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# Orita

African Journal of Religious Studies

**Joseph Kenny**

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**C.O. Ogunkunle**

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The Negoland Revisited: Discovery and Invention of the Sudanese amiddle Ages

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The aim of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan is to promote the study and understanding of "the phenomenon and the social implications of religion in general and religion in African in particular". This involves more specifically "the field of history and phenomenology of religion, theology and philosophy, aiming at an interpretation and understanding of African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam, separately and in so far as there has been cross-fertilization between them". The Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies contributes to the fulfilment of this purpose.

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# ORITA

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## Introduction

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**IMPRECATION AS A WEAPON OF THE OPPRESSED:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELECTED  
INDIVIDUALS IN ISRAEL AND CHURCHES IN  
NIGERIA**

C.O. Ogunkunle

Imprecation is a word that many people are not comfortable with. In fact, the presence of imprecation in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, poses a big theological problem to many students of the Bible. Thus it is appropriate to note some fundamental questions, which usually agitate the minds of people: How can we justify the presence of imprecation in the Bible, which is the inspired word of God (cf. II Timothy 3:16)? Who are the people that are mostly guilty of the pronouncement of imprecation? Why should men be found invoking imprecation on other men created in the image of God? Therefore, the focus of this paper is to examine imprecation as a weapon of the oppressed in our society. The historical-comparative method is used whereby the experience of selected individuals in Israel namely, David, Jeremiah and Nehemiah, is compared with the experience of Christians in some selected churches in Nigeria namely Anglican Church, United Missionary Church of Africa (UMCA), Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Church of the Lord Aladura (CL) and Celestial Church of Christ (CCC).

The motivation for the choice of the three men from Israelite society has arisen from the desire to cover a wide range of time. David was a good king in Israel who represents the monarchical period. Jeremiah was a prophet who prophesied at a crucial period in Judah while Nehemiah was a leader who took up the challenge of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. In other words, these men have helped us to understand the concept of imprecation in each of their periods.

The rationale for the choice of the five churches (Anglican, UMCA, CAC, CL and CCC) is to have a fairly good representation of all the major churches found in Nigeria. In other words, the use of

imprecation is examined in the Orthodox (Ang), Evangelical (UMCA), Charismatic/Pentecostal (CAC), Indigenous churches (CL and CCC) in Nigeria.

### The Hebrew Words for Imprecation

There are at least five Hebrew words closely connected with curses or imprecation in the Old Testament. These are:

a) **אָרַר**: The verb **אָרַר** occurs sixty-three times in the Old Testament mostly in the Qal form. The verb means to curse or ban from something. The word is used to declare a punishment as in Genesis 3:14, 17, when God pronounced judgements upon the Serpent and the man. The word is also used to utter a threat as in the case of Jeremiah 11:3 where the LORD asked the prophet to pronounce a curse upon anyone who did not heed the words of the covenant. Furthermore, the word is used within the context of violating the laws of the LORD, as recorded in Deuteronomy 27:15-26.<sup>1</sup> **אָרַר** is used to render enemies and wicked people powerless so that they cannot harm. Usually, the person who pronounces **אָרַר** announces that he is breaking off all association with the one cursed. Thus a father could cast an **אָרַר** formula of this kind upon a badly disposed son (Gen. 9:25; 49:7) or a divinely appointed leader of the people could use it against lawbreakers and evildoers (Deut 28:16-19; Jos 6:26; 9:23; I Sam 14:24, 28 etc).<sup>2</sup>

b) **אָלָה**: This is a noun which means swearing, a curse or a solemn oath between men and between God and man. **אָלָה** is a curse which the owner of an item pronounces aloud and publicly against a thief

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<sup>1</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, "אָרַר" in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Edited by Laird R. Harris et. al. 2 Volumes (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:75.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Scharbert, "Curse," in *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology in Three Volumes*. Edited by Johannes B. Bauer (London: Sheep and Ward, 1970), 1:174.

when he finds that he has lost something through theft. The word is pronounced with the purpose of inducing the person responsible to give the lost object back (Lev. 5:1; Judges 17:2; Prov. 29:24). אלה can also be a conditional curse upon oneself to corroborate a promise or an agreement, or sometimes to back up an oath (Num. 5:21; I Kings 8:31; 2 Chro. 6:22 etc.).<sup>3</sup>

c) קלל: This is a verb which means "to despise or dishonour a person or thing". Its noun form is קללה. In the *piel* form it means "to make small of", "to deal with contemptuously".<sup>4</sup> When the word is used against a king, it means that such a king is slighted or condemned (Judges 9:27; 2 Sam. 16:5, 7, 9 – 13, etc.). When used against a parent, it means disobedience and undermining of parental authority (Exod. 21:17; Lev. 20:9; Prov. 20:20). When the word is used against God, it refers to the attitude of a person who has become disillusioned with God, who no longer takes him seriously but abuses him and tries his luck with other gods (Lev. 24:11, 14 – 15, 23).<sup>5</sup>

d) קבב: Its primary meaning is to insult, abuse or blaspheme someone (Lev. 24:11, 16). It is the actual uttering of a curse on somebody indiscriminately. The word is used repeatedly in Number 22-24 as well as in Proverbs 11:26; 24:24.

e) זעם: This verb means "to threaten" (Isa. 10:5, 25; Jer. 10:10; Psal. 7:12 etc). It is an expression of indignation in speech either by God or man (Num. 23:7-8; Mal. 1:4; Prov. 24:24).

In the light of various explanations of words connected with imprecation given above, it is obvious that imprecation has a broader meaning than its traditional meaning – cursing. The word is used as an

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

expression of judgement, threat, warning, dishonour, etc. Technically speaking in this paper we would like to understand imprecation as an expression of displeasure against evil which of course was prevalent in the Israelite society and which is still a problem in our contemporary society.<sup>6</sup>

### Various Reactions to Imprecation

Biblical scholars have not agreed on the propriety of the presence of imprecation in the Bible in general and in the Psalter in particular. Firstly, dispensationalists and Roman Catholics reject outrightly imprecatory passages in the scripture on the ground that they express feelings that are contrary to what they think it ought to say. A. F. Kirkpatrick is a strong dispensationalist whose approach to the scripture is to draw a sharp distinction between the Old and New Testaments. Writing on imprecatory Psalms, Kirkpatrick argues that:

The Psalms must be viewed as belonging to the dispensation of the Old Testament; they must be estimated from the standpoint of the law, which was based upon the rule of retaliation, and not of the gospel, which is animated by the principle of love, they belong to the spirit of Elijah, not of Christ; they use the language of the age which was taught to love its neighbour and hate its enemies.<sup>7</sup>

The Roman Catholics, even though include imprecatory Psalms in their Bible, yet on the basis of moral and religious ethics, excluded

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<sup>6</sup>See C. O. Ogunkunle, "Imprecatory Psalms: Their Forms and Uses in Ancient Israel and Some Selected Churches in Nigeria". A Thesis in the Department of Religious Studies Submitted to the Faculty of Arts in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. January 2000, p. 302.

<sup>7</sup>A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: University Press, 1951), p. lxxxix. cf. Gerald Pauls, "The Imprecation of the Psalms: A Study of Psalm 54" *Direction*, 22/2 (Fall 1993): 76.

part or the whole of some of the imprecatory Psalms from their daily reading as seen in the *Liturgy of the Hours*.<sup>8</sup> While Psalms 58, 83 and 109 are totally excluded from the *Liturgy of the Hours*; parts of the following Psalms are excluded:

- Psalm 35 has verses 3 – 8, 20 – 21 and 24 – 26 excluded.<sup>9</sup>
- Psalm 59 has verses 8 – 9 and 11 – 15 excluded.<sup>10</sup>
- Psalm 69 has verses 22 – 28 excluded.<sup>11</sup>
- Psalm 137 has verses 7 – 8 excluded.<sup>12</sup>
- Psalm 139 has verses 19 – 22 excluded.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, the conservative scholars are naïve about the imprecatory Psalms in the sense that they believe the whole Bible yet their interpretation of imprecation is different. C. S. Lewis is one of the respected scholars who strongly disagrees with the use of imprecation. He refers to imprecatory Psalms as 'devilish', 'diabolical' 'terrible' or 'contemptible'.<sup>14</sup> He believes that imprecatory Psalms contain a spirit of hatred and the only way to deal with them is to leave them alone.<sup>15</sup> Peter C. Craigie, while discussing the theological perspectives of the book of Psalms, points out that there are theological problems in reading the Psalter and in making it relevant and meaningful. He refers to the imprecatory Psalms as "problematic passages; so-called

<sup>8</sup>James P. Mahoney (ed), *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite, IV, Ordinary Time, Weeks 18-34*. (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975).

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 750 – 52.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 912.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 1046-9.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 1145-6.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 1168-70.

<sup>14</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*. Large Print (New York: Phoenix Press, 1985), p. 29.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 27, 29.

individual laments" where the sentiments of the Psalmists seem to be harsh, unloving, vindictive, and hard to relate to the gospel and to Jesus' injunction that we should love even our enemies.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, there are some scholars who have a positive perspective on imprecatory passages in the Bible. Perhaps the chief advocate for the use of imprecation or imprecatory Psalms in the last century is Albert Barnes who argues that "what we consider as wrong, harsh, and vindictive should be understood in the spirit of the age in which the Bible was composed".<sup>17</sup> He argues further that "imprecatory Psalms are a mere record of what actually occurred in the mind of the Psalmist and are preserved for us as an illustration of human nature when partially sanctified".<sup>18</sup>

H.C. Leupold warns scholars against making sharp pronouncements against writers of imprecatory passages, especially as the New Testament writers make similar imprecations as found in Acts 8:20; 23:2; II Timothy 4:14, etc. He contends that David, to whom many of the imprecatory Psalms are attributed, showed an exemplary spirit of tolerance and forgiveness, especially toward Saul.<sup>19</sup> James E. Adams has done a simple but thorough work on imprecatory Psalms. He argues that the Psalms are not just word of men but God's revelation of Himself and His attributes. Hence the Psalms must be accepted as God's divine word rather than raising questions and objections to

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<sup>16</sup>Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, WBC (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publishers, 1983), p. 41.

<sup>17</sup>Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms in Three Volumes*. Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), p. xxix.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxxvii. For a summary of his six points, see, Ogunkunle, "Imprecatory Psalms: Their Forms and Uses in Ancient Israel and Some Selected Churches in Nigeria", pp. 47-50.

<sup>19</sup>H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), pp. 18-20.

them.<sup>20</sup> He argues further that imprecatory Psalms are not meant for personal use and we need to understand how the Psalmist, Jesus Christ, and the Apostles understood and used them.<sup>21</sup>

We in this paper tend to lean toward the last group, as they seem to have a balanced view, understanding and appreciation of the presence of imprecation in the Bible. I believe strongly that the presence of imprecation in the scriptures should not raise any doubt on the authority and authenticity of the Bible. Imprecatory Psalms are part of the canonical scriptures, which have been accepted by the Christian church down through the ages. Indeed, imprecation is embedded in the Bible and great men of God from Genesis to Revelation have used it.

### Imprecation in Israel

In examining imprecation in ancient Israel, our focus here is to first consider David in connection with Psalm 35 whose authorship of the Psalm is generally accepted by scholars. Some scholars even argue that Psalm 35 is an expansion of what David expressed before Saul in I Samuel 26:15.<sup>22</sup>

Historically, Psalm 35 is connected with David as he had enemies within his nation who had developed an intense enmity against him. Various ideas and words used in the Psalm have led us to suggest Saul as the arch-enemy of David.<sup>23</sup> Also, the fact remains that there are several ideas in the Psalm that are closely linked with the nasty

<sup>20</sup>James E. Adams, *War Psalms of the Prince of Peace: Lessons from Imprecatory Psalms* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Co., 1991), pp. 12–5.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 23–4.

<sup>22</sup>C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, Vol. 5, *Psalms in Three Volumes*. Translated from the German by James Martin (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co. 1867) 1:416.

<sup>23</sup>Two other possible enemies of David include Absalom and Ahithophel.

experiences of David with Saul as recorded in I Samuel.<sup>24</sup>

Psalm 35 is connected with Psalm 34 especially with the expression יהוה ומלאך (and angel of the LORD) in Psalms 34:8 and 35:5-6 which is found nowhere else in the Psalter. The Psalm has been given various titles by different scholars. A.A. Anderson calls it "a prayer of deliverance of an accused man".<sup>25</sup> H. C. Leupold titles it "a prayer of rescue from enemies within the nation".<sup>26</sup> P. Drijvers calls it "the moving prayer of petition from a person falsely accused".<sup>27</sup> J. O. Ositelu titles it "a Psalm of victory over witches and court case".<sup>28</sup> I. O. Olanrewaju calls it "a Psalm of victory over unthankful enemies".<sup>29</sup>

Personally, I see David in this Psalm as an oppressed individual who was disturbed and helpless as a result of the violent accusation of the enemies against him. Therefore, the Psalm is an expression of displeasure against evil confronting the Psalmist. It is obvious that David was fed up with his oppressive situation and he was fully prepared for battle as demonstrated in the beginning of the Psalm with battlefield language, asking God to attack his enemies. The Psalmist's call on Yahweh as the man of war is equally found in Exodus 14:14;

<sup>24</sup>Psalm 35: 4, 7 (I Samuel 20:1; 23:15; 24:11; 25:29); Psalm 35:7, 11-13, 19 (I Samuel 19:5; 20:1; 24:9, 11; 26:18, 19; 24:17-18); Psalm 35:1, 23, 24 (I Samuel 24:12-16).

<sup>25</sup>A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* in Two Volumes, NCBC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1972), 1:275.

<sup>26</sup>H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), p. 284.

<sup>27</sup>P. Drijvers, *The Psalms: Their Structure and Meaning* (London: Burns & Oates, 1965), p. 242.

<sup>28</sup>J. O. Ositelu, *The Secret of Meditation with God with the Uses of Psalms* (Sagamu: Publication Department of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide, n.d.), p. 20.

<sup>29</sup>I. O. Olanrewaju, *The Efficacious Power of Psalms in Daily Devotion* (Ibadan: Awosanmi Press, 1998), p. 7.

15:3; Deut. 32:41 and Psalm 24:8. Also, the name of God, **צבא** **יהוה**, (the LORD of Hosts), portrays Yahweh as the one who led the Israelites in their battles (Ps. 24:10; 46:7; 48:8; etc). David in Psalm 35 calls on Yahweh, the mighty warrior, to draw the spear from its protective enclosure and stand to block any attempt of the enemies to come near him. There is a progression in the Psalmist's prayer against the enemies. First, he asks God to defend him from them (vv. 2 – 3); next, he asks that they may suffer complete overthrow and that they themselves may meet with the destruction which they planned for him.<sup>30</sup> The fact that David was oppressed and helpless is observed in verses 1, 5 and 6. He implored the LORD in verse 1 to do the fighting while he appealed to the angel of the LORD in verses 5 and 6.

Perhaps, one should not be too sentimental by hastily condemning David for his imprecation. The alleged enemies did not mean well for him as they tried to eliminate him through various means: they sought for his life (v. 4), they devised evil things against him (v. 4); they hid their net for him (v. 7); they dug a pit for him (v.7); they gave malicious witness against him (v. 11); they paid him evil for good (v. 12); they gathered against him mainly to slander him (v. 15); they mocked him (v. 16); they did not speak peace (v. 20); they were full of deceit (v.20); and they planned to swallow him up (v. 25). Indeed, David was in a life threatening situation as could be observed in his frequent use of the word **נפש** in verses 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 17 and 25.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup>W. E. Barnes, *The Psalms with Introduction and Notes*, Vol. 1 (London: Methuen & Co. 1931), pp. 169-70.

<sup>31</sup>The word **נפש** has a number of meanings among which are:

- (i) That which breathes, the breathing substance or being;
- (ii) The soul which becomes a living being by God's breathing;
- (iii) It is a living being whose life resides in the blood (Deut. 12:23-24). Therefore, a serious attack upon the life is an attack upon the inner being (2 Sam. 1:9; Jer. 4:10; Jonah 2:6; Psalms 69:2, 124 : 4-5; Job 27:3). The word is used for life itself (Gen. 44:30; Exod. 21:23).

The second person to consider in our examination of imprecation in ancient Israel's Jeremiah, the so-called weeping prophet, who prophesied in Judah during a period of storm and stress, when the doom of the nation was imminent. The prophet had several unpleasant life experiences in the course of discharging his God-given assignments. The oppressive situation of the prophet is spelt out in the curses he either pronounced upon himself or on other people as recorded in the passages generally referred to as "confessions of Jeremiah".<sup>32</sup> These passages, which are reflections of the inner struggle of Jeremiah, consist of prayers, laments, monologues, and dialogues of the prophet with Yahweh. Prophet Jeremiah was fully aware of the sin of his nation and being filled with a passionate spirit of condemnation he consistently pronounced alarm and destruction upon the people. Incidentally, this led to several conflicts he had with various people such as the false prophets in Jerusalem (Jer. 27-28) and the false prophets in exile (Jer. 29). He was shunned and hated by his friends. The officials sought to cut short his life by putting him in a cistern (Jer. 38:1-6). Even the people of his village, Anathoth, plotted against him (Jer. 11:18-19). The prophet was denied several things by members of the community and his family (Jer. 11:18-12:6) which is contrary to the injunction given in Leviticus 25:47-49. The fact that Jeremiah was oppressed is demonstrated in the phrase **רדפי** (my persecutors) in Jeremiah 15:15. Also, the word **בדד** for "alone" in Jeremiah 15:17 is used in Leviticus 13:46 for leper who must be alone or separated from the community.

The various unpleasant experiences of the prophet brought him to t

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- (iv) Seat of the appetites in all periods: hunger (Psalm 107:9); thirst (Prov. 25:17)
  - (v) Seat of emotions and passions (Deut. 12:20). See F. Brown, S. R. Driver & A. Briggs, *The New-Brown - Driver Briggs - Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with An Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrikson Publisher, 1979), pp. 569-61.

<sup>32</sup>These passages comprise of Jeremiah 11:18-23; 12:1-6; 15:10-12, 15-21; 17:14-18; 20:7-13, 14-18. See J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* NICOT (Garden City: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), p. 88.

lowest point of his inner conflicts and struggles. As the whole land seemed to be against him (Jer. 15:10-21), he wished he had never been born (v. 10) and he prayed that God should judge his persecutors speedily (v. 15). In Jeremiah 20:7-18, the prophet felt dejected and frustrated for the kind of treatment he received even from the so-called priests of God. He opened his heart to God and expressed the depth of his inner emotions. He felt that God had deceived him by letting him be ridiculed by the people for his message. It has been noted of the prophet that:

His suffering at the hands of his enemies caused him at times to call upon God to visit them with vengeance (11:20; 12:3; 15:15; 17:18), and on one occasion he asked God to deliver up their children to famine and give his foes over to the sword so that their wives might become childless and widowed.<sup>33</sup>

The third and final person we are considering in our examination of imprecation in ancient Israel is Nehemiah, a highly placed man, the governor of Judah (Neh. 5:14, 10:1). It should be noted that the nation of Babylon fell into the hands of the Persians under the leadership of Cyrus who was well known for his tolerance. He ordered his soldiers to respect the religious activities of the populace and to refrain from terrorizing them. Cyrus issued a decree for the restoration of the Jewish community and worship in Palestine in the first year of his reign in 538 BC (Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5). The restoration project was under the charge of Shesh-bazzar, the Prince of Judah, who set out for Jerusalem as soon as practicable. Some of the Israelite leaders in captivity like Ezra, Nehemiah and others took up the opportunity and went back to Jerusalem. The people had new zeal to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, the Temple and to restore its worship.

The most pressing problem before Nehemiah was to give the community physical security. He turned to the rebuilding of the city

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 90.

walls, acting with speed and boldness lest his plans be thwarted. Even though Nehemiah had full authority from the king, he had powerful foes who resented his presence and wasted no chance to put obstacles in his way. Chief among the enemies was Sanballat, who was the governor of the province of Samaria (Neh. 4:1-2), and Tobiah the governor of the province of Ammon (Nehemiah 13:38). Their main purpose was to oppress Nehemiah and to frustrate his efforts. They first tried mockery with the hope of undermining the morale of the people (Neh. 2:19-20; 4:1-3). When this failed they incited certain people (Neh. 4:7-12). They also tried to harm him from the city (Neh. 6:1-4). Sanballat was particularly angry (Neh. 4:1, 7). He and his associates ridiculed the Jews in the presence of the Samaritan army. Sanballat accused the Jews of rebelling against king Artaxerxes (Neh. 2:19) with a series of questions recorded in Nehemiah 4:2-3.

Nehemiah's courage and resourcefulness helped him to overcome all obstacles. He responded to the wickedness of Sanballat, and his people through prayer, which had been his usual and consistent way to solve problems. He asked God for help in the face of the attack he received. Nehemiah's prayer is imprecatory as he asked that Sanballat and his associates be taken captive and judged for their sins. It is clear that Nehemiah was a strong man as seen in his short but powerful prayer of imprecation (Neh. 4:4-5). Just as Sanballat was disturbed that the wall of Jerusalem was being rebuilt, so also, Nehemiah felt slighted by the ridicule of Sanballat. Nehemiah could not understand why Sanballat, an ordinary man, should cast scorn upon the people's faith and on God whom they worshipped.

#### **Imprecation in Some Selected Churches in Nigeria**

The existence of evil in the world is an age long problem that man has continued to struggled with.<sup>34</sup> This has led to his various fears which

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<sup>34</sup>P. Ade Dopamu has identified three ways by which evil comes to man: (i) Physical or natural evil; (ii) Evil that can be explained in terms of mystical causation; (iii) Evil that is attributed to mankind. For detail see P. Ade Dopamu, "The Reality of Isasi, Apeta and Efun as forces of Evil among the Yoruba". *Journal of Arabic and Religious*

include:

Fear of uncertainty, fear of not being able to take care of oneself or family, fear of losing one's job or the fear of unemployment, fear of suppression by superior officers, fear of evil and wicked people, fear of losing one's position and dignity in the society, fear of sickness, fear of death etc.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, in an attempt to liberate themselves from these various problems, many Christians have resorted to the use of imprecation.<sup>36</sup> In a recent empirical research on imprecatory Psalms, the response of our respondents to some specific questions is helpful to our understanding of imprecation as a weapon of the oppressed in the contemporary society.

**Question 1:** Do you recognize the presence of evil in the world?

**Answer:** Distribution of respondents by their denominations as to the recognition of the presence of evil in the world.

| Denomination | No                 | Yes                  | Total       |
|--------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Anglican     | 4<br>5.6%<br>30.8% | 67<br>94.4%<br>13.9% | 71<br>14.4% |
| UMCA         | 1<br>1.2%<br>7.7%  | 84<br>98.8%<br>17.5% | 85<br>17.2% |

*Studies*, 4 (December 1987): 50-62.

<sup>35</sup>See Ogunkunle, "Imprecatory Psalms: Their Forms and Uses in Ancient Israel and Some Selected Churches in Nigeria," p. 208.

<sup>36</sup>The main focus of the Mountain of Fire Miracles Ministries under the leadership of Dr. D. O. Olukoya is imprecatory prayer against Satan and his forces.

|              |                    |                       |                  |
|--------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| CAC          | 0<br>0.0%<br>0.0%  | 75<br>100.0%<br>15.5% | 75<br><br>15.2%  |
| CL           | 0<br>0.0%<br>0.0%  | 51<br>100.0%<br>10.6% | 51<br><br>10.3%  |
| CCC          | 6<br>8.1%<br>46.2% | 68<br>91.9%<br>14.1%  | 74<br><br>15.0%  |
| Others       | 2<br>1.4%<br>15.4% | 136<br>98.6%<br>28.3% | 138<br><br>27.9% |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>13</b><br>2.6%  | <b>481</b><br>97.4%   | <b>494</b>       |

There is a significant difference between those who recognize the presence of evil in the world (97.4%) and those who do not (2.6%). This view cuts across the denominations. Therefore, almost every Christian recognizes the presence of evil in the world.

**Question 2:** Who is the major cause of evil?

**Answer:** Distribution of respondents by their denominations as to who is the major cause of evil in the world.

| Denom | God                | Government         | Others             | Satan                | Self               | Total           |
|-------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Ang   | 3<br>4.2%<br>30.0% | 2<br>2.8%<br>33.3% | 3<br>4.2%<br>37.5% | 56<br>78.9%<br>13.4% | 7<br>7.9%<br>13.5% | 71<br><br>14.4% |
| UMCA  | 1<br>1.2%<br>10.0% | 2<br>2.4%<br>33.3% | 1<br>1.2%<br>12.5% | 77<br>90.6%<br>18.4% | 4<br>4.7%<br>7.7%  | 85<br><br>17.2% |

|        |                    |                    |                    |                       |                      |              |
|--------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| CAC    | 4<br>5.3%<br>40.0% | 0<br>0.0%<br>0.0%  | 0<br>0.0%<br>0.0%  | 56<br>74.7%<br>13.4%  | 15<br>20.0%<br>28.8% | 75<br>15.2%  |
| CL     | 0<br>0.0%<br>0.0%  | 0<br>0.0%<br>0.0%  | 0<br>0.0%<br>0.0%  | 49<br>96.1%<br>11.7%  | 2<br>3.9%<br>3.8%    | 51<br>10.3%  |
| CCC    | 2<br>2.7%<br>20.0% | 0<br>0.0%<br>0.0%  | 3<br>4.1%<br>37.5% | 59<br>79.7%<br>14.1%  | 10<br>13.5%<br>19.2% | 74<br>15.0%  |
| Others | 0<br>0.0%<br>0.0%  | 2<br>1.4%<br>33.3% | 1<br>0.7%<br>12.5% | 121<br>87.7%<br>28.9% | 14<br>10.1%<br>26.9% | 138<br>27.9% |
| Total  | 10<br>2.0%         | 6<br>1.2%          | 8<br>1.6%          | 418<br>84.6%          | 52<br>10.5%          | 494          |

A very high percentage of the respondents, 84.6%, in all the denominations believe Satan is the major cause of evil in the world.

**Question 3:** When you are oppressed, cheated, maltreated, etc., do you think of imprecation?

**Answer:** Distribution by respondents by their denomination as to whether they think of imprecation when oppressed.

| DENOM | No                   | Sometimes            | Yes                  | Total       |
|-------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Ang   | 21<br>29.6%<br>15.1% | 40<br>56.3%<br>17.1% | 10<br>14.1%<br>8.3%  | 71<br>14.4% |
| UMCA  | 19<br>22.4%<br>13.7% | 47<br>55.3%<br>20.1% | 19<br>22.4%<br>15.7% | 85<br>17.2% |

|              |                            |                            |                            |              |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| CAC          | 25<br>33.3%<br>18.0%       | 34<br>45.3%<br>14.5%       | 16<br>21.3%<br>13.2%       | 75<br>15.2%  |
| CL           | 20<br>39.2%<br>14.4%       | 17<br>33.3%<br>7.3%        | 14<br>27.5%<br>11.6%       | 51<br>10.3%  |
| CCC          | 13<br>17.6%<br>9.4%        | 24<br>32.4%<br>10.3%       | 31<br>50.0%<br>30.6%       | 74<br>15.0%  |
| Others       | 14<br>29.7%<br>29.9%       | 72<br>52.2%<br>30.8%       | 25<br>18.1%<br>20.7%       | 138<br>27.9% |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>139</b><br><b>28.1%</b> | <b>234</b><br><b>47.4%</b> | <b>121</b><br><b>24.5%</b> | <b>494</b>   |

The table shows that 47.4% of all the respondents, especially in the Anglican, UMCA and CAC denominations said they “sometimes” think of imprecation when oppressed. A significant percentage of 28.1% and 24.5% of the respondents said, “No” and “Yes” to the question respectively. In addition, the majority of the respondents in the CCC, 50%, do think of imprecation when oppressed. We conclude that the majority of the respondents naturally think of imprecation whenever they are oppressed.

**Question 4:** When you see others being oppressed, cheated, maltreated, etc. do you think of imprecation?

**Answer:** Distribution of respondents by their denomination as to whether they think of imprecation when see others being oppressed.

| DENOM        | No                         | Sometimes                  | Yes                        | Total        |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| Ang          | 22<br>31.0%<br>14.8%       | 39<br>54.9%<br>17.2%       | 10<br>14.1%<br>8.5%        | 71<br>14.4%  |
| UMCA         | 18<br>21.2%<br>12.1%       | 50<br>58.8%<br>22.0%       | 17<br>20.0%<br>14.4%       | 85<br>17.2%  |
| CAC          | 26<br>34.7%<br>17.4%       | 34<br>45.3%<br>15.0%       | 15<br>20.0%<br>12.7%       | 75<br>15.2%  |
| CL           | 20<br>39.2%<br>13.4%       | 15<br>29.4%<br>6.6%        | 16<br>31.4%<br>13.6%       | 51<br>10.3%  |
| CCC          | 17<br>23.0%<br>11.4%       | 23<br>31.1%<br>10.1%       | 34<br>45.9%<br>28.8%       | 74<br>15.0%  |
| Others       | 46<br>33.3%<br>30.9%       | 66<br>47.8%<br>29.1%       | 26<br>18.8%<br>22.0%       | 138<br>27.9% |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>149</b><br><b>30.2%</b> | <b>227</b><br><b>46.0%</b> | <b>118</b><br><b>23.9%</b> | <b>494</b>   |

A significant percentage of 46% of the total respondents said they "sometimes" think of imprecation when they see others being oppressed. Also, a significant percentage of 30.2% and 23.9% of the respondents said, "No" and "Yes" to the question respectively.

A further illustration of the use of imprecation when oppressed is established in the words of Chris Okotie, the presidential candidate for the Justice Party who believes strongly that he is the next president of Nigeria. In an interview granted to *Sunday Punch* reporters, he claimed that his life is under threat as he has had all kinds of calls and messages

that are very very threatening.<sup>37</sup> He concluded the interview with imprecatory prayers on those whom he referred to as 'a handful of politicians who have held the nation to ransom for so many years' that:

He [God] is going to uproot them. He is already doing it. That is why there is too much confusion. They try this theory, it fails, they try another, it fails. And I prophesy it to them that they will continue to fail. All their gathering together would fail. All their clandestine meetings would end up in confusion. They will never succeed because their aim is to further hold our people to ransom and God will never allow them to succeed.<sup>38</sup>

### Conclusion

It has been demonstrated in this paper that imprecation in both Israel's tradition and in our contemporary society is closely associated with evil that was and is still prevalent in the society. Obviously, an oppressed person, sees himself helpless, hence, all that is available to him is to commit his unpleasant situation to the sovereign and Almighty God who has absolute power to judge the oppressor(s).<sup>39</sup> Also, our concept of imprecation in this paper is not just uttering of curses indiscriminately, but simply an expression of displeasure against evil. This concept of imprecation is well understood in ancient Israel as noted in our studies about David, Jeremiah and Nehemiah. Each of them invoked

<sup>37</sup>Kunle Oderemi, Theophilus Abbah and Tinuola Ayanniyi "My Life Under Threat" *Sunday Punch* (February 16, 2003), pp. 4-7, 48.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>39</sup>Naturally, an oppressed person thinks or invokes imprecation in his life threatening situations. This submission is corroborated with the view expressed by Modup Oduyoye in a personal interview with him. He states that:

Curse is a weapon of the helpless. In other words, you curse someone because you have no power or authority over the person who has offended you. People don't curse when they know that they are stronger than the other party. All that they do is to discipline the fellow.

Cf. Ogunkunle, "Imprecatory Psalms: Their Forms and Uses in Ancient Israel and Some Selected Churches in Nigeria", p. 63.

imprecation with a clear conscience, expressing his displeasure against evil confronting him and seeking for vindication from God. More so, the sincere love of David for his human enemies and his forgiving spirit stand out clearly in imprecatory Psalms, most of which are ascribed to him.

Most importantly, imprecation helps oppressed Christians to avoid sinning against God and man. The Bible says: "Be angry, but not sin; commune with your own hearts on your beds and be silent" (Psalm 4:4 cf. Eph. 4:26). Therefore, imprecation is an expression of one's inner heart to God. Thus, instead of taking the law into one's hand and cause violence in the society, all that one has to do is to report that matter to God.

Incidentally, the current policy on deregulation, which has resulted in fuel price hike, has led to imprecatory prayers in the Nigerian society in general and churches in particular. The fuel price hike has aggravated the suffering and hardship of common people who are in the majority.<sup>40</sup> In fact, in his advise to the Federal Government of Nigeria on deregulation policy, the Provost of the Abuja Diocese of the Church of the Lord, Rev. Michael Odesanya says:

I call on the Federal Government to please intensify efforts to help the poor concerning the rising prices of goods and devaluation of the Naira. The Government has to consider the impoverished Nigerian in its policy. How on can a poor woman or man afford a gallon of kerosene at N400?<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, imprecation remains the major weapon that is available to the common and helpless people of this nation. The people pray against every evil force that is likely to stand against their well-being.

<sup>40</sup>According to Mr. Boye Ilori, a National Planning Commission Official, 67.7 percent of Nigerians are living below the poverty line. Put differently, he said, over 80 million Nigerians, based on the 120 million population estimate, survive on less than \$1 per day." Quoted from the Punch Editorial titled "Rising Youth Unemployment," *The Punch* (Tuesday June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003), p. 16.

<sup>41</sup>See Oluyinka Akintunde, "FG urged to reconsider deregulation policy," *The Punch* (Monday, October 13, 2003) p. 4.