

# PSALM 23: A CONTEMPORARY READING OF A GOD-HUMAN COVENANT

O. Jason Osai

| Institute of Foundation Studies  
Rivers State University of Science and Technology  
Port Harcourt, Nigeria

## **Abstract:**

The scriptures of all the world religions are written with hidden meanings; this is to ensure that only the initiated, the adept and the ardent seeker of knowledge can understand the deeper meanings of the text and this is done through the utilization of proverbs, metaphors, anecdotes and parables, which the literature of Judeo-Christian theology refers to a “dark sayings.” This paper subjects the God-human covenant, which is metaphorically captured in Psalm 23, to critical analysis within the context of the essence of the relationship between God and human and how that covenants human attitudinally and behaviorally in his or her interpersonal relationship in the human community including his sensitivity to the earth environment and other non-human occupants of the earth. The paper argues that it is this attitudinal and behavioral disposition of the individual to his relationship with his fellow human beings, his lower neighbors in the animal kingdom and the earth environment that determines the degree to which he lives in harmony with the Creator and, consequently, his transcendence and, therefore, ascent on the eternal journey towards oneness with God, the Good Shepherd. This, the paper emphasizes, has

nothing whatsoever to do with the color, creed, station or location of the individual; it is purely a one-on-one relationship between God and every human being in creation.

**Keywords:**

*Covenant • hidden wisdom • symbolism • needs • want • shepherd-sheep relationship • universality • cross religions*

## Introduction

The spirituality of the scriptures and the indisputable reality of their relevance to human existence are abundant in the metaphor-laden parables, anecdotes and allegories of the texts and creeds of all the world religions; this obscurantist mode of communication utilized by the inspired chroniclers of the scriptures is what the literature of Judeo-Christian theology refers to as “dark sayings.” (Psalm 78:2; Proverbs 1:6) In other words, the scriptures contain hidden layers of meanings of concealed messages that are veiled in allegories, symbolism and parables. Unto you is given to know the mystery but it will be told in parable. Proverbs cautions that the sayings of the wise are riddles while 1 Corinthians (2:7) spoke “the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.” Psalm (78:2) says “I will open my mouth in a *parable* and utter *dark sayings* of old.” The concept of a 'dark saying' does not mean that the sayings' true meaning is evil; rather, it is that the true meaning is shadowed or obscured from the light. Matthew (13:35) repeats Psalm 78:2 and adds that “I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.” Corinthians overtly tells us that the parables have two layers of meaning: 'milk for babes and meat for men'—where the milk is a watered-down reading for the infantile minds, and the meat is the true message accessible only to mature minds. The incisive mind or the initiated understands the essence of the parable while the uninitiated takes the sayings, proverbs, parables, metaphors, allegories etc literally. What every individual takes from these books of life is a function of the person's capacity to decipher the meanings that are hidden therein. And here lies the difference between children who drink the milk and the adults who eat the meat, chew the bone and savor the marrow of the abundant knowledge of life in the scriptures. Rather unfortunately, a mammoth majority of the laity does not contemplate the essence of the various contents of the scripture; generally, the words are

reflexively recited in the process of the rituals of daily worship.

This paper embarks on a contemporary reading and critical analysis of the spiritual and human relational covenant contained in Psalm 23; it sets forth to subject the God-human covenant, which is metaphorically captured in the psalm under reference, to critical analysis within the context of the essence of the relationship between God and human and how that covenants human in his interpersonal relationship with his fellowmen, the human community and the earth environment, which is intricately calibrated with specificity to ensure that life would survive and thrive. In the final analysis, the objective of the paper is to arm the reader with the spiritual essence of the psalm for better understanding towards achieving greater consciousness of the Divine from the practical and behavioral perspectives and the point of view of interpersonal relationship, sensitivity to human's lower neighbors in the animal kingdom and the earth environment.

Towards the above objective, we shall, first, reproduce Psalm 23 for ease of reference and, conduct a cursory discourse on the concepts of “needs” and “want” briefly covering various perspectives of economic thought; an understanding of the line between these two concepts is considered pivotal to this discourse. Thereafter, we shall review the shepherd-sheep relationship, which has been used by the Psalmist in the tradition of the obscurantism of the scriptures, as a metaphor for illustrating the relationship between God and human and conduct an analysis of its essence, which is the *raison d'être* of this effort. Beyond that, we shall proceed to discuss the universality of the covenant and its application in interpersonal relationship; based on these, we shall arrive at a conclusion that, naturally, anchors on transcendence. The paper is laced with three poems that readily lend themselves to critical analysis within the context of the subject; these are also discussed accordingly.

*Psalm 23: The Lord is my Shepherd*

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. (2) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters. (3) He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. (4) Yea, though I shall walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (5) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. (6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

**On “Needs” and “Want”**

The intractable conflict in humanity since human became conscious of the self and developed the urge to be better than his peers is sandwiched between “needs” and “want;” this obstinate source of global conflict, which has provoked senseless wars amongst nations, has resulted in great loss to life and property. The phenomenon finds expression in the intellectual hedgerow between capitalism and communism and the consequent *class struggle* and the control of the instruments of production. While capitalism extols entrepreneurship and limitless acquisition of material wealth in a *laissez faire* public policy, economic and business environment of Adam Smith's postulate, communism, an economic preference of the Marxist school of thought, strove for egalitarianism, a classless society where each individual contributed according to his abilities and received according to his needs. (Osai, 2009)

“Need” as a word is defined as “requir[ing] something because it is essential or very important rather than just desirable;” it is also defined as “expressing necessity or being necessary.” Conversely, “want” is defined as “hav[ing] a desire to possess or do something just to wish for.” Here is the dichotomy in human quest. We note that the key words in the definition of “need” are “require,” “essential” and “necessity” as against “desire” and “wish” in the case of the definition of “want.” While settling for “needs” reflects contentment, which is considered a higher consciousness of the Divine (Swami, 2002) the quest for “want” is considered base and crass materialism that has generated conflict and crises in humanity over the years and continues to do so; the essence of “want” is captured poetically thus:

**Want**

Want inspires the maddening quest  
For feathering individual nest  
To the detriment of the rest;  
It pitches people against one another  
And results in family and societal disorder;  
It obliterates the sense  
Of motherhood  
And brushes aside the essence  
Of brotherhood;  
It is a tragic departure  
From the grand design  
Of Mother Nature

And the Divine;  
It plucks man off the vine.

© O. Jason Osai, 2012

Based on the findings of empirical studies on the lifestyle of Nigerians, Osai (2013) observes that a scan through the Nigerian socioeconomic landscape impresses one that a worrisome majority of the wealthy and middleclass of the nation seem bent on competing with the residents of the cliffhanger chateaus of the French Riviera and the magnificent mansions on the sprawling landscapes of Bel Air, Hollywood. The sad and rather instructive contrast is that whereas at the French Riviera and in Bel Air the residents of the mansions share the same socioeconomic status as their neighbors, here in Nigeria, what obtains is the saddening paradox that has been captured in the poem titled *Distant Neighbors* (Osai, 2012); the canvas version of the concept brings instant tears cascading down the cheeks of those who harbor human heart.

### **Distant Neighbors**

Your Taj Mahal  
Stands threateningly tall  
Next to my house  
Of much and thatch  
Where a million lizards hatch  
And shield theirs from the mouse

Though silent your giant ginseng may be  
The soothe chokes my little babe  
Whose tender lung  
Desperately long  
For clean and fresh air  
But I know you don't care.

Distant Neighbor  
I hear you snore  
Across our common wall  
That is Kirikiri tall  
You on the inside  
And I outside

What I say in words

Billy boy may say with swords  
Your fathers and mothers  
Your sisters and brothers  
Hang your nicked hats  
On your Taj Mahals  
Where your spoilt brats  
And their stuck up pals  
Daily make merry  
While Tom and Jerry  
With other cats  
And a thousand rats  
Conspiratorially rampage  
Confidently rummage  
And, consequently, damage  
My mud-n-thatch domain  
While I and mine, in outrage,  
Helplessly remain

Your children can't find friends  
In your hometown  
Where folks war with belligerent ends  
And mud adorn their crown

Why must I go hungry night after night?  
Why must my children be out of school?  
Why can't I afford kerosene?  
Why must my leaders take me for a fool?  
It's not as if I don't work hard  
It's just that I've been had  
By a heartless breed  
Whose excessive greed  
Disallows me my basic need

At the three armed zone  
We point one angry finger  
Single finger, all alone  
While the rest point at you  
The anguish of our masses linger  
'Cause of the greed of a few  
Who masquerade as leaders  
But are nothing but bleeders;  
Bleeders of our resource  
Who'd reap the wrath of the curse

Hide your head in shame  
You who deserve no name  
Since what belongs to us all  
You steal with pride  
Listen, at the final call  
You'd have no place to hide  
'Cause you'd be a goner  
Trapped in a web of guna

© O. Jason Osai, 2012

That a worrisome percentage of the wealth of this nation is tied to unproductive and grandiose display of opulence is there for the discerning mind to see in every Nigerian community; in one community after another, the “Taj Mahals” exist side by side mud-and-thatch huts therefore rudely driving home the socioeconomic disparity in the community and this obtains in the wider Nigerian society as it does in the global community.

Regarding the socioeconomic effects of “wants” in human society, with special reference to Nigeria, Debo Adesina, Editor of *The Guardian* and Deputy Editor-in-Chief, reacts thus:

A lot of capital is tied down in waste through building houses [private homes] that are not needed, acquiring cars that are unnecessary, breeding an army of the needy, and, consequently, an army of criminals, then erecting security gates that are costlier than even the buildings themselves to protect against onslaught. The answer to development lies in giving people a life of dignity through job creation and poverty alleviation. (*The Guardian*, November 2, 2011:5)

The above averment is as relevant to Nigeria as it is to other parts of the world where the pervading economic concept of capitalism permits limitless acquisition of wealth and resulting in gapping socioeconomic disparities; we note that the averment is consonance with the essence of *Distance Neighbors*. Here lie the effects of human quest for “wants” as against contentment with the “needs” that the shepherd provides sufficiently (“sufficient unto this day, the needs”) so that the herd (all of humanity) can partake fulfillingly in the abundance of nature in relatively equal measure.

The unbridled wasteful consumption that is preponderant in humanity in the face of abject poverty and millions going to bed each night hungry is a product of human's inordinate quest for self aggrandizement. The political philosophical posture that gave birth to communism with its ethos of “to

each according to his needs” is informed by the Marxian desire for a world that is akin to what the Creator intended. Granted that competition in the economic sphere, which is motivated by want, is what drives development in humanity, higher consciousness requires some degree of sensitivity to the socioeconomic disparity in humanity.

### **Shepherd-Sheep Relationship: A Review**

Come with me on a little exercise of the mind as, with absolutely no physical effort, we journey to a distant place while seated in the same position. Close your eyes and open your mind's eye into a wilderness, a prairie or sprawling grassland surrounded by substantial woods or jungle that is roamed by wild beasts and punctuated by deep valleys and hanging cliffs. In this setting, visualize a shepherd herding one hundred sheep as they graze in the grassland and sometimes venture to the fringes of the woods, jungle, valleys and cliffs. You will see the shepherd working assiduously to wash the sheep, guide them to green and greener pastures and away from the fringes to avoid any sheep straying into the woods and jungle therefore running the risk of falling over a cliff or prey to some wild beast. And if in this journey on the wings of your mind a beast attacks the herd, you would see the shepherd fighting it to protect and rescue the sheep. The biblical account of David leaving the herd and going after the lion and bear that took one of his sheep is instructive. (1 Samuel 17:34-36) Here, it should be noted that the shepherd left the herd in a safe place before embarking on the rescue mission for only one of the flock; here again, it should be noted that the shepherd places high premium on each and every sheep hence he left ninety-nine sheep and embarked on a rescue mission for one. The import of this is the love that God has for everyone in His creation.

In the Jewish tradition of shepherding, it is known that the shepherd fractures the leg of a sheep that is of the habit of straying away and into unsafe grounds. What happens in such case is that the sheep so punished is incapacitated and, therefore, stays close to the shepherd to ensure that it gets a fair share of the feed since it cannot compete favorably with the rest of the flock. Now, by the time the fractured limb heals, the sheep has learned to stay close to the shepherd and this it does habitually thereafter. (Stone, 2009) This metaphor applies to God-human relationship and perhaps presents a plausible answer to the question that is often asked: “why does God allow good people to suffer?” And if we may answer: Psalm (34:19) says that “many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivereth him out of



them all” and 2 Corinthians (4:17) holds that “for our...affliction...worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

### **Analysis**

We note that the main thrust and import of the covenant is contained in verse 1: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Concise yet comprehensive, this verse is the essence of the covenant and requires an understanding of the meaning of the words “want” and “need,” which we had treated earlier for a greater understanding of this analysis. A Covenant being an undertaking between two or more parties, the Lord performs the functions of the shepherd while the sheep covenants not to want i.e. desire and/or quest for anything beyond the needs. Verse 2 is descriptive of the responsibility and functions of the shepherd: “green pastures” and “still waters” are in reference to food security and safety, respectively. As the shepherd, the Lord covenants to provide food and security for the flock; this is illustrated in the allegory of David (the shepherd) leaving his flock and going after and killing the lion that took one of his sheep— an act he also repeated when a bear took one of the sheep. (1 Samuel 17:34-36) The lesson inherent in this anecdote is the extent of risk to self, which the shepherd would take to protect each and every sheep in his flock; the inherent spiritual lesson is that each party to the covenant keeps his part: the shepherd to ensure upkeep and security and the sheep being contented with the needs provided by the shepherd thus shying away from craving, coveting, desiring etc, which are all synonymous with wanting; a fundamental element of this is obedience to the shepherd.

In verse 3, the psalm departs from the strict shepherd-sheep material relationship of the metaphor and discusses the spiritual element by the Lord restoring the soul through leading it in the path of righteousness. We note that being led in the path of righteousness for His name's sake indicates appreciation of the sheep's loyalty to the covenant and the shepherd's commitment and realization that he must be seen to keep faith with the covenant. If we take the restoration of the soul in verse 3 and the reference to the journey in *the valley of death* (earth) in verse 4, we read the inference to reincarnation and the fact that the soul is on a journey here on earth towards its restoration to oneness with the Divine. Note that referring to human's abode as *the valley of death* infers that there is no death in the abode of the eventual destination of the soul when it has achieved atonement (at-one-ment) with the Divine following the death of the human body. Still on verse

4, human covenants not to fear any evil having faith in Divine guidance; this guidance refers to the ethical and spiritual codes and ordinances and is presented through the metaphors of “rod” and “staff,” which are implements with which the shepherd keeps the flock in line. We note that Moses went through the tutelage of shepherding for forty years in Median before embarking on the Divine assignment of shepherding the children of Israel out of Egypt and on to the Promised Land. (Exodus) We also note that Moses is usually depicted with rod and staff in hand; he parted the Red Sea with the staff and developed the penal code, which is referred to as the Ten Commandments.

Having achieved the restoration, the soul becomes a branch of the vine, one with the Divine at which the soul is anointed with oil (sonhood or Christhood) and lives in the abundance (“cup runneth over”) of the Divine. This climax in the eternal journal of the soul is captured in the following poem:

**One with the Divine**

Honesty, sincerity,  
Humility and simplicity  
Do not add up to stupidity;  
Rather, they are a reflection  
Of inner intensity,  
Which is the manifestation  
Of profound proclivity  
To esoteric illumination.

This transcends the dogmas of creed  
And senseless greed  
That is buoyed by material need;  
It opens effectual doors  
To consecrated corridors  
That lead to fertile fields  
With bountiful yields.

It is the real comfort zone  
Where no one is ever alone;  
Here, there is absolute certainty  
Of man's common identity  
With inner intensity.

And here, your faith is strong  
So, your prayers are not long.

For His impregnable amour is your shield  
So, you are safe in the universal playing field  
You are astute  
As you abide by Divine statute  
So, you command your circumstance  
And, with you, nothing is left to chance;  
'Cause you are a branch of the vine--  
One with the Divine

© O. Jason Osai 2009

### **The Application and Universality of Psalm 23**

The essence of Psalm 23, as enunciated in this effort, sets forth parameters and standards of attitude and behavior in the relationship within humanity, which should be informed by the individual's adherence to the tenets and essence of the God-human covenant as contained in the psalm. The application is relevant to how each individual moderates his attitude and behavior in his relationship with other individuals and the earth environment based on the precepts of the essence of the psalm. This is where the adherence to the tenets of the covenant is confronted by the hard and rude realities of existentialism; at this point it requires “a consciousness of a Beyond, or the sense of feeling of the presence of a being or reality via other means than sense perception or reason.” (Pratt, 1921:337) And this is where the acid test of the sheep's commitment to the covenant manifests as the soul is confronted by the compelling commands of the senses (sight, touch, sound, smell, taste) thereby drowning the soft whispers of the spirit of God in human, which strives to guide human aright; this eternal conflict has been dubbed Battle of Evermore.

Osai (2010) offers that there is an eternal scuffle that is taking place between higher and lower forces and the main arena of this struggle is in the human mind. In every individual on earth, there is the tri-unity of the senses, the soul and the spirit. The senses are as imbedded in the human body with the sense of touch, taste, sight, sound and smell; the soul is the essence of human's existence here on earth while the spirit is a spark of God in human. In its journey on earth, the soul utilizes the mind, that all conquering abstract instrument, as it continually makes choices between the essence of the soft whispers of the spirit on one hand and the compelling demands of the senses on the other hand. What the soul requires for ascendancy in the divine realm, the senses (human body) abhor and what the spirit abhors is the core

of the existential realities and needs of materialism; the soul is therefore constantly caught between these two forces—*Battle of Evermore*. This second-by-second non-violent eternal conflict takes place in all human beings irrespective of color or creed and station or location in the multiplicity of the corporeal world. Ascendancy in the single super consciousness of the ethereal is a direct product of the cumulative of the degree to which the soul, working in conjunction with the abstruse concept of the mind, defeats the compulsions of the senses during each and every sojourn within the multiplicity of the corporeal.

On the universality of the psalm, many scholars of religion and mysticism agree that the fundamental characteristics of the experience itself are universal and are, therefore, not restricted to any particular religion or culture; however, they concede that particular cultural, historical and religious conditions may influence both the understanding and the description of the mystical essence of the experience. Consequently, the phenomena of this experience may occur outside the framework of any formal religion, with no references to any articulated theology. Furthering on the universality of the psalm, we note that, in this presentation as in the text under reference, the covenant between the shepherd and the sheep is discussed without reference to any particular religion; this is a result of the fact that God-human covenant has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with organized religion; in other words, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Moslems and ardent of all religions in the world are party to this one-on-one God-human covenant. Again, it has nothing whatsoever to do with where the individual worships: in the Synagogue, Temple, Church, Mosque, Chursque, shrine etc. The essence of this thought is captured in the parable of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10; 30-37) We note that “a certain priest...and likewise a Levite...came and looked on [the victim of thieves], and passed by on the other side;” it took a Samaritan (an Arab of today's categorization) to go to great length and expenditures to ensure that succor is given to the victim. We note that having been “stripped...of his raiment” the victim's identity (Jew or Gentile) could not be ascertained since the blood of Abraham and its physical manifestations run through both groups. Implicit in this parable is the fact that color, creed, station, location or any of the humanmade differences and divisions that have plagued humanity is inconsequential in matters of God-human relationship and transcendence; every individual is party to this shepherd-sheep covenant and every individual grows in the eternal spiritual hierarchy according to his/her deeds in his/her relationship with fellow human beings and the environment

including our lower neighbors in this animal kingdom. In the words of the Man from Galilee: “be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap” (Gal, 6 :7). In tandem with this position, Chakravorty (2010:42) offers that

“God is hidden in the heart of man/woman and that neither priest nor prophet nor the ritual of any organized religion will help him/her to find the truth; that institutions of religion stand across the path, blocking the search. The search for God is one which everyone must carry out for himself/herself.”

In a brief interview with reporters, Italian teenager, Eva Berteli, avers that “I do not need an intermediary between me and God to sort out my problems.” (CNN, *World Report*, February 13, 2013) This underscores the one-on-one essence of God-human relationship; it also underscores the fact that the essence of Psalm 23 is pertinent to all human beings as it anticipates that every human being becomes a righteous servant of God hence it arouses in all the desire to worship the One God who is called by variegated names that reflect the cultures and peoples across the expansive and multi-perspective religious landscape of the earth. As it applies here, so it does in every mansion in our Father's house and here lies the universality of the covenant.

Advocating that people should learn to live small rather than the ostentatious lifestyle that permeates human society, CNN (November 17, 2012) offers that “smaller living is smarter living.” It is contended here that *smaller living is leaving space for others to live*; it is living with the realization of the essence of Psalm 23, which is living as a branch of the vine, one with the Divine. So we ask: Why should someone consistently threaten to commit suicide in steady daily installments by over feeding himself and thereby overburdening his metabolic system while, daily, millions go to bed hungry? Why should another live in a 60-bedroom mansion that is replicated in other parts of his country unoccupied while millions roam the streets as hobos? Why should someone enter the bathroom and waste tens of gallons of water in the name of taking a shower twice daily in a habitat that is fast running out of water while millions cannot find water to drink? Why should hundreds of thousands of workers and their families cramp in little rooms without windows and toilet facilities while, a few feet away, others are living a life of luxury. Why should ten percent of the world population control ninety percent of its vast resources while ninety percent of the population scrounges to eke out a living off of what is left (ten percent) of the

resources? Why should a Senator in a Third World country earn more than the US President, Chancellor of Germany, Prime Minister of Britain and heads of governments of other developed nations while seventy percent of the population of his country live on less than \$2/day? (Osai, 2012a) The answer to these and other questions that address the profligacy of human and his ostentatious lifestyle in utilizing the resources of nature is simply selfishness, egotism gone wild; this is a product of covetousness and a departure from the contentment (being satisfied with the needs provided) prescribed in the God-human covenant of Psalm 23. An instructive anecdote here is Jesus' admonition to the rich young man who inquired on how to enter the kingdom of God; to him Jesus said as follows: "go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven and come take up the cross and follow me" (Mark, 10:21) and, given the reaction of the rich young man in that encounter, Jesus added thus: "how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God...it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (Mark, 10:23/25) The essence of His preaching, in that particular instance, is the exact nature of transcendence; it pertains to being above various forms of materialism, in Hindu philosophy is known as *gunas* (ropes); spiritual ropes that bind the living entity to the world of repeated rebirth (*Bhagavad Gita*, 14:22-25).

### Conclusion

Addressing a vast crowd of the faithful at St. Peter's Square during the first major service since ascending the Papal seat, Pope Francis I stated that: "greed [is] the cause of many conflicts around the world; [he therefore] urged people to avoid materialism." (*The Nation*, Monday, March 25, 2013:2) Incidentally, that papal pronouncement is an echo of the essence of an age-old theme on interpersonal relationship in humanity and the relationship amongst nations.

*The Holy Zohar*, which is considered one of the great masterpieces of Western religious thought that represents an attempt to unravel hidden meanings behind the world of appearances, the text of the teachings of the Kabbalah, the scripture of Judaism and a mystical commentary on the Torah tells us that:

The universe began not with an atom or a subatomic particle but with a thought of creation, which encompassed a world in which every human being would enjoy total happiness and fulfillment, free from any form of

chaos or pain. This is what the Creator desires and intends. Bringing about the realization of the Creator's desire is up to us. For the manifestation of complete fulfillment to take place, we need to evolve into our truest and greatest selves. In our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions, we need to erase negativity and replace darkness with Light.

The Zohar also offers that people must know who they are and be conscious of being connected with the whole universe. Some refer to this as cosmic consciousness; cultivating inner strength (what is generally referred to as faith) is well grounded in all the major spiritual traditions of the world: before the grand finale of his ministry, Jesus went to the wilderness to meditate and hear the voice or seek the face of the Father; so also did Abraham and Moses, whose retreat was metaphorically referred to as climbing Mount Sinai from where he emerged with the penal code. The Holy Koran informs that Mohammed also went into meditation before his ministry. Buddhists and Hindus practice meditation for those same purposes. It also finds utility in Confucianism, Daoism and other world religions. (Farah and Karls, 1999; *Encyclopedia of World Religions*, 2006) Restated, self-awareness calls for the transcendence of the self in human interactions and relations. Osai (2008) has offered that the senses (sight, sound, smell, touch and taste) constitute the major adversary to the spirituality of human. Consistently, these fundamental elements in human combine their energies and collectively assault the sensibilities of the soul which depends on the guidance of the spirit towards resisting the compelling commands of the senses. The senses constitute the material self, which is what is required to be transcended in human relations and interactions.

On its part, the literature of Judeo-Christian theology holds that “when the righteous people are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” (Proverbs, 29:2) This biblical averment, as concise as it is, effectively captures the essence of the Zoharian postulate and the evolution of political thought, leadership in humanity and the consequent relationship between government and the governed; its essence is as relevant to the anarchic, short and brutish state of nature of the Hobbesian epoch as it is to the current era when communism has collapsed and capitalism is confronted by the masses who demand some modicum of sensitivity and consideration from government and corporate leadership. (Osai, 2012a) The “righteous people” under reference here are those who have imbibed the essence of Psalm 23—shunning materialism.

Based on extensive noetic research, McTaggart, (2011) holds that the world, at its basic, exists as a complex web of interdependent relationships,

forever indivisible. It can be inferred therefore that this complex web of eternally indivisible interdependence in relationships is as relevant to the billions of galaxies and the innumerable solar systems that interact in harmony in the humanly incomprehensible cosmos as it is relevant to interpersonal relationships in humanity and the relationship between humans and their neighbors in this animal kingdom. That the Creator desired and designed a world in which every human being would enjoy total happiness and fulfillment, free from any form of chaos or pain is evidenced by the specific calibration of our solar system in such a manner that human is able to survive and thrive on earth through the abundance of air, water and fertile soil and the unimaginable potentials of the human mind, which is the most valuable and powerful of all earth's vast resources. The responsibility for the realization of the Creator's desire for humanity rests squarely on the shoulders of human; it, therefore, requires that human evolves into his truest and greatest self. In his thoughts, feelings, and actions (including inactions), human needs to erase negativity and replace darkness with Light; he needs to come to terms with the immutable spiritual fact that in this Battle of Evermore, what you keep is what you give, not what you take.

The globally pervasive corruption, pervading highhandedness and insensitivity in governance both in the public and private sectors, the consequent suffering of the masses and a global order that has virtually reverted to the Hobbesian state of nature, (Osai, 2012b) are reflections of the effects of “want,” which is, basically, the desire for things that are beyond the “needs” of the individual; this also translates to the nations as they relate to each other in a global amphitheater. It is only when the pervading human desire for “want” is contained that *amoral familism* along with its flipside corruption will abate at which point the ever-expanding frontiers of decay of social infrastructure, pervasive poverty, ever-elongating unemployment line, youth restiveness, social fragility and volatility and countless other social malaise that constitute the insidious albatross of human society will be reined in; this requires consciousness of the Divine and spiritual intelligence, especially within the leadership class; the string that ties this postulate is the realization of the biblical “rule of the righteous,” “kingdom of God on earth,” Plato's “Ideal State” and St. Augustine's “City of God.” (Osai, 2012:10) “The righteous” of the literature of Judeo-Christian theology is the same as the “philosopher kings” of Plato's Kalipolis and the modern day leader who governs guided by the essence of spiritual intelligence; that is the leader and followers who have imbibed the essence of Psalm 23 and, therefore, do “not want.” Here, we find the “City of God,” the “Kingdom of



God on earth” where His will is “done as it is in heaven,” where harmony on earth would be such that “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock; and dust shall be the serpent’s meat.” (Isaiah 65:25)

Being contented with the “needs” as offered in Psalm 23 and shunning materialism brings the individual in sync with the intendment of the Divine in creation; the individual disconnects the gunas (ropes) that tie him down and make his soul earthbound hence a “vexation of spirit.” (Ecclesiastes, 2:17) At this state of Godliness, the soul ascends in the realm and “dwell[s] in the house of the Lord forever.” (Psalm 23:6) In succinct conclusion, the intendment of the Creator for “a world in which every human being would enjoy total happiness and fulfillment, free from any form of chaos or pain” will be achieved only when the consciousness of the essence of Psalm 23 pervades humanity and manifests in the attitudes and behaviors of individuals. Human’s oldest spiritual quest was to perceive his own entanglement, to sense his own interconnection with all things. He has always wanted to become ‘one’ with the universe...to achieve the state of at-one-ment. Today, people of various religious persuasions still strive for “atonement” without a mammoth majority of them realizing that what they are actually seeking is at-one-ment with the Divine.

Doubtlessly, human thoughts interact with the physical world, whether or not we know it, affecting change all the way down to the subatomic realm. Human consciousness is a substance outside the confines of the body; it is a highly ordered energy capable of changing the physical world. Focused thought could affect literally anything—the growth rate of plant, the direction that fish swim in a bowl, the manner in which cells divided in a petri dish, the synchronization of separately automated systems and the chemical reactions in one’s own body. Mind over matter is not a New Age self-help mantra; the human mind has the ability to alter the state of matter itself, and, more importantly, the mind has the power to encourage the physical world to move in a specific direction. Human has powers that are beyond his imagination and the genesis of unleashing this Divine potential is found in imbibing and practicalizing the essence of Psalm 23.

As a parting quote, we shall take from Thomas a Kempis’ *The Imitation of Christ*; incidentally, this quote contains the four elements that bring peace and personal liberty:

Try to do another’s will rather than your own. Always choose to have less rather than more. Always choose the lowest place and to be less than everyone else. Always long and pray that the Will of God may be fully

realized in your life. You will find that the man who does all this walks in the land of peace and quietness. (Yallop, 1984:10)

In my humble opinion, which is informed by years of open-minded reading, learning and cross-religious mingling and synergy, *in this eternal spiritual enterprise of transcendence through "give and take," what you keep is what you give, not what you take.* The discerning mind would recognize that the above constitute a twin treatise on transcendence, which finds attitudinal and behavioral expression in honesty, sincerity, humility and simplicity; incidentally, these elements sum up to contentment, which is, essentially, the practicalization of the spirit of Psalm 23.

### **Bibliography**

- Berteli, E, CNN. *World Report* (February 13, 2013).
- Bible, The Holy.
- Chakravorty, M, "Mysticism without Bounds: Perception of Space." *Melintas* Vol. 26 No. 1. Bandung: Department of Philosophy, Parahyangan Catholic University, Indonesia (2010).
- Kempis, T (quoted in) David Yallop, *In God's Name: An Investigation in to the Murder of Pope John Paul I.* London: Robinson, 1984.
- McTaggart, L, *The Bond: Connecting Through the Space Between Us.* London: Hay House, 2011.
- Osai, O.J., "In His Image and Likeness: Ponderings over Creation and the Divine Essence." *Melintas* Vol. 22 No. 2. Bandung: Department of Philosophy, Parahyangan Catholic University, Indonesia (2006).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Fundamental Concepts of Political Economy" in Osai, O.J. (ed) *Readings in Political Economy of Development: A Third World Perspective.* Port Harcourt: Ulamba Publishers, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Battle of Evermore: A Treatise on the Theater of Transcendence." Paper presented at the Seminar on *Spiritual Intelligence and Governance in Nigeria* under the aegis of Center for Experiential Learning and Leadership (CELL), Port Harcourt, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "From Rule of Law to Rule of Love: Towards Plato's *Ideal State* and the *City Of God.*" *African Research Review* (ARR) Vol. 6 Nr. 4 (October. 2012a).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Neutrality as Realism in the New World Order: A Treatise." *International Journal of Arts and Humanities* (AFRREV IJAH) Vol. 1 Nr. 4 (November 2012b).

- \_\_\_\_\_, "Wasting the Wealth of the Nation: A Note on the Ostentatious Lifestyle of The Nigerian Elite." Paper presented at the Seminar on *Wealth of the Nation: Prudently Managed or Impudently Ravaged* under the aegis of Center for Experiential Learning and Leadership (CELL), Port Harcourt, 2013.
- Plato, *The Republic*. Trans. GMA Grube, revised by CDC Reeve. Hackett Publishing Co., 1992.
- Pratt, J.B., *The Religious Consciousness: A Psychological Study*. New York: Macmillan, 1921.
- Stone, P., *Breaking the Jewish Code*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2009.
- Swami, B.T., *Leadership for an Age of Higher Consciousness: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Times*. Washington, DC: Hari-Nama Press, 2002.
- The Guardian*, November 2, 2011.
- The Nation*, Monday, March 25, 2013:2.
- Zohar, The Holy.