

# AUTHORITY, PROPHECY, AND DILEMMA: A POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF MATTHEW 14:3-4 IN THE CONTEXT OF LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE IN THE NIGER DELTA

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**Abstract:** This article offers a contextual and socio-political analysis of Matthew 14:3-4, which recounts Herod Antipas's incarceration of John the Baptist for denouncing his illicit marriage, to examine the dynamics of political leadership and administration in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. Transcending conventional theological interpretations, it utilizes a hermeneutic of correlation to compare the oppressive sensitivity of the Herodian political regime with the frequently repressive, corruption-permissive, and accountability-deficient governmental frameworks in the Niger Delta. The study reveals that John the Baptist's function as a prophetic figure challenging authority reflects the necessity and danger encountered by activists, community leaders, and journalists in the region who confront political misconduct and the abuse of power. The research provides the perspectives of political theology and postcolonial biblical hermeneutics, revealing how biblical narratives can serve as a critical framework for identifying systemic governance failures and promoting leadership defined by justice, accountability, and the common good.

**Keywords:** Matthew 14: 3-4, Politics, Leadership, Governance, Authority, Prophecy

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## **Introduction**

An analysis of Matthew 14:3-4 within the context of the Niger Delta illustrates the enduring relationship between corrupt authority and prophetic opposition. The Herodian narrative serves as a model that identifies and critiques the governance dysfunctions in the region: illegitimacy, repression, corruption, and the personalization of authority (Onimhawo & Ottuh, 2007). In contrast, it emphasizes the essential, albeit perilous, function of the prophetic voice within society (Hoek, 2017). The emergence of personal interests is expected to affect decision-making processes and agenda-setting (Mathew, 1997). This exegesis urges the church, faith communities, and scholars within and beyond the Niger Delta to adopt a theology of public engagement rooted in the biblical tradition. It advocates for a courageous critique of ineffective leadership, a mourning of its victims, and a committed envisioning and pursuit of a governance framework that exercises power with justice, humility, and accountability for the flourishing of all creation (Herron, 2015). The work functions not just as historical documentation but also as an ongoing dialogue regarding power, ethics, and the unyielding human quest for a more equitable political system.

The Niger Delta, a place of significant natural richness and deep human anguish, embodies a dichotomy. Nigeria possesses hydrocarbons that sustain its economy; nonetheless, its populace suffers from environmental degradation, systemic poverty, and governance failings marked by corruption, political violence, and the centralization of power. In this setting, biblical interpretation cannot be an abstract intellectual endeavour; it must address the tangible realities of oppression and the desire for liberation (Orobator, 2008). This study utilizes the concise yet impactful narrative in Matthew 14:3-4 as a biblical framework for analyzing political leadership. The chapter illustrates a leader (Herod) who, when faced with a moral truth that undermines his personal behaviour and political power, opts for suppression instead of remorse (Carter, 2000). This dynamic is profoundly evident in the Niger Delta, where dissent against the powerful frequently results in intimidation, imprisonment, or worse consequences.

### **Theologico-Historical Context of Matthew 14:3-4**

Herod apprehended John, imprisoned him, and did so due to Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, since John had proclaimed to him, "It is unlawful for you to possess her" (English Standard Version). Herod Antipas served as a client monarch under Roman imperial dominion. His authority was contingent, sustained by political astuteness and allegiance to Rome, rather than by democratic legitimacy. His union with Herodias, formerly wed to his living brother, contravened Jewish law (Leviticus 18:16, 20:21) and represented a conspicuous consolidation of power within the Herodian family, disregarding religious and cultural conventions. John the Baptist fulfills the conventional position of the Hebrew prophet, one who articulates truth to authority regardless of repercussions (cf. Nathan to David, 2 Samuel 12) (Wittenberg, 2002). His critique is public, contesting the moral basis of Herod's governance. His incarceration signifies the state's endeavour to suppress moral consciousness and mitigate a perceived threat to its stability.

Matthew 14:3-4 describes a conflicting situation which has to do with Herod the tetrarch, imprisoning John, who is also called the Baptist or the account of John's public criticism of Herod's unlawful marriage to Herodias, Philip's wife his brother (Ukpong, 2002). Matthew's text provides a point-by-point thematic correspondence to clarify the conflicting interests of Herod Antipas, who sought to maintain his power and keep Herodias, Philip's wife, as his own, despite the criticism by John the Baptist whose duty is to uphold God's law and the resulting actions in light of that conflict. This compelling narrative about the political leaders' interests and their actions may clarify how personal interests shaped and informed the governance of those leaders (Ngele, Onwuanaku & Uwaegbute, 2014). Matthew 14:3, which states, "For Herod had taken John and bound him and put him in a prison, because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife," underpins the rationale for Herod's action of imprisoning John. The setting of verse 3 opens with a causative clause, which describes Herod's actions in taking John and binding him and the resulting situation of John being imprisoned.

In light of the reason given in 14:4a, Matthew describes the exclusive nature of the interests of both parties involved: Herod's interest was in the woman, and

John's interest was in the woman's action (Viviano, 1992). Matthew then describes John's action of rebuking the woman's act on the basis of the woman's marital status in a narrative. The conflict entails the different, conflicting interests of the two parties involved: Herod and John. The weight of responsibility for the action lies on Herod. The action of John rebuking Herodias lacks understanding without the reference made here to Herod's actions regarding the interest in the woman. When Matthew presents the conflicting interests of the characters in his Jewish environment regarding the interests of political leaders and their subjects, the nature of those interests shines through (Viviano, 1992). The concern or interest on the part of the leaders, specifically Herod, was for pleasure, while the concern on the part of John was moral, ethical, or financial retribution. The resolution of the conflict is a murder on the part of Herod against John, placed in a context of the unfolding of salvation history regarding Jesus. Matthew's diction highlights the petty, jealous, and vindictive nature of the ruler and power holder, as well as the sincere, moral, unwavering, and identifiable concern of the leader of the opposition.

#### **Analysis of Matthew 14:3-4 on Political Leadership and Governance**

Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus and said to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him." Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." Herod's interest in Jesus was mixed with some fear due to the publicity of Jesus' works and an immediate wish to know more about Him. In rejecting John earlier, Herod was now faced with the timely consequences of his decisions. He considered the possibility that he was facing a resurrected John, his guilt-ridden conscience at work let him see visions of John who had been beheaded, rather than on a powdery roost.

The first antithesis is found with Herod's intention of visiting the newly promoted prophet, faces the first personal interest of a political leader. John, as a loyal servant of God and Israel, accused Herod of having married the wife of his brother Philip (Viviano, 1992). At that time, all Judaea salt deserted the temple of God, wherein Herod, like Jehoram before him, had turned to the worship of idols. He was reported to have sent away his lawfully wed wife and with Hazael the king

of Syria to have murdered innumerable prophets, a noxious thing in the sight of God. The severe indictment of John made Herod tremble with fear. In sealing the death sentence of John, Herodias's personal vendetta and cruel vengeance for the cutting off of the finger was compounded by envy and a desire to condemn Jesus to death ever since his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The record of Christ's agency in the matter of John's death in a way that demonstrates how the organization of a conspiracy against an innocent man was the result of unwelcome, bitter, personal interests in political leaders. The text gives an account of how personal interests of political leaders led to the condemnation to death of John for whom Christ felt the same straits which he was already beginning to encounter under Herod's later successors. The first part of this chapter deals with the theme of Herod's interest in Jesus and extends from verses 1-12 (Viviano, 1992). The beginning of this chapter and the death of John the Baptist and its consequences are recorded, and it is this paragraph which is treated in this paper. The other main section deals with the feeding of the five thousand and its counterpart of the multiplication of the loaves, while the smaller set deals with Christ's coming towards the disciples on the sea and its counterpart of the walking on the sea.

### **Personal interests in political leadership**

On account of personal interests, two matters can be discerned: first, the existence of such interests, and second, their nature. First, there is no suspicion on authority regarding the existence of personal interests in political conduct. Such interests are shown to be concerned with state and influence over men. The very existence of such interests was a hidden and uncomfortable presence in the political spirituality discussed in the Ethics (Herron, 2015). They were cruelty sown into emotional make-up and Achilles' heels in the political ambition of more than one Society frontiersman. With good political training their political morality could be clearly stated. They had neither didactic nor priestly arrogance. As far as all men were concerned, there was a thoroughly forbidding disdain for all moral teaching outside the legislative doctrine and care of the state. No Solicitor would express a political interest without a toss of the chin and a wink to himself.

Secondly, if such interests exist, what is their nature? For the matter at hand, and on the basis of the previous exposition of judicial politics, the issues are: First,

are the interests of corrupt? (Kelly, 2016). In particular, is the jurisdiction over such as Vashti prohibited? The answer is plainly contrary to the argument about buying and selling men. In Biblical times, were such as Vashti bought and sold in the nature of worldly and spiritual interests? This is a favourite question, and should be cleared up. Who were 'they'? No discontented or poor Christians would be bought and sold. It was of the discreet and wise Christians that it was said. No human being would marry the man. It was the one who was preferred, to whom the queen was so unkind, that had been originally purchased. This state of affairs was still extremely difficult and troublesome thereafter. Statecraft was within the range of theology, and one of the sainted kings was different from the rest in that he did not envisage the leasing out of men. He was simply suspicious of such interests out of the cloud of theology.

Given the universal understanding of the importance of a subjective discussor's personal interests and biases when assessing the weight of a given contention, it becomes imperative to demonstrate the personal interests of key political leaders who shaped the political landscape during the period of the New Testament (Bauer, 2000). Here, special attention will be given to the personal interests of King Herod of Judea, who plays a critical role within the antiquity chronology that included the life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and the period in which Matthew 14:3-4 was narrated relative to the life of Jesus Christ. Decades before the birth of Jesus Christ, Judea was annexed during the Roman conquest of Palestine, obliging King Herod to accept Roman domination (Despotis & Domestichos, 2023). A shrewd diplomat, King Herod quickly gained stature in the Roman court, receiving the title "King of the Jews" (Smith, 2014) and being allowed to go to Jerusalem.

Herod spent over 20 years expanding the city, erecting a lavish palace on the hill of the Acropolis complex, along with temples dedicated to the Greek and Roman gods (Hunter, 2010). This mega-structure involved the excavation of vast areas of mountain, opening tunnels to catch underground springs. Joined to this colossal work were the construction of an amphitheater, a hippodrome, and temples. Herod's personal interests were revealed in a series of self-interested decisions. The first of which was the execution of his wife's mother and brother-in-law. It is assumed Artemes and his sons' execution was an attempt to pacify client states,

thinking with politically led penance he might secure a better relationship with Cleopatra or give Augustus grounds for grievance (Viviano, 1992). The second decision which indicated a rising paranoia was a charge of conspiracy against Herod, implicated Antipater, the eldest son by Doris. He ordered Antipater's execution.

In Matthew 14:3-4, Herod's action to imprison John, who criticized Herod's marriage to his brother's ex-wife Herodias, leads to John's subsequent death at Herod's birthday banquet. Many motivations have been put forth for Herod's interest in imprisoning or executing John. (Smith, 2014) focuses on Herod's personal motivation, using historical context on Herod's overall character, desire to avoid public unrest or rebellion, and the significance of Artas at the time. His analysis concludes that Herod was a "weak king both politically and personally" who felt threatened by John, so he imprisoned, but did not kill him, as a balancing act. Josephus acknowledges Herod's complexity, however, suggesting an alternative reading focused on Herodias being the driving force behind getting John killed. (Herron, 2015) explores the passage as an example of poor leadership decision-making on Herod's part that ultimately leads to chaos and unintended consequences while taking as natural an assumption that Herod at least intends to execute John.

The passages significant for this analysis are framed by a prior reflection on Herod's difficulty with John, and on the banquet itself. What is important is that Herod in both instances has the power to act, and indeed, ultimately acts in an extreme fashion but is portrayed as grappling with a significant decision in each case as well as being influenced or controlled by outside forces in making that decision (Viviano, 1992). On its face, the observation that Herod has several powerful interests in the events of Matthew 14:3-4 are unremarkable, but it may gain additional depth and significance by examining them (Punt, 2017). John being critical of his marriage to Herodias is an obvious consideration, but there are also motivations in John's character.

Herod was a king who had made a name for himself by killing the prophet John the Baptist. The reason why he wanted John dead is given in a phrase in the Greek text that means "because of" or "on account of." This account is thought by some scholars to be based upon written sources (Magezi & Tagwirei, 2022).

Certainly, it is rife with parallels to the plot of the Greek tragedy Elektra. It also echoes the story of David and Bathsheba. According to some scholars, the clearest parallels and closest resemblance to writing from the time of Jesus are found in the works of Josephus (Mujinga, 2018). The story of Herod's finding himself in a bind because of his oath is reminiscent of the famous expression: "Give a dog a bad name, and hang him" (Smith, 2014). It might have been better to disregard the absurdity of the inebriated Salome asking for the head of John. But oaths are oaths, and Herod had already made it a matter in public forums. So here, as in the case of Pilate, arms were forced and a response had to be made. In light of these tragic parallels, it is better to see in this account an example of how a powerful leader's wife could use her husband's public career to force him into an action that was against his will, even damaging to his own interests. The incident on the one hand contains a king who loses control over the public persona that he took years to construct, one of respect and awe due to his sheer physical power over the things around him. But on the other hand, it depicts the machinations of a woman whose unwholesome interests in a man had been thwarted and the emergency measures that she takes to ensure that those interests are public knowledge at the expense of her husband's dignity.

### **Personal interests' negative impacts on political governance**

While the actions of hostility and murder are extreme, personal interests can impact governance in subtle ways. For the most part, political leaders do not have access to the resources that can make illegal behaviours happen. They are very limited to what is within the power of their office. Political leaders have the capacity to influence, promote, and impact others to gain favor, whether for themselves, business interests, or groups (Kelly, 2016). Political leaders may seek to favour or benefit professed alliances through policies, hiring/firing practices, or negotiations on deals. A reported interesting recount could be an example of how personal interests could link, influence, or impact political decisions (Salera III, Macalalad, Reyes & Linta, 2016). Today, there are numerous reports of political corruption charging lobbying practices for Senate committees, quid pro quo offers, and efforts to sway judges (Mujinga, 2018). These certainly could be amusing stories, but leaders do suspect that there could be situations where the noggin is dipped in the bucket, figuratively speaking. A public figure can be in a serious mess without

receiving money. The half-life of these accusations could stretch or bend the will of any leader as accusations of perversion strain justice or favour.

An issue that is asked of the populace nowadays is whether their perception of corrupt practices is happening. Whether through connections in the influence of regulation, unemployment insurance policies, or any point of favor for a few, the similarities of these issues could all boil down to people's perception of policy favouring the few at the top or through personal connections. Perceptions can often be a leader's worst enemy, but leaders can only create the perception they desire through service and diligence to the office and governance aspect of a position. Political integrity is under constant surveillance, and transgressions will attract scrutiny and public condemnation from fellow politicians (Putkaradze, 2023). Accusations and allegations grow toxic and cumulative, rapidly distorting reputations despite measured responses from the accused. The farcical nature of competition over political misconduct stories stains reputations while inviting its own condemnation, but the immediacy of transgressions influences how politicians respond and how the political theatre plays out (Salera III, Macalalad, Reyes & Linta, 2016). The mediation of allegations through public documents forms an alternative record of how political misconduct is understood and performed by politicians.

The moral geography of conduct defines who can claim misconduct and how, thereby shaping the reception of the accusation's claims. It reflects critics' interests in the moral order of public life and in earning the public's trust. With the assistance of senior staff in public agencies, politicians can enhance a performance of integrity. But as allegations pile on, their framing falters, and political conduct becomes a partisan football. Moreover, the political theatre is stage-managed by a wider cast, notably journalists and public servants who shape the parameters of debate and the space in which political conduct is performed (Punt, 2017). By paying more attention to how politicians behave, new questions can be asked about the influence of political interests on interpretative frames of political conduct. Corruption allegations are entertainment as much as political reality.

Political conduct stories are great television and radio, capturing argumentative exchanges in personalities and misbehaviours. They can also be used

to observe how politicians view and interpret corruption, and how they perceive the actions await addressing. From this perspective, recent political conduct stories are reflective of broader trends in the way corruption issues are defined in the context of a growing political class. Instead of politicizing corruption repercussions for political reputations, media coverage has often been self-referential and formulaic. Beyond a historical or game-theoretical reading of participation in corruption allegations, new, historically bounded questions arise about the civil terms through which politicians themselves interpret corruption. With previous experience, the substance of conduct stories is known and how political interests' shape their framing reveals how they are often used by politicians to perform integrity and attract trust.

### **Policy decisions driven by self-interest**

Now, Herod had detained John, who was called "The Baptist," and who was a great emulation to royal power at the time, and brother to Philip. For Herodias, the former wife to Philip and a niece of Herod, had been married to Herod, who had taken to live with her in a most shameful and illicit manner; against this man John boldly cried out publicly the more that it was against his interest, and bade him to turn away from the wickedness of the woman whom he had married against the law; for she was not merely his brother's wife but, more than that, she was his brother's daughter, the child of a woman whom Herod had married against the law (Viviano, 1992). From this account we can clearly observe that the political leaders did not put the public good above all their interests. This was most apparent with Herod who was blinded by his affection of Herodias, who became his wife after divorcing Philip.

At this stage of his love, he was so infatuated with the wickedest woman, who urged him to break the law for the sake of her obsessions and desires, that he was even willing to put his own character and political leadership in jeopardy. Nevertheless, the great prophet John the Baptist, who cried out against such ill-intentioned coupling, stood as the lance of morality against Herod's cunning policy of the unlawful gathering of political power, and it was deeply moved by Herod's explicit blasphemy (Petrow & Vercellotti, 2011). It continued to gnaw away at Herod and consumed him with a sense of guilt, even after he had John imprisoned. Even then, however, he had not killed John but was willing to endure all the conjectures raised against him. He was sad but anxious to keep John safe from the plots of

Herodias since “he was wondering at his words.” From the account one can see that Herod, the champion or king who stood to rule the whole state, could be misled and corrupt by lustful passion with an unbearable difficulty to refuse, just like a lamb fettered by a shepherd.

### **Erosion of public trust**

Matthew 14:3-4 narrates the story of the arrest and imprisonment of John the Baptist. At the heart of this is the strong response of King Herod to the prophetic role that John the Baptist played in calling the attention of the people away from lavish living and the dangers of the ruling elite to their moral lapses (Viviano, 1992). Herod’s lust for power led him to marrying the romantic partner of his brother, Philip. Herodias, an acute contriver, capitalized on this development to play politics and to get John on the spot. The unsatisfactory response of Herod, who grudgingly imprisoned John, points to the dilemma of public figures confronted by vocal activists. Political leadership in favour of material interests and against the interests of the masses cannot sustain its virility for long (Onimhawo & Ottuh, 2007). However, public perception of ethical impropriety gives a long lease of life to such interests. King Herod had divorced his wife and married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Immigration triggered by economic upheavals from war and the discovery of oil currently dominates discussions around the world. However, nations also have to contend with the crisis of leadership and governance spiral by the erosion of public trust in leadership and governance institutions (Abosede, 2014). For instance, some recent events in Nigeria and Britain are typical examples. For example, the credit crunch, scandals involving the British Labour Party, speak eloquently of the breakdown of the socio-psychological contract between the leadership and the governed.

Sustaining the illusion of attention and engagement becomes a challenge when moral vitriol is thrown. These are the widespread personal interests which, when brought to the public domain, throw the spotlight on ethical recklessness and political corruption. If the conviction powered stance becomes muted in defending the interest of the governed, perceptions of a moral vacuum in leadership responsibility follow (Shiu & Corbett, 2015). Public interests are relegated while the interests of the leadership and their networks’ egos, privacy, courtships, entourage, and offspring catch the attention and get publicised. Public interest matters

disappear from the public space with allusions to a government cover-up on medical negligence, and children sex abuse. What about the endless privatisation of public goods in respect of oil wells, motorways, and airports? And, where is the erstwhile invited and highly publicized celebrity of the discovery age philanthropists moved on from seeking discretionary deals with elected Presidents and parleying about the plight of children's education deprived by war and the lack of infrastructure around the world?

The misunderstanding the distinction between personal action and public action is a fertile ground for ethical misconduct. Scheming, commitment and acting on the personal interest in matters that are personal does not incur the wrath of ethics. There is generally nothing unethical with a politician spending time and resources to woo the voters, or build a residence, or acquire shares in a private business, or spend time with a lover or spouse (Herron, 2015). It is when the need to woo, build, acquire or spend on a personal basis is adopted for the public business; plan is put in place and action taken to downsize a public entity for the benefit of self or a few friends across several months/years, for instance, that the individual would be liable for personal misconduct (Smith, 2014). Finally, the complex nature of human heart should caution against simplistic and anti-intellectual understanding of the human behaviour and character. Either interest can prompt either the right or wrong action. The same stakeholder may act on both interests while the same situation can be exploited by the same action, for instance. Selfishness, greed, envy, anger, pride, obsession are common dark sides of public interests (Abosedo, 2014). Concerted use of vast resources in pursuit of lofty public interests creates a rich fund of political cultural capital amid assiduous acts to corner the same public interest, including resources, through taxes and contracts of all sorts.

### **Hermeneutical Bridge: Correlating Herodian and Niger Delta Political Contexts**

Utilizing a postcolonial and contextual hermeneutic, some significant relationships arise. Similar to Herod's usurped authority, political leadership in the Niger Delta is frequently regarded as illegitimate, enforced by external federal frameworks or sustained through corrupt electoral practices ("godfatherism") rather than authentic popular endorsement. Governance transforms into a mechanism for catering to

external interests (such as oil multinationals and federal authorities) and internal nepotism, reflecting Herod's allegiance to Rome and his personal dynasty. John's incarceration for articulating a moral truth mirrors the experiences of Niger Delta activists and journalists. The execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Nine, among the persistent harassment, arbitrary arrest, and extrajudicial killings of those who challenge environmental racism, tax injustice, or governmental corruption, exemplifies an endemic practice of suppressing dissenting voices (Saro-Wiwa, 1995). The state and its affiliated entities often categorize such voices as "troublemakers," "militants," or threats to "national security." Herod's crime was both personal (an illicit marriage) and political (an abuse of power). The conflation of personal benefit with public position is pervasive in the Niger Delta. The embezzlement of public finances (oil profits), the allocation of contracts to associates, and the utilization of state resources for personal gain exemplify a leadership culture in which, akin to Herod, the ruler's personal ambitions overshadow the collective welfare and the rule of law. The eventual killing of John by Herod (Matt 14:9-10) arises from a public pledge and the apprehension of losing prestige in front of his guests. This underscores the precariousness of autocratic authority, maintained through prestige and intimidation. Niger Delta leaders, frequently dependent on a veneer of strength and invulnerability, may resort to excessive violence to suppress challengers and uphold an appearance of control, even in response to perceived slight threats.

Interpreting this text within the Niger Delta environment transcends mere censure; it serves as a summons for re-imagination. John the Baptist represents a distinct paradigm of interaction with authority. John's action highlights the imperative necessity for audacious truth-telling as a civic and ethical principle. This bolsters the efforts of civil society organizations, grassroots movements, and the principled media in the Niger Delta. The book assumes that power is governed by a superior moral law. It contests the dominant culture of impunity and promotes leadership that is accountable not just to electoral cycles but also to enduring ideals of justice, equity, and the sacredness of human dignity and the environment. The narrative candidly recognizes the significant price of challenging authority. This establishes a context for comprehending the plight of activists and can promote solidarity and global advocacy for their safeguarding.

### **Lessons from Matthew 14:3-4 and Strategies for Mitigating Negative Impacts**

Matthew 14:3-4 reads "For Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; because John had been telling him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her'." The first lesson relates to the consequences of wrong desires. For Herod, it was a desire for his brother's wife, Herodias. The ensuing consequences were beyond his control (Viviano, 1992). He was obliged to have John imprisoned and subsequently to have him beheaded. Nothing is worse than a desire that has gone beyond control. Desire for knowledge led to man's fall; a design to become like God led to the construction of the tower of Babel; discontent with man's lot led to the sin of Adam; and being beaten by feelings of jealousy led to Cain's spiritually disastrous act of murdering Abel. Wrong desires will lead to overwhelming distress and bitter remorse, charges with terrors, pangs of guilt, and tremors of fear (Theology of Work Project and Kuecker, 2011). The second lesson refers to the necessity of good counsel, or thinking only of what is good. There was an occasion for rejoicing at Herod's birthday. Three kinds of indulgences, namely an extravagant banquet, dancing, and an oath can be observed. The first indulgence related to eating and drinking, which developed into drunkenness; the second was to witness an excessively sensual dance, which inflamed Herod's lust; and the last, to indulge in swearing an oath of reward, should have remained a matter of proper propriety and decorum, but it was sullied by Herod's unqualified answer. Indulgence in either eating or drinking leads to a full belly, thoughtlessness, heavy doing, and obliviousness. Indulgence in witnessing dancing leads to forgetfulness of youthful sensibilities, modesty, and keeping love to one's self. Indulgence in swearing kills thoughtfulness prudence.

The biblical text describing the personal interests of Herodias and Herod is a well-matched case study for the issue of governance and political leaders' personal interests over their civic interests, especially as it centres on the consequences of the outcome of a decision taken on the ground of personal interests. The biblical account shows that political leader Herod Antipas wanted to kill John but could not simply because he feared the uproar of the masses. In this case study, the move of Herodias to have Herod kill John was a purely private interest with no connection to any civic interest. As a spouse, Herodias had a patriotic interest in having the king killed or else an interest in the sense of seeking revenge on a prophet of God as Elijah had

done to her forerunning husband and King Ahab. Yet this action was too brazen and would have had a serious impact on the civic life of Herodias and Herod as well as the community. This results in Herodias' daughter dancing for Herod's entertainment and, like everything else that dances before the eye, dissipating the king's civic energy and reason, compelling him rather impetuously to grant her request. The preceding groups of concerns turn upon the consequences of this decision to act on the personal interest of Herodias.

The loss of control such a decision implies is summed up in having John executed. Had John the forerunner of Jesus been out of reach only of certain sections of the Jewish people, standards of justice and freedom may have been somewhat, if not seriously, compromised through an accommodation with the city's elders or even by Beelzebub ruling over Beelzebub (Ngele, Onwuanaku & Uwaegbute, 2014). A 'long-term' civic interest may have compelled a re-assessment of the prophet's vested interests in urban type religious leadership. At worst, had John been subjected to capital punishment, like Jesus later on, a fine, if over-horrifying, form of civic life may have continued in the city as in the countryside. There too in Tiberias, the troubles of Herod's brother Philip and his wife Herodias are where, on the one hand, the Lord chose not to go yet perform miracles in the hope of a change of heart.

### **Strengthening institutions**

God serves a dual function as both Creator and King. However, as King, God – through Christ, the Just One – deals with Davidic kings who reject His direct rule. Christ exposes the need for honesty, justice, and delivering the oppressed, evidenced by Herodias' claim to power and Herod's partial submission to God via John's ministry. With such responsibilities of the state at stake, the rulers become threatened primarily because of their inability to rule (Kelly, 2016). Unfortunately, this is not a new phenomenon and indeed accrues with "original sin." The world's first ruler, Adam, acted in a way contrary to his sovereign duties, resulting in the fall, as Satan claimed dominion over the creation. As a member of the Godhead, Sodom's King had to intervene. The kings of Egypt and Babylon went all because, like Adam, they too rejected their piety towards God and did what was contrary to their direct responsibility. Much later, but still prior to the captivity, the nation of Israel was warned of the consequences of rejecting their King. Sirach has indicated this problem clearly with the warning, "Reflect, my sons, upon kings and rulers /

and upon the things they do: / take care that it does not escape you / and, by spreading reports, / that you do not become involved in the same sins," but examples of misrule persist.

### **Promoting transparency and civility**

In order to attain greater public trust, democratic governments must promote transparency and openness in their activities. Transparency is essential in a democracy since it seeks to enlighten citizens about a range of issues that influence how a government functions. As such, efforts to combat corruption must begin with public transparency. The cooperative approach requires a commitment on the part of civil society to create an open and frank environment for holding governments accountable (Abosedo, 2014). When it comes to the battle against corruption, the significance of a free press is well acknowledged. A free public gallery, open parliament sessions, and the freedom to call witnesses are all necessary elements of transparency in governance. In order for elected representatives and interest groups, whether public or private, to contest and contribute to public policy choices, a free civil society and active participation in public discourse are crucial. Through open meetings and conferences, which unions and professional associations will have to publicize, citizens must also have access to their opinions about a government's public delivery.

Thanks to modern information technology, governments must also publicly disclose their operations and all the resulting documentation (Ottuh, Idjakpo & Uviekovo, 2022). To better inform the general populace regarding the compliance of legislation, public organizations with quasi-judicial authority are responsible for fostering the acceptance of legislation. The fight in favour of public transparency should start with the implementation of legislation to enforce electoral rules, and rights. Theme days where important votes are highlighted should be conducted, disseminating the results of the votes in a broader public forum and conveying that these votes could have a different outcome when considered in other contexts. Involving the media and civil society so that citizens understand the necessity of their engagement in elections and general efforts to combat corruption should be considered similarly valid goals.

In the wake of contemporary time, most political leaders still insist upon the public frameworks thus influencing the private beliefs and behaviour of citizens. This illustrates the serious and, ultimately, fatal consequences of permitting insecure interests, individual passions, and selfish pursuits to overwhelm the greater public concerns of governance (Niringiye, 2020). In the response that was given, moments of excitement, confusion, and outrage simmered across the audience. The many frameworks of thought tumbled and clanked wildly as the unexpectedly public nature of the inquisition dawned.

### **Conclusion**

This contextual and socio-political analysis of Matthew 14:3-4 demonstrates that the passage transcends a simple historical anecdote within the Passion narrative. Interpreted from the hermeneutical perspective of the Niger Delta experience, the succinct narrative of Herod Antipas's incarceration of John the Baptist evolves into a compelling and significant framework for analyzing the persistent deficiencies in leadership and governance within the region. The relationship between Herod's derivative, Roman-sanctioned authority and the frequently externally-supported, legitimacy-lacking leadership in the Delta reveals a common basis of power that is fundamentally disconnected from the populace it claims to serve. The prophetic encounter of John the Baptist and its brutal repression resonates tragically today in the silencing of activists, journalists, and community champions who challenge the intricate alliance of state and corporate power. The hermeneutic of correlation utilized here not only identifies connections but also serves a critical theological and ethical purpose. The biblical tale serves as a mirror, vividly depicting the systemic corruption, the privatization of public office, and the culture of impunity afflicting the Niger Delta. The narrative affirms the lived experiences of oppression and resistance in the region, situating their struggle within a longstanding historical and spiritual tradition of prophetic opposition to tyranny.

In contrast, the Niger Delta backdrop imparts new urgency to the Matthean passage, transforming it from a narrative concerning a solitary ancient dictator into a lasting testament to the essence of unaccountable power. This academic endeavour transcends critique to propose a constructive vision. John the Baptist, despite his

imprisonment, embodies a lasting emblem of an alternative civic ethic – anchored in moral fortitude, steadfast allegiance to a principle above political convenience, and the selfless pursuit of justice. This reading presents a clear summons for the church, theologians, and religious communities in the Niger Delta and analogous circumstances. It compels them to adopt and endorse this prophetic calling, cultivating a theology of civic involvement that not only alleviates the suffering but also persistently confronts the complacent authorities that undermine both human dignity and the natural world.

Consequently, interpreting Matthew 14:3-4 in the context of the Niger Delta does not relegate the region to a deterministic pattern of Herodian subjugation but calls upon all stakeholders –local, national, and global to acknowledge the significant cost of prophetic truth, to atone for complicity in corrupt systems, and to strive tirelessly for a governance model that, in sharp contrast to Herod’s, embodies accountability, justice, and a profound dedication to the common good. Thus, Scripture and context participate in a dynamic exchange, each enhancing the understanding of the other, with the enduring aspiration for a political system where authority serves the prosperity of all.

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