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Hermeneutical Study of Psalm 23: 6 in the Light of Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

In recent times, some Christian faithful in nearly all Church traditions in Africa especially Nigeria have always close worship services or any Christian event in churches or homes with the recitation of Psalm 23: 6 as against the long standing tradition of closing these with Benediction or Grace. Attempt is made in this study to investigate the reasons for this change. In this Study, Psalm 23:6 is interpreted in the light of Security which is fundamental to the survival of the African people. The study adopted the African Biblical Hermeneutics which provides a useful lens to reread biblical text in African Context so that the Bible can be relevant in African situations and times. It was discovered that the book of Psalms was very popular and used by ancient Israel and by the early Christians.

Index terms— christian faithful, recitation of psalm 23: 6, security, africa yoruba, interpretation and Nigeria.

1 Introduction

he book of Psalms is widely read and cited among Christians in Africa especially in African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria. This is based on the view that the book is more potent than all other books of the Bible. Psalms are like the trends in modern speech act theory which maintains that words are potent and effective ??Nasuti, 2001: 144). The book of Psalms is the best and most cited book in the Old Testament especially by the African Indigenous churches because of the believe that its contents are most potent and effective words in the Bible. Most times, the African Indigenous churches draw their prayer items, sermon topics and songs from the contents of the Psalter ??Awojobi, 2021: 9).

Psalm 23 is one of the most familiar Psalms in the Bible ??Crenshaw, 1993: 127-135). This Psalm the most loved book of the Psalms. Basically there are two ways of reading this Psalm: as a Shepherd to a Sheep and as God to a human. Africans would prefer that the Psalm be read as God to a human for the purposes of protection, provision, healing and success in all aspect of life which are the fundamental concerns of the African people ??Adamo, 2018: 9). Psalm 23 is one of the classical Old Testament passages depicting Yahweh as Shepherd. The words and imagery of this Psalm will certainly accompany the faithful reader 'all the days of his life'. In this Psalm we encounter an individual who confesses trust in the good Shepherd who will provide in all circumstances. Psalm 23 stands out as the most familiar book in the Old Testament (Botha, 2015: 283-300; ??ennedy, 1984: 14-21; ??errill, 1965: 354-360; ??orgenstern, 1946: 13-24). Most Christians love Psalm 23 and as such it is referred to as 'American icon' ??Holladay, 1993: 359) and 'nightingale of the Psalms' ??Segal, 2013: 103) by some biblical scholars. This Psalm is believed to have filled the whole world with 'melodious joy' ??Segal, 2013:103).

Western scholars in biblical studies have given different theme and titles to Psalm 23. As far as May is concerned the theme of this Psalm is 'the Lord Is My Shepherd ?? (1994:14). To Segal, it is 'With Me' (2013: 103), while Kraus sees it as 'Security in the Goodness and Mercy of Yahweh ?? (1988: 302-305). According to ??chaefer (2001: 58), the theme that better describe the Psalm is 'You are with me'. Bullock sees it as 'The LORD Is My Shepherd I lack nothing' (2015: 166). Waltke and Houston calls it 'The Good shepherd' (2010:416) but to Watts it is 'Psalm of Trust, Thanksgiving and Praise'. To my mind all the above interpretations are good and appropriate as theme of Psalm 23 in the light of its contents and the context of the writer at the time of the composition of the Psalm. However, this study will focus on Kraus theme for Psalm 23 as 'Security in the

[illegible]

64 2 a) Psalm 23 in Western Biblical Scholarship

65 This Psalm opens with a powerful metaphor: 'The Lord is my Shepherd' ??Adamo, 2018: 7). Shepherd is a
66 title that is synonymous with a King. This metaphor is used as a polemic argument that the vocation of a
67 King is protection, guidance, care, and even substituting ones' life for the people ??Botha, 2015: 283-300). A
68 metaphor is when a word or a phrase is used to describe somebody or something else, in a way that is different
69 from its normal use, in order to show that the two things have the same qualities and to make the description
70 more powerful ??Hornby, 2015: 976). Metaphor does not describe by comparison but only identifies by equation
71 ??May, 1994:115-119). Many symbols are actually metaphors, because they are based on analogies within human
72 experience. A symbol could be culture and history bound. That explains why the symbol of God as a Shepherd
73 was so prominent in Israel's early history. In a society where the main means of subsistence was sheep-farming,
74 a symbol such as that of the Shepherd could easily be associated with God (VanGemeran, 1997 ??VanGemeran,
75 : 1225)). As far as Foreman (2011) is concerned, Psalm 23 possess one of the powerful animal metaphor in
76 biblical literature as he classified its imagery as mammal and pastoral. Yahweh being described as a Shepherd
77 in this Psalm reflects the image of the God of Israel as seen in many Old Testament Scriptures (Exod. 15: 13,
78 Psa. 77: 21; 78: 52-53) and prophetic oracles in exile and the return of God's people from exile to their home in
79 Jerusalem. From the content of Psalm 23, it appears the author is very familiar with the history of the ancient
80 Israel and when they went through ??Botha, 2015: 283-300). The author made use of the life and experiences of
81 the Israelites in the composition of the text under review ??Bullock, 2015: 169). However, many scholars are of
82 the view that Psalm 23 originated from late Babylonian exile and was recited in the post-exilic Israel ??Adamo,
83 2018: 6).

It is clear from this Psalm that the Shepherd considered it his responsibility to provide for the Sheep. The Sheep is expected to be loyal, rely and depend absolutely on the Shepherd for provision, protection and guidance from time to time. According to Botha, Psalm 23 best describe the story of an individual in the journey of life (2015: 283-300). ??oulder (2006: 463-473) opined that this Psalm may have been composed by a King in ancient Israel because it has national overtones and as such regarded it as a royal Psalm. Also, this Psalm fit into the royal Psalm in the light of Yahweh being referred to as King and Shepherd in ancient Israel, the Author thus becomes a vassal to the King ??Merrill, 1965: 354-360; ??anner, 2004: 270-283).

91 **3 b) Literary Analysis of Psalm 23**

92 This Psalm is a Psalm of trust and confidence in Yahweh for his goodness in life and in the life to come. The
93 Psalmist speaks of Yahweh in a personal way as his Shepherd and guidance. Psalm 23 can be divided into three
94 parts and three basic images namely: Shepherds verses 1-2, the wanderer (verses 3-4) and the host, verses ??-6
95 (Weiser, 1998: 226-231; ??lifford, 2002:130). Since God is the Shepherd all that is required from the Psalmist is
96 to trust absolutely in Yahweh.

The first word of the Psalm, "The LORD", evokes the rich images of the provision and protection of God of covenant. The Psalmist maintains that the LORD is "my" Shepherd I shall not want. The common thing in ancient Israel was to address God as "our" Shepherd (Deut. 6: 4). This expression of the Psalmist is an indication that the God of Israel is also the God of individuals as well. The metaphor of the Shepherd points to the relationship between God and his Children (Baker & Kohlenberger III, 1994:823). A good Shepherd is primarily concerned about the welfare of the Sheep and as such provides all the necessities of life for the enjoyment of the Sheep. Due to the trust and confidence that the Psalmist has in the Shepherd he or she is not afraid of evil; 'because you are with me'. In verse 5, the Psalmist changed the image of God from being a Shepherd to a host in a banquet serving a meal in the presence of his enemies (Adamo, 2018:3). Verse 6 is the response of the

168 1:3), "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4), "full of pity, and merciful" (Jas 5 (Lk 10:30ff; Lk 14:12-16; Jas 3:17). In the
 169 New Testament "mercy" is associated with "grace" in the apostolically greetings and elsewhere. From all the
 170 foregoing it will be seen that mercy in God is not merely His pardon of offenders, but His attitude to man, and
 171 to the world generally, from which His pardoning mercy proceeds.

172 5 d) Psalm 23: 6 in the Light of Insecurity in Nigeria Context

173 It is important to understand the African perspective of security and success before attempting to interpret the
 174 text. Africans are always faced with situations that are overwhelming to them. The level of poverty, insecurity
 175 and health issues are very high in Africa. All human efforts to bring solution to these issues have failed. This
 176 is the reason why an average African will always seek divine intervention on issues of concern. Before the
 177 advent of Christianity, African had their own ways of solving security challenges. However, when the White
 178 Missionaries came African were told to discard their how approach to issues of security, health, poverty and
 179 the likes without concrete alternatives ??Adamo, 2005b: 31-52). In their search for solutions to these issues of
 180 concern, they discovered the book of Psalms which appeared to offer the desired solutions to their challenges.
 181 For instance, among the Yorubas of South Western Nigeria, the contents and the forms of Psalms are classified
 182 as Ofo/OgedeDafidi, David's incantations, etc. ??Kalu, 2006: 140). The contents of the Psalms resemble the
 183 African traditional incantations (ogede). This made them to memorize some portions and apply them to their
 184 challenges.

185 Psalm 23 is classified as a Psalm of confidence and trust in Yahweh in the face of insecurity. The structure
 186 of Psalm 23 in the African context is classified according to African real life interest and what it can offer to
 187 the readers -protection, provision, healing and success ??Adamo, 2018:8). This position agreed with the way the
 188 Psalms were used in ancient Israel with the verbs ?[????guard] and ?[????protect] inscribed on them (Schmitz
 189 2002:818-822; Smoak 2010:421-432, 2011:75-92). A good example is the existence of handful of Phoenician and
 190 Punic amulets from the first millennium with the same verb 'guard' and 'protect' inscribed on their surfaces
 191 ??Schmitz, 2002: 818-822; 2010: 421-432; Smoak, 2011: 75-92). Some Jews in ancient Israel wrote the words of
 192 the scripture especially Psalms on their bodies, singing and chanting these words in their daily meditations and
 193 prayers to Yahweh ??Awojobi, 2021:13).

194 In Nigeria, Psalm 23 is written on vehicles, parchments, doors, clothes and on the body as talisman, recited,
 195 chanted and sung with unwavering faith or trust in God ??Adamo, 2005: 78b). Psalm 23: 6 is always recited
 196 immediately after the benediction in most Pentecostal and Evangelical churches in Nigeria. Reading, wearing
 197 and reciting of this portion of the Psalter is consider as prayer for divine intervention or miracle in the life of
 198 the person performing the activity as it happened to the Author. This is an indication of cultural and religious
 199 parallel between ancient Israel and the Africans. As far as Brown is concerned recitation, chanting of Psalms
 200 orally as divine prayers for guidance According to Adamo, Psalm 23: 6 is a Psalm for success in all life endeavors.
 201 To an average African, success is having many wives and children, passing examination, making good profit in
 202 business, going on a journey and safe return, securing an employment, success in court cases and many other
 203 things (2005a: 90-95). To realize the above successes, many Africans go to any length. For instance, some of them
 204 go to traditional doctors for medicine or charms that will make them to succeed in any of the above endeavors.
 205 Africans inscribe the words of this Psalm on their clothes, paper, bill boards, vehicles, houses, and anything that
 206 is associated with them with the believe that the content of the Psalm will be a voice for them in the time of
 207 trouble.

208 As mentioned earlier, the study is premised on African biblical hermeneutics which attempted to bring real-life
 209 interest that are of great concern to the Africans into the text for a better interpretation and understanding of
 210 the text under consideration. Such life interest may be security, provision, and protection. The African biblical
 211 interpreter is not keenly interested in the historical, social and literary dimensions of the text but how the text
 212 can meet the daily challenges faced by the African people ??Adamo 2015b: 31-52b). In other words, Africans
 213 are keenly interested in the solution a text can bring to an issue that is confronting them at the moment.

214 To facilitate understanding of the African concept of Psalm 23: 6, the interpretation shall be done under the
 215 following headings:

216 6 Surely

217 As mentioned earlier, the word 'surely' ?????? means, certainly, truly, verily, and indeed. It is used in most case
 218 as a response to an action or a statement of fact. The Psalmist in Psalm 23: 6 declared: "surely, goodness and
 219 mercy shall follow me, all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever and ever".?
 220 ????? ?|? ???? ???? ???? ???? ? ???? ?×?"? ????? ???? ?×?"? ? ? ?????? ??? ??? ? ? ???-?? ??? ? ? ???
 221 ????? ??? ? ? ? ??? ???? ??? ? ? ???? ??? ?? ? ??? ??? ? ? ???? ??-??? ? ? ??×?"? ? ? ?×?"? ????? ???? ?
 222 ????? ???? ???? ??? ? ? ?????

223 This is a declaration of absolute trust and confidence in Yahweh for security, protection, healing, success,
 224 provisions and all that is needed in life. This suggests that the Psalmist is very certain of his security and success
 225 in Yahweh. This confidence and assurance is because of who Yahweh is and what he has done for the Psalmist
 226 (vss 1-5). In verse 5, the phrase: 'You prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies' should be noted.
 227 The 'enemies are of great concern to the Africans. The Yoruba word for enemy is ota. Two types of enemies

(ota) can be identified in Africa. They are: the world (aiye) and humans (eniyan). Some of the human enemies in Africa include: witches, wizards, sorcerers and the likes ??Adamo, 2005b: 77). One of the main prayer of an average African is how to overcome 'enemies'. It is held among many Africans that every human has enemies. These (ota) 'enemies' are said to be responsible for evils in our society. There is a Church in Nigeria called Mountain of Fire and Miracles. The content of their prayers averagely is against (ota) enemies. They always pray that their enemies (ota) should die by fire. This is because of the view that no ota will wish anybody well. This group of Christians look for potent words from the Bible especially the book of Psalm in their prayer against the enemy, ota.

According to Dopamu, the adherents of African traditional religion use potent words called incantations (ofu) pronounced on charms (epe) on their enemies (ota) (1987: 58). The effects of this on the so called enemies may be abnormal behavior, death, loss of property, sickness, poverty, loss of job, ill luck, demotion and all sort of evil (1987). The 'enemies' will prevent a person from achieving divine purpose in life. Ota could be any person who does not wish another person well. David, the writer of most part of the Psalms had many ota. There were ota from within and without for David. If not for divine intervention David would not have been King in Israel (2 Sam. [1][2][3][4][5][6]. There is parallel between David's experience and most Africans today.

It is held among the Africans that delay, sicknesses, poverty, insecurity, and any form of misfortune are the activities of ota ??Awojobi, 2021: 7). The word 'surely' is interpreted 'nitoto' in Yoruba language connote something that is true, certain, factual and cannot be reversed. The word 'nitoto' instill confidence and trust in the speaker. It removes any iota of doubt or fear in the speaker. Ota could not stop Yahweh in carrying out his purpose for the Psalmist. Therefore, 'nitoto' Yahweh will handle all Ota-'enemies' of destiny. The Yoruba word 'nitoto' (surely), expresses the absolute trust or confidence in the person being addressed. It is like drawing conclusion on a matter after a critical examination and being convinced beyond reasonable doubt. It is an affirmation of something that has been trusted and tested to be correct or true by all and sundry.

7 Goodness

The word 'goodness' means something that is good. The "goodness" ?????? of God is demonstrated in his abundant care and promises ??Baker & Kohlenberger III, 1994: 824). As far as the Psalmist is concerned, instead of enemies pursuing him, it is now 'goodness ?????? and mercy' ?????? ?x??" of Yahweh pursuing him. In other words, the 'enemies' (ota) have been rendered powerless. The Psalmist is now being accompanied by goodness and mercy all the time. The Yoruba interpretation of goodness is Ire. Ire is the opposite of ibi, bad. It is held among the Yoruba that Ire is the absence of failure, evil, mishaps and anything that brings sadness to a person. The Yoruba believe that there are certain evils that do accompany each day. There is an adage in Yoruba that says: ti ibi, ti ire la da le aye, meaning 'the world was created with good and evil'. In other words, evil and good are together. This is in accordance with the Bible verse that that says: 'redeeming the time for the days are evil' (Eph. 5: 16). Ibi always follow humans from time to time. The recitation of Psalm 23: 6 on a daily basis by an African Christian will prevent evils that are associated with a particular day from following him. Some Nigerians inscribe Psalm 23:6 on their clothes, vehicles, houses, and wrist bands that they wear from time to time. Others recite or read this Psalm into water and drink it or sprinkle it on the vehicle before they embark on a journey. In African Indigenous churches, Psalm 23 is considered a protective Psalm that can be chanted, written on parchment and worn on the waist, arm or neck, or hung on motor vehicles as a talisman and it represents the presence of God Almighty ??Adamo, 2018: 8). This is because no evil can stand in the face of good in the presence of God. The Yoruba believe that goodness is an indication of the presence of God around the Christian.

In Nigeria, some Prophets or Pastors in African Indigenous Churches have different types of programs that normally held early in the morning every day. They are usually prayer programs between 5-6:30am every day. In this type of program, the sermon is short sermon but the prayer time is long. Most of the prayer point are drawn from the Psalter. The program is designed to attack all evils that may accompany the day and that is the reason why it is held in the early hour of the day. African Christian believe that after the prayer program, the day is already secure because the evils of the day as been render powerless. One of such prayer program is the one organized by Prophet Samuel Olukosi of the Christ Apostolic Church, Achievers District Church Council, Offa, Kwara State Nigeria. It is a Radio program tagged: "Goodness at Dawn" between 6-6:20am on Mondays to Friday every week. Christians from all walks of life tune to this program to know what God has in stock for them for the day. In this program prayers are offered on the felt needs of participants. It is like early morning tonic or drug of prevention against evils that are likely to surface during the day. There are testimonies of answers to prayer by the participants (Olukosi, 2022). One of the main emphasis of this program is prevailing Prayer against enemies ota of all sorts that may prevent a person from realizing divine purpose daily. People with differs life threatening problems consult Prophets like Olukosi for special prayers and counselling on their issues of concern.

8 Mercy/Love ????? ????? ?x??"

Mercy is an event or a situation to be grateful for, usually because it stops something unpleasant ??Hornby, 2015: 973). The Hebrew word ????? ????? ?x??" means 'mercy' (KJV), 'steadfast love' (NRSV), 'constancy love' (NEB), 'unfailing love' (NIV). This conventional term refers to unfailing help to the helpless (VanGemenen, 1997:

1107). Mercy is one of the attributes of God. It is held among the Yoruba in Nigeria that every human needs divine mercy to survive every day. The 'love' of God is conventional commitment to bless his people with his promises. Instead of being pursued by enemies who seek his destruction, God's love will follow the Psalmist. He does not need to be afraid, because God's loving care follows him throughout life ??Baker & Kohlenberger III, 1994: 824). The love or mercy of God is very important to the Africans in view of the situation around. Africa especially Nigeria is going through tough times at the moment. Our roads are death traps and this make citizens to be afraid to travel in the day or night. Nigerian roads have claimed many lives. Kidnappers, bandits and Fulani herdsmen are having a field day in Nigeria. The kidnappers in Nigeria are so bold that they kidnap people in their homes, schools, churches, on the road and request for huge amount of money as ransom before their victims would be released ??Awojobi, 2021:9). Sometimes after the payment of ransom the victims are killed. In most cases whenever beautiful girls or ladies are kidnapped they are married off by the kidnappers. Terrorist activities are on the increase. The Fulani herdsmen, Boko Haram and Bandits of all sorts have taken over our forests and roads. Nigerian always pray for journey mercies (aanu irinajo) before embarking on either long or short journeys. Kidnapping has become one of the most lucrative business in Nigeria today. Travelers on Nigerian road are in the attitude of praying before leaving their houses, praying when the vehicle is about to take off and praying when they arrive at their destinations. Today, travelling has become nightmares for some Nigerians. It is a situation where divine intervention is urgently needed. Surely, 'goodness and mercy' of God must be sought and obtained before embarking on a journey in Nigeria.

9 Dwelling in the house of the Lord forever

The Psalmist mentioned that he will dwell in the house of Yahweh forever. The Hebrew word ?????? ??? forever, everlasting, evermore, perpetual, old, ancient, world, always, eternity and so on is used more than three hundred times to indicate indefinite continuance into the very distant future, the meaning of the word is not confined to the future. There are at least twenty instances where it clearly refers to the past ??Awojobi, 2021: 6). This implies that he has chosen Yahweh's residence as his place of continuous abode for security purposes. This is an indication that that sorrow and sighing will give way to joy, gladness and uninterrupted happiness for the Psalmist (Cf. Isa. 35: 10). This is a reminder of what happened in Mesopotamia, where the worshippers of the gods dedicated statues in the temple of their god to symbolize the individual continuous Volume XXII Issue XI Version I 42 () presence before their god that would guarantee divine safety, peace and goodness ??Adamo, 2018: 8). This is in agreement with the theology of inviolability of Jerusalem in the time of Prophet Jeremiah when the Temple was considered as a symbol of safety for Israel. To this end, Israel believed that as long as the Temple remain in Jerusalem the city cannot be attacked and destroyed by enemies.

As far as the Nigerian Christians are concerned, the house of the Lord is a place of security. In African Indigenous Churches, whenever some people are going through challenges, they are asked by Church leader to come and spend sometimes in the Church to seek the face of God. This sometimes means that they will leave their homes to live in the Church for some days. Some Christians spend some days on the mountain to pray to God for solution to their problems. The African Indigenous Church leaders encourages their members to go to the mountains to prayer whenever they are going through divers' problems.

10 III.

11 Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that Psalms were very popular among the ancient Israel and the early Christians. They considered the words in the Psalms as potent and as such used them in their worship services for healing, success and security. Portions of Psalms were written on parchment, clothes, houses, and any other things that are associated with them. They recited, sung and prayed from the Psalms. This suggests that the words of the Psalter were memorized and recited in ancient Israel for security purposes. In the same fashion, the African Christians especially in Nigeria see the Psalter as divine, per formative and potent. The words of the Psalms can be used to achieve healing, success and security. Psalm 23: 6 is recited among some Christian faithful in Africa especially Nigeria for the purposes of security of lives and property. This is because of the high level of insecurity in the land. This Psalm serves as immunity for the Christians against evils that accompanies every day. The Christian is confident that his security is guaranteed and as such he is not afraid because God will watch over him at all times.

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11 CONCLUSION

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