"The Preacher as Self-Consuming Artifact: Paul, Corinth, and a Homiletic of Eccentricity"[1]

Michael P. Knowles, Th.D.
George Franklin Hurlburt Chair of Preaching, McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON

In 1972, the American man of letters and legal scholar, Stanley Fish, published an influential study entitled *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature*. In it he argued that literary artifacts are sometimes the opposite of what they seem: they purport to convey truth in linear and logical fashion, but in the end contradict themselves, subvert their own intentions, and reveal their own inability to articulate what they propose. "A self-consuming artifact," writes Fish," signifies most successfully when it fails, when it points *away* from itself to something its forms cannot capture."[2] John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, for example (published in 1678), purports to show a brave and sometimes solitary pilgrim by the name of Christian making "progress" — as the book's full title declares — "from this world to that which is to come." But things are hardly as they seem: far from making progress in any conventional sense, Christian is beset by doubt and despair throughout the length of his pilgrimage. Even as he passes at last through the river that stands between him and the gate of the Eternal City, he is overwhelmed by doubt, fear, and the vivid memory of his many sins. In the end, the book is not only not about "progress," it is not about its pilgrim either: rather, Bunyan's true subject is the reader, whose own spiritual state is to be exposed in the course of reading this text.[3]

Notwithstanding the controversy it has occasioned, Fish's analysis surely grasps something essential to the inner workings of Christian piety generally, and not only in its seventeenth-century expression. Other authors whom Fish examines — John Donne and George Herbert in particular — share with Bunyan the essential conviction that their works (however sometimes self-preoccupied) are nonetheless not self-referential, much less self-substantiating, but are rather exocentric and allocentric: centred on something, some*one* very much greater than the texts and authors themselves. That key insight into the nature of Christian confession brings us to another author — the apostle Paul — to the intent of *his* texts, and to the contemporary task of understanding and expounding them. For Paul, it turns out, has something similar to say about the eccentric and allocentric task of Christian proclamation: "For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4:5). Preachers — present company included — may well be eccentric, in any number of senses. But

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[1]The reading of Paul's homiletic offered here is set out more fully in Michael P. Knowles, *We Preach Not Ourselves: Paul on Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008).

[2]Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 4 (italics original).

[3]See further Michael P. Knowles, "Reading Matthew: The Gospel as Oral Performance," in *Reading the Gospels Today*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 77.

Paul's claim in this passage is less psychological or sociological than theological. For, the apostle insists, he and all who preach like him are likewise "self-consuming artifacts," examples and articulations of a truth they can neither fully embody nor fully express. They do not possess the truth: the truth (and more particularly, "the truth of Christ," 2 Cor 11:10) possesses them. Or if we may play on the metaphor of redemption: what qualifies preachers to speak is not that they have a purchase on religious truth so much as that Truth has purchased them. Preachers point away from themselves, beyond themselves to a larger reality that shapes the words they speak, forms the consciousness these words give voice to, and fashions the lives such consciousness calls into conformity with Christ.

In such terms Paul explains his own and every homiletician's task:

> For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture — "I believed, and so I spoke" — we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. (2 Cor 4:6-14)

Whether we entirely believe him or whether he is entirely successful in this programme of theological self-effacement may be debated. Paul *does* on occasion draw attention to himself, even as he sometimes boasts about his life and ministry while steadfastly claiming to do nothing of the sort. But the point at stake is the principle itself, rather than the perfection of its performance.

What Paul argues, both here and throughout Second Corinthians, is that Christian faith, Christian ministry, and therefore Christian preaching in particular are all captured by and drawn into conformity with the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is, the experience of Jesus (with subjective genitive) determines our experience of Jesus (objective genitive). We are, he declares,

> always carrying in the body the *death* of Jesus,
> so that the *life* of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.
> For while we live, we are always being given up to *death* for Jesus' sake,
> so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh...
> so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus
> will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence.

How has Paul come to this conclusion? Ironically, on the basis of his own personal experience! Christ's death and resurrection have always been central to Paul's thinking and theology. They have forensic significance: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the

ungodly... God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us... Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God" (Rom 5:6-10). So Jesus' death and resurrection are about weakness, wrath, and sin on the one hand, but justification, righteousness, and salvation on the other. But the abasement and exaltation of Jesus are also about moral transformation: "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). Then, third, Christ's death and resurrection are about future glory: they have an *eschatological* significance: "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:5). So for Paul there is simultaneously a soteriological, an ethical, and an eschatological dimension to Jesus' cross and empty tomb.

None of that has changed. But something happens to Paul between his first and second letters to Corinth, some time in the mid- to late-fifties CE, as he must now explain to his congregants there:

> We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again. (2 Cor 1:8-10)

While we can only guess at the nature of this "affliction," the lesson Paul draws from it is unmistakable, for the same letter begins on this very note:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the *sufferings* of Christ are abundant for us, so also our *consolation* is abundant through Christ. (2 Cor 1:3-5)

From his affliction in Asia, Paul discovers that Christ's death and resurrection are not only of forensic, ethical, and eschatological significance; they also provide the experiential pattern for God's rescue and consolation of his servants in the midst of present persecution and personal suffering. Again:

> We felt that we had received the sentence of death — *so that* we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us *again...* (2 Cor 1:9-10)

Paul and his companions were overwhelmed to the point of being crushed; they despaired of life, yet find themselves alive, causing Paul to conclude that their experience follows the pattern of Christ on the cross and thereafter. Crucifixion and resurrection, affliction and consolation, death and new life as Christ's own experience forms the basic pattern for their experience of Christ.

If this is, in its most basic form, the ministry of Christ on behalf of others, so it becomes the pattern of Paul's ministry on Christ's behalf. "We have this treasure," he explains — the treasure "of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" — "in clay jars" —

fragile vessels, vulnerable and subject to affliction. On the one hand, explains the apostle, "We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4:5). Death, says Paul, is at work in us preachers, fragile and fallible vessels whom no one could accuse of glory or power, theologically insubstantial and self-consuming artifacts who point beyond ourselves to someone greater. And on the other hand, says the apostle, "We speak because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus" (2 Cor 4:14). It is this double movement of self-effacement, self-abasement and self-abandonment to the death of Jesus, of yielding to the life and new creation of Christ's resurrection, that makes it possible to speak of, in, and for Christ:

> Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor 3:5-6)

What, then, might this double conformity to death and resurrection mean for the ministry of preaching? What might it mean for homiletics, whether in theory or praxis, as both taught and practised in our present context? Here I want, first of all, to take literally Paul's declaration that "We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor 4:5). For in this consists the eccentricity of apostolic preaching, insofar as all preaching is allocentric and Christocentric — centred on Christ.

First, then, what preaching is *not.* Paul's "not ourselves" implies, first, that preaching is not — despite Phillips Brooks' famous declaration — "Truth through Personality."[4] If it is "not ourselves," then preaching is not about compelling eloquence, persuasive rhetoric, good looks, personal charm, or pastoral authority. It is not to be undertaken for the purpose of self-promotion, much less self-fulfillment. It's not about having one's name in lights, even the tiny lights of a parish notice board. Neither is Christian proclamation primarily concerned with church growth, denominational drum-beating, or cultural affirmation — however much it may be denominationally bounded and culturally specific. It cannot submit to, cannot be captured by the social, cultural, or political ideologies either of left or right. For it proclaims Jesus, not Caesar, to be *Kyrios*, "Lord." Otherwise the gospel is reduced to little more than a reflection of our own prior identity, instead of Christ's "new creation." As preachers we are responsible for conducting exegesis, finding illustrations, and delivering sermons in particular languages, particular churches, and particular cultural contexts, yet none of these provide the reason or grounds for speaking.

So if it "ain't about us," what are some possible implications of what I have called "eccentric," off-centred preaching; preaching "Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake"?

Self-evidently, Paul's homiletic is inescapably focused on Christ and the cross, by which not only the preacher's message or theology, but also the preacher's personal experience and

[4]Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching Delivered Before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877* (New York: Dutton, 1893), 8.

discipleship are interpreted via the foundational categories of death and resurrection. Paul sees the principles of human frailty — even death — and divinely-given life simultaneously at work in his own experience: in repeated rescue from hardship and persecution, in his own boldness and trust of God despite overwhelming odds, even in the effectiveness of his ministry amidst converts who actively oppose him.

Paul's challenge to preachers of the gospel is therefore that we continually seek to discern the contours of impending death and divine renewal within our own lives. To be a preacher is to look for patterns of grace (and our continuous need of grace) both in Scripture and in personal experience. Like Paul himself, preachers are examples of the gospel as much as speakers of the gospel.

This means that to preach Christ is, like the life of faith in general, essentially an exercise in yielding oneself to God, trusting God to bestow an unearned and unrepayable gift of life. Preaching is an expression of the preacher's own trust and hope in Christ; it proceeds from the experience of grace and expresses dependence on grace in the very act of speaking.

Accordingly, the purpose of preaching is to testify to the mercy and compassion of God in such a way as to invite one's congregation to find that same mercy for themselves. It avoids coercion and invites trust — but not so much in the speaker as in a God who raises the dead.

This implies that Christian proclamation does not exalt the preacher above his or her audience, but rather establishes them on the same level, because are all equally dependent upon God's mercy and God's grace — together " heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ — so long as [Paul adds] we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom 8:17).

Furthermore, I want to argue that preaching after the manner of Paul involves both silence and bold courage in speaking. The preacher is not silent because of theological timidity, or concern for alienating one's hearers, but because even Jesus — the very Word of God — falls silent on the cross. Yet because it is governed by the cross, such silence is neither final nor absolute: it is a temporary and provisional silence, ultimately reversed by its direct dependence upon the full dimensions of God's self-articulation in the person of Jesus, both crucified *and* risen. The preacher's initial silence is an act of intentional contingency that precedes bold testimony to a glorious and risen Christ.

As implied already, this approach has important — if unexpected — implications for homiletic methodology. For it suggests that the efficacy of Christian proclamation derives less from methodology than from theology. Objectively and externally, Paul's preaching is made effective less by what Paul himself undertakes than by the action of God in effecting the consolation and renewal to which the apostle bears witness. Christian proclamation is predicated less on principles of structure, rhetoric, or epistemological appeal than on spirituality; and more particularly the preacher's accession and self-abandonment to the death-creating, life-renewing, self-articulating activity of God.

Finally, even as preachers must first be caught up by and become subject to Christ in order to speak of Christ to others, so faithful preaching is marked by the transformation of its hearers. Again, this is not a result of the speaker's personal authority or skill in speaking, but of the fact that God remains faithful in continuing to act according to the pattern of Jesus' cross and resurrection. The final test of faithful preaching is the fact that preacher and hearers alike are changed by the saving action of God to which such preaching testifies. They are conformed both individually and corporately to the pattern of Jesus' own death and vindication, and express in their lives together the contours of God's new creation and new humanity. Preaching is thus attended by "glory" — not in any immediate cultural sense, but glory defined by the character of God, and by the transformation that results from knowing and yielding to a characteristically gracious Saviour.

Conclusion

We live in a culture — particularly a religious culture — that values social status, success, and personal well-being, and tends to downplay anything more negative as unworthy of Christ. Here Paul offers us a paradoxical word of reassurance and hope. The many reversals that typically characterize the life of faith (whether the preacher's own or that of the congregants) indicate neither lack of faith on their part nor lack of blessing on the part of God. Rather, Paul proposes that these are the normal conditions of discipleship from which faithful testimony and proclamation arise. Reversals are not ends in themselves so much as occasions for grace, opportunities for acknowledging the proper limitations of human endeavour, and for yielding to the faithfulness of Christ. According to Jesus' example, which Paul himself imitates, only by embracing the cross do we become open to the resurrection; only by taking up our cross and following the crucified Messiah do preachers begin to understand, to model, and to lead their hearers toward the life of Christ. This is the blessing — the homiletic, even — that Paul offers both to his hearers in Corinth and to us:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. (2 Cor 1:3-5)

“A Public Homiletic - Its Biblical Roots and Contemporary Shape

Arthur Van Seters
Knox College

Introductory Comments

I woke up this morning at 3:30 and realized that this little presentation needs an introduction. You are entitled to know that this exercise has been shaped not only by the remarkable books and articles that I have been reading throughout this past summer and into this fall, but also by a growing urgency in me that I must share a fierce conviction about public reality that begs for a courageous Word from the Lord.

We are seeing all around us a rapacious spreading cancer of evil and travail. We have been witnessing two federal elections marked more by hate than by hope, more by slandering the other than by offering truth and reconciliation. The use of astronomical sums to gain political power while the stock-market is crashing and the consequences for countless millions will be severe hardship and inevitable death for large numbers around the world is unconscionable. The ravaging of our planet with the radical extinction of increasing numbers of animal species and the threat to future human generations seems to count for little. The use of military force as the ultimate defence against fear explodes all boundaries - and often with the consent of those who claim the name of God as their inspiration.

Where is the proclamation of the Gospel in the midst of this public reality? How can our preaching nurture the church in its discernment of the disconnection between what it believes and how it is pressured by its surrounding culture? As I attempt to respond to these questions I also need to sound another note, a note of spontaneous joy. When I boarded the bus to come down here, I was enveloped by a primary school class out on a field trip and they filled the air with a cacophony of exuberant vitality that reminded me that life can appear in surprising ways.

The publicness of the Gospel has been enunciated with vigorous clarity recently by N. T. Wright in, "Kingdom Come: The Public Meaning of the Gospels." Wright begins with the observation that the central message in all four Gospels is that the Creator is claiming the whole world as his own. The salvivic effects of Jesus ministry and crucifixion are both individual and social - the saving of souls and the saving of the world.

It is already obvious to us that the Gospels see the incarnation as God's entrance into the world as such in a new way. The ministry of Jesus is that of the itinerant preacher proclaiming the *Basileia tou Theou*, God's new order for this planet. This is re-enforced in Jesus' acts of healing and transcending social and religious boundaries, all of which cause public tremors. But most public of all is the crucifixion and its radical view of exaltation through suffering. God seeks to bring order out of chaos. In Jesus God has arrived on the public stage to defeat the principalities and powers and to establish restorative healing justice.

Wright seeks to draw out public implications from this understanding of the Gospels. Earthly rulers in the interim between the present and the eschaton have a role in providing some measure of order for the common good. Political goods are not just to be recognized by the

church; God calls the church to address and reclaim the world by reminding rulers of their task. In affirming that "Jesus is Lord," the church's collaboration has to be without compromise - which means that the church must be clear about the common good as clarified in Jesus as the Christ. In our time this also means that the church must learn how to critique the workings of democracy itself which has banished God from the public square replacing transcendent accountability with the voice of the people, a public that does not recognize the publicness of the reign of God. The focus of the church is not as much on how people come to power as what they do when they are in power. This means that part of the church's vocation today is calling government to account.

This argument is in line with Chuck Campbell's reflections on the Gospels. Jesus, he says, uses language traditionally associated with hierarchy and domination (*basileia*) and turns it upside down to undermine its associations with violence while retaining the political character of his Gospel. Campbell goes on to note that Jesus announces the new order that has come near and this has practical implications for the present (peacemaking, poverty of spirit, acts of mercy, response to persecution). The whole system of mastery (so central to our culture) is rejected outright in the cross - including reconciliation over vengeance, not treating women as objects of lust, loving enemies rather than rejecting them and giving good news to the poor. Jesus confronts the spiritual reality behind power with social, political, and economic implications. (Campbell, 48-49)

With Wright the focus is largely on the political dimensions of publicness. In Campbell the political is evident again but other dimensions of publicness also surface. Here I want to reflect on this larger canvas with the help of three recent doctoral dissertations (two at McGill by the Athanasiadis brothers, Harris and Nick) and one at TST by Pam McCarroll who teaches at Knox). These studies draw on the writings of Jacques Ellul, Simone Weil, George Grant and Douglas Hall. I propose to view this public homiletic through four lenses.

A Hermeneutical Lens

I begin with a hermeneutical lens. Homiletics is always time and situation sensitive. The dominant characteristic of our times, these writers contend is the exercise of mastery. With the rise of science the world sought to master nature but, in the process of developing technology, mastering human beings also resulted. While science and technology have made numerous positive contributions to human wellbeing, their destructive power has escalated exponentially enveloping everyone. Almost every day my morning newspaper reveals evidence of this: the macabre snapping of cell phone pictures of a dying woman on Yonge St. on Boxing Day a few years ago, rising Internet addiction among teenagers and the production of toxic toys all appeared on one front page last Friday! Grant believed that technology is not just an option for good or evil but a kind of religion - that which we trust to solve all our problems and realize all our dreams. It is the dominant faith; it shapes and drives us. (H. Athanasiadis, 122) But it is a faith that is seriously flawed.

Back in the late 1940's in the aftermath of the dropping of the atomic bomb, sociologist, Jacque Ellul, wrote about "the power of death that was ruling the world." But he also wrote about the presence and vitality of the Holy Spirit through whom the will to death is transcended with a will to life. (Stringfellow in Ellul, 1-6) The brokenness of our world can be seen particularly in

the destructive power of technology. Christians, he says, are pressured to submit to mechanical solidarity and interdependence though technological communication systems, economics and democracy. We are part of a collective entity and implicated through it to collective sin so that individual virtues, while fine in themselves, do not alter collective sin. In this situation we must not weaken the opposition between our Christian faith and our life in the world with its demands, faults and compromises. We have no right to accustom ourselves to this world, nor should we hide from its realities; we are involved in the sin of humanity. (Ellul, 12-14)

In all honesty, he adds, we have to admit that we are caught between our inability to make this world less sinful and the impossibility of accepting the world as it is. In this tension we live in the spirit of repentance and, when we actually live in this tension, we also help the world socially, economically and politically. The key here is a theologically informed community of believers which seeks to engage the implicit tension between their faith and the realities of the world concretely. The church is called to preserve the world but not in the way that the world thinks best. For example, the world uses military force, develops programs of reconstruction, chooses to make and market material goods as the answer to human need. But these are technical solutions and need something more fundamental, namely, an order of life willed by God, a sense of transcendence that provides ultimate purpose and is grasped (even if only partially) through prayer and the enabling of the Holy Spirit. (17-27)

Ellul was viewed by many, not only in France but in other parts of the world, as a pessimistic voice. But his analysis of the human situation was prescient. Canadian philosopher, George Grant was deeply influenced by Ellul and became a major dissenting voice in Canada in the '60s and '70's as a critic of what he called “the American Empire.” He believed that the de facto religion of the U.S. was technological mastery through a homogeneous state and also believed that as such it was becoming increasingly tyrannical (Christian, 264).

The fundamental critique of Western modernity for Grant was the loss of a sense of transcendence. When a secular society no longer recognizes accountability to God (regardless of the motto, "In God we trust," on its coinage), it loses genuine freedom because freedom needs to be ruled by truth and goodness. Freedom unrestrained by transcendent faith and morality is bound to be destructive. (H. Athanasiadis, 133)

This hermeneutical lens for homiletics also includes seeing the church as a minority community in a secular North American society. As such it either seeks to accommodate itself to the public culture or wrestles seriously with how to witness faithfully to the Gospel. The church could, of course, also opt for withdrawing from the public arena and become a sectarian alternative enclave, but that would seem to deny the publicness of the Gospel itself. In seeking to encourage faithful witness through preaching, then, we need to help the church look as honestly at itself as it looks at the world. This includes clarifying the difference between how the world thinks and acts and how the church is called to follow Christ. This requires both clarity and concreteness. One implication of this hermeneutic is that our preaching has to distinguish between the optimistic positivism that seduces the church into seeking to create its own future and a courageous invitation to travel in the present out of God's ultimate future.

A Theological Lens

The hermeneutical lens sends us back to the theological lens of a public homiletic. We will not be able to look at either our contextual or our ecclesial realities without a specific theological perspective. What we find in Ellul and Weil, and also in Grant and Hall, is a central theological orientation, Martin Luther's *theologia crucis*. According to mystic and social activist, Simone Weil, the mystery of God's transcendence is beyond human understanding and is also an expression of God's immanence hidden in the presence of God at the cross. (H. Athanasiadis, 137) Weil revealed through her own personal experience working in factories as a common labourer that relationship based on force results in affliction. (61-63) Weil goes further. It was in the experience of the excruciating affliction of the cross that Christ fully poured out love for the world. (N. Athanasiadis, 72)

Weil was a person of brutal honesty who had about her an authority that was not one of force but a desire to live the truth as completely as possible. Her vocation was really a fevered search for the love of God in the furnace of affliction - which meant being open to the whole of reality in its beauty and its brutality - in the process she saw that affliction has a way of disabusing us of our illusions about our life in the world because affliction shocks us into reality and also brings us to a point of decision between choosing to love or allowing ourselves to despair - at that point we can love our Creator for no reason at all and therefore we discover a love based on pure grace. (250-51)

Canadian theologian, Douglas Hall, links the "theology of the cross" to the marginality of the church in North America. From this perspective the sidelining of the church is not tragedy but opportunity, opportunity for genuine Christian witness. (*Bound and Free*, 85-86) The church is part of God's response to the massive suffering of the world. It is people willing to suffer in order to become more human, more genuinely free and thereby to assume the concerns of their neighbours, their society and their world. (*God and Human Suffering*, 141)

A Practical Lens

A public homiletic, as I have already implied, also requires a practical lens. Unless listeners are concretely shown what the Gospel looks like in contrast to the ways of the world, they are unlikely to see the true nature of discipleship or be moved to practice it. For Ellul, one of the primary effects of technological culture is that means are severed from ends and simply justify themselves. Whatever is efficient and effective gives justification to the means used; the result is judged by the simplest criteria so that everything that succeeds is good. Technology is then the instrument of success because it is through technology that technological objectives are achieved. Technical know-how has no limits because it is free from consideration of values; it just needs to function well, like a machine. (Ellul, 69-71) This can be seen clearly during the last election when CTV broke a commitment to Stephan Dion to do a re-take of an interview on the grounds that "its news value justified breaking its agreement." It would have been more honest for the network to state that this was a political decision in which the means of supporting one party over another was at their disposal and they used it. But even then, the raw pragmatism (the dominant philosophy of our age) employed here is another manifestation of Ellul's critique of means. Pointing out specific examples like this one invites listeners to reflect on the analysis of ends and means regardless of their political persuasion.

We are sometimes confronted by a text at a particular moment that we don't want to

preach. Nora Tubbs Tisdale admits in a sermon that loving one's enemies is very difficult for her. She refers specifically to the victims of domestic violence forgiving their oppressors, of Billy Graham publicly offering forgiveness to Bill Clinton before any admission of wrong-doing, of letting bygones be bygones in Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge slaughtered a million of their own people. What is particularly moving about this sermon is her admission that she still does not know what such forgiving looks like for her personally even though she had a number of impressive examples like the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Specific examples may not always clarify, but they can still encourage reflection on the challenge of faithful discipleship at a given moment in time.

Some years ago the juxtaposition of the lectionary reading on Luke 10:1-20 with the Fourth of July, led Tom Long to contrast "the Lord's Day" with American Independence Day. The sending of seventy missionaries to spread the Gospel implies, he points out, the publicness of the Gospel through its association with the seventy nations in Genesis 10. While Main Street is draped with the Stars and Stripes, the church remembers that Jesus is Lord of every nation. Later in the sermon he recalls seeing a group of Black South Africans worshiping in an open space just off the expressway going into the gleaming city of Pretoria. It was 1993 as Nelson Mandela was being released from prison. The lowly African Christians, he says, had no church building, no status, no hymnbooks, no organ, no clergy; they were more like the seventy pairs of missionaries who went out with no purse, no bag, no sandals. All they had was God. But dancing there on the edge of the proud city in the power of the Spirit, Long said, "one just knew that the future belonged to them." He then repeated the sermon's refrain, "Today is the Fourth of July, and today is the Lord's Day."

The practical lens of a public homiletic calls for this kind of clarity, honesty and specificity that contrasts the fallenness of our lives and our world and the alternative thinking and order of the Gospel. Proclaiming the Word of Christ without imagining how it differs from the world of everyday will not be sufficient to help congregations grasp the public nature of the *Basileia tou Theou* that Jesus preached. It is a long, and usually gradual, process as the pieces of the Gospel puzzle fall into place. But for that to happen, a fourth lens is required.

A Distinctive Spirituality

A public homiletic also needs the lens of a distinctive spirituality. This may be the most challenging of all. The courage to look honestly at the world through a theology of the cross for a post-Christendom church and do so with vivid and candid concreteness requires awesome spiritual openness and humility. This is the stance that Pam McCarroll invites us to explore with intense attention. Like the Harris brothers she centres attention on the darkness of our fallen world and brings it to the cross of Christ. In the radical weakness of the cross, God's suffering love for the world is both hidden but then (in the resurrection) revealed. The resurrection does not overcome the cross but sends us back to see in it the strange otherness of God who chooses self-giving, suffering love to confront the principalities and powers. In a world of mastery the cross and resurrection expose God's alternative way.

McCarroll uses the image (in Matthew 24 and elsewhere) of God coming like a thief in the night, to remind us that God comes unexpectedly, that God's ways are unpredictable, that God is the ultimate Other. Our waiting for God is a waiting in the dark marked by a sense of God's

absence from our world. Such waiting is a difficult act of trust and is directly counter to notions of human mastery. But to wait for the God who is revealed in the cross, is to wait, not for powerful acts of intervention, but the pouring out of a suffering love in darkness and hiddenness. This calls for persistent trust, an act of love that seeks to be open to God in God's otherness (rather than God as a predictable friend) and implies a God of holiness.

This is an attentive waiting, a watching to see, to discern and also to transcend the fear that comes with wondering about the loss of possessions and personal security until we are clear about how much the meaning of our lives is connected to what we possess or what we can control. Waiting is a sacred disposition seeking to be in harmony with God's ways, God's timing and God's purposes. It is, obviously, subversive in an action-oriented society that tries to find ways to expand, create and make history rather than contemplate the Creator and the 'others' who could be affected by our actions. But it is this spiritual dimension of a public homiletic that is fundamental to discovering and living out the Gospel of Jesus Christ, especially in a society that has lost a sense of transcendence. In opening ourselves to the otherness of God we also become open to the world, to persons and public realities in their manifold otherness.

McCarroll ends her dissertation with a quotation form Christopher Lasch, "Progressive optimism rests at bottom, on a denial of the natural limits of human power and freedom and it cannot last very long in a world in which an awareness of those limits has become inescapable." McCarroll adds that witnessing to the resurrected crucified Christ nourishes love that establishes authentic relationships, trust that does not collapse when God feels absent and hope that is resilient in the night and trustingly yearns in hope for glimpses of the presence of God. (McCarroll, 285-86) This is the telos of a public homiletic.

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"On Preaching the Psalms Messianically Today: Do Psalms 1 & 2 Help Show Us How to Do it?"

J. Glen Taylor
Wycliffe College and the School of Graduate Studies, The University of Toronto

My family and I live in a Victorian house in downtown Toronto. One of the things that drew us to buy this old home was the entrance, which consists of two nicely sculpted wooden doors with stained glass panels that make up the upper half of each door. The first door is attractive, but mostly utilitarian; it has such aesthetic features as square wooden panels, but mostly it just keeps out old man winter. The second door is especially lovely; people often comment on the beveled glass and especially on the round, ruby-like glass buttons that form an inner frame to a cluster of diamond- and square-shaped glass pieces. It provides visitors with the same favorable impression of the house that it provided my wife and me when we first saw it. Perhaps more than any other feature of the house, it was this entrance that captured our interest and sparked our imaginations as to the potential the whole house had to become our home. (Otherwise the house, formerly a rental property, was a bit run down.) The rest is history; we packed up our belongings and made this red-brick Eastlake type house into our home, a place that we prayed might become a haven for our three kids and two dogs, along with four boarders and a stream of guests.

Over the past twenty-five years, Old Testament scholars have come to reflect on the beauty and significance of a similar set of double doors that leads to a haven of spiritual refreshment and solace within the Bible itself. The spiritual home is the Book of Psalms and the two doors that elegantly lead into it are Psalms 1 and 2. Simply put, Psalms 1 and 2, *in addition to having their own discrete exegetical roles*, are also "The Introduction" to the Psalms by virtue of their placement at the beginning of the book (more on this below).

In this essay, *I want not so much to describe Psalms 1 and 2 discretely and exegetically*, but rather to highlight they role they play as an Introduction to the Psalms. This is important because, as with any other Introduction to a book, Psalms 1 and 2 provide important clues about how the Psalms as a whole are to be read, prayed and also preached. It is important also because the rediscovery[1] that an initial Psalm (or Psalms) could play an introductory role is quite new. Finally, as I hope to show, the role Psalm 2 plays as introductory opens a door (quite literally given our analogy) for reading the *whole* Book of Psalms as a book about God's Messiah. This will lead quite naturally to a quest to see how well (if at all) Jesus fulfills that expectation.

Let us concede for now that Psalms 1 & 2 are the Introduction and that Psalm 2 introduces us to a messianic theme to the Psalm. This leaves us with Psalm 1. What introductory role does it play? What is its distinctive message as the first part of our Introduction? As anyone can see by reading it, Psalm 1 concerns the value of meditating on God's "law." Key here is the issue: To what does "the law" in Ps. 1:2 refer? The context of Psalm 1, including its placement at the beginning of the Psalms, provides a likely answer. The "law" refers to the five-book

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[1] The view that Psalm 1 was introductory was common among interpreters prior to the 20th century. Examples of commentators include John Calvin, the editors of the Gutenberg Bible, and Perowne (1878).

structure of the Book of Psalms as a whole (Psalms 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150). These "Five Books" echo the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, suggesting that the Psalms are, like the Pentateuch, an authoritative Scriptural law-book upon which one can meditate for spiritual benefit.[2] Psalm 1 is thus like a sign hanging on the first entryway door. It says something like: "Ponder the things in this house to your joy and benefit; neglect them to your peril." This role is somewhat analogous to the more conventional Introduction to the Book of Proverbs (Prov. 1:1–7), which also has the theme of deriving benefit from studying that poetic book.

I hope that by now readers will have begun to see some of the significance that Psalms 1 and 2 have for understanding the Psalms as a whole. Before exploring more of the riches these psalms offer, I want to provide some background to this new understanding that will help the reader to understand what we have explored so far, and to prepare the reader for what lies ahead. Two background issues merit consideration. Each will be considered in turn.

I. What Evidence Exists that Psalms 1 and 2 are Introductory? Are There Other Psalms that Signal such Things as a Conclusion or Climax to the Psalms?

What then (briefly and summarily) is the evidence that Psalms 1 and 2 have a role to play as the Introduction to the Psalms? And, more generally, what is the evidence that the various psalms in the Psalter have consciously been organized to form a sort of book-like "argument"? Each question will be asked in turn, starting with the more general question.

The editors' introductory essay to this volume has already referred to the phenomenon of a purposeful ordering to many of the psalms.[3] While not all scholars agree that the psalms have been intentionally ordered, most scholars would agree on the following evidence:

1. The demarcation of the Psalms into a collection of five books implies that some thought has been given to organizing the Psalms into a coherent (Pentateuch-like) whole.

2. Books I–III (i.e. Psalms 1–89) of the Psalter place relative emphasis on the role of human (i.e. Davidic) kingship in God's plans, whereas Books IV–V (i.e. Psalms 90-–50) emphasize relatively more the kingship of the Lord God. (An important corollary to this point is that psalms attributed to king David, including many of the so-called messianic psalms, occur more frequently in Books I-–II than in IV–V.)[4]

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[2] I sometimes say, too simplistically, to my Divinity students that whereas the Pentateuch is prescriptively God's law as it pertains to behavior and belief, the Psalms are descriptively God's law as it pertains to experience and belief.

[3] They write (p. ?): "Psalms 1–2 introduce the whole Psalter, meditating on the path of obedience to the Law of the Lord and God's sovereignty and appointed king. Book I continues with Psalms 3-41, which emphasize God's covenant with David."

[4] A few scholars, believing that Israel's hope in a human, messianic king is discontinued in Books IV-V, being completely replaced by an emphasis alone on God's kingship, have found it hard to reconcile the messianic theme of Psalm 2 with that psalm being an introduction to the whole book of Psalms. (These scholars usually interpret Psalm 2 to affirm more generally the sovereignty of God more than His rule specifically through the agency of the

Indeed, historically speaking, the order of Books I–III became authoritatively fixed prior to Books IV–V.[5]

3. There is in general a spiritual-psychological progression within the Book of Psalms. In other words psalms of hurtful complaint (often called Lament Psalms) eventually give way to Psalms of praise as one moves through the book.[6]

4. Several "Hallelujah" psalms (i.e. Psalms 146–50) cluster at the end of the book, as if to conclude it. Since Psalms 146–150 conclude the book, Psalm 73 is the midpoint of the Psalter. This psalm seems appropriate as a mid-way psalm, reflecting on the perspective of Psalm 1.[7]

5. A detailed study of a collection of temple hymns from ancient Sumer and of other pertinent data offer corroborative evidence for believing that the Psalms were purposefully arranged.[8]

We come now to our initial more specific background question: what evidence is there that Psalms 1 and 2 are implicitly the "Introduction" to the Book of Psalms? Several lines of evidence are outlined below:

1. Unlike almost every other psalm within Books I–III, Psalms 1 and 2 bear no title or superscription (for example, "to the choir director. A psalm of David.").[9] The intended effect appears to be that Psalms 1 and 2 are *themselves* the heading or "introduction" to the Psalter.[10]

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messiah.) However, Psalms 110 and 132 attest to the continuation of the messianic beyond Books I–III (indeed right through to Book V), thus obviating the problem.

[5] This is evident from the Qumran manuscripts where the order of the psalms in sequence is still in flux beyond Psalm 89.

[6]The progression was noted in traditional (older) scholarship as well.

[7] This psalm begins Book III and relates how the psalmist was able to overcome a personal crisis of faith that arose from observing the apparent prosperity of unbelievers. He did this implicitly by recognizing that faithful believers (the "pure in heart," v. 1) are not exempted from pain and suffering. (I owe this observation to Clinton McCann.) The psalmist did this also, and more obviously, by having a moment of revelation when, upon visiting the sanctuary complex, he came to realize that the godless end life in terror, not knowing God, whereas he was blessed beyond imagination through daily experience of God's comfort, counsel and "nearness." For more on Psalm 73, see for example Clinton McCann, "Psalm 73: A Microcosm of Old Testament Theology," in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy*, ed. Kenneth G. Hoglund, *et al*. (JSOTSup 58; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), pp. 247–57..

[8] Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBL Dissertation Series 76; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 13–138.

[9] Nowhere else in these books do two consecutive psalms occur without a superscription. Only four other psalms omit a superscription (10, 33, 43, and 71), likely due to their connectedness to the preceding psalm.

[10] Compare Genesis 1:1-2:4a which, preceding the framework of headings, "these are the generations of x" seems similarly to be an Introduction to the Book of Genesis, if not to the whole Pentateuch.

2. Although they differ in subject matter, Psalms 1–2 have several features in common. These include the following: The word "meditate" in Psalm 1:2 is the same word in Hebrew as "plot" in Psalm 2:1.[11] Both contrast a pious individual with a godless mob. Both contrast the fixed nature of the godly individual with the fleeting mobility (and ultimate demise) of the wicked.[12] Both have the Hebrew word-cluster "perish the way" at or near end. Most importantly, Psalm 2 ends in the same happy way (literally) that Psalm 1 begins: "Happy is the one who/are those who . . . ." Although the word "happy" is in itself important,[13] its significance for us here in that the Old Testament often marks a coherent unified unit through the repetition of the same word at both the beginning and end of that unit. In short, this framing device implies that Psalms 1 and 2 should perhaps be understood as a single entity.[14] This factor alone likely accounts for numerous cases in the history where Psalms 1 and 2 have been interpreted as a single psalm, including one manuscript tradition of Acts 13:33 in which Psalm 2 is referred to as Psalm 1, which can easily be explained if Psalm 2 was thought to be the continuation of Psalm 1.

3. Psalm 2 bears a number of clear similarities to the second last psalm, Psalm 149 (cf. Psalm 149:2, 7–9). This suggests that neither the second nor the penultimate psalm has been placed coincidentally.

4. Psalm 1 has several grammatical features that are more characteristic of prose than of poetry. Why is this important? Since we don't normally think of hymn collections (which the Book of Psalms is) as introductory, the profusion of prose-like features in Psalm 1 might well be a clue that it plays the double role of hymn (poetic) and introduction (normally prosaic). These features are the definite article, the relative pronoun and several particles like "therefore," and "but rather."[15] To be sure, many of these grammatical features (especially the definite article) are

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[11] A word in English that suffices in both contexts is "muse." The word conveys the notion of murmuring, either for the purpose of absorbing God's teaching (as in Psalm 1) (compare the imagery of the modern-day orthodox Jew wearing the tephilim on his forehead, moving his head back and forth, and murmuring devoutly as he reads the Torah), or grumbling (as in Psalm 2) (likely with a view to plot cunningly).

[12] Psalm 1:1 conveys mobility by referring to the wicked at one time "walking," at another "standing," and at still another "sitting." No less mobile is the imagery of v. 4 which reads literally: "Not so, [with] the wicked, but rather as the chaff that the wind blows away." (As the literary scholar Robert Alter has noted, the wicked are here not afforded the dignity of being even the subject of a verb!) All this stands in stark contrast to the imagery of the godly man being rooted like a tree. Psalm 2 has the wicked (kings) making a vane effort to (literally) "take a stand" (v. 2a) against the Lord and his anointed, paralleled in the next line with reference to them attempting vainly together to "be established (or founded [as a temple])" against the same. Their desire to break free of servitude to Judah, expressed by "let us tear off their yoke, let us cast away their ropes from upon us," similarly conveys a wayward disdain for that which provides security. This stands in stark contrast to the notion of fixedness conveyed by references to the One who "sits in heaven" and who Himself "has established" (compare similar usages of this word in Prov. 8:23 and 2 Chron. 29:35) his son upon Zion, His holy mountain.

[13] Jews in the first century A.D., likely including Jesus and the disciples, were familiar with a Greek translation of the Old Testament which renders the Hebrew word "happy" in Psalms 1:1 and 2:13 as *makarios*/*makarioi* (singular and plural respectively). This is the same Greek word that Jesus used in the Beatitudes and which we know through the *KJV* as "blessed."

[14] For a lengthy assessment of the evidence both in favor and (ultimately) against seeing Psalms 1 and 2 as a single entity, see John T. Willis, "Psalm 1—An Entity," *ZAW* 91 (1979): 381–401.

[15] These prosaic features include the following: 1) the definite article (v. 1: "happy is *the* man . . ."; v. 4: "not so with *the* wicked"; v. 4: "but like *the* chaff . . ."; v. 5: "in *the* judgment . . ."); 2) the relative pronoun (v. 1: "the man

found elsewhere in the psalms. However, in no other psalm of similar or even greater length are so many of these prosaic features found together. And further, nowhere else in the Psalms can the prose particle "but rather," which occurs twice in Psalm 1 (vv. 2 and 4), be found.

To summarize, there is ample evidence that Psalms 1 and 2 have intentionally been placed at the beginning of the book in order to introduce it. To *fully* understand the importance of these psalms one needs to do more (though not less) than an exegesis of each in its own (original) historical-grammatical context.

II. Can a Psalm Have Valid Meanings in Addition to the Meaning Intended by the Original Author?

What we have learned about the importance of the editorial placement of Psalms 1-2 presents a challenge to a commonly held rule of thumb (at least within some circles of biblical interpretation) that a text can properly mean today only what its author intended it to mean when he wrote it. The challenge with both Psalms 1 and 2, however, is that *two* divinely led people have strongly affected the meaning of each psalm. First is the person who in each case wrote the psalm, and second is the person who, likely at a much later time, decided that each psalm should be placed at (or, in the case of Psalm 2, near) the beginning of the Psalter. In my judgment, the traditional rule of interpretation must be adapted to reckon also with the meaning of the later—but clearly intentional, important and inspired—work of the person(s) who put the finishing touches on the Book of Psalms by arranging the order of Psalms such as 1 and 2 (as introduction), 73 (as midpoint), and 146–50 (as conclusion), and likely others as well.

What I am doing is coming clean by confessing a mode of interpretation that I have already implicitly invoked. An example of this slightly different (or supplementary) approach to grammatical-historical exegesis can be found in the argument earlier in this essay that the word "law" in Psalm 1 now has as its primary point of reference the law-like five-book collection that comprises the Book of Psalms as a whole.[16] This interpretation implicitly gives credence to what seems likely to have been the intended meaning *not of the original author*, but rather of an inspired compiler of this part of the Book of Psalms. The intended meaning of the original author of the psalm is not ruled out or deemed irrelevant; it contributes to the overall sense that the psalm conveys, but here, given the importance of its placement as Introduction, the later meaning *in its context of placement as introduction* should be allowed to trump that of the original writer. In summary, there is sometimes, as here, a split focus to the question of an author's original intent.

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who . . . "; v. 3: "*which* yields its fruit . . ."; v. 3: "and all *that* he does prospers"; and v. 4: "like chaff *which* the wind blows away . . ."); and 3) several particles (v. 2: "*but only* [or *but rather*] in the law . . ."; v. 4 "*but only* [or *but rather*] like the chaff . . ."; v. 5: "*therefore* wicked ones will not stand . . ."; and v. 6: "*For* the LORD knows . . .").

[16] I remember raising this interpretative question in my days as a student at Dallas Theological Seminary in the late 1970s. The issue came up in a similar discussion of Judges 4-5. Here is the problem: if the student of the Bible is to seek after only the intended meaning of the original author, whose intended meaning is the student to follow? That of the original composer of Judges 5 who likely lived in the 12th to 11th century B.C.? Or that of the composer who for his own purposes later included Judges 5 into the narrative framework of the Book of Judges?

To my mind the issue of seeking the true meaning of a text is best addressed by asking a different hermeneutical question: *Not* "what is the original intention of the author?" but rather "*how does the text in its present context want the reader to interpret it*?" I find this to be the most helpful interpretive question that one can ask of a biblical passage. This is not just because it nicely handles the problem of a split focus between the intent of an author and that of a later compiler. It is also helpful because it makes room for another possible split focus, namely between the original intent of the human writer and the intent of the divine Author who, seeing all and knowing the full plan of salvation, is able to convey thoughts beyond scope of a mere human author.[17] Finally, this alternative question, how the text wants to be heard, is preferable because we can hardly ever be sure what the intent of the original author was in the first place, leaving this a guessing game.

Allow me to indulge in one more homey illustration like the one with which I began this essay. As often as our family can, we escape from the summer heat and humidity of Toronto by going to a cottage at a place called Eagle Lake, a three-hour drive north of the city. In this cottage there hangs from the ceiling a wagon wheel that has been converted into a chandelier. The old wagon wheel lies flat and has around the rim three anchored chains that extend upwards to converge at the ceiling. Light sockets sit on the upper edge of the rim and wiring runs inconspicuously through the links of the chain up into the housing of the ceiling fixture that provides the light with electricity.

To my mind, Psalm 1 is a lot like this chandelier. Just as the chandelier was originally a wagon wheel with its own original purpose in relation to the wagon to which it belonged, so Psalm 1 had a purpose intended by its original author. And just as the form or shape of the wheel betrays its original role as part of a wooden wagon of yesteryear, so the method of Form Criticism has helped biblical scholars to identify the form of Psalm 1 as a wisdom psalm and to identify its original role as a poem that functioned within Wisdom circles in ancient Israel, perhaps within a context of training scribes for service within the royal administration and temple (this is the approach of historical—grammatical exegesis). But as it now hangs from our ceiling, the wagon wheel has been adapted for an entirely different purpose—to be a chandelier. So too Psalm 1 has now been adapted (along with Psalm 2) for a different purpose—to introduce the Psalter.

The same analogy can be applied to Psalm 2. In its earlier wagon-wheel incarnation Psalm 2 may have been part of the liturgy for a coronation ceremony for a king of Judah. On this understanding the ceremony was a dramatic affair that visualized (and perhaps ritually enacted) such things as the implications the king's rule would have for nations foolish enough to oppose the Lord's anointed. A key focus would also have been on ritually confirming the Lord's adoption of the king as his appointed ruler and son, in keeping with God's covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7.

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[17] One further example is the Trinitarian allusion allegedly inherent in the words of Genesis 1:28:"Let us make humankind in our own image." As comparison with the Ugaritic texts strongly suggests, the original human writer was likely thinking of God addressing what we today might call a parliamentary chamber of angels. However, throughout the centuries Christian interpreters such as John Calvin have seen an obvious correspondence between the plurality of "us" and between the triune nature of God. The point is this: surely God is no less capable of implying plurality within his being through such a reference than are theologians capable of inferring it.

As dramatic as that wagon-wheel phase in the life of Psalm 2 may have been, it can hardly be compared to the chandelier phase. That phase came long after the time when God's judgment fell upon Judah, resulting in the temporary demise of Davidic kingship in Judah. This coronation hymn, like wagon wheels found today, would have been out of service for a long time. But its theology remained true and its hyperbole came more and more to reflect the God-given, historical hope in an Almighty messiah who would bring God's rule to Judah and to the nations. In its chandelier phase, Psalm 2 shines a bright beam of messianic light through the whole Psalter.

III. Back to Psalms 1 and 2 in their Role(s) as Introduction to the Psalms

With the challenging issue of evidence behind us, and also the problem of single versus multiple meanings to a text, we are in a good position to ponder further what this double-introduction is trying to tell us about the message of the Psalms as a whole. Here I propose simply to summarize a few representative views that I think are in keeping with how Psalms 1 and 2 want to be heard. Now as introduction(s), Psalms 1 and 2 can each be heard independently of the other, as well as together. In light of this I will first offer views on the meaning of Psalm 1 alone. Views on Psalm 2 alone will follow. And finally will come views on the message of Psalms 1 and 2 together—a double-barreled introductory message.

A. Psalm 1 (Alone)

"Israel reflects upon the psalms. . . to learn the 'way of righteousness' which comes from obeying the divine law and is now communicated through the prayers of Israel." (Brevard Childs.[18])

"Psalm 1. . . sets the tone of the collection in terms of the choice between the life of the righteous and the wicked. In addition, with its reference to Yahweh's instruction (v. 2), it directs the community to view the Psalter as teaching about the life of faith." (W.H. Bellinger, Jr.[19])

"Here at the threshold of the Psalter we are asked to consider the teaching that the way life is lived is decisive for how it turns out . . . . This first beatitude prompts the reader to think of the entire book as instruction for life and commends a kind of conduct that uses the Psalter in that way." (James L. Mays.[20])

B. Psalm 2 (Alone)

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[18] Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 513–14. In his later *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (1985), Childs describes the Psalms as a guide to the obedient life and stresses the relation of the Psalms as an affirmation of life over the threat of death.

[19] W. H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms: Reading and Studying the Book of Praises* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), pp. 129–30.

[20] James L. Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James L. Mays *et al.*; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 40–41.

"Psalm 2 addresses the question of the community of faith faced with the problems of a history made by nations contending for power; its word to faith is the announcement of the messiah into whose power God will deliver the nations." (James L. Mays.[21])

"As a result [of placing Psalms 1 and 2 as introduction] the theme of how Yhwh's *mashiah* will conquer all opposition and rule the world from Zion must be considered as one of the broad, overarching themes of the Psalms, in whose light all the ensuing lyrics, including the royal psalms, should be interpreted." (David C. Mitchell.[22])

C. Psalms 1 and 2 Together

"[W]e. . . learn that this book will speak to us of individuals and their way and destiny but also of kings and nations and their conduct and fate. . . . Psalm 1 may be a word of instruction to the king or other rulers and leaders even as Psalm 2 is a word of assurance to the individual member of the community of faith. . . . The way of the Lord's instruction and the rule of the Lord's anointed are the chief clues to what matters in all of this." (Patrick Miller, Jr.[23])

"Those who engage in such meditation [as in Psalm 1] will find joy in so doing, and will be well nourished and productive, like trees planted by the riverside. But this theological reflection is not done in isolation. It takes place in the context of a world where nations plot and engage in war, a world, nevertheless, ruled by the Lord and where those who are hurting can find refuge in God." (James Limburg.[24])

"Just as Psalm 1 and 2 call our attention to the main idioms within the subject matter of Jewish Scripture—the Torah (Psalm 1:2), the prophetic promise and judgment of God (Psalm 2:6–12), and the wisdom of God (Psalm 1:1, 2–6)—so this phrase [i.e. "happy are all who take refuge in him"] at the end of Psalm 2 is an editorial effort to demarcate a specific sub-theme for the laments that predominate in the first half of the Psalms." (Gerald T. Sheppard.[25])

To my mind all these interpretations resonate with how these texts as introduction want to be heard. As for my assessment, I would like to return to the analogy of the two doors with which I began this essay.

Firstly, we ought to think of entering the two front doors of the Psalter *independently*, as if entering one of two doors that stand side by side. On this understanding the double Introduction provides the reader with the option of reading The Psalms from the perspective of either Psalm 1 or Psalm 2. The person who enters through Psalm 1 is to faithfully meditate on

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[21] Ibid., p. 44 (compare also p. 48).

[22] David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (JSOTSup 252; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 245.

[23] Patrick Miller, Jr., *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), p. 91.

[24] James Limburg, "Psalms, Book of," *ABD* V, p. 535.

[25] Gerald T. Sheppard, "Psalms: Or, 'How to Read a Book that Seems Intent on Reading You'," *Theology: Notes & News* (October 1992), p. 17.

the Book of Psalms for the purpose of growing into a deeply rooted and spiritually productive person who follows the way of life and avoids the path of evildoers. Alternatively, the one who enters through Psalm 2 is invited to read the Psalter as a book that deals with God's plan to exercise sovereignty over the entire world through his begotten Davidic son, the Messiah. In either case, the Christian reader stands to benefit immensely.

Secondly, we ought to think of entering these two doors as if they existed *in relation to the other*, as if one led to the other in a single narrow hallway such that one must first go through one door *and also* the next. From this perspective one cannot encounter one psalm without the other. Thus, to read the psalms for the purpose of personal spiritual growth (the way of Psalm 1) is to be told in the next psalm that the messiah's reign is the means by which God executes his plan to bring salvation or judgment. And thus, too, to read the psalms as messianic (the way of Psalm 2), one must first "sign on" to the plan of personal growth and the avoidance of evil advocated by Psalm 1. Indeed, given the placement of Psalm 1 prior to Psalm 2, the messiah cannot be the subject matter of the entire Psalter independently of the call of Psalm 1 for dedication to God's law.

To this point we have been thinking of Psalm 1 as non-messianic, relating as it does to the importance of meditating on God's instruction or "law." The real messianic psalm, so we have seen, is its next-door neighbor Psalm 2. However, there is a sense in which Psalm 2 affects Psalm 1 such that it too can be understood as messianic. As it stands beside Psalm 1 Psalm 2 casts a messianic shadow over Psalm 1 such that it too can be seen to address the messiah. The shadow I am referring to can best be seen by recalling another passage from the Book of Deuteronomy.

In Deuteronomy 17, God's plan to allow Israel to have a king is discussed. God ordains that he not do such things as amass wealth, horses and wives. Rather, his primary duty as God's appointed king is as follows:

> 18 When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. 19 It shall remain with him and *he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes*, 20 neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign long over his kingdom in Israel.[26]

The king is not above the law. It pertains to him as much or more than to anyone. Given that Psalm 2 already establishes the introduction as indisputably messianic, Psalm 1 might also have been placed at the beginning to emphasize this royal mandate upon the messiah.[27] In this way, then, Psalm 1 might be not only a chandelier inviting the ordinary person to prosper through

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[26] *NRSV* (with emphasis added).

[27] A similar connection has been observed also by Miller, who writes: "Psalm 1 placed before Psalm 2, therefore, joins Deuteronomy in a kind of democratizing move. . . . While Psalm 2 invites the reader to hear the voice of the Lord's anointed in the following psalms, Psalm 1 says that what we hear is the voice of *anyone* who lives by the Torah, which may and should include the king." (Patrick D. Miller, "The Beginning of the Psalter," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* [ed. J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], p. 91.)

meditation on God's law, as we saw in the examples provided above, but also a chandelier that complements the messianic chandelier of Psalm 2 by inviting the messiah to take up his divinely appointed role to meditate on the law (Psalm 1; cf. Deut. 17:17–19).

Thirdly, we ought to think of entering these two doors as if they were *bound together as one*, much as a screen door is adjoined at the frame to the main door.[28] On this understanding (exemplified in category C above in which Psalms 1 and 2 are interpreted together) there is an implied connection between the righteous individuals in both psalms (the one obedient to torah in Psalm 1 and the Davidic king of Psalm 2) as well as the wicked (the anonymous chaff in Psalm 1 and the conspiring nations of Psalm 2). Implicitly as well, the happy *both* avoid the influence of the godless (Ps. 1:1) and take refuge in the Lord (Ps. 2:13).

IV. How to Read the Psalter Messianically

Most present-day Christians will agree: It is more difficult to read the Book of Psalms as a whole from a messianic perspective (the way of Psalm 2) than from a devotional perspective (the way of Psalm 1). In light of this, I want to share a few insights on seeing the messiah in the Psalter.

One of the most helpful discussions on this subject comes from the 19th century Anglican scholar J. J. S. Perowne whose Psalms commentary still draws the attention of reprint publishers.[29] Perowne advocates reading the psalms as typologically prophetic.[30] Reading the psalms typologically allows one to read the psalms as any other type in Scripture, namely with a view to focusing on that which corresponds to Christ and to overlooking that which does not. In this way a psalm such as Psalm 41 (which contains the words applied to Judas in John 12:18, "he who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel and turned against me") can be seen to echo the agony of Jesus despite the fact that the psalm also contains a confession of personal guilt from sin which cannot refer to Jesus (see v. 4). Perowne suggests verse 4 simply be overlooked as part of the type that doesn't apply (much in the same way, I would add, that in seeing the typological application to Christ of the serpent lifted on the pole in Numbers 21, we instinctively know not to equate Christ with the serpent, a symbol of sin and evil.) Now to be sure, such "picking and choosing" what applies to Jesus and what does not won't do much to convince a sceptic that the psalms apply to Christ, but as Psalm 1 reminds us, our purpose in reading the Psalms is not primarily apologetic (in the sense of defending the faith), but devotional and Christological.

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[28] I confess to being less enthusiastic about this approach. The psalms are different enough in character to "want to be heard" less as one than separately.

[29] J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms: A New Translation with Introductory Notes Explanatory and Critical* (4th edition; 2 vols. in 1; Reprint ed; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1966 [orig. 1878]).

[30] Ibid., pp. 43–55 (esp. pp. 43, 49). Perowne writes (p. 49): "Now, the Psalms are typical. They are the words of holy men of old—of one especially, whose life was fashioned in many of its prominent features to be a type of Christ. But just as David's *whole* life was not typical of Christ, so neither were all his words. His suffering and humiliation first, and his glory afterwards, were faint and passing and evanescent images of the life of Him who was both Son of David and Son of God. But the sorrowful shadow of pollution which passed upon David's life, *that* was not typical. . . ."

Other ways to see Christ in the Psalms include being open to different ways in which the psalms (or parts thereof) might apply to Christ. For example, most of Psalm 22 is best Christologically read as words said *by* Christ himself, whereas Psalms such as 72 are best read as words *about* Christ and his kingdom. And, regarding parts of psalms that contain cries for vengeance, these can be read messianically a) as part of the type that does not apply to Christ, b) as a legitimate prerogative that he thankfully chose not to exercise, or c) as awaiting fulfillment at the return of Christ as judge.

There are other ways as well. For example, it is helpful to take seriously the inseparability of the experience of the individual psalmist and that of the later Christ, and to see that inseparability as testimony to Christ's solidarity with human suffering and to the Christian's with His. It is also helpful to understand the messianic character of the Psalms not too narrowly. Note, for example, what one scholar says about Martin Luther's later, more mature understanding of how the psalms relate to Christ:

> Luther's approach to the psalms is notable, particularly because it is Christ centered. For him, all aspects of Christian life, including the psalms, relate to Christ. Even the psalmists' down-to-earth requests for protection and thanks for deliverance Luther applied to his own circumstances and life as a Christian. The psalmists asked for blessing and gave thanks for blessings as members of the covenant people of God, relying on God's grace, trusting his promises, worshiping in his temple, receiving his forgiveness. Yet all of these—covenant, grace, promise, temple, and forgiveness—found their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Christ "is himself the God whom we are exhorted to worship." When the psalmist exults that God's "love endures forever," Luther responds that *Christ* "stands hidden" in that phrase.[31]

As this reference to Luther illustrates, present-day Christians have a lot to learn from believers in times past who quite naturally saw Christ reflected in most Psalms.

V. Is it Really Appropriate to Read the Whole Psalter Messianically?

It may seem like giving too much weight and influence to Psalm 2 to suggest, as I am, that it casts so long a shadow (or, better, light) over the book of Psalms such that the whole book can be read messianically.[32] However, evidence from early Jewish and Christian history indicates that the Book of Psalms was read in this sort of way. One episode in this history comes from the Septuagint, a prominent Greek translation of the Old Testament that came into use in the third century B.C. and was broadly influential through the time of Jesus and the early church. Interestingly, the words found at the head of many superscriptions, "for the choir director" were translated into Greek as *eis to telos* which means, "pertaining to the end,"

[31] Bruce A. Cameron, "Preface," to *Psalms: With Introductions by Martin Luther* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), p. 4.

[32] I do not mean to imply that the Book of Psalms is to be read *only* as messianic. Other ways, many based on the grammatical-historical approach modeled elsewhere in this book, abound to the benefit of the reader and in keeping with how the book was edited.

"concerning fulfillment," or the like.[33] Since this notation for the choir director is very often followed by the words "of David," readers of the Psalms in Greek would read "Of David" in conjunction with "Concerning Fulfillment." I think it is very likely that this influenced readers of the Psalms to understand the Psalms of David to be read no longer simply as hymns but as prophecies. Prophecies about what? Most likely: about the David who is yet to come, God's messiah.

Another line of evidence from Jewish history comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Among these scrolls was found a variant version of the Book of Psalms (the best known of which is 11QPs[a]) that bore an appendix that included 2 Samuel 23:1–7. Interestingly this passage in Samuel is one of a few texts in the Old Testament that refers to David as a prophet. An implication arising from this addition to the Psalter is that 11QPs[a] bears witness to an element within Judaism (roughly at the time of Christ) that understood at least some of the Psalms to be prophecies pertaining to David. As with the Septuagint cases, it is easy to imagine that the fulfillment of these Davidic prophecies was thought to lie with a son of David who was yet to come. More, 11QPs[a] contains a prose piece called "David's Composition." That piece attributes to David the composition of 4,050 songs, all written "through prophecy." According to Peter Flint the 150 psalms of the MT are among that vast number. Thirdly, from Luke's testimony concerning the apostle Peter in Acts 2. Interpreting Pentecost for the bewildered crowd who just witnessed it, Peter cites the prophet Joel. What often goes unnoticed is that Peter, without batting an eyelash, goes right on in vv. 25–35 to cite another prophet, king David (v. 30), and then cites two passages from psalms (Psalm 16:10 and 110:1) as prophecies!

To back up, my point has not only been that Psalm 2 has become a messianic psalm, but that through its role as Introductory, it paints the entire Book of Psalms with a messianic brush. This broad messianic brushing was implicitly condoned by the apostle Peter, and continued by Christians throughout history, who instinctively knew to read the Psalms as if they had ultimately to do with Christ. Given this ancient historical tradition within Judaism first of reading the Psalms Christologically, Christians cannot rightly be accused of misreading the Psalms by reading Christ back into the book. Rather, the earliest Christians were continuing a practice begun within Judaism long before Jesus.

VI. How Does Jesus Fare in a Whole Reading of the Psalter Messianically?

We have seen evidence from the ordering of some of the psalms (most especially Psalm 2) that the Book of Psalms was meant to be read as testimony concerning a messiah. This quest leads ultimately to an important question: What kind of messiah might the Book of Psalms as a whole expect? And for the Christian, the question pointedly becomes: How well does Jesus live up to those expectations? Here then is a selective walk through the book, with a view partially to answering that question.[34]

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[33] For an accurate and accessible translation of the Septuagint version of the Psalms, see *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title: The Psalms* (translated by Albert Pietersma; Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[34] Of course anyone's pre-understanding of the Messiah (including my own) cannot help but affect his or her reading of the Psalter. For a similar attempt, see James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), pp. 99–107.

Psalm 1 is a doorway through which the messiah must first successfully pass. The king must diligently study God's law (v. 2; compare Deut. 17:18–20). Such a king would perhaps from his youth be found in the temple, listening to the teachers and asking them questions. Ideally in turn they would likely be "astonished at his understanding and answers."[35] He might even offer his own version of the beatitudes of Psalm 1, proclaiming such things as "Happy are those who . . . ."[36] His teachings might reflect such strength and maturity that common people would observe that his teaching was uniquely authoritative.[37]

Psalm 2 expects the messiah to be one whom rulers would oppose and be glad to be free of (v. 1–2). He is after all, according to God's own declaration, "My Son" (v. 7) and the clear object of his pleasure and favor. By placing his own begotten son as king of the Jews in Zion (v. 7), God has put the destiny of all nations in his hands (v. 8); indeed all authority in heaven and earth is given to him (v. 8). Lords of the nations are told to put their trust in him (v. 12b), to revere him with trembling joy (v. 11), or else to face his wrath and perish (v. 12a).

Immediately after comes Psalm 3 and after it dozens of others that speak of the Davidic king suffering (3–7, 12, 13, 22, 25–28, 35, 38–40, 42–44, 51, 54–57.) So prominent is this theme of suffering that contemporary scholars categorize these psalms as "Lament Psalms."[38] These laments are too many to rehearse. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the flavor of these laments in relation to Davidic kingship is to note that one of the main schools of scholarly interpretation understands them originally to have been prayers made by the king, often on behalf of his people, and ritually reenacted within the Temple. The prominent scholar of the Psalms, John Eaton, a proponent of this view, summarizes the content of the Lament psalms as follows:

> In symbol the king was beset by enemies from all quarters and brought to the realm of death; his humble fidelity was thus proved and Yahweh answered his prayer, exalting him above all dangers and foes. While the order of the ceremonies and texts remains uncertain, the chief elements of the royal suffering and exaltation are strongly attested, as is also the close relation to the assertion of Yahweh's own kingship. [39]

Psalm 72 celebrates the majesty, eternality and universality of the reign of the son of David. Psalm 89 does this also, but significantly, includes a rude interruption in which God

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[35] Luke 4:46–47 (*NJKV*).

[36] Compare Matthew 5:1–10.

[37]Compare Matthew 7:28–29.

[38] I find it surprising that few scholars take these psalms as testimony of the suffering of the messiah. (Many New Testament scholars judge from the absence of evidence for any *expectation* of a suffering messiah in Jesus' time that there was no Jewish *literature* regarding the suffering of the messiah. A radical, but not uncommon extension of this view is that the early Church, in desperation to explain the crucifixion, read the lament psalms back into the memory of the life of Jesus. But, why is it that Jesus' followers are allowed this innovation, but not the master rabbi who inspired them? This is all the more strange given that the earliest traditions are uniform in attributing the notion of a suffering messiah, not to the church, but to *Jesus*.)

[39] John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (Second ed.; The Biblical Seminar; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996), p. 133.

rejects his anointed one. Enemies and other passers-by have shamed and dishonored the king, casting his crown and throne to the dust (vv. 39, 44). The psalmist asks why God has seemingly forsaken his covenant with David (v. 49). This is clearly a moment of profound disillusionment; the promised eternal reign of the messiah has been dashed by an unexpected tragedy.

Book IV begins with a prayer of Moses (Psalm 90), the man known for interceding before God when a covenant like the one in Psalm 89 has apparently been broken. Thankfully, however, the psalms that follow Psalm 90 (especially Psalm 91 that immediately follows) give assurance that all is well. And Psalms 110 and 132 offer assurance that the notion of a messiah is not dead; despite the seeming finality of Psalm 89, the messiah reappears.

True, all is well (including hope in the messiah), but something has changed. From Psalm 90 onwards, a dramatic shift occurs away from speaking of Israel's king in *human* messianic terms towards an emphasis on Israel's king in *divine* terms, as abiding with Yahweh alone. This shift comes soon after the messiah's downfall. Thus, Psalms 93, 95, 96 and 97 all proclaim: "Yahweh reigns!" It is as though something happened subsequently to Psalm 89 to instill belief in the kingly rule of God not so much through his Son, but as Himself. Note however: by making this transition from human to divine kingship, the Psalter has created a seemingly impossible challenge for any king who would aspire to fulfill the messianic hope that Psalm 2 sets up for the whole book. Now, only a messiah who was *both* the human son of David *and* God Himself could fulfill that hope!

Judaism in Jesus' day did not expect a messiah who would be both human and divine. Were such a messiah to appear at this time (as Christians believe he did), he would likely have had a difficult time with the religious authorities. He might also have spent a lot of time defending his unexpectedly divine identity by alluding to Psalms such as Psalm 110, which implies that the son of David would be David's "lord" who occupies a place at God's right hand. More so—and ironically—were such a messiah to appear at this time, something else would have happened that the Psalms further speak about, but that the Jewish establishment expected no more than the messiah's divinity: the messiah would suffer. A claimant to the office of *divine* messiah would very likely have faced persecution and perhaps even death at the hands of his own people (and others), which would end up fulfilling the other unexpected component of the messiah's life, namely, his deadly suffering.

Wolfhart Pannenberg, Reinhold Niebuhr and others have observed that Jesus could not have appeared as a messiah to the Jews if the Jewish people were not in turn looking for such a figure.[40] But what happens when a messiah comes whose understanding of the nature of the messiah differs from that of his Jewish contemporaries? This would be a recipe for conflict and would pose a problem for the acceptance of the true messiah. Were he to be the true messiah of God despite this different expectation by the Jews, something would need to happen to confirm the identity of that messiah for the Jews and for others. And this is precisely what Christians affirm that God did through the resurrection of Jesus. Luke puts it eloquently when he quotes from the sermon of Simon Peter after Pentecost:

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[40] See Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, p. 99.

"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

'The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool."'

Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him *both Lord and Messiah*, this Jesus whom you crucified."[41]

What a privilege for Christians to proclaim the Good News of so divine a Messiah!

[41] Acts 2:32–36 *NRSV* (emphasis mine).