Psalm Study between 1955 and 1969

In the last decade or so great strides have been made in all fields of Biblical studies and the number of books and articles which have contributed to Psalm study during the last fifteen years, is very considerable. The publications discussed in this brief outline form but a selection from an extensive and varied literature. The untranslated works of foreign authors are referred to only when they have made a very significant contribution, or when they have been of a special interest to a wide range of readers. The year 1955 as the starting point of our review is an arbitrary choice dictated by the scope and length of this summary, and it has no particular significance, although the publication of A. R. Johnson's *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (see below) was an important event in our field of scholarship. The relevant literature can be grouped into two main groups: (a) commentaries on the whole Psalter or parts of it; (b) general introductions to the Book of Psalms, studies on certain themes, and translations and texts of the Psalms.

The first commentary to appear within the set period was *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. iv: *Psalms, Proverbs*, (Abingdon—Cokesbury Press and Nelson, 1955). It seems unfortunate that this whole series is greatly encumbered with the provision of the English text in both the King James and the Revised Standard Versions; it adds considerably to the price of the respective volumes but comparatively little to the actual value of the commentaries themselves. Furthermore, each volume contains not only an exegesis of the particular book but also a homiletic exposition (often quite interesting and helpful), the two being practically unrelated and produced by different authors; thus, metaphorically, the right hand may not always know what the left is doing. The more valuable part of the Psalm Commentary is made up by the separate introductions to each individual psalm, and by the exegetical notes. W. S. McCullough has dealt with 45 psalms, while W. R. Taylor has discussed the remainder; both have taken into account recent scholarship but their individual evaluations of recent theories are not always identical.

In 1957 there appeared L. A. F. Le Mat's *Textual Criticism and Exegesis of Psalm XXXVI. A Contribution to the Study of the Hebrew Book of Psalms* (Kemink and Zoon). This volume offers not only a detailed study of Ps. 36 but also a tentative contribution to the
Psalm study as a whole, especially to the discussion on Psalm titles and the identity of the "Evildoers" in the Psalms, who are regarded as the enemies of the king.

One of the most important recent publications in our field is the monumental German commentary (in two volumes, comprising some 1,100 pages) by Hans-Joachim Kraus, entitled *Psalmen (Biblischer Kommentar. Altes Testament)*, XV. Neukirchener Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1958-60; second edition in 1962). This work is a most worthy successor to such outstanding commentaries as those by A. F. Kirkpatrick (The Book of Psalms, Cambridge Bible, 1902), H. Gunkel (Die Psalmen, Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament, 1929; fifth edition 1968), E. Podechard (Le Psautier, vol. i, 1949; vol. ii, 1954), and others. Kraus has provided his readers with a wealth of up-to-date information; there is a comprehensive general introduction to the Psalter dealing with the usual introductory topics while in the commentary itself the author offers a new translation of each psalm, followed by textual notes, an excellent introduction to each poem in which he treats the questions of metre, psalm type, its life setting, etc., and a balanced, careful exegesis. The commentary contains also a number of special studies on various relevant themes, such as the Enemies of the Individual, the Cultic Traditions of Jerusalem, Kingship and Cult in Jerusalem, etc., as well as a most extensive bibliography. Kraus has wisely avoided unnecessary textual emendations so characteristic of many earlier commentaries, and he has made a cautious use of the Ugaritic material which contrasts greatly with Mitchell Dahood's approach to Hebrew poetry (see below). Kraus is critical of some aspects of Mowinckel's work, and the festival of Yahweh's Enthronement appears to him untenable. He emphasizes the complexity of Israel's cultic life and history, and gives due weight to the significance of the Davidic dynasty and Jerusalem. Considering everything, this commentary of Kraus seems to be the best all-round exegetical work available.

A welcome addition to the increasing number of commentaries is A. B. Rhodes' *Psalms* (Layman's Bible Commentaries, S.C.M., 1961). The series as a whole is designed to provide a concise, non-technical guide for the layman, and this particular volume has definitely fulfilled its set task. The author shows knowledge of recent scholarly research although space forbids any documentation and a more detailed discussion. A similar type of work is C. S. Rodd's *Psalms 1-72* and *Psalms 73-150* (Epworth Preacher's Commentaries, Epworth Press, 1963-4). This commentary is slightly more detailed than that by A. B. Rhodes but the lexical and textual notes are cut to the minimum, and the exegesis is concise. The author has succeeded fairly well in showing what the different psalms meant to the people of the Old Testament times, and what their relevance is to our contemporary situation. Clearly, a commentary of such a limited size is deficient in some respects but, on the other hand, its usefulness to the preacher and the general reader will be great. At this point some mention might be
made of A. Deissler's German commentary, *Die Psalmen* (a paperback edition in 3 vols., Patmos Verlag, 1963-5) which offers a fresh treatment of the Psalter, and provides a wealth of information. The comments on the individual psalms are divided into four sections: textual problems, introductory questions (type, date, life setting), brief, scholarly exegesis and the Christian significance of the psalm.

A far more sizable contribution is A. Weiser's *The Psalms: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library, S.C.M., 1962) based on the fifth revised German edition of 1959. It has an extensive general introduction (some eighty pages) dealing mainly with the classification of the psalms and their cultic interpretation. The author is sceptical of the existence of a pre-exilic festival of Yahweh's Enthronement, such as reconstructed by Mowinckel; in his view the great Autumnal festival was essentially a Covenant festival, uniquely Israelite in origin and nature, which provided the cultic setting for many psalms of the Old Testament, and which exercised, in his opinion, a profound influence upon most later traditions and institutions. He argues that the Covenant feast of Yahweh was basically a cultic drama "in the course of which the fundamental events in the history of man's salvation were re-enacted" (*op. cit.*, p. 28). The final aim of these celebrations was "the renewal of the Sinai Covenant and of the salvation promised" (*Ibid.*). The German editions of this commentary have Weiser's own rendering of the psalms but its English translation uses the R.S.V. except in cases where the author's rendering differs materially from that of the R.S.V., the change being indicated in the footnotes. Weiser's commentary may well be regarded as one of the best recent works on the Psalter, available in English, but its treatment is primarily theological; therefore it needs to be supplemented by some such work as that of A. F. Kirkpatrick (*The Book of Psalms*), W. E. Barnes (*The Psalms*, Westminster Commentaries, 1931), or any other similar but more recent exegetical commentary. An excellent but very concise exegesis of the Psalter is provided by G. W. Anderson in the new edition of *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (Nelson, 1962), edited by M. Black and H. H. Rowley. In spite of the limited space, the author offers a very satisfactory outline of most psalms and of their main problems.

A valuable study on one particular psalm is E. R Dalglish's *Psalm Fifty-One: in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism* (E. J. Brill, 1962). Of great value is the detailed exegesis of the psalm, and the quotations from the comparative material derived from various Egyptian and Sumero-Accadian sources. The author assigns Ps. 51 to the late pre-exilic period, and he believes that it was intended for the use of the king, or on his behalf. A more popular work but none the less competent, is N. H. Snaith's *The Seven Psalms* (Epworth Press, 1964) which deals with the so-called Penitential psalms (Pss. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143), and each psalm is expounded in its turn. This book is mainly intended for the general reader but it contains a fair amount of interesting textual and philological details. The exposition is usually related to the present-day problems.
We may note also the paperback edition of Fleming James' *Thirty Psalmists: Personalities of the Psalter* (The Seabury Press, 1965; originally published in 1938) which contains a rather popular exposition of certain selected psalms, and J. R. S. Stott's *The Canticles and Selected Psalms* (The Prayer Book Commentaries, Hodder and Stoughton, 1966) which offers a devotional treatment of some fifty psalms; little notice is taken of contemporary scholarship although the author often cites such exeggetes of the past as Delitzsch, Kirkpatrick, Spurgeon, and others.

A major but controversial contribution to Psalm study is Mitchell Dahood's *Psalms I (1-50) and Psalms II (51-100)* in the Anchor Bible Series (Doubleday, 1966 and 1968 respectively). These two volumes cannot be described as a conventional commentary although the Anchor Bible “is aimed at the general reader with no special formal training in biblical studies” (so the General editors of the series). Dahood who is a well-known and eminent Ugaritic scholar, has produced an ingenious but slightly dubious translation of the psalms, and the commentary itself consists mainly of detailed philological notes based largely on the findings in the field of Ugaritic studies. This is clearly an extremely important recent development but its exact contribution is not infrequently disputed. Dahood suggests numerous textual alterations; most of them are very stimulating but a large proportion of them may be of doubtful value and may not find a general acceptance. On the whole, Dahood has a low opinion of the Masoretic tradition and of the value of the ancient versions. He is convinced that “the reverence of the Masoretes for the consonantal text outstripped their knowledge of archaic Hebrew poetry” (op. cit., p. xxii) and that the versions “have relatively little to offer toward a better understanding of the difficult texts” (op. cit., p. xxiv). Among other things, he finds in the Psalter a frequent reference to the concept of immortality and to a Hebrew version of the Elysian Fields. It is possible that some psalmists may have envisaged something like immortality, such as that implied by the Enoch and Elijah episodes, but it is questionable whether such a concept, if it existed, was widely held, or whether it exercised any significant influence upon the development of the Israelite beliefs concerning the afterlife. This commentary is obviously of great interest to the scholar but its usefulness to the preacher and the general reader seems rather limited.

The most recent exegetical work of importance is J. H. Eaton's *Psalms: Introduction and Commentary* (Torch Bible Commentaries, S.C.M., 1967), and it can be regarded as the best short commentary on the Psalter, and as the best buy. Its 317 pages are packed with valuable information, and give a good reflection of modern scholarship. The author is particularly influenced by Mowinckel's cult functional approach and A. R. Johnson's views on Israelite sacral kingship, but he is not afraid to exercise his own judgment. Eaton attempts to relate most psalms to Christian faith, with a noticeable Christological emphasis.
We may conclude this section of our paper with two minor contributions. L. Griffith has written a devotional study of 21 psalms, entitled *God in Man's Experience* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1968). Much of the exposition is done by means of various illustrations derived from diverse literary sources, and its purpose is to show what these psalms may mean to some people. A similar devotional treatment is offered by J. H. Scammon in his *Living with the Psalms* (The Judson Press, 1967) who deals with ten psalms (Pss. 8, 23, 24, 34, 44, 51, 73, 97, 110 and 139). The author is acquainted with recent scholarly work, and a number of his varied quotations may prove useful to the preacher.

Next we shall turn to the more general introductions to the Psalter, and to other specific studies. The most outstanding work must surely be Sigmund Mowinckel’s *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (two vols., Blackwell, 1962). These two volumes could well be described as a summary of Mowinckel’s lifelong work on the Psalter, which began in 1921 with the publication of the first volume of his *Psalmenstudien* (reprinted in 1961). The present work is an indispensable and truly comprehensive introduction to the Book of Psalms; it is based on a revised edition of the author’s earlier publication *Oftersang og Sangoffer* (H. Aschehoug & Co., 1951), and it deals with practically all aspects of the Psalter. It is impossible to give a brief and adequate précis of this erudite and compact work; one could, however, point out that this study is essentially based on form criticism and cult functional approach, consequently the author argues that the great majority of psalms are cultic in origin and their usage. As can be expected, Mowinckel attaches a great importance to the reconstruction of the autumn New Year festival in which the enthronement of Yahweh formed the focal point. That such an Israelite festival actually existed in the pre-exilic period, and that it was equivalent to, or formed part of, the Feast of Tabernacles is probable although there is no clear and explicit mention of it in the literature of the monarchical period. It is, however, far more difficult to suggest the actual form and nature of this rediscovered festival, and it is unlikely that Mowinckel’s reconstruction is right in all its details. Nevertheless, his suggestions have provided a very useful approach to the interpretation of the Psalter. In these two volumes Mowinckel has reviewed practically every important problem related to Psalm studies, and he has given his readers a most able, scholarly treatment of them.

It is nearly an anticlimax to turn from Mowinckel’s colossal work to the much smaller and more popular general introductions to the Psalter, yet in so far as they serve a real need, they deserve at least some mention. Four of such publications are much the same and cover, more or less, the same ground; they are C. F. Barth’s informative and scholarly *Introduction to the Psalms* (Blackwell, 1966), Violet Wilkinson’s delightful and fresh treatment, *Israel’s Praise: a Study of the Psalms* (Oxford University Press, 1967), R. B. Y. Scott’s well-balanced discussion, *The Psalms as Christian Praise* (World Christian Books,
No. 24, Lutterworth Press, 1958), and G. S. Gunn's *Singers of Israel* (Bible Guides, No. 10, Lutterworth Press, 1963) which is more concerned with the theological contents of the psalms. In some ways similar but a more extensive volume is P. Drijvers' *The Psalms: Their Structure and Meaning* (Burns and Oates, 1965). This interesting work is by a Roman Catholic scholar who follows in the tradition of Gunkel, and examines the meaning and structure of the psalms in the light of their literary types and life settings. Apart from the standard introductory topics, he reviews also the religious significance of the Psalter by dealing with such themes as Covenant, Suffering, Sin, Messianic Expectations, etc.

H. H. Guthrie in *Israel's Sacred Songs* (The Seabury Press, 1966) and D. Anders-Richards in *The Drama of the Psalms* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968) examine recent scholarship on the psalms, and offer brief summaries of some of the more important contributions. Both authors help to understand the complex cultic situation which formed the setting of the Psalter, and the problems involved. They do not add, however, anything that is essentially new. Guthrie's volume is the more detailed and sizable of the two; it contains some interesting features and a fairly unusual presentation of material. It is also well documented.

A more notable study is C. Westermann's *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (Epworth Press, 1966); the original German edition appeared in 1953. Westermann is questioning the cult functional approach, of which the most illustrious representative is Mowinckel, and he recognizes only two basic psalm types: Laments and Psalms of Praise. The latter group is further divided into Declarative Psalms of Praise (=Thanksgiving Psalms) which are concerned with specific acts of God, and Descriptive Psalms of Praise (=Hymns) which deal with the nature and being of God in general. Westermann regards all other psalm types as derived from the two basic categories or Gattungen. Another point of interest is the fact that the author considers the so-called Enthronement psalms as dependent upon Deutero-Isaiah (similarly also Kraus), and not vice versa (as argued by Mowinckel).

A more specific but less inspiring contribution is made by K. R. Crim in his study, *The Royal Psalms* (John Knox Press, 1962). He gives a brief exposition of Pss. 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 144 and 2 Sam. 23.1-7, and he follows Kraus in arguing that there was an annual festival in Jerusalem which celebrated the election of David and the choice of Mount Zion, and that this festival was the life setting or Sitz im Leben of the Royal psalms in which the central figure is the king.

An outstanding work in our field is the collection of essays edited by R. de Langhe, entitled *Le Psautier: Ses origines. Ses problèmes littéraires. Son influence* (Editions Nauwelaerts, 1962). The title of this volume well indicates its scope, and the contributors include such scholars as J. Coppens who discusses various psalm types, E. Lipinski who deals with the interpretation of the so-called Enthronement
psalms, and others.

Further we should note certain studies which examine particular themes or subjects, and by far the most original work in this field is A. R. Johnson's *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (University of Wales Press, 1955; second edition in 1967). This book is a detailed and most careful study of all the psalms which celebrate the kingship of Yahweh, and of the Royal psalms. Some of the points of particular interest are the special emphasis upon the role of the king in the Israelite cult and the sacral (not divine) nature of the kingship, the probable influences of the Jebusite cult of the "Most High" and of their royal-priestly order of Melchizedek, the reconstruction of the dramatic ritual of the great Autumnal festival, etc.

H. Ringgren has published a non-technical but scholarly work on the subject of Old Testament messianic hope (*The Messiah in the Old Testament*, S.C.M., 1956), and he points out its Christian significance. For our purpose of particular value are the chapters dealing with the Royal psalms (such as Pss. 2, 45, 72, 110, 132) and what he calls the "Servant psalms" (e.g. Pss. 22, 69, 71, 86, 116, 118). Another book by the same author is *The Faith of the Psalmists* (S.C.M. Greenbacks, 1963) in which we find a brief but competent outline of the work done on the Psalter since the time of Hermann Gunkel, the modern pioneer in Psalm study. In the main part of the book Ringgren illustrates the faith of the psalmists by means of eight themes (the Concept of God, the Righteous and the Wicked, Lament and Confession, Thanksgiving and Praise, the Law and the Messiah, etc.), and he has produced an excellent introduction to the religious concepts found in the Book of Psalms. It is a very readable work, and a most useful tool for the preacher and student. Similar in nature is G. S. Gunn's *God in the Psalms* (Saint Andrew Press, 1956) which is primarily a discussion of certain theological topics, such as the Hebrew idea of God, the Divine control of history, the Divine conflict with evil, etc.

To be recommended also is C. S. Lewis' *Reflections on the Psalms* (Fontana Books, 505R, 1961; first published by Geoffrey Bles, 1958). This is a popular but brilliant work, dealing honestly with a number of perplexing problems raised by certain psalms, such as judgment, cursings, death, etc. The author has not solved all the difficulties by any means, but he has definitely helped towards the appreciation of the Psalter.

The identity of the "Evildoers" in the psalms has been the subject of many scholarly articles and volumes, and among the more recent publications we may note H. Birkeland's *The Evildoers in the Book of Psalms* (J. Dybwad, 1955) who attempts to show that these workers of evil are to be regarded as foreigners or Jewish collaborators with the national enemies. G. W. Anderson (*Enemies and Evildoers in the Book of Psalms*, The John Rylands Library, 1965) has offered us a short, authoritative summary of the debate on this same subject, dealing with the views of Smend, Rahlfs, Gunkel, Mowinckel, Birkeland, and others. He rightly warns us to avoid both overstatements and an inflexible
approach, and he suggests that we must "allow for a wide range of interpretation, taking in the assaults of national enemies, the bane of illness in national leader or private individual, the potent word of slander or derision, and a variety of cultic acts and situations" (op. cit., p. 29).

Closely related to our review is also R. E. Clements' masterly study of the development of the conception of Yahweh's presence in Israel, and of the continuing effort at its interpretation and re-interpretation. His book, *God and Temple, The Idea of the Divine Presence in Ancient Israel* (Blackwell, 1965) is essentially an inquiry "into the meaning and theological significance of the Jerusalem temple as a witness to the presence of God in Ancient Israel" (op. cit., p. ix), and in the course of his argument he offers brief, illuminating exegesis and valuable comments on many psalm passages.

A concise, sensitive study on the problem of suffering, is provided by E. Jones in his little volume, *The Cross in the Psalms* (Independent Press, 1963). He discusses some 30 psalms which, to a greater or lesser extent, contribute towards the understanding of the experience of suffering in the Psalter. In the author's view the insights found in the psalms "foreshadow the full revelation that the purpose of God has in store" (op. cit., p. 92). This book is a thoughtful work and based on up-to-date scholarship.

Several writers have tried to relate the psalms to Christian thought and worship, and here we must mention T. Worden's *The Psalms are Christian Prayer* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1961) which helps to treat the Psalter as a Christian prayer book, and in particular J. A. Lamb's *The Psalms in Christian Worship* (Faith Press, 1962). Dr. Lamb is an expert on liturgy, and he has given his readers an accurate and comprehensive account of the use of the psalms both in Jewish and Christian circles. His book may be described as a truly authoritative work on the history of the liturgical use of the Psalter, and herein lies its great contribution.

Of first rate importance and indispensable to Psalm study is the excellent volume of H. H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel* (S.P.C.K., 1967). The author's name is a sufficient recommendation to this erudite contribution, and we need only to remark that of particular significance to our subject is the chapter on "Psalmody and Music", while the rest of the book depicts the Israelite cultic life and its background. Equally valuable but less comprehensive is *Worship in Israel* (Blackwell, 1966) by H.-J. Kraus. It is concerned mainly with the cultic institutions of Israel, and surveys the different views on this subject, starting with Wellhausen and finishing with von Rad and other contemporary scholars. Mowinckel's hypothesis of an Enthronement festival of Yahweh receives a severe criticism.

We should note also some of the recent translations of the psalms. One of the most inspiring modern versions of the Psalter is *The Psalms: A New Translation* (Fontana Books, 868R, 1963) and its parallel edition, *The Psalms: A New Translation. Singing Version*
This translation from the Hebrew text, is the work of a team of scholars, and it is one of the finest renderings of the psalms. The *Singing Version* contains the musical formulas of Joseph Gelineau, and each psalm is provided with an introductory note on its Christian significance. Most of these explanatory remarks are fairly helpful, although the reader must not forget the distinction between the original meaning of a psalm and its possible Christian application. Perhaps equally beautiful is the new re-set edition of *The Psalms in Latin and English* (Burns and Oates, 1964) by Ronald Knox, originally published in 1947.

A less exciting but a useful contribution is *The Revised Psalter* (S.P.C.K., 1964). This is no new rendering but a *revision* of Coverdale's version of the Psalter. The obscurities and errors of the earlier translation have been removed but the general character of Coverdale's version has been retained, as far as possible, and the result is a great improvement. A companion volume to the *Revised Psalter* is *The Text of the Revised Psalter* (S.P.C.K., 1963) by D. Winton Thomas. Here we find the various readings which underlie the *revised* edition wherever it differs from the Hebrew text. Winton Thomas has provided also the necessary philological evidence and references. This book may be small in size but it is full of very interesting and valuable information.

Finally, of considerable interest is the publication of *The Psalms Scroll of Qumrân Cave 11 (11QPs*) (Discoveries in the Judaean Desert of Jordan. IV, Clarendon Press, 1965) by J. A. Sanders. This volume includes parts of thirty-seven canonical psalms (i.e., fragments of Ps. 93 and of most psalms from 101 upwards) as well as Ps. 151 (previously known in the Greek and Syriac versions) and other poetic compositions. The variant readings found in this manuscript are not very numerous, and most of them are not particularly significant. The popular edition of this same scroll (and by the same author) is *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll* (Oxford University Press, 1967). It includes an additional fragment of the Psalms Scroll, previously published by Y. Yadin in *Textus V* (Magnes Press and Oxford University Press, 1966), and consisting of parts of Pss. 118, 104, 147 and 105 (in that order!).

Fragments of certain psalms, especially Pss. 37 and 127, are published in *Qumrân Cave 4: I (4Q158–4Q186)* (Discoveries in the Judaean Desert of Jordan. V, Oxford University Press, 1968) by J. M. Allegro and A. A. Anderson. The biblical material in this volume is comprised mainly of "sectarian commentaries" on certain Old Testament passages, and of several series of scriptural quotations.

Arnold A. Anderson
Child Dedication in the Seventeenth Century

(Concluded from p. 169)

Title-page. To this tract John Audland responded with *The Innocent Delivered out of the Snare* (1655), and Fox replied in his *The Great Mistery of the Great Whore Unfolded* (1659). For Audland, see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "Early Quaker Letters" (1952), p. 51.

See Donald Wing, Short-title Catalogue (1945-1951), s.v., and Joseph Smith, Bibliotheca Anti-Quakeriana (1873), s.v.

*A Plain-dealing, and Plain-meaning Sermon* (1660), title-page.

For further information on Hollister, see Norman Penney's note in his edition of George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox* (1911), II, 384.

E. Terrill, *The Records of a Church of Christ Meeting in Broadmead, Bristol* (1847), E. B. Underhill, editor, pp. 50-51 (hereafter referred to as *Broadmead Records*).

*Sathan Inthron'd*, p. 50.

Pp. 50-51.

P. 51.

P. 51.

P. 48.

P. 51. For Jessey, see Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, editors, *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v.

Terrill, *Broadmead Records*, p. 38.


To this, Hollister replied in his *The Harlots Vail Removed* (1658).

*The Church of Christ in Bristol*, p. 57b (faulty pagination). He was baptised by Jessey in London in 1654, according to Terrill, *Broadmead Records*, p. 51.

P. 61b.

P. 62a.

Pp. 63a-64a.

P. 57b.

P. 64a.

P. 59b.

P. 64a.

T. L. UNDERWOOD