

FORMAL ANALYSIS AND THE PSALMS

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Along with an increased interest in literary criticism have come new techniques for analyzing poetic works. One of these is formal analysis as practiced by the Chicago Critics.¹ Formal analysis looks beyond metrics, prosodic molds, such as odes and sonnets, or conventions like Hebrew parallelisms, or any of the other interesting but external features of poetry, to a system of internal relationships. These relationships do not resemble the mechanical and impersonal ones Vern S. Poythress describes in his summary of structuralist approaches.² And despite some verbal similarity, formal analysis is not Hermann Gunkel's form criticism. Neither is it the cult-functional approach of Sigmund Mowinkel nor the time-historical one of Moses Bittenwieser. Instead it is a technique for approaching poems as unique artistic wholes to discover a system of inner relationships in which form and content are inseparable. These relationships, which I shall call the total intrinsic form, are best grasped by concrete illustrations.

My purpose is twofold: to provide examples of the method, and to give an idea of what this sort of approach can add to traditional grammatico-historical exegesis both in appreciating the poet's artistry and in furnishing additional answers to hostile critics. For instance its principle of unity, as it applies to structure, meaning, and effect, should be especially helpful in choosing between the various possible translations of words. I have selected Psalms 1 and 51 partly because their brevity and familiarity should facilitate my task of illustrating the technique—or rather, the results of the technique—and partly because, in both cases, a formal analysis demonstrates that there is usually no artistic justification for the attacks of those who would undermine the inspiration of the Scriptures. Let us begin with an analysis of Psalm 1 and then examine how this can help us reply to one critic.

To arrive at the intrinsic form the critic asks three kinds of questions. These questions have to do with how each element (character, action, thought, image, or word) is introduced, why it occurs where it does, and how it relates to the others. A lyric poet seeks to paint an emotion, thought, intention, or some other intangible of this nature, to produce the most powerful effect possible within the limits of his art. This will require economy without sacrificing richness, and clarity without destroying unity of effect. With regard to the latter the poet generally aims to keep all of the elements before the reader's mind so that there will be no lapse of interest but rather a unified and continuously mounting effect. He usual-

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¹A group led by the distinguished University of Chicago Aristotelian scholar, Richard McKeon, developed the technique by applying the principles they discovered in the *Poetics* not only to the genres treated by the Greek philosopher but to others as well.

²V. S. Poythress, "Structuralism and Biblical Studies," *JETS* 21/3 (1978) 221-237.

ly finds that alternation and inference are better ways of achieving this than the rules of rhetoric. Inference is possible because of the solidity of the inner relationships. The critic can often express these inner relationships in terms of a mathematical proportion, although most poets probably do not consciously compose with anything so rigid in mind. In 2:4::3:6, for example, any change in one number requires a corresponding change in another. While a solid base of some sort is the *sine qua non* for a successful poem, it is by no means the only important consideration. The way a poet orders and expresses the elements or leaves them to inference has perhaps even more to do with his ability to create a rich, powerful and unified effect than his choice of static arrangement. However, since the static arrangement is unusually clear in Psalm 1, I shall begin with it.

I. PSALM 1

The foundation of the psalm is an opposition between the happy (blessed) life of the godly man and the unhappy life of the ungodly man. The poet succeeds in placing all four parts—the character and life of each—before our minds simultaneously by describing the blessed man's activity in terms of what he does not do. We infer that it is the ungodly man who walks, stands and sits with sinners. We also infer that he is not blessed. These inner relationships may be viewed as parts of a proportion: The godly man's character (A) is to his happy life (B) as the ungodly man's character (C) is to his unhappy life (D). In the following diagram the implications are bracketed.³

Godly man		Ungodly man	
A	B	C	D
character :	happy life	character :	unhappy life
tree planted	delights in God's law	chaff	[walks with sinners]
yields fruit	meditates on God's law	driven away	[stands with sinners]
leaf does not wither	prosper	perishes	[sits with sinners]

We shall discuss presently how the clause in 1:6a, "For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous," ties in with the proportion, but first let us consider the elements listed above.

Note the natural imagery used to depict the godly man's character (A). Because of the transferability of the parts of a proportion, we would expect the poet to utilize natural imagery to portray the ungodly man. He does. The ungodly are "like the chaff which the wind driveth away," and "they shall perish" (C). Observe the effectiveness of the contrast. The poet's description of the tree is rich and full, while his picture of the chaff is terse and empty. This disequilibrium of the two parts helps to focus the reader's attention on the godly man, increasing the unity of effect. The psalmist uses legal imagery to depict the godly man's activity. It has to do with God's law. In comparison, what can we say about the ungodly man? Because of the correspondence between the parts of a proportion we should expect the ungodly man's life to be connected with legal matters and, moreover, to be opposed to the law of God just as the chaff is contrasted with the tree.

Here is a suggestion. Think of an ambitious young man's scheming to get

³Unless otherwise indicated all citations are from the *KJV*.

ahead by the world's principles of expediency, flattery, selling oneself, and so forth. Imagine his feverish activity to achieve recognition. He delights in being seen walking where men of importance will notice him. Indeed, he meditates day and night on how to attract attention without being obvious. After being greeted day after day by the town fathers he is quite certain that they will begin to feel that they know him. Before long they will stand and visit with him. Finally he will become one of the notables, and in the assemblies and tribunals of the day he will find himself seated in the high places reserved for the city's judges. This eager young man is not necessarily wicked as the world reckons wickedness. In fact, he may be quite virtuous from a human point of view. What characterizes him is his total disregard for God. He forgets that "except the LORD builds the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Ps 127:1). Like many men of position throughout the ages he scoffs at the childlike faith of the godly and imagines that whatever worldly acclaim he receives he has earned solely by his own efforts.

The connection between A and B and C and D is a reciprocal one once the process has been set in motion. The godly man loves to meditate on God's word, and the more he meditates on it the more fruit he bears. The ungodly man ignores God's word completely; he bears no fruit and withers away. This is not the way the ungodly man views things, however. Because he does not see himself as he really is, he cannot appreciate the irony of the imagery. He who thinks of himself as active and in control is carried around and around by forces outside himself, while the godly man, who seems to be lazy and impractical, is firmly rooted and yields fruit in due season. The imagery of the leaf that does not wither supports the idea that the judgment of the last verse is the last judgment.

Since a summary of the internal form should account for the presence of all the elements, we must turn now to v 6a: "For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous." As the ground of the proportion, the Lord underlies every part. The clause is the conclusion to the implied analogical argument—that is, an argument based on a proportion. The argument may be expressed as follows: If the godly man's character leads to a life of happiness and the ungodly man's character to one of unhappiness, it is because God knew—or "appointed" in the sense of "lovingly chose"—the way of the righteous. That he did not do so for the unrighteous is implied. Of all the possible renderings of *yāda'*, "knoweth" seems one of the least well integrated. "Appointed" picks up the "planted" of v 3 and reminds the reader that it is God who initiates the process of redemption. The fact that *šātal* really means "transplanted" only helps to confirm this interpretation by calling to mind God's sovereignty in regeneration. This implied argument provides the psalm's inner dynamic leading up to the high point of the poem (v 6a). Verse 6b, balancing v 3e, gives the other side of the coin without emphasizing it. That the primary stress is on the blessedness of the just rather than the plight of the unjust seems clear from the prominent position given to the key word "blessed," from the greater space allotted to the godly man's character (four verses to one), from the attenuated effect of the ungodly man's destiny, and by the analogical argument. Thus the poet dwells more upon God's mercy than he does upon his justice. The poem encourages humble gratitude, a desire to meditate more than ever on God's law, and a quiet assurance that the Lord is in complete control. At the same time there is in the background an ever-present, sobering and awesome realization that some day the tables will be turned and those who seem to be succeeding in this life while ignoring their Creator will know that he is Lord of all.

How can this analysis help answer our critic? Edward J. Kissane argues that v 3e, "and will prosper all that he does," does not form a natural sequence to v 3a-d (see below) because the subject is changed, the metaphor of the tree is dropped, and the success of the just is described directly.⁴ According to Kissane most critics regard v 3e as a later addition, their reason being that the clause is isolated and does not form a complete verse. "But it is at least as probable," says Kissane, "that the parallel member has been omitted by mistake."⁵ To support his theory Kissane divides the psalm into three strophes, the second of which is clearly missing a line:

(a) Rule of life

- 1a Blessed is the man who has not walked
- b In the counsel of the wicked,
- c Nor stood in the way of sinners,
- d Nor sat on the seat of scorners;
- 2a But whose delight is in the law of Yahweh,
- b And who meditates on His law day and night.

(b) Reward of the just

- 3a And he shall be like a tree planted
- b Beside the watercourses
- c That yields its fruit in due season,
- d And whose leaf withers not:
-
- e And will prosper all that he does.

(c) Fate of the wicked

- 4a Not so the wicked, not so,
- b But like the chaff which the wind drives away;
- 5a Therefore shall the wicked not succeed in the judgment,
- b Nor sinners appear in the company of the righteous:
- 6a Because Yahweh knows the way of the righteous,
- b And the way of the wicked shall perish.⁶

Kissane supplies the missing line—"For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous"—and goes on to explain why "righteous" in v 6a should be changed to "sinners":

The psalmist bases his conviction that the wicked will be condemned (5) and suffer the fate described in v 4, on his faith in the omniscience of God (6). Cf. 7:9f; 11:4f. If this interpretation is correct, an important consequence follows. If "therefore" and "because" are correlative, the latter must be expected to give the reason on which the inference is based. Yet, while the inference is the condemnation of the wicked, the cause is God's knowledge of the way of the *just*! The defective logic in the passage has always been recognized, yet no one appears to have suggested the obvious remedy. It seems, therefore, that the original reading in 6a must have been "sinner," not "righteous."⁷

⁴E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Psalms* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1953-54), 1. 3-4.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

Part of the problem is that Kissane is trying to judge poetry by rhetorical criteria rather than artistic ones. Otherwise why does he assign thematic headings to each of his strophes or find fault because the poet failed to complete one subject before moving on to the next? And why does he conclude that the "because" of v 6a necessarily explains the reasons for the "therefore" of v 5a and not of v 3a-e? He does not seem to realize that a good lyric poet composes with the effect constantly in view. The psalmist's method may seem contrary to classical rhetoric, but it is not opposed to logic and gives every appearance of being intentional. As we have seen, the poet wished to portray the blessedness of the godly and not the plight of the ungodly. Since part of the godly man's blessedness consists in knowing what he is escaping, the poet touches on that subject lightly. Verse 6a, as Kissane renders it ("Because Yahweh knows the way of the sinner"), is not only an untrue statement theologically, given the Biblical meaning of "to know"; it also ruins the unity of effect by destroying the implied argument and by placing undue emphasis on the sinner at that point where the psalmist wished to highlight the blessedness of the godly. The last line resembles the tying up of the loose ends of a novel. This does not diminish the effect but rather increases it by giving the reader the satisfying feeling that the work is a complete whole and that there is nothing more to be said.

Let me make one more comment on Kissane's translation, although there is a great deal more that one could say. It has to do with his choice of "succeed" for *qûm*, rendered "stand" by most translators. While "succeed" is a possible translation, "stand" is a more artistic one since it picks up the postures of v 1 ("walk," "stand," "sit"). Furthermore, "stand" raises some interesting questions. Did the psalmist avoid using "sit" because he knew that the Lord would be seated (Dan 7:9)? Did he realize that the godly were destined to stand and help to judge and that the ungodly would neither stand nor sit but would scurry to find cover in an undignified and terrified effort to hide from the Almighty (Rev 6:16)? Or did the Holy Spirit guide the psalmist so that he would write nothing that would contradict details later to be revealed?

Thus we see that an analysis of this type supports grammatico-historical exegesis by giving aesthetic reasons for rejecting the fanciful reconstructions of a critic like Kissane.

II. PSALM 51

This psalm was composed by David after God had convicted him of his sin with Bathsheba through the prophet Nathan. Most critics deny the inspired superscription. Buitenen find the religious sentiment too advanced for David's day and rejects the last two verses for the same reason:

David's authorship, which some interpreters are still averse to giving up, is plainly excluded by the advance in religious thought met with in the psalm, which presupposes the advent of the great prophets. Aside from this, it is psychologically inconceivable that David could be the author; the writer of the psalm is not oppressed because he has been guilty of a heinous crime—such as David committed on Uriah—rather he is shaken body and soul, because of his moral infirmity. Had David been capable of such spiritual experience, he might not have had the moral strength to conquer his lust for Bathsheba, but he could not possibly have followed up this sin with a darker plot—the murder of Uriah.⁸

⁸M. Buitenen, *The Psalms* (New York: KTAV, 1969 [1938]) 192.

Buttenwieser not only rejects the superscription and the last two verses, but he also changes "bloodguiltiness" in v 14 to "transgressions." He argues that "for the psalmist to pray that he be absolved of murder he committed or that he be protected against incurring bloodguiltiness could be out of harmony with the profound spirituality of the psalm."⁹

Some critics—both liberal and conservative—who accept the Davidic authorship believe that the last two verses are a later addition because v 18 mentions the building of the walls of Jerusalem.¹⁰ A formal analysis shows that the last two verses are part of a well-unified artistic whole in which not only these verses but also "hyssop" and "bloodguiltiness" find their place. The claim that the religious sentiment of the last verse is out of harmony with the spirituality of the rest of the psalm because of the reference to burnt offerings, and untenable because v 19 contradicts v 16, seems to be based on an anti-Biblical theory of socio-religious progress.¹¹

The psalm is a penitential prayer in which a contrite sinner expresses to God alone his private thoughts, feelings, hopes, intentions and expectations. Unity of tone is maintained by keeping the reader constantly aware of the sinner-God relationship. This is accomplished by means of cries for forgiveness, reflections, petitions for renewal, declarations of hoped-for effects, vows and anticipated blessings. The several lines of development can be reduced to four main ones which, like Psalm 1, can be arranged in a proportion: Contrition is to renewal as obedience is to blessing. Contrition and renewal are inner and invisible, while acts of obedience and effects of blessing are outward and observable. Contrition and obedience describe man's part in repentance, while renewal and blessing have to do with God's role in the whole process. Since the latter are seen from man's vantage point, they could seem to be man's doing. That the psalmist was not so deceived should become clear in the course of this analysis. In fact, the relationship between A and B and C and D is reciprocal, as with Psalm 1. The following chart exhibits the interrelationships. The reflections on God's character and good pleasure in A and the hoped-for effects of the petitions for renewal in B have been indented and a space has been left between each of the sections I shall be treating.

A		B		C		D
<i>Contrition</i>	:	<i>Renewal</i>	::	<i>Obedience</i>	:	<i>Blessing</i>
I						
1 Have mercy, Blot out lovingkind ness, mercies		2 Wash, cleanse				
3 I acknowledge						
4 Against thee justified, clear						

⁹Ibid., p. 193.

¹⁰For a conservative's opinion, see J. J. S. Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976 [1878]) 412.

¹¹Buttenwieser, *Psalms*, 190.

5 shapen in iniquity
6 thou desirest truth

shalt make me
to know wisdom

II

7 purge with hyssop

shall be clean
wash
shall be whiter
than snow

8

make me to hear
bones may rejoice

9 Hide thy face,
blot out

10

create, renew

11

cast not from
presence, take
not holy spirit

12

restore, uphold

13

then will I teach

sinners shall be
converted

III

14 Deliver from
bloodguiltiness

my tongue shall
sing

15

open my lips

my mouth shall
praise

16

thou desirest not
sacrifice
thou delightest not

else would
I give it
[ready to
do God's will]

17

God does not
despise
contrite
heart

18

Do good unto Zion
Build the walls

19

God pleased
with
sacrifices
of righteousness
and burnt
offering

then shall
they offer
bullocks

The above chart shows how the poem divides rather naturally into three sections of strophes, each one beginning with a cry for forgiveness (vv 1, 7 and 14) and closing with a blessing (vv 6, 13 and 18), except that in the case of the third strophe the blessing comes in the next-to-the-last verse. The primary emphasis in the first strophe is upon A—both cries and reflections. In the second it is upon B—petitions and hoped-for results, while in the last strophe A is stressed along with the vows of C.

- 1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness:
according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I acknowledge my transgression: and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight:
that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.
- 5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- 6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts:
and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

This strophe has to do mainly with the psalmist's progress in understanding the nature of sin. The anguished cries for forgiveness in v 1 are addressed to a loving God whose character provides the basis for hope of renewal and blessing, as well as forgiveness. In "blot out my transgressions"—already a commonplace expression—David beseeches God to look upon him as if he had not sinned. This is a plea for acquittal, not change. The truly contrite heart, however, desires cleansing. This petition comes in v 2. "Wash" is the word used for laundering or the fuller's process and brings to mind the visual imagery of pounding, shrinking and rubbing. The psalmist demonstrates by his choice of words his understanding that being made better will not be easy. The Hebrew words for sin help to clarify the meaning. "Transgressions" are deliberate acts of rebellion. "Iniquity" signifies moral perversity, and "sin" can mean habitual sinfulness or an offense. "Habitual sinfulness" fits better here because it is almost synonymous with "iniquity," just as "wash" and "cleanse" are also similar. Thus the regular parallelism of v 2 balances the chiasmic variety in v 1, setting off v 1 in a special way.¹²

The psalmist gives two reasons why God should heed his supplications. The first is the fact that he confesses them. David knew that God hears the prayers of those who humble themselves before him. Second, "my sin is ever before me" shows that he is in constant misery now that he is under conviction. He trusts that God in his mercy will not allow him to suffer much longer.

True sorrow for sin involves knowing what sin is. David acknowledges that it is an offense against God first of all. By his confession David testifies to God's justice and holiness. God was just to condemn him and has every right to punish him. The two occurrences of "behold" help to underscore the enlightenment that accompanies self-searching. Noteworthy in this confession is the complete absence of blame on parents, circumstances, or God. The psalmist accepts full responsibility for what he is and for what he has done. The second "behold" calls attention to David's incipient understanding of why he had to go through this experience. God wanted truth in the inner man. Facing up to his true nature was a necessary step in his spiritual growth. The future tense in "shalt make me to know wisdom" gives the first evidence that the speaker knows his prayer will be answered. It is also the first mention of blessing: Although David speaks of wisdom as a future gift he has clearly received a measure of it already, since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and fear probably prompted the first plea for mercy. This demonstrates that God set the whole process of repentance in motion (Acts 11:18) and that the rest proceeded reciprocally as in Psalm 1 or jointly

¹²For more information on chiasm in the Psalter see R. L. Alden's articles in *JETS* 17/1 (1974) 11-28, 19/3 (1976) 191-200, and 21/3 (1978) 199-210.

as the idea is expressed in Phil. 2:12, 13. Buitenwieser thinks that v 6 makes much better sense after v 16, and in his translation he places it there because "the verse where found at present disturbs the sequence, but when put after v 18 [*KJV*, v 16], the sequence leaves nothing to be desired."¹³ As we shall see, Buitenwieser was correct to connect these two verses, but if he had been thinking in artistic terms rather than rhetorical ones he would not have wanted to change the position of v 6.

- 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:
Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Make me to hear joy and gladness,
that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
- 9 Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out my iniquities.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God;
and renew a right spirit within me.
- 11 Cast me not away from thy presence;
and take not thy holy spirit from me.
- 12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;
and uphold me with thy free spirit.
- 13 Then will I teach transgressors thy ways;
and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

"Purge me with hyssop" pulls together the previous pleas for forgiveness and looks forward to the mention of bloodguiltiness in v 14 and sacrifice in vv 16, 17 and 19. David realizes that he cannot earn his own salvation. In fact, the word for "purge" can mean "to make reconciliation," and "clean" signifies "to be ceremonially clean." The words, as well as the imagery, are carefully selected. To the devout Israelite hyssop undoubtedly recalled two occasions, both of which tie in with the context, serving to enrich the poem and enhance the effect. At the time of the passover the lintels and doorposts were sprinkled with hyssop dipped in the blood of the lamb. Lev 4:4-6 describes the use of hyssop in connection with the rite by which a leper was declared officially cured. Because of the association of leprosy with sin—in the cases of Miriam and Gehazi, for example—and because of its role in the first passover, hyssop is peculiarly appropriate at this point. This is why I prefer the traditional rendering of v 7 to that of the renowned Ugaritic scholar, Mitchell Dahood, who offers: "Unsin me, I'll indeed be purer than gushing water."¹⁴

A number of new thoughts emerge as the poet recalls the joy of being right with God. The audible imagery in "make me to hear joy and gladness" evokes singing and dancing to the accompaniment of instruments. David is looking forward to the time when, restored to favor and cleansed within, he will be able to enjoy worship with the people of God. "That the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice" adds physical suffering to the mental anguish of v 3b. The graphic nature of the figure ties in well with the other visual images of this section. The vision of future gladness makes the psalmist long more than ever for forgiveness. Thus two emphatic petitions for pardon follow, echoing those of v 1. The supplications for inner change become more urgent.

The repetition of "O God" (v 10) in approximately the same position as in v 1

¹³Buitenwieser, *Psalms*, 194.

¹⁴M. Dahood, *Psalms II* (AB 17; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968) 1.

stresses the psalmist's humble posture before God. The word "renew" makes manifest what we have already surmised—namely, that the psalmist had previously experienced a right relationship with God. The repetition of the same thought in negative terms contributes to the power of the effect, partly because this is the first time the negative has been utilized. The perfect balance of the two clauses also helps to make the prayer seem particularly intense. Was the poet really afraid that God might turn his face from him? Surely the recollection of Saul's last years was unusually vivid to David at this time. And yet, like "renew" the effect of "restore" is to assure us that David had no fear of permanent separation from God. Perhaps, like Paul, the psalmist was afraid of being a castaway so far as serving God was concerned (1 Cor 9:27). David realizes that unless God sustains him he will surely fall again. The variant renderings of v 12b may be reduced to two main ones: Either God will uphold the psalmist by his own free Spirit, or he will do so by giving him a willing spirit. In either case it is God working in a man that makes his efforts acceptable to him, and apparently David knew this. It seems to me that if "free" refers to the Holy Spirit we have a hapax legomenon in spirit as well as fact, while if it refers to man's spirit we have at least a few instances of the adjective with "heart." Dahood prefers having the adjective modify God's spirit on the principle of "double-duty suffix."¹⁵

- 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation:
and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.
- 15 O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.
- 16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:
thou delightest not in burnt offering.
- 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.
- 18 Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion; build thou the walls of Jerusalem.
- 19 Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,
with burnt offering and whole burnt offering:
then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

The cry for deliverance from "bloodguiltiness," which opens the last strophe, almost certainly refers to the murder of Uriah. As we have seen, Buitenwieser offers "transgression" as a substitute for "bloodguiltiness." In his opinion *peša* would have been more suitable than *middāmim* in view of the poem's spirituality and may even have been the original author's choice.¹⁶ Those who are confident they would have fared better than David under similar circumstances probably do not know their own hearts. They need to remember the words of Jesus when he said that those who are angry without a cause have already committed murder in their hearts, and those who have lusted after a woman have committed adultery (Matt 5:22).

David's complete dependence on God not only for pardon but for the acts of grateful obedience that will follow his complete restoration to favor begin to occupy his attention. He must be assured of forgiveness before he can sing aloud of God's righteousness. Eventually God will loosen his tongue and open his lips. The thought of "praise" is added to that of "teach." In fact it combines the two, for to sing aloud of God's righteousness is to teach God's ways. Poignant longing has

¹⁵Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁶Buitenwieser, *Psalms*, 193.

given way to eagerness to please God and to confident expectation of blessing. The psalmist remarks that God is not pleased with sacrifices. He desires truth in the inner man. Verse 16 recalls the second "behold" of v 6. God wishes man to look at himself honestly. If he does, he will have a contrite spirit.

On the surface, the psalmist's reflections on God's displeasure with sacrifice might seem to contradict v 19, but this is the case only if one closes one's eyes to the rest of the OT and fails to note the "then" in v 19. After the spiritual sacrifices of repentance have been completed and the heart is right, *then* God is pleased with literal sacrifices. In fact, he requires them—or did in David's day. It was the same at the end of the second strophe. After David's heart was right, as evidenced by God's opening his mouth, *then* he would teach God's ways. If the "O Lord" of v 15 signifies assurance of forgiveness, why does David feel he still cannot offer sacrifices (v 16)? Perhaps the psalmist is saying that if the repentance is real, there will be evidence. Since God has never been pleased with hypocritical or careless worship, it is well to be sure that one's heart is right.

In v 18 we see that the zeal a truly repentant people feel when God restores them to favor and gives them wisdom will lead them to do what needs to be done. For the individual this means teaching God's righteousness so that others will know God's ways and turn from their sins. For the nation it means separating themselves from pagan influences by a wall of protection. Whether this clause is to be taken literally, figuratively, or both I am uncertain. Those who think it must be literal and hold to a post-exilic date as a result should remember that the walls had not yet been completed in David's day (1 Kings 3).

The enlargement of the scope of the psalm to include God's people in general has been prepared for since v 1 with David's appeal to God's loving character, the generalizations on sin and sacrifice, and the implied audience for the teaching and singing of God's praises, along with the conversion of sinners. Nevertheless, while this universalization of repentance is important, the psalmist had artistic reasons for limiting the space devoted to it. For example, penitence is much more powerfully depicted when it is associated with a particular person in a concrete situation. This explains why our attention is turned away from the psalmist only very briefly and why even then it is to focus our attention on God's role in the restoration and blessing of the multitude. Unity of effect also elucidates why David dwells so little on his role in the conversion of others. When he does he stresses God's part, so that his teaching and praising will be understood as a spirit-filled overflowing of gratitude rather than bragging.

Closing with sacrifices rather than God's blessings can likewise be justified aesthetically. Since v 18 relates to God's gifts to his people in general, it cannot serve to bring the various strands together at the end. On the other hand, sacrifices of righteousness and literal sacrifices integrate the multitude into A and C and by implication into B and D as well. Furthermore they recall all of the emotions touched on in the poem, leaving the reader satisfied that there is really nothing more to be said.

Thus we see that the last two verses are an integral part of the total intrinsic form. Nothing undermines the superscription; in fact, there are allusions to support it—particularly the "bloodguiltiness" that Bultmann refused to accept despite textual evidence. Critics often have no more justification artistically for their imaginative reconstructions than they do logically or textually. This type of formal analysis can also help the reader to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of the psalms as well as their truth.