



Paul, the prisoner (Acts 23:34-35): An insight into 2018-2022 political prisoner's rights in Zimbabwe

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Undisputed letters of Paul and Acts of the Apostles are replete with details of the Gentile Missionary's multiple imprisonments, so much as to qualify him a 'jailbird' description. Paul's incarceration in Herod's palace for 2 years (Ac 23:34–35), his arraignment before Governor Felix and subsequent detention for 5 days before plea (Acts 24) on charges of inciting public violence, being a ringleader of a cultic faction and causing disturbances in the Jerusalem Temple, resonate with the contentious arrests and imprisonment without bail and trial of members of opposition political parties in Zimbabwe. Consistent with New Testament passages that exhort caring for prisoners and the need to grant justice to those facing trial, this study seeks to understand how inmates in Zimbabwean prisons have been on the receiving end of relics of the ancient Roman Legal system in the country's Human Rights history between 2018 and 2022. The article demonstrates how the New Testament can be deployed to grapple with distress calls emerging from Zimbabwe's prison walls as part of advocacy for judicial reforms in the country's quest for rule of Law. At the end, the article recommends ways in which Churches in Zimbabwe can tap from New Testament passages how to operate an effective prison ministry in liaison with the Prisons and Correctional Services Department of the Government of Zimbabwe. The article employs qualitative methods of Socio-Historical and Ethnographic Analyses to discuss how human rights pitfalls in Paul's imprisonments present remedial lessons in Zimbabwe's quest for judicial reforms.

Contribution: Deployment of the Bible to redress Human Rights issues in Zimbabwe. Demonstration of how Early Christian Literature can dialogue with contemporary African *Sitz im Leben* for social transformation.

Keywords: Prisoner Paul's rights; Zimbabwe; political prisoners; judicial reforms; rule of law.

Introduction

The author of Acts dedicated over one-fourth of the book to narrating the story of Paul's arrests and imprisonment from Chapter 21:27 to Chapter 28. Williams (1909:273) contends that although Paul was never condemned by a single Roman judge, from Lysias the military chiliarch to Felix and Festus the procurators, he was kept in prison in Caesarea for 2 years. Evidence from Luke's account suggests that reasons for Paul's detention for 2 years without a conviction were political interference and corruption on the part of Roman officials. Williams (1909:274) further observes that Paul was subjected to scourging, public shame and torture by Lysias up to a point when he asked the chiliarch, 'Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned?' This chapter argues that the violation of Paul's rights as a Roman prisoner strikingly resembles the flouting of the rights of political prisoners in Zimbabwe. A symbiotic analysis between Paul's Roman imprisonment context and the imprisonment of political prisoners is made easier by my finding that the law used to prosecute political prisoners in Zimbabwe has its origins in Roman-Dutch law. Masimirembwa (2017) contends that Section 192 of the Zimbabwe Constitution as read with Section 89 of the independence constitution establishes that Roman-Dutch law imposed by colonial conquest is Zimbabwe's common law. Arbitrary arrests and pretrial incarceration appear to be vestiges of ancient Roman draconian laws. Christmas and Gorejena (eds. 2018:15) lament the abrogation, blatant breach and violation of pretrial rights of prisoners in Zimbabwe. The right of a prisoner to be presumed innocent until proven guilty suggests that unconvicted persons be treated differently from convicted detainees is enshrined both in the Constitution

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of Zimbabwe Section 70(1)(a). The right to freedom before conviction is also provided in several other human rights international instruments such as the United Nations Body of Principles for the Protection of all Persons under any form of Detention or Imprisonment A/RES/43/173, the United Nations General Assembly Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, 217A(iii) and the United Nations General Assembly Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 10 December 1984.

This work investigated bungling and infractions that characterised the arrest and imprisonment of Paul, conditions of the prisons, the attitude of Roman authorities to prisoners and the ways in which parallels can be drawn between the context of Paul and that of Zimbabwean political prisoners. After examining numerous infringements of opposition politicians' rights in Zimbabwe, it has been established that important lessons can be drawn from the story of Paul's imprisonment in efforts to ameliorate the country's tainted human rights image.

Methodology

The methodological praxis of this chapter is essentially qualitative and informed by Socio-Historical and Ethnographic theoretical paradigms, respectively. Socio-Historical Criticism was used in this chapter as an exegetical method to study the social context of the world behind Acts 23:34–35. Matterson (1990:25) defines Socio-Historical Criticism as the approach to textual analysis that focuses on the social and historical aspects prevailing during the time the text in question was written. According to Ehrman (1997:145), Socio-Historical Criticism is a method of biblical interpretation, which focuses on the world in which the text was written. The Socio-Historical Critical Criticism with its capacity to open discourses in multicultural settings, enabled reflections on contextual similarities between Acts 23:34–35 and the Zimbabwean socio-political context. The method combines well with New Testament studies and African theology in interrogation of social phenomena such as human rights, conflict studies and development. Furthermore, the method was especially selected because of its propensity to coalesce the aims, philosophies and methodologies of historiography with those of the social and cultural sciences (Slade 2020:2).

Ethnographic analysis was also deployed in this chapter to follow social media public opinion on politically motivated arrests and imprisonment of opposition activists. Caulfield (2023) defines Ethnographic analysis as a type of qualitative research that involves the researcher immersing herself or himself in a particular community or organisation to observe their behaviour and interactions. Ethnography was chosen for this study because it allowed me to gather information on political arrests in Zimbabwe through observations, listening to conversations of affected people in my community, participating in discussions around pretrial arrests and detentions on Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp groups where I am an active discussant. As a researcher, I am

strategically immersed in the socio-political environment of my country through participation in political debates that unfold daily in social media platforms. As Caulfield (2023) argues, by becoming immersed in a social environment, a researcher may have access to more authentic information and at the same time observe dynamics that could not be found out about simply by asking. The information gathering process used in this research included use of informants through a snowball sampling mechanism whereby three interviewees believed to possess deep knowledge of court procedures relating to the prosecution of political activists in Zimbabwean courts were interviewed. Because of the sensitive nature of the subject, assurance of confidentiality was given to the three informants who are officials of the Judiciary Services Commission of Zimbabwe. The researcher also referred to published cases that were heard in the courts of Zimbabwe. Secondary sources were also used in the process of drawing comparisons between the Acts 23:34–35 and Zimbabwean settings.

Acts 23:34–35 vis-à-vis Zimbabwean context

Acts 23:34–35 'And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall' KJV.

According to facts of Paul's arrest in Chapter 23, Claudius Lysias the military judge referred Paul to Governor Felix with referral letter, which indicated that he had found Paul without anything laid to his charge worth of death or imprisonment. After reading the letter from the military supremo, Felix ordered that Paul be jailed without conviction until his accusers had shown up. Chapter 24 begins with the statement that Paul was detained for 5 days without trial pending the arrival of his accusers. After Paul presented his defence, Governor Felix decided to imprison Paul hoping that prisoner Paul would buy his freedom with a hefty sum of money. Felix sought to please the Jews by detaining Paul for 2 years without any conviction. Wilson (2022) observes that Paul's 2-year imprisonment in Caesarea took place from 57 to 59AD as Roman governors wanted to use Paul to gain political advantage with Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. The Jews were known to be a potentially rebellious people and the Romans decided to use Paul's unjustified incarceration to prevent Jewish resentment from turning into open rebellion. Thus, Paul's detention was not about justice but for the political expediency of the Roman authorities (Brelaz 2021).

McRay (1995) points out that life in a Roman prison was a humiliating, painful and bloody ordeal. McRay (1995) posits that Roman imprisonment was preceded by the accused being stripped naked and then flogged. The prisoners sustained wounds that went untreated, and prisoners walked and sat in painful leg or wrist chains. During cold weather the prisoners in a Roman prison were not given warm clothing and they were made to wear torn and often blood-

stained clothing. Sims (2022) states that Paul was subjected to leg and wrist chains. In Chapter 26:29, Paul made his defence before King Agrippa referring to the chains that bound him. Sims (2022) further describes conditions in Roman prisons during Paul's time. He mentions that prisoners often stayed in jail for very long periods before trial because of delay in processing cases as a result of large volumes, incompetence or sheer malice. Paul was subjected to prison conditions where there was poor ventilation, dangerously stale air, suffocating heat and dehydration. Josephus (Antiquities 18.6.7 204), the Jewish historian corroborates Sims' findings by pointing out that Roman prisons were sleepless places with inmates having to sleep on the floor struggling to protect themselves from cold by using their outer cloaks as cover against cold. Sims further points out that Roman prisons were notorious for poor lighting as inner cells and underground chambers were always dark because of stringent security restrictions that prohibited provision of artificial light. Prisoners in Roman prisons often starved because of lack of food or drink (Robinson 2007). Sims (2022) finds that if a prisoner did not have friends or relatives who could bring them food in prison, chances are that they would die of hunger. Where some paltry food provisions were provided to the prisoners, the daily ration called 'solo fiscalis' was poor and not intended for health but for survival only. Squalor and filth were an eyesore in most Roman prisons and prison garbs often turned into rags. Cases of suicide were rampant in Roman prisons as inmates sought to curtail their pain and suffering by terminating their lives.

There are striking similarities between ancient Roman prison conditions and the conditions that political prisoners are exposed to in Zimbabwean prisons. Contrary to the constitutional provisions for protection of prisoners from arbitrary detentions and torture, human rights watchdogs have reported cases of extended incarcerations without trial of opposition political activists such as Joana Mamombe, Cecilia Chimhiri, Netsai Marova, Jacob Ngarivhume and journalist Hopewell Chin'ono (US Embassy in Zimbabwe 2021). In June 2022, Job Sikhala together with more than 24 other activists of the opposition Citizens Coalition for Change party known as Triple C, got arrested and were denied bail by the magistrates' court. The ZimEye News blog of 13 April 2023 reports that Job Sikhala, a prominent political figure, and member of the opposition Citizens' Coalition for Change Party, has clocked 301 days in pretrial detention at Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison in Harare, allegedly for his political views. The case of prisoner Job Sikhala was highlighted by the Zimbabwe Restoration of Human Rights organisation in a Tweet on 01 January 2023. In stressful and hapless conditions, Job Sikhala wrote a letter from Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison addressed to Zimbabweans. In the letter, just like Paul in his letter to the Philippians, Sikhala expressed concern over his deteriorating health condition and the refusal by prison authorities to allow him access to his medical doctor. In the same letter, Job Sikhala expressed chagrin over the escalation human rights abuses in the country that he felt was the cause of his continued incarceration

at Chikurubi Security Maximum Prison in Harare. Sikhala further bemoaned 'the closure of democratic space, growth of impunity, arbitrary arrests, passage of oppressive laws and the use and application of terror and violence as instruments of political coercion'.

In the tone of Paul's writing from the Roman Prison, Sikhala expressed his love for Zimbabweans, suggesting that his bonds were for the benefit of all citizens of his country. Hinting on the tough conditions at Chikurubi Maximum Prison, Sikhala wrote in his letter:

The tough conditions here at Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison have taught me to strengthen mastery over emotions. Prison opens the mind to understand how power can be used irresponsibly to inflict maximum pain to the innocent and the powerless.

From the tone of Job Sikhala's letter from prison, it is very telling that Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison exudes the ominous terror of Rome's Mamertine Prison where Paul was finally jailed pending his death. The scary conditions portrayed in Job Sikhala's prison lamentation are strikingly reminiscent of the Mamertine Prison in the Roman Forum. Two scary statements in Job Sikhala's prison letter are, 'As I always alluded, I am prepared to be killed!' and:

If I am killed dear compatriots, I am prepared to meet the fate in defence of values and principles I hold dearly, values of a free and democratic society, exuding happiness, free of impunity and fear.

The fear to be killed at Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison expressed by Job Sikhala graphically cascades the image given by Currid and Chapman (1998) of Mamertine Prison where Paul had his last imprisonment before his death. Currid and Chapman (1998) point out that the Mamertine Prison was where major convicted enemies of the State were strangled to death or kept before being thrown off the Tarpeian Rock on the Capitoline Hill. The impression created by Sikhala's prison letter is that Zimbabwe's prisons are death traps for political prisoners just as Mamertine Prison of Paul's time was more a place of execution of political opponents than a place of correctional services.

Like Paul, anti-corruption activist, Hopewell Chin'ono and political activist Jacob Ngarivhume were detained in pretrial facilities at the notorious Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison in Harare. Writing in the Human Rights Watch report, Mavhinga (2020) revealed that Chin'ono and Ngarivhume and thousands of other inmates were exposed to horrible, unsanitary, overcrowded and squalid conditions. Mavhinga (2020) decried a lack of medical supplies at the prison facilities amid the devastating coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Mutsaka (2022) reports that the Mnangagwa Second Republic government has stretched an iron fist on hapless opposition politicians who find themselves languishing in overcrowded and hunger-stricken prisons. Mutsaka (2022) mentions the case of Job Sikhala who has

been arrested 69 times in his political career but has never been convicted of any crime.

The United States 2021 Zimbabwe Human Rights Report observed that prisoners in Zimbabwean jails are exposed to physical and psychological torture. Inmates are subjected to physical abuse and torture in various ways that include beatings with sticks, electric cables, gun butts, heavy whips or sjamboks, soles of feet and pouring of corrosive substances on the skin. It is proposed that the various forms of torture will make the accused persons confess their offenses. In 2021, it was reported that life-threatening conditions because of food shortages, a lack of water, physical harassment of prisoners and a lack of access to personal protective equipment to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Zimbabwean prisons were comparable with the Roman prisons of Paul's time. Judicial backlogs and outdated infrastructure cause overcrowding in Zimbabwe's prisons. As a result of shortage of food in the prisons, inmates mostly rely on their family members for dietary needs. Other deplorable conditions at the prisons include dirty blankets and linen, lice menace and ill health because of cold conditions. The United States Human Rights Report of 2021 also noticed that most of the political detainees who were denied bail were targeted for harsh living conditions.

Just like situations that were found in the Roman prisons during Paul's imprisonments, shame and loss of dignity have been inflicted on political prisoners in Zimbabwe. Social media is replete with pictures of the Citizens Coalition for Change member of parliament, also Vice Chairman of CCC party, Job Sikhala attending court in legcuffs and struggling to walk into court rooms. Appeals by his lawyers to the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services authorities to let Job Sikhala attend court without leg irons could not be entertained. In a Tweet on 27 December 2022, Harare lawyer Obey Shava tweeted:

This is Job Sikhala, an MP, lawyer, and family man. He has been in pretrial detention for 195 days. He's treated like a convicted prisoner. He's brought to court in leg irons, subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment. Daily, his constitutional rights are violated.

The torture of prisoners in Zimbabwe replicates the scenario of Acts 22:24–29 where the Roman security chief instructed that Paul be examined by scourging. At the point when they were binding him with thongs in preparation for scourging, Paul asked the Centurion who was in charge of the torment process, 'Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?' Paul knew his rights as a citizen of Rome. The Roman Centurion and the Chief Captain were afraid of breaching the law that protected the civil liberties of prisoners. As we observed here, in the majority of instances, the Roman court officials flouted the laws governing administration of justice. This tendency to blatantly breach the Constitution and the law that prohibits arbitrary arrests and pretrial detentions is rife in the Zimbabwean context where, according to the United States Embassy Report on Human Rights (2021:7), security forces arbitrarily arrested

and detained political and civil society activists, labour leaders and journalists believed to be opponents of the government.

The incarceration of Paul for 5 days and then for 2 years without conviction is replicated in the Zimbabwean context where, despite the right to bail for detained suspects, perceived critics of the government have been subjected to prolonged detentions without bail. State counsel often oppose granting of bail to political prisoners and magistrates often accede to those requests. Conditions that are like the situation during the imprisonment and trial of Paul include delays in pretrial procedures, huge backlog of cases, poor bureaucratic procedures, shortage of magistrates, unavailability of state witnesses and insufficient number of court officials to hear many cases. In Acts 24:1, Governor Felix sat to hear charges being levelled against Paul after he had been held up in the cells for 5 days. Verse 26 of Acts 24 narrates that Governor Felix delayed adjudicating Paul's case because he hoped that Paul was going to bribe him with money. Governor Felix's conduct is a glaring reflection of the bungling of trial procedures in Zimbabwean courts. Human Rights watchdogs have complained that whereas the Constitution and court procedures provide for an expeditious appearance of an accused person before a magistrate in 48 h, corruption and executive control over the judiciary have tended to make the right to a fair and public trial extremely elusive. Governor Felix exuded both corruption and abuse of executive powers when he kept Paul in jail for extortionary and political mileage. The Felix syndrome of corruption and moral decay is very rampant in Zimbabwe courts.

A comparison between ancient Roman trial system and Zimbabwean trial system

Table 1 presents a summary of areas of confluence and conflation between the two imprisonment systems.

The given table has shown that the ancient Roman trial system that tried Paul's cases had challenges that are strikingly like those adversely affecting Zimbabwe's trial system. In the next section, the article focuses on New Testament position on prisoners' treatment in society and the role of Christian believers thereof. The New Testament position on the treatment of prisoners shall be drawn mainly from the teachings of Jesus and Paul as main protagonists in New Testament historiography.

The New Testament teaching on prison ministry

Visiting and taking care of the needs of prisoners constituted an important part of the Church's ministry during the time of Jesus. Stubbs (2022:56) argues that visiting incarcerated people, bringing them food, clothing, medical care, comfort and hope in their distress is a critical

TABLE 1: Comparison between Ancient Rome and Zimbabwean Trial Systems.

Ancient Roman trial system	Zimbabwean trial system
1. No separation of executive and judiciary. No independence of the judiciary.	Independence of the judiciary is a pipe dream as the executive interferes with court cases especially those involving political prisoners.
2. Arrests had to be explained to the accused and fair public trials were expected.	The law provides for appearance of the accused before a magistrate within 48 h to determine the next steps in the trial.
3. Doctrine of presumption of innocence before conviction was in place but often violated.	Doctrine of presumption of innocence before conviction is provided for in the legal statutes.
4. Pretrial incarceration was rampant.	Pretrial detentions are rife.
5. Senior judiciary officers solicited bribes from defendants.	Judiciary officers have been accused of corruption.
6. Torture of inmates instrumentalised to extract confessions from accused persons.	Torture of inmates used to enforce confessions to settle political scores.
7. Political prisoners could be eliminated in prison.	There are allegations and suspicions that inmates of political inclination can be eliminated.
8. Trials could be prolonged because of bulky backlogs and intensive bureaucratic processes.	Huge backlogs and executive interferences and shortage of personnel cause delays in prosecution of cases.
9. Squalid and sordid conditions prevailed in holding centres.	Appalling and unsanitary conditions prevail in prisons.
10. A lack of food, water, lights, uniforms and medicines affected prisoners.	Food, lights, water, medicines, uniforms and toiletries shortages rampant in prisons.
11. Law prohibited use of imprisonment as punishment, but the opposite was the reality.	The constitution and international statutes signed by the country prohibit the use of imprisonment as punishment.

and essential motif in expressing one's faith in Jesus. Visiting inmates was countercultural given that Jewish beliefs taught that whoever mingled with criminals risked contamination by association and that might attract grave consequences such as imprisonment or even death. Stubbs (2022:56) observes that the Old Testament was silent about visiting prisoners as an act of righteousness. However, the early church premised on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25:34–36 took visiting prisoners as equivalent to visiting Jesus himself. In Matthew 25:34–36 Jesus linked visiting prisoners to salvation and entering the kingdom of God. Stubbs (2022:56) argues that Roman and Jewish hegemonies did not have the thought of rehabilitating or restoring the morality of prisoners. Their aim was to keep social miscreants away from public life by keeping, guarding, chaining, binding, confining, restraining and locking them up. The Early Church sought to remove the damnation and negative labels from prisoners and to treat them primarily as people in need who deserve to be loved and be readmitted as deserving members of the community. Bowman (2022) opines that the gospel message of liberation and reconciliation is encapsulated in Jesus' proclamation that he came to set captives free (Lk 4:17–21). Bowman (2022) argues that Jesus had a special place for and proximity to criminals demonstrated by the fact that he made transformation at the point of death possible by admitting a criminal into the Christian community at the cross.

Early Church Christians embarked on programmes aimed at restoring the human dignity of prisoners. They visited prisoners, shared the Gospel of salvation to them, led them

to repentance, provided them with food, clothing, toiletries and made them feel cared for and loved (Stubbs 2022:57). Bowman (2022) mentions that the visit to prisons by the religious clergy acted as a restraining factor on the maltreatment of inmates. The visiting of prisoners is not only based on the teaching of Jesus as it is apparent from Paul's imprisonments that he was often visited by his compatriots in the faith. As Stubbs (2022:57) contends, a simple visit could give a prisoner hope to go on. Paul expressed gratitude in his letters for those who visited him in prison. Hulme (2008) posits that Paul's misery and loneliness were broken by those who visited him in prison such as Onesiphorus (2 Tm 1:16), Epaphroditus (Phlp 2:25; 4:18), Onesimus (Phlm verse 10), Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke (Phlm verses 23–24), Tychicus (Eph 6:21), Luke (Col 4:14) and Timothy as Paul's beloved son in the faith is believed to be one of those who most frequently visited Paul. Churches in Philippi, Rome, Colossae, Corinth and Ephesus also remembered Paul during his imprisonment.

Early church prison ministry's implications for crises in Zimbabwe's prisons

This study has shown that the plights of prisoners can be mitigated if Churches in Zimbabwe follow in the steps of early Christians who responded to Jesus' call to visit prisoners and meet their physical needs, restore hope through ministries of counselling, preaching and teaching Christian ethics and values. There are few parachurch organisations that conduct prison ministry such as Zimbabwe Prisons Ministries, Prison Fellowship Zimbabwe, Oaks of Righteousness Prison Ministry and a few denominational prison ministries such as the River of Life Prisons Ministries and Adventist Church Prison Ministries. The approach adopted by the early followers of Jesus Christ to interpret visiting prisoners as part of the Christian mandate, if followed by all Christian groupings in Zimbabwe will go a long way in ameliorating conditions at Zimbabwe's prisons. Perceptions and traditions that have tended to stigmatise inmates will change as all churches demonstrate the love of Christ by giving clothing, food, toiletries, rehabilitative and correctional services to inmates. Cases of suicide will go down if all Christian churches will take heed of Christ's clarion call on his followers to visit and take care of the needs of prisoners. At the present moment, there is a piecemeal approach to prison ministry as most churches leave the task to non-governmental organisations.

It is my conviction that full blown prison ministry programmes by Christian denominations minimise incidences of prisoner abuse at the hands of state officials because the presence of members of the clergy in jail precincts inevitably acts as a deterrent to evil practices. In so doing, the Christian churches will have moved in their position as the salt of the earth or the light of the world in terms of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5:13–16).

Summary of key findings of the research

The following are the main findings of this research:

1. Courts and prisons in Zimbabwe, like in Ancient Rome, have been used as instruments of settling political scores and vendettas.
2. The rights of prisoners that are well articulated and provided for in local and international legal statutes are blatantly ignored especially when it comes to cases involving political prisoners.
3. Christian Churches have been very passive in heeding Jesus' 'visit the prisoner' call in Matthew 25.
4. Physical conditions at prisons can improve if Churches assume their Christian mandate of meeting prisoners at their points of need in terms of the New Testament stance on prisoners.
5. Zimbabwe Common Law is an offshoot and extension of Roman Law with its traits of punitive measures visited on prisoners.
6. There is stigmatisation and negativity towards prisoners that should be redressed through enforcing of rights of accused persons and the regard of inmates as equal human beings whose dignity should be protected and respected.
7. Timeous trial of cases in terms of stipulated legal frameworks will help to decongest Zimbabwean prisons.
8. Avoidance of corruption and executive interference in the trial of cases will help to reduce heavy fiscal budgets in Prisons and Correctional services.

Emerging gaps and recommendations for future research

This study has exposed the following gaps for future research:

1. Theology and Law Nexus in Social Transformation: An Afrocentric perspective
2. More research is needed on how the Christian Churches departed from Jesus' doctrine of visiting prisoners.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that legal and biblical phenomena can be understood in great light through socio-historical and ethnographic analytical lens. The two analytical paradigms enabled a comparative study between the imprisonment of Paul in the first century and the imprisonment of contemporary Zimbabwean political activists. The problems of arbitrary arrests and pretrial incarceration of political opponents are as ancient as human power itself. Despite the promulgation of national and international laws to regulate legal processes and protect rights of prisoners, prisoners have continued to suffer at the hands of sadistic and corrupt rulers since biblical times. The study has shown that the Church is a crucial player in efforts towards mitigation of human suffering in prisons. As a

corollary, it is compellingly imperative that practitioners of the Christian faith be involved in redressing crises in prisons as a Christian mandate. Theological institutions tasked to train leaders of Christian Churches should also integrate Human Rights studies in their curricula in order to capacitate church leaders to competently articulate the rights of vulnerable people such as prisoners.

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Author's contributions

L.C. is the sole author of this article.

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