



## A CASE FOR GRASSROOTS THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION (GTE) IN MORAL DEVELOPMENT FROM DANIEL 1 FOR THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper discusses the critical need for Grassroots Theological Education (GTE) to promote moral development in Nigeria, focusing on the biblical narrative of Daniel 1. In Nigeria, where moral degradation and ethical challenges such as corruption, violence, and social injustice are pervasive, traditional theological education fails to address these issues effectively at the grassroots level. The problem lies in the gap between formal theological institutions and the moral realities societies face, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This study fills that gap by arguing for implementing GTE, which is community-based, accessible, and contextually relevant for moral formation in Nigerian society. The paper examines the current state of theological education in Nigeria and its shortcomings in addressing moral development. It analyses the narrative of Daniel 1 to draw insights into moral integrity and propose a grassroots model of theological education that can better address Nigeria's moral challenges. Through an analytical approach, the study employs textual analysis of Daniel 1 and a review of secondary sources on theological education and moral development in Nigeria. The findings reveal that Daniel's moral courage in the face of cultural and political pressures offers valuable lessons for Nigerian youths and parents struggling with similar ethical dilemmas. Inspired by the narrative, GTE provides practical lessons for moral formation by engaging societies at their level of understanding and need. The paper recommends the establishment of locally-driven theological education that integrates biblical teaching with real-life moral challenges, focusing on practical ethics, leadership, and the promotion of integrity from a young age.*

**KEYWORDS:** Grassroots Theological Education (GTE), Moral Development, Daniel 1, Nigerian Context, Family, Church, Leadership.



## INTRODUCTION

Challenges and issues surround moral development in Nigeria, and there is a need to emphasise grassroots theological education (henceforth, GTE) in addressing these issues. This is because moral decadence has taken over Nigerian society to the point where people do what they like; even believers in Christ now consider indulging in immoral acts.<sup>1</sup> Society today needs moral regeneration and anti-social vices to eradicate corruption and other harmful practices that have eroded the social fabric. Samuel C. Nwankwo argues that believers and non-believers share the same acts and conduct as long as there is existential moral practice.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, there is a danger of limiting moral education to only classroom learning. One of the ways of moral regeneration is to take moral and religious instructions into every sphere of human endeavour. This study shall put his assertion to the test as progress in this analysis by evaluating several articles and books by different authors to determine how theological education could be rooted in the local community in Nigeria.

Nigeria, a multicultural and multilingual society with over 250 ethnic groups, is grappling with the issue of moral decadence due to globalisation. This decline in ethical standards is a significant concern for Nigeria as it struggles to adapt to modernity. GTE, which involves teaching and learning to guide young people to develop self-discipline, confidence, and practical life skills, is crucial in addressing this issue. This paper examines the book of Daniel 1 as a case study for GTE in Nigeria. The paper establishes its relevance to contemporary Nigerian society by examining the moral and theological significance of Daniel 1. It presents a case for GTE to address moral development challenges in Nigeria, empower individuals to strengthen moral foundations and promote social justice and accountability.

The paper also presents various stakeholders' roles in moral development and emphasises the need to adequately empower the laity and popular grassroots education. It also explores the relationship between education and morality, that morality has a lasting impact on society by creating a conscientious and informed populace. Therefore, the Nigerian context offers a rich and diverse environment for addressing moral decadence through the lens of biblical teachings. Nigeria can work towards a moral and just society by focusing on the importance of moral education and the role of religious leaders. Therefore, this paper contributes to the ongoing discussion on the intersection of theological education and morality. One of the mechanisms this paper advocates to curb the menace of moral decadence in society is 'grassroots theological education.' Theological education has to be understood as the teaching-learning process of transmitting godly values beyond the four-corners classroom to be the concern of all the

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<sup>1</sup> C.O.T.Ugwu, *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical Perspectives* (Nsukka: Chukka Educational Publishers, 2002); J.I.Uko, "Corruption and sustainable development," In A. O. Edegbó (Ed), *Contemporary Issues And Challenges Of Sustainable Development In The New Millennium: The Nigerian Experience*(Lagos: Same Artrade, 2007): 37-45.; D. J. Smith, *A Culture Of Corruption Everyday Reception And Popular Discontent In Nigeria* (Princeton: University Press, 2007).; Chinedu Jonathan Dick, Victor Ifeanyi Ede and Ozioma Faith Chiaghanam, "Addressing Moral Decadence in Contemporary Nigerian Society: The Religious Option," *Discovery*, 56, 293 (2020): 273-280.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel C. Nwankwo, "Religious Boom and Moral Decadence in Nigeria: Implications for National Development," *International Journal of Theology and Reformed Tradition*. Vol.7, (2015): 10.



stakeholders as it was in ancient times. The effectiveness of this kind of theological approach is revealed in the book of Daniel 1.

### **Factors Contributing to Moral Decadence in Nigeria**

Discussing the state of moral decadence in Nigeria requires considering the various factors contributing to this phenomenon. Moral decadence refers to declining moral values, ethical standards, and social norms. In other words, moral decay equals failure. It also connotes depravity, decadence, and deterioration. Many groups share the belief that society's moral obligations go away rapidly. In modern culture, morality is no longer the benchmark for achievement. A rising percentage of people behave as though there are no moral guidelines or ethical precepts. Moral deterioration is a fact that affects everyone, regardless of whether it is a government figure or an average worker. That is to say, every individual is involved in and impacted by the process.<sup>3</sup> In Nigeria, several issues contribute to this state, which include but are not limited to:

First, corruption is a significant challenge in Nigeria, affecting every aspect of public life and causing a culture of unethical behaviour. It undermines governance, leading to misallocating resources, poor service delivery, and lack of accountability, weakening the state's ability to provide essential services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure. A survey conducted by UNODC in collaboration with NBS published in 2019 states that:

The administrative bribery covered by the 2016 and 2019 surveys is the type of corruption that most affects the daily lives of ordinary citizens in Nigeria. By affecting a significant portion of their interactions with public officials, the compounded effects of administrative bribery can make it just as destructive to society as higher profile grand corruption schemes that misappropriate public funds. Recurring requests for bribes erode the rule of law, disrupt the fair allocation of resources and reduce accessibility to public services. Bribery also places a heavy burden on the whole population and has a toxic effect on the fair and efficient functioning of the public administration. Given the pervasiveness and persistence of bribery in Nigeria, as evidenced by both the 2016 and 2019 surveys, it is a form of corruption that seriously threatens the integrity of public services and thus Nigerian citizens' faith in the administration and even the Government.<sup>4</sup>

Corruption also acts as a barrier to development, deterring foreign investment, stifling entrepreneurship, and distorting market mechanisms. According to Sanjib et al.,

... corruption threatens to derail the progress of developing nations by staunching the flow of FDI into these countries. Sadly enough, the more underdeveloped a nation is, the greater appears to be its level of corruption. Officials engage in a mad scramble to pocket as much of the incoming financial resources as possible for themselves and their families and friends, even if at

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Alemu, "Moral decadence and its impact on society," *The Reporter*, <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/8731/>. Accessed April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> UNODC and NBS, "Corruption in Nigeria: patterns and trends Second survey on corruption as experienced by the population," *UNODC Research* (2019): 13.



the cost of future development. The pocketing of bribes drives up the cost of doing business, the cost to consumers and adds to market impenetrability, thereby making the host country less attractive to more FDI.<sup>5</sup>

It exacerbates social inequalities by favouring the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the marginalised and vulnerable, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement. Pervasive corruption erodes trust in institutions and undermines the rule of law.<sup>6</sup> Citizens are less likely to comply with laws and regulations when perceived as corrupt and self-serving, leading to social cohesion and order breakdown. This lack of trust extends beyond the public sector, affecting business transactions, interpersonal relationships, and societal norms. Resources intended for essential services are siphoned off through corrupt practices, depriving citizens of access to fundamental rights and opportunities for advancement. Nigeria's reputation for corruption has international implications, affecting its standing in the global community and hindering diplomatic relations and foreign aid. Corruption scandals involving multinational corporations operating in Nigeria further undermine the country's economic prospects and diplomatic credibility.

Although, according to U. Myint, "...a consensus has now been reached that corruption is universal. It exists in all countries, both developed and developing, in the public and private sectors, as well as in non-profit and charitable organisations."<sup>7</sup> These days, accusations of corruption play a significant role in politics, leading to the downfall of governments, the ruin of the careers of prominent personalities, and the discrediting of enterprises and organisations. The global media thrives on malfeasance, rendering scandals and unethical behaviour more noteworthy. Corruption has gained attention due to a growing trend of exploiting it to destroy political opponents, media attention to it as a commercial commodity, and popular fascination with uncomfortable circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

Second, economic hardship in Nigeria contributes to moral decay and unethical behaviours. Wealth inequality, high unemployment, and underemployment are among the factors that exacerbate poverty and create frustration among the marginalised, making the populace "suffering in the midst of plenty."<sup>9</sup> The lack of job opportunities leads to individuals resorting to criminal activities such as fraud, theft, and corruption to survive. Economic hardship also strains social relationships, increasing crime rates, unrest, and declining mutual trust and cooperation. This leads to a cycle of moral decay where individuals prioritise immediate survival over ethical considerations. Poverty takes a toll on mental and emotional well-being, leading to feelings of hopelessness, despair, and alienation. This leads to risky or unethical behaviours such as

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<sup>5</sup> Sanjib Guha et al., "Does Corruption Act as a Deterrent to Foreign Direct Investment in Developing Countries?" *Organizations and Markets in Emerging Economies*, vol. 11, núm. 1, (2020): 18.

<sup>6</sup> D. Kaufmann, A. Kraay and M. Mastruzzi, "The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytical Issues," *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law*, 3, 2 (2011): 220–246.

<sup>7</sup> U. Myint, "Corruption: Causes, Consequences And Cures," *Asia-Pacific Development Journal* Vol. 7, No. 2, (2000), 33.

<sup>8</sup> Myint, "Corruption: Causes, Consequences And Cures," 33-34.

<sup>9</sup> Victor Ifeanyi Ede, "Curbing Moral Decadence In Contemporary Nigerian Society Through Moral Education," *OWIJOPPA* VOL. 7, 3, (2023): 104



substance abuse, gambling, or fraudulent schemes to escape poverty. The cycle of poverty in Nigeria has been perpetuated for generations, trapping families and communities in a cycle of deprivation and despair.<sup>10</sup>

Third, the weak institutional structures in Nigeria contribute to moral decadence and a culture of impunity. Medani P. Bhandari opines, “These weaknesses create opportunities for political corruption to thrive, as there may be little to no repercussions for those engaged in corrupt practices.”<sup>11</sup> These include chronic underfunding, inadequate staffing, poor infrastructure, political interference and corruption, selective enforcement of laws, inadequate accountability mechanisms, and inadequate protection of human rights. Law enforcement agencies lack the necessary resources, training, and equipment to investigate crimes thoroughly and apprehend perpetrators. As pointed out by Agbonika John, the judiciary faces backlogs of cases, insufficient judicial personnel, and a lack of modern facilities, leading to delays in justice dispensation.<sup>12</sup> Politically connected individuals manipulate law enforcement agencies, judicial processes, and regulatory bodies to protect their interests or target opponents, eroding public trust and confidence in the rule of law. Weak institutions result in selective enforcement of laws, with influential individuals and vested interests enjoying preferential treatment, while ordinary citizens face arbitrary arrests, harassment, and unfair prosecution. This unequal application of the law undermines equality before the law and creates a culture of impunity. Inadequate accountability mechanisms are also present in Nigeria’s institutions, with limited transparency, oversight, and accountability in public funds, procurement processes, and policy implementation. Without effective mechanisms to detect and deter corruption and malfeasance, officials have little incentive to act ethically or in the public interest.

Fourth, Nigeria’s social fabric is characterised by ethnic and religious tensions, which contribute to a state of moral decay by fueling conflict, violence, and a breakdown in social cohesion. These tensions stem from the country’s colonial history, which favoured certain ethnic and religious groups over others, leading to longstanding grievances and inequalities. Political manipulation by politicians exploits these identities, exacerbates existing tensions, and undermines efforts to build a cohesive national identity.<sup>13</sup> Resource competition frequently intersects with ethnic and religious identities, leading to conflicts over control and access. Historical grievances, perceived injustices, and competing narratives of victimhood exacerbate these conflicts. Ethnic and religious identities also shape social, political, and economic interactions in Nigeria, leading to the prioritisation of group interests over the common good, promoting a sense of “us versus

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<sup>10</sup> Damilare Adeleye, “Economic hardship and the way forward,” Punch, 19th February 2024. <https://punchng.com/economic-hardship-and-the-way-forward/>.

<sup>11</sup> Medani P. Bhandari, “The Corruption a Chronic Disease of Humanity: Causes, Effects and Consequences,” *ASEJ - Scientific Journal of Bielsko-Biala School of Finance and Law* Volume 27, No 1 (2023): 6.

<sup>12</sup> Alewo Musa Agbonika John, Delay in the Administration of Criminal Justice in Nigeria: Issues from a Nigerian Viewpoint,” *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*, Vol. 26, (2014): 132.

<sup>13</sup> Eyene Okpanachi, “Ethno-religious Identity and Conflict in Northern Nigeria: Understanding the Dynamics of Sharia in Kaduna and Kebbi States,” *IFRA-Nigeria e-Papers*, n° 07. [http://www.ifra-nigeria.org/IMG/pdf/Okpanachi\\_2010.pdf](http://www.ifra-nigeria.org/IMG/pdf/Okpanachi_2010.pdf)



them” and perpetuating divisions within society.<sup>14</sup> Violence and insecurity are expected consequences of ethnic and religious tensions, leading to communal clashes, intergroup conflicts, and terrorist attacks. Ethnic and religious tensions undermine social cohesion by eroding trust, empathy, and solidarity among diverse groups, breeding suspicion, fear, and hostility, challenging the building of inclusive and resilient communities that withstand external pressures and internal conflicts.

Fifth, Nigerian popular culture impacts societal norms and values, mainly through Nollywood and Nigerian music. It is a tool for positive change and social mobilisation but also contributes to moral decadence by promoting materialism, hedonism, and moral relativism. According to Okocha and Echoi, “While the success of the entertainment industry in Nigeria is applauded by many, some are concerned and of the opinion that the industry’s heavy portrayal of negative cultures, violence, immodest lifestyles, including dressing, and ritual killings for wealth and power may have harmful effects on the country’s social values.”<sup>15</sup> Nollywood films depict the complexities of Nigerian society, conveying moral messages but also glamorising wealth, extravagance, and morally questionable behaviour. This culture of materialism distorts values and priorities, encouraging individuals to prioritise material gain over personal integrity, honesty, and empathy. Nigerian music, particularly Afrobeat and Afropop, celebrates hedonistic lifestyles, leading to a culture of instant gratification and disregard for long-term consequences.<sup>16</sup> Some elements of Nigerian popular culture promote moral relativism by blurring the lines between right and wrong, good and bad. Despite these challenges, Nigerian popular culture promotes positive values and social change. Artists, filmmakers, and cultural activists use their platforms to address social issues, advocate for justice, and inspire positive action.

Sixth, the decline in traditional values in Nigeria, influenced by factors such as rapid urbanisation, globalisation, and exposure to Western values, has significant implications for societal cohesion and moral development. Rapid urbanisation disrupts traditional social structures, leading to the erosion of communal values and practices. In urban centres, individuals prioritise individualism and personal advancement over collective well-being, weakening the bonds of community and social solidarity. Globalisation and Westernisation have facilitated the spread of Western culture and values, promoting individualism, consumerism, and secularism. Exposure to Western media, technology, and lifestyles has led to adopting Western norms and behaviours among Nigerian youth, including a shift from traditional values such as respect for elders, communalism, and adherence to cultural norms. Onyima lamented that:

Most Nigerian social institutions and structures such as family, marriage and kinship systems are threatened by the wave of modernisation, technological developments and, and globalisation. For instance, the value system has gradually been eroded as issues like respect for elders, chastity, integrity and morality are considered archaic, while wrong values like respect, disobedience,

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<sup>14</sup> Okpanachi, “Ethno-religious Identity and Conflict in Northern Nigeria: Understanding the Dynamics of Sharia in Kaduna and Kebbi States,” 6.

<sup>15</sup> Desmond Onyemehi Okocha and Michael P. Echoi, “Entertainment Industry And Nigerian Social Values,” *Nasarawa Journal Of Multimedia And Communication Studies* Vol. 4 No.2 (2022): 112.

<sup>16</sup> Okocha and Echoi, “Entertainment Industry And Nigerian Social Values,” 117.



nudity, fraud, kidnapping, corruption are entrenched in the society. This has been traced to the failure of the family system. Parents in their quest for wealth and materialism abandoned their primary responsibility of inculcating right moral values into their children through proper parental training. This affects the society in the long run negatively by leading to chaos and conflict.<sup>17</sup>

This cultural convergence results in generational conflicts and identity crises as younger generations struggle between traditional and modern influences. The decline in traditional values has led to changes in family dynamics, with nuclear families becoming more prevalent and extended family networks weakening. Felicia Iremeka states, “Some aspects of traditional values and morality have been influenced by the processes of modernity that are passing through African societies. Some values and morality are wearing new frames in order to grapple with the increasing socio-religious problems of the contemporary society.”<sup>18</sup> This shift affects the transmission of cultural values and norms from generation to generation, contributing to a loss of cultural identity and cohesion within families. Respect for elders is also lost, as modernisation and Westernization have eroded their authority, leading to a decline in respect for their wisdom and guidance. A strong sense of communalism characterises traditional Nigerian society. Still, the influence of Western values has promoted individualism and self-interest, leading to competition, selfishness, and a breakdown in social cohesion.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the decline in traditional values challenges moral development, particularly among younger generations. Individuals adopt morally ambiguous attitudes and behaviours without a strong foundation in conventional values, weakening moral standards and social norms.

Finally, inadequate education in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas, according to Aina and Adekunle, is a significant obstacle to personal and moral development, exacerbating social inequalities and leaving many vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation.<sup>20</sup> Factors such as poverty, distance to schools, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural barriers contribute to low enrollment rates and high dropout rates, particularly among girls and marginalised groups. The quality of education in many parts of Nigeria needs to improve, with overcrowded classrooms, underqualified teachers, outdated curriculum, and insufficient resources hindering effective teaching and learning. This results in students graduating without acquiring essential knowledge, skills, and values necessary for personal and moral development.<sup>21</sup> Education is a means of acquiring knowledge and skills and a pathway to empowerment and agency. Without access to education, individuals, particularly women and girls, may lack the confidence, autonomy, and

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<sup>17</sup> Blessing Nonye Onyima, “Nigerian Cultural Heritage: Preservation, Challenges And Prospects,” *Ogirisi: a new journal of African studies* vol 12 (2016): 287-88.

<sup>18</sup> Felicia Iremeka, “Moral Values as the Pivot for Sustainable Development in Nigeria,” in Jumoke F. Oloidi, ed., *Nigerian Peoples Culture and Development* (Enugu: Ebenezer Productions, 2011): 99-144.

<sup>19</sup> Ogugua Patricia Anwuluorah and Jude Chinweuba Asike, “Nigeria Traditional Moral Values In The Context Of Globalization: Approach Of Justice And Responsibility,” file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/ajol-file-journals\_497\_articles\_119702\_submission\_proof\_119702-5869-330155-1-10-20150721.pdf

<sup>20</sup> Jacob Kola Aina and Aremu Raufu Adekunle, “Inequality Of Educational Opportunities In Nigeria: Impacts On The National Development,” *Asian Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies* 5, 2 (2022): 28.

<sup>21</sup> Aina and Adekunle, “Inequality Of Educational Opportunities In Nigeria: Impacts On The National Development,” 28-34.



abilities necessary to pilot their lives and advocate for their rights. This vulnerability makes them more susceptible to exploitation, abuse, and manipulation by others. Inadequate education leads to poverty, social fragmentation, and exploitation by unscrupulous actors. It also perpetuates divisions along socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious lines, as well as resentment and distrust. Disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes exacerbate these inequalities.<sup>22</sup> Education also plays a crucial role in moral development, instilling values like empathy, respect, and ethical reasoning. Without quality education, individuals lack the moral foundation to get through with the dilemmas and make decisions in their personal and professional lives.

### **Concept of Grassroot Theological Education (GTE)**

GTE refers to imparting religious knowledge, moral values, and spiritual guidance within local communities, particularly at the grassroots level. According to Volker Glissmann, “Grassroots theological education refers to the process of equipping Church members with foundational competencies in their faith. Grassroots education centres on helping people gain expertise in biblical literacy, theology, discipleship, and contextual application.”<sup>23</sup> It encompasses formal and informal teaching methods and learning about faith within families, churches, and community groups. This concept emphasises the importance of making theological education accessible to everyone, regardless of their level of formal education or socioeconomic status.

Informal settings play a crucial role in GTE, providing accessible and supportive environments for individuals to engage with religious teachings and explore spiritual matters. Family gatherings are foundational spaces where parents and older relatives pass down religious teachings, values, and traditions to younger generations. Sunday school classes are standard in Christian churches. Glissmann believes it “prepares the next generation of the Church.” It offers structured opportunities for children and youth to learn about the Bible, Christian doctrine, and moral living. These classes feature an age-appropriate curriculum, interactive activities, and discussions led by trained teachers or volunteers. Small group studies provide a more intimate and interactive setting for GTE, involving a small group of individuals studying Scripture, discussing theological topics, and praying together. These gatherings promote an exploration of faith and encourage open dialogue and spiritual growth.

GTE is a method that integrates religious teachings into daily life, making them practical guides for everyday challenges and relevance to real-world situations, demonstrating how biblical principles address issues like relationships, work, finances, and ethical dilemmas. Glissmann believes that “comprehensive grassroots theological education is and remains an important internal development need of the church.”<sup>24</sup> GTE also encourages personal reflection and discernment, empowering individuals to explore how their faith shapes their beliefs, values, and actions. It takes a holistic approach, recognising that faith is not just a set of beliefs but a way of life encompassing all aspects of human existence. It helps integrate religious teachings with daily

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<sup>22</sup> Aina and Adekunle, “Inequality Of Educational Opportunities In Nigeria: Impacts On The National Development,” 28-34.

<sup>23</sup> Volker Glissmann, “Grassroots Theological Education,” *InSights Journal* Vol. 5 No. 1 (2019): 56.

<sup>24</sup> Volker Glissmann, “Viability of Grassroots Theological Education or ‘My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,’” *Towards a Malawian Theology of Laity* (Mzuzu, Malawi, 2020), 259.





life, an ongoing process of learning and growth, encouraging participants to continually apply biblical principles to new situations and challenges, their understanding of faith, and expanding their capacity.

Lifelong learning is fundamental to GTE, and spiritual growth and development beyond formal schooling are essential. This approach encourages individuals to embrace learning opportunities at every stage of life and remain open to new insights. Personal responsibility is also emphasised, enabling individuals to take ownership of their spiritual growth and actively seek opportunities for learning and reflection. Praying and meditation are included in this approach, helping individuals develop their relationship with God and cultivate spiritual awareness. Studying Scripture is another crucial aspect of lifelong learning, providing a solid foundation for spiritual growth. This involves reading Scripture individually, participating in group Bible studies, or attending lectures and seminars on biblical interpretation and theology. Therefore, continuous growth and development are essential in one's faith journey.<sup>25</sup> It embodies a dynamic and inclusive approach to religious education rooted in lifelong learning. GTE equips individuals to live out their faith authentically and positively impact the world around them for spiritual growth, social cohesion, and integrity. It catalyses personal transformation and collective flourishing, enabling individuals to fulfil their spiritual potential and contribute to the common good.

## An Analysis of Daniel 1

### Introductory Background

Daniel's identity and character are central to the book's narrative, which introduces the other stories and visions that comprise the rest of the book. The Babylonians invaded Judah in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim (609–598 B.C.), a period that extended from Tishri (Sept.-Oct.) 606 B.C. to Tishri 605 B.C.—according to the Judean system of regnal dating, Jehoiakim's third year extended from Tishri (Sept.-Oct.) 606 B.C. to Tishri 605 B.C.<sup>26</sup> In the late spring or summer of 605 B.C., Babylonian historical texts indicate that Nebuchadnezzar swept into the region after the battle of Carchemish and attacked Palestine.<sup>27</sup> As one of the greatest monarchs of ancient times, he came to Jerusalem and besieged it, taking captives, including Daniel and his three friends. The historicity of the invasion described in the book is not questioned, but archaeological discoveries have confirmed the fact of Nebuchadnezzar's 605 B.C. campaign. In 1956, a cuneiform tablet stated that immediately after the battle of Carchemish in the spring of 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar “conquered the whole area of the Hatti-country.”<sup>28</sup> It was reasonable for Nebuchadnezzar to move quickly against Jehoiakim, one of Pharaoh's allies and placed on the throne of Judah by Pharaoh Neco himself.

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<sup>25</sup> Volker Glissmann, “The Fragmentation of Theological Education and its Effect on the Church, Grassroots Theological Education in Malawi and TEE,” *Towards a Malawian Theology of Laity* (Mzuzu, Malawi, 2020), 167-197.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary* vol. 18 (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Miller, *The New American Commentary*.

<sup>28</sup> D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1961), 69.



## Exposition of Daniel 1

Verse 3: The term **סְרִיטָיִם** refers to the “court officials”, which can refer to both literal eunuchs and officials. It is derived from the Akkadian term *ša rēši šarri*, meaning “he who is of the king’s head.” It is unnecessary to assume that Ashpenaz, Daniel, and his three friends were made literal eunuchs, as the King wanted young men without physical defects. Nebuchadnezzar took Israelite captives from the royal family and nobility, including Daniel and his friends. Josephus says they were members of Zedekiah’s family and from high social standing.<sup>29</sup> Baldwin argued that taking these captives would weaken resources in the Judean court, be helpful to the conqueror, and Judah’s vassal status.<sup>30</sup>

Verses 4-5 describe a privileged education for young men in Babylon, where they were required to meet specific qualifications such as being a certain age, having good physical health, and having a pleasing appearance. Nebuchadnezzar wanted boys at a “teachable age” so they could learn new things.<sup>31</sup> Intelligence was paramount to Nebuchadnezzar, as it was considered “having insight” or “comprehension.” The phrases “for every kind of learning” refer to secular and religious instruction, while “well informed” means “knowers of *yōdē‘ē* knowledge *da‘at*.” These phrases suggest that the Jewish boys were intelligent and learned quickly by their intellectual ability. Young men inducted into the King’s service must also be “qualified to serve in the king’s palace.” Daniel and his friends were trained as counsellors to Nebuchadnezzar or officials who would give an account to him. They would literally “stand” in the King’s presence to respond to his bidding. The text describes a privileged education for young men in Babylon, where they learned to speak and write the Neo-Babylonian, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Persian languages. They studied the extensive body of literature preserved in their new home.<sup>32</sup> The youths were instructed not to follow Babylon’s religious teachings but to pass judgment upon and refute them. Daniel and his friends received a privileged diet, eating the very food the King ate. An opportunity to achieve a privileged position in the King’s court was afforded to the young men, who were trained for three years to prepare them to serve the King in some capacity.

**Verses 6-7:** These young men were given Hebrew names, such as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, likely common Hebrew names. The chief official, Ashpenaz, assigned them Babylonian names to assimilate them into their new culture. Jews accepted the requirement to have foreign names besides Hebrew, as seen in Joseph, Hadassah, and many Jews in New Testament times. Daniel’s name was “Beltshazzar,” believed to be the Hebrew transliteration of *balātsu-ušur*, meaning “protect his life.” Hananiah was called “Shadrach,” likely signifying “command of Aku,” the moon god. Mishael was given “Meshach,” which represents “who is what Aku is?” the pagan equivalent to Hebrew Mishael, “who is what God is?” Azariah’s name was changed to “servant of Nebo,” which is likely a corruption of the name of the god Nebo. The

<sup>29</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* 10.10.1.

<sup>30</sup> J. G. Baldwin, *Daniel*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978), 79.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, *The New American Commentary*.

<sup>32</sup> *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings*, 86-89.



Hebrew appellations in each case reference the true God, while the Babylonian counterpart involves an allusion to a pagan deity.<sup>33</sup>

**Verses 8-10:** Daniel, one of the four Hebrew youths, decided not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, which would have been considered moral or ceremonial defilement. Two factors could have caused this decision: the uncleanness of the foods eaten at the Babylonian court, such as pork and horseflesh, and the association of meat and wine with idolatrous worship. Daniel refused to eat the King's food based on his religious convictions. God blessed him with great insight and honoured his faithfulness by imparting more. To avoid defilement, Daniel asked the chief official (Ashpenaz) for a substitute diet. Daniel was polite and discreet in making his request, setting himself apart from others.

However, due to several factors, Daniel's refusal to eat the royal diet was courageous. First, refusing the royal diet could have been seen as an insult to the King and an act of direct disobedience to Nebuchadnezzar's orders. Second, pressure from his peers made the decision difficult, setting them apart from others. Third, their new location may have tempted them to be unfaithful, as Judah was nine hundred miles away, and parents and friends would never know whether they followed God's laws.<sup>34</sup> Daniel and his friends remained faithful to their God despite their challenges in foreign lands. They were aware of the importance of adhering to Mosaic law and the consequences of their actions, and their refusal to eat the King's food was a courageous act.

Verses 11-14: Daniel proposed to a chief official, a "guard," to allow them to have an alternative diet for ten days. The guard would then assess their physical condition after the test was completed. The youths proposed eating only vegetables and drinking water instead of the King's meat and wine. Daniel's diet was similar to modern health food diets, but he did not suggest that meat consumption was wrong. After the trial period, the overseer would check their physical condition, and if they looked healthy, they would continue the diet. The overseer agreed, and the experiment was carried out.

Verses 15-21: Daniel and his friends were gifted by God for their faithfulness, including the ability to understand visions and dreams. The King was impressed with their skills and appointed them as counsellors in Nebuchadnezzar's administration. The King's counsellors were referred to as "magicians" and "enchanters," both meaning "conjurer" or "necromancer." The Akkadian root means "to conjure," meaning "enchanters" with their magic spells and incantations believed to communicate with the spirit world. Despite entering the King's service, Daniel and his friends did not engage in occult practices. Daniel was blessed with a long life, likely around 620-535 B.C., and supports Christians today. The story also teaches about the believer's participation in society, particularly politics. Daniel exemplifies active service in governmental affairs under divine leadership while teaching that there should be limits to one's commitment to the state. Refusing is acceptable and a biblical directive when asked to commit acts that violate God's laws.

<sup>33</sup> J. J. Slotki, *Daniel-Ezra-Nehemiah* (London: Soncino, 1978), 3.

<sup>34</sup> J. E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989), 19-20.



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## A Case for Grassroots Theological Education

Daniel was determined to resist the worldview of pagan Babylon and not defile himself with the King's food or wine. He approached the chief of the eunuchs and requested permission to disregard the King's order and not defile himself. After three years of education, the four Hebrew teens were brought before the King, Nebuchadnezzar, where they stood head and shoulders above all the rest. They were given key administrative posts due to their social, educational, and personal superiority. The period that they were taken to captivity was a period of moral laxity; almost everyone 'to his tent' majority did not harken to the injunctions of God. There was not much reverence for God; instead, some resorted to the worship of idols; hence, they were taken into captivity. Despite such reality, some parents still instilled moral and religious values in their children, and the fruit of their labours showed up in the lives of such young men. Having been raised and trained by godly parents and grandparents, they loved the Lord their God with their whole hearts, souls, minds, and strength (cf. Deut 6:4; Matt 22:37). They had been prepared, by their parents and spiritual mentors for this day. According to Swindoll's summary of these verses:

In a world filled with people who rebel against the divine King, it is inevitable that believers of all ages will face situations in which their convictions will be challenged. We who are parents need to prepare our children for those occasions by both teaching them God's truth and modeling integrity. And all of us who are Christians need to personally commit ourselves to living God's way regardless of the temptations to live otherwise.<sup>35</sup>

This is what Daniel and his friends had been taught. This is how they would live or die.

## Why Grassroots Theological Education

Theological education goes beyond the formal teaching-learning process. It involves informal and formal learning processes of the knowledge of God among His people. The informal aspect encompasses personal quiet time, family devotion, Sunday school, and other church-related programs that impact people in the way of the Lord. While the formal has to do with the classroom theological teaching-learning process.<sup>36</sup> The history of theological education can be traced to ancient Israel; education was primarily familial, with parents responsible for teaching their children the commandments and laws of God. Prophets and sages also played a crucial role in imparting religious knowledge and moral guidance to the community.

Not everyone will come to seminary to be trained as a pastor, yet everyone needs to be taught the Word of God. Not everyone is called a Christian living uprightly, but everyone is supposed to be. Therefore, GTE represents a grassroots approach to moral instruction and spiritual growth rooted in the fabric of homes, communities, and religious congregations. It predominantly unfolds within informal settings such as family homes, religious gatherings, community centres, and

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<sup>35</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Daniel: God's Pattern for the Future* (Fullerton, CA: Insight for Living, 1986), 17.

<sup>36</sup> Bernhard Ott, *Understanding and Developing Theological Education* (Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2016), 89-90



informal social groups. The family home is a cornerstone for this education, where parents, siblings, and extended family members engage in discussions, prayers, and rituals to instill religious teachings and values. In their book *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*, Kehrwald et al. propose that:

... parents and the family are the most powerful influence for virtually every child and youth outcome—personal, academic, social, and spiritual-religious; and that parents are the most important influence on the social and religious lives of children, youth, and emerging adults. Given the central role of families in shaping the lives of children and youth, the value of engaging, supporting, and educating families should be self-evident to all of us.<sup>37</sup>

The Bible says, “Train up a child in the way he should go” (Prov. 22:6), and this indicates the importance of parental guidance in shaping a child’s moral and spiritual development according to God’s principles. The parents have a role in providing intentional, nurturing guidance that aligns with God’s ways. Each child is unique, with individual gifts, talents, and inclinations. Parents are urged to discern and encourage these qualities, guiding children along paths that honour God and reflect His will for their lives. The foundational training provided in childhood will have a lasting impact, even if children stray temporarily. Parents are encouraged to integrate faith into their children’s lives through prayer, Scripture study, worship services, and discussions about God’s principles and values. The home is the essential and foundational environment for faith nurture, faith practice, and the healthy development of young people.<sup>38</sup>

Also, the Church must take the concept of GTE seriously because the uprightness of society depends on what the Church is transmitting to its members, who are also part of the society. Although there is no empirical fact to substantiate this claim, most seminarians built their basis of beliefs from the Church, accepted Christ from the Church, and got the sense of call into the ministry through the Church. Meanwhile, the basic knowledge of God came to them through the GTE of the Church, such as Sunday school, discipleship and other organisational meetings. Therefore, the parents and the Church cannot afford to be slacked over a conscious effort to transmit theological education from the grassroots since formal theological education depends on what they produce and send to them. Parents and churches must intentionally raise and teach their children and members so that they grow and go outside; they will not depart from the truth.

The narrative of Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, demonstrates the transformative impact of faith and moral conviction in the face of cultural and societal pressures. Despite being taken captive and placed in a foreign land, Daniel and his friends remain steadfast in their commitment to God and refuse to compromise their religious identity. GTE instilled This resilience in them, equipping them with an understanding of their faith and a solid moral compass. In Nigeria, where societal norms and cultural influences clash with biblical principles, GTE plays a crucial role in shaping individuals’ values and beliefs. Parents, religious leaders, and mentors impart spiritual knowledge and moral guidance to the younger generation, preparing

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<sup>37</sup> Leif Kehrwald, John Roberto, Gene Roehlkepartain and Jolene Roehlkepartain, *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* (Naugatuck: Lifelong Faith Publications, 2016), 1.

<sup>38</sup> Kehrwald, et al., *Families at the Center of Faith Formation 2*.



them to map the world's complexities with integrity and conviction.<sup>39</sup> GTE promotes a sense of belonging, providing individuals with a support system of like-minded believers who encourage and uplift one another in their spiritual journey.

Investing in the spiritual formation of individuals from a young age can cultivate a generation of faithful and moral leaders who stand firm in their commitment to God amidst the challenges of their time.<sup>40</sup> The example of Daniel and his friends is a powerful reminder of the importance of GTE in nurturing a generation of faithful and conscientious individuals in the Nigerian context. Proverbs 22:6 shows the importance of intentional and consistent instruction in the ways of God from an early age. Within the home, parents have a unique opportunity to create a nurturing environment where biblical principles are integrated into daily life. This involves regular family devotions, prayer times, and discussions centred around Scripture. Roehlkepartain adds, "The same is true for other adults outside the family. Sometimes a neighbor, a colleague at work, a childcare provider, a babysitter, or an adult friend of the family plays a significant role in the nurturing of a child's faith development. So much of our society places a great deal of stress and pressure on parents, and parents cannot parent children well alone."<sup>41</sup> Also, sometimes, parents' acts of kindness and compassion, witnessing their commitment to serving others, and participating in worship and service as a family help children learn. Through these lived experiences, children internalise values such as love, integrity, and empathy, which are central to the Christian faith. In the Nigerian context, where formal theological education may not be readily accessible due to various socioeconomic factors, GTE becomes even more crucial.

In today's increasingly secular and pluralistic society, individuals face numerous influences and pressures that undermine their faith and moral convictions. GTE equips individuals with the knowledge, understanding, and spiritual fortitude necessary to withstand these challenges and remain steadfast in their faith. By grounding individuals in the teachings of Scripture and providing opportunities for critical thinking and reflection, GTE empowers individuals with confidence and integrity. A society of individuals grounded in biblical principles and values exhibits honesty, integrity, compassion, and social responsibility. These qualities contribute to the flourishing of communities, building trust, cohesion, and cooperation among individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Furthermore, GTE is a bulwark against eroding societal moral values and standards. By instilling a deep-seated commitment to truth, righteousness, and justice, GTE helps to counteract the moral relativism and moral decay that threaten to undermine the fabric of society, especially Nigeria. Hence, by prioritising moral development from a young age, Nigerians will cultivate a culture of righteousness, justice, and compassion, aligning with the values of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, by investing in moral development and nurturing a solid faith, GTE shapes a society rooted in the Kingdom of God's values and contributes to its flourishing.

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<sup>39</sup> Jolene Roehlkepartain, "Nurturing the Faith of Young People through the Family," in *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*, Kehrwald et al., eds. (Naugatuck: Lifelong Faith Publications, 2016), 103-118.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Roehlkepartain, "Nurturing the Faith of Young People through the Family," 116.



## CONCLUSION

The narrative of Daniel 1 is a powerful authentication of the significance of GTE as a catalyst for moral development and spiritual resilience within the Nigerian context. Prioritising the transmission of religious knowledge and ethical values within families and churches, Nigeria has the potential to cultivate a generation of individuals who, like Daniel and his friends, stand firm in their faith amidst the challenges of a secular society. Daniel 1 presents the transformative power of faith and moral conviction in the lives of individuals who are grounded in the teachings of Scripture and committed to living out their beliefs. Despite being immersed in a foreign culture that sought to undermine their religious identity, Daniel and his companions remained steadfast in their devotion to God, refusing to compromise their convictions.

GTE becomes even more critical within the Nigerian context, where societal norms and cultural influences conflict with biblical principles. Equipping individuals with a solid foundation of faith and moral values from a young age empowers them to withstand the pressures of secularism and remain faithful to their beliefs. As individuals come together to study Scripture, engage in prayer, and participate in acts of service, they strengthen their bonds of fellowship and solidarity, their commitment to living lives that honour God. Therefore, investing in GTE, Nigeria can nurture a generation of individuals who are equipped to make a positive impact on their communities and society at large. Just as Daniel and his friends stood as beacons of faith and integrity in their time, so too can the people of Nigeria rise to the challenges of their day, guided by the timeless truths of God's Word and empowered by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

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