The Night Is Far Spent, The Day Is at Hand: The Transformations of Romans 13:12 From Pauline Cosmic-Apocalyptic Warning to Blueprint for Instant Breakthrough, Prosperity and Deliverance in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper investigated the interpretive fluidity and hermeneutical polyvalence of biblical textuality through a targeted socio-hermeneutical analysis of Romans 13:12: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light…." (KJV) Employing a methodology that synthesises Reader-Response Theory and Postcolonial Hermeneutics, this paper traced the transformation of the Pauline temporal metaphor across divergent historical, geographical, and institutional boundaries. Intensive Greek word study of Romans 13:12 was conducted, comparing its urgent, cosmic-apocalyptic timeline with the localised, incarnational framework of John 9:4. This paper tracked the historical reception of the text from the internal moral-monastic focus of the Patristic era to the historicist, civilisational narratives of Eurocentric modern commentaries. The findings revealed that biblical texts function not as static containers of fixed meaning, but as fluid spaces continuously renegotiated to address distinct spiritual, economic, and political realities. Based on these findings, this paperrecommended integrating contextual hermeneutics into theological education, fostering ecumenical dialogue between mainline and Pentecostal bodies, and conducting further research into how digital platforms reshape global reception.

Keywords: Romans 13:12, Polyvalence, Textual Fluidity, Postcolonial Hermeneutics, Patristic Exegesis, Homiletics

1. Introduction

The scholarly pursuit of a singular, static meaning within biblical texts often overlooks the inherently dynamic, malleable, and fluid nature of sacred language. Rather than operating as static repositories of absolute truth, biblical texts undergo an ongoing process of transformation as they cross different historical epochs, geographic boundaries, and cultural landscapes. Scripture is an interactive space where meaning is continually negotiated between the historical text and the changing horizons of its readers (Ukpong 12).

This study investigated this interpretive fluidity by tracking the history and reception of a central New Testament passage: **Romans 13:12**. Written by the Apostle Paul to the diverse house churches of Rome around 57 CE. It began with its original first-century Jewish-Roman

context, comparing its cosmic-apocalyptic timeline with the localised, incarnational framework found in the gospel tradition of **John 9:4**. The paper then traced the historical reception of the text, exploring how early Patristic writers like Augustine of Hippo and John Chrysostom adapted the passage to support monastic asceticism and internal moral discipline. It also examined how later Eurocentric commentaries used the text to justify modern narratives of rational progress and colonial enlightenment.

Finally, the study shifted focus to the Global South, examining the religious landscape of contemporary Nigeria. Here, the interpretation of Romans 13:12 splits along distinct denominational lines. Mainline Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions treat the passage as a blueprint for institutional moral reform, civic responsibility, and nation-building.In contrast, Nigeria's prominent Pentecostal and charismatic preachers read the verse through entirely different lenses. For some, it represents spiritual warfare and immediate personal deliverance from ancestral blockades; for others, it is a divine mandate for financial prosperity, strict holiness, or a radical message of grace.

2. Theoretical Framework

To critically evaluate the interpretive evolution and polyvalence of Romans 13:12, this study synthesised two primary methodologies: Reader-Response Theory and Postcolonial Hermeneutics. This integrated framework allows for an analysis that accounts for the literary, political, and contextual forces that shape biblical interpretation across time and space.

2.1. Reader-Response Theory and Reception Aesthetics

Reader-Response Theory, as articulated by literary scholars Hans-Robert Jauss and Stanley Fish, argues that the meaning of a text is not a fixed asset locked within the written words. Instead, meaning is actively created through the interaction between the text and the reader, heavily mediated by the historical and cultural expectations of the reader's community (Fish 14). Jauss's foundational concept of the "horizon of expectation" (*Erwartungshorizont*) explains how successive generations of readers interpret a text based on their specific historical positions and cultural frameworks (Jauss 22).

When a new reader encounters a text, they bring a predetermined set of questions, values, and assumptions that reshape the text's potential meanings. Applying Jauss's reception aesthetics to Romans 13:12 highlights how the core metaphors of "night," "day," and "armour of light" transform depending on whether the reading community is a vulnerable minority in ancient

Rome, a monastic community in the Egyptian desert, or a contemporary congregation in Lagos.

Furthermore, Fish's concept of "interpretive communities" demonstrates that readings are never entirely individual; they are governed by the shared strategies and institutional norms of a particular group (Fish 167; Igwe 113). Consequently, the varied readings of Romans 13:12 are not arbitrary distortions, but organised productions generated by specific communities to address their unique institutional needs.

2.2. Postcolonial Hermeneutics

Postcolonial Hermeneutics, as formulated by biblical scholars R.S. Sugirtharajah and Musa Dube, serves as the second critical framework. This methodology critiques how Western, Eurocentric biblical interpretations have historically positioned themselves as universal, objective, and absolute truths, often minimising, rewriting, or pathologising non-Western perspectives (Sugirtharajah 31). Postcolonial criticism exposes how nineteenth-century imperial commentators used the binary language of light and darkness in Romans 13:12 to support paternalistic, colonial interventions, associating European culture with the coming "day" and indigenous traditions with a "night" of primitivity (Dube 45).

By using a postcolonial approach, this study shifts focus away from Western-centric paradigms, valuing localised readings from the Global South as independent, creative engagements with scripture. Rather than judging contemporary Nigerian interpretations by how well they align with Euro-American commentaries, this framework evaluates how African readers actively resist, reclaim, and adapt the text to navigate postcolonial structural challenges, spiritual insecurities, and indigenous realities (Ukpong 18).

3. Historical Background and Exegetical Nexus: Romans 13:12 vs. John 9:4

To understand how later interpretations developed, we must first examine the original first-century context of Romans 13:12 and how it relates to other early Christian writing. Written by Paul to the house churches of Rome around 57 CE, Romans addresses an audience living in the capital of an empire that frequently clashed with early Christian claims of lordship (Jewett 23). In Romans 13:11-14, Paul uses Jewish apocalyptic imagery, dividing time into two distinct eras: the present age of darkness and the coming age of God's complete renewal (Dunn 785).

An intensive linguistic analysis of the Greek text highlights this structural tension. The phrase ἡ νὺξ προέκοψεν (*hēnyxproekopsen*) uses the aorist active indicative of προκόπτω (*prokoptō*), a term originally used in military and seafaring contexts to describe pioneering an

advance through difficult terrain or making significant forward progress (Mounce 432). By stating the night has "pioneered forward," Paul uses a common idiom meaning the night is well advanced, late, or nearly over (Fitzmyer 682). This is paired with ἡ δὲ ἡμέρα ἤγγικεν (*hē de hēmeraēngiken*). The verb ἐγγίζω (*engizō*) is written in the perfect active indicative, which denotes a past action with ongoing results (Wallace 573). This tense structure implies that the new dawn has broken in principle through the resurrection of Christ, even if its full realisation remains in the future (Käsemann 362).

Because of this overlapping of eras , Paul issues a double command using hortatory subjunctives. First, believers must "cast off " (ἀποθωμεθα / *apothōmetha*) the works of darkness, a verb often associated with stripping off soiled clothes (Dunn 787). Second, they must "put on" (ἐνδυσωμεθα) Crucially, the noun ὁπλα (*hopla*) refers specifically to military armour or weapons, not everyday attire (Moo 823). Paul frames the ethical life of the believer not as passive waiting, but as an active, armed outpost defending God's future kingdom within the challenging environment of the imperial capital (Jewett 793).

This cosmic-apocalyptic timeline contrasts with the symbolic timeline found in **John 9:4**: *"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."*While Paul views "night" as the fading current age and "day" as the approaching ultimate salvation, the Johannine text reverses these associations (Brown 372). In John, "day" represents the historical earthly ministry of Jesus —the physical presence of the Light of the World (Keener 777). Conversely, "night" (νὺξ/*nyx*) in John symbolises Jesus' impending death, his departure from the world, and the onset of spiritual opposition (Schnackenburg 240).

These distinct frameworks demonstrate the early flexibility of Christian metaphors. For Paul, the passing night brings hope for a nearing salvation. For John, the approaching night brings a sense of urgency to complete divine assignments before conditions shift. Both texts emphasise accountability and deliberate action, but they construct their spiritual maps differently, showing that early Christian writers regularly adapted common symbols like light and darkness to meet different pastoral and theological needs.

4. Patristic Reception: The Ascetic and Internalised Dawn

During the Patristic era (second through fifth centuries), New Testament exegesis underwent a profound shift. As the immediate, historical expectation of the cosmic *parousia* faded, theologians began moving away from Paul’s imminent apocalyptic timeline. Instead, they

adapted his language to support a permanent ecclesiastical institution and an internal, ascetic focus (Athanassakis 84). Romans 13:12 was transformed during this period from a corporate warning about a cosmic transition into an ethical mandate for internal self-regulation, personal monastic discipline, and the fight against hidden vices (Wilken 112).

A pivotal moment in the history of Christian interpretation took place in a Milan garden in 386 CE, centred directly on this text. As recorded in his *Confessions*, Aurelius Augustine was enduring a profound spiritual and psychological crisis when he heard a child-like voice chanting, *"Tolle lege, tollelege"* (Take up and read) (Augustine 152). Opening the Pauline epistles at random, his eyes fell upon Romans 13:13–14—the verses immediately following our primary text: *"not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness... But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ"* (KJV). For Augustine, this encounter reoriented his entire understanding of the passage:

> No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away. (Augustine 153)

Through this experience, Augustine internalised the Pauline dawn. The transition from "night" to "day" was no longer viewed as a future, cosmic event on the historical timeline. Instead, it became an immediate, internal action of divine grace that reordered the human will, turning the soul away from physical desires and toward spiritual devotion (Fredriksen 204).

Other Church Fathers looked at the passage through different lenses, reflecting their own pastoral and theological priorities:

- **John Chrysostom:** Preaching to the wealthy populations of Antioch and Constantinople, Chrysostom focused on public morality and social transparency. In his *Homilies on Romans*, he argued that the ἡ δὲ ἡμέρα ἤγγικεν (*hē de hēmeraēngiken*) required Christians to live open, visible lives that could withstand public scrutiny, comparing the "armour of light" to splendid garments worn by a king's guards (Chrysostom 412). He urged his wealthy listeners to strip away luxurious excess, which he viewed as a work of darkness, and instead put on the visible armour of charity and justice (415).
- **Origen of Alexandria:** Origen took a deeply allegorical and mystical approach. He viewed the fading "night" as the departure of spiritual ignorance and the deceptive passions of the material world. For Origen, the "armour of light" represented the

gradual development of spiritual knowledge (*gnosis*) and the cardinal virtues, which allowed the intellect to perceive divine realities (Origen 89).

- **The Monastic Desert Fathers:** Within the monastic communities of Egypt and Syria, the text was given a strict, literal application in daily life. Antony of Egypt and his followers viewed "casting off the works of darkness" as a literal command to withdraw from secular society, reject family ties, and practice poverty. In this setting, the "armour of light" (*ta hoopla touphōtos*) was interpreted as the strict discipline of fasting, continuous prayer, and celibacy, which protected the monk from demonic attacks in the desert (Athanassakis 91).

Through these varied approaches, the Patristic era demonstrates the early flexibility of the text. By shifting the focus from a cosmic timeline to an internal spiritual battle, these early theologians ensured that Paul's apocalyptic warning remained relevant to a changing, institutionalised church.

5. Eurocentric Modern Commentaries: Civilisation, Order, and Progress

With the arrival of the Enlightenment, the rise of historical-critical scholarship, and the expansion of Western imperialism, European commentators began reading Romans 13:12 through a lens of civilisational progress, human rationality, and social order. Modern Western exegesis often moved away from both the cosmic timeline of the early church and the internal focus of the Patristic era. Instead, commentators aligned Paul's language with historicist narratives that positioned European civilisation as the fulfilment of historical progress (Sugirtharajah 31).

During the Reformation, **John Calvin** laid the groundwork for this institutional reading in his *Commentary on Romans*. Calvin interpreted the "day" as the clear, public presentation of the Gospel, which had been recovered through the Reformation after a long "night" of medieval error (Calvin 482). He argued that the "armour of light" required strict obedience to Christian magistrates and the maintenance of public order, warning against radical groups like the Anabaptists who sought to disrupt social hierarchies (485).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this civilisational framework became more pronounced:

- **Enlightenment Rationalists:** In Germany and Great Britain, rationalist commentators shifted the meaning of "light" from divine grace to human reason, scientific inquiry, and the rule of law (Barth 492). "Darkness" was no longer defined

as personal sin or demonic influence, but as intellectual ignorance, religious enthusiasm, and social disorder.

- **Colonial-Era Commentators:** During the height of European imperial expansion, commentators frequently used the binary language of Romans 13:12 to justify colonial projects. Authors like Christopher Wordsworth argued that Western nations had a duty to bring the "day" of Christian civilisation to non-European societies, which they described as locked in a "night" of primitivity (Wordsworth 214). In this context, indigenous spiritual traditions and social practices were classified as "works of darkness" that needed to be rooted out and replaced by Western legal, educational, and religious institutions (Sugirtharajah 64).

In the early twentieth century, Swiss theologian **Karl Barth** launched a major critique of this progressive reading in his landmark work, *The Epistle to the Romans* (1919). Writing in the wake of the devastation of World War I, Barth rejected the idea that human culture, science, or empires could bring about God's kingdom (Barth 496). He argued that the "day" represents a radical, divine intervention that stands in judgment over all human achievements, writing:

> The day is at hand, but it is always God’s day, not the day of human progress or civilisational triumph. To put on the armor of light is to acknowledge our radical bankruptcy under the judgment of the cross. (Barth 498)

Barth’s critique exposed how easily earlier modern commentaries had aligned the text with political and colonial power, demonstrating the need for fresh interpretive approaches outside the Western paradigm.

6. Mainline Nigerian Homiletics: Anglican and Catholic Institutionalism

In the contemporary religious landscape of Nigeria, the historic mainline churches—specifically the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) and the Roman Catholic Church—exhibit an interpretive framework that echoes the moral realism of John Chrysostom alongside modern institutional social responsibility. Moving away from the individualised, materialist expectations common in popular religious spaces, these institutions read Romans 13:12 through a liturgical, collective lens. The text is consistently treated as an ethical blueprint for structural moral reform, institutional accountability, and national development within a complex postcolonial state (Ukpong 24).

6.1. The Anglican Communion: Liturgical Order and Civic Integrity

Within the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), homiletical applications of Romans 13:12 are deeply connected to the liturgical calendar, typically serving as a foundational text

during the season of Advent. Preaching in these spaces treats the metaphors of light and darkness as visible realities that affect public life, directly challenging widespread societal corruption and governance failures. For example, a sermon preached during a diocesan synod at the Cathedral Church of Christ in Lagos demonstrates this institutional focus:

> To put on the armor of light in contemporary Nigeria is to stand uncompromised against the systemic darkness of institutional bribery. The night of political exploitation and governance failure is spent; the church must awaken to its prophetic role as the moral conscience of the nation. (Anglican Diocese of Lagos 14)

Anglican exegesis moves the text away from simple personal piety, framing "casting off the works of darkness" as a direct civic demand to reject systemic bribery, nepotism, and political apathy (Gifford 34). The "armour of light" is reinterpreted as public righteousness, urging church members to view their professional and public roles as spaces for ethical resistance.

6.2. The Roman Catholic Tradition: Sacramental Ethics and Social Justice

Roman Catholic homiletics integrate Romans 13:12 with Catholic Social Teaching, emphasising communal solidarity, structural accountability, and the common good. Homilies delivered by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) frequently use the passage to challenge the deep anxieties of the Nigerian public, particularly regarding widespread corruption and economic instability. An excerpt from a homily by a Catholic Archbishop in Abuja illustrates this approach:

> Paul’s call to cast off the works of darkness demands an active dismantling of the structural sins that keep our people in poverty. The armor of light is our collective commitment to transparency, the rule of law, and the defense of the vulnerable against the dark forces of insecurity and bad governance. (Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria 8)

In this framework, the text maintains a strong ethical focus that mirrors Patristic exegesis while expanding its scope to include modern structural issues. Catholic homiletics treat participation in the sacraments not just as a source of personal comfort, but as the spiritual training needed to live out the "armour of light" in public service, making the passage a call for systemic change and nation-building.

7. Nigerian Pentecostal Homiletics: Charismatic and Spiritualised Rhetoric

In contrast to the institutional focus of mainline churches, Nigerian Pentecostalism approaches Romans 13:12 through an array of personal, highly dynamic readings. Within this space, the text is adapted across different ministries to address the immediate spiritual, economic, and emotional needs of millions of believers (Gifford 78). By highlighting andanalysing the sermons of Nigeria's prominent Pentecostal figures, we see how Paul's metaphors are continuously reimagined to provide hope and survival strategies within a challenging economic environment.

7.1. **David Oyedepo (Living Faith Church Worldwide)**

Bishop David Oyedepo interprets Romans 13:12 through a faith-command paradigm that prioritises financial breakthrough and personal empowerment. Preaching from Faith Tabernacle, Oyedepo treats "light" as an immediate spiritual force—specifically, deep insight into biblical promises that gives a believer total command over life's difficulties (Oyedepo 22). An analysis of his sermon transcripts shows how he applies this metaphor:

> When light comes, darkness has no choice but to clear out! The armor of light is your shield of faith and revelation in the Word. The night of financial hardship is over! By the light of God’s word, you step into your dawn of supernatural breakthrough today! (Oyedepo 22)

Oyedepo shifts the text's timeline completely away from a distant, future eternity, using it instead to promise an immediate transformation of material circumstances. Here, the "works of darkness" are redefined as spiritual ignorance, and the "armour of light" becomes the bold application of faith needed to secure wealth and health.

7.2. E.A. Adeboye (Redeemed Christian Church of God)

Pastor E.A. Adeboye uses a devotional holiness framework, employing simple, comforting metaphors to describe a shift from personal suffering to divine blessing. In a Holy Ghost Service sermon, Adeboye explained the passage to his audience:

> The Lord wants me to tell someone here tonight, your night is over. The night of weeping, the night of barrenness, the night of stagnation is far spent. The day of your celebration has arrived. But you must cast off sin, because sin is darkness, and light cannot dwell with darkness (Adeboye 5).

Adeboye balances a reassuring message of personal breakthrough with a strong demand for clean living. In his homiletics, "the night" represents times of prolonged personal trial and

delay, while "the day" is the arrival of long-awaited miracles, making personal character reform a prerequisite for receiving God's blessings.

7.3. W.F. Kumuyi (Deeper Christian Life Ministry)

Pastor W.F. Kumuyi remains dedicated to a strict puritan eschatology and radical personal holiness. Unlike many of his contemporary peers, Kumuyi preserves the original urgency of the New Testament regarding the literal return of Christ (Kumuyi 11; Moo 821). In a Monday Night Bible Study, he warned his congregation:

> The day of the Lord is at hand. This world is passing away. To put on the armor of light means total separation from the world, complete sanctification, and an uncompromised life of holiness. If you are still hiding in secret sins, you are in deep darkness, and you will be left behind when the day dawns. (Kumuyi 11)

Kumuyi rejects materialist readings of scripture, treating them as dangerous worldly distractions. For him, "casting off the works of darkness" requires an absolute rejection of modern secular trends, and the "armour of light" is the daily practice of strict moral purity needed to survive final judgment.

7.4. Paul Enenche (Dunamis International Gospel Centre)

Pastor Paul Enenche connects intense spiritual warfare with vocal social commentary, building an aggressive deliverance paradigm. Preaching from the Glory Dome in Abuja, Enenche links hidden spiritual forces directly to visible national challenges (Enenche 17):

> We are wearing the armor of light to fight the powers of darkness that are destroying this nation! The night of terrorism, the night of ancestral curses, the night of institutional failure is far spent! We cast them off by fire! The day of righteousness is rising over Nigeria! (Enenche 17)

Enenche reinterprets the "armour of light" (*ta hoplatouphōtos*) as active combat equipment used to break ancestral curses and combat poor governance. His sermons merge the spiritual and the political, giving his congregation an active role in pushing back both demonic and societal limitations.

7.5. Johnson Suleman (Omega Fire Ministries)

Apostle Johnson Suleman focuses his preaching on prophetic confrontation and personal survival, addressing deep-seated fears of hidden or generational spiritual opposition. In his sermons, the transition from night today is presented as an aggressive victory over malicious adversaries (Suleman 33):

> Your night is far spent! Those who mocked you in the dark will see you shine in the day. The armor of light means you become untouchable to the witchcraft of your father's house. I decree that every work of darkness fashioned against your destiny is shattered right now! (Suleman 33)

Suleman reads the text through an indigenous spiritual lens, where "darkness" refers to localised spiritual threats like witchcraft, generational hexes, and hidden enemies. The passage is used to reassure believers of supernatural protection and public success over those plotting their failure.

7.6. Jerry Eze (Streams of Joy International)

Pastor Jerry Eze utilises an immediate breakthrough paradigm adapted for a large, globally connected digital audience via his daily morning prayer program, NSPPD. His approach focuses on quick transformation, bypassing deep doctrinal analysis in favour of direct, encouraging declarations (Eze 12):

> What God cannot do does not exist! I prophesy to you: your long night of delays is broken! The day of your open doors is here! Carry your armor of light and step into your morning of testimonies! (Eze 12)

Eze re-imagines the text for a fast-paced digital age. "The night" represents everyday frustrations like career stagnation, visa delays, or prolonged illnesses, while the "day" represents an immediate release of miracles, making the text a source of daily emotional and spiritual encouragement.

7.7. Abel Damina (Power City International)

In stark contrast to performance-driven and deliverance models, Dr. Abel Damina offers a radical Christocentric grace paradigm. Damina critiques popular charismatic readings, arguing that they misuse the text to create fear and manipulate congregations into performance-oriented rituals [Damina]:

> Many preachers are using Romans 13:12 to put people back into fear and bondage. They tell you to 'cast off' so that God will bless you. That is error! The text is telling us what Christ has already done! Christ is the Light. When you believed, you were taken out of darkness forever. You don't put on the armor by your works; Christ is your armor! The day has already dawned in your spirit! (Damina)

Damina uses a strict Christocentric approach to deconstruct traditional Pentecostal frameworks. He argues that the "armor of light" is not a moral checklist or a defense strategy

against demons, but a description of the believer's secure identity in Christ, highlighting a significant theological shift taking place within the West African church.

8. Synthesising the Hermeneutical Spectrum: From Institutional Moralism to Charismatic Personalism

The interpretive nuances of Romans 13:12 across contemporary Nigerian ecclesial traditions demonstrates the profound fluidity of biblical textuality when confronted with distinct institutional priorities. Rather than operating as mutually exclusive semantic spaces, the textual readings of mainline and Pentecostal bodies form a complex hermeneutical spectrum. This spectrum continuously adapts the core Pauline metaphors of "night," "day," and "armour of light" (*ta hoplatouphōtos*) to engage with postcolonial realities (Sugirtharajah 78). By analysing these groups side-by-side, we can trace how a single scriptural passage shifts between institutional moralism and charismatic personalism.

8.1. The Concept of "The Night": Structural vs. Localised Darkness

The mainline traditions (Anglican and Catholic) understand "the night" primarily through a structural and civic lens. Within their homilies, darkness is identified as the collective, systemic failures of the postcolonial nation-state—including institutional bribery, political nepotism, security collapses, and economic mismanagement (Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria 8; Anglican Diocese of Lagos 14).

Conversely, the Pentecostal and charismatic preachers shift the focus of "the night" toward individualised and spiritualised realities (Gifford 34). For figures like Oyedepo, darkness represents spiritual ignorance of biblical laws; for Adeboye and Eze, it represents prolonged periods of personal trial, barrenness, or career stagnation (Oyedepo 22; Adeboye 5; Eze 12). Meanwhile, preachers like Enenche and Suleman interpret the night as active territorial oppression, witchcraft, and ancestral curses (Enenche 17; Suleman 33). Strikingly, Kumuyi and Damina represent two alternative doctrinal poles: Kumuyi retains a traditional apocalyptic reading where the night is worldly corruption, while Damina views the night as theological ignorance regarding the finished work of Christ (Kumuyi 11; Damina).

8.2. The Vision of "The Day": Liturgical Hope vs. Immediate Deliverance

The vision of "the day" reveals a deep split in how these traditions view time and history. Mainline churches integrate the coming dawn into the liturgical calendar (specifically Advent), framing it as an ongoing ethical journey toward social justice and national

transformation (Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria 8). For these historic institutions, "the day" is a long-term goal realised through steady civic reform and Christian public service.

In contrast, mainstream Pentecostal homiletics accelerate this timeline, transforming the Pauline eschaton into immediate, real-time intervention (Moo 821). On Jerry Eze's NSPPD and during David Oyedepo's services, "the day" represents an immediate release of miracles, breakthroughs, and financial testimonies (Eze 12; Oyedepo 22). The future-oriented hope found in early Christianity is adapted into a pressing expectation of immediate personal deliverance from material or physical suffering.

8.3. The Application of "The Armor of Light": Civic Duty vs. Spiritual Warfare

Finally, how each tradition applies the "armour of light" (*ta hoplatouphōtos*) reveals their different pastoral goals. For Anglican and Catholic prelates, putting on the armour means actively practicing ethical integrity, social responsibility, and visible public righteousness (Anglican Diocese of Lagos 14). The armour serves as an ethical garment that protects the public sphere from moral decay.

For Pentecostal leaders, the armour is treated as an active, personal resource, though they define its exact nature differently:

- Oyedepo and Eze view the armour as a shield of faith and spoken declarations that command material success (Oyedepo 22; Eze 12).
- Adeboye and Kumuyi treat the armour as strict personal holiness, sexual purity, and moral separation from secular culture (Adeboye 5; Kumuyi 11).
- Enenche and Suleman weaponise the armour as an instrument for aggressive spiritual warfare to defeat territorial and ancestral adversaries (Enenche 17; Suleman 33).
- Damina offers a unique grace-centred critique, arguing that the armour is not something human effort can build, but is simply the believer's permanent identity in Christ [Damina].

This wide range of contemporary interpretations shows that Romans 13:12 does not have a single, locked meaning. Instead, it serves as a flexible framework used by different traditions to address the diverse spiritual, social, and physical needs of the modern African context.

9. Implications

The historical and contemporary journey of Romans 13:12 has significant implications for our understanding of biblical textuality, global hermeneutics, and pastoral practice:

- **The Malleability of Sacred Language:** This study demonstrates that biblical texts function as open, polyvalent symbols rather than static containers of fixed

information. The meaning of the text is continually reshaped by the context, needs, and expectations of the reading community.

- **Decentring Western Authority:** The variety of interpretations within contemporary Nigerian Christianity challenges the traditional authority of Eurocentric commentaries. African readings demonstrate that interpretations from the Global South are valid, independent engagements with scripture that address distinct local realities, rather than mere adaptations of Western theology.
- **The Power of Homiletics:** The study shows how homiletics serves as a primary space where theology and daily life meet. Preachers use the same scriptural metaphors to produce diverse outcomes—ranging from civic action and moral discipline to personal financial motivation and radical theological shifts—demonstrating the profound influence of pulpit rhetoric on shaping public consciousness.

10. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following actions are recommended for biblical scholars, theologians, and religious educators:

1. **Adopt Multi-Dimensional Hermeneutics:** Theological institutions should train students in both traditional historical-critical methods and contemporary contextual approaches, such as postcolonial and reader-response frameworks.
2. **Encourage Ecumenical Dialogue:** Church leaders from mainline and Pentecostal traditions should engage in mutual dialogue to explore how their distinct readings of scripture might complement one another—balancing mainline concerns for social justice with Pentecostal emphases on personal transformation and hope.
3. **Investigate Digital Homiletics:** Further research should be conducted into how digital media and live-streamed prayer platforms affect the transmission and interpretation of biblical metaphors across global audiences.
4. **Promote Critically Engaged Preaching:** Preachers should remain mindful of the ethical dimensions of translation and interpretation, ensuring that homiletical metaphors are used to encourage constructive community values, social responsibility, and genuine spiritualgrowth.

11. Conclusion

The historical and contemporary journey of Romans 13:12 highlights the profound flexibility and polyvalence of biblical textuality. As demonstrated through Reader-Response Theory and

Postcolonial Hermeneutics, scripture does not operate as a static repository of absolute, unchangeable meanings. Instead, it functions as a fluid canvas that is continuously redrawn through the interaction between the written text and the changing experiences of reading communities.

From Paul's original first-century cosmic-apocalyptic warning to the house churches of Rome, the passage has undergone multiple transformations. It shifted into an internal, moral-monastic battleground during the Patristic era, and was later used to support historicist narratives of civilisational progress within Eurocentric commentaries.

In the contemporary Nigerian landscape, this interpretive flexibility is fully visible, splitting along clear denominational and socioeconomic lines. Mainline Anglican and Catholic homiletics reframe the text as a call for systemic moral integrity, civic accountability, and institutional reform.

In contrast, the neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movement breaks the text down into several distinct paradigms. These range from David Oyedepo's focus on faith-driven prosperity and financial empowerment to the deliverance models of Paul Enenche and Johnson Suleman, the immediate digital intercessions of Jerry Eze, and Abel Damina's radical theology of finished grace.

These diverse readings prove that the vitality of the biblical text does not depend on enforcing a single, uniform interpretation. Its power lies in its ability to be read completely afresh across different generations and cultural contexts. By examining these diverse interpretations, the global church can better appreciate the depth of its scriptural heritage. This approach recognises that the ancient dawn of the Pauline text continues to find immediate, practical meaning within the vibrant landscape of contemporary African faith.

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