

The Lamentations of the Disadvantaged: Reading Psalm 73 in the Context of Oppression in Contemporary Nigerian Society

JOEL K. T. BIWUL (ECWA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AND
STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY)

ABSTRACT

The evil of humanity's inhumanity to fellow humans via the act of oppression is pervasive across human societies. This evil will continue unabated because of the inherent evil inclination of the benefiting perpetrators. The lamentation in Ps 73 reveals the enigmatic irony of divine theodicy, an apparent contradiction of divine promise vis-à-vis prevailing orchestrated oppression in society. The empirical paradox of life unavoidably poses the question: "why should someone happily celebrate the plight of the disadvantaged 'other,' becoming emotionally insensitive, oppressing fellow humans against good conscience, simply because the oppressor is in position of privilege in society?" This is the aching question many oppressed Nigerians are constantly asking. This article comparatively resonates the emotional torture of the psalmist consequent upon the disadvantaged economic status vis-à-vis the oppressed economic, political, religious, social, and psychological condition of many Nigerians today.

KEYWORDS: Nigeria, Oppression; Psalm 73, Psalmist, Psalter

A INTRODUCTION

Every human society—developed, reasonably developed, developing, or underdeveloped—experiences some level of human degradation and traumatic agony via class stratification and discriminatory ideology. Humanity, ironically, has become hostile, devouring itself. Apparently, the weak and disadvantaged of every society usually come under unfriendly and sometimes brutal treatment by the rich, the powerful, and those in positions of political privilege in such an insensitively hostile environment. The first stanza of the national anthem of Nigeria states,

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Arise, O compatriots, Nigeria's call obey
To serve our fatherland
With love and strength and faith
The labour of our heroes past
Shall never be in vain
To serve with heart and might
One nation bound in freedom, peace and unity.

In addition, the national pledge states,

I pledge to Nigeria my Country
To be faithful, loyal and honest
To serve Nigeria with all my strength
To defend her unity
And uphold her honour and glory
So help me God.

The literary content of Nigeria's national anthem and national pledge is now a mirage given the country's present socio-economic and socio-political state. Increasing levels of senseless, horrific oppression in Nigeria are painfully worrisome—the degradation and violation of human dignity, neglect of societal peace, security and cohesion, highly deplorable infrastructures, impoverished healthcare and jettisoned education, growing anger and bitterness, the disintegration of the state on account of religious and ethno-tribal sentiments, to name a few. Most worrisome of all is the silence of different levels of government on these aching issues and the nonchalant disposition to them. Whenever government reluctantly speaks, it merely exhibits its shameless and disgraceful denial and peddles fake news about the real Nigerian condition. The country has systematically come under a carefully and purposefully orchestrated religious, economic and political siege like the city of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The cries of the oppressed in Nigeria persistently fall on deaf ears and their plight is greeted by the blind eyes of the very people who canvassed for their votes. Painfully, the present condition of the Nigerian state is a massive failure; nothing is working except corruption and the gruesome murder of innocent citizens by hired religio-political mercenaries and accomplices. Thus, Nigeria can no longer be said to be a country worth dying for as both human dignity and human life are no longer valued.¹

¹ Godwin Akper has argued that the activities of radical religious activists has caused the displacement of high number of persons, for instance, in the years between 1982 and 2016, who have been dispossessed of their lands and their hopes for better living standards. See Godwin Akper, "Is God in Nigeria? Land Dislocation and the Challenge of Confessing Belhar in Nigeria Today," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 4/1 (2018): 61–72, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2018.v4n1.a03>. Also, Amnesty International reported in 2016 the gross human violation, torture and brutality meted on

The traumatic emotional experience in Ps 73 has some resemblances to the Nigerian situation. It depicts the condition of one lamenting under the yoke of torturous emotional oppression while the other celebrates benefits from such inhumane behaviour. Interestingly, both characters exist within the same human society.

John S. Kselman describes this psalm as a meditation on the justice of God in terms of his retribution and theodicy (his justice in an unjust world).² The content of Ps 73, whether real or imaginary, presents the experience of an oppressive condition in society. The complainant, presented as righteous, beholds the presence of the rich but wicked and godless in society and grieves because of their inhumane and insensitive oppression of the poor, voiceless and helpless. At the same time, it is also the expression of faith and confidence by one who claims to be righteous even though economically impoverished. While the liturgical aspect of expressed "faith" in this psalm has received much treatment in scholarship, the noticeable oppressive economic, emotional and psychological traumatic conditions have not received much attention.

This article is an attempt to re-read the content and experience of the righteous in Ps 73 in light of contemporary Nigerian political, social, economic, psychological, regional/ethno-tribal and religious situations. This comparative interdisciplinary approach in which a conglomeration of the social, moral, political, and religious constituents are blended in reading Ps 73 vis-à-vis the Nigerian context seeks to connect the content of the psalm to the present experiences of Nigerians to discover how the latter resonate with the experience

Nigerian citizens by the Nigerian Special Anti-robbery Squad (SARS). See Amnesty International Report, "Nigeria: 'You Have Signed Your Death Warrant'," in Amnesty International Ltd, London: Peter Benenson House, 2016. www.amnesty.org. In 1991, Jibrin Ibrahim had commented on the Nigerian condition, arguing that in the context where religious manipulation becomes a weapon for achieving political gains, social upheavals and insecurity would become obviously homogeneous. See Jibrin Ibrahim, "Religion and Political Turbulence in Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 29/1 (1991): 115–136. Doubtless, insecurity systematically orchestrated by the activities of Boko Haram, Islamic State of West African People (ISWAP), Fulani herdsmen militias and kidnapers where innocent citizens are brutalized and are forcefully sent as refugees into Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps, where others are maimed and killed, seem synonymous with Nigeria today. See the article, "The traumatized Nigerian citizens" by Sherifdeen Tella in the Punch Newspaper online version of October 10, 2022; "The Gale of Insecurity in Nigeria" by Jide Oyewusi in the online version of *The Guardian Newspaper* of April 29, 2022; the Nigerian Federal Government had admitted as reported in *The Nigerian Tribune* online version of September 6, 2022 that the present insecurity is Nigeria's greatest threat since the Civil War.

² John S. Kselman, "Psalms," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (3rd ed.; ed. Michael D. Coogan, Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsom and PHEME PERKINS; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 838 (Hebrew Bible).

of the former. Accordingly, the study proceeds first by stating the overall nature and genre of the Psalter; second, it continues with a contextual understanding of Ps 73; third, it seeks to unveil the identity of the oppressed righteous and the oppressor in the psalm; and lastly, because Nigerians are crying for relief from the clutches of their political captors, it relates the content of the psalm to the traumatic contemporary Nigerian situations to resonate with their semblances.

B NATURE AND VARIOUS GENRES OF THE PSALTER

The Psalter is said to be a collection of collections of poetic prayers.³ These collections, also consisting of different genres, are categorised into the Hebrew *mizmor* (to *prune* or *pluck*), *Tefilot* (prayers) and *Tehillim* (praises)⁴ or simply as various hymns, laments and thanksgiving.⁵ It is a book of either emotional expression of faith or lamentation of divine silence in times of despair or elegy dirges. Walter Brueggemann captures this aptly when he says the psalms consist of the experiences of well-being and betrayal and of despair and surprise. He continues,

The book of Psalms provides the most reliable theological, pastoral, and liturgical resource given us in the biblical tradition. . . [Season after season, people of faith discover that]. The Psalms are helpful because they are a genuinely dialogical literature that expresses both sides of the conversation of faith.⁶

The entire Psalter is a collection of sung poetic prayers associated with divine worship in Israel, usually recited to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument.⁷ Considered "the prayerful responses to life experiences,"⁸ the Psalter is a collection of published memoirs of human experiences that encapsulate their expressions of sadness and joy, abandonment and relief, disappointment and redress and trauma and healing. These experiences are couched largely in poetic hymnal form, hence, the title *Tehillim*. But the Psalter also depicts conversely the

³ Adele Berlin and M. Z. Brettler, "Psalms," in *The Jewish Study Bible, Jewish Publication Society, TANAKH Translation* (ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1280. It is helpful to follow the development of the various historical interpretive grids applied to understanding the Psalter in Bruce K. Waltke and J.M. Houston with E. Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 2010).

⁴ Gavin Michal, "Exploring Rabbinic Approaches to the Psalms," *OTE* 35/1 (2022): 85–86.

⁵ Dianne Bergant, "Psalms." No Pages in *The Catholic Study Bible* (3rd edition. EBook edition; ed. Donald Senior, John J. Collins, and Mary Ann Getty; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 15, 21.

⁷ Kselman, "Psalms," 775 (Hebrew Bible).

⁸ Dianne Bergant, "Psalms," n. p.

human expression of faith and confidence in Yahweh amid the uncertainties and unfairness of life, even during moments of seeming divine silence. Some Psalms, individual or corporate, are liturgical, while others are complaints as well as lamentatory, intercessory and offertory prayers.

The Psalter consists of various literary genres that, according to Brueggemann, have passed through the lenses of piety and scholarly interpretation.⁹ It is generally written in alphabetic acrostics. Laments are part of the genre of the Psalter. This may be personal statements of despair such as that found in Ps 22:1–21 or communal cries in times of crisis such as Ps 137.¹⁰

In the Psalter, one also finds the genre of individual and corporate praise, occupying over a third of the book. While corporate praise psalms typically begin with an imperative call to praise, followed by a description of all the good things the Lord has done, individual praise psalms often begin with a proclamation of intent to praise, followed by declaring what God has done in a particular situation in the psalmist’s life.¹¹ Accordingly, descriptive praise psalms are directed to God for specific acts towards an individual or community while declarative praise psalms celebrate God’s acts in the present.¹²

Furthermore, worship, whether private or corporate, is an aspect of the genre in the Psalter. Sacred space, times, rituals and words characterised Israelite worship whilst the focus of worship was preserving the holiness of God’s presence, preserving the Law and the covenant and recognition of who God was and what he had done.¹³ In Temple worship, “God’s presence was the most important element to preserve . . . [and] The priests existed to maintain that purity and to control access,” such that Yahweh’s holiness and the holiness of the sacred space are maintained.¹⁴ On the whole, being a collection of human experiences expressed to a divinity, it is correct to state that “The psalms generally speak *to* God rather than *about* God . . . the psalms are just that—prayers *to* God.”¹⁵

C NATURE AND CONTEXT OF PS 73

The composition of the entire Psalter consists of national and personal elements. Psalm 73 possesses a dual character. It is both “highly personal, yet also

⁹ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 15.

¹⁰ John H. Walton, V.H. Matthews and M.W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 512. Brueggemann describes the psalms of lament as “psalms of darkness.” Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 52.

¹¹ Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 513.

¹² Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms: The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), n. p.

¹³ Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 513.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Bergant, “Psalms,” n. p.

fundamentally communal."¹⁶ As a psalm of an honest personal expression of how the psalmist feels about his situation, it is both a psalm of doubt in divine promises as well as belief in theodicy. Terry L. Smith says it belongs to the group of psalms that are most prominent in psalms dealing with suffering and justice.¹⁷ Bergant agrees that Psalms such as 37 and 73 among others are "concerned with the problem of evil, the suffering of the righteous, and the justice of God."¹⁸ Psalm 73 indicates that it is a personal psalm that combines both ironic complaint and the expression of faith because of the presence of personal pronouns **וְאֲנִי** (when I/but I), **רַגְלִי** (my foot), **קִנְאָתִי** (I envied/I was jealous). Seen in this light, it invokes typical wisdom themes about God's justice in the world and His punishment of evil.

Psalm 73 presents the prayer of a struggling righteous individual trying to come to terms with the idea of theodicy. Willem VanGemeran says we see in this psalm the psalmist's struggles to find appropriate response to evil and injustice in the world,¹⁹ particularly in the context of torturous oppression, perplexingly happening under the watch of the divine. In what Wendland describes as "experiencing a faith-attack,"²⁰ eloquently dramatised by the psalmist, "The psalmist, seeing how wicked people prosper and how they have no fear of punishment, almost abandoned belief that God rewards the good and punishes the evil. But a visit to the Temple, with its aura of being in God's presence" caused a reversal in the psalmist's thought as his faith was strengthened when he renewed his praise of God.²¹ Prior to such a discovery and reversal, the content of this psalm, aroused by empirical existential realism, indicates the psalmist's "facing the crisis of confidence,"²² as it reveals his struggle to resolve the paradox of Yahweh's promised goodness and blessings to the righteous and retribution of the wicked now overturned by Yahweh's condoning the nefarious lifestyle of the latter. Consequently, the psalmist "calls Yahweh's covenant loyalty into question by complaining over the overt prosperity of the psalmist's enemies and their persecution of the righteous."²³

¹⁶ Ernst Wendland, "Introit 'into the Sanctuary of God' (Psalm 73:17): Entering the Theological 'Heart' of the Psalm at the Centre of the Psalter," *OTE* 11/1 (1998): 129.

¹⁷ Terry L. Smith, "A Crisis in Faith: An Exegesis of Psalm 73," *Restoration Quarterly* 17/3 (1974): 166.

¹⁸ Bergant, "Psalms," n. p.

¹⁹ VanGemeran, *Psalms: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, n. p.

²⁰ Wendland, "Introit 'into the Sanctuary of God,'

²¹ Berlin and Brettler, "Psalms," 1361.

²² Leslie J. Francis, Susan H. Jones and Christopher F. Ross, "Is God Really Good to the Upright? Theological Educators Exploring Psalm 73 through the Jungian Lenses of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling and Thinking," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76/1 (2020): a6171. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.6171>.

²³ Wendland, "Introit 'into the Sanctuary of God'," 133.

Here, the psalmist is confronted with a theological irony as he comes to a crossroad of faith and doubt because of his altered belief in traditional theodicy. Nonetheless, faith finally overturns the irony. Brueggemann includes Ps 73 among the disorientation psalms, describing it as a psalm that may be the most remarkable and most satisfying of all the psalms, surprisingly marked by joyous trust in demonstration of its act of faith. In his words, "It is a mighty engagement with God, a struggle against God and a wondrous communion with God."²⁴ This is more theological than ethical; hence, it is thought that "Psalm 73 lies at the theological heart of the book of Psalms as an existential cry to God and a search for meaning in life."²⁵ Allen P. Ross explains that Ps 73, when read in conjunction with Ps 49, or even 37, may be classified as a wisdom psalm or could at least be studied for its wisdom motif. Ascribed to Asaph, he says it relates the personal experience of near-overwhelming doubts when the psalmist compares the existential condition of the righteous to that of the wicked.²⁶ This psalm reveals the struggles of the pious amid contradiction of faith, yet, attempting to maintain communion with God.²⁷

Context matters. What then might have occasioned this psalm? Neither the form nor the context of Ps 73 receives scholarly consensus. However, more scholarly view leans towards its form as wisdom and individual song of thanksgiving psalm and liminally as individual psalm of lament. Marvin E. Tate avers that this psalm belongs to a larger genre of testimony encompassing both thanksgiving and reflection psalm type.²⁸ Such reflective testimony spirals

²⁴ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 115.

²⁵ Jiří Moskala, "Psalm 73—Its Structure and Theology: I Delight in God's Goodness in Spite of Devastating Problems," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 27/1–2 (2016): 155.

²⁶ Allen P. Rose, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck; Wheaton: SP Publication, 1985; repr., 1987), 847. This psalm, in view of the positioning and at least the four meanings of the *lamed* (for, to, by, of), might have been composed by Asaph, a head of a choral group in Israel appointed by King David. Being a religious Israelite, a chorister, and a Temple Choirmaster, raises the likelihood of Asaph being the psalmist here. See Michal, "Exploring Rabbinic Approaches to the Psalms," 94, 95. This psalm is assumed to be Asaph's second psalm. See Moskala, "Psalm 73," 158.

²⁷ It is a truism, as Moskala points out, that "We live in a post-modern and post-Christian world where lies, fake news, propaganda, and deception prevail." Evil and wickedness never go away from society, even in the reasonably organised and civilised ones. While in the Western world they are more imagined than experienced, rape and violence, armed banditry, kidnapping for financial ransom and terrorism are some prevalent vices and misdeeds prevalent in African societies just as they are elsewhere. Abuse of human dignity and disrespect for the sacredness of human life are growing phenomena. In the face of such calamities, "It is extremely difficult to navigate through the storms of life." Moskala, "Psalm 73," 153.

²⁸ Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 51—100* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 233.

through the structure. Verse 1 starts with the conclusion of divine goodness; verses 2—5 describe the condition of the wicked and godless wealthy; verses 6—12 depict the irreligious disposition of the wicked and godless wealthy; verses 13—16 describe the struggles of the righteous psalmist; verses 17—20 reveal the final end of the wicked and godless wealthy; and verses 21—28 return the complaining psalmist to foundational faith.

Contextually, it is difficult and almost impossible to identify the occasion of the psalm. However, the literary image readers encounter in Ps 73 indicates that the experience of the psalmist emerges in an emotionally torturous oppressive economic context like what the *Qoheleth* had observed and experienced. The psalmist expresses an empirical aberration of the reality of the hitherto subscribed traditional Jewish wisdom where the wicked has it all but the righteous in heart is deprived of the same. One comes away with lessons from the agonising psalmist to the effect that, as Lapsley opines, living faithfully restricts one to a neutral zone by crushing and striking one down.²⁹ Izak Spangenberg captures the point quite succinctly,

The author of Ps 73 was evidently confronted with discrepancies that he could not integrate into the wisdom paradigm in which he had been raised and educated. It shook the very foundations of his belief system. The wisdom paradigm presumed a fixed order in nature and human society, an order that had been established by God. Those who lived in harmony with this order experienced 'health, wealth and prosperity,' while those who lived a disruptive and disorderly life experienced the contrary, or rather *should* experience the contrary.³⁰

For the psalmist, this sharp paradigm shift is an irreconcilable enigma. Notwithstanding, the presence of **שְׁדֵרָה** (sanctuary, sacred place) indicates that Ps 73 appears undoubtedly as a liturgical-testimonial piece used also for temple worship. According to Leslie C. Allen, the psalm vividly pictures the psalmist standing before fellow worshippers in the temple and candidly testifying to a personal experience of crippling doubt from which the testifier emerges spiritually enriched.³¹ On this point, it is noted,

²⁹ Jacqueline E. Lapsley, "'Bring on Your Wrecking Ball': Psalm 73 and Public Witness," *Theology Today* 70/1 (2013): 64.

³⁰ Izak (Sakkie), J. J. Spangenberg, "Psalm 73 and the Book of Qoheleth," *OTE* 29/1 (2016): 153–154.

³¹ Leslie C. Allen, "Book Three: Psalms 73–89," in *The International Bible Commentary* (ed. F. F. Bruce, rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 605. Craig C. Broyles accepts the testimonial aspect of Psalm 73 but rejects its liturgical element. See Craig C. Broyles, "Psalms Concerning the Liturgies of Temple Entry," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum. Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature 4; ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D.

That the psalmist cries out to God demonstrates [the psalmist’s] belief that God has both the power and the will to intervene and deliver [him] from [his] present distress . . . Even as [the psalmists] cried out in complaint, they proclaimed God’s all-encompassing power and declared their trust in God’s continued concern for them, a concern based on divine covenantal promises. An expression of confidence, then, is an important characteristic of the lament.³²

If this psalm is correctly ascribed to Asaph,³³ a Levite who established a guild of Temple singers,³⁴ then, this presupposition has strong currency. The purpose would be to inspire faith in Yahweh despite any experience of irreconcilable rational and intellectual tendencies. Aptly stated, as a reflection psalm on theodicy, the psalmist reassures his listeners of God’s unmistakable goodness toward the righteous people of integrity.³⁵

The ideology of societal oppression and its application is a purposefully designed structure—a social hierarchy that seeks perpetual dominance of the vulnerable in society. Of course, oppression marginalises “the other,” having exploitation as its primordial benefit for the perpetrators. It is said that oppression does “not just fall from the sky, nor does it merely result from the accidents and vicissitudes of human history. Rather, while the proximal forces constructing and

Miller, Jr.; Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005), 280. David Adamo, in his semiotic interpretation of inscriptions in the Psalms, identifies the ongoing contemporary significance of such spiritual enrichment in stickers one observes on some vehicles in Nigeria. According to him, such inscriptions are an expression of faith: “signs that represent the religious commitments and beliefs of the vehicle owners and drivers . . . they are expressions of the faith of the drivers, owners of the vehicles.” See David Tuesday Adamo, “Semiotic Interpretation of Selected Psalms Inscriptions (23, 35, 121) on Motor Vehicles in Nigeria,” *Scriptura* 114 (2015): 2.

³² Bergant, “Psalms,” n. p.

³³ Smith explains that ‘Asaph’ may be a reference to the father or ancestor of Joah, King Hezekiah’s recorder (2 Kgs 18:18, 37; Isa 36:3, 22) or the ancestor or founder of one of the three chief families of guilds of Levite temple musicians known as the “sons of Asaph” (1 Chron 25:1, 2, 6, 9). He reports that according to the Chronicler, Asaph was a Gershonite Levite, who, along with Heman and Jeduthan (Ethan), was placed in charge of the song service in the tabernacle by David (1 Chron 6:39). He notes that while full information is lacking, Asaph was most likely a contemporary of David. The Chronicler’s history has the “sons of Asaph” participating in nearly every major temple celebration before and after the Exile. They are occasionally represented as cymbalists, but mostly as singers (1 Chron 15:17, 19; 16:5, 7, 37; 2 Chron 5:12; 29:13; 35:15; Ezra 3:10; Neh 12:35). Smith further explains that the Asaph superscriptions probably indicate a tradition of his authorship of the psalms, a style peculiar to them which was originated by him, or perhaps simply a reference to the Asaphite guild. See Smith, “A Crisis in Faith,” 167–168.

³⁴ Kselman, “Psalms,” 838. See also Berlin and Brettler, “Psalms,” 1361.

³⁵ S. J. Mitchell Dahood, *The Anchor Bible: Psalm II 51—100* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 188.

maintaining oppressive systems are complex and multifaceted, they are also the expressions of human will, agency, and mind."³⁶ Evil, such as oppression, is first preconceived, hatched, nurtured, and strategically and systematically implemented.

The summary theological import of Ps 73, then, is this:

The psalm impresses one in its remarkable insight and candor. It is the tale of a heart seduced and then healed, a heart isolated and then restored to fellowship. It provides clues to the moves into disorientation and out. One goes there with unqualified honesty, but what faith finds in the disarray is the memory and hope of God.³⁷

The affirmation of faith to the extent that "Only those who have a pure heart can see the goodness of God" becomes "the main theme of the poem"³⁸ from an existential standpoint.

D IDENTITY OF THE OPPRESSED AND THE OPPRESSOR IN PS 73

In Ps 73, we encounter two main groups of characters – one under oppression, wondering why Yahweh appears unfair to them and another the class of the rich who take pleasure in their flagrant oppressive behaviour. However, only the voice of the oppressed character echoes in verses 2—3 and 13—17 while the same speaker reports the description of the attitude and lifestyle of the second character (as a group of persons) in verses 3—9, their blasphemous words and inclination in verses 11—12 and their end in verses 17—20. These incomparable polarities are replete in every human society. According to Jiani Sun, the designation or association of these characters (the righteous and the wicked), a depiction of ethical behaviours and their corresponding outcomes, "is closely tied to human behaviors and the different results that these behaviors yield."³⁹ The oppressed in this Psalm is considered as the righteous and the oppressor(s) as the unrighteous. Here, readers come face-to-face with a contest for personal freedom and tranquillity and a usurped, arrogated right to oppression.

The one contesting to gain personal freedom from traumatic emotional oppression vis-à-vis an impoverished economic status, according to v. 13, is a צַדִּיק (*ṣadîq*): a just and righteous person, in the right and innocent, and one whose

³⁶ Jim Sidanius and F. Pratto, *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; first paper ed., 2001), 61. These authors, themselves psychologists, use the theory of social dominance for the study. The theory argues that "the major forms of intergroup conflict, such as racism, classism, and patriarchy, all derive from the basic human predisposition to form and maintain hierarchical and group-based systems of social organization."

³⁷ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 121.

³⁸ Moskala, "Psalm 73," 158.

³⁹ Jiani Sun, "Flowers of Evil: Constructing the Wicked in Wisdom of Solomon," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 31/2 (2021): 110.

conduct is examined and found to be faultless. The other contesting to maintain the status quo of the right to oppression is the רְשָׁעִים (*rēšā'im*), the wicked, evil ones, the ones who are guilty. This word is repeated twice here (vv. 3, 12). Who is the oppressed and the oppressor within the context of this psalm? Are both characters fellow Israelites or is one an Israelite but the other a foreigner(s)? The unveiling of their identity is essential to our re-reading Ps 73 in the Nigerian context of massive multiple oppression. This will further help to show the resonance of the psalm with the Nigerian condition.

1 The Oppressor in Ps 73

The identity of the רְשָׁעִים (*rēšā'im*), the wicked/evil ones, is crucial to determining the motivating factors for their behavioural and senseless oppression of the innocent. The wicked and evil (oppressing) ones are either fellow Israelites or foreign Gentiles. Smith explains two possibilities as mentioned by the psalmist:

The terms ‘righteous’ and ‘wicked’ (*resha'im*) have often been taken to indicate two ‘parties’ among the Jews, the righteous being obedient to the law, and the wicked being the ungodly or worldly-minded. But as a rule, the terms point to national antagonists (Gentiles). The *resha'im* in the psalms do not signify any group of men, but all those who act as enemies of the worshipper. They could be national enemies of the worshipper. They could be national enemies or treacherous countrymen, but usually they are national enemies of Israel or ‘the ‘heathen’ oppressors and their helpers within Israel. In Psalm 73 they may refer to pagan overlords or even fellow apostate Jews.⁴⁰

While it is possible that the wicked ones in this psalm are foreign interlopers (vv. 10–11), the literary rhythm and pulse of the text favours apostate Jews because of the mere absence of any of the nations mentioned. The testifier speaks from first-hand experience using first-person personal pronouns “I,” “me” and “my,” strongly indicating that the wicked ones are members of the same Israelite society/community as the traumatised complainant.

The oppressed envied the lifestyle of the rich oppressors רְשָׁעִים (*rēšā'im*), the wicked/evil one, because this person observed them from a close range as an almost daily routine. The phrase in verse 3, שְׁלוֹם רְשָׁעִים אָרְאָה (*š'elōm rēšā'im 'ere'eh*), variously translated as, “when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (ESV, JPS, NIV, NKJV), “I saw the wicked at ease” (TNK) and “when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness” (NLT) indicates this idea.

The descriptive terms assigned to the behavioural characteristics of the הוֹלָלִים, variously translated as the “arrogant” (ASV, CJB, ESV, JPS, NASV, NIV, NJB, NRSV), “proud” (NET), “boastful” (NJKV), “wanton” (TNK) and the רְשָׁעִים (wicked/evil) ones also suggest that they were living in the land together

⁴⁰ Smith, “A Crisis in Faith,” 171.

with the traumatised complainant. They are physiologically robust without the experience of suffering from the frailties, adversities, diseases, and toilsome labour that are the normal struggles and burdens common to humanity, especially the poor and needy (vv. 4–5). Due to their affluence and their inability to comprehend the pains of lack and infesting poverty given their lack of personal experience, arrogance becomes their lifestyle. They are spiteful, callous, scoffers, malicious and insatiably possessive (vv. 6–8, 12); although they had opted out for "an easy way of life devoid of moral and religious scruples,"⁴¹ things still worked out well for them.

To further confirm their likely identity as fellow Israelites, they possess the knowledge of God but their callous mind makes them blaspheme by discrediting the divine knowledge and discounting reverence due his holiness (vv. 9, 11). Ross states that because of such blasphemy, they become consumed by presumptuous self-confidence.⁴² The preceding discussion is indicative that these Israelites became irreligious brutes on account of their material possessions, at the expense of love for their neighbour. Such theological blindness serves as the causation for their trampling the poor and needy in society against the principles of the Decalogue and their Deuteronomistic obligations. Thus, the hitherto envious complainant in this psalm, according to Brueggemann, makes a shrewd economic analytical critique of the affluent, self-indulgent, cynical, well-off, and autonomous people who do not subscribe to the tradition of moral responsibility but conclude that the source of their wealth and comfort is violence and oppression.⁴³

2 The Oppressed in Ps 73

When we appropriately identify the oppressed in the psalm, we can decipher the implication of oppression in human society relating it to its Nigerian context. We saw previously that Ps 73 is both a personal lamentation and a testimonial. The self-blame and self-pity expressed in verse 13 and the presence of the lamenting Israelite in Yahweh's sanctuary in verse 17 are an affirmation of the victim's citizenship in Israel. As one who expects God's blessing to fall on the righteous,⁴⁴ the psalmist was so emotionally oppressed and tortured that he got to the point of religious despair and disenfranchisement.

In Israelite conceptual understanding, illness and early death were perceived as divine retribution for sin, evil and wickedness. Enigmatically, however, the psalmist observed that the perpetrators of morally reprehensible acts are comfortable, live in affluence, doubt the divine knowledge of cosmic

⁴¹ Allen, "Book Three," 606.

⁴² Ross, "Psalms," 847.

⁴³ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 117–118.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, 116, Spangenberg, "Psalm 73," 161.

activities and have no fear of any danger or punishment.⁴⁵ A scholarly opinion submits that "the psalmist's distress is made even more bitter because of the resentment he has at seeing the ungodly prosper while the righteous are plagued. He has come to doubt any sense of righteousness in God's sovereignty of the world and even any use in trying to live a godly life."⁴⁶ Commitment to morality and a faithful and meticulous adherence to religious ethics appears senseless to the psalmist in his condition. Wendland says this thought increases the psalmist's mental anguish, physical affliction and doubts about the justice of God.⁴⁷

However, "Reason alone could not solve the psalmist's dilemma or quiet his doubts; a religious experience in God's *sanctuary* provided him with an answer."⁴⁸ The revelation this victim received from Yahweh in his sanctuary about the temporal state of the wicked reveals his theological myopicism about life (v. 22). It is an existential truism for the psalmist, and for many religious people today, that it is an irreconcilable contradiction that the people who oppose God are better off than those who trust and obey him. As the experience of the psalmist indicates here, "Life can be very difficult for the godly. At times they seem to get nowhere and are provoked to anger and jealousy."⁴⁹

Yet the philosophical-theological conclusion about the irony of life is this: life is what it is; therefore, we must take life as it comes. This conviction aligns with the theological conviction of faith noticeable in the lament psalms. Despite the experiences of the pain of betrayal, despair and the feeling of apparent abandonment and surprise, the expression of such psalms, as Walter Brueggemann notes,

. . . is an act of bold faith . . . because it insists that the world must be experienced as it really is and not in some pretended way. . . it is bold because it insists that all such experiences of disorder are a proper subject for discourse with God. There is nothing out of bounds, nothing precluded or inappropriate. Everything properly belongs in this conversation of the heart. To withhold parts of life from that conversation is in fact to withhold part of life from the sovereignty of God . . . everything must be brought to speech, and everything brought to speech must be addressed to God, who is the final reference for all of life.⁵⁰

According to Ross, Asaph confesses that the divine revelation about life enables the victim to keep a proper perspective about life and wealth.⁵¹ The wicked and

⁴⁵ Berlin and Brettler, "Psalms," 1362.

⁴⁶ Smith, "A Crisis in Faith," 171.

⁴⁷ Wendland, "Introit 'into the Sanctuary of God'," 128.

⁴⁸ Berlin and Brettler, "Psalms," 1362.

⁴⁹ VanGemeren, *Psalms: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, n. p.

⁵⁰ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 52.

⁵¹ Ross, "Psalms," 847.

evil ones, despite the wealth they amass and their life of affluence, and despite their violence to society, would end abruptly in misery (verses 18–20).

Consequently, such divine disclosure reinforces the religious character and rekindled cultic fervour in the hitherto agonising, complaining and disenfranchised victim of societal oppression (vv. 23–28, 1). The sanctuary encounter "freed the speaker from the mesmerizing evidence so close at heart."⁵² Clearly, "It is only in the context of the sanctuary, of worship, that the psalmist comes to the realization that his previous envy of the unrighteous was misguided."⁵³ As VanGemeren puts the sanctuary engulfing experience,

Overwhelmed by the greatness, glory, and majesty of God, the psalmist regained a proper perspective on his situation. He rediscovered something he had known but had forgotten: the Lord is just! In the end evil is not and never will be victorious. The wicked will be severely judged."⁵⁴

Ritual experience always has an impact. It is correctly argued that in an atmosphere of true worship, the permeating wonders and grace of God are experienced. In such a context, God usually reveals himself as Sovereign judge and Saviour, "to prompt His people's praise, warn against infidelity and assure the oppressed of vindication."⁵⁵ The resolve to make the Sovereign Lord one's refuge provides solace (v. 28).

The lamenting psalmist finally comes away with the theological lesson to the effect that the boastful and robust living of the wicked oppressor will end only in becoming pernicious to them. Although the wicked live in affluence, look successful, are robust and are care free, disaster will overtake them as ruin comes upon them suddenly.⁵⁶ The psalmist concludes from the discovery in the sanctuary that the satisfactory good life is neither conditioned by material factors nor actualised on materialistic premises. Rather, the vitality of the good life is when one continues to find in God the source of spiritual life.⁵⁷ Ill-gotten wealth is not to be envied after all. One should rather maintain one's place in life and wait patiently for divine timing and provision which comes with it his blessings.

E PSLAM 73 AND THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

The psalms become meaningful as every generation of the community of faith easily relates to it. More poignant is its inherent "universal language,"⁵⁸ as readers

⁵² Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 119.

⁵³ Lapsley, "'Bring on Your Wrecking Ball,'" 65.

⁵⁴ VanGemeren, *Psalms: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, n. p.

⁵⁵ Allen, "Book Three: Psalms 73–89", 606.

⁵⁶ Berlin and Brettler, "Psalms," 1362.

⁵⁷ Allen, "Book Three: Psalms 73–89," 606.

⁵⁸ Gavin Michal, "Exploring Rabbinic Approaches," 87.

in every generation discover that their doubts and despair are displaced by the hope, encouragement, courage and strength they find in them. Thus, the semblances of Ps 73 are found in contemporary Nigerian context. Jiří Moskala is right to say that we, like the Psalmist, also have a tendency to question God's justice in the face of oppression.⁵⁹

The Nigerian trajectory indicates that the seed of oppression was initially planted, nurtured and facilitated by the British colonial masters when they forcefully amalgamated⁶⁰ the northern and southern protectorates to form the country now called Nigeria. This was insensitively motivated by socio-political and socio-economic benefits. Such an erroneous action arrogated power to northern supremacy, which since then has ceaselessly motivated the north, particularly the politico-religiously subsumed Muslim Hausa-Fulani extraction, to exert its hegemony on every facet of the country.⁶¹

Northern Nigeria (the "Core North") has consistently claimed the right to political supremacy over the Nigerian state because of this grave politico-historical error committed by the British colonial masters. The tainted legacy⁶² is fundamentally the historical root of the many issues of social, political, economic, ethnotribal/regional and religious oppression that the country has been battling. The aching lamentation of the oppressed person in Ps 73 readily resonates with such oppressive behavioural potholes in the Nigerian experience.

Oppression itself is the inhumane act of marginalising and subjecting an individual or group of persons under the hegemony of another powerful individual or group of persons. Seen this way, it is a denial of justice and the deprivation of one's fundamental right to freedom in a free human space.

⁵⁹ Moskala, "Psalm 73," 153.

⁶⁰ The conceptual understanding of the term *amalgamation* within the Nigerian context refers specifically to the unification of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in January 1914 by Sir Frederick Lugard, a British colonial administrator who himself became the colony's first governor general from 1914 to 1919, when he retired. To achieve the British colonial and political administrative interest, Sir Frederick Lugard, after the amalgamation, "felt it necessary to set up a 36-member advisory council to assist the colonial governor. The council included British colonial representatives (the governor, members of his executive council, residents, secretaries, and nongovernmental Britons). It also included six Nigerian chiefs and Nigerian representatives from Lagos, Calabar, and Benin. The chiefs rarely attended the meetings due to a lack of interest. It was officially disbanded in 1922 by the Clifford Constitution and replaced by the Legislative Council." See Toyin Falola and Ann Genova, *Historical Dictionary of Nigeria* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2009), 34, 213, 255.

⁶¹ Fr. Matthew Hassan Kuka, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1993; repr., 2011), x.

⁶² Yusufu Turaki, *Tainted Legacy: Islam, Colonialism and Slavery in Northern Nigeria* (McLean: Isaac Publishing, 2010).

Undoubtedly, the purpose of oppression is the deprivation of human rights, abuse of human dignity and the disturbance of the comfort of another to achieve dominance and control against the principle of the universal law of justice, equity and fairness. The universal law was intentionally set in place for humanity's good. It is basically, according to Amunnadi and Ezeugwu, to embrace political, cultural, social, ethical and economic dynamics that should moderate personal, inter-personal, inter-group as well as international relations.⁶³

Suffering trauma inflicted by orchestrated oppression in whatever form—physical, psychological, or emotional—is not only shocking but has become an anthropological malady.⁶⁴ The perpetrating oppressors of such nefarious malady are rather described as rapacious profiteers⁶⁵ for their derivable feasting benefits. They denounce social norms and exhibit social vices and unbridled lustful passions.⁶⁶

1 Economic Oppression

The rising level of economic impoverishment of most Nigerians today is perplexingly frightening and suffocating. Such condition not only distorts one's sense of judgement but also paralyses one's intellectual capacity of right thinking and productive action. Amunnadi and Ezeugwu state that poverty in Nigeria is caused by the forces of structural injustices, oppression and greed.⁶⁷ Oil bunkering and kidnapping have become lucrative businesses in Nigeria today. While personal selfishness and greed unarguably serve as the primary motivating factor, this misnomer has produced economic oppression, whereby the majority of citizens are impoverished while a microscopic few live in affluence via oppression.

The Nigerian case is an unfortunate paradox—a country that is exceedingly rich in human intelligence (and in both human and material resources such as oil, minerals, arable land fertile for agricultural activities, homogeneous ethnographic composition that should serve for national bonding and hydrological resource) is now caged in escalating poverty.⁶⁸ This is an intentional act orchestrated by the rich and politically powerful to their egocentric advantage. Government officials steal public funds and stack them

⁶³ Chukwudi Amunnadi and E.C. Ezeugwu, "Bridging the Gap of Poverty in Modern Nigeria Society: The Biblical Platform," *Icheke Journal of the Faculty of Humanities* 17/2 (2019): 24, www.ichekejournal.com.

⁶⁴ Reuben Ishaya Chuga, "Theology as Participation in a Situation of Conflict and Suffering in Africa," in *BETFA, Journal of Ogbomosho Circle*, Special Issue Numbers 5 & 6 (2006/2007): 24.

⁶⁵ Lapsley, "Bring on Your Wrecking Ball," 63.

⁶⁶ Sun, "Flowers of Evil," 110.

⁶⁷ Amunnadi and Ezeugwu, "Bridging the Gap of Poverty," 24.

⁶⁸ Toyin Falola and M.M. Heaton, "Back Comment," in *A History of Nigeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

away in foreign banks; some also hide theirs in soakaways/sewages, in dug trenches on their farmlands, in overhead water tanks and in secured rooms. Imposed poverty orchestrated by economic oppression is usually confronted by unpalatable reactions. As Attahiru Jega correctly observes, because,

. . . the socioeconomic conditions of the majority of the people have not changed for the better . . . The masses, especially in urban areas, take out their anger with the hopeless socioeconomic situation on their well-to-do neighbors . . . Youth's anger arising from unfulfilled promises, shattered expectations, unemployment and poverty, finds expression, often in the violent ethno-religious conflicts . . . and criminal activities, such as armed robbery, cultism, extortion and fraud.⁶⁹

The psalmist also finds himself in a similar context of frustration, as Spangenberg notes. The psalmist notices that although *impious folks* in his society are wealthy, their bodies are in perfect condition, well nourished, without cares, unlike other people, they do not use their wealth to alleviate others' misfortunes, instead, oppressing them and imposing their will on them.⁷⁰ Yet such ostentatious behaviour is merely momentary; their end is misery and ruin. This is consoling. Oppressed Nigerians, and those of every human society, therefore, "By observing the losses of the wicked, [should learn] to shun injustice."⁷¹

2 Political Oppression

Oppressors possess certain tendencies. Due to their dipsomaniacal political addiction, they intimidate, frustrate, threaten, manipulate, dictate, coerce, and determine what goes on in the political corridor in society. They usually succeed with their scheming agenda because they have both the economic power and the political connection. Political evil is global. Jacqueline E. Lapsley describes what obtains in the American context: "The politicians and the wealthy steamroll whomever they can for their own gain by whatever means at their disposal—by the use of wealth itself, and by the manipulation of words, and the twisting of ideals."⁷² Their greed is their motivator. Osaji speaks to the Nigerian situation, where political parties fight one another, rig and manipulate elections, by using every machinery to take over power just as does a ruling party to remain in power.⁷³

There is no truly democratic process and experience in Nigeria. Jega admits painfully that democracy in the Nigerian context is something "much

⁶⁹ Attahiru M. Jega, *Democracy, Good Governance and Development in Nigeria: Critical Essays* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2007), 176.

⁷⁰ Spangenberg, "Psalm 73," 164.

⁷¹ Sun, "Flowers of evil," 120.

⁷² Lapsley, "'Bring on Your Wrecking Ball'," 63.

⁷³ Jacob Olasupo Osaji, "Religion, Peace and Security in Nigeria," *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* (IJOURLS) 6/2 (2016): 47.

talked about, greatly aspired, and strenuously struggled for . . . [but] Democracy has turned out to be a sort of a mirage. For almost half a century, Nigerians have been searching for democracy . . . [but] they have been continuously disappointed."⁷⁴ Unfortunately, Nigerian politics is based on personal greed finely dressed in the garment of regional, ethnotribal, and religious sentiments.⁷⁵ The northern hegemony, with its Islamic agenda, always seeks to dominate the political scene. Northern Nigerian politicians use domination, coercion and subversion to ensure that their favoured candidates, and not the candidates preferred by the people, are elected to government positions.

This is the political scenario in Nigeria—going to the polls is largely a mere kangaroo arrangement because the people’s votes do not count. Their votes are subverted and exchanged, candidates are imposed on the people and not elected by them, they are killed by the government security operatives for mere peaceful protests and justice is subverted in legal issues in favour of the oppressors. The “delegates” system of screening political aspirants in the primaries worsens the situation. These delegates are not free to express their democratic freedom; they are rather hijacked, manipulated, coerced and bought over to vote the candidate of the oppressors’ choice. They submit to economic pressure and manipulation to vote for the highest financial bidder. This is an easy escape route schemed by the politically impious because the open ballot method has been furiously resisted by the political oppressors. Such institutionalised scheme destroys democratic ideology and kills its spirit.

3 Sociological Oppression

It is apparent that every human society has certain status classifications such as middle and lower classes alongside the excessively rich and those who live in abject poverty. In an oppressive society, however, the divide is largely between the excessively rich and the extremely poor, the strong and powerful and the weak and voiceless. The former carefully structure society in this way so they can easily manipulate the latter to their benefit. The unfortunate divide is the existing unimaginably wide gulf of social discrimination between the two

⁷⁴ Jega, *Democracy, Good Governance and Development in Nigeria*, 22. Jega possesses the requisite qualifying credentials to address the Nigerian political topography as a professor of political science in Nigeria and as an amiable intellectual treasure of renown. He was Vice Chancellor of Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria; president of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) of Nigeria; Director, Centre for Democratic Research and Training; and the Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria.

⁷⁵ Nigeria is a country that prides itself of many ethnic groups with no less than 600 languages. But this, unfortunately, is to the nation’s disadvantage. The dogged effort by some to foster a protectionist agenda of their ethnicity is a threat that tends to promote mediocrity against excellence, thus, hindering economic prosperity. See Amunnadi and Ezeugwu, “Bridging the Gap of Poverty,” 25.

groups. Plotting the circumstantial denigration in society on such a sociological imbalance indicates the destructive power of the capacity of trauma to alter and restructure a person's social self-concept and self-worth.⁷⁶ This evil became pronounced in the north through the slave trade orchestrated by the Sokoto Caliphate, which "plundered the people of Northern Nigeria's Middle Belt because [it] needed them as agricultural workers, skilled workers, artisans and soldiers, and as a means of [economic benefits when they were exported] to the Sahara, North Africa and the Middle East."⁷⁷

It would appear that the situation of the Psalmist in Ps 73 was better than the situation in contemporary Nigeria. The "I" complaining psalmist though suffered emotional trauma on account of poverty, enjoyed human dignity. On the other hand, the "we" oppressed of Nigeria lose their human worth and dignity. In Nigeria, lower classes and economically impoverished people serve the higher classes in a system carefully created and orchestrated by the oppressive higher classes. They are used as domestic staff and sales slaves, with women being used as mere objects of sexual gratification. The oppressors, living in perpetual affluence, are "untroubled by the travails of regular human beings"⁷⁸ and therefore lack empathy for the oppressed.

While the vulnerably disparaged serve such economic and political oppressors, they themselves are not recognised in the public space neither are their contributions to the successes of their oppressors appreciated. This erodes their sense of dignity and self-worth, causing them to share the oppressors' low view of them. They take on the social identity given to them by their oppressors and make it their own, even if subconsciously.⁷⁹ Like the Psalmist, Nigerians can also be led to ask questions about God's justice and fairness in the face of such oppression.

4 Religious Oppression

Knut Holter is not far from the mark in describing the religious fragrance of Nigeria: "Religion is important in Nigeria, and the country as a whole functions as a multi-religious laboratory."⁸⁰ However, the religious terrain in contemporary Nigeria is gradually becoming more hostile. The stark illiteracy of adherents, along with uninformed or egocentric clerics, has led to an increase in fundamentalism, mainly between Islam and Christianity, as they struggle for

⁷⁶ Orla T. Muldoon et al., "The Social Psychology of Responses to Trauma: Social Identity Pathways Associated with Divergent Traumatic Responses," *European Review of Social Psychology* 30/1 (2019): 338. DOI: 10.1080/10463283.2020.1711628.

⁷⁷ Turaki, *Tainted Legacy*, 91.

⁷⁸ Lapsley, "'Bring on Your Wrecking Ball'," 64.

⁷⁹ Muldoon et al., "The Social Psychology of Responses to Trauma," 336.

⁸⁰ Knut Holter, "Pregnancy and Psalms: Aspects of the Healing Ministry of a Nigerian Prophet," *OTE* 27/2 (2014): 429.

dominance. While the religion of the cross aims at a peaceful conversion, the religion of the sword orchestrates forceful manipulative conversion. An impoverished knowledge of the latter religion easily leads to violence.

The Nigerian situation is not only unfortunate but also quite appalling. What appears a painful, irreconcilable enigma is the role of theodicy in the midst of it all. Like the psalmist, morally upright Nigerians observe, regarding these evil perpetrators, that

It is painful beyond words that they get away with their schemes. Instead of their selfish plans being crushed by God, as they should be, these evildoers succeed and prosper in their oppression, in their relentless violence and malevolent speech. Even death does not bring pain to them, as it does to regular folks.⁸¹

5 Psychological Oppression

The human mind is a dictator in the same way that the nervous system is to the entire human body. People who oppress others psychologically within human society capitalise on the disadvantaged, traumatised psyche of the other. Such perpetrators further injure either the individual or group victim by suggesting that they amount to nothing and whatever effort they make would also amount to nothing.

Psychological oppressors use the principle of trauma as their oppressive tool. When a person or a group (of persons) is psychologically traumatised, there is little they can do to liberate themselves. The paralysing, injurious effect is the experience of post-traumatic stress disorder. Left untreated as in the case of many helplessly traumatised Nigerians, it can become "severe and prolonged and interfere with social and/or occupational functioning."⁸² This aspect of oppression becomes cancerous to the effect that it paralyses every aspect of the persons' well-being, causing them to exist as merely living corpses.

Besides, those who oppress "others" psychologically leverage on their emotionally imbalanced condition to achieve their ends. They are aware that when one's emotional stability is altered, such a person becomes demoralised and therefore incapable of finding the mental and physical strength required to defend himself or herself. Quite accurately, "For those in situations such as these, life is simply not worth living any longer."⁸³

⁸¹ Lapsley, "'Bring on Your Wrecking Ball'," 54.

⁸² Muldoon et al., "The Social Psychology of Responses to Trauma," 315.

⁸³ Akper, "Is God in Nigeria?"

F CONCLUSION

Kuka's description of Nigerians, more pronounced in the northern part, that "Nigerians are almost by nature, accommodating and by habit, ecumenical,"⁸⁴ is correct. Even so, ethno-tribalistic and religious hegemonic tendencies have distorted such values. Oppression, in whatever form, is evil against humanity. It is dehumanising and disregards human value and dignity. The Nigerian condition projects only a hopeless, gloomy future. The oppressed in her, like the psalmist, when asked about their country, "can speak only of pain and suffering."⁸⁵ Indeed, "it appears the end to this [torturous traumatic discriminatory oppression] can only be more imagined than envisaged."⁸⁶

Such evil against humanity has far-reaching consequences. It dehumanises by defacing and humiliating one's self-worth; it enslaves by placing one perpetually under a disadvantaged condition; it dislodges one's self-pride, self-worth and dignity by creating the feeling of inferiority in the victim; it deprives by robbing one of personal and national productivity as the oppressed person suffers from psychological dysfunction of being regarded as a nonentity in society; and it negates a person's human right to freedom of existence and expression as well as to a comfortable and self-fulfilling life. Consequently, their hurtful experience easily serves as a breeding ground for generational anger, bitterness, malice, unforgiveness and vengeance by the progenies of the oppressed against those of the oppressors.

Nigerians appear to suffer a worse scenario than the psalmist of Ps 73 in view of their complex oppression indices and disregard for human worth and dignity. The latter merely suffers from emotional trauma for his low economic status while the former come under a perpetual political, economic, social, religious and psychological traumatic oppression. The psalmist found consolation and healing by entering the sanctuary but where will denigrated Nigerians find any succour? One only hopes these denigrated Nigerians will one day enter the sanctuary of deliverance like the psalmist to find relief. One also only hopes that they, as in the words of Apostle Paul, will find relief and have a blissful end in the eschatological age where the creator who identifies himself both as the God of all flesh as well as the God of justice will repudiate their oppressors and recompense their suffering (Jer 32:19, 27; Phil 4:15–18).

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⁸⁴ Kuka, *Religion, Politics and Power*, ix.

⁸⁵ Spangenberg, "Psalm 73," 166.

⁸⁶ Akper, "Is God in Nigeria?" 62.

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Rev. Prof. Joel Kamsen Tihitshak Biwul, ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS), Jos, Nigeria/Old and New Testament, Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa, biwul.joel@jets.edu.ng. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2727-4637>