

PSALTER AND MESSIAH. TOWARDS A CHRISTOLOGICAL  
UNDERSTANDING OF THE PSALMS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT  
AND THE CHURCH FATHERS\*

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1. *Introduction*

The Christology of the early church could to a large extent be described as a Christology of the Psalms, depicting Jesus Christ as being testified to in the Psalms of Israel and also as being interpreted by them.

This same function of the Psalms can already be seen in the New Testament writings, although they are by no means used only Christologically there (Löning 1998). To name only a few examples: the letter to the Hebrews develops its Christology especially according to the Psalms. With reference to Psalm 40, Hebrews 10.5-9 interprets ‘the life of Jesus as one great “psalmic prayer”’ (Zenger 1997: 23). The Gospels use Psalms 22, 31 and 69 to recount the events of the passion and death of Jesus. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter based his argumentation about Jesus’ resurrection on Psalm 16 (Acts 2.25-32). In close association with the fate of Jesus, the experiences of his congregation are interpreted in terms of Psalm 2 (Acts 4.25-28).

The Psalms also served the Church Fathers in their Christological argumentation. In his fight against Christological heresies, Tertullian already refers to the Psalms at around 200 CE. He mentions them as biblical testimonies to the human side of Jesus:

‘We shall also have the support of the Psalms on this point, – not the “Psalms” indeed of Valentinus the apostate, the heretic, and the Platonist, but the Psalms of David, the illustrious saint and well-known

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prophet. He sings to us of Christ, and through his voice Christ indeed also sang concerning Himself.<sup>1</sup>

The Christological interpretation of the Psalms in the early church also had no small influence on the theology and spirituality of the different liturgies, especially since the biblical Psalms had begun replacing charismatic hymns in church services and to a certain extent became canonized in the liturgical context (Hengel 1987). Therefore, until recently, many liturgists accepted as a matter of course that, whoever really wanted to understand the deepest meaning of the Psalms and wanted to use them as such in the liturgical service, had to approach them especially ‘from the viewpoint of the Church Fathers’<sup>2 3</sup>.

This traditional handling of the Psalms, however, is hardly compatible with historic-critical exegesis, at least as long as the latter merely wants to reconstruct single Psalms in their original textual form, assign them a specific cultic or institutional *Sitz im Leben* and, as far as the history of religions is concerned, place them within the sphere of the Ancient Near East. Do we Christians therefore have to accept and live with this kind of conflict between the reception of the Psalms in the liturgy of the church on the one hand and their interpretation within the enlightened biblical sciences on the other? Moreover, the patristic and liturgical use of the Psalms seem to contradict a biblical hermeneutics that tries to shun the results of ‘a self-centred disregard for Israel in Christian theology’ and ‘no longer’ wishes to ‘interpret the Old Testament without respect for the unbroken chosenness of Israel.’ (Zenger 2000a: 243).

In the light of this dilemma, my contribution will aim at reconciling modern exegesis of the Psalms with the interpretation of the Church Fathers and the liturgical tradition.<sup>4</sup> The bridging of a gap such as this is made possible by a reorientation in biblical studies, progressing from ‘the historical formation of a single text to the text of a completed

1. Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 20, 3 (CSEL 70): ‘Nobis quoque ad hanc speciem psalmi patrocinantur, non quidem apostatae et haeretici et Platonici Valentini, sed sanctissimi et receptissimi prophetae David. Ille apud nos canit Christum, per quem se cecinit ipse Christus.’ Zenger (1997: 21) already refers to this text.

2. This is true, for example, of a ‘classic’ in liturgical science, which has been translated into many different languages, C. Vagaggini, *Theologie der Liturgie* (cf. Vagaggini 1959: 286).

3. See H. Buchinger’s excellent article, providing an overview (Buchinger 2000: 196–199).

4. One should, however, not confine oneself to those Psalms which were cited in the New Testament and reinterpreted Christologically, the *relecture* of which the Patristic and Medieval theologians then took up. Rather, one should develop a hermeneutics that would be principally valid for the whole Psalter. P. Grelot (1998) therefore falls short of this ideal when, following on his summary of the historic-critically gleaned ‘literal sense’ of those Psalms cited in the New Testament, he merely represents their Jewish, New Testament and Patristic *relecture*.

biblical book to the canonical text.<sup>5</sup> The methodological perspective of research on the Psalms has shifted from genre criticism of the individual psalm to the composition of the Psalter and its intertextuality, especially within the canon (cf. Janowski 2001: 161–179; Braulik 2003). For our theme, it is important that this change of perspectives opens our eyes for a deeper dimension of the Psalter already within the Old Testament, a dimension which was well-known to the New Testament and to the exegesis of the Church Fathers. Therefore I confine myself to hermeneutical convergences between modern and patristic exegesis of the Psalms. However, I want to stress: when the synagogue reads the Psalms in the context of the Hebrew Bible only, this reading of course has to lead to a different messianic-Christological interpretation than that of the church when it reads the same biblical<sup>6</sup> Psalms in canonical dialogue with the New Testament.<sup>7</sup> Yet the Jewish reading is as legitimate as the Christian, on the one hand, because the texts

5. M. Fiedrowicz (1998: XX) rightly pointed to the interest in Early Christian exegesis currently shown by modern hermeneutics: 'Die Erkenntnis, daß das Verstehen eines Textes nicht nur seine Genese, sondern auch seine Rezeption umfaßt, daß Interpretation Implizites freizulegen, verborgene Reichtümer einer Aussage ans Licht zu heben und Vergangenes in neuen Kontexten zu aktualisieren hat, läßt die Exegeten der alten Kirche zu einem ernstzunehmenden Gesprächspartner in der hermeneutischen Diskussion der Gegenwart werden.' Cf. Schwienhorst-Schönberger (2003: 415): 'Das Erstaunliche an der Diskussion ist, dass sich aus diesen manchmal als "postmodern" apostrophierten Literaturtheorien Affinitäten zur so genannten praemodernen Bibelwissenschaft ergeben. Mit Hilfe der durch die postmoderne literaturtheoretische Diskussion angestoßenen Theorien können Aporien historisch-kritischer Exegese aufgearbeitet und grundlegende Einsichten der patristischen und mittelalterlichen Schriftauslegung wiedergewonnen werden. Das Prinzip kanonischer Schriftauslegung und die Einsicht "von einer grundsätzlichen Kohärenz und Konsistenz der biblischen Aussage aus dem Universalkontext" (Karla Pollmann) findet sich, um nur ein Beispiel aufzugreifen, bei Augustinus, in "De doctrina christiana", dem grundlegenden Werk christlicher Bibelhermeneutik'.

6. I deliberately speak of 'biblical' and not of 'Jewish' Psalms, as is frequently done by E. Zenger especially with a view to the Christian-Jewish dialogue. The church retained the Psalms by virtue of their being part of the Holy Scriptures of early Christianity or of the Old Testament of its bipartite canon. The church however hardly 'defended' this choice, because it knew that it was confronted with 'their irrenounceable rootedness in the Jewish context' – against Zenger (1997: 22 *i.a.*).

7. This aspect may be lacking in E. Zenger's hermeneutics of the Psalms. (I do, however, otherwise generally agree with his stance.) For instance, he makes a somewhat too undifferentiated remark on Psalmic prayer, namely, 'daß die biblischen Psalmen keiner besonderen Verchristlichung bedürfen' (Zenger 2002: 37). The many-sided image of the Messiah that we encounter in the Psalter gains a concrete profile through Jesus as the Christ. Even Yahweh, to whom we pray our Christian psalmic prayer in concord with the tradition of the early church, thus became the God and Father of the Christ in a sense unexpectedly new compared to his fatherhood of the Davidic Messiah of the Psalms. In the light of the events around the Christ testified of in the New Testament, the psalmic prayer of the church has to elevate some and eliminate other of the traits of the 'incarnatory-messianic dynamics' of the

themselves are open and show multiple perspectives. This will soon be illustrated more clearly. On the other hand, it is equally legitimate because the reception of the Psalms as Holy Scripture is basically connected to the community of faith and interpretation, the canon of which they belong to (Böhler: 2002).

I will now speak about (1) the principal trend in the current exegesis of the Psalms and then (2) summarize its results concerning history and literary studies for the messianization of the Psalter, principally according to research done in the German-speaking exegetical community. Starting with the Davidic and royal Psalms, a messianic or 'Christological' understanding of the Psalms already begins to develop within the Old Testament. Their collectivization or 'democratization' then irrevocably leads to an 'ecclesiological' understanding of the Psalms. I shall conclude by (3) comparing the methodologies of the rediscovered canonical reading and the patristic interpretation of the Psalms by means of two selected examples.

## *2. The principal trend in current research on the Psalms*

The methodological attention of modern Old Testament studies focuses on an aspect which can be described with the formula: '*From text to context*'. The newer exegesis of the Psalms accordingly reads any given individual psalm in the context of the entire book ('end text exegesis')<sup>8</sup> and of the relevant canon ('canonical exegesis')<sup>9</sup>. Exegesis of the *Psalms* thus

Psalter (Zenger 2001a: 24). This becomes especially clear when the weekly scheme of the liturgy of the hours is designed to form a Christological Easter Psalter. Cf. the outline by N. Füglistner in: *Benediktinisches Antiphonale* (Münsterschwarzach: Vier Türme, 1996).

8. Cf. e.g. Zenger (2000b: 416–419). This end text exegesis does not require any reconstruction of hypothetical earlier stages. The multi-perspectivity of the end text can also be perceived and interpreted theologically without taking the diachronical detour (against Zenger 2000a: 244). On this change in the scientific-exegetical trend see, most recently, L. Schwienhorst-Schönberger (2003).

9. This canonical-intertextual interpretation takes place in such a way, that 'zunächst die im Psalm selbst explizit anwesenden Texte der Hebräischen Bibel als Prätexte (in diachroner Perspektive) oder als Hypotexte (in synchroner Perspektive) erhoben und in die Interpretation des Psalms eingebracht werden.' Then the exegete has to enquire after the explicit and implicit reception of the Psalm in the New Testament and the texts have to be correlated with each other according to the method of canonical dialogue (Zenger 2000a: 248). The enquiry into the 'Nachgeschichte der Heiligen Schriften Israels' in the Jewish reception of a Psalm, although exegetically indispensable, for the Christian Old Testament scholar no longer belongs to a canonical exegesis of the Psalms (against Zenger 2000a: 249). On the methodology of the canonical interpretation of Scripture, see the excellent recent article of G. Steins (2003).

developed into exegesis of the *Psalter*.<sup>10</sup> Each psalm, of course, still has to be examined according to its own literary and theological profile. However, its specific forms of speech and expression can also fulfil other functions in text pragmatics when seen within different, broader contexts.<sup>11</sup> They can also draw new horizons of meaning, which in turn can each be attributed with an own scheme of thought. The message of the *Psalter* is greater than the sum of the messages of its individual *Psalms*. The degree to which the Church Fathers, too, were aware of this, can for example be seen in the extensive treatise of Gregory of Nyssa, 'On the Inscriptions of the psalms' ('In Inscriptiones Psalmorum', in: GNO V [Leiden: Brill, 1962] 24–175; English translation: Heine [1995]), in which he depicts the five books of the *Psalter* as steps on the ascending way to blessedness. Because of this 'added value', I explicitly speak of the *Psalter* in the title of my paper, meaning the structured book of 150 psalms available to us today.<sup>12</sup> The *Psalms* as texts of Holy Scripture, secondly, can only be considered to be fully accessible when they are interpreted within the framework of the biblical canon. The new *canonical and intertextual reading* taught us to see a close network of diverse correspondences, connecting the *Psalms* with the other books of the Old and New Testaments. The phenomenon of a messianic-Christological influence which is at issue here, however already determines the *Psalter* in its (canonical) final form! As was said earlier, its structure and function are now looked upon in a more differentiated way than had previously been the case in exegetical circles.

10. On the canonical-theological interpretation of the *Psalter*, cf. the recent works of Auwers (2003) and Zenger (2003: 126–134).

11. F.L. Hossfeld (1998: 60) therefore rightly criticised the hermeneutical-methodological position of E. Gerstenberger (1997/2001: 212). He formulates Gerstenberger's position as follows: "Eine flächige Auslegungsmethode, sei sie allegorisch oder christologisch, psychologisch oder historisierend, strukturalistisch oder kanonisch, verbietet sich bei der geschichtlichen Tiefendimension der P[salmen]-Texte. Die Exegese hat den Weg nachzuvollziehen, den ein Psalm von seiner Entstehungssituation und seinem ursprünglich gesellschaftlichen und gottesdienstlichem Haftpunkt an durchlaufen hat." Darauf ist knapp zu antworten: keine Einordnung der kanonischen Exegese unter die angegebenen "flächigen" Auslegungsmethoden und keine Entweder-Oder-Alternative zwischen synchron-flächiger und diachron-historischer Methode. In den nachzuvollziehenden Weg des Einzelpsalms gehören die verschiedenen Stadien seiner Existenz als Mitglied einer Teilgruppe bis hin zum Gesamtpsalter.'

12. 'First, one must understand the aim of this writing. Next, one must pay attention to the progressive arrangements of the concepts in the book under discussion. These are indicated by both the order of the psalms, which have been suitably arranged in relation to the knowledge of the aim, and by the sections of the whole book, which are defined by certain distinctive conclusions. The entire prophecy in the *Psalms* has been divided into five parts.' (Heine 1995: 83).

A composition and redaction-critical investigation of the (proto-Masoretic) Psalter reveals that the correspondences in form and content between the psalms had to be the result of a deliberate juxtaposition (*iuxtapositio*) and/or an intended concatenation (*concatenatio*) of psalms standing directly next to or near to one another.<sup>13</sup> The works of Norbert Lohfink and Erich Zenger<sup>14</sup> contributed fundamentally to the (re-discovery of these phenomena<sup>15</sup> in the Middle-European context. They observed the way in which collectors, editors and redactors used correspondences in words and contents at hand, and furthermore replaced single expressions, inserted certain additions and even entire psalms, and structured groupings of psalms to form fields of expression reaching across the whole area of the grouping.

The book of Psalms, of course, does to a large extent contain originally independent texts, this can be seen in its complex system of superscriptions. At the same time, though, the titles of the psalms illustrate that the Psalter is no unsystematic archive of individual texts out of which official liturgy or private piety borrowed one psalm or another (Zenger 1994a: 175). It has been made into a '*book of meditations*' (Füglister 1988)<sup>16</sup>, the text of which is to be learnt by heart and is again and again to be recited to oneself. It can thus be inferred from the concatenation of the psalms and its effect,

13. The same techniques were applied, e.g., in systematizing legal texts within the framework of a legal corpus, cf. Braulik (1991).

14. N. Lohfink (2003b) has proved the same principles for the New Testament, too. For E. Zenger, cf. the publications listed in Zenger (2000b: 417 n. 50). These were partially prepared in cooperation with F.-L. Hossfeld. G. Barbiero (1999) even examined the whole first book of Psalms regarding the interlinkage of its individual Psalms.

15. Many of them were already represented in the commentaries on the Psalms of the 19th century, albeit in an irregularly developed form. This is especially true of the (originally two-volumed) commentary on the Psalms by F. Delitzsch (1859/60). The fifth revised edition (Leipzig 1894) was reprinted in: *Die Psalmen* (Gießen: Brunnen, 1984).

16. N. Füglister also proves that, in the time of Jesus, the Psalter did not serve as the official liturgical hymn and prayerbook of the services in the Temple or synagogues of the Jewish communities. Rather, it was used as an aid to personal piety, instruction and devotion (1988: 329–352 and 380–384). The text was recited by heart, that is, it was 'meditated' on as was already required by the 'Hear Israel' for the Deuteronomic law (Deut. 6.6); also cf. Lohfink (1993). The redaction-historical arguments against the Psalter that was handed down being a collection of Psalms for the services in the Temple or synagogue were summarised by Zenger (2000b: 430–433). Also cf. the programmatic beatitude of him that 'delights in the Torah of Yahweh when he *murmurs/recites* it day and night' in the prologue to the Psalter. Zenger (2000b: 433) describes the proto-Masoretic Psalter as a 'book of Wisdom', which had retained 'seine Endgestalt im Milieu jener Weisheitsschule... die in gewisser Distanz zur Tempelaristokratie und deren hellenisierenden Tendenzen stand und die mit ihrer Verbindung von Tora-Weisheit (vgl. Ps. 1 und Ps. 147; 148), Eschatologie (vgl. besonders Ps. 2 und Ps. 149) und "Armenfrömmigkeit" (vgl. besonders Ps. 146 und Ps. 149) den Psalter als ein *Volksbuch* ausgestaltete und verbreitete, das als "konservative" Summe der Tradition gelernt und gelebt werden konnte'.

that the genre of the ‘book’ fits the description of the Psalter (Lohfink 2003a). A dynamics, which leads from one psalm to the next and makes the Psalter into a single, unified text, is created when keywords and motifs are taken up in successive psalms. The technique of sometimes announcing one or more following psalms at the end of a previous psalm, serves the same purpose of unifying the text of the Psalter. The announced psalm or psalms are then developed compositionally from the basis provided by the announcing psalm (Lohfink 2003a; Zenger 1997: 14–21). Apart from this unifying effect, the concatenation of psalms furthermore brings about an ‘interpenetration of aspects’, described by Lohfink (2003a: 83) as follows:

‘The linking of the first three psalms already effects in those who meditatively murmur the Psalter as a whole something like an explosion of the individual statements, a sweeping obliteration of the individual levels of interpretation. One can quickly read each of these psalms on one level or another. Everything is open to insights and still further and more penetrating comprehension. The plane becomes space in which understanding can move freely. This process of understanding is typical of meditation’.

The interlinking of adjoining psalms can ultimately even change their sense, perhaps by supplying them with a new subject – for instance the nations instead of Israel. All these different ‘reading instructions’ are essential, not only for the genre and function of the Psalter, but especially also for its messianic *relecture*.

### 3. *The messianization of the Psalter*

Concerning its *total structure*<sup>17</sup> as delineated in the framing Psalms 1–2 and 146–150, the Psalter is directed at the praise of the universal kingship of God, which is based in creation and Torah. The book of Psalms wishes to realise this kingship through the Davidic-messianic king, appointed on Zion (cf. Ps. 2), and through his messianic people (cf. Ps. 149) in the midst of all other peoples of the world. This messianic perspective is especially made clear through the ‘royal psalms’ (A) and the ‘Davidic psalms’ (B), deliberately built in on a macro-structural level. Both of these types of psalms are to be read in connection with God’s people (C). I will sketch the phenomena relevant to our theme on the synchronic level of the Psalter we have at hand.<sup>18</sup>

17. Recently summarised by Zenger (2001a: 25).

18. Today, the origin of the Psalter is explained according to three basic models: a redactional, a compositional and a collection model. All three of these are used in the commentaries on the Psalms of F.-L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger (see Hossfeld & Zenger 1996: 338). According to them, the book of Psalms that we have at hand today, originated ‘in

(A) The *Royal psalms* are not arbitrarily or coincidentally distributed through the Psalter.<sup>19</sup> They have been inserted at certain points of compositional conjunction.<sup>20</sup> I will here focus only on the most important observations. Psalms 2 and 72 frame the first and second books of the Psalter, that is, Psalms 3–41 and 42–72. Psalm 89 concludes the third book, Psalms 73–89. Each of the three books that are separated by doxological formulas, thus are either introduced or concluded by a royal psalm. At the end of the first book, Psalm 41 shares a number of motifs with Psalms 72 and 89 and can therefore also be read as a royal psalm and be drawn into the framework of kingship theology.<sup>21</sup> Although Psalms 2, 72 and 89 are not identified as ‘Davidic psalms’ through superscriptions, they frame the two large collections of Davidic psalms. They are interpreted by the theme of the covenant of David: by its foundation in Psalm 2, its handing down in Psalm 72 and its failure in Psalm 89. Thus Psalms 2–89 are now to be read as ‘the distressing but at the same time heartening story and theology of the Davidic reign’ (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993a: 51).

The next two books, encompassing Psalms 90–106 and 107–145<sup>22</sup>, display a different profile than that of the previous three books.<sup>23</sup> They now turn the Psalter into ‘a great composition of theological history and creation theology – and as such, a poetical appropriation or revision of Torah and prophecy’.<sup>24</sup> In the last two books of the Psalter, however, the royal Psalms 101, 110 and 144 also fulfil an introductory or concluding

mehreren Schüben. ... und zwar durch Aneinanderreihung von Teilsammlungen, die teilweise ihre je eigene Entstehungsgeschichte haben. Als Faustregel kann gelten: Die Abfolge der Teilsammlungen im jetzigen Psalmenbuch entspricht auch ihrem Alter’. (Zenger 2001b: 320; Hossfeld 1998: 71). In contrast to this model of the addition of completed sub-collections, C. Rösel (1999), for instance, represents the redactional model and reckons with several redactional layers.

19. The framing and closing function that certain royal psalms have for the groupings of Psalms or for smaller psalters, was already observed by C. Westermann (1964). It was especially G.H. Wilson (1986) that then treated this theme separately.

20. According to M. Millard (1994: 165–167), Torah and wisdom psalms, but also Zion- and royal psalms were used in these positions by editorial preference. For the royal psalms, Millard otherwise confines himself to individual observations.

21. On the connection of Psalm (1 and) 2 with Psalm 41 and the framing of the first book of Psalms that to a certain extent results from this, cf. e.g. Millard (1994: 125). The way in which Psalm 41 is connected with Psalms 72 and 89 under the aspect of kingship theology was illustrated by Zenger (1996: 100 n. 12.)

22. On the demarcation of the fifth book of Psalms, cf. Wilson (1993).

23. Cf. Zenger (1991a; 1994b; 1996), in which the structural suggestions of G.H. Wilson, K. Koch and R. G. Kratz on the fifth book of Psalms are also presented and commented critically.

24. [Der Psalter ist nun] ‘eine große geschichts- und schöpfungstheologische Komposition – und als solche eine poetische Aneignung bzw. Aktualisierung von Tora und Prophetie’. Zenger (2003: 130). On these perspectives, cf. Ballhorn (2000).



function. In contrast to Psalms 2, 72 and 89, though, they are Davidic psalms. Psalm 101 introduces a grouping of Davidic psalms, 101–104 (Zenger 1991a: 243). According to Psalm 101.1, it is the first task of David, as ruler, to sing praises to Yahweh. Psalms 110 and 144 conclude the two smaller Davidic Psalters 108–110 and 138–144. Within the fifth book of Psalms, these two minor Psalters structurally correspond and form an internal frame.<sup>25</sup>

Considering that every Davidic Psalter is either introduced or concluded by a royal psalm, it can be inferred that we have to reckon with a deliberate compositional scheme: Psalms 3–41 are introduced by Psalm 2 and 101–104 by Psalm 101. Psalms 51–71 end with Psalm 72, 108–110 with 110 and 138–145 with 144, followed by Psalm 145, depicting Yahweh as King above all.

The royal psalms are thus inserted in key positions of the Psalter, of groupings within the Psalter and of individual smaller Psalters. Their varying usage probably should be explained diachronically. The overall hermeneutics of the Psalter presumably was successively built up over a longer period. In these points of junction, the dimensions of meaning of the individual texts are in any event semantically transformed through compositional attribution. This in turn has an important result: In exilic and post-exilic times, Israel having lost their king, the royal psalms could hardly be understood in any other than a messianic sense. Therefore, the groupings of psalms that are framed by these royal psalms or the compositional entities to which they belong, have to be *re-read from the perspective of a messianic expectation*.<sup>26</sup>

Concerning the compositional grouping of Psalms 2–89, Zenger (1994c: 149) speaks of a ‘*messianic psalter*’, which he characterises as follows:

‘In this “messianic” psalter, on the one hand, the ambivalent experiences Israel had had with its historic monarchy are enumerated meditatively.

25. Zenger (1996). Psalm 45, where motifs of human and divine kingship meet, is to be read as God’s first answer to his people’s situation of need as it was sketched in the composition of lament in 42–44. It is also to be read as the hermeneutical key to the Zion theology developed in Psalms 46–48 (Zenger 1994a: 185). On Psalms 122, 127 and 132, which are characterised by kingship theology and which have a central position in the three groups of five Psalms each into which the songs of ascents can be divided, cf. Zenger 1996: 109.

26. In Psalm 45, in which the marriage ceremony of the king is celebrated, the latter is interpreted as being the Messiah. This has implications for the understanding of the woman that is extolled in the second part of the Psalm. She becomes the embodiment of Israel, which is now married to the Messianic king. Against the background of the marital bond between Yahweh and Israel, the messianic saving king vicariously steps into the role of God, wedding himself to the people. The Messiah, representing Yahweh, even appears as the bridegroom of the eschatological people of God in Psalm 45. It thus attests to a special case of the close connection between ‘Christology’ and ‘Ecclesiology’ resulting from the Messianic *relecture* of the Psalms.

Starting with David (Psalms 3ff) and moving to Solomon (Psalm 72 is a prayer of the elderly David for his son Solomon), the account leads to the end of the monarchy in the year 587 (Psalm 89). Dealing with the way the monarchy went, the “messianic” Psalter holds on to the promise given in the Davidic covenant: the programmatic opening text of Psalm 2 recapitulates the promise of Nathan in 2 Sam. 7.14 (cf. Ps. 2.7) in the context of the intimidating world of the nations. The closing Psalm, 89, brings in 2 Sam. 7.14-16 corresponding to its “historical” setting. It serves both as interpretation of the current situation and as request that opens the future (cf. Ps. 89.27, 30, 33). In its closing section, Psalm 89 in a “democratizing” way widens the messianic perspective to include Israel as a people. The faithfulness of God that “David” assures his “son” of, is meant for the “messianic” Israel, with a view to this same intimidating world of the nations. Ps. 72.17 quotes the opening passage of the story of Israel, Gen. 12.1-3 with its perspective on the nations, and thereby emphasizes: “All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed”.<sup>27</sup>

The royal psalms are partially combined with *psalms about the kingship of Yahweh*. This can, for instance, be seen in the grouping Psalms 18–21, where the royal Psalms 18 and 20–21 frame Psalm 19, about Yahweh as universal king.<sup>28</sup> The royal Psalm 101 reflects on the preceding Yahweh-kingship Psalms 93–100. The fifth book of Psalms is concluded with Psalms 144 and 145, a royal and a Yahweh-kingship psalm. This combination corresponds to the programmatic opening psalm, number 2, which combines both kingship theologies. Seen from within the total

27. ‘In diesem “messianischen” Psalter werden einerseits meditativ die ambivalenten Erfahrungen Israels mit seinem historischen Königtum abgeschrieben: Von David (Psalmen 3) über Salomo (Psalm 72 ist Gebet des alten David für seinen Sohn Salomo) bis hin zum Ende des Königtums im Jahre 587 (Psalm 89). In Auseinandersetzung mit diesem Weg des Königtums hält der “messianische” Psalter aber die im Davidbund gegebene Verheißung fest: Der eröffnende Programmtext Psalm 2 rekapituliert die Natanverheißung 2 Sam. 7, 14 (vgl. Ps. 2.7) im Kontext der bedrohlichen Völkerwelt. Der abschließende Psalm 89 spielt 2 Sam. 7, 14-16, dem “geschichtlichen” Standort entsprechend, sowohl als Deutung der Situation wie auch als die Zukunft eröffnende Bitte ein (vgl. Ps. 89.27, 30–33). Psalm 89 weitet in seinem Schlußabschnitt dann “demokratisierend” die messianische Perspektive auf Israel als Volk aus. Die “David” für seinen “Sohn” zugesprochene Treue Gottes gilt einem “messianischen” Israel – gerade mit Blick auf die Völkerwelt, wie Psalm 72.17 (mit Zitat der die Geschichte Israels eröffnenden Völkerperspektive Gen. 12.1-3) herausstellt: “Und es sollen sich in ihm segnen alle Völker, ihn sollen sie glücklich preisen”.’

28. If it could be proved according to literary critical criteria that the three royal Psalms were intentionally bound together into a single ‘unit of expression’ through redactional insertions and thus originally formed the centre of the sub-collection Psalms 15–24\* – cf. Hossfeld & Zenger (1993b: 169–177) – then not only do we have an early testimony of a structurally purposed insertion, but also an example of the concatenation of Psalms, in this case, of clustered royal psalms.

perspective of the Psalter, the 'messianic concept' of the first three books with its 'dialectics of restoration and Utopia', develops into the 'theocratic concept' of the last two books, thus culminating in the universal kingship of Yahweh (Zenger 1994b: 151).

The messianic *relecture* of the royal psalms and, at that, of all other psalms in their field of tension, *partially coincides with two other new interpretations*, which I have until now more or less left out and which I now wish to introduce. These are the 'Davidization' and the 'democratization' of the 'I'-speaker of the psalms, especially the 'I' of a king or of David himself. Both interpretations, the '*historicizing*' and the '*collectivizing*', are partially the result of redactional activity, but could also have developed from a new interpretation inherent to the Old Testament, which needs not necessarily have brought about any textual changes such as superscriptions or insertions or additions. In both cases, the psalms had been awarded a new literal meaning.<sup>29</sup>

(B) Jewish as well as Christian pre-critical exegetes considered David to be the author of the Psalms.<sup>30</sup> David, who wrote and sang them, was a prophet and archetype of Christ. He also was the David of the liturgy. This naively historical interpretation proved itself to be untenable in scientific research on the Psalms.<sup>31</sup> The actual value of the *Davidization*, however, namely its historical hermeneutics deeply rooted in the Old Testament, only started to be acknowledged in recent times. Today, exegetes consider David to be the canonical 'integrative figure' of the Psalter and the 'coded message' ('Chiffre-Begriff') especially pointing to Israel (Millard 1994: 231)<sup>32</sup>. This he became through a multi-phased process in the course of inner-Old Testament development. Apart from the Chronistic History<sup>33</sup>,

29. On the nature and value of such new interpretations, see e.g. Becker (1967).

30. On the image of David in the Psalter, cf. especially Luyten (1990); Ballhorn (1995); Kleer (1996); Auwers (1999).

31. For more information in outline, cf. Becker (1975).

32. 'Das gilt einerseits lokal und sozial: für ein Israel, das – im Duktus der biblischen Geschichtsdarstellung – noch nicht in Nord- und Südreich, geschweige denn in verschiedene Diasporagruppen aufgespalten ist. Das hat andererseits aber auch eine Bedeutung in Bezug auf den Tempel:... Der Gottesdienst ohne Tempel gibt das Vorbild ab für die Wendung zu Gott in der Situation, in der der Tempel zwar als Zentralheiligtum anerkannt ist, aber faktisch unerreichbar ist. Diese situative Analogie eröffnet dem Beter, der sich mit David identifiziert, aber nicht einfach nur die Möglichkeit der gegenwärtigen Begegnung mit Gott außerhalb des Tempels, sondern zugleich die Hoffnung auf eine künftige Begegnung mit Gott im Tempel.' (Millard 1994: 231).

33. According to the Chronicles, the Psalms of the Levitical guilds of singers originated with the temple personnel appointed by David (1 Chron. 15.17, 19; 16.41-42; 25.4-6). 1 Chronicles 16.7 presents a 'snapshot' of the Chronistic Davidian Renaissance: after the Ark of the Lord was brought to the place, '... David (on that day) first committed to Asaph and his associates this psalm of thanks to the Lord'. A skillfully arranged textual collage of Psalms 105.1-15; 96.1-13a; 106.1, 47-48 then follows. It represents an excellent systematization of

the Psalms form the most important setting for the completion of this process. The canonising postscript of the Septuagint Psalter, Psalm 151, stemming from Early Judaism, proves David to be a writer and singer of psalms. The superscription even places him among the ‘scriptural prophets’ (Zenger 2003: 134).

David is mentioned 86 times in the Masoretic Psalter: 73 times in superscriptions, once in the colophon 72.20 and twelve times in the text of six psalms<sup>34</sup> in total. To this can be added a ‘Davidic *relecture*’ of individual psalms without explicit reference to David.<sup>35</sup> I will only speak about the superscriptions and the single colophon, because they are of especial hermeneutical importance and ought to be analyzed and interpreted in the end text exegesis of the Psalms.<sup>36</sup>

Almost half of all psalms of the Hebrew Psalter are made into ‘Davidic psalms’ through the superscription *l’dāwid*.<sup>37</sup> It can also be found in cases where the speaker is a collective entity, for instance in Psalm 60. At least

important aspects of the theology of the books of Chronicles, consistently composed according to the principles of the past (a retrospect in Psalm 105), present (a praise of Yahweh from Psalm 96) and future of God’s people (a prayer in Psalm 106 for liberation from the enemy). Thus Asaph acts as a singer of ‘Psalms of David’ (cf. 2 Chron. 29.30), which the latter, according to the Chronicles, had commissioned, but not composed himself. These Psalms cited in Chronicles neither have Davidic superscriptions nor any other remarks on the authorship of the Psalter.

34. Psalm 18.51; 78.70; 89.4, 21, 36, 50; 122.5; 132.1, 10, 11, 17; 144.10. These Psalms are neither all Davidic Psalms – Psalm 78 is attributed to Asaph and Psalm 89 to Ethan, the Ezrahite – nor do they all belong to the royal Psalms – the historical psalm, 78, describes itself as *maskil* or wisdom song and according to its superscription, Psalm 122 is a ‘song of ascents’. On the image of David in Psalms 18, 78, 89, 132 cf. Luyten (1990: 209–221). He summarises this image as follows: ‘On the one hand they see David as the first and very successful king of greater Israel, as the king elected by Yahweh and bearer of the dynastic and national promises. Even after the downfall of the monarchy this David-image is foremost in continuing to feed the hope of restoration and renewal and, furthermore, that expectation of a new David, an anointed “par excellence”. On the other hand, these psalms reflect a growing tendency to make David the prototype of the faithful and law-abiding Israelite whom Yahweh rescues from every danger.’ (1990: 225).

35. Psalms 4.3; 23.4; 31.21–22; 51.16; 52.3; 54.5; 56.4, 8; 59.16; 63.12.

36. ‘Die Überschriften sind in der Regel nicht nur Reflex des Kompositionsprozesses der Teilsammlungen des Psalmenbuchs... sondern geben oft auch wichtige Hinweise zur Interpretation des jeweiligen Einzelpsalms im Kontext seiner von der Redaktion als solche intendierten “Nachbarpsalmen”’ Zenger (1994c: 128).

37. For an overview, cf. e.g. Millard (1994: 251–254). The Septuagint translates *l’dāwid* with τῷ Δαυῖδ, that is, with the dative case: Psalm 32 (31G); 34 (33G); 35 (34G); 36 (35G); 40 (39G); 60 (59G); 61 (60G); 68 (67G); 69 (68G); 70 (69G); 144 (143G). In three superscriptions, it goes further than the Masoretic text does. Two of these additions, however, are substantiated by Qumran: Psalm 33 (32G), cf. 4QPs<sup>d</sup>; 104 (103G), cf. 11QP<sup>s</sup><sup>a</sup>; 137 (136G). Four times only does the Septuagint reproduce the annotation with the genitive τοῦ Δαυῖδ: Psalm 26 (25G); 27 (26G); 28 (27G); 37 (36G). Cf. the exhaustive analysis of Kleer (1996: 78–86) on the superscriptional annotation *l’dāwid*.

two intentions of expression can be associated with this polysemic formula. Both Jewish and Christian interpreters usually read *l'dāwid* as an indication of authorship: the Psalms were considered to be composed by David. This would also agree with the biographical details given in the superscriptions and in the colophon of Psalm 72.20.<sup>38</sup> The 'David' of these superscriptions is a 'paradigmatic "prayer leader"' and a "figure of identification".<sup>39</sup> The 'subscript' in the colophon of Psalm 72.20, 'This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse', extends the Davidization to include Psalms 2 to 72. Thus the preceding psalms of Korah and Asaph in the second book (Psalms 42–49 and 50) are also called 'prayers of David'. The later redaction of the Psalms brought David into connection with the entire Psalter, despite all other notes on authorship in the superscriptions of individual psalms. This by no means implies that David was the author of all psalms, since the '*lamed auctoris*' is neither philologically nor topically the only explanation for the expression *l'dāwid*. The superscription of Psalm 72.1 contains the note *lišlomoh*, which can only mean 'for Solomon', since, according to the colophon in verse 20, the psalm is one of the 'prayers of David'. Thus, David composed this psalm for the enthronement of his son. The preposition *l'* describes the *finality* or purpose of a psalm. Moreover, the Septuagint does not understand the '*lamed*' in the title of the psalm as '*lamed auctoris*' either, but as '*lamed relationis*'.<sup>40</sup>

At least since Persian times, this David of the Psalter no longer serves as historical king, but, among others, already as prototype of the 'Anointed

38. In 13 superscriptions of the Masoretic text of Psalms that, with the exception of Psalm 142, belong to the first two books of Psalms (in the first book of Psalms/Davidic Psalter these are the four Psalms 3, 7, 18, 34, in the second book of Psalms/Davidic Psalter the eight Psalms 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63), supplementary Midrash-type remarks can be found attached to the formula *l'dāwid*, 'of David'. These remove the Psalms from their original liturgical context and, to a certain extent countering the integration of Psalm 18 into the books of Samuel, in a mystical and ideal-typical way connect them to different events from the life of David as told in the books of Samuel. In contrast to David's appearances in the Chronicles, but also in contrast to the situation in the majority of the royal Psalms and the Psalm corpora, these mostly are situations of distress or suffering, in which David expresses his feelings through song.

39. Zenger (1991b: 407). 'Daß dabei nicht eine triumphalistische Davidfigur, sondern David als der Leidende und Büßende, aber auch als der die Tora liebende Knecht JHWHs zur messianischen Hoffnungsgestalt geworden ist, macht diese Überschriften auch für eine kanonische Auslegung der Psalmen im Horizont des Neuen Testaments kostbar' (1991b: 408).

40. Kleer 1996 translates *l'dāwid* with 'to David', 'referring to David', 'concerning David' and understands the superscriptional annotation 'im Sinn einer Leseanweisung oder Interpretationshilfe' (80). In 'weist den Leser/Beter des betreffenden Psalms an, bei dessen Lektüre an David zu denken' (80), it invites him to enter into 'eine Schicksalsgemeinschaft mit David' (81).

One', the Messiah, who was expected for the future. In its superscriptions and even beyond them, the Septuagint further expanded on the image of David as prayer of the Psalms. It thereby strengthened this Messianic expectation (cf. e.g. Rösel 2001: especially 143).<sup>41</sup>

(C) The psalms of Israel do not only have an 'I'-speaker, but also the 'We' of the congregation or of the people. Principally, changes of subject are possible within a psalm and originally individual psalms and songs of praise or thanksgiving can furthermore be reinterpreted to be collectivized.<sup>42</sup> In this case, the Psalms would constitute a normative and formative self-portrait of Israel, especially in times of a crisis of their collective identity (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993b: 167). A *collectivizing new interpretation of the Davidic and royal psalms* 'democratized' the royal predicates, too, and thus made all Israel into an 'anointed' messianic people and the nation who prepared the way for the universal reign of God.<sup>43</sup> Against such a collective messianic background, the superscription

41. The Psalter of the Septuagint, which was probably translated in Palestine during the second half of the second century BCE, had brought more different Messianic ideas into the Psalms. It shares its eschatological expectation with contemporary Jewish writings (Schaper 1994: 58–61). This is especially important for the New Testament and liturgical use of the Greek Psalter, although, at the time, the 'David' of the Hebrew Psalms of course had already been understood in the light of the Messiah within the Old Testament, too.

42. Scharbert (1987). 'In dem "Wir" ist bald das Volk Israel in seinen vielen Generationen, bald die versammelte Kultgemeinde oder die Gruppe von Verwandten und Freunden, die einen der ihren zum Dankopfer geleitet, dann wieder das dem König untergebene Volk oder die Gola im Exil zu sehen. Manchmal sind es die Zuhörer eines Weisheitslehrers oder eines lehrenden Priesters, selten die sündige Menschheit, bei einer Wallfahrt auch die Wallfahrer begrüßenden oder verabschiedenden Kultdiener. Auffallend ist das seltene Sündenbekenntnis.' (1987: 308). On the level of the Psalter, Israel acts as the collective body of reference. This follows, i.a., from the doxologies concluding the books of the Psalter. The doxologies serve a number of purposes: '(Durch sie werden) Einzelsalmen zu Bündeln zusammengefasst und in einen größeren kompositorischen Rahmen gestellt. Über die Gottesbezeichnung wird ein weiterer Zweck erreicht: alle Psalmen werden noch einmal ausdrücklich auf den Gott Israels bezogen. Indem aber der Gott Israels gepriesen wird, ist gleichzeitig die Israeldimension angesprochen, womit auch jedes individuelle Gebet des mit der Doxologie abgeschlossenen Bündels noch einmal auf der höheren Ebene in die Gemeinschaft Israels hineingenommen wird. Das oben festgestellte Phänomen der kollektiven Relecture lässt sich also auf kompositorischer Ebene festmachen! Gerade auf der Buchebene gibt sich der Psalter als Buch Israels zu erkennen und macht damit deutlich, dass er in jeder Hinsicht das Gebet des einzelnen transzendiert' (Ballhorn 2003: 248).

43. Cf. Becker (1977), who worked on the theme of the collectivizing reinterpretation of royal texts, especially the royal Psalms, and their Messianological setting alongside the restorative expectation of a king, resulting from the theocratic movement. The widening of horizons or the transfer of the Davidic promise to the people of Israel in the Psalms is characteristic especially for exilic and post-exilic writings and their Davidic theology. It is especially Deutero-Isaiah that transmits definite royal traits to Israel or the deportees in the exilic period. This takes place – at least within the total scheme of Isaiah 40–55 – in the texts about the 'Servant of Yahweh'. According to Isaiah 55.3-5, the proof of favour is given to

formula 'for David' would already signalise 'that Israel' could 'internalise and realise its "Davidic-messianic" standing or mission in and with these psalms' (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993a: 16).

To summarise: On the level of the whole Psalter, the identity of the prayer of the Psalms is semantically opened up by the multiple *relecture* described here. Lohfink (1993: 280) makes an excellent résumé with a view to the canonical interpretation of Scripture:

'Even when originally used in a cultic context, the Psalms already were "formulas". Different prayers could use them. The reference of the words changed, depending on the person who prayed them. In the Psalter as a whole, even in the wording of individual Psalms the individuality of the "I"-speaker in prayer apparently is opened up towards Israel. The prayer is David. However, since Deutero-Isaiah, his role was given to Israel in its relationship with the nations. This is especially true where a superscription attributes a psalm to David – but not only there. Israel in prayer can of course be represented in each prayer-gathering and condensed in each individual Israelite, and all the more in the coming "messianic" David. Where all of Israel is praying, the "enemies" are the nations who threaten Israel. Where an entity within Israel is praying – so to speak, the "true Israel" – the other part of Israel can move into the position of the enemy, for instance, those groupings of rulers in Israel who oppress the "Anawim" [the poor]. Since the Theologoumenon of the eschatological flocking of the nations also is at hand, even a complete exchange of positions between the official Israel and the nations is possible. Members of the "nations" could step into the position of the prayer, and that which used to be Israel, could increasingly move into the position of the enemy. For all of these changes, the expressive structure of one psalm or the other stands waiting in the wings.'<sup>44</sup>

David, the 'faithful love promised to David', that is, the Davidic covenantal promise (2 Sam. 7.15-16) is also transferred to the people. They move into David's position and receive his commission as witness towards the nations.

44. 'Auch bei ursprünglichem kultischen Gebrauch waren die Psalmen schon "Formulare". Verschiedene Beter konnten sie beten. Die Referenz der Worte änderte sich je nach dem Beter. Im Psalter als ganzem wird offenbar selbst beim Wortlaut individueller Psalmen die Individualität des betenden Ich auf Israel hin eingeschränkt. Der Beter ist David, doch dessen Rolle ist seit Deuterojesaja auf ganz Israel in seinem Verhältnis zu den Völkern übergegangen. Das gilt noch einmal besonders, wo die Überschrift einen Psalm David zuordnet – doch nicht nur dort. Das betende Israel kann natürlich in jeder betenden Versammlung und in jedem einzelnen Israeliten verdichtet da sein, erst recht im kommenden "messianischen" David. Betet ganz Israel, dann sind die Feinde die Völker, die Israel bedrängen. Betet eine Größe innerhalb Israels, gewissermaßen das "wahre Israel", dann kann auch der andere Teil Israels in die Feindposition einrücken – etwa die in Israel herrschenden Gruppen, die die "Anawim" [die Armen] unterdrücken. Da auch das Theologoumenon der endzeitlichen Völkerwallfahrt bereitliegt, ist selbst ein völliger Tausch der Positionen zwischen

This *multi-dimensionality of the Old Testament Psalms* requires of exegetes not to limit the Old Testament message of the text to the original meaning of the earliest possibly reconstructable stage of the text. The Christological reception of the Psalms in the New Testament, for example, already has to take into account the multiplicity of connotations evoked within the Old Testament. For a canonical interpretation of the Psalms, the given scriptures all are canonical writings, as one single text.

#### 4. *Canonical and patristic interpretation of the Psalms*

As was just outlined, modern 'end text exegesis' as a methodological reflex first focuses on the *iuxtapositio* and on the redactionally intended *concatenatio*, secondly on the hermeneutically meant superscriptions of the psalms, especially on the 'notes on authorship' and thereby, their 'Davidization'. Thirdly, it becomes clear that this 'Davidization' oscillates between the 'king' and the people of God, and bathes all in a messianic light.<sup>45</sup> Crossing the boundaries of the Psalter, 'canonical exegesis' fourthly also interprets the inter-textual connections in the entire Bible, naturally within the framework of the textual repertoire of each psalm concerned. All of these principles are familiar to patristic exegesis of the Psalms, too.<sup>46</sup>

In 'consequence of the historical-critical analysis' as well as the 'interpretation within the entire biblical canon', Zenger and Hossfeld also consider it vitally important to take the 'history of influence (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) and reception (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*)' of the Psalms into account in a 'theologically committed and hermeneutically reflected commentary on the Psalms' (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993a: 24). This programme confirms the importance that the understanding of the early church had gained for the biblical sciences today. Equally important is the wide spectrum of questions that belongs to the background of the liturgical use of the Psalms, especially the background concerning their history of

dem offiziellen Israel und den Völkern in Reichweite. Menschen aus den Völkern könnten in die Beterposition mit eintreten, und was Israel war, könnte immer mehr in die Feindposition geraten. Für alle diese Wandlungen steht das Aussagegefüge eines Psalms parat.'

45. Old Testament Messianism thus gains a degree of relevance for the hermeneutics of the New Testament that transcends the tradition-historical observations such as were summarised and described by Gese 1995.

46. The classical work on the Church Fathers' exegesis of the Psalms is Rondeau (1982; 1985). The concept of 'Christologizing from below' had meanwhile been placed within the horizon of the 'prosopological exegesis': with Hilary of Poitiers, Rondeau considers the key to the patristic interpretation of the Psalms to lie in the question, 'in whose name or referring to whom (*ex cuius persona, uel in quem*) that which is said, is to be understood' (1985: 7). However, neither Hippolytus nor Asterius can be found among the authors representing this prosopological process of interpretation. I will briefly present their basic exegetical principles here.



interpretation. The following two examples should illustrate some of the most important hermeneutical correspondences between patristic and modern exegesis of the Psalms – without, however, questioning either the independence of their theological profiles and of their methodical approaches or their being historically determined.

I have chosen (A) the oldest Christian homily on the Psalms, ascribed to Hippolytus, and (B) Asterius's homilies on the Psalms.

(A) *Hippolytus's Homily 'On the psalms' (HomPs)* is the oldest known systematic reflection on the Psalter.<sup>47</sup> Harald Buchinger comprehensively analyzed this explication on the Psalms, embedded in their patristic context (1995). It is one of the earliest certain records of the use of the Psalms in the Christian service. It also contains the first clear reference to the reading (!) of Psalms. The text was written in Rome at the beginning of the third century and today is only still partially preserved. It was transmitted in Greek catenae on the Psalms. From the fourth century onwards, it shows a broad history of influence. Despite its original oral rendering and fragmentary transmission, Hippolytus's homily on the Psalms formally as well as theologically represents a relatively cohesive treatise on the entire book of Psalms and on Psalms 1–2.<sup>48</sup> On the one hand, it expressly aims at demonstrating the inspired origin and meaning of the whole Psalter, especially the superscriptions. The actual theme of this treatise, however, is the superscriptions of the Psalms and their function in the inspired Psalter.

Hippolytus presumably considered the arrangement of the Psalms to be of hermeneutical relevance, because he reflects upon their position in the Psalter:

'Two psalms were read to us and it is necessary to state why they are the first'. (*HomPs 18*).

Thus, Psalms 1 and 2 were read and explained according to their numeric order. Hippolytus does not consider Psalms 1 and 2 to be one single text, as many Jewish and Christian sources do (Zenger 1993, especially 39–43), but he speaks of 'two psalms' (*HomPs 18*) and of a 'first' and a 'second' psalm (*HomPs 19*). Furthermore, these two psalms are not at all further explicated in their content, but, as was said, are merely treated with reference to their canonical position and to the fact that they have no superscription.

Concerning the superscriptions of the Psalms, Hippolytus first discusses the problem of the different names of the authors before he treats their

47. The quotations from Hippolytus are taken from the first English translation of Stewart-Sykes (2001).

48. Rondeau (1967: 15) therefore notes: '*notre homélie est justement un prologue à une exégèse des psaumes*'. He also describes it as '*le premier "Prologue au Psautier" connu*'.

further particulars. The titles of the Psalms, which naturally belong to the inspired text, not only reveal the inspired origins of the Psalter, but, concerning their content, also act as a hermeneutical key to its meaning.

Just as the redaction of the Psalter would have it, Hippolytus says:

“The psalms number altogether one hundred and fifty. Some think, because they have not studied with sufficient care, that all are of the blessed David, but this is not what is signified. All are attributed to David, but the titles indicate which psalm is assigned to whom. I have said that four leaders of the singers were elected, and that there were two hundred and eighty-eight accompanists. The psalms are assigned to the four leaders, as indeed the titles indicate. For when it says “A psalm of the sons of Korah”, Asaph and Heman uttered it. When it says “A psalm of Asaph”, Asaph himself uttered it. When it says “A psalm of Jedutun”, Jedutun himself chants. When it says “A psalm of David”, David himself was the speaker. But when it says “A psalm to David” it was addressed to David by another. There are, in all, hundred and fifty psalms, of which seventy-two are to David, nine of David, twelve to Asaph, twelve of the sons of Korah, one of Jedutun, one to Ethan, one to Salomon, two to Haggai and Zechariah, thirty-nine are without title and one to Moses, a total of one hundred and fifty. We must now consider the mystery of by what rationale the Psalter is attributed to David when there are different singers and when not all of the psalms are by David. We shall miss nothing out. The rationale of the attribution is this: he was himself the cause of all that came about. He chose the singers himself, and since he was himself the cause, he should be considered worthy of the honour that all the singers uttered should be reckoned to David’ (*HomPs 6–7*).<sup>49</sup>

Hippolytus’ creativeness in explicating the further elements of the psalm titles is shown in his remarks concerning the individual superscriptions. He for instance uses the superscription and introductory lines of Psalm 9 to portray Christ as prayer of the Psalms – however, not in an exclusive or typical sense:

“A psalm concerning the hidden things of the Son. I shall confess to you, Lord, with all my heart, I shall proclaim your marvels.” Who was it who confessed the father, yet cried out and spoke with clarity of speech? “I confess to you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and have revealed them to the simple. Yes, Father, because that it was your good pleasure in your sight.” Let us see, then, beloved, the Son of God proclaimed here’ (*HomPs 11*).

49. The Babylonian Talmud (*BabaBatra 14b; 15a*) not only has David appearing as Psalm writer – amongst ten other authors – but also as editor of the Psalter.

The quoted words of Jesus (Mt. 11.25-26) could have lead Hippolytus to his subsequent explication of the superscription of Psalm 8, which is of especial interest for the understanding and theology of the Psalms. Here, Hippolytus formulates his basic hermeneutical principle, which he subsequently applies, as he had just done for Psalm 9: the Psalms and their titles act as mutual interpreters. Hippolytus is seldom only content with this narrow form of intertextuality, though, and applies both the Old and the New Testament in his argumentation, often starting with an association of keywords. He furthermore develops a 'trinitarian theology of prophecy': in the Psalter, David speaks to God in – and also about – the same spirit of Christ that already filled the prophets; at the same time, Christ takes up the meaning of the Psalms and deepens it. Thus the unity of the canonical scripture, too, is substantiated theologically:

'Another title is "Psalm of the wine-vat". What are these vats, except the blessed prophets? For just as the vat receives the sweet wine from the crushed grape, and just as therein it is boiled and fermented, likewise the Holy Spirit flows into the prophets, as Christ was crushed like a grape, and "delights the heart" just as does sweet wine. This is easy to see because the title shows the meaning of the psalm and the psalm shows the meaning of the words which are to be interpreted. For it is added "from the mouth of babies and infants you have found praise". Christ says: "You have revealed these things to suckling infants." He is speaking to the prophets, because they are partakers of the Holy Spirit, living far from evil like children, and so they build the glorious school of grace. Rightly did David sing about them' (*HomPs 12*).

As could be seen from the text cited from *HomPs 6–7*, Hippolytus considered *David* to be the originator of the Psalter, despite the differing notes on authorship (cf. *HomPs 7*). The image of David and the inspired origins of the Psalter relate to the Chronistic History, especially to 1 Chronicles 16, a key text of Old Testament Davidization, and to 1 Chronicles 25. In this context, Hippolytus interprets the number of 72 singers each that David, 'the leader of the leaders of the singers' (*HomPs 4*), allotted to each of the four chief musicians, as counterpart of the 72 nations of the world. This symbol in the sphere of the economy of grace acts as a prophecy 'that in the last times every tongue should glorify God' (*HomPs 3*).

To recapitulate: Hippolytus' Homily on the Psalms testifies to

'a number of fundamental perceptions on the Psalter, which the early church moreover shared with the Judaism of its time: the "total Davidization", the basically doxological understanding of psalmody, the importance of the Psalter as a revision of the rest of Scripture. These beliefs have their theological basis in the conviction that the Psalter has a (spirit-given) prophetic and messianic dimension. This conviction,

combined with the natural idea of the unity of Scripture, allows for a Christian Christological and ecclesiological reinterpretation of the Psalms. They in turn refer to the (earlier and later) history of salvation. We are, however, not dealing with arbitrary typologies and allegories here. The Psalter is the sacrament (*μυστήριον*) of the *one* reality of salvation, which encompasses the whole history of salvation and the road to salvation of the individual: in the Psalter, David sings about “the glorious school of grace” (cf. *HomPs 12*).<sup>50</sup>

(B) Although *Asterius*<sup>51</sup> is no ‘exegete of the stature of Origen or Diodore’, he does ‘have exceptional theological standing within the early exegesis of the Psalms’ and is considered to be ‘the rhetorician among the exegetes of the Psalms’ (Kinzig 1992: 130). Wolfram Kinzig (1992) recently systematized his basic exegetic principles.<sup>52</sup> The *three keys* that gave Asterius access to the understanding of a psalm, almost exactly correspond with the criteria that today apply for end text exegesis (namely the arrangement of the Psalms, Davidization and messianization) as well as for canonical interpretation (that is, consideration of the whole Bible).

Firstly, Asterius always refers to the sequence of the Psalms as an indication of their interpretation (109). He clearly states: ‘The sequence of the Psalms teaches us the understanding of the Psalms’ ([*Hom. 23:5*] 110).

Secondly, the superscriptions of the Psalms play an important role:

‘But let us look at the title! What the seals are for the testaments, the headings are for the Psalms. Just as those who (want to) open the testaments, first loosen the seals and (only) thus (can) read the

50. Buchinger (1995: 298): [Hippolyt bezeugt] ‘mehrere fundamentale Auffassungen über den Psalter, die übrigens die alte Kirche mit dem zeitgenössischen Judentum teilt: die “Totaldavidisierung”, das grundsätzlich doxologische Verständnis der Psalmodie, die Bedeutung des Psalters als Aktualisierung der übrigen Schrift. Theologische Grundlage dafür ist die Überzeugung von seiner (geistgewirkten) prophetischen und messianischen Dimension. Diese Überzeugung, in Verbindung mit der selbstverständlichen Auffassung von der Einheit der Schrift, ermöglicht christlicherseits auch die christologische und ecclesologische Aktualisierung der Psalmen, die ihrerseits auf die (frühere und spätere) Heilsgeschichte bezogen sind. Dabei geht es freilich nicht um willkürliche Typologien und Allegorien. Der Psalter ist vielmehr das Sakrament (*μυστήριον*) der *einen* Heilswirklichkeit, die die ganze Heilsgeschichte und den Heilsweg des einzelnen umfaßt: im Psalter “singt David über das schöne Lehrhaus der Gnade” (vgl. *HomPs 12*).’

51. The authorship of the Homilies is disputed today. Since *Asterii Sophistae Commentariorum in Psalmos quae supersunt. Accedunt aliquot homiliae anonymae* (Ed. M. Richard; SO.S 16; Oslo: Brøgger, (1956) they are ascribed to the Arian Asterius the Sophist, also known as Asterius of Skythopolis, a student of Lucian of Antioch. This Asterius would have written them between 337 and 341 (Auf der Maur 1967). Kinzig (1990), on the other hand, holds the thesis that they could have been written by a non-Arian author of the same name who lived in Syrian Antioch in the early fourth or fifth century CE. Certain exegetical basic principles were systematized by Kinzig (1992).

52. The following page numbers in round brackets all refer to Kinzig (1992).

document, so those who (want to) read and interpret the Psalms, first unroll their headings and (can only) thus trace the things that are written in them' ([*Hom.* 21:3] 112).

According to Kinzig, in Asterius' view, the titles of the Psalms determine 'whether a psalm is to be interpreted literally-parenetically or Christologically-ecclesiologically' (112). In this kind of exegesis, an allegoric-typological (εἰκόνας και; τύπους) interpretation *κατα; θεωρίαν*, is opposed (119) to an interpretation *κατα ιστορίαν*, which can be the starting point and centre of the ἐρμηνεία (113).

At all times, David is the author of the Psalms (107). The notion of the Psalms being prophetic and inspired is connected to the Davidic authorship:

'Beautiful is the prophetic flute of the shepherd and king (David), for its reed is language, its breath is the Paraclete, its sound is the Word, its melody is temperate delight, its key is prophecy and its support [?] is the gift of the Spirit from above' ([*Hom.* 26:1] 107).

For Christian conduct, David is an example and a point of orientation (117). In connection with the Christological interpretation, Asterius gives an interesting reason for David's ability to write psalms that can be explicated in the light of Christ:

'... whence did David know the mysteries of the Son? The Son had revealed them to him. He himself says: "*The unknown and the hidden (things) you have revealed to me*" [Ps. 51.8]. He taught David the mysteries, because he was his father according to the flesh. And which are the mysteries of the Son? The mysteries of his incarnation, which were hidden from the beginnings of times and epochs but were revealed to his saints, and among them, also to David. And the prophet himself is a witness (to the fact) that the secret mysteries of the Son were revealed to David, when he says about his descent from heaven: "*And he bowed the heavens and came down*" [2 Sam. 22.10a]. "*Darkness covered his hiding-place*" [2 Sam. 22.12a]' ([*Hom.* 18:4f] 118).

Christ can also act as speaker of a psalm, especially in cases where the Christological interpretation is given in the New Testament (107).

And this already is the *third criterion*: the interpretation is determined by the example of the apostolic explication of scripture or of the *New Testament* (108). Therefore, Asterius for example understands the resurrection psalm, 16 (15G), as words of Christ, and that on account of Acts 2.31. He justifies his Christological exegesis of Psalm 2 as follows:

'... one should not wonder that we explained this psalm as pointing to the resurrection of Christ. We have followed the apostolic example and we have the interpretation of Paul as a guide' ([*Hom.* 2:13] 108).

Today, the cleft between an historic and literary-scientific interpretation of the Psalms on the one hand and the interpretation of the early church on the other, can be bridged. Without trying to level differences or write them off as no longer being of any consequence, it can be said that there are a number of methodical and hermeneutical similarities or convergences between the end text or canonical exegesis and the patristic or liturgical interpretation. As far as literary history is concerned, the messianic-Christological and ecclesiological understanding of the Psalms is already made legitimate by the Old Testament itself, and that against the background of the coming, the saving King Yahweh and his universal dominion.

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