

Poverty and Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

Poverty and insecurity is a trait of developing nations or third world countries and this is quite evident in the 21st century Nigeria. It is expedient to see that the effect of poverty and insecurity had eaten deep into the Fabric of the country (Nigeria) to the extent that virtually every individual can feel the effect around the atmosphere of the country. Nigeria, known as a giant of Africa is now becoming a shadow of herself because of these two phenomena which has eaten deep to the nation and has brought a huge depreciation to the country. As such, the book of Psalm 23 which centers on a discourse about the activities of a shepherd to the sheep is employed as a manual to fall back on in order to still see hope in the obscure state of the nation's deteriorated state of being.

Key Words: Poverty, Insecurity, Shepherd, Yahweh, Nigeria.

Introduction

From the understanding of mineral resources and national assets, Nigeria is seen to be greatly blessed by nature and this is traceable to God's divine providence for Nigerians. These assets had been there even before anyone occupied the land and luckily, the Nigerians were the fortunate individuals to have occupied the land, and this is thanks to the combined effort of amalgamating the basic tribes which cover the six geo-political zones of the nation.

But despite the natural endowment given to Nigeria by God, it is so disheartening that a paradox of what ought to be happening is what is happening. One would hope that, Nigeria, being blessed with so much natural assets would be a nation of unique force to reckon with and by this 21st century season, it should have been classified a developed nation. Instead, the national Bureau of Statistics, according to Josiah Adesope, paints a grim picture in 2016 which covers about three quarter of the year's analysis that, 27.1 million citizens are unemployed, manufacturing companies are closing down; others are shedding jobs in an effort to stay afloat. Revealing that, (Adesope, 2018:10) the country is in a state of deterioration.

The World poverty Clock (world poverty clock is a tool being employed to monitor the progressive war against poverty globally and regionally. It presents a data to be used in understanding the level of poverty across nations) have it that, Nigeria is almost topping the list of nations with high rate of poverty as there is approximately an increase of six people per minute falling into poverty stage and even if there is possibly an improvement, the figure will improve to three people per minute. This is an indication that by 2030, the level of poverty would have increased more greatly if the economic situation of the country persists to be in the current state it is at 2018 when the forecast was made.

To this effect, this work is set to address the issue of insecurity and poverty in Nigeria from a theological point of view and thereby creating a biblical response to the situation in order to rectify the issue of restlessness in the nation. Using Psalm 23, a reading of the passage in the light of these cankerworms in the nation will help to see, where the country got it wrong and how to rectify the *sitz im leben* of the country.

Definition of Contextual Terms

Poverty: poverty is the quality or state of being poor or indigent; in want or scarcity of means of subsistence. According to Famoyin

(2007), the poor lacks the means to satisfy the basic needs of life. They do not have personal assets necessary to produce income and wealth. Poverty is basically one out of many contemporary social conundrums which is actually affecting Nigeria as a third world (or developing) country. Poverty is a situation of complete lack of minimal source of living. Judging by the American standard, about eighty five percent (85%) of Nigerians are poor. This gives birth to incidence of high involvement of her citizens in criminal activities such as corruption, bribery and all types of immoral conducts. (George and Ukpong: 2013).

Averagely, a poor individual is said to be unable to meet his daily needs. Basically a poor individual lacks what it takes to have a three square meal in a day and this can be transferred or interpreted in the light of a family vis-à-vis a poor family is unable to meet her basic daily needs. The phenomena are practically dominant in African and Asian countries and it had been a dominant factor over centuries in these parts of the world. Poverty might be traceable in other parts of the world likewise, but it is predominant in these two continents.

Insecurity: This is a state of being prone to danger. It connotes the idea of being subjected to vulnerability and uncertainty. The state of being insecure could be seen in light of an individual being strip of his or her clothing thereby being exposed to cold. This represents what the state of insecurity looks like as danger is always not far from an insecure environment. The absence of security is the presence of phobia and lack of rest of mind as there would be no peaceful relaxation by the individuals in the insecure situation.

Poverty in Nigeria: An Assessment

Poverty is known to be inability of man to meet his daily needs. Poverty has aggravated the tension of better living among habitants of the nation and this has posed a great threat to lives and properties. One can relate with a lot of ethnic rivalry, religious disputes inter-communal rivalry which in most cases had led to shedding of bloods

of fellow humans. In affirmation of this position, Adetula (2006:392) relates that, poverty has not only been able to reduce the ability of people to lead productive lives in Nigeria, but also exacerbated identity conflicts along communal, ethnic, religious and regional lines.

Poverty is also promoted in the nation due to laziness of the citizenry. Taking a random look at the workforce of the nation, there is a huge disparity between the Nigerian workforce diligence and developed nations workforce. The Nigerian workers in most cases are more concerned only with “what they can gain from the country” and not “what the country can gain from them” or “what they can do for the country” thereby making only a form of ‘extortion’ (by extortion, the researcher mean being complacent and not being diligent to their responsibility to the nation. They only canvass for their wage even when they have not done the task diligently) to the country. Many youths today are seen to be relaxed with the state of things and not ready to do anything to rectify the issue of economy degradation and recession.

The use of social media should originally be meant to improve the society, but a cursory look at the use of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter among others) by young Nigerians today is apt on doing useless things that could literally promote poverty instead of utilizing the positive side of these inventions. As such, the youths which are to be the strength of the nation are busy flaunting their pictures and making unscrupulous posts on the internet.

The education level of Nigeria is high (at least from annual statistics of tertiary institution students and even students sitting for JAMB examination annually) but, the pragmatic aspect of what is being learnt in schools are quite incomparable as the end product is nothing to write home about. The failure to be pragmatic about what had been learnt in schools to better the society is a great catalyst for poverty in the nation and it will not alleviate the poverty level.

There are lots of factors responsible for poverty in a society which has been explored above, but predominantly, poverty is caused by unemployment and overpopulation. These two factors are so important to the level of increase of poverty in the land. The formal denies citizens that are ready to work an opportunity to work at all, because of the absence of work to engage in while the latter chokes the available resources that it would not be sufficient to go round and as such, only a very few individuals are privileged to have access to the little resources and opportunities that are available.

Poverty is not limited to Nigeria, as a matter of fact; it is almost a unique nature for most African countries. Leonard (2013) in his master's Dissertation expressed the causative catalyst for poverty in Cameroon, in his words; the majority of Cameroonians suffer directly or indirectly from corruption. They live in poverty and the poverty level is a result of political economic and moral corruption.

This phenomenon of corruption is traceable in many African nations and over the years it has been a basic factor for retrogression in the continent. Corruption as it concerns selfishness, nepotism, favoritism among other factors are responsible for the poverty level of the nation. African generally could be regarded with the popular saying that "The rich got richer, while the poor become poorer". This in a wide extent has affected the equilibrium level of the nation and thus, there is no balance.

It could then be seen that poverty could metamorphose into promoting social vices and afterwards lead to insecure state of a particular community or nation and that is the current state of most areas of the 21st century Nigeria. Better put, poverty can lead to insecurity in a society and the effect is vastly wide on the larger society involved.

Insecurity in Nigeria: An Assessment

According to Ekpenyong (2011:96), it is now widely accepted that violent conflict is the major hindrance to the development of the

African continent and Nigeria in particular. It inflicts human sufferings through death, destruction of livelihoods, constant displacement and insecurity. Presenting the length at which insecurity has eaten deep the shores of the country. Violence is the other of the day; in virtually all daily News being cast on the cable or in the Newspaper, there have always been cases of life loss or security challenge for one person or the other

Insecurity is a phenomenon that can distort the *modus operandi* (mode of operation) of a community or country, turning it to operate as an anathematized society because, trust and reliance upon one another between the citizenry will be lacking and rather than proper democracy anarchy would be in action as there would be vices looming in the society.

An insecure society might have a rule of law but the symbol of justice will be faulty as there would be a great threat upon the judiciary to pervert justice in favor of the wealth. For an insecure society, the affluent will continue to enjoy maximum protection as the pauper would continue to experience injustice and majorly be the victims of danger. But, the state of insecurity in Nigeria today is more complicated because, both the affluent and the pauper, literate and illiterate, elites and common men are prone to danger. Mass killings makes no selection, victims of robbery attacks on the road know no social class; rape victims are not limited to a class of the society among others.

The level of insecurity in Nigeria has risen to the level that, even the religious sectors are not left out of the 'national cake'. Various News of Religious leaders, monarchs, society leaders among other renowned figures of the society being abducted are over the country's information institutions (cable news, Newspapers, Radio news, online news etcetera) in which, some of these victims were released after receiving a huge ransom and some murdered in the course of the operation.

Nnaemeka *et al* (2015) are of the opinion that globally, some countries of the world, especially the third world countries are currently experiencing political, economic and social insecurity, and these insecurities is orchestrated by the current leadership of these countries which is a deviation of the wishes and aspirations of the colonial fathers and leaders of these countries. In order words, the level of insecurity is not limited to one sphere or aspect of the country but instead, it cut across so many spheres of the countries operational activities and this has gone a long way in causing a ‘backward run’ of the country.

A very disheartening effect (generally, insecurity of the nation has no palatable effect to the citizenry at large) of the insecurity state in Nigeria is that, it hinders progress and it even cause set back to the nation. In light of this, Anikpo (2007:168) opines that, the instability engendered by the frequent inter-ethnic violence has direct bearing on the country’s development prospects. Not only that it creates an un-enabling environment for productive activity, it destroys what has already been achieved. In the words of Anikpo, it causes a reduction in items that are already in existence. Instead of promotion, insecurity brings demolition; instead of progress, insecurity brings about demolition; instead of development, insecurity brings destruction and depression.

Exegetical Note on Psalm 23:1

Brief Background to the Text

This psalm by David is a unique one in that, it is a widely read by Christians and it appears to the most memorized chapter by Christians. Psalm 23 is a passage that deals with the a man (David) who trusted and depended solely on God even as a brave young man who was able to confront the lion and the bear when they attacked the sheep he was shepherding, he was still able to depend solely on God as the source and backbone of his security in his situation.

Nggada (2012) in his Doctorate Thesis in the University of Jos, Nigeria is seen to have analyzed some scholarly thoughts on the subject of authorship for this passage and since, the authorship will go a long way in affecting the work, the position of Keller (15) and Yilpet (21), as quoted by Nggada, where both scholars suggested exegetical evidence looking at the superscription for the construction לְדָוִד the preposition לְ may mean the following – “belonging to David”, “to David”, “for David” and “in honor of David” is not far from the truth and since, there is the use of LORD (Yahweh) in the text, the key figure standing in the role of the shepherd can only be God and not David. Adeyemo (26) opines that David who “was a shepherd boy, musician, warrior and king,” wrote the Psalm and others making a total of 73 Psalms out of the 150 Psalms in the Psalter. As such, this paper agrees with the school of thought that, David is the author of the text.

In approaching the text, some scholars like Gunkel and others have placed this Psalm as a psalm of trust or confidence due to the “flavor” found in the work while some others in agreement with Craigie has it that, the Psalm is communal psalm. Although, the latter approach by Craigie had been criticized based on the shallow exegetical rudiment discovered in the conclusion of that school of thought but more understanding is and clarification could be seen from the former approach made by Gunkel and others as it is more evident that the psalm is of confidence or trust. It could also be discovered that the psalm is being classified as one of the royal psalms under the types of psalms that the entire book of psalm is classified into.

Historically, various scholars have individually conducted an excellent work in clarifying the ANE context of this psalm. And though not all individuals approaching this text does that, it is important for grasping the meaning of the Psalm in its original historical context to know that the duo of Egyptians and Mesopotamians used the image of a shepherd culturally for their kings, their gods, or both. The concluding part of a famous Hammurabi code presents a king stating clearly that: “I made the

people lie down in safe pastures; I did not allow anyone to frighten them”. Just like many other texts in the Old Testament, which have parallels from writings gotten in the ancient near eastern documents, the epilogue of the Hammurabi document is almost a literal parallel of the text in consideration.

From a close reading of the psalm and a close understanding of the choices of words, it is very obvious that the Psalmist in this passage was under serious stress. Goldingay (2006:323) in making his comment about the text explained that, it may imply that we are invited to imagine David using it when pressure (e.g.) from Saul or imagine a latter “David” such as Hezekiah using in “Setting such as that in 2 Kings 18-20. Thus, it affirms that the Psalmist was in a very fixed position where the possibility of giving up was glaring since man power and attempts appears to have failed. This could also be seen in the Light of Jesus’ state of being while in the garden of Gethsemane where he was to be subjected to death and punishments and as such he knew that only a great strengthening which is divine could intervene in the case and as such, Jesus could have also sang this psalm.

Literarily, some commentators including Bruce (1986) denied the extension of the shepherd’s metaphorical expression in which they are of the opinion that the picture of a shepherd in action is viewed from the first four verses. But this work denies that as a truth since, the last two verses (5 and 6) are only an expression of a greater love a shepherd for his sheep thereby making the enemies to be helpless due to his (shepherd) presence.

Some view towards the passage are of the opinion that there are divisions in the chapter, where verses 1-2 is referring to the ‘Shepherd’, verses 3-4, is regarding to the Wanderer and the last two verses refers to a ‘Host’. But this work is basically throwing its weight behind the observation that, the entire chapter is centered on the activities of the shepherd towards his sheep.

Exegetical Analysis of the Text Psalm 23:1

In approaching this text exegetically, this work will deal with it from the perspective of making a breakdown of the verse into two sections and at the latter end a link will be made to connect both divisions for the purpose of this paper. (A) The shepherd personalized (verse 1a) (B) The providing shepherd (verse 1b). Hebrew writing of the passage:

אֶהְיֶה לַיהוָה לְדֹגֵד מִזְמוֹר

English Translation: A Psalm of David the LORD is my shepherd I shall want not

The Shepherd Personalized (verse 1a)

The first part of the verse “The Lord is my Shepherd” is a proclamation which explains a speech of confidence by the speaker. As it had been presented earlier in this work, David (being the author of the passage) was in a tensed situation and he was not being able to create his way out on his own. Reading through the Bible, David had been seen to be a man of great force and a man of war. But it could be so baffling on how a young man of his caliber would be under such tension. Even as an adolescent, he killed wild animals coming to devour his flock, fought against Goliath (a giant opposition who was terrifying to the trained warriors of the Israelites), and even later as a man, he fought many battles spear heading the team and he conquered.

But in spite of these achievements (some already at the time of singing this psalm and others after the psalms) he was still able to find himself in a very tight situation that, he was fixed and needed to call out for a greater Being to trust in and to be sure of his stand in that Being proclaiming it. This Being was to be Yahweh. Yahweh is being used by the Israelites, differently from the way other nations around them referred to their gods and as such, it is translated LORD in

English instead of ‘Lord’ or ‘lord’. The use of this name uniquely shows that the Yahweh being referred to by the Israelites is very unique and different from the other gods around and this distinguishes any form of misconception about the God that is being referred to.

The *Tetragrammaton* (YHWH) is the center of attention for the entire passage and He is the one being referred to obviously as the Shepherd in the text. David’s use of this metaphor to refer to God must have been as a result of his previous experiences with Yahweh. He could have just taught it all round and discovered that Yahweh was a shepherd. The experiences might vary but his purpose for referring to Yahweh as a shepherd must be traceable to Yahweh playing the role of a shepherd.

This proposition of this paper could therefore initiate the stand that, since the role of a shepherd is much (multitasking); reading between the contexts of the work would help to realize that David was probably in lack or in the midst of enemies. Perusing through the entire chapter or better say reading in the literary context, every expression is centered upon the feeding and being secured from enemies. He was possibly in a danger zone or just left the danger zone with a miraculous escape thereby seeing the enemies lose their grip over him.

These experiences of David must have caused him to resolve to a supreme power greater than his, thereby giving the metaphoric expression in qualifying the work of that divine occurrence that had happened. He could have said “The Lord is a Shepherd” or better still “The Lord is the Shepherd” these two are actually still referring to the same thing but neither the former or the latter could be used interchangeably with the original one being used.

The word used for shepherd in the Yoruba (one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, majorly occupants of the southwestern region of the country) land could be used in interpreting the in-depth meaning of the term. It is known by the Yoruba people as *Olusoaguntan* the

concept is literally interpreted as “The one who guards or watch sheep”. This idea present that a shepherd is primarily saddled with the responsibility of keeping the sheep safe from danger. And this address of David to God as a shepherd vividly portrays the Yoruba name for shepherd as the one capable of keeping the sheep.

In the words of Nggada (2012), he presents that the exegetical evidence in this construction suggests ‘my shepherd’ is in the possessive noun in which the Psalmist acknowledges and professes Yahweh to be his only and one shepherd who takes care of him as such. David instead of using either of those two expressions chose to make the statement more personal to himself which corroborates this work’s hypothesis of being an experiential psalm. And it also establishes that, David must have had a personal relationship with God before he could come up with that metaphorical expression in describing God’s attitude towards him.

The Providing Shepherd (verse 1b)

The second phase of the verse “I shall not want” is basically dependent on the first statement. It builds on the affirmation of the psalmist that since God is to him a shepherd, and then he would be a victim of want (lack/poverty). The statement is an affirmation statement concerning the potency of the shepherd being referred to.

The statement could imply a corroboration of the fact that the shepherd is capable of meeting his (David’s) needs as many scholars have opined concerning the practice of being a shepherd who is responsible for his sheep in the ANE, or it could be an indicting statement as there could be some acclaimed shepherd that are not capable of their task as a shepherd and as such not meeting the needs of their sheep. The statement therefore presents Yahweh as a shepherd who is capable of his task in shepherding his sheep (David). This could be seen even in the statement of Jesus Christ (the incarnated God), where he referred to himself as a good shepherd in John 10:11.

The sheep is totally dependent on the shepherd because, the sheep does not have a mind of its own and cannot emphatically tell when it has arrive a green pasture but since the shepherd is available, direction is given to the sheep to halt and start feeding. Thus, the shepherd is able to figure the basic needs of the shepherd and finds a solution to the problem.

Psalm 23:1: God’s Providence for Nigerians

Although, there are great companies of security agents in Nigeria, the military and Para-military organizations like the Nigerian Police, Army, Air Force, Civil Defense, Navy, and Custom Officers among others but still it appears as if they do not exist because, even the security agencies are also affected and prone to danger as well as the other citizens. It is therefore, logical to conclude that both the military and civilian in Nigeria are insecure and the question will remain “Where then should Nigerians face for security?” and this is why God being the creator and shepherd is being turned to for help as the only means to scale the huddles of these challenges in the country.

In line with presenting a solution to the conundrum of poverty and insecurity in Nigeria, a framework centered on God acting in the capacity of a shepherd would be employed vis-à-vis as God was a shepherd to David that he (David) could present his hymn centered on the activities of God shepherding him, God could also be a shepherd for Nigerians only with the condition of having a personal relationship with him which was also same with David. In view of this, the responsibilities of a Shepherd are explored below picturing God in light of these responsibilities.

The Shepherd as a Protector: The practice of being a shepherd is traceable to the ANE as noted earlier in this work and one of the major responsibilities of the shepherd to the sheep is to protect the sheep from danger. Being a gentle animal, they are prey to wild animals and as such, they need protection from the predators and in this capacity is the shepherd to act. To the Egyptians, a deity who

protects, guards, feeds or cares for his people is referred to as a shepherd in a metaphoric expression. For instance, an Egyptian god, Amon also called 'strong drover' is referred to as a shepherd because he is said to guard his people and offers timely protection (Jeremias, 1985:901). Also, God being the creator, of his people and Nigerians inclusive is ever ready to protect his sheep. The protection of God is ever ready for his own people. A glimpse of this could be seen from the relationship of God to the Israelites when they departed Egypt. He was their protector right from the land of Egypt, through the red (reed) sea, the wilderness to the promise land.

The Shepherd as a Provider: A shepherd provides for the needs of his sheep. He takes them through the pasture and makes them to graze in the right place. Sometimes, it might warrant the shepherd to go to the extra miles of fetching the grass for the flock during the dry season. Or sometimes, it might warrant nomad and his flock to move around even to a far distance in order to get a land to graze. God as a providing shepherd knows the needs of his sheep and even the level of poverty is no excuse for God to cause a remedy. A typical illustration is seen in the period of scarcity in Samaria (2 kings 6:24-7:1-20). The scarcity level experienced a great turn to abundance within a very short period of 24 hours for the entire city of Samaria. This affirms the level to which God can be a provider and that is why Abraham called him Jehovah Jireh (Gen. 22:14).

The Shepherd as a Risk Taker: Jesus Christ in John 10 stated that, "The Good shepherd lay down his life for his sheep". Laying down his life for the sheep is being spoken by Christ five times and the focus is no other but for his sheep (10: 11, 15, 17-18). In referring to this statement by Christ, MacDonald (2016) expressed that, this shepherd (Jesus) chose personal sacrifice for the welfare of his sheep. This establishes the fact that, a shepherd would go to any length to take risk for his sheep. David, being a young shepherd was also in a situation of going the extra length to deliver his flock from danger. He would rather confront the wild animals on two different occasions (1 Samuel 17:34-36) and have a 50/50 chance of living or dying than to

escape solely and allow the wild beast to feast on the flock. God acting in the capacity of a shepherd for Nigerians can go to any length to see that his sheep are doing fine; he went the extra mile in making enemies to confront themselves instead of fighting the Israelites.

A Shepherd as a Health Worker: As it is to other animals, sheep are also prone to diseases, and they are also be taken care of at eh time of being in the stage of infant (lamb). In the open field, they are liable to be struck by insects carrying a kind of disease or the other. And as such, the shepherd is needed to help the sheep out. Beth Greenwood (2018) puts it that, Shepherds are often responsible for minor injuries or basic medical treatment, especially since they work in isolated areas far from veterinary services. It thus indicates that, shepherd would be responsible for a kind of “first aid treatment” for the sheep when it comes to health challenges in a very remote area. God as a shepherd is more than able to interfere in the health situations of Nigerians likewise. Being a shepherd, he is able to make a provision for healing of the mind and giving the wisdom to men to make use of the available resources (trees, leaves, grasses etcetera) for the total well-being.

It thus could be said of a shepherd that, the well being of a sheep is basically dependent on the shepherd. Or better still one could assert that, a sheep cannot live healthy and maintain a ‘hygienic’ life without the involvement of the shepherd.

Conclusion

The work of a shepherd is so numerous and encompassing that, describing the activities of the shepherd can be said to be inexhaustible. The shepherd has lot of activities to deal with in the field and among the flock. But the activities of the shepherd in this work as it had been explored are not literary statement but rather, a metaphorical expression.

Insecurity is vast spreading as seen in the course of this work, and poverty is also not in any way obscure in the contemporary Nigerian society. Many forces and attempts had been made by some individuals to rectify the situation and to create a lasting solution to the situation but there had been human factors responsible for the persistent dwelling in poverty and insecurity. These two factors are almost working hand in hand because; poverty can lead to exposure to danger which is insecurity.

As such in getting a solution that is lasting to the issue of insecurity and poverty, Wilson (2002:431), gave a description of the effect of Psalm 23 on the Old Testament individuals in pragmatically depending on Yahweh for shield and welfare. He opined that, Psalm 23 is one of most familiar and patronized piece writing in Old Testament. It is being patronized because of its uniqueness from the emblematic approach the psalmist employed to write the passage. Wilson furthered his explanation of the passage that, this Psalm expresses the confidence of the Psalmist in Yahweh's protection and care. The Psalmist introduced the Lord as shepherd and the Lord can be trusted and depended upon the dependency on Yahweh as a shepherd would mean a guarantee of security in the land.

But in the quest to have the divine interference into the problems of man which is being caused by man (building on the earlier assertion of this work that poverty and insecurity are as a result of the misuse of available resources by Nigerians), Nigerians are to take note of the fact that, they also have their role to play for God to assume the 'office' of a shepherd in the land. The role to play is being ready to accept him as the shepherd just as David also admitted with a clear proclamation that God is his shepherd. Lowery in an unpublished material had rightly noted that attention had always been on the responsibilities of the shepherd to the sheep from time past and little or no attention is being made towards the sheep's responsibility to the shepherd and since the two (shepherd and sheep) are involved in the deal, they both have their responsibilities to carry out in order to make a smooth outcome of the relationship.

Thus, just as the popular saying goes that “God will not do for man, what man can do for himself”, Nigerians should be up to task in order to do what is required of them in regulating the insecurity and poverty level of the land and after taking their path, a dependence on Yahweh for his part will be inevitable.

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