

INJUSTICE AND CONFLICT: A REREADING OF LUKE 18:2-5 IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

FR. PETER ONWUKA, D.D.

(Biblical Department, CIWA, Port Harcourt, Nigeria)

ABSTRACT

Insecurity in Nigeria is a product of many factors which include Boko Haram terrorism, banditry, farmer-herders conflict, unknown gunmen phenomenon among others. Whereas motives for these are varied, ranging from religious extremism, greed, poverty among others, some are due to feelings of animosity of not being fairly treated, of marginalization and total neglect either by the Nigerian society or a section of it and therefore, of injustice. Injustice leads to conflict which can bring about insecurity. A search for security takes the issue of justice seriously. The paper reads Luke 18:2-5 from the point of view of conflict and its resolution. It analyses the parable from the point of view of widow's persistent search for justice and how attempts to deny her justice led to conflict that was later resolved when justice was granted her. The parable therefore deals with conflict and its resolution through perseverance in seeking for justice. The paper argues that a persistent seeking of justice through dialogue and non-violent means can go a long way in bringing about justice and improving the state of insecurity in Nigeria.

Keywords: Conflict, Injustice, Justice, Widow, Judge, Nigerian Context.

Introduction

Nigeria as a nation is currently faced with various forms of insecurity and conflicts: Boko Haram in the Northeast, extending to Northwest and North central, the banditry in the Northwest which is fast spreading to other areas, the herdsmen terrorists in the North central and Southwest, the unknown gunmen in the Southeast and the kidnapping and oil bunkering in the South-south. These have claimed so many lives, decimated the economy of the country and have seriously threatened the corporate existence of the Nigerian nation. The Nigerian government for years has tried to solve this problem through the use of military might but not much success seemed to have been achieved. In the words of Akinride (2020) this unwholesome web of "insecurity has remained almost supreme, unsolvable and indestructible". Whereas it is obvious that so many factors including criminality, religious extremism, get-rich-quick syndrome and poverty are responsible for present state of insecurity, an aspect often overlooked is that some of those behind these problems harbour some grudges and animosity. They feel that they have not been treated fairly either by the Nigerian state or a part of it or by some individuals and they see their activities as a way of getting back either to government, or to some individuals. They see themselves as victims of injustice.

This study focuses on Luke 18:2-5 which is commonly known as the parable of unjust judge and which is one of the parables of Jesus on prayer. Though the text is a parable, it is a story that reflects the social life of the people at the time of Jesus. This work examines it more as a window to the social life of the people at the time of Jesus. It uses the story as a means of understanding the social situation of widows at the time of Jesus, especially in their quest for

justice, and the relationship between injustice and conflict. This is based on the understanding that the parables of Jesus are drawn from the various forms of the life of the people such that the hearers “find themselves in a familiar scene where everything is so simple and clear ... that those who hear it can say, Yes, that’s how it is” (Jeremias 1972). The work therefore studies it from the perspective of three dialectical stages of injustice, conflict and resolution. The aim is to show that when justice is denied, there arises conflict which can only be resolved through restoration of justice. The meaning and import of the text is brought out through the use of analytical and narrative methods. It is then read and interpreted within the context of Nigerian through contextual method. The paper argues that if the method employed by the poor widow in the parable which is persistently seeking for justice through dialogue and non-violent means is applied to Nigerian situation, it will go a long way in reducing insecurity in the country.

1. Explanation of Some Key Terms

The work begins by explaining some of the key terms used in the course of this paper. These are injustice, conflict, judge, and widow. Because some of these words are better understood through their antonym, this work examines some of them with their antonym.

1.1 Injustice (Adikia) and Justice (Dikaïosynē, Sedeq/Sēdadah)

A simple definition of injustice is “lack of justice” or “an unjust act or occurrence”, while justice is “just behaviour or treatment”, “administration of law or authority in maintaining it” and “a judge or a magistrate” (The Concise Oxford English Dictionary 2006). In Classical Greek language, the ideas of justice and injustice are contained in the root *dik-* which has to do with conformity to standard or norm. Greeks believe that there is a universal norm or standard to which both gods and human have to conform. From this root, on the positive side, come the nouns, *dikē* (justice personified in the goddess of justice as well as penalty for unjust act), *dikaïosynē* (righteousness or justice) and *dikaïoma* (regulation that brings about justice) and *dikaïosis* (result of righteous judgement, acquittal or vindication), the adjective *dikaïos* (just or righteous) and the verb *dikaioō* (to be right or act with justice) and on the negative side the noun *adikia* (unrighteous act, injustice), and *adikēma* (violation of norm of justice), the adjective *adikos* (unjust, unrighteous) and the verb *adikeō* (to act in unjust or unrighteous manner, Reumann 1992, p. 746). The key term used to express justice is *dikaïosynē* which means righteousness in terms of quality, practice or state that is in accordance with standard or norm of the society, or when used in juridical setting, juridical practice or judgement that is in accordance with the norm. For Greeks therefore, justice (*dikaïosynē*) is relationship, behaviour, juridical process or judgement that is in accordance with the norms of the society. On the other hand, injustice (*adikia*) denotes act or behaviour that violates standard of right conduct or practice and is equivalent to wickedness or injustice.

The notion of justice in the Old Testament (Biblical Hebrew) is contained primarily in the idea of righteousness (*šēdāqāh* or *šedeq*) and sometimes in righteous judgement (*mišpat*)¹. *Šēdāqāh* or *šedeq*², generally translated as righteousness, describes relationship which is ethical,

¹ Other words like *din*, *’emet* are sometimes used though their occurrence is minimal when compared to *šēdāqāh* and *mišpat*.

² *Šēdāqāh* is a feminine noun meaning righteousness. It occurs 158 times in the OT while *šedeq* is its masculine form and it occurs 118 in the OT. According to Snaith (1964, 72) there is no essential difference between the two words.

forensic or theocratic, with the last understood as the basis of the other two. Ethically, it has to do with behaviour or relation that is right and in accordance with the norm or the Law (see Lev 19:36; Job 29:12-15; 1 Sam 24:7; Amos 5:23-24), forensically, it concerns judgements that conform to the Law (see Lev, 19:15; Exod 23:7; Isa 5:23) while theocratically, it deals with God-human and human-human covenantal relationship (Ps 1:1-6; Ps 31:1; Deut 5:25; Jer 11:20). Unlike the Greek understanding of *dikaioσynē*, the standard here is the will of God implied in the covenant relationship and expressed in the Law. Righteousness or justice is acting properly in accordance with the covenant relationship (Onesti and Brauch, 1993, 829). It is justice manifested in actions and in relating with others or judgement in accordance with the state of things and will of God (Lev. 19:15; Exod 23:7; Isa 5:23 etc). In the New Testament, righteousness or justice (*dikaioσyne*) denotes conformity of conduct, practice or judgment with the will of God made manifest in Jesus Christ³. Therefore, justice has to do with conduct or practice that is on conformity with the standard, established order or the will of God and while injustice is that which falls short of this standard, order or the will of God.

1.2 Judge (Kritēs)

The term judge is closely related to justice since the latter is sometimes defined in terms of the former. One of the ways justice is defined is as “a judge or magistrate” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2006). In Greek, the word for a judge, *kritēs* comes from the verb *krinō* which literally means to break something into smaller parts in order to understand it better and therefore to make a judgment based on taking various factors into account, “to analyse”, “decide”, or “to judge” (Danker 2000, 568). For Greeks, a judge is one who analyses a case or situation to know its true nature in order to make a right decision or judgement. In Hebrew and OT, the term for judge, *šōpēṭ* comes from the verb *šāpāṭ* which means to govern or to judge. In the Old Testament the work or duty of the judge is seen primarily from the point of view of restoring relationship than that of making decision. To judge is also to rule because it is the prerequisite of the rulers to maintain justice and restore relationship. On account of this, the ruler doubles as the ruler and judge. In both Old Testament and New Testament God, the Universal Ruler is the universal judge (see the book of Judges) who appoints kings and judges as his representatives in settling disputes and maintaining justice in the society. King Jehoshaphat made this clear in his instruction to judges in 2 Chronicles 19:6: “Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on behalf of human beings but in the Lord’s behalf, he is with you in giving judgement.” (NRSV).

1.3 Conflict (agōn) and Peace (ierēnē, šalōm)

Concise English Dictionary (2006) defines conflict as “serious disagreement, prolonged arm struggle or incompatibility between opinions”. According to Dudley Weeks (1994, 4), “conflict is a relationship between parties who disagree over matters they value and who perceive that their power to attain that which they value is threatened by the other party’s values, goals, perceptions, behaviour and/or degree of power”. This is more comprehensive and brings out four essential elements in conflict: differences or divergence, perceptions, feeling of threat and power. Conflict generally takes place within relationship and one of its key elements is disagreement which is usually as a result of differences or divergence in views. Perception

³ In the Old and New Testaments, righteousness is the attribute of God who created and sustains the world in justice and who as the judge and guardian of justice acts with justice and whose relation with created world is characterised by righteousness. Righteousness and justice define not only how God relates to the world and humanity but also how humanity is expected to relate to God and among themselves.

has to do with how an individual or group sees the other, their actions or non-action and the matter at the centre of conflict. Central to conflict are values individual or group holds dear like religious beliefs, culture, principles, and understandings on how things are or ought to be. In conflict, power is often used to protect one's or individual value, to impose one's or group's view or position on the other or even to suppress opposition. On account of this, Mark Anstey (1991, 2-3) states that "conflict exists in relationship when parties involved perceive a divergence in the values, needs or interest and purposely employ their power in an effort to defeat, neutralise or eliminate each other to protect or further their interest in the interaction". However, it is good to note that not every conflict is destructive or leads to violence and for this, Cunningham (1996, 2) identifies two levels of conflicts. The first is overt, coercive and sometimes violent in which the contending parties intend to impose their views on the other while the second form which does not lead to violence may involve subtle processes and behaviour. A distinction can therefore be made between destructive and constructive conflicts. According to Deutsch (1973), destructive conflict has to do with processes which escalate to such an extent that groups or individual employ every means to destroy one another while constructive conflict is that which leads to an innovative ways of dealing with the situation.

Biblical perspective of conflict is different. Though there are no Greek or Hebrew words that capture adequately the English term "conflict", yet conflictual situations abound in Bible. Some of the New Testament Greek terms which are closer to the idea of conflict are *agōn* which means opposition or conflict (see Phil 1:30; Col 2:1) and the verb *agonizomai* which means "to struggle" or "to resist" (see John 18:36), and *anthistēmi*, "to oppose" or "resist". In the OT, conflict is a lack and therefore it is better understood through its closest antonym, which is peace or shalom. Shalom comes from the root (šlm) that has to do with completeness, wholeness, soundness, its verb *šālēm* (to be complete or to be sound) while shalom means wholeness, soundness or wellbeing. Hebrew understanding of peace does not entail a lack or absence of something like war but a positive reality, wholeness or completeness or wellbeing and this comes about through relationship. It is the wholeness and wellbeing that is only possible through communion with God who is shalom in its fullness. Conflict is the situation that arises when there is lack of peace, soundness or wholeness and wellbeing. It is the result of relationship that is not in line with covenant obligation and which is characterised by injustice.

1.4 Widow (Chēra)

In the Old Testament, the normal status of women is to be under the protection of men, who act as their defenders, their fathers when they are not yet married and husbands when they are married. A widow (*'almānāh*) is a woman who has lost her husband and therefore her protector and defender in the society (Is. 1:23; 10:2; 2 Sam 14:4; Luke 18:3). She is generally marginalised and her situation is worse when she has no children or her children are underage. Widows do not have right of inheritance and when they do not have children, they are required to return to their parents or to remarry (Gen 38:11; Lev. 22:13; Ruth 1:8). The society looks down on them and often they are deprived of their rights (Is. 1:17; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47). However, God is their refuge who threatens judgement on those who wrong them and promises blessing on those who help them (Exod. 22:21ff; Jer. 7:6). They are equally protected by the law though often its implementation is neglected (Exod. 22:22; Deut. 24:17). They are generally grouped with orphans and aliens as the most disadvantaged in the society.

In the NT, Jesus showed compassion to widows (Luke 7:12), praised the generosity of the poor widow who put into the treasury all she had (Mark 12:43; Luke 21:3) and condemned those who swallow the properties of widows (Luke 20:47). The early Christians being conscious of the plight and poverty of the widows cared for them (Acts 6:1; 9:39; Jas 1:27; 1 Tim 5:3-16).

2. Injustice and Conflict in Nigeria

Long years of military dictatorship and corrupt civilian government have given rise to various forms of injustices and conflicts in Nigeria. The discovery of petroleum in Oloibiri in 1956 in the Bayelsa State and subsequently in other areas in Niger Delta which should have been a big blessing, not only to the Nigerian nation but also to the Niger Delta, has become a great nightmare to the later that gradually witnessed the systematic destruction of its ecosystem, the pollution of its water and air through gas flaring and oil spills respectively, and the destruction of its farmland without any compensatory development in its area⁴. As Bodo and Gimah (2020, 164) rightly observed: “the region responsible for such wealth has been ecologically destroyed with its locals suffering from abject poverty”. A situation like this cannot but give rise to various forms of conflict manifested in form of militancy, kidnapping and oil bunkering. Nigerian nation is blessed with abundant material and human resources and yet it is the nation where about 85 per cent of its populace live in abject poverty and where about 95 per cent of the nation’s wealth is in the hand of 1 per cent, a nation that has been described as the poverty capital of the world (Brookings Institution Report, 2018).

The so-called herders-farmers conflict is another clear case of injustice where the government has continued to play down what has globally been recognised as terrorism. Whereas prior to 2015, the mobile Fulani herders and the sedentary farmers mainly from the Middle Belt and southern part of Nigeria had co-existed relatively in peace, in the past seven years, the relationship between the herders and the farmers had degenerated to the level that many farmers were killed, raped and displaced with many farmland destroyed by herders often armed with dangerous weapons like A-K 47. It is suggested that climatic factors, population increase and expansion of cultivation area sometimes into the grazing zone and path could have impacted on the herders negatively (Asogwa and Okafor, 2016). However, the recent crises seem to be propelled by some sinister motives. If herders’ primary intention was to graze their cattle, they could have done that without destroying farmers’ crops, much less killing and raping farmers and deliberately destroying their products. As it is observed, the Nigerian Federal Government, the Nigerian Police and the Military are sometimes actors in this conflict because instead of being neutral in dealing with the matter, they sometimes cooperate with the attackers which had made the victims to resort to self defence mechanism (Gursory 2019). A situation like this cannot but generate more conflicts which could lead to reprisal attacks, thereby aggravating the conflict.

Marginalization is another form of injustice that breeds conflict in Nigeria. It occurs when some individual or groups are pushed to the fringes in the distribution of resources, political powers and offices and in the control of the wealth of the nation. It takes various forms and occurs in many areas. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation and whereas a more internationally

⁴ It is reported that over 4,000 spills amounting to several millions of barrels of oil had been discharged into rivers, ponds and creeks in the Niger Delta and over 12.7 million tonnes of Carbon dioxide (CO₂) released into the air in Niger Delta in 2004 (Dido and Gimah 2020, 163-5).

acceptable practice should be that a better qualified person should be elected for a political office irrespective of his or her ethnicity or religion, it has become a practice in Nigeria that some people see governance in Nigeria as birth right and others as good only to be ruled. This attitude is further worsened by that of winner-takes-it-all, where such rulers populate key government posts and offices with people of their ethnic group and concentrate the resources of the nation in developing their areas. This has given rise to various forms of agitation like quest for resource control and autonomy, among others.

Another form of injustice which gives rise to different forms of conflict is youth exploitation for selfish political end. Some politicians during election engage some youth and arm them with guns and dangerous weapons and use them to intimidate their opponents and rig elections, sometimes with the promise of providing them jobs when they win. After the election and when they are eventually declared winners, they abandon those people whom they used as weapon to perpetuate various forms of crimes. Some of such people turned into armed robbers, kidnappers and some even joined or formed terrorist group menacing the nation.

3. Rereading of Luke 18:2-5

3.1 The Setting

From the point of view of the literary organization of the Gospel of Luke, Luke 18:2-5 falls within the wider context of Luke 9:51-19:43 which is the journey to Jerusalem, the wide context of Luke 17:11-18:8 that deals with the expectation of the second coming of Jesus Christ and the immediate context of Luke 18:1-8. Luke in the organisation of his gospel made it in such a way that Jesus' journey to Jerusalem offers him opportunity to groom his disciples on the true meaning of discipleship and this periscope is part of it. In its immediate context, 17:11-18:1-8, the focus is on the second coming of Jesus Christ and how the disciples should await it. Luke 18:2-5 is the parable of the Unjust Judge which is framed by verse 1 and verses 6-8 that both indicate the purpose and application of the parable respectively. Some scholars have pointed out some dissonance between the parable (2-5) which centres on seeking justice and its interpretative frame (1, 6-8) which focuses on prayer⁵. Some even suggest that it could be as a result of the merging of two parables⁶. Whereas there is some dissonance between the parable and its interpretative frame, yet there is some connection that makes it possible for the parable that centres on justice to be interpreted as parable of prayer and this lies on perseverance. It is a parable meant to explain the need for the disciples to persevere in prayer while they await the second coming or return of Jesus Christ. The perseverance of the widow serves as model for disciples waiting for the coming of the Lord while the judge serves as antitype of God. Using the argument from smaller to greater, it shows that if the unjust judge could do what the widow asked because she persevered, God the just Judge will do much more than they asked.

⁵ R. Bultmann is of the view that verses 6-8 is a later addition (*The History of Synoptic Tradition*, trans. I Marsh. New York: Harper & Row, 1963, 175) while I. H. Marshal maintains that 6b-7 does not reflect Lucan terminology (*The Gospel of Luke: Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, 670-671.).

⁶ Stephen Curkpatrick is of the view that the dissonance between the parable (2-5) and its interpretative frame is due to the merging of two parables with one centring on justice and the other on prayer ("Dissonance in Luke 18:1-8" *JBL* (2002) 107-121, 108.

3.2 Analysis of Luke 18:2-5

The parable, though a speech is story which has basic characteristic of a narrative, namely beginning, middle and end and therefore can be studied from the point of view of narrative analysis. It is a short drama with two scenes with an introduction and can be structured as follows:

1. The introduction of characters: 2b-3a
2. Scene One: the action of the widow and the initial reaction of the Judge (3b-4a)
3. Scene Two: the later reaction of the Judge (4b-5)

3.2.1 Introduction or Presentation of the Characters: 2-3a

The parable begins with the introduction of the characters. According to Osborne (1991, 195), the success of story (or parable) depends in the ability of the narrator to develop a real people whom the readers or audience can identify. In other words, the success of a story depends on the ability of narrator to present characters that match the audience daily experiences. The parable has two major characters. The first is presented as *kritēstis* (a certain judge) which shows that the narrator is not interested in his real identity or from where he comes. He is simply a typical judge. Though the location is not indicated, the image presented represent what the audience are familiar with and therefore he is likely to be a judge in Israel⁷. The function of a judge in Israel is to dispense justice, to acquit and vindicate the just and to condemn and punish the unjust. As a judge, he is a representative of both the king whose duty is to see to peaceful coexistence of the members of his kingdom and of God who is the universal judge. To prepare the reader or audience on what expect, he is further described in two ways: as one who has neither the fear of God nor regard for men (*ton theon mē phoboumenos kai anthrōpon mē entrepomenos*). The two qualifications show his relationship first with God and secondly with his fellow human beings. To have fear of God in this context is to act in consciousness of the presence of God, to act in obedience to the commandment of God. A person who does not have the fear of God is one who does not take God into consideration in his or actions. He is a person with no scruples (Johnson, 1991, 269) He is one who acts not according to the will of God but according to his own will. O'Connor (2019, 48) rightly pointed out that this is an antithesis of what a judge in Israel is supposed to be. His character is direct opposite of what a judge should be as indicated in the words of King Jehoshaphat to judges: "Let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take care of what you do, for there is no pervasion of justice with the Lord our God (2 Chron 19:7). In the second qualification, the Greek participle *entrepomenos* comes from the verb *entrepō* which means to have shame or be ashamed of something while its middle means to have regard or respect for someone. In social relationship, shame in a positive sense moderates people's behaviour who generally do not like to do things that will bring them to disrepute. When it is said that the judge has no regard for men, it means that he is shameless and insensitive to the feelings of others and not that he is impartial or not swayed by emotions. He is only interested in himself and does not care how the society sees or judges him. With these two qualities, it is clear that getting justice from a character like this will be difficult.

⁷ C. Uzowulu opines that the judge is most likely to be a Jew and a powerful man since Romans permitted the Jews to manage their own legal matters ("Corrupt but Repented Judge – A Study of Luke 18:1-8: Implication for the Contemporary Society" *Integrity and Corruption in the Bible*. Acts of the Biblical Association of Nigeria, 12, 2020, 154-166, 157.

The second character is simply introduced as *chēra* (a widow). Like the judge, she is identified simply as a widow and therefore she is a typical widow. She is further identified as *en tē polei ekeinē* (as being in that city), in the same city with the judge. It means that it is to the judge described above that she is entitled to present her case. Widows are generally marginalized and oppressed. According to Tannehill (1986 136), widow in Luke presuppose a state of economic helplessness in a male-dominated society. The status of the two character are in contrast: the judge is an influential and powerful person in the society who has no fear of God nor regard for his fellow humans while the widow is a poor defenceless woman whose trust is in God. The contrast of the characters prepares the reader for the coming conflict.

3.2.2 The Interaction between the Widow and the Judge: 3b-4a

The first scene presents the encounter between the two major characters, the actions of the widow and the initial actions of the judge. The action of the widow is presented with *ērxecho*, the imperfect of *erchomai* which means “to go” or “to come” used here in interactive sense. It shows a repeated action on the part of the widow. The widow was constantly going to the judge while the second verb in participle (*legousa* from *legō*, to say or speak) shows her mission. The widow was going repeatedly to the judge and saying to him. In this narrative, the repetitive nature of the action of the widow plays a very important role in the narrative. The widow knows that based on the character of the judge that justice will not come by easily but she is not ready to give up. She was determined not to give up until she gets justice. What the widow says to the judge is presented thus: *ekdikeson me apo tou antidikou mou* which literally means: grant me justice from the one who denies me justice. *Ekdikēson* is aorist imperative of the verb *ekdikeō* which means to grant or procure justice and *antidikou* from the noun *antidikos* means an opponent and both come from the same root *dik-* which has to do with justice. The widow is not simply asking the judge to proclaim judgement in her favour but she is asking the judge to give her justice which is hers. She is convinced that the opponent is taking something that belongs to her and she is asking the judge to act with justice and restore to her what is truly hers. According to Mbonu (2012, 106), injustice has the tendency to cry out and the outcry comes from the depth of human spirit where the dignity is located. The initial reaction of the judge is presented in these words: *ouk ethelen epi chronon*. He was not willing for some time. He has the power and knows the true state of the case but he was not willing to grant the widow justice. *Chronos* means unspecified period of time.

An essential element of plot in narrative is conflict. This story has a number of conflicts. The first is between the widow and her opponent who must have taken something that belongs to the widow, perhaps on the ground that widows do not have protectors and defenders. The second conflict is between the widow and the judge which was because the judge was not willing to grant the widow her due justice. The judge for some time and for unspecified reason was not willing to grant the widow justice and since he was introduced as judge who has neither the fear of God or regard for people, he could for some personal reason or because he had collected bribe from the opponent was not ready to grant the widow justice. However, the widow was not ready to allow him to get away with it and she continued to visit him and demand for justice.

3.2.3 The Later Reaction of the Judge: 4b-5.

Scene two presents the later thought and action of the judge. The judge's several encounter with the widow provoked thought in him. The phrase “after these things” (*meta de tauta*) refers

to the encounters the judge had with the widow. With the help of psychological perspective, the narrator helped the reader to gain access into the inner thoughts of the judge and the conflict within him. He confirms the earlier description given of him that he neither fears God nor has regard for human being, showing that it is a true description of him and correct presentation of his attitude and perspective to life. It further shows that not even the perseverance of the widow can make him to change this attitude and perspective to life. However, he has a bigger worry, his peace. The persistent visit of the widow with her demand for justice created conflict for the judge which he stated with a causal clause. The preposition *dia* together the articular infinitive introduces a causal clause while the particle *ge* intensifies it. The present infinitive *parechein* from the verb *parecho* means to provide or to give while its present form shows that it is an on-going action. The cause is presented thus: *dia ge to parechein moi topon ten cheran tauten*: because this widow is continuously giving me trouble. This shows the cause of his change of heart and decision while the motive behind his action is presented thus: *hina me eis telos erchomene huopiaze me*, which literally means, so that she does not through her continuous coming wear me to an end. Based on these considerations, the judge decides to grant the woman justice and to do what the woman asked of her. He uses almost the exact word the widow. Whereas in verse 3, the woman said: *ekdikēson me...* (grant me justice) and in verse 5 he says: *ekdikēso auten*: I will grant her justice. What then brought about transformation in the judge is not the fear of God nor the regard for men but the perseverance of widow which creates conflict in him.

At the end of the parable, Jesus posed two rhetorical questions at his audience with the first bothering on what the unjust judge said and the second on divine quick dispensation of justice. Jesus identifies the judge as judge of injustice who knew what constitutes justice in the case before him but was unwilling to do that until he was compelled to do so. What is of interest in what the judge said is that he was compelled to grant the widow justice not because of the fear of God nor respect for men but because of the perseverance of the widow and the fear that she might wear him out. Then comparing God and the judge, Jesus asks: will God not grant justice to his elect who like the widow are persistently crying to him. Here Jesus applies the rabbinic principle that if small matter applies of something, the greater matter will even apply more. In this case, if unjust judge can grant a widow justice because the widow persisted in her request, God who cannot be compared with unjust judge, God the righteous judge will definitely and speedily grant justice to those who ask of him.

4. Synthesis: Injustice and Conflict in Luke 18:2-5 In The Nigerian Context

Although the parable is meant to teach the necessity of perseverance in prayer, Jesus uses a story which depicts the social situation at this time to convey his message. It is a story which centres on injustice and conflict and its final resolution. Judges who represent the leaders of the society are meant to be the custodian of justice but instead, they turn round to exploit the very people they are meant to protect. In doing that they fail to understand that they are rather representatives of God who has the final say in matters of justice. In the parable, there is no doubt that there are cases of injustice. First, the widow's opponent wants to deny and deprive her of what legitimately belongs to her. He could have done that knowing how defenceless widows were. This generated conflict between the widow and the opponent with the former dragging the latter to the judge. The judge on his part was also not willing to grant the widow justice. Since he is a man who is propelled by selfish interest rather than the fear of God or public opinion he may have collected bribe from the opponent and was not willing to grant

the widow justice. This again created conflict between her and the judge, and the widow uses her persistent visit and demand for justice to sway the judge to grant her justice.

Injustice breeds conflicts but conflict can be resolved through removal of the cause of injustice and through restoration of justice. Some people employ of all sorts of means like power, violence, intimidation, calumny and other oppressive measures in handling conflicts. These instead of bringing about the resolution of the conflict often aggravate it. Like the case of the widow, there is need for a constructive engagement. The widow did not keep quiet in the face of injustice or chose to remain silent. She confronted both her opponent and the judge but she did that constructively and not destructively. She never employed violence or calumny but engaged her opponent and the judge in a civilised manner. She took her case with the opponent to the judge which is equivalent to the court of law. When she realised that the judge was not willing to grant her justice, rather than giving up, she continued to pester the judge till he did the right thing. The widow engaged the judge in some form of communication. She constantly reminded him of injustice he practiced which is contrary to ethics of his profession. Both her conversation and persistence made the judge to have a rethink that brought about the resolution of the problem and restoration of justice.

Various forms of injustices in Nigeria have given rise to various forms of conflicts which often create opportunities for growth. Injustices are not meant to be condoned or swept under the carpet; they are meant to be denounced. However, it is meant to be managed constructively and not destructively. Those who suffer injustice should follow proper channels of seeking justice. They should not take laws into their hands or employ violence. Dialogue has remained the internationally acceptable standard of conflict resolution. For dialogue to be fruitful, it has to be constructive and issue based and not emotional and the parties involved should be ready for dialogue and for compromise when necessary. When initiating dialogue becomes very difficult, other forms of communication like strike, peaceful demonstration may be employed to bring the other party to the dialogue table. The ideal thing is that conflict should be resolved within a short period. However some takes a longer period while some may not be resolved because some parties involved are not willing to cooperate in the resolution.

The role of God in dealing with injustice and resolving conflict can never underestimated. He remains the judge of the universe and the source of all justice and righteousness. People seeking justice should constantly call on him. While they should employ legitimate means of redressing the injustice, they should also seek God's intervention who knows the best way to resolve the matter. As Jesus concludes in the parable of the unjust widow, he will see that justice is done to them and done fast.

Conclusion

This paper sets out to show that injustice is one of the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria. It leads to conflict which when not properly managed brings about various forms of insecurity related problems. The widow in the parable shows that injustice should not be condoned or swept under carpet but could be overcome through persistent seeking of justice through dialogue and non-violent means. God is of justice who created and upholds the world in justice. In addressing injustice, while employing all legitimate means in bringing about restoration of justice, there is always the need to bring God at the centre of the entire process. For as the psalmist says: if God does not watch over the house, in vain do the watchmen watch (Ps 127:1).

Works Cited

- Akinrinde, O. O (2020). "Social injustice, corruption and Nigeria's national security quest: A theoretical discourse". *Global Journal of Sociology: Current Issues*. 10(2), 63–70.
- Anstey, Mark,(1991). *Negotiating conflict: Insights and skills for negotiators and peacemakers*. Juta & Co.
- Asogwa, Felix C. & Okafor, Nneka Ifeoma.(2016). "Herders-Farmers' conflict and national security in Nigeria", *South East Journal of Political Science*, 2(2), 22-37.
- Bodo, Tombari & Gimah, Batombari.(2020). "The pollution and destruction of the Niger Delta ecosystem in Nigeria: Who is to be blamed" in the *European Scientific Journal*, 16(5) accessed 27 February 2023.
- Bultmann, R. (1978). *The history of synoptic tradition*. (I Marsh,trans), Harper & Row.
- Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2006. 11th Ed, Oxford: Oxford Press.
- Cunningham, Thomas F. (1992). *Conflict resolution strategies and the church: The church's role as an agent of social change in the political conflict in South Africa*. Doctoral Thesis. University of South Africa.
- Curkpatrick, Stephen. (2002). "Dissonance in Luke 18:1-8" *JBL*, 107-121, 108.
- Deutsch, Morton. (1973). *The resolution of conflict*. Yale University Press.
- Gursoy, Gulsah "Farmer-Herders conflict in Nigeria: An analysis of the root causes and the effects of the conflict". *ResearchGate*, accessed 27 February 2023.
- Healey, Joseph P. "Peace", *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol . 5. Doubleday, 206-207.
- Jeremias, Joachim. (1972). *The Parables of Jesus*. SCM.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. (1991). *The Gospel of Luke*. Sacra Pagina 3, The Liturgical Press.
- Marshal, I.H. (1978). *The Gospel of Luke: Commentary on the Greek text*. Eerdmans.
- Mbonu, Caroline. (2012.) "Liberative reading of the parable of the widow in Luke 18:1-8: A paradigm for Christian widows in Igbo world" *JIT* 13(1) 95-110.
- Mckenzie, John L (1998). *Dictionary of the Bible*. Asian Trading Cooperation.
- O'Connor, John T. (2019). *The parable of persistent widow: Luke 18:1-8 in context*. M.Th. Thesis. University of Divinity.
- Osborne, Grant R. (1991). *The hermeneutical spiral: A comprehensive introduction to biblical interpretation*. Downers Grove, Illinois, 1991, 159.
- Procksch, O. (1950). *Theologie des Altern Testaments*. Gutersloh.
- Reumann, John. (1992). "Righteousness (NT)" in David Noel Freedman et al.(eds). *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, Doubleday, 745-773,
- Reventlow, H.G. (1971). *Rechtfertigung im Horint des Altern Testaments*. BevT 58. Munich.
- Schmid, H.H. (1964). *Gerechtigkeit als Weltorddnung*. Tubingen.
- Scullion, J.J (1992) "Righteousness (OT)", David Noel Freedman et al. (Eds). *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, Doubleday, 724-736.
- Tannehill, Robert C. (1986). *The narrative unity of Luke-Acts. A literary interpretation. Volume 1: The Gospel of Luke*. Fortress.
- Uzowulu, C. (2020). "Corrupt but repented Judge – a study of Luke 18:1-8: Implication for the contemporary society" *Integrity and Corruption in the Bible*. Acts of the Biblical Association of Nigeria, 12, 154-166.
- Weeks, Dudley. (1994). *Conflict partnership*. Trans World Publisher.
- Ziesler, J. (1972). *The meaning of righteousness in Paul: A linguistic and theological enquiry*. SNTSMS 20. Cambridge.