Commentary on Psalm 67

The central theme of Psalm 67 is that God's inclusive blessing and grace extend to all nations. God uses Israel as a means of grace to bless the nations. The United States is the most powerful and wealthy nation on earth. Can God use this nation to bless others? I am not talking on the political level, but on a personal and organizational level. Let me share my experience in the United States, especially with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). I am a Palestinian Christian, born and raised in Bethlehem. I immigrated to the United States in 2008 to pursue my Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible. Later, I completed a Master of Divinity in preparation to become an ELCA pastor because it was impossible to do that in Palestine. I came from a low-income family that was unable to support my education. The political unrest between Palestine and Israel made it difficult to find opportunities to answer God’s call and to live with dignity.

The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) served as an agent of God’s blessing to many international students from different nations. Students from Latin America, Korea, Middle East, India, Africa, and Europe were blessed by LSTC on spiritual, intellectual, and material levels. The LSTC community blessed me before I arrived in the USA by providing me all I needed to immigrate, including assistance with my application for a student visa, and providing a scholarship and an airline ticket. The ELCA granted me a scholarship to study for my Master of Divinity degree at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS) in Berkeley, California. I enjoyed God’s abundant blessings at PLTS. Without the help of the ELCA, LSTC, and PLTS I would not have been able to become the person I am today. Currently, I am called to serve a congregation as Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Wausau, Wisconsin.

The author of Psalm 67 begins with a summary of the Aaronic benediction in Numbers 6:24-26, “Yahweh bless you and keep you; Yahweh’s face shine on you, and be gracious to you; Yahweh’s face turn towards you, and give you peace” (my translation). In our liturgy, we end the service with this blessing, or benediction. The psalmist begins with the Aaronic blessing to emphasize God’s blessings to all nations, not to a particular group. The reason for God’s blessing of Israel is that all people know God’s saving power through Israel. God chose the descendants of Abraham and Sarah to bless the nations through them (Genesis 12:1-3). Israel’s mission is to bless others.
Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas interprets Psalm 67 through the lens of church mission theology. As he states:

*The psalmist [in Psalm 67] has used material available to him like the Aaronic Blessing but has so remodeled it as to make it missionary minded. Retaining all the theological import that the blessing carries, he has instilled in it the Abrahamic hope and has portrayed Israel as a blessing to the nations...Receiving God's blessing, it [Israel] becomes a blessing to the peoples because it teaches them by life and worship how to be participants in the blessing.* ¹

God’s blessing helps all nations to know God’s saving power that freed and liberated the Israelites from slavery and oppression in Egypt. God also executes justice to all nations and guides them all (v.4), which means God is present in their lives. The outcome of this blessing is that all people will praise God (vv. 3, 5), and experience joy (v. 4). The psalmist offers a universal invitation to all nations to celebrate God’s work among the Israelites. The image of inclusiveness is emphasized in the second book of Isaiah, as Isaiah 56:7 reflects on God’s universal invitation for all the nations to pray in God’s house.

Near the end of Psalm 67, the reason for the blessing is revealed as the abundant harvest (v. 6). The earth produces food for the benefit of all nations. People who receive abundantly share the blessing with the disadvantaged people. In this way, developing nations taste God’s grace. Sharing our food and resources with the nations is part of the church’s mission to sustain and nurture life. In Matthew 15:21-28, Jesus sets an example for how to share God’s blessings with the nations. Jesus heals the daughter of a Canaanite woman who is, according to the Jewish law, considered as Gentile, unclean, and an outsider.

Psalm 67 reflects my experience as an immigrant to the United States. The ELCA became the agent of blessing to me, and I am praising God with joy for these blessings. Now, I am an agent of God’s blessings, too. I am sharing God’s blessings with the people around me here and with my family back home in Palestine.

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