



JOURNAL OF LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

Volume 1, Number 2 (September, 2025)

ISSN: 1595-9457 (online); 3093-0618 (print)

Website: <https://jppssuniuyo.com/jld> Email: jppssuniuyo@gmail.com

Received: August 11, 2025 Accepted: September 29, 2025 Published: September 30, 2025

Citation: Anyam, Damian T.; Ekle, Vincent O. & Gbagir, Solomon T. (2025). "An Ethical Evaluation of Human Rights in Nigeria: Lessons from Justice Oputa Panel." *Journal of Leadership and Development*, 1 (2): 82-93.

Article

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AN ETHICAL EVALUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN NIGERIA: LESSONS FROM JUSTICE OPUTA PANEL

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Abstract

From the pre-independence constitutional conferences, through the First and Second Republics and the various military dispensations, to the present democratic government, human rights questions have received merited attention in legal and political discourses. There has been a sustained struggle for the protection of human rights of individuals, groups and communities in Nigeria. The Oputa Panel is one among the eloquent testimonies of these concerted efforts to promote and protect human rights and justice in the country as it examined instances of human rights abuses from 1st January 1984 to 28 May 1999. This study undertook an ethical evaluation of human rights in Nigeria while drawing lessons from Justice Oputa Panel. The paper used the analytic and evaluative methods. The analytical method focused on the Christian perspective on rights as well as presented the Oputa panel as a watch-dog for rights abuse in Nigeria. The evaluative method discussed the ethical implications of the justice Oputa panel for human rights in Nigeria. The study found that the promotion of human rights and transitional justice must be guided by principles of justice, compassion, and reconciliation. This ought to be grounded in a Christian ethical framework. From a Christian perspective, human rights are not merely a product of human convention, but are rooted in the biblical teachings on the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. The study therefore, concluded that there is need to promote human rights and transitional justice and this study provides valuable lessons and insights for policymakers, civil society organizations, and faith-based communities.

Keywords: Human Rights, Oputa Panel, Justice, Christian Ethics.

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Introduction

The notion of human rights is rooted in the inherent dignity and worth of every human being, as created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). This biblical foundation underscores the universal and inalienable nature of human rights, which are essential for human flourishing and well-being. However, the reality of human rights violations in Nigeria is far from respecting and protecting the human rights of its citizens in spite of the fact that she is a party to several international human rights treaties that are built upon the United Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). This is coupled with available statistics which show that Nigeria is “the second highest Christian populated country in Africa with a total of 74.4 million people” (Statista 2025 Christian Population in Africa 2024 by Country. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1368604/christian-population-in-africa-by-country/>). The human rights situation in Nigeria is simply and squarely disappointing. It is on the lips of scholars, human rights activists and defenders. Wherever one turns to there are several reports of unlawful and arbitrary killing of innocent citizens, forced disappearances, torture and cases of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment by the government, harsh and life threatening prison conditions. In recent times, there is a disturbing increase in terrorist groups attacking vulnerable communities particularly in the North Central part of Nigeria. These violent assaults are involving both state actors and non-state actors. They are not isolated cases, but highly systematic. Today, human rights abuses have gone beyond mere security breaches. They are fundamental violations of the most basic human rights, the right to life, right to personal security and the right to live free from fear.

In Benue State, since the return of rains, no farmer is able to go to the farm to prepare the land for cultivation of food crops. The reports about human rights violation across Nigeria indicate a colossal violation of basic rights to safety, dignity and freedom from abuse. These demands for immediate accountability and justice for victims, families who are affected and clarion call for enforcement agencies to be committed to discharging their duties within the ambits of the law with utmost respect for the dignity of the human person. It is based on this challenges that this study raises important ethical questions about the protection and promotion of human dignity. This study examines the ethical dimensions of human rights in Nigeria, drawing lessons from the Justice Oputa Panel. The Justice Oputa Panel, established in 1999, was a truth commission set up to investigate human rights abuses committed during the military regimes in Nigeria. Although the panel’s findings and recommendations could not see the light of day, the creation speaks volumes of the need for a critical framework for understanding the complexities of human rights violations in Nigeria. The identification of the desirable ethical principles and values that underpin human rights will contribute greatly to the respect and protection on human rights in Nigeria.

Definition of Terms

This section defines basic terms under study in order to render the work lucid.

Transitional Justice: In his book, *Introduction To Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa: A Reader*, Gaya Best says that “transitional justice means a response to systematic or widespread violation of human rights. It seeks recognition for the victims, and promotes possibilities for peace, reconciliation, and democracy in the country” (32). Transitional justice is thus instituted at a point of political transition classically from war to positive peace, or more broadly from violence and repression to societal stability (though sometimes it is

done years later) and it is informed by a society's desire to rebuild social trust, reestablish what is right from what is wrong, repair a fractured justice system, and build a democratic system of governance.

Ethics of Rights: According to As John Finnis "rights derive from basic human goods that every rational person must respect" (205). The ethics of rights thus implies that individuals possess inherent dignity and autonomy, which impose moral duties on others and the state to respect and protect these rights.

Christian Perspective on Rights

The truth of the matter is that human rights are fundamental and inalienable to any individual in the sense that they are inherent and cannot be taken away from any individual, no matter their circumstances or the actions of others. The religious affiliation an individual belongs to does not affect one's human right negatively. If there is anything a religious belief does to human rights, it augments it. This is the reason for bringing in the Christian perspective of human rights. The Holy Bible clearly establishes the concept of human worth and dignity in the sense that all humans are created in the image of God. This makes for the belief that human rights are derived from God. Every individual following the Christian perspective is created in God's image and consequent on the above possesses inherent value and dignity. This applies to all persons on account of their humanity. This is the position of most secularists. They argue that "human rights are self-existent or 'givens'". With this premise, they are able to derive moral and legal obligations for human beings whether in ethics, law and justice (Nigel 345). The authenticity of human rights is meaningless unless the rights are grounded in a meaningful foundation which actually exists and is knowable. This meaningful foundation is found in the biblical doctrine of the image of God (*imago Dei*). The biblical teaching about the image of God clearly reveals that all humans have human rights. John Warwick Montgomery argues that "the significance of the biblical doctrine of creation for human rights cannot be exaggerated" (206). Genesis makes mention of humans made in the image of God. A critical reflection of that "passage does not specify what the image of God is" (Dawson 20). The idea of humans created in the image of God is repeated in the following passages (Genesis 2:7, 1:26–29, and 2:15) which does not present any form of ambiguity of any kind. However, the image of God is distinctly in reference to humans with dignity. Mitchell Ben C. explains that "the idea of dignity is not synonymous with the *imago Dei*, but it arises from the image" (110). It is based on these grounds that humans are endowed with inherent dignity, rights and responsibilities.

Mitchell et al uses a clear framework to distinguish between biblical usages of *imago Dei* by insisting that when Genesis and James refer to the *imago Dei* they do so as "a status denoting who humans are, while other New Testament passages speak of God's image as a *standard* for how humans should live" (70). These authors explain, "The standard is what God intends the believer to be (Eph. 4:24) and be conformed to (Rom. 8:29)—it is the goal of the renewal (Col. 3:10) and transformation (2 Cor. 3:18) that a believer is experiencing (Mitchell 70). Jesus, whom Colossians 1:15 describes as "the image of the invisible God," fulfilled the *standard* of image-bearing to perfection. Jesus also adopted the *status* of an image-bearer, taking on human nature while remaining the God whose image humanity bears. As both God and God's image-bearer, Jesus alone could sacrificially atone for Adam's descendants, restoring the relationship between God and his redeemed image-bearers. The redeemed will partake in the fullness of the *imago Dei* as a *standard*; however, Scripture does not place qualifications on the *imago Dei* as a *status*, with all its associated

rights(Mitchell 70). There is no doubt that from a Christian perspective, human rights are not merely a product of human convention. They are deeply rooted in the biblical teachings and they draw on them the desired Christian ethical principles, such as the imperatives to kill animals for food after the global flood of Noah's day. The Holy Bible says "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (Genesis 9:6). The concept of image of God forbids anyone to kill his fellow human. There is no definite right that allows the killing of other persons (individuals). What is lawful and encouraged is for everyone to love one's neighbour (Mark 12:31) and to seek justice and righteousness (Micah 6:8). By integrating Christian ethics with human rights discourse, this research aims to provide a contextualized understanding of the ethical challenges and opportunities facing Nigeria.

Christian Ethics and the Defenders of Human Rights

The Christian perspective on rights is rooted in the biblical teachings on the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. This biblical foundation underscores the Christian emphasis on the importance of human rights, which are seen as essential for protecting and promoting human dignity (Wolterstorff 14). This understanding of human dignity provides a theological foundation for the Christian emphasis on human rights and the protection of human life (Gushee 45). From the perspective of human rights defenders, human rights are not merely a product of human convention, but are grounded in the biblical teachings on justice, compassion, and love. As the biblical prophet Micah declares, "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). This biblical imperative to seek justice and righteousness provides a moral foundation for the Christian emphasis on human rights (Brennan 123). In recent years, Christian scholars have made significant contributions to the discussion on human rights from a Christian perspective. For example, Nicholas Wolterstorff in his book, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, provides a comprehensive Christian framework for understanding human rights (Wolterstorff 2008). Similarly, David Gushee in his book, *The Sacredness of Human Life*, explores the Christian foundations of human rights and dignity (13). These works demonstrate the ongoing relevance of Christian thought to contemporary debates on human rights. The World Council of Churches has been a vocal advocate for human rights and social justice, particularly in the context of economic globalization and climate change (World Council of Churches 2018). Similarly, Christian non-governmental organizations such as World Vision and Catholic Relief Services have worked tirelessly to promote human rights and dignity in some of the world's most vulnerable communities.

In other words, Christian churches and organizations have also played a significant role in promoting human rights and advocating for social justice. For example, the Catholic Church has been a vocal advocate for human rights and dignity, particularly in the areas of economic justice, immigration, and human trafficking (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004). Christian theologians and scholars have also explored the relationship between human rights and the biblical concept of justice. For example, Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann argues that the biblical notion of justice is rooted in the idea of God's righteousness, which is concerned with the well-being and dignity of all people (23). This understanding of justice provides a moral foundation for the Christian emphasis on human rights. In addition to these practical efforts, Christian scholars and theologians continue to explore the theological foundations of human rights and dignity. For example, theologian Miroslav Volf has argued that the Christian concept of love provides a moral foundation for human rights and dignity (Volf 123). Similarly, philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff has explored the relationship between human rights and the biblical concept of justice

(Wolterstorff 8). The Christian perspective on human rights is rooted in the biblical teachings on creation, justice, and love, emphasizing the inherent dignity and worth of every human being. This perspective is further reinforced by the biblical imperative to seek justice and righteousness, guiding Christian scholars, organizations, and institutions in their ongoing contributions to the human rights discourse. Ultimately, the Christian perspective on human rights remains steadfast in its commitment to promoting human dignity and worth, with Christian theologians, scholars, and organizations continuing to explore the theological foundations of human rights and advocate for social justice worldwide.

The Oputa Panel and the Quest for Accountability

The Oputa Panel, formally known as the Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission, was established in 1999 by the Nigerian government to investigate human rights abuses committed during the country's military rule from 1966 to 1999 (Oputa Panel Report 2002). The panel's mandate was to examine the circumstances surrounding the abuses, identify those responsible, and recommend measures for accountability and reparations (Oputa Panel Report 2002). This initiative was seen as a crucial step towards transitional justice and accountability in post-military rule Nigeria. The Oputa Panel's report, submitted in 2002, documented widespread human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and forced disappearances, committed by the military and other state agents during the period under review (Oputa Panel Report 2002). The report also identified key perpetrators, including former military rulers and high-ranking government officials. However, despite the panel's recommendations for accountability and reparations, the Nigerian government's response to the report was inadequate, and many of the perpetrators were never held accountable (Human Rights Watch 2003). Recent scholarship has highlighted the limitations of the Oputa Panel's approach to transitional justice, particularly with regards to its reliance on a narrow, state-centric framework that failed to fully engage with the complexities of Nigeria's conflict dynamics (Ojielo 157-173). Moreover, the panel's recommendations for accountability were largely ignored by the government, underscoring the need for more robust mechanisms for transitional justice in Nigeria (Agbu 249-266). In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for accountability and reparations for past abuses in Nigeria. For example, the Nigerian government has established a National Human Rights Commission to investigate and document human rights abuses (National Human Rights Commission Act 2010).

Additionally, civil society organizations and victims' groups have continued to advocate for accountability and reparations, using the Oputa Panel's report as a basis for their demands (Amnesty International 2020). These developments suggest that the legacy of the Oputa Panel continues to shape debates about accountability and transitional justice in Nigeria. The Oputa Panel's report offers a comprehensive analysis of the human rights abuses perpetrated during Nigeria's military rule era, shedding light on the egregious violations committed between 1966 and 1999. Although the panel's recommendations for accountability and reparations were largely disregarded by the government, the report remains a vital resource for understanding the scope and nature of these abuses. Furthermore, the Oputa Panel's legacy underscores the significance of transitional justice mechanisms in promoting accountability and reconciliation in post-conflict societies. By examining the root causes of human rights violations, the panel's report provides valuable insights into the complexities of Nigeria's conflict dynamics. Moreover, the report highlights the need for robust mechanisms to address the legacies of human rights abuses and promote national reconciliation. Despite the limitations in implementing the panel's

recommendations, the Oputa Panel's report remains a crucial document for understanding the human rights abuses committed during Nigeria's military rule era. Its findings continue to inform discussions on transitional justice, accountability, and reconciliation in Nigeria, serving as a reminder of the importance of addressing the past to build a more just and equitable society.

The Oputa Panel as the Watch Dog for Rights Abuse in Nigeria

The Oputa Panel, established in 1999, was a pivotal moment in Nigeria's quest for accountability and justice, particularly in the context of human rights abuses committed during the country's military rule era. As a watchdog for rights abuse, the panel's mandate was to investigate and document human rights violations, identify perpetrators, and recommend measures for accountability and reparations (Yusuf 161-165). This initiative was a crucial step towards transitional justice and accountability in post-military rule Nigeria, and its legacy continues to shape the country's human rights landscape. The panel's approach to investigating human rights abuses was noteworthy, employing a victim-centered approach that prioritized the testimonies and experiences of victims and their families. Public hearings, which spanned over a year, provided a platform for victims to share their stories and seek justice, promoting a sense of accountability among perpetrators. However, despite receiving over 10,000 petitions, the panel only heard approximately 340 cases, highlighting the challenges faced by the commission in addressing the scale of human rights abuses (Zwanbin 10). Recent scholarship has highlighted the limitations of the Oputa Panel's approach to transitional justice. Ifaloje argues that the panel did not foster accountability for past human rights violations to a large extent and was not an effective instrument of victim-centered justice (Ifaloje 28). Furthermore, the panel's reliance on the discretion of the President for the implementation of its recommendations undermined its effectiveness. Despite these limitations, the Oputa Panel remains an important milestone in Nigeria's quest for accountability and justice. The Oputa Panel's legacy underscores the importance of transitional justice mechanisms in promoting accountability and reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

As Zwanbin notes, the panel's report highlighted the gross violation of human rights perpetrated by the military ruling class, emphasizing the need for accountability and reparations (Zwanbin 10). However, the panel's recommendations were ultimately annulled by the government, citing constitutional reasons. This decision underscores the challenges faced by truth commissions in Nigeria and highlights the need for robust mechanisms to address the legacies of human rights abuses. Moreover, the Oputa Panel's report highlighted the need for institutional reforms to prevent future human rights abuses. The panel recommended the establishment of an independent national human rights commission, which was eventually established in 2001 (National Human Rights Commission Act 2001). However, the commission's effectiveness has been hindered by inadequate funding and limited powers (Agbu 249-266). In addition, the Oputa Panel's legacy has inspired civil society organizations and human rights activists to continue advocating for accountability and justice in Nigeria. Organizations such as the Nigerian Bar Association and the Civil Liberties Organization have played a crucial role in promoting human rights and the rule of law in Nigeria (Nigerian Bar Association). Above all, the Oputa Panel played a crucial role as a watchdog for rights abuse in Nigeria, particularly during the country's military rule era. Despite its limitations, the panel's legacy continues to shape the country's human rights landscape, highlighting the importance of transitional justice mechanisms in promoting accountability and reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

Assessing Nigeria's Human Rights Record: Insights from the Justice Oputa Panel

The Justice Oputa Panel was a significant milestone in Nigeria's quest for accountability and justice, particularly in the context of human rights abuses committed during the country's military rule era. From a Christian ethics perspective, the panel's mandate to investigate and document human rights violations, identify perpetrators, and recommend measures for accountability and reparations resonates with the biblical imperative to seek justice and righteousness (Micah 6:8). The panel's work can be seen as an attempt to uphold the inherent dignity and worth of every human being, as emphasized in Christian teachings (Genesis 1:26-27). There have been ethical implications of the Justice Oputa Panel for human rights in Nigeria. For instance, Yusuf argues that the panel's report provided a critical examination of human rights abuses committed during the military rule era, highlighting the need for accountability and reparations (Yusuf 161-165). From a Christian ethics perspective, this emphasis on accountability and reparations can be seen as a reflection of the biblical principle of restitution and restoration (Exodus 22:1-15). However, the panel's limitations, including its reliance on the discretion of the President for the implementation of its recommendations, have been criticized for undermining its effectiveness (Ifaloje 28).

The Justice Oputa Panel's legacy also underscores the importance of transitional justice mechanisms in promoting accountability and reconciliation in post-conflict societies. As Zwanbin notes, the panel's report highlighted the gross violation of human rights perpetrated by the military ruling class, emphasizing the need for accountability and reparations (Zwanbin 29). From a Christian ethics perspective, this emphasis on accountability and reparations can be seen as a reflection of the biblical principle of seeking justice and righteousness (Micah 6:8). Moreover, the panel's work can be seen as an attempt to promote healing and reconciliation, which are core Christian values (Matthew 5:23-24). Furthermore, the Justice Oputa Panel's report highlighted the need for institutional reforms to prevent future human rights abuses. The panel recommended the establishment of an independent national human rights commission, which was eventually established in 2001 (National Human Rights Commission Act 2001). From a Christian ethics perspective, this emphasis on institutional reforms can be seen as a reflection of the biblical principle of seeking justice and righteousness through the establishment of just institutions (Psalm 82:1-8). Thus, the Justice Oputa Panel's work has significant ethical implications for human rights in Nigeria, particularly from a Christian ethics perspective. The panel's emphasis on accountability, reparations, and institutional reforms resonates with core Christian values, including seeking justice and righteousness, promoting healing and reconciliation, and establishing just institutions. Moreover, the Justice Oputa Panel's report highlighted the importance of acknowledging the past and taking responsibility for human rights abuses. This is in line with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of confession, repentance, and forgiveness (Matthew 5:23-24, 1 John 1:9). The panel's recommendations for reparations and compensation for victims of human rights abuses can be seen as a form of restitution, which is a key principle in Christian ethics (Exodus 22:1-15). However, the Justice Oputa Panel's report also raises questions about the nature of justice and accountability in Nigeria. For instance, the panel's recommendations were not fully implemented, and many perpetrators of human rights abuses were not held accountable.

This raises questions about the effectiveness of transitional justice mechanisms in Nigeria and the need for more robust mechanisms to ensure accountability and justice. From a Christian ethics perspective, the Justice Oputa Panel's report highlights the importance of seeking justice and righteousness, particularly in the context of human rights abuses. The

panel's emphasis on accountability, reparations, and institutional reforms resonates with core Christian values. However, the report also raises questions about the nature of justice and accountability in Nigeria and the need for more robust mechanisms to ensure that perpetrators of human rights abuses are held accountable. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for accountability and justice for human rights abuses in Nigeria. For instance, the Nigerian government has established a National Human Rights Commission to investigate and document human rights abuses (National Human Rights Commission Act 2010). Additionally, civil society organizations and human rights activists have continued to advocate for accountability and justice, using the Justice Oputa Panel's report as a basis for their demands. Above all, the Justice Oputa Panel's report has significant ethical implications for human rights in Nigeria, particularly from a Christian ethics perspective. The panel's emphasis on accountability, reparations, and institutional reforms resonates with core Christian values, including seeking justice and righteousness, promoting healing and reconciliation, and establishing just institutions. The following are ethical lessons of the Oputa Panel for Human Rights in Nigeria

- i. **Accountability and Reparations:** The Justice Oputa Panel's emphasis on accountability and reparations for human rights abuses resonates with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of seeking justice and righteousness (Micah 6:8). According to Yusuf, the panel's recommendations for reparations and compensation for victims of human rights abuses can be seen as a form of restitution, which is a key principle in Christian ethics (Yusuf 161-165). This emphasis on accountability and reparations is also in line with recent scholarship on transitional justice, which highlights the importance of providing reparations to victims of human rights abuses (Agbu 249-266). The Justice Oputa Panel's report highlighted the need for accountability and reparations for human rights abuses committed during the military rule era. According to the report, the Nigerian government should provide reparations to victims of human rights abuses, including compensation for loss of property and livelihood (Justice Oputa Panel Report 2002). This recommendation is in line with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of providing restitution to those who have been wronged (Exodus 22:1-15). According to Ifaloje, the Justice Oputa Panel's recommendations for reparations and compensation for victims of human rights abuses were an important step towards promoting accountability and justice in Nigeria (Ifaloje 77).
- ii. **Promoting Healing and Reconciliation:** The Justice Oputa Panel's report highlighted the importance of acknowledging the past and taking responsibility for human rights abuses. This is in line with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of confession, repentance, and forgiveness (Matthew 5:23-24, 1 John 1:9). According to Zwanbin, the panel's report provided a platform for victims to share their stories and seek justice, promoting a sense of accountability among perpetrators (Zwanbin 30). The Justice Oputa Panel's approach to promoting healing and reconciliation was noteworthy. According to the report, the panel employed a victim-centered approach that prioritized the testimonies and experiences of victims and their families (Justice Oputa Panel Report 2002). This approach resonates with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of seeking justice and righteousness, particularly for the most vulnerable members of society (Matthew 25:31-46). According to Agbu, the Justice Oputa Panel's report provided a framework for promoting healing and reconciliation in Nigeria, emphasizing the need for accountability and reparations (Agbu 249-266).

- iii. **Institutional Reforms:** The Justice Oputa Panel's report emphasized the need for institutional reforms to prevent future human rights abuses. According to the report, the Nigerian government should establish an independent national human rights commission to investigate and document human rights abuses (Justice Oputa Panel Report 2002). This recommendation is in line with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of establishing just institutions (Psalm 82:1-8). The Justice Oputa Panel's approach to institutional reforms was noteworthy. According to the report, the panel recommended the establishment of an independent national human rights commission, which was eventually established in 2001 (National Human Rights Commission Act 2001). This commission has played a crucial role in promoting human rights and the rule of law in Nigeria. To Ifaloje, the Justice Oputa Panel's recommendations for institutional reforms were an important step towards promoting accountability and justice in Nigeria (Ifaloje 76).
- iv. **Victim-Centered Justice:** The Justice Oputa Panel's approach to investigating human rights abuses was noteworthy, employing a victim-centered approach that prioritized the testimonies and experiences of victims and their families. According to Yusuf, this approach resonates with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of seeking justice and righteousness, particularly for the most vulnerable members of society (Yusuf 161-165). The Justice Oputa Panel's report highlighted the importance of providing reparations to victims of human rights abuses. According to the report, the Nigerian government should provide reparations to victims of human rights abuses, including compensation for loss of property and livelihood (Justice Oputa Panel Report 2002). This recommendation is in line with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of providing restitution to those who have been wronged (Exodus 22:1-15). According to Ifaloje, the Justice Oputa Panel's approach to victim-centered justice was an important step towards promoting accountability and justice in Nigeria (78). This further highlights the importance of victim-centered justice in promoting transitional justice in Nigeria.
- v. **Challenges of Transitional Justice:** The Justice Oputa Panel's report raises questions about the nature of justice and accountability in Nigeria. According to Agbu, the panel's recommendations were not fully implemented, and many perpetrators of human rights abuses were not held accountable (Agbu 249-266). The Justice Oputa Panel's approach to transitional justice was noteworthy, but it also faced several challenges. According to Zwanbin, the panel's report was not widely disseminated, and many Nigerians were not aware of its findings and recommendations (Zwanbin 29). According to Ifaloje, the Justice Oputa Panel's report provided a framework for promoting transitional justice in Nigeria, but it also highlighted the need for more robust mechanisms to ensure accountability and justice (29).
- vi. **Importance of Acknowledging the Past:** The Justice Oputa Panel's report highlighted the importance of acknowledging the past and taking responsibility for human rights abuses. According to Yusuf, this approach resonates with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of confession, repentance, and forgiveness (Yusuf 161-165). The Justice Oputa Panel's approach to acknowledging the past was noteworthy. According to the report, the panel employed a victim-centered approach that prioritized the testimonies and experiences of victims and their families (Justice Oputa Panel Report 2002). This approach resonates with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of seeking justice and righteousness, particularly for the most vulnerable

members of society (Matthew 25:31-46). Thus, the significance of acknowledging the past in advancing transitional justice in Nigeria has been underscored by recent scholarly research. Specifically, Ifaloje's work reveals that the Justice Oputa Panel's report served as a foundational framework for promoting transitional justice in Nigeria, with a pronounced emphasis on ensuring accountability and providing reparations to victims of human rights abuses (Ifaloje 30).

- vii. **Need for Robust Mechanisms:** The Justice Oputa Panel's report raises questions about the need for more robust mechanisms to ensure accountability and justice for human rights abuses in Nigeria. According to Agbu, the panel's recommendations were not fully implemented, and many perpetrators of human rights abuses were not held accountable (Agbu 249-266). The Justice Oputa Panel's approach to promoting accountability and justice was noteworthy, but it also faced several challenges. According to Zwanbin, the panel's report was not widely disseminated, and many Nigerians were not aware of its findings and recommendations (Zwanbin 80). Contemporary scholarly research has emphasized the imperative of establishing robust mechanisms to guarantee accountability and justice for human rights abuses perpetrated in Nigeria. Notably, Ifaloje's analysis reveals that while the Justice Oputa Panel's report furnished a foundational framework for advancing transitional justice in Nigeria, it simultaneously underscored the necessity for more robust mechanisms to ensure the realization of accountability and justice (Ifaloje 31).
- viii. **Importance of Civil Society:** The Justice Oputa Panel's report highlights the importance of civil society organizations and human rights activists in promoting accountability and justice for human rights abuses in Nigeria. Yusuf stresses that civil society organizations played a crucial role in promoting the work of the panel and ensuring that its recommendations were implemented (Yusuf 161-165). The Justice Oputa Panel's approach to engaging with civil society was noteworthy. According to the report, the panel worked closely with civil society organizations to gather evidence and testimony from victims of human rights abuses (Justice Oputa Panel Report 2002). This approach is in line with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of seeking justice and righteousness, particularly through partnerships and collaborations (Matthew 28:18-20). Ifaloje notes that civil society organizations have been instrumental in championing accountability and justice for human rights abuses in Nigeria, and their tireless efforts have been crucial in facilitating the implementation of the Justice Oputa Panel's recommendations (81).
- ix. **Challenges of Impunity:** The Justice Oputa Panel's report raises questions about the challenges of impunity in Nigeria, particularly in the context of human rights abuses. According to Agbu, the panel's recommendations were not fully implemented, and many perpetrators of human rights abuses were not held accountable (Agbu 249-266). The Justice Oputa Panel's approach to addressing impunity was noteworthy. According to the report, the panel recommended that the Nigerian government establish a special prosecutor to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of human rights abuses (Justice Oputa Panel Report 2002). This approach resonates with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of seeking justice and righteousness, particularly through the establishment of just institutions (Psalm 82:1-8). Of course, one would understand the importance of addressing impunity in promoting transitional justice in Nigeria. According to Ifaloje, the Justice Oputa Panel's report provided a framework for

promoting transitional justice in Nigeria, but it also highlighted the need for more robust mechanisms to ensure accountability and justice (Ifaloje 81).

- x. **Importance of International Cooperation:** The Justice Oputa Panel's report highlights the importance of international cooperation in promoting accountability and justice for human rights abuses in Nigeria. According to Yusuf, the panel's report emphasized the need for international cooperation in promoting transitional justice in Nigeria, particularly through partnerships with international organizations and NGOs (Yusuf 161-165). The Justice Oputa Panel's approach to international cooperation was noteworthy. According to the report, the panel worked closely with international organizations like Amnesty International and NGOs to gather evidence and testimony from victims of human rights abuses (Justice Oputa Panel Report 2002). This approach resonates with Christian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of seeking justice and righteousness, particularly through international partnerships and collaborations (Matthew 28:18-20).

Conclusion

This study has undertaken an ethical evaluation of human rights in Nigeria, with specific focus on the Justice Oputa Panel. Through a critical analysis of the panel's report and recommendations, this research has highlighted the importance of acknowledging the past, establishing robust mechanisms for accountability and justice, and promoting civil society engagement in advancing transitional justice in Nigeria. From a Christian ethics perspective, this study has demonstrated that the principles of restitution, forgiveness, and reconciliation are essential in promoting healing and justice for victims of human rights abuses. The findings of this study have significant lessons for the promotion of human rights and transitional justice in Nigeria. The Justice Oputa Panel's report provides a framework for promoting accountability and justice, but its recommendations must be implemented in a manner that prioritizes the needs and experiences of victims. Furthermore, this study has highlighted the importance of civil society engagement in promoting transitional justice, and the need for robust mechanisms to ensure accountability and justice. From a Christian ethics perspective, this study has demonstrated that the promotion of human rights and transitional justice must be guided by principles of justice, compassion, and reconciliation. In sum, this paper has provided an ethical evaluation of human rights in Nigeria, with a focus on the Justice Oputa Panel. The findings of this study highlight the importance of acknowledging the past, establishing robust mechanisms for accountability and justice, and promoting civil society engagement in advancing transitional justice. From a Christian ethics perspective, the study demonstrated that the promotion of human rights and transitional justice must be guided by principles of justice, compassion, and reconciliation. As Nigeria continues to grapple with the challenges of promoting human rights and transitional justice, this study provides valuable lessons and insights for policymakers, civil society organizations, and faith-based communities.

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