1517 Media
Fortress Press

Chapter Title: The Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function

Chapter Author(s): Walter Brueggemann

Book Title: Soundings in the Theology of Psalms

Book Subtitle: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship

Book Editor(s): Rolf A. Jacobson

Published by: 1517 Media; Fortress Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt22nm6mh.5

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

1517 Media and *Fortress Press* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms*

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

CHAPTER 1

The Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function

Walter Brueggemann

What has been the function and intention of the Psalms as they were shaped, transmitted, and repeatedly used?[1] That is, what was the purpose of "doing them," albeit in highly stylized fashion?

What was being done when the Psalms were "done"? Such questions move in a constructive direction, in contrast to the more analytic questions of form and setting. To ask about the function of the Psalms means to move away from direct textual evidence and to engage in some tentative reconstructions. Our consideration of function must of course be based on the best judgments we have about form and setting in life.[2] The present discussion assumes and fully values both the methods and the gains of form-critical study. I am proposing neither a criticism nor a displacement of form-critical work. Rather, I explore the possibility of a move beyond form criticism that necessarily is concerned with hermeneutical issues.

The main questions and conclusions about form in the Psalms have largely been laid down by Hermann Gunkel. As the reviews of Ronald Clements and Erhard Gerstenberger make clear, we have not moved very far from Gunkel's fivefold classification, even though there is still room for refinement regarding those psalms

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

that do not fall into Gunkel's major categories.[3] Claus Westermann has attempted some consolidation of Gunkel's classification, and we will have more to say about his way of putting the matter.[4]

Questions of setting in life for the Psalms are much more unsettled.[5] Concerning the hymns, there has been some uneasiness with the festival hypothesis of Sigmund Mowinckel, perhaps because it has been judged too comprehensive, explaining too much in too singular a way.[6] On the other hand, Westermann has largely dissolved the question of setting in life, so that it is meaningless. Thus he says of the hymn, "The life setting is the experience of God's intervention in history,"[7] a judgment that has no interest in the sociology or social function of the hymn. So, concerning the hymn, we are still left mainly with some form of the festival hypothesis.[8] Concerning the setting in life of the lament, and especially the individual lament, the judgment of Hans Schmidt (made already in 1928) has led to a major strand of interpretation that sets the lament in the temple, in a juridical context of the innocently accused who seek vindication and plead for acquittal.[9] Schmidt's general understanding has been refined by Walter Beyerlin and Lienhard Delekat, but not greatly advanced.[10] An alternative hypothesis by Gerstenberger breaks the linkage with the temple and with the juridical frame.[11] He proposes that we have in the individual lament reflections of a domestic ritual of rehabilitation conducted by the legitimate and recognized, though lay, leaders in the community. They deal with those whose lives, for whatever reason, have disintegrated.

Gerstenberger removes the ritual and the Psalms from the temple and thinks they may have been used in the home. On the question of setting in life (and derivatively of function), Gerstenberger is more helpful than Westermann, for even with his acute analysis of form and structure, Westermann is not in fact interested in the institutional setting. By contrast, Gerstenberger suggests a cogent sociological situation.[12]

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

I

While form-critical work, especially with reference to setting, is not dormant, we may regard the present consensus as fairly stable. It is in any case firm enough to provide a basis from which to consider the question of *function*. One can of course answer the question of function by saying that the function was to lament and to praise. But in addition to being simply a tautology, such an answer stays in the realm of religion, where interpretation has stayed too long. However, to ask about function permits us to approach the matter from other, more pragmatic perspectives. We may consider the issue of the social usefulness of the Psalms that influence the character and quality of social existence. Two purposes may be served by asking the question this way. First, it may advance our understanding of Israel's intention in transmitting the Psalms. Second, it may help contemporary users to identify more clearly what resources are available in the use of the Psalms and what may be "done" in this "doing" of them. I suggest a convergence of a *contemporary pastoral agenda* with a more *historical exegetical interest*. Thus the question of function is put as a hermeneutical issue.

The question concerns both the use in ancient Israel, which admits of some scholarly analysis of the Psalms, and the contemporary religious use of the Psalms by practitioners of faith.[13] The hold that the Psalms have on the contemporary practice of faith and piety is a legitimate part of our concern. That hold is evident liturgically, with regular and sustained use of the Psalms in the daily office generation after generation. It is also evident devotionally, in those free church traditions that are not so keen on liturgic use but nurture persons in their own prayer life to draw guidance and strength from the Psalms.

And finally, contemporary use is evident pastorally, for many pastors find in the Psalms remarkable and reliable resources for many situations, the hospital call being paradigmatic. Thus, liturgical, devotional, and pastoral uses are dimensions of the contemporary function of the Psalms.

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

In this discussion, we hazard the provisional presupposition that modern and ancient uses of the Psalms share a common intent and function, even though other matters such as setting and institution may be different.[14] We may anticipate a *commonality of function* even when other matters diverge. That commonality, I suggest, is probable because the psalms (and especially the most poignant of them) present human persons in situations of regression: when they are most vulnerable in hurt, most ecstatic in naive joy, most sensitized to life, driven to the extremities of life and faith, when all the "covers" of modern rationality or ancient convention have disappeared or become dysfunctional. The hermeneutical possibility of moving back and forth between ancient function and contemporary intentionality exists because the use of the Psalms in every age is for times when the most elemental and raw human issues are in play.[15] The intended function and resilient practice of the Psalms reflect their peculiar capacity to be present to those elemental and raw human issues.

In what follows, I make special appeal to the work of Paul Ricoeur.[16] He has for some time studied the role of language in the life of faith. Out of the juxtaposition of the Psalms and the work of Ricoeur come fresh suggestions concerning the function of the Psalms.

II

Ricoeur understands the dynamic of life as a movement, dialectic but not regular or patterned, of disorientation and reorientation.[17] The human organism struggles to maintain some kind of equilibrium in his or her life. That sense of holistic orientation, of being "at home," is a gift that is given and not forced, yet we struggle to it, fight for it, resist losing it, and regularly deny its loss when it is gone. Two movements in human life are important: (1) deep reluctance to let loose of a world that has passed away, and (2) capacity to embrace a new world being given. These themes in Ricoeur's study will be important to interpretation of the Psalms suggested here.

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Human experience includes those dangerous and difficult times of dislocation and disorientation when the sky does fall and the world does indeed come to an end. The figure of disorientation may be taken psychologically and sociologically. It includes all facets of our common life and experience. The times of disorientation are those when persons are driven to the *extremities* of emotion, of integrating capacity, and of language. In the company of Isaiah, we are "undone" (Isa 6:5). There is no speech, and there is no safe reality about which to speak. The loss of an orderly life is linked to a loss of language, or at least to a discovery of the inadequacy of conventional language.[18]

Human persons are not meant for situations of disorientation. They will struggle against such situations with all their energies. Insofar as persons are hopeful and healthy, they may grow and work through to a new orientation. But as Freud has seen, human persons are mostly inclined to look back, to grasp for old equilibria, to wish for them, and to deny that they are gone. Ricoeur, in his study of Freud, is clear that it is *situations of dislocation* that evoke the dangerous language of extremity, which may express *hope* but more likely resistance.

The countermovement of reorientation comes, says Ricoeur, through a representation of reality that is genuinely new and has the mark of gift.[19] The reorientation has both continuities with and discontinuities from what has been. But the accent is on the new. It is a surprise. In our resistance, we do not expect to be surprised. The new situation is not an achievement or a working out of the dislocation but a newness that comes to us. Equally, it is not a "passage," as though it were automatic or inevitable.[20] It comes as miracle wrought from outside the situation. And it is only when that newness meets the human person or community convincingly that an abandonment of old orientation may be fully affirmed.

I propose that the sequence of *orientation–disorientation–reorientation* is a helpful way to understand the use and function of the Psalms. Very likely, the overview suggested here has been intentional in the practice of many believing people, even though they have not recognized or articulated it in this way.

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

1. *The Psalms of Orientation*. The psalms we include here are not the most interesting, for there is in them no great movement, no tension to resolve. Indeed, what mainly characterizes them is the absence of tension. The mindset and worldview of those who enjoy a serene location of their lives are characterized by a sense of the orderliness, goodness, and reliability of life. Thus, they might be especially represented in *creation psalms* that reflect the coherence of life:

> These all look to you,
> to give them their food in due season.
> When you give to them, they gather it up;
> when you open your hand,
> they are filled with good things. (Ps 104:27-28)

Or reference may be made to the psalms that teach clear, reliable retribution, in which evil is punished and good is rewarded (e.g., Psalms 1 and 119). Reference to creation and retribution suggests that psalms of orientation especially relate to sapiential tradition, which, as Robert Gordis and Brian Kovacs have suggested, reflects a class orientation of those who enjoy and appreciate much of life's material goodness.[21]

We might better seek examples in the book of Proverbs, which largely reflects life in its coherence and reliability. Apparently, Psalm 37 is a sapiential statement in the book of Psalms that reflects undisturbed, uncritical equilibrium. It offers imperatives and prohibitions about how to maintain and enhance this order. It asserts Yahweh's reliability and makes a didactic contrast with the wicked.

Psalm 145 might be located in this grouping. It may be regarded as a not very interesting collection of clichés. But in fact, it affirms God's providential care. The unimaginative style makes the confident claim. Such a psalm comes very close to civil religion, for it sounds like a celebration of the status quo. The other element that could easily be placed here are some of the psalms of ascent (e.g., 127; 128; 131; 133) reflecting domestic life that is in good

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

order. They are the voice of genuine gratitude and piety for such rich blessings.[22]

It may be legitimate to place here what Westermann calls descriptive hymns,[23] for they anticipate or remember no change. They describe how things are, with the assurance that they are well grounded and with the anticipation that they will continue.[24] The function of such description is the continued reaffirmation and reconstruction of this good world. Thus songs of creation, wisdom, retribution, and blessing all function in this same context of good order and well-being.

2. *The Psalms of Disorientation*. The psalms of lament, both individual and corporate, are ways of entering linguistically into a new distressful situation in which the old orientation has collapsed. There are various shapes and nuances of distress in different psalms, suggesting that different ones are appropriate for use depending on how fully the subject has *accepted and embraced* the dislocation and how much *resistance or denial* remains.

Thus, some of the psalms remember better times (Ps 42:4) back in the old period of orientation. There is a wish to return to that situation. Others are heavy in anger and resentment against the one who has caused disorientation. (It does not greatly matter if that one is thought to be God or enemies.) This mood leaves the impression that the speaker believes that the loss of orientation is reversible and the old orientation is retrievable.

Westermann has most helpfully shown that the Psalms move from petition and plea to praise.[25] And Gerstenberger has argued that the form of Israel's speech is complaint and not lament; that is, protest and not resignation. There is expectation and even insistence that Yahweh can be moved to act and that Yahweh will act.[26] And when Yahweh acts, Yahweh will bring things to a new life-order. The break between plea and praise in the Psalms reflects an important moment of realism.[27] There is a turn from yearning for the old orientation, a recognition that it is gone and not retrievable, and a readiness for a new orientation. The conclusion of vow, praise, and "assurance of being heard" faces forward. They have put the

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC 34:56 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

old lost world behind. Thus, whatever the spoken or acted device of the "turn," the movement reflects a firm resolve to look in a new direction. There is a turn from resentful remembering to a fresh anticipation of an equilibrium that is a gift from God, genuinely new and not a restatement of the old.[28] In speaking of that remarkable turn, Ricoeur writes, "Remembrance gives rise to anticipation; archaism gives rise to prophecy."[29] The turn is a move beyond remembering. But it could not be done without the painful part of remembering. In the various psalms of lament and in the various parts of these psalms, the speaker is located at various places in the movement of living into and emerging out of disorientation.

Two specific comments are in order. First, if the psalms of *lament* correlate with the situation of *displacement*, we may have a fresh appreciation for some metaphors often used—for example, "pit," and the various references to "enemy." This rich array of language in which the words tumble out becomes, then, not an exegetical problem to be solved but a pastoral opportunity to let the impressionistic speech touch the particular circumstance of dislocation. For the truth of the matter is that the listener to such a psalm in a time of actual dislocation will have no doubt as to the meaning of the references and will find such exegetical speculation both unnecessary and distracting. To fall into "the pit" is indeed to lose one's old equilibrium. The "enemy" is quite obviously the one who has caused the loss. David Clines has seen that the identity of the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah is not a code to be cracked but an open-ended statement that allows for and encourages multiple interpretations.[30]

Using Clines's insight, I suggest that a person in disorientation is precisely the one who has the freedom and vitality to face the openness of lament language. Those who are safe and settled in an old equilibrium are the ones who want to identify the enemy and all the other figures in this poetry. Interpreters must be freed of our closely oriented habits of exegesis if the psalm is to have the freedom to fully articulate the experience of disorientation. That is, the function of the psalm requires of us a certain imaginative freedom of interpretation.

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Second, special reference may be made to Psalm 88. So far as I know, Westermann nowhere deals with this psalm as an important exception to the "plea/praise" pattern. Nor does Gerstenberger, to my knowledge, deal with this as a lament rather than as a complaint.[31] Perhaps it is the exception that proves the rule. But it is in fact the case that Psalm 88 is unrelieved in its embrace of disorientation: there is no movement away from displacement. It includes "I" statements of trouble (vv. 3-5), three "Thou" statements of accusation, and a middle section of rhetorical questions (vv. 10-14). But the questions do not linger for an answer. The psalm concludes in verses 15-18 in utter hopelessness. I submit that this psalm has a peculiar and distinctive function and is a resource as precious as it is peculiar.

3. *The Psalms of Reorientation*. Concerning these, we may provisionally follow Westermann's consolidation of hymns and songs of thanksgiving, to group them together as songs of celebration concerning reorientation. I am aware that Westermann has not been widely followed. And it may be that in terms of form, the two different types cannot be coupled. But in terms of function, declarative hymns and thanksgiving songs do agree in the welcome and amazed recognition that a newness has been given that is not achieved, not automatic, and not derived from the old, but is rather a genuine newness wrought by gift. Thus, Westermann's proposal may be open to question in terms of form but is functionally on target.

We may group hymns and songs of thanksgiving together. However, as indicated, we need to distinguish between declarative and descriptive hymns in terms of function. Thus, we may be left with two functions as well as two forms, but they must be grouped differently with reference to form and function:

a. The two clusters of *form* may be:

1. hymns, both descriptive and declarative, and
2. songs of thanksgiving.

b. The two clusters of *function* may be:

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

1. songs of orientation, including descriptive hymns, and
2. songs of reorientation, including declarative hymns and songs of thanksgiving.

There is no need to force the issue from function to form. It is sufficient to acknowledge that groupings will be different for function and for form. Thus, descriptive hymns, as Westermann has seen, describe an enduring state of things and therefore reflect a continuing secure orientation. By contrast, the declarative hymns and songs of thanksgiving do not *describe* what has been but assert what has just now been wrought. This function speaks of surprise and wonder, miracle and amazement, when a new orientation has been granted to the disoriented for which there was no ground for expectation.

These psalms reflect a quite new circumstance that speaks of newness (it is not the old revived); surprise (there was no ground in the disorientation to anticipate it); and gift (it is not given by the lamenter). For these reasons, this new circumstance evokes and requires a celebration, for reversals must be celebrated (see Luke 15:6-7, 9-10, 22-24, 32).[32] Psalms scholarship has worked hard at characterizing what this celebration is. The three dominant hypotheses are those of Sigmund Mowinckel, Artur Weiser, and Hans-Joachim Kraus; respectively, enthronement festival, covenant renewal, and royal Zion festival.[33] Each of these suggestions obviously has some warrant. But perhaps the vitality of this celebration is not to be understood in terms of Babylonian parallels (so Mowinckel), in terms of Israel's traditions (so Weiser), or with reference to Jerusalem's institution (so Kraus). Perhaps we may stay with the rich and diverse human experience of reorientation, of which more than one language can speak. And while the form or legitimacy of the festival may come from a borrowed phrase such as "Yahweh is king," the power, vitality, and authority for celebration come from the unarguable experience of those persons who have discovered that the world has come to an end but a new creation is given. Life has disintegrated but has been formed miraculously again.[34]

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

The enduring authority of these psalms must surely be found in their ability to touch the *extremities* of human life, extremities we have characterized in terms of disorientation and reorientation. The extremity of reorientation is as shattering as that of disorientation.

Thus, Westermann, in defending his two-type hypothesis, can quote Gunkel: "In the alternation between lament and song of thanks there unrolls the whole life of the pious."[35] It may be added that songs of orientation present a dimension of life not characterized by extremity. Thus, the psalms Westermann labels as descriptive and declarative stand at the far moments of orientation and reorientation and should not be grouped together in terms of function.

III

Ricoeur has for some time been in dialogue with Sigmund Freud. Behind that has been his attempt to understand the conflict between two hermeneutical perspectives and his attempt to find a way to face them both.[36] On the one hand, Ricoeur has tried to take seriously what he calls the "hermeneutic of suspicion," represented by Karl Marx, Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche.[37] It is the purpose of this approach to expose the dishonesty of interested speech that protests, conceals, and controls and to be attentive to the deceptions (especially self-deceptions) that are practiced in the name of truth. In Marxist terms, it means discerning the distance between appearance and reality. In Freudian terms, it means paying attention to the ways in which reality is suppressed and driven into the unconscious. In a word, this is an unmasking that is aware that every statement is an attempt to mislead and misrepresent.[38]

The other hermeneutical tradition (to which Ricoeur is more drawn by his interest in language) is that of full symbolization. This tradition holds that the oversurplus of language permits more to be said than the original articulation intended, and it assumes that attentive listening can always hear more in freighted texts. Ricoeur refers to this as "iconic augmentation."[39] This tradition

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

of interpretation is represented by the *sensus plenior* of the Roman Catholic tradition, the New Hermeneutic, and the obscure possibilities of structuralism.[40] Ricoeur understands the work of this hermeneutic to be re-presentation, to state with fullness the old realities of sacred coherence in ways that are especially appropriate to, and run beyond, the sober meaning of words.[41]

Now it is clear that these two approaches are in some tension. I cite two specific examples. First, Loretta Dornisch observes that in Scripture study, traditional biblical hermeneutics is concerned with representation—that is, restatement of the claim of the text in its full kerygmatic power—whereas historical criticism is a practice of the hermeneutic of suspicion, which wants to penetrate back to what was "really there originally."[42] Presently, it is recognized that this posture of critical, historical study creates new and different issues for those engaged in Scripture study in the environs of a believing community.[43] And, therefore, Brevard Childs's title is important, ". . . Old Testament as *Scripture*."

Second, and more personally, I have had conversation with a pastor whom I most respect who is an accomplished Freudian therapist. He is aware, on the one hand, of the very difficult task of being a therapist of the critical, suspicionist tradition; that is, to practice consistently that no words really say what they mean and must be exposed as deceptive. On the other hand, he is at the same time a faithful Christian preacher who regularly must speak these large words about the truth of the gospel without turning the same suspicionist eye on those words until there are no words left to speak. The struggle to hold these together is difficult for any who would believe honestly.

Ricoeur argues that these two hermeneutics are both essential and must be seen in a dialectic of *displacement* and *recapture*:

> Consequently, the first task—the displacement—cannot be separated from the second task—the recapture of meaning in interpretation. This alternation of relinquishing (*déprise*) and recapture (*reprise*) is the philosophical basis of the entire metapsychology.[44]

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

It is precisely the *dispossession* of false and deceptive positions that can lead to the *recovery* of powerful symbols. Thus, the two works that must both be carried on are (1) the criticism of idols, and (2) heeding the true God who will make all things new.[45] Ricoeur's discernment of these two hermeneutical positions can be correlated with the paradigm of psalmic function I have proposed above. Thus, the hermeneutic of suspicion is practiced in the lament songs of dislocation, and the hermeneutic of representation is practiced in the celebrative songs of relocation. (I leave to one side the settled songs of orientation, but I believe that at times they may assert the new and at other times stand in need of the radical criticism of suspicion.) Ricoeur's model can help in understanding both what is going on in the text of the Psalms and what is going on in the life of the user(s) of the psalms, for as Ricoeur argues, it is the experience of limit that is important to the expression of limit.[46] The psalms of disorientation and reorientation may be regarded as expressions of limit. That is, they speak about times when normalcy is sharply in question. The user(s) brings to the psalms experiences of limit. Thus, the use and intention of a psalm depend on this hermeneutic coincidence between what is at issue in the text of the psalm and what is at issue in the life of the user(s).

The lament *psalms of dislocation* may be understood as an instance of the *hermeneutic of suspicion*.[47] The lament psalm of dislocation becomes necessary usually quite unexpectedly. It is necessary in a situation in which the old worldview, old faith presuppositions, and old language are no longer adequate. Obviously, if one has (in practice or even implicitly) been living out of creation songs about stability and harmony in life, or songs of morality about the equity of life, then one cannot readily receive abrasions and incongruities that provide the kind of data such songs cannot contain and comprehend. That experience of radical dissonance is what is presented to us in the laments. They are speeches of surprised dismay and disappointment, for the speaker never expected this to happen to him or her. They are fresh utterances, sharp ejaculations by people accustomed either to the smooth songs of equilibrium or to not

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

saying anything at all because things are "all right." They are the shrill speeches of those who suddenly discover that they are trapped and the water is rising and the sun may not come up tomorrow in all its benevolence. And we are betrayed!

These psalms are the voices of those who find their circumstance dangerously, and not just inconveniently, changed. And they do not like it. These are the speeches of caged men and women getting familiar with their new place, feeling the wall for a break, hunting in the dark for hidden weapons, testing the nerve and patience of those who have perpetrated the wrong. We may observe two features of this poetry in particular.

First, we should not expect the speaker of Psalm 37 or Psalm 145 ever to speak a cross word. However, it is likely that the speakers of harsh laments are the same voices as the singers of hymns, but in radically new circumstances. Now the same voices speak venom against God, enemies, parents, and everyone else, venom they did not know they had in their bodies. But consistent with the hermeneutic of suspicion, this is because the facade of convention and well-being has at last been penetrated. The beast is permitted an appearance.

The speakers of these psalms are in a vulnerable, regressed situation in which the voice of desperate, fear-filled, hate-filled reality is unleashed and no longer covered by the niceties of conventional sapiential teaching. As in the freedom of speech in therapy of regression, any language and any speech are appropriate. So also in lament psalms, and most unmistakably in the laments of Job,[48] anything may and will be said. The juices flow, and the animal is loose.

Perhaps the acceptance of the animal role illuminates why the speaker is presented as surrounded by other animals who will devour, for the speaker is now able to face the censured imagery of beastliness in his or her own person (Pss 7:2; 22:13-14, 16; 57:4; 58:6; 59:6; 74:19). The speaker discovers that she or he is also a beast once the conventions have been penetrated. So in Psalm 73, when life is inequitable, the speaker is aware of a skewed relationship in which one is less than human:

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

When my soul was embittered,
    when I was pricked in heart,
I was stupid and ignorant;
I was like a brute beast toward you. (Ps 73:21-22; cf. 102:7-8)[49]

The speaker discovers animal dimensions in life. Only now he or she is not king of the jungle, as in Psalm 37.

Second, these complaints are filled with questions:

You have kept count of my tossings;
    put my tears in your bottle.
    Are they not in your record? (Ps 56:8)

In God I trust; I am not afraid.
    What can a mere mortal do to me? (Ps 56:11)

Have you not rejected us, O God? (Ps 60:10)

Will you hide yourself forever? (Ps 89:46)

Why have you forsaken us these many days . . . ,
    unless you have utterly rejected us,
    and are angry with us beyond measure[?] (Lam 5:20, 22)

These questions are usually understood as motivations to get Yahweh to do something. They are clearly rhetorical questions that do not seem to expect an answer. Or perhaps the answer is thought to be so obvious that it needs no expression. They may be only raw expressions of emotion. But they may also be understood as questions now occurring to the speaker for the first time: bold new thoughts, the answers to which are as yet unknown, for the question is now first posed in the mouth of the disoriented.[50] The poet, in the collapse of convention, permits regression to deep questions never before permitted and until now censured by the community and by self. They are the "ah-ha's" of a dangerous kind; they go to the brink for the first time to ask, "What if . . . ?" What if the whole orientation is a fraud that can no longer be relied on? And once asked, such a probing can never be unasked. The disorientation, once brought to full speech, is irreversible.

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

It is the function of these songs, if seen this way, to enable, require, and legitimate the complete rejection of the old orientation. That old arrangement is seen, if not as fraud, at least as inadequate to the new circumstance. The Psalms have the abrasive effect of dismantling the old systems that hide the well-off from the dangerous theological realities of life. It is a key insight of Freud that until there is an embrace of honest helplessness, there is no true gospel that can be heard. Until the idols have been exposed, there is no chance of the truth of the true God. It is telling that these psalms use the words "pit/Sheol/waters/depths," for in therapy, one must be "in the depths" if there is to be new life.[51] Freud has seen that the utter abandonment of pretense is a prerequisite to new joy. (The loss/finding, death/life dynamic is evident also in the three celebrations of Luke 15.)

These psalms, correlated with a hermeneutic of suspicion, warn against an easy hermeneutic of symbols and myths or an easy psychology of growth through symbolization. These psalms mean to empty out the old symbols that have failed.[52] They apparently know that the dismantling must be complete and without reserve. And if the dismantling is not total, the religious building of life likely will be a construction of idols. Thus, Psalm 88 stands as singularly important, for it is a word precisely at the bottom of the pit when every hope is abandoned. The speaker is alone, and there is as yet no hint of dawn. Psalm 88 is the full recognition of collapse.[53]

Conversely, a similar correlation may be suggested between the *psalms of celebration* (declarative hymns and songs of thanksgiving) and the *hermeneutic of recollection and representation*. The song celebrative of reorientation is a movement out of the disorientation marked by lament. In a parallel way, the critical hermeneutic of suspicion is superseded (in a dialectical fashion, to be sure) by the restorative hermeneutic of representation. The song of celebration is a new song sung at the appearance of a new reality, new creation, new harmony, new reliability (Pss 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa 42:10; Rev 14:3). Its style and rhetoric must speak of the quality of surprise and newness that are appropriate to such new

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

reality, which may be variously symbolized. It may, indeed, with Mowinckel, be enthronement of a new king, fresh confidence that there is a life-giving order operative among us. It may be articulated, with Weiser, as new covenant, as belonging to a community bound to and cared for by God. It may be, with Kraus, affirmation of the primal, sacral institutions, dynasty, and temple. But the reality of the new experience is something other than, and more than, what can be caught in and confined by any one of these referents. It is the experience that the world has new coherence, that the devastating hopelessness of the lament is not finally appropriate for the way life is. Thus it is telling that the "new song" occurs not only in the great hymns of enthronement (96:1; 98:1) or even concerning the king (144:9), but also in the thanksgiving of 33:3 and 40:3, which may refer to any personal crisis.

As the hermeneutic reflected in the lament is, following Ricoeur's words, "reductive and demystifying," so this hermeneutic is "restorative, recollective of the sacred," daring to represent in fresh form the elemental well-being first articulated by the primal myths.[54]

Thus, the declarative hymns and songs of thanksgiving speak of a newness not unlike the old assurances expressed in the descriptive psalms "before the flood." It may be for that reason that the mythic dimension is more explicit, daring, and comprehensive in the hymns than in the laments. The songs of celebration wish to take the worshiper not back into the old primal ordering of goodness (as in Gen 1:31) but into a newness now being given. The hymns thus look back in mythic categories and out of them assert a promissory conviction.[55] As the laments want to show life—in its shattered leanness—as regression to primal chaos, so the celebrative songs tend to be effusive with a surplus of meaning in every metaphor and symbol.

It is likely that the hymns can scarcely be overinterpreted. The new song asserts that the waters will not drown and the pit did not hold, that the captor was unnerved and the enemy is shattered. The sky has fallen but is now secured again. The world has ended but begun again. And there is no word for that beyond doxology.[56]

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Just as the lament warned against celebration too quickly, and just as the hermeneutic of suspicion warns us against positive symbolization too easily and early, so now our discernment leads us in the opposite direction. Israel has the capacity to exploit the fullness of language in the service of reorientation and new creation. Such a practice affirms that we do not need to be forever reductive, demystifying, critical, and exposing. There is a time when this work is done.

Unmasking has run its course when life is shaken from its phoniness and scattered in its deception. Then it is appropriate to turn to the gathering work of symbols.[57] Or to move from hermeneutic to the Psalms, Israel must not forever lament, complain, protest, and question. There is a time for affirmation and rejoicing, a time to end the criticism, to receive the gift, and to sing a doxology (see Eccl 3:2-10).[58]

Thus, our appeal to Ricoeur suggests correlations between functions of the Psalms and two alternative hermeneutics, which correspond to two extremities of life.

1. The movement of our life, if we are attentive, is the movement of *orientation*, *disorientation*, and *reorientation*. And in our daily pilgrimage, we use much of our energy for this work.

2. This experience is correlated with songs of orientation (descriptive hymns), *songs of disorientation* (laments), and *songs of reorientation* (declarative hymns). While declarative and descriptive hymns may be grouped together form-critically, they stand at the opposite extremes of Israel's experience of life and of God.

3. The descriptive and declarative hymns—as opposites—form an envelope for the closer movement in the individual lament itself. Following Westermann's analysis, the two parts of the lament, plea and praise, express in microcosm the movement we have been discussing. The plea still looks back to the old orientation, still yearning for it and grudging its loss, while the praise element begins to look forward and to anticipate. Thus, the two parts of the lament—one of which looks back in anger and chagrin and the other forward in hope—correlate with our two hermeneutical postures. The lament as plea and petition regresses to the oldest

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

fears, the censured questions, the deepest hates, the unknown and unadmitted venom, and a yearning; whereas the lament as praise anticipates and is open to gift. It looks ahead, consents to receive, and intends to respond in gratitude.[59] The two functions, as the two hermeneutics, belong together. So Ricoeur can speak of the two together as regressive-progressive in a way whereby the remembrance gives rise to anticipation.[60] He sees the two as linked and the process as "inherently dialectical."[61]

4. In one other articulation of the same, Ricoeur suggests a difference between the second naïveté and the first.[62] The first naïveté is the precritical. It believes everything, indeed too much. It is an enjoyment of well-being but unaware of oppression and incongruity. It is a glad reception of community, but unaware of hurt. It can afford to be uncritical because everything makes sense. But growth—and indeed life—means moving to criticism: a new awareness of self in conflict, of others in dishonest interestedness, of God in enmity. The critical dimension of our pilgrimage discovers, with Marx, the slippage between appearance and reality in our social arrangements, slippage poorly covered by ideology. And it discovers, with Freud, the censorship that we exercise and that is exercised on us.

But the second naïveté is postcritical, not precritical. The second naïveté has been through the pit and is now prepared to "hope all things" (1 Cor 13:7). But now, hope is after the pit. It now knows that finally things have been reduced and need be reduced no more. It knows that our experience is demystified, as it must be. But it knows that even in a world demystified and reduced, grace intrudes and God makes all things new. The ones who give thanks and sing genuinely new songs must be naive or they would not bother to sing songs and to give thanks. But it is a praise in which the anguish of disorientation is not forgotten, removed, or absent.

IV

Through all of this, I have been appealing to Ricoeur's theory of language.[63] Clearly, of all the points I have attempted to utilize, it

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

is language that interests Ricoeur the most. In general, his work is related to the New Hermeneutic and its discernment of language. For this, we may refer to the enigmatic statements of Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling[64] and to the extended discussion of Hans-Georg Gadamer.[65] More directly, we may refer to the studies of Robert Funk and John Dominic Crossan on New Testament parables.[66] And closest to our concern are the shrewd conclusions drawn by David Clines concerning Isaiah 53. This general movement sees that alongside language that describes what is, there is a language that evokes what is not. Thus, this language has a creative function. It does not simply follow reality and reflect it, but it leads reality to become what it is not. So we may appeal to Martin Heidegger's well-known aphorism, "The poet is the shepherd of being."[67] But we should insist that for Israel, the matter is much more characterized in promissory ways than Heidegger seems to suggest.[68] The relation of language and reality is dialectical. New reality permits new language; language spoken by Israel's Authoritative Speaker calls forth new reality. In his own study, Ricoeur has illustrated this with particular reference (1) to the *proverb*, which has been a description of conventional reality (i.e., before the disorientation, but which is now turned to surprise); (2) to the *eschatological saying*, which is no longer interpreted literally but now used to rediscern present reality; and (3) to the *parable*, which is not a teaching of general ethical truth but a surprise that causes a new awareness of reality. Each of these, he has shown, is presented to evoke a scandalous perception of reality that breaks our conventions.[69]

This creative, evocative function of language is precisely what is at work in the Psalms.[70] The Psalms transmit to us ways of speaking that are appropriate to the extremities of human experience as known concretely in Israel. Or, to use Ricoeur's language, we have "limit-expressions" (laments, songs of celebration) that match "limit-experiences" (disorientation, reorientation). The use of the Psalms in one's own life and in ministry depends on making a genuine and sensitive match between expression and experience. The enduring authority of this language stems from the fact that it

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

bears witness to common human experience but is at the same time practiced in this concrete community with specific memories and hopes. Thus the openness to the universal and the passion for the concrete come together in these poems.

Without such a view of language, the psalms of extremity are reduced to clichés, at best a ready standing supply of words that can be conventionally drawn on to stylize things. To view the Psalms that way is to trivialize them, as I believe has widely happened and is perhaps even encouraged by our inability to get beyond rather academic categories of presentation.

We have asked about the function of the Psalms. I should argue (in Ricoeur's terms of *demystifying* and *representing*) that the function of the Psalms is twofold. First, the Psalms bring human experience to sufficiently vivid expression so that it may be embraced as the real situation in which persons must live. This applies equally to the movement in the life of an individual person and to the public discernment of new reality. Persons and communities are not fully present in a situation of disorientation until it has been brought to speech. One may in fact be there but absent to the situation by denial and self-deception. Specifically, until the reality of "the pit" is spoken about, with all its hatred of enemies, its mistrust of God, its fear of "beasts," its painful yearning for old, better times, its daring questions of dangerous edges—until all that is brought to speech—it is likely that one will continue to assume the old, now-discredited, dysfunctional equilibrium that, in fact, is powerless. Living in the "old equilibrium" that is powerless makes one numb, mute, liable to oppression, and easily used by others.[71] But to speak first the words to the disoriented, and then to have the disoriented actually speak the words, can be a new recognition and embrace of the actual situation. The censorship of the old orientation is so strong that the actual situation may be denied and precluded. The "language event" of the lament thus permits movement beyond *naïveté* and acceptance of one's actual situation *critically*.

The songs of new orientation perform a parallel work. Those who have entered deeply into "the pit" may presume that is the

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

permanent situation, when, in fact, life has moved on and their circumstances have been transformed toward newness. In such times, the songs of celebration may lead the person or community to embrace the context of newness in which they live.

Second, the language of these poems does more than just help persons to embrace and recognize their real situation. In dramatic and dynamic ways, the songs can also function to evoke and form new realities that did not exist until, or apart from, the actual singing of the song. Thus, the speech of the new song does not just recognize what is given but evokes it, calls it into being, forms it. Israel's hymnic assertion, "Yahweh is king," is not just a description of Yahweh the king, but evokes Yahweh to kingship. It calls Yahweh to the throne. Thus, understood in a quite different way, the old claims of Mowinckel concerning the creative, evocative function of hymns to bring forth a new reality are reaffirmed.

Ricoeur is repetitious and clear on this point. The redescription of human reality in terms of positive celebration is not regressive, not a return to an old, safe, religious world where God was on the throne. A return to the primal symbols must therefore be treated "suspiciously." The redescription of reality in terms of positive celebration has a lament behind it that decisively cuts it off from the primal. There is no return.[72] The second creation is a new one and not a return to the first one. Thus, the hymn of celebration is not regressive but anticipatory.[73] So we may say of the doxologies, as Ricoeur says of good art sketches, that they are

> not simply projections of the artist's conflicts, but the sketches of the solution. Dreams look backward to infancy, the past. The work of art goes ahead of the artist; it is a prospective symbol of his personal synthesis and of man's future, rather than a regressive symbol of his unresolved conflicts.[74]

Ricoeur follows Ernest Jones in observing that symbols have two vectors. They "repeat our childhood in all the senses, chronological and non-chronological, of that childhood. On the other hand, they explore our adult life."[75] So it is with the songs of celebration.

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

The hymn (even more than the song of thanksgiving) goes ahead. It goes ahead of the poet, of the worshiper, of the pastor. It calls into being the new creation, and there are glimpses—only glimpses—of life in the new kingdom in which all other gods have been destroyed and we have only to do with the lover of justice (Ps 99:4). The new song is sung (Rev 14:3). It is a song about the new king (Rev 14:7), but it is also about the death of Babylon (Rev 14:8). Thus the hymn forms the new world. Ricoeur, in an important theological link, relates this movement to the problem of law and grace. He observes that the dislocation dislocates us from our project of "making a whole of our lives," "self-glorification," "salvation by works," and sets us into the world of grace.[76] For good reason, Dornisch concludes that "for Ricoeur, the restoration of meaning always moves toward kerygma."[77] The hymn sings good news.

V

We have appealed to three of Ricoeur's insights in understanding the Psalms.

1. Human experience, which is the name for what we are about, moves in a *painful* way from orientation to disorientation and in a *surprising* way from disorientation to reorientation.

2. We must utilize both hermeneutics, the *hermeneutic of suspicion*, which demystifies and disenchants, and the *hermeneutic of representation*, which resymbolizes and redescribes our life. (I have no term to describe a hermeneutic for the "psalms of orientation" reflecting stable life. Perhaps such a view is a "hermeneutic of convention.")

3. The use and function of this language are *not descriptive but evocative*. Its knowing use can receive new worlds for the community, given by God.

As concerns the practice of the Psalms in ancient Israel, it makes sense that the lament psalms are likely to be understood more personally or domestically,[78] whereas the hymns belong to the festival; for disorientation is much more intimate than reorientation. It

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

likewise makes sense to follow Mowinckel in the notion that the festival of the cult is creative of the very experience it expresses, but now on the ground of the linkage between language and experience. The Psalms reflect the difficult way in which the old worlds are *relinquished* and new worlds are *embraced*.

Hopefully, in this admittedly subjective handling of ancient and contemporary pastoring, we have been as fair as possible to both. For contemporary pastoring, we hope to suggest that if we are attentive to the needs of people where they are, we have in the Psalms resources for helping persons both (1) live in the situation in which they in fact are, and (2) evoke in their lives new worlds of well-being that we know "dimly" (1 Cor 13:12) and in prospect.

The psalms of disorientation and reorientation are songs of scattering and gathering. The laments of Israel, like the hermeneutic of suspicion, are an act of dismantling and scattering for sheep without a shepherd (Ezek 34:5; Mark 6:34). The hymns and songs of thanksgiving in Israel, like the hermeneutic of symbolization, are an act of recollection, of consolidation, of new formations of wholeness when the shepherd is with the flock (Ps 23:1; John 10:10-11).[79]

As such, the Psalms are very much like our lives, which are seasons of scattering and gathering (Eccl 3:2-9).[80] We live always with the Lord of the exile, and all our songs to this Lord are from a strange land (Ps 137:4). This God has an intention of welfare and not of evil, to give a future and a hope. This God is the one who dares to say:

> I will . . . *gather* you from all the nations and all the places where I have *driven* you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile. (Jer 29:14)

> He who *scattered* Israel will *gather* him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock. (Jer 31:10)

> As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been *scattered* abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will *rescue*

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

> them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. (Ezek 34:12)

The Psalms reflect the human experience of exile and homecoming. The reality of exile is partly a result of the stratagems of Babylon. But partly the matters of exile and homecoming happen in the practice of faithful imagination, in contexts of pastoring and liturgy. And in those contexts, where these poems live, songs of disorientation and reorientation do the work Fuchs characterizes as "world-destroying and world-forming."[81]

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

This content downloaded from
208.95.48.49 on Mon, 02 Aug 2021 14:01:37 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms