

- **2. Psalm 67: God, Our God**
- **2. Psaume 67: Dieu, Notre Dieu**
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RÉSUMÉ

Le psaume 67, dont l'intérêt pour toutes les nations se compare à celui d'Ésaïe 42 ou 49, risque de ne pas retenir une lecture trop rapide. Pourtant, la simplicité de son style cache une composition rigoureuse, et une forte originalité théologique.

L'analyse de sa structure montre une belle symétrie concentrique: aux vv. 2 et 3 (où l'on entend l'écho de Nb 6,24ss) répondent les vv. 7 et 8: à l'invocation, l'assurance de la bénédiction; les vv. 4 et 6 sont identiques, encadrant les trois lignes centrales, le coeur du psaume. Celui-ci est le seul à discerner dans la bénédiction accordée à Israël le

témoignage de la volonté divine de salut pour toutes les nations.

Les interprétations minimalistes—les nations ne seraient que spectatrices—échouent sur l'insistance du psaume. L'audace de Calvin, qui ose y voir prophétisée la mission chrétienne, rejoint mieux l'intention de l'auteur, même si la révélation du 'mystère' d'Ephésiens 3 ne lui avait pas été faite. Ce que le Psalmiste veut proclamer se résume dans la formule du v. 7: Dieu, notre Dieu; notre Dieu est le Dieu universel, le Dieu de toute la terre est le Dieu d'Israël. Il vaut la peine de méditer en théologien cette vérité non dialectique—ce qu'esquisse la troisième partie de l'article.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Psalm 67, dessen Interesse an allen Völkern sich mit dem in Jesaja 42 oder 49 vergleichen läßt, verleitet zu einer oberflächlichen Lektüre. Jedoch verbirgt sich hinter dem einfachen Stil ein sehr strenger Aufbau sowie eine theologische Eigentümlichkeit.

Bei der Strukturanalyse erkennen wir eine ringförmige Symmetrie: Auf die Verse 2 und 3 (wo wir das Echo von 6,24ff. hören) antworten die Verse 7 und 8: Auf die Anrufung folgt die Vergewisserung des Segens; die Verse 4 und 6 sind identisch, sie umrahmen die drei zentralen Linien, das Herz des Psalms. Dieser ist übrigens der einzige, der in dem Segen, der Israel zugesprochen wird, ein Zeugnis für den

göttlichen Heilswillen für alle Völker erkennt.

Minimalistische Auslegungen — sie behaupten, daß die Völker lediglich Zuschauer seien — scheitern an dem Nachdruck des Psalms. Die Kühnheit Calvins, der es wagt, hier eine Prophezeiung der christlichen Mission zu sehen, trifft die Absicht des Autors besser, auch wenn die Offenbarung des 'Geheimnisses' von Epheser 3 ihm nicht zuteil wurde. Was der Psalmist verkünden will, wird in Vers 7 zusammengefaßt in der Formulierung: Gott, unser Gott; unser Gott ist der universale Gott, der Gott der ganzen Welt ist der Gott Israels. Es lohnt die Mühe, als Theologe diese nicht-dialektische Wahrheit zu meditieren — und das wird im dritten Teil des Artikels skizziert.

Note d to the 67th Psalm in the 1956 French Jerusalem Bible reads: 'The refrain reflects that universalism which is taught in the second part of Isaiah: heathen nations called, by the example of the chosen people and by the lessons of Israel's history, themselves to serve the only God'. This is enough to highlight the relevance of the Psalm to the burning topic of the Christian theology of other religions.

At first reading, however, we might have felt the pinch of a slight pang of ordinary disappointment. The Psalm is so simple, deceptively simple, like a draught of water! No striking metaphor to arrest us, no original choice of words! Yet, it is so well composed, and so deep in its simplicity, that some of the older interpreters dared to call it 'the Old Testament Paternoster' (Delitzsch). This homiletical exaggeration is worth passing on; it may open our eyes to the beauty of the poem.

I. Analyzing the structure of the Psalm

Structural analysis, and even the discovery of chiasmus, may be more subjective than they purport to be, but symmetry *here* can hardly be disputed. The repetition of a 'refrain' makes it obvious, the same two lines appear in vv. 3 and 5 (Hebrew: 4 and 6).

How should we translate them? 'May (or let) the peoples praise you . . .' or 'The peoples will (shall) praise you . . .' Most commentators raise the question of the tenses, or verbal aspects, in the Psalm. Grammatically, most forms may be interpreted either as mere imperfects (with a future sense), or as jussives, to express commands or wishes; even the perfect in v. 6 (Heb.: 7), 'The earth has given . . .', may be understood as 'precative', that is, a prayer (Dahood), or 'prophetic'.

The opening verse must be jussive ('make shine' is found in the special jussive form), whereas the probable links with harvest thanksgivings justify a preference for the indicative mood in the closing part of the Psalm: imperfects and perfect are thus to

be rendered by present or future, an ongoing and open present—we 'hear' the Psalm more as a song of faith than as a supplication for rain. The verses between would rather be in a jussive tone: 'Let the peoples . . .', with the second (divine) person: 'You rule . . . and guide . . .' in the indicative present or future.

Coming back to the symmetry in structure, the ending of the Psalm discreetly answers to the beginning: the same theme of *blessing* is stressed, together with the expected effect on the nations; in each case, three verbal forms are used. V. 1 (Heb.: 2) borrows the words of the solemn 'Aaronic' blessing of Numbers 6, whereby the priests would 'put the LORD's name' on the people; vv. 6f. (Heb.: 7f.) use rather the device of repetition, emphasizing the idea of blessing. The overall correspondence between the opening jussives and the final statements express the assurance that the prayer or invocation shall not be in vain.

If the harvest festival was the occasion for the song, as is commonly accepted, it is remarkable that the mention of the fruit or 'increase' of the earth should come so late, in the penultimate verse. A. Weiser considers this to be highly significant: priority is given to personal relationships with God, to his favour and acceptance, to his sovereign grace and revelation in history, over against the provisions of earthly existence. 'A Copernican revolution', he claims—just the reverse of John Hick's clever use of the same metaphor.

Then comes the central piece in the arrangement: celebrating universal joy flowing from God's universal rule. The usual Massoretic division of the words of v. 4 (Heb.: 5) implies the presence of three lines, instead of two or four: this exception, in the Psalm, may signal the centrality of the verse both for structure and meaning. (We need not deal here with Dahood's rival division nor with the LXX Sinaiticus addition.)

How intriguing that a Psalm enthralled by God's blessing upon Israel should give pride of place to his leading, shepherdlike, of the *nations*! We surmise that the main intention of the poem is precisely to relate

the one to the other: God, our God (v.6, Heb.: 7). Such is the specific, well-nigh unique, burden of this Psalm. H. J. Kraus says in his commentary (*ad loc.*): 'It is remarkable how this blessing in Psalm 67 alone is understood as a witness to the salvific reality and the salvific activity of Yahweh on earth'.

II. Discerning the intention of the Psalm

May we describe in greater detail and precision the original intention? As it is often the case, possibilities fall between a minimal pole and a maximal one.

At one end of the interpretative spectrum, one could imagine that the nations are involved only as witnesses, as spectators of the exceptional good done to Israel. When they hear of Israel's miraculous prosperity, they will realize God's way with Israel, the advantage of his dominion. When they see how he delivers his chosen people, they will fear him and praise him, saying: 'Israel is fortunate indeed to have such a generous and efficacious God!' God's rule of all peoples is really for the benefit of Israel, who can enjoy safety and fair treatment at the hands of the others.

At the opposite end, we could locate such an interpretation as Calvin's. For the French Reformer, the Psalm foretells the spread of salvation to all peoples in the Church, through Jesus Christ. Its universalism is that of the Gospel, of Christian mission. Old Testament scholarship today shyly retreats from Calvin's Christian boldness.

Against minimalists, Calvin's argument carries much weight: if nations are just by-standers, why so heavy an insistence? Why all the repetition, and, we would add, the emphasis by means of the structure on the theme of the nations? In v. 4 (Heb.: 5), they rejoice because God rules or will rule over *them*, as if they also were sheep of his pasture; it must be for their own benefit. Their 'fear' is no mere respect for a foreign Numen, and the praise in the refrain borders on confession

(*yâdâh* is rendered *exomologoumai* in the LXX). It seems indeed that they will know the Way and Salvation of God experientially, that salvation which shall reach to the ends of the earth according to Isaiah 49. The possible allusion to Isaiah 11:4 would strengthen the case of the stronger sense, of the larger hope.

To the inspired writer, the 'mystery' of Ephesians 3 had not yet been revealed in clarity: the full ingrafting of the Gentiles into the Israel of God, their inclusion into the One Covenant on an equal footing with the 'sons of the Kingdom'. But he was given the assurance that our God is the God of all the earth, that our Saviour God is the Saviour God of all peoples. He expected that it would be more manifest in the future—at the time when the promises are fulfilled. He, therefore, wished to stress that Israel's election and blessings were somehow designed to benefit savingly all the nations: in faithfulness to the Abrahamic perspective, all blessed through one. Spurgeon's simile is apt here: rain falling on the top of mountains waters the whole land, valleys and plains; such is the grace bestowed on Israel.

III. Meditating upon the truth of the Psalm

The meaning which the inspired Psalmist wished to convey, provides food for theological meditation.

As XXth century theologians, we may ponder the logic involved: the association of the Particular and the Universal does *not* set a *dialectic* into motion. They do *not* work together as opposing principles whose bond and fruitfulness is their very antagonism. That Abraham is the channel of blessing, that salvation is of the Jews, that God's favour to Israel will lead all nations to know his salvation: this may be paradoxical, but it is not dialectical. It is acknowledged in peaceful naiveté as the Way of the Lord.

In other words, God is not the God of all the earth *although* he is the God of Israel; rather, *because* he is, and vice-versa. Already Exodus 19:5 had displayed this

splendid paradox: 'You will be my peculiar possession *because* (*kî*) the whole earth is mine'. We can follow the thought: God's choice of this particular people demonstrates his freedom; he chooses Israel because he has the choice! He has the choice because he is no local deity, nor a mere aspect (be it the deepest) of the cosmos: he is truly the Lord, the whole earth is his. And, conversely, by being the God of this particular people, God demonstrates his concrete, living character: that he is not an Idea, a God of abstract heavens, but the God of all the earth!

The concrete blessing which the Psalm mentions is the produce of the earth, of the ground. This indication fits the message perfectly. It implies God, our God, as the *Creator* and the *Provider*—two universal exercises of his lovingkindness. The issue of 'common ground' surfaces when inter-religious dialogue is discussed: we would point to the God-given ground and the blessings of providence as our common possession.

And further, the word and concept of *blessing*! Why is it so prominent in the

Psalm? Blessing is characterized by two features. First, it is a *good* bound to the *word* (as Greek and Latin etymologies would underline). Secondly, it may go both ways: we bless the God who blesses us. These traits are not unrelated, perhaps, to the combination of particular election and universal love on which we have been meditating: for the Word cuts through indistinct noise or silence, it decides in a particular event of speech—and it is able, also, to spread to the ends of the world, and to convey to all the benefits of the One event. Reciprocity in blessing suits a situation where the higher grace of final salvation is offered to all but is not conferred automatically: only through particular decision.

Our meditation could lose its way in golden mists. The foundation shines as bright as the sun at noon: in the Psalm, *nostra res agitur*, we are of these peoples whom God has brought to the knowledge of his salvation, whom God has given a share in the blessing of the saints under the rule of his grace, shepherdlike. Let us be glad and sing for joy: God is *our* God!