightness	242	13	12	90.6%
10. Jesus challenged the misuse of religious power	222	25	20	83.1%

The results in table 2 reveal a high level of awareness among respondents regarding Jesus' teachings on moral responsibility and social justice. Across most items, over 80% of participants agreed with the statements, with the highest agreement (94.0%) on Jesus' teaching of love for all and compassion for the poor (93.3%). This suggests that Nigerian Christians have a clear understanding of the moral and social dimensions of Jesus' message. However, lower agreement (74.2%) on Jesus' concern with structural injustice indicates a potential gap in interpreting systemic ethical concerns through the lens of Jesus'

teachings. The data affirms that while awareness is generally strong, deeper theological reflection may be needed on broader justice issues like institutional corruption or structural oppression.

Table 3: Application of Jesus teachings to real-life engagements

Area of Engagement	Always Apply	Sometimes Apply	Rarely Apply	Never Apply	% Always + Sometimes
1. Treating others with compassion and respect	129	107	23	8	88.0%
2. Practicing honesty and integrity at work	118	96	37	16	80.2%
3. Speaking out against injustice in the community	84	93	56	34	66.3%
4. Forgiving those who wrong me	97	109	36	25	77.2%
5. Refusing to participate in corrupt practices	112	94	38	23	77.2%
6. Advocating for peace and reconciliation	101	102	44	20	76.8%
7. Showing humility and avoiding pride in leadership or service roles	106	98	44	19	76.8%
8. Volunteering time or resources for the needy	89	104	51	23	72.3%
9. Promoting fairness and equity regardless of ethnicity or religion	94	103	48	22	73.4%
10. Living out faith principles in political or civic decision-making	78	99	57	33	66.3%

The findings from Table 3 paint a thoughtful picture of how Nigerian Christians try to live out Jesus' moral teachings in their daily lives. Many respondents say they strive to show compassion, treat people fairly and stay honest at work, reflecting strong alignment with values like love, truth and respect that Jesus taught (see Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31). Areas like forgiveness, refusing to take part in corruption and promoting peace also received high scores, suggesting that people are making real efforts to uphold Christian ethics in their relationships and decisions. However, when it comes to more public or risky actions like speaking out against injustice or applying their faith in politics, fewer respondents reported active involvement. This might be due to fear, lack of support, or societal pressure. Volunteerism and promoting fairness across ethnic or religious lines were moderately practiced, likely affected by economic realities or deep-seated divisions. What this shows is that while many Christians genuinely care about doing what's right, there's still a noticeable gap when it comes to turning moral convictions into public action. Churches and Christian institutions may need to do more to build confidence, provide training, and encourage courageous engagement with societal issues.

Table 4: Perceptions of the Relevance of Jesus' Moral Teachings in Addressing Nigeria's Socio-Political Issues

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	% Agree (SA + A)
1. Jesus' teachings on justice, mercy and love are applicable to Nigeria's socio-political challenges.	152	94	8	10	3	92.1%
2. If Nigerian leaders practiced Christ-like values, governance would improve.	139	91	11	20	6	86.1%
3. Christian ethics should be emphasized more in national discourse.	131	95	16	18	7	84.6%

4. Jesus' teachings provide hope for national healing and reconciliation.	129	91	14	24	9	82.4%
5. Jesus' teachings can help promote accountability in leadership.	137	96	12	14	8	87.2%
6. Applying Jesus' values can help reduce corruption in Nigerian society.	140	93	11	17	6	87.6%
7. Jesus' teachings on forgiveness can help resolve ethnic and religious conflict.	128	88	16	26	9	80.9%
8. Nigerian politics is resistant to the influence of Christian moral values.	98	102	16	32	19	74.9%
9. The Church should do more to demonstrate the relevance of Jesus' moral teachings in public life.	143	92	10	15	7	87.6%
10. Moral teachings of Jesus are more relevant now than ever in Nigeria's democratic journey.	134	93	11	21	8	85.0%

The data in Table 4 reveals a strong consensus among respondents regarding the relevance of Jesus' moral teachings to Nigeria's contemporary challenges. An overwhelming 92.1% agree that teachings on justice, mercy and love are directly applicable to the nation's socio-political climate. Similarly, 87.6% believe that applying Jesus' values can reduce corruption and enhance leadership accountability. There is also strong support for the Church to become more proactive, with 87.6% agreeing that religious institutions must do more to promote the practical application of Christian ethics in public life. However, a notable 74.9% acknowledge that Nigerian politics remains largely resistant to the influence of Christian moral values, signaling the presence of structural and ideological barriers. Furthermore, 85% of respondents view Jesus' teachings as increasingly relevant in Nigeria's democratic journey, reflecting a collective yearning for ethical renewal grounded in spiritual principles. In summary, the respondents recognize the profound potential of Jesus' teachings to transform Nigerian society, but also highlight the limitations posed by entrenched political and institutional challenges.

Table 5: Barriers to the Practical Expression of Christian Ethical Values in Nigerian Society

Identified Barriers	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	% Agree
1. Widespread corruption and systemic injustice	234	19	14	87.6%
2. Fear of victimization when standing for moral values	219	26	22	82.0%
3. Lack of ethical role models in politics and public service	227	23	17	85.0%
4. Compromise and materialism within religious institutions	212	29	26	79.4%
5. Poor integration of Christian ethics in education and leadership training	203	31	33	76.0%
6. Ethnic and tribal loyalties overriding moral convictions	198	38	31	74.2%
7. Weak enforcement of laws and absence of accountability	223	20	24	83.5%
8. Cultural norms that prioritize loyalty over justice	191	41	35	71.5%
9. Lack of practical discipleship and moral education in churches	209	27	31	78.3%
10. Fear of political backlash or social exclusion	202	30	35	75.7%

Table 5 shows that respondents overwhelmingly agree that systemic corruption (87.6%) and the absence of ethical leadership (85.0%) are major barriers to the expression of Christian ethical values in Nigeria. Fear of victimization (82.0%) and the failure of churches to model integrity (79.4%) further compound the challenge. Other notable barriers include weak integration of ethics into leadership and education systems (76.0%) and tribal or ethnic loyalties (74.2%) that often undermine moral decision-making. These factors contribute to a social environment where Christian values—though respected in theory—are not often practiced in public or professional life. The findings highlight the urgent need for institutional reform, value-based leadership training and intentional discipleship programs to bridge the gap between Christian teachings and real-world ethical practice in Nigerian society.

Discussion of Findings

This study set out to investigate the relevance, application and perceived impact of Jesus' moral teachings on the lives of Nigerian Christians in the face of persistent socio-political challenges. The findings, drawn from a sample of 267 respondents, including clergy, church workers and lay members, reveal a significant awareness of the moral principles taught by Jesus, particularly regarding compassion, justice, humility, truth and servant leadership.

The results from this study offer valuable insight into how Nigerian Christians understand and live out the teachings of Jesus on moral responsibility and social justice. Most respondents showed a strong awareness of core Christian values like love, compassion, truthfulness and care for the vulnerable. Over 90% agreed that Jesus emphasized these values, which supports Ojo's (2005) observation that moral teaching remains at the heart of Nigerian Christianity. In fact, Ojo (2004, 2005) argues that values such as honesty, public accountability and justice are consistently emphasized in sermons and institutional rhetoric, especially within Pentecostal networks. This suggests that churches and Christian education programs have been relatively successful in communicating the personal and interpersonal aspects of Jesus' message. However, as Ojo also points out, there remains a significant disconnect between ethical preaching and public engagement. Our study revealed that while many respondents claimed to apply Christian ethics in their personal lives, fewer reported doing so in professional or civic spaces—areas where Jesus' teachings on confronting injustice and structural sin would also be relevant. Ojo's work helps to explain this gap, highlighting how moral instruction, though central, is often not accompanied by the practical tools, courage, or institutional support needed to challenge systemic problems. Therefore, while the Church clearly shapes individual morality, its ability to influence broader societal change remains limited without a more deliberate focus on social ethics and public accounta

However, when it comes to understanding Jesus' concern for social structures and systemic injustice, the responses paint a more limited picture. While most participants clearly grasped His teachings on love, kindness and personal morality, fewer seemed aware that Jesus also challenged unjust systems and power structures. This mirrors Kalu's (2007) insight that African Christians, while often strong on individual moral behavior, may not always link their faith to broader social transformation. His work suggests that the focus tends to stay on personal righteousness, with less emphasis on challenging the unjust systems that affect society at large. In this study, that disconnect is evident: even though many respondents embrace Christian values in their private lives, fewer take those convictions into civic or political spaces where they might address injustice more boldly. The idea of Jesus as a personal savior seems to be emphasized more than His prophetic role as a reformer who stood up to corrupt leaders and oppressive institutions (cf. Matthew 23; Luke 4:18–19).

In practice, most Christians in the study reported applying their faith primarily in personal settings, such as being honest at work, showing kindness, or offering forgiveness in relationships. However, when it came to translating these ethical values into public action like speaking out against corruption, advocating for justice, or engaging in civic responsibilities, the responses were noticeably more cautious. This gap between belief and action reflects what Orobator (2005) identifies as a common tension in African Christianity: the divide between private religious devotion and public ethical engagement. According to Orobator, while many African Christians demonstrate deep personal faith, this does not always extend to challenging unjust structures or participating in broader societal transformation. Given Nigeria's difficult socio-political climate, where injustice and impunity often dominate public life, it is perhaps understandable that many believers struggle to act boldly on their convictions. Yet, this also

highlights the urgent need for Christian communities and leaders to nurture a faith that empowers believers to embody their ethics not only in private life but also in the public square.

Interestingly, nearly 90% of respondents agreed that the Church has a responsibility to speak out against social evils like corruption. Yet only about 38% believed the Church is actually doing enough in this regard. This gap between expectation and action is not new. Gifford (1998), in his study *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, described this as a kind of “credibility crisis”, where churches are seen to preach morally upright messages but often fall short in confronting the very injustices they denounce. He argues that many African churches emphasize personal salvation, prosperity and spiritual growth, while avoiding the harder work of speaking prophetically to systems of oppression and corruption. This perspective resonates with our findings. Many respondents in this study expressed disappointment that church leaders do not always model the values they proclaim and that prosperity sermons often overshadow deeper teachings on justice and accountability. Yet, there is still a hopeful note: nearly three-quarters of the participants said that church teachings have influenced their public decisions, echoing Ilo’s (2019) view that the Church, despite its imperfections, continues to shape moral consciousness and inspire ethical action among believers.

Several barriers continue to make it difficult for Nigerian Christians to fully live out their moral convictions in public life. Respondents identified key obstacles such as loyalty to ethnic or political groups, fear of social or political backlash, a lack of credible role models and the deeply rooted nature of institutional corruption. These findings echo the argument of Ter Haar and Ellis (2004), who observed that while religious beliefs are powerful in shaping African private and communal life, they often lose their influence at the doorsteps of political and cultural institutions.

In other words, the moral authority of religion tends to be strong within personal and religious spheres but weak when it comes to challenging state power or unjust systems. This cautious withdrawal from public engagement reflects what Iroegbu (2005) aptly termed the “privatization of morality”, where Christian values are internalized for personal behavior but rarely extended to the public arena. Many believers may feel safer living out their faith in church or family settings than speaking truth to power or advocating for justice in society. The data suggests that unless Christians are empowered, both theologically and socially, to see their faith as relevant to public issues, the transformative potential of Jesus’ teachings on justice and moral responsibility will remain largely untapped in Nigeria’s national life.

In summary, the study reveals a vibrant awareness of Jesus’ moral teachings among Nigerian Christians and a strong belief in their relevance to the nation’s problems. However, the translation of these teachings into public life remains uneven, due to both internal weaknesses within the Church and external societal pressures. There is a growing need for a holistic Christian moral framework that empowers believers to live ethically not only in private but also in public, professional and political life. For this to happen, theological institutions, churches and religious educators must shift from a purely doctrinal approach to one that equips believers for ethical action and civic responsibility.

Conclusion

This study has explored the relevance, application and perceived impact of Jesus’ moral teachings on Nigerian Christians in the context of the nation’s current socio-political crises. Drawing on responses from 267 clergy, church workers and lay members, it has become evident that while there is a high level of awareness and agreement on the importance of Jesus’ teachings, particularly regarding love, truth, justice, humility and servant leadership, this moral consciousness does not always translate into practical engagement within public, professional, or institutional spheres. The gap between ethical knowledge and lived experience is fueled by a complex interplay of societal corruption, institutional failure and cultural norms that hinder moral courage and integrity. Additionally, the Church, while recognized as a potential moral authority, often struggles with its own inconsistencies in modeling the values it promotes. Many respondents believe that churches emphasize prosperity at the expense of social ethics and that religious leaders must do more to align their messages with Christ’s example of justice, compassion and truth. Despite these challenges, the study affirms that Jesus’ moral teachings remain a viable and urgent framework for addressing Nigeria’s ethical decay. They offer a transformative vision that cuts across tribal, political and economic divisions, rooted in love for neighbor, servant leadership and personal

accountability. Realizing this vision, however, will require not just preaching or teaching, but intentional institutional reform, ethical discipleship and courageous moral leadership at all levels of society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are relevant:

1. Christian Religious Studies departments and theological schools should integrate socio-political ethics into their curriculum. Courses should go beyond abstract doctrines to include topics like public morality, civic responsibility and ethical decision-making in professional life.
2. Church leaders must not only preach Jesus' teachings but model them consistently in their leadership, finances and relationships. Ongoing training in emotional intelligence, social justice and ethical leadership should be mandatory for clergy.
3. Churches and religious organizations should create platforms for civic education, political awareness and community activism rooted in Christian values. Christians must be encouraged to participate actively and ethically in governance, advocacy and development.
4. Faith-based interventions should be designed to confront systemic corruption, nepotism and fear of reprisal. Churches can partner with NGOs, human rights groups and civil society to promote accountability and transparency in public institutions.
5. Denominations should collaborate to create a unified Christian voice on national ethical issues. Forums, ecumenical summits and policy dialogues can help Christian leaders speak with moral clarity and unity on issues affecting the nation.
6. Young people and lay members must be empowered to lead ethically in their communities, professions and institutions. Mentorship programs, leadership training and ethical role modeling should be intentionally targeted at emerging leaders.
7. Christian media outlets should increase programming that highlights Jesus' teachings on justice, peace and servant leadership. Social media, radio and TV can be powerful tools for spreading moral values and challenging unethical practices.
8. Internal mechanisms for financial transparency, leadership evaluation and congregational feedback should be strengthened to build trust and ensure integrity within church structures.

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