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The Laments of Integrity An investigation of Psalms 17, 101, and 26

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Introduction

This paper originally had the working title of "Psalms You Can't Use," reflecting a natural tendency among theologians to internally edit the revelation of the Scriptures so that our personal "working copy" would include and elevate only those portions which support our own (or our denomination's) doctrinal position; while at the same time diminishing those portions which give us difficulty. Since this tendency is natural within any church body, this paper is the result of a challenge to "go against the grain" and intentionally take on a portion of Scripture that on its face, we would just as soon avoid because of its contrary sound to our Lutheran ears.

My small contribution to this effort to face without fear that which would trouble the traditional Lutheran doctrinal waters is before you: an investigation of three Psalms that, on first impression, sound incredibly self-righteous, seemingly touting the Psalmist's own moral living to the exclusion of any thought of sinful depravity and our absolute inability to produce anything considered righteous or meritorious in the sight of God.

Each Psalm states a basis for the Psalmist's appeal of integrity, i.e., a reason why he should have some sort of standing before Yahweh. Each appeal is constructed around one word that summarizes the appeal. Psalm 17 bases its appeal on righteousness, or that which Yahweh requires to be acceptable to him. Psalm 101 is a song to integrity, or blamelessness, the lack of any transgression or impurity. In Psalm 26, the Psalmist addresses Yahweh the Judge and challenges him to find a verdict of innocence, or no basis for any charges of wrongdoing

against him. These three appeals (righteousness, integrity, and innocence) form the basis of this paper.

The goal is simple: to demonstrate how these three Psalms can (and should) be brought back into our "working copy" of the Scriptures, and no longer excluded from consideration like some strange uncle who must be allowed his place at the family dinner table, simply because they are included in the Psalter. We can do better, and we need not look any further than the texts themselves.

Examples to follow and model

Similar attempts to recover certain seemingly offensive portions of Scripture have been successfully offered in recent years. Ingvar Floysvik, in his dissertation on the Psalms of complaint; W. E. Peals, with his treatise on the "God of vengeance," as well as W. E. Zenger's offering on a similar tack have already shown that Biblical scholars are now more willing to visit these difficult texts and gain from them an expanded view of the heart of Yahweh that is still consistent with the more familiar texts.

In that same spirit of discovery, I will use the traditional tools of exegesis to analyze three Psalms – 17, 101, and 26 – that have fallen out of favor and usage in recent times, and ask the same questions and seek the same answers. Where are the apparent misstatements or inconsistencies in these Psalms that would cause them to be put on the shelf, removed from our working Bible and seldom used? How should these inconsistencies be addressed and resolved? What is the best "recovered use" of these Psalms in the worship and devotional life of the Church of Jesus Christ? Finally, how can the Church best promote the re-inclusion of these texts as she teaches and confesses the one true faith?

Due to the need for brevity, a limited approach to discussing these Psalms will be taken. Some of the limitations of this work are as follows:

1) I will assume that the Masoretic Text as published in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (4th edition)* (BHS) is reliable.

2) Textual variants (including those offered by the LXX) will not be discussed except when a consideration of the translation options they present enhances a particular point in the discussion.

3) Most importantly, this paper takes the point of view that has been regaining its prominence in Biblical scholarship of late, which could be referred to as a post-Gunkel return to a revelatory view of the Hebrew Scriptures.[1]

The post-Gunkel view

Twentieth century Biblical scholarship, especially with regard to the Old Testament, has been dominated by the views of Hermann Gunkel as expressed in his seminal work *Die Psalmen*. Gunkel was willing to view the Psalms primarily in terms of their cultural heritage as well as their ability to address the *Sitz im Leben*, or the "setting in life" of both author and audience. While not an unacceptable method for pursuing the historical setting and historical meaning of the Psalms, Gunkel's approach tended to ignore the Psalms as divine revelation, authored by Yahweh Himself through the Psalmists. Gunkel did not support the position that the Psalms were Yahweh's means of revealing Himself, His thoughts, and His message of rescue and recovery to His fallen creation. Allowing for a divine component in the production and understanding of the Psalms quickly became a casualty of modernism, the philosophy driven by the premise that any divine explanation for any phenomena is unenlightened and inferior. In the late 20th century the pendulum began to swing back to the recognition and reconsideration of the shortcomings of a modernist view. A renewed assertion emerged that divine

[1] One example of this recent (1996) swing of the interpretive pendulum is summarized by J. Clinton McCann in his introduction to the book of Psalms in *The New Interpreter's Bible.*

and revelatory books could not be properly understood if one had to eliminate their divine element in both authorship and impact. This paper embraces the view that there is a divine Author and purpose in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that these writings as the means through which Yahweh revealed who He is and how He works, first to His nation, and then to the world. One can therefore expect that a holy and righteous God would speak with a consistent voice.

Acceptance of divine revelation and its impact on reading difficult Psalms

My approach, then, is to find the consistent voice of Yahweh in the midst of apparent inconsistencies in the language and tone of these three Psalms. This consistent voice is found in the consistent "defining words" in the Hebrew Scriptures, words that reflect the very character of Yahweh: righteousness, steadfast love ("mercy"), justice, truth, integrity, and their result: the Psalmist's own personal "rightness" which flows from his faith in Yahweh as the source of all that is right, just, and true.

Structure of this paper

I will present my own annotated translation of each Psalm and then explore (in the theology section) how the structure of the Psalm leads the reader directly to the message the Psalmist set out to convey: the revelation of Yahweh and His dealings with his people. In the process, the reasons for the erroneous conclusions that flow from a lack of understanding of the structures of Hebrew poetry will become readily apparent.

A basic understanding of Hebrew poetic structure (where the central thought is positioned in the center of the poem) will prove to be an essential key to seeing each Psalm as it was meant to be seen. Seeing Yahweh as author and Psalmist as receiving His Word is the necessary step to shift the perspective away from the previous approaches of modernity-driven thought.

I will then synthesize the three views from each Psalm into a more comprehensive view of what these "inconsistent" Psalms reveal about the consistency of Yahweh. Finally I will look at these Psalms as a pastor of a Lutheran congregation and a proclaimer of Yahweh's message, examining how these Psalms may be recovered as part of the devotional life of the Church.

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Psalm 17: Translation

1) A prayer of David.

Hear, Yahweh: Righteousness!

Hearken to my cry;
Give ear to my prayer,
(which is) not with lips of deceit.

2) From your presence may my verdict go forth;
may your eyes see it correctly.

3) You tested my heart;
You examined (it) in the night;
You tried me;
and you will find nothing.

I have resolved: my mouth will not transgress!

4) As for the doings of men,
by the word of your lips
I myself have guarded
(against) the ways of the violent.

5) Hold fast my steps in your paths;
Have not been shaken, my footsteps.

6) I, yes I, cry to you,
for you will answer me, O God;

Extend your ear to me;
Hear my utterances.

7) Show marvelously your mercies,
You who save those seeking refuge
from those raising themselves up, by your right hand.

8) Guard over me as the darling of (your) eye;
In the shadow of your wings you will hide me

9) from the presence of the wicked,
who do me violence;
enemies of my very being,
(who) surround me.

10) Their fatness has closed (them) off;
(with) their mouths they speak in pride.

11) Our steps, now they surround us;
Their eyes, they set to cast (us) to the ground.

12) His appearance is
like a lion, who longs to tear his prey;
like a young lion, crouching in concealed places.

13) Arise, O Yahweh!
Confront his face!
Make him bow!

Deliver my life
from the wicked (by) your sword!
14) from men (by) your hand, O Yahweh;
from men who are of the transient world
(whose) portion is in (this) life.

(From) your treasure you fill their belly,
they are satisfied (with) children
and they deposit their excess for their (own) infants.

15) (But) I, in righteousness, will behold your face;
I will be satisfied in awakening (with) your likeness.

Psalm 17: Translation Notes

Title: תפלה, "prayer"; the double-emphatic (here and in v.1) stresses the urgency and specificity of the prayer, as opposed to a "general" prayer. This is a prayer born of specific circumstances, the details of which we can only infer.

v.1) The BHS apparatus shows that both ancient and modern translators were uncomfortable with leaving צדק ("righteousness") unmodified. Leupold suggests צדק is a one-word urgent prayer, which is my choice here[2] (cf. Habakkuk 1:2, "violence!").

בלא demonstrates the "circumstantial" use of a ב prepositional prefix, i.e., this prayer is not offered "deceitfully," but in circumstances of true urgency.[3]

v. 2) מישרים (rectitude, or "straightness" – the root is ישר), is a judicial and wisdom word meaning "a fair and equitable decision." It is commonly used in combination with משפט and צדק to describe Yahweh's justice as "righteous and upright." Parallel examples in the Psalter are found at Ps. 9:8, 58:1, 75:2, 96:10, 98:9, and 99:4.

v. 3) The imperfect verb "you will find" after three perfects ("you tested," "you examined," "you tried") implies that this is the predicted result of the actions taken in the perfect verbs. It may also include the expectation that the result will

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[2] Leupold, *Exposition of Psalms,* p. 155.
[3] Waltke & O'Connor 11.2.5d, p. 196ff.

never change.[4] In light of verse 15's conclusion, Kidner also takes the progression of the verbs as the indication of a sleepless night for the Psalmist!

v. 4) Use of the non-specific words פעל ("deeds/doings") and פריץ ("violent ones") conveys a general climate where evil behavior is the norm.

v. 5) תמך is pointed as an infinitive absolute, here used as a substitute for an imperative. The niphal of מוט may be rendered as either a middle perfect ("My footsteps do not stumble") or more likely as a passive perfect, which would be the result intended from the opening infinitive-as-imperative: "My footsteps are not made to stumble." This is the more difficult reading and follows the tone and pattern of the Psalm up to this point: imperative appeals, and a confident statement of result (usually as an imperfect read as a jussive) from those appeals.

v. 6) הט־אָזְנְךָ "Extend your ear" is from the hiphil imperative of נטה used modally, i.e., "you should" or "you must" extend.[5]

v. 7) Many manuscripts as well as the Targums prefer הפלא "show marvelous, show surpassing" over BHS הפלה "show separateness, show distinction." On the other hand, the participle noun מושיע "the one who saves" following the hiphil imperative could indicate a vocative, and מן could be both comparative as well as prepositional, emphasizing the distinction called for in the

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[4] Kidner, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary,* p. 87.

verb as rendered in BHS. Either approach is preferable, but I chose the footnote because of the stronger element of contrast.

v. 8) The idiomatic term of endearment "apple of your eye" is also found at Deut 32:10 (the song of Moses). The feminine בת in the MT (BHS would dismiss it as a gloss) could simply be a feminine emphatic of the idiom; hence my rendering of "daughter" or "darling of your eye." It could also be a poetic replacement for the 2ms pronominal suffix that is found in Proverbs 7:2.

v. 9) The last verb is the hiphil of נקף, "to surround," and possibly another modal use of the hiphil expressing the determination and desire of the enemies who continually wish to surround the Psalmist.

v. 10) יזלבמו "their fat" has multiple metaphorical possibilities. Fat is the "stuff of offerings" (starting with Abel's in Genesis 4:4). In the Psalms the word becomes a synonym for richness and luxury (63:5; 147:14) and from there it develops a negative connotation of excess, similar to its use in English. The source of this particular idiom appears to be the same as Psalm 73:7, יָצָא מֵחֵלֶב עֵינֵמוֹ, literally, "their eye from fat goes out."[6] This explains the interpretive jump often taken when translating this "fat" idiom as "callous."

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[5] Waltke & O'Connor suggest this as the preferred translation of hiphil imperatives whose roots do not naturally occur in the hiphil.

[6] Waltke & O'Connor (p. 25 fn72) make a convincing argument that by typographically extending the *yod* into a *waw* one gets עונמו "their iniquity from fat," which may well be the source of the idiom of "fat" as a hindrance. See also Psalm 119:70, "callous (fattened) hearts").

גאוּת "majesty," is also used as "pride" in the sense of physical appearance (as in "bulging" or "bursting"), but the term itself is value-neutral. It is used of God (Ps. 93:1) but also of the "surging" sea (Ps. 89:9) and "billows" of smoke (Is. 9:18). This helps clarify that the "fatness" in the first half of the verse is meant to be derogatory. The context implies an arrogant edge, and the LXX takes that tack as well.

v. 11) נטוֹת "stretch out" is used here as an infinitive construct with the ל "prefix of purpose" which communicates the end result of the plot in v. 10: that the Psalmist is the victim being "spread out" when he is cast headlong to the ground.

v. 12) One final description of the enemy: a lion in hiding, waiting to attack (an image akin to 1 Peter 5:8).

v. 13) The verb root קדמ "confront" is derived from the noun describing the "front," or the "East" (sunrise, the "front" of the day). The verb is found only in the piel.

כרע "bend the knee" or "bow" is found here as a hiphil imperative (make him, cause him to bow!) and is the only occurrence of that form in the MT.

פלט, "deliver" is used often in the Psalms with Yahweh as the subject. The hiphil is intransitive, and the piel (found here) becomes causative as well as transitive (cf: 22:5, 22:9, 31:2, 37:40, 71:2, 82:4, 91:14). In the Psalter the verb is

often, as in this verse, matched with a מן preposition (18:44, 18:49, 37:40, 43:1, and 71:4).

v. 14) The BHS apparatus marks the entire first line of text as corrupt (this is consistent with the LXX position that the end of v. 13 is really the beginning of v. 14). This is very possible, since the first "corrupt" part of v. 14 has no verb; these are additional prepositional phrases that modify the verb "deliver." The *waw* that is the first letter of the second line of the text serves as a "paragraph marker" to indicate a change of perspective, where Yahweh is now being addressed parenthetically instead of directly.

v. 15) **אני** ("I," the first-person emphatic particle) is used here as a strong conversive that sets off the concluding statement of the Psalm. The ending cohortative forms express confidence in contrast to the "excesses" of the previous verse.

תמונתך "your form," or "likeness" has a generic use, e.g. the shadowy figure in Job 4:16, but its specialized use is found in Numbers 12:8 where Moses is distinguished as one who saw the תמנת יהוה, the "form of Yahweh," and spoke to Him "face to face" (ESV: "mouth to mouth").

Psalm 17: Structure and Theology

The Appeal of Righteousness

The immediate difficulty

The most immediate problem that confronts the reader of Psalm 17 is this: whose righteousness is the Psalmist appealing to? Is the Psalmist indeed touting his own deceit-free lips (v. 1) and how he has apparently "passed inspection" (v. 3)? Add to this his sincere repudiation of the amoral enemies (v. 4-5) and he seems to have everything necessary to go into the court of Yahweh and receive a verdict of "righteous."

Allowing the structure to communicate the theology

If we were to read this Psalm as a traditional English poem where the theme is strongly stated in the initial words, we might be tempted to conclude that the Psalmist is presenting his own case. However, following a simple structural approach that looks to the center of the poem as the location of the Psalm's primary message, the reader is led to a different conclusion:

v. 1-2) The appeal of righteousness
3) The evidence of righteousness
4) The contrast with the wicked
5-6) The struggle of righteous living among the wicked
7) The source of righteousness: Yahweh's mercy
8) The position of righteousness: Yahweh as guardian
9-10) the culture of the wicked in my midst
11-12) The strategy of the wicked
13-14a) The victory and deliverance of righteous Yahweh
14b-15) Epilogue: the temporal satisfaction of the wicked (full bellies);
the permanent satisfaction of the righteous (Yahweh's face)

Even in a traditional English literary approach the message of the Psalm is not focused on the Psalmist and his own righteousness. The Psalm breaks down as follows:

1-6) The Psalmist and his righteousness bring struggle in the face of his enemies.
7-15) Yahweh and His righteousness bring deliverance to the Psalmist in the face of his enemies.

The theology of Psalm 17 is driven by the initial, open-ended cry in its first line: "Righteousness!" We must resist the impulse to follow the examples of copyists and translators who insist on filling in the void. Instead, we should let this isolated word communicate as intended.

Based on the pronominal suffixes in the text, the direction and the source of the appeal is unmistakable. The Psalmist is indeed building a case for himself, and attempts to use Yahweh himself as his star witness. Using the familiar three-fold emphasis to state his case in the strongest possible terms, one can nearly hear the Psalmist pounding his fist on the table before Yahweh: "You tested; you examined; you tried me, and you came up empty." The appeal seems to be gaining momentum as the Psalmist shifts his perspective outward, using the behavior of "the violent" to bolster his case.

The first word of verse 5, however, puts an abrupt end to the apparent motive of self-congratulation and starts us toward the center of the Psalm, where we find out that self-righteousness was never the theme, nor the intent, of this

prayer. The infinitive absolute of תמך puts us in another "open-ended" interpretive position. Who is holding whose feet in whose paths? Far from being grammatically trivial, this is the Psalmist's way of telling us to shift our focus elsewhere, namely to the center. And in the center of the Psalm we discover that we have come to all the wrong conclusions. The cry of the Psalmist has not been a demand for verification of his own efforts at righteousness. It never was! The evidence is not only in the second-person verbs that dominate the action in the Psalm, but also in the words in the center, words reserved in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe the essence of Yahweh and the essence of his work: your mercies; your saving; your refuge; by your right hand, the location of your power.

Verse 8 immediately confirms the result of the *power* of what only Yahweh can do by describing the *position* of the one who is the object of that power, the Psalmist himself. In describing himself with the same term of endearment used of Israel in the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, the Psalmist personalizes the work of Yahweh and sees himself as a member of the broader community. Israel's story is my story, says the Psalmist, because Israel's God is my God.

That special relationship of "Savior and saved" becomes the theme that takes us out from the center of the Psalm and into its application to all who have centered their identity in the mercies and saving work of Yahweh. It is presented in the imagery of being "surrounded." As my enemies "surround" me (v. 9), and as

they themselves are "surrounded" by the "fatness" of their own excesses, they threaten my own steps of dependence on Yahweh. As their lion-like presence draws closer and closer, Yahweh himself must rise up and intervene. The forces of "this world" are forced into submission to the God of Israel. Yahweh delivers to his dear children, the darlings of his eye, a "surrounding" of his own origin and design. They are surrounded by his wings of protection that provide a hiding place from the wicked enemies.

Finally, the Psalmist is left with this "us and them" comparison: The wicked can only satisfy themselves with their own excesses; fatness yields only overweight children who follow in the self-indulgent ways of their parents. The recipient of Yahweh's righteousness, however, lives in a universe that goes beyond himself and his own selfish desires. His satisfaction is found in nothing less than beholding the very face of Yahweh. No longer fearing his own death for beholding the face of God, the possessor of righteousness finds himself in Yahweh's very presence. This righteousness, this "right-ness" can only originate in Yahweh himself, who grants an audience in his presence. This Psalm is far from being an exercise in self-importance and self-indulgence; the appeal to righteousness can only be based on the source of all that is righteous, Yahweh himself, the only righteous God.

Psalm 101: Translation

Of David; a Psalm.

1) (Of) steadfast love and justice I will sing;
To you, O Yahweh, I will make music.

2) I will pay close attention to the way of integrity;
When will you come to me?

I will walk in the integrity of my heart
in the middle of my house.

3) I will not place before my eyes (any)thing corrupt.
The doings of those who fall away I hate.
It will not adhere to me.

4) A crooked heart will turn away from me;
Evil I will not be intimate with.

5) (As to) the one who slanders in secret his neighbor,
him will I exterminate.
(As to) the one lofty of eyes and proud of heart,
him will I not endure.

6) My eyes (are) on the faithful ones of the land
that they may dwell with me.
(The one) walking in the way of integrity
he will minister to me.

7) He will not dwell in the middle of my house – (he) who does deceit.
The speaker of falsehoods will not be established in front of my eyes.

8) Each morning I will exterminate
all the wicked of the land;
That I may cut off from the City of Yahweh
all the evildoers.

Psalm 101: Translation Notes

v. 1) Both verbs in the couplet end with an added ה which indicates the imperfect should be translated as a cohortative of intention – "I intend to" sing of your love and justice.

v. 2) A precise definition of שׂכל, "give attention to," is elusive. It occurs most often in the hiphil or pointed as a segolate noun meaning "prudence" or "insight."[7] The implication is one of conscious or deliberative wisdom, as opposed to instinctive or inborn wisdom (cf: Gen 48:12-14 where Jacob *intentionally* reverses his hands when blessing Ephraim and Manasseh). The word is also used of Daniel (Daniel 1:4) when he is described as "skillful in wisdom" (KJV).

In the Psalms שׂכל is exclusively used to convey contemplative thought of both good and evil people.[8] שׂכל helps the reader better understand תמים, "integrity," as discussed below under "Theology."

דרך־תמים, "blameless way" occurs in the Psalms at 18:30; 18:32; 101:2; 101:6; 119:1. This construct is used in contrast to the "way of wickedness," cf: Deut 32:4, Prov 11:5, Prov 28:10, Prov 28:18.

v. 3) The "blameless way" of v. 2 is contrasted here with בליעל, a compound word meaning "without worth." Usage suggests it is "worthless" in the sense of

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[7] Brown-Driver-Briggs.

"destructive" or "leading to ruin," as opposed to economic or practical lack of value. The word is rendered often in Proverbs as "corrupt." Also see Jdgs 19:22, Jdgs 20:13, (the "worthless men" who raped the Levite's concubine), and 1 Sam 2:12 (describing Eli's sons).

Most lexicons and LXX believe that סטים is a copyist error and should be, in fact, שׂטים, the 3mp of the hollow verb שׂוט, "to swerve or veer away."

v.4) The imperfect of סור "turn away" also reads well as a jussive of desire, "may a crooked heart turn away," while עקשׁ, "twisted" or "crooked" or "perverse," serves as the antonym of תמם here and at Prov 10:9, 11:20, 19:1, 28:6, and 28:18.

v. 5 מלוּשני is a poel participle, a rare form indicating "occupation" or "activity." It is a poetic denominative form of לשׁון, "tongue," literally "tonguing" or derogatory speech. The form is a *hapax*, but see Prov 30:10 "slander" where the same idea is communicated with a hiphil verb.

אצמית is the poetic 1cs of צמת, "to bring to a final end" with no further activity or existence. With two exceptions (18:40 and 69:1), when this verb is found in the Psalms, Yahweh is the subject.

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[8] See Psalms 2:10; 14:2; 32:8; 36:3; 41:1; 64:9 ("ponder"); 94:8; 106:7; 119:99; also in Proverbs 1:3 ("prudent").

גבה "lofty" is used of Yahweh in 138:6, but is meant to be taken negatively when used of people (Ps 131:1; Is 3:16; Prov 16:5; Ecc 7:8).

לא אוכל, literally, "I am not able," is a rare intransitive use of יכל (i.e., without a companion infinitive) which may be the reason for the *sureq* replacing the *yod* in the text.[9]

v. 6) The niphal participle of אמן "be faithful" is best rendered as a passive that is understood as a stative, i.e., those who are already qualified to be in fellowship with Yahweh. The construct chain is clearly marked with a *maqqeph*.

v. 7) In contrast to the "faithful ones" of v. 6, רמיה is translated as a poetic "wisdom word" meaning "deceit" when used of speech, tongues (v. 5), and lips (Ps. 32:2; 52:2; 78:57; 120:2-3). However, it means "lax" or "lazy" when speaking of hands or work (Prov 10:4; 12:24).

v. 8) The only two references to the "City of Yahweh" in the Psalms are here and in 48:8.

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[9] Waltke & O'Connor para 31:4b, and footnote 26, suggest a "modal" use with an English infinitive, similar to 13:4 and 129:2. See also Ps. 18:38 and 36:12, "able to rise" and 40:12, "able to look up." In the present case, the infinitive is only implied, similar to the English "I just can't...."; there is only one other attestation of this intransitive use, in Isaiah 1:13.

Psalm 101: Structure and Theology

The Appeal of Integrity

The Immediate Concern and an Immediate Answer

"I will walk in my integrity," declares the Psalmist in 101:2. Such claims of personal integrity cause immediate concern to the Lutheran mind, indeed to any Biblical believer with a proper understanding of fallen human nature and how that nature is devoid of any internal remedy to our fallen state. But arrogance alone on the part of the Psalmist is not what really troubles us here. Rather, it is the apparent ascription of so many divine abilities and attitudes by the Psalmist to himself. For example, the ability to see secret thoughts and the condition of the heart (v. 5), or the ability to judge one's "faithfulness" (v. 6) as well as the working of retribution upon the wicked (v. 8) certainly require the Psalmist to take quite a bit into his own hands.

Two correctives come to light when studying the text: The first is to allow for the possibility that this Psalm is actually a dialogue between Yahweh and David; the second is a careful investigation of the concept of "integrity" as expressed by the Hebrew root תמם and its cognates. The "dialogue" explanation is reflected in the following presentation of the Psalm's structure. Common thematic elements are underlined.

Part 1: David speaks

v. 1) A I will sing Yahweh's song: mercy and justice.
v. 2) B I will walk in integrity of heart in the middle of my house.
v. 3) C I will not place before my eyes those who fall away.
v. 4) D Crooked hearts, I turn away and will not be intimate.

Part 2: Yahweh responds

v. 5) D' Proud hearts, I exterminate and will not endure.
v. 6) C' My eyes are on the faithful ones, who dwell with me.
v. 7) B' The speakers of falsehood will not dwell in the middle of my house.
v. 8) A' I will cleanse Yahweh's city: where justice cuts off the wicked.

Or antiphonally,
(1) David: I will sing Yahweh's song.
(8) Yahweh: I will cleanse Yahweh's City.
(2) David: I will walk in my house in integrity.
(7) Yahweh: Men of deceit will not dwell with me in my house.
(3) David: Not before my eyes: the unfaithful.
(6) Yahweh: My eyes are on the faithful.
(4) David: Crooked hearts, I turn away.
(5) Yahweh: Proud hearts, I will not endure.

Viewing the Psalm as dialogue

The position that the Psalmist has not simply written a hymn to himself and his own personal blamelessness comes from matching attributes and abilities with those who are able to fulfill them. Divine work can only originate with the Divine. This "balance" of reality is seen in the "balanced" structure of the Psalm (four verses for David and four for Yahweh).

The general concept of a "dual message" or "dual messengers" has its support in the literature. Derek Kidner,[10] while not seeing this Psalm as a true dialogue, is still willing to see in David's "desire for a clean (civil) administration" both a "desire stated" and a "reality fulfilled," a fulfillment which may only come in the Messiah himself. Leslie Allen[11] also recognizes "two divisions" in the Psalm, which he labels "the King's personal standard" and "those for his people." Only John S. Kselman[12] clearly embraces the idea that this Psalm is a "dialogue between king and deity," giving credit to Helen Kenik for the original idea.[13] My rendering of the dialogue generally follows Kselman's outline of 1) the king's protestations of innocence and 2) the divine oracle, but the expansion of the basic idea is largely my own.

<u>David's claims (v. 1-4)</u>

The first line is vital to properly seeing David's perspective. The first indicator is the "character words" that have always been clearly connected to Yahweh, "mercy and justice," חֶסֶד־וּמִשְׁפָּט. The second is in the clear direction of the song: לְךָ יְהוָה "<u>to</u> You, O Yahweh." What the Psalmist will say about himself is now set into a song <u>to</u> Yahweh that is <u>about</u> Yahweh. Having these

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[10] Kidner, *Psalms 73-150* pp. 357-358
[11] Allen, *Psalms 101-150,* pp. 1-7.
[12] Kselman, "Psalm 101: Royal Confession and Divine Oracle", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (JSOT) 33 (1985) 45-62.

guides in place tells us that David is willing to redirect the spotlight even before we get into the body of the Psalm.

From there David speaks of the values he has adopted: integrity of heart and the repudiation of what is false and destructive. David must reject what is not consistent with the God of truth, rightness, and straightness; therefore, he must part company with the false, faithless, and crooked.

Yahweh's response (v. 5-8)

Where David can only express agreement, Yahweh is ready to respond with action, as he does justice by exterminating the slanderers and not putting up with the faithless. Yahweh will "clean house" of all the agents of lies and deceit. He not only tears down the wicked, but he builds up those who follow his way of integrity, placing them into his service. The City of Yahweh will undergo a transformation of its population: from faithless to faithful, lies to truth, crooked to straight.

The prominence of "integrity" as an interpretive key

The *Theologisches Worterbuch zum Alten Testament* (TWAT) provides the best capsule summary toward understanding the verb root תמם and its cognates. It is part of a word group that defies any simple or unilateral approach to its meaning and usage. According to the *TWAT*, the usage of תמם follows two distinct

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[13] Helen Kenik, "Code of Conduct for a King: Psalm 101", *Journal of Biblical Literature* (JBL) 95 (1976), pp. 391-403.

definitional lines depending on whether the word is used as a verb or as a noun/adjective.

The verb occurrences in the MT (*TWAT* cites 64, of which 54 are in Qal) are limited to the finite and physical world, the world of empirical measurement. The bare definition of the verb is "to bring to closure or completion" in the sense of fulfilled requirements; every step has been followed and no short-cuts have been taken. The verb is used in plowing and planting, where one plows "to the end of the row" and one harvests every single ear. A useful English parallel might be "coming full circle."

It is in its noun/adjective form, though, that תמם proves to be more than "integrity" defined solely by high standards. The word is a wisdom word meant to reflect a spiritual reality. Simply put, תמם is a summary word for "the things that please Yahweh," based on what He has said will please Him, in both a ceremonial sense as well as in one's standing before Him. The word is used if people (Noah, in Gen. 6:9, Abraham in Gen 17:1), the Passover lamb (Ex 12:5), sacrificial animals in general ("without blemish" 15 times in Leviticus), the works of God (Deut 32:4), the way of God, (2 Sam 22:31) and how he has made David's way the same (22:33). Yahweh uses this word whenever someone or something reflects himself in its character, truthfulness, or moral nature. It is a "passing grade" of the highest caliber.

תמם is often expressed negatively as the absence of blemish (e.g., "spotless," and "faultless"). When stated positively there are not enough adjectives to complete the picture. תמם is pure, right, true, and loving to the highest degree. Or as the *TWAT* itself states, it is *vollstandig*, an all-encompassing wholeness of soul and spirit.

"Integrity" in this sense is something only God can bring about, something He does through His mercy and His justice. The Psalmist, then, can only receive this "wholeness" of God through the means and methods which God has designated (here, the sacrifices of the Temple), and can only respond by living out the "wholeness" he has received: hating evil as Yahweh hates it, avoiding the company of faithless men, and establishing his own "community of the whole ones" who live to express this gift that Yahweh has given them. David sees his own life as a parallel to the conquest of Joshua: driving out evil, replacing it with the way of Yahweh, and establishing righteousness in the land.

This is not mere imitation; it is transformation of the kind that Yahweh seeks to build into his people through what is offered in His house, the work of the Temple that brings the saving acts of God to bear on His people.

Psalm 26: Translation

Of David.

(the Psalmist's view of himself)
1) Judge me, O Yahweh!
For certainly I, in my innocence, walk;
and in Yahweh I trust.
I will not be unstable.
2) Examine me, O Yahweh; and test me!
Try by fire my innermost being and my heart.

(the Psalmist looks to Yahweh as the source of his confidence)
3) For your steadfast love (is) in front of my eyes;
thus, I will walk continually in your truth.

(The Psalmist contrasts himself with his enemies)
4) I do not sit with men of emptiness,
and with secret-keepers I do not enter.
5) I hate the assembly of those who cause evil,
and with the criminals I will not sit.

(The Psalmist proclaims the source of his innocence: Yahweh's altar)
6) I will wash in guiltlessness my hands
and will go around your altar, O Yahweh,
7) proclaiming with the voice of thanksgiving
and recounting all your countless deeds.
8) O Yahweh, I love the shelter of your house
and the place where resides your glory.

(the Psalmist again abhors his enemies)
9) Do not combine with sinners, my soul
and with men of blood, my life,
10) which in their hands (are) evil plans,
and their right hand is full of bribe(s).

(the Psalmist sees himself as a part of Yahweh's people)
11) But I, in my innocence, will walk;
ransom me and be gracious (to) me!
12) My foot stands in a level place;
among those assembling I will bless Yahweh!

Psalm 26: Translation Notes

v. 1) I have elected to render בתמי as "in my innocence" (instead of "in my integrity"), which would be the more general use) because the context supports a more judicial understanding of integrity. The emphasis is not on the state of being blameless, per se. It is on the result of that blameless state being applied to a test or a response to a charge where the Psalmist expects to be exonerated.

מעד, "wavering" is better rendered as "unstable," or the perpetual instability of something that by nature is on an unsound base or is out of balance. In the Psalms the word is used metaphorically and poetically; e.g., unsteady feet (18:36, 37:31) or in a broader sense, the effect of any unstable source (69:23).[14]

v. 2) The triple-emphatic (examine – test – refine) combined with the double focus of the examination (inner parts and heart) communicates the Psalmist's desire for the highest level of scrutiny to be used upon himself.

בחן in the imperative (examine, prove, test) is an appeal of reliability and verifiability; used of words (i.e., a promise) in Gen 42:1-6 (Joseph's brothers' promise to return with Benjamin), and of gold in Job 23:10 and Prov 17:3.

נסה in general, is to "test or try." It is found exclusively in the piel and is also found exclusively in one of two settings: either where Yahweh is the "one

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[14] Waltke & O'Connor cites this verse as an example of a perfect-perfect-imperfect verb progression (I walk, I trust, I will not be unstable) communicating a specific result at an unspecified time in the future

who tests," or Yahweh is the "one who is tested." The situation in which the word is used determines which meaning to apply.

When Yahweh is the one who tests, the purpose of his test is to verify the intent of the heart (Hezekiah's in 2 Chron 32:31; Israel's in Deut 8:2 and 16) or more directly, to see if the person or nation tested will follow Yahweh's directions and do what he tells them to do (e.g., Abraham, in Gen 22:1 regarding the sacrifice of Isaac; Israel, regarding gathering the manna at Ex 16:4). Yahweh also sends other nations against Israel to see if they will "stay in the way" and follow his commands (Judges 2:22 and 3:4).

When Yahweh is the one tested, it is quite a different story. Here נסה indicates a testing of Yahweh's patience, such as by the arguments over the water at Massah and Meriba ("testing and quarreling") in Ex 17 that gave the site its names. This testing of Yahweh is tantamount to disobedience (Num 14:22), unbelief (Ps 95:8-9) and giving in to one's cravings and desires (Ps 106:14). It is a repetitive negative theme in Psalm 78 (at 18, 41, and 56).

The use of נסה in Psalm 26 is of the first type. The Psalmist invites Yahweh to verify the intent of his heart, to see how well he "follows directions." The reason for such confidence is not revealed until vs. 6-8.

(para 31.6.2b, p. 512).

צרף is "to smelt, refine, or remove the dross" (Is 41:7, Jer 6:29, and as a participle noun at Jer 51:17). It is used adjectivally to describe God's words in Psalm 18:30 and 119:140.

v. 3) The hithpael form is the causative-passive-reflexive, or a verb "personally enacted."[15] When this form is applied to הלך it communicates an ongoing, continuous, and repetitive expression of what is in the heart, as enabled by Yahweh's steadfast love and truth.

v. 4) מתי־שוא is a poetic construct, "men of emptiness," meaning lives that are characterized by an absence of truth, substance, or purpose. It is used in Ez 13:6-9, and also Ps 12:3; 144:6, 11 ("mouths full of lies"); 31:6 ("worthless") 41:6 ("false") and 127:1 (those who labor "in vain"). It is often used in tandem with הבל, the "vanity" word of Qoheleth.

נעלמים is the niphal plural participle of עלם, "to conceal." The niphal renders it in a reflexive sense, "concealing to oneself," or keeping a secret.

v. 5) מרעים is a hiphil plural participle of רעע ("do evil") while רשעים is used of criminals or those who are guilty of committing crimes (40 times in the Psalms, e.g. 1:1, 5, 6 and 37:14, 16, 17, 20, 28, 34, 38).

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[15] C. L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, p. 227ff.

v.6) אסבבה (with its paragogic ה suffix) expresses a jussive of desire, i.e., "I wish to be around" your altar.

v. 7) Each colon begins with a ל of purpose, making this line a concluding statement (concluding verses 4-7, which all begin with first-person verbs). לְשַׁמְּעַ is a hiphil infinitive participle also conveying result, that the Psalmist will "cause to hear," or "proclaim" his thanksgiving. The final phrase of the verse is not so much quantitative (counting Yahweh's countless deeds) as it is qualitative (recounting Yahweh's marvelous and astonishing deeds).

v. 9) אל with the imperfect is a negative jussive, a desire for an action <u>not</u> to happen. אסף is used to indicate a gathering or a union/reunion with a larger group (cf: Num 12:14 where Miriam is allowed to rejoin the camp after her leprosy, and Num 31:2 where Moses is told he will be gathered to his people upon his death).

"Men of blood" (ESV/NIV "bloodthirsty men") is also found in the Psalter at 59:2 and 139:19, there implying an unmerited or unjustified desire for vengeance.

v. 10) The "right hand," the source of their power, is from ill-gotten means, and is an extension of the bloodlust from the previous verse.

v. 11) Two imperatives (Ransom me! Grace me!) complete the Psalmist's appeal. פדה (ransom, redeem, buy back) is historically rooted in Deut 9:26 (the rescue from Egypt) and in Ps 49:8, which intensifies the context to imply a life-saving act. וחנני, "favor me" implies an inequitable result, where the terms of the "ransoming" are not perceived as fair.

v. 12) מישׁור, "a level place," (1 Kings 20:23 and 25) is usually used in a military context as a reference to the best place to do battle; a literal "table-land" or the plains, as opposed to the mountains. It is a place of stable footing. מקהל is the participle of קהל, "to assemble" or the "great assembly," the great congregation gathered for worship (Ex 35:1). The ב preposition puts the Psalmist "in" or "among" the worshippers, one of "those assembling," and not just an observer. See also Ps 68:27.

Psalm 26: Structure and Theology

The Appeal of Innocence, or "Integrity Applied and Enacted"

Introduction: The source of the appeal

As we saw in Psalm 101, the noun/adjective forms of תמים are broad in their definitional scope, arguably as broad as the character of Yahweh himself. Psalm 26 clearly brings this out, taking the concept of integrity or blamelessness and framing it in a practical package. It is only a start to know how "whole" one are. The natural extension would be to bring that wholeness to bear on everyday life, and that is what happens here. When integrity is applied to life, one walks in *innocence*. The state of innocence becomes the basis for the Psalmist's appeal as he explains *why* he should be allowed to be in Yahweh's presence. It follows, then, that this "innocence" must be verified by appealing to its source, which is exactly the path down which the Psalmist wishes to lead us.

Outline and structure

This Psalm resists a strict chiastic structure while still drawing our attention to the center. The Psalmist accomplishes this through a trialogue between himself, his enemies, and Yahweh that revolves around the topics of innocence, the assembly of the unrighteous, and Yahweh's altar, as follows:

A. Innocence
    B. Separation from the unrighteous assembly
        C. Altar
    B'. Separation from the unrighteous assembly
A'. Innocence

A unique feature of this Psalm is the extra phrase (verse 3) that is a necessary "outside interpolater" that disrupts the Psalm's natural flow and symmetry, as follows:

v. 1-2) A. The Psalmist proclaims his own innocence.
v. 3) A.(i) Innocence which is born in Yahweh's steadfast love and truth.

v. 4-5) B. The Psalmist separates himself from the unrighteous assembly.

v. 6-8) C. The source of innocence: the altar in the house of Yahweh.

v. 9-10) B'. The Psalmist will not join with the assembly of "men of blood."

v. 11-12) A'. The Psalmist lives out his innocence in the assembly of the righteous.

A bold appeal

While many may see David's boldness (Judge me! Examine me!) as inappropriate when addressing Yahweh, it still piques our curiosity and prompts the question: What is his reason for such boldness? The answer comes from common sense; one dare not make such bold appeals unless one is already sure of the answer!

David takes no risks here. His appeal is indeed grounded in the steadfast love and the truth (v. 3) that is found only in the intervention of Yahweh (signified

by the asymmetrical departure from what would otherwise be a balanced text). And as we head closer to the center of the Psalm and the heart of the matter, that is exactly what we find. Mercy and truth, the "intervention" of Yahweh for the Psalmist, have a location.

The Psalm first takes us on a "movement away" – away from men of "emptiness and secrets" so we can then join him in the "movement toward" the source of the claim of innocence, where this "wholeness" is found: the altar in the house of Yahweh. Here we are washed. Here we express our thanks as we recount the saving work of a God who is in the continual business of providing innocence to his people through the shedding of blood on his altar.

Innocence does not begin with our appeal. Yahweh, instead, takes us to the place where innocence is not only found but accomplished. The altar in the house of Yahweh is not only at the center of the Psalm; it is the true center not only of his presence, but of his verdict. Because of his altar, we have innocence. It is no surprise that David wishes to circle around it continually, and that he loves the shelter of this house. It is the place where Yahweh's glory dwells, for it is the place where his atoning work, the reason why we can claim our innocence, is done.

As the Psalmist moves out from the altar, he encounters the "real world" – a "world of blood" in a different sense, blood that is shed in anger and murder, blood that remains on the hands of the unrighteous. The Psalmist's reaction to these

enemies flows from his cleansed status: "I have no need of this, or of them." My "walk" is now level and secure, and my "assembly" is now with those who have also visited the altar and been given what I have also received: blamelessness and wholeness, enacted and accomplished in the atoning sacrifice.

The "walk around the altar" is the start of the redeemed reality of the Psalmist and the certainty of his claim of innocence. In the text's movement away from the altar (vs. 9-12), there are now positive words of embracing the redeemed reality, just as there were negative words of the repudiation of the unrighteous previously. An important shift from first person to second has occurred; from "I do not" and "I hate" (vs. 4-5) to "do not combine my soul with sinners" (vs. 9-10) and "ransom me and be gracious to me" (v. 11).

Such a re-orientation from "what I do to avoid unrighteousness" to "what you (God) do so I can live in <u>your</u> righteousness" is how the Psalm teaches us as to what the visit to the altar has done. It has effected not just a change in behavior, but a revelation as to the source from where the ability to live "righteously" has always been. This reorientation (or, according to the prepositions, a relocation) is the essence of what is usually called "the walk of faith." This is what the righteous life not only looks like, but where it comes from. It is a life and conduct that is transformed by that visit to the altar that has set life in a "second person" and not a "first person" mode. I now walk in an innocence and integrity granted <u>to</u> me; I find

myself standing in a level place, and in a new assembly of those who have also been brought to this point. The only proper response is to join with them in praising Yahweh, for any claim of self-righteousness has been effectively redirected to the altar, where Yahweh's true righteousness is found.

Theology in Summary: The Lessons From the Appeals of Integrity

Lutheran theology is often accused of forcing a result from a textual study, and getting the text's "peg" to conform to our Lutheran "hole." In reality, the study of these three Psalms that appear to be pillars of works righteousness is the ideal place to see Lutheran theology at its best. Here, Lutheran thinking acts as a control that prevents readers of Scripture from going into unbiblical waters in their interpretation. When "saved by grace through faith and not of works" is part of one's interpretive framework, it actually allows one to anticipate the new ways in which God's truth may be expressed and recognized, precisely because our understanding of Scripture has been normed in such a way that we know where we cannot go. And in that sense, these Psalms do not disappoint in their ability to further open our eyes to the mysteries of properly understanding the redeeming work of Yahweh as he chooses to reveal it to us.

The story of each of these Psalms is a story of changed presuppositions by a changed perspective. Just when we are about to jump to the wrong conclusion, the text takes us on a "perspective shift" that gets our eyes back on the truth so we can then move out with a renewed sense that all we are and have is the sole result of Yahweh's intervention and work.

Since the wrong reading of each Psalm is caused by an immediate impression, the practical lesson from these Psalms is to "read further, and read

deeper." These Psalms support the idea that God prefers not to be a God of first impressions alone. To truly know him will take time and effort. For example, to use creation as the revelation of God is a good start, but only a start. God reveals himself most fully in the depths of both our experience and his revelation. Similarly, these Psalms instruct us that it is in the depth of the text where the true revelation is found.

While the initial reading of these Psalms may lead us to believe that there is another basis for our righteousness before God, that very misconception becomes the means through which God leads us to see the depths of his righteousness all the more clearly. Each Psalm eventually brings us to the same unavoidable point. The appeal of integrity always takes us away from ourselves, just as the Psalmist cannot continue referring only to himself from start to finish. All of the "my's" and "I's" must give way to the "you" and the "yours." Each Psalm moves from a false initial assumption to a rejection or repudiation of that assumption, to the discovery of where "true" righteousness or integrity is to be found. From there the Psalm moves outward and back into the real world of the Psalmist's enemies, but with the Psalmist now prepared to live beyond and apart from them.

The friction point in the process always occurs when one is confronted with the words reserved for Yahweh. Every appeal, in fact, is built upon the words that Yahweh claims for himself. Even if the Psalmist does not initially make the

connection, by the end of the Psalm he cannot help but do so. These words are defined by the character and actions of Yahweh. These words exist to reflect Yahweh's nature, even when we mistakenly try to claim his words as the result of our own efforts.

Common threads and themes

Very often the appeal is expressed negatively by the example of the wicked. The Psalmist sets himself up in contrast to those bloodthirsty mockers intent on both his and even their own destruction. The validity of the appeal is often a function of the current situation. "They" are bent on falsehood, which is happening right now. The Psalmist leads us to see that Yahweh is concerned with the present as well. The Psalms do not speak of punishments deferred to some future time in hellfire. Yahweh is the God of the present; present blessings as well as present curses.

This idea of Yahweh's immediate presence and concern is actually first seen in what some might see as the short sighted view of the appeal (bless me now, because I'm living righteously now, and punish them now because they are wicked now). No, the status of the wicked is permanent, as shown by the participle nouns that describe each group. Their actions are the result of their inborn character and not the result of a momentary thing. The deep-seated mature of wickedness leads

to the proper basis of the appeal to the deep-seated inborn character of Yahweh. His righteousness, just like the nature of evil, is a permanent thing.

The revelation to David is also one of permanence, that what is true for the group of all who trust in Yahweh is also true for him. His is not a "sinner today and forgiven tomorrow" type of existence. As expressed in Psalm 26, the life of the believer is a continuous and ongoing trip around the altar, similar to the "life of repentance" that Luther promotes in the first of his 95 Theses. It is not "spot" forgiveness (deed-by-deed); it is, to borrow a term from the appliance world, a forgiveness of "continuous clean," the reality of the altar continuing one even after one leaves the temple.

This realization then works its way out to all of life, including the daily reality where the enemies still attack and the sinful nature still makes its presence known. The solution is found textually in "going back to the center," the discovery of where true righteousness and innocence is to be found. In the Psalmist's life, that center of life is found in the manifestation of Yahweh in his Word and the presence of Yahweh in the ceremonial structures of the temple. Having been to the center (both poetically and literally) Psalmist is prepared to head back out into the wicked world.

Each appeal also becomes a vehicle for Yahweh to express himself in a new and different way, which only serves to broaden our mental image of the expanse

of his forgiveness. The shed blood on the altar, the "wings" of his protection, the city or community of the righteous, all become part of the collection of images available to us to understand the comprehensive reconciliation that Yahweh has brought into our existence.

So how does one rightly read these Psalms? The following suggestions are geared more to the person in the pew and the Sunday morning Bible class member, for that is also where some basic principles can be taught, received, and applied for the total health of the congregation. The excitement over understanding a difficult Scripture can be contagious.

This is done first by re-asserting that Yahweh has not changed, and his consistency is a tool of interpretation. He deals with His people, with the wicked, and with our sin in an unchanging manner. Even in the pre-figurement mode of the Old Testament, the nature of sinful humanity, the problems brought by sin (separation, uncleanness, and distance) and the solutions revealed in the worship life of Israel (inclusion, cleansing, and intimacy) remain as anchors that prevent us from jumping to the wrong conclusions.

Second, understanding is found in the willingness to accept approaches to reading the Psalms that do not follow traditional western linear thinking. The foundational assertions upon which current interpretive rules are fashioned need to be expanded upon. In other words, the "this is so" of explaining revealed truth

needs more outlets of expression. Based on the subject Psalms, these approaches need to include presenting the possibility of dialogue (Psalm 101), temple imagery (Psalm 26), and the "search for the source in the center" (Psalm 17) as additional tools for interpretation. This is poetry, after all, so a precise statement of doctrine will not be found. But it will be alluded to, hinted at, and suggested. The teacher then can build a bridge from the Psalm's expression of the truth to the truth itself.

The assertion of God's creativity within God's consistency, or seeing the printed Word as a dynamic expression of its unchanging Author, is also of benefit to the teacher. Rather than fearing that we will discover a dissonant view of Yahweh, we should expect a result similar to that of the Psalmist: I didn't think I would find you *here*. Our current thinking can be allowed to expand to include new expressions of Yahweh's work and gifts. We can then show the parallels between the Psalmist's life and our own. We are still dependent on Yahweh to properly define the experiences of life for us and to set for us his own "points of entry" where Yahweh reveals to us where he is to be found. As it was through the temple, it is now through the temple incarnate, Jesus Christ. The need for entry, cleansing, discourse, and strength for the day are as needed today as they were in ancient times. The examples of these Psalms are given not to frustrate us, but to encourage us on to a deeper and richer encounter with the God who never ceases to instruct us in the ways he speaks our language.

Concluding thoughts

Far from being embarrassing exceptions to the whole of Biblical theology, these three appeals, once properly explained, provide a working model that demonstrates what Luther expressed in his explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe that Jesus Christ… has redeemed me… that I may be his own… and live under Him in his kingdom…" King David expressed the same truth in these Psalms. When the focus is on Yahweh and not self (as it always should be), his gracious attitude and actions toward me prepare me all the more for a life of dependence on and service to Him. To come to any other conclusion is to miss the vital message of these supposedly self-glorifying Psalms: that God has redeemed me to serve him in "righteousness, innocence, and blessedness" which is God's Scriptural definition of true integrity.

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