

A Comparative Study of Nigerian-Annang & Judeo-Christian Concepts of *Unen* (Justice)

Michael Ufok Udoekpo

Introduction

Justice is a universal need, while injustice is not. It is rather a major obstacle facing humanity today. As a concept, Justice remains one of the most contested parts of our moral and philosophical vocabulary. Justice is contested not only by philosophers and theologians, but within society generally. This essay examines the concept of *unen* (justice) among the pre and early post-colonial Annang people of the present day Akwa Ibom States, in southeastern Nigeria. It draws a comparison with its biblical[and other ancient near east] counterparts (*mišpaṭ*, *tsədāqâ*, *dikaioṣunē*) in order to preserve, highlight and inculcate sound traditional Annang values such as truth (*akpan iko*), firmness of heart (*ati*), honesty (*akpaniko*), integrity (*uko*), generosity (*uno owo nkpo*), joy (*inem*) and security (*mme ukpeme*). Other values are an authentic sense of the sacred (*ubak-nkpo*), respect for elders (*ukpono nkpon owo*), in-laws (*ukot*), family (*ekpuk/ufok*), grandchildren (*nto ajejen*), resident aliens (*mme isen owo*), sojourners and promotion of peace (*mme emem*) and unity (*mboho*) among contemporary peoples, especially the Annangs,

in the light of Judeo-Christian ethics and biblical theology of justice.

As a comparative study my analysis is contextual, limited, theistic and sociotheological. From my perspective, as an Annang man and a biblical theologian, I argue throughout this essay that God and justice expressed in the Bible Hebrew/Old Testament (OT) and in the New Testament (NT) are strongly intertwined. Justice is basic to God's sovereignty in Annang and everywhere. Annangs are deeply religious. For them Justice resides in God; as they have always been aware of *Awasi/Abasi Onyong* (Supreme God) and *awasi isong* (small beings, deities). Justice, it is argued in this essay, leads to the realization of many of the values already listed above, especially true peace (*shalom* and *emem*) desirable to everyone, within and outside Annang society. This is presented in four steps with two sub-headings or section of thought each. First, a brief reappraisal of the history of Annang people and a study of the general meaning of justice throughout the ages. Second, a concise exposé of the origin or the history of Annang as well as biblical justice, noting ANE as their common root. This is followed by a detailed exploration of the Annang and biblical notions of justice. Finally, a comparative evaluation and conclusion.

Furthering an in-depth study of Justice (*unen*) in Anaang past and present requires a brief recollection of some of her available (written or oral) dynamic cultural history, customs, values, beliefs and identities. In other words, (a) it is imperative to know broadly who the Annangs are, and (b) to delineate the general or various notions of justice.

Annang History in Retrospect

In terms of the history or origin of Annang people, a complete written document, without error or contradiction is not available since it was an oral culture. Annang past as one scholar would put it “is a scarce resource “(Appadurai, 1981). This affirms the position of some elders that “the Annangs have no traditional legend of migration” (Udo, 1983, p.4). My argument is that even if that is true or that, there is no universally accepted written history to this effect, a study of Annang concept of *Unen*, of this kind, in light of Judeo-Christian ethics, would still demand that at least we briefly review some of the available history.

Significant works related to Annang culture and history, some of which have been cited repeatedly in this essay include *The History of Annang People* (Udo, 1983), *Some Key Religious Concepts of the Annang* (Enang, 1987), *The Concept of Unen (Justice) in Annang Political Philosophy* (Udoekpo, 1991), *Clashing Cultures: Annang Not (with) standing Christianity: An Ethnography* (Ekanem, 2002), and also significantly informative and worthy of consulting is *The Man-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria* (2007), on Annang people, by a British anthropologist, David Pratten.

In these studies, as in many others, we learn the Annangs comprise present day Abak, Essien Udim, Etim Ekpo, Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara, Oruk Anam and Ukanafun Local Government areas of Akwa Ibom States, in southeastern Nigeria. We learn that the origin of Annang is traceable to Ibom near Aro northwest and East of the Cross River along the highland of Cameroons thousands of years ago, while some trace it to the Bantus in East Central Africa (Udo, 1983, p. 6-7).

Others would still argue that they were immigrants from Ancient Near Eastern areas (Israel, Egypt etc.), and “settled among the Twi of Ghana, where the name “Annang” means “fourth son,” before arriving in the coastal Southeastern Nigeria and Southwestern Cameroon (“A Brief Walk”). After this arrival there continued internal migration to the current day Annang territories. This explains why we have “Afaha Eket,” Afaha Ikot Ebak in Essien Udim,” Ikot Akpan Eda in Oruk Anam and Ikot Eda in Essien Udim and such duplications. Throughout their journeys, and prior to the advent of Christianity or pre-colonialism, the Annangs have been known to be fearless in fighting a common enemy. We also learn that in spite of Christianity and colonialism Annang today still maintains good values (Ekanem, 2002). They are eloquent in proverbial speeches, courageous, resilient, and enduring in their endeavors; as well they cherish land, farming, hunting, crafting, trading and education. They are deeply religious and firm in beliefs, especially the traditionalists, in the existence of divinities (*abasi isong*) and a Supreme Being (*Abasi Ibom/Eyong*) as well as in the importance of justice, right and wrong (*unen, mbet, mme ndudue*).

Justice in General Terms

Generally speaking, “Justice is vital for all generations and groups who have labored to define not just its meaning but also its importance for a healthy society” (Udoekpo, 2017, p. 105). Many ancient philosophers as well as Annang people sought its meaning and essence. But a reflection on the Annang concept of justice (*Unen*) in the next section demands a thorough review of the development and understanding of justice at least in human philosophical history. This will help us at the end to critically compare and contrast the Annang conception of Unen

with the Judeo-Christian, as well as with a global understanding or administration of justice at different ages.

Some defined it as an objective practical moral concept indispensable for a healthy, socio-political society (Udoekpo, 1991). Cephalus saw Justice as the speaking of the truth and payment of one's debt, while his contemporary Thrasymachus understood justice as the interest of the ruler (Plato, 1967). Plato saw it as a virtue whose fundamental nature and structure was as much in the life of an individual as in the way in which a society is organized; that is why he believed that "the just man is the one whom part of the soul is harmoniously governed by reason" (Plato, 1967, p. 74). Aristotle for his own part conceived of justice as the greatest virtue whereby one does the right thing, believing in the right conduct, wishing what is right, and wishing above all, that the law should be maintained while treating equals equally (Stumph, 1971). Among several other scholastic philosophers who championed the crusade and war against immorality and injustices was St. Augustine. Augustine saw justice as "the habit of the soul, which imparts to everyman the dignity due to him" (Stumph, p.157). St. Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, defined justice as "a habit whereby a man renders to each one his due by constant and perpetual will" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1429).

One of the most remarkable modern philosophers that raised the issue of justice, that may also interest readers of Annang Studies, was David Hume (1711-1776). He was an empiricist. For Hume the central fact about ethics is that moral judgements are formed not by reason alone but by the sentiment of sympathy. He argues that justice which he describes as "general peace and order" or "a general abstinence from the possession of others," reflects the self-interest of each person

who desires to be secured in person and property. This security and happiness can be achieved only in society in an arrangement of justice. To this extent justice is a reflection of self-interest. The usefulness of justice is that it satisfies self-interest. In other words "self-interest is the original motive to the establishment of justice; but a sympathy with public interest is the source of the moral approbation which attends that virtue (Stumph, p.299, Udoekpo, 1991, 4-5). Benedict Spinoza, a Dutch-Jewish Philosopher also made his voice heard that "the habitual rendering to everyman his lawful due is justice, while injustice is depriving a man, under the pretense of legality, of that which the laws rightly interpreted would allow him," (Spinoza, 1951,p.208). Thomas Hobbes also is often said to have been a positivist because he maintained that "'just' and 'unjust' presupposes obligations and that no complaint of injustice could be made against the sovereign legislator," (Benn, 1967, p.298). Finally, justice, in a contemporary sense is "the concrete accomplishments of the fundamental imperative which calls for positive respect for the dignity and rights of others and contribution of the meeting of human necessity," (John K. A., 1990, p. 1).

These definitions, meanings and understanding have often led to a classification of justice into: "commutative" (advocating for a fair stand of giving and receiving what is assigned to a person); "distributive" (classification of goods and resources equally and fairly to all); "retributive" (having as its ends and finality correction, restoration, and restitution of offences and damages done); and "social justice" which is simply seen as a general justice requiring general good in all its aspects with regard to the needs of everyone in the society poor and rich (Udoekpo, 1991, pp.10-17).

In addition to the above definitions and classifications, Nicholas Wolterstorff's views in his *Justice, Right and Wrong* (2008) is one of the most impressive works on justice since John Rawls' *Theory of Justice*, that basically emphasized equal respect for all members of the social order "as moral persons" (Rawls, 1999, p. 447). Wolterstorff not only acknowledges the above distinction between distributive and commutative justice, on one hand, and rectifying or corrective justice, on the other hand, but basically defines justice, in the light of St. John Chrysostom, as inherent natural rights superior to a mere just and right order (Chrysostom, 1984). He is mostly interested in distributive justice, or what he calls, "primary justice." Rectifying justice for him "consists of the justice that becomes relevant when there was a breakdown in distributive and commutative justice" (Wolterstorff, 2008, p. ix).

He arrived at his notion of primary or distributive justice as an inherent right to all human beings (not just as the mere platonic "right order"), by reading the definition of justice found in the Justinian's *Digest*, a codification of the Roman law. The *Digest* begins with the third-century Roman jurist Ulpian's famous definition of justice as "a steady and enduring will to render to each their *ius*..." (Digest, 1985; Wolterstorff, 2008, p.22). Although Ulpian's emphasis was on possession of right and the virtue of justice, Wolterstorff's emphasis is on "the social condition that those who possess the virtue seek to bring about" (pp.22-23).

Inherently too, various generations of Annang, in politics, religion, culture, ownership, possession, economics, family, relationships, farming, fishing, hunting, commerce and in various settings, have always had not only a profound and natural sense of right and wrong, good and bad, but also a

deep sense of concern for justice, *unen and ikpe*, identifiable with some similarities and differences, with some of the above classification. The Annang's approach and conception of justice is the focus of the next section.

Justice (*Unen*) in Annang- Pre and Early-Postcolonial Eras

Like other nations or generations, Justice has always been vital in Annang society during the pre, early and post-colonial eras. Their concerns for justice are expressed in their language, semantic, proverbs, folklore, names, laws, cultic societies (*ekpo, ekpe, ebre/abre, ekong* etc.), and in arms and agents of administration (Udo, 1983). Even though Annang society lacks detailed documented and semantic history, their concept of justice is etymologically rooted in the word "*Unen*" (Udoekpo, 1991, p.12). In the recently published *Annang-English Dictionary*, "*Unen*" is variously defined as "the right; the propriety of a thing; the proper method of it," "the right as in any cause," "success in anything taken at hand," "success, advantage, benefit," (Owulette, 2019, p. 261). As a noun it is derived from the verbs "*Enen*," "*Aneke*," or "*Annen*," all meaning "to make straight," "to be justified," or "to be correct," (Udoekpo, 1991, p.12), depending on the Local Government Area of the Annang community. *Unen* can further be explained through the use of analogies. For example, in southern Annang, "*Edinen*," or "*Nnenen*," or "*Edinen/Neke-Usung*," means straight path or right way. It means the route that is not only straight, correct, just, true and holy, but peaceful. Even though the idea of physicality is implied here, the phrase "*usung unen*," (way of righteousness, or way for the common good), all sum up the idea of justice, or *unen*, in Annang land. Other phrases are "*Unen ami*," (my right), and "*Unen fo* or *afo*," (your right). Similarly, Patrick Okure of the sister Ibibio- tribe speaks of

"*Unen mmi*...as the object of right which is owed objectively to each person or community that is the basic attitude, a constant disposition to give to each his due" (Okure, 1983, p. 58).

Many have also characterized "*Unen*" from a humanistic perspective. From this perspective, "*Edinen owo*," (a person who adheres to truth, freedom and sincerity), means a righteous and upright person. For the Annangs, a just person must make an effort to view reality objectively, respect people, property and rights. It implies respecting the elders, "repository (s) of knowledge and wisdom (Ekanem, 2002, p. 15), in order to live long and share at the end with the communion of the ancestors. This is why an Annang elder named Chief Eyo Udofa, while been interviewed on the subject of justice in Annang said:

Justice means respect my right and yours will be respected. Give my due and yours will be given to you. It demands fair judgment and equal right. By this noble act God and our forefathers are happy. *Unen*, my son means do not oppress the poor, do not cheat people, be very straight forward in one's manner, love and relate well for the good of the land (Udofa, 1990, oral interview)

Like Chief Eyo Udofa, many elders in Annang have defined *Unen* (Justice) with emphasise on some aspects of its meaning. Like other contexts, such as the philosophical, medieval and Judeo-Christian, two terms, "Justice" and "right "are used interchangeably for the Annang concept of "*Unen*."

Finally, there are still additional words that can shed further light on the root meaning of justice (*unen*) in Annang. These words are: *utip* (reward) and *ikpe* (judgment). Positively,

“reward” (*eti utip*) represents good reward, while “*idiok utip*” represent bad reward. This is of course rationally and morally justifiable, because the existence of the reality of reward and punishment presupposes the existence of a moral and political sense of good and evil, right and wrong, as well as just and unjust. Finally, the word “*ikpe*”(judgement), further points to the root meaning of justice, hence, phrases such as “*unen ikpe*,”(right, true or straight judgment) and “*ukwuang ikpe*,” or “*ufik ikpe*,”(crooked, partial, oppressive and unjust judgement). In fact, despite the foregoing analysis, there is no single word that sufficiently demonstrates Annang’s understanding of *Unen* (Udoekpo, 1991).

In spite this semantic sufficiency, broadness, complexity and ambiguity of the word, the concept of *Unen* in Annangland can also be grouped into commutative, social, distributive and retributive justice. Commutative justice (giving each his or her fair due) and forbidding encroachment into ones’ right is experienced, for example, as violations through theft (*ino*), fraud (*nkwo*), as well as unjust damage of communal and individual property or values. Distributive justice in Annangland classifies goods and resources equally and fairly to the community of individuals and groups. It promotes equality and freedom. Distributive justice in Annang stresses restitution of offences and restoration or rectifying of damages done. In Annangland crimes are severely punished while acts of bravery, solidarity, loyalty, diplomacy are judiciously rewarded. Finally, social justice is general justice to the poor, the downtrodden and the less privileged.

In Annangland concern and sense of justice is also communicated through proverbs (*nke, ifiet*), names and folklores. We shall take the following few examples. Annang

parents, for instance, expect their children to be of good conduct. When they say “*nkok nno usine eye enyin edet andom*” (I made medicine for a rabbit, yet it bites me), they mean children or people should not bite the fingers that feed them. They should be grateful. In Annangland gratitude is regarded as justice, while ingratitude is regarded as an act of injustice. In Annang “*eto isidaha ikpon ikaba akai*” (a tree does not make a forest) stresses the importance of solidarity and communal justice.

Other sayings, or folklores like “*usen usukiet ayie ino, ajoho usen duop anyie anyene iwang*” (nine days are for the thief, while a day belongs to the owner of the farm) means cheating, or working less and expecting more rewards or reaping where one did not sow is injustice. Dishonesty and deceitfulness are counted as forms of injustice in Annanland.

Justice (*Unen*) is further expressed in names such as “*emem*” (peace), “*udeme*” (portion, or share) and “*Akaninyene*” (child is greater than wealth) and “*uwem ade inyene*” (life is wealth). Childlessness is regarded as a curse or injustice from the gods. Stressing this Ekanem (2002), in his *Clashing Cultures* writes “children are considered the height of blessings of any house. In children the perpetuation of the house is assured.... It is a sign of life and continuity” (p.66). So also are the grandchildren. They are regarded as *ibet* (sacred bird, vulture “*utere*”), hence no act of injustice, or deprivation must be committed against grandchildren. This is what Ekanem (2002, pp.67-69) calls “uterization.” That is, sacralisation of grandchildren in Annangland. Underneath “uterizataion” is an aspect of Annang people’s concern for justice, on behalf of the weak, especially the grandchildren. Similarly, a sense of sacredness, or act of justice are extended to in-laws (*ukot*),

widows (*ebekpa*), and sojourners or visitors (*isen okwo*). There are many other names, proverbs, folklores and objects of injustices beyond the scope of this essay.

In terms of the actual administration of justice Annang people are deeply religious even in their socio-political practices. They believe that the good, truth, beauty, harmony, and oneness reside in God (Awasi/Abasi Onyong). Like the Ibiobios, for them “all other things are just according to the degree of their closeness to God or nearness in time and place or kingship to god....Justice takes its bearing from God and not from man (Okure, 2002, 39). It is a fundamental aspect of God’s activity.

The pre-colonial Annang, before the advent of colonialism and Christianity makes no clear distinction between religion and moral, political struggle, justice and power. First of all, and as rightly observed by Pratten (2007, p.26), identities in Annang society are conceived in intimate intersecting relationships between people, places and the past. Personhood concerns ancestral relationships within lineage, relationships with cohorts through initiation, and relationships with the natural world through animal affinities. In Annang although government and administration of justice, humanly speaking, is in the hands of the chiefs “Mbong” and the Council of elders “Afembong” or “Afe Nkuku” (cf. Udo, 1983,41-48), cultic societies such as *Ekpo*, *Ekpe*, *Ekong*, *Idiong* and *Ebre* societies assist them for effective and grass root administration of *Unen*.

The ancestral masquerade (*ekpo*) “marks the conjunction of modes of Annang identity and selfhood: descent and initiation, lineage and secret society” (Pratten, 2007, pp.32-35). Details of initiation into this society is a process beyond the scope of this paper. This society represents Annang ancestors as custodians

of justice. It operates on special occasion. Its membership includes only the landed hierarchy and men who could keep top secrets. It sees that justice “*unen*,” is implemented (Owo, 1990, Oral interview; Archibong, 1982) p. 53).

The leopard society (*ekpe*) was another instrument of justice in Annangland, especially in the pre- and early colonial eras, “and was more expensive to join,” (Pratten, pp. 35-36). According to Okure (1983) “under the aegis of chiefs, Ekpe, just as the leopard of the forest monopolizes all authority in village councils, promulgates and enforces most of the laws and policies, judges criminal cases and imposes sanctions on culprits,” (p.48). The goal of this cult, *ekpe-owo* (man-leopard), is to keep the society together, with the help and solidarity of the leading titlemen. It was a force of resistance to reckon with, especially during the pre and early colonial days, in matters of power, justice, commerce, trade and politics.

Describing the role of this secret society *ekpe-owo* (man-leopard), a British anthropologist, David Pratten (2007), who lived and researched in southeastern Annang, from his own perspective writes:

The leopard society had the power to impose summary justice (to ‘blow ekpe’) and a set of sanctions, which included execution or seizure. The society was especially involved in recovering debts, in condemning debtors to enslavement and in policing other aspects of the slave trade such as settling and collecting ‘comey’ duties. The commercial sanctions it imposed, plus the creditworthiness and freedom of travel it

afforded members, contributed to the *ekpe* society's expansion into the hinterland (p. 52).

Still, in the context of justice in ancient, precolonial-Annang, Pratten (2007, p.52) notes that:

In the Abak area *ekpê* was the executive arm of village government and implemented judicial decisions in tandem with lineage heads and village chiefs. Any thief who was caught would be paraded through the market, beaten and either sold or killed at the execution grove (*ukang ino-place, thief*). The fate of those executed was relayed to their relatives by the phrase the leopard had 'eaten' them (*ekpe omum enye ata-leopard caught person chew*). Combined with their rights to catch and kill stray livestock on cultivated land, the lucrative privileges of status that membership of the leopard society conferred led to the saying that "the leopard is food' (*ekpe edi udia*).

This society was also used as an instrument of resisting what ancient Annang perceived as "injustice" or the failing the colonial policies in terms of chieftaincy, taxation, justice and the palm oil economy. It was an extended judicial apparatus (judges in open court as well as clandestine tribunals) for everyday disputes (divorce, adultery, debt and land), political matters (chiefs, pretenders and usurpers) and economic changes (exchange rates and price controls (Pratten, pp. 278-280).

Call it a clashing sense of justice! These clashes, resistance and motives are highlighted in Pratten's research *Man-Leopard*

Murders (2007) to include: “ritual, revenge, jealousy, dispute over dowry, dispute over land, non-payment of debt, dispute over succession to children and property, refusal to allow sexual intercourse, dispute over ownership of property, dispute over ‘*esusu*’ society contributions, dispute over inheritance of widows, and concealment of another murder” (p.267). These motives of violence, though not the best, are a pointer to what ancient Annang consider as just and unjust.

Diviner’s society (*idiong*) was another arm or instrument used for seeking justice in Annang. Members manifest a strong sense of solidarity among themselves. They are consulted in times of sicknesses, misfortunes, war and during search for justice (Pratten, pp.38-43).

Of course women played a role in maintaining peace and promoting justice in Annang land. This is true not only in the 1929 women’s war (*ekong iban*), but also in existence of *mbobo* (fattening room) and *ebre* (water yam) societies in Annang. *Mbobo* was an important initiation for Annang woman. It was a period of seclusion in the transition from adolescence to womanhood prior to marriage and childbirth. By entering the fattening room the young Annang woman was displaying publicly that she was just, fair, a virgin and has good character (Pratten, 36; Ekanem, 2002, 37-50). From the fattening room most Annang women were initiated into the senior women’s association within the village. Holding authority over unmarried women and the rites of the fattening house, this secret society was named after the water yam (*ebre*), a tuber crop associated with women cultivation (Pratten, p. 37). They maintain peace and justice in the society by composing and singing songs against thieves (*ino*), prostitutes (*akpara*), murderers (*owot owo*), witches and poisoners (*ifot*). Having

discussed, though inexhaustibly the concept of *Unen* in ancient Annangland, and considering the great impact that Christianity and western civilization have had on the Annang society, it's perhaps worth comparatively examining, next, and in a nutshell, the biblical perspectives of justice.

Justice in Judeo-Christian Perspectives

In addition to Annang notions and practices of justice, the Judeo-Christian communities expressed particularly in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, recognize justice in different forms (rectifying, primary, social etc.). As we saw in the ancient Annang context, biblical texts see justice not only as basic to God's rule, holiness, and steadfast love, but as a naturally inherent right to all God's children and creatures. In the OT, concerns for justice occurs in the Law codes, the prophets, psalms, historical books and in the wisdom literature. While in the NT these concerns are found particularly in the Gospels and in the Letters. In Annang they were found in names, discussed terms, proverbs, folklore, and in ritualistic secret societies.

In the OT two key terms used interchangeably to express justice are "*mišpat*," translated in English as "justice" and "*tsədāqâ*" translated as "righteousness," (Holladay, 88; Birch, 1991). Wolterstorff thinks "*tsədāqâ*" is better rendered into the present-day English as the right thing, or going right, or doing right—even, now and then, as rectitude" (p.69). Commenting on these two terms, Heschel (2001) believes that if justice is seen as judgment given by a judge in the court, a norm, a legal right, a law, or the bestowal to each person his or her dues, then righteousness goes beyond justice. While justice tends to be strict, righteousness connotes compassion, charity, kindness

and generosity. What both have in common is an ability to discern between good and evil (pp.256-57).

In further explaining this commonly misunderstood pair of terms, Birch says understanding righteousness in legalistic terms has “often led to the belief that the Old Testament is devoid of the grace depicted in the New Testament... although righteousness is the most common translation, it is also translated as vindication, deliverance, uprightness, right and even prosperity” (p.153). When applied to God, he argues, *tsədāqâ* “implies the covenant relationship which God has initiated with Israel” (p.154). Justice, “*mišpat*” on the other hand, has a more basic forensic character to its meaning than *tsədāqâ*, dealing with “judicial activity at every level” (Wright, 1983, p.134). In Birch’s view, *mišpat* has a broader meaning dealing with rights due to every individual in the community and in the upholding of those rights” (p.155). It is fair to conclude that Israel used these two terms not only as juridical but as ethical concepts as expressed not only in their Law codes, but also in the prophetic books, narrative texts, the psalms and wisdom literature.

Justice in the Legislative Texts

In the legislative texts or three Law codes (Exod 20:22-23:33; Lev 17-26 and Deut 12-26), Israel expresses great concerns for justice. Since we do not have space, let me demonstrate a few of them. In Exodus 22:21 and 23:9 for instance, Israel understands justice as treating the widow, the sojourner and the fatherless fairly. Israel understands justice as loving the sojourner and seeing them as one of themselves (Lev 19:33-34; Deut 10:19). As noted by Malchow (1996), Leviticus 24:22 further specifies that sojourners and natives are to be governed by one law. Thus,

these commands reveal high ethical sensitivity in not only providing total justice for people easily misused but also in calling for equality and love toward them. In Leviticus 22:26 one sees what ancient Israelites think of the justice of pledges and material objects given as collateral for loans. They “insist that garments given in pledge are to be returned before sundown. Without a cloak a poor person would have no covering for the night” (Malchow, p.23). In fact since in ancient Israel laws were constantly renewed and updated (Ska, 2006), the idea expressed in Leviticus 22 is extended in the Deuteronomistic Code. For example, Deuteronomistic 24:17 prohibits the use of a widow’s garment as a pledge. A creditor is forbidden from going into a debtor’s apartment to fetch a pledge (Deut 24:10-11). The laws on interest protect the deprived and the marginalized. Collecting interest from the poor who borrow are seen as unjust (Exod 22:25). This sense of justice is expanded in Leviticus 23:19-20. False weight or measure were also regarded as unjust behaviors (Deut 25:13-15). The poor and hired servants must be paid wages due to them (Deut 24:1-15). Rich farmers were to allow gleanings in the field for the poor and widowed (Deut 24:19-22; Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; cf. Ruth).

Wolterstorff’s (2008) timely signal that in the midst of a lengthy catalogue of legislative materials of Israel’s life, Moses’s exhortation sums it up thus (p.70):

You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decision for the people. You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes

of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you (Deut 16:18-20).

Justice in the Prophetic Literature

I agree with Wolsterstorff “that what lay behind the injunction” (p.70-71) of Amos and other of Israel’s prophets (especially, Micah, Isaiah and Jeremiah etc.) on matters of Justice was their conviction that the demands for justice in the legislative texts, including Deuteronomy 16:18-20, just cited, were not followed. Amos, a wealthy man from Tekoa in a Judean town in southern Jerusalem is commissioned as a prophet to challenge injustices in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Udoekpo, *Amos*, 2017).

In Amos 5: 7 Amos says, “Ah, you that turn justice (*mišpaṭ*) to wormwood, and bring righteousness (*tsədāqâ*) to the ground!” (NRSV). Wormwood was a dwarf bitter shrub and so Amos’ listeners were breaking the dictates of the legislative texts and were changing the sweetness of justice to the bitterness of injustice (Malchow, p.34; Udoekpo, 2017, p.84). O’Donovan (1996) believes that “when Amos calls for *mišpaṭ* (justice) to roll down like waters and righteousness (*tsədāqâ*) like ever-flowing stream” (v.24), “ he means precisely that the stream of juridical activity should not be allowed to dry up” (pp.41-42).

On another occasion Amos addresses wives of the corrupt elite, as “cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, “bring something to drink,”(4:1). In doing this, Amos was not out to please the “First Ladies” nor their elite husbands and

court officials, but to defend justice (Malchow, p.35; Udoekpo, 2017, 107). Defending justice against court officials in the Jerusalem Temple, Micah says,

Listen, you heads of Jacobs, and rulers of the house of Israel!

Should you not know justice?—you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin off my people, and the flesh off their bones; who eat the flesh of my people, fly their skin off them, break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a caldron(3:1-3).

In 7:3 Micah reiterates “the official and the judge ask for a bribe, and he powerfully dictates what they desire; thus they pervert justice.” Isaiah of Jerusalem, says “learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow” (1:17; cf. 59:4). He also speaks of those, “who cause a person to lose a lawsuit, who set a trap for the arbiter in the gate, and without grounds deny justice to the one in the right” (29:21).

Similarly, Jeremiah attacks Jehoiakim for doing the opposite of justice, saying,

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages;...Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did you father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness...? (22:13-17).

Jehoiakim's use of forced labor as did Solomon before him to renovate his old palace, did not sit well with Micah. He pointed out that Jehoiakim was not following the footsteps of his father, Josiah, who fulfilled the ideal of kingship, rightly judging the needy. Very comparably, Isaiah of Babylon says that "no one brings suit justly, no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies, conceiving mischief and begetting iniquity" (59:4).

Justice in the Psalms

Like the prophetic books, and later the Annang people, earlier discussed, some passages in psalms describe justice of different kinds that exist in Israel, especially social justice. Psalm 10 for instance, imagines the thought process of the oppressors.

In the pride of their countenance the wicked say,
"God will not seek it out"; all their thoughts are,
"There is not God." Their ways prosper at all
times; your judgements are on high, out of their
sight; as for their foes, they scoff at them. They
think in their heart, "We shall not be moved;
throughout all generations we shall not meet
adversity" (vv.4-6)

Also the oppressors,

Sit in ambush in the villages; in hiding places they
murder the innocent. Their eyes stealthily watch
for the helpless; they lurk in secret like a lion in its
covert; they lurk that they may seize the poor;
they seize the poor and drag them off in their net
and the helpless fall by their might (vv.8-10)

In verses 12-15 the psalmist with the spirit of social inversion, invites God to intervene, “Rise up, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed. Why do the wicked renounce God and say in their heart “You will not call us to account”?...break the arm of the wicked and evildoers; seek out their wickedness until you find none”(Bruggemann, 1991, p. 11).

In light of these verses, other passages in psalm 89, for example, talk about justice and righteousness as the very foundation of God’s throne:

Let the heavens praise you wonders, O Lord,
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.
For who in the skies can be compared to the
Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the
Lord...the heavens are yours, the earth also is
yours...righteousness and justice are the
foundation of your thrones, steadfast love and
faithfulness go before you(vv.5-14).

Psalm 33 also links justice to God’s very act of creation “God (He) loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord” (v. 5). Yoder (1987) argues that, in light of these Psalms 33, 89 and many others, “God as God of justice is connected with God as the creator of the world “(p. 26).

Like Israel’s prophets, and later the Annang, earlier examined, the psalmists in a few other places talk about oppressors killing the needy, “they crush your people, O Lord, and afflict your heritage. They kill the widow and the stranger, they murder the orphan” (Ps. 94:5-6). We can conclude that psalmists add to Israel’s legacy for social justice. By the content of their

prayers they appealed for those who were enduring crises. They advocated for justice. They championed righteousness. They also reinterpreted legislative texts and added to past traditions new forms of expressions of confidence in the love of God to assist the poor and the victims of injustices (Malchow, 1996, p.57).

Justice in the Historical Books

In the historical books, especially in the Deuteronomic and Chronicler histories, as well as Ruth, Ezra-Nehemiah, we find references to justice and righteousness. For example, in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, echoes of social justice are heard. Like Mary's Magnificat in Luke's Gospel, it reads,

The bows of the might is broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger forever.... The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor (vv.4-8).

Similar message of justice is heard in Prophet Nathan's parable to David (2 Sam 12:1-4); Charity to Elijah the prophet (1 Kings 17:8-16); Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21); story of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz (Ruth 2:1-11). Also in the narrative where King Jehoshaphat appointed Judges in 2 Chronicles 19:5-7, justice is emphasized:

Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on behalf of human but on the Lord's behalf; he is

with you in giving judgment. Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take care what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the Lord our God, or partiality, or taking of bribes.

Justice is also emphasized in the memoirs of Nehemiah (Neh 5:1-13). In this text, the wealthy seemed to have forced the poor to surrender some of their property as well as enslaved their children and grandchildren. Nehemiah, in the spirit of the law codes, the prophets, psalms, is a good example of a wealthy man like Amos and others who take the side of the poor.

Justice in Wisdom Literature

In addition to justice and righteousness in the law codes, prophets, psalms, narrative and historical books, echoes of justice are heard, as well in some passages of Wisdom Literature (proverbs, Job, Eccl, Sirach and Wisdom). Malchow (1996, pp.65-75) rightly notes that Wisdom Literature received its concepts from other Near Eastern Wisdom literature some of which we will discuss in the next section. Although this literature possess prophetic influences it emphasizes fear of the Lord, prudence, need to keep the Torah, elegance, faith, self-control, justice, good attitude towards wealth, social class of the wise, as well as charity (Prov 28:27; Job 31:16-20). In terms of wealth, “money answers everything” (Eccl10:19), the rich rule the poor (Prov 22:7), wealth is a rich person’s protection (Prov 10:15) and brings honor (10:30-31); the rich are surrounded by friends while the poor are isolated (14:20; 19:4; Sir 13:21-22). In spite of all these, the wise counselling is that God is not only the source of wealth, but he is the one who gives the power to enjoy wealth (Eccl 5:18-19). There are values greater than ordinarily wealth, such as wisdom (Prov 3:13-15), quiet (17:1), a

good name (22:1), and health (Sir 30:14-16) and fear of the Lord and love (Prov 15:16-17).

In addition, the wise must respect the poor and the needy. Proverbs 30:13-14 describe the proud who devour the poor like cannibals. Wisdom 2:10-11 talks about the ungodly who plan to oppress the poor and the widows and claims that might makes right. In these literatures there also many ways in which justice was denied to the poor (Prov 11:1; 16:11; 20:10, 23; Sir 42:4). There other passages too large for our limited space. But, we conclude with Malchow (p.74) that, like other previous texts cited in Wisdom Literature stood back, center and front in promoting social justice in ancient Israel.

Finally, and before we comment briefly on the ANE and NT notions of justice, it's worth highlighting the commonality found in the language of the OT texts to include concern for the poor (*uwuene/ubuene*), widows (*mme ebekpa*), orphans (*ajen/nto nnana*), resident aliens and sojourners (*mme isen owo*). In Hebrew we heard the terms such as, *`ānî*, *`ānāwîm*, *dal*, *'ebyôn*, and *rāš* (Malchow, 12-13; Wolterstorff, 75-78).

Justice in Ancient Near Eastern Culture

It is also worth noting that, "Israel received its concern for social justice from the Near Eastern cultures surrounding it," (Malchow, 1; Fensham, 1962, 129; von Waldow, 1970, 184-85; Havice, 1979, Rakin, 1936, 13-15; Fichtner, 1933, 26-33). Defending the poor, the sojourners, resident aliens, widows and fatherless children was also a common policy in the ANE. In the Sumerian times (ca. 2850-2360) in Mesopotamia there were references to the plight of the deprived (Kramer, 1963, p. 264; Nardoni, 2004, pp. 1-20). As spotted by Fensham, concern for the poor is mentioned in the Mesopotamian legal texts like

the reformatory measures of Urukagina of Lagesh and the Code of Ur-Nammu and in the Babylonian Theodicy and the Proverbs of Utnapishtim (pp. 130-31). A hymn to Shamash as quoted by Havice says “you created justice for the weak, give judgment to the orphan girl. The weak you make a hero, the insignificant you make rich,” (p.150). For Israel’s neighbors, Mesopotamians, divine justice was given to the rulers by the gods (Kraus, 1989, p.78). Their duties were to provide justice for the deprived as evident in the prologue of the Code of Hammurabi, which speaks of King Lipts-Ishtar of Isin;

Anum and Enlil named me, to promote the welfare of the people, me, Hammurabi, the devout, god-fearing prince, to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil, that the wrong might not oppress the weak (ANET, p. 164).

Apart from Mesopotamia’s concern for justice, social justice was also a dominant feature in ancient Egypt that may have influenced Israel’s concepts of justice. As noted by Havice (pp. 31-32, 47, 65-77, 75, 83-84), it occurs in Egyptian ideal biographies, declarations of innocence, inscriptions, hymns, and Wisdom writings. Those with power throughout various successive historical periods in Egypt were asked to deal impartially with all or even to seek out and meet human need (Malchow, pp. 2-3).

In the biblical era God/YHWH was seen as the sources of justice. In Mesopotamia and in Egypt the gods were seen as the originator of justice. There is hymn associated with this, cited by Havice (p. 84), which says:

Amon, lend thine ear, to one who is alone in the court, in which he is poor, he is not rich. When the court defrauds him of silver and gold,... May Amon transform himself into a vizier in order to release the poor.

The same could be said of the Hittites, the Canaanites, the Phoenicians and other of Israel's neighbors in the Near East. All these were seen in the above discussion of justice in ancient Israel, whose concern for justice lay in the earlier ANE conception of the issue. Speaking about this in a very emphatic terms Nardoni (2004) once said "any study of justice in the Bible must begin with ancient Mesopotamia because the concept and the vocabulary of biblical justice is rooted in that culture" (p. 1).

Justice in the New Testament

According to Professor Udo Essien Udo (1983) "75% of the Annangs are members of both Catholic and Protestant churches, while 25% are still practicing the ancient religion of their ancestors" (p.63). If Udo's argument is at least partially tenable, it makes sense to further examine the concerns of justice in the NT, being part of the sacred scriptures (Hebrew Bible=OT/NT) embraced by most post-colonial and contemporary Annang Christian people. In the NT two key terms used in expressing justice are *krisis* (justice or judgment) and *diakaiosunē* (righteousness). Wolterstorff (2008) has a unique way of explaining these terms. Between the Hebrew Bible and the Greek NT there came the Septuagint (LXX) translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. This began in Alexandria around the third century BC and continued for a hundred years or more; tradition holds that the initial work

was done by seventy scholars—hence, the name Septuagint (LXX). He notes that one of challenges facing the LXX translators was how to catch, in the Greek of their day, the combination of “*mishpat*” with “*tsədāqâ*” that we find in the OT, standardly translated into English as justice and righteousness, and if I may add, in Annang, as *Unen and Ikpe*. The solution the seventy translators settled with was to translate “*tsədāqâ*” as “*dikaosunē*,” and to use the term whose home use was in legal situations, namely “*krisis*,” to translate “*mishpat*.” “*Mishpat*” and “*tsədāqâ*” became “*krisis*,” and “*dikaosunē*.” As was the case in the OT, the pattern is not entirely consistent, however, every now and then, when *mishpat* is not paired off with *tsədāqâ*, it is translated with *dikaosunē* (e.g., 1 Kings 3:28; Prov 17:23; Isa 61:8).

In the NT, especially in the Gospels and Paul’s Letters, both terms “*krisis*” and “*dikaosunē*” are used to express justice and the love of God-righteousness (pp.112-113). In the NT *dikaosunē* basically means, the character or the quality of being right or just. It is also a word used to describe God. He is in the ultimate sense the Just One (Rom 3:5, 25). It is also used to describe the righteous life of the believer, i.e., a life lived in obedience to the will of God (Rom 6:13, 16, 18, 19, 20; Eph 6:14, etc.). I will now briefly comment on Luke-Acts.

In Luke-Acts a number of underclass voices in Jewish society are mentioned. For instance, Zechariah, a minor priest; two hill-country women, both pregnant, Elizabeth, the elderly wife of Zechariah, and Mary, a young relative of Elizabeth; Simeon, a pious elderly Jerusalemite; Ann, an extremely pious eighty-four-year-old widow; and some shepherds. And what they said came to a fulfilment. Therefore, Luke presents his narratives as the continuation of a story already told (Matera, 2007, pp.52-

55). It is a story of salvation history (*heilsgeschichte*), divine necessity and justice already told in the OT.

In his *Moral Vision of the NT* (1996) Richard Hays says:

The Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles are two parts of a single grand literary work in which Luke tells the story of salvation history in a stately and gracious manner. God's mighty act of deliverance through Jesus Christ is narrated as an epic, in such a way that the church might discover its location in human history, particularly within the history of God's dealings with his people Israel (p.112).

Hays is right that the story offered by Luke the historian is not just an empty story, but one of God's justice. For example in Luke Jesus is the one who brings Justice. Luke says Jesus,

Unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written; the spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; He sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed to go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:17-21; cf. Isa 61:1-2).

Earlier on in Luke 1: 46-53 we heard of the theme of rectifying justice. The coming of justice include social inversion as proclaimed by Mary in her Magnificat:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant...He has

brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry
with good things, and sent the rich away
empty(Luke 1:46-53).

Commenting on this text, Wolterstorff (2008, p.124) believes that theme of justice or social inversion is heard in the lowly shepherds who were elevated by the message of the heavenly good news that to the city of David will be born, this day, a Savior (Luke 2:10-11). Justice is also found in the fact that the shepherds found their Lord laying in a manger, picked up in Luke's Beatitudes, "Blessed are you who are poor' and "woe to those who are rich," blessed are those who are hungry now," and "woe to those who are full now," (Luke 6:20-25). No wonder Dempsey (2008) has described the New Testament vision of justice (cf. Luke 18:1-8; 23:26-43; Matt 23:1-36) as assertive and reconciling (pp.36-43). That is to say, the essence of divine justice expressed in the NT was not necessarily retributive, punitive or juridical, but compassion expressed through forgiveness as shown in the passion narratives.

A Comparative Summary

In what precedes we have seen the general philosophical notions of justice, Judeo-Christian, ANE as well as Annang concerns and understanding of Justice (*unen*). As contemporary Annang people, Christians and non-Christians, we are left with the need for comparative analysis and conclusions. We are challenged not only to compare, contrast and evaluate, but to retrieve from various traditions a vision of justice that offer contemporary Annang culture peace (*emem*), *uforo* (prosperity), love (*ima*) and unity (*mboho*).

Very comparable between the Annangs and Judeo-Christianity is not only the idea of the social settings for justice, but in both Judeo-Christian and Annang settings, there is a common phenomena of exodus, immigration, class struggle, search for food, land, border, overcoming poverty, home, settlement, peace and justice. In Annang more than one word, for instance *unen*, *ikpe* are used to communicate justice, so also in Judaism, where “*mishpat*” (judgement) and “*tsedeqa*” (righteousness) are also used interchangeably for social justice. In Annang context the poor, *uwuene/ubuene*, widows (*ebekpa*), orphans (*ajen/nto nnana*), resident aliens and sojourners (*mme isen owo*). In Hebrew we heard the terms in their semitic wordings such as *`ānî*, *`ānāwîm*, *dal*, *'ebyôn*, and *rāš* (poor, vulnerable, orphans, widows, sojourners, Levites), although the idea of the sacredness of a grandchild is not emphasized as we saw among the Annang people.

In discussing the classes of justice such as, social, commutative, distributive and retributive/rectifying, there are noticeable points of divergence and convergence. Biblical justice does not minister justice of any kind through secret societies (*ekpe*, *ekpo*, *ekong*, *ebre*, *mbobo* etc) as was the case especially in pre-colonial Annang, although both understood justice as the fundamental aspect of the activity of God.

In sum, Christianity has offered us a true solution of the meaning justice (“*krisis*” and “*dikaiosunē*”) illustrated by the few selected and studied NT texts. No wonder the NT vision of justice has been received (cf. Luke 18:1-8; 23:26-43; Matt 23:1-36) as assertive and reconciling. That is to say, the essence of divine justice expressed in the NT was not necessarily retributive, punitive and juridical, but was compassion, expressed through the forgiveness, values and mission of Christ as shown in the

passion narratives of Christ. Christ's values in my point of view are not far from true African moral values. These moral values include pursuit of the truth (*akpan iko*), firmness of heart (*ati*), honesty (*akpaniko*), integrity (*uko*), generosity (*uno owo nkpo*), joy (*inem*) and security (*ukpeme*); plus authentic sense of the sacred (*ubak-nkpo*), respect for elders (*ukpono nkpon owo*), in-laws (*ukot*), family (*ekpuk/ufok*), grandchildren (*nto ajejen*), resident aliens (*mme isen owo*), sojourners, and promotion of peace (*emem*) and unity (*mboho*) among contemporary peoples, especially the Annangs.

If I may conclude with one of my favorite prophets, Amos, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like ever-flowing stream" in Annangland and beyond (Amos 5:24).

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