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“TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD” PS 34:8
An Exegesis of Psalm 34 and Its Pastoral Relevance, with
Special Attention to Abused Youth.

Supervisor

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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Ecclesiastical Degree of Baccalaureate in Theology

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DEDICATION

I wholeheartedly wish to dedicate this thesis to my beloved Youth of: Port Gentil (Paroisse Sainte Barbe, Gabon), Kibera Slum Christ the King Parish, St. Mary's Parish Mukuru and all youth I have come close to in one way or another. By their questions and quest of God's love they have encouraged me to love, and taste the Scriptures, and integrate them into my personal life of faith. Thank you for the faith sharing we had together.

EPIGRAPH

גִּרְלִי לְכֹהֵן דְּבַרְךָ וְאוֹר לְנִתְיָבְתִי:

Psalm 119:105 [WTT]

“Thy Word is a Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path”.

Psalm 119:105 [RSV]

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research, method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial requirements for the Bachelor Degree in Sacred Theology (STB) with specialization in Scripture Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed: *St. Marius*

Name of the student: Jiodio Tsafack Marius Jean Pierre, S.D.B.

Date: *07 - 12 - 2006*

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed: *Ambrose*

Name of the Supervisor: Rev Father Ambrose Mutinda, C.S.Sp.

Date: *On the feast of St. Ambrose*
7 - 12 - 2006

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Motivation and objective of the study

From my study of theology I have taken these words of St Anselm as the summary of my experience: “Understand so that you may believe and believe so that you may understand.” For me¹ it means that Faith and Reason go hand in hand any true and genuine religious experience should have them both at its foundation. This is valid at any moment of our journey of response to God’s love for us in times of peace and in times of trials. Without faith our experience is a mere following of an ideology; and without reason we risk falling into fundamentalism.

Wisdom literature in the scripture gives us a genuine way where faith and reason come together in Israel’s experience of God’s goodness. Some scholars however say that wisdom literature does not speak directly about God² or salvation history, but only

¹ As a religious Salesian of Don Bosco, I have worked with young people with various degrees of difficulties and poverty: physical, intellectual, human, religious and spiritual. As a minister of the Word of God I have seen how it is difficult to impart the Good News to young people in general. This is even more difficult if the youth we are dealing with have been wounded in their inner esteem by persons in whom they had put their trust. The motivation of this work is a duty and a vital interest to see how God’s goodness can be imparted to abused youth. How can a minister God’s Word and loving kindness working with young people who are wounded say: God is Good. That is a challenge for the Church. I have brought the challenge even further by choosing to get a passage from the Psalms, a literary genre that is not always easy to full and genuinely grasp.

² Wisdom literature does not deal with salvation history. For this reason, some scholars do not hesitate to call wisdom literature as a foreign body within the Old Testament.

deals with the life issues of people. In the first place, what is wisdom?³ In the course of Israel's history, the true wisdom of God was believed to reside in the Law of Moses. Actually in Israel, law and wisdom were identified. The wisdom that originated in everyday life was transmitted orally and later on put into writing,⁴ was valued by Israel at the same level as the Law of Moses. Wisdom literature was so influential that in the Psalter there are several psalms that have a strong wisdom character and we should not be surprised that in this context the law is often highly exalted.

Through this thesis, I will attempt to answer some questions: what does it mean to taste and see the goodness of God? What is the faith and hope message of Psalm 34, that can be summarized in this statement of the psalmist: "Taste and See that the Lord is Good" (Ps 34: 8)? What did it mean in the historical context of the psalmist and for his community? To what extent can our present world address the issue of God's goodness to young people, especially those who are abused? In this work, as I attempt to answer the above questions, I do not promise to be very exhaustive in my approach, since the length cannot allow me.

Method and content of the study

The thesis is composed of three chapters. I will have a general introduction at the very beginning; each chapter will have its own short introduction and conclusion. At the end I will have a general conclusion to sum up the work. Actually, chapter I will deal with the Jewish background and experience of God's goodness and this will serve

³ According to the Oxford Dictionary, Wisdom is the "ability to make sensible decisions and give a good advice because of the experience and knowledge that you have" A.S. HORNBY, Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary. In Israel, wisdom is a cultural and religious phenomenon hence has a special meaning and a meaning that is different from our contemporary understanding of the word wisdom. Cf. P. THAYIL, *Class Note Wisdom Literature*, 2005-2006.

⁴ Probably under King Solomon, cf. P. THAYIL, *Class Notes Wisdom Literature*, 2005-2006.

as the foundation of the detailed exegesis and interpretation of the whole Psalm 34 in Chapter II. Chapter III will give us the theological message of Ps 34 the pastoral application to youth who are abused.

Once the text is placed in its context, it will serve as an eye opener to our readers. It will be as a window from which we shall look at the struggle of the Jewish culture which came to terms with the divine intervention in their lives, in comparison to our faith crisis today caused by similar reasons: the godless and the wicked seem to be prosperous. All this will be done within the framework and the mindset of the psalmist and his community and those for whom he composed Psalm 34.

This thesis comes at a time when modern African society is experiencing a lot of changes. It is a moment where believing in God is not something taken for granted, but is a personal decision. It is a moment where faith in God is challenged by a consumerist society; in this situation many young people, especially those who are abused, stand in need of the experience of God. Is God asleep for them? Is there any meaning in believing in the goodness of God when everything seems to be dominated by evil and abuses of all sorts? Here the message for Christians today is to be always open and receptive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit from within and have faith and trust in God. He takes care of those who “put their trust in him” (Ps 34: 8b).

CHAPTER I.

Introductory Questions: The Text in its Context.

1. Introduction

The relation with God, the experiencing of God's closeness stands at the heart of the people of Israel, the chosen people of God. This is a relation to a jealous God who made a covenant with his people. This reality of the experience of Israel is marked with high and low moments.

In this chapter, I am interested in the introductory questions that I consider very important for the purpose of deepening and clarifying our topic so as to allow the reader to follow and grasp more easily our line of thought. Actually, it is important that the reader be helped to understand the message of the wisdom that the psalmist conveys when he writes: "Taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps 34: 8).

In dealing with introductory questions, first of all I shall look at the historical context of our text. This will be followed by the remote and immediate contexts, the form and structure, and the textual criticism of the entire Psalm 34 that is the object of this study. After the textual criticism of the psalm I will analyze some words and expressions that the psalmist uses and that convey his experience of God. Then, by looking at the mystery of suffering, I will introduce wisdom literature and above all

offer some tools to understand the condition of the abused youth who are the subjects of this study. Chapter one will then act as a foundation to the second chapter that will deal with the exegesis of Psalm 34 and its interpretation.

2. Background of Ps 34

2.1. Historical setting

The Psalter is commonly known as 'Psalms of David'. This designation, according to Kissane is not to be understood as a claim of sole authorship, but merely as implying that David is the principal author, and for this there is ample evidence apart from scripture itself.⁵ For Oostrom, the historical setting of the compositions of Psalm 34 is the experience of David running away from Saul.⁶

"Even if David wrote certain psalms, he may have wished to express the religious thoughts of all the faithful, and so no allusion to the circumstances of his own life may be present."⁷ However David had a very deep experience of Yahweh and may have found that such a treasure could not be kept for himself. David knew that anyone who calls upon the Lord would also discover his goodness. This invitation, "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps 34: 8), has been asserting faith throughout the whole Christian era⁸ as it did for many Jews who prayed this same psalm throughout the centuries.

According to Sabourin, "it is reasonable to hold that there must be some connection between the Davidic collection and David himself. Taking into account what the historical books have to say of his musical talent (1Sam 16: 16-18; Am 6: 5), his

⁵ Cf. E. J. KISSANE, *The Book of Psalms Vol I*, xxxix.

⁶ Cf V. E. OOSTROM, *The Message of the Psalms*, 11.

⁷ E. J. KISSANE, *The Book of Psalms Vol I*, xxix.

⁸ Cf H. GARIEPY, *Treasure from the Psalms*, 100.

poetic gifts (2Sam 1: 19-27, 3: 33), and his love for liturgy (2Sam 6: 5-15ff), it would seem inevitable that the Psalter should contain some of David's compositions."⁹ It is important to know that the historical setting of the use of Psalm 34 is the individual or communal prayer of thanksgiving in the Temple for the goodness received from God.

2.2. The Context of the Ps 34

2.2.1. Remote Context

This context is that of a creative action of God for Israel. God alone is the Savior of Israel, the people whom he 'created' at the time he brought them out of Egypt (Ex 15: 16). This activity entails his deliverance in the Exodus, preserving the people in the wilderness, and bringing them safely to the Promised Land.¹⁰

The context is how Yahweh was experienced as one who hears the poor in the Jewish scriptures.¹¹ At this level, the experience of Israel in Egypt is very important (Ex 3: 17; 4: 31; Dt 26: 7). Among all the nations of the world, Yahweh chose Israel as his own portion and entered into covenant with them at Sinai. Israel did not deserve in any way to be chosen by God, but it is God's steadfast love that is the reason for Israel being chosen. Israel's response to God's word and actions are heard throughout the entire Bible.

⁹ L. SABOURIN, *The Psalms, their Origin and Meaning*, 16.

¹⁰ R. BROWN - J.A. FITZMYER - R. E. MURPHY, *NJBC*, 526.

¹¹ Good who is merciful and compassionate (cf Isa 5: 7) does not but act in favour of his people whose cry reaches up to him. So, "for the first time we are told that the oppressed cried out under their bondage, the cry of the oppressed proves to be the turning point of their situation. God began the redemptive action only when the oppressed voiced knowledge of the injustice being done to them. The naming and protest in injustice in the beginning of deliverance" C. J. BURN, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, 40.

From the first book of the Bible to the last, the human response to God's words and actions is described.¹² For the sake of our topic, we are going to concentrate on God's creative action in the psalms, bearing in mind that God in the psalms is acknowledged as the creator. "Praise and lament are the two basic melodies which echo and accompany God's actions on the long path of history".¹³

Praise is an essential part of the account of God's great deeds. The song of those who have been rescued rises up at the Sea of reeds (Ex 15); the conquest is accompanied by the song of victory (Judges 5); the barren woman whom God has comforted celebrates the reversal of her destiny (1 Sam 2); the king celebrates the saving hand of his God through victory in war (2Sam 22).

Psalms were used in liturgical celebrations, but they are deeply connected to the historical accounts of Israel's life. Actually, before being written and edited, the psalms were transmitted orally, because they were the fruit of Israel's reflection on their history where they discovered God's saving intervention on their behalf. "Israel's earliest writing about its history grew out of its declaration of praise for God's act of deliverance."¹⁴

The history of Israel was not only faithfulness to God; there were moments of sin, unfaithfulness, and betrayal. So, the response to God does not consist only in praises, but also in lament. When Israel was "smitten by God's blows, or plagued by

¹² This means that the "creator's praise is heard in the account creation, and in the book of revelation God's final deed is followed by the creation's perfecter. Cf C. WESTERMAN, *The Living Psalm*, 10.

¹³ C. WESTERMAN, *The Living Psalm*, 10.

¹⁴ C. WESTERMAN, *The Living Psalm*, 10.

God's silence and his turning away from them, Israel cried out from its troubles, poured out its heart to God."¹⁵

Laments also accompany the entire path God traveled with the chosen people described in the Bible: "beginning with the laments of the people in the wilderness and of Moses, the lonely mediator between God and the people, continuing with the laments of Elijah and the prophets (especially Jeremiah) and the people's lament in Babylonian exile (book of Lamentations) and ending with the tears of Jesus over Jerusalem and his cry from the cross ("Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? Which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Mk 15: 34; Mt 27: 42).¹⁶ This is the theological basis of experiencing the nearness of God. All the ancient creeds (Dt 6: 20-25; 26: 5-10, Job 24: 2-13) make a clear mention of the exodus from Egypt¹⁷. And this forms a theological basis for a cult of Yahweh¹⁸; from the exodus on, Yahweh is the sole legitimate object of Israel's worship.¹⁹ From here derive the fact and the vital need of tasting and seeing God's goodness and the only possibility of true happiness. So, tasting and seeing the goodness of God can better be understood if we read it in the broad view of the entire creative action of the new people of God.

2.2.2. Immediate Context

We consider the episode of David running away from King Saul's cruelty as the immediate context of our text. This is basically because Ps 34 is one among a group of eight psalms that narrate David's experience outside his homeland; where he ran away

¹⁵ C. WERSTENMAN, *The Living Psalm*, 10.

¹⁶ Cf C. WESTERNMAN, *The Living Psalm*, 10.

¹⁷ Event that we consider the basic creative action of God who makes Israel as a nation.

¹⁸ Of whom Human being can taste and see the goodness.

¹⁹ Cf. A. MAGNAN TE, *The Message of Exodus*, 56.

from Saul who was trying to kill him. The eight psalms “were composed upon that weary way of suffering (David went through) extending from Gibeon of Saul to Ziklag.”²⁰

Psalm 34 is situated in the first part²¹ of the division of the Psalter.²² Another aspect to note here is the Davidic character of this psalm. Psalm 34 has all the marks of relief and gratitude for a miraculous escape. The title²³ of Ps 34 identifies the occasion as that of 1 Samuel 21: 10ff, where the king of the Philistines had threatened to kill David, but he feigned he was mad, and was able to escape unharmed. Our immediate context is that of someone who, in spite of the helplessness of the situation, had a very deep experience of Yahweh, though assailed with sorrows,²⁴ and who has found that such a treasure, as the salvific action of God in his favor could, not be kept for himself. The liturgical use of this Psalm 34 reinforces its wider contextual use in the Temple. The use of Ps 34 is the expression of someone who faithfully and strongly believes that anyone who calls upon the Lord will also discover his goodness. In terms of the individual use of it, it means God’s salvation is seen in rescuing one from sickness, death and enemies and providing health, happiness and long life.²⁵

²⁰ The following is the approximation to their chronological order: 7, 59, 34, 52, 57, 142, and 54) Cf F. C. KEIL, - F. DELITSCH, *COT*, 407.

²¹ The Psalter has been divided in five parts: Book I (Psalms 1-41) they are associated with David, Yahweh is used to refer to God, Book II (42-72) they use Eloyim for God; Book III (73-89) they are community lamentations; Book (IV) speaks of God’s Kinship; and then Book V (90-150) which have songs of pilgrims, songs of ascent.

²² “This division of the Psalter in five books seems to have existed before the LXX translation was made; for the doxologies at the end of the first four books appear in the Greek version as well as in the Massoretic text” Cf SWETE, *Introduction to Old Testament in Greek*, 254. It would seem that no psalms were added after the formation of the Greek version [end of the 3rd Century BC] in E. J. KISSANE, *The Book of Psalms Vol I*, xxxi.

²³ The superscription or the title is: “Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.”

²⁴ He had the soldiers of Saul guarding his house with order to kill him (Ps 59), he narrowly escapes death in the hands of the philistines (Ps 34), he escaped Saul in the cave (Ps 57), and he manages to hide from Saul (Ps 54).

²⁵ R. BROWN – J.A. FITZMYER – R. E. Murphy, *NJBC*, 526.

2.3. Form and Structure of Ps 34.

2.3.1. Form of Ps 34

Ps 34 is an acrostic psalm²⁶, its verses (all but the last) beginning with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet²⁷ “with the exception of *waw* (unless 6a in the MT supplies this). Such a scheme is simple to execute, and allows the free movement from theme to theme without enduring loss of coherence.”²⁸ It indicates that we are in the presence of a thanksgiving psalm for the covenant. Actually, in Ps 34 we have many words that point to thanksgiving: bless (v1a), worship (v1b), glorify, glad (v2b), magnify (v3a), and exalt (v3b). The mood of acrostic psalms is happiness in the Lord.

According to Oostrom, acrostic psalms offer a sequence of sentiments whose logical connections are not always immediately evident. The reader and exegete must accordingly take into account the formal element and its logical consequences.²⁹

As an acrostic psalm, Ps 34 is similar in many ways to Ps 25. For instance, as in Psalm 25, v22 lies outside the acrostic structure, and if the first letter of vv1 and 11 (the central poetic line); and 22 are taken in order, they spell the word (*Aleph*), the first letter of the alphabet. This apparent intentional literary cleverness is often associated with

²⁶ ‘*Acrostic Psalm*’ is synonymous of ‘*Alphabetic Psalm*’; each verse of the psalm starts with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

²⁷ Having the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet at the beginning of the verses of a psalm, made it easier to memorize to psalm and rendered it liturgical use smoother. “It is quite normal that part of the ‘Mosaic teaching’ on the ‘Mosaic Law’ was sometimes cast in the poetic form, so that it might be more easily communicated in memory. To aid the memory, several of those teaching-wisdom are alphabetical; i.e. verse or couple of verses is assigned to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, so that the first letter of the verse or group of verses is determined by the order of the letters of the alphabet e.g. Pss 37, 122, 119” V. E. OOSTROM, *The Message of the Psalms*, 54.

²⁸ DEREK, 138 In E. J. KISSANE, *The Book of Psalms Vol I*, xxx.

²⁹ M. DAHOOD, *The Anchor Bible, Psalm I*, 205.

wisdom literature.³⁰ Ps 34³¹ is an acrostic psalm of thanksgiving that shares many characteristics with Wisdom Literature as well.

2.3.2. Structure of Ps 34

Many scholars have proposed various structures of Ps 34. Keil and Delitzsch suggest one of the most comprehensive structures of Ps 34;³² so, since this structure is clear enough and it fits our interest, we are going to follow it with a few modifications.

I- Ps 34: 1-10

Superscription (v0)

Vows of praise in which all are invited to unite (vv1-3)

Vows of praise because Yahweh has answered the prayer of his afflicted people and delivered them by the guardian angel (vv4-7)

An exhortation to seek Yahweh, the source of 'all good' (vv8-10)

II- Ps 34: 11-22

Instruction that prosperity depends upon good conduct (vv11-14)

The watchful care of Yahweh over the righteous (vv15.17-20)

Destruction of the wicked (vv16.21)

Liturgical gloss was added (v22)

The first half of the psalm (34: 1-10) alternates between personal testimony (v 1-2a, 4, 6) and repeated calls to join in the praise and be stimulated to fresh faith. According to Alden, v3 is the first verse of exhortation. These words, which frequently have been set to music, urge the listeners to join the psalmist in exalting God's name.³³ The personal testimony begins in verse 4, with the statement that God has answered and delivered. Except in vv 1 and 13, the balance of the testimony is in the third person. It is clear that David includes himself among those who fear God (cf v7).³⁴

³⁰ *NIB Vol IV*, 813.

³¹ Psalm 34 is a psalm of thanksgiving, yet its content brings it closer to Wisdom Literature. Cf *NIB Vol IV*, 813. Also see acrostic poem in Prov 31: 10-31.

³² F. C. KEIL, - F. DELITZSCH, *COT* 407-414.

³³ R. ALDEN, In E. J. KISSANE, *The Book of Psalms Vol I*, 83.

³⁴ F. C. KEIL, - F. DELITZSCH, *COT* 407-414.

Ps 34: 11-22 is the second part of the Psalm. There are lessons that show that “the true good is to be in accord with God”. It is the answer to the hardest times (v19) and to the most ultimate questions (v21f).³⁵ Many commentators agree that the second part shows even stronger educational tendencies, that is, sapiential influence.³⁶

2.4. Textual Criticism

In general, the aim of textual criticism is to recover as far as possible the original text of the Bible.³⁷ With Kissane we can say that owing to its general use as a popular hymn book, the Psalter was liable to suffer changes and above all the ordinary corruption that is due to the fault of the scribe. Actually, there was a natural tendency to modernize the language³⁸, to accommodate the psalms to its liturgical purpose, and according to some critics, to make additions to the text because of altered political and social condition.³⁹

As far as Ps 34 is concerned, Kissane points out some few modifications that have occurred in it during the centuries.⁴⁰ Though those modifications occurred, the understanding of the psalm was not affected. We shall however look at the insertion at Ps 34: 17a of the word צָרוֹתָם that appears in G, Syr and Targ versions. The inserted word צָרוֹתָם means “troubles”. In the original text the psalmist does not specify from

³⁵ D. KIDNER, *Psalm 1-72, An Introduction and Commentary*, 140.

³⁶ PERDUE, 278, in S. E. GERSTEMBERGER, *Psalms Part I*, 148.

³⁷ Z. MATTAM, *Opening the Bible, Meeting Christ in Scriptures*, 139.

³⁸ “Yet in the psalms which have a refrain, the refrain is often omitted, and in the alphabetic psalms, some verses are omitted or inserted in the wrong place. Sometimes, the corruption of the text has been noted by the Massoretes” But these cases are comparatively rare (*qere* instead of *ketib*) there are few other warnings that the text is unsound, like the ‘dots’ in Ps 27: 13” and the inverted ‘nun’ in psalm. Cf E. J. KISSANE, xxxiii.

³⁹ E. J. KISSANE, *The Book of Psalms*, xxxii.

⁴⁰ V5a הַבִּיטוּ (8MSS. G., Syr. Jer) MT אֱלֹהֵי (cf. 7). MT וְנִהְרֹוּ (G., Syr. Jer) MT וְפָנִיהֶם (G., Syr. Jer) MT וְפָנִיהֶם, V6a שָׁמַע MT שָׁמַע V17a Insert צָרוֹתָם (G., Syr., Targ.). Cf E. J. KISSANE, *The Book of Psalms*, 149.

what the Lord would deliver the crying one. This would probably mean that the editor of the psalm held that the Lord delivers, or restores the afflicted to his or her original state of wholeness. The insertion of צָרוֹתָם (Troubles), from which the Lord delivers the afflicted one, shows a situation of trouble in which the listeners of the psalm found themselves. They added the word צָרוֹתָם (Troubles) in order to respond to a particular socio-political situation.

3. Words and Phrases

In this section my intention is to highlight some key words that the psalmist uses and whose significance is important in the understanding of Psalm 34 as a whole. In transmitting his message, the psalmist invites the listener or the reader to Taste, to See, that the Lord is good and he promises happiness to those who take refuge in God. These words and expression are very significant in trying to understand the intention and the message of the psalmist in contrast to the abused one today. From the Old Testament and the New Testament, we shall analyze the biblical meaning of these significant words and expression used by the psalmist.

3.1. "O taste" טַעֲמוּ

Contemporary biblical scholars have reached the common agreement that the expression "O taste" טַעֲמוּ is as very complex expression. Failure to grasp the nature of the metaphor behind that word led *La bible de la Pleaide, II P. 90*, to render 'ta mu' טַעֲמוּ, which really means 'taste, savor' by "constatez" (witness, attest), a dubious

translation.⁴¹ According to certain scholars like Selwyn, the correct version is found in the citation in 1Pet 2: 3⁴² in which to “taste” means to learn, to savor⁴³ or to have experience of God’s kindness and be grateful for it. Other scholars like Brown are of the view that to taste⁴⁴ figuratively means to partake of, to enjoy and experience.

The object of experience for the psalmist is God’s goodness that we shall analyze below. That which is to be tasted is not something material but rather immaterial not to say spiritual. It is an experience into which someone enters. For example, to adhere to Christ is the consequence of an intimate experience, “Revelation is not information about God and his nature, but an invitation to the trust in the one whose self-disclosure is a foretaste of the promised inheritance. The future for the community of faith is not an unknown leap into the dark because the coming one accompanies the faithful towards the end”⁴⁵

Tasting does not refer to the quantity of intake of something whatsoever; to taste has nothing to do with taking in a sip. In Heb 2: 9 Christ tasted death in the sense that he experienced its bitter taste to the full. This means that in tasting, the amount

⁴¹ <http://www.ccf.fr/catho/prier/commentaires.php>, August 2006.

⁴² “Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation; for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord” (1Pet 2: 2-3).

⁴³ E. G. SELWYN, in C. BROWN, *NIDNTT* 269. On the other hand, Brown thinks that 1Pet 2: 3 takes up the words of Ps 34: 8 when it says: “for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord”. If understood in that way that would mean that the purpose of tasting is to urge the reader to “put away malice and all guile, and insecurity and envy and all and slander” (1Pet 2: 1) and grow up in a way appropriate to those who have been ‘born anew’ (1Pet 1: 23); in other words taste is to live a new experience. Ed C. BROWN, *NIDNTT*, 270.

⁴⁴ In the same way, According to Collins Brown, the verb ‘to taste’ appears in its figurative form only three times in the Old Testament: that is in Ps 34: 8; Job 20: 18 and Prov 31: 18. In that figurative sense, it expresses the element of experience and can be translated into perceived experience. Actually, the Old Testament puts it *geuomai* (Root *geus, gys*; cf Lat *gustare*, Ger *Kosten* to taste) Cf Ed C. BROWN, *NIDNTT*, 270. Other scholars are of the view that another interpretation of 1Pet 2: 3 is a must; so, in view of connecting this passage of 1Pet 2: 3 with Ps 34, SELWYN suggests that its force is best brought out if it is rendered: if the response to the psalmist’s words (taste and see the that Lord is Good) is taken as the initial step of adherence to Christ.” E. G. SELWYN in C. BROWN, *NIDNTT*, 270.

⁴⁵ B.S. CHILDS, *The Book of Exodus*, 89.

consumed is not the point, but the experience itself. Hence, to taste or to experience is not an act of the moment but a kind of journey. He who has experienced God once, has experienced something of a future age, something of the world that is to come. Therefore, to experience or taste in our case is to receive a foretaste, meaning a type of tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet' in the life of the believer or the one experiencing.⁴⁶

What is the effect of tasting? Is the human being, who is a limited being able to experience God, the infinite Being, without his humanity being overwhelmed or destroyed? Can a human being experience God and remain the same? Actually, knowing, tasting or experiencing God does not remove man's humanity. Cases of knowing God are many in the Bible.⁴⁷ In none of these cases do we find anything that goes beyond communion and fellowship with God; "there is no unio-mystica or identification with the deity. God remains God and man remains man. Man can experience God's nearness and goodness in joy and gratitude; he can tremble before the holy and terrible one. But he is not absorbed by the mystical experience so as he becomes united with God."⁴⁸

Tasting or experiencing God also has the meaning of being saved. The statement of Heb 2: 9 that Jesus "tasted death for everyone" sees his death as an act of salvation. "Jesus' condemnation as a sinner does not spare man from physical death, but takes away his fear of death, because through it, death's power of eternal destruction was

⁴⁶ Cf C. BROWN, *NIDNTT*, 271.

⁴⁷ Experience of Abram, Moses in the burning bush, Joseph in his dream, Jacob fighting with God, Samuel as a child, Job...etc.

⁴⁸ R. HELMER, *The Faith of the Psalmist*, 60.

broken (cf vv 14ff). Similarly, Jn 8: 52 contains the promise: “truly, truly, I say to you if anyone keeps my words, he will never taste death.”⁴⁹

3.2. “And see” ܐܢܝܢܐ

To see can be used metaphorically for the sense of: “Oh, I see” when one grasps an insight.⁵⁰ In its biblical sense, to see refers to the verb to drink; to be saturated, to be satisfied. This points to the fact of having some needs met.⁵¹ There is also a transition from sensory to intellectual and spiritual perception.⁵²

One biblical expression that is pregnant with meaning is “seeing the face”. Usually it means to ‘visit’, ‘to meet at court’, ‘to be granted an audience’. It can also denote a spiritual experience or perception; this is why it can mean ‘to observe’ (Gen 16: 4-5), ‘to perceive’ (Gen 26: 28), ‘to experience’ (Jer 5: 12), and ‘to encounter’ (God in history Ex 34: 10). Thus seeing God’s glory means receiving the revelation of God in his glory (Ps 97: 6; Isa 26: 10).⁵³

Valles equates the word “see” with the gift of understanding. He refers to the understanding of Jesus, his doctrine, his father, and his spirit, to understand from inside, in depth, in love.⁵⁴ This is to see with God’s eyes, to understand with his mind, to

⁴⁹ C. BROWN, *NIDNTT*, 271.

⁵⁰ M. R. THOMSON, *I want to See: In the Bible Today* Vol 43, n1, 2005, 5.

⁵¹ This is why according to Dahood, ‘and see’ can imply ‘and drink deeply’. “Assigning imperative ‘ru’, often deleted, to yr’ II, ‘to be fat, sated, drink deeply’, semantically connotes with ‘rawah’, “to be saturated, drink one’s fill” where in each instance the synonymous verb is ‘saba’, “to be sated, satisfied” “Studied by Dahood in PNWSP, p 23, in connection with Prv25, where ‘yura’ (MT yore) is paired with ‘tdussan’. Text studies there includes Ps XIC 16: Isa LIII 11, Job X 15.” M. DAHOOD, *The Anchor Bible Psalm I*, 206

⁵² G. W. BROMILEY, *TDNT*, 707.

⁵³ G. W. BROMILEY, *TDNT*, 708.

⁵⁴ C. G. VALLES, *Taste and See. Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit*, 42.

contemplate with his spirit. To recognize God's hand where others see only human circumstances, to see providence in history and love in suffering.⁵⁵

To see just for the sake of seeing is meaningless; so, those who have the privilege of seeing, of having an experience of God make right decisions in the light of what they saw and heard (Mt 13: 14-15). The eyewitnesses of Jesus who participated in his ministry both saw what took place and understood its significance as revelation (cf Jn 20: 31). Experiencing God is authentic only when the imperatives of faith are present as well as the privilege of sight.⁵⁶ He who sees God cannot but empty oneself to God. With the evangelist we can agree that purity of heart is connected with experience of God: "Blessed are the pure in heart because they will see God" (Mt 5: 8); they will contemplate God in himself and in all He does among men, the gift to see what most people do not see.

3.3. *The Lord* **יהוה**;

In the Old Testament, the term '*adon*' was a common Hebrew word parallel to *ba'al* and signified 'lord' or 'master', and was often used for persons having some kind of superiority, e.g., a king (1Sam 24: 11), a husband (Gn 18: 12) and a tribal patriarch (1Sam 24: 11). Sometimes it was a polite form of address (2Sam 1: 10), but most importantly a divine epithet.⁵⁷

As a divine epithet, the word 'Lord' can be an honorific title for God;⁵⁸ this is so in the sense that it expresses the sovereign power of dominion of God. In that case it is

⁵⁵ Cf C. G. VALLES, *Taste and See, Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit*, 44.

⁵⁶ G. W. BROMILEY, *TDNT*, 711.

⁵⁷ *NCE*, Vol VIII, 988.

⁵⁸ The prophets emphasized God's supreme authority and the subjection of Israel to God as his servant.

always used with the definite article to mean the ultimate Lord (Ex 23: 17; 34: 23; Isa 1: 24; Mal 3: 1), Lord of all the earth (Jos 3: 11, 13; Mi 4: 13), and Lord of lords (Dt 10: 17; Ps 135: 3). As a matter of fact, *'adon*, was preferred to *ba'al* to express God's Lordship since the latter was used as the proper name of many Canaanite gods.⁵⁹

'The Lord' can also be a substitute for God's sacred name 'Yahweh'. It is commonly agreed among scholars that the exile in Babylon and the continued dispersal of the Jews throughout the Near East, the emergence of a new place of worship and instruction, the synagogues, where Jewish faithful recited their psalms and had the scriptures read and explained to them are reasons for substituting 'Yahweh' with 'the Lord'. In an environment other than the Temple and the Holy City of Jerusalem, the sacred name of Yahweh was treated with reverence and respect, so that eventually it became sacred even to pronounce.⁶⁰

The "Lord"⁶¹ in its theological connotation was not predicated of Jesus before His resurrection. Before his resurrection he was addressed as "Rabbi", "Master", or "sir". So, in the Fourth Gospel, when Jesus is called "The Lord" it is mainly describing post-resurrection events (Jn 20: 2; "the Lord" of Jn 6: 23 and 11: 2 appear to follow the Lucan usage mentioned above).⁶²

⁵⁹ Cf. *NCE*, Vol VIII, 988.

⁶⁰ "This reverence for the sacred tetragrammaton was so carefully fostered during the post-exilic period that Yahweh does not occur at all in Job, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Chronicle, and the second and third and second collection of the psalms. The usual substitute *Adonai*, itself become so revered that it acquired substitutes of its own, heaven, father of heaven, the name" *NCE*, Vol VIII, 989.

⁶¹ In the New Testament, "Lord" is used for Jesus Christ. In Mark and Matthew for example, Jesus is called "Lord" only once (Mk 11: 3, parallel to Mt 21: 3). The vocative κύριε is frequently applied to Him in all four Gospels but originally meant only 'sir'. Luke refers to Him as "The Lord" ὁ κύριος many times, but the usage is commonly recognized as coming from a later stage in the Gospel tradition, when Christians began to speak of Jesus while he was on earth with the understanding that they had of Him long after Pentecost. Cf C. OWSZAREK, *Class notes Luke and Acts*, 2004-2005.

⁶² Thomas' cry, "My Lord and my God" is intended as a doctrinal climax to John's Gospel, affirming the Lordship of the victorious and glorified son of man (Jn 20: 28). *NCE*, Vol VIII, 989.

According to St Paul, Jesus received the Lordship because he humbled himself by becoming obedient even to death on the cross. In this text the name that transcends any other name is not 'Jesus', which he received at His circumcision, but κύριος, the substitute for the name 'Yahweh'; and thus this ancient hymn affirms Christ's equal rank with the Father.⁶³

After his resurrection, Jesus revealed himself to be the victor over death and sin, and to be the prince of this world (Rom 1: 4). As a result the terms by which he had formerly been designated (Son of Man, Messiah, Prophet) were now inadequate to express the new dimension that was manifested by his exaltation.

Unlike θεός, κύριος does not express Jesus' nature as much as his divine Lordship.⁶⁴ A Christian must acknowledge that 'Jesus is Lord' (1Cor 12: 3) and must recognize that there is only one Lord (1Cor 8: 6). In Paul's doctrine God the Father and the Lord Jesus are on the same level: both are divine, and the Father acts through the Lord, His Mediator.⁶⁵

The New Testament writers agree on the doctrine of Jesus' Lordship. Unless they worshipped him as the divine Lord, at the right hand of the Father, it is impossible

⁶³ *NCE*, Vol VIII, 989.

⁶⁴ The word "Lord" is intimately linked to the resurrection of Jesus. This means that the title Lord was the only adequate title to express Jesus' exaltation to the glory he had with the Father before he became flesh. However, there is room to think that even during his ministry Jesus gave hints of Lordship. Here we recall Jesus' prediction that he would come with the Father's glory to judge all people (Mt 16: 27; 25: 31); his conundrum about the Messiah's being David's Lord (Mt 22: 41-45), and His confession that he was the mysterious Son of God who would establish God's final kingdom (Mt 26: 64; cf. Dn 7:13). Jesus thus suggested even before His exaltation that His Messiahship was more than that of the awaited judge, the Lord. In the light of his resurrection his followers understood that he was really the Lord and applied to him other passages of the Old Testament that previously referred only to Yahweh (cf Acts 2: 34-36, 1cor 10: 9, Num 21: 5-6, acts 2: 14-41), Cf. *NCE*, Vol VIII, 989.

⁶⁵ Cf. *NCE*, Vol VIII, 989.

to explain how these ardent Israelite monotheists could have attributed to him the incommunicable name and the functions of the Lord God Yahweh.⁶⁶

3.4. Good טוב

In the Old Testament, 'good' has a religious connotation; in this sense, it can be referred to what God is and what he does. 'God is good' is somehow like a self-evident confession (cf 1Chr 15: 34). God also does 'good' (cf Ex 18: 9) in his work in history, which aims at final salvation and gives direction for life though the law.⁶⁷ The Vulgate correctly uses the expression "The Lord is good" כִּי־טוֹב יְהוָה: meaning 'Yahweh is good' is rendered: *quoniam suavis est Dominus*.⁶⁸ In 1Pet 2: 12, a parallel expression to "the Lord is good" is found in: "That they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation".⁶⁹

In modern English versions of the New Testament, "good" appears as a translation of αγαθος, καλος, and χρηστος.⁷⁰ In the synoptic gospels, the word "good" is frequently used in a moral sense.⁷¹ Three of the Markan usages are in a dialogue between a rich young man and Jesus: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (Mk 10: 17-18). Jesus' response does not so much deny the goodness of Jesus himself,

⁶⁶ NCE Vol VIII, 989

⁶⁷ G.W. BROMILEY, *IDNT*, 3.

⁶⁸ For this nuance of 'toḥ', cf. UT, 1084:1, *vn tb*, "sweet wine," and song of Sol 1: 2, 'ki tobim daddeka (*MT dodeka*) miyyayin,' "for your breasts are sweeter than wine." See further, Albright, "Archaic /survivals in the Texts of Canticles," *Hebrew and Semitic Studies presented to Godfrey Rolles Drive, p.2*, and Aistleiner, *WuS*, p.119. In M. DAHOOD, *The Anchor Bible Psalm I*, 206.

⁶⁹ M. DAHOOD, *The Anchor Bible Psalm I*, 206.

⁷⁰ "In Greek text, each of these terms with their cognates has specific nuances. The nuances vary somewhat from one New Testament author to another, as does the preference for one term or another. In the whole New Testament, *agathos* appears 107 times, *kalos* 104 times, and *chrestos* 7 times." R.F. COLLINS; in D. N. FREEDMAN, *ABD*, 1074.

⁷¹ Matthew uses it 16 times, Luke 17 times, mark 4 times. Cf R. F. COLLINS; in D. N. FREEDMAN, *ABD*, 1074.

as it emphasizes the goodness of God. In this way, the Markan Jesus recapitulates traditional biblical teaching about the goodness of God, a teaching likewise reflected in the *qal wahomer* argumentation (a rabbinic argument from lesser to greater of Mt 7: 11, Lk 7: 13). According to Mark, God's goodness is manifest in the gift of eternal life.⁷²

Some scholars see in the response of Jesus about good: "one there is who is good" (Mt 19: 17) as a paraphrase of the Markan statement about the goodness of God, whereas others like Cope and Murray argue that Matthew had made a statement about the goodness of the law.⁷³ "Matthew's emphasis upon ethical good (Mt 19: 16-17) is congruous with Matthew's general ethical interests and his consistent antithetical use of 'good,' αγατος and 'evil,' πονερος (Mt 5: 45; 7: 11, 17-18, 12: 34-35; 20: 15);⁷⁴ 22: 10; 25: 21-26). Matthew frequently contrasts good and evil persons (Mt 5: 45; 12: 34-35; 20: 15; 22: 10; 25: 21-26)."⁷⁵

Several times, the psalmist employs the word "good" טוב in connection with man's relationship with God (Ps 34: 8).⁷⁶ St Paul reflects on the goodness of God and the good that humans strive to accomplish. The diatribe of Rom 2: 1-11, addressed to the presumably upright, recalls the biblical conception of God's goodness, manifest in the gift of eternal life. It warns that God's goodness (*chrestotes*) is not construed as a reluctance to punish. Glory, honour, immortality, and peace are given only to those who truly do good (Rom 2: 7, 11). Elsewhere, Paul includes goodness among the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5: 22); from the power of the Holy Spirit comes the goodness of

⁷² "Good can refer to ethical good to be achieved as a condition for entrance in eternal life. This is especially clear in the Markan dialogue, also found in Lk 18: 19 and in Matthew with some modifications". R. F. COLLINS; in D. N. FREEDMAN, *ABD*, 1074.

⁷³ Cf R. F. COLLINS; in D. N. FREEDMAN, *ABD*, 1074.

⁷⁴ It Literary means: "Is you eye evil because I am good?"

⁷⁵ R. F. COLLINS; in D. N. FREEDMAN, *ABD*, 1074

⁷⁶ Cf. M. DAHOOD, *The Anchor Bible Psalm I*, 206.

humans (Rom 15: 14). Paul then views goodness in a cosmic perspective and considers the goodness that accrues to humans to be the result of God's empowering gift.⁷⁷

One question that arises here is whether doing good is possible without God! Qoheleth thinks not, when it says: "Surely there is no righteous man on earth that does good and never sins" (7: 20)⁷⁸, this points to the fact that God is good and is the source of all good and that those who do good only participate in the goodness of God.

God's goodness is often combined with his steadfast love (eg Ps 106: 1) or with his loving help, which is probably also in Psalm 34 (cf vv 4, 6 and 17). In psalm 73: 28 the psalmist asserts that "it is good to be near God" or perhaps "to draw near to God" i.e. in his temple. But it is rather difficult to determine the emotional reality behind the expression "good" in these and similar statements. The Hebrew word 'tob' has at least as many shades as its English equivalent.⁷⁹

Good has already been done but it is also awaited (Jer 32: 39, 42), meanwhile we are shown what is good "by revelation of God's will in the Law."⁸⁰ The climax of this revelation is in the person of Jesus Christ. Eph 2: 7 sees the manifestation of God's goodness among us, mediated through Jesus Christ, in the age to come. In contrast, the very creation of God is good (1Tim 6: 18, Titus 2: 7, 14; 3: 8, 14).⁸¹

3.5. *Happy* **יְשׁוּעָה**

In the Old Testament, happiness always refers to persons, not to things or states.⁸² It is a person that is said to be happy; it is a person that is declared to be happy,

⁷⁷ Cf. R. F. COLLINS; in D. N. FREEDMAN, *ABD*, 1075

⁷⁸ Cf. G. W. BROMILEY, *TDNT*, 3.

⁷⁹ Cf. R. HELMER, *The Faith of the Psalmist*, 59.

⁸⁰ G. W. BROMILEY, *TDNT*, 3.

⁸¹ Cf. R. F. COLLINS; in D. N. FREEDMAN, *ABD*, 1075

⁸² Cf. G. W. BROMILEY, *TDNT*, 548.

to be blessed. Blessedness “is fullness of life and relates to such things as a wife, beauty, honor, wisdom and piety.”⁸³

Happiness or beatitude is the personal possession of a desirable good, ultimately the perfect good of an intellectual nature. Accordingly, God, the sovereign uncreated good, is happiness itself. Inasmuch as creatures participate in the perfect good, they possess created happiness under various forms and in different degrees.⁸⁴ The highest degree of happiness is found in the New Testament as a “distinctive joy which comes through participation in the divine kingdom.”⁸⁵ The verb μακρίζο⁸⁶ occurs only twice in the New Testament, first in Lk 1: 48 for the blessing of the mother of the Messiah by all generations and then in James 5: 11 with reference to those who endure.

Happiness can be either objective or subjective. Objective happiness is the good that is capable of giving a person one’s ultimate perfection by fulfilling one’s every need; this is God alone, who by his infinite goodness can satisfy creatures. Subjective happiness is the actual perfection experienced by the person through a realization of one’s potentialities; it is the possession of the desirable object. When this actualization is ultimate, the person possesses perfect subjective happiness, until then it can only be imperfect.⁸⁷

Man has but one goal: perfect happiness⁸⁸, which is full realization of his potentialities through intimate personal union with God in the beatific vision.⁸⁹ In this

⁸³ G. W. BROMILEY, *TDNT*, 548.

⁸⁴ Cf. *NCE*, Vol VIII, 990.

⁸⁵ G. W. BROMILEY, *TDNT*, 548.

⁸⁶ It means ‘to extol as’ or ‘declare to be blessed’ Cf. G. W. BROMILEY, *TDNT*, 549.

⁸⁷ Cf. *NCE*, Vol VI, 920.

⁸⁸ “Unending joy, rectitude of will, full appreciation of creatures; expansive friendship and ultimate glorification of the body accompany perfect happiness” *NCE*, Vol VI, 919.

⁸⁹ DENZ., 1000 in *NCE*, Vol VI, 919.

life, however, a limited participation in the perfect good through human activities (physical, spiritual, and supernatural, both individual and social) produces a form of happiness, natural and/or supernatural, that, although imperfect, is a beginning of the perfect happiness.⁹⁰

In this life man can possess an imperfect natural felicity through virtuous activity in which temporal and spiritual goods, including friendship, are conditionally necessary. The problem, however, is not to explain a purely natural happiness in a supernatural economy of salvation. In the supernatural order, the wayfarer actually possesses God, but in a manner proper to one's state: operations of the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are most perfectly manifested in the beatitudes, which produce a happiness that is both terrestrial and a beginning of perfect happiness.⁹¹

Is individual happiness possible or can someone be happy alone? Responding to this question, we have the position of Kane who thinks that the other name of happiness is relationship. For him Christianity is all about relationship.⁹² This is why when persons are respectfully intimate with their lover, friend, neighbor, God and world; the result is happiness in this life and the next.⁹³ The result of such happiness is love itself. This can be seen in the love that exists in the Trinity.⁹⁴

The psalmist is sensitive to God's goodness and his living presence to such a degree that they actually become for him objects which he is able to perceive with his

⁹⁰ Cf. *NCE*, Vol VI, 919.

⁹¹ Cf. *NCE*, Vol VI, 919.

⁹² Cf. T. A. KANE, *Happy Are You who Affirm*, 17-18.

⁹³ Cf. T. A. KANE, *Happy Are You who Affirm*, 17.

⁹⁴ "In fact, so important is relationship in Christian theology that it teaches that the love relationship of the father for the son, son for the father is so meaningful that the relationship results in a person love- whom we call the Holy Spirit" T.A. KANE, *Happy Are You who Affirm*, 18.

senses. The psalmist is so near to God (taste and see), and this inspires him to sing with joy the praise of the blessedness of those who find their refuge in God.⁹⁵

3.6. Take refuge **יָחֹסֶה**

Another phrase that I consider useful as a window through which we can view our exegetical text and the psalmist's general intention is the expression "To take refuge in Him" **יָחֹסֶה בּוֹ**. It can also mean to 'find refuge in Him' (Ps 91: 4); figuratively, it means to place confidence in or to rely on someone, hence the KJV translation is "put trust in Him." Actually, apart from two exceptions (Judg 9: 15; Isa 30: 2), the verb **יָחֹסֶה** (take refuge) is exclusively seeking refuge in Yahweh.⁹⁶

With the notion of taking refuge in something or in somebody, comes the idea of the Levitical cities of refuge where individuals who had committed manslaughter could go. The cities of refuge can be considered as oasis or irreplaceable "refuge is the 'dwelling hidden by [lit. In the dwelling place of'] the most high ('elyon) where the outcast can find shelter."⁹⁷ According to Kidner, to find shelter or to 'take refuge' gives the defensive or external aspect of salvation; God is the unchanging in whom we find shelter.⁹⁸

The question at this point is, what is the concrete action or effect that springs from getting refuge close to God? The Bible provides us with a series of pictures showing how the man who trusts God is relieved of all fear (Ps 22: 23), protected from the snare of the fowler (Ps 91: 3), from the plague of destruction (Ps 78: 50), from the

⁹⁵ Cf. A. WEISER, *The Psalms, A Commentary*, 298.

⁹⁶ Cf V. GEMEREN, *NIDOTTE Vol 2*, 219.

⁹⁷ V. GEMEREN, *NIDOTTE Vol 2*, 219.

⁹⁸ Cf. D. KIDNER, *Psalms 1-72*, 174.

destructive word (Ps 109: 3).⁹⁹ The above actions or effects are initiatives of God that the righteous who turns to Him benefit from.

Theologically, **חָסֵהוּ** (take refuge) emphasises the human insecurity and inability in the face of calamity, and highlights the divine security and ability to harbour and preserve those in distress (Ps 11: 1; 16: 1; 37: 4; etc). Consequently, believers petition Yahweh for refuge (Ps 57: 1) or praise Him for providing such deliverances in the past (Ps 18: 2).¹⁰⁰

3.7. Partial Conclusion

The verse “O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him” (Ps 34: 8), as we have seen in the above analysis, is a rich verse that finds it deeper meaning and understanding in the Old and New Testaments. This verse conveys the impression of emotional, intellectual, spiritual involvement of the person; we should notice here that to the impression of emotional involvement, there is a combination of security, trust and joy in God.¹⁰¹ So, in the study of Psalm 34 when the psalmist says “O taste and see that the LORD is good, happy are those who take refuge in him” (v8) he means “my heart is glad, my soul rejoices, and my body dwells secure”; body and soul- i.e, the whole person- is engaged in the experience of divine goodness.

4. The Mystery of Suffering

The experience of God’s goodness may leave us with the impression that he or she who trusts in the Lord always has happiness. That is not the case because suffering is part and parcel of the human condition, and common sense shows that the degree of

⁹⁹ Cf. V. GEMEREN, *NIDOTTE Vol 2*, 220.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. D. KIDNER, *Psalms 1-72*, 174.

¹⁰¹ Cf. R. HELMER, *The Faith of the Psalmist*, 59-60. Cf. Also Ps 16: 9.

happiness is made evident in comparison to suffering. In this section on the mystery of suffering, our aim is to look at the biblical understanding of suffering.

In the traditional wisdom¹⁰², suffering is regarded as a punishment for sin, and even as the result of God's wrath. Prosperity, together with all the earthly blessings, is the reward of a good life, a life freed from any great difficulties. In traditional wisdom,¹⁰³ the course of history was regulated by the law of retribution and not by God's free and merciful intervention. In the world, the individual's action could influence the course of his or her history. Time showed that the wicked people could prosper while the righteous could suffer. This situation proved retributive justice¹⁰⁴ not to be hundred percent true. The idea of a justice that retaliates is replaced by the mercifulness and the goodness God.

The imprecatory psalms and the book of Job show how much the principle of retribution had an unpardonable influence on the idea of justice and good.¹⁰⁵ With this in mind, i.e., the idea that retributive justice is not always verified, a new understanding of suffering was developed. Israel turned to a new understanding of suffering as a

¹⁰² The traditional wisdom is based on the conservative idea that good things in life are a result of good behavior and action. As a consequence, bad behavior and bad action can be the only justification of suffering; actually, blessings in this life are explained as God's reward and sufferings seen as God's punishment. Cf P. THAYIL, *Class Notes Wisdom Literature*, 2005-2006.

¹⁰³ The experience has proven that traditional wisdom is not always justified; especially when it comes to the situation where by a good man suffers while the wicked man is prospers. Ps 34: 16.19 seems to agree with the books of Proverbs, Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon that in traditional wisdom, God blesses the righteous and punishes the wicket. Cf P. THAYIL, *Class Notes Wisdom Literature*, 2005-2006.

¹⁰⁴ "The principle of divine retribution applies both to nation as well as to individuals. And the psalmists frequently illustrate it with example of Israel history, i.e.: Ps 9-10 where the problem of posterity of the wicket is treated in the context of Israel's past successes (Israel being the 'Just one')" V.E. OOSFROM, *The Message of the Psalms*, 55.

¹⁰⁵ Critical wisdom is based on the challenge of traditional wisdom. Here the experience shows that good deeds are not always rewarded and that the innocent suffers while the wicked is prospering. This challenging tendency is found in the bible in the books of Job, and Ecclesiastes. Critical wisdom points to the fact that God is free and omnipotent in all his decisions and can not be obliged even by the good deeds of the righteous. cf P. THAYIL, *Class Notes Wisdom Literature*, 2005-2006.

means of education that Yahweh used to purify his chosen people.¹⁰⁶ If this is true for a nation, this should also be true for the individual. So the sufferings of an individual could be considered as an instrument in Yahweh's hand.

It goes without saying that - and psalm 34 the object of our study has this line - the righteous man must suffer: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Ps 34: 19a), he walks in the midst of troubles (Ps 138: 7); he knows the time of need and the day of trouble (Ps 37: 39; 50: 15). But "the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Ps 34: 19b).

From what we have said up to now, the impression will be that suffering leads to happiness, sadness to joy; therefore suffering takes on a new meaning, because it expiates sin, because it purifies and acts as a means of education. Above all, it also means that suffering opens up man's heart to God. Going deeper in this direction might lead us think that in the Old Testament God could only really become the God of his people through the testing experience of suffering. If this is true, then what about the mercy and goodness of God? (Ps 34: 9).

The discourse on a passible God finds supportive argument in the Old Testament notion of God. God was intimately involved in the affairs of the Hebrew people. As a living God who truly is, he was ever active in the history of his people. He suffered over their plight, and he determined, in his mercy, to rescue them (Ex 2: 23-25; 3: 7-8). He is distressed by their unfaithfulness and suffers over their sinful plight (Hos 11: 1-4). Thus God showed himself to be a God of compassion and, above all a God of faithful Love.

¹⁰⁶ The prophets Hosea puts into the mouth of Yahweh the words: "they shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king because they have refused to turn to me" (Hos 11" 5). While Amos spoke about all the goodness God did for Israel but how they answered with disobedience "but you refused to return to me" (Am 4: 6-12).

This shows the ability of God to suffer because he loves his people. “If he does so as the God of Love, then such God must, by necessity, experience suffering”.¹⁰⁷

In the Old Testament, the poor, the *Anawim*, are frequently referred to in the psalms. These *Anawim* are the humble and pious Israelites from all the classes of society, perhaps especially from the middle group, who were not particularly blessed with the world’s goods, yet were not poor in the strict sense of the word.¹⁰⁸

Indeed human misfortune points to sin, but it is not the painful means used by God to bring man to contemplation and self-surrender, to make a sort of analysis of himself before God’s presence, to a dramatic purification of his beliefs which leads him to utter the cry: “Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord” (Ps 130).¹⁰⁹

Suffering is no longer considered here as a punishment, no longer as a means of education but as a positive good in itself. It is considered to have real value because it indicates patience in the ‘waiting upon the Lord’. As a matter of fact, it is from the experience of suffering that someone, in the Old Testament, is able to cry to the Lord: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Ps 51: 10). In suffering the believer realizes the nearness of God, so that he or she can say with the Psalmist: “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.” (Ps 34: 18).

5. Conclusion

The Psalms are part of the Wisdom Literature that is found in the Bible. Because of the difficulty for the contemporary mindset to grasp the meaning and depth of

¹⁰⁷ T. G. WEINANDY, *Does God Suffer?*, 8.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. V. E. OOSTROM, *The Message of the Psalms*, 52.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. O. CANIORE, *Prophetic Literature. Class Notes 2004-2005*.

Wisdom Literature, our introductory questions have helped us look at the large context in which Psalm 34 gets its full meaning for today's world.

This chapter has introduced us to the Psalmist's world and Wisdom Literature in general. It has provided us with some basic tools to help us walk in the steps of the psalmist and grasp his mindset. In this chapter we have a glimpse of the framework through which our Psalm is to be understood. And so, it has laid the ground for an in-depth and meaningful exegesis of Psalm 34 in relation to the possibility that afflicted people have of experiencing God. In the next chapter, we shall look at the exegesis and interpretation of Psalm 34.

CHAPTER II

Exegesis and Interpretation of Ps 34

1. Introduction

The analogy of St Bernard fits here, for he holds that just as we taste food with the mouth, so we taste the psalm with the heart, *psalmus in corde sapit*. The soul that is faithful and prudent will not fail to grind (scripture) with the teeth of understanding, because if one were to swallow it as a lump, not having chewed it, one's palate would not gain the desirable taste which is sweeter even than the honey from the honey comb; just as honey comes from the wax, so is devotion from the letter.¹¹⁰

Following this wisdom of St Bernard, we shall in this chapter attempt an exegesis of the whole Ps 34. We are going to 'chew' the Psalm. This will be done with one purpose in mind, to fully enter the psalmist's world and intention as he was writing Psalm 34. By doing so, my wish is to be fed by the message of the psalmist (wisdom literature). However for the purpose of this paper and in view of remaining focused and fulfilling the requirement of Tangaza College I shall keep most of the result of the

¹¹⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux, from sermon on the Song of Songs 67.2.3. In M. S. BURROWS, 'To Taste With the Heart' Allegory, Poetic and Deep Reading of Scripture', In *Interpretation* Vol 56, N2, April 2002.

exegesis and interpretation of our psalm in the appendix; nevertheless I shall allude to that work done once we reach the pastoral application in chapter three.

What does the psalmist mean when he says: “His praise shall continually be in my mouth” and “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted”? What does “Fear the Lord, you holy ones” mean? What does “I will teach you the fear of the LORD” mean? Our aim is to reach objective conclusions at the end of this chapter through a strict scientific exegesis of Psalm 34.

2. Detailed Exegesis of Ps 34

In this exegesis we shall use the RSV (Revised Standard Version) of Psalm 34, we shall proceed verse by verse.

אֲבָרְכָה אֶת־יְהוָה בְּכָל־עֵת תָּמִיד תִּהְלֵתוּ בִּפְּיִי

1 “I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”

“I will bless the LORD” אֲבָרְכָה אֶת־יְהוָה. This is a feature that starts some hymn in the Psalter (cf Ps 103: 1; 104: 1); it is an introduction to the Psalms. The psalmist is getting ready to give his message.

“His praise” תִּהְלֵתוּ, this is about the praise addressed to the Lord. “To praise is to share one’s enjoyment and our eternity will consist is ‘praising God’, which means ‘enjoy God’, ‘marveling at God’, ‘being imperfect love with God’. To glorify, to enjoy and to love is one and the same thing. Now we can understand why the most striking note in the psalms of praise is joy, which fits in well with their original life setting that

is the joyful festivals of God's people. This joy of praise is totally God centered. It is a joy of admiration for the marvels God has done and is still doing."¹¹

To have God's words "In my mouth" בְּפִי, is not a restriction to the mouth but also involves the heart.¹² To assert that the praise of the Lord is on the lips shows the involvement of the poet. To bless the Lord 'at all time' בְּכָל-עֵת, and to praise the Lord 'continuously' תָּמִיד mean that the Psalmist will praise his Lord forever, and that he is ready to tell all the good things his Lord has done in his life. Not only now but, as long as he lives.

בִּיהוָה תִּתְהַלֵּל נַפְשִׁי וְיִשְׁמְעוּ עֲנוּיִם וְיִשְׂמְחוּ:

2 "My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad."

"My soul" נַפְשִׁי. In Hebrew the soul is the whole person. So, it is the whole person of the psalmist, from the depth of his being, that wants to "boast" תִּתְהַלֵּל in the Lord. To "boast in the Lord" בִּיהוָה תִּתְהַלֵּל is to trust in the Lord with total confidence.

"The humble" עֲנוּיִם is also translated 'the afflicted one'. This brings us back to the fact that the psalmist describes a situation of hardship he had experienced and is addressing an assembly or an individual. "Humble" עֲנוּיִם in Hebrew can refer to an individual or to the group of those who are afflicted. However in Ps 34 'humble' stands

¹¹ V. E. OOSTROM, *The Message of the Psalms*, 20.

¹² God is not satisfied with those who acknowledge him only by word of mouth only.

for ‘*submissi*’, those who have learnt endurance or patience in the school of affliction.¹¹³

To “be glad” וַיִּשְׂמְחוּ means to be strengthened and encouraged. The psalmist invites and encourages those who have been afflicted to be strong.

גְּדְלוֹ לַיהוָה אִתִּי וְנִרְוַמְנָה שְׁמוֹ יַחְדָּו:

3 O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.

“O magnify the Lord with me” גְּדְלוֹ לַיהוָה אִתִּי reminds us of the Fiat of the Virgin Mary in the New Testament. “O magnify” גְּדְלוֹ expresses the utterance of praise; this is the acknowledgement of the divine greatness.¹¹⁴ The expression “with me” אִתִּי is a call to join, to come together. This implies joining forces to give strength to the praise. The psalmist wants many people to give weight to his praise. “O magnify the Lord with me” גְּדְלוֹ לַיהוָה אִתִּי means that, so that the praise may sound forth with strength and fullness of tone, the psalmist is seeking the assistance of companions.

“And let us exalt his name together” וְנִרְוַמְנָה: The ‘name’ of God is God himself, so, to exalt God’s name means to exalt Yahweh¹¹⁵ and praise Him for what He is in Himself.

¹¹³ Cf. F. C. KEIL, - F. DELITSCH, *COT*, 408.

¹¹⁴ It means: “with heart and in words and in deed, to place the exalted Name of God as high as it really is in itself” F. C. KEIL, - F. DELITSCH, *COT*, 410.

¹¹⁵ In the Old Testament, the name reveals the character of the holder of the name (Cf Am 3: 8.27, cf Kephaz: Simon Peter) a name is a very important thing therefore; it stresses the importance of the person itself. The name of Yahweh is often used as an equivalent to his person and his character; as he manifests himself to man (cf 2Sam 7: 13; Isa 18: 7).

דַּרְשֵׁתִי אֶת־יְהוָה וְעֲנֵנִי וּמִכָּל־מִגְדָּרוֹתַי הִצִּילָנִי:

4 “I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.”

“I sought the Lord” דַּרְשֵׁתִי אֶת־יְהוָה וְעֲנֵנִי: In Hebrew, דַּרְשֵׁתִי means to strive, to struggle to find, to long for something and take pain to find it. דַּרַּשׁ is different from בִּקַּשׁ¹¹⁶. בִּקַּשׁ simply means seek, whereas דַּרַּשׁ has the idea of striving to get something. In this case, the search has become a prayer, an active calling up to God for help. The psalmist is fully involved in the action of calling unto God.

“He answered me” וְעֲנֵנִי. The striving דַּרְשֵׁתִי, ‘I sought...’ did not remain unanswered. God answers the prayers of those who call upon him. From Egypt Yahweh heard the cries, the strivings of the Israelites calling upon him, and he answered וְעֲנֵנִי (cf Ex 3: 7b). The psalmist here means that God hears those who call upon Him. עָנָה is used for being heard and the fulfillment of an answer to the petition of the praying one.¹¹⁷

“He delivered me from my fear” מִגְדָּרוֹתַי הִצִּילָנִי. The psalmist just means that the prayer was heard, and the praying one got fulfillment in his need; freedom from fear.

¹¹⁶ Seek, with idea of demanding, require (בִּקַּשׁ is seek, simply), with acc. In Bibleworks for Microsoft.

¹¹⁷ Cf. F. C. KEIL, - F. DELITSCH, *COT*, 409.

זֶה עָנִי קָרָא וַיִּהְיֶה שְׁמֵעַ וּמִכָּל-צָרוֹתָיו הוֹשִׁיעֵנו:

6 “This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD, and was saved from every trouble.”

“This poor soul cries” זֶה עָנִי קָרָא, or “a poor calls”: It might be referring to Israel itself or the poor who experiences God’s mercy; however the horizon of the psalm should be broadened. When the psalmist speaks of ‘this poor’ it could be any poor or a particular poor (NIV). “Yahweh heard him” שְׁמֵעַ וַיִּהְיֶה: everybody, not only Israel, could be heard by the Lord. Though not furnished with an accusative suffix, ‘same’ is entitled to one by virtue of its balance with ‘hosi o’.¹¹⁸

David, who is considered to be the subject of this psalm (cf Appendix 1), speaks of himself; his life was in grave danger when he was brought to the court of the Philistines. Yahweh whom he called upon, heard¹¹⁹ him and “rescued him” הוֹשִׁיעֵנו. Now he turns his thoughts with gratitude and praise for having been previously delivered;¹²⁰ therefore the gratitude is because Yahweh had heard him.

8 “O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.”

In the first chapter we have dealt at length with this Ps 34: 8. What we can say is that “O taste” טַעֲמוּ is a very complex expression. Its correct meaning as far as this work is concerned is found in the citation in 1Pet 2: 3, “you have tasted”. In 1P 2: 2-3,

¹¹⁸ Cf. M. DAHOOD, *The Anchor Bible, Psalm I 206*

¹¹⁹ In the wilderness, the angel of the Lord said to Hagar: “behold you are with child, and shall bear a son; you shall call his name *Ish'mael*. To footnote of RSV translate Ishmael as ‘God hears’” (Gen 16: 11). God has heard the prayers of Hagar, a slave running from her mistress Sarah.

¹²⁰ Cf. F. C. KEIL, - F. DELITSCH, *COT*. 410.

to “taste” means to learn, to savor¹²¹ or to have experienced of God’s kindness and be grateful for it.

יִרְאוּ אֶת־יְהוָה קְרֻשָׁיו כִּי־אֵין מַחְסוֹר לִירְאָיו:

9 “O fear the LORD, you His holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.”

“O fear the Lord” אֶת־יְהוָה יִרְאוּ is an expression that means to revere Him with thankful love. Here, there is no reason for being afraid of the Lord; but rather to trust the Lord and depend on him like a small child depends and totally relies on its parents. According to Edmund, “God will not permit him who fears the Lord to suffer excessive need;¹²² this is because the prophet calls the fear of the Lord the greatest treasure (Is 33: 6).

“Holy ones” קְרֻשָׁיו are all the members of the chosen people of God, the psalmist calls upon all saints. In this call to the saints (Holy ones) to fear Yahweh; the psalmist uses יִרְאוּ instead of יִרְאֵהוּ in order to preserve the distinction between *veremini* and *vedebunt*, as in Josh 24: 14, and 1Sam 12: 24”.¹²³ The holy ones “will have no want” מַחְסוֹר אֵין: This expression is found but once in the Psalter, ‘*mahsor*’ occurs in El AmRNA, 287: 16, and as an economic term in UT, 1137: 1, ‘*mhsrn*’ with the meaning “deficit”.¹²⁴

לְכוּ בָנִים שְׁמְעוּ־לִי יִרְאַת יְהוָה אֶל־מִדְבָּרָם:

11 “Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.”

¹²¹ “Like new born babes, look for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may up to salvation, for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord” 1Pet 2: 2-3.

¹²² Cf. E. KELI, - B. FRITZ, *Herder's Commentary on the Psalms*, 121

¹²³ F. C. KEIL, - F. DELITSCH, *COT*. 441.

¹²⁴ Cf. M. DAHOOD, *The Anchor Bible. Psalm 1*, 206.

The address “O children, listen to me” לְכוּ בְנִים שְׁמַעוּ לִי¹²⁵ is a wisdom formula and unparalleled in the psalms (cf Prov 4: 1, 5:7, 7: 24, 8: 32). The more frequent expression is “listen my son” or “hear my son” (Prov 1: 8, 10, 15; 2: 1, 3: 1; 5: 1; 6: 1 etc...), with the singular possessive suffix pronoun pointing to the original familial setting). The plural “children” without possessive suffix indicates congregational use,¹²⁶ this contrasts with Prov 1: 8; 4: 1 where the address is to an individual. Children בְנִים, are not children in years or in understanding, but it is a tender form of address of a matter of experience in the way of God to each one and all.¹²⁷

The word “fear” יִרְאַת־יְהוָה occurs three times in vv 4, 7 and 9 and anticipates v11 where “fear of the Lord” is the subject of the psalmist’s instruction.¹²⁸ In the book of Deuteronomy, fearing God appears to be virtually synonymous with obeying God’s command (see Deut 6: 2, 24; 10: 12-13). Obedience to God is a basic theme of Wisdom Literature: it means recognizing the supremacy of God over one’s life and experiencing the recognition by obeying his commandments and worshipping him.¹²⁹ Here the sapiential character of Ps 34 comes out clearly. The psalmist has become a teacher, the sharer of an acquired knowledge (cf Chap I) that he imparts to an assembly (“O

¹²⁵ According to the Oxford Dictionary, wisdom is the “ability to make sensible decisions and give a good advice because of the experience and knowledge that you have.” A. S Hornby, Oxford Advance Learner’s Dictionary, 2000. According to Thayil, in Israel, wisdom is a cultural and religious phenomenon hence has a special meaning and a meaning that is different from our contemporary understanding of the word wisdom. Cf. P. THAYIL, *Wisdom Literature, Class Notes 2005-2006*.

¹²⁶ Cf S. E. GERSTEMBERGER, *Psalms Part I, with and Introduction to Cultic Poetry*, 148.

¹²⁷ Cf. F. C. KEIL, - F. DELITSCH, *COT*, 442.

¹²⁸ Cf. *NIB*, 814.

¹²⁹ Cf. R. BROWN - J.A. FITZMYER - R. E. MURPHY, *NJBC*, 531.

children, listen to me” (לְכֹרֵבָנִים שְׁמַעוּ לִי) The fear of the Lord includes both due reverence and obedience to his law.¹³⁰

מִי־הָאִישׁ הַחֲפֵץ חַיִּים אֲהַב יָמָיו לְרֵאוֹת טוֹב:

12 “Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good?”

“Which of you desires life” מִי־הָאִישׁ הַחֲפֵץ חַיִּים אֲהַב : “life” at the time of the psalmist connoted vivacity and good health. This life was carefully distinguished from the netherworld. From this results the common ancient Near East view that not only the dead but also the seriously sick were in the realm of death. Hence for the psalmist suffering from one illness.

The fear of God found in a special way in v11 leads to life (v12). In this verse the psalmist tells us that the fear of the Lord consists in the desire to live, to live a life valued as something coming from God. In the Old Testament, “many days” יָמָיו means long life (Prov 3: 2; 10: 27); a life of happiness, free from troubles and free from dangers of premature death (Ps 16: 1; 30: 62). Long life in a retributive justice system is a sign of blessing from God (cf. Chapter 1).

עֵינֵי יְהוָה אֶל־צְדִיקִים וְאָזְנוֹ אֶל־שׁוֹעֲתָם:

15 “The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.”

“The eyes of the Lord” עֵינֵי יְהוָה refers to the Lord Himself, with his compassionate look upon all his creatures and especially on his chosen one. This verse stresses the fact that nothing on earth remains hidden from God’s searching eyes (Ps 14: 2; 53: 3; 102:

¹³⁰ Cf. E. J. KISSANL, *The Book of Psalms Vol I*, 149.

19; Lam 3: 50). In Ps 53: 2, we see God looking forth from heaven on the human race to see if there is anyone seeking him. Therefore in Lam 3: 50, we have the poet who weeps until the Lord looks down and sees the condition of his people in exile. In our case, the righteous has plenty of troubles about which to cry to God (vv15, 17).

“The righteous”¹³¹ צְדִיקִים in the psalms is someone who lives in a way pleasing to God, but God’s response is not always reciprocal, so the righteous is also someone who is oppressed; sometimes it seems by God himself.¹³² And the righteous can turn to God because “His ears are open” אָזְנוֹ, meaning that God listens and therefore he answers.¹³³

צַעֲקוּ וַיְהוּה שָׁמַע וּמִכָּל-צָרוֹתֵם הִצִּילֵם:

17 “When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears, and rescues them from all their troubles.”

The Hebrew word translated “cried/cry”¹³⁴ differ in each case. In v17 it emphasizes the reason for crying out to the Lord: for help. However in all the cases, the righteous is the subject who cries: “When the righteous cry for help” צַעֲקוּ, or ‘When they cry’ (NIV); the righteous or the just of v17 is the same righteous of v15. Actually,

¹³¹ The word צְדִיקִים is more often employed in the psalms than in any of the book on the Old Testament. It appears 139 times and thus comprising about 26.6% of the total occurrences. Cf V. GEMEREN, *NIDOTTE* Vol 3, 57.

¹³² Cf. V. GEMEREN, *NIDOTTE* Vol 3,3, 762.

¹³³ Cf. V. GEMEREN, *NIDOTTE* Vol 4, 242.

¹³⁴ V6 קָרָא ‘he called’, v15 שִׁעָתָם ‘cry of them’, v17 צַעֲקוּ ‘they cry’.

according to Dahood, the acrostic arrangement of the psalm 34¹³⁵ may account for the disruption of thought caused by v16.¹³⁶

The ‘cry for help’ may include a great deal of physical suffering along with the psychological anguish of the afflicted.¹³⁷ However, the ‘cry for help’ in v17 does not stop with the oppressive deeds and the outcry of the afflicted since “the Lord hears, and rescues them from all their troubles” **שָׁמַע וּמָצַל-צָרוֹתָם הַצִּילָם**. God’s deliverance follows in without delay; it is a quick response (Judg 2: 18; 4: 3; 6: 9; 10: 12; 2Kgs 13: 4). However in other contexts, there is a strong expression of hope in an immediate intervention and in the prospect of a new and just social order (Isa 19: 20-26; Jer 30: 19-22).¹³⁸

קָרוֹב יְהוָה לְנֹשְׁבֵי-לֵב וְאֶת-דַּפְאֵי-רוּחַ יוֹשִׁיעַ:

18 “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.”

“The LORD is near to the brokenhearted” **קָרוֹב יְהוָה לְנֹשְׁבֵי-לֵב**: As v18a suggests, the good news is the nearness of God. God is with the broken hearted (see Ps 51: 17; Isa 61: 1) and the crushed in spirit (see Ps 51: 17; Isa 57: 15); this points to God’s preferential option for the poor.

“Brokenhearted” literally means someone whose heart is broken. One’s heart can be broken because of abuse (Ps 20), because of false teachers and/or teachings (Jer 23: 9) or because of sin (Ps 51: 17). Even God’s heart can be broken in grief (Ezek 6: 9;

¹³⁵ According to the flow of ideas, v17 was supposed to come after v15. But in order to keep the alphabetical order, the psalmist put v16 in between.

¹³⁶ Cf. M. DAHOOD, *The Anchor Bible Psalm I*, 207.

¹³⁷ A good example is found in 1Kgs 22: 27, which concerns a political prisoner who is fed on a scant ration of bread and water. Cf also Isa 30: 20.

¹³⁸ Cf V. GEMEREN, *NIDOTTE* Vol 2, 798.

'I have been grieved' NIV). But in our case God is "near to the brokenhearted", he heals them (Ps 147: 3), and he binds them up (Isa 61: 1). A bruised reed Yahweh's servant will not break (Ps 42: 3).¹³⁹

רַבּוֹת רַעוֹת צְדִיק וּמַכְלֵם יִצִּילֵנוּ יְהוָה:

19 "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD rescues them from them all."

Indeed, "many are the afflictions of the righteous" רַבּוֹת רַעוֹת צְדִיק: the righteous in this case is the one who is oppressed; sometimes it seems by God himself. Still there is no other source of life, and so the plea is put forth for the righteous to obtain 'salvation', and for God's own righteousness to result in the security and beneficence of the righteous who prays this psalm.¹⁴⁰

"The Lord rescues them from them all" יִצִּילֵנוּ יְהוָה ; this means to redeem them.¹⁴¹ It can also be an affirmation of confidence (Ps 35: 10), a vow of thanksgiving (Ps 54: 7), a thanks to Yahweh as the deliverer of those falsely accused or a thankful look on a rescuing action already accomplished (i.e., delivery from death, Ps 56: 13; 86: 13) or freedom from a dreadful king (Abimelek; Ps 34: 1).¹⁴²

פֹּדֵה יְהוָה נַפְשׁ עֲבָדָיו וְלֹא יֵאָשְׁמוּ כָּל־הַחַסִּים בּוֹ:

22 "The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned."

¹³⁹ Cf. V. GEMEREN, *NIDOTTE* Vol 4, 39.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. V. GEMEREN, *NIDOTTE*, Vol 3, 763.

¹⁴¹ In the psalms, with three exceptions Yahweh is the only subject of the verb 'to redeem'. In general, it designates the snatching away or freeing from the grip of some distress. Cf V. GEMEREN, *NIDOTTE*, Vol 3, 142.

¹⁴² Cf. V. GEMEREN, *NIDOTTE* Vol 3, 144.

“The Lord redeems the life” פִּדְיוֹן יְהוָה נַפְשׁוֹ¹⁴³ Here , the poetic metaphor of ‘to redeem’ depicts Yahweh paying money (to death) to assure his saints of life.¹⁴⁴ During the times of famine “Yahweh will redeem the just ones from death” meaning, Yahweh does pay back for the righteous, he saves the just.

The benefit of seeking refuge in Yahweh far outweighs the monetary affliction of present circumstances, in that those who find shelter in God are blessed with his favor (Ps 2: 12; 5: 11) and are not condemned.¹⁴⁵ So, ‘to redeem’ as far as God is concerned does not have the meaning of paying something back to anybody. To say that the Lord redeems means that he restores, he creates he gives anew.

The psalmist in this verse seems to be giving a promise. If the psalmist is well vested in the wisdom literature then what he promises to the just is the eternal happiness of their soul. The perspective of the resurrection at this time in the history was not yet part of the Jewish understanding of life after death.

3. Interpretation of Ps 34.

The immediate context of our psalm, that of someone who faithfully asserts that anyone who calls upon the Lord will discover his goodness, and the overall context of a thanksgiving-sapiential character of Ps 34, will provide us with the theological framework within which the Psalm is to be interpreted and find its meaning. For the interpretation of Psalm 34, we have divided the whole Psalm into three parts:

¹⁴³ The verb ‘*pdy*’ occurs in UT, 1006: 2.12, a juridical text that states that certain EWRKL emancipated a family of seven by paying a hundred shekels of silver to the citizens of Beirut.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Job 5: 20.

¹⁴⁵ “A most important principle developed in the Old Testament ethical law on the ground of Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel from oppression: Israel was not to oppress foreigners or strangers, for once they had been strangers in Egypt, the great oppressor of Israel and they knew what it felt like to be oppressed aliens”. V. GUMEREN, *NIDOTTE*, Vol2, 793.

thanksgiving for deliverance (vv1-8), the rule of life (vv9-15), and justice of God (vv16-22).¹⁴⁶

3.1. Thanksgiving for deliverance (vv1-8)

3.1.1. Vow of praise to Yahweh (v1-7)

The greatest proofs of the Lord's love are found in the prerogatives of man's soul; there is no greater elevation for man than that the infinite God condescends to manifest in man His love and his mercy.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, in Ps 34, the psalmist wishes to proclaim loudly God's mercy and grace (v2-3). Other people who are also visited with sorrow and adversity should hear how good the Lord has been to him, in order that they too may call upon Him with confidence (v4-5), and because of this confidence in God the helper they should also rejoice and join in the praise of the Lord's mercy (v7b). He calls upon the entire group of cross bearers to glorify God with Him and to praise his great name.

3.1.2. Exhortation to seek the source of all good

For every believer, there is no greater work in the entire world than sharing his/her faith, and there is no greater joy than that of seeing another finding the grace and goodness of God. By his faithful life and witness, a believer can invite others to taste and see that the Lord is good.¹⁴⁸ "So, praising God is proclaiming God, and to 'proclaim God' consists first and foremost in 'praising God' this is why the prayer of praise (and thanksgiving) is eminently a missionary prayer".¹⁴⁹ It is a missionary prayer in the sense that it is a proclamation. This proclamation is ultimately intended for the 'brethren' i.e.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. E. J. KISSANE, *The Book of Psalms Vol I*, 149.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. E. KELI, - B. FRITZ, *Herder's Commentary on the Psalms*, 120.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. H. GARIEPY, *Treasure from the Psalms*, 101.

¹⁴⁹ V. E. OOSIROM, *The Message of the Psalms*, 23.

the fellow members of the people of God (fearers of God v7). The purpose is that their faith may be strengthened, so that they in turn may praise and glorify Yahweh.¹⁵⁰ The proclamation is made in order to glorify and praise God before the world (vv1 and 3), to increase God's glory (v1a), so that Yahweh may be known (v5), loved, obeyed and enjoyed. All these aspects definitely show the missionary element of our Psalm.¹⁵¹

3.2. The rule of life (vv9-15)

3.2.1. Fear of the Lord

Verse 10 gives a vivid contrast between those who fear the Lord (v9), and the young lions that suffer want and hunger; this contrast is made clear by the happiness felt by a human heart brimming over with joy in the goodness of God, "the comparison of the position of the godly ones with the affliction of the creature that is left to its own resources reveal a profound appreciation of the magnitude of the gift which man, compared with such creature, receives through the communion with God."¹⁵²

The fear of God (v11) is a golden rule of Ps 34; it is rewarded with newness of life (v12). "He who wants to taste the sweetness of the Lord must put his trust in him. But trust in God can only thrive in a soul that fears the Lord. Hence the psalmist begins his psalm of thanksgiving with the recommendation to fear the Lord (vv5 and 11). He himself has experienced its value. In great affliction he sought the Lord in constant trustful prayer and it was not in vain. The Lord delivered him from bad situations and freed him from all fear and anxiety."¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Cf. V. E. OOSTROM, *The Message of the Psalms*, 23.

¹⁵¹ Cf. V. E. OOSTROM, *The Message of the Psalms*, 24.

¹⁵² A. WEISER, *The Psalms, A Commentary*, 298.

¹⁵³ E. KELT, - B. FRITZ, *Herder's Commentary on the Psalms*, 120.

In every day life, the fear of the Lord is manifested in the following and abiding in the observance of the commandments, not by fear of a punishment, but by the desire to conform to the Lord's will. This psalm is very clear: "Keep your tongue from evil and your lips to speak deceit" (v13), 'Depart from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it' (v14). These recommendations are answers to the previous question: "Which of you desires life and covets many days to enjoy good?" (v12); this question points to the sapiential character of Psalm 34 (cf Chap I).

3.2.2. Total trust is the Lord

The book of Deuteronomy emphasizes this point (Deut 10: 12). The law is the way toward happiness; this is the message of the acrostic psalm (cf. Chap I). "Holy ones of the Lord fear the Lord", "nothing lacks those who fear him", "young lions suffer want and hunger but those who seek the Lord lack nothing" (v10). At this level we have a small taste of the Magnificat.¹⁵⁴ However, critical wisdom (cf Chap I) reminds us that in our everyday life we know some instances whereby some good fearers of God know no happiness. This situation makes us think that the reward for those who fear the Lord is not something automatic. It is sometimes true that the holy ones of the Lord fear Him (the Lord) and their search for Him will not be in vain (v9). This is true and all depends on God as far as its actual realization in this life is concerned. Only one thing is sure and the psalmist makes it clear for us: "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry" (v15).

¹⁵⁴ Magnificat. Also cf Si 34: 14-16

3.2.3. *Good's goodness*

The psalmist stresses God's goodness when he says that "only the man who fears God has God as his protection; only he can taste how good the Lord is. The satisfaction which the palate enjoys feasting at the delicious banquet is only a weak likeness to the spiritual satisfaction of the soul when it partakes of the divine Love."¹⁵⁵

3.3. *Justice of God (vv16-22)*

To take refuge in God means to live. The rich man, with all his riches, can suffer hunger, but "it is impossible that the man who fears the Lord, who longs for the knowledge and love of the Lord, who seeks to unite with him will lack a true 'good'. He, who has God, has all; suffering and deprivation mean nothing to him, for the possession of the greatest good and the hope of eternal life outweigh all perishable goods. Hence, there is nothing more conducive to his greater wealth than the fear of the Lord."¹⁵⁶

3.3.1. *Care of Yahweh over the righteous.*

The Lord looks towards the just (v15), he listens to him when he cries (v17) – many are his troubles, but the Lord rescues him (v19). He keeps them safe such that no bones of them will be broken (v20). These verses point to a total and sure protection from God; however some questions arise. Is there really true suffering? Why should we suffer if our God is good? Can suffering ever be destroyed? Is there justice in this world? How comes Jesus, the just par excellence was not delivered from suffering?

Those are the eternal questions we ask ourselves when confronted with sufferings. The book of Job treats this issue. The Bible itself does not answer all our

¹⁵⁵ E. KELI, - B. FRITZ, *Herder's Commentary on the Psalms*, 120.

¹⁵⁶ E. KELI, - B. FRITZ, *Herder's Commentary on the Psalms*, 121.

questions about suffering; but it gives a direction towards total trust in God (vv17-18). We should believe, we should strongly believe even though the events of life seem to be contrary to our expectations. We should believe that God is with us when we suffer. As we have seen in v15, God's ears are attentive to the cries of the afflicted. We have here an echo of Moses at the burning bush.¹⁵⁷

3.3.2. *Yahweh's saving grace*

However God's saving action towards us is not automatic, all sufferings and hardships do not disappear from our lives. In the Desert, under Moses, or at Canaan under Joshua, the people of Israel were not automatically spared from sufferings and hardships, but God's presence was with them at every moment to help them overcome all obstacles. This is one of the meanings of verse 7 "the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them".¹⁵⁸

The psalmist tells us that the just will not be magically delivered from sufferings, but rather He will live with them (v19), in him (the just one) and with the 'Holy Spirit' (Angel of the Lord, Ps 34: 7) as a guide. With the angel of the Lord around him/her, the just one will definitely find the strength and carry on in spite of sufferings. Luke the Evangelist, in his teaching about prayer, wrote: "Ask and you will receive ... how much more God will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him" (Lk 11: 9-11). Here, Luke was emphasizing the insistence in asking. In the same way, in times of sufferings and abuse, the just one is not only allowed but also recommended to cry

¹⁵⁷ "The Lord said I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry" (Ex 3: 7).

¹⁵⁸ According to the book of Exodus, at the night the Israelites were leaving Egypt, the angel of the Lord was protecting the people (Ex 14: 19), it guarded them during their entire journey towards the Promised Land (Ex 23: 20, 23; 32: 34; 33: 2).

towards God with all one's strength; the Lord looks at the just and listens to his cry (v18).

4. Conclusion

It seems quite evident that the psalmist had a deep knowledge of the Old Testament. He used terms and expressions understandable to the people of his time. It is clear at the end of our detailed exegesis that, in order to understand Psalm 34, the knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures and particularly of Wisdom Literature is very important. In few instances we have also seen the New Testament authors borrowing terms and expressions from Psalm 34.

Having analyzed Psalm 34 in depth, now we need to know the message the Psalmist wanted to convey. We intend, in other words, to grasp the message of faith and hope that flows from Psalm 34. How relevant can such a message of faith and hope be for the contemporary African and especially for the abused youth? This will be the core of our next chapter.

CHAPTER III

Theological Message of Ps 34:8 and Its Pastoral Relevance

1. Introduction

From the exegesis of this text, it comes out clearly that all human beings stand in need of experiencing God's goodness in a deeper way. Our exegesis showed how the Psalm is ended with a promise of hope that everybody is invited to attain.

In this chapter we are going to use the psalmist's theology as a window through which to point out and analyze a few situations in which abused youth in the African Church find themselves, and then see how the Church presents God's goodness to them.

Today in Africa youth undergo a lot of challenges in their lives, some of those challenges prevent them from living life to the full and seeing the future with hope and a lot of expectations, though they try their best to live an upright life. What is the message of the psalmist to all the young people especially the abused ones? Are abused youth also called to receive the message of Ps 34: 8, "Taste and see that the Lord is good"? These are some questions that arise at this point of this reflection.

In this chapter, I intend to look at the relevance of the message of Ps 34 to abused youth in the African Church today. Our intention is to see what Psalm 34 meant in its historical setting and also articulate its meaning in the context of the African

Church today. By doing so, we are desiring to come out with the message of faith and hope of the text as originally intended by the psalmist; and then see the meaning of that same message of faith and hope for the African Church. We shall point out some areas of life where the message of Ps 34 can serve as a guide towards a faith-solution of the problems facing youth in Africa today, as well as the all the afflicted ones.

First of all, we shall get the theological message of Ps 34:8 in order to discover the message of faith and hope that it conveys. After identifying some situations in which abused youth find themselves, we shall focus on the pastoral relevance of Ps 34: 8 to them and see how much abused youth stand in need of 'salvation'. In the next step, we shall look at the way the Church today presents God's goodness to its abused youth, meaning to discover in what sense does the Church - like the psalmist - share with its afflicted members that eternal "sweetness" of God. Lastly we shall draw some conclusions and give some recommendations.

2. Faith and hope message of Psalm 34.

During her history of salvation, Israel as a nation experienced (tasted and saw) God's mercy. During the exodus and the covenant with God (Exod....), they experienced the salvific intervention of God in their history. When people in the Temple were singing Ps 34: 6, 'this poor man cried and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble', they were first of all talking of themselves. This psalm however is not limited to Israel itself but to any 'poor'. NIV translates v6 as 'a poor man called', which can mean any poor man around the world can say this psalm. The above points to the universality of Psalm 34 and definitely points also to the universality of the faith it conveys.

Hence, Psalm 34 presents Israel as a nation that has discovered her vocation; a double vocation that she¹⁵⁹ held and fulfilled among the nations. First of all, it is a vocation of teaching to the humble of heart confidence and trust in the Lord. Faith is a dialogue between God and human beings. The people Cry to God (v4a); God frees them, saves them and comes to their help (v4b). And then the people give thanks to God and magnify the Lord (v6). In this way, Ps 34 points towards a faith lived against all adversities.¹⁶⁰

The second vocation of Israel is to be God's stewards, meaning to be God's instrument. Just as Moses (Exodus 1-18) and Joshua were instruments in God's hand to free the people from Egypt, so Israel is also invited to be God's ears and eyes for the poor and to be God's mercy for the afflicted. Lk 6: 20 helps us understand that "happy the poor, the kingdom of God is theirs" and in accordance with Ps 34. We can note the evangelist also saying "Let the poor hear and be glad" (Ps 34: 2). From this double vocation of Israel, we can understand that it is meaningful to rejoice in God because God is not without ears, he will intervene (cf. Ps 34: 17): that is the message of hope. God has chosen instruments on this earth to come to the help of all his children especially those who are abused.

Israel's vocation has been to make this message of faith and hope of Ps 34 heard. Israel and the Church after it have been re-echoing throughout the centuries this invitation to "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps 34: 8). A message meant to give strength to the weak and the suffering, an invitation to the afflicted to call upon God, to

¹⁵⁹ Among all the people of the earth God chose Israel out of love and made a covenant with her.

¹⁶⁰ The message of faith is to live the reality of seeing the future, we should be able to express and explain it in term of a message of life before it is told in form of a message of hope (salvation).

trust in Him, to praise Him and hope in Him.¹⁶¹ All that we have just said was meant for alleviating all forms and sorts of poverties. There is only one poverty that Israel and the Church should never remove: the poverty of heart (“poor in heart”) of the humble ones, and of all those who accept to be the *Anawim*. It is the poverty of heart of those who ‘dare’ to call God to their help: like Matthew puts it, “happy the poor in heart, the kingdom is theirs” (Mt 5).

3. Pastoral Relevance of Ps 34: 8 to the Abused Youth

Having seen how relevant the psalmist’s faith and hope-message was to the people of his time and to the Christians at large, it is now important for us to see how this message of faith and hope of Psalms 34 can serve as a pastoral guide towards a solution for the present day. This is with particular reference to the major problems facing youth in Africa, specially abused youth of the African Church.

3.1. Identification of the Situation of Youth as Abused.

3.1.1. What Youth stand for

Whom do we consider as a youth in this study? A youth is someone between 12 and 25 years of age. Youth is the period of life in which a person is making the best decisions of his or her life. Youngsters take decisions that shape their lives. It is a time in which the person wants to affirm oneself¹⁶²: physically, mentally, and emotionally. To be happy is one of the characteristics of this time: a time of “easy life”, and time

¹⁶¹ (Cf. Jn 10: 10; I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full).

¹⁶² “Young people are by far most open to new experiences and activities. They are eager to learn, to experience and to grow. They will engage in activities that few adults would ever consider” W. MARCUM, *Living the Light*, 7.

with friends. "Looking at it rather specifically, young people stand for joy and easy going style."¹⁶³

However, life experience shows that life is not so easy-going for youth. There are moments of difficulty, pain and tears on their path. It almost seems that youth is a time where many crosses assail the still frail human being in the making. "While the cross stands for commitment, sadness suffering and death, youth is happy going, full experiencing life open to the future."¹⁶⁴ "If we seriously look at the youth situation today, we can see how the reality of the cross fills the life of so many of them: violence, disease, war and death."¹⁶⁵ Hence there are many crosses in the life of the youth. This situation makes us to acknowledge that "youth are the future of humanity"¹⁶⁶, a common saying states; but in many instances it seems that there is no future for youth. This happens when the abuses youth have suffered, and in many cases continue to suffer, have become crystallized.

3.1.2. *Situations of Youth as Abused*

Abuses are to be understood as any commission or omission, either by individuals, institutions or society as a whole that interferes with the optimal development and deprives a person (a child or a youth) of equal rights and liberty.¹⁶⁷ The problems, abuses and challenges youth experience in Africa are many. In our

¹⁶³ E. RASTELLO, - G. ROLANDI, "*Bringing the Church to Youth or Youth to the Church*", In Tangaza Occasional Papers, N19, 45.

¹⁶⁴ E. RASTELLO, - G. ROLANDI, "*Bringing the Church to Youth or Youth to the Church*", 45.

¹⁶⁵ E. RASTELLO, - G. ROLANDI, "*Bringing the Church to Youth or Youth to the Church*", 45.

¹⁶⁶ "The World needs young people what have drunk deeply at the source of truth. You (youth) have to listen to the truth. For this, you (youth) need purity of heart; you (youth) have to have understood it and for this you (youth) need deep humanity; you (youth) have to surrender to it, and for this you (youth) need strength to resist temptation of pride, selfishness and manipulation" John Paul II, World Peace Day, 1984.

¹⁶⁷ D. J. ANTONYM, *Types of Counseling: A Life-Span Development Approach*, 30.

opinion, the present day major problems facing youth in Africa include not only physical assault, but also emotional, sexual and abuses of negligence.

One basic characteristic the human being living in society has is the sense of belonging to a community. It is a situation in which each member participates in the common life, provides for the group and is provided for, respects and lives according to the rules that are established for the good of all. So any abuse or problem any member (child, youth, adult, elder) may suffer has multiple connections and implications: socio-political and economic, cultural and religious.

We shall now make a fast survey of the situations of abused youth. We shall look at them under the following categories: physical, emotional, sexual and negligence. These categories with include abuse in the individual, social, cultural and religious dimensions.

3.1.2.1. Violence against youth.

The most common abuses children and youth in particular are likely to be the victims are physical in nature: extreme beating, vigorous and repeated caning, causes bodily wounds. Many would argue that parents have the right to punish their children and that corporal punishment is an acceptable way of punishment. Experience however shows that many youth who have been 'severely punished' have ended up in hospitals; others are left handicapped and some even died.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ In a Kenyan News Paper we read: "Prisoners beaten to death says autopsy"; "five of the eight prisoners who dies at the Meru Prison on Monday (27 Sept) last week were tortured and beaten to death" P. MURUNGI. J. OGI TU, *Standard, New Paper*, 04 October 2004, p2.

“Part of the violence in today’s world may be traced back to the violence in the home. Children who observe their fathers hitting their mothers are more likely to be perpetrators as well as victims of severe mental aggression.”¹⁶⁹

Youth are victims of culturally and socially accepted violence, like child beating in homes and violence by police in riots. Many of them, especially those who have been unjustly beaten or deeply violated¹⁷⁰, remain hurt for the rest of their lives. In many instances polygamous families experience situation of abuse and mistreatment of siblings that mark one or the other member of the family (especially the youngsters) in a very grave way (i.e. no food, no clothing, no love, no shelter).

Peer violence is one of the lasting acts of physical violence that youth experience: bullying, age-group violence, gang fighting, and competition for girls that can go out of hand and become group raping.¹⁷¹ This shows how, as a reaction to the violence they go through, some youth can transfer their violence-anger on their own peers¹⁷² out of frustration; this is done in a destructive manner.

Many handicapped children and youth face inevitably violent abuses. Some families are ashamed to show their handicapped members in public. That is a physical abuse to some handicapped to be denied to socialize with other children of their age. Few months ago Kenya was shocked with the case of a 30 years old mentally impaired

¹⁶⁹ F. P. RICE, - K. G. DOLGIN, *The Adolescent Development, Relationships and Culture*, 18.

¹⁷⁰ “Rape inflicts a lasting wound in the heart of victims... Today we are witnessing a new brand of marauding rapist. They attack women in the broad daylight and in the presence of their family. The crime in effect traumatizes the whole family” M. ITHULA, *Rape Statistics*, Standard. New Paper, Wednesday 13 October 2004, p18.

¹⁷¹ Few years ago Kenya witnessed the gang raping and murdering by fire of dozens of school girls by their male counterpart in a school riot (Kyanguli Secondary School tragedy) Cf J. JESOT D. OKOTH, *School Unrest Spreads*, In East Africa Standard, New Paper, Monday 6 August 2001, p5.

¹⁷² “Teen forced into rape orgy kills himself”, a primary schoolboy has committed suicide after he was forced to participate in gang raping a woman. Standard Saturday, New Paper, 02 October 2004, p8.

Kenyan who had been chained by his relatives in a dark room for over 10 years.¹⁷³ His parents pretended it was for the good of their 'beloved child' that they chained him.

3.1.2.2. Emotional Abuse

Youth are very sensitive to words and remarks said to them by the authority figures like parents, teachers, elders relatives, religious leaders and the society as a whole. Improper language can cause long and lasting emotional damage that will take time to be cured.

Emotional abuse may include constantly screaming at the youth. Calling youth foul names, giving unconstructive criticisms, making fun that hurts their self-esteem must be avoided. In other words, constantly comparing youth with siblings, ignoring them, and refusing to talk or listen to them, especially by religious figures or close relatives can be frustrating.

Some mothers out of ignorance can be sources of emotional abuses to their children. Actually, "there are mothers whose genuine capacity to love is underdeveloped, atrophied or poisoned and who, as compensation for their own negative fulfillment, fling themselves on their children, not in order to give away a superabundant love, but in order to fill their own emptiness with the child... Such mother's possessive 'love' is always making demands on the child (and even the youngsters). She represents her love as a gift and demands gratitude, her love requires a payment and becomes a means of pressure."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Daily Nation, New Paper, 15th July 2006.

¹⁷⁴ "That such mothers with their pseudo-spoiling are in reality 'terrible' mothers can best be seen from the fact that they impart the children automorphism and render it not only uncreative but also impotent or frigid" E. NEUMANN, *The Child Structure and Dynamics of the Nascent Personality*, 64.

On another dimension, cultural and traditional belief in Africa can become source of abuse to the youth.¹⁷⁵ Because of their beliefs, some young people feel tied up by traditional taboos that prevent them to blossom in life. A tradition can forbid a young person, though he may have the money, to build his own house before his elder sibling. This taboo and the likes are mental and emotional tortures many youth face.

All the above are emotional abuses that youth face and that leave them deeply hurt. "Common reactions include an inability to trust others; low self-esteem, increased risk of developing depression, eating disorders, and substance abuse; diffuse symptoms such as stomach pain."¹⁷⁶ Those are the wounded youth that the Church has to deal with.

3.1.2.3. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse¹⁷⁷ is the most common threat that can happen to a human being.¹⁷⁸ According to Rice and Dolgin, "sexual abuses against youth and children more often than not are incestuous, that is, it takes place between the victims and people who are closely related to them."¹⁷⁹ Such an abuse has on the victim a very lasting effect.¹⁸⁰ "The most prolonged, severe effects occur when the abuser is a father or a stepfather,

¹⁷⁵ Compulsory marriage after Female Genital Circumcision, fun of unmarried girls; young people's view not accepted in family meetings...

¹⁷⁶ J. E. HOLIFIELD - W. M. WILLIAM - K. J. HART, "MMPI Profiles of Sexually Abused and Nonabused Outpatient Adolescents". In *Journal of Adolescent Research*, (2003), Vol 17, 1998-195.

¹⁷⁷ Sexual abuse may include very suggestive language, use of pornography, fondling, petting, masturbation, exhibitionism, voyeurism, oral sex, or full genital or anal intercourse. Cf J. E. HOLIFIELD - W. M. WILLIAM - K. J. HART, "MMPI Profiles of Sexually Abused and Nonabused Outpatient Adolescents". 196.

¹⁷⁸ Boys as well as girls can fall victim of sexual assault. "Ms Sherry Hwachong an American woman was charged with indecently assaulting five boys at Bahati Children Rehabilitation Center" Daily Nation, New Paper, February 01, 2006.

¹⁷⁹ F. P. RICE, - K. G. DOLGIN, *The Adolescent Development, Relationships and Culture*, 250.

¹⁸⁰ Daily Nation, New Paper, 15th Sept 2006 gave the case a 8 year old girl who died after several sexual assault by his 75 years old stepfather.

when the abuse involves penetration and when the abuse was prolonged.”¹⁸¹ That is why, it is not unusual for incestuous survivors to find it difficult to trust others, and so they often have trouble forming intimate relationships.¹⁸²

Sexually abused youth need a lot of care, especially if a trusted authority was the culprit of the abuse.¹⁸³ The long-term consequences of incest are similar to those of other forms of sexual abuse.¹⁸⁴ However, “due to the intense sense of betrayal that they experience, victims of incest are generally more affected¹⁸⁵ by the experience than victims of non-incestuous sexual abuse.”¹⁸⁶

3.1.2.4. Abuse of Negligence.

The four basic rights of any human being are: food, clothing, shelter and health. To deny any human being any of these basics is an abuse. Youth, being human beings, have the right to be provided for or/and to be helped as much as possible to be self-reliant. So, on the part of the family, society and government, failure to provide even the minimal support to youth, including adequate food, clothing, shelter and medical care,

¹⁸¹ G. E. WYATT – M. NEWCOMB, “*Internal and External Mediations of Women’s Sexual Abuse in Childhood*”. In *Journal of Consolatory and Clinical Psychology*, (1990), Vol 58, 758-767.

¹⁸² F. P. RICE, - K. G. DOLGIN, *The Adolescent Development, Relationships and Culture*, 250.

¹⁸³ These last years we have seen, young and less people around the world come out with anger to denounce sexual abuse they had been victim of on the part of religious leaders. Such victims will definitely find it difficult to believe in God’s goodness.

¹⁸⁴ The Government of Kenya has been trying to deal severely against rapists. In its publication of October 29th, the News Paper Standard gives the following case: “Man (42) gets 70 years for defiling schoolgirl 13. The court heard that medical tests showed that the suspect infected the girl with venereal diseases” Standard, New Paper, Friday 29 October 2004, p15.

¹⁸⁵ “Young people often indicate in rather pathetic ways the feeling that only by merging with a ‘leader’ can they be saved, the leader being an adult who is able and willing to offer himself as a safe object for experimental surrender and a guide in the re-learning of the very first steps towards an intimate mutuality and a legitimate repudiation. The late adolescent wants to be an apprentice or disciple, a follower, a sexual servant or a patient to such a person when this fails, as it often must from its very intensity and absoluteness, the young individual recoils to a position of strenuous introspection and self testing, given particular aggravating circumstances or a history of relatively strong autistic trends, can lead him to a paralyzing borderline state” E. H. ERIKSON, *Identity Youth and Crisis*, 164.

¹⁸⁶ B. I. BANYARD,- L. M. HART, “Characteristics of Child Sexual Abuses as Correlates to women’s adjustment: A Perspective Study” In *Journal of Marriage and Family*, (1996) Vol 58, 865.

as well as for the youth's emotional, social, intellectual and moral needs is an abuse of neglect.

When free primary education is denied to child, the child's future survival is at stake. This is an abuse and neglect, because such a child in future will lack the skills to compete in the market and will be unable to cater for his or her basic needs. Some pastors sometimes use handicapped people in their healing ministry. It become an abuse of neglect when the pastor performs the healing miracle session not for the good of the disables, but just to impress the assembly; they want their faith to be like the faith of others.

3.1.2.5. Other related cases of abuse

The use of child soldiers especially in wars in the African countries, is a form of abuse, because these children do not have a choice¹⁸⁷, and their childhood is stolen from them. Young people (especially young girls from poor families) are forced into prostitution.¹⁸⁸ Another strong abuse that youth face is the lack of respect for their life.¹⁸⁹ All the above abuses are only the tip of the iceberg that is visible. The root cause of these abuses towards youth people in Africa is something deeper.

3.1.3. Factors Underlying these Youth Situations

The prevalence of abuses against youth in Africa has many root causes that should be looked into. Understanding, fighting and alleviating situations of abuse is possible only when the root causes are addressed.

¹⁸⁷ Talking the horror in Uganda war, we read in Daily Nation news paper: "Boy and girls are dragged at gun point from their homes and schools and forced to join rebel ranks. They are easier to mould in to vicious, soulless fighters than adults with developed mindsets" A. MURUNGU, *Daly Nation, New Paper*, Outlook, Inside story February, 06, 2006, p

¹⁸⁸ Many young girls from poor countries are lured by promises of job abroad, but end up in house of prostitution.

¹⁸⁹ The main treat against life is abortion that is usually provided and/or forced by older people, relatives, or because of the socio-economic situation, and moral decadence.

Today, abuses present themselves at different levels. At the individual level, we can find the following reasons: greed, ignorance, poverty, family violence. At the level of society as a whole, there is moral decadence (loss of moral values), injustices coupled with religious decadence (relativism, syncretism, devil worshipping, atheism, agnosticism). All these are characteristic of a society that is materialistic.

At the government level, we can see that inefficient legislation does not allow an efficacious protection of youth from abuse.¹⁹⁰ At the cultural level, traditional beliefs and practices, acculturation infringe in one way or another over youth growth.¹⁹¹ At the world level, no one can remain indifferent in face of the ravages of globalization.¹⁹²

4. Church's Presentation of God's Goodness to Abused Youth Today

Abused youth are the poor of Yahweh who are experiencing in their "own persons the anxiety of the present season of history, laden with hopes and uncertainties, a season in which it may at times be easy to lose the way that leads to the encounter with Christ."¹⁹³ Here lies the necessity for the Church to present God's goodness to abused youth without delay. Actually, "if the Church has a special interest in (the) youth, it is because they are, at all times, the hope of both the world and the Church. This is particularly true in our time".¹⁹⁴

4.1. Teaching Faith is Possible (v11).

Faith is a gift from God. We realize how true this is when we hear Jesus saying: "You have not chosen me, I have chosen you" (Jn 15: 16). However, faith also requires

¹⁹⁰ The "Ndugu Bill" on Child molestation recently adopted by the Kenya parliament is not being applied to new cases of rape. Cf Daily Nation, New Paper. 15 September 2006, p15.

¹⁹¹ Female Genital Mutilation is still practiced in spite of the new legislation. Cf Daily Nation, New Paper, 08 July 2006, p20.

¹⁹² We do not deny the benefits of globalization, but compared to the gain, globalization is not so favorable to many countries of the 'Third world'

¹⁹³ John Paul II, *World Youth Day*, 21 November 1993.

¹⁹⁴ John Paul II, *World Youth Day*, 21 November 1993

an option on part of those who fear the Lord. This requires openness and a readiness to live it, and live from it. Faith sets the humble free: it is the freedom to be fully human and not a restriction of our humanity. Faith frees a power within us, a power that comes from God.¹⁹⁵ To have faith is to be a disciple; and to be a 'disciple means to be with others disciples'; this is because discipleship is normally carried out in the context of community.¹⁹⁶

One famous African scholar said that 'Africans are notoriously religious'.¹⁹⁷ This is still true for many Africans the existence of God is self-evident. However, the African tradition has been diluted and the problem of faith is in need of being readdressed.¹⁹⁸ This is why in any society or any community, especially in Africa, where young people are 'abused', teaching faith, imparting faith or talking of God and experiencing God is a very difficult task; but it is a possible task. This task is the challenge that the Church faces, to tell abused youth: "Come, O sons, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the LORD" (v11).

4.2. The Necessity of Experiencing God's Goodness (v13)

According to Marcum, "the most direct and powerful form of learning is experiential. If someone tells us something, we may or may not believe it. And even if we do, it may make little or no difference in our lives. However, when we ourselves experience something, it has a direct and powerful impact on us"¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ G. BORAN, *Youth Ministry that Works*, 19.

¹⁹⁶ "The word 'disciple', in its singular form is used very little in the New Testament (singular form used only 28 times in the New Testament, the plural form is used 241 times) when it is used, it is primarily in the context of Jesus describing the conditions of being a disciple. The vast majority of citations are in plural form: Disciples." F. MERCANDANTE, *Growing Teen disciples*, 17.

¹⁹⁷ J. MBITI, *African Philosophy*, 102.

¹⁹⁸ A. SHORTER, *Introduction to African Culture*, 45.

¹⁹⁹ W. MARCUM, *Living the Light*, 16.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was one of the first thinkers to call for a new way of knowing. He held that the best thing to do is to start with facts²⁰⁰ and formulate generalizations from those findings, rather than starting with the beliefs that can be the result of prejudices or preconceived ideas.²⁰¹ The tendency of the deductive methodology²⁰² (starting with beliefs) is to avoid change and to maintain the status quo with the risk of 'living in an ivory tower'. The inductive method (starting with facts and experience), on the contrary, helps us maintain contact with the real situations in the real world where all of us live.²⁰³ So, the effective presentation of God's goodness is that which starts with the youth's own experience of God in general. "Young people are more motivated and better learn when pastoral agents start with their problems, their needs and aspirations."²⁰⁴

4.3. The Role of the Church is to Bring Conversion to Those it Relates to

In order to bring the message of God's goodness to people, it is a must to adopt the '*incarnation method*' (see below), that is God's own method. It is clear that the essence of '*God's method*' was and is to reveal Himself to people and invite them to respond to his love. This he does by accommodating Himself to us and to our situation, by entering into our history.

²⁰⁰ It is an encouragement to start with concreated things exactly like the psalmist with gives concrete actions to reach wisdom: "Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit" (V13); "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it" (v14).

²⁰¹ G. BORAN, *Youth Ministry that Works*, 38.

²⁰² As far as the faith in God and experience of faith are concerned, the deductive method will start by announcing the salvation in Jesus Christ, something that the young of today, especially those who are abused, are not interested in.

²⁰³ G. BORAN, *Youth Ministry that Works*, 139.

²⁰⁴ G. BORAN, *Youth Ministry that Works*, 142.

As Christ's messengers and sharers in the Church's mission, pastoral agents²⁰⁵ have to present God's message as the Good News of the history of salvation. But this truth has to be taken further. It is not enough that the Church should merely teach²⁰⁶ that our religion is incarnational; that God reveals himself through our human history; that he acted with particular men and women in specific situations and continues to act, here and now, with us in this way. Besides proclaiming God's acts in this way, we²⁰⁷ must also act according to what we teach."²⁰⁸

4.3.1. God's Goodness Brought by Human Experience

Every pastoral agent should believe that God loves the young no matter what. This is the basic conviction that is at the core of the pastoral agent's vocation and it is this faith that motivates one's ministry and all one's pastoral activity. Every pastoral agent is required to believe²⁰⁹ that this God in Jesus, wants to offer liberation and to share his fullness of life with the young people. This represents the shape of a new future and in their expectations they bear the seeds of the values of the kingdom.²¹⁰ All that we have just said in this section is valid for any youth and above all for youth who have been abused and are living in affliction.

Abused youth are to be embraced as they are; they are to be met in their afflictions without judging them, but empathizing with them. Spending time with them

²⁰⁵ We shall use 'Pastoral Agent' and 'Agent of Evangelization' interchangeably. "Pastoral Agent" for us is someone who has tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord in his own life.

²⁰⁶ "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable" (Rom 12: 2).

²⁰⁷ "We" refers to the Church, the pastoral agent or agent of evangelization and nay adult faithful who have experienced God's goodness.

²⁰⁸ D. LANCE, In E. J. KISSANE, *The Book of Psalms Vol I*, 83.

²⁰⁹ So, "Every pastoral agent should be convinced that the Spirit is present and active in the young and that through them he wants to develop more authentic human/Christian communities." J. VALLABARAJ, *Empowering the Young Towards Fullness of Life*, 28.

²¹⁰ Cf. J. VALLABARAJ, *Empowering the Young Towards Fullness of Life* 28.

and not being judgmental is a good step forward. Youth who are abused are on the scales. The challenge of the pastoral agent is to know which side to 'press on' for missing the point can draw abused youth further from God. The pastoral agent should play the role of a psychologist which entails entering into the world of the abused, feeling as they feel, thinking like them, and being empathetic towards them.²¹¹

4.3.2. *The Character²¹² of the Youth Has to Be Touched*

The pastoral agent will be more effective when he accepts the character of abused youth and knows their way of life in order to change it eventually. "Bad character" is not something that is genetically transmitted but it is acquired. By coming close to abused youth, the pastoral agent is saying: "I have seen how your life here on the street is, I understand you, I do not judge you. If you wish, you can come and experience with me another way of living."²¹³ When afflicted youth accept this first invitation to 'come and see' that another way of life, different from what they have been used to, is possible, at that moment there is room for talking to abused youth about salvation. Before this, talking of salvation will have almost no effect.

The pastoral agent should spend time with the afflicted youth and allow them to see his life and actions as those of someone who *is saved*. This is why it is important to

²¹¹ The pastoral agent should always keep his integrity. So, he or she in the work of evangelization is not obliged nor even advised to taste drugs to be and feel with the drug-addicts; understand them and be there for them and with them.

²¹² For example someone with a "good character" can be the one who wakes up at 5am, prays, takes shower, has breakfast, walk in the office are the habit a Christian manager of a society can develop. On the other hand, we can have a drug-addicted person who will wake up from the corner of the street, taste his drug, take his hidden food, start begging, starting thinking of a bad move accomplish; such person is said to have a "bad character". Nb: a Character is to be distinguished from the personality; a 'personality is the outward expression, appearance of a person. They are all the manners of expression and ways of interacting with other'.

²¹³ This my personal experience with street children in Cameroon.

know²¹⁴ them in person and help them to open up and talk. A youth who is aware of a listening ear will definitely open up, and this shows that he/she is on the way to conversion.

The more the pastoral agent talks and shows by his/her life the goodness and kindness of God, the more abused youth will experience conversion²¹⁵. At this moment, the journey has begun: afflicted youth will be progressively made able to 'taste' the goodness of God.

4.3.3. *Personal Experience of 'Tasting'*

As far as youth are concerned, the announcement of salvation in Christ is not a good starting point.²¹⁶ First, it is necessary to have a joyful experience of God in Christ Jesus. "Is not Christ the secret of true freedom and profound joy of heart? Is not Christ the supreme friend and teacher of all genuine friendship?"²¹⁷ Pastoral work with young people should be drawn from the experience of the pastoral agent.

The pastoral agents themselves, before they can share and spread the goodness of God, must have experienced it. They have to have 'tasted and seen' in their own lives that the Lord is good. This makes them more credible in bringing light to those still in the same darkness they once experienced.²¹⁸ One important thing to keep in mind is that it is the task of the pastoral agent to be with abused youth so as to help them have a

²¹⁴ The pastoral agent becomes the eye of God towards the abused youth: "The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous, and his ears toward their cry (v15)."

²¹⁵ This can be reflected for the drug-addict by the going away with drugs. For the sexually abused, it can be reflected by the readiness to forgive. For the emotionally abused youth, it can be opening a window to personal self-esteem. This is however not yet a professed their faith, but it is only a sign that their habit has started showing that they have got the message.

²¹⁶ Though it might be the better thing to do if the 'received faith' has remained steady.

²¹⁷ (NMI 11)

²¹⁸ Bringing light or helping the youth that are abused to experience God's goodness starts with exposure of theirs habits and their ways of life. It is not just a matter of preaching the message by words of mouth, but it is first and foremost by experiencing it and preaching it by life.

'taste' of what the pastoral agent tasted. Unfortunately, most pastoral agents do not spend much time with the souls in need of conversion.

How will abused youth taste God's goodness if not in the life of those who have already experienced conversion? The agent of evangelisation is to be 'God' touching them and bringing them to God, and not keeping them to themselves. This is possible only when the pastoral agent lets them know through their lives the goodness of the Lord.

4.3.4. The Power of Choice

Through his life, witness and moral standard, the agent of evangelization who has tasted and seen God's goodness is well placed to help abused youth and to show them that what happened in the past and is still keeping them in a situation of affliction is not a curse. The agent of evangelization's way of life is that which should speak louder than words and tell abused youth that life is worth living and that God gives them His grace.

So, this means that the life of the pastoral agent should convince abused youth that life is a choice,²¹⁹ not a curse. He/she should show that his/her way of life is such because he/she has chosen to be not suffering; he/she has chosen life'; because he/she has made the right choices, he/she is not suffering

4.3.5. 'Incarnational' Example of Jesus Christ

Jesus came into the world (incarnation), he lived with people (public ministry). By doing so, he revealed to Israel the goodness of God (the Kingdom of God). Our Lord Jesus Christ was ready to mix with simple people (lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors,

²¹⁹ The psalmist called about the choice to be made: "What man is there who desires life, and covets many days that he may enjoy good?" (v12).

sinner...) and live their life. The agent of evangelization has to live the 'experience of incarnation' with abused youth, touch them and allow himself to be touched.²²⁰ For example the prostitute of the gospel tasted and saw that Jesus' character was good (Mk 14: 3-9). Another person out of his experience called Jesus 'good master', "Only God is good", Jesus said. Jesus Christ lived among the poor and they saw his goodness.

According to Katamoi, "only a God who suffers can theologially ground and make sense of the immense pain and suffering with the contemporary world"²²¹, therefore, only a God who suffers in solidarity with the innocent is worthy of the name 'God'. We must not think that the above idea came out of a vacuum. The Christian concept of God came from the human experience of suffering coupled with the human experiences of God as love (*Hesed*, Ex 34: 6-7). Hence, in human suffering, God is not only a witness but also a participant. In this case, human experience becomes an experience that God chooses to experience.²²²

4.4. What Can Be Done in Sorrowful and Difficult Experiences?

The Holy Spirit is at work in and through the Word of God. The first thing to do is to present Christ to abused youth as He really is.²²³ They will certainly experience him as an answer that is convincing, and they will be able to accept his message even when it is demanding and bearing the mark of the cross.²²⁴

²²⁰ "To touch the life of another human being is to have your life touched. And to touch the soul or influence the spiritual growth of another human being is to feel that touch upon your own soul and your own spiritual growth" L. SAVARY, *Building Self-esteem in Children*, 149.

²²¹ K. KATAMOI, *Theology of the Pain of God*, 19.

²²² Cf T. G. WEINANDY, *Does God Suffer?*, 5.

²²³ In spite of the abuses that the young people face their lives, it is possible, when Christ message (Word of God) and Christ himself (his life, passion, death and resurrection...) is presented, as he really is, that they can make their own experience and ideas meaningful to them.

²²⁴ NMI 11.

4.4.1. *Suffering as Object of Salvation*

Suffering through Christ got a new meaning. It is a salvific suffering when it is offered to Jesus Christ as an offering of salvation for the world,²²⁵ something used for salvation. Because we are saved by the blood of Christ, “we do not need to come full of guilt, or shame. We are to approach (Him) boldly, with confidence, knowing he not only feels with us, but also wants to heal us. And he has not let us alone, for the Holy Spirit helps us with our infirmities (cf. Rom 8: 26). The human experience of Jesus is now with us in the presence of the Holy Spirit who will aid us with our infirmity, in mutual participation for their healing.”²²⁶ According to George Donald, “the Son of God suffered until death, not that people may not suffer, but that their sufferings may resemble His.”²²⁷ This is an invitation to interpret the sufferings of the abused in the light of Calvary.

According to Seamands, to say, as do the ancient Creeds,²²⁸ that ‘Christ descended into hell’, means that Jesus Christ has entered into the world of fears, abuses, terrors, and anxious feelings any abused youth can experience at his/her lowest moment of rejection, forsakenness and depression. It means there is no single abuse that Jesus cannot understand.²²⁹ In Jesus Christ, all the sufferings and related consequences due to

²²⁵ “And being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey him” (Heb 5: 9).

²²⁶ D. A. SEAMANDS, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, 46.

²²⁷ F. M. KAMUNGISHA, *Is your Sorrows like the Sorrows of Mary?*, 42.

²²⁸ “The Apostle Creeds says, ‘he descended to hell’, when Christ was hanging on the cross, the very heavens became brassy, not brotherly, they come frightenedly deaf as he was cut off from the land of the living. He cried for help in his final anguish but there was no answer. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer; and by night, but find no rest” (Ps 22: 1-2). Psalm 22 is a psalm of confidence; it has an expression of deep faith, though it starts with utter desolation, and ends with a thanksgiving expression of total trust in Yahweh.

²²⁹ Cf. D. A. SEAMANDS, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, 44.

abuse that youth suffer find new meaning in the sufferings of Jesus Christ himself, true God and true man.

All abused youth can be sure that He is the high priest who is not incapable of feeling their weaknesses with them, but has been put to the test in exactly the same way as themselves, apart from sin (cf. Heb 4: 15). It is this assurance that gives to abused youth ground for their hope and healing. The fact that God not only knows or cares, but fully understands, is the therapeutic factor in the healing of their damaged emotions self-esteem.²³⁰

4.4.2. *God's Word Sets Free*

For someone who has been through sufferings and abuses of all kinds, some even perpetrated by relatives, or trusted authorities (like religious leaders and social figures, like teachers), the love of God is not easy to be 'seen' and to be 'tasted' or experienced. What the afflicted ones lack or are impaired to grasp is the knowledge of God is really in himself. They wonder whether they can see God, they wonder why God allows them to suffer. For abused youth especially, God is hard to be known, God seems wrapped up in mystery.

In order for them to "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (v8), those who have already tasted God's goodness help them to discover God's goodness and grace for them in their lives²³¹ and in the Scriptures. This means to invite them to go beyond the cover of the Bible (their love letter from God) to discover amazing love, amazing history, amazing poetry, amazing stories, amazing drama, and amazing humour. "God invites (them) to peel back the layers of each page and discover how amazing the Love

²³⁰ D. A. SEAMANDS, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, 46.

²³¹ Let them experience the pastoral agent's present life and see that it is good; experiences and actions will be talking to them, this will be possible if they are accepted as friends.

of God can be.”²³² The pastoral agent’s task should be to help afflicted youth take the Bible, open it, taste it, see it, pray it and the God of Love will deliver the sweetness of his merciful and loving kindness to those who ‘seek Him’.

4.5. *Youth Abused as the Anawim of God Today*

Youth that are so often unjustly abused are the “suffering ones” of Yahweh, they are those unjustly affected who cry to God and he listens to their voices.²³³ The love of God for the just man, for the innocent youth who has been wrongly abused does not exclude the fact that he/she will be confronted with lots of sufferings (v19a). It is God who allows trials in the lives of those He loves; ‘for the Lord reproveth the one he loves, as the father the son in whom he delights’ (Prov 3: 12). But the Lord will not permit the one he loves to be lost (v19b); he will not permit things to come to extremes, but will remove all tribulations before the godless will triumph over him.²³⁴

It is Christ who refreshes and enlightens the hearts of those who are afflicted. In one-way or another, He loves and says to each youth that is abused: “Come to me all who labour, learn from me, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11: 28-29). “Grace, too, is a mystery, we can’t explain the moment when it arrives, just simply embrace it (grace) when it comes.”²³⁵

4.6. “*Let Nothing Trouble You*” (Don Bosco)

Don Bosco used to help all his youth in difficulty to go out of their problem and he encouraged them: “Let nothing trouble you”. This optimism of Don Bosco vis-à-vis

²³² *God is Near*, 30 Extraordinary Encounters. Copyright (c) 2001, Group Publishing, Inc.

²³³ In an egalitarian society like Israel, the law and the distribution of resources was supposed to leave everybody satisfied. The widows, orphan and stranger were those likely to be abused; they are the ‘*Poor of Yahweh*’: the *Anawim*.

²³⁴ E. KELI, - B. FRIIZ, *Herder’s Commentary on the Psalms*, 122.

²³⁵ J. ROSONGEN, *Meeting Christ in Teens, Starling Moments of Grace*, 100.

youth joins the invitation of John Paul II to the youth in Philippines: “Dear young people, strive to build a character that is strong, rich and consistent, one that is free and responsible, sensitive to genuine values, a character that accepts the superiority of ‘being’ over ‘having’, one that perseveres in challenges and shuns escapism, facile compromise and heartless self-centred calculations.”²³⁶

The desire to ‘see’ the Lord dwells always in the human heart (cf. Jn 12: 21), as a constant urge to see his face. The Abused youth too, are setting out on their way, and give expression to their longing with the pilgrim of Zion, as each one repeats, “Lord, I seek your face” (Ps 28: 8).²³⁷ It is a life characterized by the fear of the Lord.

It is indeed true that the godless frequently enjoy earthly prosperity while those who fear God are visited with sorrows and adversity, but the Lord lightens the burden that he lays upon them. When the afflicted ones call upon Him, He (Lord) hears them and delivers them from their needs. When the just is sick at heart, when spiritual strength is needed, it is then that the Lord consoles his servant, helping him and raising his dejected spirit.²³⁸

5. Conclusion

Because the Lord has said: “I will never forsake you”, hence we can confidently say: “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can a man do to me?” (Heb 13: 5b-6). From Psalm 34, it comes out that “even in the midst of greatest sufferings God looks down condescendingly upon his servant, God guards all his servants so that no one shall perish. This is the precious certainty of a man who fears God. This certainly lifts him above all afflictions and gives him strength to bear patiently and to wait until

²³⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Message to the Youth of Philippines, Manila, 1992.*

²³⁷ Cf JOHN PAUL II, *World Youth Day, 21 November 1993.*

²³⁸ E. KELT, - B. FRITZ, *Herder's Commentary on the Psalms*, 122.

God wills to put an end to his suffering. For the just man's suffering will never be the cause of eternal death, but sin and malice will kill the blasphemous."²³⁹

The psalmist conveys a faith and hope message in the moment of intense sufferings whatever its cause. Trust, faith, endurance and strong hope and confidence that the Lord listens to the cry and the prayers of those who call upon him. This is an enduring message not only for abused youth as we have tried to show in this work, but also for all Christians of Africa and the world at large. When things seem to have no meaning, our God has the last word. He manifested it in a special way through the incarnation and the paschal mystery of His son our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, after his death and resurrection, rose from the dead and brought eternal victory over any affliction.

When youth who have been abused are able to cry to God, the experience of the Psalmist is that God will hear and answer them. God will never allow us to be tempted beyond our strength. A young person who has been heard and answered by God has the privilege and the duty to share in the conviction of John Paul II that "the church entrusts to the youth the task of crying aloud to the world the joy that springs from having encountered Christ (of having been heard by God)."²⁴⁰

Such an expression of joy is a sign of a youth who has tasted the goodness of God and has now become a communicator of God's goodness. The message of faith and hope that Psalm 34 holds is a very actual message that is fully relevant to many youth in Africa, especially those who are abused. It is a relevant message to all the *Anawim* of

²³⁹ E. KEI T., - B. FRITZ, *Herder's Commentary on the Psalms*, 122.

²⁴⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *World Youth Day*, 21 November 1993.

Africa who, though they are righteous, are still suffering the lack of experiencing and tasting God's goodness.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Though historically Psalm 34 referred to David when he feigned to be mad in front of Abimelek and had his life saved, theologically, Ps 34 can refer to any afflicted and/or righteous person, every human being who has suffered any affliction. In this study, we apply it to all youth that are abused so much so that they are unable to see or to experience or even believe the existence of God. Every youth that in one way or another has gone or goes through individual, familial, social and even religious abuses is a 'poor of Yahweh' who stands in need of salvation and is crying towards God.

The psalmist's message of faith and hope is an enduring message. This is the call to put one's faith and trust in God. God listens to the afflicted one and will definitely act. The psalmist thanks God for all the good things he received and shares with others the good things that the Lord did in his life: he does not keep his experience of God for himself. His intention and mission is to praise God, to share the great things that the Lord has done in his life.

The enduring message of the psalmist to any afflicted person, and especially to abused youth, is that God always has the final word. God is not an impassible God who is not moved by the sufferings of the just one, but He is a God of compassion and above all a God of love. He is a God who has the ability to suffer because he loves his people.

Out of love, Jesus poured out his blood for our sins. If Jesus who is God does so, as the God of Love, he tells us that good can spring from experience of suffering.²⁴¹

Neither suffering nor death has the last word. The psalmist assures his reader that eternal reward will be the lot of those who fear the God. God redeems the souls of his servants from all sufferings, from all passing sorrows, and from all deceptions. For those who fear the Lord, death is deliverance in the true sense of the word. He who trusts in God at all times, and seeks help and consolation from him; he who trustingly believes in his power, will not regret it for eternity.

²⁴¹ Cf. T. G. WEINANDY, *Does God Suffer?*, 8.

APPENDIX I (WTT Psalm 34)

- 34:1 WTT Psalm לְדָוִד בְּשִׁנְוֹתָיו אֲחִי־טַעֲמֹלוּ לִפְנֵי אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וְהִנְבְּשִׁיתֶהוּ וְיִלְךְ:
2 אֶבְרַכְכָּה אֲתִי־הִדְוָה בְּכִלְעֵת חַמְלִיד תְּהַלְּחֵנוּ בְּפִי:
3 בְּיִדְוָה תִּחְתַּלְּלֵנִי וְנִפְשִׁי יִשְׁמַעֵנִי וְשִׁמְעֵנִי וְיִשְׁמַחֵנִי:
4 גְּדֹלְךָ לִידְוָה אֱמִי וְנִרְמַמְתָּה שְׁמִי וְיַחַד:
5 הִרְשַׁמְתִּי אֲתִי־יְהוָה וְעַנְנִי וּמִכְּל־מַגּוּרֹתַי הִצִּילָנִי:
6 הִפְרִיטֵנוּ אֵלָיו וְנִגְהַרְוּ וּפְנִינֹתָם אֶל־יְהִפְתְּרוּ:
7 זָדָה עֵנִי קָרָא וְיְהוָה שָׁמַע וּמִכְּל־צָרוֹתַי הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי:
8 חָגְנָה מִלֵּאֲד־יְהוָה סָבִיב לִירְאֵי וְיִחַלְצֵם:
9 טַעֲמֵנוּ וְרָאוּ כִּי־טוֹב יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־הִנֵּב הַגִּבֹּר יִחַסֵּד־בָּנוּ:
10 וַיִּרְאוּ אֲתִי־יְהוָה קִדְשׁוֹ כִּי־רָאוּ מַחְסוֹ לִירְאֵיוֹ:
11 כְּפִירִים רָשָׁו וְרַעֲבֹו וְדִרְשׁוּ יְהוָה לֹא־יִחַסְתְּנוּ כָּל־טוֹב:
12 לְכֹו־בָנִים שִׁמְעוּ־לִי יְהוָה יִרְאֵת יְהוָה אֶלְמִדְבָּרָם:
13 מִי־הִאִישׁ הִחְפֵּץ חַיִּים אֲהִב וְיִמִּים לִירְאוֹת טוֹב:
14 נֶצַר לְשׁוֹנֵה מִרַע וְשִׁפְתָיו מִדַּבֵּר מִרְמָה:
15 סוֹר מִרַע וְעִשְׂד־טוֹב פִּקֵּשׁ שְׁלֹם וְהִדְפֵּהוּ:
16 עֵינֵי יְהוָה אֶל־צַדִּיקִים וְאֹזְנָיו אֶל־שׁוֹעֲתָם:
17 פִּנְיֹו יְהוָה פֹּעֵשׁ רַע לְהַכְרִית מֵאָרֶץ וְכָרָם:
18 צִעֲקֵנוּ וְיִדְוָה שָׁמַע וּמִכְּל־צָרוֹתָם הִצִּילָם:
19 קָרָוֹב יְהוָה לְנִשְׁפָּר־לֵב וְאֲתִדְכַּא־רוּחַ יוֹשִׁיעַ:
20 רַבּוֹת רַעוּת צַדִּיק וּמִכְּלֵם יִצִּילָנוּ יְהוָה:
21 שְׁמֵר כָּל־עַצְמוֹתַי אַחַת מִתְהַנֵּה לֹא נִשְׁבַּרְהָ:
22 חַמּוֹתָת רָשָׁע רָעָה וְשִׁנְאֵי צַדִּיק יִאֲשָׁמוּ:
23 פּוֹדֵת יְהוָה נִפְשׁ עַבְדָּיו וְלֹא יִאֲשָׁמוּ כָּל־הַחַסִּים בָּנוּ:

APPENDIX II (RSV Psalm)

RSV Psalm 34:1 A Psalm of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he him out, and he went away. I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

2 My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and be glad.

3 O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!

4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.

5 Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.

6 This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

8 O taste and see that the LORD is good! Happy is the man who takes refuge in him!

9 O fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no want!

10 The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

11 Come, O sons, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

12 What man is there who desires life, and covets many days, that he may enjoy good?

13 Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.

14 Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous, and his ears toward their cry.

16 The face of the LORD is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

17 When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles.

18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the LORD delivers him out of them all.

20 He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.

21 Evil shall slay the wicked; and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

APPENDIX III ABBREVIATIONS

1. Biblical Books

1Chr	1Chronicles
1Cor	1Corinthians
1Kgs	1Kings
1Pet	1Peter
1Sam	1Samuel
1tim	1timothy
2Cor	2Corinthians
2Sam	2Samuel
Act	ACTS (or Acts of the Apostles)
Amos	Amos
Dn	Daniel
Dt	Deuteronomy
Ex	Exodes
Ezek	Ezekiel
Gal	Galatians
Gen	Genesis
Hos	Hosea
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Jn	John
Job	Job
Jos	Joshua
Judg	Judges
Lev	Leviticus
Lk	Luke
Mk	Mark
Mtt	Matthew
Num	Number
Phil	Philippians
Prov	Proverb
Ps	Psalm
Rom	Romans
Titus	Titus

2. Others

ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
Cf	Confer
Chap	Chapter

COT	Commentary on the Old Testament
i.e.	Example
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Massoretic Text
NCE	New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol VI, Jack Haraty & Associates, Inc, 1981
NIB	The New Interpreter's Bible, Abingdon.
NIDNTT	BROWN, C., <i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> Vol 2, Exeter the Paternoster Press, 1971.
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	GEMEREN, V., <i>A New International Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology & Exegesis, Grand rapids 1997.</i>
<i>NJBC</i>	BROWN, R.E. – FITZMYER, J. A. - MURPHY, R. E., <i>New Jerome Biblical Commentary</i> , Englewood Cliffs 1968.
NMI	JOHN PAUL II, <i>Nuovo Millenium Inuente</i> n11.
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (Bible)
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version (Bible)
Syr	Syriac Bible
NIB	The New Interpreter's Bible
TDNT	BROMLEY, G. W., <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , Paternoster Press, 1985.
Tg	Targum
Vol	Volume
YHWH	Yahweh

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