

The Psalms in the Passion of Christ Michael Kolarcik, S.J

The Context: For the early Church the proclamation of Christ as the Messiah met its first serious theological obstacle in the stark reality of the passion and death of Christ. This was an unexpected association with the expected Messiah. To find a source which would serve effectively as a prism for understanding the passion events, the early community turned naturally enough to the Scriptures. Here there was a wealth of images through which the passion and death of Christ could be identified with common Jewish piety and which could be grounded in Jewish prayer. Two ancient biblical images particularly stand out which were used to explore and to understand more deeply the mystery of the passion: a) the just one who suffers unjustly, b) the suffering servant of Isaiah (chapters 52-57). It is the first image that constitutes the heart of the largest type of prayer in the Psalter, called the lament. The prayer of the lament was identified as the prayer of Christ in his passion, death and resurrection.

Structure of the psalms of lament:

| | Psalm 22 | Verses |
|--|--|-------------------|
| Address to God, a cry of help | My God, my God ... | 1 |
| <hr/> | | |
| God | Why have you forsaken me? | 1-2 |
| Complaint I/We | I am a worm and no man ... | 6, 14-15 |
| They/Foes | All who seek me mock me ... | 7-8, 12-13, 16-18 |
| <hr/> | | |
| (Declaration of Innocence) | | |
| <hr/> | | |
| Confession of Trust | In you our Ancestors trusted ... | 3-5 |
| (Sapiential reflections, the two ways) | Yet you are the one who took me from the womb ... | 9-10 |
| <hr/> | | |
| Hear! | Be not far from me ! | 11, 19 |
| Petition | Deliver my soul from the sword | 20-21 |
| <hr/> | | |
| Motivations for God's Intervention | (3-5) (9-10) | |
| <hr/> | | |
| Save! | | |
| Justice of God | (19-21) | |
| Punish! | | |
| (double wish) | | |
| <hr/> | | |
| Vow to Praise | I will tell of your name to others in the assembly | 22-31 |
| <hr/> | | |

A few Psalms of lament: 3, 17, 51, 80, 88, 142, 143.

See Michel Gourgues, "Les Psaumes et Jésus - Jésus et les Psaumes", *Cahiers Evangile* 25 (1978).

References to the psalms in the passion narratives:

Prelude to the Passion

| | | Matt | Mark | Luke | John |
|---------------------------------|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| a) the plot against Jesus | | | | | |
| Ps 2:2 / 31:13 (royal psalm) | – <i>The rulers take counsel together against the Lord and his anointed.</i> | 26:4 | | | |
| b) the last supper | | | | | |
| Ps 41:9 | – <i>One who ate with me</i> | | 14:18 | | 13:18 |
| Ps 69:4 | – <i>those who hate me without cause</i> | | | | 15:25 |
| The Passion Narratives | | | | | |
| a) Gethsemane | | | | | |
| Ps 42:6 | – <i>My soul is cast down within me</i> | 26:38 | 14:34 | | 12:27 |
| Ps 42:7 | – <i>the thunder of your cataracts</i> | | | | |
| b) the Sanhedrin | | | | | |
| Ps 110:1 (royal psalm) | – <i>Sit at my right hand</i> | 26:64 | 14:62 | 22:69 | |
| c) the Crucifixion | | | | | |
| Ps 69:21 | – <i>For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.</i> | 27:34 | | | |
| Ps 22:18 | – <i>they divide my garments...</i> | 27:35 | 15:24 | 23:34 | 19:24 |
| 22:7 – | <i>they shake their heads...</i> | 27:39 | 15:29 | | |
| 22:7 – | <i>all who seek me mock me...</i> | | | 23:35 | |
| 22:8 – | <i>he committed his cause to the Lord...</i> | 27:43 | | | |
| 22:1 – | <i>My God, my God why have you forsaken me?</i> | 27:46 | 15:34 | | |
| 22:15 / 69:21 | – <i>thirst</i> | | | | 19:28 |
| Ps 69:21 | – <i>For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.</i> | 27:48 | 15:36 | | |
| Ps 31:5 | – <i>Into your hands I commit my spirit.</i> | | | 23:46 | |
| Ps 38:11 – | <i>My friends and companions stand aloof.</i> | | | 23:49 | |
| Ps 34:20 – (Praise) | <i>He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken.</i> | | | | 19:36 |

BOOK I

1 Torah (wisdom)
 2 Royal (messiah)
 3 Ind. lament
 4 Ind. lament (trust)
 5 Ind. lament
 6 Ind. lament (penit.)
 7 Ind. lam.(innocence)
 8 Hymn
 9-10 Ind. lament
 11 Song of trust
 12 Com. lament
 13 Ind. lament
 14 = 53 Ind. lament
 15 Liturgy, admission
 to cult
 16 Song of trust
 17 Ind. lament
 18 Ind. praise
 (royal)=2 Sam 22
 19:1-6 Hymn
 19:7-14 Torah wisdom
 psalm
 20 Royal psalm
 21 Royal psalm
 22 Ind. lament
 23 Song of trust
 24 Hymn (liturgy)
 25 Ind. lament
 26 Ind. lam.(innocence)
 27 Song of trust
 28 Ind. lament
 29 Hymn (creation)
 30 Ind. praise
 31 Ind. lament

32 Ind.praise (penitential)
 33 Hymn
 34 Ind. praise
 35 Ind. lament
 36 wisdom, lament, hymn
 37 wisdom
 38 Ind. lament
 (penitential)
 39 Ind. lament
 40:1-11 Ind. praise
 40:12-17 Ind. lament
 41 Ind. lament, praise.

BOOK II

42-43 Ind. lament
 44 Com. lament
 45 Royal psalm
 46 Song of Zion (trust)
 47 Hymn (enthronement)
 48 Song of Zion (praise)
 49 Wisdom
 50 Covenant Renewal
 (liturg. mosaic)
 51 Ind. lament(penitent.)
 52 Ind. lament mixture
 53 = 14 Ind. lament
 54 Ind. lament
 55 Ind. lament
 56 Ind. lament
 57 Ind. lament
 58 Com. lament
 59 Ind. lament
 60 Com. lament
 61 Ind. lament (royal?)
 62 Song of trust

63 Song of trust (lament)
 64 Ind. lament
 65 Com. praise (hymn)
 66:1-12 hymn
 66:13-20 Ind. praise
 67 Com. praise
 68 Zion (liturgy, vict.)
 69 Ind. lament
 70 = 40:13-17 Ind. lament
 71 Ind. lament
 72 Royal (wisdom)

BOOK III

73 Wisdom (enemies)
 74 Com. lament
 75 Hymn
 76 Song of Zion (praise)
 77 Ind. lament
 78 Salvation history
 (wisdom, David)
 79 Com. lament
 80 Com. lament
 81 Coven. Renewal (mosaic)
 82 liturgical (lament)
 83 Com. lament
 84 Song of Zion (praise)
 85 Com. lament
 86 Com. lament
 87 Song of Zion (praise)
 88 Ind. lament (dismal)
 89 Ind. lament (royal)
 vv 5-18=hymn

BOOK IV

90 Com. lament
 91 Song of trust (wis)
 92 Ind. praise
 93 hymn (enthronement)
 94 Com. lament
 95 hymn enthronement
 96 hymn enthronement
 97 hymn enthronement
 98 hymn enthronement
 99 hymn enthronement
 100 hymn enthronement
 101 royal (wisdom)
 102 Ind. lament (roy.pen.)
 103 hymn (grace)
 104 hymn (creation)
 105 Salvation hist. Exodus
 106 Salvation hist. Deut.

BOOK V

107 Com. praise
 108 =57:7-11+60:5-12
 109 Ind. lament
 110 royal psalm
 111 hymn (wisdom)
 112 wisdom (two ways)
 113 hymn
 114 hymn (epiphany)
 115 liturgy (idols, praise)
 116 Ind. praise
 117 hymn (shortest)

118 Ind. praise (victory)
 119 Torah, wisdom
 120 Ind. lament
 121 Song of trust
 122 Song of Zion (trust)
 123 Com. lament
 124 Com. praise
 125 Song of trust (Zion)
 126 Com. lament
 127 Wisdom (God builds)
 128 Wisdom (marriage)
 129 Com. lament
 130 Ind. lament (penitential)
 131 Song of trust (child)
 132 Liturg. of Davidic
 Covenant
 133 Wisdom (unity, oil)
 134 liturgy (blessing)
 135 Salvation Hist. hymn
 136 Salv. Hist. (praise)
 137 Com. lament
 138 Ind. praise
 139 Ind. lament (wisdom,
 creation)
 140 Ind. lament
 141 Ind. lament
 142 Ind. lament
 143 Ind. lament (penitential)
 144 royal psalm = 8
 145 hymn (enthronement)
 146 hymn
 147 hymn
 148 hymn (creation)
 149 hymn
 150 Doxology to conclude
 the psalter (majesty)

THE PSALMS - M. KOLARCIK SJ

Hebrew 9,10 = Greek 9; H 114,115 = G 113; H 116 = G 114,115; H 147 = G 146,147

| Books of the Psalter | I (1-41) | II (42-72) | III (73-83) (84-89) | IV (90-106) | V (107-150) |
|----------------------|-------------|---------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| The Divine Name | | | | | |
| YHWH | <u>272</u> | <u>30</u> | <u>13</u> | <u>31</u> | <u>103</u> |
| Elohim | 15 | 164 | 36 | 7 | 0 |
| | Davidic | Elohism | Asaph | Koraic | milieu |
| | Yahwist | | | | |

Collections of Psalms within the Psalter:

| (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|--|---|
| 3 - 41 | 42 - 89 | 90 - 150 |
| The oldest collection, comprised of davidic psalms, mostly individual laments. Psalms 1 and 2 are introductory psalms for the entire psalter. | 42 - 49 = the Sons of Korah, (2 Ch 20:19) 51 - 72 = another davidic psalter (51-64= laments; 72+127=Solomon) 50,73 - 83 = psalms of Asaph (1 Ch 16:4-7) 84 - 89 = psalms from a Koraic milieu (39,62,77=Yedoutoun, 1Ch 10:41-2) (88=Heman, 1 Ch 15:17) (89=Etan) | 90 = psalm of Moses 91,92,94,95,104 = pre-exilic prophetic 93,96 - 100 = Kingship of The LORD 101,103,108-110, 138-145 = Davidic 102 = individual lament 105-107 = historical psalms 111,112,119 = wisdom psalms 113-118 = Triple Hallel (ordinary) hymns of praise 120-134 = Psalms of Ascent 135-136 = Triple Hallel (great) 137 = exilic lament 146-150 = Triple Hallel (small) |

Various Categories of Psalms:

Penitential Psalms: 6,32,38,51,102,130,143.

Hymns to the Creator: 8,19,104,139,148.

Hymns to Lord of History: 33,103,113,117,145-7.

Trust: 11,16,23,27,46,62,91,121,122,125,131.

Wisdom: 1,32,36,37,49,73,94,111,112,119,127,128,133,139.

Torah psalms: 1,19:7-14,119.

Covenant psalms: 50,78,81,89,132.

Hymns to Creator of Israel: 66,100,

111,114,149.

Thanksgiving: 18, 30, 34, 116, 118, 124, 138.

Songs of Zion: 46,48,76,84,87,122.

Royal Psalms: 2,18,20,21,45,72,101,

110,132,144.

Salvation Hist.: 78,105-7,135,136.

Acrostic: 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145.

Structure of Declaratory Praise

Psalm 30

1) Exhortation, Proclamation

This opening praise takes up the vow to praise which concludes a lament.

1a) I will extol you, O Lord,
(4) *Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name).*

2) Introductory Summary

The reason for the praise is often introduced in summary fashion

1b) for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me. 2) O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. 3) O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit. (5) *For his anger is but for a moment; his favour is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning).*

3) Looking back at a time of need

The dire straights of the psalmist are recalled in order to highlight for the listeners the extraordinary gift that was given to the psalmist. Their function is to intensify the joy and praise that the hearers are called to share with the psalmist.

(Sapiential Reflections)

6) As for me, I said in my prosperity, "I shall never be moved." 7) By your favour, O Lord, you had established me as a strong mountain; you hid your face; I was dismayed. 8) To you, O Lord, I cried, and to the Lord I made supplication: 9) "What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness? 10) Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me! O Lord, be my helper!

4) Report of Deliverance

The acts of God that have transformed the lament of the psalmist into praise are here recounted. This is the "confession proper" of the psalmist.

11) You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, 12) so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.

5) Renewed vow of praise

The return to praising God at the end of the psalm emphasizing the fundamental thrust of this form of prayer, namely to bring others into the joy of praising God's beauty and power.

O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

The Structure of Descriptive Praise

- 1) The call to praise
- 2) Reason for praise
- 3) Description of God's majesty
 - a) in creation (Creator)

(Praise may break in throughout)

 - b) in history (Exodus)

Out of compassion, God turns from majesty in order to enter into the life of Israel.

(Sapiential reflections)
- 4) Description of God's goodness
 - a) God saves (Exodus)
 - b) God preserves (Recreation)
- 5) Concluding call to praise

Psalm 33

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous. Praise befits the upright. 2) Praise the Lord with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings. 3) Sing to him a new song; play skilfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

4) For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. 5) He loves righteousness and justice;

the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.

6) By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses. 8) Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe. For the Lord spoke; it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

10) The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. 11) The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the thoughts of his heart of all generations...

13) The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all humankind.

14) From where he sits enthroned he watches all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds. 16) A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength... 18) Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, to deliver their soul from death

and to keep them alive in famine.

20) Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

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