

Contextual Reading of ‘Every Creeping Thing’ in Genesis 9:3 as basis for Dietary Choices among Nigerian Christians

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Abstract

Dietary choices and habits are motivated by a variety of factors. From a religious viewpoint, Christians in Nigeria make reference to some biblical texts to affirm their motivations for dietary choices. One of such texts is Genesis 9:3. Its problem hinges on the concise and compact nature of the command to add animal flesh to human food. The study undertakes an exegesis of *kol-rémes* in order to unravel its meaning, scope, and practicality. The contextual understanding and application of *kol-rémes* among Christians from the three major tribes in Nigeria was also examined. The study revealed the relative nature of *kol* which lends its final interpretation and applicability to the context, making generalization unacceptable. Against other occurrences of *rémes* (noun or verbal), where it is used alongside ‘sea monsters’, ‘birds’, and other ‘species’ in distinguishing the categories of living creatures, Genesis 9:3 uses only *rémes* in referring to the entire classifications. Contextually, Christians from the three major tribes in Nigerian (Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba) have corresponding meanings of *kol-rémes* akin to its biblical interpretation. But their understanding of *kol-rémes* differs relative to their hermeneutical assumptions. While some believe it should be treated as ‘all-encompassing’ guaranteeing the freedom to eat every living thing that moves, others believe it must be understood within the context of what God has rendered ‘clean’ and good for food. Nevertheless, some of those who believe *kol-rémes* should be treated as ‘all-encompassing’ do not practically eat every moving thing either for health or other reasons, making them unfaithful to their conviction.

Keywords: all, creeping things, every moving thing, dietary choices, food

1. Introduction

The question of dietary choice attracts universal concern especially because it hinges on survival and well being. No wonder God was intentional in making a provision in this wise from the very beginning (Gen. 1:29). At Creation, God gave humanity a plant-based (vegetarian) diet (Gen 1:29). In Genesis 9:2-4 however, animals were added to human diet ‘freely’ apart from blood. This was followed by the Mosaic dietary regulations (especially Lev.11 and Deut. 14). Scholars like Harris (1987), Jordan (1992), and Morrison (2007) argue that the Mosaic laws were abrogated by the death of Christ thereby removing the restrictions between clean and unclean animals. Through the extensive works of some early Church fathers like Tertulian, Origen, Novatian (Moskala 2000), it was supposed (as at AD 400) that as opposed to “Jewish dietary restrictions”, evangelical liberty puts to end the question of the restriction between clean and unclean animals/food, considering it a settled issue. Moskala

(2000) Hamilton (1993) and Loughran (1999) believe the dietary laws are still applicable today. They argue that God did not mention clean and unclean in Genesis 9:3-4 because Noah was already aware of the restrictions (Genesis 7:2). Therefore the argument for eating ‘all moving things’, is not tenable.

The aforementioned assumptions set the background for two views among Christians: 1) those who believe everything God created is good for food without restriction, 2) those who believe the dietary regulations as evident in the Pentateuch are still valid. The coded nature of Genesis 9:3a which is being referenced by many scholars as seen above has also impacted the dietary habits of contemporary Christians in Nigeria. To unlock this enigma, the study attempts an exegetical and contextual reading of *כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ kol-rémes* ‘every creeping thing’ in relation to *אֲכָלָה ṓklāh* ‘food’, ‘meat’, as basis for underscoring the basis for and impact of the various assumptions that constitute dietary habits among contemporary Christians in Nigeria.

2. Scope of the Text

From a broader perspective, Genesis 9:3 falls within the Flood narrative of Genesis 6 – 9. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 up to verse 19 deals with the reasons for the Flood, pre-Flood activities, the Flood itself, and the fulfillment of God’s promise to save Noah’s family at the end of the Flood. Chapter 8 (vs. 20 – 22) and Chapter 9 deal with post-Flood events. In its strict sense, Genesis 9:3 is part of Genesis 9:1 - 29. The chapter has two major divisions thus: verses 1 – 17 deal with the covenant relations which God made with Noah after the Flood, while verses 18 – 29 deal with the post flood activities of Noah’s family, especially the fallout of Noah’s drunkenness. This study follows the first division which could be further segmented into two: verses 1-7 ‘pericope on blessing’, and verses 8 – 17 which seems to deal more on covenant issues (Mason 2007). Amidst the chosen pericope (Gen. 9:1-7), the study is narrowed down to Genesis 9:3a with emphasis on *kol-rémes* in relation to food.

3. Historical-literary Context

Douglas Stuart (2001) observes that there seems to exist an overlapping between the historical and literary contexts of certain Hebrew texts, and this seems true of Genesis 9:3. As part of the “New Creation” order which is part of the Flood story (Gen 6-9), Mason (2007) and Alexander (2003) opine that Genesis 9:3 is best discussed within the context of eternal Covenant. Mason hints that the argument for the unconditionality of the Noachic eternal covenant is to a great extent due to appeals to a form-critical analysis of Genesis 9. He observes that it is widely accepted that the content of the Noachic *בְּרִית עוֹלָם bərit ṓlām* ‘eternal covenant’ resides solely within verses 8 – 17 of Genesis 9. The literary structure and content of Genesis 9:1 – 17 displays two distinct periscopes: a blessing section (Gen.9: 1-7) and a covenant section (Gen.9: 8-17) (Mason 2007). To R.K. Harrison (1980), Genesis 9 is divided into two under the following headings: verses 1-7 – the new decrees; verses 8-17 – the universal covenant. A. Maclaren (1984) skipped verses 1-7 and concentrates on verses 8-17 probably with the intent that the covenant relations begins with verse 8.

The so-called blessing periscope, hinges on the view that Genesis 9:1 reintroduces the creation mandate as a blessing like Genesis 1:28. This seems to be marked out by a verbal and conceptual *inclusion*. Genesis 9 verses 1 and 7 both share the imperative פָּרֹוּ וַרְבּוּ *pārû ûrəbû* ‘be fruitful and multiply’ along the call to fill the earth and multiply in it, reinstating the original commands of Genesis 1:26-30. The phrase כִּבְשׁוּהָ וַרְבּוּ *kibšūhā ûrəbû* ‘subdue and rule’ presented in Genesis 1:28 is notably absent from the Genesis 9:1 mandate. Yet, Mason notes that “this is precisely the subject of vv. 2-6 which details the authority structure of relationships on the earth” (Mason 2007). In other words, the call to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 9: 1 and 7) brackets new stipulations involving humanity’s relationship to animals (Gen.9: 2-4), the reverence for lifeblood (Gen.9: 5-6a), as well as a reminder that humankind is made in God’s image (Gen. 9: 6b). Another major covenant concept embedded in Genesis 9:1-7 is the relationship of humanity to lifeblood. The permission to eat flesh may have been an innovation of Genesis 1:29, 30 and the command seem implicit before but in Genesis 9:3 it is now explicit (Kinder 1967). Such implicit inference seems not to harmonize with the overall context of Genesis 1:29, 30 and Genesis 9:3 especially in relation to the “New Covenant” ideology. However, the law on blood suggests a fresh development which is theologically far-reaching. It appears the theme of the sanctity of blood is now taken further. Such emphasis (Gen. 9:5) seems to suggest that beasts as well as men had been implicated in the antediluvian bloodshed (Candish 1979).

4. Analysis of *kol-rémes*

Although located in the context of an eternal covenant, the generalized nature of the command to eat animal flesh and fish in Genesis 9:3 which rest on first, its conciseness – without specifications, and the use of *kol-rémes* ‘every moving thing’ in referring to food what is to be eaten seems to lend the text to a diversity of interpretations. It therefore sets the background for analyzing the key words of Genesis 9:3 as a benchmark for determining its impact on contemporary dietary habits today.

4.1 כֹּל *kol* ‘All’

The word translated ‘all’ is the Hebrew כֹּל *kol*. *kol* has a variety of renderings as evident in most English Bibles (ERV, GWN, KJV, NAB, NAS, NET, NIV, NKJ, NLT, and RSV). It could mean ‘everything’, ‘every’, ‘whatsoever’, ‘every one’, ‘enough’, ‘whole’, ‘the whole’, ‘altogether’ (Wilgram 1972). Although a noun *kol* is used extensively as a particle. It is often found with the article and with other prefixes – the meaning of the word itself being unchanged. The pronominal suffixes, with which it is also often combined, do not influence the meaning of the word itself. *kol* occurs about 5,421 times in the Hebrew text. Of these all but about 800 are in a genitive relation with the following word, signifying thus, "the whole of something." It is commonly translated "all" if the following word is plural, and "every" if the word is singular and without the article. It can also have a suffix attached to it: "the whole of it, all of it." This particular formation may then follow a given noun, stressing the aspect of totality (2 Sam 12:9). It can also be used in this way with the noun understood, as does Isaiah when he expressed the corruption of the entire people by saying, "All of it loves a bribe" (Isa 1:23 cf. also Isa 9:17).

The above complexities suffice further study of certain usages of *kol* in order to clarify its meaning in Genesis 9:3. Of the about 5,421 occurrences, the book of Genesis accounts for 324, that is 6% in the Old Testament, while 129 of such occurrences and usages of *kol* appear in Genesis 1 – 11. Given such wide usage, the study makes a random selection of its occurrences in Genesis 1 – 11 thus: 7 occurrences each from Genesis 1 (vss. 1- 29) and 9 (vss. 2 – 10), and one from each of the other chapters in this order 2:1; 3:17; 4:14; 5:5; 6:2; 7:2; 8:9; 10:21; 11:4) – making a total of 23 occurrences. The above choice hinges on the fact that Genesis 1 and 9 contain the ‘original’ and ‘new creation’ accounts in which the dietary laws were emphasized. References to other usages outside this scope are made as relevant to the study.

In Genesis 1:21 *kol* is used twice in the construct and is rendered ‘every ‘and ‘every sort of’, ‘every type of’ or ‘all kinds of’ consecutively in referring to the creation of sea creatures, birds, and other moving things, which were created according to their kinds. Genesis 1:25 contains *kol* in the construct. It is rendered ‘everything’, ‘all’, ‘every type of’, ‘all kinds of’ and ‘each’ each. This is used in describing God’s creation of the beasts and cattle and creeping things according to their kinds. *kol* occurs twice in Genesis 1:26 thus: וְבְכָל-*ûbəkāl*. Prefixed with *vav* conjunction ‘and’, and the inseparable preposition ‘in, by, with’, the first occurrence is rendered ‘all’ while the second is rendered ‘all’ and ‘every’. In its usages here, *kol* describes the totality of the dominion which God intended to give the man He was about to create, that is over all the earth and every creeping thing. In Genesis 1:28, וְבְכָל-*ûbəkāl* is used in describing the extent of the dominion God promised to man over all creation. Here it is rendered ‘all’, ‘every’ in relation to the totality of everything that God created.

kol occurs three times in Genesis 1:29. Rendered ‘every’, ‘all’, ‘every’ ‘entire’, and ‘whole’; the three were in the construct and are used to describe green plants, the earth, and the tree respectively. From the context the first and third occurrences which refer to ‘every’ in relation to ‘green plants’ and ‘tree’ bearing fruit could be rendered ‘everything’ in its totality or ‘all’ encompassing. However, a closer look at the divine prescription in Genesis 2:16 affirms that *kol* in this verse must be understood within the context of ‘every green plant’ and ‘every tree’ as specified. Its use in relation to the earth in the second occurrence suggests the earth in its totality. This is further affirmed by the use of other renderings such as ‘entire’ (NET), ‘whole’ (NIV), and ‘throughout’ (NLT).

In Chapter 2:1, וְכָל-*wəkāl* is used in the construct with the *vav* conjunction ‘and’ in reference to the completion of God’s creative works in the beginning. It is rendered ‘all’ and ‘everything’. The context suggests the perfect completion of God’s creative work, especially since this declaration was followed by rest from His labor. In Genesis 3:17 *kol* appears in its absolute state although used in the construct. It is translated ‘all’, and ‘every’ in describing the extent of God’s punishment for Adam in the Garden of Eden. The term “‘all’ or ‘every’ day of your life” is understood from a comprehensive viewpoint especially because such pronouncement is applicable to us today. Genesis 4:14 contains *kol* in the construct and is rendered ‘anyone’, ‘whoever’, and ‘whosoever’ in relation to Cain’s lament over God’s punishment on him and his vulnerability before those he might meet. Although such usage might suggest ‘all’ in its totality in that anyone who sees Cain will obtain vengeance in God’s behalf, it seems plausible that not

everyone who sees him might be willing to kill him. Hence, such rendering of *kol* has the possibility of exceptions. In Genesis 5:5 *kol* is used in the construct. It is rendered ‘all’, ‘total’, ‘whole’, ‘entire’, and ‘altogether’. The various renderings describe the number of years Adam lived before he died. It appears GWN, NAB, NET, and NIV ignored the use of ‘all’ in order not to confuse the intended meaning of *kol*, that is, ‘all’ in its totality in this context.

Genesis 6:2 contains מִכֹּל *mikkōl* in its absolute prefixed with inseparable preposition ‘from, out of’. It is rendered ‘any’, ‘all’, ‘as many’, ‘whomever’, ‘such of’ in relation to the actions of the sons of God toward the daughters of men. Although Genesis 6:5 states that the imaginations of the hearts of the antediluvians were ‘evil continually’, it will amount to overgeneralization, to think that *kol* is used to refer to ‘all’ the daughters of men in its entirety. This is true because not all of them in its entirety were involved in this heinous act; but rather ‘all’ whom the sons of men could lay their hands on. Genesis 7:2 also contains מִכֹּל *mikkōl* in the absolute although translated in its construct form and is prefixed with inseparable preposition ‘from, out of’. It is rendered ‘every’, ‘every kind’, ‘each’, and ‘all’ in describing the kind of animals Noah was to take into the ark prior to the Flood. Again, one might argue that ‘all’ or ‘every’ here refers to ‘all’ the animals in totality; but suffice it to say that as evident in the GWN, NET, and NIV, *kol* here refers to ‘all’ or ‘every’ animal at Noah’s disposal. This is important because Noah could only lay hand on land animals and even if he dares take of the aquatic life, of course, they will not survive. So, Noah rather than bring ‘every’ animal into the ark as prescribed, took ‘all’ as was within his reach. In Genesis 8:1 *kol* occurs twice in the construct. It is translated ‘all’, and ‘every’. In this context, ‘all’ or ‘every’ as the case may be refers to the totality of all the animals that were with Noah in the ark at the end of the Flood.

Genesis 9:2 has four occurrences of *kol* thus: כָּל־ *kol* (x2), בְּכֹל־ *bəkol*, and וּבְכֹל־ *ūbəkōl* respectively. The first two occurrences appear in the construct and are rendered ‘every’ or ‘all’. The third occurrence appears in the absolute with the inseparable preposition ‘in, by, with’. It is rendered ‘all’, ‘everything’ or ‘every’. The last occurrence appears in construct and is prefixed with a *vav* conjunction ‘and’ and an inseparable preposition ‘in, by, with’ and is rendered ‘all’. The various usages and renderings of *kol* in this context reflect various efforts in capturing the extent of the dominion humanity was to enjoy over the animal kingdom and the entirety of living things after the Flood. This is a repeat of the divine injunction in Genesis 1:27 – 28 which expectedly assumes a perfect control without exception.

kol occurred twice in Genesis 9:3 in the construct and absolute respectively. The first occurrence is rendered ‘every’, ‘everything’, and ‘any’ and ‘them’ in NLT presupposing reference to antecedence. The second occurrence is rendered ‘all’ or ‘everything’ while the idea is subsumed in the NLT. The first occurrence describes the extent of God’s permission for the inclusion of animal and fleshy food in human diet. Here, ‘every’ or ‘everything’ could be rendered comprehensively to include creeping things of all kinds and species. However, a closer look at the text giving keen attention to Genesis 7:2 where ‘all’ or ‘every’ referred not necessarily to the entire ‘moving things’ but rather what was within Noah’s reach, coupled with the pre-Flood designation of and separation between clean and unclean animals presupposes the idea of ‘everything’ not in its totality, but as specified. The second occurrence is a repeat of or reference

to Genesis 1:29 where humanity was permitted to eat of ‘every’ green leaves and tree bearing fruits. As earlier observed, the idea of ‘every’ or ‘everything’ being rendered in its totality in Genesis 1:29 is cut short by the divine injunction in Genesis 2:16. Hence, ‘every’ or ‘everything’ in Genesis 9:3b must be understood from the point of ‘all’ as earlier specified.

In Genesis 9:5 *kol* appears in the construct and is rendered ‘every’, ‘each’, ‘any’ and ‘anyone’. Here, the prohibition against taking human life is extended to not only humans but also animals. The usage of ‘every’ seems universal and comprehensive covering all kinds of animals and humanity. However, a closer look suggests that it applies mostly to wild, untamed, and predatory animals, mature humans, and other creatures with the capacity of taking human life. The usage also seems to be silent on future occasions when God’s people will have divine permission to destroy the lives of other nations. This therefore limits its comprehensive usage. Genesis 10:21 has *kol* in the construct and is rendered ‘all’ in describing the descendants of Shem which included the entire children of Eber, son of Arphaxad, and grandson of Shem. In Genesis 11:4 *kol* also appears also in the construct. Its translations include ‘whole’, ‘all over’, ‘entire’, and ‘all’. The above renderings describe the intention of the descendants of Noah after the Flood to refute God’s command for them to multiply and fill the earth. *kol* is therefore used in its entirety. The idea of ‘whole’, ‘all over’ and ‘entire’ here is further strengthened by the use of עַל־ *al-* “‘over’ ‘upon’ ‘on’ ‘above’” with *kol*.

The above survey reveals that a proper usage of *kol* which could be diversely rendered ‘all’, ‘every’, ‘everything’, ‘each’, ‘any or anyone’, ‘whole’ and ‘entire’ carries a diversity of meanings in which only the context of a given occurrence can be used to ascertain its intended meaning not only in a given verse, but also to differentiate between two or more occurrences in a verse. This is true of Genesis 9:3 where *kol* is understood not as ‘all encompassing’, but rather ‘all’ as specified. Moskala (2000) insists that *kol* ‘everything’ or ‘all’ in Genesis 9:3 does not necessarily depict everything in the sense of completeness or comprehensiveness. This is because *kol* is a very relative word with its intent depending on context - whether all comprehensively, or a majority, or a certain group, among others. Since the knowledge of clean and unclean food was already known to Noah (Gen 7:2-3) there was no need for repetition. And since *kol* could mean “all of its kind”, “all sorts of” (Gen 24: 10, ESV) and “all kinds of” (NIV), the context of Genesis 9:3 plausibly fits into this relative usage as opposed to completeness or comprehensiveness. It implies that the “moving things” will follow such specifications; that is, every specified, sort of, or kind of moving thing that lives. Generalization of *kol* in this text is therefore untenable.

4.2 רֶמֶשׂ *remes* {*reh'-mes*} ‘Creeping thing’

The Hebrew word translated ‘creeping things’ is רֶמֶשׂ *remes* {*reh'-mes*}. It includes ‘moving things and creeping organism’. This includes ‘gliding things’ (of sea animals), ‘moving things’ (of all animals) (BibleWorks 2007). It could also include שָׂרָץ *śeres* ‘swarming things’ that is, tiny animals occurring in large numbers, in water, as fish and worms which slide, swim or creep (Gen 1:20), in air, and on ground. *remes* occurs 34 times in the Old Testament in 5 different

forms (Ibid). Of the 34 occurrences, Genesis accounts for 20 which are found in Genesis 1 – 9 thus: 7 in chapter 1; 2 in chapter 6; 5 in chapter 7; 4 in chapter 8, and 2 in chapter 9. The study takes a look at 6 of these occurrences selecting two from Chapter 1 and one from each of the other chapters.

In Genesis 1:21 *remes* appears in the verbal form הַרְמוֹשֶׁת *hārōmésēṭ*, *qal* participle feminine singular absolute with the definite article. It is rendered ‘moveth’ (KJV) ‘moves’, ‘moving’, and ‘swim or swimming’ in describing the variety of land and sea creatures which God created in the beginning. However, the use of הַתַּיִנִּים *hattannîm* ‘serpent’, ‘dragon’ ‘sea monsters’ and עוֹפֵי עוֹר *ôp’* birds’ ‘flying creatures’ alongside הַרְמוֹשֶׁת הַחַיָּה כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה *kol-népeš haḥayyā^h hārōmésēṭ* ‘every living thing that moves’ (NKJ) presupposes the inclusion of all other living creatures not mentioned both on land and on the sea. In Genesis 1:30 it is רֹמֵשׁ *rômēs*, *qal* participle masculine singular absolute and is rendered ‘creeps or creepeth’, ‘move’, ‘crawl’ and ‘scurry’ (NLT) in describing the categories of creatures that God assigned ‘every’ green herb for food. Here as in Genesis 1:21, *rômēs* describes ‘everything that creeps on earth’ apart from ‘every beast of the earth and every bird of the air’ (NKJ) which suggests emphasis on certain species of living things outside the latter categories. Genesis 6:7 contains *remes* in its masculine singular absolute. It is rendered ‘creeping’, ‘move’, ‘crawling’, and ‘scurry’ in describing the things that will be affected by the impending Flood thus: man, beast, creeping things, and birds of the air (NKJ). Again, it is used to cover other creatures apart from man, beasts and the birds.

In Genesis 7:21 *remes* appearing in a verbal form (*qal*) הַרְמוֹשׁ *hārōmēs* but rather used as participle masculine singular absolute, represents ‘swarm’, ‘teem of vast numbers of creatures in water, on ground, in woods’(GWN, NAB, NAS, NET, NIV, and RSV), ‘creep’ (KJV and NKJ), and ‘scurry’ (NLT) in random movement. This also follows the previous tradition where birds, cattle, beast, and humans were listed apart from ‘every creeping thing that creeps’ in describing the extent of the devastation resulting from the Flood. Genesis 8:17 has a combination of *remes* in its noun absolute and verbal form thus: וּבְכָל־הַרְמוֹשׁ הַרְמוֹשׁ *ûbəkōl-hārēmes hārōmēs*. Prefixed with vav conjunction ‘and’, inseparable preposition ‘in, by, with’ and singular noun construct *kol* ‘all of’ or ‘every’, the masculine singular absolute הַרְמוֹשׁ *hārēmes* and *qal* participle הַרְמוֹשׁ *hārōmēs* combine to emphasize the kind or species of living creatures being described and their nature. *hārōmēs* is therefore rendered ‘creeping’, ‘creeps’ ‘crawls’, ‘move’, and ‘scurry’ in describing the categories of living things (birds, cattle, and ‘every creeping thing’) God commanded Noah to bring out of the ark in order to multiply and fill the earth.

Genesis 9:3 has *remes* in its masculine singular absolute and is rendered ‘moving’ or ‘moves’. Against previous occurrences either in noun (absolute or construct) or verbal form, where it is used alongside ‘sea monsters’, ‘birds’ ‘flying creatures’, ‘cattle’ and ‘man’ in distinguishing the categories of living creatures, Genesis 9:3 uses only *remes* in referring to the entire classifications. This poses the question: What categories of animals do such rendering cover? The answer is found in translators use of ‘every moving thing’ or ‘every living thing that moves’ rather than ‘every creeping thing’ because as evident in the study, the latter is limiting referring to certain species of lower animals, while the former encompasses the entire animal kingdom both on land and on the sea, having a sense of movement. Corroborating the above submission

Moskala (2000) argues that to translate *remes* here as “creeping” or “crawling thing” does not make sense, instead “moving thing” does. To him, such a translation is a *hapax legomenon*, derived in this context through the alleged Akkadian cognate word *namasu* “to move”. He argues that the Hebrew verb רָמַסׁ *rāmas* describes first of all the movement, or locomotion. If this term means “moving thing(s)”, it suggests the meaning is not specific, but rather general. Therefore the context alone provides the meaning whether it includes every moving thing in its completeness or as specified.

Put together therefore, *kol-rémes* in Genesis 9:3 refers to a specific group of animals and not the totality of the animals God has made. In Martin Luther’s opinion, the meaning of the expression *kol-rémes* “every moving thing” in Genesis 9:3 does not mean all animals inclusive, but only “clean animals” (Luther 1972). Such understanding will enhance the dietary choices of many Nigerian Christians caught up in the web of diverse hermeneutics intrinsic in Genesis 9:3.

5. Conceptual Understanding of *kol-rémes* among Nigerian Christians

Following the exegetical study of the key word in Genesis 9:3 this segment interacts with the conceptual understanding of Nigerian Christians on *kol-rémes* in relation to dietary choices. This is aimed at fulfilling the task of contextualization. The Nigerian equivalent of *kol-rémes* will be considered in the three major languages spoken in three regions thus: 1.) Igbo – the language of the people from Eastern Nigeria, 2.) Hausa – the dominant language of the people of Northern Nigeria, and 3.) Yoruba – the language of the people of Western Nigeria.

To the Igbo people *kol* means *the nile* or *the obula* with varying degree of translation. First, *the nile* is rendered ‘everything’, ‘all’, ‘every’, ‘entire’, and ‘all-encompassing’. It could also mean ‘all of its kind’ or as specified. On the other hand, *the obula* ‘all’, ‘everything’, ‘whatever’, ‘whatsoever’, ‘entire’, and ‘all-encompassing’ ‘whole’ among others. This carries a more sense of completeness than *the nile* (Dickson 2009). Among the Hausa people *kol* is rendered *duka* ‘all’, ‘all of its kind’; *duka duka* ‘all encompassing’; *komai* ‘all’, ‘all of its kind’; *komai da komai* ‘everything’, ‘all encompassing’; *kowane abu* ‘everything’ including items and materials, and *gaba daya* ‘all inclusive’- without exemption (Audu 2009). To the Yoruba *kol* is translated *pata pata* ‘all’, ‘all encompassing’, ‘complete’, ‘perfect’; *gbogbo* or *gbogboe* ‘all’, ‘the whole thing’ which could also designate ‘all as specified’; *gbogboe patapata* ‘all encompassing’ carrying the idea of not only ‘totality’, but ‘completeness’ although there might be some exceptions in certain contexts (Sosanya 2009); and *laikukan* or *tikoseku* (Adesanya 2009) ‘totality’ without exemption.

The Hebrew *remes* is perceived in the aforementioned languages as follows: To the Igbo people, it is *anu ohia* ‘wild animal’ such as leopard, antelope; *anu ulo* which includes ‘domestic animals’ like ‘chicken’ ‘goat’, and ‘cow’; *arira* or *the nari ari* ‘reptiles’, ‘insects’, and ‘termites’; *anu ufe* ‘birds of the air’; and *azu* ‘fish of all kinds’ (Dickson 2009). In Hausa it is *naminin jeji* ‘wild animals’ like antelope, monkeys, hyena, deer, and so on (Audu 2009); *dabbobin gida* ‘domestic animals’ such as dog, chicken, turkey, and cat; *dabbobi masu rarrafe da kwari* ‘reptiles’ and ‘insects’ which includes rat, snake, grasshopper, among others; *tsuntsaye* ‘birds of the air’ such as crow, pigeon, owl, fowl and so on; and *kifaye* ‘fish of all kinds’ (Adams, Chiroma & Ibrahim 2011). To the Yoruba *remes* is translated *eranko* ‘wild animals’ such as leopard and antelope;

okun osin ‘domestic animals’ like goat, cow, and so on; *kokoro* ‘reptiles and insects’ which includes lizard, and termite; *eye* ‘birds of all kinds’, and *eja* ‘fish of all kinds’ (Adesanya 2009).

The above interpretations of *kol* and *remes* are followed by their contextual applicability relative to the command to receive it as food. Although Genesis 9:3 appears simple and direct in its instruction concerning what is added to human diet after the flood, Nigerian Christians hold a diversity of assumptions when *kol-rémesé* is applied to food. Among the Hausa people there is a diversity of motivations for what is to be eaten. Adams (2011) submits that in Pankshin, Plateau State tradition requires that the groom present at least dog and pig as marriage requirements. This is also the practice in Kagoro, Kaduna State, although in some parts certain Christian understandings have led to the substitution of dog and pig with two legs of cow. Ibrahim and Chiroma (2011) observe a strong division among Christians in relation to what to eat. Some who eat dogs and pigs, snake and others, cite Bible texts such as 1Timothy 4:4 – 5, among others as basis for eating everything for food. Those who do not eat cite the Bible (Genesis 7:2, Lev. 11, Deut. 14) as basis for not eating unclean food. Ishaya Chullu (2011) argues that *kol-rémesé* must be understood within the context of everything that God has permitted for food. He affirms that although *kol*, Hausa *duka duka* means ‘all encompassing’ which carries the idea of ‘perfect or totality’, that must be understood within the context of what God had already designated as ‘clean’ (Gen. 7:2). To him, it will be mistaken to assume that *duka duka* or its synonyms *komai da komai*, *Kowane abu*, or *Gaba daya* will mean all without exception. This he argues is evident when either of these supposed absolute words combines with *dabbobi masu rarrafe da kwari* ‘reptiles and insects’ which will include but not limited to rats, snakes, grasshoppers, millipedes, centipedes, earthworms, and glowworms. The fact that it is difficult for an individual to eat all things in its totality remains undisputable. He submits that apart from religious or doctrinal reasons, culture, and health risk, personal choices, the appearance of some creatures like cockroach, constitute limitations for not eating everything.

In western Nigeria, Awolaja, Olajesu, and Ogunlalu (2009) posit that all that God created is good for food. Hence, *kol* Yoruba *gbogboe*, or *patapata*, will mean all encompassing, that is in its totality. Olajesu (2009) refers to NT texts such as Acts 10: 9-16, 1Timothy 4:4, 5 to affirm that everything God has made is good for food. To her, whatever is sold in the market is to be received by Christians for food. Apparently, this suggests that lizard, snake, insects of all kinds including mosquito and flies are good for food. To her, the only obligation is to bless it with thanks to God (1Tim. 4:4, 5). Although Ogunlalu, Olajesu and Awolaja argue that everything God has made is good for food, Ogunlalu (2009) submits that there has to be exceptions because no one will try to eat what is harmful to his or her body. On the contrary, Elder Adesanya, Oduroye, and Somefun (2009) posit that ‘everything’ in Genesis 9:3 cannot be taken as food. They unanimously argued that God has given us provisions on what to eat. To them, not every animal and fish is ‘clean’, Yoruba *moo*, Igbo *ocha* and Hausa *tsabta*. Consequently, *kol-rémesé* will not mean the totality of all animals without exception, but rather all animals that are specified as clean. Part of the reasons given by the latter is that some of these animals like cockroach, toad and pig could be dangerous to one’s health.

Among the Igbo of eastern Nigeria, the same arguments apply. Although *ihe obula* carries the idea of ‘totality or completeness,’ it does not exclude the possibility of exceptions. However

opinions remain divided. For instance, Iheanacho (2009) argues that *the nile* ‘everything’ is good for food that she can even eat vulture. But when confronted with the choice of cockroach as food she resigned her decision. Nwobi (2009) submits that although in certain contexts *the nile* or *the obula* could be all-encompassing, they are not without exceptions. He agrees that certain animals like pigs are disease carriers which could be dangerous to human health.

6. Conclusion

The exegesis of the phrase כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ *kol-rémes* in Genesis 9:3 indicates that first, a proper usage of *kol* which could be diversely rendered ‘all’, ‘every’, ‘everything’, ‘each’, ‘whole’ and ‘entire’ carries a diversity of meanings in which only the context of a given occurrence can be used to ascertain its intended meaning not only in a given verse, but also to differentiate between two or more occurrences in a verse. Against other occurrences of *rémes* (noun or verbal), where it is used alongside ‘sea monsters’, ‘birds’, and other ‘species’ as ‘creeping things’ in distinguishing the categories of living creatures, Genesis 9:3 uses only *rémes* in referring to the entire classifications. Therefore rather than render *remes* ‘every creeping thing’ which limits its meaning/scope to certain species of lower animals, ‘every moving thing’ or ‘every living thing that moves’ sounds most appropriate. The latter encompasses the entire animal kingdom both on land and on the sea having a sense of movement. Given God’s instruction to Noah in Genesis 7:2, *kol-rémes* in Genesis 9:3 is best understood as ‘every moving thing’ as specified, and not in its totality. In other words, *kol-rémes* must be understood not in the context of all that God created which the Hebrew text rendered very good (Gen. 1:31); the freedom to eat all moving things after the Flood without restrictions, or in the context of freedom as obtained by Jesus Christ through His death on the Cross, but rather within the context of that which God has provided for food as evident in the instruction to Noah in Genesis 7:2.

A Contextual reading of the text shows that Christians from the three major tribes of Nigeria have an understanding of *kol-rémes* akin to its biblical interpretation. However, they hold divers opinions regarding its meaning and applicability in relation to food which affect their dietary choices. While some understand *kol* as ‘all encompassing’, others insist it is ‘all as specified’. The fact that some of those who argue that *kol* is ‘all encompassing’ do not practically eat everything for one reason or the other makes them ‘unfaithful’ to their religious convictions.

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