

THE PARADOX OF THE TWO WAYS A STUDY OF THE POETIC TECHNIQUES AND MESSAGE OF PSALM 1

BY FRANCIS FEMI ADESINA

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 1 occupies a significant position in the Psalter. It is the opening psalm, the gateway to the Psalter. In the older Psalter, it is either not numbered or it is combined with Psalm 2. This might be the reason why in the Western texts of Acts 13,33, a quotation from Psalm 2 is cited as from Psalm 1. It is also possible that this confusion crept in because neither Psalm 1 nor Psalm 2 has a title commonly known as superscription.

The choice of vocabulary and the content of Psalm 1 give the impression that the psalm represents a comparatively late stage in the history of the Old Testament (OT) theology. Throughout the six verses of this psalm, one comes in contact with the nomistic-wisdom teaching of later Jewish piety. As such, the antithetical relationship between the righteous (צדיקים) and the wicked (רשעים), and the emphasis on the written law (תורה) which one encounters frequently in the psalm is striking. Based on these facts, A. A. Anderson, H. J. Kraus, S. Bullough and M. Dahood, to mention but a few, are of the opinion that psalm 1 is one of the post-exilic wisdom psalms which was later prefixed as an introduction to the whole Psalter by the editor. This may be true. Nevertheless, it does not solve the problem of the authorship of Psalm 1 for an editor is not necessarily a composer.

Psalm 1 is special and unusual. Its style is both didactic and poetic. The peculiar characteristics of this psalm have led many scholars to conclude that it is more a prose than a poem. For instance, Bullough says "Psalm 1 is a prose account of the happiness of the righteous and the doom of the wicked, yet the traditional view may well be right". By traditional view, Bullough may want to refer to the popular historical testimonies that support the inclusion of Psalm 1 in the early Psalter. It seems Bullough is ready to accept Psalm 1 as a piece of poetry based on tradition. However, he does so hesitantly and with less conviction. W.G.E. Watson, on the other hand, takes a radical position. He suggests that Psalm 1 should not be considered a piece of poetry because, according to him, it lacks the basic characteristics of ancient Hebrew poetry. However, Dahood accepts Psalm 1 as poetry. He remarks, "This psalm is more than an introduction to the Psalter, it is rather a précis of the Book of Psalms". In other words, Psalm 1 is not just a psalm or an introduction to the Book of Psalms, but a résumé of what the Psalter is all about.

In this present study, we want to investigate the poetic techniques employed by the author or editor of Psalm 1 to communicate his message. To

achieve this goal, we shall proceed by stating the problems of the psalm and analyse some of its poetic devices. We shall also study the structure of the psalm, its exegetical points, its theological message, date, and then conclude with some remarks.

THE PROBLEM

We have stated in the introductory remarks that there are elements in Psalm 1 that qualifies it for a wisdom psalm. Psalm 1 may be categorised along with Pss. 32, 34, 49 and with Prov 2,10-15,20-22. Recent studies on this psalm raise some serious questions. These questions can be summarised under three main headings, namely:

i) *Is Psalm 1 Poetry or Prose?*

This is a fundamental question. It touches on composition, style and message of the psalm. Different scholars have expressed different opinions on the issue. Most of the debate rest on the psalm's obvious lack of regular poetic beat namely, meter. Bullough is very close to Watson's opinion already stated in the Introduction when he claims that Psalm 1 is a prose, or at most, 'a plain rhythmic poem'. In other words, Bullough does not fully appreciate the poetic qualities of Psalm 1, nor does he completely deny them. H. Gunkel, on the other hand, without denying metrical irregularity of the psalm, suggests a provisional analysis in his work *Die Psalmen*. R. P. Merendino supports Gunkel's view by saying that the strophes in Psalm 1 are "tissues of interdependence". Gunkel's, Kraus' and Merendino's views of Psalm 1 continue to gain more popularity among scholars today and, as such, they provide a basis for continuous research on the psalm as we attempt to do in this present study. It is true that Psalm 1 is problematic and has some unique characteristics which will be discussed in the course of this study; nevertheless, the use of poetic techniques like *chiasmus*, *parallelism*, *ellipses*, *meter*, *repetition*, *alliteration*, *assonance* and *simile* must not be overlooked. These techniques prove and strengthen the poetic character of Psalm 1.

ii) *Is Psalm 1 an Independent Poem?*

The unity within Psalm 1 and its traditional coupling with Psalm 2 in the older Psalter is yet another aspect of the problem of our psalm. In the first instance, the coupling of Psalms 1 and 2 in the older Psalter is already a defeat of the argument, which raised doubt about the poetic character of Psalm 1. For if Psalm 2 is accepted by all as a piece of poetry, Psalm 1, its prefix, should logically enjoy the same status. It will be clear from our study that Psalm 1 is an independent unit. For instance, the unity of Psalm 1 is strengthened by the presence of an *inclusio* formed by *בְּעֵצַי וּבְחִלְבֵּי* (*counsel of the wicked*) in v. 1a and *נִדְרֵי רָשָׁעִים* (*'path' of the wicked*) in 6b. Moreover, P. J. Botha argues that the poetic elements identified in Psalm 1 constitute and produce a complete, self-

contained unity⁴.

iii) *The Problematic Structure of Psalm 1.*

The third problem and a fundamental bone of contention in the study of Psalm 1 is that of its structure. Many scholars have made their contributions to the discussion but the outcome of their investigations has not been completely unambiguous. The reason for this state of affairs according to Botha must be sought in the different criteria applied by scholars in the search for the structure of Psalm 1. Sometimes, these criteria have not been suggested by the text itself. W. S. Prinsloo, quoted by Botha, rightly observes that structures have been unduly imposed on Psalm 1 as a result of a structuralistic approach of some scholars. However, despite the differences in the structuring of the psalm, there is a consensus on the fact that the theme of Psalm 1 is the contrast of the righteous and the wicked; as such Psalm 1 may be structured as follows:

- A. Verses 1-3: The righteous.
- B. Verses 4-5: The wicked.
- C. Verse 6: Contrast of the righteous and the wicked.

POETIC DEVICES IN PSALM 1

It is important to consider some of the poetic devices used in Psalm 1. Such consideration enables us to appreciate the poetic qualities of the psalm. The psalm is made-up of six interrelated verses. The first verse or strophe is a quatrain⁵. Such numerous cola⁶ are not unknown in Hebrew Poetry, although, it is not a common occurrence. Scholars are divided on the metrical analysis of verse 1. However, many would consider its meter to be 2 + 5 + 4 + 4 especially if one gives לֹא הָלַךְ (lo halak) two beats (cf. Dahood, Craigie and Botha). Alliteration⁷ is observable with the repetition of Aleph (א) and Lamed (ל). There is Assonance⁸ with patah (a), qames (a); seghol (e) in all the cola. The first strophe equally exhibits synonymous parallelism. The first strophe unfolds its message by the use of *Litotes*⁹: *The counsel of the wicked... the way of sinners... the seat of the scoffers.*

Verse 2 is a Bicolon¹⁰. The Meter is 5 + 4 and the Syllable is 9 + 12. The presence of Alliteration of Waw (ו) and yod (י) is very much noticeable. Assonance occurs with Qames (a), Seghol (e) and Holem (o). Both cola exhibit synonymous parallelism built around the word תָּרֵן (law). De Lagarde, as quoted by Kraus, suggests that for better poetic synonymous parallelism, one of the double occurrences of תָּרֵן should be changed to מִצְוָה (inscription or decrees). De Lagarde's proposal may not be necessary. According to Watson, repetition is an acknowledged factor in Hebrew poetry, there is no need to alter the second

occurrence of the same word to a synonym, or delete it¹¹. Care must be taken not to sacrifice the integrity of the *Massoretic Text* (MT) for mere poetic technicality because keeping the text is more important than poetic styles. Keeping the MT here brings out the climax of the colon, which is תָּרֵן. In fact, in both cola תָּרֵן stands immediately before the verb, which gives it an emphatic nuance.

Verse 3 is problematic. It is a quatrain like the first strophe. The meter is highly disputed among scholars because some claim that it exhibits both poetic and prosaic qualities. For instance, Bullough does not give the meter of this strophe. He claims that the psalm moves along a kind of prose with a hymnic elation. Kraus is undecided on its meter. He suggests 3 + 2 and 3 + 2 with a big question mark. His argument is that the last colon of v. 3 is a secondary addition and goes beyond the possibility of metrical assimilation. Just as Bullough fails to demonstrate convincingly the prosaic and non-poetic content of this psalm, Kraus also fails to tell us the source of this addition. On the other hand, majority of scholars are in favour of an irregular metrical analysis of the strophe, that is, 5 + 4 + 2 + 3 as evident in the structure of verse 3.

The syllable of this quatrain is even irregular than the meter. It is 12 + 9 + 7 + 10.

There is Assonance of with Qames (a) and Patah (a). Likewise, there is Alliteration of Lamed (ל), Waw (ו) and of Yod (י). The use of simile is very prominent in this strophe. The psalmist, having described positively and negatively the characteristics of a truly happy man, goes further to portray the good fortune of such a man in an agricultural simile. The comparison of a person to a tree is not uncommon in Ancient Near East (ANE) literature and the OT.

The happy man is compared to a tree (עֵץ). The imagery, as we have earlier mentioned, is not unfamiliar in the world of the OT¹². While Ps 1,3 may not be dissociated from the general background of the ANE from which it emanated, we think that the immediate background of the OT is more appealing to the mind of the author of this psalm. In that case, Ps 92,13-15 and Jer 17,7-8 which are close semantically and theologically to psalm 1 may have influenced the author; that is if the texts pre-date psalm 1. It may be difficult to prove this. The use of simile is very strong in Psalm 1. It is one of the poetic devices used by the author to communicate his message. Unfortunately, no one knows the type of tree the psalmist has in mind. Perhaps, it is a palm tree as in Ps 92,12.

Another tricolon¹³ is found in verse 4. The meter is balance and regular: 2 + 2 + 2, but the syllable (6 + 4 + 7) is not. Verse 4 is antithetically parallel to verse 3. The antithetical parallelism is built around the 'metaphorical tree and chaff':

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He is like a tree transplanted by the stream of water (v. 3).

But (they are) like chaff which the wind blows away (v. 4).

There is Alliteration of *kaph* (כ), *mem* (מ) and *Aleph* (א).

Verse 5 is a bicolon like verse 2. The meter is 4 + 3 and the syllable is 12 + 9. There is assonance of *games* (א), *patah* (א) and *hireq* (י) and the alliteration of *mem* (מ). Verse 5a is synonymously parallel to 5b and both cola are antithetically parallel to the first v. 1.

The use of an articulated noun (משפטים - in the judgment)¹⁴ in v. 5a indicates that in the mind of the psalmist, a particular judgement is being referred to. M. Joüon calls this a "particular determination"¹⁵. What exactly משפטים (*mispat*) refers to in Psalm 1 remain unresolved among exegetes. The common opinion, however, follows the traditional translation of the colon (*the wicked shall not rise in the judgement*). "Judgement" here refers to the final judgement. If this interpretation is acceptable, then v. 5 has a "prophetic" or "eschatological" undertone; in which case, Dahood is right to have identified futuristic elements in v. 3. On the other hand, משפטים may refer to a constant righteous governance of God on earth as it is found in Eccl 12.14. If so, then the "judgment" is not prophetic like the former, but 'existential and secular'. Once again, we are on a delicate ground and should be careful of imposing one particular interpretation on the psalm. L. Kohler's translation, as cited by Kraus, deserves attention. He translates משפטים בלשון רשעים as "the wicked may not stand in the legal assembly". The implication is that according to the Jewish custom, the accused person would usually wait during the discussion of his guilt, kneeling or lying on the ground. Could this be the practice which has informed and influenced the mind of the author of Psalm 1? It may as well be the case.

The final verse of Psalm 1 is a bicolon. The meter is clearly 4 + 3, while the syllable is 11 + 8. In the first colon, we have assonance of *hireq* (י). "The path

reaching any consensus concerning the structure in Psalm 1. Recent studies carried out on the psalm by Merindino, Botha, and Craigie, to mention but a few, throw more light on the structure and theology of Psalm 1.

Let's evaluate some of the structures proposed for Psalm 1. Anderson proposed a two-part structure:

V. 1-3: The attractiveness of the godly life.

V. 4-6: The ultimate futility of the godless existence.

Anderson's structure is simple and represents an overview of Psalm 1, but fails to clarify some details in vv. 4-6. For instance, if vv. 4-6 describes the ultimate futility of the godless, where does Anderson place the declaration that *Yahweh (knows) cares for the path of the righteous*? This ambiguity makes Anderson's structure problematic and unacceptable.

The structures of Psalm 1 proposed by P.C. Craigie and Kraus are very similar. The only difference is that Kraus did not explicitly emphasize the chiasmic nature of Psalm 1. Both scholars, however, identify a tripartite structure as follows:

i) The solid foundation of the righteous: vv. 1 - 3: Stanza 1.

ii) The impermanence of the wicked: v. 4 - 5: Stanza 2.

iii) A contrast of the righteous and the wicked: V. 6: Stanza 3.

Craigie further claims that within the tripartite structure, the poet uses a *chiasmus*¹⁶ in the first two sections:

Vv. 1-2	A
V. 3	B
V. 4	B ¹
V. 5	A ¹

The *chiasmus* between the first two sections reappears in the antithetical parallelism of v. 6 and results in an *inner chiasmus*:

For Yahweh knows ^a the path of the righteous ^b
But the path of the wicked ^{b¹} perishes. ^{a¹}

The simplicity and clarity of Craigie's structure overcomes the ambiguity of Anderson's and makes up for the incompleteness of Kraus. Craigie's structure seems to adequately represent the movement in the psalm; at least, it brings out the contrast between the two ways, which most scholars admit is the focus of Psalm 1. The limitation of Craigie's structure is that it is difficult to tell the centre of his *chiasmus* and he failed to identify any form of *inclusio* in the psalm. However, we can build on his initiative. Based on Craigie's suggestion, therefore, the following analytic structure can be gleaned from the study of Psalm

- I) Vv. 1-2 The righteous man
V. 3 The righteous man's fate A
B
- II) V. 4 The wicked man B¹
V. 5 The wicked man's fate A¹
- III) V. 6 Contrast of the two ways C

The *chiastic* stanzas I and II are unified in the *inner chiasm* in v. 6. It is noteworthy, that while the Torah of God is the heart of the first *chiasmus*; God, himself is the centre of the second. The relationship between the Torah and God will be clarified under the session on the exegesis of the psalm.

EXEGETICAL POINTS

Our searchlight now turns to the exegesis of psalm 1. The MT does not manifest any serious textual problem except the editorial additions that we find in the Syriac text. Therefore, our exegetical excursion will focus on words or concepts that are considered important in Psalm 1 and concern the purpose and thrust of the psalm. Such concepts includes *Yahweh* (יהוה), *Torah* (תורה), *The happy man* (אשר יצא) and *the wicked* (אשר יפס).

The name *Yahweh* (יהוה) appears 6,828 times in the OT and 695 times in the Psalter. The name occurs only two times in Psalm 1. The first of these occurrences is found in a construct chain (genitive construction)- *יהוה יצא* (*b'torat adonai* - v. 2). The second and the only real statement made about *Yahweh* is in v. 6 (*Yahweh cares for the path of the righteous*) It is not said as one might perhaps expect, that *Yahweh* does not care for (know) the way of the wicked, but only that their way will perish (v. 6). It is true, however, that much is implied in this psalm about *Yahweh*. In fact, he is the main actor in the poetry. For this reason the only declaration about *Yahweh* is stylistically suspended until it is made known at the summit of the psalm in v. 6.

The word *Torah* (תורה) likewise occurs in the OT 220 times, and only 36 times in the Psalter. Like the word *Yahweh*, *Torah* appears twice in Psalm 1. Both occurrences are found in the same verse (v. 2). The right interpretation of *Torah* in this verse is the key to understanding the entire psalm.

The Hebrew word *Torah* traditionally means 'Law'. In the opinion of Kraus, rendering *Torah* simply as law is "unsuitable and deceptive" because in the real sense, *Torah* signifies more than just the written code. G. Von Rad, as quoted by Kraus, supports this view and further states that the *Torah* is an "instruction" in the sense of the "merciful revelation of the will of God"¹⁷. Craigie buttresses the same point claiming that *Torah* means the instructions, which God gives to mankind as a guide for life. Thus, it may include that which is technically law, but it also includes other general parts of God's revelation¹⁸. In

Psalm 1, this revealed will of God is presupposed to be fixed and written and must be read in the public assembly (Deut 31,9-11) and in private (Josh 1,7). It also includes historical pronouncements (Deut 1,5; Ps 78,1). The heart of the *Torah* remains the law of God transmitted by Moses (Mal 4,4).

The *Torah* as it is presented in Psalm 1 is a source of delight; a delight that is attained by means of constant meditation on its meaning. It is useful to remark that the scope of what the poet has in mind in this psalm when he used the word *Torah* cannot be easily determined. Was the Psalmist referring specifically to Deuteronomy or to the Pentateuch or even to the partially completed canon? From the context of Psalm 1, it seems reasonable to understand *Torah* as the whole of the Pentateuch and by extension the Psalter, which in the view of the author of Psalm 1, is a poetic form of transmission of the divine will of *Yahweh*.

The happy man (אשר יצא) is one of the key *dramatis personae* in Psalm 1. Following the thought pattern in this psalm, we could assume that this term refers to the same class of person called the *צדיק* (*righteous*) in vv. 5-6. If that is the case, the concept occurs three times in Psalm 1 (vv. 1a, 5b, 6a). The happy or the righteous man was first of all defined negatively. He is a man who does not "follow the counsel of the wicked", "stand in the path of sinners", nor "sit on the seat of scoffers". With these parallelisms, v. 1 describes the evil companies the righteous avoids. It is this avoidance, coupled with his delight in the *Torah*, which is his source of blessedness or happiness. The *צדיקים* are joyfully rooted in the 'life-giving' soil of the *תורה*. Their happy state is not strictly speaking something given automatically by God, but a direct effect of their disposition (vv.1-2).

The happy state of the righteous is further explained in v. 3 by using a poetic simile (*like a tree transplanted by the stream of water*). A tree may flourish or die, depending upon its location and access to water. A tree transplanted, for example, from some dry spot or *wadi* where water runs only occasionally to a location beside an irrigation channel, where water never ceases to flow, would inevitably flourish. This agricultural simile is easily understood by people of ANE and of course by the Hebrews in Palestine. This simile occurs in a number of Hebrew poetry and prose¹⁹. In those passages, prosperity and productivity of life are often highlighted.

The simile employed by the author of Psalm 1 does not only illustrate the prosperity of the righteous, it also makes a theological point that the state of happiness of the righteous is not a reward; rather, it is a result of a particular type of life, a life lived according to the *Torah*. Just as a tree with constant water supply naturally prospers, so too, the person who avoids evil and delights in the *Torah* naturally prospers. Craigie's remarks succinctly represent the mind of the Psalmist when he says that the prosperity of the righteous reflects the wisdom of a life lived according to the plan of the Giver of all life²⁰.

The wicked (רשעים) is another important *dramatis personae* in Psalm 1. It appears in this psalm not just as semantic antonym of the righteous (צדיקים), but also as persons whose ways of life must not be emulated because they lead to total annihilation (vv. 4, 5 and 6b). It would seem that words like חוטאים (sinners) and לצים (scoffers) which regularly appear in psalm 1 refer to the same group of persons, the wicked ones. They are, most probably, titles employed by the poet to qualify the wicked. The use of parallel terms like these is well attested to in the Psalter, wisdom literature and prophetic books²¹. That being the case, it may be claimed that the wicked (רשעים) appears 7 times in Psalm 1 (vv. 1, 4, 5 and 6). These occurrences raise question about the purpose and focus of Psalm 1. Is the Psalmist concerned about the wicked (רשעים) and their fatal end or about the righteous (צדיקים) and their prosperity or both? Internal evidences in Psalm 1 show that the Psalmist is interested primarily in highlighting the way of the righteous or the happy man; and it is only by an elaborate comparison, he touches on the way of the wicked. This view is supported by the usage of a strong adversative וְ (but) in vv. 2a and 4b, an adversative waw in וְדָרַךְ (but the way) in v. 6b and the comparative use of לֹא כֵן (not so) in v. 4a.

In vv. 4-5, the Psalmist focuses specifically on the image of the wicked. They are like the chaff. This is another typical agricultural language. It pictures what happens to the grain in the hands of the harvesters at the village threshing floor when they are winnowed (cf. Ruth 3, 3.6-7). The custom is that when grain is tossed up with a pitchfork, the wind separates the chaff from the husks. The chaff, light and useless, is blown away by the wind; while the more substantial grain falls to the floor. Thus, the Psalmist depicts the wicked as lightweights, persons without real worth. The lightness and the worthlessness of the wicked are further elaborated in the synonymous parallelism in v. 5.

A possible way of interpreting the problematic v. 5a is to interpret it in the light of the simile in vv. 3-4. If this is done, then, the message which the Psalmist intends here would be that the wicked have no weight or influence in human society. In other words, wherever the righteous meet to pursue justice, peace and good government, the wicked have no say or place and are not to be recognized. They live for themselves, and by means of the same logic, destroy themselves. Therefore, they cannot meaningfully participate in the affairs of those who live for others and for true righteousness.

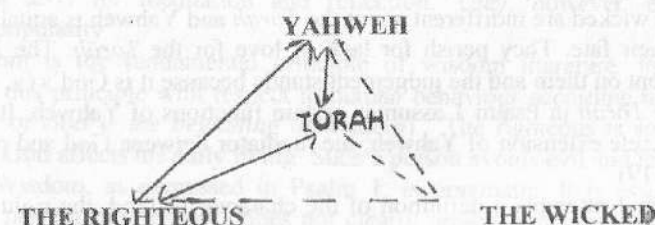
Finally, it should be mentioned that in the unfolding of Psalm 1, the way of the wicked is not presented as a practical possibility or an alternative way of life. Rather, the Psalmist talks about the futility of the wicked; that is, those who do not observe the decrees of the *Torah*, only because it offers a sombre contrast to a life lived in accordance with the *Torah*. Thus, by means of contrasting the 'two ways' the Psalmist wishes to draw all attention to the way of life of the righteous.

THE THEOLOGY AND MESSAGE OF PSALM 1

What does Psalm 1 have to contribute to the theology of the OT? Obviously, this psalm has a specific theology and message, which fit well into the general theology of the OT. As a matter of fact, none of the scholars who deny the poetic characteristics of Psalm 1 object to this fact. What, therefore, is the theology and message of Psalm 1?

There seems to be a consensus among scholars on the theological message of Psalm 1. Though scholars may differ in their approach to the psalm, especially on what they consider to merit more attention; nevertheless, majority admits that the comparison of the "two ways" is the central issue in Psalm 1. Driver, for instance, says that in two antithetical stanzas (vv. 1-3 & vv. 4-5), Psalm 1 contrasts the happiness of the righteous man with the ultimate ruin of the wicked. The righteous avoid the company of the wicked and meditatively study the *Torah*. Dahood expresses the same idea when he says that psalm 1, like other wisdom psalms, contrasts the assembly of the just with the assembly of the wicked. There is happiness for the good and the nether world for the impious. Even though Dahood interprets this with an eschatological flavour, his summary of the psalm is basically the same as others.

The theology of Psalm 1 can be summarised in terms of relationship. Botha²² initiated this idea when he related the *dramatis personae* encountered in the Psalm namely, *Yahweh*, the *righteous* and the *wicked*. Apart from the *dramatic personae*, the *Torah* of *Yahweh* plays a very crucial role in the formation of the Psalm 1. In fact the *dramatis personae* could be said to form a 'theological triangle' around *Torah*:



The author of Psalm 1 is not oblivious of the relationship between *Yahweh* and the righteous. As a matter of fact, that seems to be the only relationship our Psalmist is interested in. He says, *Yahweh cares for the way of the righteous*, but became silent about his concern for wicked. What the Psalmist did say is that the way of the wicked perishes. It may not be right to interpret this statement as a limitation of God's ability. Instead, the statement should be read as a stylistic device on the part of the Poet to emphasize his interest – *the way of the righteous*. Again, the relationship between *Yahweh* and the righteous is underscored by referring to righteous, intimate and enduring love to the *Torah*.

The righteous meditates on the *Torah day and night*²³. "Day and night" expresses the constancy and consistency of the righteous with regards to reading the *Torah*. Again, it is not said explicitly, but it is implied that the wicked do not study the *Torah*.

The Psalmist dissociates the righteous from the wicked. He (*the righteous*) does not sit, does not walk or stand with the wicked. In the same manner, the wicked does not stand up in the congregation of the righteous. The wicked one's lack of relationship with the *Torah* is explicated by implication. It is contained in the effect of the *Torah*. For the righteous, the *Torah* has a sustaining quality. It is like water to a tree. The wicked, on the other hand, do not only forfeit the sustenance given by *Torah*; he is threatened and condemned by his dissociation (vv. 4-5).

Finally, the *Torah* is linked to Yahweh with a genitive construction. It is an extension of Yahweh. The *Torah of Yahweh* is the core of Psalm 1 as shown in the triangle. It brings blessings into the life of the one who meditates on it daily and passes judgement on the life of the one who dissociates himself from it. The choice of vocabulary and the subtle infiltration of the theology of retribution that the author employs in Psalm 1 betray the psalm's connection with wisdom literature and links it with later Jewish piety.

The theology of Psalm 1 may thus be summarised:

- I) Yahweh provides the *Torah* to guide people's way of life. The one who observes it is righteous and prospers (v. 2 & v. 6a).
- II) Yahweh knows, cares and is concerned with the way of the righteous. There is no better direct interaction between Yahweh and the righteous except through the *Torah* (v. 2 & v. 6a).
- III) The wicked are indifferent about the *Torah* and Yahweh is equally indifferent about their fate. They perish for lack of love for the *Torah*. The *Torah* passes judgement on them and the judgement stands because it is God's (v. 4 & v. 6b).
- IV) The *Torah* in Psalm 1 assumes certain functions of Yahweh. It functions as the concrete extension of Yahweh, the mediator between God and man (vv. 2-3; cf. Ps. 119).
- V) Psalm 1 attempts a definition of the character of God, the righteous and the wicked vis-à-vis the *Torah* as it was in post-exilic theology.

DATING PSALM 1

The general impression one gathers from our exposition so far is that Psalm 1 represents a comparatively late stage in the history of the OT religion. This impression may be justified if it is true that one of the characteristics of late writing is that they make use of earlier ones.

In our study of Psalm 1, we have identified vv. 2-3 to be based on earlier writings. For instance, Ps 1,2 reflects Josh 1,8. "Depart out of your mouth" has been substituted with "delight in" which indicates a latter and more matured

understanding. Likewise v. 3 of Psalm 1 is based on Jer 17,5-8 and Ezek 47,12 which are equally from post-exilic background.

The *תורה* and *עצור* as they are presented in Psalm 1 are not typical of pre-exilic writings; rather they represent the thinking of later period when the school of ethical teaching was fully developed. The author of Psalm 1 blends the exclusive devotion to the law in Pss 19,8-15; 119 with the wisdom of Prov 1-9 to come up with his own message. Connected to this is the concept of judgement in v. 5b. Thus, in Psalm 1, one encounters a fully developed theology of retribution from the nomistic wisdom teaching of late Judaism²⁴ (Isa 26,14-19). Based on these considerations, we think psalm 1 demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt its affinity with post-exilic theology. Hence, it should be dated in that epoch (around 550 BC).

CONCLUSION

The *gattung* of psalm 1 is generally considered to be non-liturgical. It has both internal and external evidences in support of grouping it among post-exilic wisdom literature. Most scholars would agree with this position. However, we may not completely eliminate the possibility of this psalm having a liturgical connection. After all, didactic exaltation on the Mosaic Law was not only for private and personal edification. It concerns life within and outside the community²⁵. For this reason, K. Seybold says didactic poems (which Psalm 1 is claimed to be), seek to inform, to instruct, and to teach. Many of these poems were not initially suited for public worship, but came into the collections of the sanctuary as intellectual and spiritual votive offering, without having been intended or used for public performance. They were unlikely ever presented aloud, but as texts for meditation and reflection. They, however, enjoyed considerable popularity²⁶.

Wisdom is the fundamental principle of wisdom literature. Psalm 1 elaborates on this principle with respect to human behaviour according to Prov 1,7 (*The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom*). The righteous is someone whose fear of God affects his daily living. Such a person avoids evil and learns to please God. Wisdom, as expressed in Psalm 1, is pragmatic. It is essentially related to the present life. Psalm 1 does not clearly present a doctrine of future life as proposed by Dahood based on vv. 3-5. The anticipated prosperity mentioned in the poem may not necessarily be futuristic. It is most probably a kind of prosperity bound to the present life, just as the failure of the wicked is to be a present reality.

It may be of interest to ask why the editor of the Psalter makes Psalm 1 the first psalm. The answer is certainly not easy to give. However, the contents of Psalm 1 give clue to think that the editor considers it as a brilliant resume of the whole Psalter. In this sense, therefore, Psalm 1 provides a practical preface to the Psalter. Dahood affirms this when he claimed that Psalm 1 "is more than an

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ S. Bullough, 'The Question of Metre in Psalm 1', *VT*, XVII (1967), pp. 42-49
- ² M. Dahood, *Psalm 1-50* (The Anchor Bible 17, Garden City, NY 1966), p. 3.
- ³ R.P. Merendino, "Sprachkunst in Ps. 1.1," *VT* 29 (1979) 45.
- ⁴ P.J. Botha, "The Junction of the two ways: The structure and theology of Psalm 1," *OTF* 4 (1991) p. 381
- ⁵ *Quatrains* are group of four cola (Ps. 1.1, Jer 2.13). It is also called *tetracola*.
- ⁶ *Cola* is the plural of *colon* – a single verse-line of poetry.
- ⁷ *Alliteration* is the repetition of consonants for the purpose of making effects on the audience.
- ⁸ *Assonance* is the repetition of vowels for the same purpose stated above
- ⁹ *Litotes* is the emphatic use of an understatement. It is not common in Hebrew language, except in some handful examples (Gen 18.4; Isa 10.7) influence by Greek (cf. G.B. Bird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, London, 1980, p. 134).
- ¹⁰ *Bicolon* or *couplet* is a two verse-line of poetry. The two-colon unit is the standard in Hebrew poetry.
- ¹¹ W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A guide to its techniques*, (Sheffield, England 1995) p. 287, cf. H. W. Wolf, "Psalm 1", *EvTh* 1949/50, 9, 389
- ¹² Tree simile are used in Ps 92.13; Jer 11.19; 17.8; Ezek 17.5-10.22; 19.10.
- ¹³ *Tricolon* is a set of three cola forming a single-line in poetry (Ps. 1.4; Job 21.8).
- ¹⁴ *שֶׁנֶפֶשׁ*: Preposition + definite article + noun, masculine, singular of *נֶפֶשׁ* (*judgment*).
- ¹⁵ P. Jouon – T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico), Roma 1996. # 137
- ¹⁶ *Chiasmus* is a series (a,b,c...) and its inversion (...c,b,a) taken together as a combined unit. In Hebrew such a unit is generally a parallel couplet, so that a chiastic combination of a,b,c // c',b',a' is formed
- ¹⁷ H.J. Kraus., *Psalm 1-59, A Commentary*, trans. H. C. Oswald (Minneapolis, MN 1988) p. 114
- ¹⁸ P. C. Graigie, *Psalm 1-50* (World Biblical Commentary, Vol. 19, Texas, TX 1983) p. 60
- ¹⁹ Cf. Jer 17.7-8; Ezek 19.10-11, 47.12; Rev 22.2
- ²⁰ P. C. Graigie, p. 60-61.
- ²¹ *Sinners* - Ps 105.35; Prov 1.10; 13.21; 23.17; Amos 9.10; Isa 1.28; 13.9, 33.14
- Scoffers* - Pr 1.22; 9.12; 14.9; 19.28; 29.8; Isa 28.14; Hos 7.5.
- ²² P.J. Botha P. 393.
- ²³ *Merismus* is an abbreviated way of expressing totality, usually by two extremes of a series representing the whole (e.g. Ps 115.15)
- ²⁴ Cf. Isa 26.14-19
- ²⁵ Cf. Deut 31.9-11
- ²⁶ K. Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* translated by G. Dunphy, (Eanburgh, Scotland 1990) p. 114.
- ²⁷ M. Dahood, *Psalm 1-50* (The Anchor Bible 17, Garden City, NY 1966) p. 3

introduction to the Psalter; it is rather a précis of the Book of Psalms²⁷

The picture of the *צדיק* presented in Psalm 1 is a feature of an ideal Pharisee who is loyal to the Law and isolates himself from whatever might contaminate him. Such a perfect Pharisee was hardly possible to find, neither in the post-exilic Judaism nor in the Qumran community. Perhaps, the ideal *צדיק* in the mind of the author of Psalm 1 would only be fulfilled in the New Testament (NT), that is, in and only in the person of Jesus Christ. The NT teaches that Jesus Christ, "whom God made our Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption" (1Cor 1.30) is the fulfilment of what the Psalmist had in mind. Doing the will of his Father was his food (John 4.34). In the same way, followers of Christ are expected to follow Jesus' footsteps by living fully in the wisdom of the New Covenant.

Finally, the contrast of the two ways in Psalm 1.1-6 was probably taken up and re-interpreted in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7.13-14). Jesus speaks of two gates, a broad gate leading to destruction and a narrow gate leading to life. If Psalm 1 was at the background of Jesus' thought, then he has illuminated it with eschatological and soteriological elements.

Translation of Psalm 1:

- V. 1. Oh happy the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits on the seat of scoffers.
- V. 2. But his delight is in the law of Yahweh and his law he murmurs day and night.
- V. 3. He is like a tree planted by a channel of water,
Which gives its fruits in its season and its leaves never wither;
And everything which he does prospers.
- V. 4. Not so for the Wicked,
Rather, they are like the chaff, which the wind blows away.
- V. 5. Therefore, the Wicked shall not rise in the judgement
And the sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- V. 6. For Yahweh cares for (knows) the path of the righteous
But the path of the wicked perishes.