

THE PSALMS AND THE LIFE OF FAITH: Walter Brueggemann

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1. Psalms & the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function

Hermann Gunkel: Fivefold classification.

Sitz im Leben

Hymns = Sigmund Mowinckel - festival hypothesis.

Laments = Hans Schmidt - in the Temple.

But let's follow Ricoeur = human organism struggles to maintain equilibrium.

So: a sequence of ***Orientation - Disorientation - Reorientation***

Psalms of Orientation:

Descriptive Hymns. Creation Psalms & Retributive Justice Psalms

A naïveté without realism or criticism.

Psalms of Disorientation:

Psalms of Lament. - The Pit beckons. Wild animals abound.

Cf. Freud acknowledges that you must be in the pit before life. Abandon pretence.

Psalms of Reorientation:

Songs of Celebration. Enthronement, Covenant, Zion festival.

Doxology. It is a new naïveté but this time honed in the reality of the Pit.

New coherence.

A Language Event:

(Compare in NT: 1. Proverb 2. Eschatological saying 3. Parable.)

In both cases, the final "Reorientation" phase evokes as well as rehearses.

Cf. Exile and Homecoming.

2. The Psalms as Prayer

Prayer must be spoken not just thought. Spoken to an identifiable Thou (You).

cf. Buber, "Life never begins in I, but always Thou."

Yahweh is the Thou who characteristically does Wonders.

Yahweh's wondrous deeds are 1. Israel's life and 2. Creation's functions.

His wonders subvert our knowledge and power arrangements and destabilise us.

Astonishment.

Israel uses "language of relatedness" about this experience of God.

The power of his wonderful deeds are expressed not in domination but

Righteousness = *sedaqa*; Faithfulness = *amuna*; Steadfast Love = *hesed*.

Taken from God's self-revelation of his wonders to transform chaos into order.

Israel prays Yahweh's character back to God. Be this God! In both Praise & Petition.

"For the sake of your steadfast Love..." not for my sake or goodness but yours.

Doxology is irrational trust that *Hesed* is greater than guilt and death.

The laments do not "shield" God (assuming him to be no God) but try to force his hand!

Psalm 88 holds God accountable and expects him to act.

Praise of God is initiator of obedience.

Theodicy: The Psalms wait and trust even beyond prayer and obedience.

Why do sinful prosper? No answer, but Israel must trust more than it can see.

“But for me it is good to be near God.” Ps 73. Nothing else desired but Thou.

This language of relatedness is the world of a conversation with Yahweh. Cf. Covenant.

3. cf. Mighty Acts of Jesus which similarly respond to the voices which “Cry out” as in the Psalms of Lament. So, the blind, demon-possessed, Peter, Lord, save me.

Isaiah 65:25 “Before they call, I will answer.” = confidence in God.

4. Psalms give a **Formfulness of Grief**: allow it to be expressed whilst at same time containing its scope. Psychologists talk of a pattern in grief which is commensurate with the Lament Psalms.

Denial; Humiliation; Bargaining; Depression; Acceptance.

But there are also dissimilarities: Israel practices covenant not denial.

Expectant petition not depression; form centres on intervention.

5. The Costly Loss of Lament:

Without lament we lose the following:

1. Genuine covenant interaction.
2. Stifles of the question of Theodicy. Addressed to God against neighbour and against God!

6. Praise and the Psalms: A Politics of Glad Abandonment.

Praise is a Liturgical Act. It moves off into another realm of consciousness.

Praise is a Poetic Act. An Audacious Act. (Tells God how wonderful he must be)

Praise is an act of basic trust: it abandons self.

Yet, It is a knowing act: it is a self assertion..

As doxology it is opposite from self-assertion.

It dismisses rival claims. It's a polemical act.

It's political: it denies other forms of power & authority. Therefore subversive.

It is an evangelistic act. Ultimately, it is useless. Not a means but an end in itself.

Church is “Humanity at Praise”. [cf jazz, rooted in Xn slave culture]

cont...

PART TWO:

7. Prayer as an Act of Daring Dance:

If God is immutable, then all depends in the relationship upon human being acting and not God, which is heresy. God in OT is a ‘Free Partner’.

Prayer is a way of participating in the covenantal dance.

The main thing is not the prayer but the covenant.
David prays [2Sam7:18f] as if in charge.
Hezekiah [Is37:16f] prays in panic.
Jacob [Gen32:9f] prays that God will deliver him as promised.
Moses [Num11:11f] prayer tantrum takes Israel's part against God.
So prayer is not so predictable and obvious but dynamic.

8. Bible and Pastoral Care

Covenant God is he who can make things new. We don't make it on our own.
He holds tight and gives us hope. We listen and obediently answer.
We are allowed to rage and protest, and grieve. And praise buoyantly.
Receive our identity from the Other. We believe his vow & nothing else can threaten.

9. Abraham and Sarah: Impossibility & Epistemology: [Gen 18:1f]

At first Abraham is hectically the host. Then v9 only "dialogue of waiting".
Anticipated reality is different from known world.
Songs of impossibility: Miriam, "Who is like you O Lord", Jeremiah,
incomparability of God.
Radical impossibility trajectories onto the NT. See Luke 1.
Birth of liberator, John Baptist & Magnificat recital of impossibilities.
Mk 10:27 For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.
Faith size of mustard seed,
This may seem like a blank cheque for exploitative Christians, but NT shows how this
impossibility is possible. *Resurrection only after crucifixion.*
Who decides what is then possible?
Politics is the art of the possible; religion helps decide what is possible.
Technological rationality [Marcuse] leaves us one dimensional. But the real impossible lies
elsewhere. What is thinkable? Sociology of the impossible.
Sarah laughed then, but eventually laughed happily.

10. The Psalms as Canon:

Psalms 1 = Torah Faith portrayed blessed person. No Torah then you are blown away.
So participate in the community of obedience.
Psalm 150 = unfettered Praise.
This can mean 1. Only the obedient can praise. 2. Obedience overcome by praise.

Cf Jesus asked how to inherit eternal life: he answers
1. Obey Law 2. Sell everything in overwhelming praise
From willing duty to utter delight..
Be candid about suffering and grateful about hope and obedience turns to praise.
Between Psalm 1 and 150 are the realistic laments in Hesed faith. [Ps73 is fault line]
Theodicy never answered, enough to be in God's presence.
Israel has nowhere else to go with his lament but back to God.

Chapters 11 following:
particular Psalms are tackled.

13. Psalm 109. Steadfast Love as Social Solidarity [cf. +Roger]

Prayer of trust and petition addressed to God in vociferous terms.

The problems of the speaker are not hidden from God. If our liturgies are thus censored how real is God to us?

Such a sense of injustice does concern Yahweh. This Psalm is a bold act of faith.

These areas of our life are screened out from God and are increasingly autonomous.

The Psalm invites us to rethink our class commitments.

It recognises that vengeance is an urgent agenda in our society.

The Psalm does not ask for supernatural intervention but due process of law in society.

We prefer a bible that does not address these feelings and injustices that create them.

Without this voice, we end with a protected religion.

1. Hesed as social solidarity is just expectation of the poor.
2. Absence of solidarity with poor brings rage.
3. This social rage eventually taken to Yahweh, ultimate agent of justice.