

Research Article

Unveiling the Significance of Psalm 23 in Christian Education Amidst the Post-Human Era

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Abstract.

The main objective of this study is to analyze and provide an interpretation of Psalm 23 within the framework of Christian Education in the post-human era. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research utilizes a combination of literature study and biblical exegesis to gain a comprehensive understanding of the text. By employing an interpretative approach that involves exposition and critical analysis, the study engages with relevant literature to discuss the significance of Psalm 23 in education. The psalm portrays a profound trust in God's guidance, care, and provision, emphasizing the importance of these theological themes in the field of education. In the context of the rapidly evolving challenges presented by advanced technology and the blurring of human-machine boundaries, the timeless wisdom of Psalm 23 serves as a moral compass and provides valuable insights for educators to navigate these complex issues.

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Published: 9 August 2024

Publishing services provided by Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the 6th SoRes Conference Committee.

Keywords: Psalm 23, Christian education, post-human

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading Psalm 23 within its original context presents three key ideas: God as a shepherd who extends pastoral invitation, holistic responsibility, and leadership experience (Aruan et al., 2022). Psalm 23 encompasses three primary concepts. Firstly, it presents God as a shepherd who invites His people to experience His pastoral care. Secondly, it highlights the comprehensive responsibility that God assumes in taking care of His followers. Lastly, it underscores the experiential dimension of God's leadership.

It is important to acknowledge that certain scholars dispute the concept of a theological interpretation of the Psalms. They do so primarily because they believe that the Psalter, consisting of 150 poems, is too diverse to serve as meaningful source material for systematic theology. It is indeed true that the 150 psalms in the Hebrew Psalter exhibit great diversity. They were not authored by a single individual or written during a specific

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historical period. Additionally, they were not compiled by a particular school of thought in a single time and place. These poems do not adhere to a singular genre either; the term “psalm” itself does not indicate a specific literary genre but rather denotes “any sacred song” or “any song or ode with a sacred or serious character”(Jacobson, 2017).

Among those who reject the idea of a theology of the Psalms, Erhard Gerstenberger, for instance, argues that the Psalter encompasses such vast theological dimensions that any attempt to systematize it would inevitably fall short. Gerstenberger prefers to refer to “theologies within the Book of Psalms” as the diverse functions of the divine within the emerging Jewish community indicate a segmentation of theology into different discourses. Therefore, according to Gerstenberger, the Book of Psalms does not present a uniform theology either chronologically or synchronically. Instead, it exhibits multifaceted conceptions of God (Jacobson, 2017).

The realms of theology and education have long been intertwined, shaping the beliefs, values, and moral frameworks of individuals and societies. As we navigate the post-human era, characterized by technological advancements and evolving notions of human nature, our educational systems undergo profound transformations . This research examines the theological aspects of Psalm 23 and explores its relevance in the context of education in the post-human era. By analyzing the deep insights offered by this ancient text, we can glean valuable lessons that can inform and guide educational practices, aiding individuals in addressing the complex challenges and ethical dilemmas of our rapidly changing world.

Psalm 23 from the Christian Bible is one of the most recognized chapters, picturing God as a guiding and nurturing shepherd. The various metaphors within the Psalm offer direction, solace, and assurance of God’s enduring protection and support. Although often interpreted through a religious lens, Psalm 23 has profound relevance to education, advocating a supportive, nurturing, and morally grounded environment. The research gap in this study pertains to the disagreement among scholars regarding the theological interpretation of Psalm 23 in the context of Christian Education during the post-human era. While some scholars argue that the diverse and segmented nature of the Psalms makes it difficult to derive a unified theological message, others acknowledge the multifaceted conceptions of God depicted within the Book of Psalms.

This research aims to bridge this gap by examining and interpreting Psalm 23, exploring its implications for Christian Education in the ever-changing landscape of the post-human era. Through an analysis of the profound insights found in this ancient text,

the study seeks to provide guidance and inform educational practices in navigating the complex challenges and ethical dilemmas of the contemporary world. The objective of this study is to examine and provide an interpretation of Psalm 23 within the framework of Christian Education in the post-human era.

2. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative methodology utilizing textual analysis and literature review as its approach. The qualitative method was selected due to its ability to depict or elucidate the understanding derived from a particular situation, event, or incident (Zaluchu, 2020). The author utilizes an interpretative method based on an exposition approach to Psalm 23, and then engages in dialogue with various relevant literature to discuss the results of the exposition.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Historical and Literary Analysis of Psalm 23

It is crucial to delve into the historical and literary context of Psalm 23. This widely cherished Psalm, often attributed to King David, depicts a relationship between God as the shepherd and the individual as the sheep, conveying themes of guidance, provision, and protection. Through a careful analysis of the poetic and metaphorical language employed in the psalm, we can uncover profound theological implications that can inform educational practices (Wenham, 2013).

3.2. Exegesis of Psalm 23

“The LORD is my shepherd”. The LORD, who is like a shepherd, guides and cares for me. This psalm is well-known for its simple and vivid portrayal of this metaphor. In the following line, the shepherd leads the sheep to lush meadows with abundant grass, beside peaceful streams where the sheep can quench their thirst (Alter, 2009).

As a Shepherd, the LORD guides His people to rest in lush green meadows. The term “nawah” refers to a picturesque setting of fields adorned with vibrant green grass. In Jeremiah 5:37, it describes a flourishing and peaceful pasture, free from difficulties and secure in its tranquility. This idea is also mirrored in the imagery of a sheepfold

filled with nourishing green grass (Isaiah 33:20). According to Hamilton, the metaphor of green pastures represents the fertile land of Canaan, abundant with crops like wheat for sustenance and fruitful orchards. The psalmist further affirms that the LORD leads them to still waters. The act of guidance illustrates God's role in directing His people's lives and providing for their fundamental needs, including agriculture and a reliable water source. This portrayal embodies the human longing for serene environments, symbolized by green pastures and calm waters. In the presence of lush fields, the sheep find solace and are carefully laid down by the shepherd. Alongside tranquil waters, the sheep can drink peacefully. Green pastures and still waters symbolize God's nurturing provision and refreshment for His flock (Kawangung et al., 2020).

Psalm 23, presenting the LORD as a Shepherd who leads His people to peaceful green pastures and tranquil waters. These symbols represent God's provision, protection, and renewal for His flock. The metaphoric language emphasizes humanity's innate desire for security, serenity, and abundance, underscoring God's role in fulfilling these longings. Ultimately, Psalm 23 serves as a powerful reminder of the unwavering care and guidance offered by the divine Shepherd.

"He makes me lie down". The use of the verb (*hirbits*) "יָרַבִּית" emphasizes the shepherd's ability to make the animals lie down, thus maintaining the continuity of the sheep-shepherd metaphor (Alter, 2009).

"He restores my life". Although the phrase "*He restoreth my soul*" is a traditional rendering, the Hebrew word נֶפֶשׁ (*nefesh*) actually refers to the breath of life or one's existence. The image presented is that of someone who is on the verge of losing their breath but is revived and brought back to life. He leads me on the right path. By using the phrase "*pathways of justice*," the speaker transitions from the sheep metaphor to describing their own life in human terms (Alter, 2009).

"Even in the darkest times, I fear no harm". The intention behind this translation is not to deviate from the well-known phrase "in the shadow of the valley of death." Instead, it aims to capture the concise nature of the original Hebrew phrase בְּעֵינֵי תְּסַלְמֹוֹת (begey *tsalmawet*) by reducing the number of syllables. While some scholars believe that תְּסַלְמֹוֹת (*tsalmawet*) is a misinterpretation of תְּסַלְמוֹת (*tsalmut*) meaning "darkness," the traditional vocalization reflects a play on words or folk etymology (where "*tse*" means "*shadow*" and "*mawet*" means "*death*"), justifying the inclusion of the death element (Alter, 2009).

"You are with me, and Your guidance comforts me". In this moment of terror in the valley of the shadow, the speaker turns to God directly, while still maintaining elements

from the shepherd imagery through the mention of the rod and staff. You refresh me with oil. The verb used here, *dishen* ~~XXXX~~ does not refer to anointing but rather has sensual connotations of making something abundant or luxurious. This verse depicts various physical aspects of a joyful life a well-prepared table with delicious food, a head anointed with fragrant olive oil, and a cup overflowing with wine (Alter, 2009).

“Throughout my life”. This closing phrase echoes the reference to “*all the days of my life*” in the preceding line. It does not imply eternity or a future beyond the present. The speaker hopes for a blessed existence for the entirety of their days and prays to dwell in the secure and harmonious sanctuary of the LORD, experiencing divine favor for most, if not all, of their days (Alter, 2009).

Psalms 23 describes the restored soul as an individual who has been revived or brought into the presence of God (Yhwh) and is filled with confidence. This soul is portrayed as being in close proximity to the shepherd, completely rejuvenated, and without any fear of lacking anything, as it is shielded from all adversaries. The most crucial aspect is that the revived soul’s secure existence is reinstated due to God and for His sake. Not only is the soul discovered, revived, and refreshed, ensuring its inseparability from God and its lack of any deficiencies, but it also receives guidance and purpose, thereby bringing honor to God’s reputation. Interestingly, among the forty-eight psalms typically classified as individual laments, thirty-seven (77 percent) depict the soul pleading for deliverance. Likewise, out of the eight explicit psalms of trust, six (75 percent) mention the soul receiving assistance during times of distress. Therefore, in these types of psalms, the condition of the soul reveals more about the speaker’s overall circumstances than any other factor. In fact, the term “soul” is often understood primarily as a substitute for the personal pronoun. It represents a holistic rather than a dichotomous entity. Being present with God (the shepherd) signifies safety and life, whereas absence from Him implies danger and potential death (Tappy, 2023).

Psalms 23 is a prayerful passage containing positive declarations that possess the power to revitalize negative energy within the human chakras and restore the inherent radiance of the body’s aura. Consequently, individuals are empowered to think, innovate, and achieve abundant success in life. Psalm 23 serves as a potent affirmation for David, supporting his quest for success, and can be employed as a therapeutic tool to purify the aura of individuals, specifically church leaders, enabling them to radiate positive energy and accomplish prosperous ministry (Kawangung et al., 2020).

The God depicted as a shepherd in the Bible assumes a role beyond merely guiding His chosen people to the promised land or fitting into His current plans. He goes beyond protecting them from imminent dangers and instead assumes the responsibility of nourishing and meeting every need of His chosen ones. (Manurung, 2021). According to Brueggemann, one notable and intriguing grammatical feature in the psalm is the frequent use of the first-person pronoun, which appears throughout the entire psalm. While in some instances, such repetitive self-references may seem like an unhealthy fixation, that is not the case here. In this psalm, the “I” statements are brimming with gratitude, surrender, trust, and thanksgiving. The speaker acknowledges that every aspect of life is fully attended to and resolved by the One who responds to and anticipates every need. This psalm affirms that a life in communion with Yahweh is a life of contentment and fulfillment (Brueggemann, 1984).

Psalms serve as a spiritual and national reflection of the covenant-based life of Israel. Consequently, each psalm centers on God as its primary focus. This holds true for Psalm 23 as well, where the psalmist’s intention is to vividly depict the nature of God (Gabriel, 2021). Psalm 23 beautifully portrays the close bond between the Lord and His people using the analogy of a shepherd and his flock. The psalmist’s words convey a profound trust in God’s guidance, provision, and protection. Through the imagery of the shepherd tending to the sheep’s needs and leading them to places of nourishment and rest, the psalmist expresses unwavering faith in God’s constant presence throughout their journey in life. They find comfort in God’s ability to revive and renew their existence, and they express gratitude for His abundant blessings. Ultimately, Psalm 23 captures a deep longing to live in harmony with God, to experience His favor, and to dwell securely in His sanctuary.

3.3. The Shepherd's Rhetoric: Exploring Psalm 23 and its Relevance to Christian Education

3.3.1. Metaphor

Psalm 23 employs the metaphor of God as a shepherd and His people as sheep. This metaphor creates an image of care, guidance, and provision (Schmutzer & Howard, 2013). The metaphor of God as a shepherd and people as sheep can be applied to the teacher-student relationship.

3.3.2. Parallelism

The psalmist uses parallelism, a common Hebrew poetic device, to express similar ideas in different ways. This repetition enhances the poetic flow and emphasizes the central themes of the psalm. Parallelism can be used as a communication tool in education to reinforce important concepts.

3.3.3. Imagery

Psalm 23 employs vivid imagery to convey the nurturing and protective qualities of God. The images of green pastures, still waters, and a table prepared in the presence of enemies create powerful mental pictures. The vivid imagery in the psalm can be utilized to engage students' imaginations and facilitate better learning experiences.

3.3.4. Repetition

The psalmist repeats certain phrases, such as "I shall not want" and "He restores my soul," for emphasis. This repetition reinforces the psalm's message of trust and dependence on God. Repetition, as seen in the psalm, can be employed in education to reinforce learning and enhance retention.

3.3.5. Contrast

Psalm 23 contains contrasting elements, such as the contrast between the "valley of the shadow of death" and the "table prepared before enemies." These contrasts heighten the impact of the psalm and illustrate God's provision and protection. The use of contrast can promote critical thinking and help students understand different perspectives.

The study of genres, parallelism, and canonical formation has always been significant in Psalms research. Noteworthy progress has been made in these areas by scholars (Jones, 2022). Incorporating these rhetorical elements in education can improve communication, engagement, and knowledge retention among students. Psalm 23 is relevant because it offers a framework for effective teaching and learning. It inspires educators to adopt creative and impactful strategies in the classroom, utilizing the power of metaphors, parallelism, imagery, repetition, and contrast to enhance the educational experience for students.

3.4. The Post-Human Era and Educational Challenges

Psalm 23 encompasses various theological themes that hold enduring relevance in education. The metaphor of God as the shepherd emphasizes the importance of guidance and leadership in the educational context. Educators, akin to shepherds, bear the responsibility of guiding students towards knowledge, wisdom, and moral growth. The notion of provision and sustenance conveyed in the psalm highlights the significance of meeting students' basic needs and fostering an environment conducive to their overall well-being (Kidner, 2014).

Drawing from a study of the biblical text, Psalm 23:1-6, utilizing a hermeneutical approach, various forms of shepherding can be identified for Christian religious educators. These include catering to the students' needs, offering guidance, ensuring their safety, and nurturing their well-being. By employing these shepherding methods, the educational process can become both effective and efficient. Additionally, students have the potential to experience positive changes in their lives, exemplified by improved behavior aligning with Christian principles (Nababan, 2020). The importance of shepherding in Christian education is underscored by the interpretation of Psalm 23:1-6 using a hermeneutical approach. It emphasizes the crucial responsibilities of religious educators in meeting students' needs, providing guidance, ensuring their safety, and nurturing their overall well-being. These aspects play a vital role in creating an effective and efficient learning environment. Additionally, the analysis highlights the transformative power of shepherding in molding students' behavior to align with Christian values. In essence, shepherding is crucial for promoting holistic growth within the realm of Christian education.

The advent of the post-human era presents novel challenges for education due to technological advancements and the blurring of boundaries between humans and machines. Adapting to this rapidly changing landscape necessitates skills such as adaptability, critical thinking, and ethical decision-making (Floridi, 2019). Additionally, emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual reality raise questions about human identity, consciousness, and moral responsibility. In this context, the timeless theological insights of Psalm 23 can serve as a guiding force, offering a moral compass to navigate these intricate challenges.

Psalm 23 holds significance in the realm of education, particularly in its metaphorical portrayal of God as a shepherd and its implications for guidance and leadership. Educators, akin to shepherds, bear the responsibility of guiding students, attending to their

needs, and nurturing their overall well-being. This educational approach, influenced by the hermeneutical interpretation of Psalm 23, fosters effective learning and transformative behavior that aligns with Christian values. As we navigate the complexities of the post-human era, characterized by technological advancements and ethical dilemmas, the timeless wisdom of Psalm 23 can serve as a moral compass, offering guidance in addressing the challenges presented by emerging technologies and the evolving nature of human existence.

4. CONCLUSION

Psalm 23 eloquently portrays a strong reliance on God's guidance, care, and provision. It reflects a longing to live in harmony with Him and find solace in His presence. These theological themes hold significance in the realm of education, emphasizing the importance of guidance, leadership, and attending to students' needs. As education grapples with new challenges in an era characterized by advanced technology and blurred human-machine boundaries, the timeless wisdom of Psalm 23 can offer valuable guidance and a moral compass to navigate these complex issues. Psalm 23 holds great importance historically and literarily, depicting the close bond between God and His people using the metaphor of a shepherd and his flock. This psalm teaches unwavering faith in God's guidance, provision, and protection. It also has relevance in the realm of education, particularly in the face of challenges in the post-human era. Through its timeless wisdom and figurative language, psalm 23 provides a moral compass, enriches learning experiences, and offers guidance for navigating life's complexities. It serves as a reminder to trust in God's constant presence and care, providing comfort and direction for those seeking spiritual and practical guidance on their journeys.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thank you to The Director General of Directorate General Christian Community Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Dr. Jeane Marie Tulung, S.Th., M.Pd and The Rector of Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Manado Dr. Olivia Wuwung, S.T., M.Pd.

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