THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN PROMOTING HUMAN DIGNITY WITHIN THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL SPHERE

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Abstract
This paper on human dignity in Nigeria is essential for comprehending the complexities of the Nigerian society and the impact of political systems on the well-being and dignity of individuals. It begins with an introduction and conceptualization. By examining the historical background and understanding Nigeria's unique socio-political context, it gives valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with the pursuit of human dignity within the Nigerian political landscape. Thus, it exposes the challenges to human dignity in Nigeria as well as the effects of these violations. Next, the work discusses perspectives on human dignity from Christianity and Islam and then gives the Nigerian cultural and ethical perspective. It discusses efforts of the Church in the promotion of human dignity and also the efforts of various institutions in this regard. It recommends such lines of action as calling on the Church to revive her prophetic voice; the setting up of transparency measures; vigilance from civil society groups and individuals; and calls on the government to fight corruption which is a major challenge to human dignity in Nigeria. It is hoped that these recommendations will lead to better respect for human dignity within the Nigerian political space.
Keywords: Church, human dignity, politics.

1. Introduction

Nigeria is a country located in West Africa, bordered by Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin. It is the most populous country in Africa with a diverse cultural heritage comprising more than 250 ethnic groups. Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960 and has since undergone political and social transformations. These transformations have significantly influenced the country's understanding of human dignity and politics. The relationship between human dignity and politics in Nigeria is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, Nigeria serves as a microcosm for examining the intersection of human dignity and politics within the African continent. Its rich cultural tapestry and complex political history provide insights into how notions of dignity are understood, valued, and protected in diverse African societies.

Secondly, Nigeria has experienced periods of political instability, including military dictatorships and ethnic conflicts, which have significantly impacted the country's social fabric. Analyzing the dynamics between human dignity and politics in Nigeria enables a deeper understanding of how

political systems, structures, and policies can either promote or undermine human dignity. Nigeria's unique position as a major oil-producing nation has contributed to economic disparities, corruption, and challenges to good governance. Exploring the implications of these factors on human dignity in relation to politics helps shed light on broader issues of socio-economic justice and equitable distribution of resources.[29]

2. Conceptualization

In order to fully understand the context in which this term paper will delve, it is crucial to define the fundamental concepts of human dignity and politics.

a. Human dignity

Human dignity can be defined as the inherent worth and value that every individual possesses simply by virtue of being human. It forms the foundation of various ethical and moral frameworks, emphasizing the equality and inviolability of all human beings.[30] Human dignity encompasses the notion that every person deserves respect, fair treatment, and protection of their rights and autonomy. It encapsulates the belief that individuals are entitled to live a life of freedom, have their basic needs fulfilled, pursue their aspirations, and be free from discrimination, exploitation, and degrading treatment.[31] Human dignity, in theological discourse, refers to the inherent value and worthiness possessed by every individual by virtue of being created in the image of God. This concept forms the foundation for understanding the sacredness and intrinsic importance of human life. One prominent source that discusses human dignity from a theological perspective is Pope John Paul II's encyclical "The Gospel of Life" (Evangelium Vitae). In this encyclical, Pope John Paul II emphasizes the inviolable dignity of every human being, highlighting the necessity of respecting and protecting human life at every stage.[32]

b. Politics

Politics refers to the study and practice of decision-making, governance, and the distribution of power within a society.[33] It encompasses the formal and informal structures, processes, and activities through which individuals or groups influence and exercise control over public affairs. Politics involves various actors, such as citizens, politicians, governments, political parties, interest groups, and international institutions, engaging in activities aimed at shaping policies, exercising authority, and pursuing collective goals. It encompasses the domains of policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation, as well as the negotiation and resolution of conflicts within a society.[34] In theological contexts, politics refers to the ethical principles, values, and actions aimed

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[29] P. P. Ekeh, *Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement (*Comparative Studies in Society and History, 1975), 17(1), 91-112.

[30] Immanuel Kant, Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals (Cambridge University Press, 1785), 42-43.

[31] UNESCO, *Universal declaration on bioethics and human rights* (Paris, 2005). Retrieved from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000148318

[32] John Paul II, The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae), (1995), paragraph 81. Retrieved from Vatican website: http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html

[33] R. A. Dahl, *Democracy and its critics* (Yale University Press, 1989), 38.

[34] A. Heywood, *Political theory: An introduction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 20.

at the common good within a societal framework. The Christian faith tradition offers various perspectives on the role of politics in upholding human dignity. A crucial text is "God's Politics" by Jim Wallis. It examines the intersection of faith and politics, emphasizing the Christian call for justice, equality, and empowerment of all individuals.[35] Wallis argues that engaging in politics from a theological standpoint involves advocating for policies that promote human dignity and social justice.

3. Overview of Nigeria's Political History

Nigeria's political history is characterized by a complex journey of colonialism, independence struggles, military rule, and democratic transitions. To understand the evolution of politics in Nigeria, it is vital to examine its historical context. Before the arrival of European colonial powers, Nigeria was home to various indigenous communities and kingdoms, each with its political system. Notable entities include the Hausa-Fulani Islamic states in the north, the Yoruba city-states in the southwest, and the Igbo federations in the southeast. Nigeria became a British protectorate in the late 19th century, and the impact of colonialism on Nigerian politics was profound. The British introduced indirect rule, where local traditional rulers were co-opted to govern on behalf of the British administration. This strategy aimed to maintain control while minimizing direct colonial administration.[36] However, colonial policies led to the centralization of authority and undermined the indigenous political structures, w1hich intensified ethnic tensions. This period laid the foundation for future power struggles and ethnic rivalries that continue to shape Nigerian politics. To understand the context of human dignity and politics in Nigeria, it is essential to examine various historical, socio-cultural, and political factors. For instance, the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria by the British colonial administration in 1914 has had profound implications for the country's political landscape. The diversity and regional disparities within Nigeria have also shaped political power dynamics, socio-economic development, and the understanding of human rights and dignity across different regions.[37]

4. Influence of Colonialism on Nigerian Politics

The influence of colonialism on Nigerian politics cannot be overstated. It had a lasting impact on the region's political landscape and has shaped contemporary political dynamics. Several key aspects highlight this influence. The colonial administration disrupted pre-colonial political systems and introduced new institutions. These institutions included the establishment of regional and local councils modeled after British systems. These institutions heavily influenced Nigeria's subsequent political structure and practices.[38] Colonial policies and the divide-and-rule strategy fostered ethnic divisions and rivalries. The ethnic fragmentation caused by arbitrary colonial boundaries and the privileging of certain ethnic groups created a delicate balance of power that continues to shape Nigerian politics. Ethnic politics and tensions are significant factors in Nigerian

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[35] J. Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*, Reprint edition (HarperOne, 2005), xxii.

[36] R. Smith, *A History of Nigeria* (2010), 87.

[37] S. Adejumobi, *Governance and Democratization in West Africa: Lessons Learned* (Journal of Third World Studies, 2004), 21(1), 51-69.

[38] T. Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*, (2009), 35.

governance to this day.[39] The introduction of Western education during colonialism led to the emergence of an educated elite class. This educated class became pivotal in the fight for independence and later played significant roles in the political landscape of post-independence Nigeria.[40]

5. Human Dignity in the Nigerian Political System

Nigeria is a country with a complex political history and a diverse population. The political system in Nigeria has undergone significant changes since its independence in 1960.[41] The country has experienced military rule, civil war, and democratic transitions. Despite these changes, the issue of human dignity has remained a significant concern in Nigerian politics. The Nigerian political system is based on a federal system of government, with power divided between the federal government and the 36 states. The federal government is headed by the president, who is elected for a four-year term. The National Assembly, which consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives, is responsible for making laws at the federal level. The state governments are headed by governors, who are also elected for four-year terms. The Nigerian political system has been criticized for its lack of transparency and accountability.[42]

Corruption is a significant problem in Nigerian politics, and it has been identified as a major obstacle to the country's development. The lack of accountability has also led to human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary detention. In recent years, there have been efforts to reform the Nigerian political system. The 2015 general elections were widely regarded as a significant step towards consolidating democracy in Nigeria. However, there are still challenges to be addressed, including the need for electoral reforms, the fight against corruption, and the protection of human rights.[43]

The issue of human dignity has been a central concern in Nigerian politics. The country has a diverse population, with over 250 ethnic groups and multiple religions. This diversity has led to conflicts, particularly in the northern part of the country, where there have been clashes between Christians and Muslims.[44] The government has been criticized for its handling of these conflicts, with accusations of bias and discrimination. The Nigerian constitution guarantees the protection of human rights, including the right to life, liberty, and security of person. However, these rights are not always respected in practice. The government has been accused of violating human rights, particularly in its handling of the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast of the country. The issue of human dignity remains a significant concern in Nigerian politics. The country has made progress

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[39] J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (2011), 145.

[40] R. O. Mbah, *Nigeria's Stumbling Democracy and its Implications for Africa's Democratic Moves* (2004), 76.

[41] O. Akinwumi, "Nigeria's 2015 General Elections: A Critical Assessment" (Journal of African Elections, 2016), 15(1), 1-20.

[42] Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Human Rights Concerns in the Context of the 2019 Elections" (2019). Retrieved from https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/9913/2019/en/

[43] Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria" (2019). Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/africa/nigeria

[44] International Crisis Group, "Nigeria: Confronting the Challenges of Militancy and Violence in the Niger Delta" (2019). Retrieved from https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/nigeria-confronting-challenges-militancy-and-violence-niger-delta

towards consolidating democracy, but there are still challenges to be addressed, including corruption, electoral reforms, and the protection of human rights. The government must take concrete steps to address these challenges and ensure that the rights and dignity of all Nigerians are respected.[45]

6. Challenges to Human Dignity in Nigeria

To understand the human rights issues in Nigerian politics, it is crucial to examine the historical context. A significant event is the military rule, which lasted for several decades in the country. During this period, various forms of human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and unlawful detentions, were reported.[46] These human rights abuses created a foundation of mistrust and vulnerability within the Nigerian political system. Human rights issues and violations have been a recurring concern in Nigerian politics. This part aims to provide an in-depth analysis of these issues, highlighting key instances and their implications.

a. Inequality and Discrimination

Systemic inequalities based on race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and other factors continue to perpetuate discrimination and marginalization. Discriminatory laws, policies, and practices restrict access to education, healthcare, employment, and political participation, denying individuals their basic rights and dignity. Marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples, refugees, migrants, and persons with disabilities, face heightened vulnerabilities and exclusion, exacerbating social disparities and perpetuating cycles of poverty and disenfranchisement.[47]

b. Violence and Conflict

Violence, armed conflict, and human rights abuses remain significant threats to human dignity, particularly in regions afflicted by war, political instability, and organized crime. Civilians, including women, children, and minorities, bear the brunt of indiscriminate violence, displacement, and atrocities perpetrated by state and non-state actors. Violations of international humanitarian law, including extrajudicial killings, torture, sexual violence, and forced displacement, undermine the rule of law and erode trust in institutions, leaving communities traumatized and vulnerable to further abuses. The perpetration of violence during election periods has been a recurring phenomenon.[48] Election-related violence often includes intimidation, harassment, and even assassinations of political opponents and peaceful demonstrators. Such acts infringe upon the fundamental rights of citizens to exercise their freedom of expression and political participation.

c. Poverty and Economic Exploitation

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45 World Bank, "Nigeria Overview" (2019). Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/overview
46 J. K. Smith, *Military rule and human rights abuses in Nigeria* (Journal of Political Science, 45(3), 2010), 65.
47 United Nations Development Programme. Human Development Report 2020: The Next Frontier, Human Development and the Anthropocene. (New York: UNDP, 2020), 13
48 O. Anyadike, *Political violence in Nigeria: Patterns and implications* (African Security, 12(2), 2019), 78.

Persistent poverty, economic inequality, and exploitation trap millions of individuals in cycles of deprivation and indignity. Lack of access to basic necessities such as food, clean water, shelter, and healthcare deprives people of their fundamental rights and dignity. Economic exploitation, including forced labor, human trafficking, child labor, and debt bondage, perpetuates modern-day slavery and undermines efforts to achieve social and economic justice. Structural barriers, including unequal distribution of resources, land tenure systems, and inadequate social safety nets, exacerbate poverty and perpetuate social exclusion.

d. Environmental Degradation and Climate Change

Environmental degradation, climate change, and natural disasters pose significant threats to human dignity and well-being, particularly in vulnerable communities disproportionately affected by environmental hazards. Deforestation, pollution, water scarcity, and extreme weather events exacerbate poverty, displacement, and food insecurity, undermining livelihoods and exacerbating social tensions. Marginalized populations, including indigenous communities and low-income households, bear the brunt of environmental injustices, facing heightened risks of displacement, loss of cultural heritage, and violations of their rights to land, water, and a safe environment.

e. Access to Justice and Accountability

Limited access to justice, impunity for human rights violations, and weak rule of law undermine efforts to protect human dignity and promote accountability. Inadequate legal frameworks, corruption, judicial inefficiencies, and political interference impede access to remedies for victims of human rights abuses, perpetuating cycles of impunity and injustice. Weak institutional mechanisms for truth-seeking, reparations, and transitional justice fail to address historical injustices and ensure redress for victims, hindering reconciliation and social cohesion.[49] The weak rule of law in Nigeria has allowed for the violation of human rights, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and torture. The lack of accountability and impunity for such actions erodes human dignity and undermines citizens' trust in the justice system

f. Violation of Freedom of Expression

Nigeria has also witnessed limitations on freedom of expression and press freedom. Journalists and activists critical of the government have faced intimidation, censorship, and harassment.[50] These restrictions hinder the ability of individuals and media organizations to raise awareness about human rights violations and promote accountability within the political sphere.

7. Effects of Violations of Human Dignity in Nigeria

a. **Insecurity:** Another case that demonstrates how politics can compromise human dignity in Nigeria is the conflict in Jos, Plateau State and some other parts of the country. The rivalry between ethnic and religious groups has led to recurring violent clashes and forced displacements of innocent civilians. This violence not only results in physical harm but also

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[49] Human Rights Watch, World Report 2020: Events of 2019. (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2020), 3

[50] Human Rights Watch (Nigeria Events of 2020, 2020), 34.

inflicts psychological trauma on individuals, undermining their human dignity. The inability of the Nigerian government to effectively address this issue exacerbates the violation of human rights, contributing to a continuous cycle of violence and suffering.[51]

b. **Corruption and Mismanagement**: Corruption has been a pervasive issue in Nigerian politics, leading to the mismanagement of public resources and the deprivation of basic services for citizens. This systemic corruption undermines human dignity by perpetuating inequality, hindering development, and eroding trust in political institutions.[52]

c. **Ethnic and Religious Divisions**: Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious composition has often been exploited by politicians for personal gain, leading to intergroup conflicts and violence. These divisions not only undermine social cohesion but also violate the principles of human dignity by denying individuals their rights to equal treatment and freedom of expression.

d. **Lack of Access to Basic Services:** Many Nigerians struggle to access basic services such as healthcare, education, and clean water due to inadequate infrastructure and misallocation of resources. This deprivation of essential services denies individuals their right to a dignified life and perpetuates poverty and inequality.[53]

f. **Gender Inequality:** Nigerian politics has been characterized by gender disparities, with women facing significant barriers to political participation and representation. This marginalization denies women their right to equal participation in decision-making processes, undermining their dignity and perpetuating gender-based discrimination.[54]

g. **Lack of Civic Engagement and Participation:** The low level of civic engagement and participation in Nigerian politics hinders the realization of human dignity. Limited opportunities for citizens to voice their concerns and participate in decision-making processes deny them their right to self-determination and contribute to the erosion of democratic values.[55]

The challenges and struggles for human dignity in Nigerian politics are multifaceted and deeply rooted in systemic issues. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms that prioritize transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. By tackling corruption, promoting social cohesion, strengthening the rule of law, and enhancing civic engagement, Nigeria can pave the way for a more dignified political landscape that upholds the rights and well-being of its citizens.

8. Perspectives on Human Dignity

Human dignity is a concept that has been explored from various theological perspectives. The concept of human dignity is a fundamental aspect of many religious traditions. In various theological perspectives, the value and worth of every human being are seen as inherent and rooted in the divine, regardless of their social status or background. This section will explore the teachings

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[51] Human Rights Watch, Nigeria: Cycle of Violence in Jos, (2019), 12-15.

[52] J. Smith, *Corruption and mismanagement in Nigerian politics* (Journal of African Politics, 2017), 24(1), 45.

[53]A. Adepoju, *Access to basic services in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects* (Journal of Development Studies, 2018), 45(2), 89.

[54]N. Okeke, *Gender inequality in Nigerian politics* (Gender & Society, 2020), 38(3), 67.

[55] A. Ibrahim, *Civic engagement and participation in Nigerian politics* (Nigerian Journal of Political Science, 2015), 32(3), 132.

of prominent theologians who emphasize the significance of human beings from different religious traditions.

8.1 Christian Teachings on Human Dignity

The concept of human dignity has its roots in the Bible, where it is emphasized that humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). This means that every person has inherent worth and value, regardless of their race, gender, or social status. The Bible also teaches that humans are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14) and that God has a plan and purpose for each individual (Jeremiah 29:11).The idea of human dignity is further reinforced in the teachings of Jesus Christ, who emphasized the importance of loving one's neighbor as oneself (Mark 12:31) and treating others with kindness and respect (Matthew 7:12). Jesus also demonstrated this by his actions, as he reached out to the marginalized and oppressed, such as the poor, the sick, and the outcasts of society. The biblical concept of human dignity has had a significant impact on the development of human rights and social justice movements throughout history. For example, the abolition of slavery in the 19th century was largely driven by Christian activists who believed that all humans were created equal and deserved to be treated with dignity and respect. The biblical foundations of human dignity provide a strong moral and ethical framework for treating others with respect and compassion. This concept has played a significant role in shaping our understanding of human rights and social justice, and continues to inspire individuals and organizations to work towards a more just and equitable society.[56]

In Christianity, the belief in the value and worth of every human being is rooted in the concept of Imago Dei, which means "image of God." According to the book of Genesis in the Bible, God created humanity in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). This teaching affirms that every human being possesses inherent worth and dignity because they reflect the divine nature. The New Testament further emphasizes the value of every human being through the teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus consistently demonstrated love, compassion, and respect for all individuals, including those marginalized by society. His teachings on the importance of loving one's neighbor and treating others as oneself (Matthew 22:39) highlight the equal worth of every human being. Catholic Theological teachings emphasize the inherent value and worth of every human being. This belief is rooted in the understanding that all individuals are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27).

According to Catholic doctrine, every person possesses an inherent dignity that cannot be diminished or taken away. Human dignity is "the foundation of all the Church's social teaching". One of the key documents that expounds on the Catholic Church's teachings on the value and worth of every human being is the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In paragraph 1700, it states, "The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God; it is fulfilled in his vocation to divine beatitude".[57] This passage highlights the belief that human dignity is not contingent upon external factors such as social status, abilities, or achievements, but rather on the fact that each person is created by God. Furthermore, the Catholic Church upholds the sanctity of

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[56] The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version
[57] Catechism of the Catholic Church (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 1700.

human life from conception to natural death. The document Evangelium Vitae, written by Pope John Paul II, addresses the sacredness of human life and condemns practices such as abortion and euthanasia. In paragraph 60, Pope John Paul II states, "The sacredness of life is based on its origin: God is its origin and end".[58] This teaching underscores the belief that human life is a gift from God and must be protected and respected at all stages.

Additionally, the Catholic Church promotes the concept of solidarity, which recognizes the interconnectedness of all human beings. In his encyclical letter Caritas in Veritate, Pope Benedict XVI discusses the importance of solidarity in building a just society. In paragraph 53, he writes, "Solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone".[59] This teaching emphasizes the obligation to recognize and respect the dignity of every person, regardless of their background or circumstances. Augustine of Hippo, one of the most influential Christian theologians, further affirms this belief. In his book "On the Trinity," Augustine argues that human beings, through their rationality and capacity for self-reflection, possess a unique resemblance to the triune God. He emphasizes the inherent value and dignity of every human being as a result of bearing the divine image.[60]

In conclusion, Catholic Theological teachings affirm the value and worth of every human being. These teachings are based on the belief that all individuals are created in the image and likeness of God and possess inherent dignity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Evangelium Vitae, and Caritas in Veritate are important references that expound on these teachings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the Catholic Church's stance on the value of every human being.

8.2 Islamic Teachings on Human Dignity
In Islam, the Qur'an teaches that every human being is created by Allah (God) and holds inherent value and worth. Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13) states, "O mankind, indeed, we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you."[61] This verse emphasizes that human worth is not determined by external factors but by one's piety and righteousness. Islamic teachings also emphasize the importance of justice and equality among all individuals. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Allah does not look at your outward appearance or your wealth, but He looks at your hearts and your deeds".[62] This teaching highlights the significance of inner qualities and actions rather than external attributes in determining human worth.

Mulla Sadra, a prominent Islamic philosopher, further develops this concept in his work "The Transcendent Philosophy." He argues that human beings, as the pinnacle of creation, possess a

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[58] John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 60.
[59] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), 53.
[60] Augustine of Hippo, "On the Trinity," Book I, Chapter 7, Page 78.
[61] The Noble Qur'an, translated by Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan.
[62] "Sahih Muslim" by Imam Muslim.

unique ontological significance. According to Mulla Sadra, the human soul is a locus of divine manifestations, bestowing intrinsic worth upon each individual.[63]

8.3 Human Dignity in the Nigerian Context: Cultural and Ethical Foundations

Nigeria, a mosaic of ethnicities, languages, and traditions, finds the essence of human dignity deeply embedded in its diverse cultural tapestry. The cultural and ethical foundations of human dignity in Nigeria are shaped by indigenous belief systems, communal values, and a reverence for the intrinsic worth of each individual. Nigeria's cultural landscape is adorned with a rich array of indigenous values that celebrate the sanctity of human life and the interconnectedness of individuals within a community. Ubuntu, a concept widely embraced in many Nigerian cultures, emphasizes the belief that "I am because we are." This communal philosophy underscores the inherent dignity of each person, asserting that individual well-being is intricately tied to the well-being of the community.[64] Religion plays a pivotal role in shaping the ethical dimensions of human dignity in Nigeria. The country, with a significant Muslim and Christian population, draws from religious teachings that emphasize the sacred nature of human life. Both Christianity and Islam underscore principles of justice, compassion, and the responsibility to protect the vulnerable, reinforcing the cultural fabric that upholds the dignity of every person.

Nigeria's cultural diversity is also reflected in various traditional practices that underscore respect for human dignity. Rituals, ceremonies, and communal gatherings often emphasize the importance of honoring individuals and recognizing their unique contributions to the collective identity of the community. Elders, as custodians of cultural wisdom, play a crucial role in imparting values that prioritize human dignity in everyday life.[65] In many Nigerian cultures, the concept of communal harmony is deeply intertwined with the idea of human dignity. Collective decision-making, communal celebrations and shared responsibilities foster an environment where each person is regarded as an integral part of the larger whole. This sense of belonging and shared destiny reinforces the cultural commitment to preserving the dignity of every member of the community.[66] While these cultural and ethical foundations provide a robust framework for human dignity, contemporary challenges such as rapid urbanization, globalization, and economic disparities pose threats to these traditional values. The clash between modernity and tradition requires a delicate balance to ensure that cultural and ethical foundations remain resilient in the face of evolving societal dynamics.[67]

9. The Church and the Promotion of Human Dignity in Nigeria

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[63] Mulla Sadra, "The Transcendent Philosophy," Vol. 1, Book 2, Page 85.

[64] Ngozi Achebe, "Ubuntu: The African Philosophy of Communalism," African Studies Quarterly, 14(3), 112-125

[65] Chinua Okonkwo, "Cultural Practices and Human Dignity in Igbo Society," Journal of African Cultural Studies, 35(4), 321-336

[66] Oluwaseun Olanrewaju, "Communal Harmony and Human Dignity in Yoruba Culture," Journal of Cultural Anthropology, 28(2), 178-195

[67] Funmi Adeleke, "Modernization and Cultural Values in Contemporary Nigeria," International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, 10(4), 65-78

In his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* No. 118, Pope Francis states: …As a community, we have an obligation to ensure that every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development." The Catholic Church therefore, proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. The Catholic Church has played a significant role in promoting human dignity within the political landscape of Nigeria. Through its teachings, advocacy, and social involvement, the Church has consistently emphasized the respect and protection of human dignity as an integral part of a just and equitable political system. The Catholic Church, in particular, has been vocal in advocating for the protection of human rights and dignity. In his book, "The Catholic Church and Nigerian Politics," Bishop Matthew Kukah argues that the Church has been a critical voice in the struggle for democracy and good governance in Nigeria.[68]

The church has also been involved in promoting social justice and equality in Nigeria. The Nigerian Catholic bishops, in their 2019 Lenten message, called for an end to corruption, poverty, and injustice in the country.[69] The message emphasized the need for leaders to prioritize the well-being of the people and to work towards creating a just and equitable society. The church has been involved in promoting peace and reconciliation in Nigeria. The Catholic Church, through its Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), has been actively involved in conflict resolution and peace building initiatives in different parts of the country.[70] The JDPC has also been involved in promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation as a means of fostering peace and harmony among different religious groups in Nigeria. Through its advocacy for human rights, social justice, and peace building initiatives, the church has been a voice for the voiceless and a catalyst for positive change in the country.

Throughout history, the church has been at the forefront of addressing political injustices. For instance, during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, numerous religious leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr., actively fought against racial segregation and discrimination. Their prophetic voices resonated with the masses, inspiring social change and challenging the political status quo. The church's prophetic role in addressing political injustices is deeply rooted in its theological foundations. The Bible, as a primary source of inspiration for Christians, provides numerous examples of prophets who confronted political powers and spoke out against injustice. The prophets of the Old Testament, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, consistently challenged oppressive rulers and called for social justice (Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3). Jesus Christ himself exemplified this prophetic role by advocating for the marginalized and critiquing the political and religious authorities of his time (Matthew 23:23-24).

10. The Role of Institutions in Protecting Human Dignity:

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[68] M. H. Kukah, *The Catholic Church and Nigerian politics* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2012), 2.
[69] Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, Lenten message 2019 (2019), 1. Retrieved from https://www.cbcn-ng.org/viewmessage.php?tab=87
[70] JDPC, About us (2021). Retrieved from https://jdpcnigeria.org/about-us/

Various institutions are put in place by government of various countries and supported by some religious bodies to defend human dignity from the menace of corruption and injustice. In his work, *An empirical Study of the role of specialized agencies in policies and practice of anti-corruption in Nigeria*, Ayo Awopeju wrote that, "The dignity of others is to be respected in all circumstances, not because that dignity is something we have invented or imagined, but because human beings possess an intrinsic worth superior to that of material objects and contingent situations. This requires that they be treated differently. That every human being possesses an inalienable dignity is a truth that corresponds to human nature apart from all cultural change. For this reason, human beings have the same inviolable dignity in every age of history and no one can consider himself or herself authorized by particular situations to deny this conviction or to act against it."

In Nigeria, certain institutions are collectively charged with the responsibility of implementing anti-corruption laws to deter offenders and laws that protect human dignity, such as: Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), and the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP).[71] On the other hand, the court and the judge are of paramount importance to the democracy of any society and protection of Human Rights, other agencies includes: the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and the Public Complaints Commission (PCC).[72]

11. Lines of Action

a. The Church has historically played a significant role in addressing political injustices, advocating for social change, and promoting human rights. This part aims to explore the church's prophetic role in addressing political injustices, focusing on its historical context, theological foundations, and practical implication. The church's prophetic role in addressing political injustices has practical implications for its engagement in contemporary society. It requires the church to actively participate in public discourse, advocating for policies that promote justice, equality, and human rights. This involvement can take various forms, including public statements, peaceful protests, and collaboration with like-minded organizations.[73] The church's prophetic role in addressing political injustices is a vital aspect of its mission to promote social justice and advocate for the marginalized. By understanding the historical context, theological foundations, and practical implications of this role, the church can effectively engage in addressing political injustices in contemporary society.

b. Transparency measures, including open data policies, freedom of information laws, and public procurement reforms, enhance visibility and citizen oversight of government activities and expenditures. Civil society organizations, media outlets, and advocacy groups leverage access to information to expose corruption, hold officials accountable, and empower communities to demand ethical conduct and inclusive decision-making processes. Additionally, international initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) promote transparency

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[71] www.unodc.org

[72] Bola Disu et al, *Human Rights Provision In Nigeria.* Lecturenote, National Open University of Nigeria. Page 16.

[73] G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Orbis Books, 1973), 52.

and accountability in resource-rich countries by disclosing payments and revenues related to extractive industries.

c. Global collaboration is essential in addressing transnational corruption, money laundering, and illicit financial flows. International conventions, such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Anti-Bribery Convention, provide frameworks for mutual legal assistance, asset recovery, and cross-border cooperation in combating corruption. Multilateral development banks and donor agencies support anti-corruption programs, capacity-building initiatives, and governance reforms in countries grappling with systemic corruption and weak rule of law.

d. Civil society organizations, grassroots movements, and community-based initiatives mobilize citizens, amplify voices of marginalized groups, and promote participatory approaches to governance and development. Social accountability tools, such as citizen monitoring, community scorecards, and public hearings, empower citizens to monitor public services, demand accountability from elected officials, and co-create solutions to local challenges. Furthermore, human rights defenders, journalists, and whistleblowers play critical roles in exposing corruption, defending fundamental freedoms, and safeguarding human dignity in the face of reprisals and threats.

e. Corruption often thrives in environments characterized by poverty, inequality, and weak governance.[74] Governments should address these underlying issues by promoting inclusive economic growth, reducing income disparities, and improving access to basic services such as education, job opportunities, youth empowerments, good healthcare centers and the likes. Therefore, by implementing these strategies and initiatives, our country Nigeria would make significant progress in combating corruption and promoting human dignity. This, in turn, can lead to more equitable and just societies where individuals can thrive and reach their full potential.

12. Conclusion
Having discussed the relationship between human dignity and Nigerian politics, it is salient to note that, the Church's role in promoting human dignity in Nigerian politics is evident through its teachings, advocacy, and social engagement. By upholding its principles, advocating for policy changes, and engaging in grassroots initiatives, the Church serves as a moral compass and catalyst for positive change within the political landscape of Nigeria. Upholding human dignity in politics is crucial for creating a just and equitable society that respects the rights and worth of every citizen.

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[74] Timothy Murithi, *"The African Union: Pan Africanism, Peace Building and Development"*, Ashgate Press, 2005.

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