

Towards Johannine understanding of the terror of the Cross and the hope of the resurrection

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ABSTRACT: This study explores Johannine understanding of the terror of the Cross and the hope of the resurrection. In recent years, acts of terrorism have become the most dangerous threats to world order. They have become so pervasive that no country on earth can claim immunity from its violent acts of bombing, shooting, armed robbery, hostage taking and demand for ransom, kidnapping, bank robbery, train attack, plane hijacking, displacement of local communities and killings. In the Cross, Jesus suffered the full terror the world has to offer, and in the resurrection, this terror was defeated. In the terror of the Cross, Pilate, as the most powerful man in Judea, capitulates to the powers of falsehood and hands Jesus over for execution. Against this background, the question is: why did Jesus have to die on the Cross? Accordingly, this study reflected on Johannine understanding of the terror of the Cross and the hope of the resurrection using an epistemological framework to unravel the implications for the faithful, the Church, the world, and the devil. This study aims to reveal that on the Cross, evil is conquered as evil, principalities and powers are disarmed; the faithful are forgiven, and the defeat of the last enemy, death, is complete and irrevocable. Furthermore, the finding reveals that the resurrection gives hope in a time such as this, in a society being torn apart by violence of all kinds, continuing extralegal killings, and high levels of corruption. This study advocates that the Cross carries the message of love, finality, fulfilled promises, and the ultimate emblem of faith. It concludes that the resurrection gives hope and perseverance in the midst of terror.

Keywords: Crucifixion, extrajudicial killings, hope, Johannine, police brutality, resurrection.

INTRODUCTION

Apparently, society is being torn apart by violence of all kinds. The recent illegal and inhuman invasion of Mary Odili's house at No. 7 Imo River Road on Oct. 29, 2021, in Abuja, as well as abuse of power, is turning Nigeria into a jungle where fundamental human rights have been buried. In another event of terror, security agents raided the homes of the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Walter Onnoghen and Sylvanus Ngwuta of the Supreme Court, as well as the homes of Adebisi Ademola, Muazu Pindiga, and Nnamdi Dimgba of the Federal High Court in Abuja. Department of State Services (DSS) officers spent time breaking the gate of Justice Dimgba's house with a sledgehammer before beating his brother to pulp when they could not find him. In another development, DSS officers on December 2, 2019

and June 6, 2021, supervised the invasion of Barr. Ifeanyi Ejiofor's home for defending the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, during which his aide was killed. Similarly, on July 1, 2021, Nigerian security agents invaded Sunday Igboho's house, killing two of his separatist members (Adeyanju, 2016; Ejekwonyilo, 2021; Kabir and Ayitogo, 2021).

On the other side of the ledger, as Christians commemorated the 2026 Holy Week, the most sacred time of the year, Nigerian Christians were hunted down and killed by ISIS-affiliated terrorists. On the evening of Palm Sunday, March 29, 2026, gunmen opened fire on people gathered in the streets of Angwan Rukuba, a predominantly Christian community in Jos North Local

Government Area, Plateau State. In particular, at least 53 Christians were massacred, and some were burned. Families were torn apart. Entire communities were thrown into chaos. Similarly, armed militants have attacked more than 200 communities in northern Nigeria, leaving dozens of Christians dead. This is not random. This is targeted persecution, escalating at one of the holiest moments for the Christian faith. There is no respite for beleaguered Christians in Nigeria. Still reeling from the massacre of more than 50 Christians on Palm Sunday, ISIS-affiliated terrorists struck again at ECWA Church and St. Augustine's Catholic Church in Ariko Village, Kaduna State, during Easter service. Also, in Borno State, suspected *Boko Haram* terrorists attacked Awapul community in Chibok, burning homes and displacing residents, just hours after another deadly assault on a police post and IDP camp (Agbodo, 2026; Sekulow, 2026; Christian Council of Nigeria NEWS Desk, 2026).

These chronicles and litanies of invasion by agents of the Nigerian government and jihadist groups against innocent and vulnerable Nigerians are clear evidence that the terror of the Cross and gross violations are rife in Nigeria. What it attests to unequivocally is the fact that unlawful killings by security forces and non-state actors have become commonplace in the country since 1999. To emphasise this point, Nwannekanma *et al.* (2021, p. 1) maintain that:

These unlawful killings largely go unpunished because of Nigeria's Force Order 237, which allows officers to use lethal force in ways that contravene international law and the government's corruption and prevailing culture of impunity. Successive governments in Nigeria have used unlawful killings to quell secessionist upheavals and terrorist activities, a practice that was exacerbated during President Muhammadu Buhari's tenure, such as the unlawful killing of 350 Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) members by the Nigerian army in 2015. It is pertinent to state that extrajudicial killings by state actors have become the primary cause of death in the country. In fact, state actors have cumulatively killed 13,241 people since 2011.

The above citation clearly depicts the brutal forms of terror of the Cross in contemporary society as it was in the cultural world of Jesus of Nazareth. Crucifixion was considered in antiquity one of the most brutal and shameful modes of death, applied mostly to slaves, disgraced soldiers, and foreigners; only very rarely applied to Roman citizens, as Jesus Christ died (Retief and Cilliers, 2003).

Griffith (2002, p. 268) is definite in stating that in the Cross "Jesus suffered the full terror the world has to offer, and in the resurrection, this terror was defeated.

Accordingly, whether it is in the name of liberation and revolution or in the name of security and order, every act of terror is a reenactment of the crucifixion." Against this backdrop, the basic question for this study is: why did Jesus have to die on the Cross? In view of the above, this study reflected on Johannine understanding of the terror of the Cross and the hope of the resurrection using an epistemological framework to unravel the implications for the faithful, the Church, the world, and the evil. Notably, it is very important to emphasise that the Cross, which has become the symbol of the Christian faith, is properly an empty Cross and a bloody instrument of torture. This form of "torture would become synonymous with the Roman Empire and ultimately, the founding of Christianity and its subsequent branches" (Habermas *et al.*, 2021, p. 748). In his uncanny manner, Barclay (1975, p. 250) opines that "there was no more terrible death than death by crucifixion. Even Romans themselves regarded it with a shudder of horror. Cicero declared that it was the most cruel and horrifying death."

Barclay (1975), citing Tacitus, said that crucifixion was a "despicable death." Tacitus, or more formally Cornelius Tacitus (55/56-c to 118 AD), was a Roman senator, orator, and ethnographer, and arguably the best of Roman historians. Tacitus provides Greco-Roman historical evidence for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ by Pontius Pilate in his last major work titled *Annals*, written in C:116-117 AD. According to Mykytiuk (2022, p.1), this is what Tacitus wrote ". . . whom the crowd called '*chrestians*.' The founder of this name, Christ (*Christus* in Latin), had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the Procurator Pontius Pilate." Crucifixion was never used as a method of execution in the homeland, but only in the provinces and was usually reserved for criminals and political revolutionaries (Barclay, 1975; Bookman, 2021; Habermas *et al.*, 2021). From the foregoing, it was unthinkable that a Roman citizen should die such a death. Roman citizens at this time were also exempted from poll taxes, physical abuse during interrogation, corporal punishment without trials, and the more excruciating forms of capital punishment such as crucifixion or exposure to wild beasts. He also had "the right to be represented by an advocate and to appeal to the emperor concerning any capital charges against them. Almost all Jews, along with others in the early Christian era, were precluded from any of these legal benefits" (Welch, 2020, p. 165).

Furthermore, Barclay (1975), citing the Roman orator, Cicero, states that it is a crime for a Roman citizen to be bound; it is a worse crime for him to be beaten; it is parricide for him to be killed. What am I to say if he is killed on a cross? A nefarious action such as that is incapable of description by any word, for there is none fit to describe it. It was that death, the most dreaded in the ancient world, death of slaves and criminals, death of politically motivated individuals, and deserted soldiers, that Jesus Christ died. Accordingly, the terror of the Cross is not a rational

phenomenon. It possesses people's body, soul, and mind. In the extreme, it even disables the so called "fight or flight" response and leaves people "paralysed by fear" (Griffith, 2002, p. 6). Brinton (1956) expresses this reign of terror as an understanding of justice that was swift as the guillotine. If virtue is the mainstay of a democratic government in time of peace, then in time of revolution, a democratic government must rely "on virtue and terror. . . Terror is nothing but justice, swift, severe, and inflexible; it is an emanation of virtue. . . It has been said that terror is the mainstay of a despotic government. . . The government of the revolution is the despotism of liberty against tyranny" (Griffith, 2002, p. 10).

The foregoing has created the need for the present study. John's Gospel has been called the "Maverick Gospel because its portrayal of Jesus is done in a manner quite distinctive from that of Mark, Matthew, and Luke" (Ryan, 2018, p.1). The Fourth Gospel perspective of the Passion narrative follows the upward movement of the pendulum. It begins with Jesus in the posture of a servant, washing the feet of His disciples (13), and concludes when Thomas acknowledges that Jesus Christ is Lord and God (20:28). This brings the narrative back to the high point where it began in 1:1 (Barclay, 1975; Koester, 1991; Barker, 1995). Chapters 2-12 unfold the revelation of the Word to the world, while chapters 13-20 concern the glorification of the Word for the world. At one end of the drama is the prologue (chapter 1) introducing the main ideas. At the other end is the epilogue (chapter 21) setting out an agenda for the Church in the future, on the basis of the exaltation of Jesus (Smalleys, 1994). Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem marks the end of His public ministry and introduces the Passion narrative, which will culminate in the terror of the Cross and the resurrection (13-20).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

For the purpose of properly providing guidelines for the clear appreciation of the conceptual framework of this study and its contextualization, it is pertinent to clarify some of the key concepts inherent in the theme.

The Cross

The Greek word for "cross" *stauros*, verb *stauroo*, Latin *crux*, *crucifigo*, "I fasten to a cross", means primarily an upright stake or beam and secondarily a stake used as an instrument for punishment and execution" (Torrance, 1992, p. 256). Torrance asseverates that it is used in the later sense in the New Testament. The noun occurs 28 times and the verb 46 times. In their uncanny manner, Torrance (1992) and Retief and Cilliers (2003) state that apart from the single upright post (*crux simplex*) on which the convict was tied or imposed, there were three types of

cross. They are: the *crux commissa* (St. Anthony's cross) shaped like a capital T (*Tau* cross); the *crux decussate* (St. Andrew's cross), shaped like the letter X; and the well-known Latin cross, *crux immissa*, with the familiar two beams, held by tradition to be the shape of the cross on which Jesus died. This is variously supported by the references in the Gospel to the title nailed to the Cross of Christ over His head (Mt. 27:37; Lk. 23:33; Jn. 19: 17). In this study, the Cross is used as a bloody instrument of torture, where Jesus Christ was crucified.

Abuse of police power

According to Barker and Carter (2016) in Igbo (2017, p. 89), police abuse of power or authority conferred on them by the state refers to:

Any action by a police officer without regard to motive, intent or malice that tends to injure, insult, trespass upon human dignity, manifest feelings of inferiority and/or violates an inherent legal right of a member of the police constituency in the course of performing police work.

The author further delineates two forms of abuse of police authority. These are: physical abuse, which involves police brutality and violence in the discharge of police work; psychological abuse, which has to do with verbal assaults, harassment or ridiculing a citizen by the police. In physical abuse or coercion, suspects may be beaten up, physically assaulted, and tortured. They may be subjected to electric shocks, hand-cuffed, burnt with cigarette lights, and tear-gassed (Iroanya, 2016; Igbo, 2017). This present study adopts this conceptual framework as it reflects the situation in the Roman Empire.

Terrorism

The word terrorism is a derivative of terror and terrorist. Bruce (2021) in Bjorgo states that terrorism is a set of methods of combat rather than an identifiable ideology or movement, and involves premeditated use of violence against (primarily) non-combatants in order to achieve a psychological effect of fear on others other than the immediate targets. Furthermore, citing Fernando Reinales, Bruce (2021) distinguishes three traits that define terrorism for the purpose of academic study. Firstly, it is an act of violence that produces widespread disproportionate emotional reactions such as fear and anxiety, which are likely to influence attitudes and behaviour. Secondly, the violence is systemic and rather unpredictable and is usually directed against symbolic targets. Thirdly, the violence conveys messages and

threats in order to communicate and gain social control. Scholars have also conceptualised terrorism from different theoretical perspectives.

Udo (2026), citing Hoffman (2017) defines terrorism as the intentional use of violence by organised groups against civilians for political purposes. The author argues that terrorism is distinguished from ordinary criminal violence because it seeks symbolic and political effects beyond immediate physical destruction. Furthermore, the author views terrorism as a strategic method employed by groups that perceive themselves as politically marginalised or incapable of achieving objectives through conventional means. Gokpe and Aksu (2025) define terrorism as voluntary and purposeful terrorist activities that are used to intimidate specific populations and the broader masses by threatening to use conscious and planned violence in order to achieve political goals. Contextually, terrorism is the illegitimate use of force to achieve a political objective by targeting innocent people. This present study adopts this conceptual framework as it depicts the cultural world of Jesus of Nazareth.

Hope

Miller (2026), citing Worthington (2020) defines hope as a motivation to persevere toward a goal or end state, even if we are skeptical that a positive outcome is likely. Hope is best viewed as an ameliorating emotion, designed to fill the liminal space between need and reality. According to Lawlor (2022), hope is a feeling and a mindset that you have to work at in order to achieve your goals, despite trying and extenuating circumstances. Hope has two systems of operation that work hand in hand, and both are necessary for hope to be an effective therapeutic tool at an individual and collective level. Hope is crucial in times of uncertainty and in dealing with adversity. Admittedly, there is plenty of uncertainty in Nigeria at the moment. The flip side of hope is fear, and sometimes fear and despair are easier to fall into than hope. Fear disempowers hope and paralyses action by activating the anxiety and fear pathways in our brains. Rural communities in northern and southern Nigeria now fear terrorist attacks more than cancer and stroke. Fear has gripped residents as families flee in search of safety. When fear erases hope, despair sets in. Hence, I am convinced that creating a framework of hope around terrorism in Nigeria is crucial if we are to address and overcome the negative attitudes that permeate society around it. In context, hope is an emotion with spiritual dimensions. This opens the door to the arrest and trial of Jesus Christ.

THE ARREST AND TRIAL OF JESUS

John's account of Jesus' arrest and trial is a literary

masterpiece that demands to be read and heard. It establishes the context in which the crucifixion must be understood. Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus declared, "stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (7:24 NIV). Jesus appears to be on trial, but in reality, the world condemns itself in these scenes. On one level, it is a tale of terror, betrayal by a friend, a violent nighttime arrest of an innocent person, and the abuse of power by armed authorities. This narrative is a chilling scene, very familiar, and very contemporary for Christians in many parts of the world. But there is another level to this scene. Jesus freely chooses to place Himself before His enemies; the overwhelming authority of His sacred person hurling the power of darkness to the ground; and Jesus in command even at the moment of His arrest. Ostensibly, the Johannine Passion narrative spotlights that the tragedy of violent death is overwhelmed by the power of redemptive love. The most compelling statement of that love is, paradoxically, the death of Jesus. In giving His life "for His friends" (15:13), the most noble of human actions, Jesus reveals God's overwhelming love for the world.

Furthermore, in John's perspective, Satan induces Judas to betray Jesus (13:2). Judas allies with the Roman soldiers (only John mentions this) and guards from the priests and the Pharisees (18:3). Thus, the whole spectrum of power is arrayed against Jesus: Satan, Jew, and Gentile; demonic, secular, and religious (Barclay, 1975; Koester, 1991; Ryan, 2018; Bookman, 2018; Neyrey, 1995). But this phalanx of oppressive and even demonic power does not make Jesus a helpless victim. Earlier in the Gospel, the Johannine Jesus had stated His freedom in the face of death. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I receive from my Father (10:17-18 NIV). Ryan (2018, p. 2) elaborates on the ramifications of this as follows: Jesus confronts the powers with His sacred name: "I am" – the divine name which Jesus the Word reveals to the world. In the face of this, the power of death wilts and falls to the ground; not once but twice. Jesus, not death, is in command here. He lets His disciples leave (18:8 – they do not flee as in Mark and Matthew's accounts), and He restrains Peter from any violence on His behalf. Jesus will freely and willingly "drink the cup" of the Passion because in so doing, He fulfils His mission of revealing God's love for the world.

The last participant in the drama is Pilate. As Roman governor, he reported directly to Caesar and was considered the most powerful man in Judea. Pilate's questions to Jesus concerning kingship are met by Jesus' reply that He had come to bear witness to the truth. Although Pilate feigns ignorance, asking "What is truth?"; he actually knew something of the truth, namely, that Jesus is innocent (18:38). In this sense, Koester (1991, p. 89) submits that "Yet, Pilate is not of the truth. Jesus had

said “everyone who is of the truth hears my voice. Pilate questions, but does not listen for Jesus’ response (18:37-38).” As the drama progresses, Pilate continues to declare that Jesus is innocent (19:4, 6), but proves incapable of acting in accordance with that truth. In spite of Pilate’s claims of his power to deal with Jesus as he wishes (19:10), when he tries to release Jesus, he discovers he is powerless to do so (19:12). Pilate’s pretences are exposed when he capitulates to the powers of falsehood and hands Jesus over for execution. In sharp contrast, the Fourth Evangelist depicts “the truth as highly personalised. In John 14:6, Jesus does not claim to tell the Truth, but to be the Truth. Jesus tells the disciples. . . I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Griffith, 2002, p. 208).

In the light of this truth, the curtain that served to hide the Holy of Holies (Ex. 26:31-35) has been torn open (Mt. 27:57; Mk. 15: 38; Lk. 23:45) and the way is clear to approach God with confidence and hope (Heb. 10:19-25). On this score, Koester (1991, p. 90) emphatically states that:

It is the world, not Jesus, that stands condemned. Representatives of the entire world – Jewish, Roman, and Christian – are weighed and found wanting. The soldiers appear to have power and authority, but do not. Peter seems to be a loyal disciple, but denies his Lord. The Jewish authorities are guilty of rebellion against God and Rome, and the mighty Pilate proves powerless to act according to the truth. The sin of the world has been exposed. Jesus now goes to die as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29). The sign on the Cross will proclaim His identity in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek, for all the world to see (19:19-20).

Against this background, there are various examples of how this Evangelist, more insistently than the synoptics asserts the superhuman awareness of Jesus about humanity and His own mission, and of all that would happen as part of His return to the Father (2:25; 6:61, 64; 13:1, 11; 17:11-13; 18:4, 11).

On this point, Rogers (2022, p. 9) makes an apt submission thus “his whole manner of telling the story, including that of the Lord’s Passion, is designed to affirm the divine status of Jesus.” In recapitulation, the trial of Jesus before Pilate, which extends from 18:29-19:16a, is the central act of the Passion narrative in the Gospel of John. It has a careful theological and dramatic structure split into seven scenes. The main point of this theological structure is to show the kingship of Jesus. But apart from that, the structure incorporates an inner dynamism which unfolds. Upon the unjaundiced reading of the foregoing, John injects irony into his narrative. In the first scene, the religious leaders are concerned with maintaining ritual

purity but they are engaged in handing over the Son of God to the Romans. They are concerned to be ready for the feast of Passover (18:28), yet the Passover Lamb is about to be sacrificed.

Ryan (2018, p. 3) completes the point thus: “their joisting with the Roman procurator about legal rights leads ironically to Jesus being crucified, the very manner of death which the Johannine Jesus had predicted He would undergo being lifted up “for the life of the world” (3:14-15; 12:32-33). The climax of the Passion comes on Golgotha, where Jesus is crucified. Gleaning from the above, there were two legal systems that condemned Christ: the Jewish and the Roman, the very two which underlie modern jurisprudence. The arrest and proceeding under Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin were under Jewish law. Those under Pilate and Herod were under Roman law. Willmington (1984, p. 329), accurately points out that “the Jewish trials was illegal in several particulars (11:53, 18:19, cf. Mt. 26:62; 27:24). Welch (2020, p. 173) lay credence to the fact that “nothing like a normal, full Roman trial seems to have been held in Jesus’ case. As far as the Jewish leaders were concerned, at least according to the Gospel of John, Caiaphas had issued a ruling of the ‘council’ (11:51) but as the High Priest, that Jesus should die as a deceptive wonder-worker leading people to follow Him (11:47;50;12:11; cf. Deut. 13: 1-12).” To substantiate this fact, a few weeks before His entry into Jerusalem, Jesus was convicted in absentia by the Sanhedrin, in an ex parte proceeding suitable in abnormal, emergency cases involving robbers, traitors or evil workers leading people to follow Him and putting their faith in Him. Thus, all that remained was to plan how they would apprehend Him (11:53,57), along with His putative accomplice Lazarus (12:10), as well as how, when and by whom He should be executed. Notably, when “Jesus was taken from the Garden of Gethsemane to Caiaphas, there was no need for a retrial” (Welch, 2020, p. 173).

The implication in the above position is that the Sanhedrin used a crime control model which is based on the “presumption of guilt”, until a person is proven innocent. According to Igbo (2017, p. 88) this crime control model, which is favoured by the police, has been seen as the most important function of criminal justice. It reflects traditional conservative values based essentially on crime fighting. The model assumes that the repression of criminal conduct is the sine qua non of the criminal justice system.” On the other hand, Pilate used the status passage model, which focuses on societal reactions that are designed to publicly shame Jesus so as to humiliate Him and make Him become remorseful. Furthermore, there are two other value judgements that can be identified with the trial and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. They are the “due process model, which lays emphasis on the doctrine of “legal guilt” and the “presumption of innocence.” The due process model, which is favoured by the courts, assumes that “a person is innocent until proven

guilty by a court of competent jurisdiction. It advocates for a formal, adjudicative fact-finding process" (Bohm and Haley, 1997 as cited in Igbo, 2017, p. 88). This is what was served on the two criminals crucified with Jesus (Lk. 23:40-41). The other is the power control model that sees the criminal justice system as representing the interests of the powerful elites in society. This is what Pilate used in releasing Barabbas, "the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will" (18:40; Lk. 23:25).

JESUS AND HIGH CRIMES IN ROMAN JURISPRUDENCE

Rome took strong action against any threat or disrespectful conduct committed against the Roman people and its security. Apparently, the terror that came in the form of banditry, slave revolts, and popular rebellions was matched and surpassed by the terrorism of the imperial regime. To substantiate this fact, Welch (2020, p. 165) opines that "such matters were dealt with under the law of treason (*crimen maiestatis*). In Jesus' day, the law of *maiestas* condemned not only outright revolts or insurgencies but also treasonous conversation or expressions, the selling of a statue of the emperor for money, or spreading slanderous stories in the army with a seditious intent, if such conduct was directed against the deified Augustus, (his wife) Livia while she lived, and (his son) Tiberius. The potential penalty for such offences was death. The law of *maiestas* explains why the Jewish Chief Priest urged Pilate to take action against Jesus. For them, letting Jesus lay a miraculous spell on the emperor or speak "against Caesar" would certainly make Pilate no friend of Caesar (19:12) and such also would comprise an accusation of *maiestas populi Romani*.

This is clearly articulated by Legasse (1997) when he identifies treason (*maiestas*) as the reason for the death of Jesus, concluding that "Jesus was executed for having laid claim to royal power over His own people. Such a claim. . . fell under the accusation of *crimen maiestatis populi romani* (19:13) (Welch, 2020, p. 167). Magic and sorcery were also very serious concerns of the Roman State. Under Roman law, wonder-working or having a demon spirit was a serious offence. Jewish law had similar concerns, especially when such powers were presented as signs of divine approval or as miraculous wonders that encourage people to follow gods other than Jehovah (Ex. 28:18; Lev. 20:27; Deut. 13:1-12). Kunkel (1973) illuminates the consequences posed by this in Roman law and religion: "only a king (emperor) possessed the necessary magic power. . . due to the rightful king's closeness to the gods" through a sign (especially through the flight of birds) (Welch, 2020, p. 172). The author's viewpoint elaborates on this when he affirms that in Roman legal terminology, *maleficus* is "common parlance for "magician" and commonly denotes a sorcerer."

Its Latin cognate, *maleficium* (Greek *Kakopoiis*) is sometimes synonymous with *magia* (magic). The practice of magic was a capital offence when "performed with an evil intention to harm or defraud another." Consequently, at the time of Jesus, in AD II, certain forms of spell casting or use of supernatural powers had become high crimes punishable by death. Later, Rome would specify that the punishment for enchanterers or spell binders was crucifixion. These Roman and Jewish laws would explain the Chief Priests' answer to Pilate that they had found Jesus to be an evil-worker (*Kakourgos* or *Kakopoios*) and also behind Jesus' affirmation that His realm was not a kingdom of this world (Jn. 18:36). Brigands were a third serious threat to the social order of the Roman Empire. More than mere thieves, these bands of robbers attacked and plundered especially the elites, often appearing during times of heavy crisis. They operated openly, violently and often with the support and protection of poor, rural peoples. Roman law treated them as outlaws; therefore, they could be dealt with harshly (normally executed) under martial law or with no trial at all (Welch, 2020, p. 172). As a matter of fact, such brigands were popular among some anti-establishment segment of the general population. This position can help explain the demand from the crowd to release Barabbas, the rebel and murderer (Lk. 23:10), whose name in Aramaic means "son of *Abba*", that is, "son of the father", in place of Jesus, the "Son of God (Father) to die on the Cross (18:40) (Barker, 1995). Implicated in the foregoing discussion is the fact that Jesus was crucified on the pretext that He instigated rebellion against God and Rome, on a par with zealots and other political revolutionaries.

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AND THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION

According to Bauckham (1998, p. 18) theology of the Cross does not refer simply to the doctrine of the Cross, in which the Cross is seen as the focal point of Christ's work of salvation, but to an "understanding of the whole of theology as theology of the Cross, in that the Cross is seen as the focal point of God's revelation of Himself and therefore of the Cross. The Cross becomes a methodological key to the whole of theology." Seen against this background, it is in the humiliation of the Cross that Christ's divinity is most fully revealed. In the humanity, lowliness, and suffering of the Cross, the true God truly expresses His divine nature, which is His freedom to love humanity in this way, by contrast with all the false gods who cannot do so. Essentially then, the implications of this revelation of God in the Cross are a revolution in the concept of God, rejecting all notions of God not derived from the Cross. The death of Jesus as death, not of God, but in God, as an event between God and God, in which God abandons God to death, makes it necessary to conceive of God in terms of a Trinitarian history.

The Cross is the evidence of God's love in which the Son suffers abandonment by the Father, the Father suffers the death of the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the powerful love that spans the gulf between Father and Son and so reached god-forsaken humanity (Bauckham, 1998, p.182). Understood from a Christian perspective, the Cross is a Trinitarian event. The Christian faith is distinctively Trinitarian and cross-shaped. Therefore, the Cross reveals the Trinity. God the Father sent the Son to save the world, the Son submitted to the Father's will, and the Spirit applies the work of redemption to Jesus' followers. On this note, the remark of Torrance (1992, p. 254) is quite axiomatic; we quote him in extenso here;

The word "Cross" was used as a summary description of the Gospel of salvation, that Jesus Christ "died for our sins." So 'the preaching of the Gospel is the word of the Cross', the preaching of Christ crucified" (I Cor. 1:17ff). St. Paul glories 'in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ', and speaks of suffering persecution 'for the Cross of Christ'. . . 'The word 'Cross' here stands for the whole glad announcement of our redemption through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. . . 'The word of the Cross' is also 'the word of reconciliation' (2 Cor. 5:19).

The above quotation is a fitting characterisation of the theology of the Cross. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to point out that Jesus' absolute victory over the rulers of darkness is clearly stated in John 19:30, thus: "It is finished." Koester (1991, p. 90) tersely states that "the Cross brings Jesus ministry to its *telos* or "goal." Neyrey (2020:3) further states that "the story of Jesus' shame is ironically understood by His disciples as His lifting up, His exaltation, His enthronement, in short, His honour." The Cross is the completion, not the interruption of Jesus' ministry." This theme emerges clearly in the Epistle to the Ephesians and Colossians (Eph. 1:7-9; 2:14-16; Col. 1:20 ff; 2:13-15).

To illustrate this, Colossians 2:13-15 will suffice. The text spotlights three triumphs Jesus won by His death and His resurrection for the faithful. The faithful are forgiven (Col. 2:13). Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it has become possible for God to justly forgive the faithful (Jn. 1:29; I Pet. 2: 24-25). Also, Jesus has wiped out the handwriting of ordinances against the faithful (Col. 2:14). Ephesians 2: 15 speaks of the same truth (cf. Rom. 7:4; 10:4). More so, Jesus has disarmed principalities and powers (Col. 2:15). Accentuating to this fact, Prince (2013, p. 48) writes that when Jesus 'disarmed' or 'spoiled' His enemies, He "stripped them of all their armour and weapons. Having done so, He triumphed over them. He put them to an open, manifest, total, and irredeemable defeat. This has already happened. It is not going to

happen; it has happened." In Luke 11:21-22, Jesus gave a parable that illustrates His triumph. Jesus has defeated the fully armed strongman guarding his own palace, that is, Satan.

Most significantly, by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ, the faithful "has already been delivered from this present age" (Gal. 1:4), has been rescued from the rule of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God (Col. 2:14-15; I Pet. 2: 9-10). Again, in Christ, the faithful have already experienced death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4) and is already exalted to heaven (Eph. 2:6, 19-21). Chia (2005, p. 59) brings another significant factor into focus when he points out that "in the resurrection, Christ has already defeated the last enemy, death, and has made manifest the immortality that belongs to the new age (2 Tim. 1:10)." This is established by the fact that, the resurrection of Christ signals clearly the complete and irrevocable victory of God over the last enemy, death. This point is much more emphasised and clarified by Paul. When he queries, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 15:55-56 NIV).

But Paul's statement is possibly even more revealing when he said that "for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. . . I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Phil. 1:21-23 NIV). Understood from the standpoint of Christian theology, Chia (2005, p. 67) elucidates further that "God in Christ has vanquished death. . . For the unbeliever, death is a curse. It is not merely an end to earthly life, but is also eternal separation from God." For the believer, however, the curse is gone, and death has become a vanquished enemy now forced to submit to the will of God. Therefore, the faithful can face the prospect of death without fear because he understands that the effect of death is not final. Death is a vanquished enemy. This is why when the disciples proclaimed the resurrection, they were "not preaching a doctrine, a mere hope for the future. They were proclaiming an event in the present which guarantees the future. They were preaching in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Ladd, 1978 in Chia, 2005, p. 75).

Most poignantly, the Cross and resurrection bring peace, reconciliation, and unity. The words of Schreiner (2018, p. 1) are unmistakable in this regard;

At the Cross, the whole world has the opportunity to be reconciled to the Father. The peace that the world has been seeking; the unity of all people is found in the blood of Christ "for He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14). Reconciliation for the world, peace, and unity comes only by the blood of the Cross (Col. 1:20).

Following the crucifixion of Jesus, the governing authorities sensed that something was afoot, a birth, stir, and alive that represented a supreme threat to their power. They waited in fear (Mt. 27:62-66), and their worst fear was realised (Mt. 28: 1-7; Jn. 20:1-18) when Christ rose from the dead. Given the aforementioned, it will not be a hyperbole to say that John perfectly situates the resurrection as the terror of God (Rev. 11:3-11), and the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:15-17) that deprives the violent of their power. In effect, the resurrection is God's war on the terrorism of both guerrilla bands and nation states. To underscore this, Griffith (2002, p.269) states that:

Where terrorism fosters and reflects the disintegration of community, the resurrection marks the inauguration of community. Where terrorism reflects the dualism that identifies some people as evil and as fair targets, the bodily resurrection is an affirmation of the love that is due all people in spirit and body. Where terrorism reflects a messianism that announces and encourages the violent conflagration of the world, the resurrection is God's incarnation in the world. Where terrorism assembles sufficient quantities of weapons to assure victory, the resurrection is embodied in the one who suffers defeat. Where terrorism sows and reaps death, the resurrection is God's reaping of life from the grave.

What is clear from the foregoing is the fact that the old order, married by sin and death, corruption and decay, wickedness and evil, will give way to a new order that is resurrection, characterised by perfection, harmony, and blessedness. Against this salubrious background, the resurrection gives hope in a time such as this. This resurrection gives hope that non-state armed groups, terrorist sponsors, superpowers, and oppressors of minority groups, as well as state actors, criminals, and religious baits, might cease from spreading their "terror in the hand of the living" (Ezk. 32:22-32). Inexorably, it is the promise of the resurrection which renders null and void the victories of all who shed blood, either in the past or in contemporary society.

Gunton (1998) as cited in Chia (2005, p.145) gives the most impressive and breathtaking description of this as follows;

The New Testament indicates that the irrational force of evil can be understood only in its defeat by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. In the incarnation, Jesus Christ made manifest the character of evil as the enemy of the created order by taking on human flesh and bearing

the effects of evil in it in order to destroy it. . . The defeat of evil through the Cross of Christ means that God has chosen to eradicate evil eschatologically. Evil will be destroyed in God's "good time", just as God takes His time in perfecting the creation. By the Cross, God profoundly tuned evil against itself.

To put it in perceptive, in the Cross, evil is conquered as evil in that the supreme crime, the murder of the only righteous man, becomes the means for the abolition of sin. In this "sin of sins", the murder of the incarnate Son, the greatest love is demonstrated and the wages earned by human sin are paid for. In the Cross, God's justice, that is, "that evil be punished, is met by love, in the giving of His Son, innocent of sin, to take the place of the guilty vicariously" (Chia, 2005, p:145).

It is poignant to know that the Cross and the resurrection of Christ reveal the dialectical nature of hope. In Jesus Christ, the Cross, though the most brutal execution method in history, became the greatest symbol of hope the world has ever seen. God took the ugliest, bloodiest thing, and made it beautiful. He took a Roman tool of death and turned it into the resurrection key. Additionally, God took shame, scandal, powerlessness, weakness, and opprobrium suddenly, transforming it into glory, honour, pre-eminence, laudation and applause (Kukah 2022). To quote Chia's (2005, p. 149) delightful and profound expression in this sense will suffice:

Hope is dialectical simply because present conditions are antithetical to those for which we hope. We hope for righteousness in the midst of moral degradation for justice in the midst of injustice and oppression, and for life in the midst of death. In the dialectic of destiny, we confront our folly, sinfulness, weakness, and mortality, and in doing this we also confront, through grace, the wisdom, and righteousness, and power, and everlasting God.

Implicated in the above position is that the resurrection of Christ is constitutive of the Christian hope in the resurrection. Incontrovertibly, every drop of blood that is shed such as that of Mrs Eunice Elisha Olawale, a 42 year old mother of seven while evangelizing around Gbazango-West area of Kubwa, a satellite town in Abuja in July 9, 2016; Mrs Bridget Patience Agbaheme, a 74 year old Igbo woman on the flimsy and unjustifiable excuse of blasphemy on Thursday June 3, 2016 by unthinking fanatics at Kofar Wambai market in Kano, Kano State confirms that their defeat is already sealed. The death and resurrection of Christ eloquently reveal that life is stronger than death, hope is stronger than despair, and that in the end, the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of

our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever (Rev. 11:15) (Smaller, 1994). Importantly, the resurrection gives hope of the second coming of Christ in glory, judgment of the wicked, and eternal life for the righteous who are persecuted.

TERRORISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

In recent years, acts of terrorism have become the most dangerous threats to world order. They have become so pervasive that no country on earth can claim immunity from its violent acts of bombing, shooting, armed robbery, hostage taking and demand for ransom, kidnapping, bank robbery, train attack, plane hijacking, displacement of local communities and killings. They have become so prevalent that no nation is immune from the act of terrorism. In particular, since September 11, 2001, when Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda struck the twin towers of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the United States of America, the world has never been the same. From the Nazi Holocaust to communist dictatorship, to apartheid in South Africa, to the Rwandan genocide, to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, to the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian and Gaza-Israel conflicts, as well as the Vietnam syndrome, terror strikes at random inflicting pain, fear, mass murder, the destabilisation of established society, and regimes (Griffith, 2012; Iroanya, 2022).

Bemoaning the precarious situation, Cardinal Renato Martino, former Pope John Paul's Ambassador to the United Nations and later, head of the Vatican Council for Justice and Peace, said:

We have entered the fourth world war, I believe we are in the midst of another world war and it involves absolutely everyone because we don't know what will happen when we leave a hotel, when we get on a bus, when we go into a coffee bar, war itself is sitting down right next to each and everyone of us (Osewa, 2019, p. 341).

Closer home, society is engulfed by terrible acts of terrorism. These include: illegal oil bunkering in the Niger Delta by Niger Delta militants, IPOB agitations in the South East, separatist agitations in the South West, Boko Haram and ISIS-affiliated terrorist groups in the North East, banditry, Fulani herdsman attacks in the North West and North Central. With these activities, Nigeria is sitting precariously on a keg of gunpowder that can explode any time soon. Ostensibly, society has become a theatre of genocide, bloodshed, and insecurity conducted in different forms, means, and places. These include: bombing and killing of persons and targeting certain persons and places such as worship centres, living homes, commercial buildings, telecommunication masts, government

installations and infrastructure, kidnapping, abductions, as well as depriving people of their legitimate entitlement (Majekodunmi, 2015; Iroanya, 2016; Osewa, 2019). These terrorist activities are carried out by non-state actors against politicians, religious leaders, traditional rulers, teachers, students, farmers, market men and women, and government functionaries, including security agents that ought to protect lives and properties. All efforts by the security agencies and humanitarian organisations in combating the security challenges have only yielded little positive result. As attacks are carried out almost on a daily basis, the security situation in Nigeria is becoming more worrisome.

An extensive report by Majekodunmi (2015), Imhonopi and Urim (2016), and Osewa (2019) reveal that *Boko Haram* are known to be championing their course with the use of arms such as AK 47 rifles, bombs, knives and cutlasses, rocket propelled grenade (RPG), improved explosive devices (IED), sub-machine guns (SMG), and heavy guns such as general purpose machine guns (GPMG), and armored tanks. With the above arms and others, they easily perpetrate acts of terror on the citizens. As the Punch Editorial of October 26, 2021 has clearly shown, bandits numbering hundreds of thousands, that is, 30,000 in Zamfara State alone said Governor Bello Metawalle; and 20,000 in only six northern states such as Zamfara, Sokoto, Borno, Kebbi, Kaduna, and Plateau have murdered thousands of innocent citizens, kidnapped thousands of others for ransom, burnt down entire villages and displaced farmers from scores of communities in North West, North East, and North Central states. The results of terrorists' and insurgents' primary activities of these groups are indiscriminate mass murder, creation of fear, and instability. Motivated primarily by the impetus for forcible seizure of land and profit, bandits and Fulani herdsman have also forged links with terrorists seeking religious and political suzerainty through military conquest.

For instance, in mass kidnappings, the herder-killers are even more prolific, outshining their allies, *Boko Haram* and ISIS-affiliated terrorists, in the numbers and frequency of abduction of school children and adults alike. Hundreds have been abducted in brazen daylight and nighttime operations, one just over 100 kilometres away from Daura, Katsina State, where President Muhammadu Buhari was vacationing. Like in the North East, the economy of the North West and North Central is tottering, and schooling has been disrupted all over the North that was already the world's capital for out of school children and extreme poverty. Consequently, the effects of terrorists' activities such as suicide bombings, kidnapping, hostage-taking, destruction of lives, public infrastructure, private and entrepreneurs' investments, the climate of fear, panic, and confusion, as well as hatred and an ungovernable polity, have continued to make Nigeria an unsuitable bride for foreign direct investments. Beyond *Boko Haram* and ISWAP insurgency, the continuing uneven distribution of

oil revenues, high levels of corruption, and violence across Nigeria pose significant challenges to Nigerian security (Imhonopi and Urim, 2016).

On the other side of the spectrum, research by Iroanya (2016), Mayah (2016), and Igbo (2017) has revealed that the use and abuse of police powers and extrajudicial killings in Nigeria are rife with lawlessness and corruption. Police terror and its militarisation is brutally showcased in the APO six killings on June 8, 2005, in Abuja by some officers and men of the Nigeria Police Force, and the killing of a seventeen-year-old Gabriel Agada on February 14, 2014, by policemen in Wuse 2 police station (Iroanya, 2016). Recently, it also occurred at Onitsha, the commercial capital of Anambra State, as a group of soldiers stationed at the Head Bridge Market opened fire on jubilant crowds who poured out into the streets to celebrate a court ruling in favour of the release of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the separatist Biafran Organisation (IPOB) on December 17, 2015. Twelve persons perished in the fatal shooting, while many others were seriously wounded. Also, on February 9, 2016, officers of the Nigerian Army killed twenty-two unarmed suspected IPOB members holding a prayer meeting at Ngwa High School, Obuda, along Port Harcourt Road, Aba, Abia State.

Thus, from Onitsha to Aba, Enugu to Umuahia, Owerri to Ohafia, “maximum force” has been “the operational code for the unprecedented police and military brutality that has led to the extra-judicial killings of an unknown number of defenceless civilians across the South East” (Mayah, 2016, p. 1). Mayah (2016, p. 1) notes with uncanny insight that between August 2015 and February 2016, about 170 “unarmed citizens” were “shot dead or critically injured while about 400 others were arrested, charged or detained without trial. These victims go through torture and inhuman and degrading treatment at the hands of personnel of the Nigeria Police Force” (Mayah, 2016, p. 1). Expectedly, there are scores of reported cases of disappearances, abductions, and pretrial killings of suspected members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). Other victims of extrajudicial killings, sometimes called extralegal killings, by the Nigerian security agencies include: armed robbers, suspected kidnappers, oil buccaneers or pirates and oil thieves who engage in pipeline vandalism.

Nonetheless, many innocent Nigerians have been killed extrajudicially at police checkpoints, in police stations, on the highways, and in their homes for failure to give bribes, refusal to stop at police checkpoints, perceived or real rudeness to the security agents, suspicion of being a cultist, armed robber or IPOB member. These gruesome and barbaric killings of citizens are perpetrated in the name of “fighting crime” or “crime control.” This graphically describes the situation in the cultural world of Jesus Christ where the Jewish leaders and the Romans used crucifixion

as a crime control model. What is more worrisome in the deprivation of life without full judicial and legal process is that, even members of the public sometimes engage in extralegal killing or what in Nigeria is generally referred to as “jungle justice” by lynch-mob. The uncouth and senseless killing of Deborah Samuel Yakubu, a 200 level Home Economics female student of Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto, Sokoto State, on Tuesday, May 11, 2022, for allegedly insulting and blaspheming against Almighty Allah and Prophet Mohammed by her fellow students graphically illustrates this point.

The rampaging students who were demanding her blood were shouting “*Allahu Akbar*”, translated in English as “God is great” before they killed her. After killing her, her body was burnt on the school premises. Her killers made a disturbing video showing their faces and claiming responsibility for killing the poor Christian (Olorok, 2022; Kayode, 2022; Salman, 2022). Similarly, Mrs Bridget Patience Agbaheme, a 74-year-old Igbo woman, was killed on the flimsy and unjustifiable reason of blasphemy on Thursday, June 3, 2016, by unthinking fanatics at Kofar Wambai market in Kano, Kano State. Astonishingly, but also tellingly, Odinaka (2022, p. 1) narrates that the Kano State Government quickly announced the arrest and arraignment of five men in connection with Madam Bridget’s lynching: “Dauda Ahmed, Abdullahi Mustapha, Zubairu Abubakar, Abdullahi Abubakar, and Musa Abdullahi. A mere five months after Bridget’s murder, the Kano State Government itself withdrew the charges against the five suspects. Like Bridget, this case died, never to be resurrected.”

Continuing, the author asserts that in August 1995, a young Christian trader from South East Nigeria, Gideon Akaluka, was beheaded in Kano State, again on unverified allegations of blasphemy. Some high-profile arrests followed but, as with the case of Bridget Agbaheme more than two decades later, the suspects were never brought to book. Instructively, behind every unlawful arrest, prolonged detention and abuse of state power are real human beings and families whose lives can be permanently destroyed. Nigeria cannot continue to be an unjust nation operated by cruel and violent men in government who wield state power without accountability. Expressing his abhorrence a little more light-heartedly, Kefas (2021) famously noted that hundreds of Christian communities in Northern Nigeria have been held under siege by Fulani terrorists. Killings of Christians in genocidal proportions have continued unabated, with no one being prosecuted for such crimes against humanity. For instance, the former Nigerian Government headed by Major General Muhammadu Buhari Rtd and the present Government, led by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, have done little or nothing serious to put an end to the carnage against Christians and minorities in the Northern part of the country. What it attests to unequivocally is the fact that Northern Christians, wherever they are in the minority, are

facing elevated persecution at the hands of their predominantly Muslim sisters and brothers in their neighbourhoods. This crime control model also spotlights the fact that, truly, this minority group of Christians are endangered. Another unfortunate development in such extralegal killings is the involvement, complicity, tolerance or acquiescence of the Government or its agents. More importantly, this also depicts the experience of Jesus Christ, who was arrested with the involvement of Government agencies and charged with blasphemy (10:33, 18: 3-14; 19:12 cf. Mk. 14:61-64). This paradoxical contrast between life in religious centres and life in other daily activities raises new implications of the terror of the Cross and the hope of the resurrection in contemporary society.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Among the many implications of the terror of the Cross and the hope of the resurrection, this study will spotlight the following:

Victory by the blood

John, the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (13:23; 19:26) is thoroughly Christocentric in referring to Jesus of Nazareth in "shorthand" focusing attention on His death and resurrection. The "slaughtered Lamb" (1:29, 36), John's favoured image for Jesus, is worthy (Rev. 5:9-10), and the Paschal Lamb whose blood compelled the destroyer to pass over as the Israelites set out upon their exodus to freedom (Ex. 12: 21-33). Griffith's (2002, pp. 210-211) viewpoint elaborates on this, "the Lamb is also the Shepherd (Rev. 7:17). And the powerful Lion of Judah (Gen. 49:9-10; 1 Macc. 3:4), the symbol of royalty, is identified as Christ, the slaughtered Lamb (Rev. 5:5)." The royal strength of the Lion of Judah is derived not from its ability to slaughter but from its identity as the slaughtered Lamb.

From the foregoing, it is significant that the forces of Satan are not defeated by the terror of violence and armaments but by "the blood of the slaughtered Lamb" and by the testimony of the martyrs who "did not cling to life even in the face of death" (Rev. 12:11). Blood is the means by which mighty empires and terrorists of all stripes seek to claim their victories, but John unveils that it is precisely their own shedding of blood that is the means by which the powers are defeated. The shed blood of the Lamb and of the martyrs becomes the instrument of God's victory. This point is sufficiently significant to stress if only because it is often neglected

Gleaning from the above, the blood of the Lamb and the blood of the martyrs will be fruitful as it is put to use in the service of God's reign. No suffering for the love of God is

ever forgotten; no sacrifice is ever without fruit. As Elul (1977) in Griffith (2002, p. 212) affirms, "there is an auto-destruction of political forces at the interior of history. That which makes them live, that which gives them authority, that upon which they are based, is the very spirit that finally repudiates them." Essentially then, blood is the foundation, the sustenance, the glory, and the apotheosis of every superpower, terrorist, jihadist, unknown gunmen, killer herdsman, cultist, trigger-happy security agent, lynch mob, and murderer. It is this same blood of the victims that they thought was gone forever that now comes back in mighty torrents to mark their fall.

Transformed and authentic witnesses needed

One of the greatest wonders of the world has been the spread of Christianity. Defying power and persecution (Acts 4: 1-22; 5:17-34; 17:5-9), the Christian faith has and continues to spread across the globe, bringing together people of every race and culture. The Christian faith is cherished and preached from Africa to China to South America. This is happening despite the bitter opposition that Christians have endured from the first century, as already indicated. Certainly, one may ask, what is it that fuels this missionary enterprise and makes it, against the odds, unstoppable? The answer is in the disciples' testimony before the Sanhedrin: "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, Whom God has given to those who obey Him" (Acts 4:32 NIV). Mbewe (2015, p. 80) completes the point thus: "Good news is indeed the heart of it. Christians know that we have the best, most important, and most joyful news in the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15)." Accordingly, the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is Good News, and the faithful cannot keep it to themselves. Like John, the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (19:35-36), who represents authentic discipleship, the faithful is called upon to bear witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

According to the Fourth Evangelist, the first resurrection scene roots discipleship in the faithfulness of Christ by showing how Jesus gives His disciples the gifts of peace (14:27, 20:19-21), joy (16:20-22; 20:20), and the Holy Spirit (14: 26; 20:22) as He had promised. Without mincing words, Koester (1991) notes that Jesus then sends His disciples into the world as God has sent Him into the world (17:18; 20:21), to forgive and retain sins. In John's narrative, retaining sins means to identify and hold people accountable for sins, as Jesus had done (7:7, 8:24, 9:40). Sins are identified to awaken the need for grace, just as the world's sin was exposed in John 18-19 before Christ died to save it. Repentance is done for the sake of forgiveness, in the same way a frank diagnosis prepares a patient for a cure. This Great Commission (20:21) places on the faithful and the Church a great responsibility of taking the Gospel to all parts of Nigeria and beyond,

through evangelism, discipleship, social delivery, and promotion of social righteousness.

In this regard, the faithful without a Cross is a faithful without a climax; a faithful without an ending, a faithful without a solution. In avid agreement with this position, Schreiner (2018, p.1) opines that “the Cross is the marching order for Christians. The Cross is more than a near-universal symbol of Christianity. It carries the message of love, finality, fulfilled promises, and the ultimate emblem of faith.” In a significant sense, then, the message of Christ’s “witnesses” is not confined to physical borders or limitations; neither can it be controlled or killed (Mt. 16:18; Acts 1:8; 2 Tim. 2:9). It transcends any label or box men may deem appropriate. According to White (n.d, p. xiii), in his foreword to the 30th anniversary edition of *Tortured For Christ*, the original Greek word for “witness” means “martyr.” The writer of Hebrews states that we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses (martyrs)” (12:1), and Jesus instructs us in Acts 1:8, “you shall be witnesses (martyrs) to me in Jerusalem. . . and to the ends of the earth.”

In the same vein, T. S. Eliot, in his play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, describes a martyr as one who has become an instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, not lost it, but found it, for he has found freedom in submission to God. The martyr no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of martyrdom (White, n.d, p. xii). By this description, many have lost the true significance and depth of martyrdom. In the true sense, the faithful personal testimony to the truth, power, and Lordship of Christ comes at a great cost. It can cost the faithful his reputation, popularity, prestige, time, talent, and treasure. It may even cost them their families, friends, careers or even their lives (12:25-26 cf. Mt. 16:24-26; Mk.8:34-36; Lk. 14:25-27; Phil. 1:29). In any case, the Church has deployed men and materials to carry her Gospel Commission of mission, evangelism, and witnessing to bless the local community, city, and the nation in which she is planted. Evangelism remains the primary mission of the Church, and she uses three basic ways to fulfil this commission. They are: preaching (1 Cor. 15:1-4; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 4:2-5); witnessing (20:21; Acts 1:8; 2 Tim. 2:2), and transformational service (13:34 cf. Mt. 25:34-40; Lk. 4:14-18).

According to Wong and Rae (2011, p. 284) transformational service is “a calling for the common good”, that is “a calling on personal, institutionalised, and structural levels to serve God and participate in His mission of bettering the lives of others in multiple dimensions.” This framework clearly relates to bettering people’s lives both as individuals and as a community, both present and future. Okowa (2022, p. 1) equally reinforces the above position when he posits that the church’s desires for societal transformation begin with “transformed individuals. . . Transformed hearts and minds are veritable instruments for change, development, and

societal advancement. . . We are not witnesses of Christ by words alone; our faith must impact our conduct and character, otherwise it is in vain.” The message of the witnesses or testifiers is so powerful that they are admonished to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:1-2).

Perseverance in trial

In contemporary society, many soldiers of Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:4) are suffering persecution because of their faith in Christ. As already mentioned, for millions of Christians in Asia, China, Nigeria, Sudan, and many Islamic states, death is the result of faithfulness to unneringly and courageously attest that Jesus Christ is Lord (Mbugua, 2015). In fact, Islamic terrorism has brought the possibility of martyrdom for Christ to any street in the world. One can think of the Christians singled out and kidnapped as they gathered for prayer in Borno, Kaduna, Katsina, and Kwara States. With the above, it is clear that perseverance is a key to spiritual maturity and to carrying the Cross of Christ. Perseverance serves as the conveyor belt upon which godliness can be delivered. Wilson (2002, p. 110) succinctly states that perseverance means “to remain constant despite obstacles or discouragement. Without perseverance, there is little hope of complete or lasting change.”

Perhaps her key insight is that to persevere is to be steadfast in doing something despite difficulties or delays. Accordingly, perseverance involves setting your mind on a goal and not allowing anything, including shame, humiliation, and status degradation, to stop you from achieving it (18:11 cf. Heb. 12:2). In this case, perseverance is something the faithful has to learn, like surfing a wave or riding a bike. This is clearly articulated in Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2-4, where the faithful is exhorted to embrace trials as opportunities to cultivate perseverance, character, and hope as well as love. To use the biblical story of Ruth, the Moabites, to illustrate perseverance as a key ingredient for carrying the Cross (18:17 cf. Mt. 10:38-39) and for spiritual maturity will suffice. Ruth completed a season of harvesting, symbolising carrying her Cross, which prepared her to marry Boaz. Had she not persevered in gleaning (carrying her Cross) both physically and spiritually, it is likely her life would have taken a very different course. Ruth’s perseverance to continue working in the field and her persistence in loving Naomi won her the attention of both Boaz and the people of Bethlehem (Ruth 2:11; 4:14-15). They praised Ruth for her unusual devotion and acknowledged the character produced in her as a result of her perseverance (Ruth 3:11).

On this point, Wilson (2002, p. 110) experience is once

again pertinent. Ruth persevered through the entire harvest season. Day after day, she "faithfully showed up to glean. Symbolically, she completed the full sequence of spiritual maturity. By persevering, she allowed God to cleanse and mold her into the bride He desired to bear His seed." Implicated in the foregoing, like Ruth, the faithful persevere when they daily meet the Lord in the fields of spiritual instruction. Through prayer and fasting, meditation and worship, Bible study and evangelism, and so on, they glean from the Lord what they need to grow up in Him. The test question here is: what is the motivation to persevere in carrying the Cross with the terrors? What in the world could possibly sustain the faithful in such a long, hot, and difficult pursuit? There is only one motivation strong enough to overcome the opposition, persecution, imprisonment, pain of rejection, betrayal, hunger, mocking, flogging, torture, and even death. In the words of Wilson (2002, p. 111), that one motivation is:

Lovesickness. . . Only "lovesickness" can withstand the refining flames of persecution or the quenching effects of time. True love enables us to remain constant regardless of opposition. Because it finds its source in God alone, true love cannot fail. Therefore, love is the surest foundation for all spiritual growth. . . Only through love can we hope to persevere and purify ourselves until we become like Jesus – not mixed, not compromised, and not overextended. Love is the only element that overwhelmingly identifies His nature and thus, should also identify ours.

To put it more concretely, "lovesickness" is the disciples' longing for the full realisation of "holy love." It is an apt description of wholehearted devotion in an awakened soul. Therefore, because of this holy love, the faithful will voluntarily lose sleep, sacrifice pleasure, initiate missionary enterprise; risk their lives, and forfeit all their belongings for the one whom they love and who first loved them (3:16-17; 13:34; 15:12 ff, cf. Jn. 1:4:9-10; Rom. 5:8). Accordingly, this steadfast love creates patience in adversity, thankfulness in prosperity, and confidence that nothing can separate the faithful from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:26-39 cf. 10:28-30).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined Johannine understanding of the terror of the Cross and the hope of the resurrection. The major finding of this study is that the Johannine narrative captures how the essential core of the Passion lay not in the shame and horror heaped upon Jesus of Nazareth, but in His "lifting up" (3:14-15; 12:27-28, 31-33), His exaltation, His enthronement; in short, His honour and glory. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to summarise the

finding by stating that Jesus' absolute victory over the prince of this world (12:31) is clearly stated in John 19:30, thus "It is finished." This finding elaborates on the ramifications of this victory to include that on the Cross, evil is conquered as evil, principalities and powers are disarmed, the faithful is forgiven, and the defeat of the last enemy, death, is complete and irrevocable. Accordingly, in a society that is being torn apart by violence of all kinds and high levels of corruption, the resurrection gives hope in a time such as this. It gives hope that non-state armed groups and state actors, terrorist sponsors, religious extremists, and oppressors of minority groups will cease from spreading their "terror in the land of the living" (Ezek. 32:22-32 cf. Jn. 18-19) because a day of judgement is coming.

Furthermore, the finding gives hope that every drop of blood shed, such as that of Mrs Eunice Elisha, Madam Bridget Agbahema, Miss Deborah Samuel Yakubu, those killed in St. Francis Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo State, and among others, confirms that the defeat of those killers and terrorists is already sealed. This victory by the blood of the Lamb (1:29, 36) and by the testimony of the martyrs (Rev. 12:11) empowers the faithful to persevere in the face of persecution. This perseverance produces character, hope, and love (Rom. 5:3-5) as well as obedience to the Great Commission (20:21). Therefore, as Nigeria still totters and wobbles as we screech towards a dangerous and avoidable canyon of dry bones, the faithful still cling to hope, a hope in the resurrected Christ, knowing as St. Paul; said, 'this hope does not disappoint us' (Rom.5:5). This study stresses that the crucifixion is the touchstone of Christian authenticity, the unique feature by which everything else is given true significance. Incontrovertibly, this study concludes that the empty Cross, like the empty tomb, is the sign of victory. Christ has departed in glory and will soon return in glory.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. There should be an establishment of a Church-Government Security Consultative Forum at national, state, and local levels to improve security infrastructure around religious institutions, schools, and public institutions.
2. There should be concerted efforts to strengthen interfaith cooperation among Christian and Muslim leaders to deepen understanding of each other's faith and to focus more on the issues of welfare, safety, and security of ordinary citizens.
3. Develop community-based early warning and early response systems.
4. The faithful are encouraged to learn perseverance, which involves setting your mind on a goal and not allowing anything, including shame, humiliation, and status degradation, to stop you from achieving it (18:11 cf. Heb. 12:2).

5. Accordingly, the faithful are exhorted to embrace trials as opportunities to cultivate perseverance, character, and hope as well as love.
6. Strengthen judicial accountability and prosecution of terrorists, jihadists, killer herdsmen, cultists, trigger-happy security agents, lynch mobs, terrorist sponsors, religious extremists and all who are complicit in the carnage against Christians and minorities in various parts of the country. In particular, there should be justice for the victims and the rest of the country they have destroyed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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