

PROPHETIC INDICTMENT AGAINST STRUCTURAL CORRUPTION: INTERTEXTUAL LESSONS FROM JUDGES AND PAUL FOR THE NIGERIAN CHURCH

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ABSTRACT: This paper develops a practical theological framework for confronting systemic political corruption in contemporary Nigeria. While corruption studies typically approach the crisis through political or economic lenses, this study addresses a critical gap by constructing a theological account of state failure and ecclesial complicity. Using dual-horizon canonical exegesis, it creates a conversation between the Book of Judges' diagnosis of institutional collapse and Paul's apocalyptic understanding of justification (*dikaiosisynē*) as God's structural rectification of oppressive systems. Integrating the practical theology frameworks of Osmer (2008) and Swinton and Mowat (2016), alongside Andy-Philip's (2018) indigenous Nigerian scholarship, the paper argues that true justification demands active ethical participation and creates a community that visibly embodies justice. The paper contributes to African public theology by demonstrating how canonical exegesis can generate practical, contextually appropriate responses to corruption. It concludes with a practical roadmap for the West African church to move from political apathy into prophetic witness through structural transparency, communal accountability, and cruciform character formation.

Keywords: *systemic corruption, prophetic indictment, practical theology, canonical exegesis, Book of Judges, Pauline justification, Nigerian democracy*

1. Introduction: The Anatomy of Systemic Corruption

Nigeria is one of the most religiously active nations on the planet. Thousands of churches fill its cities every Sunday, millions of believers fast and pray with genuine devotion, and the country's Christian population is among the largest on the African continent. However, despite this extraordinary religious energy, Nigeria continues to rank among the most corrupt nations in the world. Public institutions have largely collapsed. Roads, hospitals, schools, and the power supply remain in a state of chronic failure. A small political class enriches itself through the systematic looting of public funds while the majority of citizens live in poverty and insecurity.

This contradiction — a nation that is intensely religious yet deeply corrupt, is not simply a political problem. It is a theological one. It points to a serious failure at the heart of the dominant theological frameworks being taught in Nigerian churches. If millions of people are being formed by the gospel every week and yet those same millions are producing or tolerating corrupt leaders, corrupt institutions, and a corrupt civic culture, then something essential is missing from the theology being preached.

This paper argues that what is missing is a sufficiently comprehensive and socially engaged understanding of the Bible's teaching on justice, power, and the covenant community's responsibility. Nigerian Christianity has largely adopted a theology of individual escape, a framework in which salvation is about securing a personal ticket to heaven. At the same time, the structures of this world are left to rot. This paper challenges that framework by bringing two powerful biblical traditions into conversation with the contemporary Nigerian situation.

The first tradition is the Old Testament Book of Judges, which provides a detailed and unflinching account of what happens when a covenant community allows institutional corruption to take root. The second tradition is the Apostle Paul's theology of justification, which, when read in its full apocalyptic depth presents salvation not as a private legal transaction but as God's cosmic action to set the entire broken world right.

The practical theology of Richard Osmer (2008) and John Swinton and Harriet Mowat (2016) provides the scholarly framework for this dialogue. It is grounded in the indigenous Nigerian theological scholarship of Dr Nesta Andy-Philip of the University of Abuja, whose research has pioneered the application of Old Testament anti-corruption themes to the modern Nigerian democratic context (Andy-Philip, 2018).

The paper proceeds in eight sections. Following this introduction, Section Two describes the methodology. Section Three examines the Book of Judges as a theological diagnosis of institutional collapse. Section Four analyses Pauline's justification as God's structural rectification. Section Five develops the intertextual dialogue between these two horizons. Section Six applies the framework to the contemporary Nigerian democratic crisis. Section Seven proposes a practical ecclesial pedagogy for renewal. Section Eight offers a conclusion.

2. Methodology: Practical Theology and Canonical Exegesis

This study uses two complementary methodological tools: Osmer's (2008) four-task model of practical theological inquiry and Brevard Childs' (1994) approach to canonical exegesis. Together, these tools ensure that the biblical material is read with academic rigour while remaining directly accountable to the concrete social and political realities of contemporary Nigeria.

2.1 Richard Osmer's Four-Task Practical Theology Framework

Practical theology, as Osmer (2008) defines it, does not simply take abstract doctrines and apply them to a social situation at the end of a study. Rather, it treats the current social situation itself as a source of serious theological reflection. Osmer (2008) proposes four interconnected tasks that structure this process (p. 4):

The first task is the Descriptive-Empirical Task, which asks, "What is actually going on?" This task involves gathering accurate, honest information about the reality under examination which in this case is the specific forms and mechanisms of political corruption in Nigeria.

The second task is the Interpretive Task, which asks, "Why is this happening?" At this stage, the researcher draws on the social sciences, history, and theology to explain the deep roots of the problem under study.

The third task is the Normative Task, which asks, "What should be happening?" This is where the serious work of biblical and theological exegesis takes place, as the researcher examines what God's word says about the situation.

The fourth task is the Pragmatic Task, which asks, "How should we respond?" This task produces practical, contextual proposals for how the church can act faithfully in the light of the biblical and theological analysis.

This framework is particularly valuable for the present study because it prevents the analysis from becoming either purely academic (detached from Nigerian realities) or purely activist (detached from biblical grounding). As John Swinton and Harriet Mowat explain, practical theology is defined by its commitment to critical, contextual reflection on the church's practices as they engage with the practices of the world, always to enable faithful participation in God's redemptive purposes (Swinton and Mowat 6).

2.2 Canonical Exegesis

Alongside Osmer's practical theological model, this study employs canonical exegesis as its primary method of biblical interpretation. Canonical exegesis, most influentially developed by Childs (1994) and extended by N. T. Wright (2013) and others, reads individual biblical texts not as isolated historical fragments but as parts of a unified, complete body of Scripture given to the believing community as a whole.

This approach allows us to read the Book of Judges and the letters of Paul in genuine conversation with each other, not as documents from two unrelated religious contexts, but as two parts of a single canonical witness to the character and purposes of God. When read canonically, the Old Testament's narrative warnings about institutional collapse and the New Testament's theology of divine rectification illuminate and reinforce each other in powerful ways.

Wright's (2013) canonical-narrative approach to Pauline theology, developed in his *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, is particularly helpful here. Wright argues that Paul

consistently reads Israel's story including its repeated cycles of faithlessness, judgment, and restoration as the backstory to the gospel of Jesus Christ (p. 36). The Book of Judges is one of the most important chapters of that backstory.

3. The Old Testament Horizon: Institutional Collapse in the Book of Judges

The Book of Judges is frequently misread as a collection of exciting stories about individual military heroes. A more careful canonical reading reveals it to be something far more important and far more disturbing: a sophisticated political and theological commentary on how a covenant community falls apart when it abandons its ethical foundation. It is a textbook on institutional decay.

3.1 The Downward Cycle of Societal Failure

The literary structure of Judges is built around a recurring cycle of collapse introduced in its early chapters. The community compromises its covenantal identity, falls under the control of an oppressive external power, cries out to God in distress, is temporarily rescued by a charismatic leader called a judge, and experiences a period of peace. In contrast, the judge lives, and then collapses into an even worse moral condition after the judge dies. As the narrative progresses, this cycle does not simply repeat — it deepens and worsens. Each iteration of the spiral leaves the community in a more degraded state than the previous one.

What is particularly striking is the progressive moral deterioration of the judges themselves. They are not simply flawed heroes who occasionally make mistakes. They represent a pattern of leadership failure that mirrors the institutional corruption they are called to address. Gideon, celebrated as a military deliverer, moves steadily toward idolatry and the accumulation of personal power (Judges 8:22–27). Jephthah makes a rash, transactional vow that costs his daughter her life — a devastating picture of how a leader who treats God as a business partner ends in catastrophe (Judges 11:30–40). Samson, gifted with extraordinary physical power, reduces his calling to a series of personal vendettas driven entirely by wounded pride (Judges 13–16).

The theological message is clear and devastating: charismatic individual leadership, no matter how dramatically gifted, cannot save a society whose underlying institutions are

rotten. The problem is not simply the wrong leader in the wrong position. The problem is a structural corruption that has infected the entire social fabric.

3.2 Dr Andy-Philip's Framework: Judges as a Template for Modern Nigeria

The connection between the institutional collapse described in Judges and the contemporary Nigerian situation has been developed most specifically by Dr Nesta Andy-Philip of the University of Abuja. In his groundbreaking article "The Prognosis of Some Corrupt Practices in the Book of Judges as a Nexus for Fighting Corruption in Nigeria," Andy-Philip (2018) demonstrates that the patterns of corruption described in Judges such as the abuse of sacred office for private gain, the manipulation of religious ritual to mask ongoing ethical failure, and the breakdown of communal accountability are not merely ancient historical curiosities (p. 48). They function as a precise diagnostic template for understanding the mechanisms of institutional corruption in modern West Africa.

Andy-Philip's (2018) analysis is particularly important because it refuses to treat corruption as a merely individual moral problem — the failing of a few bad actors whom better people could replace. Instead, following the logic of the Judges themselves, he identifies corruption as a systemic, structural phenomenon that shapes individuals' behavior through the incentive structures and social norms of institutions. When an institution normalizes treating public office as a resource for private enrichment, it produces corrupt actors regardless of their personal moral starting point. This is what political scientist Richard Joseph (2014) identified as prebendalism — the system in which public officials feel entitled to treat state resources as personal property (p. 5).

Andy-Philip's (2024) further research in his monograph *God and Mammon: An Evaluation of Contemporary Wealth Teachings Among Some African Christians* develops the theological dimension of this analysis, demonstrating how prosperity gospel theology creates precisely the transactional relationship with God and with power that the Book of Judges diagnoses as the root of national collapse (p. 34). When a leader's relationship with God is defined by financial transaction by giving money to God in expectation of material return, they will naturally apply the same transactional logic to their relationship with the state.

3.3 The Final Chapters of Judges: Internal Rot

The most devastating section of the Book of Judges is not its early stories of foreign oppression but its final chapters (17–21), which shift attention from external threats to internal societal decay. These chapters describe religious fraud (Micah constructing a private idol system and hiring a Levite as his personal spiritual legitimizer), tribal warfare, and a horrific case of gang rape and murder whose cover-up precipitates a devastating civil war. The book closes with one of the most chilling sentences in the entire Old Testament:

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."
(Judges 21:25, ESV)

This sentence is not primarily a call for a stronger human monarch. It is a theological diagnosis: when a community abandons its covenant accountability to God and to one another, it enters a state of moral entropy in which every individual and faction pursues their own interests at the expense of the common good. This is precisely the condition that political analysts describe when they speak of state failure, and it is precisely the condition that much of contemporary Nigerian political culture exhibits.

4. The New Testament Horizon: Pauline Justification as Structural Rectification

If the Book of Judges provides the diagnosis, the New Testament response must offer something capable of addressing the disease at its roots. This study argues that the Apostle Paul's central theological concept — justification by faith (*dikaio syne Theou*) provides exactly this kind of comprehensive, structural response when properly understood in its full canonical and apocalyptic depth.

4.1 Recovering the Full Depth of Pauline Justification

The tragedy of much contemporary Nigerian Christianity is that the explosive, world-transforming power of Paul's theology of justification has been reduced to fit within the narrow confines of individual, private religion. In this reduced version, justification means nothing more than a legal transaction by which an individual sinner receives personal forgiveness and secures a place in heaven. The corrupt structures of the present world are left entirely untouched.

This narrow reading is not faithful to Paul. When Paul writes about the righteousness of God — *dikaiosyne Theou* — in passages such as Romans 1:16–17, 3:21–26, and Galatians 2:15–21, he draws on the full Old Testament background of the concept. In the Hebrew Bible, the righteousness of God (*tsedaqah*) is not a static legal standard. It is an active, saving, rectifying power: God acting in history to vindicate the oppressed, to call the powerful to account, to set broken relationships right, and to restore the covenant community to its proper order. As Wright (2013) explains, when Paul says that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God, he means that God's own powerful, justice-restoring nature is being unleashed in the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (p. 795).

Campbell's (2009) detailed study of Pauline soteriology reinforces this reading. Campbell argues that Paul's theology is fundamentally apocalyptic in character — meaning that God breaks into a corrupt human history from outside, not to patch individual problems but to overthrow the entire regime of sin and death and to establish a new human community defined by justice, peace, and mutual care (p. 69). Justification, in this reading, is not God helping individuals to cope better within a corrupt world. It is God who demolishes the corrupt world's claim to final authority and creates an alternative community that embodies a completely different set of values.

4.2 Justification as a Subversive Political Claim

When Paul proclaimed justification through faith in the crucified and risen Jesus in the first-century Roman Empire, this was not a politically neutral statement. The Roman Empire maintained its power through a system that was, in its own way, a form of institutionalized corruption by the extraction of resources from conquered peoples through military violence, the concentration of power in the hands of a small elite, and the use of religious ritual (including the worship of the emperor as a divine figure) to legitimate the whole arrangement.

Paul's proclamation that true authority over human society belongs not to Caesar but to the crucified Messiah was a direct and deliberate challenge to this system. Bates (2017), in his important study *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, argues that Paul's concept of faith (*pistis*) is best understood not as a purely internal, cognitive act but as an enacted allegiance to a new

sovereign — King Jesus — whose values and character stand in direct opposition to the values and character of corrupt imperial power (p. 89). To be justified through faith in Christ is to transfer one's fundamental loyalty from the corrupt powers of this world to the crucified-and-risen King who has already overcome them.

Barclay's (2020) *Paul and the Power of Grace* provides a complementary resource for understanding the socially transformative implications of Paul's theology. Barclay argues that the grace Paul describes — the incongruous, unmerited gift of God given without calculation of the recipient's worth — is itself a radical social practice. A community that truly lives by this grace will embody radically different social norms from those of the surrounding culture: norms of radical generosity, mutual vulnerability, equality across social boundaries, and the rejection of patronage networks that keep corrupt systems alive (p. 565).

4.3 The Spirit, Community, and Structural Transformation

Paul's theology of justification does not stop at the individual. It creates a community — the church — that is called to embody the alternative social order that justification inaugurates. Gorman's (2019) work on Pauline participation theology demonstrates that the Spirit who witnesses to individual believers' adoption into God's family is simultaneously the Spirit who constitutes the community of faith as a visible, structural alternative to the corrupt societies in which it lives (p. 45). The church is not simply a collection of individuals privately forgiven. It is a new social reality — a demonstration community — whose internal life of justice, transparency, and mutual accountability is itself a form of prophetic witness against the corrupt structures of the surrounding culture.

5. Intertextual Dialogue: Judges and Paul in Conversation

When the narrative warnings of the Book of Judges and the theological claims of Pauline justification are placed in direct conversation with each other, they produce a powerful and coherent framework for understanding and addressing the Nigerian democratic crisis. The table below summarizes the key dimensions of this intertextual correlation:

Theological Theme	The Book of Judges	Pauline Justification
Institutional Integrity:	Institutional collapse occurs when leaders treat power as personal property rather than public trust	Justification creates a new community defined by transparency, mutual accountability, and equal dignity
The Nature of Power	Power is used as a transactional weapon for personal enrichment and tribal dominance	Power is redefined through the cross as self-giving service and solidarity with the vulnerable
Religion and Ethics	Religious ritual is used to mask and legitimize ongoing corruption and ethical failure	True faith expresses itself in concrete deeds of justice and honest public engagement
Leadership Pattern:	Charismatic individual leaders fail to produce lasting change because underlying institutions are corrupt.	Christ's kenotic, servant leadership is the paradigm for all authority within the covenant community
Community Responsibility	Every person who does 'what is right in their own eyes' undermines communal solidarity and shared accountability	Justification creates mutual obligation, shared discernment, and communal responsibility for the common good

Table 1: Intertextual Correlation between Judges and Pauline Justification

The table reveals a coherent and powerful theological narrative. Judges describe the problem in narrative form: a society that treats religious performance as a substitute for genuine ethical accountability will inevitably collapse into institutional corruption, social fragmentation, and the systemic abuse of the vulnerable. Paul provides the theological solution: God's own rectifying righteousness, unleashed in the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, creates a new community whose internal life of justice and transparency is itself a challenge to corrupt social orders.

Together they expose the profound danger of a purely transactional theology — one that treats religion as a tool for managing or benefiting from corrupt systems rather than

challenging them. As Andy-Philip's (2023) research repeatedly demonstrates, whenever the church reduces its scriptural mandates to instruments for personal advancement, it ends up endorsing the very structural corruption that destroys the society around it (p. 95). The God of both Judges and Paul refuses to be used as a tool for maintaining corrupt power. He is a God who acts to break such power and to create communities of genuine, visible justice.

6. The Nigerian Democratic Experiment: Applying the Framework

Applying this intertextual theological framework to the Nigerian democratic context requires completing what Osmer (2008) calls the descriptive-empirical and interpretive tasks: naming the concrete reality and understanding its structural causes, before engaging with the normative response.

6.1 The Reality of State Failure and Prebendalism

Nigeria returned to civilian democratic governance in 1999 after decades of military rule. In the years since, the country has conducted multiple elections and maintained the formal structures of democratic government. However, the substantive content of democratic governance — accountable institutions, the rule of law, equitable distribution of public resources, and the protection of citizens' basic rights — has remained largely absent from the experience of ordinary Nigerians.

The political scientist Joseph's (2014) concept of prebendalism remains the most accurate analytical framework for understanding why. Prebendalism describes a system in which public officials treat state offices not as positions of public service but as personal property to be exploited for their own benefit, their families, and their ethnic networks (p. 5). In a prebendal system, winning political office is functionally equivalent to winning a lottery: it confers access to public resources that can be extracted for private benefit. This is not a distortion of the system. It is how the system is designed to work in the minds of most of those who operate within it.

The consequences are devastating. Public funds that should build roads, hospitals, and schools are systematically looted. Security institutions are underfunded and compromised. Young people, educated enough to understand what genuine governance could look like but unable to access its benefits through honest means, are vulnerable to recruitment into

criminal networks. Public trust in institutions collapses, and a culture of cynicism becomes self-reinforcing.

6.2 The Church as a Mirror of the Corrupt State

The tragedy that gives this study its particular urgency is that the institutional church in Nigeria — the community that should be the prophetic alternative to this corrupt system has in many cases become its mirror. Many Nigerian congregations have adopted what can be called a "Big Man" ecclesiology that replicates the exact structures of prebendal politics within the church itself.

In this ecclesial model, the senior pastor operates as a political patron. Decision-making is centralized around a single powerful figure. Financial management is opaque and unaccountable. The congregation is expected to provide the leader with material resources and personal loyalty, and in return, the leader distributes spiritual blessings, prophetic words, and social connections. The prosperity gospel provides the theological legitimation for this arrangement: material success is evidence of God's favor, and giving generously to the pastor is the means of securing that favor.

Ukah's (2008) sociological study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, one of Nigeria's largest and most influential Pentecostal denominations, documents how this institutional model is replicated at scale across Nigerian Christianity (p. 103). Andy-Philip's (2024) examination of the intersection between economics and theology in the Nigerian context similarly demonstrates how wealth-focused preaching creates a theological framework that is structurally indistinguishable from the patronage networks of prebendal politics (p. 56).

The result is a deep and pervasive political apathy among Nigerian Christians. Believers are taught to pray for miraculous deliverance from broken infrastructure, inadequate healthcare, and insecurity. However, they are rarely equipped to understand these as systemic failures that require organized, informed civic engagement to address. The church's prophetic voice is further silenced when church leaders accept financial gifts and political patronage from corrupt politicians, trading their spiritual authority for institutional security.

6.3 Religious Legitimation of Corruption

One of the most disturbing dimensions of the Nigerian situation is the way in which religious language and practice are routinely used to legitimize corrupt behavior. This dynamic finds an almost exact parallel in the final chapters of the Book of Judges. Political inaugurations, election campaigns, and government functions are routinely accompanied by elaborate religious ceremonies that invoke divine blessing on activities that, in substance, amount to the systematic looting of public resources.

Andy-Philip's (2022) paper "Peace and National Security: The Strategic Role of Religious Leaders in Nigeria's Fourth Republic" identifies this dynamic as one of the most serious challenges facing Nigerian civil society, arguing that religious leaders who allow themselves to be co-opted into the political patronage system effectively become agents of the system's perpetuation rather than its reform (p. 120). When the church's prophetic function is corrupted by political patronage, it loses the very thing that makes it valuable to both God and the society it serves.

7. Towards a Reconstructed Ecclesial Pedagogy: The Pragmatic Task

The final movement in Osmer's (2008) practical theology framework — the pragmatic task — requires moving from analysis to action. What concrete, specific steps can the Nigerian church take to reclaim its prophetic identity and embody the structural justice demanded by both the Book of Judges and Pauline justification theology?

7.1 Institutional Transparency as a Theological Practice

The most urgent and basic step is establishing genuine financial transparency and accountability within the church itself. The church cannot credibly call on the government to manage public resources with integrity and transparency. At the same time, its own financial management remains opaque and centralized in the hands of a single unaccountable leader.

Every local congregation should establish a publicly accessible financial reporting system, an independent financial oversight board with genuine authority, and clear, enforceable accountability mechanisms for all who handle church funds. This is not simply a matter of organizational good practice. It is a theological statement: the church treats its resources as

the shared inheritance of all its members — the household funds of the family of God — not the personal property of its pastoral patriarch.

Andy-Philip's (2016) *Theses Writing Made Easy*, while primarily a research methods guide, articulates a broader principle that applies directly to this institutional context: academic and ecclesial integrity alike require clear, documented, and publicly accountable standards of practice that prevent the concentration of unaccountable power in individual hands (p. 12). The same intellectual integrity that governs honest scholarship must govern honest stewardship.

7.2 Dismantling the Culture of Charismatic Personality Dependency

Following the lessons of the Book of Judges, the Nigerian church must actively work to dismantle the culture of personality cult that surrounds many of its leaders. Judges demonstrate, with painful clarity, that a community whose survival depends on the extraordinary gifting of a single individual is in deep structural trouble, because no individual leader can sustain the moral weight the community has placed on them. When they fall — as they inevitably do — the community falls with them.

The practical steps for dismantling this culture include developing genuine shared leadership structures in which strong, empowered lay leadership boards balance pastoral authority; creating open and honest feedback channels within congregations so that concerns about leadership behavior can be raised without fear of retaliation; and cultivating a theological culture in which leaders are evaluated not by their charismatic performances or their material prosperity but by their demonstrated servant character, their willingness to be held accountable, and their practical commitment to the growth and freedom of those they lead.

Gorman's (2019) account of the Pauline community as a community of mutual accountability — in which the Spirit distributes gifts to all members for the common good, not to a single leader for their personal glory — provides the theological foundation for this structural shift (p. 100). A Pauline ecclesiology is structurally incompatible with the Big Man model.

7.3 Public Liturgies of Lament and Civic Mobilization

The church must redesign its corporate worship to include honest, public liturgies of lament — structured practices of naming, mourning, and condemning the specific corruptions and injustices of the Nigerian situation before God. Katongole's (2017) theology of lament, developed from an African perspective in *Born from Lament*, demonstrates that honest lament is not a sign of weak faith but a form of prophetic courage: the willingness to refuse easy comfort, to name what is genuinely broken, and to bring the community's honest pain and anger before a God who hears and acts (p. 78).

This liturgical lament must then serve as a launching pad for organized civic engagement. The church must educate its members about their civic rights and responsibilities, equip them to vote with integrity and hold elected officials accountable, and actively support those in the community who work in public service, doing so with transparency and courage. As Andy-Philip's (2022) research on peace and national security emphasises, faith leaders have a non-negotiable duty to step directly into the public square as agents of social accountability and anti-corruption advocacy.

7.4 Forming Cruciform Character for Public Life

Ultimately, all of these structural reforms depend on and must be accompanied by the formation of a different kind of person — what Paul calls, in Philippians 2:5, the person who has the "mind of Christ." Wright's (2010) work on Christian virtue and public character, developed in *After You Believe*, argues that genuine ethical transformation — the kind that can resist the seductive pull of corruption in public life — requires not merely correct information or correct rules but the cultivation of habituated, second-nature virtue: the kind of character that chooses honesty and justice automatically, as an expression of who a person has become, rather than calculating each decision from scratch under pressure.

This cruciform character is the church's deepest and most important contribution to Nigeria's political renewal. It is also its most distinctive contribution — the one thing that the church can offer that no political party, civil society organization, or government institution can provide. The church is, or should be, in the business of forming the kind of people who, when they enter public life, carry with them a non-negotiable, theologically

grounded commitment to the values of justice, transparency, and the common good. When the church is genuinely doing this work, it becomes the most powerful anti-corruption institution in the nation — not because it wields political power but because it produces people with the character to resist corruption wherever they encounter it.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged honestly. First, the intertextual dialogue between the Book of Judges and Pauline justification, while methodologically productive, involves a degree of canonical selection: other Old Testament texts that speak directly to institutional accountability — including the prophetic books of Amos, Micah, and Isaiah — have not received sustained exegetical attention within the scope of this paper. A fuller canonical account of the biblical theology of anti-corruption would enrich the framework proposed here. Second, the qualitative diagnosis of the Nigerian democratic experiment draws on published sociological and theological research rather than on primary empirical fieldwork. While the scholarship of Ukah (2008), Joseph (2014), and Andy-Philip (2018, 2022, 2023, 2024) provides a rigorous empirical foundation, the diversity of Nigeria's ecclesiastical, regional, and socio-economic contexts means that generalizations about Nigerian Christianity must be approached with caution. Third, the practical ecclesial pedagogy proposed in Section Seven has not been empirically tested within specific Nigerian congregational settings. Its effectiveness as a tool for pastoral renewal remains to be demonstrated through applied and longitudinal research. These limitations define the scope of the present study and open clear pathways for future investigation.

8. Conclusion

The systemic political corruption that continues to prevent the full realization of Nigeria's democratic potential is not, at its deepest level, simply a political or economic problem. It is a theological problem, rooted in deficient theological frameworks that have produced a Christianity that is privately devotional but publicly disengaged, spiritually enthusiastic but structurally compromised.

This paper has argued that the biblical tradition offers powerful resources for diagnosing and addressing this problem. The Book of Judges, read in its canonical depth with the

guidance of Dr Nesta Andy-Philip's indigenous scholarship, provides a devastating diagnosis of how institutional corruption takes root, spreads, and destroys: through the abandonment of communal accountability, the treatment of sacred office as personal property, and the use of religious performance to mask ongoing ethical failure. Pauline justification theology, read in its full apocalyptic and social dimensions, provides the theological solution: God's own righteousness — active, cosmic, and structural — breaking into a corrupt world through Jesus Christ to create a new community defined by justice, mutual accountability, and the radical equality of all persons before God.

The West African church stands at a critical crossroads. It can continue to mirror the corrupt patronage structures of the Nigerian state, trading its prophetic authority for institutional security and material benefit. Alternatively, it can reclaim its true vocation: to be, in the language of the Pauline tradition, a demonstration community — a visible, concrete, structural embodiment of the alternative social order that God is bringing into being through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This reclamation will not be easy. It will require courageous pastoral leaders willing to dismantle the structures of their own institutional power. It will require theologically serious congregants willing to hold their leaders to genuine accountability. It will require the painful, ongoing work of lament, repentance, and structural reform. However, it is precisely this kind of courageous, costly, cruciform engagement that the God of Judges and the God of Paul has always called his covenant community to embody.

When the Nigerian church finds the courage to make this choice, it will not merely become a better institution. It will become what it was always meant to be: the prophetic, transformative, justice-bearing presence of God in a nation that desperately needs exactly that.

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