

The Image of God and Human Dignity: A Biblical Theology for Social Justice in Contemporary Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's persistent socio-economic inequality, religious violence, and political corruption contradicted the biblical vision of human dignity rooted in the image of God (Imago Dei). Despite widespread Christian presence, the reality of dehumanisation, marginalisation, and systemic injustice called for a re-examination of Christian theology's role in promoting social justice. This study aimed to develop a biblical theology of human dignity that could inform Christian engagement with social justice issues in contemporary Nigeria. A qualitative research design was adopted for the investigation. Data were collected through library research involving theological texts, biblical commentaries, and scholarly journals. The method of analysis employed was content and thematic interpretation guided by biblical-theological frameworks. The study found that the Imago Dei doctrine, when properly understood, upheld the equality and worth of all human beings and directly challenged social structures that perpetuated injustice. It also revealed that many Nigerian churches had underemphasised social justice in favour of personal piety and prosperity. The study recommended the integration of justice-focused theology into church teaching, leadership formation, and public advocacy. Christian institutions were urged to actively address structural injustices through ethical leadership, interfaith collaboration, and grassroots community engagement. In conclusion, the research affirmed that a rediscovery of the image of God as foundational to human worth could provide the theological basis for societal transformation in Nigeria. The Church must reclaim its prophetic role in fostering justice, peace, and human dignity for all citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Nigeria, mounting socio-political crises have significantly eroded the worth and dignity of the human person. Violence, corruption, poverty, ethnic tension, and religious intolerance have all contributed to a persistent disregard for human life and wellbeing. Across various regions of the country, individuals and communities grapple with systemic oppression and injustice, often without recourse to legal protection or societal support. These conditions have exposed a troubling disconnection between the theological affirmation of human dignity and the lived realities of countless Nigerians. At the heart of this disjunction lies a critical theological and ethical question: how can the Christian doctrine of the Image of God (Imago Dei) inform a more just and humane society? Rooted in Genesis 1:26–27, the concept of Imago Dei underscores the intrinsic worth of every human being, irrespective of status, ethnicity, gender, or creed. The assertion that all people are made in God's image forms a foundational pillar for Christian thought on dignity, rights, and justice. Scholars such as Kilner (2015) argue that understanding humanity through the lens of divine image compels the church and society to uphold the sacredness of life and promote equitable treatment. In African theological discourse, this doctrine assumes even greater urgency as it provides a counter-narrative to the historical and ongoing marginalisation of vulnerable populations (Agang, 2020). Despite this theological grounding, the application of Imago Dei as a framework for social justice remains underexplored in the Nigerian context, where religion wields significant influence on social and political dynamics.

The ideal envisioned in biblical theology is one where all human beings are accorded respect, value, and justice, grounded in their creation in God's image. However, the reality in Nigeria reflects a stark contrast. Many citizens endure indignities such as extrajudicial killings, gender-based violence, displacement, and exploitation. Institutional corruption and the failure of governance have compounded these issues, rendering justice inaccessible to large segments of the population. The consequence of this situation is a growing culture of dehumanisation, where life is cheapened, social trust eroded, and moral apathy entrenched. A theological framework capable of addressing these challenges is urgently needed, one that speaks both prophetically and pastorally to the Nigerian context.

This paper seeks to construct a biblical theology of the Imago Dei as a basis for affirming human dignity and promoting social justice in contemporary Nigeria. It examines scriptural foundations, theological interpretations, and the relevance of Christian social ethics in light of Nigeria's pressing injustices. The study further explores the role of the Church as a moral and social actor capable of transforming public consciousness and structures. Through this inquiry, the research intends to bridge a crucial gap between theological conviction and socio-political practice, thereby contributing to the development of a more equitable society rooted in biblical principles.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Image of God (Imago Dei): The concept of the Imago Dei is central to theological anthropology and undergirds Christian perspectives on human value and dignity. Derived from Genesis 1:26–27, it asserts that humans are created in the likeness of God. Theologians have historically interpreted this doctrine from three major perspectives: the substantive, functional, and relational views. The substantive approach holds that the image of God consists in intrinsic human attributes such as reason, moral awareness, and the capacity for self-reflection (Erickson, 2015; Lemke, 2015). These qualities distinguish humans from other creatures and imply a divinely imparted essence that mirrors God's own nature.

The functional interpretation emphasises humanity's role as stewards over creation, drawing from the dominion mandate in Genesis 1:28. In this view, bearing God's image entails responsibility, creativity, and governance reflective of divine authority (Middleton, 2005). The relational perspective, championed in contemporary theological circles, sees the image of God expressed primarily through relationships with God, others, and the wider community (Grenz, 2001). Scholars argue that a holistic understanding of the Imago Dei should synthesise all three dimensions, essence, function, and relationship—to affirm both the inherent dignity and the social responsibilities of human beings (Kilner, 2015).

Human Dignity: Human dignity, within a biblical framework, is derived directly from the doctrine of the Imago Dei. Unlike secular definitions that may root dignity in autonomy or individual achievement, theological accounts assert that human worth is not earned but inherent. Every person, regardless of social status, ethnicity, gender, or physical condition, possesses equal value because of being created in God's image. Catholic social thought, for instance, teaches that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society (USCCB, 2005). This intrinsic worth stands in opposition to any ideology or system that dehumanises or marginalises individuals.

John Kilner (2015) contends that Christ, as the perfect image of God, both reveals and restores true human dignity. Through the Incarnation, Jesus not only confirms the value of human life but also provides the pattern toward which believers are conformed (Romans 8:29). Theological reflection thus moves beyond abstract doctrine to a Christ-centred anthropology that recognises dignity as both a divine gift and a human calling. In the Nigerian context, where people often suffer under systems that deny their humanity, reclaiming a theologically grounded view of human dignity becomes essential for any meaningful pursuit of justice.

Biblical Theology: Biblical theology offers a narrative framework through which doctrines such as the Imago Dei and human dignity are explored across the arc of Scripture. Unlike systematic theology, which organises doctrine topically, biblical theology traces themes through the unfolding story of God's redemptive activity. Genesis affirms that humanity is created in God's image, while the prophets critique society's failure to honour that image in others (Isaiah 1:17; Amos 5:24). In the Gospels, Christ represents the true Image, offering both a model and means of restored humanity (Colossians 1:15). Revelation anticipates the consummation of human dignity in the new creation, where all will reflect God's glory in fullness.

This narrative progression situates justice and dignity within the broader context of God's purposes for creation. As Wright (2006) notes, biblical theology makes clear that justice is not peripheral but central to the mission of God. It links personal salvation with social responsibility, and spiritual renewal with societal transformation. For Nigerian Christians, this approach offers a

coherent vision that binds theological conviction with civic engagement. Understanding biblical theology in this way enables believers to see justice not as a modern ideological construct, but as a divine imperative rooted in God's character and redemptive plan.

Social Justice: Social justice, in biblical terms, refers to the equitable and compassionate treatment of all individuals by God's standards of righteousness. Scripture frequently associates justice with defending the rights of the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 1:17; Psalm 82:3). These imperatives reflect God's concern for the vulnerable and His call for communities to embody covenantal faithfulness not only in worship but also in societal structures. Social justice thus encompasses ethical governance, fair distribution of resources, and legal systems that protect human dignity.

Although modern definitions of social justice can vary, a biblical theology of justice anchors the concept in the Imago Dei and the divine law. It challenges systems and attitudes that reduce people to mere economic or political instruments. In contemporary Nigeria, where inequality, tribalism, and religious discrimination persist, social justice must address both structural injustice and personal responsibility. Christian theology can contribute meaningfully to national development when it reclaims its prophetic role, urging believers to act justly as an expression of their discipleship and as a witness to the transformative power of the gospel (Togunu-Bickersteth, 2022).

The Image of God and Human Dignity in the Bible

The Hebrew Scriptures begin their account of humanity with the profound declaration that humankind was created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–27). This assertion, placed at the pinnacle of the creation narrative, affirms the sacred worth of every human life. The Hebrew term *tselem* (image) signifies representation, suggesting that humans, as divine image-bearers, are called to reflect God's character and authority within creation. This connection grounds human dignity not in function or achievement, but in divine origin. In Genesis 9:6, the divine image forms the basis for prohibiting murder, further underscoring the sanctity of life. As Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright (2004) explains, the Imago Dei forms the "foundation of biblical ethics" and sets the tone for justice and equality throughout Scripture.

Old Testament prophets repeatedly anchored their calls for justice in the intrinsic value of the human person. The oracles of Amos, Micah, and Isaiah, for instance, condemn the exploitation of the poor, the perversion of justice, and the neglect of the vulnerable. These denunciations emerge not merely as social criticisms, but as theological indictments—violations of God's intention for human dignity. Micah 6:8's injunction "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" speaks directly to the image-bearing responsibility of humankind. According to Brueggemann (2014), the prophetic tradition consistently reminds Israel that human beings are not disposable commodities, but sacred vessels of divine imprint. Therefore, to mistreat others is to dishonour their Maker.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is identified as "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), embodying the fullness of God's nature and the perfection of human dignity. Through his ministry, teachings, and redemptive work, Christ reaffirms and restores the image of God in humanity. His interactions with the marginalised—the leper, the Samaritan woman, the poor—display a radical affirmation of worth that cuts across social, ethnic, and gender divides. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–

37) illustrates a theology of neighbourly love grounded in shared humanity. In Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus equates acts of compassion with service to himself, reinforcing the dignity inherent in even “the least” of his brothers and sisters. As N. T. Wright (2010) argues, Jesus’ kingdom vision upholds the image of God in all people and calls his followers to mirror that image through justice, mercy, and love.

The early Church, as depicted in Acts, lived out this theological vision through communal sharing, hospitality, and advocacy for the oppressed (Acts 2:44–47; Acts 4:32–35). The epistles continue to affirm the ethical implications of the *Imago Dei*, exhorting believers to put on the “new self” created after God’s likeness in righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24). Paul’s declaration in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” conveys a powerful theological levelling. This identity in Christ redefines societal value systems and calls believers to reflect divine justice in their treatment of others. A biblical theology of the *Imago Dei*, therefore, encompasses both ontological dignity and moral obligation, making it a compelling framework for social justice in any context, including Nigeria.

Theological Foundations for Social Justice

The God revealed in the Bible is deeply concerned with justice. From the beginning, Scripture presents righteousness and justice as integral aspects of God’s character. Psalm 89:14 declares that “righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne,” linking divine sovereignty with moral governance. This pairing recurs throughout the Hebrew Bible, often in contexts where the dignity of the poor, the stranger, and the oppressed is at stake. The law codes in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy contain numerous injunctions protecting the vulnerable, including widows, orphans, and foreigners (Deuteronomy 10:18–19). These commands are not arbitrary but flow from God’s concern for the dignity of every person. According to Nicholas Wolterstorff (2008), “justice is not an optional social arrangement but a moral obligation grounded in the worth of persons as God’s image-bearers.”

A biblical view of the human person, or Christian anthropology, strengthens the moral imperative of justice. The concept of *Imago Dei* means that each individual possesses inalienable worth, independent of utility or social standing. Theologically, this prohibits viewing people as instruments to be used or obstacles to be removed. Instead, every person must be regarded with reverence as a bearer of divine likeness. The Church Fathers, including Augustine and Irenaeus, upheld the dignity of humanity as essential to theological anthropology. More recently, John Stott (2006) affirmed that “every human being has an intrinsic worth because God made them, Christ died for them, and the Spirit can dwell in them.” This understanding provides a moral foundation not only for personal ethics but also for socio-political engagement.

The ethic of the Kingdom of God, as articulated in the life and teachings of Jesus, provides a comprehensive vision for justice rooted in dignity. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) exemplifies an alternative social order marked by mercy, peacemaking, and righteousness. Jesus challenges structures of domination and exclusion, calling his followers to embody values that reflect divine justice. The Beatitudes bless the poor, the meek, and the persecuted, shifting the axis of value from power and wealth to humility and compassion. The Kingdom of God is not merely a future hope but a present reality that demands ethical living and systemic transformation. According to Christopher Marshall (2005), “the justice of God’s kingdom demands both

personal righteousness and structural reform, a commitment to the poor and a critique of power.”

In African contexts, liberation theology and African biblical hermeneutics provide crucial insights into the application of justice. Liberation theology, initially developed in Latin America, has influenced African theologians who interpret Scripture through the lens of suffering, resistance, and hope. Kā Mana (2012) argues that theology in Africa must be contextual, prophetic, and transformative, addressing the lived experiences of people in marginalised communities. Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001) advocates a feminist theological approach that reclaims African women’s dignity through biblical reflection and social engagement. Nigerian theologian Sunday Bobai Agang (2020) calls for a theology that recognises violence and systemic injustice as direct assaults on the image of God in others. These perspectives emphasise that Christian theology must not remain abstract but should inspire concrete action towards justice in society.

Human Dignity and Social Justice in Contemporary Nigeria

The Nigerian social context presents a complex landscape of injustice, inequality, and systemic marginalisation. Despite the nation’s rich human and natural resources, millions of Nigerians live in abject poverty, lacking access to basic amenities such as clean water, quality healthcare, and education. Corruption and mismanagement have continued to plague governance, deepening socio-economic disparities and disenfranchising vast portions of the population. Ethnic and religious tensions frequently erupt into violence, threatening national cohesion and eroding public trust. As a result, the dignity of many citizens is persistently undermined through exploitation, exclusion, and abuse. This national crisis raises urgent theological questions about the role of faith in confronting injustice and restoring human dignity.

Across various regions, individuals face systemic violations of their God-given dignity. Extrajudicial killings, especially through police brutality exemplified during the #EndSARS movement, reflect the devaluation of human life in the public space. Young Nigerians are often profiled, harassed, and sometimes murdered with impunity. Women suffer disproportionate violence, including rape, forced marriage, and domestic abuse, while children face trafficking and child labour. Internally displaced persons, victims of insurgencies, are left vulnerable in underfunded camps with minimal support. These realities depict a nation where the theological affirmation of the *Imago Dei* is tragically disconnected from everyday practice. According to Dada (2021), the Nigerian context “manifests an overwhelming disregard for the sacredness of life,” demanding urgent theological engagement with the structures that perpetuate such indignities.

One of the major obstacles to justice in Nigeria is the failure of institutions to uphold the rights and dignity of all citizens. A weak judiciary, politicised security forces, and compromised public offices contribute to a system in which justice is neither accessible nor impartial. Additionally, the misuse of religion has further entrenched injustice. In many cases, religious leaders remain silent in the face of oppression, while others align with political elites to protect personal interests. Prosperity theology, widespread in some churches, diverts attention from social responsibility and glorifies wealth acquisition without addressing the moral costs. As Akintunde (2019) notes, “religion in Nigeria has become a tool for legitimising inequality rather than challenging it.” This institutional failure, both secular and religious, has compounded the social fractures affecting the dignity of the people.

The Church's prophetic role in society has, in many instances, been muted or compromised. Instead of confronting injustice with courage, some Christian institutions have adopted postures of neutrality or complicity. Yet, the biblical mandate for justice remains unambiguous. The Church is called not merely to preach salvation but to embody the values of God's kingdom—including righteousness, equity, and compassion. In recent times, there have been commendable efforts from certain denominations and Christian NGOs advocating for education, healthcare, and peacebuilding. However, such efforts remain limited in scope and often lack theological grounding. A deeper and more intentional engagement with the doctrine of the Imago Dei offers the Church in Nigeria a potent theological resource to reclaim its voice in the public square and promote the dignity of all persons.

A Biblical Theology for Social Engagement

The rediscovery of the doctrine of the Imago Dei within the context of public theology offers a compelling resource for social engagement in Nigeria. This doctrine affirms the inherent dignity of every individual and lays a theological foundation for advocating justice in the public sphere. Preaching and teaching that highlight the biblical image of humanity as bearers of God's likeness can shift cultural mindsets and inspire ethical reforms. A Christ-centred understanding of human worth, as presented in both the Old and New Testaments, reinforces the idea that injustice is not only a social problem but a theological affront. As Wright (2006) argues, the Church's mission must include active participation in societal transformation, informed by Scripture's call to justice, mercy, and humility.

The Church, as the visible expression of God's people on earth, possesses the moral and spiritual authority to act as an agent of social transformation. Historically, the Church in Africa has played significant roles in education, health, and peacebuilding. In Nigeria, however, its potential remains underutilised due to fear, denominational divisions, and limited theological training in public theology. A renewed understanding of the Church's mission, rooted in the biblical vision of the kingdom of God, calls for strategic involvement in addressing systemic injustices. According to Agang (2014), Christian communities must embrace a theology that engages political structures and economic systems while remaining grounded in biblical convictions. This approach resists both withdrawal from the public arena and uncritical complicity with corrupt regimes.

One of the primary means through which the Church can influence society is through advocacy, education, and empowerment. Christian leaders must use their platforms to challenge injustice and model integrity. Churches should offer civic education, promote ethical leadership, and create safe spaces for dialogue on national issues. Additionally, churches can partner with civil society organisations and NGOs to implement community-based programmes that address the needs of the marginalised. These efforts must be grounded in Scripture and fuelled by a theology that affirms human dignity and prioritises justice. As Forster and Oostenbrink (2019) note, effective social engagement requires theological depth, moral clarity, and practical compassion.

Theological institutions have a critical role to play in preparing the next generation of leaders for ethical and prophetic engagement in the public sphere. Seminaries and Bible colleges must revisit their curricula to include courses on biblical justice, social ethics, and political theology. Students should be trained to understand the intersections between faith and society, equipped not only to pastor churches but also to challenge unjust systems. Practical theology must move beyond pulpit-focused training to encompass public

discipleship and civic responsibility. When ministers are taught to integrate the theology of Imago Dei with issues such as governance, human rights, and economic justice, the Church becomes better equipped to foster societal renewal. The transformation of Nigeria's public life requires a transformed Church—one rooted in Scripture and active in society.

Toward a Practical Theology of Human Dignity

Contextual engagement remains essential in developing a theology that affirms human dignity within Nigerian society. Community-based initiatives grounded in the doctrine of the Imago Dei provide a practical platform for addressing injustice at the grassroots level. Many rural and urban communities suffer from inadequate social services, political neglect, and systemic marginalisation. Churches and Christian organisations working within these spaces must design interventions that reflect the biblical view of humanity as sacred and valuable. These may include offering food banks, medical missions, and literacy programmes that restore dignity to the vulnerable. As Tiénou (2001) argues, theology must respond to “real-life struggles” and not remain confined to academic discourse or ecclesiastical settings.

Youth engagement is another key dimension in actualising a theology of dignity and justice. Nigeria's youth, who make up a significant portion of the population, are often victims of unemployment, political manipulation, and police violence. The #EndSARS movement revealed the frustrations of a generation demanding recognition, justice, and opportunity. Churches must move beyond rhetorical support and create platforms for youth empowerment—such as leadership training, skills acquisition, and mentorship grounded in biblical ethics. Teaching young people their identity as image-bearers can foster resilience and purpose. As Osadolor (2022) observes, youth engagement through theological reflection and social mobilisation remains “one of the most potent forces for systemic change” in Nigeria's future.

Interfaith collaboration also holds immense potential in advancing a shared vision of justice and dignity. While religious diversity in Nigeria has often been a source of tension, it can also become a channel for peacebuilding and common action. Christian and Muslim leaders, for example, can jointly affirm the sanctity of human life and challenge practices that dehumanise or divide communities. Shared theological principles—such as the belief in divine creation and justice—can serve as a foundation for cooperation. Programmes that promote dialogue, joint community service, and peace education can bridge divides and foster mutual respect. According to Gifford (2015), “faith-based actors are uniquely placed to influence moral attitudes and social behaviours” in ways that transcend political ideologies.

Engagement with policy and governance represents another critical frontier for affirming human dignity in Nigeria. The Church must cultivate leaders who understand both the spiritual and civic dimensions of their calling. Rather than avoiding politics due to its perceived corruption, Christians should enter public service with a commitment to justice, transparency, and moral accountability. Prophetic witness includes challenging unjust laws, advocating for marginalised groups, and participating in democratic processes. This engagement must be strategic and rooted in Scripture, not merely reactive or partisan. A theology of the Imago Dei that affirms each person's worth must translate into structures and policies that protect rights and promote equity. When theology and governance are bridged through ethical leadership, a more just society becomes possible.

Challenges and Limitations

Theological challenges represent one of the most significant limitations to fully actualising a biblical theology of human dignity in Nigeria. Misinterpretations of key doctrines—such as divine sovereignty and submission to authority—have often been used to discourage resistance to oppression. In some theological circles, suffering is perceived as an inevitable divine will, leading to fatalistic acceptance of injustice. This perspective undermines the biblical call to pursue justice and resist evil. A theology that overemphasises spiritual salvation while neglecting earthly suffering disconnects the Christian message from the lived realities of many Nigerians. According to Katongole (2011), African Christianity must reclaim a theology that sees justice and dignity as integral to the gospel, not mere socio-political concerns.

Socio-political resistance poses another major obstacle to social justice advocacy. In a country where political leaders often act with impunity, voices calling for reform are frequently met with intimidation, harassment, or violence. Activists, including those from religious communities, have been targeted for challenging corrupt practices or exposing abuse. This atmosphere of fear can stifle prophetic witness and dissuade meaningful engagement with public life. The complicity of some religious leaders with political elites has further compromised the Church's moral authority. As Gaiya (2020) notes, "when the pulpit is silent in the face of oppression, it becomes complicit in injustice." Therefore, efforts to promote dignity and justice must also involve courageous resistance to structures that protect privilege at the expense of the common good.

Internal Church limitations also hinder the capacity of Christian communities to model and promote human dignity. Denominationalism, competition for membership, and doctrinal divisions often fragment the Church's efforts, making it difficult to coordinate meaningful action. Some churches focus exclusively on spiritual deliverance and prosperity preaching, neglecting the biblical imperatives of justice, compassion, and equity. Financial mismanagement and a lack of transparency within church leadership further erode public trust. Additionally, theological education in many seminaries remains heavily focused on doctrinal orthodoxy without adequate emphasis on public theology and social ethics. As Omenyo (2016) points out, the African Church must overcome internal dysfunctions if it is to serve as a credible witness to God's justice in society.

Moreover, cultural and patriarchal systems present deep-rooted barriers to the affirmation of human dignity, particularly for women and children. In many Nigerian communities, traditional norms still promote gender inequality, child marriage, and the silencing of victims of abuse. While Scripture affirms the equal value of all people, cultural practices often contradict this message. The Church's failure to confront such customs with theological clarity contributes to the normalisation of dehumanising attitudes. Combating these challenges requires more than theological abstraction; it demands intentional discipleship, cultural critique, and social reformation rooted in the conviction that all people—regardless of gender, age, or status—bear the image of God.

Prospects for a Transformative Theology of Social Justice in Nigeria

A transformative biblical theology of social justice holds substantial promise for reshaping Nigeria's moral and social fabric. Rooted in the doctrine of the Imago Dei, this theology affirms the inviolable dignity of every person, calling the Church and society alike to a renewed sense of moral responsibility. As human beings are created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), each person possesses

inherent worth that transcends ethnicity, gender, class, or status. Reclaiming this biblical vision offers a foundation for advocating social equality, challenging oppressive norms, and promoting just governance. According to Wright (2010), a biblically grounded theology provides not only spiritual nourishment but also a moral compass for addressing real-world injustices.

The youth demographic presents a strategic opportunity for the dissemination of this transformative theology. With over 60% of Nigeria's population under the age of 25, there exists a growing hunger among young people for authenticity, justice, and social relevance in their faith expressions. Empowering Christian youth with sound theological education that integrates faith and public engagement can catalyse social change. Faith-based organisations and campus fellowships could serve as platforms for theological dialogue, civic training, and advocacy campaigns. As Ihejirika (2014) notes, the vibrancy of Nigerian youth must be harnessed for prophetic action rooted in biblical principles of human dignity and justice.

Interreligious collaboration also offers potential for advancing a theology of justice in a pluralistic society like Nigeria. While Nigeria is often divided along religious lines, both Christianity and Islam contain moral imperatives that promote dignity, compassion, and equity. Dialogues that emphasise shared values such as justice, charity, and the sacredness of human life can foster mutual understanding and joint action. Religious leaders, when united across divides, possess immense influence that can challenge corrupt systems and promote national healing. As Turaki (2010) asserts, any viable theology of justice in Nigeria must account for religious diversity and aim at holistic transformation beyond denominational interests. In addition, a theology that connects spiritual formation with social engagement must inform pastoral training and ecclesial mission. Seminaries and Bible colleges need to revisit their curricula to include modules on social ethics, public theology, and conflict resolution. Churches should integrate messages of justice and dignity into their discipleship programmes, encouraging believers to live out their faith in tangible ways. Such a holistic theology challenges the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular and repositions the Church as a transformative agent in society. The path to a just Nigeria lies not merely in political reform but in moral renewal driven by a people who understand that to honour the image of God in others is to honour God Himself.

Conclusion

A biblical theology anchored in the doctrine of the Imago Dei offers a profound and necessary foundation for addressing social injustice in contemporary Nigeria. Recognising that all human beings bear God's image leads to the affirmation of their inherent dignity, equality, and rights. This foundational truth challenges systemic structures that dehumanise individuals and marginalise communities. The study has shown that the Bible does not limit its concern to spiritual matters alone but speaks directly to societal structures, calling for righteousness, justice, and compassion. When this vision is faithfully interpreted and applied, it equips the Church and Christian communities to respond meaningfully to poverty, corruption, violence, and inequality in Nigerian society. Nigeria's socio-political landscape remains marred by injustice, including the misuse of power, economic disparity, ethnic discrimination, and gender-based violence. These realities represent a contradiction to the biblical ideal of a just society shaped by love and truth. The gap between the scriptural vision and the Nigerian experience reveals the urgent need for the Church to embrace its prophetic mandate. The current religious engagement in Nigeria often leans towards personal prosperity and spiritual

warfare, neglecting the structural transformation of society. A recovery of the biblical call to justice can reorient Christian practice to become an instrument of societal healing and reform.

Recommendations

The study recommends that Nigerian churches re-examine their theological curricula to integrate a robust understanding of human dignity and social responsibility. Preaching, discipleship, and theological education should address contemporary issues such as corruption, political oppression, and economic injustice through the lens of biblical ethics. Churches should invest in social justice ministries, partner with civil society organisations, and raise awareness of Christian responsibility in public life. Clergy and lay leaders must model integrity and compassion, reflecting the biblical call to love one's neighbour and defend the oppressed (Isaiah 1:17; Micah 6:8). A vibrant faith must be incarnated in works of justice and mercy, not confined to religious rituals.

Further, the Church in Nigeria is encouraged to participate in interfaith dialogues and community initiatives that promote peace and development. A theology of human dignity rooted in the Imago Dei provides a common ground for cooperation with other religious and secular bodies committed to social justice. Such engagement does not dilute Christian conviction but exemplifies neighbourly love and public witness. If the Church takes seriously its biblical calling to defend the dignity of all people, it can become a catalyst for national transformation. A just and humane society is not only a political aspiration but a biblical mandate entrusted to those who seek the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

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