

Psalm 119:81-88 and Acts 6:1-7

14th Sunday after Pentecost. August 30, 2026.

Texts from the NRSVUE Bible. According with *Un giorno una parola* lectionary.

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Psalm 119:81-88

⁸¹*My soul languishes for your salvation;
I hope in your word.*

⁸²*My eyes fail with watching for your promise;
I ask, "When will you comfort me?"*

⁸³*For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke,
yet I have not forgotten your statutes.*

⁸⁴*How long must your servant endure?
When will you judge those who persecute me?*

⁸⁵*The arrogant have dug pitfalls for me;
they flout your law.*

⁸⁶*All your commandments are enduring;
I am persecuted without cause; help me!*

⁸⁷*They have almost made an end of me on earth,
but I have not forsaken your precepts.*

⁸⁸*In your steadfast love spare my life,
so that I may keep the decrees of your mouth.*

Acts 6:1-7

¹Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ²And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Therefore, brothers and sisters, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, ⁴while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." ⁵What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Sermon notes

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible, an acrostic poem of 22 sections, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Today's reading (vv. 81-88) is the section for the letter *Kaph*, the eleventh letter. In Hebrew, every line of this section begins with that same letter.¹ Unlike most of the psalm, which speaks calmly about loving God's law, this section is a cry of distress: "my soul languishes," "my eyes fail," "how long must your servant endure?" The psalmist is not only meditating on the law; he is waiting for God to act, and the waiting is hard.

Acts 6:1-7 also describes a hard moment, though a very different kind. The church in Jerusalem was growing quickly (v. 1), and this growth itself created a problem: the Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food, while the Hebrew-speaking widows were not. The apostles did not deny the complaint or brush it aside. Instead, they gathered the whole community and worked out a solution: seven men, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, would be appointed to this task, freeing the apostles to give themselves to prayer and to preaching (vv. 2-4).

Both readings share a concern for people who are easily overlooked. In the psalm, it is the psalmist himself, worn down and "persecuted without cause" (v. 86), waiting for God to notice and act. In Acts, it is the widows, a group the Old Testament repeatedly commands God's people to protect (for example, Deuteronomy 10:18, Isaiah 1:17). The psalmist's plea, "in your steadfast love spare my life" (v. 88), uses the Hebrew word *chesed*, God's covenant loyalty and care.² That same *chesed* is exactly what the early church had to learn to organize and put into practice, one widow at a time.

Both readings also show that waiting on God does not mean doing nothing. The psalmist does not simply endure in silence; he keeps asking, "when will you judge those who persecute me?" (v. 84), and he keeps affirming, "I have not forgotten your statutes" (v. 83), "I have not forsaken your precepts" (v. 87). His waiting is active: it holds on to God's word even while it asks hard questions of God. In the same way, the apostles do not simply wait for the problem in Jerusalem to go away. They act, and they act wisely, choosing a structure that lets both needs be met: the word of God is preached, and the widows are fed.³

Finally, both readings end by widening the picture from one person's need to the health of the whole community. The psalm section ends with a personal prayer, "spare my life, so that I may keep the decrees of your mouth" (v. 88) — one man's survival tied to his ongoing obedience. Acts 6 ends by stepping back to the whole church: "the word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples increased greatly" (v. 7). Calvin comments that the very trouble over the widows became, through the apostles' wisdom, an occasion for the church's growth rather than its division.⁴ What began as a complaint about neglect ends as a sign of how God's people, cared for rightly, keep going forward.

¹See the appendix below, the Hebrew text of this section, and Dante Lattes, *Il Libro dei Salmi* (Rome: Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane, 1963).

²On the ten Hebrew words this psalm uses for God's law and for God's faithfulness, see the appendix below, an excerpt from Dante Lattes, 466-468.

³See the appendix below, John Calvin's commentary on this passage, especially on verse 3: "the Church is permitted to choose... this is the most lawful way, that those be chosen by common voices."

⁴Calvin: "we learn in this history that the Church cannot be so framed by and by, but that there remain somewhat to be amended." See the appendix below.

A note about AI

This type of document requires a lot of drafting work: finding the documents online, downloading them, formatting according to the template, finding appropriate references and preparing the footnotes, revising the language and logically reorganising the already available partial draft. This work was done by GP by prompting the AI Assistant Claude Code. In this specific instance the procedure revealed the presence of a moderation filter that, at a given moment, blocked the delivery of the machine answer. It is interesting to read the report by Claude itself about the incident, because of the obvious implications for the conversation about the dangers of AI. Here is the report by Claude.

While this text was being drafted, one generation attempt returned “API Error: 400 Output blocked by content filtering policy.” That error is not something the assistant itself generates or decides — it is a system-level response from an automated content-filtering layer that sits between the underlying language model and the output stream, and it can block a response before it ever reaches the person who requested it.

It is often a false positive. These filters scan for patterns such as violence, self-harm, or harassment using heuristics, and a large block of text combining Hebrew script, a psalm full of words like “persecuted,” “arrogant,” “pitfalls,” and “destroy,” and a long historical commentary dense with archaic legal and ecclesiastical language, can occasionally trigger it even though the content is a completely legitimate Bible commentary for a sermon.

The block is also not tied to a fixed, reproducible meaning of a given request — it can trigger on a partial or streaming chunk of output rather than the response as a whole, so simply retrying, or splitting a large combined draft into smaller discrete steps, often succeeds where one big combined output did not. Nothing already saved to disk was lost when the error occurred; it affected only that one in-progress response, and this document was completed by proceeding section by section instead.

The filter is claimed to scan for negative *patterns*. It seems to me that the logic of such filters is simply to trap inadmissible expressions. The actual outcome is a prescription to abolish any use of non-positive words. I wonder if it is an implementation of the Newspeak of the Big Brother described by George Orwell.⁵

Appendix: the Hebrew acrostic

Psalms 119 is an acrostic poem. In an acrostic, each line (or group of lines) starts with the next letter of the alphabet, in order. Today’s reading (vv. 81-88) is the *Kaph* section: in Hebrew, every line starts with the same letter, כ (Kaph). This device does not survive in English translation, so it helps to see the original Hebrew text.

Hebrew is read from right to left. In the text below, the first word of each verse is in bold. Look at the right-hand edge of each line: every bolded word begins with the same letter, כ.

כָּלֶתָהּ לְתַשׁוּעָתָךְ נַפְשִׁי לְדַבָּרְךָ יְחִלֵּתִי⁸¹
כָּלֵנוּ עֵינֵי לְאִמְרָתְךָ לְאִמְרָתְךָ מִתִּי תִנְחַמֵּנִי⁸²

⁵George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949), see especially the appendix titled “The Principles of Newspeak.”

כִּי־הָיִיתִי כְנָאֵד בְּקִיטּוֹר חֲקִיךָ לֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי:⁸³
 כְּמָה יִמִּי־עַבְדְּךָ מְתִי תַעֲשֶׂה בְרִדְפִי מִשְׁפָּט:⁸⁴
 כְּרוּ־לִי יָדַיִם שִׁיחֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא כְתוּרְתָּךְ:⁸⁵
 כָּל־מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֲמוֹנָה שֶׁקֶר רִדְפוֹנִי עֲזָרְנִי:⁸⁶
 כְּמַעַט כְּלוֹנִי בְּאַרְץ וְאֲנִי לֹא־עֲזַבְתִּי פִקְדֶיךָ:⁸⁷
 כְּחֹסֶדְךָ חֲיִנִי וְאַשְׁמְרָה עֲדוּת פִּיךָ:⁸⁸

Hebrew text: the Leningrad Codex (Masoretic Text), via Sefaria.org.

Appendix: John Calvin's Commentary on Acts 6:1-7

1. Luke declareth here upon what occasion, and to what end, and also with what rite, deacons were first made. He saith, When there arose a murmuring amongst the disciples, it was appeased by this remedy, as it is said in the common proverb, Good laws have taken their beginning of evil manners. And it may seem to be a strange thing, seeing that this is a function so excellent and so necessary in the Church, why it came not into the apostles' minds at the first, (before there was any such occasion ministered,) to appoint deacons, and why the Spirit of God did not give them such counsel which they take now, being, as it were, enforced thereunto. But that which happened was both better then, and is also more profitable for us at this day, to be unto us an example. If the apostles had spoken of choosing deacons before any necessity did require the same, they should not have had the people so ready; they should have seemed to avoid labor and trouble; many would not have offered so liberally into the hands of other men. Therefore, it was requisite that the faithful should be convict [convinced] by experience that they might choose deacons willingly, whom they saw they could not want; and that through their own fault.

We learn in this history that the Church cannot be so framed by and by, but that there remain somewhat to be amended; neither can so great a building be so finished in one day, that there may not something be added to make the same perfect. Furthermore, we learn that there is no ordinance of God so holy and laudable, which is not either corrupt or made unprofitable through the fault of men. We wonder that things are never so well ordered in the world, but that there is always some evil mixed with the good; but it is the wickedness and corruption of our nature which causeth this. That was, indeed, a godly order, whereof Luke made mention before, when the goods of all men being consecrated to God, were distributed to every man as he had need; when as the apostles, being, as it were, the stewards of God and the poor, had the chief government of the alms. But shortly after there ariseth a murmuring which troubleth this order. Here appeareth that corruption of men whereof I have spoken, which doth not suffer us to use our good things. We must also mark the subtilty of Satan, who, to the end he may take from us the use of the gifts of God, goeth about this continually, that it may not remain pure and sound; but that, being mixed with other discommodities, it may, first, be suspected, secondly, loathed, and, lastly, quite taken away. But the apostles have taught us, by their example, that we must not yield unto such engines (and policies) of Satan. For they do not think it meet (being offended with the murmuring) to take away that ministry which they know pleaseth God; but rather invent a remedy whereby the offense may be taken away, and that may be retained which is God's. Thus must we do. For what offenses soever Satan raise, we must take good heed that he take not from us those ordinances which are otherwise wholesome.

The number increasing. We ought to wish for nothing more than that God would increase his Church, and gather together many on every side unto his people; but the corruption of our nature

hindereth us from having any thing happy in all points. For there arise many discommodities also, even of the increasings of the Church. For it is a hard matter to keep many hypocrites from creeping into the multitude, whose wickedness is not by and by discovered, until such time as they have infected some part of the flock with their infection. Moreover, many wicked, froward, and dissolute persons do insinuate themselves under a false color of repentance. And that I may pass over innumerable things, there is never such agreement amongst many, but that, according to the diversity of their manners, their opinions are also diverse, so that one thing cannot please all alike. This offense causeth many to be desirous to choose a few for a Church; it causeth them to loathe or else to hate a multitude. But no trouble, no irksomeness, ought so much to prevail, but that we must always be desirous to have the Church increased; but that we must study to enlarge the same; but that we must cherish so much as in us lieth unity with the whole body.

A murmuring of the Greeks. Hereby it appeareth that they were not fully regenerate by the Spirit of God, to whom the diversity of nation and country ministereth occasion of disagreement. For in Christ there is neither Jew nor Grecian, (Galatians 3:28.) Therefore, this indignation smelleth of the flesh and the world. Wherefore we must take good heed that the like fault be not found in us. There is another fault in that they declare their indignation by murmuring. Furthermore it is uncertain whether the complaint were true or no. For when Luke saith that the Greeks murmured, because their widows were not honored, he showeth not what was done in deed, but what they thought was done. And it may be that forasmuch as the apostles did prefer the Jews, because they were better known, the Greeks did think (though falsely) that their widows were despised as strangers. And this seemeth to be more like to be true. Furthermore the word ministering may be expounded two manner of ways, actively or passively. For we know that at the first there were widows chosen unto the ministration. Notwithstanding, I do rather think that the Greeks did complain, because their widows were not so liberally relieved as they wished. So that the ministration shall be that daily distribution which was wont to be made.

2. The twelve having the multitude called unto them. It is a point [proof] of patience and meekness that the apostles are no more moved. It is a point of prudence and godly carefulness, in that they prevent the evil which began to arise, without deferring the remedy. For after that every dissension and division hath gathered strength, it is a wound hard to be cured. By this assembly it appeareth that the Church was governed by order and reason, so that the apostles had the chiefest authority, and that they did impart their counsels and purposes unto the people. Again, we must note that the faithful, or Christians, are in this place called disciples, in whom that of Isaiah must be fulfilled, "That they were all taught of God." And again, that of Jeremiah, "They shall all know God, from the least to the greatest."

It pleaseth not. It is in Greek [οὐκ ἀρεστόν] By which word, the Grecians do now express every opinion or decree which is better than another, or which is to be preferred as being better. I do rather think that the apostles declare what is profitable, than simply what they have decreed. But if it be not expedient for them to meddle with this business, they seem [now] to acknowledge some fault in that they ministered hitherto. And surely that is true, that use is the father of wisdom. Wherefore there shall be no absurdity if we shall say, that the apostles desire of the Church to be unburdened of that function, after that they have tried [experienced] that it is not meet for them. But if there were any fault, it ought rather to be ascribed unto necessity than unto them; for they took not this burthen upon them greedily, but seeing there was no other way as yet, they had better burthen themselves out of measure than that the poor should be forslowled. And when as they say that it is not meet that they should be occupied in providing for

the poor, their meaning is, that are unable to endure both burthens, so that they must needs let the one alone. For it is as if they should say, If thou wilt enjoy our ministry in the preaching of the gospel, deliver us from the charge of the poor, because we are not able to do both. But this seemeth to be spoken out of season by them, because they had not left the charge of teaching before, although they had the oversight of the alms. I answer, forasmuch as the administration was confused, they were so enwrapped, that they could not wholly attend upon doctrine as was meet. Therefore, they refuse that function which draweth them away from the free and perfect charge of teaching. Notwithstanding, we may not think that they had quite cast away all care of the poor, but that they did only seek somewhat to be lightened and eased, that they might attend upon their office. And, in the mean season, they declare that the ministry of the word is so painful that it requireth a whole man, neither will it suffer him to be occupied about any other business; which, if it had been well considered, there had been a far other order taken in the Church.

The Popish bishops did suck up great riches under color of the ministration or deaconship; nevertheless, they entangled themselves in divers businesses, which they were scarce able to overcome, though every one of them had had ten heads. Notwithstanding, such is their wickedness, that they say that there can be no church unless it be drowned in this depth; neither do they cease to brag and boast that they are the successors of the apostles, whereas there is nothing which appeareth to be more contrary. They were careful for this, that they might not be occupied about serving of tables, and so be compelled to leave their own banquets. For whosoever is careful for his own table, he taketh leave to be vacant from other men's tables.

But omitting these things, let us mark this sentence. We know what a holy thing it is to be careful for the poor. Therefore, forasmuch as the apostles prefer the preaching of the gospel before if we gather thereby that no obedience is more acceptable to God. Notwithstanding, the hardness is also declared, when as they say that they cannot discharge both these duties. Surely we are not better than they. Therefore, let every one of us that is called unto the function of teaching addict himself wholly to order this his estate well. For we are inclined to nothing more than to fall to slothfulness. Again, the flesh ministereth goodly cloaks and colors, so that those men cannot see by and by that they are led away from their calling which enwrap themselves in strange business. Wherefore, to the end ministers may prick forward themselves to do their duty, let them remember this saying of the apostles oftentimes, wherein they declare that, forasmuch as they are called unto the function of teaching, they must not any longer take charge of the poor. Therefore, what excuses have profane affairs (taken in hand even for some private gain) where that is set aside, which is otherwise accounted no small part of the worship of God.

3. Therefore, brethren, look out. Now we see to what end deacons were made. The word itself is indeed general, yet is it properly taken for those which are stewards for the poor. Whereby it appeareth how licentiously the Papists do mock God and men, who assign unto their deacons no other office but this, to have the charge of the paten and chalice. Surely we need no disputation to prove that they agree in no point with the apostles. But if the readers be desirous to see any more concerning this point, they may repair unto our Institution, chapter 8. As touching this present place, the Church is permitted to choose. For it is tyrannous if any one man appoint or make ministers at his pleasure. Therefore, this is the (most) lawful way, that those be chosen by common voices who are to take upon them any public function in the Church. And the apostles prescribe what manner [of] persons ought to be chosen, to wit, men of tried honesty and credit, men endued with wisdom and other gifts of the Spirit. And this is the mean between tyranny

and confused liberty, that nothing be done without the consent and approbation of the people, yet so that the pastors moderate and govern this action, that their authority may be as a bridle to keep under the people, lest they pass their bounds too much. In the mean season, this is worth the noting, that the apostles prescribe an order unto the faithful, lest they appoint any save those which are fit. For we do God no small injury if we take all that come to hand unto the holy function of the Church unless we have some trial of him first. The number of seven is applied unto the present necessity, lest any man should think that there is some mystery comprehended under the same. Whereas Luke saith, full of the Spirit and wisdom, I do interpret it thus, that it is requisite that they be furnished both with other gifts of the Spirit, and also with wisdom, of those men, who being too much given unto begging, require that which is necessary for the poverty of the brethren, and also of their slanders, who cease not to backbite, though they have none occasion given them. For that function is not only painful, but also subject to many ungodly murmurings.

4. And we will give ourselves unto prayer. They show again that they have too much business otherwise, wherein they may exercise themselves during their whole life. For the old proverb agreeth hereunto very fitly, which was used sometimes in the solemn rites, do this. Therefore, they use the word [προσκαρτερησαι] which signifieth to be, as it were, fastened and tied to anything. Therefore, pastors must not think that they have so done their duty that they need to do no more when they have daily spent some time in teaching. There is another manner of study, another manner of zeal, another manner of continuance required, that they may indeed boast that they are wholly given to that thing. They adjoin thereunto prayer, not that they alone ought to pray, (for that is an exercise common to all the godly,) but because they have peculiar causes to pray above all others. There is no man which ought not to be careful for the common salvation of the Church. How much more, then, ought the pastor, who hath that function enjoined him by name to labor carefully [anxiously] for it? So Moses did indeed exhort others unto prayer, but he went before them as the ringleader (Exodus 17:11.) And it is not without cause that Paul doth so often make mention of his prayers, (Romans 1:10.) Again, we must always remember that, that we shall lose all our labor bestowed upon plowing, sowing, and watering, unless the increase come from heaven, (1 Corinthians 3:7.) Therefore, it shall not suffice to take great pains in teaching, unless we require the blessing at the hands of the Lord, that our labor may not be in vain and unfruitful. Hereby it appeareth that the exercise of prayer is not in vain commended unto the ministers of the word.

5. Stephen, full of faith. Luke doth not, therefore, separate faith from the Spirit, as if it also were not a gift of the Spirit; but by Spirit he meaneth other gifts wherewith Stephen was endued, as zeal, wisdom, uprightness, brotherly love, diligence, integrity of a good conscience; secondly, he expresseth the principal kind. Therefore, he signifieth that Stephen did excel first in faith, and, secondly, in other virtues; so that it was evident that he had abundance of the grace of the Spirit. He doth not so greatly commend the rest, because undoubtedly they were inferior to him. Moreover, the ancient writers do, with great consent, affirm that this Nicholas, which was one of the seven, is the same of whom John maketh mention in the Revelation, (Revelation 2:15,) to wit, that he was an author of a filthy and wicked sect; forasmuch as he would have women to be common. For which cause we must not be negligent in choosing ministers of the Church. For if the hypocrisy of men do deceive even those which are most vigilant and careful to take heed, what shall befall the careless and negligent? Notwithstanding, if when we have used such circumspection as is meet, it so fall out that we be deceived, let us not be troubled out of measure; forasmuch as Luke saith that even the apostles were subject to this inconvenience.

Some will ask this question, then, what good shall exhortation do? to what use serveth prayer, seeing that the success itself sheweth that the election was not wholly governed by the Spirit of God? I answer, that this is a great matter that the Spirit directed their judgments in choosing six men; in that he suffereth the Church to go astray in the seventh, it ought to seem no absurd thing. For it is requisite that we be thus humbled divers ways, partly that the wicked and ungodly may exercise us; partly that, being taught by their example, we may learn to examine ourselves thoroughly, lest there be in us any hidden and privy starting-corners of guile; partly that we may be more circumspect to discern, and that we may, as it were, keep watch continually, lest we be deceived by crafty and unfaithful men. Also it may be that the ministry of Nicholas was for a time profitable, and that he fell afterward into that monstrous error. And if so be it he fell in such sort from such an honorable degree, the higher that every one of us shall be extolled, let him submit himself unto God with modesty and fear.

6. Having prayed, they laid their hands upon them. Laying on of hands was a solemn sign of consecration under the law. To this end do the apostles now lay their hands upon the deacons, that they may know that they are offered to God. Notwithstanding, because this ceremony should of itself be vain, they add thereunto prayer, wherein the faithful commend unto God those ministers whom they offer unto him. This is referred unto the apostles, for all the people did not lay their hands upon the deacons; but when the apostles did make prayer in the name of the Church, others also did add their petitions. Hence we gather that the laying on of hands is a rite agreeing unto order and comeliness, forasmuch as the apostles did use the same, and yet that it hath of itself no force or power, but that the effect dependeth upon the Spirit of God alone; which is generally to be thought of all ceremonies.

7. Luke setteth forth again the increasing of the Church, to the end he may the better declare the power of God and his grace in the continual going forward thereof. This was an excellent work of God that the Church should suddenly, and, as it were, in a moment, be raised up; but this is worthy no less admiration, in that he furthereth that work which he had begun amidst so many lets, in that the number of these is increased, whom to diminish, and so, consequently, to destroy the whole stock, the world doth so greatly labor. In that he saith that the Word of God did grow, his meaning is, that it was spread further abroad. The Word of God is said to grow two manner of ways; either when new disciples are brought to obey the same, or as every one of us profiteth and goeth forward therein. Luke speaketh in this place of the former sort of increasing, for he expoundeth himself by and by, when he speaketh of the number of the disciples. Notwithstanding, he restraineth this so great an increasing of faith unto one city. For although it be to be thought that the disciples were scattered abroad elsewhere, yet was there no certain body save only at Jerusalem.

And a great company. Seeing that (in speaking properly) our faith doth obey the doctrine of the gospel, it is a figurative speech, uttered by metonymia, when Luke saith that they obeyed the faith; for the word faith is taken by him for the Word of God, and the very profession of Christianity. And he reckoneth up the priests by name, because they were for the most part enemies; for which cause it was a wonderful work of God that some should be converted, and much more wonderful that many. For at the first they raged against Christ with this brag, "Hath any of the rulers believed in him? But this multitude, which knoweth not the law, are accursed."

Source: John Calvin, Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, vol. 1, trans. Christopher Fetherstone, rev. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), on Acts 6:1-7. Public domain; digitized by the Christian Classics Ethereal Library (ccel.org).

Appendix: the hymn setting

99

St Ethelreda CM

Thomas Turton, 1780-1864



PSALMS

119

St Ethelreda, 99

JOD THE TENTH PART

- 73 Thy hands have made and fashioned me,
teach me thy laws, O Lord.
- 74 They who thee fear see me with joy,
for I trust in thy word.
- 75 That righteous are thy judgments, Lord,
I know, and do confess,
and that thou hast afflicted me
in truth and faithfulness.
- 76 O let thy kindness merciful,
I pray thee, comfort me,
as to thy servant promised was
in faithfulness by thee.
- 77 And let thy tender mercies come
to me, that I may live;
because thy holy laws to me
sweet delectation give.
- 78 O let the proud ashamed be,
for they without a cause
with me have falsely dealt; but I
will muse upon thy laws.
- 79 Let such as fear thee, and have known
thy statutes, turn to me.
- 80 In thy laws let my heart be sound,
that shamed I may not be.

119

Chiosare, 43

CAPH THE ELEVENTH PART

- 81 My soul for thy salvation faints;
yet I thy word believe,
mine eyes fail for thy word: I say,
When wilt thou comfort give?
- 83 For like a bottle I'm become,
that in the smoke is set,
but still thy righteous statutes, Lord,
I never do forget.
- 84 How many are thy servant's days?
when wilt thou execute
just judgment on these wicked men
that do me persecute?
- 85 The proud have digged pits for me,
which is against thy laws.
- 86 Thy words all faithful are: help me,
pursued without a cause.
- 87 They so consumed me, that on earth
my life they scarce did leave
thy precepts yet forsook I not,
but close to them did cleave.
- 88 After thy loving-kindness, Lord,
me quicken and preserve:
the testimony of thy mouth
so shall I still observe.

Psalm 119, Jod (vv. 73-80) and Caph (vv. 81-88), tune "St Ethelreda" (Thomas Turton, 1780-1864). From the Irish Presbyterian Hymnbook (2004), no. 119, p. 483.

Appendix: Dante Lattes on Psalm 119

Se volessimo spiegare o commentare questo lunghissimo Salmo, dovremmo esaminare e parafrasare ognuno dei suoi doppi 176 versi. In sostanza però si può riassumere il suo contenuto dicendo che il lungo canto è stato probabilmente composto da un maestro allo scopo di destare nei giovani discepoli l'amore di Dio e la passione del Suo insegnamento, di suscitare in loro il fermo proposito di adempiere alle Sue norme e la calda volontà di tenere una vita onesta. Vi si sente l'anima semplice e fervida allo stesso tempo d'un modesto poeta innamorato della Torah e desideroso di infondere nei giovani cuori degli scolari questa sua ardente passione. Travers Herford ci ha veduto rispecchiata l'idea che i farisei si facevano della Torah. Benamozegh vi ha scoperto spunti nuovi, ignoti ad altri Salmi, come per esempio lo studio costante della Torah e cenni e consuetudini di ascetismo come la preghiera di mezzanotte e quindi una stretta analogia tra la predicazione profetica e l'insegnamento della tradizione farisaica.

Abbiamo già detto sopra che questo Salmo di 176 versi è il più lungo di tutti ed è diviso in 22 stanze in ordine alfabetico di otto versi ciascuna. Così lungo canto, costretto in rotaie alfabetiche e ispirato a motivi limitatissimi, doveva costringere l'autore ad una evidente monotonia ed uniformità di accenti, ad un artificioso e difettoso nesso fra i versi e a continue ripetizioni, come se un pittore, disponendo sulla sua tavolozza di dieci colori, ne adoperasse ora l'uno ora l'altro per comporre il suo quadro. Però quasi ogni verso o una breve sequela di versi presentano un pensiero nobile, una sete di virtù, una passione di Dio calorosissima. Chayes afferma, a nome di un innominato sapiente, che gli otto termini con cui è designata la Torah, quanti egli ne conta (non comprendendovi *dérech* ed *emunàh*) sono tolti dal Salmo XIX vv. 8-11; la parentela fra questo e il nostro Salmo è infatti evidente perché in sostanza si tratta in tutti e due dell'elogio della Torah.

Il Gordon chiama il Salmo CXIX un grande inno «in onore della Torah» nello spirito del profetismo; l'esercizio dei propri doveri, lo studio, la meditazione, il quotidiano approfondimento della Scrittura sono infatti i temi prevalenti dell'inno.

Volere determinare l'autore e l'epoca della composizione sarebbe impresa ardua e non necessaria. Nella composizione del Salmo ricorrono con una costanza forse artificiosa tutti i termini con cui si usò rappresentare l'insegnamento e la varia dottrina e materia della parola biblica. Sono dieci vocaboli che formano il tessuto e i fili del Salmo o i suoi colori: *dérech* (via, strada, condotta), *Toràh* (insegnamento, dottrina), *'eduth* (testimonianza), *piqqùd* (ordine), *choq* (statuto), *mizvàh* (comandamento), *mishpath* (legge), *davàr* (parola), *imràh* (detto, proposizione, premessa), *emunàh* (fedeltà), tutti termini che indicano ora l'uno ora l'altro aspetto della Torah e investono tutta la vita morale dell'uomo ebreo.

RaDaQ comincia il suo commento al Salmo collo spiegare le varie voci con cui sono indicate le parti o elencati gli elementi della Torah, che, anche secondo lui, ammontano a dieci. Torah, indicherebbe la specie, il carattere o la qualità del precetto e il modo della sua esecuzione, così si direbbe *Toràth ha-ashàm*, la legge relativa al sacrificio di pentimento (Levitico, VII, 1); *dérech* è la condotta virtuosa, il retto comportamento, o, come egli lo chiama, il *tiqqùn ha-mizvòth* (o *ha-middoth*?) che è la meta a cui mirano i comandamenti della legge cioè la imitatio dei; *chuqqim* sarebbero i precetti di cui ci è ignota la ragione, sia che essa trascenda l'umano intelletto o non sia stata dichiarata esplicitamente; *mizvòth* sono i doveri che si portano questo nome come il mancato adempimento dei voti; *mishpath* indicherebbe le norme che governano i rapporti sociali e i contatti umani; *'eduth* designerebbe le cerimonie commemorative o i riti che servono a ricordare

qualche dovere pubblico o privato come il sabato, lo zizzith, i tefillin e simili; piqqudim sarebbero quei precetti razionali che rappresentano una specie di deposito (piqqadòn) o una cosa chiusa e serbata nel cuore umano (definizione poco chiara e di cui il celebre esegeta medioevale non porta alcun esempio esplicativo); zédeq vorrebbe essere la giustificazione dei precetti, cioè la dimostrazione della loro retta e giusta natura; dibbùr e amirah sarebbe un termine generale per indicare i comandamenti o le promesse fatte da Dio, come davàr sarebbe l'attributo della divina volontà nella creazione del mondo, emunàh, la parola serbata, la promessa data e mantenuta all'atto della creazione.

Il Castellino pure nel suo commento (pag. 746) dà la spiegazione di quei termini stessi cominciando da davàr (logos), voce secondo lui generica per le comunicazioni di Dio; imràh (lòghion), pronunciamento di Dio in forma più solenne; choq e chuqqim (dikaiòmata), brevi statuti o decreti; mishpath (krímata), sentenza o prescrizione giudiziaria e quindi giudizio; Torah (nòmos), il corpo della legge ed anche una sua prescrizione singola, mizvah (entolè), comando, precetto del Pentateuco e dei profeti; edàh, edòth (marturìa), testimonianze o attestazioni asseverative di Dio, piqqudim (dikaiòmata), comandi, ordini. Volendo darne la versione latina quelle voci si tradurrebbero così: Torah = lex, eduth = testimonia, piqqudim = mandata, chuqqim = leges, mizvoth = praecepta, mishpatim = iudicia, davàr o imràh = parola; tutti però avrebbero, secondo il commentatore francese più volte citato, il senso generale di legge divina senza alcuna sfumatura fra quelle distinzioni o mature fra precetti religiosi, politici, naturali o giuridici che esegeti ebrei e cristiani vi hanno intraveduto.

Source: Dante Lattes, Il Libro dei Salmi (Rome: Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane, 1963), 466-468.