

# Shepherd Motif in Psalm 23 From an African Perspective: A Textual and Theological Consideration

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## *Abstract*

This article examines the shepherd motif in Psalm 23 from an African perspective. The popular opinion over the years has been misunderstood, misinterpreted and subjected to criticisms in recent times due to the varying degrees of methodology ranging from Harman Gunkel who handles form criticism and Mowinckel's tradition criticism from the western world. These methods were used to interpret many of the biblical passages and shepherd motif without closely examining the contribution of the African perspective which is similar to the ancient Near East world view. The objectives of the study are to provide an adequate translation and interpretation that will correct the misunderstanding and misconception of the shepherd motif in Psalm 23 from the African perspective and to establish that *ro'eh* (shepherd) was a key term in Psalm 23 and this metaphor is seen from the beginning of the first verse to the very end of the last verse. Using contextualization and inculturation hermeneutics blended with adequate use of exegetical and theological methods, the meaning of shepherd motif in Psalm 23 was established which gives meaning to the shepherd motif in the Old Testament and in particular Psalm 23 from an African perspective. It was discovered that an untiring desire for care serves as the basis for interpreting, understanding and correcting shepherd motif in the Old Testament (OT) and in particular Psalm 23. This novel discovery was informative, educative and transformative. It therefore recommends that shepherd motif which exemplifies shepherd-sheep relationship in Psalm 23 from an African perspective, would serve as a paradigm for leadership in the church and society in Africa.

**Keywords:** Motif, sheep, shepherd, hermeneutic, contextualization

## **1.0 Introduction**

Psalm 23 is arguably the most widely read text across the centuries of the Jewish and Christian traditions, but literary scholars have not taken time to critically observe the rich metaphor that controls it. For example Psalm 23 has been

misunderstood, misquoted and misinterpreted in recent times. J. Stanley in his works on Psalms 23, comments on the misconception and misinterpretation by a drug addict:

The heroine is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. He lays me to rest by the brooks; he leads me to sweet insanity and destroys my soul. He leads me along the road to hell for the love of its name. Even if I walked in the valley of the shadow of death, I would fear no evil because the drug is with me. My syringe and my needle bring me comfort (p. 70).

The above excerpt is a complete distortion of Psalm 23 which is read below;

<sup>1</sup>The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me besides still waters. <sup>3</sup>He restores my soul. He leads me in path of righteousness for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup>Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me, <sup>5</sup>You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me. All the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the **LORD for ever.**

Other scholarly debates gravitate around the genre, theme, structure and life setting of the Psalm. Therefore, it is important and quite necessary to investigate it. The objective of the study is to correct the misquotation, misunderstanding and misconception of the shepherd motif in Psalm 23 and to establish and develop that *ro'eh* (shepherd) is a key term in Psalm 23 and this metaphor can be seen controlling the Psalm from the beginning of the first verse to the very end of the last verse. In examining the psalm, it is worthwhile giving a brief survey on the background of its literature alongside other texts which are poetic and prophetic in nature. Poetic literature occupies a considerable part of the Old Testament. It cuts across the major canonical divisions of the Old Testament text namely Law, Prophets and the Writings. For the sake of this article, the researcher restricts this study to few poems that are entirely poetic. Poems are indeed very difficult to interpret and it takes more effort than prose (Longman III 90).

Since this study is on shepherd motif from the Old Testament, the researcher focuses on Psalm 23 because it consists of shepherd imagery and this will give a better understanding of the shepherd motif in the Old Testament. He does recognize the fact that the entire book of Psalm is not the only poetic book, but do have other books like Job, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Proverbs and most of Ecclesiastes that are also poetic in nature. It should be noted that most

prophets like Jeremiah, Daniel, Jonah, Micah use symbolism in their prophetic utterances to convey their messages.

What then is poetry? What functions does it play in scripture? Why is it so significant that it attracts attention? These are some of the questions that would guide this study into better understanding why this material was chosen for examination. Hebrew poetry composed during Israel's early history reflects the following: firstly, it is a form of language native to Israel and most ancient Near East cultures. Secondly, it was a medium, which expresses "the most profound of human feelings and insights. These expressions come through prayer, praise, liturgy, music, wisdom and Psalms" (Craigie, p. 26). Having noted its expression, what message does poetry bring? Tremper Longman III in his works on Psalms notes:

Poetry appeals more directly to the whole person than prose do. It stimulates our imaginations, arouses our emotions, feeds our intellects and addresses our wills. Perhaps this is why poetry is the preferred mode of communication the Psalters and prophets used whose purpose depends on capturing the attention of their listeners and persuading them their message is urgent (p. 92).

From the above, one can see why the messages of the poets are attractive and their thoughts deeply conveyed. However, the Hebrew poetry is noted for its common characteristics, namely: parallelism and imagery, the former speaks of repetition and extension of meaning and the later speaks of images. Kraus citing Bishop Robert Lowth in his work discovered four basic types of parallelisms that are commonly found in Psalms (33).

Synonymous Parallelism- it repeats the content of the first line with new words in the parallel lines of the verse. (Ps. 44:6). In Antithetic Parallelism the content in the second lines contradicts the statement of the first line (Ps. 20:8). The Synthetic Parallelism speaks of the second line, how it expands and supplements the thought expressed in the first line. (Ps. 23:1- 3; 126:1). And the Climatic parallelism maintains that the second lines repeat a word from the preceding one. It uses words of comparison "like" and "as" (Ps. 29:1; 93:1).

In examining shepherd motif in Psalm 23, there are elements of parallelisms especially synthetic parallelism which speaks of the second thoughts, completes and supports the first lines and gives a good relationship existing between the two lines. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" because the Lord is his shepherd therefore, he lacks nothing. This verse stands out as the peak for understanding the shepherd motif in the whole of Psalm 23. The other subsequent verses or the five phrases go together thus "He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside still waters, He restores my soul, He leads

me in path of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalm 23:2,3). This explains the shepherd motif of caring which unites the five phrases; the pronoun "he" is used in place of the noun shepherd, which suggests that the imagery of the shepherd is carried forward in the subsequent verses. Just as we find parallelism in scriptures we also find imagery too in scripture.

Another important characteristic of the Hebrew Poetry is the imagery or the use of images. The question is why images? And how do they work in scripture? Imagery is very common with Psalms; it is used in comparing two things. Imagery accomplishes word pictures by means of comparison. In Psalms, there are varying degrees of imagery used to describe what God is like e.g. a shepherd, a rock, a shield, a fortress, etc. Meanwhile, there are basically two types of imageries in Psalms namely: (i). Simile (ii) Metaphor. A simile is a comparison made explicit which is indicated by "like" or "as" in Ps. 42:1 "As the deer pants ..." A metaphor on the other hand is a comparison, which avoids the use of "like" or "as". Looking closely at Psalm 23 as an example of shepherd motif in the Old Testament, "The Lord is my shepherd" is a metaphor and a metaphor communicates a more vivid image than a Simile, because it is implicit and draws the comparison more closely (Longman III, p. 115).

Additionally, the general use of imagery in poetry speaks to us with deep thought than just literal language. In regards to images, T. Longman III opines: "They stir our emotions, attract our attention and also stimulate our imaginations as well as help us discuss some new truths about the object compared" (p. 116). Longman III (117) further states, "Pictures are vivid and striking and communicate its points more than literal language. They also speak a universal language. This is due to the fact that images speak powerfully to our minds, to our hearts and wills as well" (p. 117). Examining Psalm 23, the shepherd in this text speaks to the hearts more directly; it quickly reminds us how a shepherd lives with his sheep, tends to their very need, keeps them from getting lost and protects them against wild beasts (p. 177).

## 2.0 Clarification of Terms

The following terms are explained in the context of this study:

**a. Sheep:** These are animals that are most frequently mentioned in scriptures with nearly four hundred references with flocks. In the modern practice, sheep are allowed to fend for themselves and left without fends but in the ancient Palestine, these animals were totally dependent on the shepherd for protection, grazing, watering, shelter and tending to injuries. In most cases sheep will not survive long without a shepherd. They are creatures with other qualities like lack of intelligence, being prone to wondering and unable to trace their roots to the sheepfold even at close range (Ryken, 782).

**b. Motif:** Motif is a pattern of events occurring repeatedly in a written text. Customarily, it applies to repeated instances of the same pattern, which often incorporates images. It could also mean an artistic design of the artist interacting with the mind of his readers (Ryken, pp. 17-18).

**c. Hermeneutic:** This refers to the principles of interpretation which seeks to give meaning of a text in a given context (Osborne, p. 6).

### 3.0 Textual and Exegetical Issues of Psalm 23

Psalm 23 has been subjected to criticisms in recent times due to varying degrees of methodology used on it such as Form and Tradition criticisms as propounded by Harmann Gunckel and S. Mowincke (Hayes, p. 83; Holladay, p. 92). This Psalm has attracted and challenged many scholarly debates on its theme, structure, genre and (life setting). F. Bruce posits that Psalm 23 belongs to and exhibits the Shepherd-King motif (p. 101) while L. Koehler opines that it is the Shepherd motif alone (pp. 27-34). For H. Kraus the later imagery running right through the first four verses vv. 1-4 and the last two verses vv. 5-6 seem to show no connection with the aforementioned verses, instead it is given the metaphor of a host (p. 305). Kraus further sees three different metaphors; a shepherd, a guide and a host in the whole of the Psalm (p. 305). All the various positions held by these scholars seem to be convincing but not sufficient enough to satisfy the curiosity of this research to this end.

It should be noted that in this exegesis, textual criticism approach is used in this research in order to determine the original wording of the author. This method is chosen here because of the variations in 'reading' and 'word' especially when using an edition from the major committee of translation of scripture RSV, JB, NKJV, NAB, and NIV. For instance in vs. 4 of Psalm 23 the word *hemmah* is translated "they" by NASB, RSV, NIV, etc. but the BDB offers variety of options such as "the same", "who", etc. But P. Craigie noted in his textual notes that Dawood suggest, "behold" in his studies with the Ugaritic (Hm Psalm, 47). The research's position is that since the word *hemmah* is in the emphatic position, the work submits to the Masoretic Text to take the meaning "they" or "the same", therefore, the translation would read, "They shall comfort me ..." Another example is the word *shulhan* in verse 4 translated "table" which E. Power, suggests an emendation to *shalah* "weapon" or "spear". Most versions translate this word as "table" but for E. Power suggests the reading to be "thou preparest arms for my defence against my enemies". It seems to reveal the sense or meaning of the text but highly hypothetical, The researcher subscribes to the Masoretic rendering of "table" to be the most acceptable translation which suits the literal context of the text, so that when one translates, the reading becomes "you will spread a table before me in the presence of my enemies".

Other variant readings within the text are *washabti* in vs. 6a, which suggests literal reading as “and I shall return”, derived from the root word *shuv*. But if the construction is *wayashbti* “and I shall dwell” it then means that the root word is from the Hebrew verb *yashab* which tends to support the MT construction for it clearly reveals the meaning of the text taking into consideration of the last construction *Yamimaorek* which is literally translated by BDB as “Length of days”, “forever” and “continuity”. With all these variations taken into consideration the reading is carefully established.

#### 4.0 Theme of Psalm 23

Nevertheless, the scholarly debate on textual and hermeneutical issues in Psalm 23 is an on-going discussion in recent studies. The climax of these debates is focused on the theme, structure, genre and (life setting). For the sake of this study, the structure has been taken for examination. F. Bruce posits that the theme of Psalm 23 is shepherd king motif (p. 101), while L. Koehler opines that it is the shepherd motif alone (pp. 27-34). For W. Kraus, he sees three different metaphors; a shepherd, a guide and a host passing right through the beginning of the verse to the end of the verse (p. 305).

The above submission shows no consensus among scholars as indicated above. However, this research seeks to justify and establish that the theme of shepherd is dominant or prevalent in Psalm 23. This will be investigated and developed in the course of the exegesis. Koehler in his works on Psalm 23 opines “the basis of the whole Psalm is the change of pasturage as indicated in vv. 5-6” (p. 229). But Anderson argues that it is a forced interpretation of the text (p. 195). Still on the theme, Anderson suggests a more reasonable hypothesis and maintains that the theme revolves around two word pictures of Yahweh as a caring shepherd and a gracious host (p. 195). This study agrees with this view for it explicitly gives a sense of meaning to the text. For others, Yahweh is seen as a guide of the wanderer according to vv. 3-4.

#### 5.0 Genre of Psalm 23

Another hermeneutical issue associated with the text under examination is the genre. Majority of scholars like Anderson, Hans-Joachim Kraus and others have identified the genre of this Psalm to be a Psalm of trust or confidence of an individual while Craigie seem to place it in the communal Psalm in the wider context. The reaction to the later view is that it does not have enough or sufficient or substantial evidence to prove that it is exegetically and legitimately communal in context. Perhaps these scholars have jumped into conclusion rather than investigating the issue through exegetical processes, which this work, seeks to argue and address.

Meanwhile, the meaning of the text has to be determined or drawn before any application is done. To further determine the meaning of the text, this work seeks to investigate the individuality of the Psalm through grammatical exegesis by identifying the constant use of the personal pronouns 'I' in both subject and object of the governing sentence by the author. Considering the hermeneutical issues involved in the genre of the Psalm, Vogt in his works *Bib* 34 (1953) pp. 193-211 sees the Psalm, slightly different from the popular opinion, and asserts that Psalm 23 is a thanksgiving Psalm basing his position from the content of the last two verses vv. 5-6 which seem to suggest a cultic setting. He saw a disconnection between vv. 5-6 and vv. 1-4 which seems to disagree with the shepherd metaphor running right through the whole Psalm. In this position this work seeks to argue that Vogt's position has not taken into consideration the contribution of linguistics in determining the grammatical position of some of the words and the semantic relationships of the whole construction in drawing out the meaning of the text. Recognition is also given to the fact that there are some deep theological thoughts within the text, which might have suggested a cultic setting. But with all of these, this study still subscribes to the genre of the text to be a poem of confidence or trust by an individual Psalter, which can be applied to the communal setting as noted earlier by (Craigie *Psalm*, p.47).

Lorezt in his analysis suggests that the genre of the Psalm could either be a poem of confidence or thanksgiving *UF* 6 (1974) pp. 187-91. He argues that history has borne this witness but then he did not specify when and where. May be that is the reason why some scholars posit the Psalm as a communal Psalm. Two other scholars Merill and Vogt echo Psalm 23 to be a royal Psalm. This study does not wholly subscribe to this position arguing from the analysis of the text, for it does not show any characteristic of a royal Psalmody. But these scholars maintain that it can be inferred to a royal Psalmody for the facts of its praise to a king who is a shepherd, again this is highly hypothetical. But Keller (p. 15) opines that Psalm 23 can be called "David's Hymn of praise to Divine Diligence". The reaction to this subscription is that the author agrees with this opinion looking at the contribution of the superscription for the construction *l'dawid* the preposition may mean "to David", "belonging to David", "for David" and "in honour of David" these are indeed possibilities (Yilpet *Canonical Criticism* 21).

## 6.0 The structure of Psalm 23

This is another hermeneutical issue among scholars. Looking at the structure of Psalm 23 Kraus quoting Briggs and Weiser in his works on Psalms say both scholars agree in their position that Psalm 23 consists of three divisions with three basic metaphors (i) the shepherd vv 1-2, (ii) the wanderer vv 3-4 and (iii) the host vv 5-6 (305). But Westermann holds a different view that the Psalm is

basically of two parts with two images as well. (i) The shepherd vv. 1 – 4 and (ii) the host vv. 5-6.

Looking at the analysis of these scholars, there are some degrees of agreement of the various structures of the Psalm which concur with the writer's opinion that when this poem is carefully examined, the shepherd metaphor seems to be controlling the Psalm which can be seen from the beginning of the first verse to the end of the last verse. This is supported by Bruggemann and Koehler who maintain that Psalm 23 is a continuously uniform hymn with a single metaphor of a shepherd throughout. It is the shepherd metaphor that gave rise to all the various structures and its meaning (p. 233). It can also be viewed as the determining factor of the shepherd motif. If for instance the shepherd metaphor were removed from the text, each of the exegetical and theological pericope would not convey its meaning positively (Biwul 1).

### 7.0 *The Sitz im Leben or Life Setting of Psalm 23*

The last debate on the hermeneutical issues in Psalm 23, which is still an ongoing issue in modern study of Psalm or scholarship, is the situation in life. Anderson (p. 195) opines that Psalm 23 can be classified as a Psalm of confidence and he suggests a cultic setting according to the reference to the house of the Lord in vs. 6. He also proposes that the meal before the enemies implies a thanksgiving banquet for the Psalmist. Anderson further envisages the situation of an ordinary Israelite who was expressing his confidence in Yahweh after he has been discharged and acquitted. He maintains that an ordinary Israelite may have said the utterance either before or during the sacrificial meal (p. 196). Anderson and Von Rad suggest that the Psalmist was a priest or one of the spiritual writers who found consolation in the experience of the cultus (p. 260).

Morgenstern in his works in *JBL* 65 (1946) pp. 13-24 suggests that initially the Psalm was not composed to be used in temple worship. A pious Jew closely relates his view with that of Anderson when he asserts that it was the expression of faith and trust in Yahweh (196). Vogt offers a fairly elaborate hypothesis from the substance of the Psalm a liturgical ritual of thanksgiving. (*Bib* 34 (1953) 195-211). Milne in *SR* 4 (1974/75) 237-47 proposes that this life setting of the Psalm is an exilic product. Freedman looking at the shepherd metaphor suggests Exodus experience and advances his thought that it offers hope for an exiled community cut off from home and temple. With all these sheer diversity of views from different schools of biblical interpretation, Kraus beautifully and logically sets three questions, which summarize all their arguments. Where was Psalm 23 intoned? At what occasion? Who is the composer? (p. 305). The psalmist expresses his trust in Yahweh of an individual Psalter delivered from his enemies and still anticipating greater deliverance in the future. This is

indicated by the Psalmist “even though I walked through the death dark valley your presence is with me” v. 4. The detail explanation of this is captured in the exegetical section.

### **8.0 African Perspective of Shepherd Motif**

The concept of the shepherd motif in Africa is akin to the ancient Near Eastern tradition in terms of form, nature and motif. This is different from the western perspective that has no intimate relationship with flock as does the African shepherd. In Africa, shepherds are identified with livestock and cattle as it is obtainable in the ancient Near East. The image of the shepherd in African context is understood both literally and metaphorically. The gods in Africa are seen as shepherd for they offer protection, provision, lead and guide their worshippers in all activities. They punish wrong doers severely depending on the degree of offence and show kindness and favour to the righteous doers. All of these qualities are tied around leadership responsibility be it of God or humans as is commonly found in Africa. To get to the heart of the matter, this study takes a look at some specific regions in Africa which will give the African understanding of the shepherd motif.

In the metaphorical sense, the concept conveys leadership responsibilities and relational affiliations. Most of the African tribes do recognize the fact that the shepherd-sheep relationship is deeply rooted in their cultural heritage, norms and values. Of this John Mbiti in his works on kingship in African religions and philosophy writes: “African concept of kingship is deeply rooted in traditional African life through blood and betrothal (engagement and marriage)” (p. 193). He further maintains that “kingship controls social relationships between people in a given community ... it determines the behaviour of one person to another. This sense of kingship binds up together the entire life of the tribe and even extends to animals and non-living objects” (p. 194), thus ensuring motif of caring. This understanding illustrates a deep and genuine relationship between the rulers and the ruled. This ideal picture serves as a paradigm for perfect relationship from the kingly line even to the smallest family unit. Furthermore, the family head is seen as a shepherd by implication, because he functions in a similar way as a shepherd. For just as the shepherd provides, leads, guides, cares and sustains his flock, so it is with the head of the nuclear and extended family (Mbiti, p. 194). The implication for this understanding is what is found in Psalm 23 where the shepherd-sheep relationship is explicitly demonstrated seeing the shepherd providing, leading, guiding, protecting and caring for his flock.

### **8.1 Masai Nomads in East Africa**

The *Masai* nomads are found in Kenya and Tanzania. Before the advent of the colonial masters, they were found in the 'Great Rift Valley of Africa'. They had

their first contact with the Europeans in 1840. After this encounter they were faced with various challenges of drought, famine and an epidemic of small pox and rinderpest with their cattle (Jayanth, p. 1). In his article “*Masai: The Shepherds of East Africa*” P. Jayanth (1) traces the location and identity of the *Masai* tribe. He identifies the *Masai* as nomadic and pastoral people living in the East African region. He stresses that they are perennial nomads who live solely on their flocks for milk, meat and even blood for survival. The *Masai* live in small clusters of houses call *kraal* which consists of eight families with their cattle. They are so much intertwined with their cattle. One of the most important things about them is the position of their cattle which occupies the nucleus of their existence, for the fact that it is their source of wealth. And so the cattle and flock are tended and cared for with a great deal of concern. The *Masai* shepherd stays behind and sometimes in front of the flock as he guides, directs and leads his flock in search of pasture and water. This is directly relational to Psalm 23 in which the shepherd demonstrates care, protection, leads and guides his flock. This style of leadership is slightly different from the traditional ancient Near East society in which the shepherd stays in front always, while the sheep follows him from behind. What is important here is the care offered to the flock. It doesn't matter the position of the shepherd (Jayanth, p. 1).

The *Masai* shepherds are warriors and are divided into groups such as child, junior and senior warrior, junior and senior elder. The age groups from 14-30 are known as *Morans*. They live independently in the bush. During this time they learn their cultural values and norms, they also develop courage, strength and endurance which they are known for. P. Jayanth (p. 2) opines that they are great hunters and during the initiation period they are taught skills on how to survive. In the time past, the young *Masai* must prove his manhood by killing a lion (p. 2). It is like David, the shepherd boy who while tending his father's sheep in the wilderness killed a lion and a bear that attacked his sheep (cf. 1 Sam 16:34-36). It has been observed that the *Masai* are caring shepherds and their lives are blended with their cattle. Such intimate relationship between the shepherd and the flock is what explains Psalm 23. With the aforementioned qualities, we can affirm that they are warriors and look after their flock with great care, hence can be described as good shepherds. And from all indication the communal life and their braveness in leadership roles are strong evidence that they exhibit common characteristics with the ancient Near Eastern tradition of the shepherd motif, but with some limitations in the caring motif.

## 8.2 The *Fulbe* society in Northern Nigeria

The *Fulbe* society popularly known as the *Fulani* communities are predominantly pastoral nomads, although there are few exceptions that settled down and concentrated on agricultural farming. They are like the Bedouins in the Middle East. The physical environment in which they live is the bush in the

Savannah belt of Northern Nigeria. One of their characteristics is that they migrate from one place to another in search of pasture and water for their flock and sometimes due to climate, economic and political reasons. They also have cattle and livestock in which they earn their living. What is so interesting about this society is their social structure and their attitudes toward the flock they pasture. They give prime attention and caring to the flock and the community.

A significant initiative is the contribution of S. Mogensen (p. 78) on the social organization of the *fulbe* society of Northern Nigeria and notes that a key component of the pastoral *fulbe* is the flock to which they are closely attached. He further maintains that the cattle play a major role in the social organization of the *fulbe* and that the social status of an individual in the society is determined largely by their relation to cattle. He notes again on the significance of the flock in which a *fulbe* proverb says: "If one harms the cattle, one harms the *fulbe*" and "If the cattle dies, the *fulbe* will die" and "cattle surpass everything and they are even greater than father and mother" (Mogensen, p. 78). Additionally, in explaining this proximity S. Mogensen quotes Hopen thus:

Ownership of cattle gives membership in the society and the loss results in expulsion. Membership in the society places an individual under strict code of conduct ... Serious breaches of this code are believed to cause a reduction in the fertility and milk yield as well as an increase in the mortality of the herd upon which the offender is dependent (p. 27).

The researcher's other findings with the *fulbe* shepherd is the personal interaction with some of them in which one discovers some interesting illumination about the relationship existing between the shepherd and his flock. In an interview with M. Adam who by every inch looks a typical Fulani shepherd, lamented over his tragic experience during the Jos 2001 religious crisis, where he lost some of his cows and a brother. Despite all these tragic experiences he did not turn off the question he was asked to explain the relationship that exists between him and his flock. He maintained that every cow, goat and sheep is given a name distinct from the other. He stressed that every young calf born in the family of the flock is named after its mother. He further said what this means that when the mother of any of this is called the little ones will equally respond with her. This also explains the fact that relationship existing between the shepherd and his flock was a primary factor that leads to the responses.

A. Masoba is the next man on my interview list who is also my student in Hebrew. He too is a typical Fulani shepherd before his conversion to Christianity. From his experience when asked on the same question he offered

some quite revealing truth that cows names vary from one clan to the other. He said "If a clan maintains the brown herd then all the brown cows have their peculiar names distinct from those clans who have other colours". This explains the diversity and peculiarity of one flock to the other, which helps the shepherd to know how best to attend to their distinctive needs. In other words this explains the diversity of the inter-relationship existing between the shepherd and his flock and the responsibilities of the shepherd to his flock.

## **9.0 Conclusion**

Shepherd motif in Psalm 23 from the textual, exegetical and African contextual perspective has been examined. It was discovered that the western methods as propounded by Harmann Gunkle and S. Mowinckle on form and tradition criticisms were not sufficient enough to represent global scholarship on interpreting Psalms and in particular Psalm 23. It was further discovered that contextualization was a viable tool in hermeneutics for it provides adequate platform for understanding and interpreting shepherd motif in African context. It was further justified in this study that the shepherd metaphor was retained in Psalm 23. This research discovers that an untiring desire for care is the basis for understanding, interpreting and correcting shepherd motif in the African perspective and in particular Psalm 23. This novel discovery serves as a contribution for knowledge, for it is informative, educative and transformative for governance in Africa. Therefore, this study recommends that the church and society in Africa needs leadership that is selfless and sacrificial as was uncovered by the shepherd motif in Psalm 23 from the African perspective.

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