

Istituto Adventista di Cultura Biblica

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THE LEADERSHIP MODEL OF PSALM 23

An Exegetical, Theological and Practical Commentary

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«A leader [...] is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind».

N.R. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom. The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, New York, Little, Brown and Company, 1995², p. 28.

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Introduction

«The Lord is my shepherd» is one of the most quoted bible verses at funeral services because its words transmit a sense of compassion and security¹. Though the Lord's loving-compassion and protection amidst our darkest moments are legitimately part of the messages in the text of the twenty-third psalm, there is more to it. In fact, as the Bible says in Isaiah 55:11, every word that comes from God shall accomplish its purpose and will not return to God in void. Psalm 23 does not limit itself to wiping our tears, but the text also seems to portray more on the Lord's leadership in our daily lives. For this reason, the poetical and theological depth of Psalm 23 may lose their grip if the text is limited to the «cemetery». This paper is therefore presented as one of the many ways to look beyond the «shadows of death» of the twenty-third psalm, and to see if there is more above the shadows of death and specially to observe more closely how the Lord leads as a shepherd even in bad times. In fact, the Lord's comfort and presence in times of need is mostly shown through his direction, guidance and healthy leadership in every sphere of existence.

The theme of *leadership* is important for God so his inspired word, the Bible, presents this theme in a variety of ways from the Old to the New Testament. For instance, the first words of Genesis talk about creation which starts with this particular phrase «In the beginning God [...]» - Gen. 1:1. Interestingly, in the original Hebrew text the term translated as «beginning» is the feminine noun ראשית («reshith») which comes from the masculine noun ראש («rosh») which means «head, chief, captain» or in general «leader»². So, we can see from here that leadership has been one of the core subjects of our existence since the beginning of the existence of our world and our existence as humans³. Furthermore, the last words of the Bible describe Jesus as Lord (Rev. 22:20, 21) of all, the one who leads all his children to salvation, the leader, the king, who sits on the throne to bring «light» to the world. In summary, at the end of the history of man, at the end of our era, God will still stand out, he will still be at the *head* of time, of space, still leading in creation and into recreation.

¹ B. Shirilla, «The Lord is my Shepherd Prayer» in *The Art of Condolences*, <https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/help-resources/arranging-a-funeral/planning-the-service/funeral-poems/the-lords-my-shepherd-psalm-23> visited 03/02/2022.

² J.B. Doukhan, «Leadership in the Creation Narrative», in *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, <https://jacl.andrews.edu/leadership-in-the-creation-narrative/> visited 03/02/2022.

³ *Ibidem*.

Humans are also interested in leadership because it is wired in our being and in our society. In fact, there have been written millions of pages on leadership theories (circumstance theory, function theory, trait theory, etc.), leadership styles (autocratic, *laissez-faire*, democratic, etc.) and leadership functions (general functions, functions of maintenance, functions of organization, etc.)⁴. As organized as our society is, we obviously need people who can influence and positively impact us as well as lead us to a better society. This is seen in how many of us expect a lot from our politicians and the candidates we vote for during any kind of elections. The world is looking *for* and *to* leaders. Looking back at history⁵ and observing our present world, we can all honestly testify what lack of leadership can mean.

Along with the other ways the Lord has shown mankind to achieve good results in life through wise leadership choices in the ages past, the leadership model presented by Psalm 23 is also useful and should be looked into because first of all it is inspired by God and transmitted in a poetical and musical piece which is interwoven with faith, history and spirituality. In fact, one of the reasons why the Psalms are loved is due to their musicality which has always been

⁴ For a more detailed information about these theories see J.C. Maxwell, *The Twenty-one Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You*, Nashville (TN), Thomas Nelson, 1998, p. 17; Indeed Editorial Team, «6 Leadership Theories for Career Growth», <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/leadership-styles-and-theories>, visited 07/12/2021; R.M. Stogdill, «Historical Trends in Leadership Theory and Research», in *Journal of Contemporary Business*, Autumn, 1974, p. 7; J.M. Kouzes, B.Z. Posner, *Learning Leadership*, San Francisco (USA), Wiley, 2016, pp. 4, 171-180; Youth Ministries Department. General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, *Youth Ministry Handbook and Leadership Training Manual*, College Press, 2005; S. Tubbs, *A System Approach to Small Group Interaction*, New York (USA), McGraw-Hill Education, 2011; G.P. Quaglino, C. Ghislieri, *Avere leadership* (Piccola Enciclopedia del Comportamento Organizzativo), Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2004; «The maintenance Function» https://reliabilityweb.com/articles/entry/the_maintenance_function visited 07/12/2021.

⁵ For more on leadership in Ancient Near East, especially regarding rulers such as kings, queens, priests, prophets or sages see N. E. Andreasen, «The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society» in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 45, 1983, pp. 179–194; J. Baines, «Kingship, Definition of Culture, and Legitimation», in D. O'Connor & D.P. Silverman (eds.) *Ancient Egyptian Kingship*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995, pp. 3-48; J. Baines, «Ancient Egyptian Kingship; Official Forms, Rhetoric, Context», in J. Day, (ed.) *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, pp. 16–53; P.F. Bang, (ed.) *The Roman Empire II: The Monarchy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; J. Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995; M.Z. Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989; T. Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2006; C.V. Camp, «The Female Sage in Ancient Israel and in the Biblical Wisdom Literature», in J.G. Gammie, & L.G. Perdue (eds.) *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990, pp. 185–203; J.S. Cooper, «Divine Kingship in Mesopotamia, A Fleeting Phenomenon», in N. Brisch, (ed.) *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008, pp. 261–268; A.E. Cundall, «Sacral Kingship—The Old Testament Background» in *Vox Evangelica*, 6, 1969, pp. 31–41; G.E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986; R. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961; K.J. Dell, «The King in the Wisdom Literature», in J. Day, (ed.) *King and Messiah in Israel and the ancient Near East*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, pp. 163–186; O.R. Gurney, «Hittite Kingship», in S.H. Hook, (ed.) *Myth Ritual and Kingship*; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958, pp. 105–121.

exquisite to the ears of every good listener through centuries. Music and poetry are a great combination in transmitting important information and these elements become essential and vital when the topic is as crucial as that of leadership as seen in the twenty-third psalm.

Therefore, in this paper, we are going to exegetically and theologically look at the model of leadership presented in Psalm 23. Studying the Bible is not an easy task because it is the Word of God. Studying the Psalms is a complex exercise because among a variety of themes the Psalter deals with worship and expression of genuine human emotions. Understanding Psalm 23 needs patience because it is poetry, art and theology which did not have in mind, a recipient such as that of a 21st century Ghanaian young man who is studying theology at the Adventist University of Villa Aurora in Italy.

Hence, here is how we will proceed. In the first chapter, we will start looking at the text of Psalm 23 in the original Hebrew in order to have a better in-depth comprehension of its message. Following this, we will look at the literary context of Psalm 23 to understand the nature of the text we are analyzing, its place in the Bible and in the Psalter as well as offering a structure which will help organize our work in the exegetical section. The last part of chapter one will look at the historical context to understand the society at the time the text was written as well as considering the words chosen for the psalm and used in the psalm. Knowing who wrote the Psalm and when it was written is important to comprehend its message.

The second chapter concerns the exegetical commentary of Psalm 23 where we will also do some word-study. In this chapter, we also chose to include some sections of the New Testament because we believe that Scripture mostly explains itself through the divinely inspired interdependency of both the Testaments.

The third chapter is closer to the text more than it seems. Here, we will look at the text from various perspectives. It is a mix of the theological message of Psalm 23 and how this message can be applied in our daily lives, in our leadership at church and in the society in general. In every phase of life, from childhood, adulthood to death, the book of Psalms continues to talk to us⁶. These historical and theological mini paintings of pieces of Israel's life journal present individual and community expressions of beliefs and sincere spiritual expressions.

⁶ JOHN CALVIN, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. H. Beveridge, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1979, vol. I, p. 44. «In considering the whole course of the life of David, it seemed to me that by his own footsteps he showed me the way, and from this I have experienced no small consolation».

This work does not touch every aspect of leadership which is exegetically or theologically present in Psalm 23 but hopes to be useful in valuing more the Holy Scriptures as it leads us to *fresh waters* where all our needs are met because we are led by the Lord, who is our Shepherd. This paper's purpose is also to be of help to leaders, aspiring leaders, and every person who believes to have an impact in the world.

Chapter 1 - Introduction of Psalm 23

The Psalter is a musical and poetically woven messages *of* God, messages *from* God, divinely inspired individual and collective lyrics of prayers expressing joy, despair, injustice, anger, praise, repentance, trust and all sort of human emotions that ultimately call upon God's presence and intervention. It is in this compilation that we find the *twenty-third psalm* which is usually classified as a psalm of trust. This psalm is often recited by many believers when they find themselves in trouble or on behalf of a sick person. In Israel, this psalm is commonly sung on Shabbath, during meals such *Shalosh seudot*, the third Shabbat meal or even at the end of Friday evening services⁷. This first section is the introductory part of our analysis, to prepare the ground for an in-depth study.

1.1 Text, Textual Variants and Translation

Here, we observe the original Hebrew text of Psalm 23. This is one of the first steps in our analysis as we begin to decipher the meanings of the words, the sentences, their word sequence and what the writer meant with those words. This helps to avoid many inaccuracies and mistranslations because the specific meter, rhyme, rhythm and any nuance is carefully studied in its context and translated. The translation tried to stay as close as possible to the original Hebrew text as well as rendering the text meaningful to today's reader. This operation offers a deeper connection between us the readers and the psalmist. As the hermeneutical say goes, every translator is a traitor, therefore, a defense of translation will be given to underscore the fact that the translation is imperfect compared to the original text.

⁷ S.C. Kesselman, «Psalm 23: L-rd Is My Shepherd», https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3832324/jewish/Psalm-23-L-rd-Is-My-Shepherd.htm, visited 22/06/21.

1.1.1 Text in Hebrew

1 WTT מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְהִנֵּה רְעִי לֹא אֶחָסֵר:
2 בְּנֵאוֹת דָּשָׁא יִרְבִּיצָנִי עַל־מֵי מְנַחֹת יִנְהַלְנִי:
3 נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבָב יִנְחֲנֵי בְּמַעְגְלֵי־צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שָׁמוּ:
4 גַּם כִּי־אֵלֶּךְ בְּגִיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא־אִירָא רְעֵ כִּי־אַתָּה עֲמָדִי שְׁבֹטְךָ וְיִמְשַׁעַנְתָּךְ הַמָּה יִנְחֲמֵנִי:
5 תַּעֲרֶךְ לְפָנָיו שְׁלֹחַן גִּגְד צַרְרֵי דַשְׁנֹת בַּשָּׂמֶן רֹאשִׁי כּוֹסֵי רִנָּה:
6 אֵדוּ טוֹב וְתַסֵּד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה לְאָרְךָ יָמִים:

1.1.2 Translation in English

1. A Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
2. He makes me lie down in grassy green meadows.
He leads me beside still waters;
3. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
4. Even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me; Your rod and your staff – they comfort me.
5. You prepare a table before me in the sight of my adversaries.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup is filled to capacity.
6. Surely, goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord unto perpetuity forever (length of days).

1.2 Literary Type of the Psalms

In the following section we are going to look into the definition of a «psalm», the literary genres of the book of Psalms, and in the type of genre group Psalm 23 falls into. The style of writing of this genre will be studied as well as the division of the Psalter. Once that is done, we will be able to identify the collocation of Psalm 23 in the midst of these divisions. This information and

more will enable us to get into the environment of the text we are analyzing to get a better understanding of its perspective on the theme of leadership.

1.2.1 «Sēper Tehillîm» – The Names of the Book

The title of the book of Psalms in Hebrew ספר תהלים (*sēper tehillîm*), «book of songs», reveals its main characteristic, which is «praises» in Hebrew *Tehillim*. The term in the singular (*tehillah*) appears just once as a title of an individual psalm (Ps. 145, «Praise of David»). This may suggest that initially, the term was used to indicate a «type» of psalm, meaning that even though the book of Psalms has its focus on the element of praise or adoration of God, the Psalms cover other elements regarding human living and Israel’s relationship with God. Another reason could be that praising God is considered as the primary task of someone who says a prayer⁸. The English word «psalm» or «psalms» has its origin from the Greek ψαλμος (*psalmos*) or ψαλμοι (*psalmoi*)⁹ - «hymn» - which translates another Hebrew word, מִזְמוֹר *mizmor* («song»). The other popular title which one may encounter in literature is «Psalter». This word comes from *Alexandrinus*, a fifth-century AD copy the Septuagint (LXX)¹⁰ which entitled the book *Psaltērion*, which means «stringed instrument» and precisely translates the Hebrew words *kinnor* or sometimes *nevel* which means «lyre». The book of Psalms is therefore, mainly, an official assembles of a collection of songs of prayers¹¹.

1.2.2 Nature of the Book

The book of Psalms offers a variety of sacred poems of prayers and chants. Some songs were composed for private of the individuals while others were purposely created for public worship¹². Since we are in the world of prayer, art, and poetry, emotions and sentiments, reality and clarity are often intertwined. The reader can encounter different expressions of fear, trust, love, hate, desire, apathy, wrath, mildness, sadness, affliction, excitement, compassion, cruelty,

⁸ G. Ravasi, *Il libro dei Salmi, commento e attualizzazione*, (Salmi 1-50), vols. 3, Bologna, Dehoniane, vol. I, 1986³, p. 23.

⁹ See its use by some of the New Testament writers in Lk 20:42; Acts 1:20. Cf. N.L. DeClaissé-Walford, *Introduction to the Psalms. A Song from Ancient Israel*, Denvers (MA), Chalice Press, 2004, p. 2.

¹⁰ The LXX is a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, undertaken beginning in the third century, B.C.E., by the Jewish community living in Alexandria in Egypt.

¹¹ N. De Claissé-Walford, *et. al.*, *The Book of Psalms*, (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament), Michigan, Eerdmans, 2014, pp. 2, 3.

¹² L.A. Schökel; C. Carinti, *I Salmi, (Commenti Biblici)*, 2 vols., Roma, Borla, vol. I, 1992², p. 12.

envy, admiration, resentment, rancor, bitterness, restlessness, nostalgia, surprise, wonder, repentance, gratitude, praise, etc. The Psalmist was therefore a kind of mediator, in a certain manner, a prophet who through art, translated and communicated religious sentiments through the channels of the realms of the divine and of the human, precisely, the Lord's assembly. The Psalms play a special role in the Scriptures because most of its parts are words of humanity to God and not vice versa only as it happens in other books of the Bible¹³. Brueggemann, in fact, affirms the Psalms are the «voice of humanity»¹⁴.

1.2.3 Place of the Book in the Canon and the Book's Numeration

To «canonize» a book or collection is to confess and declare that its content is sacred, which, in a certain unspecified way, means the book is the work of God. It means that one has accepted that the book was inspired by God and therefore its content can have a positive impact which will lead the reader to eternal life. This is the conviction of the whole Jewish and Christian tradition without distinction¹⁵. The canon of the Old Testament is divided in three groups: a) the *Tôrāh* or Pentateuch; b) the *N^ebî^hîm* which is divided into two groups: the Former Prophets, in Hebrew: נביאים ראשונים *Nevi'im Rishonim* is made up of the narrative books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings; the Latter Prophets (Hebrew: נביאים אחרונים *Nevi'im Akharonim*), consists of the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve Minor Prophets¹⁶; c) The *K^etûbîm*, in English the «Writings» and in Greek *Hagiographa*, is divided into four sections: poetical books

¹³ Some of its words are intended to be uttered by people on the presence of and directly to God. For instance: «Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge» (Ps. 16:1); «Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion» (Ps. 65:1); «Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones» (Ps. 89:5). Nahum Sarna wrote these words in 1993: «In the Psalms, the human soul extends itself beyond its confining, sheltering, impermanent house of clay. It strives for contact with the Ultimate Source of all life. It gropes for an experience of the divine Presence. The biblical psalms are essentially a record of the human quest for God». N.M. Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel*, New York, Schocken Books, 1993, p. 3.

¹⁴ Cf. W. Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms. Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, Eugene (OR), Cascade Books, 2007², p. 2.

¹⁵ Tradition's preservation took place in Israelite communities through a long process of selection and repetition. When someone sings or recites a psalm and some members of the community find in its words help for understanding how to relate to God, they sing it again and so forth. In a process of repetition, the psalm sticks in the minds and hearts of the people, hence, becoming part of the collected tradition of that community. The element of *personalization* of most psalms first of all made their meanings variegated and their survival crucial. Cf. N.L. DeClaissé-Walford, *Introduction to the Psalms. A Song from Ancient Israel*, Denvers (MA), Chalice Press, 2004, pp. 27, 28.

¹⁶ The Twelve Minor Prophets include the Book of Hosea, of Joel, of Amos, of Obadiah, of Jonah, of Micah, of Nahum, of Habakkuk, of Zephaniah, of Haggai, of Zechariah, and of Malachi.

(Psalms, Proverbs, and Job), the M^egillôt, or Scrolls (Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations of Jeremiah, Ecclesiastes, and Esther), prophecy (Daniel), and history (Ezra, Nehemiah, and I and II Chronicles). Though the Psalms are not in the strictest sense neither Torah nor Prophecy, well known intellectuals like Brevard Childs and John Calvin agree that these three are interestingly intertwined in announcing God’s present and coming kingship¹⁷.

The official number of the Psalms is *One-Fifty*, both in the Hebrew text and in most of the ancient collections (Ps. 151 is considered adventitious and not canonical). However, the LXX has an additional (the 151st) at the end of the book while the Syriac Peshitta Bible translation contains five additional psalms. Most of these previously unknown compositions have been found in the Qumran Psalm scroll (11QPs) suggesting the initial flexibility of the early psalter¹⁸. Some authors like Schökel and Carinti, suggest that the number One-fifty is an artificial number, three times the number fifty or five times the number thirty. The variation of the digits is proved by various arguments: from a different numbering in the versions, from duplicates, from the union or separations of passages¹⁹. The numbering does not coincide in the Hebrew and in the old versions and this may create confusions or the need to affix a double number, one of which in brackets²⁰. The length of the Psalms varies from two verses to 176 verses: to the antipodes Pss. 117 and 119. The following table²¹ summarizes the above.

<i>Greco-Latino</i>	<i>Testo Masoretico</i>
1-8	1-8
9 A	9
9 B	10
10	11
11-112	12-113
113, 1-8	114
113, 9-26	115
114	116, 1-9
115	116, 10-19
116-145	117-146

¹⁷ B.S. Childs, *Introduction to Scripture as Canon*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1979, p. 517. Cf. W.P. Brown (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, Oxford (NY), Oxford University Press, 2014.

¹⁸ A. Berlin; M.Z. Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible. Featuring the Jewish Publication Society. Tanakh Translation. Torah-Nevi'im-Kethuvim*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 1280.

¹⁹ Alphabetical artifice proves that Pss. 9 and 10 form one psalm, as the versions attest. The refrain likely joins Pss. 42 and 43. Moreover, Ps. 117 sounds like a refrain rather than an autonomous psalm. Ps. 53 is a variant of Ps. 14. Some psalms turn out to be composed of passages from other psalms: Ps. 40:14-18 = Ps. 70; Ps. 107 = Ps. 57:8-12 + Ps. 60:6b-14. *Ibidem*.

²⁰ Cf. L.A. Schökel; C. Carinti, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

²¹ *Idem*, p. 90.

146	147, 1-11
147	147, 12-20
148-150	148-150

1.2.4 Literary Genres of the Psalms

All the Psalms fall in the genre of poetry²² in which one can identify a variety of genres or types of Psalms. Psalms of the same literary genre share similar characteristics, phrases, and structure. The two primary genres of the psalms are *hymns*²³ and *laments*²⁴. Others are:

1. *Individual psalms of lament* which may include personal laments of sickness²⁵, anguish, persecution, and false accusations²⁶, and community psalms of lament involving the nations. They include Pss. 44, 60, 74, 77, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126, and 137²⁷.

²² W.P. Brown (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, Oxford (NY), Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 2.

²³ They include Pss. 8, 19, 29, 65, 66, 96-99, 100, 104, 105, 136, 145, 148-150.

²⁴ In Book One, twenty-four of the forty-one psalms (59 percent) are laments, while eight (20 percent) are hymns. • In Book Two, twenty of the thirty-one psalms (65 percent) are laments, while six (19 percent) are hymns. • In Book Three, eight of the seventeen psalms (47 percent) are laments, while six (35 percent) are hymns. • In Book Four, only four of the seventeen psalms (24 percent) are laments, while five (29 percent) are hymns. • In Book Five, only ten of the forty-four psalms (23 percent) are laments, while twenty-three (52 percent) are hymns. N.L. DeClaissé-Walford, *Introduction to the Psalms. A Song from Ancient Israel*, Denvers (MA), Chalice Press, 2004, p. 42. For more information on the laments, see G. Castellino, *Le lamentazioni individuali e gli inni di Babilonia e in Israele*, Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1940.

²⁵ Some compositions which fall into the category of prayer song of the sick are Psalms 38, 41, and 88. Varying in degree either by form or theme, some other psalms which may be included in this category are Psalms 6, 13, 22, 30, 31, 32, 35, 39, 51, 69, 71, 91, 102, and 103. It should be noted that one can find included here some *prayers of confession* as well. Cf. A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-115.

²⁶ These are prayer songs of the persecuted and the accused and in this category, we find songs like Psalms 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 23, 26, 27, 28, 57, 61, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, and 86. C.H. Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms. A Literary and Theological Introduction*, Grand Rapids (MI), Baker Academic, 2018, p. 96.

²⁷ The psalms of lament are the largest category in the Psalter because they express the extremities of human life. Human beings are excellent in terms of complaint and lamentation. Anytime something does not fall into its place as we want, we easily get distressed and tries to find an answer or a solution to the problem. This does not mean that these songs do not have any element of praise. On the contrary, there are often many elements of praise directly or a vow to praise the Lord for his mercy and deliverance. W.D. Tucker Jr., «Psalms 1: Book of», in *Dictionary of the Old Testament. Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, (A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship), T. Longman III & P. Enns (eds.), USA, InterVasity Press, 1984, pp. 581, 582.

2. *Psalms of Thanksgiving* («from death to life»)²⁸ – They are basically psalms of praise and testimony²⁹. E.g., Pss. 18, 30, 31, 32, 34, 40, 41, 92, 111, 116, 118 and 120. Some psalms of community thanksgiving are Pss. 65, 66, 107, 112-124 and 129³⁰.
3. *Royal psalms* – Pss. 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132 and 144. The common thread that holds these psalms together is the subject of kingship³¹. Under this category fall the psalms on the kingship of Yahweh such as Pss. 47, 93, and 95-99³².
4. *Wisdom psalms* – Beside the element of prayer, these psalms are didactic and contain many reflections³³. Three groups of psalms fall into the category of «didactic» psalms: (a) wisdom psalms – Pss. 1, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128 and 133³⁴ (b) Torah psalms (1, 19, 119), and (c) historical psalms (78, 105, 106)³⁵.
5. *Imprecatory psalms* - As the name implies, some of the Psalms contain extremely harsh judgments upon the enemies of the psalmists. There are at least seven psalms that fall into this category, in a greater or lesser degree: Pss. 35, 55, 59, 69, 79, 109, and 137. Of

²⁸ B. Janowski, *Arguing with God. A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms*, Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press, 2013, pp. 39-53.

²⁹ The individual psalms of thanksgiving have two basic criteria. Firstly, the psalmist reports on a crisis and then gives a testimony that the crisis he reported has come to an end and does not exist anymore. The composer therefore praises God for the passing of the difficulty he was facing earlier. Cf. G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

³⁰ J.R. Lundbom suggests Ps. 23 is a song of passage: «Psalm 23 is then best understood as a song of passage. Broadly speaking, it recounts David's passage out of Jerusalem, into the wilderness, and back to Jerusalem once again. There are other passages too which II Samuel 15-19 makes explicit. They are a mountain crossing, two crossings of the Jordan, two important meals, and one passage at least through a valley of the death-shadow (II Sam. 18:6-8). In terms of David's own development there is passage through a crisis with his rebellious son». In fact, he suggests Ps. 3 is Ps. 23's companion. In this case, Ps. 3 becomes David's song of passage into exile, and Ps. 23, his song of passage back from exile. J.R. Lundbom, «Psalm 23: Song of Passage», in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, vol. 1, no. 40, 1986, p. 15.

³¹ Royal psalms are identified based on some criteria such as their reference to the king, the mention of «the anointed one» where the cognate verb «to anoint» (Hebrew root *mshkh*) often occur, or lastly based on their reference to king David by name. The royal psalms focus on the historical king of Israel and his kingdom but at the same time, these compositions, with a mix of frustrations and failed expectations, aspire and cling to a coming king who will rise above human disappointments. For more on kingship see J.H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (Studies in Biblical Theology – Second Series 32), 1976.

³² G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 58.

³³ *Idem*, pp. 61-63.

³⁴ Sigmund Mowinckel believed that 140 out of the 150 psalms were written for cultic purposes or worship in the temple. The other ten he called «learned psalmography», which originated in the circle of the sages.

The first criterion that marks a psalm as wisdom is the formal criteria relating to literary style, such as proverbs, wisdom admonitions, the use of similes, the occurrence of the blessed» formula ('*ashre*), the address to students as «sons» or «children», and the occurrence of «better» sayings. The second criterion is thematic. Of course, here we are dealing with content, and we determine these wisdom motifs based on the Wisdom literature as we have it in the wisdom books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Some of the wisdom motifs identifiable there are the contrast of the two ways of life, the problem of retribution for good and evil deeds, practical advice on living, and the all-encompassing notion of the fear of the Lord. Cf. A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-145.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

these seven, Pss. 35, 69, and 109 are the most intense, although the others by their content and tone help to define the category³⁶.

6. *Song of/for Zion*³⁷ – Pss. 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122. At Zion God is present in space (the «house» of the temple) and in time (the dynastic «house» of David) and it is from this presence that sanctification, stability, and protection flourish for Israel.
7. *Psalms of trust - Individual Psalms of Trust* – Pss. 4, 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 73, 131; *Community Psalms of Trust* -Pss. 46, 90, 115, 123-126.

1.2.5 Psalms of Trust and Psalm 23

Trust is a security founded in another (we disregard from self-confidence, which does not have access to prayer). Trust is the enemy of fear and doubt because when trust comes to the scene all negativities vanish. Trust is not static in space but mobile, active, dynamic and moving so it can be at the beginning of a process or at its end. We are humans and we definitely know we do not have great expectations from people we distrust or from whom we are certain we cannot get what we are seeking³⁸. Trust is about ability, capability, competence, power and availability. Minds and hearts are not certain, and tones are not yet clear when one is trying to confide but as far as the person is willing, it means that though he/she does not fully confide yet, this individual is confident that he/she can reach a trust sooner or later because trust often and repeatedly swings between a lot of doubts as well as a lot of certainties. Sometimes these two ends take turns but in other occasions they come together, and this can become quite confusing and blur. Confidence can be expressed in the Psalms in a calm and categorical tone as well as with dramatic ambiguity³⁹. The psalms of trust were composed amidst present difficult moments or in view of future troubles. These psalms differ from those of thanksgiving because in the latter, a word of assurance is added to the state of crisis, while the psalms of trust do not always make clear the event that caused the declaration of confidence. The psalms of trust often give hints of the

³⁶ The term «imprecations» means «curses» and suggests that the psalmists prayed that evil would befall their persecutors. It is a rather strong term and perhaps not the most accurate one. “Psalms of anger” or “psalms of wrath” would be a better phrase, but the term «imprecatory psalms» is a standard one, and for the sake of genre classification and tradition, we will use it when referring to this group of poems. C.H. Bullock, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

³⁷ Zion is also the center of the heart, of joy and of suffering for every Jew believer. Cf. Pss. 46:1, 5, 8, 12; 87:2.

³⁸ G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³⁹ L.A. Schökel; C. Carinti, *I Salmi, op. cit.*, pp. 75, 76.

ongoing crisis. For example, Ps. 27 alludes to a situation of war which drove the psalmist to trust more in God (Ps. 27:3, 6). Similarly, the psalmist in Ps. 23 pictures himself surrounded by enemies (Ps. 23:5) and in the «valley of the shadow of death» but his confidence in the Lord saves him. Though some of these descriptions are not explicit, some are quite clear as in the case of Ps. 62, where those who wanted the psalmist's downfall are exposed (vv. 3, 4). The psalmist in Ps. 73 is rather troubled as he watches the wicked prosper (vv. 2, 3). This feeling of restlessness drove him to the sanctuary where he found comfort (v. 17)⁴⁰.

In the psalms of trust, confidence substitutes complaint and makes abundant space for confidence in Yahweh's provision. These psalms express faith and « [...] bare the hearts of these ancient worshippers and reveal the spiritual buoys that kept them afloat amid their world of pain and turmoil». This means that the experiences of faith which are sang, recited, chanted and poetically arranged in these compositions do not necessarily and always have a happy end⁴¹.

The psalms of trust can be divided into *individual psalms of trust* (Pss. 4, 16, 23, 27, 62, 73) and *community psalms of trust* (Pss. 46, 90, 115, 123-126). Though other psalms talk about trust in the Lord, these psalms are known for their explicit underscoring of the writers' trust in the Lord. Words such as *trust*, or *faith* are frequently used in these compositions as well as some expressions portraying a state of trust such as «lying down to rest (23:2) and to sleep (4:8) and enjoying safety in the presence of one's enemies (23:5) ». Other expressions picture the Lord as light (Ps. 27:1), a rock (Ps. 62:2, 6), and a fortress or refuge (Pss. 16:1; 27:1; 62:8)⁴². The essential elements in the structure of the psalms of trust are declaration of trust, invitation to trust, basis for trust, petition, vow to praise and interior lament (implied or expressed). The *hesed*, that is the loving mercy that leads to the faithfulness of God to his *covenant* with Israel, is the source of personal and communal trust⁴³.

Therefore, as seen so far, Ps. 23 falls into the category of psalms of trust in which the believer abandons himself totally and with serenity in the hands of a God who saves. The psalmist celebrates this total surrender. In fact, some writers call this psalm a «confession of trust»⁴⁴. As we will see in the second part of the paper, in the exegetical and poetical components

⁴⁰ J. Goldingay, *Psalms. Psalms 1-41*, (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament wisdom and Psalms), 3 vols, Michigan, Tremper Longman III, vol. I, 2006, pp. 64-66.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² C.H. Bullock, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

⁴³ G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁴⁴ *Idem*, p. 431.

of this poem, this psalm has nuances of the Pilgrim Psalms or of the pilgrimage to Sion. In these types of psalms one can find some common literature or poetic traits such as the shortness of the poem or the *poetic purity* which is a « message-free verse that is concerned with exploring the essential musical nature of the language rather than with conveying a narrative or having didactic purpose»⁴⁵.

From individual psalm of trust, Psalm 23 can be expanded to a collective level. We can start from Gen. 38:15; 49:24 and Ps. 80:2 where we read about God as the *shepherd of Jacob*. The feast would symbolize a messianic and ecclesiastic communion with God. An individual psalm of trust becomes a song for the whole nation of Israel who walk under the care and guidance of the Great Shepherd towards the feast of peace divine intimacy⁴⁶.

1.2.6 The Outline of Psalm 23

The ideas presented in this psalm can be traced in different stages⁴⁷, or settings through which the scenes are developed. This is Briggs' idea: vv. 1-3a (in trimeter) – the shepherd-feeder; vv. 3b-4 (in tetrameter) – the shepherd guide; vv. 5, 6 (in pentameter) – banquet host⁴⁸. This coincides with Perowne's verbal-based division: «I lack nothing», «I shall not fear», and «I shall return»⁴⁹. It is also possible to have a threefold structure based on the main scenes: the shepherd in the field (vv. 1-4), the host in the banquet hall (v. 5), and the Lord in the sanctuary (v. 6). Ross can see «a pilgrimage movement towards the end of the psalm, but it is overshadowed by the meditation on the Lord and the display of his loyal love»⁵⁰. Other authors such as P. Volz

⁴⁵ «Pure poetry» in *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Satanic-school>

⁴⁶ *Idem*, p. 433.

⁴⁷ B.K. Waltke, J.M. Houston put it in this way: «The psalm consists of three vignettes [...]. The first two are extended metaphors, envisioning I AM's relationship with the individual believer. As in a drama, when the curtain lifts, the stage is set for pastoral scenes, and I AM appears as a shepherd. After the curtain is dropped at the end of verse 4, the curtain is lifted a second time in verse 5; this time I AM appears as host preparing a banquet table. Once again, the curtain drops and opens in verse 6; this time, as reality replaces imagination, the psalmist is seen returning to I AM's eternal house». B.K. Waltke, J.M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship. A Historical Commentary*, Grand Rapids (MI) / Cambridge (UK), Eerdmans, 2010, p. 243.

⁴⁸ C.A. Briggs; E.G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Psalms* (The International Critical Commentary), 2 vols., Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, vol. I, 1903, p. 207.

⁴⁹ *Idem*, p. 257.

⁵⁰ A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 557.

and J. Boehmer even suggest our basic images: Shepherd, Leader, Host and Father of the House⁵¹.

Taking into consideration all these models, we propose the following structure:

- I. The Lord the Shepherd who provides (vv. 1-4)
 - A. Physical and spiritual nourishment (vv. 1-2a)
 - B. The Provider of refreshment (vv. 2b-3a)
 - C. The Guider to the right path (v. 3b)
 - D. The Defender of his people amidst danger (v. 4)
- II. The Lord, the gracious host (v. 5)
- III. The apex of communion (v. 6)

1.2.7 The Fivefold Division of the Book of Psalms and the Collocation of Psalm 23

Considering the emphasis that Psalm 1 puts on the Torah in its introduction, the manner in which the Torah psalms⁵², 19 and 119⁵³ elevate the Torah, which is the Law, and observing the *Midrash on the Psalms*⁵⁴, one can consider highly intentional, the fivefold division of the Torah (Pentateuch)⁵⁵. Adding to this we have got some other psalms which have in their nucleus, the Torah – passages of psalms like those of Ps. 37:30, 31; Ps. 40:8; Ps. 78:1, 5, 10; Ps. 112:1. All these facts show us that, theologically speaking, in Israel's religion, the Torah is inscribed in the structure of the book of Psalms. Though the Psalms treat themes regarding the kingship of

⁵¹ P. Volz, «Psalm 23» in *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, XXXVI, 1925, pp. 576ff; J. Boehmer, «Der Reichtum von Psalm 23», in *Biblische Zeitschrift*, XXIII, 1935, 1936, pp. 166-170.

⁵² Cf. J. L. Mays, «The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter» in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, n. 106, 1987, pp. 3–12.

⁵³ Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem which reflects on the great value and depth of the Torah in the postexilic period using all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Bullock affirms that it was a «symbolic way of exhausting human language to say the unutterably deep things of the soul». C.H. Bullock, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁵⁴ W.G. Braude affirms that the division of the Psalms is attested in both Jewish literature and all the modern translations. W.G. Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms* (Yale Judaica Series), 13 vols., New Haven, Yale University Press, Vol. I, 1959, p. 5. «The Midrash is a succession of homilies concerned with the recurrence or comparison of words and situations in the Scriptures as a means of bringing forth their contents. Compiled by Jewish rabbis since 200 A. D., its subject matter is enormous. Characteristically, The Midrash on Psalms deals with varying matters, from the radishes and cucumbers served at the table of a Roman ruler to the prayer which God, the King of Kings, directs to Himself». <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300003222/midrash-psalms> 06/02/2021.

⁵⁵ L.A. Schökel; C. Carinti, *I Salmi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 14, 91. According to Ravasi, Roberto Bellardino defines the Psalter as a compendium and summary of the entire Old Testament («quasi compendium et summa totius Veteris Testamenti»). Cf. G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Yahweh, the temple, Yahweh's presence, creation (evidencing God's omnipotence), the promise to Abraham of land and progeny, the exodus (which served as a school to understand the covenant between God and his chosen people), the exile (586 BCE), the Davidic monarch, the centrality of Jerusalem, Zion or the Temple, one cannot deny or overlook the centrality of Israel's identity, their call, and the Torah in the editorial and theological macro-microstructure, or plan⁵⁶. Bullock sums this in a beautiful manner when he states: «The Torah is thus the encompassing principle of faith in the Psalter or the essence of Hebrew piety»⁵⁷.

Another recognizable characteristic of the fivefold Psalter is the generally identifiable historical background of each of the five books. Book 1 (Pss. 1-41) and Book 2 (Pss. 42-72) cover the monarchical period of king David's reign⁵⁸. At the bookends of this collection, we non-coincidentally have two royal psalms (Pss. 2 and 72). Other marks of the monarchy are seen in the ascriptions of the titles «to/for/by David» found in Books 1 and 2 (except for Pss. 1⁵⁹, 2, 10, and 33 in Book 1, the psalms of Korah [Pss. 42–49], one psalm of Asaph [Ps. 50], and three psalms which are anonymous [Pss. 66, 67, and 71]). The colophon in Ps. 72:20 («This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse») underscores the «Davidic nature» of this collection⁶⁰.

Book 3's backdrop is the early exilic era (Pss. 73-89). This is confirmed by at least two elements: the first element is the theme of the destruction of the temple (586-587 BC) which is common to both Pss. 74 and 79. The second element is seen in the presentation of Psalm 89 in a form of interrogating inquiry into how and why the Davidic dynasty failed⁶¹.

⁵⁶ R.D. Anderson Jr., «The Division and Order of the Psalms», *Westminster Theological Journal* n. 56, 1994, p. 225.

⁵⁷ C.H. Bullock, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁵⁸ A drastic change in history occurs as there is a shift from the Rachel line, represented by Saul from the tribe of Benjamin, to the Leah line, represented by David from the tribe of Judah. Cf. Ps. 78:70-72.

⁵⁹ «If we give the name “Hebrew faith” to the Old Testament religion of Israel prior to and during the exile, we should assign Psalm 1 to the early age of Judaism, that is, somewhere between the return from exile (about 538 BC) and the time of Ben Sira (about 190 BC), when the Torah had clearly come to be recognized as the substance of Israel's theology. It is my contention that this process of putting Torah at the center of Israel's life and faith began, or took on prominence, during the Babylonian exile itself, as a substitute for the centrality of sacrifice that was lost when the temple was destroyed in 586 BC. Psalm 119 provides evidence of that changing community». «Reading Psalm 119» in C.H. Bullock, *Psalms - Psalms 73–150*, 2 vols., (Teach the Text Commentary Series), Grand Rapids (MI), Baker Books, 2017, vol. II, p. 358. See also J. Nieuviarts; P. Jean-Pierre, *I salmi. Lettura e preghiera*, Bologna, EDB, 2010, p. 135.

⁶⁰ C.H. Bullock, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁶¹ J.C. McCann Jr, «The Book of Psalms» in *A Commentary in Twelve Volumes. 1 & 2 Maccabees - Introduction to Hebrew Poetry – Job – Psalms* (The New Interpreter's Bible), Nashville (TN), Abingdon Press, 1996, p. 660.

The postexilic era forms the historical background for Book 4 (Pss. 90-106) and Book 5 (Pss. 107-150), making music on the realities of the return from the Babylonian exile (e.g., Ps. 126) and the reconstruction of the temple (e.g., Ps. 118:19, 20, 22-24).

These five collections are marked with doxological passages or with concluding intercalary verses: Ps. 41:14; Ps. 72:18-20; Ps. 89:53; Ps. 106:48. Consequently, the five collections are: Book 1 (Pss. 1-41); Book 2 (42-72); Book 3 (73-89); Book 4 (90-106); Book 5 (107-150). Books 1, 4 and 5 use the divine name *Yhwh* and so they are called *Yahwistic psalter*. Books 2 and 3 instead, use the general name of God *'lhym* and are therefore known as *Elohistic psalter*⁶².

As one can notice, Psalm 23 is collocated in the first collection of the Psalter, Book 1.

1.3 Historical Context

The historical context is essential for our paper because knowing it can change or amplify the overall meaning of the leadership subject, we are treating in Psalm 23. This kind of context helps us to gather information and explore other perspectives we otherwise would have ignored. Our duty here is to collocate Psalm 23 in the author's compositions and briefly describe David's role in the book of Psalms. After discussing about the author, we will look at the place and date of composition of Psalm 23.

1.3.1 The Psalms of David and the Latter's Role in the Psalter

The three major categories of the Psalter mainly present three individuals to whom these compositions are attributed or dedicated to. These individuals are *David*, the *sons of Korah* (Pss. 42-49, 84, 85, 87, 88), and *Asaph* (Pss. 50, 73-83). David's name and reputation form the overarching canopy for these three groups. There are also some equally important categories such as the literary attributions (e.g., *maskil*, etc.) and liturgical associations (e.g., Ps. 30, «for the dedication of the house»). For instance, as precedently observed, the *Egyptian Hallel* (Pss. 113-118) which is put in the framework of the historical exodus functions as guide for

⁶² Cf. L.A. Schökel; C. Carinti, *I Salmi*, 2 Vols., Roma, Borla, Vol. I, 1992², p. 92.

celebrating the return from Babylonian exile. The *Pilgrim Psalter*, also known as the *Songs of Ascents* (Pss. 120-134), furnish a blessing on the community after the exile as they celebrate the return and the reconstruction of the temple. The *Hallelujah Psalter* which concludes the collection (Pss. 146-150), considered as the highest point of the final edition of the Psalter, is a liturgical piece that invites all Israel together with every human being on the earth to praise the Lord⁶³.

The largest portions of Psalms so far are those attributed to David, consisting of the large section in Book 1 (3-41, except Pss. 10 and 33), an ample collection in Book 2 (Pss. 51-65, 68-70), only a single psalm in Book 3 (Ps. 86), two psalms in Book 4 (Pss. 101 and 103), and another sizable collection in Book 5 (Pss. 108-110, 122, 124, 131, 133, and 138-45). As earlier observed, the noteworthy collections of David psalms in Book 1 and Book 5 give a balance to the Psalter⁶⁴.

The Psalter gathers the description of David in the books of Samuel and Chronicles as musician, psalmist, and liturgical innovator⁶⁵. His portrait as psalmist and harpist in the books of Samuel can be seen in the story in which he used musical therapy to calm king Saul's troubled spirit (1 Sam. 16:14-23). The second reference to David's connection to music in this book is in the episode of the celebration of the transfer of the ark of Jerusalem, which was accompanied with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals (2 Sam. 6:5). Moreover, David's three poems in 2 Samuel are of great importance as regards his image of psalmist in biblical memory. His first poem was a lament over Saul and his son Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:17-27); the second is the praise and victory song when the mighty hands of the Lord delivered him from all his enemies, including king Saul (2 Sam. 22:1-51/ Ps. 18); and the third is his deathbed words in 2 Sam. 23:1-7⁶⁶.

The Psalter itself talks of David as a psalmist:

- The ascription of seventy-three psalms to David,
- The superscriptions of thirteen psalms which furnish a historical setting from David's life (Pss. 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142), and

⁶³ N. De Claissé-Walford, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-38.

⁶⁴ C.A. Briggs, E.G. Briggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-65.

⁶⁵ It is worth noting that the widespread acceptance of David as the author of most of the compositions of the Psalter can even be seen in the first century CE New Testament book, Acts of the Apostles (4:25) where the author, presumably Luke, assigns Ps. 2 (which is without ascription) to David.

⁶⁶ C.A. Briggs, E.G. Briggs *op. cit.*, 61-65.

- Random information about David within the content of certain psalms (18:50; 78:70-72; 89:3, 4, 20-37, 49; 132:1– 5, 10-12, 17, 18; 144:10).

The Jewish believers in the Second Temple period and the New Testament Christians were certain that the historical books and the Psalms were talking about the same David⁶⁷.

The Chronicler reports that in approximately 835 BC, Jehoiada the priest, restored temple worship after backing a coup to remove Athaliah, an usurper, from the throne of Judah. The restoration of the temple came along with the return of the Levites to their duty of presenting the burnt offerings before the God, according to the law of Moses «with rejoicing and singing». David was the original responsible of the assignment to that duty as part of his liturgical innovations during his reign (2 Chron. 23:18; cf. 1 Chron. 23:1-5). As seen in Ezra 3:10, the Levites continued to exercise their duty in the sixth century BC when Zerubbabel and his associates rebuilt the temple (520-516 BC). The Chronicler further depicts David as an inventor of instruments, a memory that was alive as late as Hezekiah in the eighth century BC and Nehemiah in the fifth (1 Chron. 23:5; 2 Chron. 7:6; 29:26; Neh. 12:36)⁶⁸. It is interesting to note that the refrain «For [the Lord] is good, for his steadfast love endures forever» which is found in 2 Chron. 5:13 is the same refrain we find in 2 Chron. 7:3, 6 when king Solomon dedicated the temple to the Lord. This same refrain recurs in various psalms such as Pss. 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29; 136:1. The Chronicler (2 Chron. 6:41, 42) also used Ps. 132:8-10 in this occasion⁶⁹.

As modern criticism arose, confidence in Old Testament historicity began to diminish leaving small circles of scholarship who really believed in the Old Testament's historical authenticity. Yet there was a lingering sentiment in the minds of most critics that David must be somewhere in the Psalter. Alan Cooper, citing Johannes Herder, set out two criteria for determining whether a psalm is Davidic or not. Firstly, one should consider the *aesthetic standard*, by which the psalms are judged by the commentator's aesthetic view of David's poetic ability and moral character. One could choose not to consider the historicity of the materials about the story of David and his character but the facts that attest David's deep faith in God,

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*

⁶⁸ J. Goldingay, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-30.

⁶⁹ G. J. Wenham, *Psalms as Torah. Reading Biblical Song Ethically*, (Studies in Theological Interpretation), Grand Rapids (MI), Baker Academic, 2012, p. 13.

which is observable in the books Samuel, Chronicles and in the book of Psalms could not be easily overlooked or written off too quickly⁷⁰.

At the same time, we know that some psalms were «dedicated to» or «in honor of» David. This is seen in the use of the preposition «to/by/for» (*le-*) which is often put as prefix to the names in the titles. For instance, the final «David» collection (Pss. 138-145) very likely falls in this category. Another phenomenon in the Psalter is the *rhetorical voice of David* in the Psalms. Usually, this voice is heard in a composition, through the titles, snippets of other David psalms (e.g., Ps. 86) which are put together. These include details about David's life and exploits, and bigger segments of David psalms. For example, Ps. 70 is a virtual repetition of Ps. 40:13–17, and Ps. 108 is a *collage* of segments of the Davidic Psalms 57 and 60. In other occasions, it becomes harder to identify the nature of a psalm whether it is Davidic or not because sometimes, in order to justify the title «of David», the writers seem to voluntarily borrow vocabulary, short sentences from other David psalms and other times even use topics of David psalms to create David's voice. This information become tricky for the reader, so some experts suggest considering the psalms which have *ledavid* in the superscription as David's composition unless the composition does not clearly meet aesthetic standard and/or historical facts. It is worth noting that the first David collection (Pss. 3-41) is mainly composed of psalms which describe David's political-military and personal strife. The portrait we see here fits the Chronicler's description of David as a man of war (1 Chron. 28:3) and what the book of Samuel says about him as a man of sometimes failing character (2 Sam. 11-12). The second collection in Book 2 (Pss. 51–65; 68–70), closes with the colophon: «This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse» (Ps. 72:20)⁷¹.

1.3.2 Psalm 23 – Author⁷², Date and Place of Composition

As stated earlier and as confirmed by Gunkel⁷³, this composition sounds like an individual psalm of trust as the Lord's love and faithfulness is at the center of this composition. Little attention is

⁷⁰ J. Goldingay, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-30.

⁷¹ C.A. Briggs, E.G. Briggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-65.

⁷² For more on the authorship, see O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P.R. Ackroyd, New York, Harper & Row, 1965, pp. 448-450. A.R. Johnson «Psalm 23 and the Household of Faith» in *Proclamation and Presence, Old Testament Essays in Honour of G. Henton Davies*, ed. J.I. Durham & J.R. Porter, Richmond, John Knox, 1970, p. 271.

⁷³ H. Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form Critical Introduction*, Trans. by T.M. Horner, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1969, p. 35.

put on a particular crisis if not the mention of the presence of enemies and a dangerous death-like valley. This is one of the reasons why Psalm 23 is the song of trust *par excellence*.

The *setting* of this psalm is uncertain. Regarding the authorship, this psalm is traditionally attributed to David due to the imagery used and its resonance with David's story (the shepherd herding the sheep, the host in the banquet hall and the yearning to commune with the Lord in the sanctuary)⁷⁴. Many biblical characters such as Abraham, Lot, Rachel, Jacob, and Moses had flock and worked as shepherds for some time in their lives. David himself was a shepherd as well as his father. Based on the deep element of confidence in the Lord which can be found in Ps. 23 and Ps. 3, Delitzsch and Lundbom⁷⁵ suggest Psalm 23 was composed in the wilderness when David had to flee during Absalom's rebellion⁷⁶. Due to this internal historical reference, it is difficult if not impossible, to determine the exact time of the composition of this psalm.

Other theories appear to be more imaginative. Kraus for instance, takes the view that it is a pre-exilic composition which was used in a cultic setting due to the focus on the «house of the Lord» (cf. v.6). In fact, this Psalm can also be considered as a «Psalm of Pilgrimage». He proposes the idea that the writer may have been unrightfully accused and later acquitted. The meal mentioned in the psalm then would refer to a thanksgiving banquet as the writer's enemies watch him enjoy and thank the Lord in adoration⁷⁷. Merrill affirms that the described scene is a royal coronation ritual in which a procession went from the temple to the spring as a sort of pilgrimage around the city⁷⁸. Vogt instead, suggests that Ps. 23 is connected to the thanksgiving sacrifice which the pilgrim offered possibly to show the thankfulness of a current safekeeping when he went through a dark valley. The dark valley in his opinion would therefore represent a false prosecution. Some elements of this prosecution are the presence of enemies while the sacrifices are being offered and this can be seen in other similar compositions such as Pss. 22:26, 27; 63:6; 66:13ff; 116:17ff). According to E. Vogt, the «paths of righteousness», the right of asylum to the temple (also called «a place of rest or hospitality»; cf. Ps. 132:8, 14) mentioned in Ps. 23:2, the confession of innocence in v.3 (cf. Ps. 5:8; 28:11, 12; 143:8-10) and much other evidences indicate, a real judicial debate before the supreme cassation of the temple. The

⁷⁴ J. Goldingay, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

⁷⁵ Cf. J.R. Lundbom, *art. cit.*, pp. 6-16.

⁷⁶ C.F. Keil; F.K. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (trans. F. Bolton), 3 vols., Grand Rapids (MI), vol I, Eerdmans, 1949, p. 329.

⁷⁷ Cf. H.J. Kraus, *Psalms 1—59*, 2 Vols., Minneapolis, Augsburg, vol. I, 1988, pp. 305, 306.

⁷⁸ A.L. Merrill, «Psalm XXIII and the Jerusalem Tradition», *Vetus Testamentum*, 1965, n. 15, pp. 354-360.

enemies are supposed to be in the midst of the crowd waiting as the believer worship in celebration for the success he got through the «paths of righteousness» during the prosecution. The pastoral (shepherd) images here instead, would be a symbolic anticipation of the rites of *thanksgiving* which was explicitly mentioned in v.5. The following verse (v.6) describes the departure from the temple as the goodness of the Lord accompanies the believer who in return promises to return to the house of the Lord for the remaining days of his life⁷⁹.

Various writers suggest that behind this psalm is a kind of symbolic cultic journey, a pilgrimage, made by the king through the valley of the shadow of death⁸⁰. Concerning this, Anderson pictures the composer as a royal head and originally a representative of the community. However, this idea is far from answering to reason why this psalm is used in the community after the exile⁸¹. Other studies theorize that the song existed before the exile but was creatively reworked during and after the exile as the community remembered the Davidic covenant⁸². «It would be just as easy to say an ancient psalm was applied to subsequent experiences without saying it had to be revised»⁸³.

Based on v. 6 of the psalm, Dhorme and von Rad suggest it is a joyous testimony of a Levite who despite many attempts of those want to drive him away from his call, sings the splendor of the holy choice of serving God in the temple. Mowinckel and Maillot-Lelièvre instead, suggest it is a psalm of goodbye of a pilgrim at Sion, who after worshipping God at the temple, goes back to his village and prays to God for divine protection during his journey back home (cf. Ps. 121)⁸⁴. Some other commentators suggest that Ps. 23 may have a link with the sacrificial meal in the temple worship as part of an offering of thanksgiving. Cf. Pss. 22:22-26 and 116:17-19⁸⁵.

As one can see, the issues here are complexed because poetry is art and often archaizing as older-sounding phrases may be tricky to prove an early date. This poem as many others is essentially intuitive and not a detailed descriptive demonstration. However, we should focus on the evidence that we have discussed so far. We prefer the idea that Ps. 23 was composed in the

⁷⁹ E. Vogt, «The “Place in Life” of Psalm 23», in *Biblica*, 1953, n. 34, pp. 195-211.

⁸⁰ See for example, J.H. Eaton, *Psalms: Introduction and Commentary* (Torch Bible Commentary), London, SCM, 1967, pp. 76, 77.

⁸¹ A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (New Century Bible), 2 Vols., London, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, vol. I, 1972, p. 196.

⁸² M.L. Barré; J. Kselman, «New Exodus, Covenant, and Restoration in Psalm 23», in *The Word of the LORD Shall Go Forth*, C.F. Meyers; M. O'Connor (eds.), Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 1983, pp. 97-127.

⁸³ A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 556.

⁸⁴ G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, pp. 431, 432.

⁸⁵ J.H. Waltner, *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Psalms*, Scottdale (PA), Waterloo (ON), Herald Press, 1931, p. 127.

post-exilic period. This theory is mainly based on the typological elements such as shepherd, water, darkness, feast, journey which are also very common in the theology of the Deutero-Isaiah (40-55) which is of the second exodus from Babylon (cf. Ez. 34). This means that the presumed historical background we choose to hypothesize is that of the Second Temple⁸⁶. Notwithstanding, it is quite interesting that the very absence of specific historical references makes the poem appear timeless, relevant, and suitable for any recurring situation in life or a person (individual) or a group of people (community).

⁸⁶ G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, pp. 431, 432.

Chapter 2 - Exegetical Analysis of Psalm 23

In the first chapter of the paper, we made an introductory presentation of *Psalm 23* through a generic observation of the entire Psalter to achieve a better comprehension of the historical and literary context in which the twenty-third psalm was born. In this second section instead, we move from an introductory overview to focus on the twenty-third psalm until we reach an in-depth comprehension of this psalm through exegesis.

2.1 Poetic Analysis

We have already faced the issue of translation and the original text in the first chapter of this paper. Therefore, the following section gives some glimpses of poetic analysis, and is mainly focused, not on the translation but on the division, we find in the poetical composition. Basically here, we deal with the colons⁸⁷ and their positions as they will be useful for a better comprehension of the exegetical part which follows later.

⁸⁷ The image of the scansion is from M.T. Walker, «Poetic Analysis of Psalm 23» in *Partial Fulfillment of the requirements of the course Hebrew intensive III BL706*, 2020, pp. 1, 2.
https://www.academia.edu/42622999/Psalm_23_Poetic_Analysis

A psalm of David.

יְהוָה רֹעִי | לֹא אֶחָסֵר: || 2:2

YHWH is my shepherd; I will not lack.

בְּנֵאֲוֹת דָּשָׁא יִרְבִּיעֲנִי | עַל־מֵי מְנַחֲוֹת יִנְהַלֵּנִי: || 3:3 2

In pastures of green grass he causes me to lie down; beside restful waters he leads me.

נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבֵב | יִנְחֵנִי בַמַּעְגָּלִי־צָדֵק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ: || 2:4 3

My soul he restores; he leads me in right paths for the sake of his name.

גַּם כִּי־אֵלֶּךָ בְּגֵיא צִלְמוֹת | לֹא־אֵירָא רָע כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי | שְׁבִטָּךָ וּמִשְׁעֲנֵתְךָ הֵמָּה 4

יִנְחֵמֵנִי: || 4:4:4

Even when I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear evil because you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.

תַּעֲרֹךְ לְפָנָי שִׁלְחֹן נֶגֶד צָרָרִי | דִּשְׁנָתָּ בְּשֵׁמֶן רֹאשִׁי כּוֹסֵי רוּיָה: || 5:5 5

You arrange before me a table in the presence of my enemies; you anoint with oil my head, my cup is overflowing.

אֵדָא | טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי | וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה לְאַרְבַּע יָמִים: || 6:4 6

Surely goodness and grace will pursue me all the days of my life; and I will return to the house of YHWH for length of days.

2.1.1 Defense of Scansion

Considering the cause-and-effect relationship between the words expressed by the psalmist in the first lines, v. 1b can be considered as a 2:2 bicolon though it is at the beginning of the composition⁸⁸. Verse 2 is clearly a 3:3 based on the structural organization of the phrase⁸⁹. We chose to consider v. 3 as a 2:4 against Morgenstern's 3:3 because the latter's scansion forces the text to create something that is unfitting⁹⁰. The semantics of v. 4 suggests a 4:4:4 tricolon scansion. In fact, the addition of seemingly an unnecessary personal pronoun which is *אני* helps to balance the line. The pronoun here may play the role of emphasizing the comfort the sheep finds in the two special items of the shepherd which are his *rod* and *staff*. Our choice of a 4:4:4 tricolon for this verse can also be justified by the change of metaphor at the next verse, which is typically one of the characteristics of a tricolon⁹¹. Verse 5 is clearly a 5:5 bicolon in which the Host is described as setting or arranging a table for the guest, anointing his head with oil, and filling his cup till it overflows. If we separately count the emphatic particle *וְ* which is at the beginning of the phrase, v. 6 can be considered as 6:4. Apart from that, it seems more poetic and reasonable to have a shorter second half of the poem which brings the composition to an end.

2.2 Exegetical Commentary

Though we have said it multiple times and we will encounter the repetition of the following idea in various forms, implicitly and explicitly, we should not forget that the sheep of Psalm 23 is not just an ordinary sheep but rather a metaphor for David, the composer of the psalm himself as we can see from the title and from other elements we can find in the text. Therefore, it is David who speaks in a form of testimony where lament and confidence are intertwined in the voice of the sheep. Psalm 23 is a psalm of the King shepherd David and so Yahweh, in this text, more than being the sheep's shepherd, is in reality the shepherd's shepherd.

⁸⁸ J.L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, New Haven (CT), Yale University Press, 1981, pp. 49, 50; Cf. W.G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, Sheffield (England), JSOT Press, 1986, pp. 169, 170.

⁸⁹ J.L. Kugel, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 50.

⁹⁰ J. Morgenstern, *art. cit.*, pp. 15-17, 22.

⁹¹ Cf. W.G. E. Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 183, 343-348.

2.2.1 Defense of Translation

The main English translations such as The New King James Version (NKJV), the English Standard Version (ESV), the New Living Translation (NLT), the New International Version (NIV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) go more or less the same direction in the mainstream. There are some few nuances and synonyms that might differ, but they are not many and very important, so they are not going to be given much space here nor to be deeply taken into consideration. In addition, the LXX will be taken into consideration for a further confrontation.

Verse 1 - The LXX translates the participle «my shepherd» (רִעִי) with «shepherds me» (ποιμαίνει με) so the phrase becomes: «The Lord Shepherds me». Ποιμαίνω can also mean «to rule», «to govern» or «to feed». Though this is a possible meaning of the text, putting it in this manner makes it sound already paraphrased in some way and the nuance is lost. In fact, there is a big difference between «he shepherd's me» and «he is my shepherd». We can note that a great emphasis is lost along the way. In view of the previous participle, the first verb (אֶרְחֹק) can be considered as a habitual imperfect, translated «I lack nothing» or «I do not lack». The NASB translates «I will not be in need».

Verse 2 - Κατασκηνόω - «I encamp», «tabernacle», «dwell», «camp down»; Με κατεσκήνωσεν - «he encamped me». The Greek gives an interesting nuance to the phrase «he makes me lie down». The Greek translation probably makes an illusion to some aspects of the Jewish Tradition such as the feasts. There is an implicit link to the final verses of the composition where the psalmist talks about his dwelling place. The «grassy green meadows» as is found in our translation, is a synonym of «pastures». The Greek translates «grassy green pastures» with Χλόη «tender foliage». This better gives the original sense of the kind grass the psalmist was pointing to, which is verdant grass, the fresh shoots of spring⁹². The Hiphil form of רָבַץ has an implemented causative sense and that is the reason why it was translated «he makes me lie down»⁹³. As regards the water element which is mentioned in the second part of the second verse, the construct מַיִם מְנוּחָה can also be translated as «quiet waters», designating a peaceful, resting place. Though we can notice the attributive genitive's function here, the text brings a

⁹² A.P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms* (Kregel Exegetical Library), 3 vols., Grand Rapids (MI), vol. I, Kregel, 2011, p. 561.

⁹³ H.R. Laird, *et. al.*, (eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 Vols., Chicago (IL), Moody Press, 1980, vol II, p. 830.

sort of ambiguity in its formulation to the extent that one does not really know if it is the water itself which is «still», «quiet», or «restful» or it is the water which offer a place or a sense of rest. The NLT goes in this direction. The Greek says «the water of rest» ὕδατος αναπαύσεως. The Piel form of the verb נהל conveys an idea which is not easy to be understood because it does not simply indicate «leading» but leading towards a place of water and causing to rest there. All these actions or activities are often named in reference to a shepherd⁹⁴. Since grasping this entire nuance is difficult, we are helped for a better comprehension by the immediate context.

Verse 3 - The Greek translates ἐξέθρεψέ με «he has nourished me». It seems the translator wanted to remain on the literal sheep context and therefore the word «soul» seemed to him, out of context. The Hebrew term for *soul* has many different meanings including the primary ones such as «life» or «self». The Polel form of שׁוּב as we find here, in the causative sense, means «bring, restore, repair»⁹⁵. The NLT translates, «He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name». Comparing this to the original text, it is evident that this translation is a paraphrase especially as regards the «name» part. The common translation is «for his name's sake». Cf. ESV, NKJV.

Verse 4 - Instead of «valley» Greek has «midst» (μέσῳ). «Death-shadow», «deep shadow», «deep darkness», «shadow of death» are all synonyms. We can also translate the phrase with «through the darkest valley». One of the noticeable elements here is that the phraseology here depicts both a scene of darkness and danger in which the sheep finds itself. Moreover, the terms «rod» and «staff» are well translated but most of the English translators. The metonymic expression here therefore denotes a sense of care and defense which is accompanied by the piel form of נָחַם which signifies «to comfort, to console»⁹⁶.

Verse 5 – The translation goes on quite smoothly until one gets to the construct רַנְיָהּ כּוֹסֵי which can be literally translated as «my cup of saturation»⁹⁷. This saturated cup is filled to overflowing⁹⁸. LXX reads «your cup cheers me (inebriates me, intoxicates me) like the best (strongest) [wine]» μεθύσκον με ὡσεὶ κράτιστον. The NKJV translates «my cup runs over».

⁹⁴ F. Brown; S.R. Driver; C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, pp. 624, 625.

⁹⁵ *Idem*, pp. 998, 999.

⁹⁶ H.R. Laird, *et. al.*, (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 570, 571.

⁹⁷ A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 568.

⁹⁸ J. Morgenstern, «Psalm 23» in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65, no. 1, March 1946, p. 16.

Verse 6 – What we translated «surely» can also be rendered with «only». In the Greek translation, «goodness» is omitted. The text simply reads «And your mercy will follow me». The NIV version says: «surely *your* goodness and love will follow me». As one can note from the Masoretic Text, there is no possessive pronoun such as «your». In fact, the version gives the poetic impression of personifying what follows, which is «Goodness and lovingkindness». The term **חַסְדֶּךָ** indicates more than «love» or «mercy» as some versions translate. Though it is not a wrong translation it can also be translated as «loyal love», «faithfulness», or «lovingkindness». The NLT for instance, translates it with «unfailing love». «All the days of my life» - Literally **לְאֶרְךָ יָמַי** «unto perpetuity forever». The NRSV translates «my whole life long» and the NKJV «All the days of my life». The following phrase often translated with «will follow me» as we will also see in the exegetical commentary is better rendered by the verb «pursue» because that seems to be the real meaning the author was trying to give to the readers in the original text. In fact, **רָדַף** means «to pursue» or «chase», often with hostile intent⁹⁹. «I shall *dwell*» - If we assume that **וּשְׁבַתִּי** has its root from **שׁוּב** «return», the 1csg with the waw consecutive would be translated «and I will return [to the house of the Lord for the length of days] ». The additional perplexity comes from the preposition **בְּ** «in» which in a literal translation would be «I will return in the house of the Lord». But if we consider **וּשְׁבַתִּי** as a Qal infinitive which derives from **שָׁבַת** then we could translate with «I will dwell [in the house of the Lord for the length of days] ». In fact, the Greek translates **το κατοικεῖν με** «and my dwelling [will be] in the house of the Lord» or «I will dwell in the house of the Lord». This is supported by the NASB's translation. Taking into consideration the Masoretic Text, a «half-way» translation would be the combination of the two proposed translations: «return to dwell». A.P. Ross affirms «such an idea of “returning” would lead to “dwelling” in the sense of worshipping»¹⁰⁰.

2.2.2 The Lord the Shepherd Who Provides (vv. 1-4)

Psalm 23 starts with the Tetragrammaton **יְהוָה** and the well-known metaphor, which in the Hebrew is a nominal phrase - «The Lord [is] my shepherd» (cf. parallel texts: Ps. 78:52; 80:2; Isa. 40:10; Jer. 23:4; Eze. 34:11-16). This is a simple and profound profession of faith which

⁹⁹ R.E. Tappy, «Psalm 23: Symbolism and Structure» in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57, no. 2, April 1995, p. 279.

¹⁰⁰ A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 554.

does not need complications¹⁰¹. In fact, while L. Köhler wants to bend the text in a subordinative manner («When [or as long as] YHWH is my shepherd, I shall not want»), E. Pfeiffer wants to read the phrase in a vocative way: YHWH, my shepherd! »¹⁰². The Old Testament mainly presents two names of God which are *Elohim* (אלהים) and *Yahweh* (יהוה). The latter name can also be translated as *Jehovah*. *Yahweh* primarily indicates a self-subsistent eternal being. He is the one whose existence does not depend on anyone. This is the kind of being who the writer of the Gospel of John was pointing to when he stated he has «life in Himself» (Jhn. 5:26). Adam Clarke defines *Yahweh* as « [...] a Being who, from his infinite wisdom, cannot err or be deceived; and, from his infinite goodness, can do nothing but what is eternally just, right, and kind»¹⁰³. The divine name used here, *Yahweh*, is so central to this composition that it forms an *inclusio* in the first and last verse lines of the poem.

The figure of the shepherd¹⁰⁴ will be the center of the next four verses. In some biblical passages such as Ps. 77:21; 80:2; Eze. 34:11-16 or Isa. 40:11, God is described as the «Shepherd of Israel». In other Old Testament passages, the shepherd metaphor is used by the prophets to describe and compare the return from the exile in Babylon with exodus (Isa. 40:11; 49:9-13; Jer. 23:1-8; 31:8-14). Since good shepherding requires love¹⁰⁵ and devotion, Abraham, Lot, Rachel, Jacob and his twelve sons, Moses, and many leaders of Israel started off as shepherds. Through that, God prepared them to nurture, love and care for his creatures, initially animals and later, human beings, his chosen people. In fact, Moses, for instance, is called «faithful shepherd» in the sense of an actual shepherd of flock and as his people's shepherd. He cared for his people as he cared for his flock¹⁰⁶. Furthermore, the image of the flock is used various times as a

¹⁰¹ Some authors such as Goldingay suggest «the possibility that the opening line of the psalm, rather than being principally a statement about YHWH, is a claim that the psalmist is making about *himself*: “My shepherd is YHWH”. Read in such a manner, the psalm comes into sharper relief as a powerful declaration of the speaker's own confidence and trust in YHWH». R. Alastair, «The King's Shepherd – Psalm 23:1-6», <https://politicaltheology.com/the-kings-shepherd-psalm-231-6/> visited 18/06/2021.

¹⁰² G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, p. 439.

¹⁰³ A. Clarke, as quoted in J. McClintock, J. Strong, eds., *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 3, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1894, p. 903, <http://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/G/god.html>

¹⁰⁴ The shepherd image is very common to the so-called *Greek bucolic poets* such as Theocritus (d. 261 B.C.E.), Bion (121-51 B.C.E.), and Moschus (second century B.C.E.), as well also Virgil (70-19 B.C.E.) who wrote in Latin. Cf. C.W. Skinner, «'The Good Shepherd Lays Down His Life for the Sheep (Jhn 10:11, 15, 17): Questioning the Limits of a Johannine Metaphor'», in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 80, n.1, 2018, pp. 97-113.

¹⁰⁵ As Thomas Merton puts it: «Love seeks one thing only: the good of the one loved». D. Willard, *Life Without Lack. Living in the Fullness of Psalm 23*, Nashville (TN), Nelson Books, 2018, p. 84.

¹⁰⁶ S.C. Kesselman, «Psalm 23: L-rd Is My Shepherd», https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3832324/jewish/Psalm-23-L-rd-Is-My-Shepherd.htm, visited 22/06/21.

metaphor for people (e.g., Pss. 74:1; 77:20; 78:52; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3). This shows that the metaphors of shepherd and flock can be used in singular cases (e.g., God/David in Ps. 23) and plural cases (e.g., the Shepherd of Israel/Flock in Ps. 77)¹⁰⁷. Here, in Ps. 23 the psalmist talks of a Shepherd-God whose provisions come in a variety of ways. David can talk about God in a shepherd's clothe because he himself was a shepherd of sheep (1 Sam. 16:11, 19; 17:34) and he knew what it meant to be delivered from incidences of distress (1 Sam. 22:1; 23:19-29).

As a domesticated animal (in our case, a sheep) can be humanized as it becomes part of the house, so can a man become beastly fierce¹⁰⁸. The realism through which the image of the shepherd is developed and expanded in this psalm in an amazing, extremely impressive, and astonishing. The poet decides not to focus on microscopic details but simply select precise scenes and privileged instants and then move forward with the description. This is obtained through a careful choice of vocabulary as we will see and precise words of action which are verbs that create a vivid imagination for a reader who is familiar with this reality and symbolism. In fact, as Alonso Schökel affirms in his *Manuale di poetica ebraica*, «symbol» invokes man in his entirety through fantasy, intuition, and emotion. Symbols also vibrate us and keep us in vibration as we open ourselves in a contemplative manner. Symbols do not have walls but are open and globally expansive¹⁰⁹.

The imagery used in this first part of the psalm is clearly the imagery of an animal, a sheep but one can also note that despite the reality and authenticity of the image, the writer's theme goes beyond the sheep-image description. In fact, it is also noticeable that the poet is talking about himself in the shoes of a sheep. The precision and underscoring of these two intertwined lineages give the poem a powerful grip on the reader and enlarges and expands its comprehension into multiple facades. Physical, spiritual, and especially allegorical themes are weaved together. Through all the animalistic vocabulary, one comes to terms such as קָדָשׁ, שָׁפָט, אֵל, and אֱלֹהִים which sound ambiguous. Soul, conduct or behavior of doing good, name (which is «title» in the context), and consolation are all terms which belong more to human sphere than the sheep or animal world in general. The human voice is heard once more with the phrase: «you

¹⁰⁷ J.G. Audirsch, «Sermon: Psalm 23» in *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry*, Fall 2016, Vol. 13, n. 2, p. 61.

¹⁰⁸ The usage of the image of a domesticated animal will be linked to our relationship with God. When one comes to God, he becomes a new creature, he puts down his boastful manners and offers himself to be tamed, domesticated under the guidance and leadership of God. A.L. Schokel; C. Carniti, *I Salmi*, (Commenti Biblici), 2 vols., Roma, Borla, vol. I, 1992, p. 457.

¹⁰⁹ A.L. Schokel, *Manuale di poetica ebraica*, Brescia, Queriniana, 1989², p. 139. He describes the symbols present in this psalm as *archetype* and *cultural* symbols.

are with me» at v. 4b. However, the metaphor of sheep is interesting because people have needs and challenges similar to those of the sheep.

2.2.2.1 Physical and Spiritual Nourishment (vv. 1-2a)

This first poetic line points out the provision of the shepherd as he feeds his sheep. The term «shepherd» is an active participle which can also mean «feeder». In fact, the word רֹעֵי has its root from the verb רָעַר «to pasture, tend, graze, feed» (Cf. Gen. 41:2; Ps. 95:7). As seen in the syntactical analysis in the translation of the original Hebrew text, the predicate participle in the phrase «is my shepherd» gives the idea of companion, faithfulness, and security in the qal form and usage¹¹⁰. The participial form of the verb רָעַר appears 63 times in the entire Scriptures¹¹¹.

2.2.2.2 Some Usages of the Verb in the Old Testament

The primary usages of the verbs *shepherding*, *tending*, *herding* or of the nouns *shepherd*, *shepherdess*, or *herdsman*, which all derive from רָעַר are: first of all, used to describe «herders of livestock»; secondly, YHWH is also portrayed in the clothes of a shepherd who leads his sheep, which is Israel; moreover, רָעַר is also used to talk of a person or group of leaders or rulers.

The primary use of the term to describe herders mostly occur in the Pentateuch, especially in the book of Genesis where these people feed and lead the livestock to pasture, to tend and protect them¹¹². In some special occasions and among people who could afford to act in that manner, flock were fed intensively with grain but in most of the cases they were led by shepherds towards vegetation and water as they fed «extensively». Though we are used to reading about shepherds who *lead* the flock, various texts from the Scripture show that there was not a fixed position for the shepherd or the flock during the journey. In fact, shepherds could

¹¹⁰ J.W. Vancil, «Shepherd», in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D.N. Freedman [ABD], 6 vols., New York, Doubleday, vol. V, 1992, p. 1187-1189. «Shepherding was one of man's earliest occupations. Flocks and herds, always a prominent feature in Palestine and other Near Eastern societies, consisted specifically of cows, sheep, and goats, but could also include horses, asses, and camels; the principal animal, however, owing to size, abundance, and usefulness, was the sheep».

¹¹¹ A.J. Kostenberger, *Encountering John. The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1999, p. 124.

¹¹² Cf. O. Borowski, *Every Living Thing: Daily Use of Animals in Ancient Israel*, Walnut Creek (CA), AltaMira, 1998; J. Galtay and D.L. Johnson (eds.), *The World of Pastoralism: Herding in Comparative Perspective*, New York, Guilford, 1990; J.D. Huntzinger, «The End of Exile: A Short Commentary on the Shepherd/Sheep Metaphor in Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophetic and Synoptic Gospel Literature» (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999).

be «before», «within» or even «behind» the flock in base of the need and the situation. David and Amos are for instance, described as «following the flock» 2(מֵאַחַר מִצְאֵן Sam. 7:8; 1 Chro. 17:7; Am. 7:15)¹¹³.

A second usage of shepherd imagery in the Old Testament points to the Lord, YHWH as the shepherd of Israel. Twenty percent of the verses where רֹעֵה is used is translated *shepherd*. Cf. Gen. 48:15; 49:24; Pss. 23; 28:9; 74:1; 77: 20; 78:52-55; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; Isa. 40:10-11; 49:9-13; Jer. 23:2; 31:10; 50:19; Eze. 34:31; Mi. 2:12-13; 4:6-8; 7:14-15¹¹⁴. In the narrative of the Patriarchs, YHWH is described as the shepherd of Jacob and his clan. The narratives regarding the period of the monarchy talk of YHWH as the shepherd of Israel and the monarch as YHWH's under-shepherd. This imagery is used throughout the exodus and exilic narratives, seemingly showing up in times of trouble and disturbances among the people¹¹⁵. Later on, the prophets Ezekiel and Zechariah expanded the imagery in eschatological perspective which later became associated with the Messiah in the prophetic tradition. The fact that Israel is under YHWH's care, provision, and rule makes the people's rejection of YHWH more astonishing and scandalous (1 Sam. 8:4-22)¹¹⁶.

The third usage in the Old Testament of רֹעֵה points to political and religious earthly rulers of Israel. Cf. Num. 27:17; 1 Sam. 21:8; 2 Sam. 5:2; 7:7-8; 1 Kgs 2:17; Ps 78:70-72; Isa. 56:11; Jer. 2:8; 3:15; 10:21; 22:22; 23:1-4; 25:34- 36; 50:6; Eze. 34:2-10; Zech. 10:3; 11:5-8. Regarding Gentile rulers, see: Isa. 44:28; Jer. 6:3; 12:10; 25:34-36; 49:19; 50:44; Nah. 3:18¹¹⁷. When they acted faithfully according to the law of God, they were considered good shepherds as David was in most cases (cf. 2 Sam. 7:5-10)¹¹⁸. But when they acted unfaithfully and with wickedness, abuse, and abandon as we see in the texts of Eze. 34:1-10; Zec. 10:3; 11:4-17, they were considered wicked shepherds and rulers. This will lead to the Davidic Messiah who will

¹¹³ «Wherever the shepherd was in relation to the flock, two methods of maintaining flock cohesion are particularly intriguing for this study: bells worn by animals chosen because they willingly and lovingly follow the shepherd and voice commands to keep strays from wandering». Q.P. Kinnison, «Shepherd or One of the Sheep: Revisiting the Biblical Metaphor of the Pastorate», in *Journal of Religious Leadership*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Spring 2010, p. 68.

¹¹⁴ Y.S. Chae, *Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd*, (WUNT 2), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2006, p. 25.

¹¹⁵ J.D. Huntzinger, *art. cit.*, p. 81.

¹¹⁶ According to Laniak though Israel desired and had a king, it never had to forget its dependence on YHWH, the flock's true Owner and King. In fact, beginning from Saul, the kings in Israel were to be delegates of the Supreme King of the universe who regularly delivered his messages through his messengers the prophets. T.S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (NSBT), Downers Grove (IL), InterVarsity, 2006, pp. 37, 42.

¹¹⁷ Cf. I.M. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 56), New York, Brill, 1994.

¹¹⁸ Cf. J.D. Huntzinger, *art. cit.*, p. 79.

put an end to this as he will lead his people in *faithfulness* and will *restore* the *shalom* of his flock¹¹⁹.

2.2.2.3 Some Usages of The Verb in The New Testament

The New Testament Greek generally translates ποιμήν with «shepherd» and the verb Ποιμαίνω¹²⁰ with the act of «shepherding» or «tending». The verb and the noun are used in different ways and in different occasions in base of the context. Ποιμήν (noun) appears eighteen times in the New Testament (Mt. 3; Mk. 2; Lk. 4; Jhn. 6; Eph. 1; Heb. 1; Jhn. 1; Acts 1; 1 Cor. 1; 1 Pt. 1; Jude 1; Rev. 4). The verb Ποιμαίνω occurs eleven times in the New Testament (Mt. 1; Lk. 1; Jhn. 1; Acts 1; 1 Cor. 1; 1 Pt. 1; Jude 1; Rev. 4)¹²¹. Ποιμήν (noun) is used in the birth narrative of Jesus according to the evangelist Luke. We can find its usage also in Mt. 9:36; Mk. 6:34 where the crowds are described as «sheep without a shepherd». In Mt. 25:32, Jesus is implicitly described as a shepherd who separates the «sheep from the goats» and in John 10 he is the «Good Shepherd». Though ποιμήν and ποιμαίνω are not used in these texts/contexts, there is certainly an allegorical shepherd imagery in the parable of the lost sheep in Lk. 15:3-7 and Mt. 18:12, 13. Matthew and Mark will later interpret prophet Zechariah's stricken shepherd with Jesus and identify the scattered flock with Jesus' disciples (Mt. 26:31; Mk. 14:27; cf. Zech. 13:7).

The noun ποιμήν is also used to talk about church leadership. This noun form occurs four times in the New Testament. Christ is called the «great Shepherd of the flock» in Heb. 13:20, «Chief Shepherd» in 1 Pt. 5:4 and «sheep and guardian of your souls» in 1 Pt. 2:25 - «τὸν ποιμένα καὶ ἐπίσκοπον τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν». In Luke's account (Lk 12:32), Jesus interestingly addresses his followers as his «little flock». Another usage of the noun ποιμήν appears in Eph. 4:11 in the context of church leadership where ποιμήν is translated «pastor». In Eph. 4:12, 13, ποιμένας (nom. masc. pl.), is included in Christ's gifts to the church together with the gifts to

¹¹⁹ «Those who serve faithfully (albeit imperfectly) are associated with God's presence in the Spirit. Those who serve unfaithfully are associated with the Spirit's absence. Thus, the coming of YHWH's Messianic shepherd will have God's Spirit residing upon him (Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1-2, Mi. 5:4) as foreshadowing for the outpouring of YHWH's Spirit on all God's people (Num. 11:29; Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Eze. 37:58 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; Zech. 12:10)». Q.P. Kinnison, *art. cit.*, p. 73.

¹²⁰ «Ποιμαίνω» is commonly translated «rule» but «Ποιῶσθημι» which is more frequent in ecclesial contexts is also translated rule. Cf. A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC), Nashville (TN), Thomas Nelson, 1990.

¹²¹ S. Kubo, *A Reader's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Beginner's Guide for the Translation of New Testament Greek*, Grand Rapids (MI), Zondervan, 1975, p. 75.

be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers. They are all together, gifts Christ gave to the Church «to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ»¹²².

There is also an anthropological church leadership approach and usage of the verb ποιμαίνω as men and women «tend» (Jhn. 21:1; 1 Pt. 5:2) and «shepherd» (Acts 20:28; 1 Pt. 5:2) the flock of God. In other occasions, ποιμαίνω is also used in connection to Christ's leadership. The verb occurs in the first and last book of the Bible (Mt. 2:6 and Rev. 2:27 (cf. Ps. 2:9); Rev. 12:5 and 19:15).

2.2.2.4 The Shepherd and His Work Through Scriptures and History

The shepherd image portrays the Lord as a leader and teacher of his people (flock). It is a loving, relational, and intimate image as that of fatherhood or paternity because the sheep are like children to the shepherd and the shepherd is a father to the sheep¹²³. The Lord is the psalmist's shepherd, his owner, his cherished property, and he is delighted to be owned by such a kind, loving and selfless owner under whose care he can flourish and thrive contentedly. The shepherd finds delight in his flock. «For Him there is no greater reward, no deeper satisfaction, than that of seeing His sheep contented, well fed, safe, and flourishing under His care. This is indeed His very “life”. He gives all He has to it. He literally lays Himself out for those who are His»¹²⁴. The Good Shepherd will never spare himself any pain to provide his sheep shelter, good pasturage, clean water as well as protecting them from enemies, diseases, parasites or too many flies (nasal flies, bot flies, warble flies, and ticks) – cf. Ps. 80:1-3; Jer. 31:10. He is always alert and with his sympathetic eyes, with an instant look, he can see the sheep's wellbeing as well as being able to tell if any of them has been molested during the night or need special assistance due to illness. The Lord the Shepherd sleeps «with one eye and both ears open», meaning he is

¹²² Q.P. Kinnison, *art. cit.*, p. 76.

¹²³ «Each shepherd has his own distinctive earmark which he cuts into one of the ears of his sheep. In this way, even at a distance, it is easy to determine to whom the sheep belongs». The process of marking a sheep can be painful for the sheep and the shepherd but from this mutual suffering comes an indelible mark of relationship. There is a similar ritual in the Old Testament between a slave and his master when the latter had to puncture a hole through the former's ear to mark belonging to that house. Cf. W.P. Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Grand Rapids (MI), Zondervan, 2007², pp. 21, 22.

¹²⁴ Cf. W.P. Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

alert even at night, especially in the night¹²⁵. The connection and the intimacy between the flock and the shepherd is so tight that some sheep even have pet names in base of their appearance, character or a particular event connected to it¹²⁶.

The Shepherd is also the person who calms down the flock, and make them lie down in rest, without tension or bad competition within themselves. In fact, W.P. Keller defines a flock's «order of dominance» as the *butting order* when the oldest leader-ewe among the sheep rule on the rest of the flock. Her position and predominance guarantee her the best feeding bedgrounds. This often creates discontent and rivalry, but the shepherd's presence puts an end to this as he shifts the flock's focus to himself¹²⁷.

Transhumance is defined as a «form of pastoralism or nomadism organized around the migration of livestock between mountain pastures in warm seasons and lower altitudes the rest of the year. The seasonal migration may also occur between lower and upper latitudes»¹²⁸. Some events such as the transhumance is often dramatic due to several reasons. The rapidity with which this journey is made stands as a difficult task for the sheep who are pregnant or have just given birth. These two groups, along with the older generations slow the journey in a decisive way. One should also consider the presence of predators who make the journey a nightmare for both the sheep and the shepherd who leads them.

With the period of transhumance came the spring full moon festival which later became the historical feast of Passover (*Pesach*). Ravasi links the pastoral elements here to the Passover. The staff, the traveling costume, the unleavened bread baked on stone slabs, the bitter herbs gathered in the steppe and the lamb with intact bones were all auspice of reproduction in the fertility of the flock. The blood sprinkled served as an exorcism the evil powers of the long journey. All these and many more are plainly pastoral and Passover elements (Exo 12)¹²⁹.

Shepherds are not always looked with good eyes and the situation was even worse in the past. In fact, some sedentary clans accused them of robbery, dishonesty or as bringers of diseases. Shepherds were often lowly regarded occupying the lower rungs of the ladder of the society¹³⁰. See for instance, the narration of Joseph's story when his family joined him in Egypt.

¹²⁵ *Idem*.

¹²⁶ Cf. G.M. Mackie, *Bible Manners and Customs*, New York, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1903, p. 36.

¹²⁷ Cf. W.P. Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹²⁸ «Transhumance» in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transhumance> visited 16/06/2021.

¹²⁹ Cf. G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, pp. 435.

¹³⁰ J. MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically*, Thomas Nelson, Incorporated, 1995, p. 12.

When the family arrived, they are warned that the Egyptians see shepherds as «abhorrent» or «loathsome» - Gen. 46:34. Huntzinger affirms that due to their presumed dishonesty, shepherds were sometimes even prohibited to testify in trials or participating in temple rituals in the pre-exilic period¹³¹.

2.2.2.5. *Further Development of the Imagery*

The image of God here in Ps. 23 of a faithful *guide* and of a *travelling companion* goes in contrast with that of Eze. 34:2, 11-23 where shepherds (the leaders) selfishly fed themselves and neglected the sheep not giving them the necessary spiritual nourishment. In Jhn 21:16, Jesus instructs: «feed my sheep» and lately, under Jesus' authority (the Chief Shepherd) Peter instructs the elders to feed and care for the flock, the church members (1 Pt. 5:1-4). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews (5:12-14) associates the imagery of food to the word of God. These elements point the «shepherd» image also to the act of «teaching». In various Old Testament texts such as 2 Sam. 5:2; Jer. 10:21; 23:1-3; and Eze. 34:23, God orders some kings of Israel to take care of their people as a shepherd takes care of his sheep. They had to govern as God governs his creatures. They had to learn from the *true shepherd*. Therefore, in Eze. 34 the sheep is the nation, the people of God while in Ps. 23, the sheep is David. It is also worth noting that the text of Ezekiel 34 ends with a proposal of a *new David* as *shepherd*: «I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them; he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken». Eze. 34:23, 24)¹³². In Mi. 5:3, a future shepherd is presented in messianic clothes to guide his people. In some cases, the person chosen by God to govern his flock is pagan, as the Persian conqueror Cyrus in Isa. 44:28: «Who says of Cyrus, “*He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure*” ».

¹³¹ J.D. Huntzinger, «The End of Exile: A Short Commentary on the Shepherd/Sheep Metaphor in Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophetic and Synoptic Gospel Literature» (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999), pp. 66-69.

¹³² Though it comes late, the original context of this promise might anticipate the restoration of the monarchy. In a more ample sense, it gives the possibility to expect a *coming shepherd*. In a theological sense, the traditional Christian interpretation links it to Jesus and his Second Advent. Eze. 34 and Ps. 23 get revised and reutilized in the New Testament in John 10 (see also Lk 15:3-6).

Cf. W. Brueggemann; W.H. Bellinger jr, *Psalms*, (New Cambridge Bible Commentary), New York, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 125, 126.

2.2.2.6. *YHWH, The Shepherd Among All shepherds*

Considering this amazing image of a shepherd as seen so far, it is very understanding the reason why in the Eastern culture this image was linked to the *king* and to the gods. Regarding the latter, the Egyptian *Hymn to Aton* of Amenophis III (1413-1377 B.C.E.), described the sun-god and invoked him as «courageous shepherd who guides his sheep [...]»¹³³. Hammurabi's¹³⁴ royal epithet says: «the beneficent shepherd» while in the *Admonitions of Ipuwer* (an Egyptian sapiential writing) it is written: «He is the shepherd of all men no wickedness is in his heart. Though his flock is small, he spends the day to cure it». There is a similar hymn to the god-sun Shamaš. This hymn was from the library of Assurbanipal and among the many things it says, it is written «[...] Those who are endowed with life you shepherd them, for you are their shepherd, whether they are on high or in the underworld». Homer, one of the greatest poets of the ancient world, used to call the kings *poiménes laôn*, which is, «shepherds of people», those who are responsible for what the people do¹³⁵.

Only the Lord can be the real shepherd as the psalmist states because he cannot be blocked by any obstacle, and he never betrays his flock. He is the shepherd of Israel (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 74:1; 77:21; 78:52; 79:13; 80:2; 95:6, 7; 100:3; Hos. 4:16). In the Second Isaiah and in Ezekiel we have an eschatological perspective (Isa.40:11; 49:9, 10; Eze. 34:15; cf. Rev. 7:16, 17¹³⁶). Saying that YHWH is a shepherd equals to saying YHWH is king (Ps. 5:3; 17:8; 24:7-10; 29:10; 44:5; 47:7, 8). For this reason, this psalm of trust can also be linked to the psalms of kingship of YHWH¹³⁷. YHWH is definitely the shepherd of Israel, of his people but the emphasis here is on the distinctive possessive pronoun «my». The Lord here is therefore the Lord of the individual who is uttering these words¹³⁸.

¹³³ Cf. G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, p. 435.

¹³⁴ Cf. J.J. Davis, *The Perfect Shepherd: Studies in the Twenty-Third Psalm*, Baker Books, 1979, p. 51.

¹³⁵ G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, p. 435. Cf. G.W. Wade, *The Books of the Prophets Micah, Obadiah, Joel, and Jonah* (Westminster Commentaries), 66 vols., London, Taylor & Francis, vol. XXVIII, 1925, p. 42.

¹³⁶ «For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes».

¹³⁷ G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

¹³⁸ C.C. Broyles, *Psalms* (Understanding the Bible Commentary Series), Grand Rapids (MI), Baker Books, 1999, p. 134.

2.2.2.7. *Abundance in spite of Necessity (v. 1b)*

After the initial metaphor of the shepherd in the first part of the first verse, comes the psalmist's declaration on the quantity of the provision previously announced: «I lack [סָרַחָ] nothing» or «I do not lack»¹³⁹ (cf. Ps. 34:10¹⁴⁰) - For the psalmist, God's provision is enough, without deficiency quantitatively and qualitatively. The absence of reference to no direct and specific object of need is a remarkable assertion of trust. This present trust is a trust built on past experiences which have a future prospect. In fact, the imperfect used here is not a future tense but a present of habitual experience. In other words, witnessing the Lord's hand in the past gives the poet an assurance of future provision. This type of confidence and trust in the shepherd comes a step at a time and eventually the sheep know the shepherd can be trustworthy and that their lives are in safe hands. That is why the sheep can exclaim he lacks nothing. He is content with what the Shepherd gives to him to the point that he desires nothing more. More than a declaration of trust, this statement appears to be a decision. The psalmist enjoys a future promise in the light of its present blessings. Cf. 1 Sam. 2:5; Ps. 107:5, 9, 36; Ps. 146:7; Lk. 6:25; 1 Cor. 4:11; Phil. 4:12¹⁴¹.

The sheep understands and so draws a conclusion which is based on his knowledge of who the shepherd is, which is the Lord, *Yahweh*. If the Lord is *my* shepherd, then I am not in need, I am not in deficiency nor poor because my needs are supplied and fully met. I have decided to not desire more than what *my* shepherd gives me. In the imagery, there is also a political nuance because there cannot be a shepherd without a flock. Therefore, it is the sheep who deliberately attests the Lord's mercy, loyalty, and loving kindness. In fact, Calvin states that the sheep in this psalm are presented as those: «who willingly abide in his sheepfold and surrender themselves to be governed by him»¹⁴². In Ps. 77, which is a psalm of lament, the numerous repetitions of «I» and the excessive centrality of self-references portrays the idea of unhealthy obsession but here in Ps. 23 that is not the case. The repeated reference to self here

¹³⁹ A nominal form (סָרַחָ) means «poverty» - Cf. Prov. 28:22 where it is the opposite of «wealth». As an adjective (סָרַחָ) means «needy» - Cf. 1 Sam. 21:16. In a noun form (סָרַחָ) signifies «deficiency» - Cf. Eccl. 1:15. In Am. 4:6, a noun (סָרַחָ) indicates «lack».

¹⁴⁰ «Young lions can go without and be hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack for nothing good».

¹⁴¹ B.K. Waltke, J.M. Houston, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

¹⁴² J. Calvin, *Commentary on Psalms* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 5 vols., Grand Rapids (MI), Christian Classics Ethereal Library, vol. I, 1979, p. 382.

overflows with gratitude, trust, confidence, and thanksgiving because of the initial statement: The Lord is *my* shepherd. *I* lack nothing.

Hearing these words from David's mouth makes this statement very powerful because he knew what he was talking about. David knew what meant to be strongly in need or to lack. His life, at least in the initial state is known to be of intense privation, deprivation, and austerity, situations of deep personal poverty, acute hardship, circumstances in which his spirit was in great anguish. David's statement here clearly shows that having a shepherd does not mean never experiencing lack or never being in need. It would be enough to consider the careers of men like Elijah, John the Baptist, or Jesus himself to realize that the Scriptures do not talk about the believer's life with tone of greatness and abundance but also of lack and need. We need to keep this balanced view in mind (cf. Jhn. 16:33¹⁴³). Materialistic prosperity cannot be the only measure of the Lord's blessing. Rather, this kind of prosperity often blinds us from other realities (cf. Rev. 3:17 - «You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked») ¹⁴⁴. The psalmist is content and that is the reason he can affirm that he does not lack.

Since the parallel colon «He makes me lie down in grassy green meadows» supplies the emblem for the first section of the verse, the entire colon stands as a continuation of the metaphor, or an implied comparison. «Sheep commonly pasture in the wilderness (etymologically, *midbār* suggests pasturage), land that receives too little rainfall to support a settled population and sustain agriculture but grows enough grass to support flocks that keep on the move». The community cannot usually afford to put the sheep elsewhere and due to the location of the feeding grounds it is the shepherd's job to find provision for the flock in the wilderness (Jer. 9:10; 23:10; Jl. 1:19, 20; 2:22; Am. 1:2)¹⁴⁵.

A sheep will not lie down unless it is free from *fear*¹⁴⁶, free from *friction* with other sheep, free from *flies* or parasites and free from *hunger*. Due to their timidity as social beings, a

¹⁴³ «I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world». All translations are from the English Standard Version and some from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

¹⁴⁴ Also note Jesus' response to the rich young man who thought he had everything in place: «One thing you lack [...] Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor [...] Then come, follow me» Mk 10:21.

¹⁴⁵ J. Goldingay, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

¹⁴⁶ Sheep are timid animals who are easily panicked and frightened because they are helpless and feeble creatures. In panicking situations, pregnant ewes can even lose their unborn lambs in abortions. Cf. W.P. Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Grand Rapids (MI), Zondervan, 2007², p. 34.

flock can lie down and be at rest only if these four needs are met¹⁴⁷. After the morning grazing, sheep typically lie down for several hours at midday in a shady or cool place (Song 1:7). A sheep risks death if it is driven hard continuously for one day, without rest (Gen. 33:13). However, what would a flock do without the sheepman, who plays a tremendous role in these scenes? David, the writer of the psalm, lived in Israel and he used to pasture his father's flock near Bethlehem. In dry, semi-arid places like that, to find green pasture, one sometimes needs to do a tremendous work with plowing, seeding, and deal with irrigation complications. Therefore, not just to feed on the grass but to lie in grassy green meadows is a very strong image here to indicate ample provision. This kind of abundance can be linked to what God told Israel regarding the Promise Land, a « [...] land flowing with milk and honey¹⁴⁸» - Exo. 3:17. The Midrash commenting on God's provision to Israel compares the fresh green pastures to the *clothes* of the Israelites during the wilderness period, as they went out of Egypt to go to the Promised land. The people did not have weavers' gear with them, but they were clothed for forty years with «royal garments» (Eze. 16:10-14)¹⁴⁹. In fact, Deut. 8:4 declares that their clothing never wore out nor did their foot swell in those forty years. The people of the Lord had their garments cleansed by the cloud of fire¹⁵⁰.

There is a sense of *interdependency* between the sheep and the shepherd. The sheep are not forced to eat, to drink nor to lie down but they do all this freely and in an attitude of willing submissiveness and recognition that the shepherd is sovereign over all things including their lives. This covenantal relationship is linkable to God's word to Israel in Exo. 6:7 - «I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God». Therefore, it is not the sheep's effort to act but it is the Lord, the shepherd's act of care and provision which caused the sheep to lie down in green pastures. When the sheep lie down, they

¹⁴⁷ Cf. W.P. Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁴⁸ «By this we mean the peak season of spring and summer when pastures are at their most productive stages. The livestock that feed on the forage and the bees that visit the blossoms are said to be producing a corresponding "flow" of milk or honey. So, a land flowing with milk and honey is a land of rich, green, luxuriant pastures». Cf. W.P. Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹⁴⁹ «I also clothed you with colorfully woven cloth and put sandals of fine leather on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with jewelry, put bracelets on your wrists, and a necklace around your neck. I also put a ring in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. So, you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk, and colorfully woven cloth. You ate fine flour, honey, and oil; so, you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. Then your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you," declares the Lord GOD».

¹⁵⁰ S. Lieberman; H.A. Wolfson (eds.), *The Midrash on Psalms* (Yale Judaica Series), New Haven, Yale University Press, vol. XIII, 1959, pp. 330, 331.

do so to rest but mainly to digest its food, to chew the cud, which is to ruminate the food chewed earlier. Their stomachs have multiple chambers to aid such digestion. In fact, this first colon regarding feeding (v. 2a) becomes clearly, morphologically, and syntactically, parallel to the second colon which regards drinking (v. 2b)¹⁵¹. The pasture in which the flock is lying might also provide the next meal. In some other biblical passages such as Eze. 34:14, 15¹⁵²; Zeph. 3:13; Job 11:19 and Isa. 17:2, the act of feeding while lying down symbolizes security¹⁵³.

The word «green grass» (רֶפֶשׁ) points to the rich, abundant grass of springtime – cf. Deut. 32:2¹⁵⁴. The word used here precisely points to the new shoots of fresh grass, green pastures. The verb (רָפִיעַנִי a causative *hiphil*), if understood as a habitual imperfect, indicates the frequency and the constancy of the shepherd leading the sheep to lie down in the grassy meadows. Green is a color of growth, of new beginning, of fertility and fruitfulness (Isa.15:6; Ger. 17:7, 8). Green also carries the idea of temporality and fragility of life (2 Sam. 23:4; Job 6:5; 8:11-13; 38:27; Pro. 27:25)¹⁵⁵. Green meadows relax the eyes and give a sense of relief. They are cozy, snug, and enveloping as a mom’s hand. As many earthly creatures touch the ground, meadows or grass are rooted in the ground. This creates a connection among all living beings and in the context of the psalm between the shepherd, the grass, and the sheep. The greenness of vegetation is therefore an aesthetic delight as well as a functional prerequisite to life. The plural used in these verses also suggest that the Shepherd never runs out of finding green pastures for his sheep.

This emblem underlines the reality of the truth that God was at work in David’s life and that David was led and fed constantly to his heart’s content. Since this line is connected to the initial image through an implied comparison, David is testifying that through the Lord, all his spiritual needs are also met at the very best. An individual can be fed via personal meditation but this «feeding» would be constantly carried out by the priests, the «under-shepherds», who were to teach the word of the Lord (cf. Mal. 2:1-9). David could receive a spiritual provision in

¹⁵¹ Cf. F. Landy, «Poetics and Parallelism: Some Comments on James Kugel’s The Idea of Biblical Poetry», in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 9, no. 28, February 1984, pp. 76, 77.

¹⁵² «I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land».

¹⁵³ J. Goldingay, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

¹⁵⁴ F. Brown, S.R. Driver; C.A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Peabody (MA), Hendrickson Publishers, 1996 p. 206.

¹⁵⁵ S. Nelson, «The incredible Symbolism of the Color Green in the Bible», <https://www.womanofnoblecharacter.com/symbolism-of-the-color-green-in-the-bible/>, visited 13/06/2021.

any moment, anywhere, wherever, but in the sanctuary, there would be a constant and regular «feeding»¹⁵⁶.

The first and second part of v. 2 (a, b) share an identical syntax: prepositional phrase (preposition + construct pl. noun) and predicate (3rd masc. sing. + verb + verbal suffix, niph'al), meaning that they are linked to each other. It is the same shepherd who provides food in abundance and gives water to drink. Food and drink are sustaining elements of life and so the psalmist is attesting that the Lord is the life giver and the sustainer of his life.

2.2.3 The Provider of Refreshment (vv. 2b-3a)

This second line of the psalm continues the description of the cleansing, rest, refreshing and care the sheep gets from the shepherd. The verb (נָהַלְנִי) signifies «to lead», «to guide to a watering place or station», «to refresh». The particular word נָהַל is used in Isa. 40:11 and Pss. 23:2; 31:3; Gen. 33:14; 2 Chron. 28:15; Isa. 40:11; 51:18. Cf. Isa. 49:10 - «And [He] will guide them to springs of water». The act of guiding here specifically indicates a stronger party leading a weaker and needy party as the Lord led and guided Israel to the Promised Land - cf. Exo. 15:13.

The psalmist is led to waters described as «restful», literally «restfulness» (מִנְחֹחַ from נָחַח) signifying places of total rest and refreshment. מִנְחֹחַ gives the idea of quietness of place, a house rest, without disturbance. It is an intimate peaceful rest. Cf. Ruth 1:9 - «The Lord grant that you may find *rest*, each in the house of her husband [...] »; Isa. 32:18 - «My people will dwell in a *peaceful* habitation, in secure dwellings, and in *quiet resting* places». מְנוּחָה (rest or resting place) is synonym of שְׁלוֹמִים which is peace. In fact, in the Bible, peace is a divine gift connected to the Promised Land (Deut. 12:9; 25:19; 28:65). Having peace and being well is seen as a sign of divine benediction. Important leaders of Israel held in high esteem the element of peace and rest. In Joshua, we can find «The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers» (Jos. 21:43). Peace is also searched for in David's reign (2 Sam. 7:10, 11) and his son Solomon was known as a man of peace in his kingdom in Israel.

Water is vital for the sheep's well-being because it gives strength and vigor. Too much thirst generates dehydration, body desiccation and consequently, weakness. Dirty waters are

¹⁵⁶ A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 561.

often full of disease germs like nematodes and liver flukes, but calm waters are clean waters. In a cool weather condition, sheep can dwell on dew on the grass for a couple of months as they feed on these vegetations in early hours. But the shepherd's main objective is to find them wells, calm streams, or springs where they can rest and refreshen. They sometimes build small dams that can hold enough water for the flock or look out for little pool of water that are trapped in the rocks and not in danger of evaporation. These are often stagnant waters, or the marshes of Huleh or perhaps village pools. In fact, in Israel, there are not many large bodies of water apart from that of Tiberias and the Dead Sea, which are bitter and shadeless under the scorching sun. This is the image we should keep in mind when the psalmist talks about «still waters», «waters of rest» or «resting places»¹⁵⁷.

The sheep are not taken to a rushing stream, but to still, *calm waters*. In the ancient Near East, flocks were taken at least once a day to a place of cleansing to drink. At these places of refreshment, the calm streams of water which were available in rainy season washed the wounds and cleaned the mud from the sheep. In contrast with rushing waters which usually describe distress throughout the Old Testament (cf. Isa. 43:2; 28:2; 2 Sam. 5:20), calm waters for washing indicate spiritual cleansing (cf. Lev. 11:32; 16:4; 17:15; Num. 19:7; Ex. 30:18)¹⁵⁸.

It is possible to find a substantial syntactic parallelism between vv. 2 and 3 especially towards the final parts of both verses. In fact, v.2b has a preposition which is linked to a construct noun plus an adjectival modifier. After this we have a yiqtol third person masculine singular verb which has a first-person singular objective suffix. It is amazing to find the same elements in v.3b but in reverse order. Forming a small chiasm in syntax, this poetical mechanism draws the reader's attention to v. 3a.

2.2.3.1 Restoration Through Nourishment

After a wholistic nourishment composed of grass and water, verse 3 brings the sense of *restoration* which combines the idea of nourishment and the personal presence of the shepherd. The sense of renewal comes from the parallel clause: «He restores my soul». The verb «restores» (שׁוֹבֵב, here יִשׁוֹבֵב, a *polet* [habitual] imperfect), basically means to «cause to turn back, to return»,

¹⁵⁷ A. Walker, «Realism in Psalm 23:1-3», in *The Biblical World*, Vol. 2, No. 6, Dec. 1893, pp. 430-433.

¹⁵⁸ A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 562.

or «to restore». It can also mean «to repent»¹⁵⁹. The term, therefore, recalls the idea of returning something to an earlier good condition or position. A. Ross suggests, this is a declaration of how the Lord brings the writer back to a proper wholistic condition of forgiveness and renewal (cf. Pss. 32 and 51), based on some passages that use the image of sheep to describe spiritual adversity. Ezekiel 34 suggests some sheep may need restoration because they may be led astray by false shepherds through false teachings, across risky ravines or after threatening storms of life. The Gospel according to Luke (15:3-7) presents Jesus as the Good Shepherd who goes in search for the lost sheep in need of repentance. Apparently, every soul needs restoration and being under the shepherd's care does not make the flock immune from distress or losing the way. In fact, this phrase regarding restoration is linked to the next one concerning the shepherd who leads to the right paths. David, the writer of this psalm, who was God's friend, knew what it meant to be «cast down», to taste defeat and to feel hopeless. In Ps. 42:11 he cries out: «Why are you downcast, o my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God [...]».

We talk of a «cast sheep» when the animal is rolled over onto its back and is not able to get up. This can be caused by too much fat, weakness, pregnancy or perhaps too much wool. It is a moment of great anguish and distress, a moment of struggle in which only an external help such as that of a shepherd can save its life and set it on its feet again. It is also a moment of danger for the sheep because they become more vulnerable and easy prey to predators¹⁶⁰. David declares here that it is the Lord, who restores his soul, who brings back peace to his life. It is an act of revival and restoration.

The *soul* which is restored englobes the whole being. In Hebrew, *napshi*, *nephesh* indicate «personality» and it is the seat of the appetites (hunger for food – Deut. 23:24; cf. Ps. 78:18; Hos. 9:4; Prov. 12:10; 10:3; 16:26; spiritual/volitional appetite – Exo. 15:9; cf. Eze. 16:27; Ps. 27:12; 41:13) and desires (Deut. 21:14; cf. 1 Sam. 2:35; Gen. 23:8; Prov. 13:2; 19:2). Regarding the desires, it can be sexual drive (Jer. 2:24), or wanting something, the desire of the wicked, the desire of God's justice or the desire and thirst for good things (Ps. 107:9; cf. Prov. 19:15; 25:25; 27:27). It can indicate life, soul, creature, person, and mind. In Gen. 1:30 the noun indicates «breath» - cf. Gen. 2:7 - «And [the Lord] breathed (אָנַחַ) into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living *soul*». 1 Kgs. 21:22 - «The *נְפֹשׁ* [life/breath/soul] of the child

¹⁵⁹ See its uses in the causative forms («restore», «repair», «rebuild») in the following passages: 1 Kgs 13:6; Isa. 52:8; 58:12; Dan. 9:25.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. W.P. Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

returned and he revived». «He restores my soul» also means he *maintains my strength* as in Lam. 1:19 - «my priests and elders perished in the city while seeking food to revive their strength». This is linked to the provision the Lord provides, which is mentioned in the earlier verses. The soul has many usages and implication but as regards its use with the act of restoration, we have the passage of Lam. 1:16: «Because far from me is a comforter, one who restores my soul/life». Moreover, in another passage in the Old Testament concerning the story of Naomi, when the women of Bethlehem prayed for Naomi, they said: «May he [Obed] be to you a restorer of life [נַפְשִׁי], and a sustainer of your old age» - Ruth 4:15; cf. Ps. 23:3; Lam. 1:11; Ps. 18:8; Prov. 25:13¹⁶¹.

2.2.4 The Guider to the Right Path (v. 3b)

A poetic parallelism and assonance are created here with the usage of נָחַל in Ps. 23:2 and נָהַג¹⁶² in Ps. 23:3. This third poetic line «he leads me» (נָהַגְנִי) further develops the imagery of the shepherd, where we see the Lord as a leader who directs his sheep, a divine guidance. Cf. Pss. 31:1; 77:20; 78:72. In other passages, a confession of divine guidance points to the believer's assurance and certainty of God's presence. In the wilderness, the Lord led his people in the pillar of cloud (Exo. 13:17, 21; See also other information regarding the wilderness journey in Exo.15:13; 32:34; Deut. 32:12; Neh. 9:12; Pss. 77:20; 78:14, 53) and in the instructions God gave to his servant Moses. In Genesis (24:27; 48) God led his children as they prayerfully depended on Him and Ps. 67:4 prophetically speaks of a time when the nations of the earth will be led by God.

Sheep are known to be animals of habit who if not guided or led, will use the same paths repeatedly until these trails become useless, overgrazed, impoverished, desert, and barren. Apart from making the land infertile and exposing it to erosion, in some cases, the land becomes infested with parasite which will severely affect the shepherd and the flock¹⁶³. This is one of the reasons why a good shepherd is the one who conducts the sheep, who keeps the flock moving

¹⁶¹ «נַפְשִׁי» in R.L. Harris; G.L. Archer, Jr; B.K. Waltke, *op. cit.*, p. 587.

¹⁶² Barth, «נָהַג» G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (eds.), trans. D.E. Green, in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids (MI), Cambridge (UK), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004, XIII, p. 312. Cf. also E. Jenni, «נָהַג», E. Jenni and C. Westermann (eds.), trans. M.E Biddle, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., Peabody (MA), Hendrickson Publishers, vol. II, 1997, p.729.

¹⁶³ Cf. W.P. Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

and shifting from one pasture to another. He is a good manager who plans and moves the flock, accordingly, leading them on the right track.

The «tracks of righteousness» **בְּמַעַלְלֵי צְדָקָה**, in the genitive «right tracks» are those paths that «lead directly and safely to the destination, as distinguished from wrong tracks that would lead astray»¹⁶⁴. The imagery of «paths of righteousness» occurs here only, in Ps. 23 but we have parallel verses in the Old Testament which fall within the same semantic range, such as Prov. 4:11; cf. Isa. 26:7. The parallelism in the verses of Prov. 2:9 («good path»)¹⁶⁵ and 4:11¹⁶⁶ connect these «right tracks» to justice, equity, and wisdom. It is also an implicit reference to the way of the righteous in Ps. 1, the way that the Lord knows and that leads to salvation. The qualifying word, «righteousness» or «right» which is attached to the «paths» point to the Righteous One who is at the lead. If the Lord is the one leading, those paths are certainly right and righteous and are in contrast with the paths described in Prov. 14:11, 12 and 16:25 which apparently is right but lead to death and destruction. These paths are safe, easy roadways, beneficial, just, right, of justice and lead to obedience to the will and instructions of the shepherd (Ps. 25:10¹⁶⁷). They do good. **קִדְּוָה** is sometimes used of the king who creates a favorable order for the entire territory under his command (2 Sam. 8:15; Jer. 22:3, 15; 33:15; Eze. 45:9). A righteous person is selfless in contrast to the wicked who is selfish. **קִדְּוָה** is used to refer to a servant offering faithful assistance to his Lord or master (Gen. 30:33). Another reference of the word points to a community of people who act justly and fairly according to the law of God (Gen. 38:26; Ps. 15:2; Prov. 1:3). These paths of *faithfulness* are based on the Shepherds faithfulness which is implied in his name which comes in the next phrase.

The Lord is never leading any of his sheep to wrong paths because his own reputation is at stake, his *name* (**שֵׁם**) is at stake (cf. Ps. 20:1). «For his name's sake» is an expression which is also used in Ps. 25:11; 31:3; 79:9; 106:8; 109:21; 115:1; 143:11; Isa. 48:9. In Ps. 106:8 it is used in the context when the psalmist recounts Israel's liberation from the Egyptian bondage - «Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known». Here, the Lord's *name* is clearly linked to his might, his power and to his glory and his faithfulness (Ps. 138:2). It is not a random reference to God's name in general but here in this context, this name refers to that of the Shepherd (v. 1). In this sense, we would refer to a «title»

¹⁶⁴ C.A. Briggs, E.G. Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

¹⁶⁵ «Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path».

¹⁶⁶ «I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness».

¹⁶⁷ «All the paths of the Lord are *hesed* and truth».

more than a real name in its strict sense. There is authority in the name of the Lord because his name reflects his nature – an eternal, self-subsistent being.

In David's times, a shepherd's reputation was based on his ability to lead the sheep home, in safety, in the right path and direction. Therefore, what David is stating here, is that the Lord's *name* is at stake and his reputation (good or bad) depends on his capability of leading his sheep safely home. The psalmist has no doubt that the Lord has a good reputation in his life because he leads him to safety, to paths of righteousness. The process of leading to safety is synonym of *salvation* – in Jhn. 6:39, Jesus affirms that if he leads his sheep and the sheep follow him, none of them will perish. In Rom. 8:14 Paul declares «as many as are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God». There is an interesting spiritual development of the ideas expressed so far: the writer receives the Lord's teaching which escorts to spiritual renewal, which consequently ensures the psalmist will let himself to be led by the Lord in righteousness¹⁶⁸. John Goldingay affirms that when God acts in faithfulness his name becomes a reflection of his character¹⁶⁹. Ravasi gives two themes for which the mention of the Lord's name here is essential. First, it is about *honor*, meaning that the Lord is honored and excited when he saves his creatures (Eze. 20:9, 44; 36:22). Second, the presence of the name of the Lord shows how salvation is reachable for everyone. Everyone who follows the Lord and accepts his leadership will be saved and consequently glorify his name¹⁷⁰. *Soli Deo gloria!* Together with the idea of maintaining personal *integrity*, the concept of acting «for your name's sake» indicates an action «to uphold this reputation whether by *guiding* (Pss. 23:3; 31:3), *pardoning* (Pss. 25:11; 79:9), *sparing* (1 Sam. 12:22; Isa. 48:9; Jer. 14:7, 21; Eze. 20:44) or *delivering* (Pss. 106:8; 109:21; 143:11) »¹⁷¹. Name and person are inseparable because name brings into existence the void and gives it a meaning. In the Old Testament Absalom erected a memorial stone for his name to be remembered because he had no son to mention his name after death (2 Sam. 18:18). The Israelites practiced *levirate* marriage for the woman whose husband died without leaving her any male child. The woman was then given to the brother of the deceased to bear her a son who would take forward the deceased name to be remembered (Deut. 25:5-10). The psalmist in

¹⁶⁸ A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 564.

¹⁶⁹ J. Goldingay, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

¹⁷⁰ G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, p. 441.

¹⁷¹ B.K. Waltke, J.M. Houston, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

other words, is exclaiming that the Lord, who is his shepherd has a well-being and this well-being of the Lord is inseparably connected to his¹⁷².

2.2.5 The Defender of his People Amidst Danger (v. 4)

This verse has the most assonances of the entire psalm. The wide range of e-class vowels in 4a rhythmically alternates the i-class and the a-class vowels which are in v. 4b. There is a sound pair play between v. 4c and the second person masculine singular pronominal suffix through the repetition of the letter *שׁ*. One of the most clearest sound pair *אֵיךָ רַע* stands at the middle of the line to draw the reader's attention. Furthermore, the construction *אֵיךָ לֹא* seems to be syntactically parallel with *לֹא אֶחָסֶר לִי* in v.1 suggesting that the shepherd's provision without lack also includes the ability to help overcome or manage fear. All these technical aspects together with the rumbling sounds and echoes prepare the ground for this following stage. Here, the scene seems to get darker and as the night falls, perspectives change as well as the manner of addressing each other. We pass from 3rd person singular (he) to 2nd person singular (you). Starting with a concessive clause «Even though I may walk in the valley of the shadow of death»¹⁷³, David proclaims the Lord's protection even in menacing environments. Apart from the life-threatening experiences or difficult places to which the psalmist might allure (cf. Ps. 130:1), there is a probability he actually walked in deep valleys, considering the geographic area of the hill country of Judah. Briggs explains: «The hill country of Judah is broken up by narrow and precipitous ravines, or wadis, difficult to descend and ascend, dark, gloomy, and abounding in caves, the abode of wild beasts and robbers»¹⁷⁴. Though these are difficult paths, the ways to the valley are often well-watered routes and consequently constitute the richest feed and the best forage a shepherd can get for the flock. The idea of a *valley* and not of a mountaintop or broad meadow suggests the imagination of a situation in which one is stuck in between, hedged in,

¹⁷² Cf. J. Goldingay, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

¹⁷³ The people of Israel read these words and embrace David's words as their own: «Whether tied to the stake during the Spanish inquisition, butchered by the Cossacks in Eastern Europe, or sent into the fires of Auschwitz, our lips did not cease from murmuring King David's song. This portrayal of the Jew's unwavering, unshakable trust in G-d has stood by our ancestors in times of sorrow and triumph». S.C. Kesselman, «Psalm 23: L-rd Is My Shepherd», https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3832324/jewish/Psalm-23-L-rd-Is-My-Shepherd.htm, visited 22/06/21.

¹⁷⁴ C.A. Briggs, E.G. Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

and surrounded without much protection or defense. The expression can also convey the idea of the experience the people of Israel had in the wilderness¹⁷⁵.

The following genitive, «shadow of death» (לְמִוֶּתֶצַּח) is a joint word composed of «shadow» (צַח which derives from צָלַל, «to be dark, to grow dark»), and «death» (מוֹת). «Deathly darkness» or «darkness of death» are all ways of describing a state of «deep darkness». Therefore, the psalmist used a metonymy of adjunct¹⁷⁶ to describe the dangers in the valleys (cf. «terrors of thick darkness», «distress», «extreme danger», «land of darkness» - Am. 5:8; Job 24:17; 13). מוֹת has a superlative purpose here and it can be synonym of hell in a context of mortal danger. The term implies also sorrow and fear. In fact, Job uses צַח לְמוֹת to indicate his cursed day of birth in parallel with הַחֹשֶׁךְ «darkness», עֲנַנִּים «cloud» and כְּמַרְרִיר «blackness» (Job 3:4, 5; cf. 28:3; 34:22; Am. 5:8). In Job 16:16, Job declares «deep shadows (לְמִוֶּתֶצַּח) ring my eyes». So, as we have seen, it has a connotation of terror (Job 24:17, twice), deep gloom (Ps. 107:10, 14), deep distress (Isa. 9:2; Ps. 44:19), and extreme danger (Ps. 23:4; Jer. 2:6). The term is also figuratively used to refer to the dead (Job 10:20-22; 12:22) combined with other terms (nouns) which pertain to the semantic camp of darkness¹⁷⁷. The presence of a shadow indicates there is a light somewhere which is thrown into the scene in the valley. Another interesting element regarding the shadow is that it is a shadow and not a tangible reality. A shadow cannot bite, touch, kill or destroy. The sheep here is testifying that though shadows can be frightening he can walk through them even if they are of death itself, because there is a greater light which reveals those dark parts and shapes.

2.2.5.1 An Active Presence

Since trusting in the name of the Lord, entails his presence, the shepherd David who is here in the clothes of a sheep, could survive life threatening situations and fear no harm or evil. It is worth evidencing that the psalmist does not say «there shall be no evil» but rather «I shall fear no evil». Space permitting, we might dwell more on this in the third chapter of the paper.

¹⁷⁵ P.C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (Word Biblical Commentary), 61 Vols., Waco (TX), Word Books, vol. XIX, 1983, p. 206.

¹⁷⁶ Metonymy of Adjunct: the writer puts the adjunct or attribute for the subject. «The Classification of some of the Major Figures of Speech».

<https://theologue.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/somefiguresofspeechinthebiblebasedonbullinger.pdf> visited 11/05/2021.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. L.A. Schökel, *Dizionario di Ebraico Biblico*, Milano, Edizioni San Paolo, 2013, p. 713.

The emphasis in this verse is stronger because from talking *about* the Lord, the psalmist starts talking *to* the Lord - «*you* are with me». The conversation becomes more intimate and full of deep affection. As D. Willard states it, the kind of confidence, and the tone with which it is proclaimed here, soars above any kind of wants or fears of the flock¹⁷⁸. The presence of the Lord is vital for all creation and constitutes one of the major themes of the Scriptures. It is not a mere presence, but this presence englobes and expresses itself actively, visibly, in dynamic actions and activities which defeat all adversaries and defend the Lord's people (e.g., Isa. 41:10 - «Do not fear, for I am with you»). The tone of assurance is the same in Ps. 23:4 and in the oracle in Isa. 41:10 but the difference is in the subject who pronounces or utters the words of assurance. In Isaiah's oracle, it is God who assures the assurance of his presence while in the psalm, it is the psalmist who declares the assurance he has in the Lord.

The Lord's presence can be seen from creation to Jacob at Bethel («I will be with you» - Gen. 28:15), to Moses («I am with you» - Exo. 3:12), to Isaiah, in the prophecy of 'Immanu'el («God is with us» - Isa.7:14) till humanity experienced the physical presence of God in Jesus who at his ascension promised to be with us always, even to the end of the age (Mt. 28:20; Col. 2:5; Acts 18:10)¹⁷⁹. It is a nearness of faith, trust, care, death to self, and agape love. The certainty described here is not superstition or a certainty based on mystery, but it is a relational and experiential awareness and understanding. «Faith has the elements of desire and vision. The element of vision comes from our contact with reality or words about reality, which in turn brings about a certain attitude and action»¹⁸⁰.

The phraseology in vv. 4-5a somehow calls out to the oracles of salvation in the Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 41:8-16; 43:1-7; 44:1-5). «These oracles, commonly introduced by the call “Do not fear”, contain a promise of salvation substantiated either by a clause with the verb in the perfect tense or by a nominal clause»¹⁸¹. The call «fear not» in the present psalm of analysis is quite implicit but revealed explicitly through Yahweh's actions in vv. 2, 3. After the core affirmation of the Lord's presence, come four explanatory affirmations of why the believer declares he does not fear. The first explanation comes with the tools of the shepherd.

¹⁷⁸ D. Willard, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. R. Alastair, *art. cit.*

¹⁸⁰ D. Willard, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁸¹ Cf. C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library), Philadelphia, Westminster, 1969, p. 11.

2.2.5.2 Imagery of the Lord's Active Presence

In the times of David and even today most shepherds in the Middle East often carry two essential equipment, which are a *rod* and a *staff*¹⁸². In this verse, the Lord's presence is renewed in this equipment which is named here to symbolize the Lord's leading and protection. The shepherd is fully equipped. The rod (שֹׁטֵט) is carefully chosen for each shepherd boy according to one's strength and size. It is carved and carefully designed with a rounded head of hard wood at one end. Once it is ready for use, the shepherd spends hours learning about the equipment and practicing on how he can use it as his basic weapon to defend himself and his flock against any danger like predators. When in 1 Sam. 17:36, David narrated to Saul his defense against the lion and the bear while he was shepherding the flock of his father, he was referring to the rod which he used to kill these predators. The rod is somehow an extension of the shepherder's right arm, and it symbolizes his power, his might, and his authority in all situations and especially amidst danger. The «rod» (שֹׁטֵט, from a verb «to smite, slay») can be used for counting the sheep or as an instrument of discipline and chastisement of any wayward sheep (Lev. 27:32, Eze. 20:37). To pass «under the rod» portrays the idea of being under someone's control. In the context of shepherding, it means being under the care and authority of the owner, as he carefully counts and examines at the same time each sheep, one by one. He keenly inspects and scrutinize their wool and the skin to see the condition and to look for any injury or disease. This scrutiny which brings comfort reminds of Ps. 139:23, 24: «Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting»¹⁸³. This is the reason why the sheep feel comforted and protected with the shepherd's rod. When Moses, «the desert shepherd» was called by the Lord to deliver his people from the Egyptian slavery, God showed his powerful miracles to the Pharaoh and to the Israelites through Moses' rod. The rod (שֹׁטֵט) is also used to designate the king's scepter (Ps. 2:9; Isa.

¹⁸² G.M. Mackie gives a very detailed description: «Hanging by his side or sheathed in a long narrow «pouch attached to his cloak is his oak club. It is carefully chosen, a straight young tree having been torn up for this purpose, and the bulb at the beginning of the root trimmed to make the head of the club. The handle is dressed to the required thickness, with a hole at the end by which it is tied to the belt or hangs from the wrist like a riding-whip. Into the head he drives nails with large heads like those of a horse-shoe. It is the “rod” of Ps. 23, 4 [...]. The “staff” mentioned along with the rod in Ps. 23, is made of the same wood but is about 6 feet long, quite plain, rarely with a fork or crook at one end. It is a help in clambering over rocks, in striking off leaves and small branches, in chastising loitering sheep and fight goats, and on it the shepherd leans as he stands watching his flock». E. Power, «The Shepherd's Two Rods in Modern Palestine and in Some Passages of the Old Testament» in *Biblica*, vol. 9, n. 4, 1928, p. 435. Cf. G.M. Mackie, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁸³ Cf. W.P. Keller, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-86.

14:5; cf. 1 Sam. 17:43¹⁸⁴; Isa. 10:24; 28:27; Prov. 13:24; Job 9:34; Zec. 11:7) and the scepter of God (Mi 7:14). Apart from its utilization as a tool of reassurance, it also serves as a tool of judgement¹⁸⁵.

The «staff» (מִקְלוֹתָי, from the verb יָצַץ, «to lean, support») mainly serves as support for the shepherd when he stays on his feet for longer periods and as device of protection. It is the staff that makes a shepherd a shepherd. In fact, staffs are used almost exclusively in the profession of shepherding. This unique and personal instrument is purposely designed for the care and management of the sheep. The staff is never used for other animals such as cattle or horses. The sheep finds comfort in the staff because in it is installed the shepherd's compassion, love, and care, contrary to the image of the rod which gives the idea of authority, discipline, or protection from attacks. «The shepherd's staff is normally a long, slender stick, often with a crook or hook on one end».¹⁸⁶ The staff is the shepherd's companion of journey (cf. Exo. 21:19; 2 Kgs 4:29; Isa.30:31, 32; Eze. 29:6).

The staff is extremely significant in at least three areas of sheep management. Firstly, the staff intimately brings the sheep and the shepherd nearer. For instance, at the birth of a newborn, «[t]he shepherd will use his staff to gently lift a newborn lamb and bring it to its mother if they become separated. He does this because he does not wish to have the ewe reject her offspring if it bears the odor of his hands upon it». Secondly, the shepherd also uses the staff to draw the sheep to himself for a close and detailed inspection. Thirdly, the staff is used for guiding the sheep through arduous paths¹⁸⁷.

Regarding the text of Zechariah 11 especially v. 7: «So I fed the flock for slaughter, in particular the poor of the flock. I took for myself two staffs: the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bonds; and I fed the flock». This is the prophet's description of the manner in which he obeyed to God's mandate to shepherd his people, Israel. The plural of rod here is מִקְלוֹת [two] rods. The first rod is named here as «Favor» or «Pleasantness» (agreeableness, delight, suitability, splendor, grace), which in Hebrew, it is expressed with נֶעֱם. The second rod is called «Union», which in a literal meaning would be «Binders» הַקְּבָלִים. The shepherd's rods keep the flock together, in one bond, united as they enjoy themselves in excitement and joyfulness. Once these two functions are being limited or ruined in both parts, meaning from the shepherd's

¹⁸⁴ «Am I a dog that you come to me with rods (מִקְלוֹתַי)? ».

¹⁸⁵ G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, p. 442.

¹⁸⁶ See photo - Cf. W.P. Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. *Idem*, p. 87.

part and the flock's part, the bond is broken, and the gladness become sorrow and disappointment. The passage informs us that the rod (עֵבֶד) which is broken indicates the breaking of the covenant between the Lord and the nations. The breaking of the rod (בְּלִיָּהוּ) instead, indicates the breaking of the union between Judah and Israel. This situation leaves the nation defenseless inside and outside its walls without any cover or protection. In fact, as stated earlier, it is with the shepherd's club that he protects his flock from any possible threats, and it is with his staff that he keeps order and unity within. Without this equipment (עֵבֶד), things are not easy neither for the sheep nor for the shepherd¹⁸⁸.

The old people also used the «staff» as a walking aid of stability (cf. Zec. 8:4). In the case of Isaiah 36:6¹⁸⁹ «staff» is figuratively used as Egypt's support to Israel. «Staff» and «rod» therefore, point to the *comfort* and *courage* the Lord's care, support and protection bring to David in times of need¹⁹⁰. The rod and the staff are said to be Comforters as they encourage emotionally and act with the purpose of bringing change in every situation in the life of the flock.

2.2.6 The Lord, the Gracious Host (v. 5)

Verse 5 comes with a change of scene which goes from the pasture to the banquet hall which implicitly calls along the sacred duty of hospitality, reminiscent of the exodus and wilderness wanderings. Pasture, calm waters, and valleys are lowered to exalt the images of bread, wine, oil, and house hospitality. Consequently, from the Lord the Shepherd, the psalmist talks about the Lord the Host. Some commentators such as Morgenstern and Köhler drag the shepherd imagery also in this verse where the table mean tableland¹⁹¹, and the anointing a treatment of the sheep. This kind of interpretation seems forced because the language in these verses is clearly of the house, in the setting of a banquet hall and those previous presuppositions would not even fit the apex of being in the house of the Lord (Jerusalem). It will rather suit the context

¹⁸⁸ Cf. E. Power, *art. cit.*, p. 437.

¹⁸⁹ «Look! You are trusting in the *staff* of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him».

¹⁹⁰ A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 566.

¹⁹¹ The shepherd prepares the feeding and the bedding ground for his flock. He does so by picking off dangerous weeds or thorns that could be harmful to the sheep. Suspicious stones are also overturned to avoid scorpion attacks. Big holes and dens are also checked to avoid the attack of bigger predators. Cf. A.R. Sauer, «Fact and Image in the Shepherd Psalm», in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. XLII, September, n. 8, pp. 489, 490.

of the text if one imagines a worshipper in the temple setting, who is praising the Lord for being a guest at the Lord's (the Host) house¹⁹². The Lord the Host provides for his honored guest. Isa. 25:6 offers a similar image of banquet: «And in this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees». Cf. Hos. 9:2; Ps. 92:11; 147:14; Isa. 61:3¹⁹³.

Ps. 23:5 begins: «You prepare a table¹⁹⁴ before me in the presence of my enemies»¹⁹⁵. The phrase «prepare a table» can also be seen in the following passages: Isa. 21:5; 65:11; Sal. 78:19; Pro. 9:2. The idea here is in a form of implied comparison, that is, the Lord provides for his guests the same manner a banquet host would do and in preparation of a table, there is abundance of food and drink – cf. Isa. 25:6. More is entailed because «setting a table» also mean showing respect and providing what is needed. In the verse we quoted of Isa. 65:11, the prophet talks about preparing a table as a manner of paying respect to pagan gods. In Ps. 78:19, the psalmist describes the Lord's provision of the needs of Israel in the wilderness. Therefore, what the psalmist is also saying in this first part of v. 5 of Ps. 23, is that the Lord, who is his shepherd, gives him all he needs to be respected and also to be victorious before his enemies¹⁹⁶.

« שֶׁלֶּחֶן » translated as table, originally designated a skin or leather mat spread on the ground (cf. Ps. 69:23; 128:3). It was like what we would describe as a picnic table. Later in the history of Ancient Israel, they used bigger tables for bigger purposes such as banquets as we find in Judges 1:7 with the expression « שֶׁלֶּחֶן לְמֶלֶךְ » (table for king's repast).

To really grasp the meaning of this image, one must know the importance of *hospitality* in a nomadic culture. Vagabonding without a place to stay such as a tent means having little time remained to die unless another clan takes in the fugitive, or the person who has been expelled from the community in his compound. This kind of hospitality is called *asylum*. This situation seems to fit the fugitive described in these last two verses. As the fugitive escapes from his enemies, he takes refuge in a Sheikh or a Bedouin's tent. He is given food and drink (cf.

¹⁹² J.H. Waltner, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁹³ G. Ravasi, *op. cit.*, p. 437. See also Jesus' analogies regarding banquets in the Gospel: the parable of the ten virgins (Mt. 25:10); the big dinner (Lk. 14:16-24); the seats to be filled at the table (Lk. 14:10); the wedding dinner (Mt. 22). Jesus also used alimantal imagery to describe his soteriological mission – Lk. 15; Jhn. 6:35, 54, 56. John puts the things in a very interesting eschatological perspective in Rev. 19:9.

¹⁹⁴ The satisfaction expressed here goes beyond religious desire, therefore, the images of cup and table are real food and drink. W. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms. A Theological Commentary*, Minneapolis (MN), Augsburg, 1984, p. 155.

¹⁹⁵ Considering the political nuance in this psalm, the psalmist might represent his people who though blessed by the Lord is attacked by enemy forces. Cf. R. Alastair, *art. cit.*

¹⁹⁶ Cf. R. Alastair, *art. cit.*

Gen. 18) and he is anointed with oil. The enemies remain outside the tent as they observe the fugitive enjoy the lovely hospitality he is offered. They understand they do not have any power on him because he has found refuge and he is protected. Any attack in such a circumstance would violate the rules of sacred hospitality and it would also mean a big offense to the host. After eating, drinking, and resting, the fugitive is ready to leave. The host offers him an escort of men who will accompany him wherever he goes. The escorts are *Goodness* and *Mercy*, and the place of arrival is the *house of the Lord*¹⁹⁷.

The qualifying phrase «in the presence of my enemies», literally «in the face of, in front of» my enemies shows that the psalmist is referring to physical nourishment¹⁹⁸. David describes his prosperity in the presence of his enemies while he eats and drinks in safety and security also because according to customs, enemies had no power on the guests of a host as the latter's name was at stake. In fact, the host had the obligation to protect a guest at all costs (cf. i.e., Lot's attempts to protect the angels who came to stay with him – Gen. 19:6-9)¹⁹⁹.

The second half of the verse introduces the element of anointing *oil*. It was the host's duty and pleasure to give the guest scented oil. Considered the geographical area of Israel, the sand and the sun connected to dry skin issues, perfumed oil was a great choice to freshen up. The term «oil» (שֶׁן) can mean «fat, oil, olive oil». In some other passages of the Bible (cf. Eccl. 9:7, 8; Eze. 16:20; 2 Kgs. 20:12; Hos. 12:2), «oil» symbolizes a token of happiness, prosperity, wealth, and honor. Here in the psalm, the oil stands for provision of hospitality for an honored guest. Exo. 30:22-33 gives a description of the composition of the anointing oil which was an aromatic mixture like the «balm of Gilead». The metaphorical value of the oil is multiple. Perfumed oil is an athletic symbol as it was spread on the muscles which were penetrated to be toned. In the context of the psalm, it may mean being beamed and radiated by a divine energy. Oil is also used for medical purposes and therefore it symbolizes health and strength. Oil was also used as cosmetic which protected the skin for the harsh eastern sun. It would, therefore, allude to peace, splendor, and joy (cf. Ps. 45:7)²⁰⁰. In base of what has been said so far, it makes sense in Lk. 7:44, 45 when Jesus reproached his host for despising a woman who did what a host should have done, that is to offer water or oil.

¹⁹⁷ A.L. Schökel, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. A.C. Gaebelien, *The Book of Psalms*, Wheaton, Van Kampen Press, 1939, p. 115.

¹⁹⁹ C.A. Briggs, E.G. Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

²⁰⁰ Cf. A.R. Sauer, *op. cit.*, p. 490.

The verb «anoint» (אָנױַך) derives from the verb «be fat» which can signify «make fat» and «anoint» in the causative *piel* stem²⁰¹. This type of anointing, which symbolizes festivity and gladness, differs from the ceremonial anointing of a king (אָנױַך), cf. Ps. 2:2. The psalmist is affirming that the Lord is his source of joy, comfort, and refreshment. The use of perfume during banquets is a common practice in the biblical world. It is an act of hospitality and a sign of feast. Cf. Ps. 133:2; SS. 1:3; Ps. 145:5; Pro. 21:17; Eccl. 10:1²⁰².

After this follows the exclamation, «my cup runs over», my *cup* is filled to the brim, well-filled, filled to satiety (אָנױַך). There is an interesting parallelism between the *table-cup* imagery and the *pastures-waters* imagery in v.2. In fact, here the overflowing cup symbolizes plenitude, fullness, and abundance (Ps. 36:9; 1 Sam. 25:36; 2 Sam. 13:28; Isa. 5:12; Jhn 2:1-11). The «cup» in the Scriptures symbolizes «one's portion or lot in life» and in some contexts of judgement (cf. Mt. 26:39) it can assume harsh implications such as a cup of God's fury (Isa. 51:17; Rev. 14:10), a cup of fire and brimstone (Ps. 11:6). Here in Psalm 23 as well as Pss. 16:5 and 116:13, this cup is a delight²⁰³. Usually at a banquet, the cup is filled with choice wine, good wine so David is affirming that even amid difficulties the Lord overfills his life with good things, providing for all his needs, especially his physical needs such as nourishment. The Lord the Host is not stingy, but he gives in abundance and in exuberance according to his glory which is revealed in his name and his riches which give rest, nourishment, refreshing and salvation which is found in the restoration of the soul. The overflowing of the cup reflects the abundance that the psalmist finds in the Lord because he offers so much that he can never run out of anything. Paradoxically it seems that the guest is affirming that the more the Lord gives the more he is preparing to give. He is abundance in person, and he can give more than it is needed. The Host knowingly overfills the cup not because he wants to waste the provision but here the psalmist wants to prove the fact that the Host is benevolent and more than caring and that he can give more than one requires²⁰⁴.

²⁰¹ Cf. Prov. 15:30 - «The light of the eyes rejoices the heart good news puts fat on the bones».

²⁰² Cf. A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, pp. 567, 568.

²⁰³ E. Power, *art. cit.*, p. 440.

²⁰⁴ Cf. A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 568.

2.2.7. The Apex of Communion (v. 6)

Verse 6, which constitutes the final words of Ps. 23 comes in with two changes: firstly, a change from the shepherd and host imagery to the house of the Lord; secondly, after the pondering and the exclamations of contemplation and reflection, the psalmist ascertains that communion with the Lord is his upmost longing, wish and prayer. The adverb וַיֵּשׁ («surely»), which also serves as an emphatic particle, marks the apex of this communion. It is an apex of certainty, of faith, of trust and confidence. This is the same particle which Abimelech used when he realized Rebekah was Isaac's wife (Gen. 26:9; cf. 29:14; 44:28)²⁰⁵.

The word דִּקְוָה is often translated with «mercy, lovingkindness» but the addition of טוֹב (goodness) makes the understanding of the phrase more complex as well as its translation which sounds like: «Surely, goodness and loyal love will follow me» or «Surely, good loyal love (or mercy) will follow me». Here, the psalmist wants to poetically emphasize the greatness and desirability of loyal love. דִּקְוָה and טוֹב are connected to each other. The latter, «goodness» or «good» «refers to that which promotes, protects, produces, and enhances life (s.v. Ps. 34:8)»²⁰⁶ while the common covenant term «loyal love» points to the Lord's love which is revealed in his faithfulness in always keeping his covenant promises. This «covenant faithful love»²⁰⁷ describes a motivated behavior which derives from a relationship of mutual commitment such as should be seen in marriage or in government. Other related words to דִּקְוָה are the verb (הִדָּק) «to be kind, good»; the adjective (הַדָּק) «faithful, kind, pious» (often used as a substantive for the saints, the godly who totally rely on the covenant); the noun (הַדָּקוּת) which can mean «love» as well as «stork». This term may be linked to this big bird due to its affectionate care towards its young

²⁰⁵ Cf. A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 569.

²⁰⁶ *Idem.*

²⁰⁷ The term has interesting nuances in other contexts. In Isa. 40:6 it has a meaning of «lovely in appearance» - «All flesh is grass, and all its beauty (הַיָּפֶת) is like flower of the field». In Joseph's story (Gen. 40:14) - «Please do me the *kindness, favor*, to mention me to Pharaoh». In the narration of Rahab (Jos. 2:12), Rahab requested to be treated *kindly*. In 1 Kgs. 20:31, Israel's king is described as *merciful* and Prov. 11:17 talks of a man who is *kind*. There is another use of *kindness* which appears in relational settings and contexts such as with Abraham and his wife in Gen. 20:13 and in the case of Ruth regarding the family of her husband (Ruth 3:10).

Another category is that of *faithful covenant love* as seen in Deut. 7:12, 1 Kgs. 8:23, Exo. 15:13, Ps. 33:22 and Ps. 6:4. The Lord shows his faithfulness and love when he forgives the sins of his children (Ps. 51:1) and comes to their rescue (Ps. 109:21-26). This makes sense why many Bible characters called the Lord by this character of his (Ps. 36:5; Jon. 4:2; Exo. 34:7 and Ps. 118:1, 2). This makes what the psalmist proclaim in Ps. 118 amazing and no doubt this praise becomes relevantly repeated in Israel's worship. «O give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his loyal love endures forever».

When the children of God positively respond to his covenant, they refer to God's «piety, faithful covenant acts» as in the case of Hosea 6:4 and Isaiah 57:1. Cf. N. Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, Cincinnati (USA), The Hebrew Union College Press, 1967, pp. 1-100.

(cf. Ps. 104:17; Job 39:13-15)²⁰⁸. David could not have found a better summary of the Lord's faithful love in his provision, care, and protection.

Goodness and loving mercy of God are typical virtues of the *covenant*, and they usually go together (cf. Ps. 25:21; 37:37; 43:3; 89:15; Hab. 3:5). «Loyal love» and «Goodness» are personified and described as *followers* of the psalmist, rather, *pursuers* who chase David for the rest of his life. David prays that the Lord will stalk him with loving mercy because he has been pursued in various occasions in his life, but nobody has ever chased him as continually, persistently, and effectively as the Lord (cf. Ps. 139:7)²⁰⁹.

The Psalmist will always need these *followers* because the chase will never end, and the enemies will always be present. In fact, this idea of *recurrence* is connected to the next phrase «return to dwell». A similar scene is presented in Ps. 43:3 where God's light and truthfulness are sent out to *lead* (נהג) as in Ps. 23:3b towards the *house of the Lord*. As J.C. McCann states, we can better capture «God's active, even frantic, attempt to reach us with the gift of life and the resources which sustain life»²¹⁰. Therefore, «Goodness» and «Mercy» do not suddenly enter into the scene, but they englobe all the acts the shepherd does toward the sheep. In fact, Walter Brueggemann looks at this verse with different eyes as he affirms that towards the last verse of the psalm, the scene presented seems that the believer looks back retrospectively and finally realizes surprisingly that all the while, the dangers, threats, the valleys, and the darkness were in reality the providential goodness and fidelity of the Lord which have been pursuing and chasing after him. Then he poetically adds: «The alternative life made possible by such divine pursuit concerns the generous God of creation (goodness) and the faithful God of covenant (fidelity) who has been the subject's companion all along the way»²¹¹. It is in this understanding which leads to the proclamation regarding the Lord's house, the place of the Lord's most intense presence.

David's last words are that he will *return to dwell* (the same used to say «he restores my soul») in the house of the Lord for the *length of days*. Seemingly, the psalmist's spiritual and

²⁰⁸ Cf. N. Glueck, *op. cit.*, 1967.

²⁰⁹ Worth noting, in light of this, is the English poet, Francis Thompson's (1859-1907) 182-line poem «The Hound of Heaven» <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fulllist/second/en227/texts/thompson-hound.pdf> visited on 13/05/2021.

²¹⁰ J.C. McCann, Jr., «Preaching the Psalms: Psalm 23, Fourth Sunday in Lent» in *Journal for Preachers*, 2008, n. 31, p. 46.

²¹¹ W. Brueggemann; W.H. Bellinger jr, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

physical yearning has its apex in the house of the Lord, the place of formal worship, to the sanctuary, where he is continually drawn back to meditate on the Lord's provision. The «house of the Lord» is any place, whether the countryside (Gen. 28:17) or the tent of meeting (1 Sam. 1:7), where people fellowship with the Lord's presence. It is at this special place where the Lord's word, which is a guide to the believer's path, is taught. It is the place of healing, restoration, forgiveness, prayer, praise, and provision (cf. Ps. 36:6-8). Isaac Watts centralizes God's figure here when he affirmed: «The sure provisions of my God attend me all my days; O may your House be my abode, and all my work be praise. There would I find a settled rest, while others go and come. No more a stranger, or a guest, but like a child at home»²¹².

Tappy makes an interesting comment on the *house of the Lord* named in this psalm:

« [...] This idiomatic reference to the temple as the “*house of Yhwh*” was itself, presumably like similar references, surely grounded in the kinship structure which formed the nucleus of Israelite society at the local level. Here the *bêt 'āb* comprised the fundamental unit of village organization. To dwell in the house of an earthly father, whether by blood relationship, marriage, or the fictive kinship of adoption, meant to share in that family unit's *nahālā*, its inalienable “patrimony” or “inheritance”, and thereby to enjoy some degree of socioeconomic security [...]. The phrase *bêt yhwh* fused these various aspects of life and added to them the religious aspect. The temple was the earthly house or dwelling place of Yhwh, the cosmic father to all Israel, his adopted children. As such, the phrase *bêt yhwh* may plausibly – perhaps more accurately – be translated “the *household* of Yhwh” »²¹³.

One of the metaphorical applications of this idea in the New Testament is in Jhn 14:2, 3.

The two images of the Lord as shepherd and host can be linked to Exodus, when the people of Israel came out from the Egyptian slavery and the hardships of the wilderness (Gen. 48:15; Exo. 15:13, 17). It is the Lord who guided his people through the desert as a shepherd leads his sheep. It is the same Lord who provided fresh water, food, and rest for them till he brought them to the Promised Land where, as a host, he took them into the land (cf. Ps. 77:20; 68:10; Exo. 15:13).

²¹² I. Watts, «My Shepherd Will Supply My Need (Psalm 23) », in *Amazing Grace: Hymn Texts for Devotional Use*, eds. B. Polman, M.K. Stulken, and J.R. Sydnor, Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 1994, p. 51.

²¹³ R.E. Tappy, *art. cit.*, pp. 274, 275. This can be linked to the theme of Yhwh as the *gō'el* or the «redeemer» as we can see in Ruth (4:13-17) when Boaz redeemed Ruth and consequently saved Naomi.

The entire poem was heading to this last part, and this is the reason why we entitled it the «apex of communion». The main two images of the host and of the shepherd divide and link the parts of the composition together. Apart from paralleling with v.1 through the second mention of the divine name, this last verse is connected to the first part of the psalm (precisely v. 3a) where «*שׁוּב*» is mentioned. Therefore, the restoration which was formerly announced seems to ultimately come into reality in a continuous communion with God while he guides the way. There is a sense of movement towards the house of the Lord through a crescendo emphasis of the Lord's protection, provision, and guidance²¹⁴. This progression has at least two steps or periods developed in the main two symbols of the shepherd and the host. After lying down to rest, having a drink of water which together bring restoration to the soul, there is a walk through the valley of the shadow of death towards a destination (implicitly in the text, the house of the Shepherd, the house of the Lord). The second period of the poem presents a similar progression: after eating, drinking, and resting, the fugitive continues his journey with an escort in case of emergency. The pursuit of Goodness and Mercy is as strong as when fierce predators pursue the flock. The psalmist is *led* to the house of the Lord or as the Masoretic Text puts it, he *returns* to the house of the Lord. The poem ends in an interesting suspense and gives the idea of a continuing journey of rest, food, and water, then the valley of the shadow of death (the sheep) and then flight, food, wine, oil with enemies at the door and once out, escorted forever towards the house, in the house or as one returns to the house. This means that it is a repetitive process of abundance and lack, of goodness and then mercy, or rest and walk. «The two final adverbs relativize the symbols by forcing them to coexist: journey and dwelling, flock and guest, a whole life and for days without end»²¹⁵.

A sense of being at a banquet was always met when an Israelite entered the temple. Once one reaches the temple and clings to its angles, every fear is gone because every kind of persecution stops (cf. 1 Kgs 2:28-35). Apart from the temple as a special dimension, E. Power suggests the land (אֶרֶץ) of Yahweh as the «house [בַּיִת] of the Lord» (cf. Hos. 8:1; 9:15; Zach. 9:8; Jer. 12:7). He bases this theory on the idea that the sheep in Israel wander in search of

²¹⁴ D.D. Sylva, «The Changing of Images in Ps 23:5,6» in *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 102, no. 1, 1990, pp. 111–116.

²¹⁵ A.L. Schokel; C. Carniti, *op. cit.*, p. 462.

pasture as they are guided by the shepherd. They do not really have a fixed settlement where they feed²¹⁶.

So far, as we have seen, how the Lord the Shepherd leads through provision, nourishment and refreshment. He also guides to the right path and especially amidst danger. He is the same Lord who can host and serve even in unimaginable circumstances. Because of all these mini testimonies of the Lord's presence, the psalmist can in turn confirm and testify his desire to always be with the Lord and in his house as long as he lives.

²¹⁶ E. Power, «The Shepherd's Two Rods in Modern Palestine and in Some Passages of the Old Testament» in *Biblica*, vol. 9, n. 4, 1928, p. 435-440.

Chapter 3 - Theological and Practical Commentary

After analyzing the text of Psalm 23 in the original Hebrew, after considering its literary type and historical context, and after looking into the text poetically and exegetically, this third chapter of research aims to reflect on the theology of this psalm from the point of view of its leadership model as well as contextualizing the main themes in our 21st Century realities (from our personal daily lives to our workplaces, schools and in the society in general). In order to explain some ideas with much more clarity, some references are made from the Bible in whole which are not directly connected to the book of Psalms in general or Ps. 23 in particular but are implicitly linked thematically.

3.1 The Word - Leading *in* and *to* Salvation Through Nourishment

Here, we are looking at theological and thematical link between the elements of pasture, green grass, feeding, food, and nourishment in general (which is provided by the Lord who is the Shepherd) and the Word of God which *nourishes* the soul of every believer²¹⁷. The element of «word» is explicitly connected to Ps. 23 and its leadership model because first of all *communication* is vital in every relationship in general and in particular, in the case of the relationship between a shepherd and his flock. Though the term «word» is not mentioned, it is implicit that all the provision, guidance, protection and leading are accompanied by words. Moreover, as explained in the first section of this paper, the arts of poetry and music, through which Ps. 23 is written, deal with words.

The shepherd provides nutrition to be fed on and fresh water to drive away thirst and give energy, life, freshness, vigor, and vitality to the body and soul. The Bible associates food with the *Word of God* as the latter brings fulness and gladness to the soul and fills the heart with all kinds of blessings from above. Through the word of God, the soul is refreshed and guided into righteousness and paths of righteousness²¹⁸. If it is the Word (which can be associated to the Shepherd himself) which leads us into paths of righteousness, then it means that all that we

²¹⁷ A.P. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 566.

²¹⁸ «A change that occurs or takes place through the Word is one of the greatest mysteries of the Word of God. We cannot understand it, we can only believe that as declared by the Scriptures it is 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.' A knowledge of this mystery furnishes a key to every other. It opens to the soul the treasures of the universe, the possibilities of infinite development». E.G. White, *My Life Today*, Washington D.C. (USA), Review and Herald, 1952, p. 26.

own we owe. It means that we are saved by *grace* and not by our works because if we can ever do works of righteousness it is not because we are righteous but because through his words, the Shepherd led us into paths of righteousness, preparing everything beforehand so that we might walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

The Word *vivifies* and empowers the believer with divine life which drives him to eternal life as the believer is pursued to the *house of the Lord*, in the Lord's presence. Mt. 4:4 says: «But he answered and said, it is written, “man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God” » (cf. Deut. 8:3). As the prophet Ezekiel (2:8-3:4), we should take the scroll and eat it, then speak it (prophesy for God – Rev. 10:8-11; and prophesy to build up the church [in and out] – 1 Cor. 14:3) as we *digest it* and assimilate it into our being. As the sheep takes time to chew the grass and later on ruminate for better digestion, so should the believer take time to read the word of God (the *Bible*)²¹⁹.

It is the sharp, living, and operative word which pierces, divides, and discerns, judges, criticizes (κριτικός) every thought and intention (Heb. 4:12). The present participle tense used here indicates that it is alive, active (1 Pt. 1:23), full of energy (ἐνεργής), effective and productive of due result, and it brings life (ζῶν) which lasts in time. It is a continuous process, *in the length of days*²²⁰. Ps. 119:103 says: «How sweet are your words to my taste! [Sweeter] than honey to my mouth! ».

God the Son, Jesus Christ, is known as the Word of God. «In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God» - Jhn 1:1. John the Revelator in the Book of Revelation (19:13) wrote: «He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is *The Word God*»²²¹. In the economy of the Trinity, God the Son is the only one who has this title. The title is not associated either to God the Father nor God the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the reason is that he is the one member of the Trinity who personally *communicated* God to humanity²²².

²¹⁹ S. Pirisola, «Feeding on God's Word», <https://allsoulschurchlekki.org/Food%20For%20Thought/feeding-on-gods-word/>, visited on 21/04/2022.

²²⁰ J. Goldingay, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

²²¹ The italics were added for emphasis.

²²² Cf. J. Lebreton, «L'apologetica cristiana nel II secolo» in J. Lebreton, J. Zeiller (a cura di), *La Chiesa primitiva*, (Storia della Chiesa), Torino, S.A.I.E., 1979⁴, pp. 567-574.

In the New Testament, the «Word of the Lord» and the «Word of Christ» are used interchangeably but they all point to the authoritative Word of God²²³. We are therefore called to *listen* to the Word (Pro. 28:9; Lk. 19:48), *read* and *study* it from the Scriptures (Deut. 17:19; Rev. 1:3; Acts 17:11; Pro. 2:1-5), *memorize* the Word (Deut. 6:6,7; Ps. 37:31; Pro. 7:1-3; Mt. 4:1-11 [helpful in temptation]), *meditate* (שׁוֹמֵר) and *contemplate* (בְּטַן) on the Word (Ps. 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 148; Phil. 4:8). As the shepherd anticipates eventual dangers, so does following what the Lord says will help us discern and anticipate many dangers the enemy has on our path.

The Word can also be symbolized by the *rod* and the *staff* as well as the voice of the shepherd. In fact, the word of the shepherd is heard through his voice. The sheep use their voices too to communicate their wants and get aid from the shepherd. He tends and herds the flock with diligence, faithfulness, and especially companionship. It is like a father-son relationship because the owner of the sheep finds delight in the sheep and vice-versal. Word brings *intimacy* and intimacy brings calm, rest and peace (Isa. 9:6 – Jesus is the Prince of peace « נְשִׁי לְוֹם שָׁר »). When the sheep is fed, it lies down and rest.

As the rod (שֹׁטֵט) is one of the basic weapons of the shepherd in dangerous situations so is the Word of God. It protects the believer in dangerous situations and from attacks of the enemy. As the rod is in some manner an extension of the shepherd's right hand, a symbol of his strength and authority, so is the Word of God is an extension of God's power and authority which should be obeyed (Deut. 6:6-9). It is also an instrument of chastisement and discipline²²⁴.

In fact, *discipline* and leadership go together and though discipline seems to have become popular in our 21st century, it is still vital to maintain the church united in the Word. It therefore becomes a symbol of grace as being redemptive and not simply punitive in nature becomes a more accurate display of the love and transforming power of the Gospel to the World. On the other hand, the *staff* is something the shepherd leans on, it gives him *stability*, it serves as his support and with it, the shepherd shows his compassion and care towards the sheep. He uses it to guide the flock and draw the sheep to himself as the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, through the Word, draws folks together into a warm, personal fellowship with one another.

The Word is the pasture in the wilderness, the water of quietness, the bread, wine, and oil of hospitality. It brings peace, joy (Jer. 15:16) to our heart and makes us fat, filled and

²²³ D. Stewart, «Why Was Jesus Called the Word of God? (Logos)», https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_219.cfm, visited 21/04/2022.

²²⁴ Cf. W.P. Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

overflowing with good deeds, praise, adoration and testimony. Surely, Goodness (1 Pt. 2:2, 3) and Lovingkindness will pursue us if we abide in the Word as the branch abides in the vine (Jhn 15:1-8; cf. the humbleness expected from the branch which is grafted to the tree – Rom. 11:17, 18, 20). And we will bear fruits (cf. Gen. 1:11, 12) as it leads us to the house of the Lord, the apex of communion. As sheep follow the shepherd, so do disciples follow the steps of the master, and the master wants his disciples to bear fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23). The writer of the letter to the Colossians puts it in this way: « [...] lead lives worthy of the Lord²²⁵, fully pleasing to him as (we) bear *fruit in every good work*».

The Word of God, therefore, is our nourishment, our spiritual food, compared to milk (1 Pt. 2:2), honey (Pss. 19:10; 119:103), and strong food or meat (Heb. 5:12, 14)²²⁶. Through our faith in Jesus Christ, it brings us *salvation* (2 Tim. 3:15) and the *joy* of this salvation should be shared with others as the green meadows to which the shepherd leads are shared by the entire flock. We consequently grow (Acts 20:32) in *hope*, *wisdom* (Hos. 4:6), and *discernment* (Ps. 119:99, 100). It is our *light* (Ps. 119:105) which brings us *comfort* in the death-like shadow of darkness of difficulties (Ps. 119:28, 50, 76; Rom. 15:4), *joy* (Jhn 15:11) and *blessings* from above (Deut. 28:1-8; Jos. 1:8).

3.2 Leading Through Rest and Amidst Conflict

Ps. 23:2 testifies that leadership is connected with rest. Our twenty-first century stands out with its neurological illnesses. In fact, nowadays, *depression*²²⁷, *attention deficit hyperactivity disorder* (ADHD), *borderline personality disorder* (BPD), and *burnout* syndrome is on the top list of pathological health issues together with increase anxiety, insomnia, increased blood pressure and consequently weakened immune system. Our restless lives in some cases lead to muscle pain, diabetes, and depression²²⁸. This attitude is sickeningly sickening also due to the

²²⁵ Cf. H.W. Lee, *Effective Church Leadership*, Silver Spring (MD), Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2003, pp.180, 181.

²²⁶ Cf. J. MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary on Acts 1-12*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1994, p. 83.

²²⁷ Viewing the situation of depression from the perspective of the economy of the self, Ehrenberg states: «Depression began its ascent when the disciplinary model for behaviors, the rules of authority and observance of taboos that gave social classes as well as both sexes a specific destiny, broke against norms that invited us to undertake personal initiative by enjoining us to be ourselves [...]. The depressed individual is unable to measure up; he is tired of having to become himself». A. Ehrenberg, *Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age*, Montreal, McGill Queen's University Press, 2010, p. 4.

²²⁸ B.C. Han, *The Burnout Society*, Stanford (CA), Stanford University Press, 2015, p. 1.

additional element of excessive multitasking which discourages *contemplative attention*. Repetitively and continuously switching between different tasks pushes aside if not eliminate *profound idleness* which is one of the primary factors of *creative process*²²⁹. In fact, Walter Benjamin defines this deep boredom as a «dream bird that hatches the egg of experience»²³⁰. Byung-Chul Han adds that «[i]f sleep represents the high point of bodily relaxation, deep boredom is the peak of mental relaxation»²³¹. Our present *community of activity* is so active and restless that it has lost the *gift of listening*. We are no more a community of listeners but of merely speakers and doers to the point of self-exploitation. Acceleration is also leading us to the island of mechanic behaviors²³², stupidity, mediocrity, idiocy, and foolishness²³³.

As the shepherd makes the sheep lie down to *rest* and to *restore* back their energy, so are we as leaders of our own body and all those people who lead in any area (e.g., in the employer and employee relationship) should highly consider the rest factor²³⁴. In fact, our daily existence is dominated by rush hours, school activities, work deadlines, appointments at the hospital, shopping, and weekly groceries, traffics and various engagements which we live as our nightmares, and which threaten our well-being. Advance technology has taken work into all spheres making people work anywhere and anytime which often makes us be so preoccupied by living the good life that we end up in falling into hysteria of surviving. We rush towards money and forget to live a good life. As Aristotle observes:

«So, some people believe that this is the task of household management and go on thinking that they should maintain their store of money or increase it without limit. The reason they are so disposed, however, is that they are *preoccupied with living*, not with *living well*. And

²²⁹ Recent studies are showing that taking time for silence restores the nervous system, helps sustain energy, and conditions our minds to be more adaptive and responsive to the complex environments in which so many of us now live, work, and lead. J.T. Zorn; L. Marz, «The Busier You Are, the More You Need Quiet Time» in *Harvard Business Review*, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/03/the-busier-you-are-the-more-you-need-quiet-time> visited 11/08/2021.

²³⁰ W. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, ed. R. Tiedemann, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 106, 107.

²³¹ B.C. Han, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²³² *Idem*, p. 22.

²³³ Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press, 1996², p. 132.

²³⁴ «More and more of us find ourselves unable to juggle overwhelming demands and maintain a seemingly unsustainable pace. Paradoxically, the best way to get more done may be to spend more time doing less. A new and growing body of multidisciplinary research shows that strategic renewal — including daytime workouts, short afternoon naps, longer sleep hours, more time away from the office and longer, more frequent vacations — boosts productivity, job performance and, of course, health. The importance of restoration is rooted in our physiology. Human beings aren't designed to expend energy continuously. Rather, we're meant to pulse between spending and recovering energy». T. Schwartz, «Relax! You'll Be More Productive», in *The New York Times*, Feb. 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/10/opinion/sunday/relax-youll-be-more-productive.html> visited 11/08/2021.

since their *appetite for life is unlimited*, they also want an *unlimited amount of what sustains it*»²³⁵.

Today, we have faster devices, machines and incredible internet connections that could not be thought of hundreds of years ago, but it seems that we are always behind and the more we do the more remains for us to do – *perennial time-scarcity problem*. We are always behind time, and we feel we never have enough time. It is like a dog trying to bite its tail. This ongoing, non-stop, frantic, and consuming lifestyle affects our sleep, driving many of us to rely on drugs like caffeine and energy boosters making us «doping society». Given the choice, many people would never rest as post-modern society sees it as a *functional necessity* and contrasts rest with productivity and we forget that rest is physically, mentally and spiritually vital²³⁶. Ps. 23 invites us to rest.

3.2.1 Rest in the Old Testament

Rest is very important for God. For instance, in theological terms, the element of *rest* is connected to salvation, to grace, to creation, to the Sabbath²³⁷, to our understanding of the state of the dead as Seventh-day Adventists, to the soon coming of Jesus — and to so much more. In the second chapter of the first book of the Bible (in canonical order), we find that at a certain point during the Creation week, God rested – Gen. 2:1-3. The Bible testifies that rest is the climax of all God's creation. After six days of creation, God, in his eternal wisdom set up the seventh day, which he *blessed*, and made it special, holy, set apart, in which we should not be worried about *doing* but just *being* and celebrating creation and the Creator himself. It is a day of *reverence* towards God and the entire creation. God is willing to deliver us from any sort of bondage to give us the gift of freedom, liberty, repose, rest and wholistic re-creation.

The psalmist declared in Ps. 4:8 - «I will both *lie down* in peace, and sleep; For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety». God commanded the people of Israel to rest and

²³⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1998, p. 17 (1257b). Emphasis added.

²³⁶ «Balancing Rhythms of Rest and Work», <https://www.theologyofwork.org/key-topics/rest-and-work-overview> visited 10/08/2021.

²³⁷ «God gave to men the memorial of His creative power, that they might discern Him in the works of His hand. The Sabbath bids us behold in His created works the glory of the Creator [...]. On the holy rest day, above all other days, we should study the messages that God has written for us in nature [...]. As we come close to the heart of nature, Christ makes His presence real to us, and speaks to our hearts of His peace and love». E.G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, Washington, D.C., Review and Herald, 1941, pp. 25, 26.

celebrate the Sabbath, the seventh day (Exo. 23:12; Deut. 5:14). Now, let us see some technical terms of rest in the Old Testament.

The Hebrew Old Testament uses various terms to refer to rest. In Gen. 2:2, 3, the writer uses the verb שָׁבַת which means «to cease work, to rest, to take a holiday, to desist from labor, to put to an end». In Exo. 5:5, it is written - «And Pharaoh said, “Look, the people of the land are many now, and you make them rest from their labor!” ». In this text, the verb שָׁבַת is used in a causative form and translated as «making someone rest» in this case from their work or labor. This is what pharaoh, talking about his slaves, accused Moses of. He accused him of making the Israelites rest from their labor²³⁸.

Interestingly, the verb used to describe God’s act of resting on the seventh-day Sabbath in the fourth commandment (Exo. 20:11; Deut. 5:14) is נָח which means «rest» (Job 3:13), «calm», «free space» («a place in time – cf. Heschel»), «lay down», or «to settle down and remain» (Num. 10:36; 2 Kgs. 2:15)²³⁹.

Rest is also rendered with another verbal use which is שָׁקַט in Jos. 11:23 - «So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land *rested* from war». In the books of Joshua and Judges, שָׁקַט which indicates «to be at rest, grant relief, be quiet» also means «peace»²⁴⁰.

Apart from meaning «to disturb» or «to harden», the verb נָחַץ also means «to be at rest, repose». In fact, in Deut. 28:65, God admonishes his people that if they continue in disobedience, they won’t find *rest* in exile. The causative form of the verb appears in Jer. 50:34 as the writer portrays the Lord’s capability of providing rest. The idiomatic expression «rest with your fathers» has its verbal root from שָׁכַב which also means «to lie down, sleep, rest» - Deut. 31:16; 2 Sam. 7:12²⁴¹.

It is also fascinating that God instituted other seasonal festivals which marked cycles of rest for his people in Lev. 23 such as the feast of the Passover, a harvest festival, a day of atonement, a rest day of a week which comes before the day of atonement, known as *Yom Kippur* and *Rosh Hashanah* respectively. They also celebrated the festival of booths (*Sukkot*). Apart

²³⁸ Cf. « שָׁבַת » in L.A. Schökel, *op. cit.*, p. 839.

²³⁹ Cf. « נָח » in *Idem*, p. 534.

²⁴⁰ Cf. « שָׁקַט » in *Idem*, p. 882.

²⁴¹ Cf. Hebrew Interlinear in Bible Hub, <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/deuteronomy/28-65.htm> visited, 21/04/2022.

from these seasonal festivals were also some extended rest patterns of every seven (Exo. 23; Lev. 25:1-7) and forty-nine years (Lev. 25:8-55). It was a period of time during which a period of time was provided for the land to rest and recover²⁴².

3.2.2 Other Rest-Elements in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the most common verbal form for rest is «ἀναπαύω». This term also means, to «give intermission from labor» and by implication it can also refer to «refresh». The verb is used in Mt. 11:28 - «Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest». This rest can have a *physical* connotation as in Mt. 26:45 as well as a *spiritual* connotation as in the case of 1 Cor. 16:18 where Paul, concluding his letter to the Corinthians appreciates his friends as people who bring refreshment to his spirit. In Mk. 6:31, Jesus uses this verb in an imperative form as he commanded his disciples to «rest a while» after their long mission trip, when they were sent in pairs to proclaim the Gospel (Mk. 6:7). The narrator explains why Jesus acted in that manner in verse 31 when he states: «For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat». Jesus taught his disciples that being busy doing God's work does not justify a disregard of one's health and emotional well-being. It is a physical and spiritual rest which englobes both social, emotional, individual as well as collective elements. As the night offers us rest so does the Sabbath offers us repose and slows us down.

There is another verb which is also used to refer to rest and that is ἡσυχάζω which signifies «to rest, to cease from labor» (Lk. 23:56), «to lead a quiet life» (1 Thess. 4:11) or «to be silent», for instance «say nothing» or «hold one's peace» (Lk. 14:4; Acts 11:18; 21:14)²⁴³.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (4:4) uses καταπαύω to describe God's creation rest on the seventh day. This verb means «make quiet, cause to cease, bring to rest, rest», «to lead to a quiet abode» (Heb. 4:8), «to still, restrain, or to cause (one striving to do something) to desist» (Acts 14:18)²⁴⁴.

²⁴² Cf. E. Wieja, «Feasts of the Lord: Biblical Holidays & the Hebrew Calendar», <https://firmisrael.org/learn/feasts-of-the-lord-biblical-holidays-and-hebrew-calendar/> visited 21/04/22.

²⁴³ Cf. D.L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament), Grand Rapids (MI), Baker Academic, 1996, pp. 1515-1518.

²⁴⁴ Cf. Greek Interlinear Bible Hub, <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/hebrews/4-4.htm> visited 21/04/2022.

3.2.3 Shifting Our Focus

By accepting the gift of rest, we pause to deepen our relationship with God and with our loved ones while the Lord renews our minds and bodies from stress, fatigue, anxiety, and fear. Too much busyness draws our focus afar together with our faith in God and this results in seeing our small problems in a larger perspective making them look too big to be solved. This leads to a wholistic exhaustion, tiredness and *burnout* which discourages us to accomplish whatever we desired to achieve. This consequently affects our spirituality because when one is burned out, there is naturally no desire and strength to reach out to pray or study the Word of God²⁴⁵.

We need to *make time* and *refocus* on our priorities and nurture our relationships with family and friends and with the rest of creation. Rest, in general and the Sabbath, in particular, is a time of worship²⁴⁶, not in a rush or busyness but in rest, *remembrance* and *responsibility*.

Our rest on earth is temporal, not full and often in the midst of sorrow, suffering, sickness, denial, etc. but there comes a day when our rest will be forever in the Lord, without worries or any disasters because the Lord will be our rest (Exo. 33:14). This is what Abraham Heschel describes as *deep rest (menuha)* when he states: «*menuha* came into existence on the sabbath and can be described as tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose. Menuha is the state in which there is no strife and no fighting, no fear and no distrust»²⁴⁷. This is the rest of the sheep in grassy green meadows.

²⁴⁵ «All who are under the training of God need the quiet hour for communion with their own hearts, with nature, and with God. In them is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and they need to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in *quietness* we wait before Him, the *silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God*. He bids us, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' Psalm 46:10. This is the effectual preparation for all labor for God. Amidst the hurrying throng, and the strain of life's intense activities, he who is thus refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. He will receive a new endowment of both physical and mental strength. His life will breathe out a fragrance and will reveal a divine power that will reach men's hearts». E.G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, Mountain View (CA), Pacific Press, 1942, p. 58. [Italics supplied].

²⁴⁶ «The demands upon God are even greater upon the Sabbath than upon other days. His people then leave their usual employment and spend the time in meditation and worship. They ask more favors of Him on the Sabbath than upon other days. They demand His special attention. They crave His choicest blessings. God does not wait for the Sabbath to pass before He grants these requests. Heaven's work never ceases, and men should never rest from doing good. The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds. The work of Christ in healing the sick was in perfect accord with the law. It honored the Sabbath». E.G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, Mountain View (CA), Pacific Press, 1943, p. 207.

²⁴⁷ A.J. Heschel, *The Sabbath (FSG Classics)*, New York, Farrar Straus Giroux, 2005, p. 23.

Psalm 23 for Busy People²⁴⁸:

«The Lord is my pace-setter, I shall not rush;
He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals;
He provides me with images of stillness
Which restore my serenity.
He leads me in the way of efficiency,
Through calmness of mind: and his guidance is peace.
Even though I have a great many things to accomplish each day
I will not fret, for his presence is here.
His timelessness, his all-importance will keep me in balance.
He prepares refreshment and renewal
In the midst of activity.
By anointing my mind with the oils of tranquility,
My cup of joyous energy overflows.
Surely harmony and effectiveness
Shall be the fruits of my hours,
For I will walk in the pace of the Lord.»

3.2.4 Leading Amidst Conflict

Among the sheep there is a phenomenon called «order of dominance» known as the *butting order*. This is when the oldest leader-ewe among the sheep rule on the rest of the flock. Her position and predominance guarantee her the best feeding bedgrounds. Males in rut also fight for dominance in their group which also implies breeding privileges. Social rank therefore circles around age, presence, size of horns, body mass and height. According to various researchers, in fights, rams can speed up to 20 mph (32 kph). Fights can last hours until one male submits²⁴⁹. Conflicts and discords can create discontent and rivalry, but the shepherd's

²⁴⁸ T. Miyashina, «Psalm 23 for Busy People» in *Theology of Work Project*, <https://www.theologyofwork.org/work-in-worship/hymns-psalms-poems/psalms-poems-for-a-service-on-work/modern-psalms-and-poems/psalm-23-for-busy-people> visited on 11/08/2021.

²⁴⁹ A. Bradford, «Facts About Sheep», in *LiveScience*, <https://www.livescience.com/52755-sheep-facts.html> visited 12/09/2021.

presence and his voice²⁵⁰ puts an end to this as he shifts the flock's focus to himself and creates a peaceful environment.

In our business firms, inside our offices, in our family circles, in our communities, in our churches, in any human organization, or group, be it large or small, one element never misses out and that is the struggle for *self-assertion* and *self-recognition*. The fight to be the «top sheep» unceasingly continues in our daily lives. We butt and quarrel and compete to «get ahead». As the sheep fighters usually break their horns and severely injures the head, so do we as people get hurt (physically, emotionally, psychologically) in the process of conflict. The arena becomes messy as jealousy arises into hate, contempt, disdain, rivalry and intense discontent²⁵¹.

Conflict commonly starts with *communication* which should primarily be based on understanding and then letting oneself to be understood. According to a survey conducted in early 2010 by ISPESL (Istituto Superiore per la Prevenzione e la Sicurezza del Lavoro), 43% of Italian workers suffer from «office sickness» (*mal d'ufficio*). This report found that approximately nine million Italians consider work a risk factor for their physical health and nearly five million workers consider work a risk to their psychological well-being. The main cause of «office sickness» was psychological/relational which basically derives from communicational factors²⁵².

We are all different with all kinds of personalities as not all sheep are the same. Some people will tend to behave more aggressively and contemptuously, others instead will prove to be nice and sociable. According to Massimo Piovano, (one of the first Italian graduates in Communication Sciences and winner of the AICQ [Italian Association for Quality Culture] award), every interpersonal relationship has two poles: *interest in others* and the *degree of frankness* in relationships. Those who fall in the first category choose solitude, they don't show interest in people, and they talk without ever listening to what the other person has to say. It is an attitude of closure, of withdrawal into oneself, whether out of shyness, overconfidence or an inability to listen. Those who choose to be frank, instead, express their thoughts clearly and

²⁵⁰ «Sheep are likely to be more intelligent than generally regarded. They respond readily to food calls, may problem solve, learn their names, carry packs, and can even be clicker trained. Sheep may be grazed on open, unfenced areas and may heft (remain in home field) to a limited area as a learned behavior by lambs from their ewes. Sheep possess specialized neural mechanisms in the right temporal and frontal lobes of the brain and may recognize familiar human or ovine faces for as long as 2 yrs.». G.M. Landsberg; S. Denenberg, «Social Behavior of Sheep», in *MSD MANUAL – Veterinary Manual*, <https://www.msdrvetermanual.com/behavior/normal-social-behavior-and-behavioral-problems-of-domestic-animals/social-behavior-of-sheep> visited 12/08/2021.

²⁵¹ H.W. Lee, *op. cit.*, pp.147-156.

²⁵² M. Piovano, *Basta Rodersi il fegato*, Torino, Antepima, 2010, p. 29.

firmly, sometimes even without thinking through the consequences of doing so. These are the people who can't help but always expose their ideas frankly.

Piovano identifies four behavioral manners during conflict management: the *aggressive* behavior, the *manipulative* behavior, the *surrender or escape* behavior and the *assertive* attitude²⁵³. The *Aggressive's* frankness thinks to be so high that he looks down on others. He is convinced to be the best and so do not care about other people's emotive states. This kind of attitude usually hides the real problem which is a sense of inferiority and low self-esteem. For these kind of people, the fault is always on the other person and they themselves are never responsible for their actions. They are easily irritated, excessively competitive, against everyone and everything without any reasonable reason. They are intolerant, always generalizing situations and hardly accepting orders²⁵⁴.

The *manipulator* instead never takes a clear position and if they do, they try as much as possible not to be heard by those concerned. They are smart and dissimulative and often get ahead at the expense of their colleagues. In fact, they tend to keep important information to themselves, never expressing their true opinions and intentions and if they do, they tend to change their ideas quickly. They are fatalists, pessimists, always trying to take advantage of others. They are askers and never givers. Since they are not trustworthy, they don't trust anyone²⁵⁵.

Those who *surrender or escape* during conflict have low self-esteem and are condescending and submissive. They avoid taking on themselves responsibilities and at work focus more on the pay than finding satisfaction and loving what they do. They are not willing to learn new things because they are afraid to get it wrong and be criticized. At first difficulties, they escape and try to find excuses²⁵⁶.

Those with *assertive* spirits are content with themselves and with their relationship with others. They have a realistic, positive and concrete way to face various situations that life presents. Being assertive, according to Piovano means expressing your ideas without being arrogant, threatening, or authoritative. These kind of people are confident and determined so

²⁵³ M. Piovano, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-91.

²⁵⁴ Conte Antoine di Rivarol (1753-1801), a French writer and journalist, once said: «May he who is right laugh and not get angry» - «chi ha ragione rida e non vada in collera». https://www.frasi-celebri.net/autori/damiano_conte/2/ visited 12/08/2021.

²⁵⁵ M. Piovano, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-91.

²⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

they find healthy ways to compliment and to criticize without creating awkward moments. They take responsibilities and are often ready to be responsible for their actions. They are problem solvers²⁵⁷, evidence-based people, precise and cherishes other people's opinions without prejudice or any kind of judgement also because they are good listeners²⁵⁸.

Humans are complexed beings but as the Golden rule in Mt. 7:12 says: «*Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you*».

3.3 Leadership in the House of the Lord

If the World is voting and hoping in finding capable leaders, how much more should God's children who are called into his precious communion of grace pray and work towards a better leadership in the House of God.

«The greatest want of the world is the want of men - men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall»²⁵⁹.

3.3.1 Leading the *Young-Fresh-Shootings* Through Mentorship and Discipleship

The new shootings, grassy green meadows to which the psalmist is *led* to are new in their beginning, fresh and fragile. It is quite fascinating to think of these fresh beginnings as the young people, the youth to which the Lord leads his servants to. As the young-fresh-shootings of grass are important for the sheep and their survival, so are the youth an essential part of our church which is navigating through a particularly sensitive stage of their individual and personal growth and therefore, have distinct needs different from those of the older members of our communities²⁶⁰. The period of spiritual barrenness or crisis begins from early adolescence

²⁵⁷ Cf. E. Berne, *A che gioco giochiamo?*, Bompiani, Milano, 2008.

²⁵⁸ M. Piovano, «Impara a dire quello che pensi», in *Vita&Salute*, febbraio 2010, pp. 40-43.

²⁵⁹ E.G. White, *Education* (Mountain View (CA), Pacific Press, 1903, p. 57.

²⁶⁰ Michele Serra calls this period of transition and particularly some of the young people of this stage of life «gli sdraiati» (the loungers). «[...] Here they are, the loungers, wrapped in their sweatshirts and surrounded by their technological objects as if they were post-human extensions of their bodies and thoughts. There they are, the children of today, those who prefer the television to the spectacle of nature, who do not love the flags of the Ideal,

through their teens and during this period they are faced with making a lot of decisions regarding their spiritual beliefs, their moral value system, their social and educational skills and careers and the choice of a partner. It is the period in which one starts knowing his/her body (internal and external pleasures and stimuli). The fast-growing young person²⁶¹ starts to crave for a sort of emotional and economic independence of parents and adults. This is the stage of forming one's identity. The parents' presence is vital in this stage, and they should do their best to make their homes one that engender hospitality, safety, and wisdom²⁶². The challenges in this transitional stage of young adulthood continue with peer pressure, all sorts of addictions (drugs, alcohol, pornography, etc.), fear of the unknown, fear of failure, anxiety of the future and the fear of rejection. They face problems of envy and jealousy and many complain not having as much or as nice things as their colleagues²⁶³. All the above-mentioned elements and so much more often bring worry and anger as the youth need to deal with competitiveness, materialism, and idealism. Postmodernism's relativity has been molding our youth to be more permissive, tolerant regarding the right of people to «do their own thing» as their motto is: «what is right for you is not necessarily right for me». However, the positive side of the coin is that living in such a society encourages the young people to be more flexible, open minded, less rigid, less condemning, and more willing to accept diversity. In the other way round, it leads to too much rationality which lead them to rethink their biblical value and standards often making them less binding and less relevant for their lives.

The youth deeply desire in this stage of life, acceptance (Rom. 14:18), recognition, affection, success (Col. 2:10), achievement, new experiences, security and a sense of belonging

but who live anarchically in their autistic enjoyment, here they are in a world where "everything remains on, nothing off, everything open, nothing closed, everything started, nothing concluded». M. Recalcati, «"Gli sdraiati" di Michele Serra. Il silenzio dei padri di fronte ai figli stesi sul divano» in *La Repubblica*, 6 nov. 2013, p. 47. Cf. M. Serra, *Gli sdraiati* (I Narratori), Milano, Feltrinelli, 2016.

²⁶¹ D. Elkind, *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon*, Reading (MA), Addison-Wesley, 1981. The child in a hurry: growing up too fast, too soon. The children and adolescents we meet are increasingly forced to pass the intermediate stages of development, physical, psychological and social, forced to become adults before their time, to go through the stages as if it were a race against time, without being able to really confront the access to age. They are forced to become adults before their time, to rush through the stages as if it were a race against time, without being able to truly confront their access to adulthood. Cf. E. Genre, *art. cit.*, pp. 67-78.

²⁶² «The greatest secret in the relationship between generations is to know how to love the life of the child even when ours begins the phase of its decline. Not being afraid of one's own decline is the condition for the transmission of desire from one generation to the next». M. Recalcati, «Generazione orizzontale», in *La Repubblica*, 6 nov. 2013, p. 47.

²⁶³ Cf. P. Crepet, *Voi, noi. Sull'indifferenza di giovani e adulti* (Einaudi. Stile libero), Torino, Einaudi, 2003, p. 32.

(1 Cor. 3:23)²⁶⁴. Cf. Richard Rice, *Believing, Behaving, Belonging*²⁶⁵. They look for fellowship and ways that can uplift their spirits, sense of involvements and enjoyment.

This sense of belonging, involvement²⁶⁶ and recognition can be created when the church shows that the young people are relevant also through *mentorship*. As the shepherd is a mentor²⁶⁷ for the sheep, so was Jesus for his disciples, Moses for Joshua and Paul for Barnabas and John Mark²⁶⁸. Other biblical examples of mentorship are Abraham and Lot, Jacob and Joseph, Jethro and Moses, Naomi and Ruth, Eli and Samuel, Jonathan and David, David and Mephibosheth, Nathan and David, Elijah and Elisha, Elisha and the prophets. In the New Testament we find some examples as Elizabeth and Mary, John the Baptist and his disciples, Paul and Silas, Paul and Timothy, Paul and Philemon, Paul and Aquila. Young people are in search for adults who they can look up to as role models and mentors. Philip Kate defines mentoring as the process whereby «an older experienced guide who is acceptable to the young person and who can help ease the transition to adulthood by a mix of support and challenge [...] it is a developmental relationship»²⁶⁹. Cf. Phil. 4:9; Heb. 13:7; Prov. 13:20; 27:17; 1 Thess. 2:8; Titus 1:5, 9; 2:1-7; 2 Tim. 2:2.

The sense of recognition and involvement also comes by including them in *decision making* concerning the church administration and giving them responsibilities as regards church leadership. This will help them perceive the church as their church and actively shape the activities and the mission of the church. In fact, in the statement which was issued in 2007 by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church leadership, it was affirmed and confirmed that the common reasons which lead many members and especially a lot of young people astray are the absence of a sense of belonging, and the lack of meaningful engagement in the local congregation and

²⁶⁴ *Idem*, pp. 6, 7.

²⁶⁵ R. Rice, *Believing, Behaving, Belonging*, Loma Linda (CA), The Association of Adventist Forums, 2002.

²⁶⁶ The element of involvement works for youth leadership as well as an evangelical strategy in the society. «We've by far had the most success inviting people into our community life by inviting them to serve alongside us. As a matter of fact, that's about the only thing that's worked consistently as far as official church activities go». G. Barna, D. Kinnaman, (eds.), *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*, The Barna Group, 2014, p. 30.

²⁶⁷ On mentors and coaches see D. Goleman, R. Boyatzis, A. McKee, *Primal Leadership*, Boston (MA), Harvard Business School Press, 2013, pp. 164, 165.

²⁶⁸ K.D. Hall, «The Critical Role of Mentoring for Pastoral Formation» in *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, vol. 11, No. 1, Spring, 2017, pp. 45-48.

²⁶⁹ K. Philip, «Mentoring and Young People» in *Encyclopedia of Informal Education*, August 2000. Cf. <https://infed.org/mobi/mentoring-and-young-people/>

its mission²⁷⁰. In fact, various studies report that congregations with high levels of youth involvement are also the ones more likely to be growing²⁷¹. As H. Vanderwell affirms «God's people have always included all ages in their worship»²⁷² and as R. Dudley states from his studies, «The decline in membership of many mainline Protestant churches has been shown to be largely traceable to the shortage of young adults in the congregations»²⁷³.

The young ones are capable and when they find support and passion meets commitment, they gladly work for the Lord and his mission. This is seen in the history of our Adventist Movement. We can find many pioneers such as Ellen Harmon White, John Loughborough, J.N. Andrews, Uriah Smith, and John Harvey Kellogg, who began their work for the Lord at their teen-age and immensely impacted the church²⁷⁴.

3.3.2 A Leader of Action

According to the twenty-third psalm, a leader should be wholistically (which is spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, and especially *physically*) equipped for the task assigned to him. It is a task for *active people* who are ready to spend a lot of energy because as sheep are delicate beings, so are church members and especially the youth²⁷⁵. Psalm 23 is a *psalm of movement*. It is a psalm full of actions which are done by the Lord, by the sheep, by the shepherd and by other elements present in the text such as the rod and the staff. Then the personifications also act according to their poetic, hymnic and theological purposes. The Hebrew verb רָבַץ which we translate as «stretch oneself out, lie down, lie stretched out» in verse 2, shows an act of exercise. It is a movement towards the ground. It is as if one lies down to relax, to rest, to sleep or in the case of the ruminants, to ruminate and start the process of a deeper digestion. In the same verse, we also find the verb נָהַל which means «to guide, to lead to

²⁷⁰ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee, «Conserving Membership Gains», 2007, paragraph 5, <https://www.adventist.org/documents/conserving-membership-gains/>

²⁷¹ J.W. Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations*, Grand Rapids (MI), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006, p. 116.

²⁷² H. Vanderwell (ed.), *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshipping Together*, Herndon (VA), The Alban Institute, 2008, p. 20.

²⁷³ R.L. Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church: Personal Stories From a 10-Year Study*, Hagerstown (MD), Review and Herald, 2000, p. 35.

²⁷⁴ Regarding making impact on others, Kraemer advises any person who wants to make impact on others to sit for 15 to 30 minutes and reflect on impact the person has made on others and the impact others have made on the person. H.M.J. Kraemer Jr., *From Values to Action: The Four Principles of Values-Based Leadership*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2011, p. 15.

²⁷⁵ P. Cincala, A. Saucedo, «Rethinking the Role of Aging Pastors in Ministry», in *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, vol. 13, No. 2, Fall, 2019, pp. 101-110.

a watering place, bring to a place of rest, refresh». Another evidence of movement is in verse 3 with the verb שׁוּב «to turn back, return». In the same verse, the verb הָלַךְ appears once again. Then in verse 4, an action term *par excellence* appears – הָלַךְ «to go, come, walk». In the same verse we have the verb נָחַם «to be sorry, console oneself». In verse 5 we have עָרַךְ «to arrange, set in order» when the psalmist refers to the Lord as he prepares the table before his enemies. The same verse also has another verb דָּשַׁן «to be fat, grow fat, anoint». The action which follows is done by the cup which overflows, runs over – רָוַיָּהּ. Goodness and Loving-kindness join the actions and *follow, pursue, chase, persecute* (רָדַף) the psalmist. The last verb is יָשַׁב «to sit, remain, dwell, return to dwell». Taken into consideration the above points, a leader should be physically fit for the task and possibly not too aged or sick but in good health²⁷⁶. This affirmation is not to push aside those who are physically weak due to illness or aging but to emphasize the fact that good leadership is seen in deeds, in actions, in what we do, not in just being a spectator, but being involved *actively*.

3.4 Leading in Fellowship

Sheep live, feed, and sleep in groups because left by themselves they become restless and confused. As sheep, human beings are also relational beings and God created us in his image and likeness to have fellowship with one another. We are wired to establish individual and personal relationships with other people and form bonds with social groups to which we belong. «Interpersonal relationships involve reciprocal knowledge, attraction, communication, dialogue and the possibility of collaboration or cooperation»²⁷⁷. We are to care and love our fellow human beings as relationships are our reason for existence as they affect our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Cf. Gen. 4:9; Mt. 22:37-39; 25:35-45.

Internet in general and social media in particular promised a level of connection never seen before in humanity's history. Therefore, we are daily tempted to think that digital socialization can replace the need for real human interaction. Since March 2020, when the Italian government announced restrictions on all non-essential activities, with only work and health-related travel being authorized, the COVID-19 pandemic is proving to us that we deeply need

²⁷⁶ Cf. Habecker's idea regarding mind and body in his book E.B. Habecker, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-46.

²⁷⁷ D. Melé, C.G. Cantón, «Relational Dimensions of the Human Being», in *Human Foundations of Management* (IESE Business Collection), London (UK), Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137462619_10 visited 27/10/2021.

each other in all aspects of life. During this period of stringent social distancing measures, research shows that there has been an increase in stress, loneliness and domestic violence among the whole population worldwide²⁷⁸. Loneliness and stress have led many to problems with their mental, cardiovascular and immune health²⁷⁹. Even the simple wearing of a sanitary face mask has impacted many of us regarding the recognition and comprehension of our neighbors' emotions. In fact, the upper (especially the eyes) and the lower (especially the mouth) face are decisive in conveying and decoding emotional facial expressions such as anger or joy²⁸⁰. It seems that humanity needed a virus to remind us of the essence of love which is encapsulated in humility, slowness, vulnerability²⁸¹ and solidarity. It seems that we needed a pandemic to turn us back and refocus on the need to *cooperate* and share common values to be more united as worldwide citizens who await one destiny. As the society is trying its best, the church also should make conscious efforts to create authentic and loving relationships across generational, cultural and social boundaries and come in contact with people both in and outside the church (physically and spiritually).

3.4.1 The Concept of Biblical Fellowship and the House of the Lord

When the New Testament talks about «fellowship» (*κοινωνία*), it entices different meanings with a common denominator. The prefix *κοινός*²⁸², in the root from which the Greek word is derived. When the prefix is added to terms which signify «living», «owning a purse», «a dispute», or «mother» one can get meanings such as «living in community together», «owning a purse in common», «a public dispute» or «having a mother in common». The common denominator of the term «fellowship» is therefore «to hold something in common»²⁸³.

²⁷⁸ A. Aljunmeeyn, F. El-Dahiyat, *et. al.*, «Understanding the factors influencing healthcare providers' burnout during the outbreak of COVID-19 in Jordanian hospitals» in *Journal of Pharmaceutical Policy and Practice*, 13(1), 2020, pp. 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40545-020-00262-y>. A.R. Piquero, J.R. Riddell, *et. al.*, «Staying home, staying safe? A short-term analysis of COVID-19 on Dallas domestic violence» in *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45, 2020, pp. 601–635. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09531-7>.

²⁷⁹ L.C. Hawkey, J.T. Cacioppo, «Loneliness matters: A theoretical and empirical review of consequences and mechanisms» in *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 40(2), 2010, pp. 218–227. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-010-9210-8>.

²⁸⁰ M.G. Calvo, L. Nummenmaa, «Detection of emotional faces: salient physical features guide effective visual search», in *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 137 (3), pp. 471-494. H. Eisenbarth, G.W. Alpers, «Happy mouth and sad eyes: scanning emotional facial expressions» in *Emotions* 11, 2011, pp. 860-865.

²⁸¹ E.B. Habecker, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-156.

²⁸² «κοινός», in *Dizionario esegetico del Nuovo Testamento* (Introduzione allo studio della Bibbia. Supplementi 15), H. Balz; G. Schneider, Brescia, Paideia, 2004, pp. 61, 62.

²⁸³ <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Lexicon.show/ID/G2842/koinonia.htm> visited 31/08/2021.

The term itself, *κοινωνία* is used to indicate fellowship, association, community, joint participation, intercourse, intimacy, partners in a law firm, and labor guilds. With the addition of this broader meaning, the word «fellowship» therefore, more than «holding something in common» denotes a dynamic and an interdependent relationship, especially a «post-Pentecost relationship». In fact, the word «fellowship» was never used to describe a person's relationship with God before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Early Church²⁸⁴. In the New Testament, the word «fellowship» has at least four synonyms which express outward unity, and they are: *φίλος* («related by love for outward characteristics»), *ἐταῖρος* («a sharer in a common enterprise»), *συνεργός* («a fellow worker»), *μέτοχος* («a participant»). However, 1 Cor. 1:9 presents an inner aspect of unity and fellowship, which is our spiritual unity with Jesus Christ, when it states: «God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord». Cf. Phile. 6; 2 Cor. 13:13; Phil. 2:1²⁸⁵. This basically comes with the connection with the biblical truth which comes with the Word of God as believers pray, serve and grow (1 Pt. 2:2) together spiritually. In fact, as John Stott says: «Anti-intellectualism and the fullness of the Spirit are incompatible, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth»²⁸⁶.

Nineteen times in the New Testament, *κοινωνία* is also translated with action words such as «contribution», «sharing», and «participation»²⁸⁷. Fellowship, therefore, is a communal lifestyle (Acts 2:42), a partnership with Christ daily, with his will, being in him, being part of him and his work and especially doing the work with him such as in financial support (Rom. 12:13; 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Gal. 6:6; Phil. 4:15; Heb. 13:16). We should note that one can also have ungodly fellowship to engage in sinful acts of wickedness (1 Tim. 5:22; 2 Jhn 11).

With this information we can formulate a possible definition of fellowship according to the Bible: «Fellowship is a relationship of inner unity among believers that expresses itself in outer co-participation with Christ and one another in accomplishing God's will on earth». Acts 2:44-47 shows that fellowship is an act of the Holy Spirit who inspired the church with diversified activities, wisdom and spiritual gifts such as leadership and administration skills in order to spread the Gospel (Eph. 3:8-11; 4:11-13).

²⁸⁴ «κοινωνία», in *op. cit.*, H. Balz; G. Schneider, pp. 63-70.

²⁸⁵ <https://bible.org/book/export/html/437>; «What is koinonia? », in *Got Questions*, <https://www.gotquestions.org/koinonia.html> visited 31/08/2021.

²⁸⁶ J. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of Acts*, Downers Grove (IL), InterVarsity Press, 1990, p. 82.

²⁸⁷ <http://corecanvas.s3.amazonaws.com/thetransformedsoul-Oecb7a56/media/original/51a6953a422a5-Importance%20of%20Fellowship.pdf> visited 31/08/2021.

Fellowship is a symphony and not a solo. The Lord wants his orchestra to harmonize with his plan and purpose for humanity as his children co-participate for his glory. As God's sovereignty in the work of salvation does not exclude or downplay human responsibility so does the leaders' ability need the helping hands of the members of the group. It cannot be accomplished by just an individual²⁸⁸ because iron needs to be sharpened by iron (Prov. 27:17) so that believers can grow in faith, in love, and in good works (Heb. 10:24, 25). We need each other²⁸⁹ (1 Cor. 12:7-21; Eph. 4:16) and there is strength in numbers (Eccl. 4:9-12; Mt. 18:20)²⁹⁰. We need a network of people who share common beliefs, purposes and goals in order to pray with them and draw some encouragement to accompany us in this faith journey (2 Pt. 1:1).

That is one of the reasons why the church as a group and the *house of the Lord* (הַבַּיִת הַלְלוּ) as a space, as the psalmist states, is essential for every believer. This is one of the places in space where God's glory dwells (Ps. 26:8). It is a place of beauty, of praise, of contemplation, and of meditation (Pss. 27:4; 84:1, 2, 4). It is a place of fellowship, of rest and restoration for the soul because divine and humanity comes into contact (Rev. 21:3). The Psalmist's yearning to return to dwell in the house of God forever should be heard and felt among all believers because that is one of the reasons why Jesus came to die on the cross. Jesus' birth, life on earth, death and resurrection was a plan of salvation which had the goal of redeeming mankind and bringing us back to the Father's house through the union of the Holy Spirit so that we may all become sons and daughters of the House Master (Jhn 1:12, 13; Eph. 2:19).

Just as the embrace, pardon, warmth of the Father welcomed the Prodigal Son, so are we invited to be welcomed daily and weekly to the Lord's house where we will not lack because there is abundance of things we have never imagined. The Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who deeply knows what it means to be a sheep too, is ready to always lead us to the throne of grace and into the gates of God's house with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise (Cf. Jhn

²⁸⁸ «The Bible does not envision the Christian life as one lived apart from other believers; all members of the universal church, the body of Christ, are to be actively and intimately involved in a local church». J. MacArthur, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

²⁸⁹ Find other similar passages here: Jhn 13:14, 34; Rom. 12:10, 16; 14:13; 15:7; 1 Cor. 1:10; 11:33; 12:25; Gal. 5:13, 26; 6:2; Eph. 4:2, 16, 32; 5:19, 21; Col. 3:9, 16; 1 Thess. 5:11, 15; Heb. 10:24; Jam. 4:11; 5:16; 1 Pt. 4:8, 9; 5:5.

²⁹⁰ «We don't have to give up living with others, we don't have to isolate ourselves. We must ourselves reach out to men where they are, because very hardly will they come to us spontaneously. It is not only from the pulpit that divine truth can touch the hearts of men. [...] Through social relations Christianity comes into contact with the world. [...] All those who profess to have found Christ should work as he has worked for the good of mankind. for the good of men». E.G. White, *Gesù di Nazareth. La Speranza dell'Uomo*, ADV, Falciani-Impruneta, 2007, pp. 105, 106.

10:1-18; Ps. 100). This is the place of restoration where our wounds are bonded, our sicknesses healed, and our weakness replaced with the strength of the Shepherd.

The house of the Lord is the sheepfold where after going astray throughout the days of the week, after enjoying the green pastures the shepherd has provided, after lying down and often forgetting about the Provider of our needs, we are brought back by the shepherd to communion. The fact that it is a place of communion means that everyone is invited and welcomed because we are just guest invited by the Host. Though Jesus was referring to the house of his father which is in heaven, the message is clear: the place is big enough for everyone and there are many rooms (Jhn. 14:1-4). This is where most of our thirst is quenched and our hunger fed, it is the house of prayer (Isa. 56:7). Our mourning turn into dancing, our sackcloth of lamentation and distress into thanksgiving and joyfulness (Ps. 122:1) because our appetites are renewed.

I am not idolizing the church building because as we all know it is built with common materials and God and his activity which he does through the work of the Holy Spirit cannot be limited to temples or man-made buildings (Acts 17:24). Rather, my emphasis goes to the leadership activity which goes on there and which draws us to God and to each other. God dwells in us because we are his temple (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; 2 Tim. 1:14) and what an open-eyeing revelation that many holy temples come together, share experiences, pray, call the *name* of the Lord, and the Lord of these temples (bodies) worship and fellowship with them in his house (Eph. 2:20-22). His house denotes his presence (Gen. 28:12, 17) which is built on belief, faith, and Spirit (Mt. 16:18; Acts 2:1-4).

3.5 The Lord(s) Who Lead(s) – The Model of Harmonious Leadership in the Economy of the Trinity

Psalm 23 begins with the *Lord*. As Christians in general and Seventh Day Adventists in particular, we believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine has a variety of deeply profound meanings and implications for our Christian life and belief. Moreover, it is essential for our present paper concerning the topic of leadership because the Three God Persons living in a united, egalitarian, not hieratic, harmonized relationship present to us a perfect model of leadership. God is one but lives in a relationship of plurality: three equal and coeternal Persons

in one essence (Jhn. 17:21–26, 1 Cor. 3:9–16; 1 Jhn. 2; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4–6; 1 Pt. 1:2). Each member submits to the other and serve the other reciprocally without any sense of superiority (1 Pt. 5:2, 3). The Father serves the Son and Spirit. God the Son gives all to the Spirit and points to the Father. God the Holy Spirit serves, confesses the Father and the Son and gives all to them²⁹¹. There is coinherence in this relationship of leadership because there is a deep inseparable unity which elevates every component of the Triad. There is a sense of individuality and collectivity (plurality) which harmoniously merge. One’s actions affect the others and vice versa²⁹². The whole counts on the one and the one counts on the whole. It is a relationship of interdependency, of mutual cooperation, reciprocation and of the elevation of the «irreducible otherness»²⁹³. «A Trinitarian perspective focuses leadership on developing the personhood of individuals and fulfilling the image of God within each individual and culture»²⁹⁴.

God’s love which holds the relationship of the Triad is expressed and showed in the creative activity which is full of design, fashion, and wonder. This means that leadership is more than theory but must be practical in love which gives fruit of humility, servanthood, justice, mercy, transformation, unity, and grace. This can happen only through the grace of God, the person of the Son, and the power and enlightenment that the Spirit brings²⁹⁵.

From God the Father	From God the Son	From Leaders
My Father works Jhn. 5:17- 19	Jesus himself also works Jhn. 5:17; 9: 4	Leaders should work Acts 6:4; Eph. 4:12
The Father judges Jhn. 8:16	Jesus judges Jhn. 8:16	Leaders judge 1 Cor. 6:1-6
God is light 1 Jhn. 1:5	Jesus is light Jhn. 8:12; 12. 46	Leaders are light and walk in the light Mt. 5:14; 1Jhn. 1:7
God teaches	The son teaches	Leaders teach

²⁹¹ D.J. Zscheile, «The Trinity, Leadership, and Power» in *Journal of Religious Leadership*, 6(2), 2007, pp. 43-63.

²⁹² B. Ruffner, R.L. Huizing, «A Trinitarian Leadership Model: Insights from the Apostle Peter», in *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Fall 2016, pp. 37-49.

²⁹³ D.J. Zscheile, *art. cit.* p. 53.

²⁹⁴ B. Ruffner, R.L. Huizing, *art. cit.*, p. 46.

²⁹⁵ The following table is an adaption to some contents presented by Pas. Daniele Benini in September in the course of *Leadership and Management*, in September 2020 at Villa Aurora.

Jhn. 8:28	Jhn. 8:28; Acts 1:1	Acts 5:42, 1 Tim. 3:2, 4:11
The Father gives/ offers the Son Jhn. 3:16	Jesus gives his life Jhn. 10:11	Leaders give their life 1 Jhn. 3:16
The Father is perfect Mt. 5:48	The Son is perfect Heb. 7:28; 12:2	Leaders are called to be perfect in positive example Mt. 5:48. 1 Cor. 3:18. Col. 3:10

3.5.1 Christ, the Model Leader

Jesus is the *model* leader (Mt. 4:19). He *led* by his life in *actions* and in *words*. He was *sympathetic* and he understood the needs of his neighbors and as Ellen White states: «The afflicted ones who came to Him felt that he linked his interests with theirs as a *faithful* and tender *friend*, and they desired to know more of the truths he taught»²⁹⁶. Jesus was *kind*, thoughtful, *forgiving* (Eph. 4:32), kind, *cheerful*, patient and forbearing. He saw every person as a candidate for Heaven (Jhn. 3:16) because as his hope *inspired* hope in others, his confidence watered trust in the hearts of others. He woke the dead and awakened life in situations that has shadows of death. Jesus cared for everyone and saw people for who they could become because he had a sense of mission (Lk. 2:49; Jhn. 18:37). In fact, he talked, ate and walked with Pharisees and Publicans²⁹⁷.

The Evangelist Matthew gives a mentorship model of Jesus in his writings in Mt. 10:1-15 when Jesus chooses the Twelve and empowers them for the work of the Gospel. First of all, the calling was a personal calling. Jesus chose individuals and not a group. In fact, he calls each of the Twelve by name (vv. 1-4). Then, Jesus gives a direct, clear, and specific mandate (v. 5). He instructs them and sends them out. In the instruction, he gives the main objective (vv. 5, 6) which is not to go to the Gentiles but to the Jews, to the *lost sheep* of the house of Israel. Then Jesus gives them the precise message to proclaim: «The Kingdom of heaven is at hand» (v. 7). Apart from uttering words of salvation Jesus gave them practical mandate of service (v. 8). He *equips* them to gain credibility by giving them the tools/possibilities (miracles) to confirm their

²⁹⁶ E.G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, Mountain View (CA), Pacific Press, 1943, pp. 254, 255.

²⁹⁷ E.G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols., Mountain View (CA), Pacific Press, Vol. VI, 1948, p. 173.

message. In fact, they were to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons. Moreover, Jesus gave them certainty concerning their concrete physical needs (vv. 9, 10). He instilled confidence and gave them a plan to acquire the resources they need to accomplish the task given to them. In fact, he tells them not to take anything with them, not even clothes to change themselves. Then, Jesus gave them solid beliefs on how they should behave in odd moments or cases (vv. 11-15).

It is interesting how the Evangelist Mark molds his idea in Mk. 3:13-19 regarding Jesus' mentorship skills towards his disciples (mentees). After calling them and choosing them, Jesus *spent a lot of time* with them (3:14). He told them from the beginning what was their task (1:17). He *oriented* his disciples to live out the mission in its two main dimensions: suffering and seeing the person (6:7-13). He *allowed* them to witness and participate in his miracles (8:1-9). He issued an imperative to them to go and do what he did (16:15-16). He *promised* the credibility and provisions they would need (16:17-18), and he continued to *work with them*, confirming their works and words (16:19-20).

Conclusion

From what we announced in the introduction section till what we have been able to understand from the text so far, we can declare that indeed Psalm 23 is more than a text read at cemeteries. In fact, the Lord can comfort and guide us because he is a good *leader*. Through music and poetry, the model of leadership presented by Psalm 23 is centered on the Lord, *Yahweh* (יהוה), presented in the Holy Scriptures as the self-subsistent eternal being²⁹⁸. Even the literary and poetic composition of the text underlines the centrality of the *Lord* through the literary device of *inclusio*. This Lord the psalmist is talking about is also a *shepherd*. The fact that the subject is the Lord would even have been more than enough for the psalmist to consider him as his guide and leader because the psalmist is a creature compared to this supreme being. However, to add more emphasis, this same Lord is also a shepherd. The shepherd figure added in the expression of faith and trust of the psalmist presents another dimension of this powerful and supreme being. The psalmist presents the *tender* and *loving* aspects of the Lord-Shepherd. He is a God who *cares* for his people as a shepherd cares and loves his sheep. The Lord shows his leadership skills, first of all, as he takes his flock, his people, his sons and daughters through green pastures, feeding them and *nourishing* them. The psalmist can testify and exclaim that the Lord is his shepherd based on the goodness and tender mercies bestowed on him.

A «God» becoming a shepherd may appear as degradation, a stepping down from a higher level, a kind of *kenosis* (Phil. 2:7) because shepherding was not a noble job, and shepherds therefore weren't socially taken into consideration but were despised and outcast²⁹⁹. However, the intimacy and nearness evoked in these verses go beyond social considerations, boundaries and walls in order to reach a spiritual and a more intense state of covenantal relationship (cf. Ex. 6:7). The strong intimacy and relationship are shown by the fact that the psalmist knows the Lord-shepherd by *name*. In fact, a shepherd lays his life for his sheep³⁰⁰ and he is more than ready to protect the sheep from all kinds of harm such as enemies, diseases, parasites or harmful flies. The wellbeing of the sheep is the shepherd's priority. He shares tears and sweat working hard for the wellbeing of his flock. The Lord is a *hard-working* leader.

²⁹⁸ A. Clarke, as quoted in J. McClintock, J. Strong, eds., *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 3, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1894, p. 903, <http://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/G/god.html>

²⁹⁹ J. MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically*, Thomas Nelson, Incorporated, 1995, p. 12.

³⁰⁰ Cf. W.P. Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

With such abundance in every circumstance, the psalmist can gladly and confidently exclaim that he lacks nothing, that he is without deficiency quantitatively and especially qualitatively. He has more than enough to keep him moving, to keep his heart beating and his soul restored. It is that kind of abundance that did not make the Israelites necessarily rich but kept them alive, in good health and in communion with the Lord through and during the perils of the 40 desert-years (cf. Eze. 16:10-14). In the psalmist's declaration, there is no presence of any direct or specific object of need. This is a remarkable assertion of total trust. The Lord-shepherd has proven himself to be *trustworthy* and consequently the psalmist is confident, grateful, thankful, feels secure and at peace (cf. Ps. 23:2).

The peaceful atmosphere created by the Lord-shepherd through his hardworking, care and trustworthiness give *rest* to the psalmist. The Lord is a leader who gives rest to his people in order to regain strength and find refreshment. In a busy world where rest means unproductivity and laziness, we should rethink our lifestyle, find time to rest and encourage others to rest as well. Rest leads to a holistic restoration, therefore, the psalmist can say, his *soul*³⁰¹ is *restored*. Even company directors are aware that rest and productivity are entangled and inseparable. Moreover, the element of rest is theologically important as it is also linked to salvation, grace, creation, re-creation and with the 7th day Sabbath. It helps avoid burnout and to make time and refocus on our priorities with a sense of serenity.

The psalmist explicitly talks about the Lord's leadership in the second part of v. 3 of Ps. 23 when he states, «he leads me» (יְנַחֵם). A leader is a *guide*, a *pathfinder*, a *director* or in general a *visionary* who directs other individuals to the right tracks, good paths, «paths of righteousness». Here we see a wise and just leader, a faithful assistant who is not selfish nor wicked because he also has a good reputation (for his *name*'s sake). Dead or alive, our names will always follow our works (cf. Rev. 14:13).

The Lord-shepherd is a model for us also because he *still leads in difficult and dark times*. The leader in good times should continue to lead also in bad times. In the darkest hours the Lord is nearest to the psalmist. The Lord of the mountain is the same Lord of the valley. The writer, conscious and assured of the Lord's *active presence*, changes from talking *about* the Lord to talking *to* the Lord. In fact, he states, «you are with me». This active presence is shown

³⁰¹ Cf. «יְנַחֵם» in R.L. Harris; G.L. Archer, Jr; B.K. Waltke, *op. cit.*, p. 587.

by the presence of the shepherd's *rod* and *staff* that protect, guide, comfort, lead and also chastise to secure security to a safe destination. In this is love.

The Lord-shepherd is *dynamic* as he keeps switching from a gracious host (distant figure) to serving (near/close figure) as he even *touches* the head of the individual and anoints it with oil. Here we see dynamism in his *role* and in his character of *humility*. Moreover, he sees *opportunities* in hostile circumstances. In fact, in Ps. 23:5, a banquet is prepared amidst enemies. He gives a merry, cheerful and abundant *hospitality* even in hostile environments. Here, the Lord does not spend his time fighting enemies but rather by doing good to the one he cares about. He focuses on what is really important, which is the wellbeing on his loving one.

According to Ps. 23:6, a good leader is a leader of faith in God. *Surely* «goodness and mercy» pursue the psalmist in his whole existence towards the *house of God*. As the Lord-shepherd leads the believer back to him so should all leaders lead their people back to the Lord. True leadership in all sectors of life is complete when it points people back to the Lord. This is the starting and closing note of this beautiful song of Ps. 23. In order to achieve this, one needs to *feed* on the Lord's *Word* (the Bible) as sheep feed on grassy green pastures. This will give knowledge about God, understanding of his will, power to overcome any obstacles in life, and repentance of sins which lead to eternal sojourn in the house of God which symbolizes eternal life (cf. Mt. 4:4). This Word is to be «chewed» and «ruminated» (through listening, reading, studying, memorizing, meditating and contemplating on it) for better digestion which is effective and productive results in the length of days. The Word of God can also symbolize the *rod* and the *staff* which give the psalmist security and discipline.

The *house of the Lord* is also a place of fellowship as a sheep belong to a flock. Fellowship is sharing, contributing, participating, being in relationship and working for and towards a common goal. This is the kind of fellowship and partnership which is showed in the economy of the *Trinity* where three equal and coeternal Persons are in one essence. Fellowship is teamwork and a leader cannot omit this element.

As Willard affirms, «'[t]he Lord is my Shepherd' is a sentiment carved on tombstones more often than a reality written in lives»³⁰². For this reason, Jesus, the Good Shepherd's birth, his ministry, his death, his resurrection and his service in the heavenly sanctuary as he awaits to come back on earth and fulfill his promise to take us back with him to where he is staying should

³⁰² D. Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1998, p. 105.

be a leadership model to be adopted and applied in the lives of his followers (cf. Mt. 11:29). Until the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord is our shepherd and the leadership model revealed in Ps. 23 is more than relevant to us today than ever.

For *further developments* on the issue of research of the present paper, one can dive into the leadership model of Psalm 23 and compare it to some other passages of the Psalter which deals with similar issues. This would be meaningful because it would be an exercise of looking to a psalm in the psalms through comparison of thoughts, ideas, themes, backgrounds and literary devices. In this case, the fivefold division we discussed in the first chapter of this paper as well as its literary genre would be very helpful. Another insight would also be in comparing the leadership model of Psalm 23 with some leadership models in Ancient East, among kings and queens and see what novelty would be presented by Ps. 23. Since this psalm also portrays the journey of a believer, one can also look into the eschatological elements present in this psalm such as its relation to the story of redemption and the image of the *sheep* in the history of the people of Israel, the temple worship, and in the development of this imagery in the theology of the Old and New Testament.

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