

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## Insight into the Community's Faith in PSALM 46 and Relevance to Africa

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### **Abstract:**

*The repertoire of varied expressions of faith in the Christian Sacred Scripture has been a great source of inspirations for Christians and non-Christians alike. This is mostly found in the Old Testament Book of Psalms, which has motivated many personal and communal prayers. The psalmists expressed their faith in God in different ways by the use of metaphors and similes of things that were very familiar to them and their contemporaries. This paper is a study of one of these Psalms that embodies the psalmist's strong affirmation of faith in God. The paper also investigates the relevance of this Psalm today, especially in Africa.*

**Key words:** Faith in God, trust in God, the Book of Psalms, Psalm 46, metaphors, similes

### **1. Introduction**

Protestations of confidence in God amidst unfathomable human experiences invariably derive their matrix from God's fidelity in the divine human relationship. God himself, experienced in his words and deeds, is the *raison d'être* for human trust in him. This portrays the two basic concepts of the word *'ēmūnāh* 'faithfulness', 'faith' with which Hebrew conveys religious faith in the Old Testament. Derived from the root *'mn*, *'ēmūnāh* is both a divine and human attribute in the Hebrew Bible. YHWH is *'ēl 'ēmūnāh* 'a faithful God' (Deuteronomy 32:4b). Appositions of *'ēl 'ēmūnāh* in Deuteronomy 32:4b further clarify its meaning. These appositions as found in the first part of the verse are: "without deceit, just and upright is he" (NRSV). It has been observed that these divine titles in Deuteronomy 32:4 set the context for both God's judgment and his mercy toward Israel in the rest of the song in the chapter (Moberly 1996, 430). The term *'ēmūnāh* 'faithfulness' occurs frequently as a divine attribute in the Psalms (Psalms 36:6; 40:11; 88:12; 89:2,3,6,9; 119:90; 143:1; etc.).

Human beings share in this divine attribute in their relationship with God and with one another. In 1 Kings 12:15 and 22:7, for instance, those charged with the repair of the Temple were not asked to give account of the money entrusted to them, because they acted honestly (literally "with faithfulness"). Similarly, Habakkuk 2:4b presents another instance of *'ēmūnāh* in human action: "but the righteous live by their faithfulness". Actually, Habakkuk 2,4b is the second stich in an antithetical parallelism in this verse. The first part of this poetic line reads: "look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them". Faithfulness to God (cf. Jeremiah 5:1-3; 7:28; 9:2; Hosea 2:22), that is, to his word and to his will, is a characteristic of the upright, and this assures him security and life here on earth (cf. Psalm 37:3; Proverbs 10:25; Isaiah 33:6). The wicked, who does not have this uprightness, run to ruin.

Hebrew verbs derived from the same root as *'ēmūnāh*, particularly in the *hiphil* with the prepositions *b'* and *l'* occurring over fifty times in the Hebrew Bible, is one of the various ways Hebrew expresses both religious and secular faith (cf. Genesis 45:26; Exodus 3:1-22; 4:5, 28-31; Isaiah 43:10; Job 9:15; Lamentations 4:12; 1 Samuel 29:12 etc.). This syntagma is used in Genesis 15:6 in expressing Abraham's faith: "and he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness". Faith in God conveyed in varied forms in the Old Testament, for "faith is described rather than defined in the Hebrew Bible" (Healey 1992, 745), has its foundation in God who is the faithful God.

Faith (*pistis*) with its corresponding verb 'to believe' (*pisteuō*), which occupies an important position in the texts and theology of the New Testament, is widely expressed in the Old Testament among others with two roots *bḥ* 'to trust' and *yr* 'to fear' (understood as moral obedience). The basis of both human actions and attitudes is, like in the root *'mn*, God's constancy and fidelity. In the Old Testament, "the faith of Israel was seen primarily as a relationship between the faithful community and Yahweh. It was not a 'conversion' experience that brought individuals to faith. It was their inclusion in the community of Yahweh, the People of the Lord" (Healey 1992, 748). When this faith is expressed by an individual, it is still in the context of the large community and the experience of the members therein.

The Old Testament, especially the Book of Psalms, is replete with vivid human expressions of faith in God, often stated as trust or confidence in God, amidst human unpleasant experiences. It is instructive to observe in the Psalms that this is an important component of both individual and communal laments. In their difficulties, the petitioners find solace in God who is always faithful to his promises (cf. Psalms 13:6; 16:1,8; 25:2; 26:1; 31:7,15; 55:24; 56:4; 57:2; 119:42,66; 143:8) (Gunkel and Begrich 1998, 171). Some Psalms that are explained as Psalms of Confidence in God (Psalms 4; 11; 16; 23; 27:1-6; 62; 131) probably developed from this aspect of affirmation of confidence in God, which is seen as an essential characteristic feature of Psalms of Lament (Gunkel and Begrich 1998, 121).

I find in Psalm 46, chosen for this paper, a text rich in its expressions of trust, confidence in God even in the face of threatening dangers. "To speak of faith often involves speaking of painful testing... for it is in weakness and suffering that we discover God's power which triumphs over our weakness and suffering" (Pope Francis 2013, 56). The contents and message of Psalm 46 belong to the spectrum of perception of faith in the Psalter. Its message remains relevant to the Church in Africa beset by myriads of challenges and concerns, particularly our deformed political system that breeds injustice and other social ills in our society. Psalm 46 invites us, in our struggle for survival, to an unwavering trust in God and protestations of confidence in him who is "our refuge and our strength".

## 2. A Survey of Perception of Faith in the Psalms

Addressing God without any form of intermediary and reflecting on his words and deeds as human response to the divine revelation, the psalmists profusely communicate their faith in God whose fidelity both generates and sustains their faith in him. "Faith and fidelity are intertwined inextricably in the Hebrew Bible, that is, faith is primarily not an intellectual act but an attitude which encompasses the two-sided sense of the root *'mn*: steadfastness, which addresses the concept of acts of obedience; and trust or confidence, which rests on the notion of God's constancy and fidelity" (Healey 1992, 747). This marks some continuity between the concept of faith in the Old Testament and *pistis* in the New Testament. In both parts of the Christian Bible, God's fidelity remains foundational. Christian understanding of faith, however, explains that "in faith, the human intellect and will cooperate with divine grace" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2011, 155). In another text, it expatiates: "what moves us to believe is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason; we believe because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived" (CCC 156). This means that we believe and seek to understand why we believe, for "it is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the one to whom he has put his faith, and to understand better what he has revealed" (CCC 158). A synthesis of this can be derived from these words: "If Israel continued to recall God's great acts of love, which formed the core of its confession of faith and broadened its gaze in faith, the life of Jesus now appears as the locus of God's definitive intervention, the supreme manifestation of his love for us" (Pope Francis 2013, 15).

This section of my paper does not in any way claim an exhaustive investigation of the multifaceted nature of this theme in the Psalter (Seybold 1990, 129-158). Rather, the aim is to highlight what can be called the key points that will help one appreciate the theological thrust of Psalm 46. I part from the premise that the author of Psalm 46 fully shared in the communitarian faith of his or her people which can be found in the corpus of the Psalter. As a way of organization I wish to present this according to the following points: Perception of Faith in some major theological themes of the Psalms and in some metaphors / similes employed by the psalmists. The intention is to discover how in these specific expressions the psalmists articulated their faith in God.

### 2.1 Perception of Psalmists' Faith in Some Theological Themes

Faith in both parts of the Christian Bible is communitarian and pendular between each individual on one side and the community on the other. The believer is enriched and sustained by the community, while the individual contributes to the collective faith. In the Book of Psalms, Israel's faith, just like in other parts of the Old Testament, "recalls God's great acts of love" (Pope Francis 2013, 15), and these acts as they are remembered and celebrated in the community become the vehicles through which faith is expressed. In their experiences of God and divine inspiration, the community developed her living tradition as she remembered, contemplated and celebrated God's act of love in the world. Some of these living traditions through which the psalmists express their faith, and which are fundamental in their religious life are presented in the following paragraphs.

The Biblical accounts of *creation*, inserted at the beginning of Genesis as a well-calculated prologue to God's creating the world and a prologue to the entire Scripture, introduce a uniform and pervasive teaching on creation. This theological teaching, which runs throughout the Bible and forms an essential part of the confession of the people can be summarised in these words: "God, for his own glory, in a creative act of perfect freedom effected by his omnipotent word, brought into being out of nothing everything that exists" (Fee and Hubbard 2011, 78). In a good number of Psalms, the petitioners celebrate and confess their faith in God the Creator of all that exist (cf. Psalms 8; 24; 33; 65; 74; 89; 93; 95; 98; 135; 136; 147). It is an explicit theme in many of these Psalms. "The testament of creation is a valid strand of tradition which sets faith on a firm foundation" (Seybold 1990, 137). In a Communal Lament like Psalm 74, the people recall God's creative acts (vv.12-17) in their pleas for help against the enemies: "You have fixed the bounds of the earth; you made summer and winter" (v.17). Psalm 33, which is a Song of Praise, confesses faith in God's creative word: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth" (v.6). Similarly, Psalm 8 celebrates God the Creator and highlights with a rhetorical question the place of human beings in creation: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care or them?" (Ijezie 2013, 98-99). In all these texts, God's sovereignty over all that exist is affirmed and it is a source of strength to collective and individual faith in the Creator.

Israel's communitarian faith derives its many expressions from the *salvation history* narrated mainly in the traditions found in the Pentateuch. These traditions include the promises made to the Patriarchs, the exodus, Sinai Covenant, wilderness experience of the people, the conquest and settlement in the Promised Land. In all these traditions, YHWH, Israel's national God is the protagonist, the initiator of the different stages of this history, and he is in a covenant relationship with his people to whom he promised to be their God and they his people. The two versions of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:1-21 and Deuteronomy 5:1-22 succinctly convey the stipulations expected of the human party; while the detailed Covenant Code presented in Exodus 20:22-23,33 is recognised as the oldest legal tradition in the Pentateuch (Van Seters 1996, 319-345). In this long history of Israel's relationship with God, he eminently distinguished himself as their unrivalled Deliverer and just Judge. This common history of the people and the theology it bears solidify their faith and the trust they have in him. In the Psalter, this is commonly found in the Psalms of Asaph (Psalms 50; 73-83) (Briggs and Briggs 1987, lxvi). Many of these Psalms are Communal Lament in which the

people's hope of being heard by God rests on their nation's past experience of their God. In Psalm 80, for instance, the people retrospectively exclaim: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock". Besides the Psalms of Asaph, Psalms 105 and 106 also allude to Israel's salvation history.

Closely related to the theme of creation and salvation history is the psalmists' confession of the *Kingship of God* as a foundation of their faith in him. This tradition is partly implicit in their belief in God as the sole Creator, and in him as the Divine Leader in their history. Notable among these Psalms are the *mālaq YHWH* Psalms (Psalms 93-99) and other Psalms like Psalm 24; 29; 47 etc. where God is explicitly called king. He reigns over all created things because he is their Creator: "The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever" (Psalm 29:10). "Sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the king of all the earth" (Psalm 47:7). He is the universal king in the prayer of the psalmists. Faith in him as king strengthens trust and confidence in him, and answers to petitions are assured: "when the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul" (Psalm 94:19).

*Israel's kings* participated in God's kingship. The Royal Psalms (Psalms 2; 18; 20-21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 144) have this as their common message. Israel's king is called God's anointed (Psalms 2:2; 84:10; 89:20); one who sits at the right hand of God (Ps 110:1); God's son (Psalm 2:7). In 1 Samuel 7 where God promised perpetuity of Davidic Dynasty, he also made this promise: "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me" (1 Samuel 7:14). This father-son relationship, however, does not make Israel's monarchs divine beings, but persons with special mediatory role. Divine salvation is mediated through the king on David's throne. This kingly function is clearer in the words of Psalm 72:1-4: "Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor". It is a prayer for the king, perhaps at the coronation of a new king. From this petition offered on behalf of the king, royal charisma can be elicited: he should preserve justice and order in his kingdom, in order to guarantee divine blessings and fertility (Seybold 190, 131; Obiorah 2013, 192-199). With the Royal Psalms the psalmists express their faith in God who operates through the mediation of the kings. For them, God is ever present in the kings.

Another faith tradition in Israel and remarkably in the Psalms is the *Election of Zion* and God's choice of the Jerusalem Temple as his dwelling place. It has been observed that "as a theology of the divine presence and audience, the Zion tradition has created something lasting, also for those times when people would worship God in Spirit and in Truth". This tradition appears in a good number of Psalms and in various forms, especially with different names for which the Temple is called in these Psalms. These are the Songs of Zion (Psalms 46; 48; 76; 87; 122; cf. Psalm 24), an expression that is found in the Psalter (cf. Ps 137,3). Names given to God's dwelling place are, according to the people, perception of this holy place. Two very common names are *bay it* "house" (cf. Psalms 5:8; 23:6; 26:8; 27:4; 36:9; 42:5; 52:10; 55:15; 65:5; 66:13; 69:10; 84:5,11; 92:14; 93:5; 118:26; 122:1,9; 134:1 and 135:2) and *hēkāl* "palace" (cf. 5:8; 11:4; 18:7; 27:4; 29:9; 48:10; 65:5; 68:30; 79:1; 138:2). The use of *hēkāl* for the Jerusalem Temple seems to have been from the idea that YHWH is a king and like earthly kings he should live in a palace. Songs of Zion exalt the glories of this sacred precinct not necessarily because of its glorious beauty (cf. Pss 48:1; 87:3) but because of the people's fervent belief in the presence of God in this city. It is a holy place because God's abiding presence makes it holy. It is symbolically a place of refuge and a place where divine blessings flow like streams of river.

All these traditions of the people form their common heritage in all facets of their life, but especially in the expressions of their religiosity. They determine their communal and individual relationship with God. This explains why they are fundamental in their life of faith as we see in the Book of Psalms.

## 2.2 Perception of Faith in Metaphors and Similes

In the many and various metaphors and similes predicated of God in the Psalms, the psalmists attempted to articulate in human words their religious experience, particularly their faith in God. When using a metaphor, "one boldly and warmly declares that one thing is the other. It is an affirmation that one thing is another thing, owing to some association or connection in the uses or effects of anything expressed or understood" (Bullinger 2003, 735; Watson 1995, 270-271). A simile, on the other hand, gently states that one thing is like or resembles another. These two are transference of qualities of one thing to another. In order to achieve effectively such transference, the person employing them should be very much at home or familiar with the qualities of the thing he wants to transfer to another. Moreover, the recipient of the qualities must have some meaningful connection with the user. We find in the use of metaphor and similes in the Psalter the height the psalmists reached in their relationship with God and their natural knowledge of their environs; they were not strangers to things around them. In addition, their faith made them see in God innumerable impressive qualities.

Metaphors predicated of God are commonly derived from life experiences of the psalmists. The term *sela'* "rock" as a metaphor for God appears about twenty-one times in the Psalter (cf. Psalms 18:2,46; 19:14; 28:1; 31:3; 42:9; 62:2,6,7; 78:3,5; 89:26; 92:15; 95:1; 144:1,2). In some of these examples, the psalmists also refer to God as a stronghold, a place of refuge, defense or fortress. God is a place of refuge or he is the refuge. One of the Hebrew words for refuge is *maḥseh* originally means shelter from storm, sun and rain. The petitioner perceives God as a shelter in time of trouble. Another Hebrew word for this is *mā'ôz* which means "refuge" or "stronghold" (cf. Psalms 27:1; 31:2,4; 37:39; 43:2; 52:7). God is the hiding place, cover, shelter as in Psalms 27:5; 31:20; 32:7; 61:4; 91:1; 119:114. The psalmists' faith in God made them believe that God can hide them from their enemies or that he is the place where they can hide in time of trouble. God is the dwelling place, habitation, and the rock of refuge (cf. Psalms 90:1; 91:9; 71:3). He is also a place of escape (Psalms 59:16; 142:4). Another frequent metaphor for God in the Psalms is "shield". This is defensive armour, easy to carry. God defends the petitioner and he is the defensive armour of those who trust in him (cf. Psalms 3:4; 7:10; 18:2,30,35; 28:7; 33:20; 59:11; 84:11; 115:9,10,11; 119:114 and 144,2). God is King. Sometimes the expression "God reigns" embodies this metaphor (cf. Psalms 47:8; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1). In some texts, he is presented as

having a throne or sitting on his throne (cf. Psalms 9:4,7; 47:8; 89:14; 93:2; 103:19). As a king, he is also a judge and this occurs many times in the Psalms (cf. Psalms 7:11; 50:6; 94:2). Another metaphor for the Lord in the Psalms is “shepherd” of an individual (Psalms 23:1; 119:176) or of the people as a whole (2:9; 80:1). Sometimes God’s people are portrayed as flock and this gives God the status of a shepherd (cf. Psalms 74:1; 77:20; 78:52; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3).

God is also presented as a farmer who owns a vineyard and cares for it (cf. Psalm 80:8-12). As a farmer, he has livestock that he feeds and gently leads (Psalm 145:15-16). The Lord is also called “my portion”. He is like the share of land that belongs to a person or that the person inherits (Psalms 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5). Akin to this metaphor of God as a portion is God as “my cup” (Psalm 16:5). Once in the whole of the Old Testament God is called a “sun” and it is in Ps 84:11. This metaphor is rare in the Old Testament because of the pagan practice of worshipping astral bodies in the ancient Near East. God is also a father. This image is frequent in the Old Testament. In the Psalms we see it in Psalms 68:5; 89:26 and 103:13. The Lord is a warrior (Psalms 68:1-2,11,17,21-23; 89:10). In the Psalms of Ascents, that is, Psalms 120-134, metaphors and similes for God abound. See especially Psalm 121 where God is presented as a provider of shade. He is a builder and a watchman (127:1). He is a master and mistress (Psalm 123:2). He is like a nursing mother (131:2). He is like a mountain that protects his city Jerusalem (Psalm 125:2). In God’s saving actions we can also deduce some of these metaphors. He is an archer – a person who shoots with a bow and arrows – (Psalms 7:12-13; 18:14; 21:12; 38:2). He fires lightning bolts as arrows (Psalms 77:17; 144:6; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4). God is a builder (Psalms 102:25; 104:5). He is a magnanimous host (Psalm 23:5). He knits (Psalm 139:13). He is even a moth (a type of nocturnal insect) that consumes (Psalm 39:11). All these are varied expressions of the faith of the psalmists and how they perceive their God. “The Psalms are of course poems written out of deep and often passionate faith” (Alter 2000, 113). How did the praying community in Ps 46 articulate their trust and faith in God, amidst, perhaps, looming threat?

### 3. Psalm 46 as a Communal Psalm of Trust in God

Many Psalms might exhibit characteristics of more than one literary form (*Gattung*) but one usually dominates and guides its interpretation. The reason for the multiple forms of these Psalms could be attributed to the freedom of the composers who, perhaps, did not think of restricting themselves to any specific type. Furthermore, these literary forms are so related that an attempt to focus on a particular form always touches others. This might explain the diverse opinions on the *Gattung* of Psalm 46.

There are some scholars who explain Ps 46 as a Song of Zion or a hymn (Dahood 1965, 276-282; Westermann 1989, 283-288; Gunkel and Begrich 1998, 29; Kraus 1993, 460; Ravasi 1997, 819-836; Mays 1994, 182-185; Nowell 2008, 149-153; Miller II 2010, 218-240). , many others, however, perceive in its text obvious characteristics of Psalms of Confidence in God (Weiser 1962, 365-374; Craigie 1983, 341-346; Alonso Schökel and Carniti 1992, 749-758; Briggs – Briggs 1987, 393-397; Wilson 2002, 714-723; Terrien 2003, 369-375). Songs of Zion (Pss 48; 76; 84; 87) mention Zion within their texts and in varying forms and language sing the praise of Zion, and often in connection with an affirmation of God’s presence in the Jerusalem Temple. This feature seems to be the only clear point that justifies their being grouped together; otherwise, a close study of each text reveals that each is different and bears its own specific focal point. They are not a group under formal and stylistic aspects (Kraus 1993, 459-460; Jeremias 1971, 183-198). It is instructive to observe that Ps 46 makes no mention of Zion, although it is categorised as a Song of Zion by some. Its inclusion in this group seems to have been validated by the phrase in v.5: “the holy habitation of the Most High”, which is generally understood in the Psalter as the Jerusalem Temple, Zion equally understood. I share the opinion of many who see in Ps 46 clear indications of the characteristics of Psalms of Confidence of Trust in God.

Psalms of Confidence in God can be of an individual (cf. Psalms 4; 23; 73; 27:1-6; 62; 90; 131) or of community (cf. Psalms 123; 124; 126). In all these texts, God’s *’emūnāh* ‘faithfulness’ was what inspired the confidence and the faith of the psalmists in God. It was the matrix from which they operated. Common to the Psalms of Confidence in God is profound and sublime attitudes of the psalmists, which explode from the depth of their hearts; they are free and spontaneous in their expression (Ravasi 1997, 54-55). Highly instructive are the words of Psalm 62:1-2 “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken”. In Psalm 131, the image of a weaned child on the mother’s laps is a vivid expression of the author’s attitude towards God. For the author of Psalm 23, God is a loving shepherd and a magnanimous host. Usually, Psalms of Confidence in God freely incorporate features of other literary forms in the Psalter like petitions, hymns, Songs of Zion. This might justify the reason why Psalm 46 is also grouped among the Songs of Zion and Hymns. It belongs to the Psalms of Communal Confidence in God and exhibits general features of this group in all its components parts.

Copious references to ostensible dangers in Ps 46 seem to suggest a life situation or context that could be traced to some historical events in the life of Israelites. Actually, some have surmised Sennacherib’s invasion in 701 BC or other later threats to Jerusalem as possible *Sitz im Leben* of our Psalm (Kraus 1993, 460). Another explanation could be elicited from the text itself, particularly its communal overtone that strongly alludes to cultic setting of the text. Psalm 46 is a Song of Zion, which the people employed in their worship at Jerusalem; they could have used this Psalm in their protestations of unalloyed faith in God’s abiding presence in this city.

#### 3.1 Text and Structure of Psalm 46

Conspicuous in the structure of Psalm 46 is the use of a refrain in verses 8 and 12. “A refrain is a block of verse which recurs more than once within a poem” (Watson 1995, 259; Alonso Schökel 1988, 192). It usually takes three forms in the Hebrew Bible. There are strict refrain as in Psalm 46, variant refrain which shows some variations in the repeated word (cf. Psalms 80:4,8,15,20; 99:3,5,9; 107:6,13,19,28; 114:4,6; 144:7-8,10c-11), and chorus, which is a more frequent repetition of the refrain, sometimes after

each poetic line (cf. Psalm 136). Refrain is a major stanza marker in a poem where it occurs; it helps in determining the different segments in a poem.

In the Hebrew text of Psalm 46, the strict refrain (*YHWH šē'ḇā'ōt 'immānū mišgāb-lānū 'ēlōhē ya'āqōb*) occurs twice (cf. vv.8 and 12). Our liturgical books and some scholars insert this phrase also between v.4 and v.5, usually as part of v.4, in their translations of this Psalm. If this refrain also occurs between these two verses, Psalm 46 has almost three equal length of stanzas. Supposing the Hebrew text is taken in its present form, can we still have the same tripartite division of Psalm 46? Actually, what the refrain conveys has close affinity with the introductory verse 2: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble". In the opening words of most Psalms the poets summarise the theme expounded in the text. This seems to be what the beginning of Psalm 46 does in this Psalm. The community affirms her confidence in God not with any verb of action of the people or of God, but with nominal phrases predicated of God. The refrain is also in two chiasmically arranged nominal phrases. In both verses (vv.2 and 8/12) the communal character of the text is almost palpable in the prepositional phrases *immānū* and *lānū*. If the introduction to this Psalm can be considered a very close variant of the refrain, then one can say that the theme of the text is summarized three times.

The conjunctive phrase *'al-kē* with which v.3 begins joins this verse to the preceding verse. Verbs in verses 3 and 4 are of the same semantic field, for each of them connotes violent movement of cosmos, cosmic cataclysm. In the first stich of v.3 the verb *hāmîr* is *hiphil* infinitive construct from *mûr* "to shake", "quake"; it occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible. In the second stich of the same verse, *mōt* qal infinite construct of *mūt* means "to totter", "stagger". The first part of verse 4 describes with two verbs that are synonymous and without any conjunction (*yehēmû* qal imperfect from *hmh* "to roar", "make noise" and *yehm'ērû* qal imperfect from *hmr* "to foam") the effect of mountains that totter in the midst of the sea. The second stich of v.4 also has a verb denoting cosmic movement, *yir'āšû* (qal imperfect) from *r's* "to shake". The noun *ga'āvāh* "raging" in v.4b also belongs to this. Recurrence of some words in verses 3-4 and the theme that can be elicited from these words and others therein suggest taking these two verses as a unit inside the text. These two verses together with v.2, which is an introduction to the whole Psalm, constitute the first stanza. In fact, v. 2 plays a double role in this Psalm: it introduces the entire text and the first stanza.

In verses 5-6, the poet turns his attention to "the city of God" called again in this verse as "the holy dwelling of the Most High". God's presence in this sacred precinct is affirmed (v.6). Verse 7 links this section of the poem to the cosmic cataclysm described in the first stanza with two verbs, *hmh* and *mūt* of the first stanza, adding a third, *mûg* "to waver", "to melt", to describe the impact of God's voice on the earth. The theme of the Psalm, already stated in the introductory verse (v.2) recurs in the first occurrence of the strict refrain in v.8. Each of the verses in vv.5-8 has two stichs, making the poem to bear a uniform rhythm.

The imperative mood with which v.9 begins signals a new step in the poem, which has also some connection with the preceding. In the two parts analysed above and in the present section, the term *'ereš* "earth" occurs; it has no definite article in the first two stanzas, while its two occurrences in the third stanza have definite article. It is generally translated as having definite article because, in poem, particularly early Hebrew Poetry, to which Ps 46 might belong, definite article could be omitted where it is expected (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, 259-261). Verse 10 is the only full poetic line in this text with three stichs. It comes between vv.9 and 11 which begin with imperatives; this imperative seems to link the stanza together. It may not be necessary to take v.10 as an insertion that disrupts the text's internal arrangement. If v.9 invites all to see the great deeds of the Lord on earth, and in v.11 the Lord states "exalted among the nations, exalted in the earth", v.10 is a description of this great deeds. Just as in the second stanza, this one also closes with a refrain.

Apart from v.1 that contains the superscription, giving us the authorship of the text, of the Korahites, the type of Psalm *šîr* "song", and perhaps a note on its musical performance, *'ālāmôt*, Psalm 46 is presented in three stanzas of two stichs in each of the strophes; the only exception is v.10. The three parts are vv.2-4, vv.5-8 and vv.9-12 (Girard 1996, 756-764). In each of the stanzas, the community whose voice pervades the text affirms her confidence and faith in God. In the following paragraphs, we attempt a close study of how this is done in the text.

### 3.2 A Close Reading of Psalm 46

#### 3.2.1. Faith in God amidst Inexplicable Life Situations (vv.2-4)

The prepositional phrase *lānū* "for us" at the beginning of the Psalm proper indicates its communal background; and sequence of three terms of confidence, *maḥāseh* "refuge", *'ōz* "strength" and *'ezrāh* *ḇē'šārōt* "help in trouble", in the same verse 2 sets the tone of the text and makes this verse programmatic. In addition to these is the only verb, *nimšā*, in v.2 reinforced by the adverb, *m'ōd*. This verb is *niphal* perfect, third person masculine singular from *mš* "to find"; the same form is used as participle masculine singular. In its *niphal* form as it is presented here, the passive of its qal counterpart "to be found", and consequently to be present, or participle, God is the subject (Ravasi 1997, 830). With the adverb *m'ōd* and the verb *nimšā* this programmatic verse articulates the unflinching presence of God in time of distress. In fact, the verse contains three divine attributes found in Psalms of Confidence in God. The first is *maḥāseh* "refuge", which is recurrent in the Psalter (Psalms 14:6; 61:4; 62:8-9; 71:7; 73:28; 91:2,9; 94:22; 142:6); it is originally from *hsh* "to take shelter", "refuge". God is the refuge of his people. According to this trusting community, God is also their *'ōz* "strength", a term which is characteristic of many expressions of Confidence in God (cf. Pss 28:7,8; 59:10; 62:8,12; 71:7; 81:2; 84:6; 86:16). Thirdly, God is "help or support in trouble or distress"; *'ezrāh*, the masculine form of it, *'ezēr*, and the root construed as verb is similarly a frequent term in prayers and petitions of the psalmists. All these are the basis of the avowal of confidence in God.

The text continues in v.3 with a strong affirmation of trust in God in the phrase *lō'-nîrā'* "we will not fear" which echoes a very common expression of encouragement and invitation to repose one's trust in God, often stated in imperatives, *'al-tîrā'*, *'al-tîr'î*, *'al-tîr'û* "fear not". It serves the purpose of encouraging someone in trouble, alleviating his fear, and strengthening his resolve

(Fuhs 1990, 304). *Lō'-nirā'* "we will not fear" in Ps 46,3 strongly links the affirmation of what God is, stated in v.2, to the community and prepares the ground for those possible cosmic cataclysms which could lead one to waver in the faith. In verse 3 the psalmist describes these upheavals in two interrelated depictions. These are "though the earth should quake", and "though the mountains totter in the heart of the sea". In all these possible, terrifying cosmic catastrophes, the people affirm their trust in God because of his *'ēmūnāh* 'faithfulness' expressed in v.2. He is the Lord of creation; he constantly intervenes in times of chaos in the world and establishes it anew. This calls to mind the words of Psalm 73:4 "When the earth totters, with all its inhabitants, it is I who keep its pillars steady" (cf. Psalms 11:3; 82:5). "The sea, the abyss, and the darkness are the domain of the forces of Chaos" (Keel 1997, 55); all are under God's control.

In the first stich of verse 4, the onomatopoeia *yehēmū yehēm' rû mēmāw* "though its waters roar and foam", points to the turbulence of sea which is another horrifying natural disaster. There is no conjunction joining the two verbs used here; the omission could be in order to achieve the desired effect of the onomatopoeia. Effect of this turmoil in the seas is the seism of the mountains in the raging water. In all these the faith of the community remains firm according to the only verb, *lō'-nirā'* "we will not fear", that is predicated of the praying community in this section of the text. This faith has its foundation in God's *'ēmūnāh* 'faithfulness' which engenders trust and confidence. The turbulent water described here stand in sharp contrast to the river flowing from God's dwelling.

3.2.2. The City of God – Source of Confidence in God (vv.5-7)

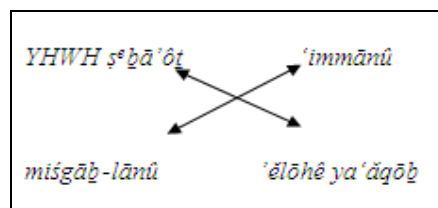
The river of God's city is different from the chaotic water described in the preceding section of the poem. This contrast is expressed in this second part of the text with a *casus-pendens* construction at the beginning of v.5. *Nāhār* 'river' in this verse is immediately followed by a disjunctive accent to indicate this kind of construction in the text. River reappears in the same line as the pronominal suffix in *p'lagāw* "its streams or canals". The streams make the City of God glad. We have here a picture of God's house in an almost paradisiacal state evoking Genesis 2 and the words of Psalm 36:9: "They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life" (Janowski 2002, 24-68). The waters of the city of God are here understood as a cosmic and protective symbol of God's presence (Ego 2001, 361-389). In v.5 of our text the poet focuses on God's house and the joy therein in the furtherance of the general theme of the Psalm which is communal trust in God. In the second stich of this verse, God's City is called *q'edōš mišk'ne 'elyōn* "the holy dwelling of the Most High" or "the holiest dwelling of the Most High" if the first word, which is an adjective in a construct chain, is considered as an indication of Hebrew superlative (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, 261). The phrase explains further the concept of "the City of God"; it is God's dwelling place.

Verse 6 continues this new perspective introduced in the preceding verse as it takes up some of the key words seen in the first part of the text. God is in the midst of the city, *b'qirbā*. Mountains totter (v.3) but God's presence in the city makes the city not to totter (v.6). The same verb *mūt* is used in both verses. God, who is the *'ezrāh* "help" or "support" of his people (v.2), will help or support the city, *ya'z'rehā*. He will do this *lipnōt bōqer* "when the morning dawns". In the Psalms, morning is the hour of God's favour (Psalms 5:3; 30:5; 49:14; 57:8; 73:20; 90:14; 130:6; 143:8). Dawn and light are symbols of deliverance (Isaiah 8:20; 9:1; 33:2; 58:10; Lamentations 3:23; Zephaniah 3:5); therefore, the phrase *lipnōt bōqer* "when the morning dawns" elucidates further assurance of God's deliverance in the midst of trouble.

Instance of this distress is resumed in v.7a which employs two verbs seen already in the first segment of the poem; these terms as they are construed in v.7 are *hāmū* (cf. v.4) and *mātū* (cf. v.3). Peoples and kingdoms also experience similar seismic movement seen in mountains and sea (cf. vv. 2-3). However, all are calm at the sound of God's voice. In fact, the earth melts, *tāmūg*, from *mūg* "to reel", "waver", and "melt", seen in *qal* in the Hebrew Bible in this verse and in Amos 5:9, where it also refers to the effect of God's action. In Psalm 46:7 the meaning of this root belongs to the same semantic field like many other verbs in the text depicting earthquake or similar cosmic upheaval (Bauman 1997,150-151). God's voice is more powerful than the cosmic and human powers: "More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the Lord" (Psalm 93:4). His abiding presence in his holy city makes it and its inhabitants, in effect, all who dwell therein or trust in God, not to totter. A refrain after this affirmation of trust in God, who is active in the world and particularly in his holy city, is appropriate for the ensuing refrain poetically embodies the theme of the entire Psalm.

3.2.3. The Lord of Hosts is with us (vv.8a and 12a)

In the strict refrain occurring twice in the text and stated in a chiasmic parallelism, *YHWH š'ḥā'ōt 'immānū mišgāb-lānū 'elōhē ya'āqōḥ* "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge", the text articulates the communal faith of the people. With its two key divine titles and two divine attributes the chiasmic structure of this nominal sentence effectively achieves the aim of the poet, which is to elucidate God's *'ēmūnāh* 'faithfulness', the basis of the community's avowal of confidence in God.



The question of the origin of *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* is far from gaining any unanimity among commentators. Because of its frequency in Isaiah as well as in Amos, some thought that this title originated from the eighth century BC prophets (Alt 1953, 350). Again, in the Psalms, most of the texts that mention *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* are in some way related to the Jerusalem Yahweh cult, Songs of Zion. This gave rise to tracing of the source of this divine title to the Jerusalem cult. A possibility, which seems to be the prevailing view, is that the title stemmed from the Shiloh sanctuary. In point of fact, the first occurrence of *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* in the Bible is in the context of the cult at Shiloh. Elkanah and his family used to worship and sacrifice to *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* at Shiloh (1Samuel 1:3). Hannah addressed Yahweh with this title in her entreaty (1Samuel 1:11). In other words, the title was part of the words in prayers at this sanctuary as in the Psalms, which were certainly employed in the Jerusalem temple. Thus, there is some continuity between the two places of worship, especially in the use of this title.

One of the explanations of *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* is based on the “intensive plural abstract” *šēḥā'ōt* and an attributive syntactical relationship between the two component words of the title (Eissfeldt 1950, 128-150). According to this view, *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* is rendered “Lord Almighty”, a term which concords with *kurios pantokratōr* and *kurios ho theos tō dunameōn* in the translations of this seen in the Septuagint; Yahweh possesses a royal dominion over all. Actually, this seems to be the sense projected in most of the occurrences of *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* in the Psalter. In the fifteen passages (Psalms 24:10; 46:8,12; 48:9; 59:6; 69:7; 80:5,8,15,20; 84:2,4,9,13 and 89:9) of the eight Psalms where *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* occurs, three are Psalms of lament: individual lament (59:6; 69:7) and one Psalm of communal lament (Psalm 80:5, 8,15,20). Psalms 46:8,12; 48:9 and 84:2,4,9,13 are usually classified as Zion Songs because of their stress on Zion as God’s dwelling place. Closely related to these are Psalms 24,10 and 89,9. The second part of Psalm 24, that is, vv.3-6, states the ethical requirements for entering God’s house while Psalm 89 is on God’s covenant with David.

When in the midst of their anguish and beset by the threat of the foes, the psalmists in Psalms 59:6 and 69:7 address Yahweh whose authority far surpasses that of the enemy. Help from God is assured because he has dominion over all. One sees here an echo of Hannah’s prayer in 1Sam 1:11, the first place where *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* is employed in a petition, specifically in a prayer of distress. The national lament (Psalm 80) earnestly asks *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* to stir up his might and save his people (v.3). The only explicit intercession in Psalm 84 commences with *YHWH šēḥā'ōt*: “O Lord of Hosts hear my prayer, give ear O God of Jacob” (Psalm 84:9). Similar protestations of confidence in *YHWH šēḥā'ōt*’s strength to save is the focus of Psalm 46: (cf. vv.8 and 12). Psalm 89:9 is not only a rhetorical question but also an explanation of *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* for it sheds light on how the psalmist understood this divine designation. Hence, when *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* is employed in prayer, the faithful confess their unwavering trust in the Omnipotent God who is Lord of all. Yahweh’s dominion is not separated from his royalty. In Psalm 24, the emphatic position of *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* at the end of all that is predicated of God, could be a hint to the other related dimensions of this title. Psalm 24:1-2 sings of God’s dominion, everything belongs to him and everything has its origin in him. The last section (vv.7-10) presents a twofold question: (cf. vv.8 and 10). This is answered at the end of the text: (v.10). Following this explanation, *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* appears a fitting title for God in a Psalm that proclaims his unrivalled dominion over all the forces of the world. This is the God whom the poem confidently proclaims as *‘immānū* “with us” which is reminiscent of the fundamental theme of Isa 7-12, *‘immānūel* “God with us” (cf. 7:14: 8:8,10) and Amos 5:14: “Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said”.

### 3.2.4. The God of Jacob is our refuge (vv.8b and 12b)

No other divine designation would be more appropriate in a text of communal confidence in God than that which embodies the name of the patriarch considered as the symbol of unity and whose name is an eponym for the entire nation of Israel (König 1900, 16-17). The twelve tribes of Israel were progenies of the twelve sons of Jacob (Exodus 1:1-5). Therefore, *‘ēlohē ya ‘āqōḥ* evokes the common ancestor of the nation from whom it derived its name (Genesis 32:27-28; 35:10).

Israel as a nation did not merely inherit a name from Jacob but also the divine assistance in the life of this patriarch (Genesis 35:3; 46:2-4; Hosea 12:4-5). His irrevocable blessings (Genesis 27:27-29) are equally counted as a patrimony that will ever remain effective. The promise of many and royal descendants as well as a land (Genesis 28:13-15; 35:11-12) is a gift bequeathed to a nation that bears the name of an ancestor. The Deity whom Jacob himself called his God (Genesis 28:21), because of his personal relationship with him, remains the sole protector of his descendants.

From all this, one observes why this title is so important in the royal supplications, in those texts that mention Yahweh’s abiding presence in Zion, a city he has chosen for his own, and in other national affairs. In Psalm 20:2 the petitioner, addressing God by the title *‘ēlohē ya ‘āqōḥ*, intercedes for the victory of the king and for the nation. This victory, he professes, stems from God’s dwelling place, Zion. The request in Psalm 84:9-10 is addressed to Yahweh in Zion. It is not only victory that proceeds from *‘ēlohē ya ‘āqōḥ* in Zion but also his life-giving word and instruction (Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2). In David’s last words (2 Sam 23,1-7), he presents himself as the anointed of *‘ēlohē ya ‘āqōḥ* (2 Samuel 23:1), thus manifesting the nationalistic concept of this divine title. We recall that these two terms are also linked in the royal prayer of Psalm 84. *‘ēlohē ya ‘āqōḥ* is the God of the patriarch and of his descendants. The protestations of confidence in God’s defense of his chosen city and people (Psalm 46) contain a refrain in which *‘ēlohē ya ‘āqōḥ* and *YHWH šēḥā'ōt* are parallel (Bazyliński 1999, 147-148). The two corresponding phrases – *‘immānū* and *mišgāḥ-lānū* – (Psalm 46:8,12) that accompany these divine designations are reminiscent of God’s promises to the patriarch (Genesis 46:2-4). Psalm 46 resembles Psalm 84:9 not only in the parallel use of the divine names but also in its strong affirmation of God’s presence in Zion, an affirmation highly central in Psalm 84 and in the Korah Psalms in general (Van Oorschot 1994, 416-430). In Psalm 76:7, *‘ēlohē ya ‘āqōḥ* is employed in the praise of God’s dwelling in Zion as well as in the praise of his wondrous deeds for his people (cf. Psalm 75:10). Furthermore, *‘ēlohē ya ‘āqōḥ* is the strength of his people (Psalm 81:2). The psalmist urgently calls upon Yahweh to save his people, and *‘ēlohē ya ‘āqōḥ* sees and perceives the evil deeds of the goddess against Israel (Psalm 94:7).

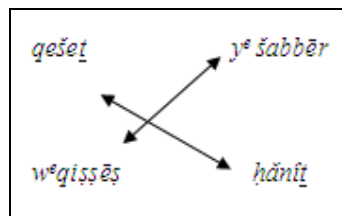


The divine designation *'ēlōhē ya 'āqōb* may not be restricted to just the etymological derivatives of the verbal root *'qb*; (Barnes 1937, 406) rather, it is rooted in the Patriarch's personal relationship with God. This relationship is in turn extended to his descendants. The God of Jacob will continue to be with his people and this active presence is manifested in the victory that the king procures in God's name for his people (Psalm 20). Yahweh's dwelling in Zion is yet another ramification and continuation of this abiding presence. His presence among the people of Israel evokes his promise to Jacob, to be with him and never to leave him, a distinctive motif in the Jacob stories (Genesis 28:10-22; 32:2-3) (Walkers 1992,607).

### 3.2.5. God's great Deeds on Earth – Source of Confidence in God (vv.9-11)

The imperative mood that begins verses 9 and 11 makes v.10 appear deliberate and afterthought in the text. In point of fact, the poetic layout of v.10 is different from the rest of the strophes for it is the only tristich strophe in the poem. Again, verse 11 seems to continue the reflection on *miṣ'ālōt YHWH* "works of the Lord" of v.9 in God's self-description in the phrase *'ārūm bagōyim 'ārūm bā'āreṣ* "exalted among the nations, exalted in the earth" in v.11. However, a close reflection might reveal that v.10 makes explicit what the verses that flank it merely announce. In other words, the contents of v.10 are part of God's deeds that make him to be exalted among the nations and on earth. Faith, according to the Old Testament, is not an abstract intellectual adhesion to series of theological themes, it is an invitation to discover God who is at work, the sense of the root of *miṣ'ālōt (p'l)* "works", in human history. Liturgical functions are also imbued with remembrance of God's past deeds (Ravasi 1997, 835). Verse 9 actually begins with this invitation, *l'kū-ḥāzū* "come, behold"; which is an invitation to faith in God. His *miṣ'ālōt* generates faith in those who see them. In v.9 God's deeds are positive, *miṣ'ālōt*; they are also *šammōt* "what causes astonishment or horror". Both aspects of his deeds make him exalted above all.

Verse 10 describes in its three stichs God's deeds on earth. While the first stich states this in a general way: God makes war cease to the ends of the earth; the two remaining stichs relay how God does this: "he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the carts with fire". Bow, spear, and carts are all instruments of war. God destroys all these in order to make war cease on earth. As Lord of heaven and earth, he creates peace on earth by removing things that human beings employ in destroying one another. The poet highlights God's actions in v.10b with a chiasmic parallelism by inverting the order of the components of the sentence:



It is instructive to observe that these divine actions take place in his holy place. Psalm 76:4 similarly conveys the same idea: "There (referring to Zion, according to the context of the verse) he broke the flashing arrows, the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war" (cf. Isaiah 54:16; Ezekiel 39:9-10; Hosea 2:20; Zechariah 9:10).

In verse 11, God himself speaks, addressing his people, and of course other nations: *harpū ūḏ' ū kī 'ānōkī 'ēlōhīm 'ārūm bagōyim 'ārūm bā'āreṣ* "Be still and know that I am God, I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted among the earth". Faith, according to this, is fundamentally recognition of who God is. Hence, in this divine self-presentation and invitation the content of faith is spelt out: He is God and he is exalted. The poet has from its beginning presented this theme in human limited way of conveying it: in the initial programmatic sentence, re-echoed in the refrain and other parts of the poem. He is *'ēl 'ēmūnāh* 'a faithful God', a quality that is the foundation of human confidence in God.

## 4. Relevance of Psalm 46 to the African Context

Africans are often accused of proliferation of Christian sects motivated not by their zeal to fulfil the missionary mandate of Jesus (Matthew 28:16-20) but by some other ulterior motives. According to these critics (Alonge 2012; Obiorah 2008, 18-21), Christian sects sprout sporadically because of some personal challenges, often financial, of those who purport to be special divine envoys. Some who meet difficulties in their sources of income, particularly business men and women, convert their warehouses into churches. It is instructive to note that any such move by anyone always attracts ample followers. A good number of these self-acclaimed founders succeed because the warehouses metamorphose within a short time into well-defined edifices that become complex comprising schools and other ways of generating money. Desire to amass wealth seems to be their priority.

On the other hand, there are some who do not have any intention of being founders of churches but rather they move from one prayer house to another in dire search of miracles in their lives. Some, still in this category of miracles seekers, have great longing for some insights into their challenges in life or some prophets who will reveal the future to them. Difficulties in life induce some Christians into search for meaning and for possible solutions to their problems. Unreasonableness of this search is often detrimental to their Christian faith. One of the consequences is syncretism, whereby some live as hybrids in their Christian life. There are also cases of those who have abandoned the Christian faith because of their experiences in life; they lost faith in human beings and in God.

Furthermore, the system in which we live or which we have created for ourselves affects us drastically in our Christian life. Our deformed political systems generate tribal conflicts, wars, poverty and other forms of social ills. Many human problems we have are as a result of human inappropriate actions. In fact these actions are as a result of superficial faith, faith without depth. This



might explain why the Church in the *Year of Faith* calls on all her members to embark on a serious reflection on the contents of our belief. This, she hopes, will be of great help to her members. The Church recommends in this year diligent study of the compendium of our faith (Benedict XVI 2011, 11), *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is a call to understand and deepen our faith. Casualties that some Christians experience in their religious life is often attributed to ignorance of the content of the faith. Faith in God is best proved in trials.

Psalms 46 presents us with the experience of those who have reached a significant height in their faith. They have experienced God as 'el 'emūnāh 'a faithful God' and this was the foundation of their confidence in him. They were able to affirm this trust in God even in moments of inexplicable events in human life. Africans are also beset by countless challenges, ranging from those ones we have created by ourselves to those that come from outside. Psalm 46 invites all of us, who today read and pray it, to recognise who God is in our life and to live accordingly. As we search for solution to our problems, we pray with the psalmist, lō'-nīrā' "we will not fear". Our recognition of God's faithfulness leads us too to cultivate this attitude which human beings should also have in their relationship with God and with one another.

Just like the psalmist who believed and trusted in God's royal dominion over all, and who is able "to make wars cease to the ends of the earth", we are invited in the Psalm to trust in the power of God who alone can make our honest quest for peace possible. We do not have to rely solely on our human strength in our struggle for survival. Psalm 46 teaches us to place our trust in God who is Lord of heaven and earth, and of human history.

Africa as a continent has experienced an event in its collective history. It is slave trade and its repercussions are still felt in many parts of Africa. In the face of these, God has not abandoned us. The divine protection and sustenance throughout the long event of our slavery should inspire us to keep on trusting in him who remains Lord of our common history. God's love that keeps us alive should spur us on in our life of faith and generate a matrix in which this faith will continue to thrive.

Restless search for explanations to our challenges is evidence of lack of faith in God who is Lord of all and who can change our situations. Many expressions of confidence in God which we see in every part of Ps 46 show a community that had strong and stable faith in God alone. It will definitely make a lot of difference when we develop strong faith in God and be able, like the psalmist to say "God is our refuge and strength", and that he is "our help in trouble".

## 5. Conclusion

The faith of the trusting community in Psalm 46 evokes some key elements in Old Testament expressions of faith in God. These points are found in the major theological themes of the Old Testament and in the literary forms deducible from metaphors and similes predicated of God. Theology of creation, for instance, is systematically presented in the entire Old Testament; God is the sole Creator of all that exist. Psalm 46 clearly alludes to this in its varied words of trust in God. The unrivalled Lord of creation subdues the primeval powers of Chaos and keeps the world under his control. This is a strong basis for the psalmists' unwavering confidence in God.

Salvation history, which runs throughout the Old Testament and beyond, finds its place also in Psalm 46. Besides the accounts of creation and their echoes, the psalmist addresses God with the name, 'elōhē ya 'āqōb "God of Jacob", that calls to mind the relationship between God and Israel's Patriarchs; this relationship is also extended to their descendants. In this relationship, God is consistent in his 'emūnāh 'faithfulness', in spite of human failure to respond positively to his invitation. The faith of the community in Psalm 46 finds its source in God's saving relationship with their ancestors.

Kingship of God and the participatory roles of Israel's kings in the divine sovereignty is another important theme in the Old Testament, especially in the prayers and petitions of the Psalter. Psalm 46 includes God's kingship in its exaltation of God's power over all cosmic and human forces. He is king and he exercises this kingship over all that exist; he is able to cause war cease on earth (v.10) because he is unsurpassed in his power. This is a strong reason for the psalmists' trust in God.

Election of Zion with Israel's belief in God's saving presence in this city is part of the content of the people's faith in God. In Psalm 46, God's city is God's dwelling place, sanctified by the divine presence (vv.5-6). His presence in this city is salutary, symbolised by the streams of water that gladden the city. This too motivates the psalmists' confidence in God and unites the people in their communal search for him.

The people communicated their faith in God by using metaphors and similes of things that were very familiar to them. We find one of these in the programmatic verse 2 of Psalm 46: God is mahāseh "refuge". He is also mišgāb "fortress", "refuge", according to the refrain in verses 8 and 12. These words, as we have seen above are frequent in the Psalter, specifically in Songs of Confidence in God. In using these images, the psalmists acknowledge God's power in their lives and affirm their confidence in him. As a Psalm of Trust in God with some nationalistic overtone, Psalm 46 inspires collective faith in God, especially in Africans who think that their life challenges have no remedy. We should be strengthened by this firm faith of the psalmists and constantly recognise God's sovereignty in our history. The *Year of Faith* offers us an opportunity to reflect deeply on our faith and encourage one another to stand firm despite all odds, for "God is our refuge and strength".

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