

Discerning the Voices in the Psalms: A Discussion of Two Problems in Psalmic Interpretation

Part 2

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In the first installment of this two-part article that appeared in the November 2008 issue of this journal we presented Gerhard von Rad's important redefinition of the proper object of a theology of the Psalms and his rejection of 19th century biographical approach to psalmic interpretation. Moreover, in view of the popularity of the psychologizing biographical approach, we noted that von Rad's position raises two important problems in psalmic interpretation. The first concerns the validity of the traditional psychologizing biographical approach to the interpretation of individual psalms. In connection with this problem, we briefly outlined the history of the mirror of the soul approach to the Psalms and presented N. H. Ridderbos's important qualifying statements to the traditional psychologizing biographical exposition of the Psalms. In this second installment we would address the second problem, which concerns the status of the Psalms as the inscripturated Word of God: is the Psalter God's word, a human response, or both?

The Second Problem: God's Word and/or Human Response?

The Nature of the Problem

Although von Rad's claim that Israel's response to Yahweh's mighty deeds constitutes the proper subject-matter for a theology of the Psalms represents an important two-fold correction to the one-sided romantic individualist approach to psalmic interpretation of the 19th century, it also entails another problem. Von Rad's approach to the Psalms as Israel's answer is still representative of the form critical approach which throughout the 20th century understood the Psalms exclusively as words of human

beings addressed to God.¹ This approach raises a crucial hermeneutical problem, which, of course, is neither new nor unique to the Psalter: if in her response to the Lord's mighty deeds Israel speaks *about* God and *to* God, how can Israel's response be called God's word?²

Various students of the Psalter have recognized this hermeneutical problem. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for example, formulated it as follows:

It is at first very surprising that there is a prayer book in the Bible. The Holy Scripture is the Word of God to us. But prayers are the words of men. How do prayers then get into the Bible?" Let us make no mistake about it, the Bible is the Word of God even in the Psalms. Then are these prayers to God also God's own word? That seems rather difficult to understand.³

Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart formulated the problem more succinctly: "*How* do these words spoken *to* God function as a Word *from* God to us?"⁴

In our judgment, however, this manner of formulating the hermeneutical problem is dangerously one-sided. To highlight this danger, attention is called to the following statement by Patrick D. Miller, Jr. He writes:

And here we come upon one of the significant characteristics of the psalms, one that poses issues for their interpretation but also rich possibilities. That is the fact that in the Psalter we have a large collection of words uttered to God and about God, but not by or from God.⁵

Whereas Bonhoeffer and Fee and Stuart wonder how Israel's response can be the Word from God, Miller's statement categorically affirms that "in the Psalter we have a collection of words uttered to God and about God, but not by or from God."⁶ We call particular attention to the concluding words of the quotation from Miller: "but not by or from God," which

¹ Cf. Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 12.

² For this problem see also: Howard Neil Wallace, *Words to God, Word from God: The Psalms in the Prayer and Preaching of the Church* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2005), 3. On pp. 12–14, he explains that this problem is not a uniquely Christian issue. Medieval Jewish commentators also debated this question.

³ Bonhoeffer, *Psalms*, 13. Cf. Bernard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, revised and expanded edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 14.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 169.

⁵ Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 19.

⁶ For a similar statement by Miller see his article, "The Psalter as a Book of Theology," in *The Way of the Lord: Essays in Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). On page 214, he writes: "Inasmuch as the psalms are notable for their character as *human words to God rather than the word of God to human beings* (italics mine), as a collection of prayers and hymns rather than comprehensive theological argument, the characterization of this collection as theology seems problematic."

stands in sharp contrast to Bonhoeffer's affirmation: "The Psalter occupies a unique place in the Holy Scriptures. It is God's Word, and with few exceptions, the prayers of men as well."⁷ In our judgment, the concluding words of the quotation from Miller, "but not by or from God," highlight the inherent danger of formulating the problem in the one-sided manner of Fee and Stuart.⁸

Confessional and Theological Answers

How then does one answer the complex question formulated succinctly by Fee and Stuart? Traditionally the church simply confessed that the Psalms also are part of the revealed Word of God. Athanasius, for example, referred to 2 Timothy 3:16 in his "Letter to Marcellinus":

Son, all the books of Scripture ... are inspired by God and useful for instruction, as the Apostle says; but to those who really study it the Psalter yields a special treasure.⁹

Similarly, Diodore of Tarsus also cited 2 Timothy 3:16 in the introduction to his commentary on the Psalms and added:

One would not be mistaken in applying this whole encomium of Holy Scripture to the book of the holy Psalms. For it teaches righteousness, and it corrects whatever unfortunate mistakes are made, either by accident or by our own choices.¹⁰

Augustine solved this problem by applying the prosopological method of interpretation to the psalms in combination with a Christological hermeneutic. Prosopological exegesis is an ancient method of interpretation that seeks to identify the different speakers in a dialogue. When it is applied to the psalms, this exegetical method "aims to define the various ways in

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 44.

⁸ In his presidential address delivered at the 1988 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Orlando, Florida, Miller has nuanced his original formulation of the problem to include the voice of God. Cf. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "Deuteronomy and Psalms: Evoking a Biblical Conversation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118 (1999): 9–18 (reprinted in: Patrick D. Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*, Journal for the Study of Old Testament Supplement Series 267 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2007], 318–36). On pages 321–22 of the reprint he writes: "The Psalter is *originally human* word that *finally* becomes *divine* word.... In the case of the Psalms, we have a book that is thoroughly human address to the deity, which, at times, incorporates the words of the deity in response to its prayers.... In the Psalter, we have *theology from below*, the very human voice that is often an apparent counter-testimony to the core testimony of Deuteronomy.... It is the voice of members of the community of faith speaking to the Lord so that the initiating word is a *human* word and the issue of response is placed on *God*, the reverse of Deuteronomy."

⁹ Athanasius, "Letter to Marcellinus," 97.

¹⁰ For this quotation, I am indebted to McCann and Howell, *Preaching the Psalms*, 33.

which it is possible to understand Christ as the speaker in the psalms.”¹¹ “For Augustine the voice of the *totus Christus* is the radiating hermeneutical center of the Psalms.”¹²

Bonhoeffer solved the problem in a similar christological manner as Augustine. According to Bonhoeffer, to pray the Psalms, “we must not ask first what they have to do with us, but what they have to do with Jesus Christ.”¹³ He claims that:

Jesus has brought every need, every joy, every gratitude, every hope of men before God. In his mouth the word of man becomes the Word of God, and if we pray his prayer with him, the Word of God becomes once again the word of man.¹⁴

Moreover, he infers:

Thus if the Bible also contains a prayer book, we learn from this that not only that Word which he has to say to us belongs to the Word of God, but also that word which he wants to hear from us, because it is the word of his beloved Son.¹⁵

Evaluation

From a Christian perspective the confessional statements of Athanasius and Diodore of Tarsus certainly represent a Scriptural answer to the question raised above because they are based on 2 Timothy 3:16–17. Moreover, the theological construct of Augustine and Bonhoeffer are hermeneutically sound from a Christian theological perspective. Nevertheless, in our judgment, their theological constructs avoid an address to the internal evidence of the Psalter itself. To be sure, a *prima facie* reading of the Psalter leaves the indelible impression that the primary speakers are human beings. And for this reason von Rad’s description of the Psalter as Israel’s response is so appealing. But is Israel the only speaker in the Psalms, as von Rad’s description of the Psalms seems to imply? Or can one discern other voices in the Psalms as well?

In response to these crucial questions, we would first note that, in agreement with Ridderbos, it is not right to *reduce* the content of the Psalter to faith’s response to God’s revelation.¹⁶ If Israel’s voice were the only voice in

¹¹ Fiedrowicz, “General Introduction,” 51.

¹² Michael Cameron, s.v. *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 293.

¹³ Bonhoeffer, *Psalms*, 14.

¹⁴ Ibid. Cf. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 154–55; Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, 15.

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Psalms*, 15.

¹⁶ N. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1:45.

the Psalter, then, for all practical purposes, the Psalms provide us only with the religious convictions and practices of Israel. In this case a theology of the Psalms is actually a description of Israel's faith¹⁷ or, in the case of von Rad's *Old Testament Theology*, "The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions."

Second, we would argue that a close textual reading of the Book of Psalms reveals that there are also other voices besides the voice of Israel. There are, for example, the voices of Israel's enemies that "whet their tongues like swords" (Ps. 64:3).¹⁸ The first example is the quotation of the enemies' defiant vow to rebel in Psalm 2:3, which allows the reader to listen in on the words of the conclave of scheming kings:

*Let us break their chains
and throw off their fetters.*

Frequently, the psalmist also quotes himself: "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'" (Ps. 32:5).¹⁹ Moreover, there are also quotations of the community.²⁰ Furthermore, and more importantly for the issue under discussion in this installment, there is also, as Th. Booij, one of Ridderbos's students, has demonstrated convincingly,²¹ the voice of the Lord in the Psalms.²²

In the ensuing discussion we will first consider the two ways in which the voice of the Lord is heard in the Psalter. Next we will argue that there is also the "voice" of the canonical editors of the final shape of the Psalter.

¹⁷ This is evident, for example, from the title of Helmer Ringren's book, *The Faith of the Psalmists* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963) and the title of Roland E. Murphy's article, "The Faith of the Psalmist," *Interpretation* 34 (1980): 229–39.

¹⁸ Rolf A. Jacobson, "Many Are Saying": *The Function of Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Psalter*, JSOT Supplement Series 397 (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 27–59.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 60–81.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 131–45.

²¹ Th. Booij, *Godswoorden in de Psalmen: Hun Functie en Achtergronden*, Th.D. Thesis (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1978). Cf. J. H. Eaton, *Vision in Worship: The Relation of Prophecy and Liturgy in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1981), 40–103; Klaus Koenen, *Gottesworte in den Psalmen: Eine Formgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, SBT 30 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1996); Jacobson, "Many Are Saying," 82–130.

²² Booij (*Godswoorden*, 3) notes that the inclusion of divine words in a text is not unique to the book of Psalms. The same phenomenon occurs in Sumerian and Babylonian texts.

Two Important Expressions of the Lord's Voice

Direct Quotations of Divine Speech

Introduction

The first way in which the Lord's voice is heard in the Psalter is through direct quotations of the Word of the Lord. This voice can be heard in Psalms 2:6, 7–9; 12:5[6]; 46:10; 50:7–23; 60:6–8[8–10]; 75:4–5; 81:6–16; 82:2–7; 91:14–16; 95:8–11; 105:11, 15; 110:1, 4; 132:3–5, 11–12, 14–18.

Booij has observed correctly that these quotations of divine speech in the Psalms have been interpreted in four ways: 1) as stylistic devices; 2) as poetical-prophetical expressions; 3) as citations; and 4) as oracles within a cultic situation.²³ Moreover, he has argued convincingly that these citations of the Lord's words in the Psalter are not "Fremdkörper" ("strange bodies," i.e. insertions). On the contrary, they represent an integral part of the psalms in which they occur and are sometimes marked by special metrical patterns, different forms of parallelism, unique positions in the poems in which they occur and sometimes they are even contrasted with the words of the enemy.²⁴ Furthermore, he has conveniently classified these citations in three sub-categories:²⁵ 1) citations of a divine oracle that the Lord spoke on a previous occasion;²⁶ 2) a divine word that constitutes an essential part of the poet's dramatic scene;²⁷ and 3) an independent divine oracle that responds to the immediate situation presented in the psalm.²⁸

Considerations of space preclude a discussion of each instance of divine speech in the Psalter. For the purpose of this essay we will illustrate the important function of a citation of a divine oracle in a psalm with two examples. In each of these psalms the citation of a divine oracle occurs in a unique and pivotal position in the poem as a whole.

Psalm 2

The first example of a citation of divine speech in a psalm is found in Psalm 2, a psalm that, together with Psalm 1, functions significantly as the

²³ Booij, *Godswoorden*, 255.

²⁴ To these important features should be added the fact that some psalms that contain quotations of a divine oracle also occupy strategic positions in the final shape of the Psalter. According to Stek (*NIV Study Bible*, 876), for example, Ps. 81 stands at the center of Pss. 79–83 and at the center of book 3. Similarly, he (p. 890) claims that Ps. 95 was placed at the center of Pss. 90–100.

²⁵ Booij, *Godswoorden*, 31–33.

²⁶ Pss. 2:7–9; 62:12; 81:9–11; 82:6; 89:20–38; 95:10, 11; 105:11, 15; 132:11.

²⁷ Pss. 2:6; 35:3; 46:11; 50:4, 16.; 82:1; 87:6; and 90:3.

²⁸ Pss. 12:6; 60:6–8; 81:6–16; 85:9.; 95:7–11; 110:1, 4; 132:11–12, and 14–18.

second half of a two part introduction to the whole Psalter.²⁹ In fact, this psalm contains two intimately related citations of divine speech. The first citation occurs in verse 6 and reads as follows:

*As for me, I have installed my King
on Zion, my holy hill.*

In view of the preceding verses, translators and commentators agree that these words are a quotation of the words spoken by the Lord against the defiant rulers of the nations. The second citation of divine speech in Psalm 2 is found in verses 7c–9, which we have already quoted in the first installment of our essay³⁰:

^{7c} *“You are my Son;
^d today I have become your Father.
^{8a} Ask of me,*

²⁹ Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 788. Cf. N. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1:72; H. Bardtke, “Erwägungen zu Psalm 1 und Psalm 2,” *Symbolae Biblicae et Mesopotamicae Francisco Mario Theodore de Liagre Böhl* Dedicatae, Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabeije Oosten. Studia Francisci Scholten Mermoriae Dictate, 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 1–18; Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 87; idem, “The Beginning of the Psalter,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann, JSOTSup, 159 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 83–92 (reprinted in Patrick D. Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*, JSOTSup, 267 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], 269–78); P. Auffret, “Complements sur la structure littéraire du Ps 2 et son rapport au Ps 1,” *BN35* (1986): 7–13; Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 120; Gerald T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*, BZAW 151 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 136–144; idem, “Canonization: Hearing the Voice of the Same God through Historically Dissimilar Traditions,” *Interpretation* 36 (1982): 23; idem, “Theology and the Book of Psalms,” *Interpretation* 46 (1991): 149; Eugene Petersen, *Where Your Treasure Is: Psalms That Summon You from Self to Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 10; J. Clinton McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 41; idem, “Psalms,” *NIB*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 664; idem, “Righteousness, Justice, and Peace: A Contemporary Theology of the Psalms,” *HBT* 23 (2001): 112–18; Erich Zenger, “Der Psalter als Wegweiser und Wegbegleiter,” in *Sie wander von Kraft zu Kraft* (Reinhard Lettman Festschrift), eds. Arnold Angenendt and Herbert Vorgrimler (Kevelaer: Butzon, 1993), 29–47; David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*, JSOT Sup 252 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 73; Calvin Seerveld, “Reading and Hearing the Psalms: The Gut of the Bible,” *Pro Rege* 27 (1999): 23; Harold E. Hosch, “Psalms 1 and 2: A Discourse Analysis,” *Notes on Translation* 15 (2001): 4–12; Jesper Høganhaven, “The Opening of the Psalter,” *JSOT* 15 (2001): 169–80; C. Hassel Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 59; Robert Cole, “An Integrated Reading of Psalm 1 and 2,” *JSOT* 98 (2002): 75–88; Gerald Henry Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 89 and 108; Nancy L. deClaissé, *Introduction to the Psalms: A Song from Ancient Israel* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 62; Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy’s Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms*, SBL Academia Biblica, 17 (Atlanta: SBL, 2004), 10, 41–70; John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1–41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 94; Mark D. Futado, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook*, Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 58.

³⁰ Carl J. Bosma, “Discerning the Voices in the Psalms: A Discussion of Two Problems in Psalmic Interpretation,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 43, no. 2 (2008): 198.

^b and I will make the nations your inheritance,
^c [.....] the ends of the earth your possession.
^{9a} You will rule them with an iron scepter;
^b you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”

This citation is introduced by the following resolve from a Davidic king in verse 7ab:

*I will proclaim the decree of the LORD:
 He said to me....*

These introductory words clearly indicate that these words were spoken to the king by the Lord on an earlier occasion.

A syntactical and stylistic analysis of the compositional structure of Psalm 2 shows that the citations of Yahweh's word in Psalm 2 are an integral part of the psalm and that they perform a fundamental role in the poem as a whole. To demonstrate this, it is necessary, in the first place, to note that commentators agree that this remarkable psalm consists of four units of approximately equal length (three verses each)³¹: verses 1–3 describe the futile rebellion of arrogant nations against the Lord and his anointed one and quotes the overconfident nations' foolish resolve to rebel (v. 3); verses 4–6 portray the Lord's ridiculing reaction that reaches its climax in the first citation (v. 6); in verses 7–9 a Davidic king quotes the decree of the Lord; and verses 10–12 issue a stern warning against the rebellious kings that, according to Mays, serves as the *applicatio* of the poem.³² Second, important word repetitions suggest that these four parts have been arranged chiastically: A (vv. 1–3) – B (vv. 4–6) // B' (vv. 7–9) – A' (vv. 10–12).³³ The repetition of the “kings of the earth” in verse 2 and “the kings ... and judges of the earth” in verse 10 show that verses 1–3 and verses 10–12 are thematically related. Moreover, verses 4–6 and verses 7–9 deal with the Lord and his anointed king and are intimately related

³¹ N. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1:76. Cf. A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms, with Introduction and Notes*, The Cambridge Bible for School and Colleges, vol. 16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1895–1903), 8; H. H. Rowley, “The Text and Structure of Psalm II,” *JTS* 42 (1941): 143–54; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 65; Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 108; Terrien, *Psalms*, 80; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1: 96.

³² Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 109.

³³ N. H. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen: Stilistische Verfahren und Aufbau mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Ps. 1–41*, BZAW 117 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), 123. Cf. Briggs and Briggs, *Psalms*, 1:13; Robert L. Alden, “Chiastic Psalms: A Study in the Mechanics of Semitic Poetry in Psalms 1–50,” *JETS* 17 (1974): 14; Lucas Kunz, “Der 2. Psalm in neuer Sicht,” *BZ* 20 (1976): 238–42; Pierre Auffret, *The Literary Structure of Psalm 2*, JSOT Sup 3 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1977), 28–30; idem, “Étude structurelle du Psaume 2,” *EstBib* 59 (2001), 307–23; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 65; Jan P. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible: At the Interface of Hermeneutics and Structural Analysis*, vol. 2, *85 Psalms and Job 4–14*, Studia Semitica Neerlandica (Assen: van Gorcum, 2000), 55; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:196; Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 89.

through the citation of a divine word in each. As a result of this chiasmic structure, the two citations of the Lord's words in verse 6 and verses 7c–9 constitute the focal point of this very dramatic poem. Third, although some assume that the whole poem was spoken by a king,³⁴ on the basis of verse 7 Ridderbos prefers to postulate a change in voices in keeping with the poem's liturgical use.³⁵ Indeed, the combination of multiple voices, quotations and the poem's chiasmic structure imposes a dramatic tension on the poem as a whole.³⁶

The first citation of a divine word occurs in the second section (vv. 4–6), each part of which stands in sharp contrast to the first section (vv. 1–3)³⁷: 1) while the defiant nations plot frantically (v. 1), the Lord laughs derisively (v. 3); 2) while the rebellious nations feverishly position themselves for battle (v. 2), the sovereign Lord threatens them with his powerful thunder (v. 5); while the conspiring nations encourage each other to rebel (v. 3), the Lord states his counter strategy by recalling the fact that he has installed his king on Mt. Zion (v. 6), which, according to Mays, points to 2 Samuel 7.³⁸ As a result of this compositional symmetry, the quotation of the word of the Lord stands in sharp contrast to the resolve of the rebellious nations in verse 3. As Norman K. Gottwald has noted, this contrast is underscored by the fact that the Lord's words are cast in synthetic parallelism, which represent a striking shift from the preceding poetic lines in synonymous parallelism.³⁹ Each word of this striking poetic line serves to underscore the utter foolishness of the nations' planned rebellion.⁴⁰

The second citation of a word from the Lord in Psalm 2 occurs in the third section (vv. 7–9) of the poem. Because it occurs back to back to the first citation, Ridderbos suggests that it is a restatement of the Lord's emphatic affirmation in verse 6.⁴¹ In any case, compositionally the decree of the Lord⁴² in verses 7c–9 serves, first of all, to indicate the absolute foolishness of the nations' plan for rebellion. This is obvious from the ironic

³⁴ Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 5; Mowinckel, *PIW*, 65; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 125; Weiser, *Psalms*, 109; Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 111. See, however, the objections of Delitzsch ("Psalms," 5: 89).

³⁵ N. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1:76. Cf. Stuhlmüller, *Psalms I*, 64; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 65; Broyles, *Psalms*, 45; Terrien, *Psalms*, 77–78.

³⁶ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 9. Cf. Miller, *Interpreting*, 88.

³⁷ N. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1: 122; Terrien, *The Psalms*, 82; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1: 99.

³⁸ Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 113.

³⁹ Norman K. Gottwald, "Poetry, Hebrew," *Interpreter's Bible Dictionary in Four Volumes*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 3:833.

⁴⁰ N. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1:80.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1:81.

⁴² For the phrase *decree of the Lord* see: G. H. Jones, "The Decree of Yahweh," *VT* 15 (1965): 336–44.

contrast between the Lord's strategy in verses 8–9 and the nations' plan in verses 1–3. Second, verses 7c–9 serve as the basis for the pelting ultimatum to the rulers of the nations in verses 10–12.

Psalm 12

The second example of a divine speech in a psalm is found in Psalm 12.5, which we have mentioned in our first installment of this article.⁴³ Verse 5 reads as follows:

^a“Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy,

^b I will now arise,”

^c says the LORD.⁴⁴

^d“I will place in safety the witness in his behalf.”

The citation formula, **יְהוָה יֹאמֵר**, “says the Lord,” clearly indicates that these emphatic⁴⁵ reassuring words are spoken by the Lord.⁴⁶

A close reading of Psalm 12 reveals that the reassuring divine oracle in verse 5 represents an integral part of the psalm.⁴⁷ In fact, this “thundering” tricolon stands in bold relief after the preceding bicolon (v. 4)⁴⁸ and constitutes the very center of this poem,⁴⁹ which, as the alternating voices

⁴³ Bosma, “Discerning the Voices in the Psalms,” 196.

⁴⁴ The words of clauses *bc* also occur in Isa. 33.10.

⁴⁵ According to Briggs and Briggs (*Psalms*, 1: 96), the asyndetic verbs “give emph. utterance to the purpose of Yahweh.”

⁴⁶ For reasons that are not clear, Goldingay (*Psalms*, 1:197) also includes v. 6 with Yahweh's word. See also p. 199.

⁴⁷ Booij, *Godswoorden*, 26–27. Booij notes that “speech” has a central function in Psalm 12. As evidence, he calls attention to the fact that the Piel of the verb **דָּבַר** (“to speak”) occurs three times (twice in v. 3 and once in v. 4), that the verb **אָמַר** (“to say”) is used in v. 5 and v. 6 and the noun **אִמְרוֹת** (“words”) twice in v. 7. Then, there is the repeated reference to flattering lips (vv. 3–4) and boastful tongues (vv. 4–5). In fact, in vv. 4–5 the words *lips* and *tongue* are repeated per inversion (cf. Wilfred G. E. Watson, “Chiasmic Patterns in Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” in *Chiasm in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch [Provo: Research Press, 1999], 131). The repetition of the phrase **בְּנֵי אָדָם** (“sons of man”) in v. 2[1] and v. 9[8] forms an *inclusio* and sets the poem in a universal frame. Verse 7[6] forms a striking contrast with vv. 3–4[2–3].

⁴⁸ Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 207; Booij, *Godswoorden*, 34; Gert T. Prinsloo, “Man's Word—God's Word: A Theology of Antithesis in Psalm 12,” *ZAW* 110 (1998): 397.

⁴⁹ Delitzsch, “Psalms,” 5: 198; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 210; Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 81; idem, “Psalm 12: Gott Hilft den Unterdrückten,” in *ANWALT DES MENSCHEN: Beiträge aus Theologie und Religionspädagogik. Zum Gedenken an Prof. Dr. Friedrich Hahn*, Gie ener Schriften zur Theologie und Religionspädagogik des Fachbereichs Religionswissenschaften der Justus-Liebig-Universität, Band 2 (Giessen: Selbstverlag des Fachbereichs, 1983), 84 and 92; Anderson, *Psalms*, 1:124. Delitzsch compares v. 5 to a jewel in a ring.

in the poem indicate,⁵⁰ forms a concentric structure.⁵¹

- A. vv. 1–2, a plea directed to the Lord: the faithful have disappeared.
- B. vv. 3–4, the Lord is spoken about in third person
and the wicked are quoted in v. 4.
- C v. 5, the Lord's oracle is quoted.
- B' v. 6, the Lord is spoken about: the words of the Lord are pure.
- A' v. 7, the Lord is addressed: the Lord will protect us among the corrupt.
- v. 8 *Refrain*: Summary reason for the petitions.⁵²

In this pivotal position the divine oracle in verse 5 is deliberately set in striking contrast to the boastful words of the arrogant in verse 4⁵³ and, as the repetition of the verbal root **ישע** (“to save”) from verse 1 shows, it also functions as the Lord's response to the opening piercing plea for help in verse 1 (**הוֹשִׁיעָה**).⁵⁴ In fact, the translation of verse 5 proposed above suggests that

⁵⁰ Cf. Broyles, *Psalms*, 82; Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 50–51.

⁵¹ Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 51. For similar proposals see: Alden, “Chiastic Psalms: A Study in the Mechanics of Semitic Poetry,” 17; Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, JSOT Supplement Series 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 247–48; Robert G. Bratcher and William D. Reburn, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Psalms* (New York: United Bible Society, 1991), 115; McCann, “The Psalms,” 4:724; Erich Zenger, *A God of Vengeance? Understanding the Psalms of Divine Wrath*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 27; Schaefer, *Psalms*, 30; Terrien, *Psalms*, 152–153; Jacobson, “Many Are Saying,” 30 and 121; James H. Waltner, *Psalms*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2006), 77. For alternative readings of the poem's compositional structure see: Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible*, 86; Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 798; and Prinsloo, “Man's Word—God's Word,” 401. Zenger (p. 27) observes that the divine name YHWH occurs in each of the five sections of Psalm 12.

⁵² John W. Hilber (*Cultic Prophecy in the Psalms*, BZAW 352 [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005], 187) reads vv. 6–8 together as a “confessional hymn of trust.” Moreover, Bratcher and Reburn (*Handbook on the Psalms*, 115, 120–21); McCann (“The Psalms,” 4:790), Schaefer (*Psalms*, 69) and Goldingay (*Psalms*, 1:197) read vv. 7 and 8 together. However, we agree with Eaton (*Vision in Worship*, 56), Mandolfo (*God in the Dock*, 51) and Terrien (*Psalms*, 153) that v. 8 is different in style and summarizes the *raison d'être* of the poem. As is evident from the repetition of the construct phrase **גַּיְ אֲדָם**, it forms an *inclusio* with verse 2[1] (cf. Prinsloo, “Man's Word—God's Word,” 401) and its pessimistic diagnosis of the distress emphasizes the gravity of the situation and implicitly urges the Lord to intervene. For the translation issues of v. 9[8] see: Eugene Zolli, “*Kerum* in Ps. 12:9,” *CBQ* 12 (1950): 7–9; P. Wernberg-Moller, “Two Difficult Passages in the Old Testament,” *ZAW* 69 (1957), 69–73; W. E. March, “A Note on the Text of Ps. 12:9,” *VT* 21 (1971): 610–12.

⁵³ Weiser, *Psalms*, 160; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 138; Broyles, *Psalms*, 84; Prinsloo, “Man's Word—God's Word,” 397.

⁵⁴ Broyles, *Psalms*, 83; van Uchelen, *Psalmen*, 1:81.

the essence of the plaintive plea and complaint in verses 1–2 is the absence of trustworthy witnesses.⁵⁵

The occurrence of the divine oracle in Psalm 12:5 shows clearly that there is more than one voice in the Psalter. Not only are the abusive words of the arrogant quoted in verse 4; the Lord is quoted as speaking words of deliverance in the next verse (v. 5).⁵⁶ The Lord's speech may have been uttered by a cult official, as Ridderbos suggests,⁵⁷ but the citation formula **יֹאמֵר יְהוָה**, "says the Lord,"⁵⁸ clearly emphasizes the fact that the Lord is speaking. Significantly, the fact that the Lord speaks in response to the plaintive complaint in verses 1–2 and the shocking request for juridical redress in verses 3–4 shows the dialogical nature of this psalm of lament. It also demonstrates that in the Psalms we do not only hear Israel responding to the Lord's mighty deeds, as von Rad claims; we also hear the Lord responding to Israel.

As a matter of fact, the dramatic dialogue continues in verse 6 with a positive reflection on the flawless character of Yahweh's word. True to their source-critical methodology, Charles August and Emilie Grace Briggs consider verse 6 to be a gnomic gloss.⁵⁹ Their opinion, however, lacks manuscript support and from a cult-functional perspective is unnecessary. According to Weiser, for example, verse 6 constitutes the congregation's resounding "Amen" of faith in response to the divine oracle.⁶⁰ Read as the response of faith, verse 6 shows clearly that, as Kraus underscores in his

⁵⁵ Janzen, "Another Look at Psalm XII 6," 163.

⁵⁶ According to N. H. Ridderbos (*De Psalmen*, 1:152) and Kraus (*Psalms 1–59*, 207), the juxtaposition of vv. 4 and 5 in the focal point of the psalm lends a dramatic sense of vividness to the poem. Luís Alonso Schökel and Cecília Carniti (*Salms I [Salms 1–72]: Tradução, introdução e comentário*, Coleção Grande Comentário Bíblico, trans. João Rezende Costa [São Paulo: Paulus, 1996], 240) note that the poet introduced the words of the enemy to characterize them and to introduce the word of the Lord.

⁵⁷ N. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1:152. Cf. Sigmund Mowinckel, *PIW*, 1:218; Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 2:44; McCullough, "Psalms," 4:70–71; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 207 and 209; Weiser, *Psalms*, 160; Broyles, *Psalms*, 82; Waltner, *Psalms*, 76; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:196. Like Kraus (*Psalms 1–59*, 207 and 209), Goldingay (p. 199) also draws a parallel between Ps. 12 and Hab. 1. Although Kirkpatrick (*Book of Psalms*, 63) acknowledges the possibility that a prophet spoke the words of v. 5, he is of the opinion that this supposition is not necessary and that the petitioner himself could be the speaker. Likewise, Craigie (*Psalms 1–50*, 127) and Stek (*NIV Study Bible*, 799) are not completely sure that a cult prophet is the speaker. Prinsloo ("Man's Word—God's Word," 398) is also not convinced and suggests that the introduction of Yahweh's speech is "a poetic technique to introduce Yahweh on the scene." J. P. M. van der Ploeg (*Psalmen: uit de grondtekst vertaald en uitgelegd*, De Boeken van het Oude Testament [Roermond: J. J. Romen, 1971], 1:91) outright rejects the hypothesis.

⁵⁸ Cf. Isa. 1:11, 18; 33:11; 40:1, 26; 41:21; and 66:9.

⁵⁹ Briggs and Briggs, *Psalms*, 1:96.

⁶⁰ Weiser, *Psalms*, 160. N. H. Ridderbos (*De Psalmen*, 1:152) and Davidson (*The Vitality of Worship*, 50) include verse 7 in the "Amem." According to Delitzsch ("Psalms," 5:193 and 195), verse 7[6] represents the petitioner's Amen.

critique of von Rad, Israel's response is part of a dialogue.⁶¹

From a cult-functional perspective the response of faith in verse 6 has an important triple function in its compositional position. To begin with, it underscores the poignant contrast between the Lord's saving words in verse 5 and the arrogant declaration of independence of the suppliant's adversaries in verse 4.⁶² Moreover, the description of Yahweh's words in verse 6 stands in sharp and striking contrast with the vivid description of the destructive speech of the wicked in verses 2–3.⁶³ Furthermore, as we will explain below, it also provides the basis and occasion for the dramatic and emphatic address to the Lord in verse 7: אֲתָהּ יְהוָה, "You, O Lord."

Two features of the "Amen" of faith in verse 6 merit further comment. First, as is evident from the repetition of the plural noun אִמְרוֹת ("words"),⁶⁴ verse 6 talks emphatically *about* the word of the Lord. The fact that verse 6 talks about the word of the Lord suggests there has been a change in speaker and addressee in verse 6. If the speaker of verse 6 is a cult official,⁶⁵ then it is addressed to the suppliant and the worshiping congregation. However, verse 6 could also be the response of the worshiping community.⁶⁶ On either option the possible shifts in speaker and addressee between verses 5 and 6 highlight once more the dialogical and liturgical nature of Psalm 12.

The second feature of verse 6 that requires further comment is its proverbial and hymnic nature.⁶⁷ The proverbial tenor of this verse is evident from the synoptic comparison of this verse with Psalm 119:140, Psalm 18:31 and Proverbs 30:5 in the table below:⁶⁸

⁶¹ Kraus, *Theology*, 12.

⁶² Mays, *Psalms*, 77; Broyles, *Psalms*, 84; Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 50; Prinsloo, "Man's Word—God's Word," 397.

⁶³ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 138.

⁶⁴ van Uchelen, *Psalms*, 1: 81.

⁶⁵ Broyles (*Psalms*, 82) suggests that the speaker is a liturgist. Mandolfo (*God in the Dock*, 49) identifies the speaker as a didactic voice.

⁶⁶ Weiser, *Psalms*, 160; Waltner, *Psalms*, 76–77.

⁶⁷ Gunkel (*Psalmen*, 44) classifies v. 5 [6] as a "Hymnus auf Jahves Wort." In his *Introduction to the Psalms* § 2.59 Gunkel notes that hymnic units occur rather frequently after an oracle and he refers to Pss. 68:33; 115:16–18; 118:18; Mic. 7:18; and Deut. 33:26–29. Moreover, in § 2.26 of his *Introduction* he also calls attention to parallels of this type of hymn in Babylonian hymns.

⁶⁸ Gerstenberger, "Psalm 12," 92.

Psalm 12.6	Psalm 18.31	Proverbs 30.5	Psalm 119.140
And the words of the LORD are <u>flawless</u> , like silver <u>refined</u> in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.	As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is <u>flawless</u> . He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.	Every word of God is <u>flawless</u> ; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.	Your word has been thoroughly <u>refined</u> , and your servant loves them.

We call attention to this similarity because in a seminal article Hermann Spieckermann has argued compellingly that the presence of citations of divine oracles in the Psalter has important implications for its function as the Word of God.⁶⁹ In addition to the presence of direct quotations in the Psalms, Spieckermann also calls attention to the presence of theological reflection in the Psalms on the דְּבָרִים (“word”) of the Lord in his דְּבָרִים (“words”).⁷⁰ He calls Psalm 119 the “Gottes-Wort-seligste Text des Psalters.”⁷¹ In this psalm the Lord’s word is professed to be the source of new life⁷² and is the basis of the petitioner’s constant hope.⁷³ Moreover, in the refrain of Psalm 56:4 and 10 the Lord’s word is the object of praise. In view of the confident claim of verse 9, “This I know, that God is for me,” this word is probably the Lord’s promise in Psalms 50:15 and 91:14–15⁷⁴ or an oracle of salvation (cf. Ps. 35:3).⁷⁵

On the basis of Spieckermann’s provocative idea, we suggest that verse 6 of Psalm 12 also constitutes a theological reflection on the Word of God in the Psalter that is similar to Psalm 19 and 119. This “proverbial” reflection in verse 6 underscores dramatically that the voice of the speaker in verse 5 is the Lord and, consequently, serves as the basis for the emphatic expres-

⁶⁹ Hermann Spieckermann, “Rede Gottes und Wort Gottes in den Psalmen,” in *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung*, ed. Klaus Seybold and Erich Zenger, Herders Biblische Studien, 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 157–73.

⁷⁰ In this connection Spieckermann (“Rede Gottes und Wort Gottes,” 167–68), calls attention to the plural phrase עֲשָׂרַת הַדְּבָרִים (“ten words”) in Deut. 4:13 (cf. 10:4) and the singular phrase דְּבַר יְהוָה (“the word of the Lord”) in Deut. 5:5.

⁷¹ Spieckermann, “Rede Gottes und Wort Gottes,” 169.

⁷² Cf. Ps. 119:25, 50, 107, 116, and 154.

⁷³ Ps. 119:74, 81, 114, 147, and 148.

⁷⁴ Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 847.

⁷⁵ Mays, *Psalms*, 208. According to Patrick D. Miller (*They Cried to the Lord*, 192n31), the reference to “your word” and “the words of your mouth” in Ps. 138:2 and 4 respectively probably refer to an oracle of salvation. See also Ps. 130:5.

sion of trust that follows in the next verse (v. 7).⁷⁶ For this reason we believe that readers of this verse must listen carefully to the text's own claim that it is the word of God.

As we noted above, the proverbial reflection of verse 6 also serves as the basis and occasion for the dramatic and emphatic address to the Lord in verse 7: אַתָּה יְיָהוָה, "You, O Lord," which clearly marks another change in speaker and addressee and once again underscores the dramatic and liturgical character of Psalm 12. After a word *from* the Lord in verse 5 and a proverbial reflection *about* the words of the Lord in verse 6, the suppliant himself passionately addresses words *to* the Lord in verse 7.

The interpretation of the speech function of this verse depends on one's exegesis of the syntactical function of the YQTL verbs תִּשְׁמְרֵם and תִּצְרְנֵנוּ.⁷⁷ On the assumption that these YQTL verbs refer to a single event in the future, the majority of Bible translations and commentators interpret verse 7 as the petitioner's consolatory expression of confidence that the Lord will intervene.⁷⁸ This hopeful confidence is prompted by the conviction that the Lord's word is utterly dependable.⁷⁹ Some, however, interpret verse 7 as a passionate petition,⁸⁰

⁷⁶ For the Lord's word as a basis for hope see also: Pss. 119:74, 81, 114, 147, 148; 130:5.

⁷⁷ The interpretation of the object suffixes on the two verbs is also debated. However, this debate does not determine one's definition of the speech function of v. 6. With respect to תִּשְׁמְרֵם, Delitzsch (p. 197) and the NET interpret the 3 m.p. object suffix ׁ to refer to the oppressed. However, N. H. Ridderbos (*Psalmen*, 1:154), Kraus (*Psalms 1–59*, 207, and 210) and Terrien (*Psalms*, 152 and 156) interpret the 3 m.p. object suffix ׁ to refer to the Lord's words, which would enhance the connection between vv. 6 and 7. For the use of masculine pronominal suffixes to refer to feminine nouns see: GKC §135o. Against Kraus, Chr. Brekelmans ("Pronominal Suffixes in the Hebrew Book of Psalms," *JEOL* 17 [1963]: 206n1) argues that this is another instance of an enclitic mem (cf. H. D. Hummel, "The Enclitic Mem in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially in Hebrew," *JBL* 76 [1957]: 103; Mitchel Dahood, *Psalm I 1–50* [Garden City: Doubleday & Sons, 1965], 75). Van Uchelen (*Psalms*, 1: 82n9) rejects Kraus' explanation on the grounds that the verb שָׁמַר, "to keep," never occurs with "words" as direct object. As for the object suffix ׁ on the verb תִּצְרְנֵנוּ, it is also subject to different interpretations. According to GKC §58i, k, this object suffix ׁ can be read as a 3 m.s. or a 1 c.p. N. H. Ridderbos (*De Psalmen*, 1:154) and Terrien (*Psalms*, 152 and 156) interpret the object suffix ׁ as a 1 c.p., "us." However, Delitzsch ("Psalms," 5:197) and Kraus (*Psalms 1–59*, 207) read it as a 3 m.s. object suffix, which refers to לָּ in v. 5 [6]. In this case, argue J. Ridderbos (*Psalmen*, 1: 106) and N. H. Ridderbos (*De Psalmen*, 1:154), the suffix must be translated in a distributive sense, "each of them" (cf. NET Bible). According to Jacobson ("*Many Are Saying*," 122n133), the 3 m.s. pronominal suffix of the prepositional phrase לָּ in v. 6 refers to a plural antecedent, as in Pss. 59:9, 73:18 and Isa. 28:6, etc. The LXX updated the text by translating the 3 m.s. object suffix in v. 7 [8] as a first person plural "we."

⁷⁸ Delitzsch, "Psalms," 5:197; Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* 63; J. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1: 106; Weiser, *Psalms*, 160; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 138; Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 799; Limburg, *Psalms*, 36; Prinsloo, "Man's Word—God's Word," 398.

⁷⁹ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 138.

⁸⁰ Cf. RSV; van der Ploeg, *De Psalmen*, 1: 90; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 210; Broyles, *Psalms*, 84. Goldingay (*Psalms*, 1:200–201) and Waltner (*Psalms*, 78) acknowledge that v. 7 could be read

in which case the textually complicated verse 8 serves as the basis for the plea. On either interpretation, the dramatic switch in addressees between verses 6 and 7 underscores once more the intense dialogical character of Psalm 12.

Evaluation and Application

The preceding discussion of examples of direct quotations of divine speech in Psalms 2 and 12 has demonstrated clearly that it is improper to reduce the words in the Psalter to human voices. Psalms 2 and 12 prove that the Lord also has an important voice in the Psalter! Sometimes he calls for a human response, as in Psalms 50 and 95; at other times he responds to a human call, as in Psalm 12:5. In view of this fact, we conclude, first of all, that von Rad's appealing characterization of the Psalms as Israel's response is one-sided because it misses this important element. As Kraus has observed correctly, Israel's answer is part of a dialogue. Israel responded to Yahweh because Yahweh had spoken to her.⁸¹ This is particularly evident from the example of Psalm 12, in which the reader encounters a dramatic interplay between human words addressed *to* Yahweh in verses 1–4, including a quotation of the boastful words of the adversaries, words *from* Yahweh to the petitioner in verse 5, a meditation *about* the words of Yahweh in verse 6 and once more words directed *to* God in verse 7. This example leads us to conclude, in the second place, that there is an important dramatic dialogical element in the Psalms, especially the psalms of lament, to which, liturgists and preachers should pay careful attention in view of the performative nature of language.

In the case of Psalm 12, for example, liturgists should consult the creative orchestration of the various voices by Carroll Stuhlmueller.⁸² Similarly, in

as a statement of confidence. In this case, Goldingay (p. 200) suggests that v. 8 could be read "as a statement of defiance: 'Let them walk about!'" He bases this interesting suggestion on Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions*, The Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), §38*a*. However, this interpretation of the YQTL verb *יְתַלְכֶנּוּ* in v. 9[8] conflicts with Alviero Niccacci's ("A Neglected Point of Hebrew Syntax: YQTL and Position in the Sentence," *LASBF* 37 [1987], 7) proposed rule that unmarked YQTL verbs are jussive if they occupy the first position in a clause. Nevertheless, Waltner and Goldingay also recognize that it could be read as a prayer. In fact, Goldingay prefers to interpret the YQTL verbs in v. 8[7] in a jussive sense and, as a result, he reads v. 8[7] as a passionate plea. He (pp. 200–201) claims that "the earlier prominence of plea makes [this] a natural way to read the verb." Again, his proposal conflicts with Niccacci's proposed rule.

⁸¹ Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 11–12. For the liveliness of this dialogue see Israel's sharp rejoinder in Psalm 60:10 in response to Yahweh's assuring promise in vv. 6–8. Cf. Eaton, *Vision in Worship*, 55.

⁸² Carroll Stuhlmueller, *Psalms I (Psalms 1–72)*, Old Testament Message (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 103. According to his reconstruction, the cry for help in v. 1*a* is sung repeatedly by the worshipping community. The motivation in vv. 1*b*–2 is sung by the major choir. The jussive prayer in v. 3 is sung by a small choir no. 1 and the words of the wicked in

view of the grimness of our current socio-economic and moral situation, preachers may want to focus their sermon on the consoling words of the Lord in the pivotal verse 5 to explain the powerful effect of divine speech on the petitioner's complaint against the duplicitous speech of his adversaries. After a massive critique of the false speech of the defiant "generation of the lie"⁸³ that destroys human community (vv. 1–2) and an urgent appeal for a divine intervention (vv. 3–4), the general reassuring promise of the Lord in verse 5 emphasizes, as Erich Zenger observes, "only the saving aspect."⁸⁴ Moreover, Zenger notes that this consoling expression of divine solidarity with the marginalized victims "does not provoke the violence of the victims against their executioners; the vicious circle of violence is broken here by the remembrance of YHWH as the rescuer and protector of the poor."⁸⁵

The Voice of Cultic Prophecy

The second way in which the reader can discern the voice of the Lord in the Psalter is through the voice of prophecy in the Psalter. The presence of this voice in the Psalms serves as the basis for Ridderbos's implicit critique of von Rad's formulation. Ridderbos asserts that to characterize the content of the Psalms as faith's response to God's revelation shortchanges the prophetic element in the Psalter. By this he means that the Psalter also contains words spoken by cult prophets in the name of the Lord.⁸⁶

v. 4 are sung by small choir no. 2. The divine oracle in v. 5 is pronounced by a liturgist. The antiphonal response in v. 6 is sung by small choir no. 2 to emphasize the contrast between vv. 4 and 6. The expression of confidence in v. 7 is sung by small choir no. 1. The refrain of v. 8 is sung by the major choir.

⁸³ For this phrase see: Martin Buber, *Right and Wrong: An Interpretation of Some Psalms* (London: SCM Press, 1952), 11–17, especially p. 11. Buber's exposition of Ps. 12 contains excellent insights on the function of human speech. According to Buber, the lie is a human invention and the ninth commandment, which, in his opinion, constitutes the background of Psalm 12, seeks to protect community. For further comments on Ps. 12 see also: Robert A. Coughenour's article, "Generation of a Lie—Study of Psalm 12," in *Soli Deo Gloria: Essays in Reformed Theology: Festschrift for John H. Gerstner*, ed. R. C. Sproul (Nutley: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976), 103–17.

⁸⁴ Zenger, *A God of Vengeance*, 28.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ N. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1: 45. For his perspective on this phenomenon Ridderbos refers the reader to Mowinckel's *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, chapter XII, "The Prophetic Word in the Psalms and the Prophetic Psalms." For the connection between psalmody and prophecy see also: Aubrey R. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1944); John Eaton, *Vision in Worship: The Relation of Prophecy and Liturgy in the Old Testament* (London, SPCK, 1981); W. H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalmody and Prophecy*, JSOT Supplement Series 27 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984). For a recent overview of the debate between Gunkel and Mowinckel and the issues in the ensuing discussion see: Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy in the Psalms*, 1–39.

First Supporting Argument

In support of this claim Ridderbos reiterates, first of all, that in several instances the psalms contain prophetic voices that speak not on behalf of themselves or the congregation but in the name of the Lord.⁸⁷ Indirectly, therefore, these voices represent the voice of God (cf. Ps. 85:9; Hab. 2:1).

The exuberant “I” speech in Psalm 20.7, a prayer on behalf of the king referred to in the first installment of this article,⁸⁸ represents such an instance for Ridderbos.⁸⁹ This arresting tricolon marks the strategic turning point of the psalm and is characterized by anacrusis and end-rhyme (יָ); it reads as follows:

<p>^a <i>Now I know</i></p>	<p>עֲתָה יִדְעָתִי</p>
<p>^b ^l<i>that the LORD saves his anointed;</i></p>	<p>כִּי הוֹשִׁיעַ יְהוָה מְשִׁיחוֹ</p>
<p>^c <i>he answers him from his holy heaven</i></p>	<p>יַעֲנֵהוּ מִשָּׁמַיִם קָדְשׁוֹ</p>
<p><i>with the saving power of his right hand.</i></p>	<p>בְּגִבְרוֹת יְשַׁע יְמִינוֹ:</p>

As we have noted in the first part of this article (p. 199), according to Ridderbos, the words of this enthusiastic tricolon were probably spoken by a cult official⁹⁰ and, in his opinion, serve as the confident answer to the people’s wishes in verses 1–4, 5c.⁹¹ Unlike Psalm 12.5, however, the answer is not spoken directly by God himself but by God’s official representative. The advantage of Ridderbos’s proposed reading is that one need not postulate that verse 6 is a response to an unquoted priestly oracle of salvation⁹² or a cultic theophany.⁹³

⁸⁷ Cf. Pss. 2:6, 7–9; 20:7; 25:8–10, 12–14; 27.14; 28:5; 31:25; 32:8, 9; 36.2; 49, 50; 60:6–8 (//108:7–9); 62:12 (?); 85.9–10; 108:7–9 (//60:6–8); 130:7–8; and 140:12–13. Because of the repetition of the words of Ps. 60:6–8 in Ps. 108:7–9, Mowinckel (*The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, 59 and 66) is of the opinion that “the same wording might be used twice.”

⁸⁸ Bosma, “Discerning the Voices in the Psalms,” 198–199.

⁸⁹ N. H. Ridderbos, *Psalmen*, 1: 42 and 216–217. Cf. Delitzsch, “Psalms,” 5: 294; Adam C. Welch, “Psalm xx,” *Expository Times* 37 (1925–26): 407–410; Weiser, *Psalms*, 207; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 186. Goldingay (*Psalms*, 1:406) suggests that the king himself is the speaker.

⁹⁰ N. H. Ridderbos, *Psalmen*, 1: 216–217. Cf. McCullough, “Psalms,” 4: 108.

⁹¹ N. H. Ridderbos, *Psalmen*, 1: 218. Cf. Kittel, *Die Psalmen*, 81.

⁹² Pace Briggs and Briggs, *Psalms*, 1: 179. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 279 and 281; Waltner, *Psalms*, 112. Briggs and Briggs assume that an editor misunderstood the speaker to be a soloist. In their judgment, this breaks the symmetry of the poem and so they reconstruct the first clause to read “Now (the hand of the Yahweh is made known).”

⁹³ Weiser, *Psalms*, 208.

In response to this official assurance of God's answer to the intercessory prayer of verses 1–4, 5*c*, another cult official,⁹⁴ the congregation⁹⁵ or army⁹⁶ voices its emphatic expression of confidence in verses 8–9 and concluding prayer in verse 10. This dramatic change of speakers in Psalm 20 confirms the dialogical nature of the voices in the Book of Psalms and argues for a liturgical setting.

Another interesting example of an answer to prayer spoken by a cult official that also confirms the dialogical nature of the voices in the Psalter is found in Psalm 28.5, another lament psalm, which we have treated more extensively earlier in the first installment of this essay⁹⁷:

^a*Because they show no regard for the works of the LORD or the works of his hands,*

^b*he will tear them down*

^c*and never build them up again.*⁹⁸

Many commentators interpret verse 5 as providing the reason for the request for juridical redress in verse 5.⁹⁹ Ridderbos, however, suggests that the striking shift from speech addressed directly to the Lord in Psalm 28.1–4 to speech that refers to the Lord in the third person in verse 5 argues for the conclusion that verse 5 is uttered by a priest or prophet.¹⁰⁰ On this interpretation the YQTL verbs *יִהְיֶה רָסוּם* (“he will tear them down”) and *יִבְנֵם* (“he will build them”) in clauses *b* and *c* may be read as simple futures instead of jussives.¹⁰¹ This interpretation of the function of verse 5 would also explain the compositional place and function of the resounding thanksgiving in verses 6–7:

⁹⁴ N. H. Ridderbos, *Psalmen*, 1: 218.

⁹⁵ Weiser, *Psalms*, 208; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 186.

⁹⁶ Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 807.

⁹⁷ Bosma, “Discerning the Voices,” 204–206.

⁹⁸ McCann (“Psalms,” 4: 789) and Goldingay (*Psalms*, 1:207) call attention to the correspondence by word play between the reason (v. 5*a*) and the judgment (v. 5*bc*). The wicked do not regard (*יִבְיֵנוּ*) God; therefore, God will not build them (*יִבְנֵם*). In his book *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982) Patrick D. Miller, Jr. has demonstrated that paronomasia is characteristic of prophetic announcements of judgments.

⁹⁹ Briggs and Briggs (*Psalms*, 1: 247) opines that a later editor inserted v. 5 to add a reason for the imprecation in v. 4. The following commentators also interpret v. 5 as a motivating clause: Delitzsch, “Psalms,” 5: 364; Weiser, *Psalms*, 257; J. Ridderbos, *Psalmen*, 1: 242; van Uchelen, *Psalmen*, 1: 189; Mays, *Psalms*, 134; Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 1: 128; McCann, “Psalms,” 4: 789; Limburg, *Psalms*, 90.

¹⁰⁰ Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1: 291. Cf. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 237 and 239; Bratcher and Reyburn, *Handbook on the Psalms*, 272; Broyles, *Psalms*, 148; Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 65; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1: 406.

¹⁰¹ Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 65.

^{6a} *Praise be to the LORD,*
^b ↳ *for he has heard my cry for mercy.*
^{7a} *The LORD is my strength and my shield;*
^b *my heart trusts in him,*
^c *and I am helped.*
^d *My heart leaps for joy*
^e *and I will give thanks to him in song.*

Because the Lord has heard the psalmist's cry for mercy, he now breaks out in a jubilant song of thanksgiving in eager anticipation of the Lord's salvific intervention. As Carleen Mandolfo correctly notes, the advantage of this interpretation is that one need not explain the dramatic change in mood in verses 6–7 by postulating the intervention of an oracle of salvation that is not in the text.¹⁰² Verse 5 constitutes the answer to verses 1–4! The prophetic character of this answer is evident from the reminiscence of Isaiah 5.22 in clause *a* and Jeremiah 1.10, 24.6, 31.28, 42.10 and 45.4 in clauses *b* and *c*.¹⁰³

Second Supporting Argument

The prophetic character of Psalm 28:5 leads us to Ridderbos's second argument in support of the intimate connection between psalmody and prophecy, namely, the fact that in the O.T. the composition of hymns of praise is intimately related to prophecy.¹⁰⁴ For example, according to Exodus 15:21, Miriam and the women sang the following song in response to the Lord's powerful deliverance:

Sing to the LORD,
 ↳ *for he is highly exalted.*
The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.

According to Exodus 15:20, Miriam was a prophetess. Moreover, Deborah and Barak sang the song recorded in Judges 5:1–31. According to Judges 4:4, Deborah was a prophetess. Furthermore, according to 1 Samuel 9:5, the procession of prophets that Saul would encounter on his way to Gibeah would be prophesying with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps.¹⁰⁵ In addition, according to 2 Kings 3:14–15, Elisha asked for a harpist and, as the harpist was playing, the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha and he prophesied. Finally, the cult personnel at the temple had a prophetic function.

¹⁰² Cf. Mandolfo, *God in the Dock*, 68. For the hypothesis that an oracle of salvation was inserted between v. 5 and vv. 6–7 see: Stuhlmüller, *Psalms I*, 167; Schaefer, *Psalms*, 70; McCann, "Psalms," 4: 789.

¹⁰³ Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 341.

¹⁰⁴ For the connection between psalmody and prophecy see also the comments of Delitzsch ("Psalms," 5: 193) in connection with Psalm 12.

¹⁰⁵ In this connection see also 1 Sam. 19:20!

That temple ministrants were also engaged in prophecy is evident, first of all, from 1 Chronicles 25:1, according to which David and his commanders "... set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying (הַנְּבִיאִים¹⁰⁶), accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals." In fact, according to 1 Chronicles 25:3, Jeduthun prophesied using the lyre in thanksgiving and praise. Consequently, these hymns of thanksgiving and praise were not only heard as words about God and offered to God but, as Howard Neil Wallace argues, "words from God, and hence standing in continuity with other forms of prophecy or divinely inspired words to humans."¹⁰⁷ In light of the above data, therefore, it comes as no surprise that Asaph and Jeduthun are called seers respectively in 2 Chronicles 29:30 (הַחֹזֵה) and 2 Chronicles 35:15 (חֹזֵה).

The prophetic activity of the temple musicians was not limited, however, to the composition of hymns of thanksgiving and praise. They also uttered prophetic oracles. A clear example of this prophetic activity is the oracle of salvation uttered by Jahaziel,¹⁰⁸ a Levite and descendant of Asaph, in 2 Chronicles 20:14–19, to which we have referred earlier in our discussion of Psalm 20:6 in the first installment of this article.¹⁰⁹ Jahaziel's role as a prophet is confirmed by Jehoshaphat's exhortation in verse 20:

Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem!
Have faith in the LORD your God
and you will be upheld;
have faith in his prophets
and you will be successful.

A Third Supporting Argument

Ridderbos's third argument in support of the intimate connection between psalmody and prophecy is that prophecy contains hymnody.¹¹⁰ In the "Vision of Isaiah" hymnic elements are found, for example, in chapters 12:1–2, 12:4–6, 25:1–5, 26:1–15, 38:9–20, 42:10–13, 44:23 and 49:13. Moreover, the book of Jeremiah contains a series of laments.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ For this *Niphal* participle see also 1 Chron. 25:2 and 3 (הַנְּבִיאִים). For its use in the N.T. see ἐπροφήτευσεν in Lk. 1.67.

¹⁰⁷ Wallace, *Words to God, Words from God*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ For this oracle of salvation see: Edgar Conrad, *FEAR NOT WARRIOR. A Study of 'al tirā' Pericopes in the Hebrew Scriptures*, Brown Judaic Studies 75 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 65–69.

¹⁰⁹ Bosma, "Discerning the Voices," 199.

¹¹⁰ For the connection between psalmody and prophecy see also: Sue Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 470–489.

¹¹¹ Cf. Jer 11:18–23; 12:1–4; 15:10–21; 17:12–18; 18:18–23; 20:7–18. Eaton, *Vision in Worship*, 69–74.

Furthermore, the book of Habakkuk consists of two penetrating laments (1:2–4; 1:21–2:1), each of which is followed by a divine answer (1:5–11; 2:2–20)¹¹² in a manner similar to the sequence of petition and divine answer in Psalm 12.¹¹³ Significantly, the book concludes with a beautiful prayer in chapter 3. In connection with this prayer, special note should be given to the psalm-like heading in verse 1 (cf. Ps. 7.1) and especially the subscript in verse 19, which is similar to the superscriptions found in the Psalter:

*For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.*¹¹⁴

According to Stek, this subscript suggests that “this chapter may have formed part of the temple prayers that were chanted with the accompaniment of instruments (see 1 Ch. 16:4–7).”¹¹⁵

Evaluation and Application

In our judgment, Ridderbos’s second and third supporting arguments clearly indicate that there is an intimate relationship between psalmody, prophecy and worship. Moreover, they also lend further credence to Ridderbos’s claim that the Psalter also contains words spoken by cult prophets in the name of the Lord. This is particularly evident from his cult functional explanation of Psalms 20:6 and 28:5. His use of the cult prophet hypothesis in these psalms allows him to underscore the dynamic interplay between the human words of the petitioners and the words spoken in the name of the Lord in a liturgical setting. As in the case of Psalms 2 and 12, this dynamic interplay emphasizes the dialogical nature of the psalms and argues against von Rad’s one-sided formulation.

Preachers and liturgists are able to discover this dynamic interplay by paying close attention to shifts in speaker and addressees in their analysis of individual psalms. Based on the shifts in speakers, for example, liturgists could structure their responsive readings on these psalms on the basis of the compositional structure of these psalms so that the contemporary congregation can experience the dramatic dialogue between the prayers of the petitioners and the answer from the Lord.¹¹⁶ Preachers may want to focus their sermons on these psalms on the verse that contains the response to the petitions. In the case of Psalm 20:6, for example, an argument in favor of this

¹¹² Eaton, *Vision in Worship*, 58–61. Eaton also refers to Is. 33 (61–64), Is. 59 (61–67), Is. 63–65 (67–69), Joel (74–80), Micah 7 (80–83) and Hosea (83–85).

¹¹³ For the similarity between Habakkuk and Psalm 12 see Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:196.

¹¹⁴ For a brief discussion of psalmic elements in Habakkuk and Joel see: Bellingier, *Psalmody and Prophecy*, 83–89.

¹¹⁵ Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 1417.

¹¹⁶ For an outline of the liturgy of Ps. 20 see, for example: Stuhlmueller, *Psalms 1*, 139.

homiletical move is that this verse is the theological heart of the psalm,¹¹⁷ as is evident from the fact that it contains the key words of the thematic framing verses 1 and 9, **יִשַׁע**, “to deliver,” and **עֲנֶה**, “to answer.” Moreover, the occurrence of the important noun **מְשִׁיחַ**, “anointed,” in this verse allows for a messianic appropriation of the psalm’s message for today.

The “Voice” of the Canonical Editors of the Psalter

Ridderbos’s use of Mowinckel’s cult-functional approach in his exposition of the Psalter allowed him to discern quotations of words spoken directly by Yahweh, as well as of words spoken by God’s ministrants. The presence of these voices in the Psalter also allowed him to qualify von Rad’s one-sided formulation of the Psalter as Israel’s response to Yahweh’s mighty deeds.

However, in addition to the quotation of words spoken directly by Yahweh and the voice of prophecy in the Psalter, in the last twenty-five years O.T. scholars who advocate a holistic, literary and ‘canonical’ reading of the final shape of Scripture have discerned yet another expression of God’s word to Israel in the Psalter, namely, the “voice” of its final editors, to which neither von Rad nor, for that matter, Ridderbos paid much attention.¹¹⁸ According to these scholars, the complex final canonical shape of the Psalter is not just a random collection of psalms but a unified, purposeful collection with an arrangement that is theologically significant and, consequently, “calls for study in its own right, along with historical and cultic settings.”¹¹⁹ For them the Psalter is a “book” of Scripture. The purpose of this new line of inquiry is to discern the theological intention of the final contours of the Psalter through a careful analysis of what psalms were included and what shape the collection was given.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ McCann, “Psalms,” 4: 757.

¹¹⁸ To his credit, Ridderbos (*De Psalmen*, 1:45) did emphasize that the Psalter as a whole embodies Israel’s official piety—one that lends the collection a deeper unity. Following Mowinckel, however, Ridderbos based this unity primarily on the conventional language of the Psalter, not its final canonical shape.

¹¹⁹ Mays, “Going by the Book: the Psalter as a Guide to Reading Psalms,” in *The Lord Reigns*, 120.

¹²⁰ According to Mays (“Going by the Book,” 120), significant indicators that shape the conscious interpretive ordering of the tapestry of the Psalter as a whole are, among others: the intentional placement of Psalms 1–2 as the hermeneutical double port of entry to the Psalter; the magnificent Hallelujah chorus of Pss. 146, 147, 148, 149 and 150 that marks a fitting conclusion to the Psalter; the deliberate pentateuchal division of the Psalter; the crucial placement of royal psalms at the “seams” of Books I–III (i.e., Pss. 2, 72 and 89); the strategic placement of *tôrâ* psalms (i.e., Pss. 1, 19 and 119) in juxtaposition with royal psalms (i.e., Pss. 1 and 2; Pss. 18, 19, and 20–21; Ps. 118–119); collections of Davidic psalms (i.e., Pss. 3–41; 51–72; 108–110; 138–145); the overwhelming preponderance of lament psalms by an individual in Books I–II and laments by the people in Book III; a series of Hallelujah

A Major Impulse: Brevard S. Childs

This new approach is a fundamental departure from the preceding historical-critical, form-critical and cult-functional approaches and received its major impulse from Brevard S. Childs's programmatic publication, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. In the chapter on the Psalms of his *Introduction*, Childs raises the question concerning the theological significance of some of the most characteristic editorial indicators of the final canonical shape of the Psalter and in that context he recalls how Bonhoeffer "once reflected on the question of how the psalms which were the words of men to God could ever be considered God's word to men."¹²¹ However, unlike Bonhoeffer, who, as we noted above, imposed a Christological hermeneutic on the Psalter, which is external to the text itself, Childs looks for a hermeneutical key that is internal to the Psalter, namely, the process of canonization whereby the Psalter became the word of God. According to Childs, the first prominent hint for this very important hermeneutical shift is the canonical editors' intentional placement of Psalm 1 as a fitting introduction to the psalms that follow, as a result of which Psalm 1 acquired a new literary function. He writes:

The redactional position of Psalm 1 testifies that this hermeneutical shift did actually take place within Israel. The prayers of Israel directed to God have themselves *become identified with God's word to his people*. Israel reflects on the psalms, not merely to find an illustration of how godly men prayed to God in the past, but to learn the "way of righteousness" which comes from obeying the divine law and is now communicated through the prayers of Israel.¹²² (italics mine)

psalms (Pss. 111–118) that are framed by two acrostic psalms (Pss. 111; 119) and enclose the Egyptian Hallel (Pss. 113–118); etc. Moreover, important signals that involve "two or more psalms as a grouping within the larger framework" (p. 121) are: (1) twin psalms that are joined by concatenation of key words (e.g., 111 and 112; 134 and 135); (2) complementary psalms (e.g., Pss. 103 and 104); and (3) "clusters of psalms that are grouped by content" (e.g. Pss. 93, 95–100; cf. "the Lord reigns"). Taken together, these editorial indicators provide the reader with important clues for a theological assessment of the message of the Psalter. For a discussion of these indicators see: Gerald H. Wilson, "The Shape of the Book of Psalms," *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 129–142.

¹²¹ Childs, *IOTS*, 513.

¹²² Childs, *IOTS*, 513–514. A similar claim is made by Gerald T. Sheppard in his article "Canonization: Hearing the Voice of the Same God through Historically Dissimilar Traditions," *Interpretation* 36 (1982). On p. 23 he notes that Pss. 1–2 function as a dual preface to the Psalter. As a result, "[t]he psalms are, thus, linked to David who supposedly prayed prayers informed by meditation on Torah. One sees in this linkage between psalms and other parts of Scripture a change in function, by which the prayers of ordinary people *become the Word of God* to the later community of faith." (italics mine)

On the same page he also notes that:

[t]he introduction [i.e., Psalm 1] points to these prayers as the medium through which Israel now responds to the divine word. Because Israel continues to hear God's word through the voice of the psalmist's response, these prayers now function as the divine word itself.¹²³

As Childs acknowledged in an earlier publication,¹²⁴ Claus Westermann had already reached a similar conclusion. Westermann assumes that Psalms 1 and 119 once framed the intervening psalms.¹²⁵ On the basis of this hypothesis, he draws the following inference:

[T]his framework bears witness to an important stage in the "traditioning" process in which the Psalter, as a collection, no longer had a cultic function primarily, but rather circulated in a tradition devoted to law. The Psalms have now *become the Word of God* which is read, studied, and meditated upon.¹²⁶ (*italics mine*)

Since the publication of Childs's seminal *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* and the ground-breaking doctoral dissertation of Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Psalter*, J. Clinton McCann can claim that "[t]here is almost unanimous scholarly agreement that Psalm 1 was placed intentionally at the beginning of the Book of Psalms."¹²⁷ In fact,

¹²³ Childs, *IOTS*, 513–514. With respect to this citation, it is interesting to note a striking hermeneutical shift in comparison with von Rad's formulation. For von Rad, in the Psalter Israel responds to Yahweh's mighty deeds; for Childs, "Israel now responds to the divine word." McCann ("The Psalms as Instruction," 119) shares Childs's perspective when he writes: "Regardless of the fact that the Psalms originated as the response of faithful persons to God, they are now to be heard and appropriated as God's word to the faithful." And on p. 121 he writes: "What the editorial activity in the Psalter ultimately reveals is that songs and prayers that originated as human words to God were appropriated by the faithful as *God's word to humans—as tôrâ*, "instruction."

¹²⁴ Brevard S. Childs, "Reflections on the Modern Study of the Psalms," in *Magnalia Dei, The Mighty Acts of God: Essays in Memory of G. Ernest Wright*, ed. F. M. Cross, W. E. Lemke, Patrick D. Miller (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1976), 381.

¹²⁵ For a critique see: Erich Zenger, "Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of the Psalter," *JSOT* 80 (1998): 97.

¹²⁶ Westermann, "The Formation of the Psalter," in: *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 253. This chapter was originally published as an essay in German: "Zur Sammlung des Psalters," *Theologia Viatorum* 8 (1962): 278–284. Futado (*Interpreting the Psalms*, 59) makes a similar claim: "But once included in the canonical book, these texts [i.e. the psalms] became God's word to humans to teach us how to pray and praise."

¹²⁷ J. Clinton McCann, "The Psalms as Instruction," *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 118. Cf. Joseph Reindel, "Psalm 1 und der »Sitz im Leben« des Psalters," *ThJL* 1979: 39–59; idem, "Weisheitliche Bearbeitung von Psalmen: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der Sammlung des Psalter," in *Congress Volume: Vienna 1980*, ed. J. A. Emerton, VTSup 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 333–356; Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 81–86; idem, "The Beginning of the Psalter," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann JSOT Supplement Series 159 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 84 (reprinted in: *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology*,

Wilson notes that “[t]here is much to commend it, and little to dispute it.”¹²⁸

Textual evidence for this claim is the fact this orphan psalm “introduces an agenda of themes that recur frequently in the book and play a fundamental role in its theology.”¹²⁹ These recurrent themes are: happiness (1:1); the sharp contrast between the way of the wicked and the way of the righteous and their respective outcome (1:2, 4–5, 6)¹³⁰; the emphasis on *tôrâ* meditation (1:2); the guarantee to due judicial process (1:5); and the act-consequence principle (1:6). Because Psalm 1 sets the agenda for these important themes in the remainder of the Psalter, one may infer that its prominent placement was intentional.

In addition to the editors’ deliberate preeminent placement of Psalm 1, Childs also argued for other important editorial indicators for the canonical shaping of the Psalter as sacred scripture in his *Introduction*.¹³¹ For Childs, important alterations that signal changes in the role of the final compilation of the Psalter from its original function are, first of all, the practice of “relecture” (re-reading) of older psalmic material to create new poems.¹³² Obvious examples of this process are the combination Psalms 57:7–11 and 60:5–12 to form Psalm 108 and the fact that Psalm 40:13–17 constitutes Psalm 70.¹³³ Moreover, like Psalm 100, Psalm 86 is a virtual “mosaic of

269–278); idem, “Deuteronomy and Psalms,” in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology*, 327; idem, “The Way of Torah,” in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology*, 497; James L. Mays, “The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 3–12 [reprinted in: idem, *The Lord Reigns*, 128–135]; idem, “The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann, JSOT Supplement Series 159 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 15 (reprinted in: *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms*, eds. Patrick D. Miller and Gene M. Tucker [Louisville: WJK, 206], 79–84); Gerald T. Sheppard, “Theology and the Book of Psalms,” 149; B. J. Diebner, *Psalm 1 als »Motto« der Sammlung des kanonischen Psalters* (DBAT 23/24, 1987), 7–45; Reinhard Gregor Kratz, “Psalm 1 und die doxologische Fünfteilung des Psalters,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 93 (1996), 1–34; Schökel-Cartini, *Salmos* 1:123; Grant, *The King as Exemplar*, 41–70; VanGemenen, “Psalms,” 5: 76–77; etc.

¹²⁸ Gerald H. Wilson, “The Shape of the Book of the Psalms,” *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 132.

¹²⁹ Mays, *Psalms*, 40.

¹³⁰ Miller (“The Beginning of the Psalter,” 85) points out that “nearly half of the references to the ‘wicked’ after Psalms 1–2 are in the next 39 psalms.”

¹³¹ Childs, *IOTS*, 514–523. For this section Childs depends heavily on Joachim Becker, *Israel deutet seine Psalmen*, Stuttgarter Bibel Studien (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967, second edition).

¹³² Childs, *IOTS*, 514.

¹³³ Walter Zimmerli, “Zwillingspsalmen,” in: *Studien zur alttestamentlichen Theologie und Prophetie*, Theologische Bücherei, Altes Testament, 51 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1974), 261–263. Originally published in: *Wort, Lied und Gottesspruch. Beiträge zur Psalmen und Propheten. Festschrift für Joseph Ziegler*, ed. Josef Schreiner (Würzburg: Echterverlag, 1972): 105–113.

fragments from other Psalms and Scripture.”¹³⁴ Second, royal psalms were placed in strategic places throughout the Psalter “as a witness to the messianic hope which looked for the consummation of God’s kingship through his anointed One.”¹³⁵ Third, *pace* Mowinckel’s opinion that eschatology was alien to the cult, Childs calls attention to “the large number of psalms which sound dominant eschatological notes.”¹³⁶ Consequently, “the final form of the Psalter is highly eschatological in nature.”¹³⁷ Fourth, “at times there was a move within the Psalter to broaden an original individual reference to incorporate the collective community....”¹³⁸ “Finally, and surely the most far-reaching alteration ... was ... [the] use of superscriptions.”¹³⁹ A key instance was to relate the psalm to the person of David as a representative human so that the psalm was immediately accessible to the reader.¹⁴⁰ As a result of these significant alterations, the choral voice of the psalms was overlaid with important didactic, messianic and eschatological notes.

Although Childs laid down the hermeneutical basis for a canonical approach to the final canonical shape of the Psalter, he did not elaborate the details of a layout of the overall literary structure of the final shape

¹³⁴ Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, 514. Cf. Childs, *IOTS*, 514; Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, *Introduction to the Psalms: A Song from Ancient Israel* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 93–94). In this psalm, for example, v. 5 and especially v. 15 echo Ex. 34:6. In so doing, the petitioner “prays-back” to Yahweh Israel’s core testimony about God. For this concept see: Walter Brueggemann, “The Psalms as Prayer,” in *The Psalms & the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 47–49. For Kirkpatrick this borrowing was a sign of the poet’s lack of originality. However, Weiser (*Psalms*, 576) critiques this approach; he notes that “we are dealing with a liturgical style which is deliberately used to incorporate the personal concern of the worshipper in the larger context of the worship of the cult community and of the speech-forms and thought forms proper to it.” In other words, the poet was deeply steeped in the conventional language of the cult. For this issue see also the lengthy discussion of this issue by Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC 20 (Dallas: Word, 2002), 378.

¹³⁵ Childs, *IOTS*, 517.

¹³⁶ Childs, *IOTS*, 517. Cf. Pss. 69:34[35]; 102:15[16]; 126:4ff.; 130:5[6].

¹³⁷ Childs, *IOTS*, 517.

¹³⁸ Childs, *IOTS*, 522. In this connection, Childs refers to “the numerous psalms in which the psalmist moves directly from speaking as an individual to representing the community with no apparent difficulty.” In our first installment we already noted that Ridderbos referred to this important feature. Childs also notes that collective references were added to individual lament psalms. Cf. Pss. 14, 25, 51, 61; etc. For this phenomenon see also: Marko Martilla, *Collective Reinterpretation in the Psalms: A Study of the Redaction History of the Psalter*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe*, 13 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

¹³⁹ Childs, *IOTS*, 520.

¹⁴⁰ Childs, *IOTS*, 513. For a critique of Childs’s handling of Davidic authorship see: Roland E. Murphy, “Reflections on Contextual Interpretation of the Psalms,” in: *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 27. According to Murphy, Childs “allows the figure of David to evaporate and in David’s stead emerges Everyman.”

to assist preachers in their exegesis. This challenging task was left to his students (e.g. Gerald Henry Wilson; Gerald Sheppard) and other students of the Psalter (e.g. James Luther Mays, John H. Stek, David M. Howard, Jr.; J. Clinton McCann; Jerome F. D. Creach; Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford; etc.). However, so far there is no general consensus about the overall intentional structure of the Psalter.¹⁴¹ Because it is not within the scope of this essay to map the different directions taken by those who heard Childs's clarion call for a canonical reading of the Psalter, nor to offer a critical analysis of each,¹⁴² we will focus our attention on the point where there is general agreement, namely, the deliberate editorial placement of Psalm 1, and highlight four important features of this new reading strategy that distinguishes it from Gunkel's form critical and Mowinckel's cult-functional approach.

Distinguishing Characteristics of the Canonical Approach

First, the canonical approach's concentrated interest in the final canonical shape of the text of the Psalter stands in sharp contrast to its disregard by the schools of Gunkel and Mowinckel. It is not, as Mays points out,¹⁴³ that students of these schools were not aware of the complex nature of the final canonical shape of the text. But, as Childs underscores, for them "the question of understanding the present shape of the Psalter was considered irrelevant and unimportant."¹⁴⁴ In fact, according to Westermann,

¹⁴¹ James L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 98. On p. 37 Crenshaw distinguishes two types of answers concerning the origin and function of the Psalter. "The first solution focuses on the content of various collections...." Westermann is representative of this approach. The second approach concentrates on the use to which the Psalter was put. Gerstenberger is representative of this position. For Gerstenberger (*Psalms, Part I*, 28) the Psalter is the hymnbook of the synagogue. Moreover, Crenshaw (pp. 98–105) also notes that there are also significant differences among those who focus on the content. Wilson ("The Shape of the Book of Psalms," *Interpretation* 46 [1992]: 133–134), for example, works with a conflictual model on the assumption that there are "competing editorial frames," whereas others, such as, e.g. Brueggemann ("Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon," *JSOT* 59 [1991]: 63–92), see a movement from lament to praise. Carroll Stuhlmueller ("Psalms," in *Harper's Bible Commentary* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988], 433–494) detects a gradual increase in liturgical language and Joseph Reindel ("Weisheitliche Bearbeitung von Psalmen," 333–356) argues for a sapiential shaping of the Psalter.

¹⁴² For an analysis of Childs, Wilson, Sheppard, Mays and McCann's models of canonical exegesis see: Harry P. Nasuti, *Defining the Sacred Songs*, 163–208. For a critique of the canonical reading of the Psalter as a whole see also: Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Der Psalter als Buch und als Sammlung," in *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung*, ed. Klaus Seybold and Erich Zenger, Herders Biblische Studien, 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 3–13; N. Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book*, JSOTSup 222 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

¹⁴³ Mays, "Going by the Book," 121.

¹⁴⁴ Childs, "Reflections on the Modern Study of the Psalms," 380.

Gunkel, for example, “had no interest in how the collection [of Psalms] was handed down to us.”¹⁴⁵ This is understandable because the primary interest and aim of Gunkel’s form critical method is to reconstruct the original *oral* form of each of the individual psalms. For this reason he had no interest, for instance, in explaining why Book I of the Psalter contains predominantly laments of an individual, nor did he make any effort “to explain the peculiar placing of the Psalms of praise and the royal Psalms.”¹⁴⁶ Gunkel simply ignored the *Sitz-im-Buch* of a psalm. Convinced that the form critical method had reached the point of offering only diminishing returns¹⁴⁷ and inspired by the fresh insights of Westermann’s incisive article on the compilation of the Psalter,¹⁴⁸ Childs called for an exegetical approach that takes seriously the final canonical shape of the Psalter because it “would greatly aid in making use of the psalms in the life of the Christian church.”¹⁴⁹

Another major difference between the reading strategies of form criticism and the cult functional approach, on the one hand, and the new canonical approach, on the other hand, is Westermann’s fruitful insight that thanks to the canonization process the individual psalms have been loosened from their original historical occasion and have been taken from their cultic *Sitz-im-Leben* and assigned a new function in the collection as a whole.¹⁵⁰ As a result of this strategic shift, the psalms have been overlaid with a new textual context from which the exegete should derive the theological meaning of a psalm. Consequently, the context of the collection as a whole (i.e. the *Sitz-im-Buch*) should co-determine how preachers proclaim the message of a psalm.

Third, in connection with this striking difference, it should also be noted that the practitioners of the canonical reading of the Psalter differ in their evaluation of the consequences of this important canonical transformation. According to some, for example, the Psalter in its final canonical shape is no longer the hymnbook of the Second (and possibly the First) Temple. In fact, Wilson, for example, is adamant about the Psalter not being a hymn book. He writes: “... in its ‘final form’ the Psalter is a book to be *read* rather than to be *performed*; to be *meditated over* rather than to be

¹⁴⁵ Westermann, “The Formation of the Psalter,” 252.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Childs, “Reflections on the Modern Study of the Psalms,” 378.

¹⁴⁸ Childs, “Reflections on the Modern Study of the Psalms,” 381.

¹⁴⁹ Childs, “Reflections on the Modern Study of the Psalms,” 385.

¹⁵⁰ Westermann, “The Formation of the Psalter,” 253. Childs (“Reflections on Modern Study of Psalms,” 381) adopts Westermann’s insight. Cf. Childs, *IOTS*, 515; Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 16.

recited from.”¹⁵¹ Instead, in their opinion, the Psalter has basically become a manual for instruction and meditation with *tôrâ* at its center.¹⁵² Following Westermann, Seybold, for example, writes:

With the new preface [Psalm 1] and the weight of the reflexive proverbial poem [Psalm 119], which in terms of its range is effectively a small collection in itself, the existing Psalter now takes on the character of a documentation of divine revelation, to be used in a way analogous to the *Torah*, the first part of the canon, and becomes an instruction manual for the theological study of the divine order of salvation, and for meditation.”¹⁵³

This position is also adopted by McCann.¹⁵⁴ Although Mays appears to recognize that the Psalter has a double identity of liturgy and literature that serves as a model for ritual in the cult and for instruction in *tôrâ* piety,¹⁵⁵ the caption “From Ritual Accompaniment to Instruction” suggests that he too draws a contrast between the two.¹⁵⁶ We will return to this issue in the conclusion to this essay.

Fourth, it should be underscored that the recognition of the highly important prefatory function of Psalm 1 is not a novel position. On the contrary, it represents a return to a view that had already been adopted by the early church fathers. Jerome, for example, already stated that Psalm 1 is “the main entrance to the mansion of the Psalter.”¹⁵⁷ Moreover, during the Reformation John Calvin, for example, clearly adhered to this tradi-

¹⁵¹ Westermann, “The Formation of the Psalter,” 253. Cf. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 16; Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 780–781; Futado, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 59.

¹⁵² Westermann, “The Formation of the Psalter,” 253. Cf. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 16; Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 780–781; Futado, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 59. For a critique of the idea that the Psalter is a “book” see: Gersternberger, “Der Psalter als Buch und als Sammlung,” 9.

¹⁵³ Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*, tr. R. G. Dunphy (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1990), 24.

¹⁵⁴ McCann, “The Psalms as Instruction,” 120.

¹⁵⁵ Mays, “The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation,” in: *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann (Sheffield: JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 17. (reprinted in: James L. Mays, *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms*, eds. Patrick D. Miller and Gene M. Tucker [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006], 79–84). On pp. 17–18 Mays shows that he is quite aware of the opposite shift in function as well. For instance, Ps. 30, the parade example of a psalm of thanksgiving, which *qua* genre originally had a didactic focus, has been assigned a cultic function by the editors’ superscription. Cf. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 16.

¹⁵⁶ Mays, “The Question of Context,” 18.

¹⁵⁷ Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume I (1–59 On the Psalms)*, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, tr. Marie Liguori Ewald (Washington: The Catholic University Press, 1964, 1964), 3. I owe this reference to Goldingay (*Psalms*, 1: 91). Schöckel-Cartini (*Salmos*, 1: 123) also refers to Origen, Basil of Caesarea and Hippolytus.

tional position¹⁵⁸ and even after the rise of historical-critical scholarship Franz Delitzsch,¹⁵⁹ Rudolf Kittel,¹⁶⁰ A. F. Kilpatrick,¹⁶¹ Briggs and Briggs,¹⁶² Gunkel,¹⁶³ among others, recognized that Psalm 1 served as the proper prologue to the Psalter. What is new is a renewed interest in the emphasis on *tôrâ* in Psalm 1, an emphasis which had proven to be problematic since Julius Wellhausen.¹⁶⁴ In a sense, this renewed interest in *tôrâ* is a return to Calvin's emphasis on the third use of the law.¹⁶⁵ But it is also more than that. The combined result of assigning the pride of place to Psalm 1 in the Psalter and a particular focus on the emphasis on *tôrâ* in Psalm 1:2 is, as McCann admits, "to elevate the concept of torah to one of central significance in understanding the Psalms."¹⁶⁶

Evidence for the Elevated Status of Torah

What warrants this important exegetical move? Is there internal textual evidence in the Psalter for assigning this elevated status to the concept *tôrâ*?

The first supporting argument for this elevated status is the emphasis on *tôrâ* in Psalm 1 itself, which, consequently, leads Childs to accept the classification of Psalm 1 as a "Torah Psalm."¹⁶⁷ This emphasis comes to clear expression in two ways. First, it is evident because of the double occurrence of the term תּוֹרָה in verse 2. Second, as the following synoptic comparison shows, in Psalm 1:2, 3 there is a clear allusion to Joshua 1:8:

¹⁵⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 1: 1.

¹⁵⁹ Delitzsch, "Psalms," 5:82.

¹⁶⁰ Kittel, *Die Psalmen*, 1–2. According to Kittel, Ps. 1 has been purposely placed as an *Art Motto* to the Psalter. Significantly, in this connection he also recognizes that Ps. 150 is the conclusion to the Psalter.

¹⁶¹ Kilpatrick, *Psalms*, 1.

¹⁶² Briggs and Briggs, *Psalms*, 1: lxxx, 3.

¹⁶³ Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 3.

¹⁶⁴ For a recent critique of Wellhausen's position on the Law see: Moshe Weinfeld, *The Place of the Law in the Religion of Ancient Israel*, Supplement to Vetus Testamentum, Volume C (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

¹⁶⁵ In connection with his explanation of the meaning of the Hebrew word *torah* in Ps. 1:2, Patrick D. Miller ("The Way of Torah," in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology*, 498), for example, claims that Calvin's emphasis on the third and pedagogical use of the law "... is precisely in tune with the understanding of law as torah in the Old Testament...."

¹⁶⁶ McCann, *Theological Introduction*, 25.

¹⁶⁷ Childs, *IOTS*, 513. It should be noted that because of the dominant presence of wisdom elements in Ps. 1, others classify it as a wisdom psalm. Both classifications are based on content, rather than compositional structure.

Psalm 1:2, 3

כִּי אֵם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה הִפְעָנוּ 2a

Instead, on the law of the LORD is his delight;

וּבְתוֹרַתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה: b

and on his law he meditates day and night.

וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלֵיחַ: 3c

and everything he does, prospers.¹⁶⁸

Joshua 1:8

לֹא-יָמוּשׁ סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה מִפִּיךָ a

Do not let this book of the Law depart from your mouth;

וְהִגִּיתָ בּוֹ יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה b

meditate on it day and night

לְמַעַן תִּשְׁמָר לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכָל-הַכְּתוּב בּוֹ c

so that you may be careful to do every-thing written in it.

כִּי-אִז תִּצְלַיֵחַ אֶת-דְּרָכֶיךָ d

Then you will be prosperous

וְאִז תִּשְׁכִּיל: e

and successful.

Significantly, Joshua 1:8b and Psalm 1:2b are the only two places in the O.T. in which one finds the expression “meditate on it day and night.”¹⁶⁹ This striking fact leads Miller to conclude that the construct phrase תּוֹרַת יְהוָה¹⁷⁰ in Psalm 1:2a refers to Deuteronomy.¹⁷¹ As a result of this unique inter-textual cross-reference, the Former Prophets (i.e., the Deuteronomistic History) and the Psalter, the first book in the Writings, begin with an emphasis on the extreme importance of constant meditation on the Law embodied in the book of Deuteronomy.¹⁷² In fact, in the Hebrew Bible the emphasis on meditating on *tôrâ* in Psalm 1:2 also forges a remarkable link with Malachi 4:4, the last book in the prophets. In this verse we read: “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.”

¹⁶⁸ According to the critical apparatus of BHS, this clause is a gloss. However, the poet’s interpretive insertion of Jer. 17:8 between v. 2 and 3c, argues against this suggestion.

¹⁶⁹ For the importance of meditating on the law see also Dt. 17:19 (וְקָרָא בּוֹ כְּלֵי-יָמָיו) “he is to read it all the days of his life”).

¹⁷⁰ For this construct phrase see also: Ps. 119:1; 2 Kings 10:31; 2 Chron. 17:9 and 34:14.

¹⁷¹ Miller, “Deuteronomy and Psalms,” 328. Miller’s claim is highly important because to rehabilitate the concept “law” in Psalm 1, McCann (“The Psalms as Instruction,” 118–119), for example, emphasizes that the Hebrew word *tôrâ* means “instruction” and should therefore “not be narrowly understood to refer to the Pentateuch.” To marshal additional support for his claim, Miller points to the association between Ps. 1:1 with Dt. 6:6–9 (p. 329) and (p. 327) the offer between life and death, good and evil made in Dt. 30:15–20 and Ps. 1. Childs (*IOTS*, 514) also refers to Dt. 30 and Josh. 1.

¹⁷² Miller, “Deuteronomy and Psalms,” 329. For a similar position see: Nahum M. Sarna, *Songs of the Heart: An Introduction to the Book of Psalms* (New York: Schocken Books, 1993), 28.

A second supporting argument for the centrality of the *tôrâ* in the Psalter is the fact that it was deliberately divided into five books, probably in imitation of the Torah (Pentateuch), as is evident from the benedictions at the end of each book: Book I (Pss. 1–41); Book II (Pss. 42–72); Book III (Pss. 73–89); Book IV (Pss. 90–106); and Book V (Pss. 107–150). According to Mays, this pentateuchal division emphasizes the central role of *tôrâ* in Israel's faith and suggests that the Psalter is a "Davidic Torah" that corresponds to the Torah of Moses.¹⁷³ Given this conceptual association, the reader is encouraged to meditate on the Five Books of David as an instructive commentary on the Torah.

Additional support comes from the prominent place assigned to two other *tôrâ* psalms in the Psalter, namely, Psalms 19 and 119.¹⁷⁴ According to Jamie A. Grant, Psalm 19 occupies the central position in Book I.¹⁷⁵ In fact, Auffret,¹⁷⁶ Miller,¹⁷⁷ and Stek¹⁷⁸ and have argued that Psalm 19 is the pivot point in the concentric arrangement of Psalms 15–24. Significantly, this cluster of psalms is framed by Psalms 15 and 24, two entrance psalms, each of which contain important elements of the Decalogue. According to Stek, "[t]ogether, these three psalms (15; 19; 24) provide instructive words concerning the petitioners heard in the enclosed psalms, offer a counterpoint to Ps 14, and reinforce the instruction of Ps 1."¹⁷⁹ Moreover, according to Wilson¹⁸⁰ and Erich Zenger, Psalm 119, a beautiful encomium to the benefits of *tôrâ*, occupies the central position in Book V.¹⁸¹ Their argument leads Grant to conclude that Psalm 119 functions as a bracket

¹⁷³ Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 122. The correlation between the five books of Moses and the five books of David is already found in the *Midrash Tehillim*: "As Moses gave five books of laws to Israel, so David gave five books of Psalms to Israel." Cf. William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 1:5. For this exegetical approach see also the Jewish exegete Saadiah Gaon (A.D. 882–942). Cf. Uriel Simon, *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms: From Saadiah Gaon to Abraham Ibn Ezra*, tr. Lenn J. Schramm (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 1–57.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. James L. Mays, "The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter," in: *The Lord Reigns*, 128–135. Originally published in *JBL* 106 (1987): 3–12.

¹⁷⁵ Grant, *The King as Exemplar*, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Pierre Auffret, *La sagesse a bâti sa maison: Etudes structures littéraires dans l'Ancien Testament et spécialement dans les Psaumes*, OBO, 49 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 407–438.

¹⁷⁷ Patrick D. Miller, "Kingship, Torah Obedience and Prayer," in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology*, 279–297. Originally published in *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung*, eds. Klaus Seybold and Erich Zenger (Freiburg: Herder, 1995), 127–142.

¹⁷⁸ Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 800 and 805.

¹⁷⁹ Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 800.

¹⁸⁰ Wilson, *Editing*, 223.

¹⁸¹ Zenger, "Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of the Psalter," 101.

and influences the whole Psalter.¹⁸² Furthermore, Miller calls attention to the fact that in each of these *tôrâ* psalms (i.e., Pss. 1, 19 and 119) “*meditation* plays a significant role.”¹⁸³

Further support comes from the important fact that each of the three *tôrâ* psalms (i.e., Pss. 1, 19 and 119) have been intentionally correlated with one or more royal psalms.¹⁸⁴ Psalm 1, for example, has been juxtaposed with Psalm 2, to form a dual hermeneutical introduction to the Psalter as a whole (see note 29 above). Similarly, Psalm 19 was framed by Psalm 18 and Psalms 20–21 in the concentric structure of Psalms 15–24 and Psalm 119 was paired with Psalm 118 and, according to Grant’s proposal, sandwiched between the Hallel Psalms (Pss. 111–117) and the Songs of Ascent (Pss. 120–134).¹⁸⁵ A probable explanation for the correlation of the royal psalms with Psalms 1, 19 and 119 is the requirement in Deuteronomy 17:19 that Israel’s king should read from the *tôrâ* as long as he lives.¹⁸⁶ In any case, according to Mays, the purpose of this correlation “seems to be the provision of an eschatological context for a piety based on torah.”¹⁸⁷

Finally, although Psalms 1, 19 and 119 are the only psalms that contain a prominent emphasis on the theme of *tôrâ*, other references to *tôrâ*¹⁸⁸ or its synonyms¹⁸⁹ are found scattered throughout the Psalter.¹⁹⁰ In fact, Psalm 81:9 quotes the first commandment!¹⁹¹ These additional references reinforce the centrality of the *tôrâ* in the Psalter. Significantly, this emphasis on *tôrâ* also comes to clear expression in lament psalms.

¹⁸² Grant, *The King as Exemplar*, 10.

¹⁸³ Miller, “Deuteronomy and Psalms,” 330. Miller also calls attention to the emphasis on meditation in Ps. 104:34 and 105:2. Because Ps. 105:2 emphasizes the meditation on Yahweh’s marvelous deeds, Miller (p. 330) concludes that the Psalter expands “the focus of constant attention to include, alongside the torah, the wonderful deeds of the Lord.”

¹⁸⁴ Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 133–134.

¹⁸⁵ Grant, *The King as Exemplar*, 124.

¹⁸⁶ Grant, *The King as Exemplar*, 66–69.

¹⁸⁷ Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 134.

¹⁸⁸ Pss. 37:31; 40:9; 78:1, 5 and 10; 89:31; 94:12; and 105:45. Miller (“Deuteronomy and Psalms,” 329, n. 20) suggests that the association of *tôrâ* in Ps. 1:2 with Deuteronomy is probably to be assumed also for other uses of the word in the Psalter.

¹⁸⁹ Pss. 18:22; 25:10; 93:5; 99:7; 103:7; 111:7–8; 112:1; and 147:19–20. Miller (“Deuteronomy and Psalms,” 329, n. 20) suggests that the association of *tôrâ* in the Psalter with Deuteronomy is probably to be assumed as well for the synonymous terms.

¹⁹⁰ Basil de Pinto, “The Torah and the Psalms,” *JBL* 86 (1967): 160–172.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Patrick D. Miller, “The Psalms as a Meditation on the First Commandment,” in *The Way of the Lord: Essays in Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 99–101. On p. 91 Miller quotes Luther’s generalization from the preface to his *Large Catechism*: “Moreover, what is the whole Psalter but meditation and exercises based on the First Commandment?”

Two examples require special attention. The first is Psalm 40:7–8 (cf. Heb. 10:5–7) because the theme of delight in the *tôrâ* from Psalm 1:2*a* is also found here (cf. Ps. 112:1).¹⁹² In these verses the speaker reports:

⁷*Then I said, “Here I am, I have come—
in the scroll of the book it is written about me.
⁸I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.*

Interestingly, according to Miller, “the scroll of the book” in verse 7 is probably a reference to Deuteronomy.¹⁹³ This suggestion is even more likely if, as Ridderbos suggests on the basis of his interpretation of the particle אֲתָּ , “then,” verse 7 refers to the occasion of his coronation.¹⁹⁴ In that case the phrase “the scroll of the book” probably refers to Deuteronomy 17:14–20.¹⁹⁵

The second example is the beatitude in Psalm 94:12, where we read:

*Oh the happiness of the strong person
↳ whom you discipline, O LORD;
the one whom you teach from your law.*

Two features of this pivotal beatitude call for attention because they recur in other psalms. The first concerns the strong affinity between the concept of happiness (אֲשֶׁרֵי), another important recurrent theme in the Psalter,¹⁹⁶ and *tôrâ*. In addition to Psalms 1:1–2 and 94:12, this intimate thematic connection is also articulated in the opening beatitude of Psalm 112:1:

*Oh the happiness of the person
↳ who fears the LORD,
who greatly delights in his commandments.*

A similar connection comes to clear expression in the double beatitude of Psalm 119:1–3:

¹*Happy are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the LORD.
²Happy are those who keep his decrees,
who seek him with their whole heart,
³who also do no wrong,
but walk in his ways. (NRSV)*

¹⁹² Miller, “The Beginning of the Psalter,” 86.

¹⁹³ Miller, “Deuteronomy and the Psalms,” 329, n. 20.

¹⁹⁴ N. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1: 435.

¹⁹⁵ N. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1: 436. Cf. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 315.

¹⁹⁶ The word אֲשֶׁרֵי occurs 28 times in the Psalter. Significantly, it occurs in each of the five books: 10x in Book I (Pss. 1:1; 2:12; 32:1, 3; 33:12; 34:8[9]; 40:2[3]; 41:1[2]); 1x in Book II (Ps. 65:4[5]); 4x in Book III (Pss. 84:4[5], 5[6], 12[13]; 89:15[16]); 2x in Book IV (Pss. 94:12; 106:3); and 10x in Book V (Pss. 112:1; 119:1, 2; 127:5; 128:1; 137:8, 9; 144:15; 146:5).

The second feature of Psalm 94:12 concerns the motif of Yahweh teaching his people. In view of this motif, it comes as no surprise that the petitioner of Psalm 25 asks the Lord to teach him “[his] ways” (v. 4), which, as is evident from verse 10, are the covenant stipulations. Similar petitions are found in Psalm 86:11 and 143:8, 10. Each of these petitions is intimately connected with another important *tôrâ* motif, namely, walking in the Lord’s ways.

In view of the foregoing data, it may be inferred with de Pinto that the *tôrâ* and the lifestyle associated with it constitute an intrinsic element in the final canonical shape of the Psalter.¹⁹⁷ This fact justifies the conclusion that a *tôrâ* spirituality has been overlaid on the final compilation of the Psalter.¹⁹⁸ Through this deliberate editorial shaping the *tôrâ* became a particularly important encompassing principle of faith in the Book of Psalms. Consequently, one may infer that the Lord’s *tôrâ* was assigned a preeminent place in the Psalter. In fact, the pervasive emphasis on *tôrâ* in the Psalter leads Mays to the following conclusion:

Taken together, this harvest of texts contains a profile of an understanding of the Lord’s way with his people and world that is organized around torah. Torah applies to everything.¹⁹⁹

Evaluation and Application

In our judgment, the editorial placement of Psalm 1 as a hermeneutical prism through which the reader is to meditate on the Psalter and the prominent emphasis on *tôrâ* throughout the Psalter justify Childs’s claim that “[t]he prayers of Israel directed to God have themselves become identified with God’s word to his people.” In a certain sense this editorial process is but an extension of the proverbial reflections on the word of God in Psalms 12:6, 18:31, and 119:140. Significantly, this editorial process is the other “voice” in the Psalter, to which exegetes and preachers must listen by taking seriously the final canonical shape of the Psalter because, as we have noted above, according to Childs, “... taking seriously the canonical form of the Psalter would greatly aid in making use of the psalms in the life of the Christian Church.”²⁰⁰

The fact that the Psalter contains direct quotations from the Lord (cf. Pss. 2:6, 7–9; 12:5), as well as words from cult officials who speak in the name of the Lord (cf. Pss. 20:6; 28:5), together with the “voice” of God that can be discerned in the intentional canonization process of the Psalter

¹⁹⁷ Basil de Pinto, “The Torah and the Psalms,” 174.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Mays, “The Place of the Torah Psalms,” in *The Lord Reigns*, 131.

²⁰⁰ Childs, “Reflections on Modern Study of Psalms,” 385.

as sacred Scripture in which even *originally human* words become *divine* words,²⁰¹ confirms once more the conclusion that, *pace* von Rad, the Psalter is not just Israel's response to Yahweh's mighty deeds in history. It is also Israel's response, to be sure, but is more than that. It is also clearly God's word to Israel. Consequently, as Psalm 12 illustrates, the Psalter plays, as the Church has recognized in her reading and praying of the psalms,²⁰² a dual role. It contains believers' words addressed to God and at the same time God's word to Israel. As Psalm 12 illustrates so well, there is a dramatic and dynamic interplay between human and divine words. Moreover, a holistic reading of the final canonical shape of the Psalter leads to the inference that the canon conscious editors appropriated (cf. Ps. 86), preserved and transmitted the psalms not only as a record of Israel's response to God's mighty deeds but also as God's word to Israel.²⁰³ As a result, the third option listed at the beginning of this second installment of our essay is to be preferred.

Methodological Implications for Exegesis

Childs's call for a canonical reading of the Psalter that seriously takes into consideration its didactic, messianic and eschatological notes raises an important methodological question for exegesis: "What are the consequences of this approach for the interpretation of particular psalms?"²⁰⁴ In answer to this question, it should be emphasized, first of all, that the exegete need not disregard the important exegetical gains of Gunkel's hallmark form critical method or Mowinckel's cult-functional approach, nor Mulenburch's rhetorical criticism. A canonical reading should be informed by the methodological concerns of these approaches but at the same time go beyond them. The exegetical task must be broadened to include a careful analysis of the final canonical shape of the Psalter in order to hear also this important inscripturated expression of the "voice" of God to Israel.

To hear this inscripturated "voice," exegetes must read each psalm not just in its cultic context but also in the literary context of the Psalter (*Sitz-im-Buch*), be that in the context of the neighboring psalm (e.g. Pss. 90–91²⁰⁵;

²⁰¹ For this formulation see: Miller, "Deuteronomy and the Psalms," 321.

²⁰² Wallace, *Words to God, Words from God*, 14.

²⁰³ McCann, "Psalms," 4: 642.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Mays, "Psalm 118 in the Light of Canonical Analysis," in *The Lord Reigns*, 136; McCann, "The Psalms as Instruction," 121.

²⁰⁵ For Briggs and Briggs (*Psalms*, 1: lxxx), Ps. 91 was assigned its present position as a counterpart to Ps. 90. In fact, according to Kirkpatrick (*The Book of Psalms*, 553–554), Ps. 91 is the answer to Ps. 90. Cf. Gerald T. Sheppard, "Theology and the Book of Psalms," *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 151; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2: 432.

Pss. 103 and 104²⁰⁶; Pss. 111–112²⁰⁷; Pss. 105–106²⁰⁸; Pss. 134–135²⁰⁹), or the context of a smaller collection (e.g. Ps. 8 in the context of Pss. 3–14²¹⁰), or in the context of the seams of the Psalter’s canonical garment (e.g. Pss. 72 and 89).²¹¹ In fact, they should also pay attention to unique sequences of psalms. In the cluster of Psalms 15–24, for example, they should note the interesting sequence of Psalm 22 (lament)→Psalm 23 (psalm of trust)→Psalm 24 (psalm of praise).²¹² Moreover, in view of the fact that Westermann,²¹³ Brueggemann²¹⁴ and Goldingay²¹⁵ have called attention to the compositional and functional relationship between psalms of lament, psalms of declarative praise and psalms of descriptive praise, they should also note the striking concentric functional sequence of Psalm 29 (descriptive hymn of praise)→Psalm 30 (declarative psalm of praise)→Psalm 31 (lament)→Psalm 32 (descriptive psalm of praise)→Psalm 33 (descriptive hymn of praise) with Psalm 31 at the center.²¹⁶ Furthermore, exegetes must also pay careful attention to the syntactical features of a psalm, discern its rhetorical structures and look for the intertextual relations of the psalm’s language with other psalms (e.g. Pss. 95:7 and 100:3²¹⁷) and with key texts in other parts of Scripture (e.g. Josh. 1:8 in Ps. 1:2, 3; Ps. 86²¹⁸; and Ps. 100:3

²⁰⁶ Mays, “Going by the Book,” 121.

²⁰⁷ For these twin psalms see: Zimmerli, “Zwillingspsalmen,” 263–267. In connection with these twin psalms, it should be noted that Ps. 111:10 ends on the theme of “fearing Yahweh” and Ps. 112:1 begins with this same theme.

²⁰⁸ Zimmerli, “Zwillingspsalmen,” 267–270.

²⁰⁹ For the extensive connections between Pss. 134 and 135 see: Patrick D. Miller, “The End of the Psalter: A Response to Erich Zenger,” in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology*, 316, n. 6. Originally published in *JSOT* 80 (1998): 103–110.

²¹⁰ Cf. Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 794; Miller, “The Beginning of the Psalter,” 89–90; deClaissé-Walford, *Introduction to the Psalms*, 67–69; Marvin E. Tate, “An Exposition of Psalm 8,” *PRS* 28 (2001): 344.

²¹¹ For an attempt to interpret a psalm from this perspective see: Mays, “Psalm 118 in the Light of Canonical Analysis,” in: *The Lord Reigns*, 136–145.

²¹² Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, “An Intertextual Reading of Psalms 22, 23, and 24,” in: *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, 139–152; Seerveld, “Reading and Hearing the Psalms,” 29. See Pss. 120, 121 and 122 for a similar sequence.

²¹³ Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 156–157.

²¹⁴ Brueggemann, “Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology,” *JSOT* 17 (1980): 3–32; idem, “Response to John Goldingay’s ‘The Dynamic Cycle of Praise and Prayer,’” *JSOT* 22 (1982): 141–142.

²¹⁵ John Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1: 68.

²¹⁶ For an alternative concentric structure of Pss. 25–34 see: Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 811.

²¹⁷ Cf. Bosma, “Discerning the Voices,” 211–212.

²¹⁸ According to Kirkpatrick (*The Book of Psalms*, 514), Ps. 86 breaks up a cluster of psalms

and Dt. 4:35, 1 Kings 8:60 and 18:39²¹⁹). A very useful tool for this task is Stek's "Significant Arrangement of the Psalter,"²²⁰ together with his explanations of the arrangement of the psalms in *The NIV Study Bible*.

Childs claims that "[b]y taking seriously the canonical shape the [preacher] is given an invaluable resource for the care of souls..."²²¹ To that end, a preacher might develop, for example, a series of sermons on the theme of genuine happiness based on the repetition of the introductory beatitude in Psalm 1. According to Mays, this opening complex beatitude introduces a major theme in the Psalter.²²² But, as Stek²²³ and McCann²²⁴ have noted, this theme is dominant in Book I. Significantly, the opening beatitude of Psalm 1:1 forms an inclusion with the closing beatitude of Psalm 2. As a result, these two psalms serve as introductory "pre-prayer" psalms to Psalms 3–41.²²⁵ Strikingly, these two introductory psalms are balanced by beatitudes in the two concluding psalms of Book I, Psalms 40:4 and 41:1 so that Book I is framed by declarations of happiness.²²⁶ Between these two frames are the double beatitude in Psalm 32:1–2, the pivotal beatitude in Psalm 33:12 and the beatitude in Psalm 34:8, which repeats the beatitude of Psalm 2:12 and reiterates the important theme of refuge that was introduced in Psalm 2:12.²²⁷ As a result, Book I is, in a nutshell, a concise instruction in happiness,²²⁸ in which each psalm emphasizes an important aspect of genuine happiness.²²⁹ The beatitude in Psalm 32, for

attributed to the "sons of Korah" (Pss. 84–85, 87–88) and is the only Davidic psalm in Book III. Cf. deClaisse-Walford, *Introduction to the Psalms*, 93.

²¹⁹ Cf. Bosma, "Discerning the Voices," *CTJ* 43 (2008): 211.

²²⁰ Cf. Mays, "The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation," 15–16.

²²¹ Childs, *IOTS*, 523.

²²² Mays, *Psalms*, 40. De Pinto, "The Torah and the Psalms," 157.

²²³ Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 829, 831.

²²⁴ J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "The Shape of Book I of the Psalter and the Shape of Human Happiness," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, eds. Peter W. Flint & Patrick D. Miller, Supplement to *Vetus Testamentum*, XCIC (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 340–348.

²²⁵ For this phrase I am indebted to Eugene Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 23.

²²⁶ Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 829, 831; McCann, Jr., "The Shape of Book I of the Psalter," 342.

²²⁷ According to Sheppard ("Theology and the Book of Psalms," 149), this theme in the beatitude of Ps. 1:12 anticipates the psalms of lament that follow and so "marks out a particular theological stance by which laments are to be understood as scripture." For this important theme see: Jerome F. D. Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (JSOTSup 217; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

²²⁸ Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 829, 831.

²²⁹ Cf. Carl J. Bosma, "Psalm 1: A Gateway to the Psalter," www.calvin.edu/worship/services/series/lent_journey/03_05_06.php; idem, "Psalm 32—Forgiveness: The Gateway

instance, functions, according to McCann, “as an important check against any tendency to misunderstand Psalm 1.”²³⁰

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, we would note, first of all, as a summary of our two part essay, that our discussion of the two problems in psalmic interpretation invites the inference that there is an important connection between Israel’s psalmody and the cult. The cult constituted an essential vehicle for the maintenance of the covenant relationship between the Lord and his chosen people Israel. This is evident from the central role which the concept of covenant plays in Psalm 50.

In connection with this psalm, Spieckermann claims that Psalm 50 makes its own unique contribution to the concept of proper worship, which is not found in the *Torah* nor the Prophets.²³¹ This original contribution comes to expression in verses 14–15, which, according to Ridderbos, assign a special place to praise and prayer:²³²

^{14a} *Sacrifice thank offerings to God,*

^b *fulfill your vows to the Most High;*

^{15a} *then call upon me in the day of trouble;*

^b *I will deliver you, and you will honor me.*

The sequence of events in these verses is striking. One would have expected the text to read: “Call upon me in the day of trouble and then sacrifice thanks offerings to me.” However, such is obviously not the case.²³³ This prescription for proper worship begins with the call to offer praise to the Lord and concludes with the affirmation, “and you will honor me,” which obviously includes praise (cf. v. 23).²³⁴ For this reason Ridderbos calls these verses a “glorious circle.”²³⁵

Three features of this “glorious circle” merit further attention. First, as a result of the *inclusio* of verses 14–15, praise (הַלְלוּ, cf. vv. 14, 23) stands at the

to Happiness,” www.calvin.edu/worship/services/series/lent_journey/03_19_06.php; idem, “Introduction to Psalm 34: Prerequisites for Happiness in the Midst of Trouble,” www.calvin.edu/worship/services/series/lent_journey/03_12_06.php.

²³⁰ McCann, “Psalms,” 4: 805.

²³¹ Spieckermann, “Rede Gottes und Wort Gottes,” 161.

²³² N. H. Ridderbos, *De Plaats van het Loven en van het Bidden in het Oude Testament: Enkele beschouwing over en naar aanleiding van Psalm 50:14, 15* (Kampen: Kok, 1970), especially pp. 14ff. In this lecture Ridderbos calls attention to the fact that Psalm 50.14 constitutes a proof text for Question and Answer 116 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*.

²³³ N. H. Ridderbos, *Loven en Bidden*, 14.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

heart of public worship in the Psalms.²³⁶ Cultic praise is the primary mode through which Israel expresses her fealty to the Lord, the great King. This is evident, for example, from the extensive call to praise in Psalm 95:1–7, in which Israel is urged to bring תְּהַלְּלֵהוּ (v. 2; cf. Ps. 100:4)²³⁷ and which, surprisingly, ends with a divine speech to remind Israel (and the reader) that jubilant praise and a bent knee are not enough.²³⁸ The Lord also requires a heart that is submissive to his word. Second, as a result of the priority of praise in the Psalms, several lament psalms begin with praise.²³⁹ In these psalms praise serves as the basis for protestation and petition,²⁴⁰ Psalm 40:1–5 being a prime example.²⁴¹ Third, the priority of praise in Israel's normative worship also explains the fact that, even though there are more lament psalms than praise psalms in the Psalter, the book bears the unique title הַלְּלֵהוּ, "praises."²⁴²

Our discussion has also demonstrated, in the second place, the dialogical nature of the Psalms, especially the psalms of lament. The primary evidence for the dialogical nature of a psalm is the presence of shifts in voice and changes in addressee. These alternations, in turn, bolster the claim that the psalms were originally composed for the cult. Against von Rad, these alternations also demonstrate that the Psalms are not a monologue; they are not just Israel's answer to the Lord. On the contrary, the Lord also speaks to Israel through his ordained cultic officials (cf. 1 Sam: 1.17).²⁴³ As a result, lament psalms like Psalms 12 and 28 can be read as normative "scripts" that preserve the passionate rhetorical dialogue between a distraught suppliant and a cult official.

We believe that the recognition of this important feature opens up new vistas of theological, homiletical, liturgical and pastoral interpretation and application. Theologically, for example, the recognition of alternating voices and addressees allows one to explore the intense dialogic tension between faith and lived experience in psalms of lament. Homiletically, this means that instead of trying to reconstruct the historical occasion for the composition of a psalm—for which the psalm contains scant evidence—the preacher should apply close syntactical and thematic analysis to a psalm

²³⁶ N. H. Ridderbos, *Loven en Bidden*, 14.

²³⁷ Spieckermann, "Rede Gottes und Wort Gottes," 161.

²³⁸ Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 895.

²³⁹ N. H. Ridderbos, *Loven en Bidden*, 17, 23–25. Cf. Pss. 9; 27; 40; 44; 85; and 89.

²⁴⁰ N. H. Ridderbos, *Loven en Bidden*, 29.

²⁴¹ N. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen*, 1: 432.

²⁴² N. H. Ridderbos, *Loven en Bidden*, 16. Cf. Childs, *IOTS*, 514. According to Childs, this title is not a literary classification; instead, it is a theological marker.

²⁴³ Cf. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "Prayer and Worship," *Calvin Theological Journal* 36 (2001): 53–62.

like Psalms 2 or 12 in order to preach its dramatic tension persuasively and passionately. Passionate preaching of the Psalms, claims Sedgwick, will demonstrate “the organic unity between ‘pulpit ministry’ on the one hand and ‘pastoral work’ on the other....”²⁴⁴

The same guideline applies to the liturgists. Instead of introducing arbitrary divisions into a psalm for responsive readings in the liturgy, they too should pay careful attention to alternating voices and changes in addressee in the Psalms in the various literary genres of the Psalter. This procedure will enable liturgists to uncover the liturgical structure of texts and make them more relevant, not only for private devotions but also for public worship. Consider, for example, the following responsive reading for Psalm 24 suggested by James C. Howell:²⁴⁵

- All sing:** Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!
- Choir:** The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof,
The world and those who dwell therein;
For he has founded it upon the seas,
And established it upon the rivers.
- All:** Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
- Leader:** He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who does not lift up his soul to what is false,
And does not swear deceitfully,
He will receive blessing from the LORD,
And vindication from the God of his salvation.
- Choir:** Such is the generation of those who seek him,
Who seek the face of the God of Jacob.
- All sing:** Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!
- Choir:** And be lifted up, O ancient doors!
That the King of Glory may come in.
- All:** Who is this King of Glory?
- Choir:** The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle!
- All sing:** Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!
- Choir:** And be lifted up, O ancient doors!
That the King of Glory may come in.
- Leader:** Who is this King of Glory?
- All:** The LORD of hosts,
He is the King of Glory!
- All sing:** Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!

²⁴⁴ Sedgwick, “Preaching the Psalms,” 363.

²⁴⁵ James C. Howell, “The Psalms in Worship and Preaching: A Report,” in *Psalms and Practice: Worship, Virtue, and Authority*, ed. Stephen Breck Reid (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 128–129.

Moreover, language is not only informative but also rhetorically performative. Language shapes experiences, including the experience of the readers of a lament psalm and the participants in a liturgy.²⁴⁶ Consequently, a responsive reading that is based, for example, on the alternating voices of Psalm 12 (see footnote 82 above) enables the participants to voice their hurt and hear the pivotal word of the Lord in verse 5. In so doing, the responsive reading can serve as spiritual muscle for believers in distress.

Third, our discussion of the newer holistic canonical reading strategy in the exegesis of the Psalter alerted us to another important expression of the word of God in the Psalter, in addition to the quotations of God speaking directly (e.g. Pss. 2:7–9; 12:5) or indirectly through his official ministrants in the cult (e.g. Pss. 20:6; 28:5), namely, the “voice” of the canon conscious editors of the final shape of the Psalter. We judge that Childs correctly argued for a serious listening to this important “voice.” Moreover, in our opinion, the presence of this inscripturated “voice” in the final shape of the Psalter bolsters our critique of von Rad’s one-sided formulation of the Psalter as Israel’s response to God’s mighty deeds. To the extent that von Rad’s important redefinition of the proper object of a theology of the Psalms sought to correct the excesses of the 19th century psychologyizing biographical approach to psalmic interpretation, it was partially correct. However, his approach failed to do justice to the final canonical shape of the Psalter. Consequently, his approach failed to deal with the important fact that, to use the words of McCann, “the psalms were appropriated, preserved, and transmitted not only as records of human response to God but also as God’s word to humanity.”²⁴⁷ Furthermore, we are of the opinion that listening to the inscripturated “voice” of the Lord constitutes an important exegetical step that should be executed before one makes Bonhoeffer’s Christological move.

Finally, our discussion of the canonical approach to discerning the “voice” of the Lord in the compositional structure of the present canonical shape of the Psalter underscored that this new line of inquiry constitutes a major shift in psalmic interpretation that has been dominated by the use of historical critical methods and their “almost exclusive concern for the individual psalm.”²⁴⁸ The advocates of this method have produced many perceptive insights.²⁴⁹ However, in our discussion we also called attention to a

²⁴⁶ Cf. Walter Brueggemann, “The Formfulness of Grief,” *The Psalms & the Life of Faith*, 84–97. For this reason Athanasius stresses the importance of singing the Psalms in his letter to Marcellinus. He (“Letter to Marcellinus,” 116) writes: “For a soul rightly ordered by chanting the sacred words forgets its own afflictions and contemplates with joy the things of Christ alone.”

²⁴⁷ McCann, “Psalms,” 4: 643.

²⁴⁸ Nasuti, *Defining the Sacred Songs*, 163.

²⁴⁹ According to Harry P. Nasuti (“The Interpretive Significance of Sequence and

tension between concept of the Psalter as a hymnbook and the concept of the Psalter as a “book” for instruction in godliness (Ps. 1) under the reign of God (Ps. 2). This tension comes to clear expression in Wilson’s claim that “in its ‘final form’ the Psalter is a book to be *read* rather than to be *performed*; to be *meditated over* rather than to be *recited from*.”²⁵⁰ The caption “From Ritual Accompaniment to Instruction” in Mays’s article “The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation” suggests that it is also inherent to his “Going by the Book” project.²⁵¹ In any case, Wilson’s adamant affirmation appears to drive a wedge between the intimate connection between psalmody and the cult. As such, it threatens to nullify the gains of Mowinckel’s cult functional approach described in this two part article. Perhaps this assumed dichotomy between worship and instruction in the final shape of the Psalter by some of the practitioners of canonical exegesis is due to the lingering influence of Wellhausen’s dislike for the cult, as Brueggemann suggests in his evaluation of Mays’s project.²⁵² At any rate, we believe that the relationship between worship and instruction in the Psalter is not a linear move from worship to instruction. In our judgment, they are intimately intertwined. As Roland E. Murphy has correctly noted, the descriptive psalms of praise in the Psalter have a clear didactic component (cf. Pss. 30:6; 32:8–10; 34:4–6).²⁵³ For this reason we prefer Childs’s more open formulation of the relationship. He writes: “The psalms were collected to be used for liturgy and for study, both by a corporate body and by individuals, to remind them of the great redemptive acts of the past as well as to anticipate the hopes for the future.”²⁵⁴ His formulation allows for a dynamic interaction between worship and instruction as the church continues to use the Psalter as a manual for prayer and praise and a manual for instruction in piety.

Selection in the Book of Psalms,” in: *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, eds. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller [Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, Volume XCIX; Leiden: Brill, 2005], 314), “one of the gains of the recent canonical approach has been its retrieval of the hermeneutical significance of the figure of David.” For an extended bibliography on this topic see: Howard N. Wallace, “King and Community: Joining with David in Prayer,” in: *Psalms and Prayers*, eds. Bob Pecking and Eric Peels (OTS 55; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 267–268.

²⁵⁰ Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, 207.

²⁵¹ Mays, “The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation,” 18.

²⁵² Walter Brueggemann, “Response to James L. Mays, ‘The Question of Context,’” in: *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann (Sheffield: JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 32.

²⁵³ Murphy, “Reflections on Contextual Interpretation of the Psalms,” 24. This important aspect of declarative psalms of praise was also recognized by von Rad. In his *OTT* 1: 359 he writes: “But in his avowal he does not primarily address Jahweh, as might have been supposed, but the community. Obviously he has an urgent desire to pass on to the community what he himself has experienced in the intimate depths of his own personal life, for all who are in a similar situation should do as he has done, cast themselves upon Jahweh.”

²⁵⁴ Childs, *IOTS*, 522.