

Prayer for Good Governance: A Study of Psalm 72 in the Nigeria Context

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Contextualization of Biblical texts is a priority of every exegete, who endeavors to bring the ancient scriptures to dialogue with contemporary issues. This paper, which studies Psalm 72 and a prayer composed for good governance in Anambra State Nigeria, focuses on this hermeneutical interpretation. The writer adopts a simplified literary method in Biblical research that takes cognizance of the varied poetic techniques in Psalm 72 and engages in a detailed comparative study of a Psalm composed more than two millennia ago and a prayer of our time. Such comparative study reveals a striking similar preoccupation of the composers of both texts. Both prayed for good governance of which all developing countries today are in dire need.

Keywords: Prayer; Good Governance; Psalm 72; Nigeria

Introduction

The few months prior to the gubernatorial election in Anambra State in February 2010 were chiefly marked by anxious desire of the people in this State for a stable, righteous and peaceful government in a State already noted for instability and the perilous canker of *god-fatherism*. Indeed, this situation was aggravated by the increasing number of those contesting for just the single post of governorship. The yearning for good governance was expressed by all residing or visiting any part of this predominantly Christian State of our nation. Such ardent desire initially nurtured by individuals quickly attained a common priority shared even by self-acclaimed political gangsters. In response to this yearning, a group of good-willed persons known as *Anambra State Good Governance Forum* (LAGGOF) requested the Catholic Prelates in the State to compose a prayer that all would adopt in preparation for the fast-approaching election. This prayer bears the seal of the Archbishop of Onitsha and the Metropolitan of Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province, the Most Rev. Valerian M. Okeke.

A three paragraphed petition with a filial invocation to Mary, Queen of Nigeria is worth citing here in full for its contents have some striking resemblance to many such prayers in the Bible, particularly Ps 72 chosen for this paper. In point of fact, the prayer, which, besides its English version also has a translation in the vernacular of Anambra State, is captioned, *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State*:

God our Father, you created the world in goodness, and blessed humanity with many beautiful things. We thank you for the gift of our country Nigeria, and particularly of our state Anambra. You have richly endowed this state with extraordinary human and material resources, which, if well used, would adequately provide for the well-being of the people of the state and beyond.

Unfortunately, dear Lord, due to egoistic political interests of some people, the populace of this blessed state

are in anguish. Now, as we prepare for the forthcoming elections, we perceive the activities of political gangsters, aimed at destabilizing the electoral process. Crime wave is on the increase, bringing about a general feeling of insecurity. These generate a sense of hopelessness in the people.

But you, O Lord, are our strength. If you do not guard the city, in vain do the guards keep watch. We pray that you send your unlimited love, strength and justice to save our state. Fight for us against the enemies of your people. Safeguard our electoral process, so that men of integrity may get into positions of leadership. Endow our leaders with the requisite wisdom to rule your people, guide and protect them while in office, and sustain them in good governance, so that they may lead your people to the "Promised Land". We ask this through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Mary, Queen of all nations, intercede for us that the will of God be done in our state (Anambra State Good Governance Forum, 2010).

If one applies our common concept of prayer as petition to the above, only the last part of the third paragraph deserves this name. Thanksgiving to God for the multifaceted gift bestowed on our nation and on the State in particular swiftly turns into a communal lament for the misappropriation of these gratuitous gifts of the magnanimous God and Father. Before the ejaculation invoking the maternal care of Mary, Queen of our nation, the prayer focuses on its immediate and primary intention: "Safeguard our electoral process, so that men of integrity may get into positions of leadership". Prayer for good governance of those that would be elected is articulated thus: "Endow our leaders with the requisite wisdom to rule your people, guide and protect them while in office, and sustain them in good governance. Furthermore, the obscure *final clause*, "so that they may lead your people to the 'Promised Land'" is comprehensible only from the Biblical perspective, and perhaps, the Chris-

tian belief in life after.

The author of Ps 72 expressed similar concern for the leaders of his time as he joined many other petitioners in interceding for the king. He must have been spurred on by the conviction that the welfare of the people depended on the political success of the king, who in the OT context was the viceroy of the national God. Just like the *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State*, Ps 72 begins with a universalistic divine name, *Elohim*. Both prayers address God who is the Creator of all and in whose sovereignty earthly leaders participate. The celebration of “Nigeria at fifty” should incite meaningful profound reflections on good citizenship and leadership. In a prayer for the king in Ps 72, which belongs to the literary genre of the Royal Psalm, one finds the characteristic features of a good leader wished and prayed for by a patriotic petitioner. A survey of these qualities and their implications for our nation set the tone for this paper.

Praying for the King as the Primary Context of Psalm 72

Psalm 72 belongs to a group of the OT texts (1 Sam 2, 10, Pss 28, 8; 61, 6-7; 63, 11 and 84, 8-9) that contain some prayers for the king. One of its verses reads: “May prayer be made for him continually, and may blessings invoked for him all day long” (v. 15b). Similar desire is found in 1 Tim 2, 1-2: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity”. Unlike Ps 72 that fully focuses on praying for the king, other OT prayers for the leaders are inserted in some general intercessions. In other words, the prayer for the king in these texts is one of the petitions found therein. These are, therefore, comparable to the General Intercessions or Prayer of the Faithful we have in our liturgy. For instance, at the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Word on Good Friday celebrations, the Church solemnly, in words and gestures, addresses ten different petitions to God. The ninth of these is for persons in public office:

Let us pray for those who serve us in public office, so that all men may live in true peace and freedom: Almighty and eternal God, you know the longings of men’s hearts and you protect their rights. In your goodness watch over those in authority, so that people everywhere may enjoy religious freedom, security and peace (...).

It is instructive to learn that the Church calls these leaders “those who serve us”; hence praying for them is not just a duty we owe them but also for the good of all whom they serve. While praying for these “public servants” the prayer asks for religious freedom, security and peace which are the pressing needs of every society. The penultimate position of this prayer in the General Intercession is similar to what we have in many OT prayers for the king, especially in the Book of Psalms.

In appreciation of the favour received from God, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, celebrates her joy with a Song which Mary’s *Magnificat* (Luke 1, 46-55) replicates. The ten verses of Hannah’s Song of Praise (1 Sam 2, 1-10) extol the good Lord who is the Voice of the voiceless and who brightens the face of the ill-fated. This exultation ends with a prayer, or rather a wish, expressed in these words: “The Lord will judge the ends of the

earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalts the power of his anointed” (v. 10). The synonymous parallelism in “his king” and “his anointed” conveys the relationship between God and the king. Of the three groups of people anointed in the OT (king, prophet and priest), only the king bears the title “the Anointed of the Lord”. Israel’s monarchs were visible manifestations of God’s kingship. If one follows the chronological order of events in the OT narrations, the prayer for the king in Hannah’s Song could be categorized as anachronism, that is, something that is not in harmony with the time. The prayer preceded the practice of monarchy in Israel. This could explain the reason why this prayer is inserted at the end of an extended song of praise. It is explained as a late addition in the text (Gunkel-Begrich, 1998), or that the entire text was composed and inserted in its canonical place. Verse 10, however, is not unconnected with the entire poem; it forms an inclusion with v. 1, and it fits the theological point of the song. “As Yahweh blesses the anointed king, the poet will personally experience divine support” (Klein, 1983: p. 19). This point is verifiable in other prayers for the king in the OT.

The author of Ps 28, a prayer for help and thanksgiving for help received from God, remembers the king in his implicit prayer for the leader of his people: “The Lord is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed” (v. 8). If the Lord saves the king, this lieutenant of God acts on his (God’s) behalf in being the strength of the people. As the poet of Ps 28 prays to God for his personal needs, he includes a protestation of faith in God who sustains his people through the king.

Psalm 61 is a prayer for God’s protection and the psalmist dedicates a significant part of his poem in praying for the welfare of his leader in these words: “prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generation! May he be enthroned forever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him!” (vv. 6-7) He prays for long life, steadfast love and faithfulness. These are God’s gifts to the king so that he will be able to do his work effectively for God and for the people, particularly for the petitioner who implores divine protection on himself. He obtains this through the good leadership of the king whom he believes that God will keep long in office. The background of this triple petition and of the concepts found in the Royal Psalms, which will be discussed below, is the promise of the perpetuity of the Davidic dynasty in 2 Sam 7, particularly in vv. 12-17. It was also customary in the Ancient Near East to pray for king’s long life. At the end of a prayer to Ishtar, the petitioner intercedes for the king, praying for his long life (Falkenstein-Von Soden, 1953). Another Babylonian hymn to Nana also concludes with an intercession on behalf of the king, particularly for long life (Falkenstein-Von Soden, 1953). In Psalm 72, the author prays twice for God to give the king long life (vv. 5 and 15). The *Prayer for Good governance in Anambra State* asks that God may sustain the leaders in good governance. In other words, those who govern well may continue in doing well and their office be prolonged.

In a Psalm of ardent longing for God in the temple, and of comfort and assurance in God’s presence, the poet of Psalm 63 prays for the king who supposedly has built the sacred precinct and maintains it: “But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult” (vv. 10-11). In the world of the Bible, one of the duties of the king was to erect and support the temple of the national God. He also played some important role in the cultic celebrations. This is because, sanctified by his anointing and adopted by Yahweh, he was a sacred person and seemed

thereby to be empowered to perform religious functions (De Vaux, 1994). With this in mind, one understands why the person who longs to be in God's presence in the temple prays for the well-being of the king. The continuity of the king guarantees the continuity of the place of worship.

Similar to Psalm 63 is the pilgrimage or Zion Song of Ps 84. The author prays: "Behold our Shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed" (v. 9). In this distich poem, the psalmist employs the metaphor of shield that is rarely predicated of the king (Obiorah, 2004). In fact, shield is a common metaphor for God's protection in the OT (Gen 15, 1; 2 Sam 22, 31; Pss 3, 3; 7, 10; 18, 2; 18, 35; 28, 7; etc.). The characteristic features of a shield that God bears are realized in human history through the protection that the king gives to his people. Praying for the king becomes, therefore, an important civic duty.

Psalm 72 is more elaborate in its prayer for the king than any of the texts discussed thus far. It is also special in the sense that the author, while praying for the king, delineates the qualities of good leadership which has its source only in God. Indeed, our Psalm begins by asking God to give the king that justice and righteousness that belong to God. These two are the key points of this long prayer, which relates to the readers what the contemporaries of the psalmist expected of their king. Justice and righteousness that a good leader exhibits are God's gifts that should be asked of God for the rulers. When people pray for the king, they ask for these fundamental virtues. In the *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State*, these basic features of a leader are called "requisite wisdom", because they are indispensable in the life of every leader. The poet of Psalm 72 aptly develops in its very interrelated strophes and stanzas the "requisite wisdom" of a good leader.

A Close Reading of Psalm 72

Psalm 72—A Royal Psalm

A prayer for the king as we have in Psalm 72 would naturally belong to the genre of Royal Psalms. These are Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 141, 1-11 (Gunkel-Begrich, 1998) and their internal unity deals with kings (Kraus, 1993). "All they have in common is that they are concerned with the king" (Westermann, 1984: p. 56). This is not farfetched in Psalm 72. Every part of its stichs, strophes, and stanzas is on its central theme, which is prayer for the king. Royal Psalms like Ps 72 bear a well spelt-out internal unity more than any other type of Psalm.

When taken as a unit, Royal Psalms form a repertoire of all the designations or appellations referring to the king. In them Israel's monarch is called "king" (Pss 20, 10; 21, 2.8; 45, 2.6.12; 72, 1), "YHWH's anointed" (18, 51; 20, 7; 89, 52; 132, 10), "YHWH's servant" (89, 51). Psalm 72 alone contains another title that is not found in other Royal Psalms. In its introductory verse, the monarch is called "a king's son". The sense of this appellation and its function in the entire Psalm will be duly explained below.

Many would argue and persuasively as well that the king mentioned in the Royal Psalms was no other than Israelite kings. This is because in all these Psalms the national God that the kings represent is YHWH, and their people are YHWH's people. Furthermore, the king mentioned in the Royal Psalms resides in Zion (Ps 2, 6; 20, 3; 110, 2; 132, 13), the city of YHWH (Ps 101, 8). Psalm 89, 51 specifies that the ancestor of

these king is David. With this in mind, arguments on foreign rulers in the Royal Psalms appear relatively unconvincing.

Related to this is the issue of the date of the Royal Psalms. Vivid presentations of events in the life of Israelite kings may not be outside the monarchic era; that is, pre-exilic period in the history of ancient Israel (Barbiero, 2007). "All Royal Psalms have reference to the time in which the monarchy existed in Israel; they are in origin pre-exilic—even though we cannot rule out later shaping" (Kraus, 1993: p. 57). However, Gerstenberger (2001) argues for a post-exilic date of Ps 72.

Royal Psalms, therefore, have their *life setting* in lived events of Israel's kings. Possible events are the enthronement of new ruler (Pss 2; 72; 101), special festivals like the one to which Hosea 7,5 alludes, dedication of the temple, victory in war (Pss 20; 18; 144, 1-11), thanksgiving celebrations, solemn procession with the ark (Ps 132), declaration of loyalty and taking a vow (Ps 101), a royal wedding (Ps 45). The special prayer for the king in Psalm 72 could be an item in the agenda of a solemn enthronement of a new king (Paul, 1972). While praying for him, the people articulate their expectations. If the *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State* is well preserved, many future generations could deduce from its content the life situation that engendered such prayer. They would know that there was a time when political turmoil that nearly destabilized this part of our nation was arrested by heartfelt recourse to the power of prayer. The generations to come would read from the text the fear that gripped all because of the uncertainty of the awaited electoral process.

Structure of Psalm 72

There is often so much to elicit from correct analysis of the structure of a text, especially the OT poems like the Psalms. The meanings of these poems are embedded in their structure. When a text still retains its original form, unaltered by redactors or editors in the course of its transmission, its structure portrays the artistry of its composer (Kselman, 1975). Many affirm that the text of Psalm 72 did not suffer so much from editorial conjectures. This means that the Hebrew version of this Psalm resembles the original text.

Psalm 72 is the last Psalm of Book II in the Psalter. Like every other Psalm that ends each of the five books of the Psalter (Pss 1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150), there is also a doxology at the end of our Psalm (vv. 18-19), and a postscript in the final verse: "The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended" (v. 20). Terrien (2003) separates v.18 from this doxology and joins it to the fifth stanza. Whatever may be his reason for this, other similar doxologies at the end of each book of the Psalter remains plausible evidence for making the poem proper of Ps 72 end in v. 17. Apart from these two verses, which most probably are not part of the original text, but editorial glosses appended at some stages in the redaction of the Psalter, Psalm 72 has five stanzas with clear stanza markers. These stanzas are vv. 1-4; 5-7; 8-11; 12-14; 15-17 (Girard, 1994). The view that v. 1 should be a mono-strophe stanza because it is the only verse that has imperative and that it encapsulates the message of the Psalm (Wilson, 2002) should not be discarded. However, no one doubts this observation because every Psalm has a well-calculated introduction, usually the first sentence in the poem. Psalm 72 is not an exception. In fact, early Christian interpretation of the Psalms names each text according to its key text, which is often from the first line of the Psalm. A very good

example is the name of Psalm 51, *Miserere*.

In Psalm 72, v. 1 introduces the entire text but in a particular manner it forms an integral part of the first stanza. The psalmist asks for divine justice and righteousness for the king. With these two the king will judge the people, and his righteous judgment will have some cosmic effect (v. 2). His “requisite wisdom”, according to *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State*, extends to those who are in dire need of it (v. 4).

In vv. 5-7 the petitioner prays for long life for the king and specifies that it is not quantity but quality that is required. The long life asked should not be empty oppressive reign but should be filled with concrete good works. In point of fact, fruitful long life is the prayer intention in this second stanza (Ravasi, 1996).

The third major division, vv. 8-11, concentrates on the international fame of the king. If he does well internally, the whole world would not fail to recognize him. In other words, his fame will reach the four corners of the earth because of how he organizes his internal affairs.

The poet returns to the initial prayer point of vv. 1-4 in the fourth stanza (vv. 12-14), but from a new perspective and context. Actually, vv. 12-14 have strong affinity with the preceding vv. 8-11. The whole world would recognize the leader and pay him homage (vv. 8-11) because he exhibits marks of good leadership in his realm (vv. 12-14).

The final stanza (vv. 15-17) begins with a prayer for long life as in the second stanza. This fifth stanza, however, is more concrete and does not use metaphors as in vv. 5-7. The king lives to fulfill the expectations of his people and of God in whose sovereignty he participates. These expectations should be the positive impacts of good leadership. The king remains in office for this purpose.

Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State is organized in three stanzas with a final Marian invocation characteristic of Catholic prayer. This intercession, like Psalm 72 has its internally unified structure. The first stanza prepares for the second and the second for the petition in the third stanza. In the first paragraph of this prayer that is addressed to God the Father, we acknowledge the manifold gifts of our nation and in particular of this part of our country. The prayer subtly echoes the words of Ps 65, 9: “you visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it”. A prolepsis at the end of this stanza anticipates the content of the second paragraph which is on misappropriation of God’s gifts by those in power. Their action impoverishes those whom God has generously enriched. The content of the third paragraph is necessary because of the general feeling of hopelessness engendered by perverse leadership. In similar manner, the author of Psalm 72 prays and wishes that his people may not be victims of vicious leadership.

The Message of Psalm 72

A very short superscription attributes Psalm 72 to Solomon. The only other Psalm with this name is Psalm 127. Perhaps, the traditional connection of Ps 72 with Solomon could be derived from the phrase “a king’s son” in v.1 and Solomon’s prayer for wisdom and righteous rule in 1 Kings 3, 6-15 (Wilson, 2002). We bear in mind always that superscriptions on the Psalms are traditional interpretations and applications of these texts and might have nothing to do with authorship.

Besides the superscription, Ps 72 being the last Psalm of the Book II of the Psalter contains an elaborate doxology (vv. 18-

19) and a post-script (v. 20) which is found only here in the Book of Psalms. The doxology here and at the end of the other books of the Psalter might have inspired the use of doxology in Christian prayers beginning from the Early Church, particularly as observed in *The Didache* 9, 1-10, 6 (Van de Sandt-Flusser, 2002). Each of the five stanzas of Ps 72 contains a specific message of the text, which we attempt in the following paragraph to elucidate.

Just and Righteous Leadership (vv. 1-4)

The king in Ps 72 is first called “king” and then “son of a king”. Though the phrase “son of a king” could be an allusion to Solomon and a basis for the attribution in the superscription, this title at the beginning of a Royal Psalm, particularly in a prayer for good leadership is significant. It is not only an appropriate title, but also the only fitting one for the ideal king portrayed in this text. It points at the legitimacy of the king. He did not come to the throne through fraudulency or usurpation, or in our parlance, through rigging the election. According to the poet, he is the successor of his father, who was also a king. The importance of this title lies in the fact that we have here the foundation of every good leadership (Human, 2002). In the *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State*, this was the preoccupation of the citizenry when February 2010 was approaching and the echo of the words, “safeguard our electoral process, so that men of integrity may get into position of leadership”, resounded in all homes and parishes.

Men and women of integrity could obtain their “requisite wisdom” if they recognize that their position of leadership has its origin in God. He gives wisdom to rule. “Justice” and “righteousness” which the psalmist asks of God for the king in v. 1 are the foundation on which good governance is built. The Hebrew version of this verse presents “justice” *mišpāt* in the plural form *mišpātim*. The Septuagint and the Syriac Peshitta translate this with a singular noun. This plural form appears strange in the text; but a close reading reveals the intention of the composer. It refers to the various aspects of this fundamental virtue of justice. In fact, it is vital that it occurs in this plural form at the beginning of a poem that focuses so much on the different manifestations of justice. Good governance is founded on administration of justice (Alonso & Carniti, 1992). It is a constant teaching of the OT Wisdom Literature, especially the Book of Proverbs (cf. 8, 15.16; 16, 12; 20, 26; 20, 28; 25, 5; 29, 14) and on the divine law which Dukor (2010: p. 30), writing in the context of African culture, describes in these words: “The Divine law is impartial. Fortunate and unfortunate developments were believed to take the course of natural justice”.

The first stanza presents these different ways by which justice could be exercised. Triple act of good leadership in v. 4 include first, “to defend the cause of the poor of the people”; second, “to give deliverance to the needy”; finally, “to crush the oppressor”. Where these are practiced, there is equity among people (2 Sam 8, 15; Pss 101; 122, 5). In the words of the author of Ps 72, 3, when justice and righteousness exist, there is natural equilibrium; mountains yield prosperity for the people. “Abundance of natural crops, especially on the mountains and hills, also belongs to the royal ideology” (Terrien, 2003: p. 519). Where there are justice and righteousness, crime wave would not be on the increase; and a general feeling of insecurity will be held at bay. People plant their crops and joyfully reap the fruit of their labour. Material resources would adequately be

provided for the well-being of the people. “The possibility of ordering, protecting, and supporting a social unit depended on the use of power for the corporate group” (Mays, 1994: p. 236). The psalmist reflects on the fact that “protection of the poor and universal peace are traditionally the benevolent capacities of monarchs” (Terrien, 2003: p. 519). Hence, there is need to pray for the king, especially for fruitful long life.

Fruitful Long Life (vv. 5-7)

To pray for long life of the king presupposes that the king is already on the right track, exercising justice and righteousness, which are manifestations of his “requisite wisdom”. Otherwise, it would be unnecessary praying that he remains in office. In the second stanza of our Psalm, the petitioner prays for fruitful long leadership of a just and righteous king. Just like the perennial sun and moon, which never fail in their divinely assigned functions, the king lives to do his work of protecting God’s people. It is, indeed, hyperbole to liken the long duration of the king’s reign to sun and moon (Alonso & Carniti, 1992). Similar use of this particular figure of speech in Ps 89, 37, however, shows that Ps 72 would not have sounded strange to its audience.

Two similes in v. 6 underscore this desire for fruitful long reign of the king. First, good governance is like rain that falls on the mown grass. Second, it is like showers that water the earth. Only a person that has experienced aridity in the land of the Bible will appreciate the image which the psalmist is evoking by using these similes. Both refer to fertility and prosperity brought by refreshing rain. There is leap of great joy among the people when their dry patched land is blessed with early precipitation that gives hope for abundant harvest. Good governance is compared to this. This symbol is recurrent in the OT, particularly in the prophets (Isa 45, 8; 52, 7; 55, 12; 61, 11; Ezek 36, 8; Micah 6, 1-2; Joel 2, 23-24; Ps 85, 12). In Ps 72, “they pray for the life of the king in order that the king may give them life which enables them, in turn, to pray” (Tate, 1990: 226). Correspondingly, writing on happiness in life in African context, Dukor (2012: p. 172) conveys: “In Africa, happiness in life is predominantly sought in the enjoyment of beauty where beauty presents itself to our senses and our judgment, the beauty of human forms and gestures, of natural objects and landscapes and of artistic and even scientific creations”.

Similarly, in the *Prayer for Good for Good Governance in Anambra State* the people pray that God may sustain the leaders in good governance, so that they may lead them to the “Promised Land”. If the term “Promised Land” is metaphorical here, as one would expect, it could be interpreted as a symbol of that peaceful and prosperous life for which the people constantly and ardently yearn.

Universal Reign of the King (vv. 8-11)

The map showing the boundaries of the king’s kingdom is presented in this stanza as “from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth”. Other occurrences (Ps 80, 2; Gen 15, 18; Exod 23, 31; Deut 1, 7; 11, 24; 1 Kgs 5, 1.4-5; 1 Chr 9, 26) of similar description of the world show that this map is an ideal borders of the kingdom of David and Solomon (Ravasi, 1996). “Psalm 72 gives the most precise definition of the realm in which the anointed one is responsible” (Seybold, 1990: p. 181).

According to some interpretations, “from sea to sea” indicates from the Red Sea in the south to the Mediterranean in the

north; or from the Dead Sea in the east to the Mediterranean in the west; from Euphrates in the east to the ends of the land in the west (Ravasi, 1996). This description, however, depends on where the writer was at the time when he composed his poem. In addition, one perceives in the text an allusion to God’s promise to Abram: “I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Gen 12, 2). This blessing is realized or reached its apex in the time of the United Kingdom of Israel.

In v. 10 specific important places in this vast kingdom are mentioned. First is Tarshish which represents the part of the world on the west of Palestine (Ps 48, 8; Isa 23, 1; 60, 9; 66, 19; Jonah 1, 3; 4, 2). Tarshish was one of the four sons of Javan, the son of Japheth who was a great-grandson of Noah (Gen 10, 4). His descendants are associated with maritime countries in the Mediterranean and Aegean (Baker, 1992). Another place mentioned in the text is Sheba. At the time of Solomon it was the Queen of Sheba that came to Jerusalem with camels loaded with spices, gold and precious stones (1 Kgs 10, 2a; 2 Chr 9, 1). In Ps 72, kings of Sheba will bring gifts to YHWH’s anointed. Sheba is said to be in the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula (Ricks, 1992). Seba that is also mentioned is located in the southern part of Arabia. Isles in the text indicates all the Islands in the Mediterranean coast (Ps 97, 1; Isa 11, 11; 24, 15; 40, 15; 41, 1-5; 42, 4.6). This covers all the places on the western part of Palestine. According to the author of Ps 72, all the kings from these places and beyond will be subject to the king, and the king, in turn, will be able to extend his protection to all of them. The wish expressed here for the extension of the power of the king’s dominion should not be interpreted as a mere political megalomania (Weiser, 1962). He will be able to do this because of his charisma of justice and righteousness that have their origin in God.

Marks of Good Leadership (vv. 12-14)

In a three poetic lines of synonymous distich in each of them, the poet articulates in his ardent desire for good governance what can be recognized as marks of good leadership. The synonymous parallelisms in each of the distich strengthen the message contained therein. Good leadership, according to the poet, makes the defense of the less privileged of the society a top priority. In this stanza (vv. 12-14) of our poem, the psalmist presents the various groups of those who should need the attention of the king more than others. Each group is matched with a corresponding and appropriate action of the king.

In v. 12 the first action of the king is expressed in the root *nšl* of the *hiphil* pattern with the meaning “to pull out”, “extricate”, “rescue”. The recipients of this action in the words of the psalmist are those he depicts as *’eb̄yôn*, that is, the needy, poor, oppressed, those in want and abused. In adding a *piel* participle of the root *šw’* (“to cry for help”), the poet further vivifies the situation of this social class. In the next stich the action of a good leader expressed by the root *nšl* extends to another group of the needy called *’ānî*, that is, a person overwhelmed by want, poor, wretched, unfortunate. The third phrase *’ēn ’ozēn lô* “one without helper” describes the third group. The syntagma with *’ēn* followed by a singular noun as we have here has been explained as categorical negation (Joüon-Muraoka, 2006). Perhaps, the position of this phrase at the end of the stich is to give a fitting portrait of the preceding *’eb̄yôn* and *’ānî*; these groups of downtrodden are persons without helper. The role of the king

is to extricate them from their deplorable situation.

In v. 13 the psalmist adds to his repertoire of Hebrew terms for the less privileged the adjectival noun *dal* “helpless”, “powerless”, “insignificant”, “poor”, “dejected”, as he repeats the term he has already used, *'ebyôn*, first as a singular noun, and then in a plural form *'ebyônîm*. These two in the text are accompanied by two verbs of actions of a good king. The first verb is from the root *ḥws* which in the Hebrew Bible is employed only in the *qal* pattern and bears the meaning “to look compassionately at”. Compassionate feeling should culminate in palpable action; hence the poet adds another and frequent verb of deliverance *yš'* used in the *hiphil* here with the meaning “to save”, “rescue”. It is impressive to note that the direct object of this second verb is *nepeš* (here in plural *napšôt*) of the *'ebyônîm*. It indicates the life, with all the connotations of this term, of the person involved. The two verbs and their corresponding direct objects are chiasmatically arranged in order to highlight the message of the poetic line and the stanza in general. An outstanding mark of a good leader is to save and preserve life, especially the life of persons who because of their social status are unable to help or defend themselves.

In v. 14 constructive emphasis on the situation of all the groups of the exploited mentioned in the two preceding verses might have engendered the emphatic position of the two terms, *tok* “oppression” and *ḥāmās* “violence”, at the beginning of this line. From both possible fates of the less privileged a good leader should redeem (*g'*) their life. He does this because their blood is precious in his sight. In other words, preservation of human life takes precedence over any other royal act. In summarizing the contents of this stanza, v. 14 concludes the psalmist's concept of marks of good leadership. Life is precious and should be protected and cared for at all just costs (John Paul II, 2004). The king participates in the divine attributes as preserver of human life.

The mark of good leadership for which the petitioner in Ps 72 fervently desires is concretized in an ancient hymn that describes the reign of Ramses IV:

Those who have fled return to their towns,
 Those who have hidden showed themselves again;
 Those who had been hungry were fed,
 Those who had thirsty were given drink;
 Those who had been naked were clad,
 Those who had been ragged were clothed in fine garments;
 Those who were in prison were set free,
 Those who were in bond were filled with joy (De Vaux, 1994).

It is the desire of every nation to be blessed with good leaders. *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State* asks God for the same when the people pray for “requisite wisdom” for their leaders. It is wisdom to know what to do and to have the will to do it. The first manifestation of this wisdom in leadership is to care for all under one's authority, especially for those who are in most need of help.

Renewed Prayer for Fruitful Long Life (vv. 15-17)

This last part of the prayer for good governance in Ps 72 takes the form of wishful desires for the ideal king presented in the text. It is all in the jussive beginning with the exclamation, “Long may he live!” (v. 15) The petitioner prays for long life,

prosperity (v. 15b), that all may continually intercede for the king (v. 15c), for the well-being of his entire kingdom, abundance of all under his jurisdiction who are most in need of (v. 16), and for enduring reign of this just and righteous king (v. 17).

The unity of these three verses is essentially marked by an envelope figure, an inclusion, deducible from verses 15a and 17. The exclamation, “Long may he live”, of v. 15a corresponds with the prayer that the king's name, that is, his reputation, may endure forever. Still in the same two verses, the gold of Sheba of v. 15b parallels other nations that will recognize the fame of the king and pronounce him blessed (v. 17). There is here without a doubt an allusion to the reign of Solomon; this could explain the attribution of this Psalm to Solomon as one can read in its superscription.

One of the points raised in this stanza is the necessity of praying for leaders always: “May prayer be made for him continually and blessings invoked for him all day long” (v. 15). We have already seen above the many OT texts, especially in the Psalter, where petitioners include short prayers for the king in their individual and communal prayers. They believe that the interests of the king are theirs too. It is indeed an act of faith to pray for the king, because such prayers come from the conviction that kings are God's representatives. They execute the will of God for the people. Being God's anointed, they bear marks of God whom they represent on earth. God's attributes, particularly those derived from divine acts of protection and care for his people are manifested in every God-fearing king.

This explains why in vv. 15-17, particularly in vv. 15-16 prayer for the wellbeing of the king is immediately followed by a prayer for the land and for the people that live therein (v. 16). This second part of the prayer could be the ultimate aim of every prayer for good governance. In fact, the people pray for their leaders so that they may exercise their duties conscientiously. Impact of this is the wellbeing of the subjects. The blessings that should be invoked for the king continually, according to v. 15c, is explained in v. 16. These blessings include abundance of grain in the land. In other words, in good governance this basic human need is diligently provided. The author of Psalm 72 underscores this when he further describes “abundance of grain” with another desire: “may it have on the tops of the mountains”. The well-watered and fertile Lebanon becomes almost proverbial in the text. Abundance of grain in the land is comparable to “fruit of Lebanon”. A land with such abundance will certainly have people that blossom like grass of the field (v. 16).

The first and second paragraphs of *Prayer for good Governance in Anambra State* are almost a lament because there is abundance of everything in the state, but “the populace of this blessed state are in anguish”. They are in anguish because the extraordinary human and material resources are not well used, and the leaders do not provide for the wellbeing of the people. There is, therefore, urgent need for God's intervention in the life of the citizens.

“Long may he live” that the psalmist earnestly desires for the king, according to v. 15, is for fruitful reign of a good king who holds his people in his hearts, and provides for them. His blessings will be manifested in his people. In this way his fame will continue as long as the sun endures (v. 17), that is, forever; a hyperbole that profoundly reveals the deepest yearning of the petitioner for good leadership.

So Much in Good Governance

In a prayer of petition, it is easy to perceive the deepest aspirations of the petitioner. These desires are often articulated in various ways. Some can take the form of entreaty directed to God, imploring him for specific needs in specific life situations of the supplicant. This is supplication that contains the intention of the prayer. The author of Ps 72 does this in the introductory verse of his poem which contains the only imperative verb, *tēn* from the root *ntn*, in the text. In *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State*, such direct petitions are presented in the third paragraph of the text and with verbs in the imperative mood: “fight for us...”, “safeguard our electoral process...”, “endow our leaders...”, “guide and protect them...”, “sustain them...”. All these reflect the desperate need of the people in their life situation. Apart from direct address to God, petition in prayer can also be expressed as desires with verbs in jussive. Many of the verses of Ps 72 are in this category. The psalmist makes his wishes part of his petition.

Another form of petition seen in the *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State* is description of some life situation of the petitioners. The aim of such detailed description is to implore God who sees all and can ameliorate such situations. This is the focus of the second paragraph of this prayer: instability in the state has been generated by political gangsters. In Ps 72 this is presented positively in vv. 12-14 which is on marks of good governance, and extols the king. The psalmist portrays the expected qualities of the ideal king in his poem.

From Ps 72 and what one can deduce from *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State*, the first mark of good governance is authenticity of persons who occupy this post of service. The author of Ps 72 prays for “a king’s son” (v. 1). In other words, he prays for one who ascends the throne lawfully. Similarly in *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State*, the people express their desire for successful electoral process, knowing that this is the foundation of good governance. Leaders should be those elected by the people and not those who forced their way to this post. Unfortunately, this has been the case in many sectors of government in our nation. Political instability, which we have experienced all these years in our nation, can be attributed to undue craving for power by persons who selfishly desire and assume posts of which in normal course of events they should not be given. Their ulterior motives are manifested in their egoistic attitude. This explains the many instances of fraudulent actions by people in authority, elimination of real or imagined rivals, and negligence of duty especially towards those they should care for and protect.

Justice and righteousness for which the author of Ps 72 prays on behalf of the king have been explained above as divine attributes. Leaders share in these attributes in virtue of their office as God’s representatives on earth. A good leader sees his office as participation in God’s leadership. Every authority comes from him. In a crucial moment in the life of Jesus, when Pilate sees only the human aspect of the Roman authority he bears and claims in these words: “Do you not know that I have power to release you and power to crucify you” (John 19, 10), Jesus instructs him on the divine origin of every earthly leadership: “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above” (John 19, 11). Corruption and corrupt use of power would very much abate if those in authority become aware of the divine origin and gift of the service they should render to others. Both leaders and “the led” suffer unde-

servedly where God is relegated to the outskirts of the society. Leaders suffer the pain of claiming what does not belong to them. The subjects, “the led”, suffer because of the actions of their leaders (Doma, 2007).

Where the divine origin of human authority is recognized, leaders exhibit the expected divine qualities in their actions. Marks of good leadership stated in Ps 72, 12-14 are copiously attributed to God in both the OT and the NT. He is the God of the voiceless. He continues this fatherly care through good leaders who acknowledge the divine origin of their authority. The grace and the strength to be the voice of the less-privileged come solely from God. Consequently, the primary task of every leader is to give life to those under him; this life knows no exemption for it embraces all under his realm of office.

Conclusion

When the purpose of existence of anyone or thing is achieved, or there is an effort to accomplish such purpose, peace, the Biblical concept of *shalom*, is felt by all. It is, indeed, one of the ardent desires of human beings that all creatures fulfill that purpose for which they have been created. In particular, everyone longs for the experience of good leadership, which is a great source of human happiness, both personal and communal. The expectations of good governance are well known to all (Azeez, 2009) with the effect that these can easily be transformed into earnest petitions, especially when they are not forthcoming, or when a new leader is about to assume the office.

Psalm 72 studied in this paper in the context of similar petition in our contemporary society, *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State*, is an example of human yearning for coherence in life. Leadership is for a purpose; it is meant for the wellbeing of all, both leaders and those they lead. In the world of the author of Psalm 72, there was a strong belief that authority was of divine origin. In fact, theocracy persisted even when human beings were leaders. These human rulers were perceived as representatives of God. Prayers were offered on their behalf so that they might effectively carry out their responsibility. These petitions were also in a way for all because of the conviction that the welfare of the monarch was also that of the people. In these prayers, especially those in Psalm 72, the deep aspirations of the petitioners are articulated.

Similarly, in *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State*, the citizens knew what they wanted and addressed their petitioner to God from whom every authority comes. They directed their entreaty according to the precarious situation in which they found themselves. In Psalm 72 and *Prayer for Good Governance in Anambra State* the petitioners delineated features of good governance expected of every leader. These qualities concentrate on protection of human life, which should indeed be the aim of every leadership and evidence of the fulfillment of its divinely ordained purpose.

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