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The Understanding and Relevance of the Book of Job in the context of
Igbo tradition and faith crisis.

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Table of contents

Contents

Table of contents	0
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	7
INTRODUCTION.....	8
METHODOLOGY AND APPROACHES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN AFRICA.....	13
PART I.....	20
CHAPTER ONE	20
NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN FAITH CRISIS	20
1.1 Meanings and definitions	20
1.2 EXISTENCE OF CRISIS IN NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS FAITH	21
1.3 MANIFESTATIONS OF NIGERIAN- AFRICAN CHRISTIAN CRISIS.....	23
1.3.1 RELAPSE TO TRADITIONAL AFRICAN RELIGION.....	23
1.3.2 SYNCRETISM.....	25
1.3.3 PROLIFERATION OF CHURCHES AND THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL.....	27
1.4 AN INSIGHT INTO THE STATUESQUE.....	30
1.4.1 POVERTY.....	31
1.4.2 VIOLENCE AND CONFLICTS	32
1.4.3 SICKNESS AND DISEASE	34
CHAPTER TWO	37
THE IGBO AFRICAN BELIEF SYSTEM AND WORLD VIEW.....	37
2.1 IGBO RELIGIOUS BELIEF SYSTEM	38
2.1.1 THE BELIEF IN A SUPREME BEING – CHUKWU.....	39

2.1.2 THE BELIEF IN DEITIES	41
2.1.3 BELIEF IN ANCESTORS	43
2.1.4 SACRIFICE.....	45
2.1.5 PRAYER AS AN INTEGRAL ASPECT OF IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGION.....	49
2.1.6 BELIEF IN CHARMS AND AMULETS.....	54
2.2.0 THE IGBO COSMOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL WORLD VIEW	56
2.2.1THE PLACE OF SUFFERING IN IGBO WORLD VIEW	58
2.2.2 THE NOTION OF LIFE AFTER DEATH IN THE TRADITIONAL IGBO WORLDVIEW	59
2.3 SOME IGBO MORAL PRINCIPLES.....	60
2.3.1 SACREDNESS OF LIFE	60
2.3.2 TRUTH.....	61
2.3.3 JUSTICE	61
2.3.4 INNOCENCE	61
2.3.5 MORAL LIVING	61
2.3.6 SOLIDARITY	62
2.3.7 HOSPITALITY	62
2.4 IGBO ANTHROPOLOGICAL WORLD VIEW	62
2.5 IGBO TRADITIONAL SOCIAL CLASSIFICATIONS.....	64
PART II	67
CHAPTER THREE.....	67
THEODICY: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF SUFFERING	67
3.1.1 THEODICY: TOWARDS A DEFINITION	67

3.1.2 KINDS OF EVIL	68
3.1.3 THEODICY: AN EXCURSES	69
3.2 THEODICY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: OLD TESTAMENT ANSWERS TO HUMAN SUFFERING	71
3.2.1 TRADITIONAL THESIS OF RETRIBUTION	72
3.2.2 COLLECTIVE SUFFERING	75
3.2.3 SUFFERING AS ABSURD	75
3.2.4 SUFFERING AS EDUCATIVE AND INSTRUCTIVE	76
3.2.5 EXEMPLARY SUFFERING	78
3.2.6 VICARIOUS OR SUBSTITUTED SUFFERING.....	78
3.2.7 ESCHATOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SUFFERING	79
3.2.8 ASSESSMENTS.....	80
3.3 NEW TESTAMENT RESPONSE TO SUFFERING	81
3.3.1 RETRIBUTION.....	83
3.3.2 MYSTERIOUS, EDUCATIVE AND DISCIPLINARY	85
3.3.3 VICARIOUS	85
3.3.4 ESCHATOLOGICAL.....	86
3.4. THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ATTEMPTS AT THEODICY	87
3.4.1 EVIL AS ABSENCE OF GOOD (privatio boni)	88
3.4.2 MORALISATION OF EVIL	90
3.4.3 ARGUMENT FROM HARMONY AND ORDER.....	90
3.4.4 SUFFERING AS LEARNING AND TRAINING PROCESS	93
3.4.5 SOUL MAKING THEODICY	93
3.4.6 AESTHETIC RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL.....	94
3.4.7. RESPONSE FROM LIFE AND NATURE	95

3.4.8 OTHER OPINIONS.....	95
3.4.9 THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH.....	99
3.4.10. THE SUFFERING GOD THEODICY	100
3.4.11. ANAMNESTIC THEOLOGY: QUESTIONING GOD OR OPEN QUESTION ON GOD (Rückfrage an Gott)	102
CHAPTER FOUR.....	107
THE BOOK OF JOB.....	107
4.0 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK.....	107
4.1 ORIGIN AND MODELS OF INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF JOB	108
4.1.1 ONE PERON AUTHORSHIP.....	108
4.1.2 MANY AUTHORS MODEL: DIACHRONIC.....	109
4.1.3 MANY AUTHORS MODEL: SYNCHRONIC.....	112
4.1.4 ALLEGORICAL MODEL.....	112
4.1.5 CONTEXTUALIZATION MODEL	113
4.2 THE BOOK OF JOB: CLARIFICATIONS	115
4.2.1 THE BOOK OF JOB: FACTS OR FICTION.....	115
4.2.2 THE LAND UZ	115
4.2.3 THE NAME JOB.....	115
4.2.4 PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF JOB.....	116
4.3 THE STORY: AN ANALYSIS	117
4.4. THEODICY IN THE BOOK OF JOB	123
4.4.1 SUFFERING AS A RESULT OF SIN- DOCTRINE OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION	124
4.4.2 SUFFERING AS ONTOLOGICALLY BELONGING TO NATURE OF MAN AS A CREATED BEING	126

4.4.3 SUFFERING AS A FORM OF GOD’S TRAINING AND UPBRINGING	126
4.4.4 SUFFERING AS A TEST OF FAITH	127
4.4.5 ASSESSMENTS.....	128
4.5. THEOLOGIES OF THE FRIENDS OF JOB	128
4.5.1 ELIPHAZ’S THEOLOGY: HIERARCHY, JUSTICE AND MERCY	128
4.5.2 BILDAD’S THEOLOGY: JUSTICE AND HIERARCHY	129
4.5.3 ZOPHAR: SAPIENTIAL THEOLOGY	130
4.5.3 ASSESSMENTS.....	131
4.6 JOB’S JOURNEY FROM LAMENTATION TO OATH TAKING	132
4.6.1 LAMENTATION	133
4.6.2 HYPOTHETICAL AND IMMAGINATIVE THINKING	138
4.6.3 JOB’S VIEW OF JUSTICE	140
4.6.4 JOB’S TWO SETS OF OATH.....	141
4.6.5 LEGAL METAPHOR.....	144
4.6.6 JOB’S THEOLOGY	145
4.7 ELIHU: THEOLOGY OF THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE GOD.....	146
4.8 THE THOLOGY OF GOD IN THE BOOK OF JOB	146
4.9.1 THE EPILOGUE: JOB’S INTERSESSION.....	151
4.9.2 THE SOLIDARITY	151
PART III.....	154
CHAPTER FIVE.....	154
THE BOOK OF JOB: ITS UNDERSTANDING AND MESSAGE IN IGBO AFRICAN CONTEXT AND FAITH CRISIS	154
5.1 MODEL OF INTERPRETATION FOR THE SIMPLE NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS	154

5.2 THE BOOK OF JOB IN IGBO AFRICAN CONTEXT	155
5.2.1 AFRICAN SCENE OF THE PROLOGUE.....	155
5.2.2 OATH TAKING	155
5.2.3 LAMENTATION OF JOB AS IJU OGU	156
5.2.4 CAUSES OF SUFFERING	157
5.2.5 NATURE AND ANIMALS	158
5.2.6 SACRIFICE.....	159
5.2.7 SOLIDARITY	159
5.3 MESSAGE OFBOOK OF JOB TO THE IGBO NIGERIAN FAITH CRISIS	159
5.3.1 THE BOOK OF JOB AND POVERTY	160
5.3.2 HUMAN LIMITATION AND THE INEXPLICABILITY OF SUFFERING .	162
5.3.4 THE INTRIGUES OF SATAN AND THE SEARCH FOR “WHO” IN SUFFERING	162
5.3.5 EXPRESSION OF HURT AND SEARCH FOR REDEMPTIVE WAYS TO OVERCOME OPPRESSION	163
5.3.6 THE NIGERIAN/ AFRICAN CHURCH	164
BIBLIOGRAPHY	165
ABSTRACT.....	169
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	171

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INTRODUCTION

Adrian Hasting, one of the most knowledgeable experts on the history of African Christianity named Igbo land of Nigeria as one of the four areas where Catholic church experienced extraordinary growth (other areas are : Masaka in Uganda, Peramiho in Tanzania, Dahomey – today’s Benin)¹. The Igbo nation is located in the southern eastern part of Nigeria and the people inhabit a total area of about 16.000 square miles.² This area can be located in the world map between 50 and 70 latitudes north of the Equator and between 60 and 80 longitudes east of Greenwich line.³ Majority of the Igbo people are Christians.

The first Christian missionaries set their feet on Igbo soil around a hundred and forty four years ago. The first were the Anglican missionaries who came in the year 1857. The catholic missionaries came later in the year 1885.⁴ The success of these missionaries in “Christianizing” Igbo land speaks for itself till today, especially in the population of Christians and number of the clergy and religious men and women. However, it is also true that the Church in Igbo land – Nigeria in particular, and in Africa in general is experiencing difficulty; what has been described as “crisis of faith and identity”. This crisis borders on the search for a practical solution to the existential life situations of the Nigerian and African Christians. In other words, this crisis is not unconnected with the socio, político, economic and religious situation of the people; the “undeserved” suffering they are undergoing and their belief that God rewards uprightness and punishes evil; or better expressed, God should reward uprightness and should punish evil.

In the course of the years this crisis has expressed itself in different attitudes of Nigerian Christians, ranging from total relapse of some Christians back to the traditional African religious practices, (especially in the early days of evangelization because they saw it as

¹ A. HASTINGS, Church and Mission in Modern Africa, in: L. DOERR (ed.), Peramiho 1898- 1998. In the service of the Missionary Church, Ndanda – Peramiho 1998, 1.

² Francis A. ARINZE, Sacrifice in Igbo Religion, in: Raphael EGWU, Igbo Idea of the Supreme Being and the Triune God, Würzburg 1998, 13. (Subsequently as: R. EGWU Igbo Idea of the Supreme Being).

³ Edmund ILOGU, Christianity and Igbo culture, in: R. EGWU, Igbo Idea of the Supreme Being, 13ff.

⁴ Francis A. ARINZE, in: R. EGWU, Igbo Idea of Supreme Being, 8. Comp. E. METU, God and Man in African Religion, 10.

more practical to their life situation), to a form of syncretism, where Christians combine both practices of Christian religion and that of African traditional religion. Today, this crisis gives itself expression most especially in the proliferation of churches and the booming of a kind of gospel that has been characterized as the “gospel of prosperity”- .The founders of these churches promise their followers not only spiritual fulfillment but above all material well being and fulfillment. Most of them propound and propagate the theory, that material well being is what God guarantees his children and is a sign that man enjoys God’s friendship and is at peace with him. In this situation and environment, many true Christians, who are experiencing great difficulty are perplexed, bewildered and disenchanted. They do not understand why this is the case, giving to the promises of the bible as interpreted by these preachers of prosperity. Their interpretation in this case seems not to be at odds with the core belief of the traditional Igbo African religion and culture which strongly favours retributive justice.

The belief in retributive justice is rooted in Igbo traditional and religious milieu long before the coming of the missionaries and the advent of Christianity. The ancient Igbos had long believed that evil brought evil and good brought good. They believed that this was the law of nature and the law *Chukwu*, the great God and maker of heaven and earth had enshrined into the core of existence itself.

A typical traditional Igbo man is “notoriously religious”. Religion permeates every aspect of his life: social, economic, political, cultural and otherwise. He sees reality not as a sundering between physical and spiritual, visible and invisible, sacred and profane. He rather sees reality as one whole entity with its different forces intersecting, interacting intermingling, co- existing and complementing one another. Ill-health, epidemic and natural disasters are seen as anthropological or cosmic disorder. In such situations, the traditional Igbo man seeks for the causes of the disorder. He does this through the consultation of diviners or fortune tellers. When he finds out the cause of the disharmony in his environment, and the diviners has ascertained that he or any member of his community consciously or unconsciously has gone against any of the ordinances of nature and of the gods, he moves forward to appease the gods through sacrifices and rituals. Through these sacrifices he seeks to bring back harmony in his life and environment. It is the belief of a traditional Igbo man that when he has fulfilled all his obligations and duties, the gods owe

it to him as a duty to protect him. History has shown that when these gods failed to perform their own duty, they were most times discarded or even destroyed. “May the spirits not cheat human beings, and let the men not cheat the spirit” is a popular proverb in Igbo land. At a time of unexplainable affliction and distress, the traditional Igbo man protests his innocence through “*iju ogu*” (*itu ogu*)

Coming from this background, the Igbo Africans were presented at the time of the evangelization with an Omnipotent and All benevolent God who never overlooked the needs of his children (Mt.6: 25-34). They learnt that the covenant of God with the Israel set two ways before the people – life through obedience and death through disobedience (Lv.26; Dt.27- 30). Put simply you reap what you sow (Gal 6: 7, Ps.34: 11-22). This idea of reaping what you sow is not alien to their traditional set up so without much hesitation, they embraced the religion of Christianity.

Today, the issue of what is regarded as “undeserved” suffering of the innocent and upright borders Nigerian and indeed African Christians on a very high level and shakes the foundation of their Christian faith. They ask: What is the theological explanation of the “undeserved” suffering of the just and innocent like death of children, children orphaned at a very early age, sickness, poverty, exploitation, wars etc? Can the Christian God not protect his children from evil forces and evil men whose main motif is to inflict pains and suffering on God’s children? What is the place of an omnipotent and all good God in the face of the suffering of the people?

Questions like these, in the words of Ludger Schwiienhorst –Schönberger, are questions of theodicy.

God’s Goodness and Omnipotence seems to contradict our experience. We experience Evil and wickedness, be it those caused by humans, or those not caused by them (moral and non moral evil – malum morale et malum physicum): natural disaster, diseases and sickness, violence, war. These and similar experiences can lead to the denial of God, to atheism (mine translation)⁵

⁵ L. SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, Ein weg durch das Leid. Die Theodizeefrage Im Alten Testament, in :M. BÖHNKE, et al(eds.), Leid erfahren – Sinn suchen . Das Problem der Theodizee, Freiburg. Basel. Wien 2007, 7. (vgl. Gottes Güte und Allmacht scheinen unserer Erfahrung zu widersprechen. Wir erfahren Unheil und Böses, sei es von Menschen verschuldet, sei es von ihnen unverschuldet (moralisches und nicht- moralisches Übel – malum morale et malum pysicum): Naturkatastrophen, Kankheiten, Verbrechen, Krieg. Solche und ähnliche Erfahrungen können zur Leugnung Gottes, zum Atheismus führen).

Jean Mark Ela rightly observes that, for the Africans, “Whenever fatalism and all the mechanism of poverty and Oppression shut the door on hope, God is on trial.”⁶

The background and bed rock of the Igbo Nigerian Christian faith crisis - the belief that God should reward good and punish evil, which is also contained in their traditional retributive justice system, is similar to the dogma of divine retribution, which according to the opinion of most scholars, is the central theme of the Book of Job. As Gregory Parson stated,

... The purpose of the Book of Job is to show that the proper relationship between God and man is based solely on the sovereign grace of God and man’s response of faith and submissive trust. This involves (in a negative fashion) the refutation of “retribution theology”; a dogmatic employment of the concept of divine retribution so that there was an automatic connection between deed and state of being...⁷

In the Book of Job, the loop holes, deficiencies, and non- universal of the in ancient Israel prevalent traditional theology of divine retribution – the belief that riches and health on one side, and poverty and sickness on the other hand are what God decrees for those who live virtuously and unvirtuously, are exposed. The excruciating pains and suffering underwent by the virtuous Job was a contradiction to the theology propagated by his friends Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar of a God who rewarded the righteous and punished the wicked. This theology has been termed the “theology of the natural man”⁸ Job’s suffering then is a “prototype” of the inexplicable human suffering, which confronts every human in one way or the other, in his existence on earth and as a participant in the universal humanity.⁹ Job saw himself as a figurative image of all the people of the earth who are unjustly and undeservedly experiencing pains and sufferings. As Schwienhorst – Schönberger stated, “The Book of Job is not all about the suffering of a person. The suffering Job sees in his

⁶ J. ELA, *My faith as an African*, New York 1988, 102.

⁷ G. W. PARSONS, *The structure and purpose of the Book of Job*, in: Roy B. ZUCK (ed.), *Sitting with Job. Selected studies on the Book of Job*, Michigan 1991, 22f.

⁸ PREUSS, *Jahwes Antwort an Hiob*, in: METTINGER, Tryggve N. D., *The God of Job: Avenger, tyrant, or victor?*, in: PERDUE, Leo, G., GILPIN, Clark W. (eds.), *The voice from the whirlwind. Interpreting the Book of Job*, Nashville 1999, 41.

⁹ L. SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, *Ein Weg durch das Leid. Das Buch Ijob*, Freiburg- Basel- Wien 2007, 80. (vgl. ... in Ijobs Not etwas sichtbar wird, was jedem Menschen, der sein Leben annimmt, in dieser oder jener Form bevorsteht)

suffering the suffering of the world”¹⁰ (trans. Mine). Job questions God on their behalf and threatens to take God to court. Only what Job wants is an answer from God and only the voice from the whirlwind can bring Job to his kneel and he declares the case (Auseinandersetzung) as ended. “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42: 5-6)

The basic investigation of this work is to ascertain of what relevant the Book of Job and the answer giving by the voice from the whirlwind is to the Igbo Nigerian Christian crisis, and what an insight it gives to the understanding and handling of the crisis. Taken into account his cultural milieu, how will an Igbo Christian at best appreciate the Book of Job? The questions that the work would be handling are no doubts those of theodicy in its African version, formulated from African world view, as it concerns the Igbo Africans of Nigeria. Any attempt at a solution or answer must of necessity take into consideration the peculiarity of the African background that poses these questions; the world view from which these questions are formulated.

This work will be divided into three sections made up of five chapters. Section one is made up of chapter one and two. Chapter one will analyze the nature and manifestations of the Igbo and indeed Nigerian Christian faith crisis. When we say Igbo Christian faith crisis, it implies Nigerian Christian faith crisis in particular and that of Africa in general. The crisis and the world view are similar. We emphasis Igbo Christians because it is their cultural background that would be analyzed. In the second chapter, attempt would be made to x-ray and expose the Igbo traditional and religious world view and settings. The religious, cosmological and metaphysical, the moral and anthropological Igbo world view, and Igbo social classifications will be systematically analyzed. This would help to ascertain how an in Igbo in his cultural milieu would best appreciate the Book of Job. It will also help to shade more light on the traditional setting of the Christian faith crisis, those traditional and religious worldviews (weltanschauung) that inform the crisis. As A. E. Afigbo rightly

¹⁰ Ibid, 138. (vgl. Im Ijobbuch kommt nicht nur das Leid eines Einzelnen zu Wort. Der Leidende Ijob sieht in seinem Leid das Leid der Welt.)

observed, “a substantial amount of indigenous belief systems and life styles continues to survive in the core of modern African life.”¹¹

The second section is made up of chapter three and four. They are basically biblical and theological. The third chapter will be an attempt to understand the views of the Old Testament and New Testament about suffering and a reflection of some theological and philosophical view points on the issue of Theodicy. Chapter four is the analysis of the Book of Job and different theologies in therein. It is a major part of this work. The Book of Job will be analyzed with the aim of ascertaining what deep messages the book is to offer on the issue of pains and suffering in a world created by God. Some major features of the Book of Job will be discussed. Attempts will be made to analyze different theologies and aspects of theodicy in the Book of Job. Chapter five will constitute the third section of this work. In this chapter I will analyze what relevance the Book of Job will have to the faith situation of Nigerian Christians and how best the Book of Job will be appreciated in the Igbo cultural and tradition setting.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACHES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN AFRICA

It is most relevant that I discuss the development of biblical interpretation in Africa and the different interpretative approaches there are. This I do in order to properly situate my work in a broad spectrum of biblical interpretations in Africa.

The earliest attempt of a systematic biblical interpretation in Christianity is traceable to Africa, to the city of Alexandria and such names as Clement of Alexandria, Origen and others who lived and worked there (Trigg. 1988: 21 -23).¹² Africa therefore can rightly be referred to as the cradle of systematic biblical interpretation in Christianity. The method of

¹¹ A. E. AFIGBO, *Social development in Nigeria. A survey of policy and research*, Ibadan 1982, 27.

¹² J. S. UKPONG, *Developments in Biblical interpretations in Africa. Historical and hermeneutic directions*, in: WEST, Gerald O./ DUBE, Musa W.(eds.), *The Bible in Africa. Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Leiden. Boston. Köln 2000, 11.

interpretation which was then used - the allegorical method, which in modern sense is uncritical, has long been replaced by other approaches.

Modern biblical interpretation is mainly grouped into three approaches:

First, the historical critical approach, which focuses on the background and history of the text, its author and original audience.

Second, there are the literary approaches. These approaches focus on the text and its underlying structure. The literary approaches try to discover the meaning of the text by decoding the text. The meaning of the text is discovered in the encounter and interaction between the reader and the text.

The third approach is the contextual approach. This approach focuses on the context of the reader in relation to the text. The reader's context is put into consideration in order to discover what meaning and relevance the text has for the reader. Arguably, almost all the approaches of modern African biblical interpretations, including this work, fall into this third approach.

An African biblical scholar, Justine S. Ukpong has distinguished three phases in the biblical development in Africa.¹³ Though the different phases are not in themselves exclusive, the classification provides a thematic understanding of the progressive changes in biblical interpretation in Africa.

The first phase is what he called the "reactive and apologetic phase" (1930s- 70). This approach was a response to a widespread condemnation of African religion and culture by the Christian missionaries of the 19th and 20th centuries. In response to this mis-judgment, some Westerners who were sympathetic to the African course, and later on Africans themselves undertook researches and sought to legitimize African religion and culture. The studies took the form of comparative studies carried out within the framework of comparative religion. It tries to show continuity between the religious culture of African and the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. Although this Approach has been criticized in the sense that ancient Israel and contemporary Africa are far apart in both space and time, the studies justifies itself in the sense that only existential and not essential

¹³ Ibid. (His article deals extensively on this issue)

continuities are sought. The major contribution of this approach is that African traditional religion came to be seen as “Africa’s Old Testament”. African biblical interpretation has long developed from this phase to another phase.

In the second phase, two main approaches were dominant: Inculturation and Liberation theologies. Inculturation theology was the child of the desire to make Christianity relevant to the African religious – cultural context; to make Christianity truly African. This has been encouraged by different apostolic exhortations. Paul VI in his visit to Kampala Uganda did not hesitate in telling Africans: “You may and you must have African Christianity”. He unequivocally stated: “

*You will be able to formulate Catholicism in terms that are completely suited to your culture and to offer the Catholic Church the precious and original contribution of ‘negritude’, of which it has particular need at this point in history.*¹⁴

In the same line of thought, John Paul II advocated for a symbolism of faith and cultural values:

*The synthesis of culture and faith is not just an exigency of culture but an exigency of faith as well. A faith that does not become culture is a faith that is not fully accepted, completely thought out, and truly lived*¹⁵

Two models are identified in Inculturation: “African in the Bible studies” and “evaluative studies”.

The overall purpose of “African in the Bible studies “ is to articulate Africa’s influence on the history of Ancient Israel and Africa’s contribution to the history of Salvation, as well as to correct negative interpretations of some biblical texts.

In the “evaluative studies “emphasis are placed on the encounter between African religion and culture, and the Bible and to “evaluate the theological underpinning resulting from this encounter.” In this model of biblical interpretation, scholars go beyond examining the similarities and dissimilarities between African religion and the Bible, to interpreting the biblical text on the basis of these similarities. Ukpong summarizes the aim of evaluative as follows: “The aim is to facilitate the communication of the biblical message within the

¹⁴ Paul VI, *Africae Terrae*, in: MBEFO, Luke Nnamdi, 29.

¹⁵ John Paul II, Letter of foundation to the Pontifical Council for Culture, in: MBEFO, Luke Nnamdi, 29.

African milieu, and to evolve a new understanding of Christianity that would be African and biblical.”¹⁶

Five types of evaluative studies have been identified. These are not in themselves exclusive. Sometimes elements of one approach are combined with those of the other. However, in each approach one observes a bent towards a particular tendency and the dominance of the features of a particular type:

The first approach seeks to evaluate, in the light of biblical witness elements of African culture, religion, beliefs, concepts and or practices, with the aim of arriving at a Christian understanding of them and bringing out their value for Christian witness.

The second approach occupies itself with what a biblical text or theme has to say in the critique of a particular issue in the society or in the church’s life or what lessons may be drawn from a biblical text or theme for a particular context.

The third approach concerns itself with the interpretation of themes or texts against the background of African culture, religion and life experience. The aim is to arrive at a new understanding of the biblical text that would be informed by the African situation, and that would be African and Christian.

The fourth approach involves identifying and using concepts from either the Bible or African culture in order to show continuity between Christianity and African culture. These concepts act as “bridgeheads” in communicating the biblical message.

In the fifth approach, scholars occupy themselves with the biblical text in order to discover biblical models or biblical foundation for the aspects of contemporary church life and practice in Africa.

The evaluative approach is the most common approach in Africa. It is based on the classical understanding of exegesis as an act of understanding the meaning of a text through the use of the historical critical tool, and of hermeneutic as the application of this recovered meaning to a contemporary context.

¹⁶ J. S. UKPONG, 16.

Liberation theology is the other aspect of the second phase of the development of biblical interpretation in Africa. This is based on the biblical witness that God does not sanction oppression but rather stands on the side of the oppressed to liberate them. Two forms of this theology are identified in Africa: The black theology and Feminist hermeneutics.

Black theology as a form of liberation hermeneutics is predominant in South Africa and focused on the issue of apartheid racial discrimination that prevailed there until 1994. It drew its inspiration from its North American counterpart “which existed for so long implicit in the Negro spirituals that gave heart to black slaves in the heavy days of their bondage and which became more articulate and explicit during the civil right campaign.”¹⁷

John Mbiti made a case against the alliance that existed between Black theology and African theology. He maintained that both theologies have different historical and social background. It is his view that African theology should concern itself with “anthropological poverty”- which centers on the abuse and exploitation of the African person in his historic contact with other races. It is the belief of the author of this work that Black theology in its historical and social uniqueness, has come to be part and parcel of theology in Africa.

Two trends of Black theology can be identified: The first “seeks to interpret the Bible in the light of the apartheid experience and to reflect on this experience in the light of the biblical message”. It studies liberative themes in the bible as “resource of empowerment for liberation struggles.” The second strand tries to free and emancipate the bible from all ideological use and misrepresentations. It aims at freeing the bible as a tool of oppression in the hands of the elites. This position is strongly articulated by Itumeleng Mosala. He recommends the use of historical- materialist analysis of the biblical text for this purpose.

The other aspect of the liberation theology in Africa is the feminist hermeneutics. It uses the bible as a tool against the operation of women. In this regard, Louise Tappa writes that: “Today it is impossible for African theology... to emerge and to bloom unless both African churches and African theology start out from, and develop around the situation of women in Africa.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Desmond, TUTU, The theology of Liberation in Africa, in: MBEFO, Luke Nnamdi, 54.

¹⁸L. TAPPA, “ The Christ- event, from the view point of women: A protestant perspective, in: MBEFO, Luke Nnamdi, 56.

Five different strands have been identified here. I will shortly outline them:

The first is a challenge to the conventional hermeneutics by which scripture and the history of Christianity are interpreted in male related terms. It is for example taken for granted that God is male. In the second approach, those terms in the bible that are critical of women or portray them as sub-ordinate to men are re-assessed and re-interpreted. In the third approach, attention is placed on those texts that show the positive contribution of women in the history of salvation or in the life of the church. The fourth approach seeks for a basic biblical orientation that can function as guide to interpreting both the negative and positive text about women. The fifth approach seeks to interpret biblical themes or text from the perspective of African women experience.

Using the tool of historical and literary criticism and social disciplines like Sociology and anthropology feminist hermeneutics has succeeded in drawing attention to forgotten areas that are of great importance.

The third and the last phase in the development of biblical interpretation in Africa is the orientation that recognizes the ordinary African reader (non biblical scholars) as partner in biblical readings. It integrates their views and makes the African context the subject of biblical interpretation. This is exemplified in contextual biblical studies and inculturation hermeneutics.

This work falls into the third phase of the development of biblical interpretation in Africa in the sense that it aims at contextualization of the biblical interpretation of the Book of Job in the Igbo African context. It falls into the aspect of inculturation theology known as “evaluative studies”. It will aim at a productive understanding of the Book of Job in the Igbo – Nigerian African traditional and social context.

The general procedure for contextual reading of the Bible is first to analyze the current or prevalent African situation for which examination or studies is intended. Then the biblical text is also analyzed and dynamically applied to the African situation.¹⁹ That is also the procedure I will follow in this work. I will first analyze the nature of the Nigerian Christian faith crisis, the traditional and cultural background of the Igbo people and ipso facto of the

¹⁹ J.S. Ukpog, *Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa*, 25.

crisis. Then the Book of Job will be analyzed, with special attention to some features of special interest. It will then be applied to the Nigerian Igbo Christian situation, allowing the text to speak to directly to the Igbo Christian of Africa in particular, and to the Nigerian and African Christians in general in their cultural and traditional settings.

In this work, I may often use the themes “Nigerian Christians” or “African Christians”. In both themes, Igbo Christians are implied. Though the work tends to focus on the Igbo Africans of Nigeria, the analysis is relevant for all Nigerian and indeed African Christians. This is because most Africans have the same world views and traditional outlook. And most of the situations found in Eastern Nigeria is the same for the rest of Nigeria and indeed Africa. It is for the purpose of specificity that Igbo Christians of Nigeria is used as a case study since there are many tribes in Nigeria and many more in Africa. The crisis of all Nigerian Christians is the same and quite similar, if not the same with that of their sister countries in African continent.

CHAPTER ONE

NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN FAITH CRISIS

1.1 Meanings and definitions

Etymologically, the word “crisis” comes from the Greek word for “turning point”, any inflection point in the course of events. Strictly speaking, a crisis can be a sudden improvement or a sudden deterioration. In this work, the later is our concern. In this sense then, it refers to any sudden interruption in the normal course of event in the life of an individual or community that necessitates re- evaluation of mode of action and of thoughts. I will like to adopt the concise definition of crisis according to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary: “A time of great danger, difficulty or confusion when problems must be solved or important decisions must be made.”

There are political, economic, cultural, social, religious and other forms of crisis. Our point of focus is the religious crisis and the religion in question is Christianity.

The term “religion” may be very difficult to define due to its employment in broad and strict senses. The word has also varying modes and conception by different people at different times in history. However E. B. Taylor simply defined religion as “the belief in spiritual being”²⁰

Christianity here may be defined as: “The ethical, historical, universal, monotheistic, redemptive religion, in which the relation of God and man is mediated by the person and work of Lord Jesus Christ.”²¹

²⁰E. B.TAILOR, in: COOK’s Religion, in: HASTING, James (ed.), Encyclopaedia of Religion, Edinburg 1980, 663.

²¹A. E. GRARVIE, Christianity, in : Encyclopaedia of Religion, 581

In the course of life, men of religion most times find themselves in critical situations where they are forced to re-consider current and inherited beliefs, to gain harmony between the present and the past experience, and to reach a position which shall satisfy the demands of feeling and reflection and give confidence for facing the future.

Whenever the ethical or moral value of activities or conditions is questioned the value of religion is involved and all deep staring experiences invariably compels a reconsideration of the most fundamental ideas. ... Ultimately these arise problems of justice, human destiny, and God and universe and these in turn involve problem of the relation between 'religious' and other ideas, and the validity of ordinary knowledge, and practicable conception of "experience" and reality.²²

Nigeria is the world's most populous black nation with over 155 million people. Over 40 percent of this population is Christian. These Christians are predominantly the Igbos of the southern eastern Nigeria.²³ When one speaks of Christian faith crisis in Nigeria, it majorly concerns the Igbos. This is not however to exclude the Christians in other tribes, whose fundamental world view and faith crisis are the same with that of the Igbos. The emphasis is on the Igbos because it is their cultural background that will be analyzed.

Christian faith crisis is engineered when Christianity seems not to cater for the integral and holistic needs of the believer and falls short of his expectations. This situation is most often the situation of Nigerian Christians. I will go forward to validate the assertion that the Nigerian Christians are experiencing crisis.

1.2 EXISTENCE OF CRISIS IN NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS' FAITH

Many churches in Nigeria still overflow with converts and there is still enthusiastic rush for the sacrament of baptism and other sacraments. Christians embark on wholesome expansions, reconstructions and new constructions of their churches. However, most of

²² COOK, Religion, in: HASTING, James (ed.), Eyclopaedia of Religion, 663.

²³ This is not to underrate the Christian population of the South western Nigeria. Over half of the population of the Yorubas of the south west Nigeria is Christians. But the Igbo tribe is the predominant major Christian tribe in Nigeria.

these Christians are unfulfilled in their Christian practices. They seem to experience a dislocation between religion and reality, of faith and life. Though they see Christianity as a fanciful way of life, they however complain that it is arid and most times unrelated to their life situations. The situation is what George Ehusani describes as follows:

The embarrassing picture is that of a poor quality of Christian discipleship and wide spread crisis of commitment among people... Though our cathedrals and chapels are filled to capacity every Sunday, many will admit that the majority of African Christians live ambivalent spiritual lives with an exterior allegiance to the God of Jesus Christ, but with an interior and perhaps a more profound allegiance to the god of their fore bears who refused to give way to the new God.²⁴

Lamenting on this Situation Bolaji Idowu states that the church has at her hands uncommitted believers who see identification with Christianity as only identification with modernity and nothing more:

The church has on hands communities of believers who by and large, live ambivalent Christian lives. Christianity for them is a fashionable religion which has the habit of beginning and ending within the wall of a church building; it does not reach those vital areas of Africans. Thus it is possible for an African to sing lustily in the church 'other refuge have I none' while still carrying amulet on his person, or being able to go out of the church straight to his diviner without feeling that he is betraying any principle.²⁵

It should be noted here that Idowu's view here represents the second and early phase of the African Christian crisis. The crisis has developed to other phases given to the passage of time. The ambivalent spiritual lives of most Nigerian Christians portray a dislocation of life and belief, a hollow in them, craving for fulfillment. Anthony Asiegbu writes that the crisis of Nigerian Christians is integral and holistic; it covers every aspect of their lives:

In the context of these Nigerian Christians, the crisis impinges on the whole human person. It touches their health, social relationship, interest, feelings, life, security, prosperity, freedom beliefs, happiness and immortality. Indeed it refers to a religious experience that concerns the whole of human life and all that a person is. It refers to the type of religious experience which can be described in Tertullian words as 'totus quod sumus et in quo sumus' - that which touches all we are in what we are.²⁶

²⁴ George EHUSANI, Trully Christian: The challenge of inculturation, Symposium paper on inculturation and the Nigerian Church at St Joseph Major Seminary Ikot Ekpene, 7th May 1999, 1. (Ehusani was at this time the Secretary general of the Catholic secretariat Lagos.)

²⁵ Bolaji IDOWU, The predicament of church in Africa, in: BAETA, C.G (ed.), Christianity in Tropical Africa, London, 1968,433.

²⁶ Anthony ASIEGBU, A crisis of faith and a quest for spirituality, Enugu 2000, 19.

This crisis revolves around all the situations of the Nigerian Christian, situations that are pathetic and awful. He questions his belief in a God who seems to ignore him in his sufferings. Jean Marc Ela said it right when he wrote that:

The darkest periods of African history correspond generally to the times when access to God's truth was blocked by everything that tramples and disfigures humanity. Whenever fatalism triumphs and all the mechanism of poverty and oppression shut the door on hope, God is on trial.²⁷

The pertinent questions we ask here is: What are the different manifestations of this crisis? How have most Igbo Nigerian and indeed African Christians reacted to this crisis?

1.3 MANIFESTATIONS OF NIGERIAN- AFRICAN CHRISTIAN CRISIS

The Nigerian African Christian crisis has manifested itself in different modes at different times and epochs of the history of African Christianity; beginning from the early periods of evangelization to date. These crisis- manifestation modes represent different ways in which Christians in different periods of the African Christian evangelization have reacted to the aloofness of the Christian faith to the practical African problems. I identify here three approaches and modes.

1.3.1 RELAPSE TO TRADITIONAL AFRICAN RELIGION

Most converts at the early periods of Christian evangelization, who saw their new faith as aloof to their practical problems returned back to their old traditional African religion. The major reason for this is described by Jean Mark Ela:

The missionary apostolate cultivated in Africans only the surface which invited cultivation, leaving fallow, a no man's land bristling with clumps of questions, doubts, hopes and dissatisfaction of every sort. The evangelization of the missionaries was peripheral. They could not go to the depths of Africans and their culture. They removed African traditional religion and yet left holes unfilled, questions unanswered, no in depth spiritual replacement.²⁸

²⁷ Jean Marc ELA, My faith as an African, 102.

²⁸ Ibid, 104.

In this spiritual emptiness, the African believer felt alienated from his cultural and social environment. He yearned for and most times returned to his old religion which was for him practical. His African traditional gods are feared and are held in high esteem. They were regarded as guarantors of justice. And they adequately punished anyone who went contrary to the ordinance of the community based on justice. The dissatisfaction of most Africans with a society where things go wrong and the gods keep silent is portrayed by Folu Olukayode in a prayer of a dissatisfied African:

Almighty return this country to pre Christian days for your people in Nigeria are stealing in the name of God. Almighty, bring back Sango (a Yoruba divinity, the god of thunder that punishes) and other deities for the God they gave us from Arabian land and Red Sea cannot prevent N2.8 billion leaving our shore and improving the life beyond the sea... Chineke (God in Igboland) uproot all churches from Nigeria and close down all mosques. Grant us the peace we used to enjoy even when they opined we were backwards and uncivilized.²⁹

This prayer also validates the claim we made earlier that the African Christian faith crisis is not unconnected with his life situations: political, economical and otherwise.

Luke Mbefo reports of an article in the “Sunday Times” of April 20, 1986 with the Caption “Give us Back Our ‘God’”. Here, the Agulu people of Anambara state, were asking the Nigerian government to return to them the statue of their god ‘Haba’ which was displayed at the National Museum at Oninka Lagos as an object of antiquity. The Agulu people claimed that their god *Haba* had been appearing to them and asking them to get his statue back home. As a result the god *Haba* had been causing spiritual problems and disturbing them.³⁰ It was not surprising that most of these people were Christians, who had not found adequate replacement for their spiritual emptiness after their god was taken away. They then yearned to return to their old life – the African traditional religion.

There was no adequate dialogue between the African traditional religion and Christianity at the time of evangelization. Reflecting on this situation, Aylward Shorter states:

The tragedy is that early missionary endeavour in Africa never produced a confrontation or a meeting of meanings between African religious thought- system and the thinking of nineteenth-

²⁹ F. OLUKAYO, The church’s prophetic witness in political cultural context of Nigeria, in: African Journal of Theology, vol. II, no.1, 1982, 13.

³⁰ Luke Nnamdi MBEFO 113f.

*century European Christianity. They represented two outlooks which, if they were not entirely exclusive, nevertheless remained mutually close to one another*³¹

Mbefe, in the same line of thought states that “it is clear that there was no dialogue between Christianity... with African’s traditional religions. Traditional religions were works of the devil destined to be annulled through... evangelism”³² He notes that “Post-Vatican Christianity is noted for building bridges through dialogue with non- Christian religions as well as with the ‘separated brethren’. Missionary work in Nigeria was pre-Vatican II. Its motive force derived from the type of thinking that informed the missiology of yesteryears”³³

The resultant situation is that of superficial Christianity especially at the early years of evangelization. This is however not to under value the great work of the early western missionaries on African soil and the difficulties they had to face in their missionary work. But in the course of the years after evangelization, Christians in Nigeria and indeed in Africa are still trying to come to terms with the principles of Christianity while at the same time not losing their orientation as Africans; to be truly Christians, and truly African. They seek to understand what answers Christianity has for their life situations.

1.3.2 SYNCRETISM

The word “syncretism” was coined by Plutarch and it comes from the Greek word “*sugkretismos*”. Its origin was secular but it later came to be one of the religious vocabularies. Since the 19th century on, the term has been mainly used in comparative religion, “meaning a fusion of different god heads”.³⁴ Syncretism refers to a process of combining different religious practices; a combination of different faiths. This combination results in synthesis, strengthening, weakening or dissolution of the old allegiance. J. Moffat describes the situation as follows:

³¹ A. SHORTER, African Christian theology – Adaptation or Incarnation, in: MBEFO, Luke Nnamdi, Christian theology and African heritage, Onitsha, 10.(subsequently : MBEFO, Christian theology and African heritage).

³² Luke MBEFO, Christian theology and African Heritage, 10.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ J. S. MARALDO, Syncretism, in: RAHNER, Karl (ed.), Encyclopaedia of theology. A concise sacramentum mundi, Kent 1986,1657.

*In syncretism, there is a blending of religious ideas and practices, by means of which either one set adopts more or less thoroughly the principles of another; or both are amalgamated in more cosmopolitan and less polytheistic shape.... The outcome is a unification of deities in a fresh synthesis.*³⁵

Syncretistic practices admit some kind of process of give and take, acceptance and rejection, joy, sorrow, confusion and utmost disappointment. Syncretism is an indication or a manifestation of crisis of faith and cry for help in the face of threatening situations. It points to a desire for self fulfillment and a state of confusion, in which the believer embarks on the experimentation of or sampling of cultic practices of different religions and beliefs, and engages on complementing different practices from these religions, which normally should be incompatible. It shows a state of insecurity of the believer.

It has been observed that many Christians in Nigeria still hold tenaciously to some of the traditional beliefs and practices which they consider central and fundamental to their lives³⁶

Leith Ross observed a very long time ago that an average Igbo Christian

*Can attend communion and believe in medicine, keep ... a church wife and several native marriage wives, tie preciously in the same corner of a handkerchief his rosary and the shaped bit of 'iron for juju' made for him by a Awka blacksmith; plant side by side in the garden round his new cement and pan -roofed house, the hibiscus of civilization and the ogirishi tree of pagan family rites*³⁷

Though the situation today is somehow different from what Leith Ross observed in 1939 when the book quoted was published, it remains true as Afigbo observed that a substantial amount of traditional belief system continues to survive in the core of modern African life.³⁸ Mbefo sees the prevalent situation where Christians see no contradiction between attending Christian service and worshipping at the shrines as dangerous, and if not controlled may result to what he called “neo-paganism”.³⁹ He interprets the situation in two ways:

In the first place we can say that we have a number of Christians who are so nominal but who have remained unconverted, unrebored,....In the second place, it can be said that we have a

³⁵ J. MOFFAT, in ASIEGBU, Anthony, 13.

³⁶ Anthony ASIEGBU, 19.

³⁷ Leith ROSS, African Women, London 1939,292.

³⁸ A. E. AFIGBO, 27.

³⁹ Luke MBEFO, 114.

*church in transition where a generation of newly baptized Christians have doubts about the new religion which used to be there home.*⁴⁰

In the course of the institution of Christianity in Africa, there have been upshots of different churches, which institutionalized syncretistic practices. This leads us to the third manifestation of the crisis of faith in Africa which is the proliferation of churches. This has taken different shapes and emphasis in the course of the African Christian history, culminating in what is termed today as the prosperity gospel.

1.3.3 PROLIFERATION OF CHURCHES AND THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

The upshot of independent churches in Africa is as old as the missionary activities in Africa.⁴¹ However, these churches have taken different forms in the course of the history of the African Christianity.

At the early stage of the African evangelization, the first form of the independent churches were founded by Africans, to take care of the African person who had been dislocated from his tradition and culture, and who is caught up between the new Christian religion and the traditional African religion and culture. Christianity had for those Africans the outlook of modernity which they would like to identify with, but fall short of attending to their holistic needs. Africans prior to the advent of Christianity had their initiation ceremonies, rituals to protect them from evil spirits and evil men; exorcisms of all kinds from evil spirits like *ogbanjes or abikus* and other cultic African religious practices. These were abolished by the missionaries without providing a substitute. According to Rijk A. van Dijk, different factors

... did in fact pave the way for a type of independent Christianity that could cater for the needs that the established missionary churches chose to ignore. A whole area of dispute had emerged after the introduction of missionary Christianity, concerned with elements of the African cosmological system that the missionaries chose to ignore as mere superstitions'. The influence of spirits, the manifestation of spirit in possession rituals, the influence of witches and other evil powers and the ritual protection and purification that were considered so essential in the life of an African individual were for the white missionaries area of strife and dispute, elements of heathen worship. Missionary Christianity could not accommodate Ancestors, witches and

⁴⁰ Ibid, 116.

⁴¹ R. A., VAN DIJK, Christian fundamentalism in Sub – Saharan Africa: The case of Pentecostalism, Leiden 2000, 5.

*similar powers in its own religious ideology, and practice; nor did it offer any substantial worship, protection and purification that could deal with their effects.*⁴²

These African indigenous churches were then founded to bridge the gap and fill up the lacuna resulting from this situation. They do this through combination of the practices of Christianity and that of African traditional religion; what can rightly be described as syncretism. The difference between this syncretism and the one discussed in the subtitle above is that while the one above is on individual levels, the syncretism here is an institutionalized one; it is part and parcel of their liturgy. It is observed that in their healing ministries and exorcisms, they adopt practices similar to those of African traditional religions while also they read the bible and sing Christian songs. The crisis of the African believer at this time was that he found himself sitting on the fence. He was afflicted by demons and evil spirits, and the missionaries and their churches neither appeared to understand nor to have answer to their problems. Most of these believers left the orthodox missionary churches for these African indigenous churches and healing homes which understood and appeared to have solution to their problems.

However, another group of churches known as the Pentecostal churches took a different course of development. Some of these churches, as Van Dijk notes came from the black American churches that have sprung up in the first Pentecostal wave in Illinois USA at the end of the nineteenth century. Other Pentecostal churches were brought to Africa by white missionaries from England, but these churches started turning to African leadership as early as the late 1940s and 1950.⁴³ These streams of churches and their movement are called Pentecostalism because of their emphasis on the Holy Spirit. The churches under this group maintained a sharp difference from the indigenous African churches. Their attitudinal and doctrinal outlooks highly favour a strict break with African tradition. They remain critical of the independent African Christian churches because of their syncretistic practices and their link to African tradition. True Christianity for them means a total break up with African tradition. They see the African tradition and culture as the old life and Christianity as the new life. At the same time these Pentecostal churches maintain also their difference from the main stream churches like Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches.

⁴² Ibid, 7.

⁴³ Ibid, 11.

Van Dijk writes that the difference between the Pentecostal churches and the white established orthodox churches is that the Pentecostal churches tend to take seriously the powers, spirits and occult forces that the missionaries tended to ignore while at the same time holding itself far removed from the syncretistic practices of African indigenous churches.

By taking such forces and powers seriously the Pentecostal churches have moved close to the experience of many Africans, closer than the white missionary churches ever could with their utter denial of the existence of such powers⁴⁴

From the 1980s, a new wave started sweeping through the Pentecostal movement. There was the use of modern technology for the spread of the gospel and a shift in gospel orientation in some of the Pentecostal churches. Some of these modern Pentecostal churches started to incorporate in their gospel what has been characterized as the prosperity gospel. “Put in simple terms, God is with those who make progress in life, and Christianity is about prosperity and not about poverty”⁴⁵ In a nutshell, “prosperity gospel is the teaching that the solution to people’s problems of sin, sickness, poverty, and demon oppression are in Jesus Christ.”⁴⁶ The prosperity gospel scrambles with the question of theodicy, with the vital issue of how the all- loving (Ephesians I:6, 7; 2: 7-9; Titus 2: 11; Luke 1: 54, 72, 78; Romans 15: 9; 9: 16, 18), all-holy (Exodus 15: 11; Isaiah 57:15, cf. Job 34:10; Isaiah 6: 5; Habakkuk 1: 13), all – just and all-powerful God (Job 42: 2; Matthew 19: 26; Luke 1: 57) can co exist as it does with evil.⁴⁷ The prosperity gospel maintain that God did not create evil; evil came into the world as result of sin. But God did make provision for the abolishment of sin and its consequential evil in the world through the death of his Son Jesus Christ. They maintain that Jesus has given a final blow to poverty and disease. They overlook the call to costly discipleship and fail to notice that though Christ has already inaugurated his kingdom on earth, it has not reached its culmination.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid,14.

⁴⁶ G. O. FOLARIN, Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria: A re- examination of the concept, impact, and evaluation, in: African journal of biblical studies, Vol. XXIII, No. II; October 2006, 83.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 90.

The prosperity gospel tendencies show the current manifestation of the Nigerian – African Christian crisis. Despite the glaring shortcomings in their theologies, prosperity preachers have continued to attract floods of followers to their churches. The reason for this is said to be the fact that the concerns expressed in the prosperity gospel matches the African worldview and state of mind. Africans, from time immemorial have been longing for freedom from sickness, demon oppression, and poverty.⁴⁸

An average Nigerian and indeed African will agree to the fact that the prosperity gospel is not delivering on its promises because there are many sincere Christians in Nigeria and Africa who are still poor, sick and possessed by demon. This brings us to the next point I intend to discuss: an insight into the nature of the suffering in Africa that Christians (and indeed non Christians) are confronted with.

1.4 AN INSIGHT INTO THE STATUESQUE

As we stated earlier on, the Nigerian Christian crisis is not unconnected with the economic, social, political and cultural situation that the Nigerian Christians find themselves. A survey of the situation will help for a better understanding of the nature of the crisis. It is important to mention that religion plays a vital role in the life of Africans. Igwegbe rightly states that, “it is to religion that that the African turned to in the face of the existential questions about human life: who is man, where does he come from, where is he going, how must he live? ;the source and meaning of pain and joy, suffering and disease, health and after life.”⁴⁹ This observation is not only true of the traditional Africans of yesteryears, but also of the today modern Christian Africans. Thus J. S. Pobee states that: “African mysticism, whether in traditional or Christian religion, is an experience of the divine, while one remains on earth.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 85.

⁴⁹ Isidore IGWEGBE, *Sacramental Theological Thinking in the African Symbolic Universe*, Frankfurt 1995, 41.

African spirituality searches for the deliverance capable of transforming one's terrestrial condition."⁵⁰

Worthy of note is that the traditional Africans do not turn to religion as Opium of the people; as a means of consolation as Karl Marx would say of religion in general, but as a fundamental source that give meaning and answer to their world. They seek to understand the world around them in order to take appropriate actions to keep the world in harmony. They believe that nature and God have placed at their disposal tools and means of controlling and manipulating the world around them. It was not a matter of sitting down and waiting for nature to play out its course, but of ascertaining what necessary actions that should be taken. Man must steadily keep the equilibrium of the cosmos in being through proper and necessary actions. Redundancy has no place in their mind set, less the cosmos would disintegrate into chaos. The belief that proper actions that have the hallmark of justice and morality must be undertaken in different life situations was part of their religion. This traditional view, still influences the African Christians of today

The present day Igbo and indeed African Christians are faced with many harsh realities ranging from poverty to disease, violence etc. But what about his religious practices, his Christian rituals? Can they not help to maintain the state of harmony and equilibrium of his world? Or should the African concept of equilibrium be redefined? In all cases, the adverse conditions bring the faith of the African Christian to question because whenever an African is experiencing great difficulty, his faith that is on trial. We shall briefly examine the nature of these conditions that put the African Christian faith on trial. The areas we shall handle include: poverty, violence and conflict, ill health and disease. The cultural and traditional background to the crisis will be extensively handled in the chapter two of this work.

1.4.1 POVERTY

The absence of economic developments are probably the most perennial and immediate source of despair for the majority of Africans. Poverty aggravates other forms of suffering.

⁵⁰ J. S. POBEE; "African Spirituality", in : WAKEFIELD(ed.), A dictionary of Christian Spirituality, in: L. A. UGBOR, Prayer in Igbo traditional Religion,56.

Although one cannot outright say that the underlying cause of all violence in Africa is poverty, it remains however true that poverty contributes a great quota to violence .It is also evident that the greatest cause of disease is poverty. As long as poverty grows, so will also disease. There is alarming rate of unemployment in Africa. Majority of the people live below one Dollar a day. The enigma is that this situation prevails amidst rich human endowment and natural resources. The problem in Africa is that of institutionalized corruption. The rich continues to grow richer at the expense of the poor. The middle class has almost disappeared from the African society.

Poor quality of leadership sickens Africa. The selfishness of her leaders cripples her. In a traditional setting where poverty is abhorred and regarded as a curse, everybody struggles to liberate himself from poverty. But despite this, poverty still persists and even spread aggressively at an alarming rate. In this situation, the Christians are in dilemma. Would the Christian God not rescue them from the curse of poverty? To this question, proponents of the prosperity gospel say yes – the mission of Christianity is to free one from the curse of poverty. But more often than not, this is not the case. Has the Book of Job any answer?

1.4.2 VIOLENCE AND CONFLICTS

Violence in Africa takes different shapes: There is the arbitrary physical violence. But there is regrettably a more subtle but most dangerous and devastating kind of violence in Africa: “the calculated violence of neglect; that is, the deliberate failure of government and state officials to carry out their state duties in order to benefit from the ensuing disorder and distress.”⁵¹

The upward movement of a culture of political violence in Nigeria and Africa is worrisome. The overall consequence of this state of arbitrary violence in Africa is a process of dehumanization which, according to the African political scientist Patrick Chabal takes at least three forms: the degradation of human body, the collapse of shared values, and the breakdown of social order.⁵² The impact of violence in African societies is devastating and

⁵¹ P. CHABAL Africa. The politics of suffering and smiling, London, New York, 153

⁵² Ibid, 154.

long lasting. It degrades individuals, dissolves social norm and deflects human energies from more productive activities.

Conflicts bring violence, directly or indirectly. Conflict is also prevalent in Africa. In trying to find reasons for this situation, scholars of African science are divided in opinion into cultural, structural, or economic lines. Those who favour cultural situation as the cause of conflicts in Africa maintain that in Africa, there are many tribes and ethnicities that live together. Tensions and conflicts may naturally most often erupt amongst them in the bid to defend cultural identities and interest. Though this may account for some conflicts in Africa, this explanation certainly does not extend to every conflict in Africa. Africa is not a land of 'ancient tribal hatred' as the western press may portray it. "It is political manipulation of 'difference' in a context of socio- economic hardship that triggers ethnic conflict."⁵³

Those who favour the structural explanation maintain that the social and political structures in Africa are still weak. While some of them maintain that with time, these structures will find their feet and come to maturity in African society, helping her to put her house in order, others maintain that these structures are western and inappropriate for the African society. However, critics maintain that in the societies where these structures appear to be in order, there arise sometimes also conflicts, even if not as prevalent as in Africa. They maintain that every conflict has its own context, so also the conflicts in Africa.

The economic explanation as the reason for the prevalence of conflict in Africa is perhaps the most common. It maintains that poverty fuels conflict. The lack of economic progress or the prospect of economic opportunities is the primary cause of conflict and violence. This assertion may be true, but I still agree with Patrick Chabal that how these economic factors translate to conflict in Africa is "a result of historical, social, and cultural factors that can only be properly assessed in their local context"⁵⁴. The present situation in Africa is that the gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow. At the times of conflicts, children, women and the innocent are most times the victims of arbitrary violence and misappropriation of power. These conflicts are caused by the rich and powerful, but the

⁵³ Ibid, 160.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 163.

poor innocent ones die on their behalf. The question an average Igbo and African Christian asks in this situation is: “God, where are you?”

The nature of conflict in Africa does not succumb to simplistic explanations. It cuts across political, cultural, socio- economic and strategic elements. This is the situation where African Christians most times find themselves and their faith is put on trial. They ask for what practical answer Christianity has for this unjust situation.

1.4.3 SICKNESS AND DISEASE

There is also the ravaging problem of sickness and disease. The prevalence of disease in Africa shows a collapse of social the structural order, as well as the dilapidation of infrastructural elements in the African continent. The problem is not that these structures cannot be in order. It shows government that thinks it owes no responsibility to its people; a debasing culture of neglect. This is not to write off the attempts by some agencies to better the conditions of Africans. An example of such effort in Nigeria is the National agency for food and drugs (NAFDAC) under Dora Akunyili. However, such efforts most times are propelled by individual reformists, rather than by an institutionalized system. When the individual reformists go, the system most times collapses.

The prevalent situation of ill- health can be properly situated in the poor economic situations of most Africans. When the state health system collapses, as is the case in most African countries, the poor Africans may not be able to afford private health treatments. They find themselves in desperate situations. The corrupt politicians steal their money and are inappropriately rich. These can afford to take care of themselves and their families in times of need and sickness. They can afford to fly their wards abroad for treatment when the required treatments are not available at home. But these are the ones who steal and are corrupt, and are wicked. Why should their situation appear better than an average African Christian whose hands are clean and who prays to God by morning and by night? This is the enigma of an average African Christian. Africans are not poor because they are ill; they are ill because they are poor.

Sickness in Africa has its social, psychological and religious implications. When somebody is sick, it affects those who are part of the social network: parents, siblings, children and extended relatives. Every one of them must be involved in finding solution to the problem at hand. Helps come in various forms: contribution of money for the hospital bills, taking care of the sick person, visitations etc. So when somebody is sick, it affects its social environment.

Sickness in Africa has its psychological aspect. This is based on African holistic view on reality. Reality is a harmonious entity. Sickness is an interruption of this harmonious entity. This interruption is most times conceived to be caused by something or somebody external. This something or somebody must be identified, exposed before the sickness can be properly treated and cured. When an African is sick, there is tension between trying to identify the cause of the sickness traditionally, and only accepting the results of modern medical procedures. The sick person may believe that somebody is trying to harm him or her. So there is always a search for “who” is responsible for the sickness. In order to find the “who”, he may have to consult diviners. Some Christians in Africa today may prefer to go to prayer houses or to some self proclaimed prophets to ascertain the person or cause of their sicknesses and the adequate healing process or medication to follow. There is still deep in them, sometimes unknowingly, a silent, resilient, traditional African belief that sickness and suffering do not belong to the normal order of things.

In traditional African society, sickness most times is interpreted as ability to be influenced from the outside. In this case it is weakness and susceptibility to outside influences. This explains why most African traditionalists carried charms on their persons to protect themselves from external dangers and evils. For the Christian, who is afflicted by great and sometimes unexplainable sickness, his faith is put to question. This constitutes a part of the crisis of the Igbo – Nigerian Christians. Some traditional African beliefs still survive and thrive in the mind of African Christians. Most of these beliefs are not in contradiction with the Christian faith though some are. The task at hand is that of harnessing these traditional beliefs and putting them at the service of the Christian faith. That is the work of inculturation as we have earlier on noted in the introduction to this work. The African Christian faith crisis arises partly as a result of friction between African traditional beliefs, which still survive in the mind of the African Christians, and the sometimes ‘arid’

Christianity in its unapplied form. A survey of some Igbo African traditional beliefs and world view will help us to get at the root of the problem; providing a more vivid background to the nature of the Igbo Nigerian Christian crisis. It will help us to establish what similarities that exist between this crisis and that of Job in the Book of Job and what message the Book of Job will communicate to the Igbo Christians in their traditional Igbo settings. This will constitute the chapter two of this work.

CHAPTER TWO

THE IGBO AFRICAN BELIEF SYSTEM AND WORLD VIEW

In this chapter, some of the key concepts in the Igbo- African traditional culture and religion would be examined. This would be done with the aim of understanding what the Igbos had believed prior to the advent of Christianity. Their traditional belief system and culture still colour and influence their understanding of Christianity. Some of these Igbo-belief system and world views are not in contradiction to Christian doctrine and teachings while others are. We shall first explore the religious belief of the Igbo people of Africa, then their cosmological and metaphysical world view, their moral orientation, and their anthropological world view and social classifications. We are not unaware of the difficulties that might arise as a result of treating these aspects differently. This is because the traditional Igbo person had a holistic view of reality. No aspect of reality existed in isolation. No clear cut sundering between the spiritual and the secular. Every aspect of his life was permeated by religion and a sense of the sacred. Echema notes this when he states:

It is a difficult task to deal with religion, culture and moral of a people like the Igbos as a separate entity since there is no dichotomy among these realities. Igbo world view is one of an extraordinary harmony and coherence, where it is difficult to distinguish the sacred from the secular, the natural from the supernatural or the animate from the inanimate (...) This harmonious view of the world of the Igbo means a system of thought in which religion, politics, social theory, history medicine, psychology, birth and burial rites were all neatly interwoven in such a way that to isolate one item from the whole means to destabilize the entire structure. For the Igbo, there is no word for religion as such, because it is not something that is objectified in their thought system, but rather is an aspect of life.⁵⁵

However, we shall carefully dissect the different aspects of the one entity that constitute Igbo world view. That the Igbos have a holistic view of reality does not mean that this one entity does not have different aspects. By differently examining these different aspects of the Igbo world view, which were interwoven with one another, the internal connection

⁵⁵ Augustine ECHEMA, Corporate personality in Traditional Igbo society and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in: OGBUNANWATA, Benignus Chukwunedum, New Religious movements or sects. A theological and pastoral challenge to the catholic church, Bern 2001, 32.

between them shall be brought to light. This would help for a better understanding of the Igbo African holistic view of reality.

This holistic African world view, the close relationship between the world of divine and the world of humans, should not be interpreted as monism. In this regard Njoku stated:

... caution however should be exercised so that the close relationship that is meant to exist between the two realms of reality will not be interpreted as some kind of monism, or playing into the hands of Hegel who charged that the African had not reached the level of consciousness where he could make a distinction between himself and a personal being. Certainly the African recognized a distinction between the sacred and the profane, otherwise what does the designation of some places, altars and persons as sacred mean? All it amounts to is that reality is better understood in complementary terms, not in terms of opposition. Diverse entities do not have to act in opposing fashions; they are better seen as complements for they reinforce one another. The sacred and profane are two sides of the order of existence. These two order at once transcend and indwell in each other... Mutual accommodation then exists between the created existences and the divine.⁵⁶

Bearing this important observation in mind, we shall carefully examine the different aspects of Igbo holistic world view, starting from his religious belief.

2.1 IGBO RELIGIOUS BELIEF SYSTEM

The ancient Igbos, like the rest of Africans, were deeply religious. Arthur G. Leonard, describing the Igbo people states that the Igbo people

Are in the strict and natural sense of the word a truly and deeply religious people, of whom it can be said as it has been said of the Hindus, that they eat religiously, drink religiously, bath religiously, dress religiously and sin religiously. In a few words, the religion of these natives (...) is their existence, and their existence is their religion.⁵⁷

E. B. Idowu makes a fourfold classification of the cardinal hinges on which African traditional religion is based. He names them as: belief in God, belief in the divinities, belief

⁵⁶ Francis O. C. NJOKU, *Essays in African Philosophy, thought and theology*, Owerri 2002, 166.

⁵⁷ Arthur G. Leonard, *The lower Niger and its Tribes*, in: B. C. OGBUNANWATA, *New Religious Movement or Sects*, 32.

in spirits, and the practice of magic and medicine.⁵⁸ G. Parrinder had before then opined that the West African religion is characterized by belief in a supreme God or creator, the chief divinities, generally non human spirits, often associated with natural forces, the cult of ancestors of the clan, and charms and amulets.⁵⁹ In an attempt to understand the Igbo beliefs and world view, we shall try as a matter of precedence to first explore the key Igbo religious belief: The belief in Supreme Being – God.

2.1.1 THE BELIEF IN A SUPREME BEING – CHUKWU

The ancient Igbos believed in a Supreme Being they called *Chukwu* (great God) or *Chineke* (the creator God). It was their belief that this Supreme Being was the greatest of everything that existed and he was their creator or originator. He was single, individual and unique and the source of all life.

The Igbos believed also in other spiritual beings. These spiritual beings were created by *Chukwu*. It was believed that each person had his own *chi* (guardian god). *Chukwu* assigned each person his own *chi*. Like a guardian angel it was the responsibility of every *chi* to protect the person assigned to him by *Chukwu* and to bring to him fortune and good luck.

The ancient Igbos believed that the Supreme Being - *Chukwu* was immanent in the deities and governed the world through them. These spirits or deities were therefore worshipped but *Chukwu* was not directly worshipped. Worships to these deities were taken to be worships to *Chukwu*. F. A. Arinze summarized the traditional Igbo belief in a Supreme God as follows:

*God is the Supreme Spirit, the creator of everything. No one equals Him in power. He knows everything. He is altogether a good and merciful God and does harm to no one. He sends rain and especially children, and it is from Him that each individual derives his personal 'Chi'. But this Supreme Spirit has made many inferior spirits who are nearer to man and through whom man normally offers his worship to Him.*⁶⁰

58 E.B. IDOWU, African Traditional Religion, in : L. E. UGBOR, Prayer in Igbo Traditional Religion: Its meaning and message for the church in Igboland today, Exerpta ex dissertation ad Doctoratum in Facultate Theologie apud Institutum Spiritualitatis Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana, Rome 1985, 6. (Subsequently as L . E. UGBOR, Prayer in Igbo Religion.)

59 E. G. PARRINDER, West African Religion , in: L. E. UGBOR, Prayer in Igbo Religion, 6.

⁶⁰ F. A. ARINZE, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion, in: L. E. UGBOR, Payer in Igbo Religion, 14.

It should be mentioned that some Igbo scholars opine that the Igbo use of the word *Chukwu*, prior to the advent of the missionaries referred to a certain Oracle at Arochukwu, an Igbo town. They maintain that the missionaries only “Christianized” the name *Chukwu* to connote the Supreme Christian God.⁶¹ There is also the opinion among some of them that the Igbo belief on a Supreme one God came with Christianity.

However records by the early explorers show that the Igbo belief on the Supreme God predated the advent of the missionaries. At least one of these documents, as Metu rightly notes, also states that there was a distinction between the *Chukwu*, the oracle of Arochukwu, and the *Chukwu*, the Igbo High God. One of them reads:

The Igbos all believe in an Almighty –being, omnipresent and omniscient, whom they call Tshuku, whom they constantly worship, and whom they believe to communicate directly with them through his sacred shrine at Aro. But they speak also of another and distinct Deity, who at Abo is known as Orissa, but throughout other parts of Igbo, as Tshuku – Okike ‘God the creator, or Supreme God.’⁶²

The Christian missionaries opened their first Christian station in Nigeria the year 1857. An Igbo slave-boy by name Olaudah Equano sold to the West Indies had already in the year 1789, about a century before the coming of the missionaries hinted, as record shows, that the Igbos believed in a Supreme Being. He wrote as concerned the Igbos:

As to religion, the native believe that there is one creator of all things and that he leaves in the sun and is girded around with a belt that he may never eat or drink; but according to some, he smokes a pipe which is our favorite luxury. They believe he governs events, especially our deaths or captivity.⁶³

There are also many Igbo myths, which narrate the event of the creation of the world by *Chukwu*. Given to these facts on ground, the author takes the usual traditional idea of Igbo belief in a Supreme Being – *Chukwu*. This Igbo traditional idea of *Chukwu* is summarized by Emefie Ikenga Metu as follows:

God precedes everything in existence. He depends on nothing for His existence. He is therefore Ens a se, He exists of Himself. He is creator of everything, Lord of everything. He continues to preserve everything in existence, which therefore depends on Him for its continue existence. He

⁶¹ Cf. E. I METU, *God and Man in African Religion. A case study of the Igbo of Nigeria*, Enugu 1999, 7ff. (subsequently as E. I. METU, *God and man in African Religion*).

⁶² W. B. BAKIE, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the River Kwora and Binue commonly known as Niger and Tsadda*, in: E. I. METU, 13.

⁶³ Olaudah EQUIANO, *Olaudah Equiano travels or the interesting Narratives of the life of Olaudah Iquiano or Gustavus Vassa*, in : E. I. METU, *God and man in African religion*, 11.

*is the Great Providence, Chukwu. God is powerful; He knows everything; He is all-good; He is in no way evil and cannot will evil... He is kind and merciful. Above all He is a person, and listens, understands and often grants our request.*⁶⁴

With this traditional understanding of God, which still influences the Igbo Christians of today and is not in contradiction with the Christian conception of God, an average Igbo Christian is frustrated when the reverse seems to be the case. He is desperate when access to God seems to be blurred by pains and sufferings. He continues to be perplexed by the presence of death, evil and suffering in the world created by God. In order to give explanations to the perplexities of evil and death in the world, the ancient Igbos adopted some myths to explain how evil came into the world. These myths show that evil and death did not originate from God. In order to protect man from evil God gave the deities charge over man. They were to protect man from calamities when man kept the natural laws and ordinances of the gods. The gods are to be blamed when there is disharmony in reality. A survey of the Igbo belief on the deities will elucidate this point more clearly.

2.1.2 THE BELIEF IN DEITIES

One finds in ancient Igbo land the multiplicity of deities. These deities were worshipped by different communities. In traditional Igbo's world view, deities occupy the next position after *Chukwu* in the ontological hierarchy of beings. These deities served as a kind of agents of *Chukwu* the Great God. *Chukwu* assigned to them different functions and areas in His administration of man and his world. Each deity was independent of the other. These deities were created by *Chukwu*, the Great God.

There were different deities for different aspects of man's life. *Chukwu* has given each of these deities their special duty on earth and area of specialization. For agriculture, *Ahianjoku* was to see for the growth of yam in the farm; *Amadioha* was the deity of thunder and justice. So *Amadioha* would only strike down somebody who has committed great offence against the natural order of things; *Anyanwu* was the sky deity in charge of good fortune and progress; *Ala* was the custodian of law and morality and mother deity of fruitfulness and fertility; *Agwu* was the deity of medicine, spirit possession, prophecy and

⁶⁴ E. I. METU, *God and man in African Religion*, 41.

divination.⁶⁵ *Igwe* was the sky deity in charge of rain. He was regarded as the husband of *Ala* – the earth deity. Thus he sent rain to the earth to fertilize *Ala* - earth.⁶⁶ There were many other deities like *Igwekala*, *Agbara*, *Oparaodu* of Umualumaku, Ehime Mbano, *Ezeala Nkwo Ogbor*, of Ihitteforukwu, and many others worshipped by different communities in Igbo land. Oracular power was attributed to some of these deities. They knew deep secret things of life and hidden deeds of men. They performed judicial functions and were consulted for the revelation of truth and establishment of justice in matters which were difficult and complicated and were beyond human understanding. This was because the ancient Igbos had a high regard for justice. They would not want to unknowingly punish the innocent; that would bring down the wrath of the deities on them. So the deities were most times consulted so that they could help in ascertaining who was wrong and who was right. In doing this the Igbo people believed they were only following the part led down by *Chukwu*, which the deities also followed; a path enshrined in the natural order of things. This natural order specified that calamities only befell the evil doer.

This conception of the Igbo people is similar to the doctrine of divine retribution as we find in the Book of Job. It is also at the centre of the faith crisis of the Igbo Christian faith crisis and indeed that of the Nigerians and Africans. We shall later treat this extensively.

It was also the belief of the ancient Igbo people that the Great God- *Chukwu* had given these deities charges and functions to protect man and to see to his well being. When something went wrong in any aspect of life, the deity in charge of this aspect of life, and not *Chukwu*, was to be blamed. As Mbefo rightly notes, the ancient Igbos had the audacity to dare some of these spirits or deities when they failed to perform their supposed duty of the protection of man and care for his well being.⁶⁷ The Igbos had gone to the extent of destroying the shrine of these small gods or deities when they failed them especially when these gods disgraced them and failed to give them victory in wars, or protection and providence in time of famine and pestilence.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 83.

⁶⁶ P. E. ALIGWEKWE, *The continuity of Traditional Values in the African Society. The Igbo of Nigeria*, Owerri 1991, 170.

⁶⁷ L. N. MBEFO, *Christian theology and African heritage*, 126.

As we earlier noted, it was also believed in the Igbo tradition that each person has his personal *chi*. The *chi* was like the guardian angel which *Chukwu* assigned to each person. It was believed that it is the responsibility of these *chi* to protect the person *Chukwu* assigned to it and to bring him good fortune.

At the time of evangelization, the Igbos were asked to jettison these manmade gods and deities which were not always trustworthy. The people were informed that the new religion would give them a direct access to *Chukwu* who was all loving and listened to the request of his children. This idea of a supreme loving and all powerful Being was not foreign to the Igbo mind. So many Igbos readily submitted themselves to the Christian faith. It is therefore incomprehensible to the Igbo Christian mind when he experiences untold pain and sufferings while still believing in a loving all powerful God. In the traditional set up, the blame could be giving to the deities and ancestors for not performing their duties. But this time the deities are no more, who is to be blamed? When evil things happen people normally say : “it is the work of the devil” But the question will always be put :”Why did God allow the devil to harm his own?” Does God not protect those who trust in him as he promised? He promised that those who put their trust in him will never be put to shame.

So the Igbo conception of God as a benevolent and all powerful God, a conception which is not contradictory but rather influential to their Christian conception of God, continues to be challenged in time of great peril and affliction.

This Igbo understanding of God is not different from the understanding of God in the Book of Job as we shall later see. Here lies one of the similarities between the crisis of Job: The belief in a supreme benevolent God on one hand, and on the other hand, the presence of suffering and evil in the world he created as exemplified by the suffering of the innocent.

2.1.3 BELIEF IN ANCESTORS

The belief in the ancestors was central to Igbo traditional life. The ancestors were deceased members of the family, who lived virtuous and dignified lives and had gone to live with

Chukwu, their creator.⁶⁸ Though no longer in flesh present on earth, the ancestors were still regarded as part of the families they left behind. In this sense they were termed as “living dead” members of the families. As earlier implied, not every dead Igbo person was qualified to be named an ancestor. Only those who had lived a well dignified life, with shining moral values like integrity, honesty, hospitality, hard work, fidelity and affability⁶⁹ were qualified to be accepted as ancestors. During important family meetings or feasts, the ancestors were always invited to be part of the gathering.⁷⁰ This shows the communion nature of the Igbo and indeed African society. There is an intrinsic and extrinsic call to solidarity with one another. The traditional Igbo man tried to maintain solidarity not only with the living, but also with the “living dead”; not only with the material world, but also with the spiritual world. Both worlds were seen as complimenting one another. Prayers and sacrifices were offered to the ancestors. Food and drinks were given to the ancestors sometimes in form of libation. Shrines were established where offerings and sacrifices could be made to the ancestors. The ancestors were expected to be the “eyes” and solicitors of their families in the spirit world. But the sacrifices offered to the ancestors were quite different from and less superior to the ones given to the gods or deities. It was the duty of the ancestors in the Igbo traditional society to protect the families they left behind and plead for their cause before the deities and *Chukwu*. They were expected to ward off from members of their families all unforeseen dangers. When any danger befell a member of a family, it was most times assumed that the ancestors had failed to perform their duty. Since they were still regarded as members of the families they left behind, they could still be rebuked. Suffering was seen as resulting from cosmic disorder, caused by the sins of men, knowingly or unknowingly committed. The ancestors as belonging to the world of the spirits had the power to see these dangers before hand and to help to prevent them. That is why sacrifices were offered to them and the gods so that they would help to prevent calamities from befalling human relatives.

⁶⁸ P. E. ALIGWEKWE, *The Continuity of Traditional values in the African Society*, 172.

⁶⁹ Pantaleon IROEGBU, *Enwisdomization and African Philosophy*, Owerri 1994, 140.

⁷⁰ Emefie Ikenga, METU, *God and Man in African religion*, 123.

This notion is still deep rooted in the African Christians of today especially the Catholics. There is the strong belief that the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints should be their intercessors before God, which is right. That is one of the reasons why devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints are strong among many African Catholics. For the Igbos, poverty means failure and failure is evil.⁷¹ The saints should help to keep off evil from them and help them to succeed in life endeavors. They are frustrated when it appears that their request through the saints like recovering from sickness, getting good jobs, success in exams etc are not granted.

We shall now examine sacrifice which is an important feature of the Igbo traditional religion.

2.1.4 SACRIFICE

Sacrifices were indispensable part of Igbo traditional religion. Offering of sacrifice was seen as a means of restoring harmony to a dislocated world, and of keeping a harmonious world in being. Sacrifices were means of appeasing the gods and ancestors, of cleansing man of his transgressions and of making supplications to the gods and ancestors.

There were different kinds of sacrifices in Igbo traditional religion. The kind of sacrifice one offered depended on the purpose of the sacrifice and the deity or ancestor to receive the sacrifice. We shall examine a few kinds of sacrifices in Igbo traditional religion.

AJA CHI (the sacrifice to personal chi): Each household in Igbo traditional religion has its own personal *chi*. Individuals also erects alters for their *chi*. As we mentioned above, it was believed in Igbo traditional religion that every person had his chi assigned to him by *Chukwu*. It was the duty of the personal chi to protect an individual and bring him good fortune. Sacrifices were offered to these personal *chi* to thank them for the protection and assistance one had received and to ask them to continue to provide and protect an individual or a household. This sacrifice was known as *aja chi*.

⁷¹ R. EGWU, Igbo Idea of the Supreme Being and the Triune God, 36.

IGBU AJA: This was known as a community sacrifice of propitiation and supplication. It was offered once a year but in sudden events of great danger like famine, deaths of infants, draught or birth of twins, this sacrifice could be offered at any time.⁷² *Igbu aja* was a sacrifice to clean a community of its transgressions in order to restore harmony to the community. This was based on the conviction that calamities and disasters could only come upon a community when the community collectively or an individual in the community had committed grave transgression against nature and the god.

In the rite of *Igbu aja*, two goats were needed. One of them was slaughtered and used to perform the rituals of *Igbu aja*. The other was made to bear the sins of the community. Every member of the community transferred his or her transgression to this goat by laying his or her hand on this goat while observing the directives of the diviner who carried out the cleansing. The goat was then chased out of the village into an evil forest where it wandered for the rest of its life. Nobody dared kill or eat this scapegoat since the goat was regarded as unclean and evil because it bore the sins of the community.

ICHU AJA: This was a sacrifice to chase out from an individual or a community grave evil threatening to befall it.⁷³ In this case a person or group of persons had committed a known grave sin; what was termed in Igbo culture as *aru-* taboo. Such offences included murder, incest, suicide etc. The Igbos believed in a communitarian effect of such grave sins. They believed that such grave offence committed by even one member of the community could spell out doom for the whole community. In order to avert the impending danger, they embarked on the sacrifice of *ichu aja*. The basis of this *ichu aja* was still their fundamental notion that evil cannot befall any person or community without some grave transgressions.

IGO MMUO: *Igo mmuo* was a protest sacrifice of the innocent and pure in times of great tribulations and unexplainable sufferings. According to the traditional Igbo Africans, suffering did not belong to the normal order of things. Suffering was as a result of grave

⁷² P. E. ALIGWEKWE, *The continuity of traditional values in the African society*, 183.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 184.

transgression committed by man. Therefore suffering should not come upon the innocent. Only the sinner should suffer. The gods and nature afflicted only those who had gone against their ordinances and laws. But when an innocent man experienced hardship or calamity like death of one's children or spouse, disease etc, the traditional Igbo man protested through the sacrifice of *igo mmuo*. As P. E. Aligekwe puts it, *igo mmuo* is

*a sacrifice offered to remind the spirits or the gods, of the innocence of a person or a community or to protest against an evil being suffered. Only persons convinced of their innocence of the transgressions of the law of the land and of the gods could offer the sacrifice of igo mmuo. No culpable person had the right to participate in the sacrifice less the gods would strike him dead; it was the sacrifice of the innocent.*⁷⁴

Another form of protest and declaration of one's innocence at a time of great affliction took the form of prayer known as *iju ugu*. This will be discussed in the section for prayer.

IKPU ARU

This was a sacrifice offered to clean an individual of his sins and readmit him into the community. In ancient Igbo culture, certain grave offences attracted instant excommunication from other members of the community. The offender would be strictly forbidden to participate in any social, religious or cultural activities of the community. He was simply ostracized. In most cases, the offender was banished from the community. Such offences included incest between close relatives, murder etc. In order to readmit the offender into the community, the *Ikpu aru* sacrifice was performed. The offender was required to confess his sin before an idol. The diviner, after the ritual sacrifice and cleansing proclaimed the penitent clean and ready to be readmitted into the community. The community readmitted him into their means as one of them. There was always rejoicing amongst relatives and friends of the pardoned person.

In some part of Igbo land, this cleansing and re - admittance sacrifice was known as *ikwa ala*- atoning the earth goddess. This is because the earth was the mother deity. It was on the earth that man existed and cultivated and lived, they thought. One had to atone the earth goddess because her grievance would threaten the very existence of man.

⁷⁴ Ibid,185.

In a nutshell, the Igbo traditional man offered sacrifices as means of appeasing the gods for the sins committed by man. He did this in order to restore equilibrium to his environment and community. He believed that calamity would not befall a person or a community that had not sinned. Man had to offer sacrifice to atone for known and unknown sins and to appease the gods and ancestors. P. E. Aligweke affirms that:

Each time an individual's or a community's life was in danger, or when the success of an enterprise was disturbed, they were interpreted as signs of the gods or the ancestors demanding the offer of a sacrifice, of the performance of rituals in their honour, to chase away an imminent misfortune. A failure in a commercial or any form of economic venture, for example was understood as a sign that the god of riches Mbataku of the trader concerned was complaining of having been forgotten. A drought or a famine meant that the society had thrown nature out of balance, by such and such a fault; that through sacrifice and prayers, equilibrium could once be re-established.⁷⁵

The traditional Igbo man also offered sacrifice as an act of supplication, of thanksgiving, of complaint and of justification.⁷⁶

One observes that the basic reason of offering sacrifice in the traditional Igbo setting was the belief that evil brought disaster while faithfulness to the gods and tradition brought well being, blessings and prosperity. This notion is still found among the Igbo and African Christians of today. Evil should not visit the righteous and upright man. In his services, he prays for God's protection from evil and success in his work. When despite his faithfulness to the Christian God and his devotion, sufferings persist in his life, he experiences faith crisis and is tempted to look for alternatives.

In the African traditional religion, in every sacrifice, there was always accompanying prayers but not all prayers went with sacrifice. Prayer therefore represented an integral aspect of Igbo traditional religion that was indeed broader than sacrifice. We shall therefore examine the meaning and aspects of prayers in Igbo traditional religion.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 198.

⁷⁶ Ibid,187.

2.1.5 PRAYER AS AN INTEGRAL ASPECT OF IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Prayer was part of the daily religious practice of an Igbo man. He started and ended his day with prayers before the personal shrine to his *chi*. In some families, prayers were done communally. Before they began their daily activities, the elder in the family would gather his household and they offered prayers before the family shrine. Kolanut was broken and all present ate together. The family *chi* (god) and the ancestors were also given their own share of the kolanut. The household prayed to the family *chi* or god and their ancestors for life and protection; for assistance as they went out for their daily work. At night when everybody was back, prayers were also offered to thank the gods and the ancestors for the protection and success granted. In the families where the elders must leave the house before their household woke up (as in the case of palm wine tapers, hunters or traders on some market days) the elder in the family made his prayers alone for himself and his family. Though the prayer might have been made alone, the contents and tone were always communal. A typical African was not individualistic in his concept of himself. He rather saw himself as a member of a community. His actions and deeds have communitarian effects. His prayer was not private even when he prayed privately. J. S. Pobee noted that “African spirituality , starting from traditional African epistemology which may be summarized as Cognatus sum, ergo sum, i.e. I am because I am related by blood, stresses a sense of belonging”⁷⁷The centre of his prayer is life for his household and community. As Okeke notes:

*The early morning prayers of the elders of different families which are started by offering Kolanut piece to the ancestors are dominated by the demand for life ... This life for the Igbo man/ woman does not just mean to exist, it is rather understood as the full dynamic existence in which other things – all the good things of life will come. Life is not just only for the individual persons; communities like the lineage, the village and the family, have their own 'Ndu' (life)*⁷⁸

There were different forms of prayers in African traditional religion. Each of these forms had an intrinsic relation to the other. Some of them did not most times exist on their own but only served as a prelude to other forms. We shall examine the different forms of prayer that one identifies in Igbo traditional religion.

⁷⁷ J. S. POBEE, African Spirituality, in : L. A. UGBOR, Prayer in Igbo traditional religion, 59.

⁷⁸ Anthony OKEKE, An investigation into the nature of interpersonal relationship in polygamous families, in : B . C. OGBUNANWATA, New Religious Movements or Sects,39.

EKPERE OTITO (Praise prayer): as the name signifies, in this form of prayer, the offerer praised the works and deeds of the deities in the past. This kind of prayer was often heard at festivals and community feasts in commemoration of origin of a clan or community, victory in wars fought in the past etc. The offerers believed that the god or deity in question had helped them to achieve this victory. In the case of an ancestor, he was reminded of the great feat he achieved in the past when he was still alive as was the case for ancestors who were warriors, great *dibias* (medicine men), wise men, rain makers, great hunters etc. In both praise prayers offered to the gods and ancestors, the praise names of the gods and ancestor were always chanted. One heard such names like, *Agbara ahuru gbuo okuko* (The great god, whose presence demands immediate sacrifice); *Ogbu mmadu mgbe ndu na ato ya uto* (The god that kills the evil doer when he thought he had escape with his deeds, or when he settles to enjoy his booty) etc. In the case of ancestors such praise names like *otu onye anasi unu abiala* (one person that equals a multitude), *Ogbu efi* (A generous rich); *Ogbu agu* (killer of lion in the case of a great hunter) etc. Sometimes these praise prayers existed in forms of songs.

In this form of prayer, the offerer reminded the god or ancestor in question of the great work which he accomplished in the past; he expressed his gratitude for this work, and ask the deity to continue to protect the community. So this kind of prayer most times appeared as a kind of prelude to other forms of prayer.

EKPERE EKENE (Prayer of thanksgiving). This kind of prayer constituted most times the part of the morning and night prayer of the traditional African man. He thanked the gods and ancestors for letting him see the light of the day, then he made his request. In the night, he thanked the gods and ancestors for success and protection granted during the day, he then prayed them to enable him and the members of his household to see the light of the next day. So *Ekpere ekene* most times serve as a prelude to the prayer of petition hence the Igbo say : *Ekene nwanyi akidi, ogwota ozo*- meaning when you thank someone for a favour done, he would be favourably disposed to do more. In the community, this prayer of thanksgiving was also offered at harvest feast like *iri ji* or *ibo uzo*. The community thanked the gods for a successful planting year and at the end of the year for life granted.

They thanksgiving prayer of the African centers on life. He thanked the gods for letting him and his household live. He then made petitions for long life, good health, peace and love in the community, and material well being. There was passion for life even for those who were not buoyant. Life for him did not mean just living, but living honourably and wholly, in good health and material well being. However, he yearned first and foremost for pure, raw life before any other things. Let there be life, he would constantly utter. He lived in constant optimism even in hard times like times of famine and pestilence. He believed that tomorrow would be better if there is life. That is the meaning of such Igbo names as: *Ndu diri*, (a short form of saying that once there is life there is hope), *Ndubu isi* (Life first) *Nduka aku* (life is greater than wealth) etc. That was the reason why it was a great abomination in Igbo culture for someone to take his own life, no matter in what situation one might find himself. To take another person's life was also abominable. The African understood life as a gift to be treasured and protected. Life belonged to *Chukwu*, so he said: *Chinwendu*.

AYIYO (Prayer of petition). Petition most times was not missing in the prayers of the traditional African. The African saw the world as permeated by spirits, sacred and controlled by forces greater than him. He believed that an invisible universe was in action around him and therefore he had to behave in accordance with the natural order and be in constant harmony and communication with the spirit world. The spirit world had to know his mind and his needs. When things tended to go as were not expected, he reminded the ancestors of their duties to their families and prayed the gods to grant his needs. That is to say that through prayers the African communicated his basic needs to the deities and ancestors. The most important thing he asked in his petition as we earlier on noted was life. As Westerman rightly remarked, if the African is asked what he considers the greatest good, his answer will be 'life'.⁷⁹ The Igbos prayed for longevity, good health, children, wealth and protection from evil spirits.⁸⁰ *Ayiyo* literally means "pleading". A form of this *Ayiyo* is also pleading for forgiveness for known and unknown sins. When the sin was grave as in the cases of murder or incest, it demanded sacrifice and public atonement.

⁷⁹ WESTERMANN, *The African Today and Tomorrow*, in: L. A. UGBOR, *Prayer in Igbo religion*, 57.

⁸⁰ L. A. UGBOR, *Prayer in Igbo Religion*, 56.

IJU OGU (itu ogu) (Declaration of innocence or prayer of protest): *Iju ogu* is a prayer of protest to the gods and deities for underserved suffering one was experiencing. The Igbo traditional man believed in retributive justice. He believed in divine retribution in its traditional setting. He believed that evil would only come upon the man who had sin. No just would or should suffer. He believed that only when one had gone against the ordinances of the gods or nature, when one had committed grave offences that grave tribulation might come upon him. As Éla pointed out, “in cases of misfortune, - sickness, a poor harvest... drought, sterility of couple, death of a wife or a child, any kind of failure, or successive deaths in the family, the diviner often attributes these sad events to misdeed.”⁸¹

There was also belief in communitarian effect of grave sins. Hence the Igbos say : *otu aka ruta mmanu, ozuo ndi ozo onu*, meaning that when one finger touches oil, other fingers would invariably be smeared by it. In this case the after effect of the grave sin would be on the whole community. But when a person or a household experienced great suffering and tribulations like constant death, unexplainable disease, or evil attack by evil men, the person in question would protest for the undue suffering he was undergoing. In this situation, if the victim of misfortunes felt he was innocent, he declared his innocence before heaven and earth through *Iju ogu*. He declared that he had neither bore nor executed any evil intention against any human being and as such, if the misfortune is coming from a human being, he implored on the gods to intervene and vindicate him; let the gods reward each person according to his deeds while vindicating the innocent. He declared that he had not committed any abomination and therefore, if he was being tormented by evil spirits, he prayed that the ancestors, his personal chi, the deities and above all *Chukwu* should intervene and redeem him. This protest prayer was known as *iju ogu*

*... itu ogu could be described as the prayer of persecuted soul. It is offered by person who is plagued by undeserved misfortunes inflicted by a spirit or a fellow human being. In the former case the offerer would beg the spirit to leave him alone because he has done nothing wrong. In the later case the protester prays the spirit to punish his persecutors because he had done them no wrong.*⁸²

Iju ogu portrayed the figure of a sincere, upright and righteous Igbo person undergoing undue and excruciating suffering. It showed a call for justice, for vindication. This form of

⁸¹ Jean Marc ÉLA, My faith as an African, 21.

⁸² Nathaniel I. NDIOKWERE, The African Church Today and Tomorrow, vol. 11, Enugu 1995, 70.

prayer of the traditional Igbo people could only be employed by one who was innocent. This was because the gods who were believed to see and know everything could not be deceived and when one was guilty, the gods might visit one with great adversity. In fact the offerer of *iju ugu* said during the *iju ugu* that the gods should punish him if he was found guilty.

Iju Ugu would be the traditional Igbo people understanding of the prayers of Job in the Book of Job as we shall later on demonstrate.

The person who was undertaking the prayer of *iju ugu* might adopt certain postures. Most frequently, people kneel or stand with the eyes raised to heaven where it was believed that *Chukwu* lived. The person might bend down to touch the mother earth. Contact with mother earth was believed to be contact with nature and contact with mother of other gods. Sometimes the person threw up the sand from the mother earth while calling on the gods, after which he raised his hands to the sky and concluded with these or similar words:

Elu lekwa aka m, Elu na Ala lekwa Aka m , Emegiderem onye? Aka m dikwa ocha. (Heaven look at my hands, Heaven and Earth look at my hands, whom did I wrong? My hands are clean)

This was a traditional way of calling on the universe, visible and invisible alike to come and examine one thoroughly and declare whether he had wronged any one.

As we have already stated, African traditional prayer was dominated by the demand for life and not just life but life accompanied by good health and material prosperity. This attitude to life of the Igbos which also found expression in their prayers is still dominant in the Igbo and indeed African Christian of today. Their prayer is filled with the demand for material well beings and prosperity; a call for liberation from poverty and sickness. The God they worship should cater for their well being. That is not to say that they are not to work for this well being, but God should grant success to the work of their hands. J. S. Pobee as we earlier noted said that “African mysticism, whether in traditional or Christian religion... searches for deliverance capable of transforming one’s terrestrial condition.”⁸³This is the conviction behind the gospel of prosperity which we noted in Chapter one of this work as one of the expressions of the crisis of faith experienced by the Africans. Proponents of the

⁸³ J.S. POBEE, “African Spirituality” in : WAKEFIELD (ed.), A dictionary of Christian Spirituality, in: L. A. UGBOR, Prayer in Igbo traditional Religion,56.

gospel of prosperity maintain that the Christian God is a God of riches and prosperity and not of poverty. They propagate that Christ had bore our sufferings and therefore the true believer should not suffer. That this gospel found wide spread acceptance and applause among many Nigerian and African Christians shows among other things a deep connection of this gospel to their Igbo and African root which abhorred poverty as failure and believed the righteous and innocent should not experience calamities. It shows a belief that suffering was always the work of the evil one. And the evil one has no power over the sons and daughters of God. For the real Christians who still experience suffering, this is a dilemma. They are absolved in faith crises.

2.1.6 BELIEF IN CHARMS AND AMULETS

As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, one of the cardinal aspects of African traditional religion, as confirmed by E. B. Idowu and G.Parrinder was the belief in charms and amulets. These charms and amulets were believed to have magical powers and capable of keeping off evil from the bearer. Most times, these charms and amulets were hung at the entrance door of a household. The belief was that these artifacts would neutralize any evil that an enemy was bringing into the family to harm members of the household. While the members of the household slept, while they were away, the belief was that the charms and amulets would watch over the house and protect it and its inhabitants. People also carried charms and amulets on their person. The basic reason for this was protection from evil spirit and evil persons.

At the time of the evangelization, people were asked to replace these charms and amulets with crosses, rosaries, holy water and other sacramentals. But Leiths Ross observed as we have earlier on stated, that an average Igbo Christian “can ... tie preciously in the same corner of a handkerchief his rosary and the shape bit of ‘iron for juju’ made for him by Awka blacksmith”⁸⁴ Asiegbu gives reason for this attitude as follows:

... at conversion Christians were asked and encouraged to dispose of all their cultural, religious practices and objects. Amulets or charms were replaced with crosses and medals. Yet deep within the converts, these religious objects were linked to their spiritual needs, and many a time they felt great need of them even after conversion. The exchange was not always convincing and so a spiritual gap was usually created. This made certain Christian converts turn the prohibited

⁸⁴ Leith, ROSS, African Women, 293.

*culture and religion into secret cult in the form of syncretistic practices so as to satisfy their spiritual needs. This in effect shows the strength of culture and religion*⁸⁵

But today, most Igbo Christians have abandoned this type of syncretistic practice and have replaced the charms and amulets with rosaries and crosses. Christians, who have effectively done this, expect these sacramental to have magical powers, to still protect them from evil powers. Most African Christians wear medals and rosaries as Christian amulets. Instead of visiting doctors when they are sick, some African Christians drink Holy water, believing that they will get cure from them. Even when they get medications from doctors, most of them take the tablets not with ordinary water but with Holy water. The belief is that the tablets will take care of the bodily aspect of the sickness, while the Holy water will take care of the spiritual aspect in case the sickness is as a result of a spiritual attack from an enemy. As we did mention in chapter one of this work, most African Christians still interpret sickness from spiritual point of view. Sickness for them means weakness, ability to be influenced from outside. When they are sick they think that maybe somebody is trying to harm them from outside. That was why in the traditional African setting people wore charms and amulets as a means of protection. It is not unusual to see the cross hung in front of the house of a Christian or to see most Christians wear rosaries and medals. These were meant to replace the traditional charms and amulets which helped, as they believed, in protecting them from outside force. But when in spite of these sacramentals, they fall sick or are unsuccessful in their endeavors, they are frustrated and are tempted to seek for help from elsewhere. Sometimes they are tempted to seek help from native doctors and diviners who still practice the African traditional religion, or they go to some of these African indigenous traditional churches who still combine Christian practices with practices of African traditional religion. These traditional churches are most times called prayer houses or white garment churches.

We shall now examine Igbo cosmological and metaphysical world view. Some of the points raised in the religious world view may reappear in other segments. This is because like his other African brothers, religion permeated every aspects of the Igbo's life and he had a holistic outlook on reality. When this occurs, we shall only mention the point.

⁸⁵ Anthony ASIEGBU, *A Crisis of Faith and Quest for Spirituality*, 30.

2.2.0 THE IGBO COSMOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL WORLD VIEW

We shall examine the Igbo cosmological and metaphysical world views together. Though both worlds are distinct in the Igbo mind, they are however closely related to one another.

The Igbo cosmological world view is summarized by Pantaleon Iroegbu in what he called “the *Uwa* ontology”. The world *UWA* is an Igbo word for “world”. This word *Uwa*, embraces not only the physical world, but also the metaphysical world. Explaining what the Igbos understand under the term *Uwa*, he stated:

*The entirety of existence, from God the highest Being to inanimate beings of our cosmos can be summarized in the englobing concept of the Igbo term Uwa. Uwa is all inclusive. It mirrors being, existence, entity, all reality. It englobes all that is: animate and inanimate, visible and invisible. It is comprehensive, universal and global. It has transcendent and immanent scope as well as explicative and prospective elasticity. Further it has moral, psychological and eschatological dimensions*⁸⁶

The Igbos believed in the existence of two worlds: the world of the spirits and the world of humans, the invisible world and the visible world. But these two worlds, though distinct in themselves, were closely related to one another. The earth (*Uwa anyi no na ime ya*) is the center of all activities and where potentialities are actualized. Though the centre of all activities and actualization, it is however transient, it is not man’s permanent abode: Hence the Igbos say that *Uwa bu ahia, onye zuru nke ya, olaa*(The world is like a market, one goes after one has finished trading). There was the belief in the spiritual world or the next world after the present: (*Uwa ozo*). There are different categories of the spiritual world. Pantaleon Iroegbu identified five of them: The divine world where *Chukwu* lived, the godian- world which he identified as the world of powerful spirits, the good spirits world which was the world of the good spirits who were formerly ancestors but whose relationship to the living was no more personalized due to the long passage of time and consequent lack of living memories. They have moved to the level of more generalized spirits. There was the bad spirit world (*uwa umu agbara*), which was the world of those

⁸⁶ Pantaleon IROEGBU, *Enwisdomization and African Philosophy*, 144.

spirits inimical to human beings and lastly, the world of the ancestors which was the abode of ancestors.⁸⁷

In his metaphysical world view, the notorious religious Igbo conceived the world as a sort of pyramids of beings and things in the state of equilibrium.⁸⁸ *Chukwu* (the great God) who was also called *Chineke* (God the creator) was at the apex or topmost of this pyramid followed by the deities, other spirits, ancestors and humans, animals, and then inanimate things and objects. Like his African counterparts the Igbo acknowledged the often intersecting, co- existence of both physical and visible, and the spiritual and invisible of the universe, and yet saw no contradictions in them. Rather he like his other African counterparts was constantly engaged in the search for harmony among these factors, and saw ill health, epidemics and natural disaster as fruit of discord in either the anthropological or cosmic order.⁸⁹ This discord was primary caused by the sins of man. In this regard, the belief of the Igbo Africans was similar to that of divine retribution as we found in the Book of Job. This belief still influences today's Christians in that they believe that Christianity is all about reaping what one has sown. Those who follow good part will find goodness, but those who follow evil part would meet calamities.

Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for what his hands have done shall be done to him.(Isaiah 3: 10- 11)

But when the just and innocent experiences calamities and deep pains despite his faith in God, the faith of the Igbo and African Christian is challenged.

In his cosmological world view, the Igbo believed that the visible world, which was created by *Chukwu*, was subject to change depending on the moral action of man. Thus man could maintain the state of equilibrium of the cosmos by not going against the ordinances of the

⁸⁷ Ibid, 141f.

⁸⁸ P. ALIGWEKWE, 199.

⁸⁹ George, EHUSANI, *An Afro Christian Vision 'Ozovehe'*, towards a more human world, New York 1999, 219 f.

In the paper presented by Prof. Dr. Leonard Swindler at the 2011 Facultatis of the faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Vienna, on the 17th of October titled " Die Menschheit im Wandel der Zeit: Vom Monolog zum Dialog, the presenter emphasized that the cosmos is in constant dialogue. There is a constant dialogue between the different components of the cosmos. I think it is in this sense that the traditional Igbo man understood the cosmos and believed that the different components of the universe were in constant dialogue with one another.

gods and of nature and by not committing what the Igbos regarded as *aru* (abomination). Thus man's moral action would maintain the stability of the cosmos and immoral actions would always bring disaster and destabilize the cosmos. So the Igbos say: *Uwa na eme ntughari*. (The world changes). This statement was multidimensional. First of all, it was characteristic of Igbo philosophical optimism⁹⁰, in that they believed that tomorrow could be better than today, one should keep on struggling and hoping for a better tomorrow. The statement was also a watch word that reminded them of the need to maintain the moral and religious elements that hold the universe in place, departure from it may cause the world to change (*tugharia*) for the worse. It was a reminder on the wicked who might be enjoying not to think it was all over because the gods, who were also known as *Ogbu mmadu mgbe ndu náto ya uto* (the god who kills the wicked when he has settled to eat his booty) would surely visit them and change their world. It was also an advice to people not to laugh at the lot of the innocent who might be experiencing difficulties. They believed that *Onye aka ya di ocha* (one whose hand is clean, an innocent man) would always be redeemed by the gods. The offerer of the prayer of Iju ogu calls for this redemption to come.

At this point we shall examine the place of suffering in the metaphysical and cosmological understanding of the traditional Igbo person.

2.2.1 THE PLACE OF SUFFERING IN IGBO WORLD VIEW

For the traditional Igbo person, suffering did not belong to the normal order of things; suffering was an aberration of the normal course of reality and this aberration was caused by the sins of man. All kinds of suffering- epidemics, disease, premature or repeated death, natural disasters and other forms of suffering were attributed to be coming from power superior to man as logical consequences of grave sins by man. As such, suffering was most times seen as punishment from the gods; therefore it must be avoided or banished by all means. This is done most times through sacrifices and prayers. As Ezeanya stated:

In the traditional religion of our people, suffering is seen as an evil that must be got rid of by all means. There is therefore no question of resignation to the will of God, no matter the nature of

⁹⁰ P. E. ALIGWEKWE, 199.

*suffering and no matter the duration...according to the religious tradition of our people, suffering could never come from the hand of God.*⁹¹

Suffering was also sometimes understood as a warning from the gods to the evil doer to change his way. In this way it was understood as a corrective measure. The gods through this warned the evil doer of a more aggressive calamity that would come if one did not change his way. Like a father, they punished to save.⁹²

The reason for the negative dispositions of the Igbos towards suffering is not farfetched as we shall see in their traditional notion of life after death.

2.2.2 THE NOTION OF LIFE AFTER DEATH IN THE TRADITIONAL IGBO WORLDVIEW

Igbo's traditional Spirituality is fundamentally earthly spirituality that is grossly concerned with the abundance of life for an individual and the community in this world. Their Spirituality is not "eschatological but historical, anthropocentric—or better perhaps, sociocentric, revolving around the community of the living and dead."⁹³ Although the Igbo traditional religion had a concept of life after death, but this was not thought in the concepts of the Christian understanding of heaven and hell, or in terms of reward for a good life lived here on earth and punishment for evil committed. The Igbo had the conception that one reaped what one had sown, in this world (*na Uwaa anyi no na ime ya*), not necessarily in the next world(*na Uwa ozo*). His belief that the elders who lived a good life here would be admitted into the assembly of ancestors was not understood in the Christian concept of heaven or reward. Ancestors were more or less a privilege position of belonging to the world of the spirits and being able to be an intercessor and a protector, respected and venerated by humans. But these ancestors could be rebuked or even starved by humans when they did not perform their duties. Speaking on this Mbiti noted:

Whether one is deified or not depends on the living, and there is nothing to hope for or look forward to in the after life... Even where there is a belief in reincarnation, this too is not a hope or reward for the after life, and he who is reincarnated is neither better nor worse off than he

⁹¹ Stephen, EZEANYA, The Christian and suffering, Lenten Pastoral 1989 in: Chris A. OBI, Biblical Perspectives on Suffering in African context, in: African Journal of Biblical studies, Vol. XXII No. 1, April 2006, 113.

⁹² Chris A., OBI, 115.

⁹³ L. A. Ugbor, 74.

*who is not. The here after is for the African people devoid of hope or promise. One is simply gathered to one's forefathers, and this is about all.*⁹⁴

In this sense, the traditional African tried to make best use of his life on earth. He sought to live life to its fullest on this earth. He observed moral and religious principles and hoped for a reward here on earth. He was not a hedonist because there were religious and moral regulations for his actions. His longing for life was understood to be communitarian, life not only for himself but for his family and community. Life for him meant wellbeing.

We shall at this point outline some of those moral principles that regulated the life of the traditional Igbo Africans; those moral actions that the ancient held in high regard and believed helped to maintain the equilibrium of the universe. We do this because it would help us to understand how some elements and principles in the book of Job would be understood in the traditional Igbo setting. It is important to state that most of these principles we shall enumerate (and of course have enumerated) still exist in the modern Igbo society of today.

2.3 SOME IGBO MORAL PRINCIPLES

The Igbo and indeed African moral principles were closely related to their religious principles. To go against the moral principles of a community meant most times going against her religious principles and in most cases, required sacrifice to clean one of his transgression. Some of these moral principles are:

2.3.1 SACREDNESS OF LIFE

For the traditional Igbo, life was very sacred and belonged to Chukwu. Under no circumstance should one take his or another person's life because life. Those who committed murder were banished from the community or sometimes made to pay with their own lives. The body of those who committed suicide were not touched. They were thrown into the evil forest.

⁹⁴ J.S. MBITI, in: L. A. UGBOR, 72.

2.3.2 TRUTH

Truth was a very high moral principles among the Igbos. The Igbos said that Eziokwu bu Ndu (Truth is life). Sometimes, one was asked to take an oath before the god or goddess of the land that he would speak the truth on a particular issue. At other times the elders pour libations on the ground calling on the gods to punish anyone that bore false witness. It was believed that one who spoke falsehood always came to an untimely death, while those who spoke the truth had long life.

2.3.3 JUSTICE

The Igbos believed in the divine justice and human justice. Their notion of justice was strictly commutative and retributive. Humans should endeavor to maintain justice on earth. Injustice to the orphans and widows would normally call down the wrath of the gods. The gods also maintained justice in their dealings with humans. It was believed that one would only reap what one had sown. It was believed that calamity would not visit any one who had not committed grave sins. That is why the offerer of the prayer of Iju ogu cried for justice when he was unduly afflicted. As Arinze stated,

Justice is one of the main pillars of Ibo morality... Justice it is that rules the relations between man and man... Justice and piety dictate the cult of the ancestors and the performance of final funeral rites... It is the Ibo man's idea of justice which drives him to justify revenge and say: Eme mbolu aburo njo (Revenge is not sin)⁹⁵

2.3.4 INNOCENCE

Innocence was a precondition for effective sacrifice and prayer. An innocent man was believed to be free from calamities. To persecute an innocent man was believed to mean inviting the wrath of the gods.

2.3.5 MORAL LIVING

Morality as it concerned sexual behaviours was strictly regulated in traditional African society. Such immoral behaviours like incest, same sex or intercourse with animals called

⁹⁵ F. A. ARINZE, Sacrifice in Igbo Religion, in: L. A. UGBOR, 60.

for banishment of offender from the community. Infidelity in marriage was a grave crime against the society.

2.3.6 SOLIDARITY

Solidarity with one another was the hallmark of Igbo and indeed African traditional societies. It was exhibited on the economic, social and religious spheres. Celebrations were done in common. A brother's misfortune was a common misfortune. When misfortune befell a family as in the case of death, every member of the community was expected to identify with the bereaved. The burial ceremony was most times a community affair. There were laid down community laws and customs about how somebody who suffered from any misfortune was to be helped. That was why the pain of excommunication was very severe in the Igbo society. It cut one off from the solidarity of the members of the community. It was against the custom of the Igbo not to help a handicap or somebody in need.

2.3.7 HOSPITALITY

This was ingrained in the custom of the Igbo people. It was believed that hospitality brought good fortunes and not being hospitable brought woes and regrets. It was believed that the gods and the spirits could be going around in human forms asking for help. Those who helped strangers would always be blessed while the opposite brought adversity.

We shall now examine the anthropological world view of the Igbo person.

2.4 IGBO ANTHROPOLOGICAL WORLD VIEW

The ancient Igbos believed that man was a created being. Different Igbo mythologies attested to how man was created by *Chukwu*, the great God. Although in his metaphysical conception they conceived the order of beings as in the form pyramid and placed man below the spirits and above animals, the ancient Igbos were however convinced that man was the crown of creation. They believed that man was the author of his own

destiny.⁹⁶ They believed that although man was a created being, man had the ability to manipulate the events of the world to his own advantage. Through his sacrifice, he could control the decisions of the gods, and through his moral principles, he could maintain the state of equilibrium in the cosmos. In this regard Aligwekwe wrote:

*With regard to man in himself, in his essence, to have been superior to all natural elements of creation, and by his ability to hold dialogue with the supernatural forces and maintain the equilibrium between him and them, he has already fixed his status among them and has proved his superiority over the rest of creation in the natural world. His duty was to work incessantly to the upkeep of that superiority they thought.*⁹⁷

The ancient Igbo's conception of the human person was different, or better said, broader than that of the western world. While A. S. Boethius defined human person thus: *Persona est rationalis naturae individuae substantiae*. (Person is an individual substance of a rational nature) and Aquinas said that: Person is a distinct subsistent in rational nature,⁹⁸ ancient African would rather see a person from its communitarian point of view, although each still distinct in itself. They saw a human person as an authentic being among other beings, involved in a wholesome and life involving relationship with other beings and environment, and he finds his realization in this relationship. The 'I' is defined in the 'We'. As John Mbiti puts it: *I am because we are, And because we are, therefore I am.*⁹⁹

For the Africans, the community is very relevant in the definition of a person. Pantaleon Iroegbu defining human person from African point of view stated that: "The human person is the communally and self-embodied being that is in search of full transcendence."¹⁰⁰

The sense of community is very strong among the Igbos and indeed Africans and is the foundation of their solidarity.

Psychosomatically, the human person in the mind of the traditional Africans, had three constitutive parts: Ahu which is the body which gives it locus on earth (Uwa), Uche (mind) which expresses its rationality, and Mmuo (soul/spirit), which ensures his immortality.

⁹⁶ Although it was also believed that a person could have a bad chi, chi ojoo (ill fated), that did not go against the belief that man had the power through sacrifice and prayers to manipulate his world

⁹⁷ P.E. ALIGWEKWE, 198.

⁹⁸ Cf. Pantaleon IROEGBU, Spirituality and metaphysics. Their Relationship in African Worldview

⁹⁹ J.S. MBITI, African Religion and Philosophy, 108,

¹⁰⁰ P. IROEGBU, Kpim of Personality. Treatise on the Human person, Owerri 2000, 107.

The ancient believed that man was fundamentally equal. However, there were different social classifications among them as we shall observe.

2.5 IGBO TRADITIONAL SOCIAL CLASSIFICATIONS

We shall examine the social classifications among the traditional Igbos. This would help us to adequately situate the person of Job(as we shall do in the last chapter of this work) in the social and cultural milieu of the Igbo Africans and what meaning his ordeal would make to them as they try to understand the Book of Job.

According to Aligwekwe, five different social status were identified with the traditional ancient Igbos: *Ogaranya or Nnukwu mmadu, Dimpka, Ogbenye, Ohu and Osu*.¹⁰¹ However, between the Dimkpa and ogbenye, I identify yet another group: *Onyenkiti*. We shall examine what they signified.

A) *OGARANANYA OR NNUKWU MMADU* *Ogaranya or Nnukwu mmadu*: These were the rich or wealthy member of the society who had social titles such as Ogbuefi or Ozo titles. The Igbo society distinguished between wealth (*aku*), and title (*echichi, okwa*). The two were necessary for the status of *Ogaranya or Nnukwu mmadu*. However, the two alone could not make one *Ogaranya or nnukwu mmadu*. It was above all the generosity of a rich man, his relevance to the socio, economic and political situation of the people; his ability to use his wealth and position for the benefits of individuals and the community. A person is realized in his relation to his community- this a principle enshrined in the African society:

*The human person is realized only in taking up and transforming the socio – economic and spiritual elements provided by his community. The accomplished person is not only rooted in the community and its givens, it is also that community that which determines his constitution and development as well as his destiny.*¹⁰²

An Nnukwu mmadu must of necessity possess all the moral principles we enumerated above.

¹⁰¹ P. E. ALIGWEKWE, 130.

¹⁰² E. M. METOGO, *Théologie Africaene*, in : KABASELE –LUMBALA, *Christianity & Africa*, in: Pantaleon IROEGBU, *Spirituality and Metaphysics*, 19.

b. DIMKPA. People under this social classification were not most times rich. However, they could be titled or untitled men. The Igbo word Dimkpa signified a strong person. The word was used then for those who with courage faced the challenges of life. A person was called dimpka, when one never despaired in the face of adversity, he might not have had great success, nevertheless he had never despaired. He was also called dimkpa when he had with brevity wrestled through life's ordeal, and came out successfully. One could say of a dead person that he was *dimkpa* when he never gave up the struggle while he was alive, or died for the sake of his brevity and audacity. One who was not afraid to say the truth was called *dimkpa*. A *dimkpa* could not be a poor person. His wisdom and strength was expected to have helped him to achieve considerable success financially and otherwise. But he was not so rich or influential as the *Nnukwu mmadu* or *ogaranya*; he had not yet attained his social status. The *Ogaranya* or *Nnukwu Mmadu* had led foundation for his riches and his riches are accessible to the commoners. A dimkpa was expected to be ambitious till death. There was the possibility that he could attain the status of *ogaranya*. But when he gave up in life struggle, he ceased to be *dimkpa* and may degenerate to *Onyenkiti* or *Ogbenye*.

C) ONYENKITI: A person belonging to this group was neither a titled man or a rich man. He was just a simple man there. He was not *dimkpa* because he lacked the brevity and audacity of those in the group. He is not at all influential. However one cannot say he is poor because he could afford the basic necessities of life. His positive aspect was that he was most times seen as a peaceful man. He would not want to say or do anything that might cause trouble. However, there were also those in this group, who though looked peaceful, could be harmful behind the scene. The *onyenkiti* could simply be referred to as a commoner who had not degenerated to the level of *ogbenye*.

D). OGBENYE: *Ogbenye* is an Igbo word for poverty or a poor person. This group was made up of those who were financially not buoyant. There were different classes of poverty. At one end, there were those who could, though with difficulties afford their daily needs. At the other end there were those in abject poverty (*ogbenye onu ntu*), those who could not afford their daily needs, who relied on the helps of relatives and friends. The good thing about the *Ogbenye* was that he still had his freedom.

E)OHU. *Ohu* is an Igbo word for slave. The *ohus* could be hostages seized during wars or those bought as slaves. There were also those who became *ohus* because they could not pay the money they borrowed. The *ohus* had masters whom they served. They had no freedom. Their masters used them as they wished. However some of them in the course of time regained their freedom through hard work or ability to pay the money borrowed. To an *ohu*, there was latent hope of regaining his freedom sometime.

F)OSU. The last social group was the *Osu*. They were those who consecrated themselves or were consecrated to the gods to play the role of protection of their altars. One may become an *Osu* through a collective action of a community which consecrates him to the service of a god when the god of the community demanded such offering through diviners. Some *osus* offered themselves as servants of those gods in order to seek protection from the god (as was the case during slave trade), or to escape punishment from the community as was the case in the case of murderers or thieves. The *osu* was hereditary. Children of *osu* remained *osus*. The *osu* benefited from the offering to the gods but they were cut off from the rest of the people socially, economical, cultural and otherwise. No association, no intermarriage. They were at the lowest social status of the Igbo traditional society.¹⁰³

With this we end the chapter two and the first part of this work. The second part, will deal with biblical and theological conception of suffering in chapter three and the Book of Job in chapter four.

¹⁰³ There is today no more practice of the consecration of new *osu*. But the descendants of the former *osus* are today still regarded as *osus*. The issue of *Osu* caste system is still a problem for the church in Igbo land. The church educates the Christian to abandon such obnoxious tradition. Success has been made. The descendants of those who were termed *osu* now participate in the affairs of the community. However, the problem revolves now around intermarriage. Those who think they are not *osu* still find it hard to marry those who they think are descendants of *osu*. It is hoped that in the near future the Igbo Christians would totally abandon such unchristian practice.

CHAPTER THREE

THEODICY: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF SUFFERING

3.1.1 THEODICY: TOWARDS A DEFINITION

The term “theodicy” was coined by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716), a German philosopher (from two Greek words: *theos*, “God” and *dike* “justice). He used the word “to describe his defense of God’s goodness and omnipotence against arguments based on the multitude of evils in the world ... Today, ‘theodicy’ refers most commonly to the theological and philosophical response to the problem of evil.”¹⁰⁴

Although the term “theodicy” is relatively new, the problem of evil which it addresses is almost as old as man’s belief in God. The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270), was the first to give the word its philosophical formulation in the so called “dilemma of Epicurus” quoted by Lactantius (260-340) and some other scholars. Epicurus’ arguments revolve around the possibility of these propositions one of which should be true: (a) God wishes to take evil away but is unable, or (b) he is able but unwilling or, (c) he is neither willing nor able or (d) he is both willing and able. If (a), he is feeble or weak and therefore not God. If (b) He is envious which is against the nature of God. If (c), he is both envious and weak and therefore not God. If (d), why then is evil in the world?¹⁰⁵ The problem of evil also occupied Plato. Boethius (480- 524) had also questioned:

„Si quidem deus est, unde mala? Bona vero unde, si non est?“

¹⁰⁴ B. WHITNEY, Theodicy, in: Berard L. MARTHALER et al (eds.), New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 13, Detroit 2003, 867.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. LACTANTUS, On the Anger of God, in : W. FLETCHER (trans.), The Writings of the Ante Nicean fathers, in : M. O. EGBUOGU, Eschatological Hope as Christian Theodicy, 124f.

“If there is God, why the evil? But why the good, if he is not?”¹⁰⁶

The argument against God’s existence on the basis of evil in the world finds its classical formulation in the writings of the ancient skeptic Sextus Empiricus (150 AD).

Is either that God does not want to prevent evil, although he can, and therefore he is not good; or he wants to prevent it but cannot – then he is not almighty; or he can neither prevent it nor wants to prevent it, then he is neither almighty nor good. If he is however neither almighty nor good, then he is also not God. But because it is undeniable there is then evil, suffering, misfortune and sin in the world, and they are not being prevented, it follows that there can be no God (trans. Mine).¹⁰⁷

3.1.2 KINDS OF EVIL

It is pertinent at this point to differentiate different kinds of evil that have been identified. Evil is summarily defined by Augustine (354 – 430) as “what presumably or really harms us”¹⁰⁸ The scholastics distinguished two kinds of evil:

- a) *Malum physicum* - The natural evil (This includes devouring and being devoured, natural catastrophe, different diseases, deformities etc). The second was:
- b) *Malum morale*: This refers to moral evil for which human beings are culpable (This includes unjustness, insult, violence, cruelty, war etc.). Other kinds of evils were later identified. They included:
- c) *Malum metaphysicum*: The metaphysical evil. This was added by Leibniz. It refers to those evils that are ontologically related to created beings. They are enshrined in the “creatureliness” of created beings. They include: finiteness and limitation, fallibility and error- prone, transiency and mortality.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Michael BÖHNKE, Von scheinbaren Lösung zu existentiellen Fragen. Zur verantworteten Rede von Gott angesichts des Leids, in: Leid erfahren – Sinn suchen. Das Problem der Theodizee, 73. (subsequently to be quoted as : Michael BÖHNKE) (Vgl. Wenn Gott ist, woher das Böse? Woher das Gute, wenn nicht ist?).

¹⁰⁷ Cf. L. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Ein weg durch das Leid.Theodizee Frage im Alten Testament, in:M. BÖHNKE, et al (eds.), Leid erfahren – Sinn suchen. Das Problem der Theodizee, 7. (vgl. Entweder will Gott das Böse nicht verhindern, obwohl er könnte – dann ist er nicht gut; oder er will es, kann er aber nicht – dann ist er nicht allmächtig; oder er will es weder noch kann es – dann ist er weder mächtig noch gut. Is er jedoch nicht allmächtig oder nicht gutig, dann ist er auch nicht Gott. Weil es aber nun unlegbar das Böse, Leid, Übel, und Schuld in der Welt gibt, sie foglich nicht verhindert werden, kann es keinen Gott geben)

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Hans KESSLER, Das Leid in der Welt. Ein Schrei nach Gott, Würzburg 2007, 9. (Subsequently to be quoted as Hans KESSLER).

The liberation theology still identified another kind of evil:

- d) The structural evil. This is a kind of evil identified and developed by the 20th century liberation theology. It refers to those evils which are conditioned by (societal, legal, political, economic, ideological) structures, created by men to their very advantage and to the utmost disadvantage of others or a group “outside”. A fifth one is called
- e) Theological evil: This has a religious undertone. It refers to a situation of cutting oneself off or separating oneself from God, the foundation of life and source of all goodness.¹⁰⁹ In this regard is equated in the Old Testament with immorality and unfaithfulness to the covenant (Judges 2:11-15; 2Samuel 12:9- 10; 1 Kings 2:44). It has the human heart as its origin (Proverbs 6:14; 21:10; Ecclesiastes 8:11). It is expressed in different forms as idolatry and apostasy (Deuteronomy 4:25, 1Kings 11:6), disobedience to divine commandments (1Samuel 15:9), false prophecy (Deuteronomy 13:5), murder (2Samuel 12:9), false witness (Deuteronomy 19:18-19), adultery and fornication (Deuteronomy 22:21-24), stealing (Genesis 44:4; Deuteronomy 24:7).¹¹⁰

3.1.3 THEODICY: AN EXCURSES

Evil is a power against life.¹¹¹ For the ancient Israel, death constituted the greatest question mark against any defense of God for one would ask: Why were we created, that we shall later only become food for worms? (Sir 10: 11). But when the notion of life after death gradually crept into the ancient Israelite thought, their inner pessimism (as regards the emptiness of their existence), and the ambiguities surrounding the goodness of the deity found somehow a solution. However, this new conviction did not in any way alleviate the contradictions and misery brought about by the phenomena of evil, suffering and death.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Ibid, 9f.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Richard P. MCBRIEN, *Catholicism*, New York 1994, 343.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Cf. J. L. CRENSHAW (ed.), *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, Philadelphia, London 1983, 1 (subsequently to be quoted as J. L. CRENSHAW)

It remains true that the question of theodicy and the problem of evil do not arise for every religion and for every conception of deity. It arises only for the religion which insists that the object of its worship is at once perfectly good and unlimitedly powerful.¹¹³ In ancient Israel thought, it is “one God that “kills and brings to life, he brings down to Sheol and raises up” (1Sam 2: 8). In the same way Deutero –Isaiah proclaims the divine word “I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe, I am the Lord, I am the Lord who do all these things” (Isa 45:7). “The consequence of emphasis upon God’s incomparability, nay sole existence, was intensified distress about undeserved suffering. Famine, pestilence, and earthquake struck human society without discrimination between the innocent and the guilty”¹¹⁴ God’s goodness and all powerfulness seem to contradict our experience when we experience evil and disaster, be it from nature or from man. This can lead to the denial of God and atheism.¹¹⁵ In short, “every phenomenon that brings into question an assumption of harmony undergirding human existence presents additional evidence for the case against God” Thus theodicy according to Crenshaw may be loosely defined as “attempt to pronounce a verdict of ‘Not Guilty’ over God for whatever seems to destroy the order of society and universe.”¹¹⁶ This definition is in line with what Leibniz had in mind in the coinage of the word “theodicy”. According to him, theodicy has as its aim the justification of God in the face of the sufferings and imperfections in the world. The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) following this line of understanding defined theodicy as “the defense of the highest Wisdom of the source of the world against the accusation brought against Him by reason because of the purposelessness in the world.”¹¹⁷ (mine trans.).

¹¹³ K. SURIN, Theology and the problem of Evil, in: Martin O. EGBUOGU, Eschatological Hope as Christian Theodicy, Enugu 2006, 125.

¹¹⁴ J. L. CRENSHAW, 2f.

¹¹⁵ Cf. L. SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, Theodizeefrage im Alten Testament, 7.

¹¹⁶ J. L. CRENSHAW, 1.

¹¹⁷ Immanuel KANT, Über das Misslingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodizee, in: Michael BÖHNKE, Von scheinbaren Lösung zu existentiellen Fragen. Zur verantworteten Rede von Gott angesichts des Leids, in: Leid erfahren Sinn suchen. Das Problem der Theodizee, 74. (Vgl. der Verteidigung der höchsten Weisheit des Welturhebers gegen die Anklage , welche die Vernunft aus dem Zweckwidrigen in der Welt gegen jene erhebt).

This “justification of God” or put another way “attempt to pronounce a verdict of ‘Not Guilty’ on God” takes place in the law court of human reason. In this “legal proceedings”, the human reason is both the accuser, the defendant and also the judge. However, J. B. Metz is of another opinion as regards the question and task of theodicy. He opines that the task of theodicy is not that of justification of God. It is not our duty or lie under our power to justify God. God should justify himself. Theodicy rather concerns itself with the question of “how at all to speak about God in the face of abysmal history of suffering in the world, his world”¹¹⁸ This becomes our next task: The conception of God is the Old Testament in the face of suffering. How was the suffering history of Israel in the Old Testament compatible with the conception of a loving faithful God of the covenant?

3.2 THEODICY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: OLD TESTAMENT ANSWERS TO HUMAN SUFFERING

There was an underlying assumption of order in the universe amongst the ancients. The universe was predictable because that was the wish of its creator. This conception made life for the ancient bearable. Even when this assumption of an underlying order and predictability of the universe was threatened by the deluge, the Noachic covenant restored the confidence that life could continued under changed circumstances (Gen. 9: 8- 17). “So long as that conviction of order held firm in the universe, essential meaning remain intact despite occasional disturbances that made happiness an elusive goal.”¹¹⁹ This is because order carries in its train a conviction that life has a discernible purpose.¹²⁰ Therefore meaning and not happiness was basic to survival. The question here then becomes: What meaning did Israel give to its experience of suffering in the Old Testament?

In the Old Testament, the God who was in a special way revealed in the covenant, and who seriously implicated himself therein, is seen as a faithful and just God. Sequel to this, the Old

¹¹⁸ J. B. MEZT, Theodizee – empfindliche Gottesrede, in: H. KESSLER, Das Leid in der Welt – ein Schrei nach Gott, Würzburg 2007,17. (Vgl. wie denn überhaupt von Gott zu reden sei angesichts der abründigen Leidensgeschichte der Welt, ‘seiner’ Welt).

¹¹⁹ J. L. CRENSHAW, 2.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 4.

*Testament response to the problem of human suffering is seen as being essentially, an attempt to offer reasons for human suffering in order to preserve untainted the justice and majesty of (this) God.*¹²¹

However, “God’s reputation was salvaged at immense cost”.¹²²

Ancient Israel understanding of suffering with belief in order and purpose spread across different approaches. We shall here discuss some of them.

3.2.1 TRADITIONAL THESIS OF RETRIBUTION

Retribution constitutes the main Old Testament response of the problem of evil. The traditional thesis of retribution maintains that suffering is the consequence of the sin of man. What you sow, you shall reap. This assumption occurs in the Hebrew Bible starting from the primeval history (Gen. 1- 11). In Gen. 3: 16- 19, the first woman receives a threefold punishment of her sins: bearing children in pain, her desire for her husband, and domination by men. The man must toil and suffer for his daily bread. Sin was the cause of the Deluge because “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thought of his heart was evil” (Gen. 6.5). The concept of retribution – punishing evil and rewarding good is seen to be grounded directly in the covenant. This covenant clearly defined what God considered good and evil actions. Whether Israel remained faithful or slipped into infidelity determined its fate.¹²³

*...Hebrew view of reward for good and punishment for evil is grounded on the covenant justice, but behind this covenant and its justice are God’s loving kindness (hesed), and his merciful compassion (rehamin) which led him to elect and to nature and to sustain Israel as his own possession, as his own first - born*¹²⁴

This idea of covenant relationship is fully worked out in Deuteronomy and in the Deuteronomistic theory of history. The “Deuteronomistic theology justifies national setbacks and political oppression as divine punishment for sin. The portrayal of Israel and Judah as

¹²¹ M. O. EGBUOGU, *Eschatological Hope as Christian Theodicy*, 69.

¹²² J. L. CRENSHAW, 2.

¹²³ J. M. MCDERMOTT, *The Bible on Human suffering*, in: M. O. EGBUOGU, *Eschatological Hope as Christian Theodicy*, 76.

¹²⁴ M. O. EGBUOGU, 82.

corrupt to the core suffices to justify divine abandonment of the chosen people...¹²⁵ Retribution was applied to Israel's history, to kings, communities and individuals within and outside Israel. Even though the Torah is basically seen as the expression of Yahweh love and mercy, "reciprocal commitment and / or promises were therein involved."¹²⁶ The Exodus account of Israel's forty years journey in the wilderness abounds with incidents of rebellion and sin on the part of the people: the golden calf incident (Exodus 32: 1-35), the complaint about the meat (Num 11: 1, 33- 34), revolt of Miriam against Moses leadership (Number 12) and the revolt of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Number 16: 1- 38) etc. Earlier on, Pharaoh had his own share of Yahweh's anger for his stubbornness and obstinacy. Deuteronomy 32 provides a list of blessings and curses in line with retribution. In Joshua, Israel is greatly punished for the sin of Achan. The first and second Books of the Kings attributed the fall of Samaria 721BC and that of Judah 587BC to the sins of the kings of Israel who persisted in the sin of Jeroboam (2 Kings 17: 7-23), and the sins of Manasseh in the case of Judah (2 Kings 21: 2- 16).

The prophetic Books also follow this line of retribution. This was evident in the words the prophets used: words of doom, warnings, threats, admonitions etc. Sin was defined as unfaithfulness to Yahweh. In Isaiah's Vineyard song (Isaiah 5), Israel is portrayed as reaping what it had sown. Calamities would visit her as a result of her unfaithfulness. Yahweh will in Hosea 4 punish Israel, priests and the people alike, because of the unfaithfulness. Amos' description of the judgment of Yahweh is full of words of threats and warnings: I will send fire, ..., I will break..., I will cut off (1: 4-5, 7-8, 14; 2: 2-3); " I will turn my hand against (1:8), I will break open (2:13), I will send you into exile (5: 27).¹²⁷ And all these can be summarized in the verse: I will punish you for all your sins (3: 2). A classical expression of the retributive doctrine is found in Isaiah:

Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him. For what his hands have done shall be done to him (Isaiah 3 10 – 11).

¹²⁵ J. L. CRENSHAW, 7.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Cf. Chris OBI, Biblical Perspectives on Suffering in African Context, in : African Journal of Biblical Studies, Vol. XXXII, No.1, April 2006, 100.

The doctrine of retribution also permeates the Wisdom Books. Psalm which is held to be product of Sapiential tradition and a late preface to the Book of Psalm¹²⁸ praises the upright man who delights in the law of God, “Whatever he does prospers” (v. 3). “But not so the wicked... the way of the wicked will perish.” (vv 4, 6). The Psalmist in Ps. 37 was confident of the destruction of the wicked and the triumph of the just. In the Book of Proverb many passages give expressions of the acts - consequence relationship. Proverbs 10: 27 states that “The fear of the Lord adds length of to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short”. Other passages include: 3.33ff; 10:29; 13: 21; 15: 3-9; 25f etc. Though the main aim of the Book of Job is an objection against the doctrine of retribution, retributive theory was the basis of the arguments of the friends of Job. This will be handled in the next chapter which deals basically with the Book of Job.

So retribution represented the Old Testament main response to the problem of suffering. But this traditional response to the problem of evil most times contradicted human experience. Experience showed that most times the just and upright suffered while the evil doer seemed to be in peace. Though a Hebrew religious thought gave an answer that the joy of the wicked was momentary and the suffering of the just temporary, sometimes people saw the just perish in their suffering. Most objections were raised by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Job and Ecclesiastes. While retributive doctrine came to the defense of God, it is grossly inadequate. Among other things, “this explanation failed to take into account the terrible misery inflicted upon innocent persons who happened to be caught in the suffering occasioned by nature’s fury.”¹²⁹ And “since nature’s destructive forces were unleashed by the creator, the distinction between moral and natural evil becomes somewhat vague in ethical monotheism”¹³⁰

But the Hebrew Bible has other answers to the problem of suffering.

¹²⁸ Cf. M.O. EGBUOGU, Eschatological Hope as Christian Theodicy, 79.

¹²⁹ J.L. CRENSHAW, Theodicy in the Old Testament, 3.

¹³⁰ Ibid,2.

3.2.2 COLLECTIVE SUFFERING

Close to the retributive notion of suffering in the Old Testament is the understanding of suffering in a collective sense. Suffering is sometimes understood as a result of inter – connectivity with others. One can suffer because one belongs to a group of people. As with retributive doctrine, suffering in this sense was seen as punishment for sin but in this case, the sin in question might not have been committed directly by the sufferer. It could be an inherited sin or sin as a result of connectivity with a group, as a member of a group. When one member sins, it touches the rest of the members of the group. This could be understood in terms of “corporate personality”.

In modern biblical scholarship, the term “corporate personality” has been coined to designate some “Old Testament sense of reality whereby the individual is a representative as well as a constitutive member of the group to which he belongs.”¹³¹ In this sense, the people of Israel could be understood in terms of “corporate personality”¹³² Following this understanding, in the Book of Joshua, Israel was greatly punished for the sin of Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah of the tribe of Judah who touched something that fell under the ban. The anger of Yahweh flared out against the Israelite and Israel was defeated at Ai (Joshua chapter 7). David’s sin resulted to pestilence 2 Samuel 24:1- 17.

However the intrinsic inadequacy of this doctrine gave rise to protest against it especially in the post exilic period when the people protested that “the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on age”. This led to Jeremiah’s “principle of personal responsibility” where he emphasized that it is the one who has sinned that would die (Jer. 31: 29-30).

3.2.3 SUFFERING AS ABSURD

Disillusioned by the state of reality, the circumstances surrounding both the just and the unjust, the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes laments:

¹³¹ J. M. MCDERMOTT, The Bible and Human suffering, The Bible and Human Suffering, in: M.O. EGBUOGU, Eschatological Hope as Christian Theodicy, 72.

¹³² Cf. L. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Theodicy Frage im Alten Testant, in: M. BÖHNKE / SÖDING (eds.), Leid erfahren – Sinn suchen, 10.

So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits him. All share common destiny- the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifice and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oath, so with those who are afraid to take them. This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all.(Eccl. 9: 1-3)

He pictures every activity as *hebel*, vanity, "chasing after the wind". This word is extensively used in the Book of Ecclesiastes.¹³³ Overwhelmed by the absurdity of suffering in the events of the world, its irregularities and its irrationalities, he questions: "What does a man get for all his toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief, even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless" (Eccl. 2:22- 24), the writer of this Book of Ecclesiastes decides to give counsel: "A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work" (3:24). Jeremiah in his lament finds no answer to his problem of suffering. His enemies prosper while he continues to languish in pains. He ventures to indict God and doubts his righteousness. (Jer.12). The absurdity of suffering also finds expression in many passages of the Book of Psalm. Psalm 22:1-2 provides a typical example. The Psalmist cries by day but he gets no answer, and by night, he is also not silent. Lamenting on the pains and suffering his people are undergoing states.

All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or being false to your covenant. Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path. But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us with deep darkness... Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression (44:17-19, 24)

Here, the silence of God makes the suffering more absurd and incomprehensible.

2.2.4 SUFFERING AS EDUCATIVE AND INSTRUCTIVE

The notion of suffering as educative or instructive is well established in the Old Testament. The educative nature comes in various form: discipline, test and trial of faith, warning etc. "The presumption is that God teaches repentance through the calamity evoked by sin,"¹³⁴ and opens the sufferer to an existential recognition of Yahweh in a plea for mercy (Ps 78: 34; Ezek 6:7; 13:14). The affliction of Israel in the desert for forty years was seen as an educative process thus:

¹³³ Cf. Chris OBI, *Biblical perspective on Suffering*, 102.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*,103.

He humbled you, he made you feel hungry, he fed you with manna... to make you understand that man does not live on bread alone... but everything that comes from the mouth of Yahwehnn (Deut.8:3)

The educative process takes place through “testing” and “purification”. Thus Isaiah uses the image of refining silver in a furnace for the “testing” of Israel “Behold I refine you (*behartika*)¹³⁵ as silver, I try you in the furnace of affliction” (Is. 48: 9-10). Thus the Genesis story of God’s instruction of Abraham to sacrifice his son is to be understood in this line. Gen. 22: 1 uses the term *nissah*, “to test”.

The idea of suffering as a disciplinary tool is further seen in the oracle of Nathan. “I will be his father and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men” (2Sam. 7: 14).

Suffering as educative also appears in the wisdom literature. A classical example is seen in Proverb 3: 11- 12:

My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him who he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

The text used the word *musar* “discipline”, *tokahah* “reproof” and *hokiah* “reprove” and ‘as a father’ image found in Deuteronomy 8.¹³⁶ This is further seen in the eschatological texts. Zachariah 13: 9 uses the synonymous term smelt, refine, and test: “And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver and test them as gold is tested.” Malachi 3: 1-4 uses the refiner metaphor *mesarep*.

In the Deuterocanonical texts, Sirach states:

My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation. Accept whatever is brought upon you , and in changes that humble you be patient, for gold is tested in fire, and acceptable men in furnace of humiliation.(2: 1, 4-5).

Here, there is reference to *peirasmos* (trial) , *kamino* and *dokimazo* (to test, prove), and also “the furnace of humiliation”. Other references are Sirach 4:7 where the word *paideia* (*musar*) discipline, and *peirazo* (test) are used. Wisdom 3: 1- 6 refers to the testing of the just using the terms *peirazo* (*nsh*) and *paideuo* (*ysr*).¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ Cf. Ibid, 105.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 107.

The notion of suffering as instructive and educative has its credits. However, it does not apply to every suffering. In addition, critics find this notion insufficient in the sense that it presents an assumption that the universe had to be constituted in such a way that evil is indispensable for good. They ask:

What conceivable argument exist for God to enter into bargain with the Satan to test the faithful Job? Or how can one even imagine God demanding that Abraham sacrifice his son as a test of obedience? No acquisition of fresh insight seems sufficiently precious to justify the private hell initiated by the words: Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.(Gen.22:2)¹³⁸

3.2.5 EXEMPLARY SUFFERING

This constitute such sufferings endured by the prophets and chosen individuals like Moses (Num. 11: 11), Elijah (1 Kings 19), Jeremiah (Jer. 15:10; 18:18; 20:14). When the people refused the message of the prophet, it implied that they refused Yahweh whose messengers the prophets were. The prophets had to accept and bear bitter experiences and hardship for the sake of Yahweh. In this way, the demonstrated Yahweh's pain and anguish as a result of Israel's unfaithfulness. A striking example is the prophetic experience of Hosea who had to marry a harlot in order to demonstrate Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh. The pains and anguished he endured were symbolic to that of Yahweh as a result of Israel's unfaithfulness (Hosea 1- 3).

3.2.6 VICARIOUS OR SUBSTITUTED SUFFERING

Vicarious as an Old Testament understanding of suffering is according to some opinion, "the most profound solution offered by religion to the problem of evil."¹³⁹ Here, the innocent suffers for the sake of others, in order to save them. It could be imposed or voluntary, but in each case, the purpose is redemptive.¹⁴⁰ A powerful example of this understanding of suffering is that of the suffering servant who voluntarily endures the affliction of a larger society and thus becomes a means of redemption (Is. 52:13 – 53: 12). His suffering is seen as punishment for the sins of others. Some verbs are used to depict the

¹³⁸ J. L. CRENSHAW, Theodicy in the Old Testament, 8.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 9.

¹⁴⁰ M. O. EGBUOGU, 86.

nature of the suffering: inhumanly disfigured (52:14), despised(53:3) he bore our grief (v. 4), was stricken,, wounded (v. 4); pierced, crushed (v. 5), “ and laid upon him”. The chastisement *musar* discipline used in v. 5 shows the disciplinary or educative function of suffering.¹⁴¹

However 53: 10 states:

It was Yahweh’s good pleasure to crush him with pain, If he gives his life as a sin offering, he will see his offering and prolong his life, critics doubt the voluntariness of the undertakings of the suffering servant.

Making reference to this, critics ask how free the action of the suffering servant was and see problem with the logic of vicarious suffering.

One almost gains the impression that the servant had little choice, like the lamb to which he is compared. Beyond that, the vicarious nature of suffering poses an additional problem if it is understood in a manner other than exemplary. How can someone else’s suffering remove my guilt¹⁴²

3.2.7 ESCHATOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SUFFERING

Eschatological answer to the problem of suffering holds that the answer to suffering does not lie here but in the hereafter where God will punish the wicked and reward the righteous. This view is associated with the nascent belief in resurrection. This notion is found in Isaiah 24- 27 where Isaiah looks at the final judgment of Yahweh, emphasizing a universal judgment on the nations for bloodshed and the victory of God celebrated by banquet of Israel and others. The eschatological notion of suffering as found in Daniel 7- 12 and 2Maccabees 7 and 12 was a response to the martyrdom which many Jews suffered during the Maccabean revolt (165BC) for refusing the Hellenization program of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175- 164 BCE)which contravened the Jewish tradition and biblical injunctions (1Macc 11: 62- 64). The Martyrdom suffered was taken as undeserved suffering leading to a later strong emphasis on life after death. Thus in the Book of Daniel, the righteous who through persecution are purged, purified and made clean, (Dan. 11: 35), who have led many to uprightness(Dan. 12: 3), who died untimely death (Wisdom 3: 13-14), will wake

¹⁴¹ Chris OBI, 107.

¹⁴² J. S. CRENSHAW, 9-10.

up to everlasting life (Dan. 12: 2; 2Mac. 7: 9). They will shine like the stars of heaven (Dan. 12:3), and receive their eternal reward and vindication from God (2 Macc. 12: 45).

The eschatological response to suffering is termed by some as “the most natural response to the incursion of evil”. However, if the anticipated event continued to be relegated to the remote future, its credibility is likely to fade:

The eschatological dimensions speaks to this fundamental need by promising that the present calamity will soon pass away, and in its place will come clear signs of God’s favor. The further into the future, or indeed into a hidden realm, this expected deliverance is projected, the safer the theodicy, since it becomes less vulnerable to empirical disconfirmation. On the other hand, because the anticipated event is relegated to the remote future, its credibility is likely to fade as generation after generation long for the saving event and experience no fulfillment of that wish. Habakkuk’s agonizing cry ‘O Lord how long shall I cry for help, and thou will not hear? Or cry to thee, ‘Violence’ and thou will not save’ (1:2), cannot be sustained indefinitely unless some indication of divine action presents itself.¹⁴³

3.2.8 ASSESSMENTS

Crenshaw is of the opinion that “ in ancient Israel defense of God was no idle chatter but was purchased at great cost...”¹⁴⁴ “The various attempts at theodicy constitute immense sacrifice: of the present, of reality itself, of personal honor, and of the will.”¹⁴⁵ ... God’s sovereignty and freedom was purchased at a high price, the self esteem of humans.”¹⁴⁶

However Schwienhorst – Schönberger says that the Witness of the Bible does not promise to spare us from suffering. Catastrophe is not foreign or alien to biblical tradition. The Bible itself contains such stories. “Lament, even charges against God are integral part of the prayer- tradition of the Bible (mine trans.)”¹⁴⁷ The Bible does not promise that the faithful will be spared from suffering. It however teaches us how to come out victorious through suffering.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 7.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 12.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid,7.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ L. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Die Theodizee Frage im Alten Testament, 8. (vgl. Die Klage, sogar die Anklage Gottes gehören zum Kernbestand der biblischen Gebetstradition)

The message of the Scripture is a good news not because it gives us the hope that we shall escape suffering, but because it shows us a way that leads us through suffering. When we say 'God is good', this statement refers then, according to biblical theology, to a God who leads us through suffering and annihilation, not to a God who spares us from suffering (mine trans.).¹⁴⁸

With this quotation from Schwienhorst – Schönberger, we end the Old Testament treatment of suffering. We shall then examine what the New Testament views are.

3.3 NEW TESTAMENT RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

The existence of God is not contested in the New Testament. A more pressing question is the reconciliation of God's justice with the injustice in the world. Paul himself clearly asks this question as he speaks of the suffering and the sins of all men, of God's holy anger and his saving grace: Is God unjust? (Rom 3:5).¹⁴⁹

The New Testament understanding of suffering revolves around the cross of Christ. It does not maintain a total break up with the Old Testament understanding of suffering. However, the Cross of Christ gives it a new understanding. "The Old Testament's doctrine on sin and suffering is taken up, purified and deepened in the New Testament. The same themes recur but their emphasis and their overall structures have been altered in view of Christ and his Cross"¹⁵⁰ Put succinctly, "The crucifixion isolated the focal point of Christian understanding of suffering".¹⁵¹

The entirety of Jesus mission (cf. Mk. 1: 34; 3: 11; 6:3), including that of his apostles (Mk. 3: 14f; 6: 7; Lk. 9: 1; Mt. 20:8) had as its main objective the throwing down and the defeat of Satan. The miracles of Christ were a direct attack on the kingdom of Satan and evil, as

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 9. (vgl. Insofern ist die Botschaft der Heiligen Schrift eine Frohbotschaft, nicht weil sie uns Hoffnung macht, wir kämen am Leid vorbei, sondern weil sie uns einen Weg zeigt, der uns durch das Leid hindurchführt. Wenn wir also sagen „Gott ist gut“, dann bezieht sich dieser Satz – bibeltheologisch gesprochen – auf einen Gott, der uns durch das Leid, durch die Vernichtung hindurchführt ,nicht auf einen Gott,der uns vor dem Leid bewahrt)

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Thomas SÖDING, „Ist Gott etwa ungerecht?“ (Röm 3,5). Die Theodizeefrage im Neuen Testament, in: Michael BÖHNKE/ Thomas SÖDING (eds.), Leid erfahren – Sinn suchen. Das Problem der Theodizee, 50. (Subsequently to be quoted as T. SÖDING). (Vgl ... die Existenz Gottes steht im Neuen Testament nicht zur Diskussion. Desto drängender ist die Frage, wie sich die Gerechtigkeit Gottes mit Ungerechtigkeit der Welt vereinbaren lässt. Paul stellt die Frage ausdrücklich, als er in schonungsloser Schärfe vom Leid und von der Sünde aller Menschen spricht, von Gottes heiligem Zorn und seiner rettenden Gnade: „ Ist Gott etwas ungerecht?“ (Rom 3, 5).

¹⁵⁰ MCDERMOTH, in: M. O. EGBUOGU, 101.

¹⁵¹ BOWKER, in: Chris OBI, 110.

well as “the irruption into the present, of the kingdom of God which the prophets had predicted with images of physical wellbeing and material prosperity.”¹⁵²

*Jesus did not only proclaim the perfect future, but also the already existing presence of God’s reign. The sick are healed, demons are cast out (Lk 11: 20; Mt 12: 27), sins are forgiven (Mk 2:1- 10), he already blesses the poor now in the present, because the door of the kingdom of God is open for them (Lk 6: 20f; Mt 5: 3-12). Jesus himself is present (Lk 17: 20). By proclaiming God’s reign, he brings it near.*¹⁵³

Satan had to be first “contended with in the ugliness of blindness, lameness, personal possession of human beings and physical death itself as a prelude to his final overthrow in the death and resurrection of Christ”¹⁵⁴ Following this, Christians believe that “by his suffering on the cross, Christ reaches the root of evil, of sin and death. He conquered the author of evil, Satan, and his permanent rebellion against the creator.”¹⁵⁵ Hence the core of Christian faith is that salvation came through Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁶ The fundamental reason for the coming and mission of Jesus is that God wants to fully participate in human life. That includes participation in their suffering and death. Jesus became a victim of inhuman injustice and like the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, he willingly accepted the suffering in order to transform it in the righteousness of God through his love.¹⁵⁷

As he was hanging on the cross, on the ninth hour,

Jesus cried out with a loud voice ‘Eloi Eloi , lama sabachthani’ which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me’ (Mk 15:34)

Commenting on this Söding notes that

The cry of Jesus on the cross justifies all those who are suffering from evil and misfortune that befalls them or others. His cry unites itself with the “why” of those who cannot understand any reason or sense in suffering. Jesus cries also on the cross as a representative of all those who

¹⁵² MCDERMOTT, in: M. O. EGBUOGU, 103.

¹⁵³ T. SÖDING, 66. (Vgl. Jesus verkündet aber nicht nur die vollendete Zukunft, sondern auch die schon anstehende Gegenwart der Gottesherrschaft. Schon jetzt werden Kranken geheilt, Dämonen ausgetrieben ... , Sünden vergeben..., Schon jetzt kann er die Armen seligpreisen, weil ihnen die Tür zum Reich Gottes offensteht... Jesus selbst ist gegenwärtig... Er bringt die Gottesherrschaft nahe, indem er sie verkündet...)

¹⁵⁴ R. J. FALEY, in: M . O. EGBUOGU, 104.

¹⁵⁵ W. KERN, in: M. O. EGBUOGU, 102.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. T. SÖDING, 65.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid 59.(vgl. Der ganze Sinn Sendung Jesu besteht darin, dass Gott vollkommen Anteil am Leben der Menschen nimmt. Das heißt : auch an ihrem Leid und an ihrem Tod... Jesus wird zum Opfer unmenschliches Unrechts, und er nimmt- wie der leidende Gottesknecht nach Jes 53- dieses Unrecht an, um es durch seine Liebe in die Gerechtigkeit Gottes zu verwandeln).

can no longer cry because their tongues have been torn out or they can no more find words. Jesus cries for God's justice.¹⁵⁸ (mine trans.)

This cry of Jesus which is taken from Psalm 22 is not a manifestation of self-disappointment, but an expression of a bitter experience. It corresponds with what Jesus had already prophesized about himself in the Gospel of Mark that the son of man will be delivered into the hands of men (Mk.9:31). He was delivered by men, but also by God through men's hand.¹⁵⁹

Jesus himself taught that his suffering was of divine necessity (Matt. 16:21). It was vicarious and 'substitutionary' in character (Heb. 13: 12; Pet.2:21); a test in which he learned obedience (Heb. 5:8); Thus he serves as our pattern and example (1Pet. 2:21). For Paul, Christ passion and death expiated man's sins and reconciled man to God (Rom. 5:9; 1Cor. 15:3; 2Cor 5: 19-21). Thus, Christ merited his own glorification (Eph. 1: 20-23). The Old Testament understanding of suffering is transformed in the light of the suffering of Christ.

3.3.1 RETRIBUTION

The connection of suffering with sin is not totally rooted out in the New Testament. In the healing of the paralyzed as narrated in Mk 2: 1 -12, Jesus first started with the forgiveness of the sins of the paralyzed. Through the healing of the soul, Jesus effected bodily healing. The mind of most people who were around as Jesus performed this miracle might have gone to retribution. However other indications show that Jesus did not maintain a direct connection between sin and suffering. Paul in the Letter to the Romans talks of the retribution of God against sinners (cf. Rom 1:18- 3: 20). He talks of God's abandonment as a result of men's sins exemplified in injustice, sexual perversion, greed, malice, etc. Thus, men reap the fruit of their sins. He formulated it so precise: "The wage paid by sin is death; the gift freely given by God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom 6:23).

¹⁵⁸ T. SÖDING, 60.(vgl. Die Klage Jesu am Kreuz gibt allen Recht, die Unheil und am Unglück leiden, das ihnen oder anderen widerfährt. Seine Klage verbindet sich mit dem „warum“ all derer, die keinen Sinn im Leid erkennen können. Am Kreuz schreit Jesus aber auch stellvertretend für alle, die nicht selbst schreien können, weil ihnen das Zunge herausgerissen wurde oder sie keine Worte mehr finden. Esus schreit nach Gottes Gerechtigkeit.)

¹⁵⁹ Ibid59. (vgl. Sie entspricht dem , was Jesus prophezeit hat: dass „der Menschensohn den Menschen ausgeliefert“ wird(Mk 9, 31)- von Menschen, aber durch ihre Hand von Gott).

However it is noted here that Paul was not referring to any kind of suffering or misfortune but self- caused suffering. There are sins that invariably lead to degraded human conditions and have repercussion both on the sinner and those around him.¹⁶⁰

However the authenticity of the general application of the doctrine of retribution is put into question by Jesus. The fact that most sins have earthly repercussion does not mean that anyone who suffers, had sinned. In the story of the man born blind as narrated by John, the disciples of Jesus were still under the influence of the traditional retributive doctrine when the demanded from Jesus an explanation for a confusing situation on ground:

Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should have been born blind. Neither he nor his parents sinned, Jesus answered 'he was born blind that the works of God might be revealed in him' (Jn. 9:2f).

Jesus' answer shows that the blind man was not born blind because of either his sins or that of his parents. In this way Jesus tears apart the traditional connection of every sin with suffering.

However, is it justified that one should suffer, that one should be born blind in order that God's works might be revealed? To take this as the literal meaning of Jesus words is false. 'Works' as it appears in the passage, as it relates to God, is in plural. One of God's works that Jesus means that might be revealed through the man born blind is the work of creation. The existence of the man born blind shows the goodness of God's creative will. It is the will of God in creation that the man born blind should live and exist, so also every sick, the weak, the sinner - all have right to live and to exist.

The other work of God that Jesus means in this passage is God's work of salvation. Jesus does not only want to show that it is the will of God that the man born blind should exist like every other person, he also shows that his suffering has an end. He heals his blindness to demonstrate that God has neither forgotten him nor thrown him away. But that God wants to deep him in the brilliance of his Glory which surpasses what the eyes can see.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Ibid, 61.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 57. (vgl. Das eine Werk ist das der Schöpfung: Allein durch seine Existenz bezeugt der Blingeborene den gutenSchöpferwillen Gottes: - er soll leben, sowie jeder Kranke, jeder Scwache, jeder Sünder auch. Das andere Werk ist das der Erlösung . Jesus will nicht nur zeigen dass der Blinde nach Gottes Willen lebt, sondern dass sein Leiden ein Ende hat. Er macht den Blinde sehend- als Zeichen dafür, das Gott ihn weder vergessen noch verworfen hat, sondern eintauchen wird in den Lichglanz siener Herrlichkeit... Den Blindgeborene

Luke narrates another incident where Jesus criticizes the doctrine of retribution:

It was about this time that some people arrived and told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifice. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than any others that this should happen to them? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell, killing them all? Do you suppose they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did (Lk 13:1-5)

Jesus here criticizes not only the popular opinion that maintains that incidents of disaster must somehow be a justified punishment from God, but also the illusion which the other people had that they could not be visited by such incidents based on their righteousness.¹⁶²

3.3.2 MYSTERIOUS, EDUCATIVE AND DISCIPLINARY

Other New Testament understanding of suffering includes suffering as mysterious (Jn. 9:3). It is divine education through which Christians like Christ learn obedience (Heb.5: 8-10). It is disciplinary and therefore a training which bears fruit in peace and uprightness (Heb.12:5-13). It is a test of Christian faith (Acts 5: 41). Understood as exemplary (Matt. 5:12; 1Pet. 2:21).

3.3.3 VICARIOUS

New Testament understands suffering as vicarious (Heb.12: 13; 1Pet. 2:24). Paul sees his own suffering as a gain for others, undergone for the good of others (2Cor. 1:6; Col.1:24). For the sake of Christ he is constantly been handed over to death (2Cor. 4:10-11). Here the idea of suffering is inseparable with New Testament concept of *koinonia* (fellowship). Any person who aligns himself with the same mind with Christ will have to suffer in the flesh.¹⁶³

Commenting on the vicarious explanation of suffering in the New Testament, Egbuogu, from African worldview states:

sieht Jesus nicht als Mittel zum Zweck der Demonstration seiner Heilssendung, sondern als ein unschuldig leidenden Menschen, dem er hilft, weil er das „Licht der Welt“ ist (Joh.9,5; vgl. 8,12).

¹⁶² Ibid,56. (vgl. Was er kritisiert, ist nicht nur die volkstümliche Meinung, dass die Unglückfälle irgendwie eine gerechte Strafe Gottes sein müssten, sondern auch die Illusion der anderen, aus der Tatsache, dass sie – einmal nicht betroffen seien, folge ihre Uschuld).

¹⁶³Cf. Chris OBI, 111.

... the problem is that it is easier to have this sense of suffering in relation to the suffering incurred in active process of announcing the good news, like Paul, who was stoned, shipwrecked, starved, expose to beast etc. (2Cor 11:23-29). Can we see Paul's suffering in the same sense as that which one encounters on a personal business? So it is not easy at all to explain the even minority of the suffering of the world in this sense.¹⁶⁴

3.3.4 ESCHATOLOGICAL

Christian understanding of suffering as eschatological is the most essential, enduring and fundamental in the New Testament. The suffering in the name of Christ faithfully sustained leads to share in eternal life. Paul maintain that the suffering experienced by Christians in this world cannot be compared with the glory they shall experience in the next world to come (Rom 8: 18). For if we die with Christ we shall live with him; if we persevere, then we shall reign with him (2Tim. 2:11).

In the New Testament, suffering and glory, suffering and patience are always linked (James 5:8). "We must all experience hardship before we enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). "For one thing, the union with Christ, the sharing of his divine love, relativizes all suffering. Just as the resurrection overcame the cross, so the eternal life presupposed and promised to the faithful in the New Testament leads them to discount the temporal tribulation of this world"¹⁶⁵. In contrast to Old Testament's negative view of suffering, in Christ it becomes something positive which leads to something greater.

The eschatological understanding of suffering is the only way out of the problem of suffering and evil in the world. Jesus on the cross also asks for the reason for suffering. But he knew that there was only one person who could give him answer- God. And this answer he got on Easter Sunday: God raised Jesus, who cried to him, up from the dead.¹⁶⁶

Whoever Jesus gives faith, can hope beyond the earthly problems, that all suffering will be transformed in the eternal joy, because Jesus has embraced those suffering. And whoever that has this hope, does not stumble against suffering, but frees himself from the compulsion that he must somehow justify it...¹⁶⁷ (mine trans.)

¹⁶⁴ M.O. EGBUOGU, 118.

¹⁶⁵ MCDERMOTT, in: M. O. EGBUOGU, 112f.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. T. SÖDING,59.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 57.(comp. Wer Jesus Glauben schenkt, kann auf ein Jenseits irdischer Not hoffen, das alles Leid in ewige Freude verwandelt, weil Jesus sich der Leidenden angenommen hat. Und wer diese Hoffnung hat, stumpft nicht ab gegenüber dem Leid, sondern befreit sich vom Zwang, es irgendwie rechtfertigen zu müssen...)

Furthermore,

*The great words about God, his goodness and justice, his power and his plan of salvation are not based on the relativization of injustice, tragedy, misery and suffering, but on the compassion with those suffering. It is not an expression of enthusiasm which has lost its foothold or idealism which closes its eyes before reality, but of hope which is solely based on God.*¹⁶⁸ (mine trans.)

With these two quotations from Söding, we end the New Testament understanding of suffering. We shall explore some theological attempt to explain the reality of suffering and calamity in a world supposedly created by a perfectly good and almighty God.

3.4. THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ATTEMPTS AT THEODICY

The different attempts of reason on theodicy could be classified under affirmative theodicy and negative theodicy. Affirmative theodicy includes those theologies that claim that God can be vindicated by human reasons in the face of sufferings and evils in the world he created. Negative theodicy however believes that the justification of God amidst the contradictions brought by evil and suffering in the world is not attainable.¹⁶⁹ Most attempts at affirmative theodicy have taken the form of diminishing the power and effect of evil (Depontenzierung) by articulating a higher good which is to be attained. This so called good is meant to consume the power of this evil. The traditional theodicy practiced in the church for a long time especially in the medieval period tried to reduce the power of evil by denying its essence. We shall try to examine some of these attempts of justification of God in the face of evil in the world. Let us start from this traditional theodicy known as *prevatio boni*.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 51. (Vgl. Die großen Worte über Gott, seine Güte und Gerechtigkeit, seine Macht und seinen Heilsplan beruhen nicht auf einer Relativierung der Ungerechtigkeit, der Tragik, der Not und des Leidens, sondern auf dem Mitleid mit den Leidenden. Sie sind nicht Ausdruck eines Enthusiasmus, der die Bodenhaftung verloren hat, oder eines Idealismus, der die Augen vor der Wirklichkeit verschließt, sondern einer Hoffnung, die ganz auf Gott setzt.)

¹⁶⁹ Cf. BÖHNKE, 75.

3.4.1 EVIL AS ABSENCE OF GOOD (*privatio boni*)

Already Plato (427 – 347) had already specified that “The source of evil must one in some other causes search, but not in the divinity.” Plotinus (205- 270) identified this cause in the material, leading to dualism –“ belief in two supreme opposed powers or gods, or sets of divine or demonic beings that control the world”¹⁷⁰ Manichaeism, a radical form of Gnosticism maintained as its doctrine this dualistic view of the world and reality. Manichaeism is described as “a church advocating a dualistic doctrine that viewed the world as a fusion of spirit and matter the original contrary principles of good and evil respectively”¹⁷¹ Manichaeism advocated that the origin of the material world of evil is founded in the duality of two uncreated principles. One of these uncreated principles is responsible for the good, the other for evil. It was this doctrinal heresy of Manichaeism, which threatened the Christian monotheism that Augustine, a major proponent of the *privatio boni* theodicy set out to fight. Augustine maintained that God is the sole source and creator of all things. God created everything good. Evil is only an absence of good, a depreciation of good (*privatio boni*). Evil has no substance; only the good is substantial. Evil therefore is not only what should not be, but it is also what substantially does not exist. In his Confession Augustine asserts: “I did not know that evil is only a privation of a good and that it tends to what has no existence”¹⁷²

Another major proponent of this notion of evil was Thomas Aquinas. His central argument is that evil is not an essence but a privation. Privation is not an essence but a non existence of something in a substance. Thomas holds that everything has their being from God (part II, ch. 15), God is perfect Goodness (part II, ch.28, 41). Therefore evil cannot originate from God. In the 49th question of *The Summa Theologiae*, (article 1-3), Thomas occupies himself with the question of whether the good can be the cause of evil. He asserts that only the good can be a Cause. Evil is rather a privation of order to the proper end; a defect of action caused by a defect of agent. But in God there is no defect but the highest perfection. In chapters 12- 15 of *Contra Gentiles*, he maintains that evil cannot destroy the good

¹⁷⁰ Dualism, in: Jacob E. SAFARA et al (eds.), *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago 1997, vol. 4, 245.

¹⁷¹ Mani, in: *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 7, 775.

¹⁷² Cf. EGBUOGU, 136.

entirely. Nothing can be totally evil since evil is no substance. In part III 71, he talks of the error of those

Who out of evil in the world conclude that that there is no God... They say: If there is God, why evil? (Si deus est, unde malum?). However, one has to say: If there is evil, then there is God. (Si malum est, deus est). Then, there would not have been evil if the order of the good was preserved, whose deprivation evil is. This order would not have been if there was no God.¹⁷³ (mine trans.)

The mystic Meister Eckhart (1260- 1328) is also in this line of thought of evil as *privatio boni*. For him, God is the absolute Being; he is Being par excellence, the absolute fullness of Being. Created beings have their beings only through participation in the ‘beingness’ of God. Evil is the separateness of created beings from their creator. Because of their distinctness and separateness from their creator, created beings tend towards nothingness which is the core of evil. At the same time, created beings struggle to move back to God as their innermost source and purpose. Man as a created being with consciousness has the dual capacity of separateness from God, and fundamental union with him. It is therefore the task of man to conquer and eliminate this distance which separates him from God so that everything will not move into nothingness. This distance is the evil¹⁷⁴

Clement of Alexandria (b. about 150 BC) in rejection of Gnosticism, asserts God’s authorship of all beings and maintains that everything was created good, corresponding to the biblical refrain in Genesis 1 “And God saw it was good.” He situates the origin of evil in the deliberate act of man.

Suffice it to say that the traditional defense by depowering evil tends to remove the negativity and brutality of the power of evil, forgetting its destructive effects in the lives of many. Concrete cases of evil are allowed to diffuse to forgetfulness. Another form of response to the problem of evil which is closely connected to the *privatio boni* is what has been described as “moralization of evil.

¹⁷³ Cf. BÖHNKE , 78. (comp. Es ist derer Irrtum aus zuschließen, die aus den Übeln in der Welt folgern, daß Gott nicht ist... Sie fragen : Wenn Gott ist woher dann die Übel? (si deus est , unde malum?). Aber man muß sagen: Wenn es das übel gibt,dann gibt es Gott (si malum est, deus est). Denn es wäre das Übel nicht wenn die Ordnung des Guten aufgehoben wäre, dessen Beraubung eben das Übel ist. Diese Ordnung aber wäre nicht, wenn Gott nicht wäre).

¹⁷⁴ See Hans KESSLER, *Das Leid in der Welt. Ein Schrei nach Gott*, Würzburg 2007, 31f.

3.4.2 MORALISATION OF EVIL

The traditional theodicy, maintaining that God is perfection itself and no trace of defect could be found in him, situates the origin of evil in the free will of man. Augustine traces the origin of evil to the misuse of God- giving freedom by Adam. This was based on the naive historization of the story of paradise and of the fall of man as found in Genesis chapters 2 and 3. This fall of man known as original sin brought evil into the world that was formally free from all forms of sufferings and evil not only to Adam, but also to his descendants. Interpreting Romans 8:20, Augustine maintains that it is also this fall of Adam that also brought evil to the animal world. One may ask: Does this literal understanding of the Genesis creation story and the conclusion that Augustine derived from them still today, in a world understood in terms of evolution valid? Furthermore, on the tactics of shifting the origin of evil on the free will of man J. B. Metz observes that “since human freedom as created freedom is made possible by God, (humans) cannot ultimately be responsible for the history of suffering of the world.” The question goes back to God. “Why the freedom with its sin ... Why - O God, why at all the evil?”¹⁷⁵

In the modern time, the free will defense finds its sarcasm in the autonomy thinking of man. Man understands himself as the creator and sustainer of the universe, leading to “atheism ad maiorem gloriam Dei” (Marquard). God is set free from the problem of evil in the world, humans are responsible. But the price for this is high - the death of God.

We examine another form response to the problem of theodicy, which is an attempt to “instrumentalise” evil.

3.4.3 ARGUMENT FROM HARMONY AND ORDER

Leibniz is credited to have formulated the world theodicy. His motive was to justify God before the law court of human reason against the accusation brought against him by human

¹⁷⁵ J. B. METZ, *Theodizee empfindlich Gottesrede*, in: Hans KESSLER, 34.(comp. Da die Freiheit des Menschen als geschöpfliche Freiheit von Gott ermöglicht ... und aus ihm empfangen ist, kann sie für die Leidengeschichte der Welt nicht leztverantwortlich sein, warum also die Freiheit mit ihrer Sünde? ... Warum - o Gott – überhaupt die Schuld).

reason because of the evil that is found in this world, his world. In this task, he assumes apriori (perhaps out of religious conviction) God's existence, wisdom and goodness. Although this world is not perfect, God must have created the best (optimal) possible world among all possible worlds aspiring to exist. Considering the fact that God is eternally intelligent he cannot do what is not reasonable, what does not conform to the Supreme reason. The evil must have been taken up in the plan of things because there was no better plan or God would have taken it. Evil is only playing its part in the establishment of the harmony of the whole, and the wholeness of the universe. If the world lacks the least of the evils found in it, it will no more be the same world again and as a result, the purpose of the whole will be thwarted.¹⁷⁶

Besides we know that often evil causes good, which without this evil would not have been achieved¹⁷⁷

So Leibniz sees evil as complement of the good, as deficiency of the good, and as resulting from sin.

G. W.F. Hegel is counted among those who systematize evil as instrument for the harmony and order. His trust in human reason emboldens him to assert with inner conviction that God is totally manifested in the revealed religions that there is no mystery again in God. God could be known as the manifestation of the absolute spirit, which of necessity progresses the world history, moving it to its end, and is at the same time reconciled with it. Even that which is seen as radically negative is really a movement of progressive development of the world history. The world history in its dialectically opposite transmitted process is the place of the manifestation of the absolute Spirit. Only the insight that what has happened and all days happens, does not only happen without God, but is also his work, can reconcile the spirit with the world history and reality.¹⁷⁸

Auschwitz remains the knockout blow to this progressive optimism that sees history as a progressive development (Fortschrittstheorie). The silence of this theory to the victims of evil and violence in history, is a disturbing silence. As in the case of all other

¹⁷⁶ Cf. KESSLER, 26-27. Vgl. EGBUOGU, 161f.

¹⁷⁷ LEIBNIZ, in : BÖHNKE, 77.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. KRESSLER, 27-28.

instrumentalization of evil, evil loses its “evilness” and cruelty. It takes the euphemistic garb of bitter pill for wholeness and order. One then asks: where is the individual responsibility? What then is the base of the call for accountability? In the instrumentalization of evil, humanity gives itself license for self destruction. The Hegelian proposed reconciliation of the absolute spirit with the world, has remained a project of projection, rejected by reality, but finding its realization only in the Hegelian thought.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881- 1955) counts as one of the proponents of the instrumentalisation of evil for the purpose of order and harmony. His ingenuity lies in his approach of the problem from evolutionary perspectives. He asserts that the conception of the world as in the process of evolution can rest the problem of theodicy, what a world viewed as a static entity would otherwise not achieve. In his formulation, evil is conceived as an unavoidable and secondary effect, a byproduct of a universe which finds itself in a constant process of evolution. Every successful evolution is certainly associated with part or share of decadence (Abfall). In the physical world, the by-product is what is experienced as disharmony, physical ruin or degeneration. In the living being it is called suffering, and sin as a result of freedom. Nothing can be constructed except at the price of an equivalent destruction. Chardin maintains that it would not have even been possible for God in his all powerfulness to will the evolution and at the same time to hinder or prevent the by-product of evolution.

Teilhard further maintains that love is the originating force of the universe. In all beings, there is a movement towards unification. All beings are interpreted either as actively unifying, or passively being unified. God’s creative act is that of unification, a reflection of himself outside himself. It is a reflection of himself because God, the perfect first being exist only as a union Triune God – Trinity and he created in order to unite himself with us. That is why he immersed himself in the world of finite beings, to wage war against evil and to stand in solidarity with created beings to the extent of death on the cross. The aim of Christ’s death is the perfection of all things in the loving unification of all things in and with God. In this sense, Teilhard defines evil as the resistance of the many that are not yet unified with God against being unified, resistance against God’s drawing to himself.

Despite its attractiveness, the evolutionary explanation by Teilhard portrays human beings as helpless beings controlled by fate, who must passively accept suffering as a byproduct of evolution. The explanation of evil as resistance to God's drawing does not appeal to the many righteous who suffer and who think that their suffering is unjust as in the case of Job. It shares the same problem of other approaches to theodicy that instrumentalize suffering in that they make suffering appear harmless and powerless. But in reality, the negative effect of suffering is crushing.

There is another form of instrumentalisation of suffering, that which takes suffering as a mean to attain maturity.

3.4.4 SUFFERING AS LEARNING AND TRAINING PROCESS

Supporters of this view mean that through suffering man is trained to attain maturity. Suffering is then seen as that which purifies man to shine like Gold. Johann Gottlieb Fichte maintains that only one world is possible- that which is totally good. Whatever happens in this world serves for the betterment and growth of man, bringing about his earthly purpose. Nature leads man through scarcity to diligence, through evil of general disorder to a legitimate and rightful condition; through the ordeals of her endless wars to final and everlasting peace. Man, through awful experiences reaches stability.

Undeniably, most incidents of suffering and evil are senseless and indeed purposeless, crushing their victims to the ground and bringing them only to the knowledge of despair, hopelessness and misery. What of children who are tortured or crushed to death and other victims of violence who are brought to silence through them – what have they learnt? One may even argue that suffering and violence distort the individuals, veiling their eyes and preventing them from attaining a true knowledge of reality; incubating them to later come out as agents and vanguards of misery through which the demonic venom of pain and misery is spat upon the delicate inhabitants of earth.

3.4.5 SOUL MAKING THEODICY

Related to suffering as a training process is what has been termed "the soul making theodicy". According to this school of thought, the world is seen to be a place of soul making, where humans can develop their potential for a higher happiness. This kind of

theodicy is associated with Irenaeus of Lyon (140- 202). According to him, the divine plan is for a gradual improvement of the human race and this process culminates ultimately in the next world. Man is created free and imperfect. Goodness or badness is not ascribed to the nature of man. The good is not what he can do without effort. He does good or bad by free choice. He does good or bad by free choice and as such he becomes a being whose action can be morally evaluated. He has to respond freely to God as a free being. The process of responding to God, of attaining maturity is mostly accompanied by difficulties and struggles. But these only lead to higher goal which is participation in God's glory.

This theodicy is also associated with Schleiermacher. John Hick, the modern time chief proponent of this "soul making theodicy" maintains that man is created in a state of what he called "epistemic distance" from God. It is a state of struggle and pains which remains till one reaches perfection in the presence of God.

The situation of human beings as initially created by God is not one of metaphysical or moral perfection, or an existence in the immediate presence of God. Rather, the initial situation must be one of ontological instability, ethical immaturity, and epistemic distance from God. In short, the human existential imperfection but includes a capacity for gradual development and actualization.¹⁷⁹

Christian theodicy for Hick must be teleological; it must point to the final blessedness incomparable to all sufferings.

Among other criticisms of this scheme, it does not take into account the sometimes arbitrariness of suffering, its pervasiveness, and the annihilation that it most times conveys. There is still another theodicy which approaches the problem of evil from aesthetic point of view.

3.4.6 AESTHETIC RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

This argument goes from the point of view that evil is necessary in order to recognize the beauty of the good. Evil then becomes the dark background on which the good shines out. According to Lactantius,

If we had not known the bad, we could not have recognize the good.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ R. R. WILLIAM, "Theodicy, Tragedy and Soteriology. The legacy of Schleiermacher, in: HTR77, in: EGBUOGU, 171-172.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. BÖHNKE, 77 (vgl. Ita que nisi prius malum agnoverimus, nec bonum poterimus agnoscere.

Aesthetic response is superficial and has no message for untold agony.

3.4.7. RESPONSE FROM LIFE AND NATURE

Another response to suffering comes from the point of view of life and nature, what Böhnke describes as “die Biologisierung des Leidens”¹⁸¹ Bernhard Waldenfels is of the opinion that suffering belongs to life rhythmus, just as breathing in and breathing out. Suffering is woven into fibre of life and existence, Although he gives no explanation of the purpose of suffering, he has however removed the negativity of suffering and neutralized its power¹⁸² what in reality is not the case.

3.4.8 OTHER OPINIONS

Human reason has recorded massive failure in its boisterous attempts to defend God in the face of evil in the world. One can say that with Kant’s (1722 – 1804) critique of pure reason- his claim that human reason is limited in its apprehension and is only confined to the world of experience, philosophical theodicy signaled its formal end. But the problem of theodicy remains, even sharper and more pressing. In the urgency of theodicy, different thinkers and men have found different meanings to hold on, in order to give answer to the ‘why’ question of theodicy so as at least, to make life bearable, for meaning and not happiness was basic to survival.

For Kant, what is valid is what he called “authentic theodicy”. Since human reason is limited to the phenomenal world, it is not given the capability of knowing things of transcendence and metaphysical, although it can think of them. Kant differentiates between “knowing” which is limited to experience, and “thinking”, which can go beyond experience. The existence of God cannot be proved theoretically through human reason. However, God’s existence is also not to be denied. God for Kant, despite many evil in the world, exists as a postulate; otherwise the reason behind the existence of the world would be unthinkable. His starting point is the practical reason where man experiences himself as a free moral being with the moral obligation (Anspruch), “you should”. For Kant, morality

Hätten wir früher das Böse nicht erkannt, konnten wir nicht das Gute erkennen).

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 78.

¹⁸² Ibid.

does not need religion as its basis; morality gives itself its foundation. Whoever behaves well because of religion or because God demands that, does not act morally. However, morality can lead to religion. For Kant, the response to the question “what should I do” is “the highest good”. Without morality, the idea of the highest good is for a moral being impossible to think of. But the highest good for man as a rational natural being, can not only exist or subsist in morality. Man longs towards happiness. The highest good then must be located in the correspondence or agreement of happiness and morality. This is the final object of human longing, that morality and happiness agree, the man who behaves morally, becomes the happy person. But in reality, this is not the case. Sometimes it is even the case that those who are immoral are the successful ones. That is why then the recourse to God is necessary. God can only be thought of as ‘the guarantor’ of the highest good, he is the guarantor, that morality and happiness will be synonymous, will correspond and be reconciled with one another, and this reconciliation is what is called the highest good. Kant’s authentic theodicy is then in the judgment of practical reason through which we formulate for ourselves the idea of God as a moral and intelligent Being, a Being that of necessity exists and that is beyond every experience and that is the guarantor of the highest good. God then is for Kant a demand of practical reason, a postulate. God cannot be seen only as a “wish-thinking”, but he is more a demand of justice, that evil does not triumph at last over good. As the guarantor of the highest good, he then must be almighty in order to be able to bring together morality and happiness. He must also be all-knowing in order to be able to look into the hearts of men. He himself must be a moral being. Kant found this practical reason expressed allegorically in the book of Job, where Job in honesty expressed his doubts, and accept to have spoken of wonders that are beyond him, which he did not understand (cf Job 42,3), and despite that, his persistence in righteousness and uprightness (morality). This according to Kant represents a negative wisdom of the knowledge of God and statements of our practical reason, which can be seen as the direct voice of God, through which he bestows meaning to his creation.

But for the Jewish thinker Hans Jonas (1903 – 1993), the problem is not so much with the existence of God, as it is with the silence of God in the face of outrageous evil. For Jonas, God has lost his almightiness. He could not intervene during the time of holocaust (Auschwitz), to stop the murder of millions of Jews, not because he did not want to, but

because he could not; he has lost his power. God has in the creation of the world already given all that he could give. He has stripped himself of his Godhead and given himself into the hands of men. He can give them nothing more; it lies on men to give him.

After he gave himself totally in the becoming- world, God has nothing more to give. Now, it is on man to give him. And he can do this, by seeing that in the ways of his life, it does not happen or too often happen, and not for his sake God repents of allowing the world to come into being (mine trans).¹⁸³

For Elie Wiesel, another Jewish author who witnessed the awful events of Auschwitz, God is hanging at the gallows on which the Jews were hanged. In his memoir *Night*, he gave his testimony:

When we returned from work one day, we saw three gallows on the assembly grounds. We lined up. The SS stood around us with menacing submachine guns; the usual ceremony. Three trussed up candidates for death, among them a little boy, the angel with the sad eyes.

The SS seemed more anxious and worried than usual. To hang a child in front of thousands of spectators was no small matter. The camp commander pronounced the sentence. All eyes were on the child. He was ashen but quite still biting his lip. The shadow of the gallows covered him completely.

This time our camp kapo refused to act as hangman. Three SS men stepped up to take his place.

The three condemned got on their chairs together. Three necks were placed in nooses at the same time.

“Long live freedom” yelled the adults.

The child was silent.

“Where is God, where is he?” asked someone behind me.

At a signal from the camp commander the chairs were tipped over.

Absolute silence prevailed throughout the entire camp. On the horizon the sun was setting.

“Hats off” bellowed the commander? His voice sounded hoarse. We cried. “Hats on”

Then we began the walk- by. The two grown- ups were no longer alive. Their swollen bluish tongues hung down. But the third rope did not hang motionless: the child was still alive. ...

For more than half an hour he hung there and struggled in death throes between life and death between our eyes. And we had to look him in the face. He was still alive as I walk by him. His tongue was still red, his eyes not yet lifeless.

¹⁸³ Hans JONAS, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, 47, in : BÖHNKE, 83(vgl. Nachdem er sich ganz in die werdende Welt hineingab, hat Gott nichts mehr zu geben: Jetzt ist es am Menschen, ihm zu geben. Und er kann dies tun in dem er in den Wegen seines Lebens darauf sieht, dass es nicht geschehe, oder nicht zu oft geschehe, und nicht seinetwegen, dass es Gott um das Werdenlassen der Weltgereuen muß).

Behind me I heard the same man ask: "Where is God?"

And I heard a voice in me answer:

*"Where is he? There – he is hanging there on the gallows. ..."*¹⁸⁴

The last statement "he is hanging there on the gallows" will be later giving a new meaning by theologians to be implying that this God on the gallows is the God who suffers with us-Jesus in Auschwitz. This interpretation leads to "the suffering God theodicy" which we shall discuss later. However, this later meaning is an imposed meaning rather than the real meaning.¹⁸⁵

Johann Baptist Metz could be judged right when he categorically stated that "obviously, there is no meaning of history that can be saved with one's back turned to Auschwitz, no truth of history that can be defended with one's back turned to Auschwitz, and no God of history to whom one can pray to with one's back to Auschwitz."¹⁸⁶ While not losing sight of the singularity, enormity and gravity of the evil of Auschwitz, and evil that shook the entire order of the earth, the name 'Auschwitz' has become for many a symbolism of the suffering of the world, past and present. The problem of evil became sharper and more urgent after the event of Auschwitz but before then, it has always existed. Voltaire (1694-1778) after the Lisbon earthquake of 1st November 1775, wrote *Candide* to question the view that under God "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds." He opts for resignation: "Let us work without thinking: this is the only way to make life bearable."¹⁸⁷ Stendhal (1783- 1842) wrote that the only excuse for God is that he does not exist. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788- 1860) thinks the world owes its existence to an irrational will. Fjodor Dostojewskis (1821- 1881) finding the suffering of children incomprehensible, and to those who suppose that all was made for a last harmony he questions in his book "Rebellion":

¹⁸⁴ Elie WIESEL, „Die Nacht“ in : Jürgen Manemann, *Abandoned by God? Reflection on the margins of theology*, in: John K. DOWNEY et al (eds.), *Missing God? Cultural Amnesia and political theology*, Berlin 2006, 23f.

¹⁸⁵ Jürgen MANEMANN, 24.

¹⁸⁶ Johann Baptist Metz, *A passion for God*, in: Tiemo Rainer PETERS, *Johann Baptist Metz. Theology of the missing God*, in John K. DOWNEY et al (eds.), *Missing God? Cultural amnesia and political theology*, 17.

¹⁸⁷ Voltaire, in: KRESSLER, 38. (vgl. *Arbeiten wir ohne nachzudenken: dies ist das einzige Mittel, um das Leben erträglich zu machen*).

*If all must suffer to pay for an eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? It is beyond my comprehension why they should suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony.*¹⁸⁸

For this reason, he prefers not to be part of such a scheme of harmony and to hand back to God his ticket to heaven. For him, even hell cannot make up for the atrocities that have been committed. And if there is hell, why then speak of harmony?¹⁸⁹ In the ensuing confusion Friedrich Nietzsche (1844- 1900) proclaims the death of God and “an absolute yes to the world.” Romano Guardini was quoted to have said on his death bed that at judgment, he would not only allow himself to be asked questions, that he would also question God: Why God the well being of the wicked, the suffering of the innocent, the guilt?¹⁹⁰

3.4.9 THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH

The Church rejects all forms of theodicy that find themselves within the confines of monism or dualism. While monism reduces evil to illusion, to the product of human ignorance, dualism postulates two competing forces, one good and the other evil and solves the problem of evil by denying God’s absolute sovereignty. The modified Gnostic dualism of Manichaeism holds that there are two primal elements, God and matter, the later regarded as unredeemable. The church strongly rejects these views. “The Christian solution to the problem of evil must not deviate from the central doctrine of God – a God who is offended by sin, who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent – nor must it deny the genuine freedom and moral responsibility of the human will, nor the genuine reality of evil”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ F. DOSTOJEWSKIS, in: EGBUOGU, 60.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. M. BÖNKE, 97.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 94.

¹⁹¹ B. WHITNEY, ‘Theodicy, in: MARTHALER et al (eds.), New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 13, Detroit 2003, 868. (Explaining further, Whitney states that “there is an ever-present monistic tendency in Christianity, a tendency based on belief that since God has created all things , all things must be good and in accord with God’s providential purposes. Evils are seen as good in disguise, having no genuine reality in themselves. One must however hold that evil are not created nor desired by God, and they are genuinely evil. That ‘all things work together for those who love God’ (Rom 8:28) does not imply that evils are merely instrumental goods

In a bid to give meaning to theology and theodicy after Auschwitz, theologians like Jürgen Moltmann opts for a God who in solidarity suffers with the afflicted and sufferers. This leads us to another kind of theodicy known as the “the suffering God theodicy.”

3.4.10. THE SUFFERING GOD THEODICY

Walter Kasper said that “If God himself suffers; suffering is no more an objection against God.” The proponents of the suffering God theodicy assert that God justifies himself by identifying with the suffering humanity – that is the only way God can morally justify himself for creating a universe plagued by evil and pain.

Suffering God theodicy takes different forms:

- a. God is said to suffer in his will for creating man as a free being. This emphasizes the limitation of God as a result of the consequence of his creative acts. The human freedom becomes a problem for God because he cannot actively interrupt it.
- b. Another form of suffering God theodicy proposes that God suffers in his being. This rubs God off his divinity. In suffering in his being, God is not only no more the Lord of the universe, he is also no more Lord of himself.
- c. The third form of suffering God theodicy proposes that God takes up suffering on himself willingly. God’s suffering alleviates our suffering, his wounds heals our wounds. By suffering, God has taken side with those suffering, calling for solidarity amongst men and an active participation in the fight against evil.

Among the proponents of the suffering God theodicy is Jürgen Moltmann who Christianized Elie Wiesel’s God that is hanging on the gallows to mean a God that in solidarity with the sufferers chooses to suffer with them:

The only way past protest atheism is through a theology of the cross which understands God as a suffering God in the suffering of Christ, and which cries out with the godforsaken, ‘My God, why have you forsaken me’. For this theology, God and suffering are no more contradictions as in theism and atheism, but God’s being is suffering and the suffering is God’s being itself because God is love.¹⁹²

caused by God for his specific purposes. Rather despite the evil caused by humanity’s misuse of free will, God makes the best use of them)

¹⁹² Jürgen MOLTSMANN, The crucified God, in: EGBUOGU, 181f.

For Moltman, on the cross, God disputes with God, God cries out to God and God dies in God.

Other proponent includes Dorothee Soelle who maintains that God has taken side with the oppressed and calls on all to work together for the conquering of evil. She however sees all suffering as social and therefore, all suffering can be worked on. She rejects metaphysical language on suffering and rejects attempts to philosophical rationalizing it.

James H. Cone on his part proposes his suffering God theodicy in the context of the Black Americans who suffer segregation. God in Exodus depicts himself as one who has unquestionable control over history and vindicates the weak against the strong. Jesus death on the cross revealed the extent of God's involvement with the suffering of the weak. Jesus death is a decisive blow on the power of sin, death and Satan and he bestows upon us the freedom to struggle against that which destroys humanity. Thus the vocation of sufferers is not to passively endure suffering or injustice, but to actively work against it through political and social praxis and proclaiming the freedom brought about by Jesus, which inspire and strengthen the oppressed in the struggle against oppression.

On suffering God theodicy, many critics opine that the suffering of God could only be saving when God does not seem to go down in suffering, when he does not appear defenseless, or when he does not passively and powerlessly endure the suffering. This would mean a double tragedy for the sufferer, recourse to nothingness, the lost of the last hope. The suffering of God is saving when, in this free undertaken divine project of love, the almightiness of God is not overshadowed. It saves when there is hope that through the suffering, the suffering itself would at last be conquered and wounds of sufferers, living and death would be healed from the root. Suffering must not lose its soteriological and teleological contents and still not be mere theoretical. It must take into account concrete human suffering. It is on this aspect of taken into account concrete human history of suffering that we examine our last theological response to suffering- a kind of questioning God (Rückfrage an Gott).

3.4.11. ANAMNESTIC THEOLOGY: QUESTIONING GOD OR OPEN QUESTION ON GOD (Rückfrage an Gott)

In the event of the project of human reason to pronounce a “not guilty” verdict on God for the evil found in the world, human reason has recorded abysmal failure. Human reason is not only criticized on the basis of talking about wonders beyond it, critics have also brought allegations against it on the basis of its out of touch posture with reality; with concrete human suffering. It only concerns itself with rationalization and makes use of metaphysical categories, forgetting the concrete life incidents, incidents of suffering and pains experienced by man. Against this backdrop, another form of doing theology is developed which has to take into account concrete human history of suffering. This new form of thinking is called *anamnestic* thinking. This is different from Hellenistic thinking which is abstract and has no place for concrete human situation. According to the chief proponent of this theology- Johann Baptist Metz, *anamnestic* thinking is biblical Israelitic thinking form that does not shy away from incidents of human suffering.

*The God-talk, as we know them from the biblical tradition contains promise. The promise of salvation, pared with the promise of a universal justice which also includes rescue of past suffering (mine trans.).*¹⁹³

Throwing more light on this, Reikerstorfer states that “biblically, the name of God remains indelibly encrypted in the passion of humankind. God cannot be established ‘beyond’ or ‘above’ human suffering; on the contrary this suffering is the cost of affirming God.”¹⁹⁴

A basic element of this questioning- God theology is “remembrance”. This “remembrancing” has some basic theological formulations as articulated by Reikerstorfer: Firstly, the “other” is a condition (Voraussetzung) for encountering God – our relationship to the other determines our relationship to God. Through the recognition of the ‘other’ the illusive mystery of God becomes present in the world.

¹⁹³ J. B. METZ, *Theologie als Theodizee?* , in: BÖHNKE, 91.(vgl. Die Gottesrede, wie wir sie aus den biblischen Überlieferung kennen, enthält ein Versprechen der Rettung, gepaart mit dem Versprechen einer universalen Gerechtigkeit, die auch die vergangenen Leiden rettend einschließt).

¹⁹⁴ J. REIKERSTORFER, ‘‘What Price God- Talk’’ in: *Missing God? Cultural Amnesia and Political Theology*, Berlin 2006, 162.

Secondly, the other who connects us to God are not only those others who we directly encounter, but also those people around the world who are threatened; the systematically disadvantaged and marginalized other.

Thirdly, the God we encounter in others remains incognito, but in the remembrance of the suffering of the others, this God comes near to us. There is then a call for solidarity with the other who suffers.

In this remembrance, the concrete incidents of the suffering history of humankind is not allow to fall into silence; to go into forgetfulness; to die away. They are kept alive and reformulated as questions unto God. Victims of suffering, living and dead are not forgotten. “It says ‘Yes’ in remembrancing as a form of resistance which refuses to stop asking whether there is justice for the innocents who suffer unjustly.”¹⁹⁵ Reikerstorfer, in line with a thesis stated by J. B. Metz, states:

*Only in this remembrancing could there be meaningful talk today of oppression and liberation as well as protest against the new forms of injustice – against segregation, continuing impoverishment, and a grinding poverty. In these times of globalization, a Christianity that renewed its cultic memory and cultivate solidarity with those who suffer in opposition to the worldwide oppression of human kind could prove itself to be an effective gadfly in the encounter with other cultures and religions.*¹⁹⁶

Furthermore, the theology maintains that this remembrancing must be active and productive. I still bring Reikerstorfer to words here:

*This remembrancing is not made to be sentimental, but political- an active, productive, and effective remembrancing with a critical and liberating intention. Faith is ignited in compassion: a compassion for God (“Gottesleidenschaft”) is the passion for engagement. In this version of the union of the love of God and the love of neighbor, faith stings and sharpens the “human conscience” in a world threatened by the decline of humanity.*¹⁹⁷

In a nutshell, this question unto God theology is a form of religious protest in which God is beckoned upon to come and demonstrate his sovereignty in the limitedness of the time of this world. “In the apocalyptic conception that God will limit the time of suffering , comes a hope against all hope , namely that God at the end of time will ‘will wipe all tears’

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 165.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 160-161.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid,165.

(Revelation 21:4). This theology holds the theodicy question open, with the hope that God will justify himself as God for only God can justify God.

In this theology, there is an expression of the missing God. In this line, J. B. Metz transforms the proposition of Thomas Aquinas that “To know God means not to know him” into “To know God means to miss him.”¹⁹⁸ This ‘missing of God’ is not an expression of loss but that of ‘agonizing absence’; it is not an expression of being hopelessly forlorn, but that of a longing for God. “The experience of the absence of God makes clear the urgent necessity of his presence...”¹⁹⁹ The question “where is God?” would be interpreted as meaning “when will God get here?” It evokes the ‘time’ dimension, a time understandable as a limited span – a time that has an end. The missing God theology goes beyond the “why” question of theodicy which aims at justification, to the “when” question of biblical apocalyptic tradition which aims at the end, at help. A theology of the missing God is therefore thoroughly apocalyptic. It seeks to break through the dominant view of history as a continuum; as endlessness. Unlike Hegel, it does not foster the view that history is the place of last judgment, and repulses the insensitive idea that “the blood of victims is dried by a process of evolving meaning.” Apocalyptic entails hope, a hope not to be confused with optimism which is a cheap hope that costs nothing. This apocalyptic hope rather entails risk – it leads to instability and uncertainty. In this situation, “apocalyptic is based on trust and confidence: a trust that God remembers those without hope and a confidence that God, will in a new act of creation, bring the history of this hopeless ones to its ‘end’.”²⁰⁰ It ignites a rare and impossible spark of hope in a situation of hopelessness which radically relativizes the present situation. It entails a waiting for the hidden coming power that saves.²⁰¹ This waiting is not utopism since God has already proved himself in human history. Apocalyptic thinking is sensitive and compassionate, concerning itself with the questions of the abandoned and vanquished, and asking for when God will come to salvage the situation.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Jürgen MANEMANN, 26.

¹⁹⁹ J. EBACH, in: J. MANEMANN, 32.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 29.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 31.

The theology is founded on the “memoria passionis et resurrection”; the remembering, anamnestic knowledge of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God has shown in Jesus Christ his perfect love and saving deed. The hope on God is a hope which has found its root and strength in God’s faithfulness to his promise. The statement “God is love” (1Jn 4:16) is central not only because it makes sensible the human suffering, but also because it makes the cry to God sharper, louder and more persistent.

This mode of doing theology as questioning God makes use of language of prayer. Language of prayer as contrasted from language of theology is more dramatic, more reasonable, more spontaneous and radical. It is a ‘rebellious’ language, which refuses to accept the statuesque as the best of all possible worlds. It restores the ‘subjectness’ of the praying subject and gives him back his identity and self esteem. It is not abstract, but it reflects the concrete life situation. It emanates from life, from experience and thus produces faith. Thus Karl Rahner is said to have remarked: I do not pray because I believe, I believe because I pray.²⁰² Rahner maintains that the Christian of tomorrow must be a mystic, a person who has experience something. The language of prayer does not succumb to cheap consolation nor can it afford the illusive luxury of abstract rationalization. “The language of prayer does not lend itself to lessening anxiety or finding compensation. And it is never a language of humiliating surrender. It is much more the language of rebellion in which those who pray connect with their God within the ‘profound this-worldliness’ of profane life and find thereby a name, a face and a dignity.”²⁰³ For “indeed, it is in this rebellious language of prayer that God remains both the one we are calling for and the one bound up with history of humankind.”²⁰⁴ It is more of calls and cries unto God. It is a language that is founded in the Bible.

*The great tradition of prayer in the Old Testament Psalms and Prophets do not suffer from any sort of excessive affirmation. Even the praise of God is parked by abysmal experiences of crisis and failure – by the horizon of danger. Pure affirmation might not be so much an expression of confidence as a signs of our lack of courage and our inability to take on doubts, anxieties, and threats as we struggle for God.*²⁰⁵

²⁰² Cf. REIKERSTORFER, 168.

²⁰³ J. REIKERSTORFER, 167.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

This assertion cannot be more true as in the Book of Job. It is a book where the language of prayer is given assertion by God and the language of theology suffers an abysmal defeat especially in matters of theodicy. The language of traditional theology, which was intelligently applied by the friends of Job- Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar suffers a disgraceful defeat for it escape reality and meets disapproval in the hands of Yahweh. Job remains true to the language of prayer for it originates from experience which he is in stock in him. In the next chapter, we shall be occupied with the Book of Job where the language of prayer abounds. Other forms of doing theology or theodicy are also found in this Book of Job as represented by Job's friends. The Book of Job will be examines with the view of identifying these theologies and ascertaining to what extent they are able to give answers to the problem of evil and may provide answers to the African Christian situation..

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BOOK OF JOB

4.0 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

In the land of Uz, there was a blameless and upright man named Job, who feared God and avoided evil. (Job 1:1).

So begins the Book of Job, one of the greatest literary masterpieces ever written. The word ‘Job’ which is both the title of the book as well as the name of the principal figure in the book could have been derived from the Akkadian word: *’ajja - ’abu*, which means “where is (my) father. The word ‘father’ as indicated here has a divine implication and element. So “where is my father” is interpreted as meaning “where is my God.”²⁰⁶ As the name connotes, the search for God in the face of abysmal and dehumanizing suffering of the innocent in the world is central to this book.²⁰⁷ The idea of God which Job has, does not correspond to the reality on the ground which he is experiencing. This leads to a process of the search for God and a demand for answer from him. The different concepts of God and descriptions of God are brought to bear in a bid to understand him, to hear him; that he gives meaning to human nature, to life situation.

“Will no one help me to know, how to travel to his dwelling? I should set out my case to him, advancing any number of grievances (23:3-4).

We start this chapter by examining the origin of the Book of Job and different models that have been identified in the interpretation of the Book of Job.

²⁰⁶ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Ein Weg durch das Leid. Das Buch Ijob,13.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 135.

4.1 ORIGIN AND MODELS OF INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF JOB

The Book of Job is presumably written between the 6th to 2nd centuries before Christ.²⁰⁸ David WOLFERS however thinks that “analysis of the text of the Book of Job ... shows an allegorical level in which the book is concerned throughout with the event taking place during the 8th Century BCE, culminating in the siege of Jerusalem in 701 (or 700).” Because of this, he places the date of the composition of the book to the 7th Century; “probably quite or very early in the century.”²⁰⁹ But many scholars are inclined to the first suggestion. And this first suggestion is the one this work adopts.

The Book of Job offers many other challenges: Is it written by an author or different authors or editors? How can the book be properly interpreted- what is the place and relationship of synchronic and diachronic interpretations in the Book of Job? We shall try to carefully approach these issues.

There are different opinions as to whether the Book of Job was written by an author or whether it is a product of different authors and editors as well as different opinion as to how the book could be properly interpreted . Schwienhorst- Schönberger identifies four models of interpreting the Book of Job.²¹⁰ I will like to present those models, and a fifth one which runs between two models.

4.1.1 ONE PERON AUTHORSHIP

The first of the models – one- person authorship model advances the opinion that the Book of Job was the work of an author. Schwienhorst- Schönberger identifies Robert Gordis as one of those who hold this view. Gordis believes that the author of the Book of Job must have written this work over a long period of time. For example he thinks that Elihu’s speech must have been written by the same author but at a later time of his life. He maintains that the style of Elihu- chapter is by no means totally different from the rest of

²⁰⁸ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Die Theodizeefrage im Alten Testament. Das Buch Job, 13.

²⁰⁹ D. WOLFERS, Deep Things out of Darkness. The Book of Job, Michigan 1995, 52f. (Wolfer has a different view of the purpose and subject of the Book of Job as we shall later see and this is his basis of the dating).

²¹⁰ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Ijob. Vier Modelle der Interpretation, in:

the book, but it does exhibit some variations. Scholars should not blindly and mechanically apply the modern tools of literary analysis to the literary work of the ancient oriental.²¹¹ David Wolfers also shares this view of one person authorship of the Book of Job. “Job” he says “shares with the Books of Ruth, Jonah and Esther the quality of being a single author literary composition. It was written originally by a single author as a self contained work”²¹² For him the author of the Book of Job must have been an exceptionally educated man of great erudition, a great poet, who lived in the 7th Century, and certainly an Israelite or a Judean. Wolfers goes extra mile to identify this author as Isaiah or at least somebody close to him.

*As we penetrate the Book of Job we shall find again and again that there are words, phrases and whole passages which cannot be understood without reference to the Book of Isaiah. This is particular the case with the two final chapters of poem, 40 and 41, which are replete with symbols whose significance is directly derived from the work of the prophet. Indeed the reader who examines Chap. 5 of this book attentively can hardly escape the conviction that Chapters 40 and 41 of Job are contemporaneous with the first Isaiah, and that their author either was he or someone closely associated with him.*²¹³

To the suggestion that there are different literary style in the Book of Job he says: “two literary worlds surely, but not necessarily two literary hands”²¹⁴ Sharing the same view with Gordis, he maintains that we should not forget “that there are numerous other stories in the Bible where a self contradictory duality is apparent, and recognize that in some of these cases as well it may be that a stylistic convention foreign to modern ideas of story-telling is at work, rather than a crude amalgamation of sections from different sources.”²¹⁵ He regards Elihu’s speeches as part of the original composition.

4.1.2 MANY AUTHORS MODEL: DIACHRONIC

The second model of the interpretation of the Book of Job maintains that the book shows a history of origin in which different authors or editors at different periods in Israel history contributed, arriving at the final product of the Book of Job. The first aspect of this model

²¹¹ Robert GORDIS, in: SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Ijob: Vier Modelle der Interpretation, 13.

²¹² D. WOLFERS, 67.

²¹³ Ibid, 54-55.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 55.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 62.

maintains that we can reconstruct this history of origins of the Book of Job. The second aspect maintains that we can only understand the Book of Job only in connection with its history of origin; only when we know this history can we understand the book of Job. According to this view point, a synchronistic understanding of the Book of Job is not possible. Theresia Mendes is identified as one of those who hold this view.²¹⁶ According to Mendes, the history of origin of the Book of Job mirrors and reveals the faith-history of the people of God starting from the time of exile (6th cent.) to the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (approx. middle of the 2nd century). She produces a sketch of this history of faith and their reflection in the Book of Job. She identifies six stages and moments in the history of the publication of the Book of Job. They are moments in the faith history of the Israelites and are reflected in the Book of Job; the seventh is a glossary. The sketch runs as follows:

1. The Wisdom instruction and narrative (1:1-22; 42:11) reflects the faith history of the people of God in Babylonian exile. The instruction is aimed at the Yahweh – faithful Israelites, who because of their innocence and upright ways are seen as judges over the wicked. Job is presented to them as an example of how they should react or behave in the face of difficulties and problems. By this way, they, like Job would overcome their problems and difficulties.
2. The Job poetry and basic part (3:1-42: 6) reflects the post exilic experience of the people of Israel who after their return and construction of the temple still experience difficulties. They wonder if God’s anger is still on them. This results in uproar, accusations, charges and anger against God. In the place of a patient Job there come a rebellious Job. The people of God should see in the rebellious Job who as well at the end prostrates and humbles himself before God an example and in him find an insight of how to handle their conflicts with Yahweh.
3. The first revision of the Job- poetry (especially the speeches of Elihu 32- 37) reflects 3rd Century Israeli tic situation in which paganism begins to find its way amongst the people of Israel. The basic questions are: how can God overlook the godlessness of his people? How can it be that the innocents and uprights suffer while the wicked in the land prosper? The answer is found in the conflict and

²¹⁶ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Ijob: Vier Modelle der Interpretation,22f.(The analysis of Mendes view in this work is based on this article).

confrontation with Hellenism and advancement of the teachings of the prophets: God directs history and trains his people through difficulties and sufferings to perfection.

4. The second revision of Job's poetry (between 187- 175 BC) orientate and places the hope and trust of the upright who under the mighty suffers, in this Lord of history.
5. This represents the third revision of the Job-poetry. It goes the way of bringing the complaining believer to the consciousness of his nearness to unbelief.
6. This, according to MENEDES represents the fourth revision of the Job-poetry under Antiochus IV. (175- 164 BC). It tries to lead those who are still sympathetic with Hellenism to the unscrupulousness of such attitude and to those who are threatened in their physical existence as well as in their faith, it exhaust them to put their hope in Yahweh, who is lord over life and death.
7. This last part of Mendes classification deals with the glossary and completion of individual thoughts.

Scholars have expressed doubts whether such a model is plausible. This is an extreme model, says Schwienhorst – Schönberger. He maintains that although the literary critical method applied here is correct and also the interpretation of different views in the Book of Job may be acceptable, but it does not necessarily follow that the Book of Job could follow such trend in its history of publication. One can at best say that those views are accommodated in the minds of the writers or publishers of the Book of Job. But there is no evidence to show that the book went through these stages in its composition. A Standard model of the history of composition of the Book of Job is presented. This model corresponds to the view point of many scholars.²¹⁷ The oldest and first form of the Book of Job is found within the framework: 1- 2; 42:7-17 of the Book of Job. This was a kind of wisdom educative narrative in which Job is presented to the reader as a person worthy of emulation (*persona imitabilis*). This Joban folk tale originated no later than the period of the Hebrew monarchy (ca.1000B.C.E- 587 B.C.E).²¹⁸ This was later found to be simple, prompting a later extension. The first addition or extension of the book took place through

²¹⁷ SCWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Ein Weg durch das Leid. Das Buch Ijob, 22f.

²¹⁸ L.G. PERDUE, W.C.GILPIN (eds.),The Voice from the Whirlwind. Interpreting the Book of Job, Nashville 1992, 12- 13.

the addition of the dialogue part (3- 27; 29- 31; 38-42:6). Perdue and Gilpin say that this addition may best be traced to the social upheaval incurred by the Babylonian exile (587 B.C.E. – 538) Elihu’s speeches (32-37) were later added and possibly the song about wisdom (28).These poetic additions were probably derived from Persian period (538 – B.C.E. - 332 B.C.E.).²¹⁹

4.1.3 MANY AUTHORS MODEL: SYNCHRONIC

The third model maintains that the Book of Job shows a history of development in which many authors or editors contributed. There are varying forms of this model. A form maintains that the history of origin can be reconstructed, the other form maintains that it cannot be reconstructed. But the distinguishing element in this model is the view that the Book of Job can be understood without one knowing its history of origin. Even if the Book of Job shows a history of origin which I know or do not know, the end form of this book offers me independently correct messages and insights which are understandable and not based on my knowing or not knowing of its history of origin. This model is adopted by Klaudia Engljählinger in her dissertation: “ Theologie im Streitgespräch. Studien zur Dynamik der Dialogue des Buches Job.” Why this model does not deny the importance of diachronic analysis of the Book of Job, it however maintains that a synchronic understanding of the Book of Job is not only possible, but also insightful.

4.1.4 ALLEGORICAL MODEL

Before the last model according to the classification of Schwienhorst- Schönberger, one identifies another model which in the work of David WOLFER, “Deep things out of Darkness. The Book of Job.” As in the first model, Wolfers proposes a single authorship of the Book of Job. He does not share Mendes view of multiple authorship of the Book of Job which was carried out at different period of the people’s history reflecting their faith history. However, Wolfers maintains that only when the Book is read allegorically can its message be properly understood .He states that the national- historical underpinning of an allegorical Job is emphatically not an optional alternative for readers. It is essential carrier

²¹⁹ Ibid.(It is certain there could be other dating assign to the stages of the development of the Book. What is of greater importance is that the Book of Job has a long history of origin).

of its most profound messages. Almost nothing of the final portion of the book, its resolution, makes any sense at all if we do not read the whole of it as allegory.

Therefore according to Wolfers, the Book of Job could only be understood, not in context of its history of origin as Mendes proposes, but only in the context of the allegorical history that it represents. The knowledge of this history is a *sine qua non* to the understanding of the Book of Job. In this way Wolfers maintains that a history is prerogative in the understanding of the Book of Job. But the history in question is not that of the origin of the book, but that which the Book allegorically represents.

4.1.5 CONTEXTUALIZATION MODEL

The last model is identified as that which one finds in Gregory's interpretation of the Book of Job – "*Moralia in Iob*". Gregory differentiates between writer (*scriptor*) and the author or source of the Book (*auctor*). The question of the writer of the Book of Job is not of great importance. Of greater importance is the question about the source of the Book of Job. The real author of the Book of Job is the Holy Spirit though Job himself is the writer. The Holy Spirit is not only the author of the Book of Job but the whole Bible. Therefore, the Book of Job should be read and understood in the broader horizon and context of the whole Scripture. According to Gregory, the truth of a text is discovered not at the superficial level but at a deeper insight into the text. It is only at this deeper level that all contradictions disappear.

In his interpretation of Job 30:20 "I cry to you, and you give me no answer" Gregory says that during the time of danger, when the faithful offer prayer and there is delay in the answering of their prayers, within this time of delay there happens in the faithful a process of inner transformation, preparing him for the heavenly goods. There is longing and yearning, and out of this develops knowledge and through this knowledge, there will come a passionate love of God. However, Gregory warns against his interpretation being taken out of context. His interpretation of the Book of Job was necessitated by his brother monks in the monastery who begged him to throw more light for their proper understanding and appreciation of the Book of Job. His interpretation of the Book of Job, he maintains is not proper for an unprotected listener (*rudibus auditoribus*), for it could prove a hindrance (*impedimentum*) to them. For an ordinary lay community "*mentes secularium*", a simple

interpretation of the Psalms would prove better in motivating the faithful to good work. For Gregory therefore, how a text should be interpreted depends on the community in question and how the interpretation will lead to the edification of the intended faithful, to the building up of their faith.

In my assessment, Gregory was emphasizing on the proper contextualization of the interpretation of the biblical text and it is of great interest in this work.

Until recently, biblical scholarship especially in the Enlightenment has been largely a historical critical enterprise, occupying itself with tracing the literary history of a biblical book and interpreting each stage of its developmental history in isolation from the others. This method was in its own way and in its own days very necessary and it remains valid. However, this method is not without its own defects. D.J.A. Clines sees in the practice of historical-critical method a kind of ethical irresponsibility and compares the practitioners of the historical- critical method to the inventors of the atomic bomb since the commitment was to the truth and not to the effect and where it leads:

*...in its quest for origins it screened out the present , and with that , the ethics of interpretation – including the ethics of keeping alive these texts by study and commentary and writing. ...commitment was to the ‘truth’, whatever that might be and wherever that might lead. And that is unquestionably a whole sight better than a commitment to falsity. But it systematically ignored the question of effect on the readers...*²²⁰

It was this effect on the readers that Gregory was emphasizing when he cautioned against inappropriate use of his commentary on Job. Since the 1970s biblical scholarship has entered a broader spectrum of literary analysis employing variety of methods in its investigation of meanings of texts: new criticism, Aristotelian interpretation, comparative literature, Russian formalism, structuralism, folklore studies and readings influenced by psychological and sociological ideologies etc. In these new literary approaches, many scholars have focused their attention more on the final form of the text of Job than on its literary history.²²¹ This is most important for the Igbo and African Christians as we shall see in the next chapter. We shall proceed to the text of the Book of Job.

²²⁰ D. J. A. CLINES, Why is there a Book of Job in: W. A.M. BEUKEN (ed.), The Book of Job, Leuven 1994, 14.

²²¹ Cf. L.G. PERDUE/ W. C. GILPIN (eds.), The voice from the Whirlwind, 16.

4.2 THE BOOK OF JOB: CLARIFICATIONS

We shall start this section by answering some basic questions patterning to the Book of Job.

4.2.1 THE BOOK OF JOB: FACTS OR FICTION

The Book of Job bears names of people and cities (Uz, Teman, Shuah, etc). One may ask: Is the content of the Book of Job a real earthly event or a folk tale. The answer to this question is that the Book of Job does not give narrative of a real historic event. The scene in heaven bears witness to that. It is no history, but a story, a fiction. But one must also bear in mind that in the traditional ancient society in which this story was written, there was no clear cut distinction between fiction and non-fictional texts.

4.2.2 THE LAND UZ

Can the Land of Uz be located in the world map? G. Frederic Owen thinks that Wadi Sirhan, SE OF Jebel ed Druz is likely to be the land where the land of Uz was located.²²² However, although references are made to Uz in Gen. 10:23 and Jer. 25:20 and there are speculations as to the location of the land of Uz, we cannot say for sure where this land is located or what land the authors of the Book of Job had in mind. In reference to 1:3 “son of the east” one can at best imagine that the land in the mind of the writers maybe somewhere east of Israel. The vulgate counts it as one of the lands belonging to the oriental. But the present day reader may not be able to outright pinpoint a place in the world map where the land of Uz could be said to be located.

4.2.3 THE NAME JOB

One could still ask: Even if the Job-text is a fiction, could it be that perhaps somebody like Job had lived, who perhaps experienced extreme difficulty, which might have inspired the authors to narrate such a story of human suffering with some earthly unrealistic features. Although based on his name and place of residence, Job is said to be a non Israelite, it is important to state that Job was only a cooperate figure representing the whole humanity.

²²² G. Frederick OWEN, The land of Uz, in: Roy B. ZUCK (ed.), *Sitting with Job. Selected Studies on the Book of Job*, 246.

Whether Job had lived or not is not important for the understanding of the text. What is described in the Book of Job is a universal theme that touches all humanity. “The Book of Job does not narrate a single event of history, but an event that touches human being irrespective of individual and cultural differences. In this way, the Book of Job does not narrate a past event but something that is deeply present.”²²³

4.2.4 PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF JOB

What then can one say is the main theme of the Book of Job? Scholars have different approaches to the Book of Job and thus the main theme they say it treats. For example, David Wolfers thinks that the person of Job was an allegorical figure representing Judah and their King Hezekiah in the time of Assyria conquests. The book strongly brings to bare the “the injustice of the punishment of Judah at just that time when there reigned a virtuous king who did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord ... (II Chron 29: 2; II Kings 18:3)”²²⁴. He thinks that the purpose of writing the Book was to show that the terms of covenant between God and Israel were no more operational “that they had been unilaterally abrogated by the Lord, or in the alternative, so transgressed by the people, they had become inoperative.” He thinks “that Job representing the Israelite nation, believe the betrayal to have been the Lord’s, while the Lord was equally convinced that His people had deserted Him and his ways.”²²⁵ Wolfers thinks the book deals precisely and singularly with the history of Israel but he also agrees that his interpretation was a novelty one. Wolfers thinks that the theme of the Book of Job has something to do with suffering and punishment but he particularized it on a historical event that happened in Judah. I should think that the theme of the Book of Job is broader and deeper than a single historical event in Israel even if that event constitutes one of the events that influenced the composition to the Book. It considers a theme that is universal to humanity. The employment of non Israelite names and places, the intensity of the treatment of the topic all point to one fact that the topic was

²²³ SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 12. (comp. Nicht etwas historisch Einmaliges wird also im Ijobbuch erzählt, sondern ein Geschehen, dass das Menschsein unabhängig von individuellen und kulturellen Besonderheiten betrifft. So gesehen erzählt das Ijobbuch nicht etwas Vergangenes, sondern etwas zutiefst Gegenwärtiges).

²²⁴ D. WOLFERS, 69.

²²⁵ Ibid, 15.

larger than a product of a single event. Besides the book passed through a long history of origin, bringing different influences of different people at different times in different styles into the Book. One can at best say that there are many things or events that could have influenced the contributors. One can understand why Wolfers proposes this view of single historical event- he believes in a single authorship of the Book of Job, which many scholars do not share.

G. W. Parsons believe that the purpose of The Book of Job is to show that the proper relationship between God and man is not a 'give and gain' bargain but is based "solely on the sovereign grace of God and man's response of faith and submissive trust."²²⁶ Mettinger however believes that no matter what theme different scholars present as the main theme of the Book of Job, "God in his relationship to evil and suffering – is the basic concern of the author."²²⁷ This is also the view of Schwienhorst- Schönberger when he states that the Book of Job deals with a universal human problem: the question or problem of suffering.²²⁸ Ortkemper was succinct when he said that the Book of Job deals with only one theme: the conflict between the faith of Israel and the problem of the suffering of the innocent.²²⁹ It is the belief of the writer of this work that the suffering of the innocent in its relationship to the belief in a just God is the central theme of the Book of Job.

4.3 THE STORY: AN ANALYSIS

The folk tale (epilogue) of the story of Job takes the form of didactic narrative. In such narrative (as in the Joseph story in Gen. 32- 37), a hero is introduced who has special qualities and abilities confirmed by actions. Then an anti- hero, with deceitful and false attitudes and character enters the scene to cause the hero harm. In the story of the Book of Job, Job is the Hero and Satan is the anti- hero.

²²⁶ G. W. PARSONS, 22f.

²²⁷ T.N.D. METTINGER, The God of Job: Avenger, Tyrant, or Victor?, in: Leo G. GILPIN / Clark W. The Voice from the Whirlwind. Interpreting the Book of Job, 39.

²²⁸ SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Die Theodizeefrage im Alten Testament, 13.

²²⁹ Franz- Josef ORTKEMPER, Von Angesicht zu Angesicht. Gotteserfahrung im Alten Testament, Stuttgart 2010, 119.

As the opening verse of the book indicates, Job was a righteous man who lives in the land of Uz. Despite his uprightness he is stricken one after the other by devastating misfortunes. The cause of this misfortune was Satan who purports that Job's righteousness is based on the favours he enjoys from God. To God's question to Satan - have you seen my servant Job, how righteous he is? Answered Satan- "Is it for nothing that Job is God fearing? Have you not surrounded him and his family and all that he has with your protection? ... But stretch out your hands and lay a finger on his possession, then, I warrant you, he will curse you to your face." God allows Satan to put Job to test in order to prove Satan wrong (1:8-12). To the many catastrophes that came his way Job first responded: "May the name of the Lord be praise" (1:21). As Schwienhorst- Schönberger notes, the Hebrew text makes a double- meaning use of the word *barak*. The real meaning of the word is to 'praise' as used by Job in 1:21 (*mebarak*). However, this same word is also used for 'curse' in 1:11 as we quoted above when Satan says to God about Job "he will curse you to your face." The Satan is speaking ironically. He actually means 'curse' but he uses the word for praise. The word *barak* as used by Job certainly does not bear a negative connotation since the narrator stated immediately in the verse 22 : "In all this misfortune Job committed no sin and he did not reproach God."

F. I Andersen remarks that the statement of Satan comes in a form of question and self curse. Like most curses in Hebrew, it omits the result clause. Thus the statement is incomplete in Hebrew and in English. It therefore reads "if he does not curse you to your face- (may something bad happen to me). The Satan calls down an unstated catastrophe on himself. It is a strong assertion on the part of the Satan meaning " I am perfectly sure he will curse you to your face."²³⁰

Schwienhorst- Schönberger also make remarks on, the Hebrew word *tilfa* which is translated as 'reproach' (Verwünschung, Anstößiges). From this word also are derived some other words like *tefilla* which signifies prayer of lamentation or complaint (Klagegebet). Following this understanding, the Psalms in Jewish tradition is designated as the 'The book of *tefillot*'. So 1:22 can be interpreted as "And he did not raise any prayer (of

²³⁰ Francis I. ANDERSEN, The Problem of EVIL IN THE Book of Job, in: The voice from the Whirlwind, 53.

lamentation, complaint) to God.” Up to this time, Job is only speaking about God, he has not yet spoken to God.²³¹

The dialogue between God and Satan took place in heaven “when the sons of God came to attend on Yahweh, among them came Satan” (1:6). The “sons of God” as contained in the text of Job in particular, and in the Old Testament in general are not gods. They have no power and are only servants and messengers or Engels according to Greek translation.²³²

The figure of Satan is also worthy of note. As a verb, the word *satan* (*satam*) means being hostile, inimical, to antagonize, to oppose or be against someone (*anfeinden, feindlich gesinnt sein, sich jemandem entgegenstellen*). In its still secular sense, the word signifies inimical behaviours between men. (Gen 27:41; 50:15; Ps 38:21; 109:4). The noun *Satan* in this regard can designate a military or political opponent (1 Sam 29:4; 1 kg 5:18; 11: 14, 23, 25) and in law court, the plaintiff or accuser (Ps 109:6). It was during the post exilic period that an article was attached to the word and it came to designate a heavenly accuser.²³³

After the heavenly episode, the scene changes to an earthly one where Job lives. He is besieged by numerous catastrophes: he has lost his possession and all his children- seven sons and three daughters, and his own health. His wife advises him to curse God and die. This he takes as a foolish advice. “We accept good things from God; and should we not accept evil?”(2:10). Up to this point, we still have the patient Job.

Job’s three friends visit him in order to console and comfort him: Eliphaz (My God is fine gold) from Teman (cf Jer 49:20; Amos 1:11f), Bildad (son of Hadad) from Shuah (cf. Gen 25:2), and Zophar (little bird) from Naamath. They are shocked by Job’s situation. They could not recognize him from afar. They are full of sorrow and sympathy for Job that they tear their garments, pour ashes on their cloths and remain seven days with Job without

²³¹ SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob,12.

²³² As we earlier indicated in chapter one of this work, in the Igbo African religion, there is an understanding that there is one supreme God- Chukwu. But there are also other small gods to whom Chukwu has charged with the government of different spheres of life. They are accountable to Chukwu. Such a background may lead an uninformed Igbo reader to a misunderstanding of the ‘sons of God’ of the text of Job 1:6 as identical with the gods in Igbo traditional religion. But there is a great difference. The sons of God in the text of Job in particular and the Old Testament in general but servants and messengers or Engels according to Greek translation. (cf. SCHWIENHORST SCHÖNBERGER, 15).

²³³ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob,15.

talking. The silence of the friends of Job as they sit on the ground beside Job is an expression of the enormity of Job's suffering (cf. Ps39: 3; Lam 2:10, Qo 3:7). The duration of this silence – seven days and seven nights is also symbolic. It is the conventional time of mourning for the dead (Gen 50:11; 1Sam 31:13, Sir 22:12).²³⁴ The visit of Job's friends marks the end of the first part of the Book of Job- the prologue. The second part of the Book is then introduced – the dialogue part.

The main dialogue (3:1- 42:6) begins with Job's personal lament (chap. 3) in which he curses the day of his birth. This is an introductory soliloquy which corresponds to Job's final soliloquy in chapter 29-31. Between these two soliloquies, there are three cycles of disputation (Streitgespräche) between Job and his three friends (chap. 3- 27). Each cycle is made up of a speech by each of the three friends of Job with a reply from Job (3-11, 12-20, and 21-27). It is only in the last cycle that there is no speech from Zophar. The dialogue assumes primarily the form of disputation: first the address of opponent, the accusation (indictment), the argument and the concluding summary.

In chap.27, Job concludes his words to his friends by collectively addressing them and telling them they have failed to convince him that he is a sinner that deserves such calamity. Job seems to agree with them that a disastrous end awaits the wicked. But the question remains: who at the end will be the wicked. Job and his friends seem to end their speeches with this pact. It was left for God to come and decide the case.²³⁵ Chapter 28 is a hymn in praise of wisdom. It first praises the human practical reason and his capabilities. But there is something that is far more valuable than these human capabilities. It is wisdom. But the question remains: this wisdom, where is it to be found (v.12)? The hymn maintains that wisdom is more valuable than everything in the world. However, this wisdom cannot be found in the land of the living. Chapters 29- 31 comprise Job's soliloquy, where he longs for his past blessed life of prosperity (29), and laments his present misfortune and misery because of God's affliction.

One observes all through in this poetic body of the work an aggressive and rebellious Job who stands his ground, rejects the unrealistic arguments of his friends and demands that

²³⁴ Ibid, 20.

²³⁵ Ibid, 153-154.

God should cease afflicting him for no- just reason. He will still have to challenge God to a law court. In chapter 31, Job makes an attestation of his innocence and utters some twelve vows²³⁶ in a form of a negative confession complete with self –imprecations by which he defends his integrity. Although this oath was common in the ancient Near East court cases, the length of Job’s oath here and its rare self imprecation points to its emphatic and determined nature. Job’s frustration reaches a high point where Job in his last chapter challenges God to a lawsuit and asks God to present his charges in writing (31: 35-37).

In the vacuum between Job’s last oath and a response from God enters another figure- Elihu. His speech sets the stage for Yahweh’s speeches. Elihu appears as a kind of mediator who speaks on behalf of Yahweh. He rebukes the three friends (cf. 32:3; 6-14; 34: 2-15; 35:4) and suggests that Job needs to repent of his pride. He advises Job to exalt God’s works which are evident in nature (36:24- 37:18); he should fear him who comes in golden splendor out of the north (37: 22- 24). The basic ideas in Elihu’s speeches are either developed or assumed by Yahweh in his speeches.²³⁷

There is then a dramatic turn in the events: God himself responds to Job. The periscope comprises of two divine speeches and two responses from Job (38:1-42:6). The double exchange between God and Job is similar to the double exchange between God and Satan in the prologue.²³⁸ God’s response in a strict sense of the word is not an answer to Job’s challenge but rather a counter challenge on Job.

Two approaches have been identified in interpreting God’s speeches: The first focuses not on the content of the speech but on the theophany itself; indicating that God’s turning to Job is a demonstration of God’s compassion and care for the sufferer. Others, assessing the theophany think that Job’s encounter with the divine majesty negates the theory of divine retribution and makes irrelevant all experiences and questions based on this theory. The other approach focuses on the content of the speeches. The analysis given by different scholars on these speeches include: a) It shows God’s effort to sustain justice in creation

²³⁶ L. G. PERDUE, W.C. GILPIN (eds.), *The Voice from a whirlwind*, 15.

²³⁷ Gregory W. PARSONS, *The structures and Purpose of the Book of Job*, in: Roy B. ZUCK (ed.), *Sitting with Job. Selected studies on the Book of Job*, Michigan 1992, 21.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

and history in spite of presence of chaos and evil. b) It shows that God transcends human standard of justice. A view in the interpretation even maintains that c) There is God's admission of divine culpability in distorting justice and wreaking havoc. But common to most of these interpretations is the view that in God's speeches, there is the rejection of the validity of doctrine of retribution.²³⁹

Job's responses have also received varied interpretations. Some scholars think that Job at the end repents of his rash judgments of divine justice. Thus he turns now to almighty in humility giving thanks to God's loving concern to the sufferer. Other scholars think that Job never repented of his hash accusation rather he succeeded in tricking the almighty in disclosing divine caprice and misrule. But also common to most of these interpretations is the rejection of the validity of the doctrine of retribution.²⁴⁰ At the epilogue, God reprimands the friends of Job, because unlike Job, they did not speak correctly of God (42: 7-9). They must offer a sacrifice of atonement and Job must intercede for them so that they may be freed from their sins.

Job is restored to his former blissful state. This time he receives double times what he had before; has another seven sons and three daughters and died at an old age. The Book of Job may be schematically presented as follows:

I.	1: 1 – 2:13	Prologue
		Narrator
II.	3:1 – 42.6	Dialogue
	3	Job's soliloquy
		The first cycle of speeches:
	4-5	Eliphaz
	6-7	Job
	8	Bildad
	9-10	Job
	11	Zophar
	12-15	Job
		The second cycle of speeches:
	15	Eliphaz
	16-17	Job
	18	Bildad
	19	Job

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

	20	Zophar
	21	Job
		Third cycle of speeches:
	22	Eliphaz
	23-24	Job
	25	Bildad
	26	Job
	27-28	Job
	29-30	Job's challenge
	32: 1-6	Introduction of Elihu
	32: 7 - 33:33	Elihu's first speech
	34	Elihu's second speech
	35	Elihu's third speech
	36-37	Elihu's fourth speech.
		Yahweh and Job
	38-40	Yahweh's first speech
	40: 3-5	Job's first response
	40: 6 - 41:26	Yahweh's second speech
	42, 1-6	Job's second reply
III.	42: 7-17	Epilogue
	42: 7-9	Yahweh's judgment of the friends
	42: 10-11	Job's restoration by Yahweh ²⁴¹

Suffering is central to the Book of Job. The next topic deals on that.

4.4. THEODICY IN THE BOOK OF JOB

The nature of Evil in the Book of Job: In the Book of Job, the problem of evil is not dealt with abstractly, but in vivid terms of one man's agony. An apparent injustice of God seems to be displayed in the inappropriate share of calamity that is laden on the righteous man – Job. This is to be mostly identified in Job's lament. In a bid to give answer to the problem of suffering, different approaches to the problem of suffering and theodicy are brought to light. We shall examine the different arguments advanced by the friends as reasons for suffering:

²⁴¹ Cf SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Job, 21f. Comp. D.J.A. CLINES, The shape and Argument of the Book of Job, in: R. B. ZUCK, Sitting with Job, 127f.

4.4.1 SUFFERING AS A RESULT OF SIN- DOCTRINE OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION

Can you recall anyone guiltless that perished? Where then have the honest been wiped out? I speak from experience: those who plough iniquity and sow disaster reap just that. Under the breath of God they perish... (4:6-8)

The above thesis from Eliphaz is a testimony to the dogma of divine retribution, which was deeply upheld in the Eastern religions and traditional to the Jewish religion. It is the major argument advanced by the friends of Job as the reason for his suffering – the belief that God gives prosperity to the just and punishes with calamity all those who do evil. D.J.A. Clines thinks that the narrator based the whole story of the Book of Job on the retribution theory. It is not a coincidence that Job the withiest of all Orientals is equally the most pious. He says: "... the narrator means to say 'The man was blameless and upright, fearing God and turning away from evil' (1:1)- that is deed. And here is the consequence: 'And there were born to him seven sons and three daughters (the perfect family), and he has 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels' ..."²⁴² But as the once prosperous and healthy Job turns to a poor dejected and miserable Job, and the patient Job of the prologue turns to the rebellious Job of the poetic aspect of the work, the friends of Job must find a theological explanation for this enigmatic situation. Whatever the explanations may be, they must not be in contradiction to the already known tradition and doctrine; there ought to be no departure from what has been the foundation of such explanations- the retributive doctrine.

Thus for Job's friends, Job is a sinner who needs repentance in order to be blessed again by the Lord (22:4-1, 21-30; 11:13-20). For Eliphaz and Bildad, since God as an impartial judge does not punish the innocent or spare the wicked, Job's misfortune and calamity must be as a result of a hidden sin (4:7- 11; 5:8-16; 8:3, 11-22; 18:5-22). Bildad states that Job's children were killed because of their sins (8:4). Eliphaz (15: 17-35) and Zophar (20:4-29) claim to be arguing from experience and the traditional wisdom of old that Job's initial prosperity and his later calamity is based on the proven belief that the prosperity of the wicked is only temporary.

²⁴² D.J.A. CLINES, *The shape and Argument of the Book of Job*, 131.

Job himself is not free of this retributive thinking. He is lured to it by Eliphaz. Job thought that God was punishing him for a hidden sin (cf. 40:8) and asks God to reveal this sin to him (10:2). He questions the validity of the doctrine of retribution because of the prosperity of the wicked (21:7-34). Because the situation at hand does not conform to the doctrine of retribution Job thinks God is misusing his power to victimize him (9:15-24; 12:13-25) Thus unconsciously in Job's mind is the belief that God punishes the sinner; in 31:2-3 assumes he that God punishes the wicked.

Elihu could not disentangle himself from the trend of divine retribution (see 34:11, 25-27; cf. 34:33; 36:17; 37:13). Though different from the three friends in their condemnation of Job, he however thinks that Job was guilty of pride(33:17; cf. 35:12; 36:9). He also defends God's justice by thinking that Job was guilty of sin before his suffering (34:37).

Yahweh's speech was a subtle refutation of the retributive theory. Rain which is in the Bible seen as instrument of reward for good deeds would be meant to fall in the desert where it has no relevance to man (38:26). Though Yahweh's restoration of Job is thought by D.J.A. Clines to be a reinstatement of the dogma as a principle to which the world operates since the story still shows at the end that the righteous man Job is also the prosperous man just as he was at the beginning,²⁴³ G.W. Parsons thinks otherwise that Yahweh's later restoration of Job and a twofold compensation of his prosperity may not be seen as a reward for Job's faithfulness but shows "a free gift based on God's sovereign grace."²⁴⁴ Schwienhorst- Schönberger sees it as an outwards expression of the inner transformation, growth and maturity that Job has attained through his struggle.²⁴⁵ The supposition of the doctrine of divine retribution runs throughout the Book of Job. But this supposition runs contrary to the situation of Job. Only by dispensing with this belief is it possible to reconcile Job's innocence with God's permitting him to suffer.

Other arguments advanced in the Book of Job as reasons for suffering are as follows:

²⁴³ Ibid,139.

²⁴⁴ Gregory W. PARSONS, 26.

²⁴⁵ SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 272.

4.4.2 SUFFERING AS ONTOLOGICALLY BELONGING TO NATURE OF MAN AS A CREATED BEING

Eliphaz is the first to advance this argument. He argues that no mortal can claim righteousness before God since even angels are not faultless before God. The imperfection of man is ontologically imbedded in him as a creature; as a result of his 'creatureliness'. (4:17- 21) He means that the distance between the creator and the created is indeed enormous. Trouble is sure to come to created beings 'as surely as the eagles fly to the height' (5:7). For Eliphaz, no man born of a woman can be pure. Even the heavens are impure before God, not to mention humanity 'which soaks up wickedness like water' (15:14-16). This was also the basic thought of Bildad in 25: 4-6. This view on suffering may be likened to Augustine's dogma of the original and inherited depravity guilt of all mankind.

4.4.3 SUFFERING AS A FORM OF GOD'S TRAINING AND UPBRINGING

Though this opinion on suffering as a form of God's correction and training is mostly advanced by Elihu (32-37), Eliphaz is the first to raise it up. Advising Job he states:

Blessed are those whom God corrects! Do not scorn the lesson of Shaddai! For he who wounds is he who soothes the sore, and the hand that hurts is the hand that heals. (5:17-18).

As Schwienhorst- Schönberger observes, the word used for 'blessed' – *Makarios* (Vulgate: *beatus*) is the same as that used in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-12). What Eliphaz means here is that Job should not be sad but he should count himself as lucky since what he is experiencing is a form of God's training or lesson. The Hebrew word used here for lesson is *musar* (Geek: *paideia*; Latin: *disciplina*). It is used mostly in passages which speak from the upbringing of youth (Proverbs 1:2; 8:10; 13:24; 23:13). The upbringing of children has two sides: the painful and the healing aspects. According to biblical tradition (and as Eliphaz notes), the painful aspect of the training is part and parcel of the upbringing and cannot be avoided.²⁴⁶

The view of suffering as a form God's training is further advanced by Elihu. For him, God speaks to man through dreams and through sickness. God speaks in dream to turn him away

²⁴⁶ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 41.

from evil and thus save his life (33: 16-18) and in the suffering of the sick bed to spare him from going down to the abyss (33:19f). Thus Job's sickness might be a form of God's communication and correction to Job. Elihu thinks that Job lived in happiness and was too sure of himself. As a result he became proud. His sin is that of pride. For through difficulties God shows kings who have grown proud the import of their deeds. The difficulties serve as warning to them. If they obey the Lord, the rest of their days will be prosperous. (36:7-11). "God saves the afflicted by his affliction, warning him in his misery (36:15). Elihu presents the picture of God as a teacher who warns (33:16-19; 36:10) and who transmits wisdom (35:11). This is surely an instrumentalisation of evil as we found in the theological arguments. It diminishes the negativity and brutality of evil.

The fourth attempt to explain suffering in the Book of Job comes in the form of suffering as a test of faith.

4.4.4 SUFFERING AS A TEST OF FAITH

This argument is advanced by Elihu:

Avoid any tendency to wrong doing, for this is why affliction is testing you (36:21).

Elihu sees the Job's suffering as a test of his faithfulness; whether Job will turn to wrong doing. He advises Job to hold on to his uprightness. This notion is also suggested in the prologue since the Satan's doubt of the authenticity of Job's faithfulness is the reason why he is allowed to test Job. But the test through suffering in the prologue is not meant to prove to Yahweh the faithfulness of Job but to the devil. The suggestion is Satan's suggestion, not God's. Suffering as a test for faith is not advanced by Yahweh but by Satan. It could be Satan's reason but not Yahweh's. The inexplicability of the reason for suffering remains in the fact that God allows it, as in the case of the Satan.

Suffering as a test of faith is an 'instrumentalisation' of suffering. If Elihu were to be right, "the case of Job precipitates the text of faith in its severest form- the supreme righteous man who sustains the most extreme calamities"²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ F. A. ANDERSEN, 183.

4.4.5 ASSESSMENTS

The vicarious understanding of suffering, the notion of the suffering of the innocent for the sake of others, was almost no theme in the Book of Job. However, suffering of the innocent Job prepares the ground for an understanding of suffering as vicarious.

The eschatological notion of suffering as partially advanced here can only be understood as limited to this world. It was Zophar that brings this dimension of the explanation of suffering in chapter 20. Just a matter of time, the wicked will receive calamity as his reward and the just shall triumph. But all these will happen in this world. Job vehemently opposes this view for he cannot indefinitely wait to see justice done on earth, or be consoled by the false notion that God is storing the punishment for the children of the wicked. It is the wicked who has sinned and he not his children should have a test of what he has done (21).

Again the Book of Job, like other Books of the Bible accepts no suggestion of limitation either in the goodness or power of God. It assumes the world as God's world, created and controlled by God. Some also see in Job's answer in the prologue: "Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh" (1:21) Job's testimony to the inexplicability and mysteriousness of suffering. This notion may be the last explanation of Job's suffering since God does not give any reason for the suffering of Job.

An examination of the speeches of the friends of Job shows different inclinations in their bid to explain the divine nature. These will be examined in the next subheading:

4.5. THEOLOGIES OF THE FRIENDS OF JOB

Through their different speeches, Duck- Woo Nam tries to categorize the friends understanding of divine nature under different theologies. I will try to examine the different theologies based on this and similar analysis. First Eliphaz's theology.

4.5.1 ELIPHAZ'S THEOLOGY: HIERARCHY, JUSTICE AND MERCY

Two different kinds of theologies are identified in the Speeches of Eliphaz: hierarchical theology and the theology of justice and mercy. In 4:17-21, Eliphaz paints a picture of a God who is so tremendous that it is difficult for both angels and humans alike to please him

or be without fault before him. “It seems that the idea of untrustworthy servants and angels is given to make an *ad minori* argument regarding the unworthiness of mortals.²⁴⁸ This is done to enhance the view of Eliphaz’s God as pure, supreme and perfect. So Eliphaz’s theology is concentrated on the high view of God and low view of human beings. This notion succumbs to Crenshaw’s critic of Old Testament theodicy as was noted earlier as purchasing God’s sovereignty at the expense of the self esteem of humans.²⁴⁹ If there is any malfunction in the world it belongs to human responsibility exemplified in Job. “Job is one of the unclean creatures, (4:17), one of the corrupt and unjust beings (15: 15-16) and one of the unprofitable beings of the high God.”²⁵⁰ In the hymnic description of divine act in 5:8-16, there is a praise of God of the creator in verse 5 which depicts God’s providential care of creation, and in verses 9-16, a praise of God of history in verses 9-16 which describes the mighty act of God in history.²⁵¹ Eliphaz’s God is a perfect Judge who governs the world with justice and he is the upholder of the moral and social order (5:9-16). For Eliphaz, everything that happens in the world reflects divine justice. Suffering and pain as well as good health and prosperity, are all constituents of divine Justice. The deity rewards each according to his work. Deserving rules the world. But he is also a God of mercy (5:17-27); for he wounds but he binds up, he strikes but his hands heals.

4.5.2 BILDAD’S THEOLOGY: JUSTICE AND HIERARCHY

Bildad propagates in his speeches justice theology and hierarchic theology. This is exemplified in 8: 2-7. Vv 3-4 is a kind of apologia for upholding “justice” and “right” as principle of divine action in history.²⁵² In v.3 he asserts that God does not pervert justice. In v. 4 he based his justice theology on retributive doctrine. Thus it was in justice that God killed the Job’s children because they sinned. In vv 5-7 Bildad offers a conditional advice that is based on cultic act: If you are pure and honest, you must now seek God and his light will shine on you and he will restore an upright man’s prosperity. Elihu claims to base and

²⁴⁸ NAM, Talking about God. Job 42:7-9 and the nature of God in the Book of Job, New York 2003, 33.

²⁴⁹ CRENSHAW, 7.

²⁵⁰ NAM, 41.

²⁵¹ Ibid,38.

²⁵² Ibid,43.

validate his teachings on the tradition of old. His position is grounded on the authority of the fathers (vv 8f.) (cf. Qoheleth 1:9-10)

In chapter 25, Bildad presents a hierarchical theology; here he presents a hierarchical order of Yahweh's world. First he begins with a hymn of praise of the most high God, poetically presenting God's sublimity and incomprehensibility and the misery and fallen nature of man. God is incomparable to men; there exists between them an immense distance. Even stars and moon which are seen as gods and are worshipped in the ancient oriental are not pure and bright before God's eyes, not to talk of humans.²⁵³

4.5.3 ZOPHAR: SAPIENTIAL THEOLOGY

Zophar's two speeches are found in chapters 11 and 20 of the Book of Job. As portrayed in chapter 11, Zophar's God is a wise deity (cf. Isa.31:2). God is portrayed as the custodian of wisdom. Wisdom is something very deep and mysterious, not accessible to many people like Job because Job belongs to the foolish. Thus he describes Job with such words as: "babbling", "wordiness" (full of words), Job is applying the method of intimidation due to lack of knowledge, "jeering" (11:2-3). Thus he prays that God will open his mouth and teach Job the secret of wisdom (v. 6).

The limitedness of human wisdom is always brought to light in order to maximize God's sole ownership and dispenser of wisdom. Thus Zophar advances the theology of the mercy of God as among the hidden wisdom which Job does not know. He thinks that in the suffering of Job, God is not only showing himself as just, but also as merciful since he demands only a very little thing from him: that he denounces his sins (v.6).²⁵⁴ Job is not wise to know this simple thing which only somebody like Zophar, who claims to know the mind of God and to speak on his behalf, would know. But this theology is based on a wrong assumption of retributive doctrine since Job had not really sinned.

There is also idea of the incomprehensibility of God, brought in to dwarf human wisdom (7-8). He uses special metaphor: higher than heaven; deeper than Sheol; to measure than the earth; and broader than the sea. These points to the cosmic domains set forth in

²⁵³ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 143-144.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Ibid, 66.

creation. God is unsearchable within these cosmic domains. This is in consistency with the common ancient Near Eastern theology. Nam notes that in the Ugaritic texts, the dwelling place of El is not precisely identifiable.²⁵⁵ Using this theology, Zophar tries an infinite elevation of God in order to degrade Job's knowledge.

The other speech of Zophar in chapter 25 is more of retributive theology which is common to the three friends.

4.5.3 ASSESSMENTS

One can unequivocally say that Job's friends are excellent theologians. What they said about God's justice and mercy, his wisdom and incomprehensibility mightiness and sublimity are all true and correct. As many scholars note, the truth in their speech cannot be given up without living the universe a moral chaos. The basic problem of Job's friends was in application. They were well meaning but presumptuous; Job's case is a special case and escaped the generalized doctrine. So they are wrong in:

1. Assuming that Job had sinned. For the friends, Job's state of misery and suffering is sufficient evidence to conclude that Job is a sinner worthy of punishment. It is true that God does judge evil in the world; it is true that people do suffer for the sake of their wrong deeds, but it does not follow that every suffering is as a result of sin committed. The case of Job's suffering opens up a whole new, wide horizon: "There is a vast area of human misery that is not penal, nor remedial nor redemptive. It is just meaningless."²⁵⁶
2. The friends based their assumption on incomplete evidence. They observe that wicked men do suffer, and Job was suffering therefore Job must be a wicked man. In this case they may be accused of rash judgment. They had already made up their mind. They could not even consider Job's side of the story. This leads us to another fault of theirs.

²⁵⁵ NAM, 54-54. (He notes that a Sumerian hymn contains an adoration of Enheduanna the high priestess for Inanna the goddess: "You (Inanna) are known by your heaven like height, you are known by your earth- like breath"

²⁵⁶ F.I. ANDERSEN, 187.

3. Closing their minds to reality. They reality on the ground suggests something different from their doctrine; to what they use to know. They would not allow themselves to be disturbed or distracted by such thoughts. Their convictions hold sway no matter whatever may contradict them. No room for dialogue. In this sense they are
4. Fundamentalists. Since there was no room for dialogue, the friends went from subtle suggestions to outright indictments. There were violent words instead of words of pity. They turn from sympathizers to accusers. In this sense,
5. They failed in solidarity, which should be the major aspect of their visit as consolers and sympathizers. What Job needs is compassion and not advice. But they friends think it is their duty to fix it. By this, Job's friend's added to his pains.

If the doctrine of the friends was to be outright correct, God will no longer be the Lord of the universe. He will have to follow and be controlled by human actions. The gratuitousness of God is put at stake. Then men would be taught to trust in their work than rather than the grace provided by God. The world will be turned into a tit and tat arena. In Job's case, "nothing but the voice from the tempest can meet his case... Beyond the frontier reached by the best human understanding ... lies the abyss of underserved suffering into which Job is plunged."²⁵⁷

We shall look into Job's own reaction to his suffering.

4.6 JOB'S JOURNEY FROM LAMENTATION TO OATH TAKING

In his approach to his suffering, two different figures of Job have been identified: First there is the patient Job "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken, bless be the name of God." (1:22). Then there is the rebellious Job of the main poetic work. This is the Job that questions, accuses and challenges God to a law suit. Both figures are not contradictory but complementary. As Schwienhorst- Schönberger notes, Job has a truth in him whose full meaning he is yet to understand. The path to the realization of this truth which is already in Job will be a turbulent and stormy one. Job will experience the meaning of what he has confessed. It is a hard experience, but its saving effect is enormous. Such is the case that at

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

end of his experience Job would exclaim: “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (42:5).²⁵⁸ We shall explore the path that leads Job to this realization. Such a path cuts across lamentations, through hypothetical thinking, desire for justice and finally to his oath taking.

4.6.1 LAMENTATION

It is really Job’s lamentation that gives the text its rare uniqueness. The theologies of the friends are not new to the tradition of the time. The manner of Job’s verbosity and audacity in speeches especially his addressed to Yahweh was something quite rare to the tradition and religion of Judaism of the time.

After the friends have stayed for seven days with Job, Job opens up in chapter 3 and burst out from his previous silence, giving bold and shocking expression to his pains and grief. This first lament is made up of three strophes. In the first strophe (vv. 3-10), Job causes the day he was born.

Perish the day on which I was born and the night that told of a boy conceived. May that day be darkness, may God on high have no thought for it, may no light shine upon it. May murk and shadow dark as the death claim it for their own, clouds hang over it eclipse swoop down upon it. See let obscurity seize upon it, from the days of the year let it be excluded, into the reckoning of the months not find its way. May that night be sterile devoid any cries of joy. Let be curse by those who curse certain days and are ready to rouse Leviathan. Dark be the stars of its morning, let it wait in vain for light and never see the opening eyes of dawn. Since it would not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide sorrows from my eyes. (3:3-9)

In biblical tradition, the birth of a child is something that gives joy, something to be celebrated. One comes from darkness to light. But Job wishes he never experience this, he was never born. He wishes that this day be blotted out from calendar. The way to do this rather illusory wish is by uttering a counter –cosmic incantation that decodes the seven fold stages of creation. To achieve this impossible wish, he implores the help of sorcerers. These have the power to arouse Leviathan the agent of terror which is normally docile (cf. Ps.104:25-26), but whose arousal would threaten the world’s order. They also have power to cast spell on certain days, causing eclipse. That will help to achieve Job’s illusory

²⁵⁸ SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 24.

wish.²⁵⁹ In Egypt, priests uttered malediction against *Apophis*, the incarnation of the powers of chaos and the enemy of the Sun- god *Re*. The incarnation of chaos was also the enemy of Pharaoh who guarantees life prosperity and health. It reads: “Re (the sun god) is triumphant over thee, O *Apophis*; Pharaoh is triumphant over his enemies”²⁶⁰ Also in the epilogue of the code of *Hammurapi* the king of justice, there are series of curses in the name of different gods which presupposes the condition that follows when successive leaders do not pay attention to the governing principle of the law of justice. The essence of these magical and juridical curses is for the continuing endurance and maintenance of order of nature, state and individual life. But in Job’s case he in contrast employs these maledictions to reverse the already existing cosmic order which he perceives as senseless and establishment that resuscitates pains and misery.

Job’s cursing of his day of birth “let that day be darkness” is a reversal of the first act of creation in Genesis where God commanded light to come into being: “Let there be light, and there was light.” (Gen. 1:3). The view of God as the creator of the world order seems to be a subject of criticism. “The creator who brings order into the world (Gen. 1:1-24) may be the God who brings chaos into that same world.”²⁶¹ There is the use of the words- darkness, shadow of death.... This kind of wish as we find in Job, although rare, is not novel in biblical tradition (cf. Jeremiah 4: 23- 26; 20:14-18).

In the second strophe (vv. 11- 1), Job longs for the comfort that Sheol provides. In contrast to the traditional portrayal of Sheol as place of misery, a place of gloomy shadowy existence, Job sees it as a place of freedom, equality and self determination. This second strophe begins with “why”. The “why” question is most often used in the Psalms of complaint to God (Cf. Ps. 22:2; 42:10). In Job’s case, he does not direct his question to God, rather he wished he were death in order to find peace.

In the third Strophe vv.20-26 Job continues to wish he were death. Like in the second strophe, it begins with the “why” question. This is similar to the teaching in Sirach 30:17;

²⁵⁹ Cf. J.E. HARTLEY, From Lament to Oath. A study of progression in the speeches of Job, 81.

²⁶⁰ Cf. NAM, 77.

²⁶¹ Ibid, 78.

41:1-2.²⁶² Job directs his “why” question to God, though indirectly. He addresses God in the third person. He uses the terms of “light” and “life”. But instead of their normal positive portrayal, Job sees them as a burden to a man in misery who otherwise would prefer death. Job does not seek restoration to life or good health, but an escape from misery which only death provides. Job yearns for death in the crucial moment of a man’s life where otherwise life would have been preferred: at conception (vv. 3-10), at birth (11-19); and now at the moment of suffering where otherwise one would have wished restoration (20-26). H.E. Hartley comments on L. Perdue identifying the reversal of four key metaphors relating to creation: creation by word is turned to malediction, sterility is sought instead of fertility, ruins are preferred to beautiful temples, and the mighty sea – dragon, which has been termed in creation, is let loosed.²⁶³

4.6.1.1 JOB’S LAMENTATION AND PSALMS

Job’s second and third speeches were also Laments. His style of lament has similarities and dissimilarities with the laments found in the psalms. Such laments in the psalms normally have these five elements: address, personal laments, affirmation of trust, petition, and vow of praise. Job develops two of these elements, alters one, and omits two.²⁶⁴ We shall try to examine these elements the two that occurred, one that is modified, and two that are omitted in Job’s lamentation.

A. ADOPTED ELEMENTS

The two elements that are both present in Psalm of lament and the lamentation of Job are: 1.) Personal lament and 2.) Petition. We try to examine the personal lament as it occurs in Job’s lamentation.

The three subjects that make up personal laments are present in Job’s lament: First, the self, Job complains about the self (3:11-19, 24-26; 6: 1-12; 7:1-10; 9: 25-31; 10: 18-22; 14:1-15; 17: 6-8,16; 29:2-5, 12- 20; 30:16- 19,24-31). Job’s complaint about the self contains expression of mourning, description of disasters and reference to former days of prosperity.

²⁶² SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch ijob, 29.

²⁶³ Cf. J.E. HARTLEY, 82.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 89.

He compares the days of his prosperity to the agony that he is at present experiencing. For Job, days of prosperity mean God's nearness (29:2-5). And now, what he most feared had befallen him (3:25-26).

The second subject in a personal lament is the enemy. (6:15-20; 19:14-19; 30:1-5). Sometimes Job puts the friends as his enemies for their lack of understanding and pity, and for their bad advice (6:15-20; 19:14-19), at other times it is God that he sees as his enemy for viciously persecuting him (16:11-14; 19:7-12).

The third subject in personal lament is God. Job complains about divine surveillance (7:12-21; 10:16-17, 20; 13: 27; 14:3; 16:12), about divine anger (9:5, 13; 10:17; 14:13; 16:9; 19:11), and divine abusive power (6:4; 7:14; 9:17-18,31; 10:3,8,16-17; 13:21-27; 16: 9, 11-16; 19:9-12; 21-22; 30:18-19, 21-22).²⁶⁵ Job did not hide his questionable view on God whom he assumes afflicts him unjustly. Job sees God not only as amoral but actively immoral in his treatment of him. This is based on his belief that it is God who is afflicting him unjustly for he has committed no sin (6:24; 13:23), and that the order of the world is based on and governed through the doctrine of retribution. Job in fact brings criminal charges against God:

...and life itself I despise! It is all one, hence I boldly say: he destroys innocent and guilty alike. When a sudden deadly scourge descends, he laughs at the plight of the innocent, when country falls into the power of the wicked, he veils the faces of its judges. Or if not he who else? (9:21-24).

Job accuses God of abuse of power and of acting out of whim. Job knows he is on the verge of blasphemy but he is not scared, he must give voice to his inner hurt.

I am putting my flesh between my teeth, I am taking my lives in my hands; let him kill me if he will; I have no other hope than to justify my conduct in his eyes(13:14-15)

The expressions, "putting my flesh between my teeth" and "taking my lives in my hands" mean to gamble for life, to stake all (Judges 12:3; 1 Sam 19: 5; 28: 21). Job does not care about his happiness any more. His utmost concern is to vindicate himself before man and above all before God. He is ready to do that at the price of his very life.

²⁶⁵ NAM, 80.

Job further sees God as one who creates a world without order or meaning. He sees creation as conforming to no moral pattern and existence itself as having no structure.²⁶⁶ Thus he calls for a counter reversion of the act of creation (chap. 3). Instead of Leviathan and sea monster being the object of God's assault as hymn to God's creative act attests, (Ps. 74:13-14), Job satirically replaces it with the innocent sufferer : "Am I the Sea, or some sea monster, that you should keep me under guard?" (7:12).²⁶⁷ Mettinger points to the use of the Hebrew verb *bala* which means "to swallow", "to destroy" in the sentence: "your hands fashioned and made me altogether- yet now you destroy me" (Job 10:8). The death or Sheol is known in biblical tradition as Swallower. But in the Apocalypse of Isaiah, it is God who swallows death (Isa. 25: 8). Job could be cynically making an allusion to this verse, meaning that instead of God swallowing chaos, he is rather swallowing his own creation, the innocent Job.²⁶⁸

But Job's image of God in the Book of Job is not negative all through. At one hand Job sees God as his enemy, and persecutor. At the other hand he sees God as his witness in heaven (16:19), as his redeemer (19:25), and as one who will give him justice²⁶⁹ (23:5-7).

The second similarity between the lamentation of Job and the lament in the Psalms is the presence of petition. Job makes petition both to his friends and to God. He begs his friend to listen to him and to handle him fairly (6:28-29; 19:21; 21: 5). And he asks God to ease his suffering and make clear to him the reason for his suffering (7:7, 16; 10:20-22).

B. MODIFIED ELEMENT: ADDRESS

As for the modified elements in the lamentation of Job, Job does not address God directly in his first speech as well as in the opening of his second speech. Later in the second speech, he does turn to God but without an introduction. Save for one time when he briefly stated: " I shall say to God" (10:2), he does not make use of introduction in addressing God.

²⁶⁶ T.N.D. METTINGER, The God of Job: Avenger, Tyrant, or Victor, in: L.G. PERDUE, W.C. GILPIN(eds.), The Voice from the Whirlwind, 43.

²⁶⁷ Here, the mind of the poet seizes on the Babylonian cosmogonies where Tiamath, (the Sea) co-operated in the birth of the gods but was later conquered and subdued by one of their own. Thus for the Israelites, Yahweh is he who sets Chaos in order and holds the sea and the sea monster in control (Ps.65:7; 74:13-14; 77:16; 88:9-10) Cf. Commentary on Job from Jerusalem Bible, 765.

²⁶⁸ T. N. D. METTINGER, 43-44.

²⁶⁹ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 184.

He addresses God mostly by the use of second person masculine singular.²⁷⁰ Job does not appeal to God's past activities, or to his greatness, in order to put the present distress within the framework of what God had done (Pss. 22:4-5;77:14-15; 80:2; 94:1-2;). This the psalmist does in order to draw God's mercy and compassion.

C. OMITTED ELEMENTS: AFFIRMATION OF TRUST AND VOW OF PRAISE

In contrast to the Psalms, there is also no affirmation of trust in God, neither is there any vow. "A vow is a voluntary, solemn promise, usually of declaratory praise or of a sacrifice which is to be fulfilled after God has granted a specific request."²⁷¹ Instead of a vow, Job makes a protestation of his innocence and takes oaths. As different from a vow, "an oath compels God to validate a position on the basis of justice"²⁷² Job chooses to adopt this legalistic and more aggressive path.

Another missing element is that Job makes no assurance of being heard as is the case in most Palms where the petitioner suddenly changes his tone from that of a complaint to a statement of confidence that the prayer is heard and that God is going to bring about a change. Hartley thinks that Job bases the ground for the resolution of his conflict on his personal innocence more than in the mercy of God.²⁷³ Nam thinks it is based on Job's presumption that God is just. I think both positions are not contradictory for it is in Job's presumption that God is just, that there is an insistence on his innocence.

The next factor we shall discuss in Job's turbulent journey to maturity is his use of hypothetical thinking.

4.6.2 HYPOTHETICAL AND IMMAGINATIVE THINKING

Through imaginative thinking, Job is able to express his mind wholly without any reservation. His expressions are full of imageries and colours. The wishful thinking offers him no boundaries or limits, but rather gives him avenues that enable him to explore every option there is, or there could be, or is imaginable even if it would never be (unrealistic and

²⁷⁰ HARTLEY, 90.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid, 91.

unrealizable). This his attitude is not without a reward- it provides him a stronghold (Halt) to hold on, a means to empty and rest his grief and embittered soul, for the inner healings only begins when the hurt is given expression through a voice.

One identifies wishful thinking in Job's desire to move back the hand of the clock and upturn creation by abolishing the day of his birth. This is certainly fantasy. When he sees that it is not possible, he wishes to take his abode in Sheol. From this wishful thinking, Job reaches a more real identification of part of his sorrows. He speaks of isolation of friends and relatives (19:13-19), and God's continuous persecutions (16:9-14; 19:7-12). Thus there is a movement from illusory escape from turmoil to concrete identification of existing problem. This he achieves through imaginatively expressing himself and giving voice to his hurt.

Job also changes his approach towards death through hypothetical thinking. He had wished he was still-born (3:11); or died at infancy like an abortive child (3:16). In 14:7-17, his conception and attitude towards death changes. He talks of hope for a tree that is felled of living again. But since this situation is not the same for a dead human being "he dies, and dead he remains..." (v. 10), Job prefers to be hidden and sheltered in Sheol till the anger of God is over. This is an expression of will to live. He longs for refuge in the only place he can think of that is different from the earth, where he is being afflicted, and from heaven being reserved to God (115:16). Later on, he hopes to see the mercy of God after God's fury is over. Job ceases to place death as his highest goal. In 17: 11, the idea begins to creep into him that if he dwells in Sheol he will not have hope. Job's oath in 31:1-40 shows his will to live for when he is finally justified, his life will be lengthened. This later wish to be vindicated and live is arrived through his hypothetical imaginative thinking.

Through his hypothetical thinking, Job also arrives at the possibility of holding God accountable for his seemingly unjust actions towards him. He first makes a consideration of this idea in chapter 9. He explores the possibilities but drops the idea since he doubts the possibility of his success in this regard. "I cannot believe he would listen to what I said...Shall I try force? Look how strong he is. Or go to court? But who will summon him? (9:16, 19). However, in chapter 13 he arrives at the resolution to hold God accountable for God's attitude towards him. This is due to his explorations in chapter 10 and his conviction

that God knows he is innocent. In 13:17-18, he comes to the resolution to take God to court.

Also, through hypothetical thinking, Job moves from his initial idea that there was no arbiter to rescue him from God (9:33-34) to the realization that he has a witness in heaven, his defender who will plead his case against God (16:19-21). Schwienhorst- Schönberger emphasizes that since the Book of Job comes out of a tradition of strict monotheism, this defender of Job against God is no other person than God himself: “No one against God against God himself” (Nemo contra Deum, nisi Deus ipse).²⁷⁴ Job comes to realize that his redeemer lives (19:25). This redeemer is no other person than God.²⁷⁵ There is a flash of liberation from the idea that it is God who is really persecuting him (the prologue state that the devil is responsible for Job’s suffering although God allows it) but it will still take a deal of struggles before he comes to full realization of this truth.

As Hartley notes, considering all these facts it is clear that “imaginative thinking ... helps Job from despondency to resolution.”²⁷⁶

4.6.3 JOB’S VIEW OF JUSTICE

Job demonstrates he has a very high view of Justice. He attests to that in chapters 29: 12-20 and 31. In chapter 29:12-20 he recounts the many different moral deeds of justice he carried out especially how he defended the disadvantaged in the land and saved them from the hands of the wicked. “Uprightness I wore as a garment, fair judgment was my cloak and my turban. I was eyes for the blind and feet for the lame” he cries. “I use to break the fangs of the wicked and snatch their pray from their jaws. He shows that his view of justice is above the conventional ideas. Job’s figure shows one totally committed to justice. Here there is a portrayal of Job not only as a defender of justice (29: 12-13, 17) but also an upright judge (29:14, 16). Hartley notes that Job’s use of the metaphor “wearing uprightness as a garment” (29:14), shows that “he ingrained the principles of justice deep in his conscience” while the contents of his oath in chapter 31 show that “he recognizes that

²⁷⁴ Cf. SCWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 98.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 113.

²⁷⁶ HARTLEY, 94.

attitude and intentions, which are beyond the scope of any legal system, are subject to moral judgment.”²⁷⁷ The whole chapter 31 has been characterized as oath of purity (Reinigungseid) or negative confession of sins, which designates a confession of innocence, as Schwienhorst- Schönberger notes.²⁷⁸

This is also the second set of Job’s oath (chapter 31) directed to God. We treat it here because its contents show Job’s high regard for justice. It contains a total of fourteen transgressions which Job maintains never to have committed. Some of these transgressions are as follows: He is aware of the dangers of the eyes and has guarded himself against the use of the eyes. (v.1). He swears of being free of the sins of deeds like fraud in barter or in the market (v.5); stealing- and other sins against the neighbor (v.7); the sin of adultery (v.9) infringement of rights of slaves (v.13) and orphans (v.21); dishonest acquisition of lands and murder (38-38). He is also free of the sins of omission and sins against love (16-17, 19-20, and 31-32). He is free of the sins of greed, arrogance and vanity which leads to false gods (vv.24-25), of adulatory (v.26), or a hidden sin in the mind (v.33). Job goes extra mile in his righteousness by not allowing himself to rejoice over the misfortune of an enemy or to curse him (v.29). Because Job is so righteous, he finds it incomprehensible that he should be treated unjustly in such a way by God. His view of God as a guarantor of justice is then called to question. He has come to the conviction that one can still argue his case before God and get justice without being overpowered (23:5-7). It is God’s continuous absence (23:8-9) that leads him to utter the two sets of oath.

4.6.4 JOB’S TWO SETS OF OATH

Job is determined to use every available source to plead his case against God and seek justice. He applies an Old Testament law which obliges one to come to the help of those who are in desperate needs who call for help (Deut. 22:23-27). So Job calls “Violence” (19:7), but no one, even God comes to his help. Aware of the Old Testament belief that the blood of the innocent cries out for vengeance (Gen. 4:10; Isa 26:21; Ezek24:6-9), Job pleads with the earth not to let his blood be covered upon his death so that his blood can cry

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 95.

²⁷⁸ SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 175.

to heaven for vengeance (16:18). But Job must at last make two sets of oath in order to rest his case. In the first set of oath (27:2-6), he formally ends the dialogue with the friends and defines his position over against theirs. In the second (31:1-40) (which we have already treated above), he declares his innocence in a bid to mandate God to speak.

In the ancient Near East, oath taken had several significances. First, it was the boldest approach to the claim of innocence, raising a person's position from a claim to evidence acceptable as proof. Secondly, an oath brought certain kind of legal context to an end. A court normally compelled a defendant to take an oath of innocence especially where there is insufficient evidence brought by a plaintiff to render judgment on a case (cf. Exod. 22:6-7). And when such oath was taken, the case came to an end in favour of the one who took the oath.

Job's first set of oath comprises of three assertions; two are placed under oath and one is stated forthright.²⁷⁹ In the first oath (vv. 2-4), Job swears by the life of God. As typical of oaths, the imprecation is left unspecified. Job begins by basing his oath on the name of God: "I swear by the name of God..." (v.2). This form of introduction to oath taking is not foreign to the biblical tradition. By this form of oath introduction, the person taking oath gives divine backing to the oath he is to take; he calls God to be a witness. The necessity that what one is to say should certainly be the truth cannot be over emphasized, bearing in mind the words of the Decalogue which states that "You must not misuse the name of Yahweh your God, for Yahweh will not leave unpunished anyone who uses his name for what is false" (Deut. 5:11). In some cases of oath taking in the Bible, there is a further addition of some aspects of God's saving deeds to the basic formulation: "In the name of God". 1Samuel 14:39 reads: "for as Yahweh lives who gives victory to Israel". Also in Jeremiah 23:7 we read "As Yahweh lives who brought the Israelites out of Egypt." In this regard, Job's oath has a major shift from the traditional method in the Bible. He irreligiously twists his addition to what does not conform to the tradition of the religion of Israel. His addition does not speak about the saving work of Yahweh but about Yahweh "who denies me justice" "who has filled me with bitterness" In this, Job seems to have become irreligious by departing from the tradition. The reason for this attitude is not

²⁷⁹ J.E. HARTLEY, 84.

farfetched - his bitter experience.²⁸⁰ Job is swearing by God and at the same time charging God of violating justice in his case. Job is maintaining that he will not put aside his own integrity even though God has put aside his justice. In this daring posture, Job appears to have elevated himself above God. Only the voice from the whirlwind will rectify and redeem the situation.²⁸¹

The phrase “who has filled me with bitterness”(v.2) echoes the phrase “bitterness of soul which Job uses four times in his ordeal. Two of the usages are directed to his own ordeal (7:11; 10:1), and the other two are directed to the general ordeal that confronts the humankind (3:20; 21:25). This phrase is unique to the lament of Job and has been distinctively constructed by the author in order to convey the unique sorrow situation of Job. This is attested by its absence in the numerous psalms of lament.²⁸² Also, Job’s use of the term “the breath of God breathes in my nostril” recalls the account of the creation of man by God by breathing into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2:7; Ps 104:29). Here Job acknowledges his dependency on God for the very life that he has (104:29-30).

In v. 4, Job categorically states that he will maintain his integrity despite all odds. “my lips will never speak evil nor my tongue utter lie.” This is a negation of Satan’s proposition that Job will curse God to his face (2:5) and a further rejection of the advice of his wife: “why persist in this integrity of yours? Curse God and die (2:9).

The second oath v. 5 is a direct statement of Job’s position against that of his friends. Job will not admit that the friends are right. He is going to maintain his integrity till his dying day. He begins with the statement “far be it from me” (*Fern sei es mir*). The unexpressed imprecation is self – inflicted. It has been suggested that the statement originally meant “May it be (my) profanation in the eyes of God if I should break my oath. Thus Job understands that he means that he should be “erased or eliminated” if his words are proven

²⁸⁰ Cf. SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, *Das Buch Ijob*, 150-151.

²⁸¹ J.E. HARTLEY, 87

²⁸² *Ibid*, 85.

to be false (cf. 1 Sam 26:11; 2 Sam 20:20; 1 Kings 21).²⁸³ Job resists the temptation to be pious or religious at the cost of the truth. He will not confess a sin he never committed.²⁸⁴

Verse 6 is a solid protestation of his innocence. “I will hold fast to my righteousness and not relax it; my hearts does not reproach me for any of my days” (RSV). Job will stand his ground and maintain his innocence. He has searched through his days and found no wrong he has committed. He is not afraid of any investigation or going to court. With this claim he refutes Eliphaz accusation against him to have committed sever sins (22:5-9, 15).

Eliphaz had leveled strong accusation against Job (22:5-9, 15). Job perhaps notes that Eliphaz may move from mere accusation to formal complaint in court. He moves ahead of Eliphaz and takes the oath in line with the high significance of oath. This he does in order to maintain his honour and bring the disputation to an end. It is either the friends make formal complaint or they remain silent. In using his very life to take oath, Job shows his innocence beyond doubt and by putting himself under divine scrutiny, he silences his accusers for the case is now beyond them. Now the case is between him and God. By this oath Job also challenges God’s continuous silence. The oath taking is also an expression of Job’s faith in God’s justice for his oath taking has value only if God is committed to justice.

4.6.5 LEGAL METAPHOR

The whole Book of Job is permeated with legal metaphor. Job talks of taking God to the law court (9:16, 19; 13:17-18). He talks of witness who will plead on his behalf (13:7-12; 16:18-21). He takes two sets of oath which have legal their significances (29:2-6; 31:1-40). Many other legal metaphors are employed in the Book of Job like in 9: 14, Job talks in legal terms “And here am I, proposing to defend myself and select my argument against him.” “I shall speak of do not condemn me tell me what your case is against me” (10:2).Job asks his friends:

Kindly listen to my accusation and give your attention to the way I plead. Do you mean to defend God by prevarication and by dishonest argument, and taking his side like this, appoint yourself as his advocates? (13:5-8)

²⁸³ Cf. Ibid, 86.

²⁸⁴ Cf. SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 151f.

His use of this and other numerous legal metaphors is consistent with the role he had played in the affairs of his town as legal and judicial personnel (29:2-17).

4.6.6 JOB'S THEOLOGY

Job passed through retributive theology to a more realistic theology, a kind of question unto God theology. He moves from speaking about God like his friends to speaking to God directly, questioning him and asking him for justice. Questioning God theology is a form of religious protest in which God is called upon to come and demonstrate his sovereignty in the limitedness of this world. This theology refuses to stop asking question whether there is justice for the innocent who suffer. It does not forget the suffering of humanity but reformulates it as questions unto God. It maintains that God cannot be established beyond or above human suffering but on the contrary the suffering is the cost of affirming God. As is the case in Job, in Question unto God theology, there is an expression of the missing God (cf. Job 23:8-9), because to know God is to miss him.

While the friends of Job demonstrate themselves as seasoned theologians, carefully choosing their words and maintaining traditional theologies, the overall language in the lamentation of Job is the language of prayer. In the Book of Job, the legal metaphor is a radical aspect of this language of prayer. It is a language of prayer that we see here. The language in the lamentation is spontaneous, real, and dramatic and comes out of experience. The language of prayer does not succumb to cheap consolation like the ones rendered by the friends of Job (Job 22:21-30), nor does it lend itself to lessening anxiety or finding compensation. It does not readily lend itself to adjustment and modifications (nicht Anpassungsbereit) because it shows men in resistance to some factual situation of life- as in the case of Job (Job 13:13-14). It is much more a rebellious language in which those who pray connect with their God in the profoundness of life situation. It also shows a demonstration of the faith of the one who prays. God has already proved himself in human history and in the case of Job there is a belief in the justice of God (Job 23:5-7). The theology of Job, in consistency with questioning God theology is apocalyptic. Apocalyptic is based on trust and confidence: a trust that God remembers those without hope and a confidence that God will in a new creation bring the arduous history of the afflicted to an

end. Thus it ignites hope. It entails a waiting for the hidden power of God that saves. In Job's case, he is enabled to behold the face of God and he was totally satisfied.

4.7 ELIHU: THEOLOGY OF THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE GOD

The name "Elihu" means "My God is He". His father's name Barachel means "God blesses, may God bless".²⁸⁵ As one who has a special kind of wisdom, a revelatory kind of wisdom which is different from wisdom based on age and experience, Elihu presents a theology of the unknowability of God (36:26). Man can to a certain degree understand God's work and deeds (37:7); we can hear God's voice in the work of nature (37:2); but a great deal of God's work is beyond human comprehension and understanding; "He, Shaddai is far beyond our reach." (37:23). It is not so much important to worry about the unknowable side of God. What is important is the fear of God (24). God is not affected or harmed by the deeds of men (35:6-7), because he is so great (35:5). But that does not mean that God does effect any action in the world. He does but his actions are free. Elihu's speech so to say is a preparation for God's theophany.

4.8 THE THEOLOGY OF GOD IN THE BOOK OF JOB

"Then from the heart of the tempest (whirlwind) Yahweh gave Job answer." (38:1).

God at last speaks. He speaks from the tempest. By the use of this dramatic image, the author wants to bring to the consciousness of the reader a theophany and seeks to differentiate sphere of the speeches of God from that of Job and his friend.

God's speeches (38-41) are remarkable as much for what they omit as for what they contain. Firstly, God does not directly address the issue of doctrine of retribution. He neither affirms it nor denies it. He simply ignores it.

Secondly God's speeches are noted for bundle of counter questions directed to Job rather than providing answers to Job's questions and yearnings.

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?...

Have you been right down to the sources of the sea...?

²⁸⁵ Cf. SCHWIENHORST – SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 188.

Have you been shown the gates of death... (Job 38: 4, 16, 17).

Some scholars think that God's speeches are not quite enough and that God is aiming at intimidating Job rather than addressing the issues brought forward. But God certainly does not aim to dazzle Job with his power and abilities but God's speeches are part of a structure pervading the book as a whole. Through these series of questions, "God invites Job to reconsider the mystery and complexity – and often sheer unfathomableness – of the world that God created."²⁸⁶ And God does it in a manner that is characteristic of the entire book, a book that is pervaded with legal metaphor.²⁸⁷ God's questions on Job are arranged in three categories: His non participation in creation, which entails that Job is not in the position to ask questions since he is not informed about the fundamental reason why things are the way they are. "Where were you when I led the earth's foundation?...Who pent up the sea behind closed doors when it leapt tumultuous from the womb" (38:1,8). The second category concerns questions dealing with the governance of the world. "Have you ever in your life given orders to the morning or sent the dawn to its post? ... Can you fasten the harness of the Pleiades, or untie Orion's bands?" (38:12, 31). Job is led to understand his human shortcomings. The third category is a series of questions about animals, lions and raven, goat and hind, wild ass, ostrich, war horse, hawk and eagle. The animals mentioned in these chapters are all wild animals, whose reason of existence is unintelligible to man.

God begins his speech with the rhetorical question: "Who is this, obscuring my intention with his ignorant words?" (38:2). The obvious reference here is to Job's satirical doxology in chapter 12 but also to the entire attitude of Job in the book where Job conceives creation as void and meaningless especially in chapter 3. Thus Job's challenge of God despite his lack of knowledge darkens and obscures God's plan in the world. Through God's speeches Job would be led to the realization of his ignorance.²⁸⁸

God makes two speeches. In the first speech, which has two parts (38:4-38 and 38:39-39:30), God defends himself against the accusation of Job that he is arbitrary in his dealings. God's defense is based on the fact that Job's accusation comes from his lack of

²⁸⁶ D. J. A. CLINES, *The shape of the argument of the Book of Job*, 137.

²⁸⁷ T.N.D. METTINGER, 44.

²⁸⁸ SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, *Das Buch Ijob*, 225.

knowledge, from his ignorance. “What Job is not aware of is the nature of God’s activity in manifesting the divine “council” or “designs”. God makes reference to the very architecture of creation (38:4-7); he brings Job to the consciousness of the order created by God’s control of the chaotic sea which in Old testament biblical tradition constitutes a threatening force to human existence (38:8-11). He leads Job to his action against the wicked by bringing in the morning and the dawn of the day (38: 12-15). Even death and its gates are subject to his control (38:16-21). Through his series of questions God tries to free Job from his fixation. He tries to free him from the erroneous judgment of the order of the world from a myopic standpoint. As noted above, in 38:12, God commands the morning and sends the dawn to its post. In the ancient Near East, the dawn represented the epiphany of the sun god, who effect effective actions against inimical evil forces in all its cosmic manifestations. This is the motive behind the Israelite conception of God’s judgment at dawn. (Zeph. 3:5; Ps. 5:4)²⁸⁹

In the second part of his speech,(38:39-39:30) God shows himself as the Lord of animals. In five parts, the animals are introduced in pairs: lion and raven (38:39-41), mountain goats and deer ((39:1-4), wild donkey and wild ox (5-12), ostrich and horse (13-25), hawk and eagle(26-30). According to the ancient Orientals motives, god and goddess are portrayed as lords of animals. The wild ferocious powers of these animals are seen as controlled and tamed by these gods and goddesses so that they do not destroy the created world. In Job’s text, the wild animal world, which can be sometimes very dangerous for humans are not destroyed but rather Yahweh takes care of them and gives them their places in his creation. He controls their powers. God leads Job through his speeches from an anthropocentric world view,(a worldview that places man at the centre of everything and other things have only their values according to their relevance to man) to a cosmocentric worldview, a world view that recognizes things as they in themselves are . Even in their seemingly purposelessness, they point to their creator²⁹⁰ God teaches Job that there may be chaotic powers on earth, but he as Lord is in control of all of them. They can disrupt creation but not destroy them.

²⁸⁹ T. N. D. METTINGER, 47.

²⁹⁰ SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, 238.

In the second speech (40:6-41:26), God defends himself against Job's accusation that the world is delivered into the hands of the wicked (9:24), that only the wicked prosper and the righteous are vanquished (21:7-21; 24). Thus God defends his righteousness. Behemoth and Leviathan (hippopotamus and crocodile) are symbols of primordial chaos, who of all animal creation are supremely wild and terrible. Othmar Keel opines that the use of hippopotamus and crocodile in the text of Job reflects the use of these animals in Egyptian mythology. It was the duty of the king to hunt and kill hippopotamus. The god Seth, the god of the deserts, wars and strength, the enemy of the god Horus took the form of a red hippopotamus. In a picture representation from this time, Horus with the help of the king, wages battle against evil forces as represented by the god Seth. It was sacred duty of the king to hunt and to kill the red hippopotamus. Keel says that the image of the god Horus is transferred to Yahweh in the second speech of God. Keel also thinks that the emphasis here is not on the control and governing of these powers but on their total destruction. However as Schwienhorst- Schönberger points out, the text of Job rather does not portray Yahweh waging war against these powers. Rather the Job text says twice that Yahweh created them (40:15, 19). So the dangerous powers are placed under Yahweh's control.

In another Egyptian mythology from the early Egyptian time (2040-1650 BC), hippopotamus represented the power of regeneration because it controls the powers in the sea and through its disappearance and appearance conquered the evil fate of death. The goddess Toeris; who was worshipped as the protector of the pregnant women and the new born is represented in the figure of a female white hippopotamus. God's second speech holds in place the tension between the typology of the human enemy red hippopotamus and that of the human friendly white female hippopotamus. It is a tension between force, power (16-18) danger (24) on one hand, and calmness peace (15, 20-23) on the other hand. The dangerous hippopotamus is under God's controlling power. It grazes and eats grass like cows and other animals play around the corner.²⁹¹ What Job is not able to do, God is doing with the beast.

In the same way Leviathan- the crocodile represents ancient inimical chaotic force. According to biblical creation theology, God conquered and subdued these forces at

²⁹¹ Ibid, 250-251.

creation (Ps.74:13-14). Leviathan is conquered but not eliminated. Leviathan further represents the image of death. The text of Job presents the crocodile in its ferocious forceful figure. It is so strong that man cannot hunt or conquer it with bare human strength. Job is meant to understand that the crocodile has come to his family in the figure of sickness and death. It has killed Job's children and eaten up Job's body. Job is led to realize that he cannot win the fight against the crocodile by himself. The crocodile in the figure of death remains. But God will help Job to free himself from the power of the crocodile. Job will be free; breath again and die at old age (42:6, 17).²⁹²

God's speeches in a nutshell show that "God's sovereign cosmic power was neither the retributive justice (as the friends had argued) nor the 'uncontrolled caprice' (as Job had perceived it) of an impersonal cosmos, but rather the majestic omnipotence and mysterious genius of a personal and gracious God."²⁹³ And when Job realizes this, his response was simple.

In his first response (40:3-5) he declares an end to the dispute and agitation. Job is led to self realization and self understanding. He recognizes how little he was. Through his self understanding and realization Job is led to the understanding of God. Job withdraws his former words which he had spoken out of ignorance.²⁹⁴ In Job's second response, he clearly states his withdrawal of his former words and from the dispute. He acknowledges that he had spoken without understanding about things that are beyond him. He says to God: "Before, I knew you only by hearsay, but having seen you with my own eyes, I retract what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:5-6). Job is gradually led from "hearing", to "seeing" God. Here "hearing" signifies something outward and "seeing" characterizes something that is inward. The "hearsay" signifies the articles of faith which were transmitted to Job through tradition. This includes beautiful stories about God and other theologies including that of his friends.

The formulation "God seeing" in the text of Job likely has its origin from a practice of ancient oriental religions, where one looked at the image of a god or goddess that was

²⁹² Ibid, 252-253

²⁹³ G.W. PARSON, 28.

²⁹⁴ Cf. SCHWIENHORST –SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 245-246.

placed in a temple or carried during a procession. The Old Testament took over this conception (Gen 32:31; Ex. 24:10; Ps 42:3). But since image representation of Yahweh was forbidden in Israel, this conception did not refer to an external seeing of God's image, but a metaphor for an inner process of God's experience; an experience of God that leads to inner transformation.²⁹⁵ Thus Job has an encounter with God that changes his life and his former conception about reality. Job had thought his suffering was as a result of guilt that he never committed. Now he realizes that suffering has most times no connection with sin and that the world is not run by deserving. He withdraws his former words because they were based on the wrong conception of the order of the world. They were based on retribution. His repentance is total.

4.9.1 THE EPILOGUE: JOB'S INTERSESSION

God condemns Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad because they had not spoken correctly of Yahweh. They must offer sacrifice and Job must intercede on their behalf (42:7-9). God restores Job to his former glory. God gives him twice what he had before (42:10-11). This restoration is the outward sign of the inner transformation that has taken place in Job through the beholding of the face of God.

4.9.2 THE SOLIDARITY

In the closing tale of the Book of Job, all his brothers and visit him. They eat meal with him, console and comfort him about the evil that Yahweh brought upon him. Each of them gives him a silver coin and a gold ring (42:11). These gifts are so valuable enough to make him rich. But more important is the sympathy and consolation they show. This is different from the attitude of his former friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. They really came to console Job (2:11) but at the end they succeeded in aggravating his suffering because of their lack of understanding and sympathy. At different points begged them to treat him fairly (6:28-29, 21:5). Because of their attitude Job called them "troublesome comforters" (16:2). God disapproves of them and says that they had not spoken well of him. Our relationship to the other determines our relationship to God. The "other" is a condition for encountering God. The visit of the friends and relatives of Job succeeds in bringing both

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 262.

material and internal welfare to Job. This relatives and friends are so to say God's tool in the restoration of Job. In consistency with God's restoration of Job, their visit has both external and internal effects. It shows the effect and essence of solidarity.

The comfort of the close human community, not debate and doctrinal instruction, solves the problem of "all the evil that Yahweh had brought upon him." The problem of evil that has a solution is not the abstract problem of the relation between power and goodness but is Job's own problem of suffering and alienation.²⁹⁶

The visit of Job's relatives also shows the social aspect of his restoration. During his period of agony, Job died a social death. The visit shows that this aspect has also been restored²⁹⁷, he is socially resurrected.

4.10 THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING IN THE BOOK OF JOB: AN ASSESSMENT

The Book of Job gives no clear answer to such questions: as "Why suffering?", "what is its origin and cause?" Its ingenuity is that although it has no already made answer to the problem of suffering, it succeeded in questioning the already existing answers and in doing so frees humanity from rigidity and evil forces of false condemnation. Although the book does not pretend to provide answer to the problem of suffering, it shows us a way out of suffering. And that is the way of contemplation, beholding God. The best way out of crisis of faith is somehow to remain in faith, to continue to seek God's face.

Another fundamental question in the Book of Job is the possibility of innocent suffering. Can one innocently suffer? Or is suffering a resultant of man's deeds? While not denying the fact that one can suffer as a result of one's misdeeds, the Book of Job strongly contends that it is always the case. Some sufferings are in fact unexplainable as in the case of Job.

The next problem of suffering that the Book of Job handles is: How do I handle my suffering or rather what do I do when I am suffering? To this issue, the book gives two models. The first model is found in the prologue of the Book of Job.1:21 "The lord gave the

²⁹⁶ Edwin M. GOOD, The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job, in: L.G. PERDUE, W.C. GILPIN, The voice from the Whirlwind, 69.

²⁹⁷ SCHWIENHORST- SCHÖNBERGER, Das Buch Ijob, 271.

lord has taken blessed be the name of the Lord.” This entails patiently bearing one’s suffering in faith; accepting it as God’s will without neither ignoring the reality of suffering by escaping to the past nor being engulf in the present misery as to ignore the blessings of the past. This is a good model but may not endure all levels of suffering.

The second model is found in the dialogue aspect of the book where Job turns to God in lamentation and protest. He speaks in the anguish of his spirit and in the bitterness of his soul (7:11). He questions and cries. He insists on response from God. His insistence paid off as God answers him and he is able to see the face of God. At the end he is satisfied and has peace. The important thing about this model is that God approves it. It is the language of prayer. As regards when either of the models is appropriate in the life of a Christian, Clines states:

By all means let Job the patient be your model so long that is possible for you; but when equanimity fails, let the grief and anger of Job the impatient direct itself and yourself towards God, for only in the encounter with him will the tension of suffering be resolved.²⁹⁸

The Book of Job also shows us that solidarity with those suffering will go a long way toward alleviating human suffering.

In the next chapter, we shall assess the Book of Job in Igbo African context and its lesson for the faith crisis in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

²⁹⁸ D.J.A. CLINES, 130.

CHAPTER FIVE

**THE BOOK OF JOB: ITS UNDERSTANDING AND
MESSAGE IN IGBO AFRICAN CONTEXT AND FAITH
CRISIS**

5.0 The first prerogative of this chapter is to examine what meaning the Igbo African Christians, from the point of view of their traditional heritage, will derive from the Book of Job. The second is to determine what relevant answers or rather messages the Book of Job give to the Igbo Nigerian and Africans faith crisis.

**5.1 MODEL OF INTERPRETATION FOR THE SIMPLE NIGERIAN
CHRISTIANS**

Without underestimating the importance of diachronic study of the Book of Job, It important to state that the Book of Job, as it appears in its end form provides inspiring messages to the African Christian. While studies in the historical development of the Book of Job remain important, an average Igbo and Nigerian African Christian may not necessary have knowledge of this historical development in order to derive message from the book. In this regard, literary studies which focus on the end form (as has been the case of most biblical studies since the 1970s), with kin interest on the sociological and psychological situation of the Nigerians and Africans, will be of great relevance to the Christians in Nigeria and Africa at large. Thus, the advice of St Gregory that the interpreter of the Book of Job must put into consideration the constitution or make up of a Christian community in which the Book is to be interpreted is very important. This is important so that the book will not constitute a hindrance but a source of edification for the hearers of the biblical message.

Some of the African Christians may be educated but a good number of them, especially those in the rural villages, are peasant farmers and traders and may not be in the position to understand the essence and details of the historical critical method in the Book of Job. As such, the method may in this situation not provide the edification that is required in the biblical message.

5.2 THE BOOK OF JOB IN IGBO AFRICAN CONTEXT

5.2.1 AFRICAN SCENE OF THE PROLOGUE

The prologue to the Book of Job paints a picture familiar to African scenario in three ways: First, there is the African ideal picture of a happy, large family (ten children), where there are material riches and herds of animals. Second, the picture of Job's children at celebration at one of their brother's house portrays the African love for celebration; the love and solidarity that should exist amongst brothers and sisters. Third, the notion of Satan as responsible for Job's misfortune brings to bear the African conception that somebody must be responsible for a particular misfortune that happens to them. Most Africans view misfortune as not part of structures of things as ordained by the creator; as an interruption to the normal course of life. Here the Satan will be seen as the interrupter.

The figure of Job in the prologue presents in African context the meaning of what it means to be successful, to be blessed by the god of riches. In Igbo traditional context, Job will be said to have been blessed by Anyanwu, the deity in charge of good fortune and progress and Ikenga, the deity of riches. He will be looked upon as an Ogarannya or Nnukwummadu. This is evident from Job's description of his activities and position in the community in chapter 29.

5.2.2 OATH TAKING

The Igbo Africans also have similar conception of oath taking as in the Book of Job. In Igbo tradition, oath taking is something sacred. Many a time when there is dispute over ownership of land or cash crops and there are not enough evidences to decide the case, the community most times obliges the one in possession of the land or cash crop to come and take an oath that he is convinced the property belongs to him. One dares not take a false

oath because it is believed that the Amadioha, the god of thunder and justice will certainly strike down any one who takes false oath. There abound stories of such incidents in the traditional set up to warn people against taking false oath. The fact that Job took two sets of oath and came out alive will prove to an Igbo African that Job was truly a righteous man.

5.2.3 LAMENTATION OF JOB AS IJU OGU

The lamentation of Job because of his suffering, his radical language to protest his innocence and his call for justice so that he can be vindicated, also ring a familiar tone in the Igbo African mind and culture. Job's attitude will be understood in Igbo traditional setting as *iju ogu*. As was earlier described in chapter 2 of this work, *iju ogu* is a prayer of protest or declaration of innocence offered by an innocent person plagued by underserved misfortune and agonies. He cries to Chukwu to come and set him free and vindicate him from the agonies and oppression he is undergoing. . As similar to Job's lamentation, *iju ogu* is made of series of oath taking. The offerer swears that if he has ever gone against the ordinances of the gods and nature or harmed the neighbor; if he has done anything to warrant the kind of suffering he is undergoing, the gods should punish him. But if he has not committed any transgression, the gods should stop afflicting him with undeserved suffering and set him free from his adversaries. The offerer of *Iju ogu* most times calls on the ancestors to come and intercede for him. Sometimes he uses harsh words to drive home his message to the ancestors that they should have protected him against evil forces and misfortunes because it is their duty to do so. The offerer says the *iju ogu* prayer before the shrine of his personal god (*chi*). As we said in chapter two, every individual has his personal *chi* assigned to him by Chukwu to protect and guide him or her. When bad things happen to an individual, he goes to the shrine of his personal *chi* and lays his complaint. These complaints are not friendly. When the individual has performed his rightful duties to his *chi* in the form of sacrifices and libations, he would not understand it that his *chi* are there and bad things are happening to him. When the misfortunes do not stop after the *iju ogu*, some individuals are known to have destroyed the shrines of their personal *chi* and through the help of a diviner, acquired new *chi* and erected new shrines for them.

This prayer is based on a similar belief as in the Book of Job that the world is run through deserving; that the gods reward with success and good things those who are upright and

that evil follows evil men. There is also the belief that the entirety of the world belongs to God and is controlled by him. However, whereas in the Book of Job, Job conceives his affliction as coming from Yahweh, the traditional Igbos would not conceive their evil as coming from Chukwu but from some malevolent spirits and gods who take pleasure in afflicting humans. Thus the basic difference here is the difference between biblical monotheism and Igbo African traditional pantheism.

5.2.4 CAUSES OF SUFFERING

Some of the arguments advanced by Job's friends as explanation for suffering find their versions in Igbo tradition and religion. The basic one being that suffering comes as a result of sins committed by man. As the friends of Job did, Igbos exonerate Chukwu from the responsibility of evil in the world but not the gods.

Suffering is also conceived in Igbo tradition and religion as a corrective means used by the gods to warn an offender of impending danger when he does not desist from sins or do what the gods or spirits oblige him to do in form of rituals or office. For example a man may be required to perform certain rituals at the death of his father. When he fails to do that, the spirits and the ancestors may be sending him warning signs in form of one misfortune or the other which would not cease until the person concerned performs the required rituals. In some cases a person may have been chosen by the gods to inherit or take over certain office like that of diviner or chief priests. If he fails to take over such office he may be tormented by the gods and spirits until he finally takes over the duty. Sometimes the person may not recognize why he is experiencing certain difficulties until he goes to the diviners. But when the person involved has done everything required and the bad situation persists, it is a time to protest in the form of Iju ogu.

The traditional Igbos also believe that the sin of one man may bring calamity to the whole community. Although this argument is not advanced in the Book of Job, collective suffering is one of the explanations of suffering in the Old Testament as we earlier on noted.

Suffering in Igbo tradition is something to be abhorred. There is no conception of suffering as redemptive or eschatological. Like in the case of Job, it is conceived that wealth is a sign of blessings from gods and one should experience it here on earth. Though there are

conceptions of life after death in the African tradition and religion, they are not conceived in terms of reward for suffering encountered here on earth. In fact suffering is most times regarded as a curse from the gods. Suffering is always seen as an enemy to be overcome; as something negative.

5.2.5 NATURE AND ANIMALS

The figures made use of by God in the response to Job will find deep impressions and understanding in the traditional African mind. The Africans have always admired and respected nature and its overwhelmingness. The mountains and hills, the oceans and seas, the sun and the moon feel them with awe. Sometimes they are admired as wonder work of great God Chukwu; at other times they are taken as abode of the gods or worshipped as external manifestation of gods. God's affirmation that the works of nature comes from him will affirm and substantiate their appreciation the mightiness of God and nature as coming from Chukwu, the great God. Some of the animals that God mentions are also known by an average African. Animals like lions, hippopotamus, and crocodile are taken to be dangerous. Some streams are said to be inhabited by crocodiles and some forest by lions and hippopotamus. Those places are regarded as dangerous. That God created these animals and hold them in being so that they do not annihilate creation; that crocodile serves as symbol of death and sickness which God will help man to conquer will make deep meaning in the Igbo and African minds. These figures serve as symbolism and most times, the Igbo and Africans speak in parables and in symbolism. In Igbo tradition, some people take as title or name such connotations as *ogbu agu* which means killer of lion. Lion is taken to be symbolism of strength and power and also danger. When somebody is very strong, he is called a lion (*Agu*). God shows his strength and his power over creation not by killing lions or annihilating dangerous animals, but by holding them in being and taming their strength so that they do not destroy creation. These animals serve their purposes in God's creation.

In different areas in Igbo land, some animals are considered sacred. They are in these areas taken as manifestation of the gods. In some streams in Igbo land, one is not allowed to kill or hunt crocodiles because of what they represent to the people of the area. This is also the case with python and different other animals. One who kills a particular animal regarded in a particular place as sacred, has committed an abomination and most perform a sacrifice of

atonement. This shows that the Igbos in general like their Egyptian counterparts also have the conception of animals as sacred, as manifestations of the gods. The symbolical use of the figures of Leviathan and Behemoth (crocodile and hippopotamus) in God's speeches, which derive their symbolism from Egyptian mythologies as manifestation of gods will not be foreign to Igbo mind. God is the one who controls these forces in whatever way they manifest themselves and hold them in being.

5.2.6 SACRIFICE

The epilogue where the friends of Job must offer sacrifice for the atonement of their sin reminds a traditional Igbo African of the sacrifice of *Ikpu aru* which is offered to cleans an individual of his sins and readmit him into the community.

5.2.7 SOLIDARITY

The solidarity shown by the brothers, sisters and friends of Job is something that has root in Igbo and African culture. The Igbos will appreciate this aspect and see it as part of their tradition. It is an aspect of Igbo culture that is greatly treasured.

In all, the figure of Job will be seen as one who was *Nnukwu mmadu* or *Ogaranya*, who is stricken so had by the a malicious spirit so that he comes to the level of *ogbenye*. In his deplorable condition, he does not cease to cry and protest against the suffering and declare his innocence in the form of *iju ugu*. Since he is innocent, Chukwu, the great God heard his cries and restores him back to his former glory not only because he is innocent, but because Chukwu, the great God is good. Through *iju ugu*, Chukwu, the great God hears his cry.

5.3 MESSAGE OFBOOK OF JOB TO THE IGBO NIGERIAN FAITH CRISIS

In chapter one of this work we described the faith crisis of Nigerian Christians. The cause of this crisis is the pains and suffering that the Christians in Nigeria most times experience while still being faithful to Christian religion. This suffering cuts across different aspect of their lives and comes in different forms as we have already explained. There is among them the belief that God rewards or rather should reward uprightness, and punishes or should punish wickedness. When in spite of their faithfulness to the teachings of the gospel they

experience great difficulties in form of poverty, sickness, premature death, violence and oppressions etc, their faith is torn apart. The preachers of gospel of prosperity promise their followers and others who may join them solution to all their problems. They propagate the message that true followers of Christ should prosper since Christ's victory over death means victory over all forms of material needs and spiritual afflictions. Though they do not live up to their promises, the preachers of prosperity gospel continue to confuse and draw many Catholics and other Christians to themselves. The basic question here is: What message can the Christians in difficulties derive from the Book of Job?

5.3.1 THE BOOK OF JOB AND POVERTY

Some criticisms have been brought against the Book of Job that it does not really address the issue of poverty in which most Igbo and African Christians find themselves, which is also one of the reasons for their faith crisis. It is said that the book does not capture what it really means to be poor. Although Job has lost all his property: 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen and 500 she donkeys (1:3), he is however able to support his wife, his four friend who have stayed with him for around a week or more (2:13), and four servants who have survived the disaster(1:15,16,17,19); he still has guests who are said to ignore him, he still has maidservants (who are treating with as a stranger) and other servants (19:15-16); he does not complain that he has no food to eat, but complains of his skin and that he cannot sleep (7:4; 30:1). So the book is said not to capture what it really means to be poor. There are real poor people, who do not have anything to eat; whose tomorrow is in danger because of lack of food.

Critics go on to say that when they really poor and hungry are described in the book, they are mocked even by the suffering Job. Thus in chapter 30, Job speaks of men who are worn out by want and hunger, who use to peak saltwort, making their meal of roots of broom (30:3-7). Job really described them with utmost scorn. It is true that they are despising Job, what really is not good; but every other person is doing the same. In 16:10 he complains of those whose sneers strike like slap in the face; scoffers who surround him (17:2); relatives who avoid him, servants who do not answer him, children who jeer at him (19:13-19); but it only these really poor people that receive the severest of criticisms. Job describes them as "Children of scoundrels, worse nameless people, the outcast of the

society”! (30:8). They are despised on account of their poverty not just because they are despising Job. Critics question whether the book actually represents the interest of the poor.²⁹⁹

In chapter 24 , there is a sympathetic description of the poor of the earth. But here poverty is only portrayed as deprivation of wealth. The poor that are described here are the orphans and the widows. D.J.A. Clines comments that the poverty that is described here is conceived only in terms of those who have suffered the same fate like Job, though on a smaller scale; those who were rich before becoming poor. “There is no systematic poverty of the long –term poor, who never owned cattle and who never were rich enough to feel the absence of a donkey lost. .. The picture of poverty in ch. 24 is not a depiction of real poverty; it is glamorized poverty; ... it does not know the world of the poor from the inside.”³⁰⁰

Despite the criticisms, it is my belief that the Job aims at capturing an agony which is universal to mankind. All the causes of this universal agony and pain that now and then besiege human kind may not have been in details represented in the book, but that the book really portrays someone deeply suffering and immersed in grief is beyond doubt. It might not have portrayed the details of real poverty, but it indeed portrays the agony which also poor people find themselves in. It could be said that the book was not set to represent any particular interest, but to portray pain and suffering in its nakedness. While poverty and hunger remain sources of pains and agonies the book shows that there are different other situations that may be sources of pains and agonies like disease, oppression, segregations, violence death etc. Even one who has something to eat may be in one form of agony or the other. Despite Job’s mockery of the poor, it is my belief that the suffering represented in the book is a universal one, which includes that of the poor. Having said this, it is pertinent to note that the Book of Job has many messages for the crisis situation of the Nigerian Christians even in their poverty.

²⁹⁹ Cf. D.J.A. CLINES, Why is there a Book of Job, in: W.A.M. BEUKEN, The Book of Job, 7.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 7-8.

5.3.2 HUMAN LIMITATION AND THE INEXPLICABILITY OF SUFFERING

First, by series of questionings on Job, God tries to bring Job to the understanding that if human mind is incapable of comprehending nature, it is futile to search exhaustibly for divine wisdom that created nature. Human beings must surrender to God when they come to realize and appreciate their limitedness. Faith must remain even when understanding fails. Nigerian Christians must realize that the world is not run through deserving but through the gratuitousness of God. When one suffers, it does not mean that one has committed sin or that God has abandoned one. Some sufferings are in fact unexplainable and inexplicable as in the case of Job. However faith must remain even when understanding fails. There must remain a continuous search to encounter God; to behold his face; somehow remaining in faith at the time of crisis and constantly searching the face of God is the best response to suffering. The victory of Christ over death should give Christians the hope that one day God “will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning, or sadness or pain. The world of the past has gone” (21:4)

5.3.4 THE INTRIGUES OF SATAN AND THE SEARCH FOR “WHO” IN SUFFERING

Job and his friends are unaware of the intrigues of Satan in the prologue. They were unaware of the scene in heaven. In their search for the reason for suffering wrong people were accused. While the friends accused Job to be the source of his own misfortune, Job accused God of afflicting him. It is true that God allowed Satan to afflict Job, but the message the author wants to communicate is that lack of understanding of the mystery of life, “of what happens in the heavenly places” can lead to false accusations. When Christians in Nigeria and Africa at large experience misfortune like sudden death, sickness or lack of progress, there is always the tendency to search for somebody who is to be held responsible. In this process of trying to find who is responsible, diviners or self acclaimed prophets may be consulted and the wrong persons may be accused. This will result to quarrel and create disunity. The challenge of the Christians in Nigeria and Africa is not to bring destruction of relationship in the search of who is responsible, to avoid the breakdown of personal integrity and suspicion of one another.

5.3.5 EXPRESSION OF HURT AND SEARCH FOR REDEMPTIVE WAYS TO OVERCOME OPPRESSION

The analysis of the lamentation of Job as was done in the previous chapter affirms the thesis from Brueggemann that voiced hurt and imaginative hope are liberating forces.³⁰¹ According to this thesis which is central to Old Testament theology, the downtrodden are to express their hurt, to give voice to their pains, and at the same time search for redemptive ways to overcome their oppression. “Giving expression to hurt links God to the harsh situations that oppress the weak. Since this God desires to involve himself with the pain of those who believe in him, lamenting before him spawns hope supported by the belief that God may transform any situation, either in manifesting his presence or through providence.”³⁰² While rebutting a strict application of the doctrine of retribution, the Book of Job tells us on one hand that the righteous who suffer ought not to be ashamed of the scars that suffering created in their bodies, for the case of Job vindicates them. On the other hand their voice should not cease or grow weary in the expression of their hurt and resistance of situations of oppression and injustice. Their lamentation should be both horizontal and vertical.

On the horizontal level, their agonizing voice should be directed to those established structures that have created their deplorable states and seek to maintain these deplorable states by feigning ignorance or simply ignoring or benefitting from them. Their agonizing cries and groaning lament must not cease, but instead grow louder in order to upturn the selfish music of the oppressors, and wake them up from the comfort of their sleep, and heal them of the drowsiness they suffer as a result of stolen or contaminated wine. Through hypothetical and imaginative thinking, the oppressed and disadvantaged faithful should explore ways of doing that, and through the symbolism of Jobian oath taking, be ever determined not to compromise on their integrity.

On the vertical level while remaining in faith, they should continuously aspire to encounter God who has taken side with those suffering. In their search to encounter God, they should not be afraid to outpour their grieves and sorrows to the God who is their father (the

³⁰¹ Cf. J.E. HARTLEY, 98.

³⁰² Ibid.

meaning of the name “Job” is where is my father; where is my God). In this outpouring, they should not cease to ask God to come and intervene in the world of suffering and firmly make visible his reign on earth which situations of suffering blur.

5.3.6 THE NIGERIAN/ AFRICAN CHURCH

The church in Nigeria and Africa on her part must like God take side with the sufferers. She must resist the modern temptation of exulting wealth and ranks, for it sends wrong signals to the vulnerable worshipper. On the contrary she must encourage hard work and honesty, while at the same time countering the deceits of the prosperity preachers for the Bible does not promise the faithful suffering free world, but the victory of Christ over death ignites the hope that there will one day be elimination of evil and its pains. She should exhort the faithful to be in solidarity with one another especially with those who suffer. While encouraging them to create a better society, she should not fail to make them to understand the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith.

The Church must also provide the platform for the oppressed and suffering people to express their hurts. One way of doing that is by reinstating lament as a part of worship.

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ABSTRACT

This academic work is an attempt to contextualize the Book of Job in Igbo culture and tradition, allowing the Book of Job to speak directly to the Igbos in particular and Africans in general in their cultural milieu and to see what messages the book offers them in the contradictions of life and faith.

The doctrine of divine retribution finds its place both in the Bible and in the African culture. However, the Book of Job poses a great question mark to the claims of retributive doctrine. The excruciating pains and suffering underwent by the virtuous Job was a contradiction to the theology of retribution propagated by his friends- Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar. The theology maintained that riches and health on one side, and poverty and sickness on the other hand were what God decreed for those who lived virtuously and wickedly respectively. This theology most times as in the case of Job contradicts life reality and situation. It has been termed “the theology of the natural man.”³⁰³

The Igbo African traditional worldview before the advent of Christianity had also a retributive outlook. There was a belief in a harmonious universe; where everything had its season and time. Sickness and suffering were not part of this harmony; they were inimical forces caused by the sins of man and to be warded off through sacrifices. The sins of man attracted these forces, but sacrifices cleansed man from his sins and restored the harmonious order of reality. When an innocent man experienced severe suffering, he protested through a form of lamentation and confrontational prayer known as *iju ogu* where he declared his innocence and questioned the reason for his suffering. The Igbo Africans also believed that there could be evil forces and evil persons trying to harm one from outside. To protect themselves against these forces, they carried charms and amulets.

At the time of conversion, Africans were advised to part ways with these means of protection and were presented with and all loving and powerful God who protects his children. Today, African Christians are still struggling to come to terms with this idea of God in the means deep sufferings and pains. This constitutes their faith crisis. This work X-

³⁰³ Cf. PREUS, in: Leo W. PERDUE/ Clark GILPIN (eds.), *The Voice from the Whirlwind. Interpreting the Book of Job*, Nashville 1999, 41.

rays the nature of the African Christian crisis and the cultural background before the advent of Christianity. It tries to capture some explanations that have been given on the problem of suffering, both in the Bible and in the course of human development. The different attempts made by human reason, to offer explanations to this enigmatic problem of theodicy appear unsatisfactory. Since there abound similarities between the biblical culture and the Igbo African culture, and there are similarities between the crisis of Job and that of African Christians, this work attempts to identify how an Igbo African would appreciate the Book of Job, and what messages the book offers African Christians in their faith crisis.

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