



Deliver Us from Violent Men (Psalm 140:1): Kidnapping and the Biblical Mandate for Justice in Nigeria

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Abstract

Kidnapping has emerged as one of the gravest manifestations of insecurity and structural violence in contemporary Nigeria, threatening human dignity, family life, social cohesion, economic stability, and religious freedom. This article examines the phenomenon of kidnapping through the lens of Psalm 140:1, “Deliver me, O Lord, from evil men; preserve me from violent men,” interpreting the Psalm as both a cry for divine intervention and a theological mandate for justice.

Employing historical-critical and contextual hermeneutical methodologies, the study explores the biblical understanding of violence, oppression, and justice in relation to the Nigerian socio-political context. The paper argues that kidnapping in Nigeria is sustained by systemic corruption, unemployment, weak governance, poverty, ritual criminality, and the erosion of family and moral values, thereby constituting not merely a criminal act but a structural evil that undermines the sanctity of life. Drawing from biblical ethics, prophetic traditions, and Catholic social teaching, the study contends that the Church and the state share a moral responsibility to protect vulnerable citizens, promote restorative justice, and address the root causes of violence. Furthermore, the article highlights the role of faith communities in advocacy, peacebuilding, moral formation, trauma healing, and the promotion of social accountability. The study concludes that Psalm 140:1 remains profoundly relevant in Nigeria’s context of insecurity, serving as both a lament against violent oppression and a prophetic call for justice, compassion, and societal transformation. By integrating biblical theology with contemporary realities, the article contributes to ongoing theological and ethical discourses on insecurity, human dignity, and national healing in Nigeria.

Key Words: Kidnapping, Violence, Justice, Biblical Mandate, Nigeria, Structural Evil

Introduction

Nigeria in recent decades has witnessed an alarming rise in violent crimes, among which kidnapping has become one of the most disturbing threats to human security, national stability, and social development. Once largely associated with militancy and political agitation in the Niger Delta region, kidnapping has evolved into a nationwide criminal enterprise affecting virtually every geopolitical zone of the country. Clergy, traditional rulers, politicians, students, farmers, business persons, and ordinary citizens have increasingly become targets of abduction for ransom, ritual purposes, political intimidation, or terrorist activities. The growing prevalence of kidnapping has generated widespread fear, psychological trauma, economic hardship, and deep mistrust within communities, thereby undermining the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the Nigerian person.



The persistence of kidnapping in Nigeria reflects broader structural problems within the nation's socio-political and economic systems. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, weak law enforcement, political instability, moral decadence, and the proliferation of arms have contributed significantly to the escalation of violent crimes. In many parts of the country, insecurity has disrupted agricultural production, educational activities, religious worship, and commercial enterprise, while also forcing families and communities into displacement and uncertainty. The inability of state institutions to adequately protect citizens has intensified public frustration and raised critical ethical and theological questions concerning justice, governance, and the value of human life.

Within this context of violence and insecurity, the biblical cry of Psalm 140:1 becomes profoundly relevant: "Deliver me, O Lord, from evil men; preserve me from violent men." The Psalm reflects the lament of individuals and communities confronted by oppression, injustice, and threats to life. Traditionally attributed to David, Psalm 140 is both a prayer for divine protection and a protest against violent oppression. The text portrays God as the defender of the vulnerable and the righteous judge who opposes wickedness and injustice. Consequently, the Psalm provides an important theological framework for interpreting contemporary experiences of violence in Nigeria, particularly the menace of kidnapping.

Biblical theology consistently upholds justice, peace, and the protection of human dignity as central dimensions of God's covenantal relationship with humanity. The Old Testament prophets repeatedly condemned oppression, exploitation, and violence against the weak, while the teachings of Jesus Christ emphasized love of neighbour, compassion, reconciliation, and justice. The biblical mandate for justice therefore extends beyond personal morality to include social responsibility, institutional accountability, and the defense of vulnerable persons. In the Nigerian context, kidnapping represents not merely a criminal offense but a structural evil that contradicts the divine intention for human flourishing and communal peace.

This article examines kidnapping in Nigeria through the theological lens of Psalm 140:1 and the broader biblical mandate for justice. It argues that the phenomenon of kidnapping must be understood not only as a security challenge but also as a moral, spiritual, and socio-ethical crisis requiring holistic responses from the Church, the state, traditional and civil society. Using historical-critical and contextual hermeneutical approaches, the study explores the causes and implications of kidnapping, analyzes the theological significance of Psalm 140:1, and proposes biblically grounded pathways toward justice, peacebuilding, and national healing. By integrating scriptural insights with contemporary Nigerian realities, the article contributes to ongoing theological and ethical discourses on violence, insecurity, and the defense of human dignity in Nigeria/Africa.

Conceptual Clarifications

Violence generally refers to the intentional use of force, power, or coercion that causes physical, psychological, social, or economic harm to individuals or communities. In the Nigerian context, violence has assumed multidimensional forms, including terrorism, banditry, herder/farmer conflict, communal clashes, armed robbery, ritual killings, and kidnapping. Johan Galtung's classical understanding of structural violence remains significant in explaining how unjust social



systems perpetuate suffering and inequality. Galtung argues that violence is not limited to physical assault alone but also includes social structures that prevent individuals from attaining their full humanity (169). In this sense, structural evil refers to institutionalized patterns of injustice embedded within political, economic, and social systems that sustain oppression and insecurity.

Within the Nigerian situation, kidnapping represents a manifestation of both direct and structural violence. While the act itself involves physical abduction and intimidation, its persistence is connected to systemic corruption, poverty, unemployment, weak governance, and the failure of state institutions. Nigerian theologians and social analysts increasingly interpret insecurity as evidence of deeper structural injustices affecting the nation. Scholars observe that insecurity in Nigeria has become a recurring phenomenon threatening sustainable development and social stability (Ngwoke and Kwaja 6). Similarly, others maintain that kidnapping in Nigeria cannot merely be understood as isolated criminality but as part of a wider “political economy of violence” sustained by systemic dysfunctions (Verjee 2).

Theologically, structural evil contradicts the biblical understanding of justice and the dignity of the human person created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) (Gen. 1:26-27). Gutiérrez contends that social injustice and oppression are sinful structures because they diminish human dignity and alienate people from God and society (175). Moreover, African communal life is rooted in solidarity and respect for human life; therefore, violence against persons undermines both community and spirituality.

In present-day Nigeria, kidnapping has evolved into several forms, including ransom kidnapping, terrorist abductions, ritual kidnapping, political kidnapping, and child abduction. The rise of school kidnappings in northern Nigeria further demonstrates the transformation of kidnapping into organized criminal violence. Verjee and Kwaja maintain that the phenomenon has become an “epidemic,” fueled by corruption, poor governance, and weak security structures (13). Gando similarly observes that kidnapping now threatens religious institutions, educational systems, and communal peace, creating fear and instability within Nigerian society (27).

The contextual reality of kidnapping in Nigeria reveals the intersection between socio-economic deprivation and moral collapse. Scholars such as Iwilade note that unemployment, inequality, and youth marginalization have intensified criminal activities among frustrated populations (1). Nevertheless, economic hardship alone cannot sufficiently explain kidnapping, since greed, ritual beliefs, and political manipulation also contribute significantly to the problem. In many cases, kidnapping has become normalized within criminal networks, thereby weakening public confidence in governance and law enforcement.

From a biblical perspective, kidnapping constitutes a grave violation of divine law and human dignity. The Old Testament explicitly condemns man-stealing and human exploitation (Exod. 21:16; Deut. 24:7). In biblical ethics, every human life possesses sacred value because humanity bears God’s image. Consequently, kidnapping is not merely a social offense but also a theological assault on the sanctity of life and communal justice. Justice is a central concept in biblical theology and is foundational to the covenant relationship between God and humanity. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew terms *mishpat* (justice) and *tsedeqah* (righteousness) emphasize fairness, equity,



protection of the vulnerable and right relationships within society. The prophets consistently denounced oppression, exploitation, bribery, and violence against the poor and marginalized.

Brueggemann explains that biblical justice is concerned with restoring social equilibrium and defending those denied dignity and security (34).

Psalms 140 emerges within this biblical tradition of justice. The Psalmist cries for deliverance from “violent men,” presenting God as protector of the oppressed and judge of the wicked. The lament reflects both personal anguish and communal suffering caused by violence and oppression.

Obiorah notes that the Psalms remain relevant in addressing contemporary insecurity in Nigeria because they express the fears, anxieties, and hopes of communities threatened by violence (4).

Thus, Psalm 140:1 provides a theological framework for interpreting kidnapping and insecurity in Nigeria as realities requiring divine intervention and human responsibility. In the New Testament, Jesus deepens the biblical understanding of justice through teachings centered on love, compassion, peace, and reconciliation. The command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31) establishes the ethical basis for protecting human life and opposing violence. Catholic social teaching therefore insists that governments and communities possess moral obligations to defend the vulnerable and uphold the common good. Pope Francis argues that indifference to suffering and injustice constitutes a betrayal of human fraternity and social responsibility (103).

African theology strongly emphasizes the communal and sacred nature of human existence. Gyekye argues that African societies traditionally uphold human dignity through communal solidarity, mutual care, and social harmony (58). Kidnapping, therefore destroys not only individual lives but also the moral fabric of society. The trauma experienced by victims, families, churches, and communities demonstrates the broader social consequences of insecurity in Nigeria.

Nche and colleagues observe that churches in parts of Nigeria now “sleep with one eye open” (9) because of persistent fear generated by kidnapping and violent attacks.

The biblical mandate for justice, therefore, calls for both spiritual and structural responses to insecurity. Justice involves not only the punishment of offenders including perpetrators, sponsors and sympathizers but also the transformation of the social conditions that enable violence. In this regard, the Church, government, and civil society must collaborate in promoting ethical leadership, economic justice, peacebuilding, and protection of human dignity.

Exegetical Study of Psalm 140:1

Psalm 140 belongs to the category of individual lament and imprecatory psalms within the Psalter. The Psalm reflects the cry of a righteous sufferer seeking divine protection against violent enemies and oppressive forces. Psalm 140:1 states: “Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men: preserve me from the violent man” (KJV). The verse introduces the central theological concern of the Psalm: divine intervention against violence, injustice, and oppression. In the Nigerian context of kidnapping, banditry, and insecurity, the Psalm assumes contemporary relevance as a prayer of lament and a theological appeal for justice and protection.



Psalms 140 is traditionally attributed to David and is classified among the lament psalms. The Psalm may have emerged from experiences of persecution, political conflict, betrayal, or military threat during David's life. Structurally, the Psalm contains petitions for deliverance (vv. 1-5), confession of trust in God (vv. 6-8), imprecatory prayers against enemies (vv. 9-11), and affirmation of divine justice (vv. 12-13). Walter Brueggemann observes that lament psalms function as theological protests against evil and suffering while simultaneously affirming confidence in God's justice (52). The literary progression of Psalm 140 reveals movement from fear to hope. The Psalmist begins with an urgent plea for rescue from violent people, describes the wickedness of enemies, and concludes with confidence that God "maintains the cause of the afflicted" (Ps. 140:12). Nancy deClaisse-Walford argues that violence in the Psalter often reflects not merely personal hostility but broader social and structural oppression, including betrayal, injustice, and organized evil (245).

Psalms 140 also belongs to the tradition of imprecatory psalms in which the Psalmist calls upon God to judge oppressors and violent persons. These psalms have generated theological debate because of their strong language against enemies. However, scholars emphasize that the imprecatory psalms do not encourage personal revenge but rather entrust justice to God. Visar Elisabet Nord explains that such psalms represent cries for divine justice from oppressed communities rather than celebrations of violence (1).

The precise historical setting of Psalm 140 remains uncertain. Some scholars associate it with David's experiences during Saul's persecution, while others connect it with periods of rebellion and political instability. Regardless of the exact setting, the Psalm reflects a context of danger, conspiracy, and violent aggression. The enemies described in the Psalm are characterized as deceitful, malicious, and warlike.

The Hebrew Bible frequently portrays violence as a disruption of covenantal justice and communal harmony. In Psalm 140, the Psalmist depicts the wicked as those who "plan evil things in their hearts" and "stir up wars continually" (Ps. 140:2). Such descriptions resonate strongly with contemporary realities of kidnapping, terrorism, and organized violence in Nigeria. David Tuesday Adamo notes that African readings of the Psalms often interpret lament texts through experiences of communal suffering, insecurity, and oppression (72).

African biblical hermeneutics emphasizes contextual interpretation by relating scriptural texts to lived realities. In many African societies, the Psalms are frequently used in prayers against oppression, insecurity, and spiritual attacks. Caleb Ogunkunle argues that the enemies portrayed in the Psalter can be understood within African worldviews as symbols of destructive forces threatening communal peace and survival. Thus, Psalm 140:1 becomes particularly meaningful in Nigeria where communities daily confront kidnapping, banditry, and violent crimes.

The opening phrase, "Deliver me, O LORD," derives from the Hebrew verb *hālaṣ*, which conveys the idea of rescue, deliverance, or liberation from danger. The Psalmist acknowledges human helplessness and appeals directly to God as the ultimate source of salvation. The prayer reflects dependence upon divine power in situations where human security structures appear inadequate.



In the Nigerian context, this resonates with citizens who increasingly feel vulnerable because of weak security systems and persistent violence.

The expression “evil men” refers to persons characterized by wickedness, injustice, and malicious intent. The Hebrew term *raʿ* denotes moral corruption and destructive behaviour. The Psalm, therefore, portrays violence not merely as physical aggression, but as moral evil rooted in the corruption of the human heart. The “violent man” translates the Hebrew word *ḥāmās*, which signifies brutality, oppression, cruelty, and unjust force. Interestingly, the same root is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to condemn societal injustice and bloodshed (Gen. 6:11-13).

Theologically, the use of *ḥāmās* suggests that violence is fundamentally opposed to God’s covenantal order. Nancy deClaissé-Walford notes that violence in the Psalter often includes physical aggression, verbal abuse, systemic oppression, and social injustice (246). In contemporary Nigeria, kidnapping embodies these dimensions of violence because it involves coercion, fear, torture, exploitation, and the destruction of communal peace.

The parallelism in Psalm 140:1 between “evil men” and “violent man” intensifies the Psalmist’s concern. Hebrew poetry commonly employs synonymous parallelism to reinforce meaning. Here, evil and violence are inseparably connected, indicating that violence arises from moral depravity and rebellion against divine justice. The verse therefore, presents violence as both a social and spiritual problem.

One dominant theme in Psalm 140 is divine protection. The Psalmist repeatedly asks God to preserve him from traps, conspiracies, and violent attacks. This reflects Israel’s understanding of God as defender of the oppressed and refuge of the vulnerable. In African Christianity, the Psalms often function liturgically as prayers for protection against danger and insecurity. The use of Psalm 140 in prayer gatherings and worship contexts demonstrates its enduring relevance for communities experiencing fear and violence.

Psalm 140 strongly emphasizes divine justice. Verses 12-13 affirm that God upholds “the cause of the afflicted” and secures justice for the poor. The Psalm, therefore, transcends individual lament and addresses broader issues of social oppression. Virginus Eze argues that biblical justice traditions condemn arbitrary violence and insist upon lawful, moral, and communal accountability (2). In the Nigerian context, the theme of justice challenges both state institutions and religious communities to confront kidnapping and insecurity. The Psalm rejects silence in the face of violence and instead calls for moral action rooted in justice and righteousness.

Psalm 140 also demonstrates the role of lament as theological protest against evil. Lament in biblical theology is not passive resignation but active engagement with God amid suffering. Alfred Korankye observes that lament psalms provide oppressed communities with language for expressing trauma, fear, and hope while entrusting justice to God (13). This dimension is especially relevant in Nigeria, where victims of kidnapping, terrorism, and violence often experience helplessness and trauma. Psalm 140 legitimizes the cry of the oppressed and affirms that suffering communities can bring their pain before God. Psalm 140:1 speaks powerfully to Nigeria’s current crisis of kidnapping and insecurity. The description of “violent men” reflects the activities of



kidnappers, terrorists, armed bandits, and criminal networks that threaten innocent citizens. The Psalm articulates the fears of communities living under constant danger while also affirming confidence in divine justice.

Theologically, the Psalm challenges Christians and society not merely to pray for deliverance but also to pursue justice, peace, and the protection of human dignity. The biblical mandate for justice requires governments to uphold security and accountability, while the Church must engage in prophetic witness, peacebuilding, and pastoral care for victims of violence. Psalm 140 therefore serves both as a lament against violent oppression and as a prophetic call for moral transformation in Nigeria.

Biblical Mandate for Justice and Protection of Human Life

The Bible consistently presents justice and the protection of human life as central dimensions of God's covenantal relationship with humanity. Both the Old and New Testaments emphasize that human beings possess inherent dignity because they are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) (Gen. 1:26-27). Consequently, every form of violence, oppression, exploitation, and murder constitutes an assault against divine order and human dignity. In the Nigerian context, where kidnapping, terrorism, and insecurity continue to threaten communal life, the biblical mandate for justice provides an important theological framework for defending the sanctity of life and promoting social transformation.

Justice occupies a foundational place in Old Testament theology. The Hebrew concepts *mishpat* (justice) and *tsedeqah* (righteousness) refer not only to legal fairness but also to social responsibility, communal equity, and protection of vulnerable persons. The Old Testament portrays God as a righteous judge who defends the oppressed, protects the weak, and condemns violence and injustice. Deuteronomy 10:18 declares that God "executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and loves the stranger." Similarly, Psalm 82:3 commands the faithful to "defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and oppressed."

The Decalogue and Mosaic laws further establish the sanctity of human life as fundamental to covenantal ethics. The commandment "You shall not kill" (Exod. 20:13) reflects God's concern for the preservation of life and communal harmony. Takore argues that Old Testament justice involves fairness, accountability, and respect for human dignity within both individual and communal relationships (7). The legal traditions of Israel therefore condemn murder, oppression, false accusation, kidnapping, and exploitation because such actions violate divine justice. The prophets repeatedly denounced social injustice, corruption, and violence. Amos condemned those who "trample on the poor" (Amos 5:11), while Isaiah criticized rulers who deprived vulnerable people of justice (Isa. 10:1-2). Malachi also linked social injustice with divine judgment, emphasizing that societies collapse when justice is corrupted. Boloje and Groenewald note that justice in the prophetic tradition is essential for social order, peace, and communal wellbeing (4).

In Nigeria's context of kidnapping and insecurity, the prophetic call for justice remains deeply relevant. The prophets challenge political leaders, religious institutions, and communities to resist oppression and uphold righteousness. Hundu argues that biblical prophetic justice provides a framework for confronting systemic oppression, corruption, and violence in Nigeria (44). Thus,



the Old Testament vision of justice extends beyond personal morality to include structural transformation and protection of vulnerable persons. The biblical doctrine of the *imago Dei* forms the theological foundation for the protection of human life. Genesis 1:26-27 teaches that humanity is created in God's image and likeness, thereby granting every person sacred worth and dignity.

Genesis 9:6 further connects the sanctity of life with divine justice by prohibiting bloodshed because humans bear God's image.

Theologically, the *imago Dei* affirms equality, dignity, and moral responsibility. Violence against persons including kidnapping, murder, torture, and terrorism, therefore, represents rebellion against God's intention for humanity. Fawenu argues that the doctrine of the image of God condemns all forms of violence and dehumanization because human life possesses sacred value derived from the Creator (146).

The Psalms provide rich theological resources for understanding justice, lament, and divine protection. Psalm 140:1 expresses the cry of vulnerable persons seeking divine intervention against violence and oppression. The Psalmist portrays God as protector of the afflicted and judge of the wicked. The Psalms consistently emphasize God's concern for the poor, oppressed, widows, strangers, and victims of injustice. Martin argues that the Psalter presents God as defender of marginalized people and challenges worshipping communities to practice justice and care for the vulnerable (5). The Psalms, therefore, reject any spirituality detached from social responsibility and communal ethics.

African biblical scholars have also emphasized the contextual relevance of the Psalms for societies experiencing insecurity and violence. Adamo notes that African Christians frequently use the Psalms in contexts of suffering, oppression, and fear because the texts resonate with existential realities in Africa (73). Similarly, Awojobi explains that lament and imprecatory psalms are widely used among Yoruba Christians in Nigeria as prayers for divine justice and protection against violent enemies (5). The use of Psalm 140 in the context of kidnapping and insecurity in Nigeria reflects this broader African hermeneutical tradition. The Psalm functions both as a lament against violence and as a theological affirmation that God stands with victims of oppression.

The New Testament deepens the biblical understanding of justice through the teachings and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God as a realm characterized by peace, compassion, righteousness, and liberation for the oppressed. In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus declares that he was anointed "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners" and "to set the oppressed free." The commandment to "love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12:31) establishes the ethical foundation for protecting human life and opposing violence. Jesus consistently defended marginalized persons, healed victims of suffering, and challenged systems of oppression and hypocrisy. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) further illustrates that justice involves compassionate action toward vulnerable persons irrespective of ethnic or social boundaries.

Catholic social teaching, therefore, insists that governments and societies possess moral obligations to uphold justice, peace, and the common good. Pope Francis argues that indifference



to suffering and injustice undermines human fraternity and social solidarity. In *Fratelli Tutti*, he condemns violence, exploitation, and social exclusion while calling for a culture of encounter, peace, and protection of human dignity (103).

The biblical mandate for justice requires active engagement by the Church and faith communities in confronting violence and insecurity. The Church is called not only to preach salvation but also to defend human dignity, advocate for justice, and support victims of oppression. Liberation theology and African public theology emphasize that faith must respond concretely to societal suffering and structural injustice. Recent theological scholarship highlights the importance of prophetic engagement in Nigeria. They contend that liberation theology provides a framework for Christian responses to corruption, poverty, insecurity, and systemic violence in Nigeria (5).

Similarly, Virginus Eze maintains that biblical justice traditions challenge human rights abuses, corruption, and arbitrary violence within Nigerian society.

In practical terms, the Church's response to kidnapping and insecurity should include advocacy for accountable governance, peacebuilding initiatives, trauma healing, youth empowerment, ethical formation, and support for victims. The Church must also collaborate with civil society and government institutions in promoting social justice and protecting vulnerable communities.

Ultimately, the biblical mandate for justice and protection of human life affirms that violence, kidnapping, and oppression contradict God's purpose for humanity. Scripture consistently calls believers and societies to defend the vulnerable, uphold righteousness, and preserve the dignity of every human person. Psalm 140:1 therefore remains both a prayer for divine deliverance and a prophetic challenge for Nigeria to pursue justice, peace, and national healing.

The Church, State, and Society in Combating Kidnapping

The increasing prevalence of kidnapping in Nigeria has exposed the fragility of the nation's security architecture and highlighted the urgent need for collaborative responses from the Church, the state, and society. Kidnapping has evolved beyond ordinary criminality into a multidimensional crisis affecting religious institutions, education, agriculture, commerce, and communal life. Consequently, combating kidnapping requires holistic responses that address not only security concerns but also the socio-economic, moral, and spiritual conditions sustaining violence. From a biblical perspective, the pursuit of justice and protection of human life is a collective responsibility involving both religious and civil institutions. Psalm 140:1 therefore serves not merely as a prayer for divine intervention but also as a moral challenge to institutions entrusted with preserving justice and social order.

The state bears the primary responsibility for protecting lives and property within society. According to Romans 13:1–4, governmental authority exists to promote justice, punish wrongdoing, and preserve peace within the community. Political philosophy and Christian ethics therefore recognize security as a fundamental obligation of the state. In Nigeria, however, the persistence of kidnapping has revealed major deficiencies in governance, intelligence gathering, law enforcement, and judicial accountability.



Corruption within security institutions, weak law enforcement mechanisms, and inadequate welfare for security personnel have significantly undermined efforts to combat kidnapping. Akin Iwilade argues that insecurity in Nigeria is deeply connected to governance failure and the erosion of public trust in state institutions (87). Similarly, Peace Ngwoke and Gladys Akabike observe that insecurity continues to threaten sustainable development because citizens increasingly perceive the government as incapable of guaranteeing safety and justice (1).

The Nigerian government has implemented several measures to address kidnapping, including military operations, anti-kidnapping legislation, surveillance initiatives, and collaboration among security agencies. Nevertheless, the continued rise of abductions demonstrates that military responses alone are insufficient. Reuters recently reported that poor intelligence coordination, porous borders, and weak rural security structures remain major obstacles in Nigeria's fight against kidnapping networks.

The state must therefore adopt comprehensive approaches that combine security reforms with socio-economic development. These include strengthening intelligence systems, reforming the police and judiciary, improving border security, creating employment opportunities, and addressing corruption within public institutions. Walter Brueggemann maintains that biblical justice requires political structures that defend the vulnerable and uphold righteousness within society (74). Thus, government policies aimed at combating kidnapping should prioritize human dignity, accountability, and equitable development rather than mere coercive force.

Furthermore, the state must ensure justice for victims of violence and prosecute offenders transparently. The culture of impunity surrounding kidnapping has contributed to public distrust in the legal system. Virginus Eze argues that justice systems lose moral legitimacy when crimes such as kidnapping, extrajudicial violence, and corruption are inadequately punished (7). Consequently, legal accountability remains essential for restoring confidence in governance and protecting human rights.

The Church occupies a critical position in combating kidnapping because of its prophetic, pastoral, and moral responsibilities within society. Biblically, the Church is called to be "the light of the world" and "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13–14), promoting justice, peace, and reconciliation. In Nigeria, where churches remain influential social institutions, Christian communities possess significant potential for moral transformation, peacebuilding, and advocacy. One important role of the Church is prophetic witness against injustice and violence. The prophetic tradition in Scripture consistently challenges oppression, corruption, and abuse of power. The Church therefore cannot remain silent in the face of kidnapping and insecurity. Oyeode Jegede and Abare Kallah argue that Nigerian churches must move beyond passive spirituality toward active engagement with societal security challenges (45). The Church's prophetic mission includes speaking truth to power, demanding accountability from leaders, and defending the dignity of victims of violence.

The Church also has a pastoral responsibility toward victims of kidnapping and insecurity. Many victims suffer severe psychological trauma, economic hardship, and social dislocation after release from captivity. Churches therefore play vital roles in trauma healing, counseling, humanitarian support, and reintegration of survivors into society. Bitrus Gando notes that kidnapping has



negatively affected evangelism, worship, and pastoral ministry because clergy and church members increasingly live under fear of abduction (26).

In several parts of Nigeria, churches have responded by organizing prayer initiatives, security awareness programs, community support networks, and peacebuilding activities. George Nche and his colleagues report that many churches in Rivers State now operate within environments of persistent fear and insecurity, leading congregations to adopt survival-oriented security measures. Such realities demonstrate the extent to which insecurity has reshaped religious life in Nigeria (4).

The Church must also engage in ethical and moral formation. Kidnapping thrives partly because of moral decadence, greed, and the collapse of communal values. Christian teaching on human dignity, justice, honesty, and compassion can contribute to rebuilding moral consciousness within society. Pope Francis insists that religious communities have a responsibility to promote fraternity, solidarity, and the defense of vulnerable persons against cultures of violence and exclusion (103).

Another important ecclesial responsibility is peacebuilding and interreligious dialogue. Nigeria's insecurity often intersects with ethnic and religious tensions, thereby increasing suspicion and division among communities. Churches can collaborate with Muslim leaders, civil society organizations, and traditional institutions to promote peaceful coexistence, conflict resolution, and community reconciliation. Ngwoke and Akabike emphasize that religion can play constructive roles in fostering social control, ethical responsibility, and collective resistance against insecurity (6).

The fight against kidnapping also requires active participation from civil society, traditional institutions, families, and local communities. Security is not solely the responsibility of government agencies; rather, it involves communal vigilance and social cooperation. African societies traditionally emphasized communal solidarity and collective responsibility for social order. However, modern individualism, corruption, and social fragmentation have weakened these communal structures.

Local communities possess important roles in intelligence gathering, conflict prevention, and protection of vulnerable persons. Community policing initiatives and neighborhood security networks have proven effective in some regions because local residents often possess better knowledge of criminal activities within their environments. Nevertheless, such initiatives must operate within legal and ethical frameworks to avoid mob justice or ethnic profiling.

Traditional rulers and community leaders also remain influential in conflict mediation and social regulation. Civil society organizations additionally contribute through advocacy, humanitarian assistance, public awareness campaigns, and human rights monitoring. Theologically, combating kidnapping requires a holistic understanding of justice rooted in biblical ethics. Scripture consistently presents justice as communal responsibility involving rulers, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens. Psalm 140 portrays God as defender of the oppressed, yet the biblical mandate for justice also demands human participation in resisting violence and protecting life. The collaboration between Church, state, and society reflects the interconnected nature of human flourishing within African thought and biblical theology.



In Nigeria's context, the challenge of kidnapping cannot be resolved solely through military operations or prayer alone. Effective responses require moral renewal, accountable governance, economic justice, interreligious cooperation, and community solidarity. The Church must continue to proclaim hope while also challenging systems that perpetuate violence and inequality. The state must uphold justice and protect citizens impartially, while society must reclaim communal values that affirm the sacredness of human life. Ultimately, the biblical mandate for justice calls all sectors of society to defend the vulnerable and confront violent oppression. Psalm 140:1 therefore remains both a lament against insecurity and a prophetic summons toward collective responsibility in the pursuit of justice, peace, and national healing in Nigeria.

Towards a Theology of Justice and National Healing

The persistent reality of kidnapping, terrorism, corruption, and social violence in Nigeria has generated profound questions concerning justice, reconciliation, and national healing. Beyond its political and economic implications, insecurity has deeply wounded the moral, psychological, and spiritual fabric of Nigerian society. Communities have been devastated by fear, mistrust, trauma, displacement, and the loss of human dignity. In this context, theology cannot remain abstract or detached from the suffering of the people. Rather, Nigerian theology must become a transformative and liberative force that responds concretely to the realities of violence, injustice, and social fragmentation. Psalm 140:1 therefore functions not only as a lament against violent oppression but also as a theological invitation toward justice, reconciliation, and national healing.

Biblical theology consistently presents justice as foundational to peace and communal wellbeing. In Scripture, peace (*shalom*) is inseparable from justice and righteousness. Isaiah 32:17 declares that "the effect of righteousness will be peace," indicating that lasting peace cannot exist where injustice and oppression prevail. Consequently, any meaningful process of national healing in Nigeria must address structural injustices that sustain insecurity, poverty, and violence.

Brueggemann argues that biblical faith demands social transformation rooted in justice, compassion, and liberation of the oppressed (79). In the Nigerian context, Ehusani contends that theology must move beyond rhetoric toward practical engagement with the socio-political realities of oppression, corruption, and insecurity. He maintains that Nigeria urgently needs "a theology for the oppressed and marginalized people" (13) that challenges exploitative structures and promotes justice.

This perspective resonates strongly with African public theology, which emphasizes the Church's responsibility to engage societal crises prophetically. Kajom observes that violence and social fragmentation in Nigeria threaten human dignity and national cohesion, thereby demanding theological responses grounded in peacebuilding and justice (1). Thus, a theology of justice in Nigeria must confront corruption, political impunity, economic inequality, religious extremism and institutional failure, all of which contribute to kidnapping and violent crime.

Justice in this theological framework involves more than legal punishment; it also includes restoration of human dignity, protection of vulnerable persons, and transformation of unjust



structures. Eze argues that justice systems lose moral credibility when societies tolerate impunity, corruption, and violence against innocent citizens (4). Consequently, justice must include accountability, fairness, and respect for human rights. In relation to kidnapping, this means ensuring protection for citizens, prosecuting offenders transparently, and addressing the socio-economic conditions that foster criminality.

National healing requires reconciliation at personal, communal, political, and spiritual levels. Nigeria's history of ethnic conflict, religious violence, terrorism, political instability, religious extremism and social injustice has produced deep wounds and mistrust among communities. Kidnapping and insecurity have intensified these divisions by creating fear, displacement, and communal suspicion. Therefore, healing cannot occur merely through military operations or political declarations; it requires rebuilding relationships, restoring trust, and promoting social solidarity.

The New Testament presents reconciliation as central to Christian theology. Through Christ, God reconciles humanity to Himself and calls believers to become agents of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Reconciliation therefore involves forgiveness, justice, restoration, and renewal of relationships. New Testament theology presents reconciliation and healing as holistic realities encompassing physical, spiritual, psychological, and communal restoration.

African worldviews generally emphasize communal relationships, solidarity, and restoration of harmony within society. Scheid explains that African theological anthropology rejects rigid divisions between individual and communal reconciliation because the wellbeing of the individual is inseparable from that of the community (212). Consequently, national healing in Nigeria must involve communal restoration and collective responsibility rather than merely individual forgiveness.

Kidnapping and violence produce severe psychological and emotional trauma for victims, families, and communities. Survivors often experience fear, anxiety, depression, social isolation, and long-term emotional distress. Communities affected by repeated violence develop collective trauma that weakens trust and social cohesion. Therefore, a theology of national healing must include trauma healing and pastoral care. Practical theology increasingly recognizes the importance of psychological and emotional healing within Christian ministry. Churches and faith communities play essential roles in counseling, emotional support, and reintegration of victims into society.

Christian communities can promote healing through pastoral care, spiritual formation, community support programmes, and advocacy for justice.

African theologians further emphasize that healing in African contexts is holistic, involving physical, emotional, spiritual, and communal dimensions. Koffi argues that Africa's search for reconciliation requires holistic approaches integrating justice, healing, peacebuilding, and social transformation (1). Thus, healing from the trauma of kidnapping and insecurity in Nigeria requires collaboration among churches, counselors, civil society organizations, and government institutions. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* also remains central to national healing. Because every human being bears God's image, violence and kidnapping represent assaults on human dignity.



National healing therefore requires restoring the value of human life within society. The Church must consistently proclaim that every person possesses sacred worth beyond ethnic, political, or economic identities.

The Church occupies a strategic position in promoting justice, reconciliation, and national healing in Nigeria. Beyond spiritual worship, the Church is called to embody Christ's ministry of peace, compassion, and liberation. This includes prophetic witness against injustice, advocacy for good governance, peacebuilding, and support for victims of violence. African contextual theology increasingly challenges churches to become agents of social transformation rather than passive observers of injustice. Okuma argues that African theology must connect faith with practical human realities and societal challenges (1). Likewise, Akanji insists that theology in Nigeria must contribute actively to conflict transformation and national integration (2).

The Church can contribute to national healing through several practical means: promoting ethical leadership and accountability, fostering interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding, supporting trauma healing programmes, advocating for economic justice and youth empowerment, educating communities against violence and corruption, encouraging forgiveness alongside justice and truth-telling. Importantly, the Church must avoid reducing theology to passive spirituality disconnected from societal realities. Some public discussions within Nigerian society criticize religious communities for emphasizing prayer without sufficiently addressing systemic injustice and governance failures. While such criticisms may at times be overstated, they reveal growing expectations that religious institutions should engage more actively in promoting accountability, justice, and social transformation.

Despite the severity of insecurity and violence, biblical theology remains fundamentally hopeful. The lament of Psalm 140:1 is ultimately grounded in confidence that God defends the oppressed and upholds justice. Christian hope does not ignore suffering but affirms that evil and violence do not possess the final word. A theology of justice and national healing for Nigeria must therefore combine prophetic resistance against injustice with hope for reconciliation and transformation. Such theology calls Nigerians to reject violence, corruption, hatred, and impunity while embracing justice, compassion, solidarity, and peacebuilding. National healing requires moral renewal, accountable leadership, communal responsibility, and renewed commitment to the dignity of human life. Ultimately, the biblical mandate for justice challenges the Church, state, and society to participate actively in God's work of healing and restoration. Psalm 140:1 remains both a cry for divine deliverance and a prophetic summons toward building a Nigeria where justice, peace, and human dignity prevail.

Conclusion

Kidnapping has become one of the most devastating manifestations of violence and insecurity in contemporary Nigeria, threatening human dignity, social stability, economic development, and religious freedom. As this study has demonstrated, the phenomenon extends beyond ordinary criminality and reflects deeper structural injustices embedded within the nation's political, economic, and moral systems. Poverty, corruption, unemployment, weak governance, moral decadence, and institutional failure have all contributed significantly to the proliferation of kidnapping and violent crime across the country. Consequently, kidnapping must be understood



not merely as a security challenge but as a socio-ethical and theological crisis that undermines the sanctity of life and the collective wellbeing of society.

Through an exegetical engagement with Psalm 140:1, this article has shown that the biblical cry, “Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men; preserve me from violent men,” remains profoundly relevant within Nigeria’s context of insecurity and fear. The Psalm reflects the anguish of vulnerable communities confronted by violence and oppression while simultaneously affirming faith in God as defender of justice and protector of the afflicted. Theologically, Psalm 140 presents violence as a contradiction of divine order and communal righteousness, thereby providing a moral framework for confronting kidnapping and related forms of oppression in Nigeria.

The study further established that the biblical mandate for justice and the protection of human life is deeply rooted in both Old and New Testament theology. Scripture consistently emphasizes justice, righteousness, compassion, and defense of the vulnerable as essential dimensions of faithful living. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* affirms the sacredness and dignity of every human person, making kidnapping, murder, and violence grave violations of God’s intention for humanity. The prophetic tradition, the teachings of Jesus Christ, and Christian social ethics all challenge believers and institutions to resist oppression, protect the vulnerable, and promote peace and reconciliation.

This article also highlighted the indispensable roles of the Church, the state, and society in combating kidnapping and fostering national healing. The Nigerian state bears the constitutional responsibility of guaranteeing security, enforcing justice, and addressing socio-economic inequalities that contribute to criminality. However, effective responses require more than military force or legal sanctions alone. The Church must continue to exercise its prophetic mission by speaking against injustice, advocating for accountability, promoting ethical values, supporting victims of violence, and engaging in peacebuilding initiatives. Likewise, civil society, traditional institutions, and local communities must collaborate in rebuilding social trust, strengthening communal solidarity, and resisting cultures of violence and impunity.

Furthermore, the article argued for the development of a theology of justice and national healing capable of responding meaningfully to Nigeria’s current realities. Such a theology must integrate prophetic resistance against injustice with reconciliation, trauma healing, and social transformation. National healing cannot occur without truth, justice, accountability, and restoration of human dignity. The Church and other faith communities therefore have critical responsibilities in promoting reconciliation, interreligious dialogue, pastoral care, and moral renewal within society.

Ultimately, the message of Psalm 140:1 serves not only as a prayer for divine deliverance but also as a prophetic challenge to Nigeria. The persistence of kidnapping and insecurity calls for collective moral responsibility, accountable leadership, and renewed commitment to justice and the sanctity of human life. Although Nigeria continues to face enormous security challenges, biblical theology offers hope that justice, peace, and healing are possible where communities courageously confront violence, defend the oppressed, and work toward the transformation of society. Therefore, the struggle against kidnapping must remain both a spiritual and social mission



aimed at restoring human dignity, rebuilding communal trust, and establishing a just and peaceful nation where every person can live free from fear and violent oppression.

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