

The Unfolding of Your Words (PS 119: 130): The Pedagogy of the Psalms

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THE UNFOLDING OF YOUR WORDS (PS 119:130): THE PEDAGOGY OF THE PSALMS

Francis D. Alvarez

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ABSTRACT

How does one teach Scripture in a way that leads to transformation? To answer that question, this study limits the matter to the Psalter and asks how the Psalms teach and transform in order to capitalize on the dynamics inherent in them. The Psalms here are treated not merely as documents to be studied but as texts to be enfleshed in practice. Utilizing the constructivist framework of transformative learning pioneered by Jack Mezirow, “thickening” that with Robert Kegan’s constructivist-developmental subject-object theory, and letting those interface with Walter Brueggemann’s categorization of the Psalter into Psalms of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation, I present the Psalms as holding environments which support and challenge us through transformations throughout our lives. After this, I focus on the extra-rational facets of embodiment, emotions, images, and encounter in the Psalms which enable them to accompany us as we widen our perspectives and paradigms. If we follow the dynamics of the Psalms, what theology, anthropology, and ethics arise? I provide glimpses of answers that can be prophetic in our postmodern culture, and I then suggest ways of practicing the Psalms which take advantage of their transformative elements. To conclude, I return to the broader question with which I began and propose a way of teaching Scripture that is inspired by the importance of the body, emotions, images, and encounter – aspects which are also active in Ignatian contemplation.

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+

A.M.D.G

ABBREVIATIONS USED

| | | | |
|---------|---|------|---|
| 1 Chron | - 1 Chronicles | ITSS | - The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture |
| 1 Cor | - 1 Corinthians | | |
| 1 Jn | - 1 John | Jn | - John |
| 1 Pet | - 1 Peter | LG | - <i>Lumen Gentium</i> |
| 2 Chron | - 2 Chronicles | Lk | - Luke |
| 2 Tim | - 2 Timothy | Mk | - Mark |
| Acts | - Acts of the Apostles | Mt | - Matthew |
| Col | - Colossians | NRSV | - New Revised Standard Version |
| CT | - <i>Catechesi Tradendae</i> | PBC | - Pontifical Biblical Commission |
| DV | - <i>Dei Verbum</i> | Ps | - Psalm |
| EnP | - <i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i> | Pss | - Psalms |
| Eph | - Ephesians | Rom | - Romans |
| Ezek | - Ezekiel | SF | - <i>Sensus Fidei</i> in the Life of the Church |
| GDC | - General Directory for Catechesis | S-O | - Subject-Object |
| Gen | - Genesis | SpEx | - Spiritual Exercises |
| GILH | - General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours | TL | - Transformative Learning |
| GNT | - Good News Translation | VD | - <i>Verbum Domini</i> |
| Heb | - Hebrews | | |
| IBC | - The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church | | |
| Isa | - Isaiah | | |

**INTRODUCTION:
“LIFTING UP THE GATES” (PS 24:7)¹**

AN EARNEST CHRISTIAN’S DILEMMA

In his many years of teaching in Christian seminaries, D. A. Carson, a Reformed Evangelical pastor and professor of the New Testament, has observed a phenomenon common among his students. He paints this as the portrait of a young man he names Ernest Christian:² Convinced by his prayer experiences and confirmed in his dream to pursue full-time Christian ministry by his congregation, Ernest heads off to study the Bible, through which he has felt God speak to him directly. He starts working towards a master’s degree, eager in his preparations to be a minister of the Word. But after six months in the seminary memorizing Greek morphology and sifting through details like the itinerary of Paul’s second missionary journey, Ernest is not that earnest anymore in his desire to learn about Scripture. He now knows how to write exegetical papers, but somehow, after lexical studies, syntactical diagrams, and surveys of critical opinions, the Bible is not as alive to him as it was before. For one reason or another, the God of Scripture has become silent. The fault, he knows, is not in his professors who are all

¹Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

²See Donald Arthur Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 23.

knowledgeable and godly believers. So what has parched what once was a wellspring for his faith?

Carson enumerates the options left open to Ernest Christian:

He may retreat into a defensive pietism that boisterously denounces the arid intellectualism he sees all around him; or he may be sucked into the vortex of a kind of intellectual commitment that squeezes out worship, prayer, witness, and meditative reading of Scripture; or he may stagger along until he is rescued by graduation and returns to the real world. But is there a better way?³

DISTANCIATION AND THE FUSION OF HORIZONS

Carson diagnoses the cause of Ernest Christian's difficulties as distanciation.

Ernest is beginning to see how different the text's understanding is from his own. Only with distanciation can Ernest avoid just imposing his thoughts on the text. But distanciation is not the end of Scripture study. It must continue on to the fusion of horizons of understanding.⁴

With his use of the concept of the fusion of horizons, Carson invokes the hermeneutical philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*. According to Gadamer, how do we understand? "A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning."⁵

³Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 23.

⁴Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 24.

⁵Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 269.

Joel Weinsheimer, translator of and commentator on Gadamer's philosophy, expounds on this:

Understanding is projection, and what it projects are expectations that precede the text. They "jump the gun" as it were, because they anticipate a meaning for the whole before arriving at it. What the interpreter projects in advance is what he understands already – that is, before beginning. He tries out a meaning already familiar to him and proposes it as a possibility. This projected meaning is his own possibility in that he has projected it; it is part of the world in which he already knows his way around, and it is something he can and does understand.⁶

We understand from what we already know. There is no other way to begin understanding. The danger here is that we may get locked in our projections, in our expected meanings, in what we are already familiar with. While starting with the familiar can allow the Bible to speak to us in a way that is easy and comfortable – as it did to our imaginary Ernest Christian – this may also hinder Scripture from challenging us. And so, as Gadamer quotes Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, "our first, last, and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves."⁷

⁶Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 166.

⁷Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 195, quoted in Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 269. "Things themselves" here should not be equated with the Kantian notion of the "thing-in-itself." "Things themselves" in German is *die Sachen selbst*. *Sache* is different from *Objekt* which can have the connotation of the ideal of objective knowledge. A better translation for *die Sachen selbst* may be "matters for debate" or "issues at hand." See Donatella Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, trans. Niall Keane (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 88.

For Gadamer, to understand is to transpose ourselves in the horizon of what we are trying to understand. "[W]hat do we mean by 'transposing ourselves'? Certainly not just disregarding ourselves. This is necessary, of course, insofar as we must imagine the other situation. But into this other situation we must bring, precisely, ourselves. Only this is the full meaning of 'transposing ourselves'" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 304). We can never fully step out of a particular point of view. Even when we try to put ourselves in someone else's shoes, our feet may be in a different place, but we still use eyes that see in what Gadamer has called our historically effected way (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 299 and 301). For

Gadamer roughly defines understanding in this way: “Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as [one] penetrates into the meaning, is [the work of] understanding what is there... Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed ‘by the things’ themselves is the constant task of understanding.”⁸

How can we avoid being locked in our own projections and always try to “work out” our fore-conceptions? Gadamer insists that “a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text’s alterity.”⁹ The authors of Scripture understand differently from us. To help us be more aware of this is the positive but, as we have seen in Ernest Christian’s case, also possibly destructive function of distancing. Textual, philological, literary, tradition, form, redaction, and historical criticism all contribute to distancing. But again, this is not the purpose of the study of Scripture. We begin immersed in a world where the Bible fits well enough – though not perfectly – in our lives. We retreat from this projected world to try to see Scripture in a light more respectful of its otherness. But taking a few steps back is supposed to give us some space for a running start to gain momentum and dive deeper into an enlarged world of the Bible and our lives in dialogue. This is what happens in the fusion of horizons.

Gadamer, there is no fully objective knowledge in the sense that we can never really approach the thing-in-itself. But while there is no fully objective knowledge, there can be some measure of objectivity: Objectivity is “the confirmation of a fore-meaning in its being worked out” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 270).

⁸Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 269-270. See the note above on “things themselves.”

⁹Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 271.

We cannot say that we have understood a text if we are not able to apply it. The early tradition of hermeneutics made distinctions among *subtilitas intelligendi* (understanding), *subtilitas explicandi* (interpretation), and *subtilitas applicandi* (application).¹⁰ For Gadamer, this separation is untenable. Romantic hermeneutics already recognized the inner unity between *intelligere* and *explicare*: “Interpretation is not an occasional, post facto supplement to understanding; rather, understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding.”¹¹ But Gadamer goes beyond romantic hermeneutics and regards understanding, interpretation, and application as a complex unified process. Understanding is not comprehending a given universal in itself and then applying it to a concrete situation: “The edifying application of Scripture in Christian preaching, for example, [was deemed] very different from the historical and theological understanding of it. In the course of our reflections we have come to see that understanding involves something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter’s present situation.”¹² We can also say that without application, we only know something *of* the text. With application, when we step beyond its grammar and syntax and wrestle with it in our particular context, we begin to know the text – and our lives – more.

The second part of *Truth and Method* can be read as a critique of historicism. One of the main insights of Gadamer in this section is that the object of history is “not what

¹⁰Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 306.

¹¹Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 306.

¹²Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 306-307.

once was, but rather what once was in relation to what now is.”¹³ It is the same for Scripture: “Writing about the past was never simply about understanding the past for its own sake, but about shaping, modeling, and creating the past to speak to the present. ‘Getting the past right’ wasn’t the driving issue. ‘Who are we now?’ was.”¹⁴ For example, in the Old Testament, there are two differing accounts of Israel’s history: the first in the books of Samuel and Kings and the second in the texts of Chronicles. The books of Samuel and Kings were put together in the shadow of the Babylonian exile. Their writers were trying to answer the question: “If God is with us, then why have we been exiled?” First and Second Chronicles were composed around two hundred years later, when Israel had returned to the Promised Land and had been back for several generations. The new question was: “Are we still God’s people after all this time?” In the New Testament, the four Gospels configure the events of Jesus’ life with some variations because their main purpose was not to present a chronology of what happened but to portray a Christ speaking to the particular situations of their different audiences. If this is why Scripture was written, then this must also influence how we read it. We must always ask Scripture: “How do these texts address and apply to my life and my community today?” Again, this is what happens in the fusion of horizons, the old and the new “combining into something of living value.”¹⁵

BIG QUESTIONS

¹³Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, 173.

¹⁴Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014), 232.

¹⁵Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305.

Academic work in Christian seminaries has been successful in the work of distancing and in highlighting the otherness of the text of the Bible. This important step is assumed in this study. But now we take a further step and ask: How can schools of theology and ministry encourage a productive fusion of horizons? We can enter the narrow gate of Scripture and exit with an even narrower field of vision, only focusing on Scripture's way of approaching things. Or we can enter the narrow gate Scripture and emerge into a broadened vista that gives us a wider vision and a more penetrating way of looking into our present concerns. How can we facilitate this enlarged seeing?

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). How do we teach the Bible to future ministers so that they will be trained in righteousness and equipped for every good work they will do? How do we form future Church leaders and workers to engage Scripture so that they can help the people they will serve read and pray with the Bible in truly life-giving ways? How do we go beyond textual, philological, literary, tradition, form, redaction, and historical criticism? How do we conduct our Scripture classes so that we produce not just Bible scholars and exegetes but pastors proficient with texts as well as their applications?

How can we help students of Scripture befriend the otherness of the text and let it speak to their lives again? How should we teach the Bible so that the strange can become familiar? This will still not be the end. Scholarship can deceive one to think that he or she knows what there is to know about a text, but deeper understanding can only happen in

the dynamic tension between the strange and the familiar.¹⁶ Academic hubris can lead one to unquestioning familiarity. How should we teach Scripture to recover the strangeness again?

The challenges presented above are the “big questions” in the background of this study. But the first question we should try to answer is not: “How should we teach Scripture?” It is: “How does Scripture teach?” By focusing on this question, we honor the dynamics of the Bible and are better able to capitalize on its inherent power.

FOCUSING ON THE PSALMS

How does Scripture teach? To answer this question, I limit this study to the Psalter. This choice comes from the breadth of the Psalms. “The book of Psalms strikes nearly every theological chord that resounds throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, from covenant and history to creation and wisdom.”¹⁷ Martin Luther, in his preface to the revised German Psalter in 1528, called the Book of Psalms the Bible in miniature or a little Bible:

In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enchiridion or handbook. In fact, I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble himself to compile a short Bible and book of examples of all Christendom or all saints, so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would here have anyway almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book.¹⁸

¹⁶Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295.

¹⁷William P. Brown, “The Psalms: An Overview” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

¹⁸Martin Luther, “Preface to the Psalter,” trans. Charles M. Jacobs, rev. E. Theodore Bachmann, in *Word and Sacrament I*, vol. 35 of *Luther’s Works*, American edition, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 254.

The Psalter is the third longest book in the Old Testament (after Jeremiah and Genesis, in terms of word count). The Psalms are also far from absent in the New Testament:

Even though the New Testament writers are [already] careful and restrained in their use of the Psalter, ignoring all passages that they view as unsuitable or unhelpful, they do draw on the vast majority of the Psalms. Nearly 500 verses out of the total 2450 are directly reflected in the N. T., approximately 20 percent; and these verses are from approximately 120 of the 150 Psalms. For the most part of the N. T., allusions and citations do not overlap.¹⁹

The Psalms, too, more than any other book in the Bible in my opinion, demand the fusion of horizons from those who use them. A majority of the Psalms are human words uttered to God or proclaimed to a community in worship. Their very format as prayers bids us to make them our own in a deeply personal way.

Of the 116 Psalms that have inscriptions, seventy-three mention David's name. Of these, thirteen refer to episodes in David's life.²⁰ We do not have to believe that these thirteen Psalms were really composed by David during those times the inscriptions say they were,²¹ but knowing that a Psalm could have been uttered by David "when he fled from his son Absalom" (Ps 3), "on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul" (Ps 18), "when he feigned madness before

¹⁹Henry M. Shires, *Finding the Old Testament in the New* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 130. In William Brown's count, 129 of the 150 Psalms make an appearance in some form in the New Testament (Brown, "The Psalms: An Overview," 6).

²⁰This number can be increased to fourteen if we include Ps 30: "A Psalm. A Song at the dedication of the Temple. Of David." The thirteen Psalms referred to here are Pss 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142.

²¹See James H. Fraser, "The Authenticity of the Psalm Titles" (master's thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, IN, 1984), 4-10 for a discussion on the divergent views of the values of the Psalm inscriptions.

Abimelech” (Ps 34), or as in one of the most beloved Psalms, “when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba” (Ps 51), can serve as a model for us to apply the Psalms to specific episodes of our lives. Beyond these inscriptions, the vivid yet stereotyped language of the Psalter, emotion-filled but at the same time generic enough, invites us to look through them and see how they can expand our ways of understanding diverse contexts and settings – the very point of the fusion of horizons.

The Psalms can be said to be the background music of the New Testament. The Psalter is the most cited Old Testament book in the New. The Psalms informed how the first Christians understood who Jesus was. In Acts 2:25-28, with the words of Ps 16:8-11, Jesus is presented as foretold by David, whom the Jews considered as someone like a prophet. When the royal Psalms, especially Ps 2 (see Mt 3:13-17, Mk 1:9-11, Lk 3:21-22, Acts 13:29-35, and Heb 1:5; 5:5) and Ps 110 (see Mt 22:43-45, Acts 2:33-36, Heb 1:13, as well as Eph 1:20, 22, Col 3:1, and 1 Pet 3:21b-22 – a list far from exhaustive), appear in the New Testament, they portray Jesus as a messianic king. Jesus utters “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” from Ps 22:1 in Mt 27:46 and Mk 15:34. Verse 18 of Ps 22 (“they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots”) can also be glimpsed behind Mt 27:35, Mk 15:34, and Jn 19:23-24. When we read these quotes and see these allusions from Ps 22, it is clear how the Psalmic image of an innocent man who suffers but still trusts in God helped the first Christians make sense of what happened to Jesus. A fusion of horizons between the Psalms and the mighty Christ-event was at work in the early Church.

The Psalter is the most transcribed and translated book of the Hebrew Bible. In Qumran, it is the most represented corpus. Shortly after the invention of the printing

press, it was the first book of the Bible – not any of the Gospels – to enjoy wide dissemination.²² But sadly, the Psalms today are marginalized in practice in the Catholic Church. At Mass, they are relegated to short antiphons, which very few recognize as coming from the Psalter, and to a few verses in the Responsorial Psalm, which many see not as an essential part of the Liturgy of the Word but as a device to keep the congregation awake in between the more important readings. While one of the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council was the attempt to make the Divine Office (the prayer of the Church that most utilizes the Psalter) “true parish liturgy” once again, there has been little progress in making the Liturgy of the Hours an integral part of the faithful’s worship.²³ The choice of the Psalms in this study will hopefully rekindle interest in praying with the Psalter.

How do the Psalms teach? In answering this question, I take a page from Gadamer’s book and follow his example of refraining from developing a procedure that describes how understanding takes place. Instead, he only clarifies the conditions in which understanding takes place.²⁴ For Gadamer, the task of hermeneutics is to shed light on the “miracle of understanding.”²⁵ To confine this “miracle” in a formula is impossible. Moreover, for Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics is no longer a methodological

²²Brown, “The Psalms: An Overview,” 1.

²³Robert Taft, “The Divine Office: Monastic Choir, Prayer Book, or Liturgy of the People of God? An Evaluation of the New Liturgy of the Hours in its Historical Context,” *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives; Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)*, 3 vols., ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 2:27.

²⁴Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295.

²⁵Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 292.

concept but a fundamental mode of being.²⁶ How do the Psalms teach? In answering the question, I will not outline a step-by-step “lesson plan” but only try to identify the conditions for learning which the Psalms make possible.

STRUCTURE AND FLOW OF THIS STUDY

Chapter 1: Foundations, Models, and Questions

Thomas Groome has many times stressed that religious education must *inform*, *form*, and *transform*. In this study, I focus on the transforming aspect of a practice of praying with the Psalms. I trace the transformative power of the Psalter in the lives of St. Augustine, Martin Luther, and Kathleen Norris. In later chapters, I refer to these illustrations again and other episodes from their lives to flesh out how a practice of the Psalms can teach. What the Psalter has done for these pray-ers, it can also do in the context of cultural postmodernity. I develop the significance of the Psalter in this “secular age” in conversation with Charles Taylor, Michael Paul Gallagher, and Harold Daly Horrell on what they see are the characteristics of cultural postmodernity.

Chapter 2: How the Psalms Teach: A Framework for Transformation that the Psalms Can Accompany

How do the Psalms teach us? The framework I use is based on Jack Mezirow’s transformative learning (TL) theory. I connect Mezirow’s TL theory with Walter Brueggemann’s understanding of the Psalms and his use of the categories of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. I “thicken” Mezirow’s constructivist model with

²⁶István M. Fehér, “On the Hermeneutic Understanding of Language: Word, Conversation, and Subject Matter,” trans. Lawrence K. Schmidt, in *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), 61.

insights from Robert Kegan's constructivist-developmental theory. While Mezirow provides the overall framework, Kegan can help me show how the Psalms can help us transform in different stages of growth and how they can facilitate development through these stages. The Psalms also serve as a "holding environment" while one is undergoing transition.

Chapter 3: How the Psalms Teach: Embodying, Emoting, Envisioning, and Encountering

How do the Psalms help strengthen us in our orientations or help trigger our disorientations? How can they help us in self-examination, in critiquing our silent assumptions, in recognizing that our discontent is shared, and support us as we go through the other phases of TL? This chapter answers these questions with a recourse through the body, feelings, symbols, and prayer. Embodiment, emotions, images, and encounter facilitate the orientation, disorientation, and new orientation the Psalms bring about.

The semantic domain of the body is one of the most widespread and frequently used figures of speech in the psalms. How does a recognition of our embodiment help us to learn? The path through the body helps us be more aware of emotions, which are another way of knowing. Through our emotions, our values are clarified. The Psalms also fuel our imagination and show us a different way of looking at experiences.

Maureen O'Connell outlines a process of approaching *aesthetica* which can be summarized in three steps: Experience, Empathize, Envision. These three steps are actually in the background of the first three quarters of this chapter: Attention to experience (what is happening to our embodied selves), attention to emotions and what

they tell us about our values, and attention to images which connect us to the ineffable and the unconscious. But the Psalms are not just sung poetry or art. They are inspired prayers which can lead us to encounter God. The encounter also involves other people of faith with whom we pray and the psalmists themselves whose words we use in prayer. How can the encounter with God and other people transform us? I begin answering this by showing how the aspect of encounter in Ps 73 changes the psalmist.

Chapter 4: What the Psalms Teach: Theology, Anthropology, and Ethics from a Practice of the Psalms

After going through how the Psalms teach, I lay out what we can learn from a practice of the Psalms. In this chapter, I present what a practice of the Psalms can give us in answer to the questions: Who is God? Who is the human person? What should a human person do in relationship with this God and other beings? When we let the Psalms accompany us through the phases of TL and through the dynamics of orientation—disorientation—new-orientation, when we engage the Psalms with our bodies, with our emotions, with our symbolic imagination – and all this in an atmosphere of personal or communal prayer – what theology, anthropology, and ethics arise? Hans-Joachim Kraus has already outlined a theology of the Psalms. What this study adds is a theology of the Psalms based not only on the text but on practice.

Chapter 5: How We Can Practice the Psalms in a Transformative Way: Applications

The first three chapters point out what in the practice of the Psalms can be transformative and how a practice of the Psalms can teach. The fourth chapter projects what the Psalms can teach. The Psalms can transform, but they also may not lead to

transformations. How can we practice the Psalms so that they can be truly transformative? In answer, I present some suggestions for ways of practicing the Psalms.

Chapter 6: How We Can Teach the Psalms and Scripture in a Transformative Way: Applications

The sixth chapter returns to the “big question.” How can we teach the Psalms and Scripture in a transformative way? How can we make better use of the transformative aspects of the Bible to teach? By the end of this dissertation, we will hopefully have a better idea of how to capitalize on the pedagogical power of the Psalms and the rest of Scripture, after seeing how the unfolding of God’s words gives light.

1.0 “HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO MEDITATE ON THE TORAH OF THE LORD DAY AND NIGHT” (PS 1:1-2): FOUNDATIONS, MODELS, AND QUESTIONS

1.1 PRELIMINARIES

1.1.1 To Inform, Form, and Transform

Thomas Groome proposes that the nature of religious education is “to inform, form, and transform Christian persons and communities as apprentices to Jesus for God’s reign in the world.”¹

For Groome, to inform means, in terms of content, to ground people in the Scripture, traditions, creed, code of ethics, and ways of worship of Christianity. In terms of process, to inform means to engage people as active learners and encourage them to make the faith their own:

Instead of a narrow cognitivism, *informing* in Christian faith must reach into the deep heart’s core of people’s very being – into their souls – educating their heads, hearts, and hands. Instead of unreflective indoctrination, catechetical education should engage people’s reason, memory, and imagination, to “see for themselves” what the Christian story means for and invites from their lives.²

¹Thomas H. Groome, “Total Catechesis / Religious Education: A Vision for Now and Always,” in *Horizons and Hopes: The Future of Religious Education*, eds. Thomas Groome and Harold Daly Horrell (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 7.

²Groome, “Total Catechesis / Religious Education,” 7.

Informing in this sense already goes beyond what the General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) calls “mere information” (GDC 24) and reaches towards a faith lived with conviction and commitment.

To form is to nurture people in the Christian outlook and commitment, disposing them to live as disciples of Christ. Formation involves socialization in a community and needs the participation of and participation in the family and the parish.³ As the GDC states, quoting *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) 24, “it is necessary to have a Christian community which welcomes the initiated, sustains them and forms them in the faith: ‘Catechesis runs the risk of becoming barren if no community of faith and Christian life welcomes the catechumen at a certain stage of his catechesis’” (GDC 69).

To transform encompasses the *lifelong journey* of Christian conversion that entails not only personal growth but also the responsibilities towards social development.⁴ The need for *ongoing metanoia* is also stressed by the GDC:

Faith is a gift destined to grow in the hearts of believers. Adhering to Jesus Christ, in fact, sets in motion a process of *continuing conversion* [emphasis added], which lasts for the whole of life. [One] who comes to faith is like a newborn child, who, little by little, will grow and change into an adult, tending towards the state of the “perfect [person]” (Eph 4:13) and to maturity in the fullness of Christ (GDC 56).

Professor of religious education Jane Regan points out that informing, forming, and transforming are three dimensions that are inextricably connected and dynamically interrelated. While it is possible to talk about them separately for the sake of discussion,

³Groome, “Total Catechesis / Religious Education,” 7.

⁴Groome, “Total Catechesis / Religious Education,” 8.

we must always consider their complementary relationship.⁵ To illustrate just a few facets of this relationship, what we are informed of (content) and how we are informed (process) nurture us and support the form that is the basis for transformation. We are formed in formal and informal ways, in conscious and unconscious ways when the Church gathers as a community, and this formation affects how open or how closed we are to ongoing transformation. The resulting transformation can then open us up to even more information and deeper formation.

While informing, forming, and transforming are intricately linked, the focus of this study will be the transformative aspect of the Psalms and how they can help sustain *continuing conversion*. But can formula prayers really be transformative?

1.1.2 Formula Prayers

Today, as self-expression is encouraged, is there still a purpose to formula prayers like the Psalms? Why should we use the words of ancient strangers from foreign climes and times when we can compose our own and even be lauded as we communicate our truest selves? Our postmodern world celebrates pluralism, diversity, and innovation. In what Charles Taylor calls an “age of authenticity,” in a culture of “expressive individualism” in which “people are encouraged to find their own way, discover their own fulfillment, ‘do their own thing,’”⁶ why should our prayers be pigeonholed in the Psalter? Aside from sentimental reasons, why should we return to the old when we can invest in the new?

⁵Jane E. Regan, *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 16.

⁶Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 299.

First of all, while there are situations when we know exactly what we want to say to God, there are also points in our lives when we find ourselves speechless – wordless and clueless about where and how to begin. Dumbstruck in moments of extreme emotion before God, we might just hide behind “sighs too deep for words” (Rom 8:26). There should be a space for silence, for laying our hands on our mouths like Job, but there is also great value in putting in language what we are going through and what is going on inside us.

“Being that can be understood is language”⁷ is one of the most cited but also one of the most misunderstood lines from Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*. This should not be taken to mean that Gadamer identifies Being with language. In a 1996 retrospective interview about his work, Gadamer himself said, “Absolutely not, I have never thought or said that everything is language.”⁸ Perhaps a better way to explain the famous quote above is by rephrasing it as: Only that which has become language can be understood. As Gadamer already said in *Truth and Method*, “Language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs.”⁹ This is not to say that once something is expressed in language, it is understood fully. Gadamer demonstrates the limits of language in the experience of searching for the right word which never is found:

Finally the deepest of the problems that essentially inheres in the boundary of language is to be indicated. I feel it only dimly, although in other areas of research

⁷Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 470.

⁸Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Dialogischer Rückblick auf das Gesammelte Werk und dessen Wirkungsgeschichte,” in *Lesebuch*, ed. Jean Grondin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 286; quoted in Donatella Di Cesare, *Utopia of Understanding: Between Babel and Auschwitz*, trans. Niall Keane, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 6.

⁹Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 390.

– I am thinking especially of psychoanalysis – it plays already an important role. It is the awareness that every speaker has in each moment when he seeks the correct word – and that is the word that reaches the other – the awareness that he never completely attains it. What reaches the other through language, what has been said in words, is always less than has been meant or was intended. An unstilled desire for the appropriate word – that is what constitutes the true life and essence of language. Here a close relationship appears between the inability to satisfy this desire, *désir* (Lacan), and the fact that our own human existence dissipates in time and before death.¹⁰

Language has its limits, but at the same time, it is only through language that we can understand. And so we must try to express our experience to better grasp it. Being given the freedom to express in our own ways what we are going through and what is going on inside us does not automatically give us the words to do so. But we do not have to begin from zero. When we encounter difficulty in finding the words that would approximate our experience to a somewhat acceptable degree, we can turn to the words that have served others before. The same Spirit which fills us with inarticulate groanings has already interceded in the past to teach us to pray during these moments. The Spirit has inspired the psalmists to help us speak words of God to God. As Martin Luther learned from his own use of the Psalms:

[T]hat they speak these words to God and with God, this, I repeat, is the best thing of all. This gives the words double earnestness and life. For when men speak with men about these matters, what they say does not come so powerfully from the heart; it does not burn and live, is not so urgent. Hence it is that the Psalter is the book of all saints; and everyone, in whatever situation he may be, finds in that situation psalms and words that fit his case, that suit him as if they were put there

¹⁰Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Boundaries of Language,” trans. Lawrence K. Schmidt, in *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), 17.

just for his sake, so that he could not put it better himself, or find or wish for anything better.¹¹

But, of course, as Luther also says, “this can only be done in faith, for the words of the saints have no flavor to a godless man.”¹²

Formula prayers can go beyond just giving us words. In the Gospel according to Luke, when Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples,” Jesus responded, “When you pray, say...” (see Lk 11:1-4). And the Gospel hands on to us the prayer we now know as the “Our Father.” The request “Lord, teach us to pray” could have been answered with guidelines, steps to follow, or even the explanations of the rationale for prayer.¹³ Instead, Jesus gave his disciples a formula prayer. But inherent in the words Jesus recited is a vision: a way of seeing God, the human being, and how humans should relate to God and other human beings – a theology, an anthropology, and an ethics. The Lord’s Prayer balances immanence and transcendence in its image of God; he is as close to us as our own fathers yet he remains unreachable because he is in heaven. Jesus’ prayer also tells us humans what we really need – not just our daily bread but forgiveness from our sins. To receive this forgiveness, we impose on ourselves the condition to forgive those indebted to us.

¹¹Martin Luther, “Preface to the Psalter,” trans. Charles M. Jacobs, rev. E. Theodore Bachmann, in *Word and Sacrament I*, vol. 35 of *Luther’s Works*, American edition, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 256.

¹²Luther, “Preface to the Psalter,” 256.

¹³Jesus does give a number of guidelines about prayer right before the Lord’s Prayer appears in the Gospel according to Matthew (see Mt 6:5-8), but by the number of verses alone, it is clear that in the pericope concerning prayer (Mt 6:5-14), the formula of the Our Father is of great importance.

It is not just the words or a vision behind them that teaches; it is also their practice. If the Our Father is our go-to prayer, our image of God as a father who provides for us and gives us security can be ingrained in us. If we continue going to the Our Father even in times of lack and insecurity, then this image can be challenged, but another aspect of God can be chiseled in us: God is not a grandfather who spoils us with what we want but a father who gives us what we really need. When we hold hands with others as we pray the Our Father during the Mass, we can come closer to realizing a deeper meaning behind all the first person pronouns in the Our Father being in the plural: The “our” and the “us” do not just include my immediate family and my close friends; people I do not know, neighbors I may not like, and those I disagree with also call God “Father.” An admittedly hasty treatment of the Lord’s Prayer in practice has already given us clues to a theology, an anthropology, and an ethics that comes from praying the Our Father.

In the same way, the Psalms can teach by their words and vision. This is clearest in the Psalms that have been classified as wisdom or *torah* Psalms. Scholars are not in full agreement about which Psalms to include in this category, but most classifications include Pss 1, 19, 37, 49, 73, 78, 111, 112, 119, 127, and 128. Employing language and imagery characteristic of Old Testament wisdom literature (i.e., Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach), these Psalms are concerned with the way of the righteous and the justice of God and seek to help their readers navigate through life. For example, Ps 49 begins by telling the people to listen: “Hear this, all you peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world.” Then it later instructs them: “Do not be afraid when some become rich, when the wealth of their houses

increases. For when they die they will carry nothing away; their wealth will not go down after them” (Ps 49:16-17).

What else do the Psalms teach us about God, about ourselves, and about how we should relate to God and others? Even the Psalms that are not considered wisdom or *torah* cover some of these points by giving us answers in the form of statements (e.g., “God is a righteous judge” (Ps 7:11); “You have made [humans] a little lower than God” (Ps 8:5); “But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments” (Ps 103:17-18)).

Again, it is not just the words or a vision behind them that teaches; it is also their practice. Many scholars see Ps 1 not only as the first Psalm but one that introduces the whole Psalter. In Ps 1:2, *torah* is usually translated as law. This can be, as Richard Clifford opines, too restrictive. *Torah* can also refer to teaching, instruction, and word. The context of Ps 1:2 suggests that *torah* can refer to the teaching and words in the Psalms that follow. The point of the introductory Ps 1 is to show that praying the Psalms brings one wisdom and instruction:¹⁴ Happy are those who meditate on the *torah*, on the Psalms, day and night. While “day and night” should not be taken literally, what is suggested here is not just praying with the Psalms once in a while. It is a prolonged and disciplined engagement with the Psalms that can best be described as a spiritual practice. It is the Psalms in practice – as when we pray them in the Divine Office or when we take five Psalms a day until we go through the whole Psalter after a month and then begin

¹⁴Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 40.

again – that can really teach and transform. If our concept of transformation revolves around *continuing conversion*, it makes sense then that what is truly transformative is a practice that can accompany us through such a *lifelong journey*.

What is the theology, anthropology, and ethics that can be learned from a practice of praying with the Psalter?¹⁵ New aspects of God, the human person, or right relationships can be highlighted because of practice, or the same aspects can be brought to light but slightly differently. If those who practice yoga profess how repeated measured movements done deliberately have increased their awareness of their bodies and environments, what can repeated meditations on the Psalms make us more aware of?

In the introduction, I stated that the question that needs to be answered first is not “How should we teach Scripture?” but “How does Scripture teach?” By turning to practice, am I now turning my back on this question? No. Scripture was not always a book studied in libraries by scholars. Most of Scripture – and this is best exemplified by the Psalter – was first and foremost a set of texts used by the faithful in liturgical practices. Though the Psalter has catechetical functions and applications, it is not a catechism. The Psalter is not a textbook for classroom use but a hymnbook for worship. Though the Psalms can teach us didactically, they are more effective in teaching us when we enter into their original dynamics, when we cease dealing with them as propositions and engage them in practice. We now modify the question we stated in our introduction:

¹⁵I tackle this question in chapter 4. Beyond theology, anthropology, and ethics, from a practice of the Psalms can also be distilled an ecclesiology, a theology of revelation, grace, and so on. But in this study, I have space to discuss only these fundamental questions: What image of God can come to the fore in a practice of the Psalms (theology)? What image of the human person can emerge in a practice of the Psalms (anthropology)? And based on these images, what is the right way to relate with God, other persons, and creation (ethics)?

How does the Psalter in practice teach? How does a practice of praying with the Psalms transform?

1.1.3 Practice

Despite their transformative potential, practices “have held a less pronounced role within Christian theology, tending to appear in the shadows and margins of what ‘counts’ formally as theology ‘properly understood.’”¹⁶ In the Western academic tradition, they have been mostly downgraded to the lower rungs in the hierarchy of theory and practice, disparaged as mere illustrations, and doomed to a token mention as “application.” It is time that the importance of practice is recovered.

In modern times, Psalm studies were sparked by the work of Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) whose form-critical research looked not only at the genres of the Psalms based on their content and structure but also on their original *Sitz im Leben*. Sigmund Mowinckel (1884-1965), Gunkel’s student, dove deeper into the life-setting of the Psalms, and aimed to reconstruct their precise cultic occasion.¹⁷ In 1976, Brevard Childs, pointing out how form criticism was resulting in diminishing returns, directed attention to the final canonical form of the Psalter and what a Psalm’s title and placement in the book might give rise to thought. Gerald H. Wilson, in his groundbreaking dissertation, “The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter,” demonstrated that the Psalter is not just a haphazard compilation of prayers but a collection with an organizing principle. From an interest in

¹⁶Colleen M. Griffith, “Practice as Embodied Knowing: Epistemological and Theological Considerations,” in *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions*, ed. Claire E. Wolfteich (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014), 52-53.

¹⁷See Brown, “The Psalms: An Overview,” 11-15 for a brief history of Psalm studies.

the *Sitz im Leben* of the Psalms, there arose an attentiveness to their *Sitz im Buch*. But now I think it is time to return to the *Sitz im Leben* – not the original one but the one today, set in the lives of the faithful who practice the Psalms.¹⁸

In the introduction, I already discussed how no understanding can take place without application. While that application can be a mere theoretical projection onto a life situation, what can really teach is an application that is an actual living out in practice. The understanding that happens in practice is that which has been referred to as “performative knowing.”¹⁹ But earlier in this chapter, I also noted how no understanding can take place without language. Gadamer though speaks of “the language of art” and “the language of nature.”²⁰ Music, photography, and architecture are other languages that cannot be reduced to words. Verbal language is only one special case of linguisticity.²¹ Language is not just made up of words; understanding is not just about formulating clear and distinct propositions. There are various ways of understanding, many of them non-linguistic, of which practice is an example.²²

To appreciate the power of practices, social theorist Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* may help. *Habitus* is a system of “durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which

¹⁸This is also the project of Stephen Breck Reid and his colleagues. See Stephen Breck Reid, ed., *Psalms and Practice: Worship, Virtue, and Authority* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).

¹⁹See Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 170.

²⁰Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 470.

²¹Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Collected Works and Their Effective History,” in *The Gadamer Reader*, ed. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 420.

²²I discuss non-verbal types of understanding in the third chapter.

generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.”²³ *Habitus* is internalized as “second nature,” functions as “accumulated capital,” and is akin to a “practical sense,” know-how, and an acquired rhythm.²⁴

Habitus produces practices. But *habitus* is a product of history, which is the product of what people do and practice.²⁵ Practices also produce *habitus*. The monasteries in the medieval ages under the *Rule* of St. Benedict can be considered the forerunners of the Catholic school.²⁶ In chapter 16 of the *Rule*, Benedict states: “The Prophet says: Seven times a day have I praised you (Ps 119:164). We will fulfill this sacred number of seven if we satisfy our obligations of service at Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline.”²⁷ In chapters 17 and 18, Benedict indicates the Psalms to be recited during these times. The communal practice of praying of the Psalms was able to create an atmosphere, to “midwife” a *habitus*. The education and training that happened in these monasteries was not just because of attendance in formal classes but because of the culture of the monastery, an environment which was suffused with the practice of the Psalms.

²³Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

²⁴Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 56, 66.

²⁵Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, rev. ed., Key Sociologists (London: Routledge, 2002), 80.

²⁶See John L. Elias, *A History of Christian Education: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Perspectives* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 2002), 34-57.

²⁷Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, ed. Timothy Fry, O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 44.

T. Howland Sanks tries to make sense of Bourdieu's dense notion of *habitus* by using the analogy of a tennis match.²⁸ I now follow Sanks' line of thinking to shed light on a practice of the Psalms but use the analogy of a basketball game. Practice is not always the result of theory. One can begin with theory and hope that it engenders practice – as this study hopes to do for the Psalms – but many times we just jump into practice even without a well-articulated theory. We can learn about basketball by reading the history of the game and its rulebook, but we really learn to play the game by getting on a basketball court and getting our hands on a ball. The more we play basketball, the more we get familiar with its particular language. We learn what a foul is by committing a foul or by getting fouled. We learn what traveling means by being called out when we do it or by experiencing how it disadvantages us when an opponent does it. We watch professional players and also learn from their moves when we try to imitate them. We gain proficiency and get a feel for the game – a *habitus*. The more we play, the more we get a sense of where the ball might bounce when it hits the rim, whether it makes sense to still chase after the ball or just let it go out of bounds, and so on.

In a similar way, when we dive into a practice of praying with the Psalms – though we may not know much about them at first – we slowly get acquainted with the Psalter's language, its world, and the attitudes it espouses. We develop a level of “expertise” also when we follow how other pray-ers have used and interpreted the

²⁸T. Howland Sanks, “A Church that Can and Cannot Change: The Dynamics of Tradition,” *Theological Studies* 76, no. 2 (2015), 308.

Psalms.²⁹ They can serve as models and can influence our own engagement with the Psalms as we test their interpretations out in our own situations.

Habitus is produced by practices and produces or revises other practices. Changing situations – full court or half court, playing on wood or cement, with a leather ball or a rubber ball, whether we have referees or not, and of course, whom we play with – make us adapt to the different circumstances. Though every basketball game we play is called basketball, every basketball game we play is also different. The *habitus* we have acquired allows us and actually makes us more confident to improvise. Sometimes we can modify things in the game but still know we are playing basketball. James Naismith, who invented basketball, probably never imagined how it is being played now – with dunks, alley-oop plays, triangle offenses, or a line-up of “small ball” – but it is still basketball. This is actually one of the most important facets of experience that Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* can bring to light. One of Bourdieu’s starting points was the question, “How can there be structure and individual agency at the same time?”³⁰ Applied to a practice of the Psalms, a *habitus* acquired from praying with the Psalter allows us and makes us more confident to interpret the old words in new ways to address our situations today but still claim faithfulness to the world of the Psalms. *Habitus* sets a structure, but the familiarity it engenders also allows us to improvise within that structure when we apply it to particular contexts – structure and individual agency can coexist. The tension between structure and improvisation is a creative dynamic similar to what happens in the

²⁹This is one of the reasons why, in the succeeding pages, I turn to Augustine, Luther, and Kathleen Norris and how they have prayed with the Psalms.

³⁰Karl Maton, “Habitus” in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael Grenfell, Key Concepts (Durham, England: Acumen, 2012), 50.

fusion of horizons. The structure is the text; the improvisation is the application to our situations. *Habitus* is like a bridge between the two that helps facilitate a meeting of horizons that is respectful of the text and that is rooted in the reader's context.

1.2 WITNESSES

"Happy are those who meditate on the Psalms day and night." To demonstrate the transformative power of a practice of praying with the Psalter, I present the witness of those "happy" ones we can consider to be "professional" players / pray-ers of the Psalms: Augustine, Martin Luther, and Kathleen Norris.

1.2.1 Witnesses from the Past

1.2.1.1 Augustine

Augustine's *Confessions* begins with two lines from two Psalms: "Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised" from Ps 47:3 and "Great is Thy power, and Thy wisdom infinite" from Ps 145:3.³¹ After these two quotations, hardly a page goes by without referencing the Psalter. It would be no exaggeration to say that the Psalms are the veritable support structure for the *Confessions* or even consider the *Confessions* an "amplified Psalter."³² This should not be a surprise because Augustine wrote his *Confessions* from 397 to 401 C.E., within the period he was also slowly completing his

³¹See Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Edward Bouverie Pusey, Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3296/3296-h/3296-h.htm> (accessed 27 June 2016).

³²Jeffrey S. Lehman, "'As I read, I was set on fire': On the Psalms in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 16, no. 2 (Spring 2013), 160. See also his second footnote on 180.

voluminous commentary on all the 150 Psalms, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (*Expositions of the Psalms*), which he started in 392 and finished in 418 C.E.

As it was in his autobiographical *Confessions*, so also was it in Augustine's life – the Psalms were constantly present. Shortly before he was baptized, as he read the Psalms in Cassiacum, Augustine was set on fire by them: "Oh, what accents did I utter unto Thee in those Psalms, and how was I by them kindled towards Thee, and on fire to rehearse them, if possible, through the whole world, against the pride of mankind" (*Confessions*, Book IX, chapter 4, no. 8). According to his biographer Possidius, as Augustine's life ebbed away, he was praying the Psalms: "For he commanded that the shortest penitential Psalms of David should be copied for him, and during the days of his sickness as he lay in bed he would look at these sheets as they hung upon the wall and read them; and he wept freely and constantly."³³

For Augustine, the Psalter was not just a text to be studied. It was something to be practiced. Jason Byassee writes:

[T]he Psalter [for Augustine] is not only informative but also performative. [Augustine wrote,] "If the psalm prays, you pray; if it laments, you lament; if it exults, you rejoice; if it hopes, you hope; if it fears, you fear. Everything written here is a *mirror* [emphasis added by Byassee] for us." ... Augustine thus awakened his hearers to themselves as subjects of the paschal mystery and participants in its dynamic of charity. Unwittingly, he also gave an intriguing reply to the hermeneutical conundrum created by the modern division between participant and observer, subject and object, positing their conjunction not by mere fiat but by uncovering the engine of participation in the structure of redemption itself.³⁴

³³Possidius, *Life of St. Augustine*, trans. Herbert Theberath Weiskotten, The Tertullian Project, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/possidius_life_of_augustine_02_text.htm (accessed 27 June 2016).

³⁴Michael Cameron, "Enarrationes in Psalmos," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 293.

Because for Augustine, Scripture has the power to convert human affections,³⁵ the Psalms are also more than a mirror:

In Augustine's hands this image of the "mirror" does more *work* than our ordinary mirrors do. Scripture does more than show us what is the case about our face – it directs us, tells us how to feel anew, gathers up our affections and converts them. Augustine's mirror *gives* us our faces. We might say that this is a mirror that acts in reverse of normal mirrors, for here the reflection does not simply mimic the person standing before the mirror. Here the image *leads*. As Augustine says elsewhere on Psalm 107, where again the people of God sees itself as it ought to be: "Let us consider, then, the lessons this psalm offers us about what should give us joy and what evoke our groans, from whom we should expect help, why we are abandoned and how we are to be rescued. Let us see if it can teach us anything about what we are of ourselves and what through the mercy of God, about how our pride is to be shattered and his grace glorified."³⁶

Brian Stock has observed that the Psalms are central to Augustine's redirection of the ethical orientation of his conduct: "As he works toward this objective, words, phrases, and verses from the Psalms are reinterpreted within the narrative of the life that he intends to live."³⁷ What did Augustine see in the Psalms that not only did he walk his Christian journey with them by his side but he allowed himself to be led by them?

1.2.1.2 Martin Luther

I have already quoted Martin Luther on the Psalter. But regarding Luther and the Psalms, he is most known not for what he thought of the Psalms but for a hymn he

³⁵Jason Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine*, Radical Traditions (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 110.

³⁶Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding*, 110-111.

³⁷Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 114.

composed based on a Psalm: “*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*” or as translated by Frederick H. Hedge, “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” Paraphrased from Ps 46 and loved in the Protestant tradition as the “Battle Hymn of the Reformation,” it has several possible origin stories:³⁸ Heinrich Heine claims that Luther and his companions sang it on April 16, 1521 as they arrived to attend the Diet of Worms. But if this is so, why was it not published with Luther’s other earlier hymns in 1524? An anecdote not attested to by historical facts suggests that it was written in tribute to Leonhard Kaiser, a friend of Luther who was burned at the stake on August 16, 1527. A third theory is that it was composed during the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 to revive dejected hearts. Perhaps, too, it was written for the Diet of Spires in 1529 when the German princes formally lodged their protest against the revocation of their liberties and were thus called Protestants.

Wilhelm Scherer, historian of German literature, states that the hymn was written in October 1527, and Julius Köstlin, a biographer of Luther, accepts this date.³⁹ We have evidence supporting this in the Hans Weiss Wittenberg hymnal published in 1528. After many years of not having a copy of this hymnbook as proof, a February 1528 copy which included “*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*” was just recently discovered.⁴⁰

In 1527, Luther suffered not only from dizzy spells, intense buzzing in his left ear, and other symptoms of illness, but also from severe depression. After one of his episodes of physical and emotional debilitation, he wrote his close friend and collaborator Philip

³⁸See James Mearns, “*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*,” in *A Dictionary of Hymnology: Setting Forth the Origin and History of Christian Hymns of All Ages and Nations*, rev. ed., ed. John Julian, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1957), 323.

³⁹Louis F. Benson, *Classic Hymn Stories: Inspiring Stories Behind Our Best-Loved Hymns* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2007), 93.

⁴⁰Benson, *Classic Hymn Stories*, 93.

Melanchthon, “I spent more than a week in death and hell. My entire body was in pain, and I still tremble. Completely abandoned by Christ, I labored under the vacillations and storms of desperation and blasphemy against God. But through the prayers of the saints [his friends], God began to have mercy on me and pulled my soul from the inferno below.” In August of 1527, the bubonic plague came and spread in Wittenberg. Luther tried to care for the sick and even though his wife was pregnant, transformed his home into a hospital. He was helpless as he watched many friends die. Then his first son Hans became ill.⁴¹

Could a hymn like “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” come out of the turmoil that Luther went through in 1527? Yes, and we become more confident in our answer when we consider the message of Ps 46 from which it was adapted: “Though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea,” we will not fear (v. 2). God is a bulwark never failing. “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (v. 7). Trouble and tumult may come, but we will not be destroyed. God constantly assures us, “Be still, and know that I am God” (v. 10).

“‘Come, Philip,’ [Luther] used to say to Melancthon, his collaborator, when the world seemed to him to be out of joint, ‘let us sing the forty-sixth psalm.’ By this he meant his own ‘characteristic version’ of that psalm as given in his famous hymn.”⁴² No

⁴¹See Mark Galli, “The Weak Man Behind a Mighty Fortress,” *Christian History* 39 (July 1993), Christian History Institute, <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/uploaded/50cf7fdbd09b24.47881377.pdf> (accessed June 27, 2016).

⁴²Edwin W. Bowen, “Two German Hymns: A Study in German Hymnody of the Reformation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 56, no. 224 (October 1899), 676. This anecdote is also shared by James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 388.

wonder then that when Luther died in 1546, its first line was inscribed on his tomb. But is it just a fixed message of the Psalms which appealed to Luther?

How one deciphers what the Psalms tell us can change. In 1513, not long after Luther became a doctor of theology, he started lecturing on the Psalms. In 1519, after his breakthrough insight about the righteousness of God, he said, “Armed more fully with these thoughts [about God’s righteousness], I began a second time to interpret the Psalter.”⁴³ What is it in the Psalter that provides stability in times of turmoil but also allows development in its message? This is what *habitus* gives us: the creative dynamic between structure and improvisation, familiarity that leads to new applications to our particular situations.

1.2.2 A Witness in the Present

1.2.2.1 Kathleen Norris

Reading about the witnesses above, one may object and say, “But Augustine and Luther are giants! Is there someone more reachable?” Though not a dwarf in terms of her accomplishments – as seen in the success of her award-winning *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*⁴⁴ and bestselling *The Cloister Walk*⁴⁵ – Kathleen Norris may be able to offer us something closer to our own experiences.

She writes:

⁴³See Martin Luther, “Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings, 1545,” trans. Lewis W. Spitz, in *Career of the Reformer 4*, vol. 34 of *Luther’s Works*, American edition, ed. Lewis W. Spitz and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 336-337.

⁴⁴See Kathleen Norris, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993).

⁴⁵See Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), EPUB.

[T]o the modern reader the psalms can seem impenetrable: how in the world can we read, let alone pray, these angry and often violent poems from an ancient warrior culture? At a glance they seem overwhelmingly patriarchal, ill-tempered, moralistic, vengeful, and often seem to reflect precisely what is wrong with our world. And that's the point, or part of it. As one reads the psalms every day, it becomes clear that the world they depict is not really so different from our own.⁴⁶

Norris likes to quote C. S. Lewis when he says that when we read the Psalms about betrayal and danger and revenge, we are in the world we know. But she adds, "I also like to say the Psalms point us to a world we don't know, where hills leap for joy and rivers clap their hands. The Psalms always try to aim us toward God's world."⁴⁷ There is violence and vengeance, but there is also wonder and marvel at "the God who made whales to play with, who calls the stars by name, who asks us to drink from the stream of delight."⁴⁸

But Norris also admits that daily exposure to the Psalms, as she experienced in her two nine-month "gestations" in a Benedictine monastery in Minnesota, can make it possible "to become numb to them, to read even the most stunning poetry ('By God's word the heavens were made, / by the breath of God's mouth all the stars' [Ps 33:6]) in such a way that you scarcely notice what you've said."⁴⁹ What kept this woman who confesses to not having gone to church for some twenty years following high school still

⁴⁶Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, 179.8.

⁴⁷Kathleen Norris, quoted in Judith Valente, "Writing, Death and Monastic Wisdom: A Conversation with Kathleen Norris," *America: The National Catholic Review*, June 19, 2015, <http://americamagazine.org/content/dispatches/writing-death-and-monastic-wisdom-conversation-kathleen-norris> (accessed June 29, 2016).

⁴⁸Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, 205.1.

⁴⁹Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, 191.5-193.4.

attending the Liturgy of the Hours with the monks? What sustained her in the practice of the Psalms? And what made this married woman who was raised a Protestant to also vow to be not just a Benedictine associate but an “oblate” in the profound sense of the word?⁵⁰

I end my account of the witnesses above with questions. These I answer in the next chapters as I also develop how the Psalms teach.

Praying with the Psalms transformed Augustine, Luther, and many other figures in history. As already glimpsed in what was shared about Norris, engaging the Psalter in practice can continue to transform people today. What the Psalms did for Augustine, Luther, and Norris, they can continue to do for the postmodern age.

1.3 THE POWER OF THE PSALMS IN POSTMODERNITY

In this section, I make a case for a practice of the Psalms in today’s world and show how praying with the Psalter can address the characteristics and the needs of our postmodern age. This is done in two parts. In the first, guided by Michael Paul Gallagher’s *Clashing Symbols* and Harold Daly Horrell’s article “Cultural Postmodernity and Christian Faith Formation,” I present how the Psalms meet us where we are. Following these two authors, I do not discuss the philosophy of postmodernism, the “intellectual school of thinking associated with Lyotard or Derrida, or even tracing its origins as far back as Nietzsche,” because I am more interested in postmodernity, the “wider cultural context that includes ways of life as well as forms of thinking, and which

⁵⁰Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, 19.0-20.8.

can be viewed more as a ‘sensibility,’ or as a ‘postmodernity of the street.’”⁵¹ Yes, postmodernism and postmodernity are not completely separable. As Gallagher points out, both share a questioning of what modernity has achieved, but whereas postmodernism operates mainly in a mode of refutation, postmodernity goes beyond negative critique. “[T]here is a ‘deconstructive’ or even destructive element in the philosophies of postmodernism, whereas postmodernity can be described as having two wings, one of existential lostness and one of ‘reconstructive’ exploration of new frontiers.”⁵² The power of the Psalms is not just in having features that resonate with the “lostness” but in aiding us in the groping for “new frontiers.” In the second part of this section, guided by C. Taylor’s story of how we arrived at this “secular age,” I present how the Psalms can help us move beyond our present confines. I do not pretend to have a comprehensive treatment of postmodernity or a systematic dialogue with C. Taylor on the secular age. I only tackle points that relate to the Psalms.⁵³

1.3.1 The Psalms Meet Us Where We Are

1.3.1.1 A movement away from meta-narratives

The first characteristic of cultural postmodernity that Horrell points out is a lessening of reliance on “overarching frameworks of meaning”⁵⁴ or meta-stories as

⁵¹Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*, new and rev. ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 99.

⁵²Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 99.

⁵³In this section and for the rest of this study, when I talk about the Psalms or the Psalter, unless it is clear that I am referring to the text or the book, I ask the reader to assume that I mean practices of praying with the Psalms that entail committed engagement.

⁵⁴Harold Daly Horrell, “Cultural Postmodernity and Christian Faith Formation,” in *Horizons and Hopes: The Future of Religious Education*, eds. Thomas Groome and Harold Daly Horrell (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 83.

Gallagher calls them. This is not a complete rejection of meta-narratives – that in itself would be a meta-narrative – but a relegation of meaning-making paradigms to secondary importance. Postmoderns begin not with universalizing insights but with experience.

There are scholars who try to see the Psalter as a book with a single unifying message, a meta-narrative, or a movement from Ps 1 to Ps 150.⁵⁵ This was triggered by Brevard Child’s suggestion⁵⁶ which Gerald Wilson took up in the already mentioned “The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter.” In his dissertation, Wilson argues that the arrangement of the Psalter is a response to the fall of the Davidic monarchy and a rededication to Yahweh’s kingship.⁵⁷ As another example, Walter Brueggemann sees in the Psalter a movement from obedience to praise.⁵⁸ For Nancy deClaissé-Walford, the Psalter tells the story of Israel for the Jews after the exile. She juxtaposes the five books of the Psalter with the major events of Israelite history.⁵⁹ One problem with this approach is that the “single message” scholars see in the Psalter seems based on selectivity⁶⁰ – certain Psalms are chosen and given more importance than others. The patterns scholars have pointed out do not always hold when a bigger net is cast and more Psalms are considered. For example, Brueggemann’s trajectory of praise does not really work when

⁵⁵See S. Jonathan Murphy, “Is the Psalter a Book with a Single Message?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165 (2008): 283-293, for an overview of this trend in Psalm studies.

⁵⁶See p. 25 above.

⁵⁷See Gerald Henry Wilson, “The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1981).

⁵⁸See Walter Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 50 (1991): 63-92.

⁵⁹See Nancy deClaissé-Walford, “The Meta-Narrative of the Psalter,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 363-376.

⁶⁰Murphy, “Is the Psalter a Book with a Single Message?” 292-293.

one considers Ps 143 and its ending, “In your steadfast love, cut off my enemies, and destroy all my adversaries, for I am your servant.” How does this Psalm fit with its neighboring Psalms and their praise of God? Why was Ps 143 put so close to the end? If we want to insist that the Psalter moves from obedience to praise, we must admit that it does so in fits and starts. Perhaps the safest conclusion we can make is, as William Brown notes, “on the smallest of scales, many psalms exhibit literary and thematic connections with their most immediate neighbors” – proofs of a deliberate arrangement within various clusters but not really of the whole Psalter.⁶¹

When used as in the Divine Office, or when taken five Psalms a day to complete the book in a month as in some Christian traditions, the Psalter does not give a sense that it is following a single movement. It is more those who study the Psalms as text rather than those who take them as prayer who see a flow in the Psalter. What stands out when the Psalter is put in practice is how the Psalms relate to individual experiences. If there is a story that can be read in praying with the Psalter, it is the narrative that follows the life of the pray-er, a plot that is still unfolding. This is related to the next characteristic of postmodernity.

1.3.1.2 A movement away from comprehensive and foundational knowledge toward an embrace of specificity and limitation in knowing⁶²

Postmodern knowing is more about the concrete experience, and because there are an almost uncountable set of concrete experiences, we must humbly admit that we cannot know everything. The Psalms allow for the pray-er to be perplexed. This perplexity is not

⁶¹Brown, “The Psalms: An Overview,” 3.

⁶²Horrell, “Cultural Postmodernity,” 86.

just temporary confusion; it can be existential. When one finds himself or herself in turmoil, in a dizzying state when one not only does not know what to think but also what to feel, perplexity becomes palpable. The Psalms give us words for just this tumult, but the Psalms do not give us nice and neat explanations.

Ps 44 begins by praising God for his mighty acts in the past:

We have heard with our ears, O God,
our ancestors have told us,
what deeds you performed in their days,
in the days of old:
you with your own hand drove out the nations,
but them you planted;
you afflicted the peoples,
but them you set free (Ps 44:1-2).

But in the present, the psalmist finds that God has withdrawn from his people:

Yet you have rejected us and abased us,
and have not gone out with our armies.
You made us turn back from the foe,
and our enemies have taken spoil for themselves.
You have made us like sheep for slaughter,
and have scattered us among the nations.
You have sold your people for a trifle,
demanding no high price for them (Ps 44:9-12).

Why has God seemingly abandoned his people? In Ps 44 at least, this cannot be because God's people have sinned or erred:

All this has come upon us,
yet we have not forgotten you,
or been false to your covenant.
Our heart has not turned back,
nor have our steps departed from your way,
yet you have broken us in the haunt of jackals,
and covered us with deep darkness (Ps 44:17-19).

The psalmist has already established that God is not weak and the people are not in the wrong. Why then does God not do anything to rescue his people? The perplexity is increased as we find out that it is not for faith~~less~~ness that this fate has befallen God's people. The text testifies that it is in fact for their faith~~ful~~ness that the people have found themselves in such a state:

Because of you [emphasis added], we are being killed all day long,
and accounted as sheep for the slaughter (Ps 44:22).

So again, why is God not acting in behalf of those who are standing up for him?

Ps 89 is marked with a similar perplexity. It recounts the promise made by God to David:

I have found my servant David;
with my holy oil I have anointed him;
my hand shall always remain with him;
my arm also shall strengthen him.
The enemy shall not outwit him,
the wicked shall not humble him.
I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.
My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him;
and in my name his horn shall be exalted...
For ever I will keep my steadfast love for him,
and my covenant with him will stand firm.
I will establish his line for ever,
and his throne as long as the heavens endure (Ps 89: 20-24, 28-29).

But what happens if David's descendants are not faithful to God?

If his children forsake my law
and do not walk according to my ordinances...
then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their iniquity with scourges;
but I will not remove from him my steadfast love,
or be false to my faithfulness.
I will not violate my covenant,

or alter the word that went forth from my lips (Ps 89: 30, 32-33).

David's children may be punished, but God will never break his covenant with David.

This inviolability is stressed when God makes an oath:

I will not violate my covenant,
or alter the word that went forth from my lips.
Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness;
I will not lie to David (Ps 89: 34-35).

This oath is not only “once and for all,” it is made with the expression “by my holiness” – an idiom of supreme emphasis. But in verses 38 to 39, the unthinkable is bared:

But now you [the Lord] have spurned and rejected him [David];
you are full of wrath against your anointed.
You have renounced the covenant with your servant;
you have defiled his crown in the dust.

It is not just the descendants of David who are punished; it is David himself. What happens when the steadfast God breaks his promise? Is God fickle? What will happen to the world if God is proven to be fickle?

There is no resolution in either Ps 44 or Ps 89. In the end, there is no theological rationalizing but only an anguished plea: “Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not cast us off for ever!” (Ps 44:23). “How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself for ever?” (Ps 89:46).⁶³ Kathleen Norris writes, “If the psalm doesn’t offer an answer, it allows us to dwell on the question.”⁶⁴

⁶³I am indebted to Richard W. L. Moberly for this reading of Pss 44 and 89. See his *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 212-231.

⁶⁴Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, 201.2

Specificity and limitation in knowing also open us up to a greater tolerance for ambiguity. The Psalms also help us become more comfortable in the gray areas of our lives. Some scholars classify Ps 41 as a Psalm of thanksgiving. The first three verses are in the form of a beatitude. In the beatitude or *asre* (“Happy-are-those-who”) formula, these scholars see the vindication and healing the psalmist has received from God:

Happy are those who consider the poor;
the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble.
The Lord protects them and keeps them alive;
they are called happy in the land.
You do not give them up to the will of their enemies.
The Lord sustains them on their sickbed;
in their illness you heal all their infirmities (Ps 41: 1-3).

The vindication is again proclaimed by the psalmist in verses 11 and 12:

By this I know that you are pleased with me;
because my enemy has not triumphed over me.
But you have upheld me because of my integrity,
and set me in your presence for ever.

But other scholars say that Ps 41 is a lament. These scholars read verses 4 to 10 not as statements that the psalmist has already been healed but as statements of petition and hope:

As for me, I said, ‘O Lord, be gracious to me;
heal me, for I have sinned against you.’
My enemies wonder in malice
when I will die, and my name perish.
And when they come to see me, they utter empty words,
while their hearts gather mischief;
when they go out, they tell it abroad.
All who hate me whisper together about me;
they imagine the worst for me.
They think that a deadly thing has fastened on me,
that I will not rise again from where I lie.

Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted,
who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me.
But you, O Lord, be gracious to me,
and raise me up, that I may repay them (Ps 41: 4-10).

Clifford is of the opinion that Ps 41 is a thanksgiving but in a Solomonic insight, sees that suffering and thanksgiving are intimately related: “One cannot give heartfelt thanks without a keen sense of ‘how bad things were,’ and one cannot plead for help without a hope that ‘things can be better.’ Without a memory of past suffering, thanksgiving gives way to short-lived euphoria. Without hope, there is only surrender and despair.”⁶⁵ Ps 41 can teach us to keep our thanks and our lament in a bittersweet embrace. Our lives are not black and white but lived in the varying shades of the gray which dominate the postmodern perspective.

*1.3.1.3 Self and social identity are seen not as givens but as projects*⁶⁶

While many lament Psalms conclude with trust and hope, there are also some Psalms that do not have a “happily ever after.” Ps 137 leaves one with a bitter – if not bloody – taste in the mouth when its last verse calls for violent revenge: “Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!” Ps 88 begins with a cry and a plea to God but ends with God seemingly deaf to the psalmist’s plight: “You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me; my companions are in darkness.” In Pss 137 and 88, there is no redemption... yet. And praying with the Psalms tells us this is all right; this is real life. Not every day ends with our prayers answered. Many times, we are left

⁶⁵See Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, 208-213.

⁶⁶Horrell, “Cultural Postmodernity,” 84.

hanging, and this is so because we are still in process. The world is still unfolding, and many things have yet to be revealed.

Even Psalms that end with trust and hope affirm that there is a process we must go through. Form criticism has identified the parts of the Psalms of lament. They generally begin with a cry to the Lord, continue with a complaint that describes a problem (e.g., sickness, injustice, or the treachery of former friends), affirm trust in God, petition the Lord for rescue or the downfall of one's enemies, and conclude with statements of praise.⁶⁷ We cannot just jump from crying to praising. We need to be able to express our complaint and anger, too, and these Psalms allow us to go through the process. Even if many of them end in joy, those struggling still in anger can take this as encouragement, a goal to strive for rather than a state already arrived at.

1.3.2 The Psalms Challenge Us to Go Beyond Where We Are

1.3.2.1 A way out of the "buffered self"

Modernity and the achievements of science have "disenchanted" the Western world. Demons and spirits have been replaced by more natural and material explanations. When C. Taylor talks about disenchantment, he gives it a different nuance: From meaning being out here in the world, meaning retreats into the mind.⁶⁸ In the enchanted world, things outside of the mind have meaning on their own and make demands on me. In the disenchanted world, the "I" gives meaning to the outside world. In the enchanted world, the human agent is "porous."⁶⁹ In the disenchanted world, the human agent is, in

⁶⁷Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, 22.

⁶⁸See C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 31-32.

C. Taylor's description, "buffered,"⁷⁰ "insulated and isolated in its interiority."⁷¹ The buffered self is a disengaged self, buffered not just from the natural but also from one's social surroundings. The buffered self leads to individualism and even atomism.⁷²

How can a sustained engagement with the Psalter lead us out of the buffered self?

1.3.2.2 *A way out of the religious dilemma*

C. Taylor points out two critiques against Christianity:

On one hand, religion actuated by pride or fear sets impossibly high goals for humans, of asceticism, or mortification, or renunciation of ordinary human ends. It invites us to "transcend humanity," and this cannot but end up mutilating us; it leads us to despise and neglect the ordinary fulfillment and happiness which is within our reach... On the other hand, the reproach is levelled that religion cannot face the real hard facts about nature and human life: that we are imperfect beings, the product of evolution, with a lot of aggression and conflict built into our natures; that there is also much which is horrible and terrible in human life which can't just be wished away. Religion tends to bowdlerize reality.⁷³

The problem – or better, dilemma – we face with these two critiques is "it seems hard to avoid one of these criticisms without impaling oneself on the other."⁷⁴ If we dive too deep into the difficult realities of our human nature, we might end up not seeing the joy within our reach in the present. But if we get too caught up in the happiness we have now, it might be because we are not taking the hard facts of life seriously enough. C.

⁶⁹C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 35.

⁷⁰C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37.

⁷¹This elegant encapsulation of the buffered self comes from James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2014), 30.

⁷²C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 41-42.

⁷³C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 623-624.

⁷⁴C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 624.

Taylor summarizes this dilemma in what he calls the maximal demand: “How to define our highest spiritual or moral aspirations for human beings, while showing a path to the transformation involved which doesn’t crush, mutilate or deny what is essential to our humanity.”⁷⁵

James K. A. Smith insightfully calls into question a presupposition that underwrites this maximal demand: its anthropocentrism, which is fixated on expectations of human flourishing, something which C. Taylor seems to uncritically accept.⁷⁶ Can the Psalms give us a way out of this anthropocentrism and the maximal demand of the modern age?

1.3.2.3 A way out of “flatness”

Towards the end of *A Secular Age*, C. Taylor takes us on a poetic itinerary using Gerard Manley Hopkins as a guide. Why? The language of poetry for C. Taylor is a way out of the “flatness” that has come to the secular age. Poetry goes beyond just pointing to something in reality; it constitutes, it makes.⁷⁷

The Psalms, too, are poetry. Walter Brueggemann, writing about the Psalms, seems to echo C. Taylor’s very thoughts:

[I]n the Psalms the use of language does not describe what is. It evokes into being what does not exist until it has been spoken. This kind of speech resists discipline, shuns precision, delights in ambiguity, is profoundly creative, and is itself an exercise in freedom. In using speech in this way, we are in fact doing in a derivative way what God has done in the creation narrative of Genesis. We are

⁷⁵C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 639-640.

⁷⁶J. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 113.

⁷⁷J. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 136.

calling into being that which does not yet exist.⁷⁸

1.3.2.4 A way into a “sense”

Poetry is not the only way C. Taylor uses to show how people have been able to escape the “immanent frame” of the secular age, the constructed social space that frames life within an enclosed, self-sufficient, naturalistic world that has no reference to transcendence. In the final chapter of *A Secular Age*, C. Taylor gives us exemplars of those who have been able to embrace a “something more,” a Transcendent.

Two chapters earlier, C. Taylor had taken issue with the modern search for meaning: “There is something absurd about the idea that our lives could be focussed on meaning as such, rather than on some specific good or value. One might die for God, or the Revolution, or the classless society, but not for meaning.”⁷⁹ In chapter 20, when he presents his exemplars and how they “converted,” what is noteworthy is that it is not because of “meaning.” In C. Taylor’s citation of Vaclav Havel’s “conversion experience,” the operative terms are more affective: “I was overcome by a sensation that is difficult to describe,” “I felt a sense of...;” “I was flooded with a sense of...;” “I would even say that I was somehow ‘struck by love,’ though I don’t know precisely for whom or what.”⁸⁰ J. Smith describes this as something like “a gut feeling” or “a vibe.”⁸¹ The modern age was characterized with the Cartesian quest for clear and distinct ideas. The

⁷⁸Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), 18.

⁷⁹C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 679.

⁸⁰C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 728-729.

⁸¹J. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 133.

postmodern age is not that obsessed with clarity and distinction. It is more welcoming of and content with “sense” rather than articulated meaning.

Havel’s experience can definitely be characterized as a moment of grace. How do we open ourselves up to such moments of grace? This is where our insistence on a sustained practice or habit of praying with the Psalms becomes important. We invoke again Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*. In making the Psalms part of our *habitus*, we develop a “sense,” a “feeling” for the Transcendent, which may not be expressed clearly and concisely in meaning formulae but becomes how we see and live in the world.

Kathleen Norris shares a Benedictine sister’s experience of that combines what we have said above about poetry and the “sense” that comes from a *habitus* that is formed by the Psalms:

One sister wrote to me: “Some winters ago, when ice covered all the lands surrounding our priory, deer came close in search of food. We had difficulty keeping them from eating our trees and even the shrubs in our cemetery.” Having been at the convent for many years, she had known most of the women buried there. One morning she woke to find that “each deer had selected a particular tombstone to lie behind, oblivious to us watching from the priory windows. The longing for God expressed at the beginning of Psalm 42, ‘Like the deer that yearns / for running streams, / so my soul is yearning / for you, My God,’ has stayed with me ever since.”⁸²

If we try to think deeply about this anecdote, we may ask, “But the deer in Ps 42 was longing for God. The deer in the cemetery lay behind tombstones. Where is the connection?” There would have been a clear connection if the deer lay at the foot of a cross or a statue of Jesus. This does not really “compute” – if we are looking for logical equivalences. If we try to think even *more* deeply, maybe we can glimpse the poetic

⁸²Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, 207.0.

connections that were being made by the Benedictine sister: Perhaps, the sisters buried underneath those tombstones were the deer, and they – as they had lived on this earth before – were still longing for God even until now? Perhaps, the image of the deer laying on the tombs was an assurance to the Benedictines who saw it that their dearly departed sisters were finally with God? Perhaps, God was the deer also seeking out these sisters? Only a sense of the Transcendent from a *habitus* formed by Psalms can see.

What other sense of the Transcendent can the Psalms give us?

Just as I ended the accounts of the witnesses to the power of the Psalms with questions, I have also ended the discussions of how the Psalms can give us a way out of the buffered self, a way out of the religious dilemma of the maximal demand, and a way into a “sense” with questions. Again, these I answer in the next chapters as I also develop how the Psalms teach especially in the postmodern age.

1.3.3 An Objection

How do you get postmoderns to engage in a sustained practice of praying with the Psalms when part of the malaise of postmodernity is a buffering against God? We can begin with exposing them to Psalms that give voice to their experiences and feelings. We can let them see how the psalmist can, in the words of the Roberta Flack song later revived by The Fugees, “strum their pain with his fingers” and “sing their life with his words.” From there, postmoderns will hopefully want to hear more and know more not only of their own lives but the life of the God the Psalms also sing about. And from there, after being “killed softly by his song,” they will also find more life. It is the same

movement we have traced in this section – meet them where they are and then bring them beyond.

1.4 EXCURSUS: INPUTS FROM NEUROSCIENCE

Theology and philosophy have long been natural partners. My use of Gadamer should come as no surprise. Theology and religious education have also been enriched by social science – as Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* has shown. But theology and the hard sciences have many times been at odds especially when science is made to debunk the claims of theology. Recently however, an increasing number of theologians and scientists have been engaging in dialogues that have been mutually enriching.⁸³ This has been happening especially in the burgeoning field of neuroscience.

David Hogue writes:

The brain sciences are becoming the church’s new partners in its commitment to the transformation of persons and communities. Daily we are confirming that the brain is built not only for survival, memory, and thought but also for feeling, relating, caring, imagining, and believing. The deepest dimensions of our humanness emerge in our brains. Our understanding of the *imago dei* underscores the importance of continuing the quest for more knowledge about the brain. The more we learn of the ways we experience God, the more deeply we may come to know Godself.⁸⁴

⁸³David A. Hogue, “Brain Matters: Practicing Religion, Forming the Faithful,” *Religious Education* 107, no. 4 (July 2012), 340.

⁸⁴David A. Hogue, *Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past: Story, Ritual, and the Human Brain* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 196.

It is not just theology but also philosophy, sociology, and religious education which can find a fruitful conversation partner neuroscience. In the introduction, I stressed, following Gadamer, that we understand from what we already know, and that there is no other way to begin understanding. Understanding and application are also intimately connected in a complex unified process. In this chapter, I repeated Gadamer's idea that there are non-verbal languages through which we understand. I also borrowed Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, and pointed out that with practice, something in us changes. What has neuroscience to say about these insights?

Biochemist James Zull, who has spent the latter part of his career building bridges between neuroscience and pedagogy, asks, "What is the physical form of knowledge in the brain? How does this physical structure change during learning?"⁸⁵ The brain is made up of cells called neurons that are enmeshed in an immense network of fibers and branches. Each neuron is typically made up of three important parts: (1) the main cell body that directs all its activities; (2) dendrites, which, compared to the other parts, are the relatively shorter fibers that receive messages from other neurons and relay those messages to the cell body; and (3) the axon, which, again compared to the other parts, is the relatively longer single fiber that transmits messages from the cell body to the dendrites (and in some cases, axons) of other neurons. Stimuli from the outside world such as light or sound are picked up as signals by dendrites. These signals pass through the main cell body to the axon (in a process that has been described as electrical) and then to other neurons. The junction where signals are transmitted from one neuron to another

⁸⁵James E. Zull, *The Art of Changing the Brain: Enriching Teaching by Exploring the Biology of Learning* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2002), 89.

is called the synapse or the synaptic cleft. Signals are typically transmitted by the release of a chemical messenger, or a neurotransmitter, into the synaptic cleft. The neurotransmitter crosses the synapse and attaches to sites called receptors on a neighboring neuron. We can say that the message is delivered when after attaching to receptors, the neurotransmitter causes a change in the receiving neuron. Learning occurs in the brain when two neurons communicate.⁸⁶ I do not have the space nor the expertise to go into the physics and the chemistry of what happens, but the most important thing for our purpose here is to note that learning happens when neurons make connections.⁸⁷ Zull, stating the same thought differently, says that if we want a physical picture of knowledge in the brain, we have it in these neuron connections or neural networks.

Nobel laureate Dr. Eric Kandel, researching on sea slugs, saw that when learning occurs, there results a functional reorganization of the neural networks.⁸⁸ In a similar way, we can say that in humans, “the brain is rewired” every time we learn something new.

We do not begin with zero connections in our brains. Even newborn babies have connections already “hardwired” in them. For example, normal infants know to turn their heads towards a sound when they hear something. Based on these already hardwired connections passed onto us genetically and through evolution, we build new connections. Continuing our example above, a gentle soothing voice is associated with the presence of

⁸⁶Marilee Sprenger, *Learning and Memory: The Brain in Action* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1999), 2.

⁸⁷Holly J. Inglis, Kathy L. Dawson, and Rodger Y. Nishioka, *Sticky Learning: How Neuroscience Supports Teaching That's Remembered* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 26.

⁸⁸Inglis, et al., *Sticky Learning*, 28.

the infant's mother, signaling that nourishment and protection are not far away. Thus, the baby can cease to cry. This is summarized by Zull in three facts he asserts:

First, prior knowledge [seen as neuron connections] is a fact... Learners do not begin with a blank slate. Second, prior knowledge is persistent. The connections in these physical networks of neurons are strong. They do not vanish with a dismissive comment by a teacher or a red mark on a paper. Third, prior knowledge is the beginning of new knowledge. It is always where all learners start.⁸⁹

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is biologically sound!

Neural change produced by stimuli from the outside world or from experience falls under the term *plasticity*. The wiring of the brain is said to be "plastic" in the sense that it can be molded. Neurons that are repeatedly used develop stronger synapses. New dendritic structures and new synapses may grow, resulting in more connected neural networks.⁹⁰ Proof of this can be seen in the brain scans of experienced and inexperienced Braille readers. The brain modules dedicated to the index finger of experienced Braille readers were, when activated, much bigger than those in inexperienced Braille readers. The repeated stimuli to the small area of skin on the tip of the forefinger had created an enlarged somatosensory area in the neocortex.⁹¹ Researcher Joe Dispenza uses the example of a piano tuner: The "ear" of a piano tuner can get so developed through repetition that, with time, he or she may no longer need to check with instruments. The piano tuner can become sensitive to sounds others may not even hear because of the

⁸⁹Zull, *The Art of Changing the Brain*, 93.

⁹⁰Zull, *The Art of Changing the Brain*, 115-117.

⁹¹See Alvaro Pascual-Leone and Fernando Torres, "Plasticity of the Sensorimotor Cortex Representations of the Reading Finger in Braille Readers," *Brain* 116 (1993): 39-52.

refinement in the neural circuits of his auditory cortex. These can become more intricately branched because of practice.⁹² Bourdieu's *habitus* and the changes it brings about in us have connections with neuroscience!

New technologies now make us able to observe brain processes that we were never able to before. Functional magnetic resonance images (fMRI) were taken of people reading stories and observing wordless cartoons. These subjects were asked to decipher what might be going through the minds of the characters in those stories and cartoons. Researchers found that we do not require words or explicit narratives to speculate about the motives and intentions of others.⁹³ Functional magnetic resonance has shown that like verbal languages, non-verbal languages can help us understand.

Above, we also said that understanding and application cannot really be separated. Neuroscientists have seen that sharp distinctions between theory and practice are also hard to maintain because of the significant overlap in the neuron system between visual and motor activity. "That rigid divide between perceptive, motor, and cognitive processes is to a great extent artificial; not only does perception appear to be embedded in the dynamics of action, becoming much more composite than used to be thought in the past, but the acting brain is also and above all a brain that understands."⁹⁴

⁹²Joe Dispenza, *Evolve Your Brain: The Science of Changing Your Mind* (Dearfield, FL: Health Communications, 2007), 172.

⁹³See Helen L. Gallagher, Francesca Happé, Nicola Brunswick, Paul C. Fletcher, Uta Frith, and Christopher D. Frith, "Reading the Mind in Cartoons and Stories: An fMRI study of 'Theory of Mind' in Verbal and Nonverbal Tasks," *Neuropsychologia* 38 (2000): 11-21.

⁹⁴Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain: How our Minds Share Actions and Emotions*, trans. Frances Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), xi.

In the next chapters, I present other excursions on neuroscience. In including these in this study, I do not mean to use science as a definitive proof, the final word that will seal my arguments. Scientific theories are not that “scientific” as Thomas Kuhn has shown in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. The development of scientific theory does not emerge from a straightforward and objective accumulation of facts, but from a set of changing intellectual circumstances and possibilities and, though those from the Enlightenment period may disagree, traditions.⁹⁵ Don Browning makes a similar point when he notes that science itself is heir to a broad base of tradition inherited from cultural and religious sources: “[T]he explanatory and distancing objectives of science do not stand on their own foundation. They evolve out of a prior understanding of the [Gadamerian concept of] effective history that shapes us all and then returns to that history with refinements and adjustments to the massive funds of wisdom and insight which tradition delivers to us from the tested, and sometimes not-so-tested, experience of the past.”⁹⁶

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore cites the four positions professor of physics and religion Ian Barbour lists as possibilities in the relationship between science and religion: conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration.⁹⁷ In the conflict position, science and religion are seen as competing explanatory views of reality – each is exhaustive and we

⁹⁵See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 210.

⁹⁶Don S. Browning, *Reviving Christian Humanism: The New Conversation on Spirituality, Theology, and Psychology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 22-23. For Gadamer’s concept of effective history, see *Truth and Method*, 299-ff.

⁹⁷See Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “Cognitive Neuroscience and the Question of Theological Method,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 20, no. 2 (2010), 71-80.

must choose between them. In the independence model, science and religion are separate spheres; science does not pose any threat to religion and vice versa because science and religion serve different functions in human life. They must not meddle in each other's affairs. Dialogue and integration go beyond conflict and independence. Integration seeks a larger umbrella that can shelter both science and religion. Dialogue hopes to find ways for science and religion to influence each other.

People can occupy more than one position, and Miller-McLemore certainly does in describing her own model which she names as critical correlation. For Miller-McLemore, science and religion are separate *and* related. There is a moment of independence – and this is necessary to preserve the distinctness of each field. Inspired by Browning, she also notes four moments when there should be dialogue:

when theology makes statements about the empirical world... to which sciences may contribute; when science becomes dogmatic or ideological and begins to form culture; when science requires normative and philosophical guidance for its goals and direction; and, finally, when visions of the “good life” in theology and science conflict. The goal of dialogue is neither integration nor triumph of science over religion (or vice versa) but clear articulation of boundaries, corrections, and intersections.⁹⁸

I am aware that in using neuroscience – and sociology and philosophy – I am crossing disciplines. But in crossing disciplines, the precise point I want to make is that there are intersections. What I have to be careful with is to respect the boundaries of each discipline.

⁹⁸Miller-McLemore, “Cognitive Neuroscience and the Question of Theological Method,” 76.

Carrie Doehring, in her own articulation of how science and religion should relate with each other, uses the expression “Mind the gap.” She believes that there should be a critical correlation moment *and* an integrative moment in the relationship:

A [critical] correlational method protects the integrity of and differences between each disciplinary voice in a way that preserves the gap between the cognitive sciences and theology, as well as the gap between these theoretical perspectives and complex religious phenomena encountered in practice... When we shift from a critical correlative method into an integrative method, we need to pay attention to whether our provisional truth claims are reducing the complexity of findings from the cognitive sciences, the complexity of religious and theological perspectives, or the complexity of the religious phenomena we encounter in our practices. If we move prematurely to integrate disciplinary voices before each voice is fully developed or elaborated, the forced harmony will likely drown out or distort one of these voices. When we make that integrative move, we need to do it provisionally and with utmost caution, formulating understandings that will work for the time being. We need to mind the gap.⁹⁹

Though I have simplified neuroscientific findings above, it is only for the purpose of presentation in a non-scientific and non-technical paper. What I have dealt with is definitely more complex. The brain itself is more complicated than even our most advanced equipment and our latest technologies can capture. Every brain contains approximately 100 billion cells that can be wired into an estimated 100 trillion connections. There are multiple possible paths for each connection. No wonder then that we also cannot define the exact process we learn in a step-by-step program. A practice of the Psalms and how it teaches is also more complex than scientific experiments and studies can fully explain. In this and future excursions, I only intend to present

⁹⁹Carrie Doehring, “Minding the Gap when Cognitive Neuroscience is a Cognate Discipline in Pastoral Theology: Lessons from Neurotheology,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 20, no. 2 (2010), 94.

provisional connections, possible conversation points that will hopefully shed more light than shadow.

In these excursions, I also want to make it clear that I am against any crass material reductionism. I hold an “emergentist” position: What make us human *emerge* from the physical, but also transcend it. This position goes beyond any simple Cartesian substance dualism, but the main problem here is that there still is no coherent account of emergence – the how and why of its occurrence.¹⁰⁰ A dimension of this difficulty, to which I agree, is nicely summarized by neuroscientist Mario Beauregard, who studies consciousness and mysticism, pushes for a non-materialist science of mind, and argues for a reality beyond the empirically verifiable: “In my view, ethical achievements are the outcome of contact with a transcendental reality behind the universe and not simply the outcome of the multiplication of neurons in the prefrontal cortex of the human brain.”¹⁰¹

In a recent survey of young American Catholics, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) found that one reason for leaving the faith is the impression that Catholicism is incompatible with the science being taught in schools and universities.¹⁰² An important purpose this and the next excursions serve is to show that what I am saying about the Psalms and how they teach has scientific bases.

¹⁰⁰For a brief treatment of emergentism, see Sarah Coakley “Postscript: What (If Anything) Can the Sciences Tell Philosophy and Theology About Faith, Rationality and the Passions?” *Modern Theology* 27, no. 2 (April 2011), 359-360.

¹⁰¹Mario Beauregard and Denyse O’Leary, *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Case for the Existence of the Soul* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 152.

¹⁰²Mark Gray, “Young People Are Leaving the Faith. Here’s Why,” *Our Sunday Visitor*, August 27, 2016, <https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/PapalVisit/Articles/Article/TabId/2727/ArtMID/20933/ArticleID/20512> (accessed November 6, 2016). As of this writing, the initial results of this CARA study have been published only in this article.

Neuroscience has received a lot of attention since 1990, the beginning of what was declared as the “Decade of the Brain” in the United States. But with the increase in interest came an increase in misunderstanding and misconceptions especially in the effort of educators to apply the results of brain research in the classroom. In 2002, the Brain and Learning project of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) raised concerns about the proliferation of “neuromyths.” Examples of these “neuromyths” are: “We only use ten percent of our brain;” “there are multiple intelligences;” and “there are left-and right brain learners.” While these are loosely-based on scientific research, they have been misread or misappropriated or simply debunked by more recent studies. Not only have “neuromyths” spread misinformation, their influence has also resulted in wasted time, money, and effort as well-intentioned education professionals have tried to integrate them into their lesson plans. Students are better served with evidence-based practices rather than “neuromyths.”¹⁰³ Another purpose of these excursions is to provide more dependable ideas from neuroscience for use by theology teachers, Scripture professors, and religious educators.

1.5 LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

In this chapter, I established that I am going to focus on the transformative aspect of a practice of praying with the Psalms. Echoing Groome, I pointed out that transformation is a lifelong process, and thus, a committed engagement in practice is

¹⁰³Sanne Dekker, Nikki C. Lee, Paul Howard-Jones, and Jelle Jolles, “Neuromyths in Education: Prevalence and Predictors of Misconceptions Among Teachers,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 3 (October 2012), 1-2.

helpful in sustaining it. For this, we have the witness of Augustine, Luther, and Norris – ones who have become “happy” by meditating on the Psalms day and night. But what really happens when someone “transforms”?

In the next chapter, I present a framework for transformation and show how the Psalms can facilitate transformation, serving as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

2.0 “A LAMP TO MY FEET AND A LIGHT TO MY PATH” (PS 119:105): A FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSFORMATION THAT THE PSALMS CAN ACCOMPANY

In the first chapter, the ongoing aspect of transformation was highlighted. Because it is a lifelong journey, transformation can be aided by a sustained spiritual practice like praying with the Psalms. But how can we define transformation? What happens when someone transforms? How can our answers to these questions illumine how the Psalms teach?

2.1 TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

2.1.1 What Is Transformation?

One of the first steps Gadamer takes in laying out the elements of his theory of hermeneutic experience is the rehabilitation of the concept of prejudice.¹ In the introduction and in the first chapter, I touched on how we do not understand from zero. We begin understanding from what we already know, and what we know is influenced by our prejudices. Originally, a prejudice was a necessary pre-judgment, one that was rendered before all the elements that determined a situation had been examined. “In German legal terminology a ‘prejudice’ was a provisional legal verdict before the final

¹See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 273-278.

verdict was reached.”² It was a hypothesis that was advanced for the purpose of being guided towards a better grounded conclusion. A prejudice could have a positive or a negative value depending on how it affected the later evaluation of a situation, but it was the negative that was stressed by the Enlightenment’s prejudice against the prejudice of tradition and authority.³ Many thinkers during the Enlightenment tried to distance themselves from tradition and authority in favor of the method of science – which in itself was another prejudice, though one not acknowledged by many Enlightenment thinkers.

Without prejudices, we cannot know. They are “conditions of understanding.”⁴ What we must keep in mind is that we are always biased. We must always try to be aware of our biases⁵ and remind ourselves that our prejudices must only be “provisional.”

While Gadamer writes about prejudices, adult education theorist Jack Mezirow writes about habits of meaning-making: “What we perceive and fail to perceive and what we think and fail to think are powerfully influenced by habits of expectation that constitute our frame of reference, that is, a set of assumptions that structure the way we interpret our experiences.”⁶ It is important to stress that while our “habits of expectation” allow us to see, they can also hinder our sight. In a similar way, Gadamer warns that there

²Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 273.

³Gadamer also seeks to rehabilitate tradition and authority in *Truth and Method*, 278-285.

⁴Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 278.

⁵Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 271.

⁶Jack Mezirow, “How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning,” in *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood*, ed. Jack Mezirow (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990), 1.

are prejudices that aid us to understand and prejudices that lead to misunderstanding.⁷ But how do we know which are productive prejudices and which are not? How do we know which habits of expectation help clarify things for us and which cloud our perceptions?

In Gadamer's hermeneutics, there is the phenomenon of "being pulled up short by the text."⁸ When a text does not yield any meaning for us or when its meaning is incompatible with what we had expected, we can begin questioning our prejudices and fore-conceptions. In life, we not only have texts but experiences. Religious education theorist Jane Regan writes, "All learning is rooted in experience. It is through experience – understood as engagement with one's social and cultural environment – that learning takes place. Experiences that educate provide the person with new insights, understandings, and perspectives."⁹ Edward Taylor and Patricia Cranton, colleagues of Mezirow, would add to this line of thinking:

We develop habitual expectations based on past experiences. We expect things to be as they were before. Or, put another way, we uncritically assimilate perspectives from our social world, community, and culture. Those perspectives include distortions, stereotypes, and prejudices. They guide our decision making and our actions until we encounter a situation that is not congruent with our expectation. At that point, we may reject the discrepant perspective or enter into a process that could lead to a transformed perspective.¹⁰

⁷Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295.

⁸Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 270.

⁹Jane E. Regan, *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 77. Regan here follows the thought of John Dewey in *Experience and Education* (see Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 106).

¹⁰Patricia Cranton and Edward W. Taylor, "Transformative Learning Theory: Seeking a More Unified Theory," in *Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Edward W. Taylor and Patricia Cranton (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 6.

For the times when our experiences demand we not only revise one or two prejudices but a whole perspective, as described above, what may help clarify our discussion is Mezirow's differentiation of our habits of meaning-making into two dimensions: *meaning schemes* and *meaning perspectives*.

Meaning schemes were defined by Mezirow in 1990 as "sets of related and habitual expectations governing if-then, cause-effect, and category relationships as well as event sequences."¹¹ Five years later, Mezirow would describe a meaning scheme as a "specific set of beliefs, knowledge, judgment, attitude, and feeling which shape a particular interpretation."¹² Meaning schemes give particular expression to the generally less-conscious second dimension of meaning-making: *meaning perspectives*.¹³

A meaning perspective is "made up of higher-order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, prototypes, goal orientations, and evaluations, and what linguists call 'networks of arguments.' ... Meaning perspectives refer to the structure of assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one's past experience during the process of interpretation. They involve the application of habits of expectation to objects or events to form an interpretation."¹⁴ In 2000, Mezirow wrote of "meaning perspectives" as synonymous with "frames of reference." "Frames of

¹¹Mezirow, "How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning," 2.

¹²Jack Mezirow, "Transformation Theory of Adult Learning" in *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning*, ed. Michael Welton (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1995), 42.

¹³Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 82.

¹⁴Mezirow, "How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning," 2.

reference” were composed of “habits of mind,” which are sets of broad, generalized, and orienting predispositions that aided the interpretations of experience.¹⁵

Mezirow sees his use of the concept of meaning perspectives or frames of reference as analogous to Thomas Kuhn’s “paradigms.”¹⁶ Studying how scientific revolutions took place, Kuhn used paradigms to refer to ways of seeing, methods of inquiry, beliefs, and ideas that guided how science was practiced in a particular field. “Models,” “conceptual approaches,” and “worldviews” are other ways scholars have referred to Kuhn’s paradigms. Kuhn’s idea of the “paradigm shift” which happens during scientific revolutions influenced how Mezirow thought of the shift in an individual’s meaning perspective. In fact, another way Mezirow describes meaning perspective is as “a personal paradigm for understanding ourselves and our relationships.”¹⁷ One major difference between Kuhn’s paradigms and Mezirow’s meaning perspectives is that Mezirow’s meaning perspectives are usually tacit and unconscious until they are made more explicit during the process of looking for a new perspective. Scientists operating within particular theoretical paradigms today are generally more aware that they are doing so.¹⁸ But just like the shift to newly developed groundbreaking scientific

¹⁵Lisa M. Baumgartner, “Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning from 1975 to Present” in *Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Edward W. Taylor and Patricia Cranton (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 109.

¹⁶Mezirow, “How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning,” 12-13. See also See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

¹⁷Jack Mezirow, *Education for Perspective Transformation: Women’s Re-entry Programs in Community Colleges* (New York: Teacher’s College, Columbia University, 1978), 109.

¹⁸For example, physicists dealing with small velocities and large distances use the paradigms of classical mechanics or the Newtonian laws of motion. With larger velocities approaching the speed of light, Einsteinian relativity becomes more useful. Over smaller distances (below the atomic level), the paradigms of quantum mechanics and quantum field theory are more utilized. These examples though are quite recent. In Kuhn’s study, he found that scientists working within certain paradigms could not always switch as

paradigms, the shift in an individual's meaning perspective is difficult because the perspectives we have grown accustomed to are deeply ingrained in us, acquired over long periods (even lifetimes) from our experiences.

From this point forward, *transformation* will be defined as the shift in an individual's meaning perspective or personal paradigm. This is based on Mezirow's own definition of *transformative learning* (TL): "transforming a problematic frame of reference [or meaning perspective] to make it more dependable in our adult life by generating opinions and interpretations that are more justified."¹⁹

Mezirow's "meaning schemes" can be considered parallel to Gadamer's "prejudices," and Mezirow's "meaning perspectives" can be likened to Gadamer's "horizons." Taken as a metaphor, horizons are easily equated with what we can see or what is available to our range of vision. But when Gadamer uses horizon, he utilizes it as a technical term,²⁰ following Edmund Husserl's phenomenology.²¹

easily between paradigms. Current paradigms could also make it difficult for scientists to see other perspectives or notice data that did not fit in with their presumptions.

¹⁹Jack Mezirow, "Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory" in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 20.

Learning can be categorized as simple or transformative. They can be differentiated in this way: In simple learning, something new is learned, but the new learning does not change the learner's epistemological system in its fundamental form or function; in transformative learning, something new is learned, and it changes the learner's whole paradigm of knowing (Douglas Robertson, "Transformative Learning and Transition Theory: Toward Developing the Ability to Facilitate Insight," *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching* 8, no.1 (1997), 107).

²⁰See David Vessey, "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 4 (2009), 531-542 for a more detailed treatment of what Gadamer means by "horizon."

²¹Gadamer acknowledges his debt to Husserl and his use of horizon: "Undoubtedly the concept and phenomenon of the *horizon* is of crucial importance for Husserl's phenomenological research. With this concept, which we too shall have occasion to use, Husserl is obviously seeking to capture the way all

Husserl used the concept of horizon to work out how we perceive physical objects. For him, we do not just see height, width, depth, color, texture, and so on:

According to Husserl, it's not that our mind is drawing inferences from the perceptual information we receive so that, for example, we first see a field of colour and then our mind organizes the colour and concludes that it is some object or person. We actually see it *as* some object or person. ... Those aspects of an object that are not directly accessible to our senses, but make it possible to see an object as an object, Husserl called the object's "horizon." ... The horizon is everything we are aware of in the perception of an object above and beyond what is given directly to our senses. It is what is "co-given" in the perception of the object that makes it intelligible to us as an object.²²

In short, Husserl's horizon is the system not just of sense data but of beliefs, knowledge, assumptions, and everything else that support how we grasp an object. To illustrate this, when we are presented with a freshly-picked apple, its insides may not be visible to us at that moment, but we know from previous experience that underneath its red peel is crisp yellowish flesh that is a mixture of sweetness and tartness. This can whet our appetite when we see – or even just smell – an apple. Or if we bit into an apple once and were shocked to find worms wriggling inside it, the sight or smell of an apple can immediately fill us with disgust. Our past experiences of apples are part of the system of beliefs, knowledge, and assumptions that make up the horizon of the apple.

While Husserl used horizons to discuss how our perception of objects is made meaningful, Gadamer utilized horizons to reflect on how a text becomes meaningful. From physical objects, Gadamer projected the concept of horizon to propositions. Horizons, for Gadamer, are the system of prejudices and expectations that help us

limited intentionality of meaning merges into the fundamental continuity of the whole" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 237-238).

²²Vessey, "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons," 533-534.

understand a text. This is similar to how Mezirow saw meaning perspectives as “networks of arguments.” But this is not all there is about horizons.

An important aspect of Gadamer’s horizons is highlighted when we note the difference between perceiving physical objects and understanding propositions. Though they can often be overlooked and though their impact on how we perceive objects can remain unacknowledged, perceptual horizons for things presented to our senses are always at hand. But horizons for interpreting texts may not always be. When we hold something in our hands, we always perceive it as an object of compact unity. We do not separate its dimensions from its color, its weight from its texture, and so on. We may not know what it is called or have an idea of its purpose, but we grasp it as one object. On the other hand, to understand propositions requires work.²³ What work needs to be done? “When we are trying to understand another person or a text, we need to have some idea of the horizon in which the subject matter is intelligible to the author or speaker.”²⁴ This does not mean that we need to know exactly what the author intends to communicate. Gadamer writes, “When we try to understand a text, we do not try to transpose ourselves into the author’s mind but... we try to transpose ourselves into the perspective within which he has formed his views.”²⁵ We try to transpose ourselves into how the author makes meaning, into the perspective that formed his or her views, into his or her horizon.

A horizon is not just what we see but a way of seeing things. Without knowing how an author sees things, we may be able to understand what his or her individual words

²³Vessey, “Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons,” 539.

²⁴Vessey, “Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons,” 539.

²⁵Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 292.

mean, we may even be able to “get” what separate sentences in his or her work are saying, but we may not be able to see how these words and sentences cohere into a meaningful unity. We may be able to see the words and sentences in one single page, but we may not be able to see the point they are trying to make. If we fail to put ourselves into the horizon from which a text speaks, the lens it uses to see things, we will misunderstand the significance of what the text is saying to us.²⁶

Again, more than just a system of prejudices, a horizon, for Gadamer, is a way of seeing. The equation of “perspective” / “paradigm” and “horizon” is also supported by what happens in the “fusion of horizons.” Horizons fuse when one way of seeing influences and perhaps even modifies another way of seeing. When we transpose ourselves into the horizon of a text, we also (as Gadamer says) “supersede” it because we also bring our own horizon into it.²⁷ In the introduction, I followed Gadamer in saying that the fusion of horizons is the old and the new “combining into something of living value.”²⁸ I add to this now by saying that in the fusion of horizons, the way of seeing things in the past and the way of seeing things in the present can dynamically come together, resulting in an enlarged perspective. This is also the goal of transformative learning for Mezirow: a shift from a narrower frame of reference to one that is wider and more integrative, more inclusive of what we experience, more open or at least more permeable to more ideas, and more discriminating.²⁹

²⁶Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 302.

²⁷Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305-306.

²⁸Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305.

²⁹Mezirow, “How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning,” 14.

What creates distortions in our meaning perspectives? What limits our horizons? Gadamer would say that it is our “historically effected consciousness” (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*).³⁰ Put in less technical terms, our consciousness is always affected by history. At all times, we find ourselves situated in our contexts; our awareness of things is never totally free of our personal history and the history of the wider world around us. Gadamer’s “historically effected consciousness” finds echoes in Mezirow’s three types of meaning perspectives.³¹ The first type of meaning perspective, the epistemic (which involves what knowledge is and how we use it), can be distorted when the knowledge we have and the sources of our knowledge are not questioned or reflected upon.³² The second type, the sociocultural (which is comprised of the taken-for-granted belief systems of power and social relationships) can be distorted by societal norms we assimilate. These social norms are further reinforced and legitimized by institutions and even by the language we use. The third type of meaning perspective, the psychological (which includes “self-concept, personality-based preferences, personal strengths, needs, and anxieties”³³) can be distorted by childhood traumas and past experiences. It is important to note that these three meaning perspectives are “not rigid compartments but interrelated influences of meaning making.”³⁴ While they can be distinguished from each other in theory, they cannot be as easily separated in our everyday experiences. It is also important to repeat that though our personal history and

³⁰See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 299-301.

³¹Mezirow, “How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning,” 15-17.

³²I give an example of epistemic distortions in the last section of this chapter.

³³Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 85.

³⁴Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 85.

the history of the wider world may limit our horizons, cause distortions in our consciousness and meaning perspectives, and lead us to “fail to perceive,” they also provide us with the means to perceive, frame our thinking, and understand the world.

To recapitulate, Gadamer’s prejudices can be seen as parallel to Mezirow’s meaning schemes; Gadamer’s horizons to Mezirow’s meaning perspectives; and Gadamer’s fusion of horizons to Mezirow’s transformation. A guiding question of this dissertation is: “How do the Psalms teach?” I sharpen this question now into: “How do the Psalms transform us?” How does the Psalter help us enlarge our horizons and make our perspectives more accountable to what we experience?

2.1.2 How Does Transformation Happen?

Jane Regan traces the movement of how TL can happen in four moments: (1) questioning the present frame of reference; (2) exploring alternative meaning perspectives; (3) applying the transformed perspective; and (4) reintegrating and grounding of the new way of making meaning.³⁵

In the first moment, the questioning of the present frame of reference, an event or a series of experiences (e.g., a crisis sparked by serious illness, an accident, or the death of a loved one, or the cumulative effect of financial instability, a change in the direction of one’s career, or moving residences) can make us start challenging our personal paradigms. Whether this happens all at once or through a slow build-up of pressure, the result is a dissatisfaction or restlessness because things no longer make sense in the

³⁵See Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 87-95.

current horizon. This can spur us to look for more adequate and authentic alternatives of making meaning – the second moment.

Part of our exploring other ways of making meaning is critical reflection on the premises which undergird our ways of interpreting our experiences, the bases of how we define problems and handle situations. The second moment in TL involves making explicit our many implicit assumptions and prejudices. From a naïve acceptance of the perspectives our personal, social, cultural, and historical contexts have handed on to us, we come to realize that these are not the only ways of seeing and understanding. Regan points out the value of interacting with others in this moment:

It is very difficult, and for many impossible, to engage in the process of reflecting on and critiquing one's present meaning perspective without being in conversation with others. Many people try out new perspectives by talking about them with others or making small steps in the hope for affirmation or, at least, acknowledgment. A supportive context in which hospitality and mutual respect are paramount is essential.³⁶

Enlightened and strengthened by our contact with others, we can begin testing a different, hopefully more satisfactory and suitable perspective – the third moment.

In trying out and provisionally applying a new perspective, we ask: Does this make things clearer for me? If it does, aside from bringing things into sharper focus, it also usually makes visible things we may not have seen before. All this strengthens us to reintegrate and ground the new perspective in the way we view the world – the fourth moment.

³⁶Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 92.

Getting used to the new lenses we gained in the third moment can consume a lengthy amount of time. To add to the challenge, a new way of looking at the world affects our relationship with others whose perspectives may have stayed the same, whose paradigms are different from ours. Long as it may already take for our new horizons to arrive at a state of equilibrium in our lives, the movement of transformation does not end with the fourth moment. We enter into and undergo new experiences which can challenge these new horizons and set into motion the dynamic of transformation again. Long as it may have taken to achieve a state of equilibrium, this moment of balance does not really last.

2.1.3 Mezirow's Phases of Transformation

Regan's four moments are a distillation of the phases which, according to Mezirow, those undergoing a personal transformation could experience. The original nine³⁷ from 1978 are listed in the left column below as Mezirow numbered them.³⁸ An updated list, compiled from Mezirow's more recent writings, is in the right column, arranged to make the parallelisms with the original list clearer, with the italicized words signaling what has been added.³⁹

| Original 1978 List of Phases of TL | Updated List of Phases of TL |
|------------------------------------|--|
| (1) a disorienting dilemma | a disorienting dilemma |
| (2) self-examination | self-examination <i>with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame</i> |

³⁷There was actually a typographical error in the listing of these phases. From number 7, there was a jump to number 9. This was a mistake which Mezirow would later correct.

³⁸See Mezirow, *Education for Perspective Transformation*, 6.

³⁹For this updated list, I rely heavily on Baumgartner's "Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning from 1975 to Present" (already quoted above) and Andrew Kitchenham's "The Evolution of John Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory," *Journal of Transformative Learning* 6, no. 2 (2008): 104-123.

| | |
|--|---|
| (3) a critical assessment of sex role assumptions and a sense of alienation from taken-for-granted social roles and expectations | a critical assessment of <i>epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic</i> assumptions |
| (4) relating one's discontent to a current public issue | recognition that one's discontent <i>and the process of transformation are shared</i> |
| (5) exploring options for new ways of living | exploring options for new <i>roles, relationships, and actions</i> |
| (6) building competence and self-confidence in new roles | building competence and self-confidence in new roles <i>and relationships</i> |
| (7) planning a course of action and acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans | planning a course of action |
| | acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans |
| (9) [<i>sic</i>] provisional efforts to try new roles | provisional efforts to try new roles |
| (10) a reintegration into society on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective | a reintegration into society on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective |
| | <i>renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships</i> |

A disadvantage of presenting the phases of TL as I have above is that it may give the impression that TL is a finite process ending with a new perspective and new relationships. That TL is a continuous flow of learning, with new perspectives open to disorientation again, has already been addressed above. When Mezirow points to the outcome of TL as a meaning perspective that is “more dependable” and “more justified,” the “more” should prepare us for the possibility that in the future, we will need to be open to better frames of reference than what we have just acquired.⁴⁰

Another disadvantage of presenting TL as a list of numbered phases is that it may make one think that TL happens strictly in this progression of steps. But the process of

⁴⁰Patricia Cranton and Elizabeth Kasl, “A Response to Michael Newman’s ‘Calling Transformative Learning into Question: Some Mutinous Thoughts,’” *Adult Education Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2012), 395.

transformative learning does not always include all the phases above and does not need to follow the exact sequence Mezirow outlined. The phases are more descriptive than prescriptive. There can be variations in these phases which are less linear and more “recursive, evolving, and spiraling in nature.”⁴¹ The process of transformative learning is also not the same for everyone. For the same person, it is not even the same at different stages of his or her life. We enter the process with different starting points and come out with different results. We are different from others and different also from ourselves a few years ago and a few years from now. We, at different stages of our lives, have different motivations, different needs, and most significant to TL, different ways of knowing.⁴²

In the introduction, I touched on how Gadamer refrained to outline the process of understanding. Instead, he only aspired to clarify the conditions in which understanding happens.⁴³ The “miracle of understanding” cannot be contained in a step-by-step procedure because it occurs in the unpredictable “in-between” that bridges the strange and the familiar. We also cannot distinguish in advance which prejudices help us to understand and which lead us to misunderstand.⁴⁴ The same can be said of Mezirow’s habits of expectation. We do not know what assumptions are distorting our perspectives until they are challenged. Though hermeneutics has its origins in the interpretation of

⁴¹Edward W. Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 290.

⁴²I develop this further with the aid of Robert Kegan later on in this chapter.

⁴³See p. 11 of the introduction.

⁴⁴Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295.

texts, Gadamer's hermeneutics goes beyond literary exegesis and steps into *ontology*, the philosophy of being. Mezirow's TL theory, as a number of scholars have assimilated it, also goes beyond the learning of concepts and models of thinking; the concerns of transformative learning can be seen as *existential*. When someone's perspective changes, the effects are not confined to one's cognition but redound to one's very being.⁴⁵ No formula or list can precisely chart this mysterious journey.

An advantage of presenting the phases of TL as I have above – especially with the developments highlighted – is that it shows how Mezirow has applied TL theory to himself and how important it is to continue the process of searching for “more dependable” and “more justified” paradigms. For Mezirow, one way of learning is by refining and elaborating our meaning schemes.⁴⁶ In the development of his TL theory, we see Mezirow practicing what he preaches. In 1994, he ended an article which responded to two critiques in this way: “I greatly appreciate the willingness of my colleagues to engage in discourse by which I more clarify some of the obscurities, implicit assumptions and incomplete ideas in my earlier writings.”⁴⁷ In 2000, he collected and edited other scholars' views about TL in *Learning as Transformation*, a book compiling “critical perspectives of a theory in progress.” Mezirow has incorporated input from others into this own thinking to make his vision wider, more open to ideas and experience, and at the same time, more discriminating.

⁴⁵See Peter Willis, “An Existential Approach to Transformative Learning,” in *Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Edward W. Taylor and Patricia Cranton (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 212-213.

⁴⁶Jack Mezirow, “Understanding Transformation Theory,” *Adult Education Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1994), 224.

⁴⁷Mezirow, “Understanding Transformation Theory,” 232.

As Mezirow admits, in conversation with other scholars, his implicit assumptions have become more explicit, and he has addressed them. His emphasis on the rational and the intellectual has been challenged by many researchers; he has talked more about *feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame*. Mezirow has been called out for focusing too much on the individual and the psychological to the detriment of the social;⁴⁸ in the updated list of phases, we see the recognition that discontent and *the process of transformation are shared*, as well as mentions of *relationships* and *renegotiating* them. Postmodernists have questioned how Mezirow seemed to subordinate context to individual agency and how he decontextualized rationality in his use of Jürgen Habermas' ideal conditions for discourse;⁴⁹ Mezirow has expounded on *epistemic*,

⁴⁸See Susan Collard and Michael Law, "The Limits of Perspective Transformation: A Critique of Mezirow's Theory," *Adult Education Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1989), 99-107.

⁴⁹Baumgartner, "Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning from 1975 to Present," 103, 107. Habermas' concept of the ideal conditions under which discourse could occur was borrowed by Mezirow.

For Mezirow, "an ideal set of conditions for participation in critical discourse is implicit in the very nature of human communication. These same conditions are fundamental to a philosophy of adult education because they are also the ideal conditions for adult learning... Under these ideal conditions, participants in discourse:

- Have accurate and complete information
 - Are free from coercion and self-deception
 - Have the ability to weigh evidence and evaluate arguments
 - Have the ability to be critically reflective
 - Are open to alternative perspectives
 - Have equality of opportunity to participate, and
 - Will accept an informed, objective, and rational consensus as a legitimate test of validity"
- (Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 198).

Empirical studies have shown no evidence that these ideal conditions exist. See Edward W. Taylor, "Building upon the Theoretical Debate: A Critical Review of the Empirical Studies of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory," *Adult Education Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1997), 34-59.

So far, I have relied much on Gadamer's hermeneutics. Should Mezirow's use of Habermas call this into question especially in the light of the famous Gadamer-Habermas debate? The Gadamer-Habermas debate is a complicated matter with nuances which we do not have space here to develop. At the risk of oversimplifying the issue, the debate is seen as concerning the philosophical status of tradition. Gadamer defends tradition and, as discussed above, the prejudices that come with it saying that both are not obstacles to inquiry but constitute the conditions of its possibility. Prejudices open us up to knowledge. Habermas counters, "Gadamer's prejudice in favor of the legitimacy of prejudices (or prejudgements) validated by tradition is in conflict with the power of reflection, which proves itself in its ability to reject the claim of traditions" (Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson and Jerry A. Stark (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), 170). In this debate, I take the position of Paul

sociocultural, or psychic distortions in our meaning perspectives (as I have already discussed above).

TL theory, stimulated by discourse with other thinkers, has “progressed.” But in 1997, in his survey of thirty-nine empirical studies which employed Mezirow’s model, E. Taylor concluded that TL theory was still downplaying the role of the affect in learning. Also, not given enough value were nonconscious learning and the collective unconscious. Even with the changes Mezirow made, relationships were also not stressed enough. E. Taylor also discerned that the importance of context in the learning process was a common theme running through these studies.⁵⁰ I do not have the space here to replicate what E. Taylor did and bring his study up to date. What presenting the development of the phases of TL and noting E. Taylor’s study have done is to clarify what in TL theory needs to be addressed more as we move forward: the extra-rational. The significance of extra-rational aspects, a number of which I discuss below, becomes heightened when we put TL in the context of faith formation.

2.1.4 Transformative Learning and Growing in Faith

Ricoeur who proposes a middle ground. For Ricoeur, being embedded in a tradition is not opposed to distancing oneself from it and criticizing it (see Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John Thompson. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991). Belonging and distancing can be seen as dialectically related (see Robert Piercey, “Ricoeur’s Account of Tradition and the Gadamer-Habermas Debate,” *Human Studies* 27 (2004), 259-280 for a more in-depth discussion of this). We can reconcile Gadamer and Habermas in a way that applies to Mezirow’s TL theory by asserting again that prejudices can distort our understanding but they also make understanding possible. When experiences question our prejudices, we can take a difficult step back and reflect on these – albeit from a standpoint that is never free of prejudices. Still, it is possible to change our paradigms to make them better able to take our experiences into account.

⁵⁰See E. W. Taylor, “Building upon the Theoretical Debate,” 34-59.

Regan joins many other scholars in critiquing Mezirow's overreliance on the rational. While the role of rational discourse in reflecting critically, in making explicit and questioning assumptions, and in modifying meaning schemes and perspectives should not be discounted, the rational is only one facet of TL. Other aspects are the affective, the intuitive, the creative, and the imaginative – facets which are important especially in the context of faith. In the process of discernment in faith, the images, symbols, and myths (here understood not as narratives of fantasy but stories which reveal meaning and identity) of a religious tradition play an important part as we try to express our personal and communal vision.⁵¹ In the third chapter, I explore the affective and imaginative (which cannot really be separated from the intuitive and the creative) aspects of TL.

TL in the faith context must also take into account the role of the classic texts of a tradition. Scripture, of course, takes pride of place here, but other classic texts include the works of saints and other spiritual works that have withstood the test of time. Regan asserts, "We approach these classic texts not for solutions to specific questions or even as sources for propositions on how we are to interact with the world. Rather, it is a case of playing with the text and in the process of interpreting the text, interpreting our lives in a new way."⁵² In the Catholic belief that Scripture is inspired,⁵³ our rational interpretation of the text is not enough; we must also let the text interpret us. As Regan eloquently

⁵¹Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 96-97.

⁵²Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 97.

⁵³I discuss Scriptural inspiration in the fourth chapter.

phrases it, this is a movement “from grasping the text to being grasped by it.”⁵⁴ To dive more deeply into the role of our engagement with Scripture in the process of transformation is one of the main objectives of this study of the practice of the Psalms and how they teach.

Transformation in the context of faith brings to light another dynamic: conversion. Regan writes, “Whether speaking of a Damascus Road-like encounter with the Risen Christ, or the ongoing call to conversion that is at the heart of apprenticeship to Christ, most would recognize and even insist that the fabric of conversion, while including a rational dimension, is interwoven with the threads of myths and symbols, of creative connections, and, ultimately, of the extrarational ‘leap of faith.’”⁵⁵ I think it is significant that Regan mentions Christ twice in talking about conversion. This is because it is the encounter and the relationship with Christ that, I think, ultimately empowers us to take the proverbial leap. This encounter with Christ I also discuss in the third chapter.

When thinking about TL in the context of faith, we cannot ignore the role of the relational (not just in terms of a relationship with Christ, as above, but also with other people) and the social. One of the central ideas of the Catholic faith is that we are saved in community.⁵⁶ Our community is a major influence in the formation of our perspectives, and we live out any changes in our perspectives in community. Thomas Groome’s idea of what transformation is, as seen in the first chapter, involves not only

⁵⁴Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 97.

⁵⁵Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 97.

⁵⁶See Edward William Clark, *Five Great Catholic Ideas*, 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2014). Regan also discusses the self in relationship and social change in *Toward an Adult Church*, 98-99.

personal growth but also responsibilities towards social development. Mezirow has been criticized for focusing too much on the individual and not enough on the social, but we need to be wary of setting up a false dichotomy between the two.⁵⁷ Phyllis Cunningham, together with her colleagues, draws the essential connection between the two:

To suggest that to educate for personal transformation is somehow not political while social transformation is a political act is to deny the social anchoring of consciousness. To deny personal transformation and to champion social transformation is to deny the unique biography of each person and his or her potential contribution to society and is equally inappropriate. To link personal and social transformation is to construct a polity of democracy.⁵⁸

More glimpses of this connection between the individual and social can be seen below and in the next chapters.

One final aspect to consider when reflecting on TL in the context of faith is grace. Humanist educational philosophy provided the foundations for Mezirow's TL theory. Humanism presupposes that humans are intrinsically good, free, and autonomous beings. It emphasizes the self – that the self has the potential for growth, development, and self-actualization which all contribute to the growth, development, and actualization of humanity in general. Humanism is central to the matrix of Western and particularly North American values which hold that humans can achieve anything if only they work hard enough to overcome the obstacles in their way.⁵⁹ In all this emphasis on the human, what

⁵⁷Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 103.

⁵⁸John Dirkx, Phyllis Cunningham, Metchild Hart, Jack Mezirow, and Sue Scott, "Conceptions of Transformation in Adult Education: Views of Self, Society, and Social Change," paper presented at the 34th Annual Adult Education Research Conference, University Park, 1993, as quoted in Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 103.

⁵⁹Edward W. Taylor and Patricia Cranton, "A Theory in Progress? Issues in Transformative Learning Theory," *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 4, no. 1 (2013), 39.

part is left for the Divine? Human freedom is active in growth, development, and actualization; is there still space for grace to work?

The both-and dynamic between freedom and grace can be seen in the role of practice in TL.⁶⁰ Practice is an act of the will; it is something we invest our effort and time in. But practice is also an opening to grace. Practices are not just something we do; they also do something to us. For example, though worshipping God is an act of the will, the more we do it, the more we develop in it. The more we praise, the more our eyes are opened to see things for which to praise God. This is what can happen when we practice worshipping God in Psalms that are considered hymns. To lament is an act of the will, but the more we do it, the more we gain the audacity to complain to God and not just resign ourselves to the dismal state of things. This is what can happen when we practice venting out to God in Psalms that are considered laments. To give thanks is an act of the will, but the more we do it, the more grateful we become. This is what can happen when we practice proclaiming God's wonderful deeds in thanksgiving Psalms.⁶¹ We can also see this dynamic in the group of Psalms reckoned as songs of trust. To trust is a choice, but to trust is also a capacity. The more we exercise our freedom in singing our trust, the more the capacity to trust is enlarged in us. And this is where grace can start building. Now this is not a matter of freedom coming first and then grace following. The more we

⁶⁰The insight I share here has its roots in six studies conducted by psychologists Brian Galla and Angela Duckworth involving more than two thousand participants. Galla and Duckworth found that self-control is not just about willpower; self-control is "mediated" by good habits developed by the participants – habits which we can say are born out of practice. See Brian M. Galla and Angela L. Duckworth, "More than Resisting Temptation: Beneficial Habits Mediate the Relationship Between Self-control and Positive Life Outcomes," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 109, no. 3 (September 2015), 508-525.

⁶¹I use the examples of hymns, laments, and thanksgiving Psalms here as they are the three major categories of Psalms. See Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 20.

open ourselves to grace, the more we see that grace was there from the very beginning, empowering our freedom.

Many scholars have come up with their frameworks of growth and transformation. I now present my own framework, influenced by the works of scholars I name below, open to address the aspects TL in the context of faith must consider, and highlighting how the Psalms can teach.

2.2 A FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSFORMATION THAT THE PSALMS CAN ACCOMPANY

2.2.1 Orientation—Disorientation—New-orientation

First of all, this framework is not made up of stages but of movements: a movement from orientation to disorientation and a movement from disorientation to new orientation. Structuring this framework in terms of movements emphasizes the fluidity with which transformation happens versus the rigidity that numbered steps can imply.

Beginning with orientation stresses the point that we do not start from zero. We bring set orientations influenced by our contexts. We are borne on but also burdened by prejudices and assumptions, many of which we are not conscious. Beginning with orientation also allows not just for disorienting dilemmas to serve as the impetus for transformation. In Stephen Brookfield's five phases of critical thinking, his way of presenting how adults come to examine the contexts that have influenced their assumptions and explore alternative ways of thinking and acting, Brookfield begins with

the neutral term “trigger event.”⁶² This admits the possibility of transformation being initiated not just by traumatic events (e.g., the death of a loved one or the loss of a job) that cause inner discomfort and even existential perplexity but also by positive events (e.g., successfully completing a project or being promoted at work) that give one consolation and affirmation. In their research on women’s ways of knowing, Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule were also able to see the power of these positive triggers.⁶³

The movement from orientation to disorientation connotes the experience of being spun around and losing direction. But new paradigms do not always need 180-degree turns, or even 90- or 45-degree pivots. Sometimes, seeking more adequate and authentic perspectives is about minor recalibrations, or subtle nuancing, or just going further in the same direction – but also diving in deeper, realizing the ramifications of the beliefs one professes. Integrating more justified outlooks into one’s life can result in major changes in existing attitudes and assumptions, or the outcome can also be being confirmed more strongly in your present positions.⁶⁴ In the latter, it can be said that one did not really move into disorientation but into a *reorientation*.

⁶²Brookfield’s five phases of critical thinking are: a “trigger event” that prompts reflection; an appraisal or scrutiny of oneself; an exploration of ways to either challenge discrepancies or to live with them; the development of new perspectives or alternative ways of thinking and acting; and the integration of new outlooks into one’s life. (See Stephen Brookfield, *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternate Ways of Thinking and Acting* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987), 13.) The parallelisms between these and Mezirow’s phases are easily traced.

⁶³See Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

⁶⁴Brookfield, *Developing Critical Thinkers*, 26-28.

Similar to the framework I present here, Paul Ricoeur understands life as a movement – “a dialectic that is not regular or patterned”⁶⁵ – of being disoriented and gaining a new orientation. In this movement is the double dynamic of: (1) the reluctance to turn from a world that has already passed away; and (2) the capacity to turn to a different world being born.⁶⁶ It is not the case that the reluctance to let go of the old comes first, and after, the capacity to embrace the new. Both are always present to some degree, and both are in tension. To start edging away from the reluctance and lean towards openness, it is important to recognize that one’s sadness as well as *the process of transformation are shared*. This is one of the additions to Mezirow’s updated list of the phases of TL.

Educational psychologist William Perry shares the thoughts of a student dealing with loss:

If a loss has been known, if a pain of mine has been known and shared by somebody, if somebody has been aware of one of my pains, then I can go on. I can let that pain die in some way and go on to reinvest the hope... [I]f these things have been known and shared, then somehow it is possible for me to do a strange thing called grieving, which I do not pretend to understand. It seems all right to let it hurt... If my loss has never “lived,” socially, then I must keep it alive myself, protect it like a responsibility, even. Then I do not know why it is that I get stuck. It comes to me as a sort of theorem, that when you have taken one step in development, you cannot take another until you have grieved the losses of the first.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Walter Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 153. Brueggemann’s categorization of the Psalms, which I go into below, is greatly influenced by Ricoeur’s insight that life is a movement of disorientation and reorientation. Ricoeur’s use of “reorientation” though is different from the way I used it above. Ricoeur’s reorientation is more about gaining a new paradigm and not just refining or elaborating an existing one. See Paul Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Semeia* 4 (1975), 114-124.

⁶⁶Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 153.

⁶⁷William G. Perry, Jr., “Sharing in the Costs of Growth,” in *Encouraging Development in College Students*, ed. Clyde A. Parker (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 271.

The Psalms of lament connect us with authors who have gone through loss and pain. Their cries, handed down through the centuries, assure us that we are not alone in dealing with suffering. There can also be felt a spiritual solidarity with other men and women who have prayed the same Psalms in different times and places throughout history and all over the world. But the feeling of being connected with others can be most palpable when we pray the Psalms in communal worship.⁶⁸ The bond with others that the Psalms can remind us of can embolden us to go farther down the uncertain path of transformation.

As we continue to search for new orientations, the role of the imagination becomes very significant. We try to imagine alternative perspectives, novel roles, different plans of action, and how these may affect our relationships. Curtis Young, in his reframing of TL for application in pastoral ministry, also emphasizes the importance of the imagination.⁶⁹ It helps us “connect the dots” and see how separate pieces that have become disjointed can “fall into place.”⁷⁰

The Psalms may not paint in detail for us the alternative perspectives, roles, plans, and relationships that we need to make sense of things again, but they encourage our imagination with the bigger picture, with images that promise that the dots will be connected and the pieces will fall into place. Daniel Harrington reads the Psalter as a

⁶⁸I explore praying the Psalms in community more in the fifth chapter.

⁶⁹Curtis Young, “Transformational Learning in Ministry,” *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2013), 331.

⁷⁰These phrases are based on the ones used by ministers who participated in Young’s research in describing their “transforming moments” (Young, “Transformational Learning in Ministry,” 330).

book of hope that is filled with visions of hope.⁷¹ These images can be majestic – the Lord of armies enjoying an effortless victory in battle (Ps 48:4-8) and God as a king, ruling over all (Ps 47:8). Or they can be bucolic – God as a shepherd leading us to green pastures (Ps 23:1-2) and a vine grower clearing the ground so that we can take root (Ps 80:8-9). They can be thunderous – the voice of the Lord over the mighty waters which symbolize chaos (Ps 29:3). Or they can be quiet – being refreshed in still waters of peace (Ps 23:2). Or the image can be of simply being able to sleep while in the midst of adversity (“I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the Lord sustains me” (Ps 3:5))⁷² or waiting in the night with great certainty that the morning will come (“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope” (Ps 130:5)). The psalmists themselves in the throes of lament provide us with a hopeful image. In times of pain, we can become trapped in our own concerns and see no further. We can think that no one else is suffering or that no one is suffering as much as we. Reading about the lament of the psalmists can put our own trials in perspective. If they can go through such tribulation and still hold on, perhaps so can we. These images may not provide us with the map to our exact destination, but they give us some light as we grope our way to transformation.

The Psalms give our imaginations images of assurance and consolation. They help us “be still” and know that God is God, exalted above all our troubles: “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (see Ps 46:10-11). They promise us that those who take refuge in God rejoice and sing for joy for the Lord spreads his protection over them (see Ps 5:11). Long before the bestselling *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series, the

⁷¹See Daniel J. Harrington, *Why Do We Hope? Images in the Psalms* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), v-xiv.

⁷²Harrington singles out this image in *Why Do We Hope*, 8.

Psalms were already providing comfort to many. The comparison to *Chicken Soup for the Soul* may, to some, trivialize what the Psalms can do, but the popularity and success of this series should also draw our attention to the profound need we all have for support and solace. It will be a disservice to the Psalms though if we limit them to this need alone. The Psalms, as I show below, go beyond comfort and consolation.

Self-examination, as pointed out above by Mezirow, comes with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame as we face our own prejudices and biases; so, too, does examining the underlying assumptions of our community and challenging them. These critical analyses that must happen for us to move from disorientation to a new orientation can be threatening, frustrating, anxiety-provoking, and can cause a range of other negative emotions. The Psalms can embolden and encourage us by connecting our plights to those of others and connecting our imaginations to images of hope. The Psalms can empower us in yet another way.

The lament Psalms, which constitute more than a third of the Psalter, can give power to those who pray them. Walter Brueggemann writes that a lament “shifts the calculus and *redresses the redistribution of power* between the two parties, so that the petitionary party is taken seriously and the God who is addressed is newly engaged in the crisis in a way that puts God at risk.”⁷³ Those who take on the words of the lament Psalms as their own, the lesser petitionary parties, are legitimated as the unmitigated supremacy of God, the greater party, is questioned. This makes God available to the petitioner. The “costly loss of lament,” as Brueggemann says in the now classic essay

⁷³Walter Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (October 1986), 59.

with the same title, is genuine covenant interaction. Brueggemann elaborates what happens we cease our lamentation:

God then [becomes] omnipotent, always to be praised. The believer [becomes] nothing, and can [only] uncritically praise or accept guilt where life with God does not function properly. The outcome is a “False Self,” bad faith which is based in fear and guilt and lived out as resentful or self-deceptive works of righteousness. The absence of lament makes a religion of coercive obedience the only possibility.⁷⁴

The Psalms of lament help give us a sense of freedom, that we and what we think matter to God. The empowerment the lament Psalms grace us with is important because while learner empowerment is one of the goals of TL, it is also one of the conditions for transformation. “An empowered learner is able to fully and freely participate in critical discourse and the resulting action; empowerment requires freedom and equality.”⁷⁵

While we need not only to be but also to *feel* empowered in order to learn, too much power can also hinder our transformation. Cranton observes, “Adults will resist contradictions to their beliefs and will deny discrepancies between new learning and previous knowledge. In response to a challenge to their assumptions, many learners will entrench themselves even more firmly in their belief system and become hostile or withdrawn in the learning environment.”⁷⁶ Brookfield writes, “It is as if a perverse psychological law sometimes seems to apply in which the strength of commitment to beliefs and values is inversely correlated with the amount of evidence encountered that

⁷⁴Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” 60-61.

⁷⁵Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults*, Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 73.

⁷⁶Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 18.

contradicts the truth of these. The human capacity for denial knows no limits.”⁷⁷ A feeling of power and a sense of control can make us more obstinate in our positions. We also need to be reminded that we have weaknesses and are far from complete and self-sufficient. The lament Psalms are also able to do this. Part of the dynamic of complaining to God is the admission that we cannot solve our problems by ourselves and that we need God’s power and aid.

The balance of empowerment and weakness, of enough support from others but at the same time sufficient independence to critique the prejudices of society which have formed our own, and of being able to adequately articulate our current perspectives so that we can explore alternative ones will hopefully help us arrive at a new orientation. This “arrival” is not just a moment but still a process. It is not just the result of learning but still part of learning. We may have gained a new perspective, but there is still the desire to hold on to the old. We need to continue to test this new understanding and follow it through to its consequences – some expected, some unintended – to slowly grow accustomed to it. A new and strange orientation gradually becomes familiar. But as life presents us with situations which challenge how we see and deal with the world, we find that even this new orientation that came after much struggle still is not able to account for all our experiences. We become disoriented again... and oriented again. Learning should never cease.

2.2.2 Brueggemann’s Typology of Function for the Psalms

⁷⁷Stephen Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom*, Jossey-Bass Higher Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990), 150.

Above, we have already seen glimpses of how the movement of orientation—disorientation—new-orientation highlight the role the Psalms can play in transformation. We can gain an even clearer view when we consider how this movement aligns with Brueggemann’s categorization of the Psalms. He proposes a typology of function that builds on and does not seek to replace or rival the form-critical categories of praise, lament, thanksgiving, and so on of Hermann Gunkel, Sigmund Mowinckel, Claus Westermann, and the other pillars of Psalm scholarship. Brueggemann stresses:

Our consideration of function must of course be based on the best judgments we have about form and setting in life. The present discussion assumes and fully values both the methods and the gains of form-critical study. I am proposing neither a criticism nor a displacement of form-critical work. Rather, I explore the possibility of a move beyond form criticism that necessarily is concerned with hermeneutical issues.⁷⁸

Brueggemann has a different concern best expressed in the questions: “What has been the function and intention of the Psalms as they were shaped, transmitted, and repeatedly used? That is, what was the purpose of ‘doing them,’ albeit in highly stylized fashion? What was being done when the Psalms were ‘done’?”⁷⁹

Brueggemann’s answers to these questions are built into his utilization of the categories of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation for the Psalms. He expounds on his scheme thus:

(a) Human life consists in satisfied seasons of well-being that evoke gratitude for the constancy of blessing. Matching this we will consider “psalms of orientation,”

⁷⁸Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 149-150.

⁷⁹Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 150.

which in a variety of ways articulate the joy, delight, goodness, coherence, and reliability of God, God's creation, and God's governing law.

(b) Human life consists in anguished seasons of hurt, alienation, suffering, and death. These evoke rage, resentment, self-pity, and hatred. Matching this, we will consider "psalms of disorientation," poems and speech-forms that match the season in its ragged, painful disarray. This speech, the complaint song, has a recognizable shape that permits the extravagance, hyperbole, and abrasiveness needed for the experience.

(c) Human life consists in turns of surprise when we are overwhelmed with the new gifts of God, when joy breaks through the despair. Where there has been only darkness, there is light. Corresponding to this surprise of the gospel, we will consider "psalms of new orientation," which speak boldly about a new gift from God, a fresh intrusion that makes all things new. These psalms affirm a sovereign God who puts humankind in a new situation. In this way, it is proposed that psalm forms correspond to seasons of human life and bring those seasons to speech.⁸⁰

The Psalms of orientation reflect the experience of the orderliness of life.

Examples of these Psalms are: The songs of creation which mirror how the world is supposed to be – set is the earth on foundations that will never be shaken (see Ps 104:5); the wisdom Psalms which teach how the Lord watches over the way of the righteous while those following the way of the wicked perish (see Ps 1:6 and Ps 37:1-40); and the Psalms of ascent which celebrate the times when God's providential care is felt, when we eat the fruit of the labor of our hands, when we are happy and all is going well with us (see Ps 128:2). In Claus Westermann's categorization, the Psalms of orientation would fall under "descriptive praise," the Psalms which do not praise a unique act of God that was just experienced but summarize the totality of the Lord's dealings with us and praises him for all of them.⁸¹ These Psalms of descriptive praise "anticipate or remember no

⁸⁰Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 8-9.

⁸¹Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 32.

Westermann does not provide a list of the Psalms he classifies under "descriptive praise," but Kenneth Barker, one of the original translators of New International Version of the Bible and a professor of

change. They describe how things are, with the assurance that they are well grounded and with the anticipation that they will continue. The function of such description is the continued reaffirmation and reconstruction of this good world.”⁸²

Brueggemann opines that the Psalms of orientation are not the most interesting because there is no dramatic movement or intense tension to be resolved.⁸³ He even has to invent a hermeneutical term for them – the “hermeneutic of convention” (whereas the Psalms of disorientation and reorientation fit neatly under the hermeneutics of suspicion and representation respectively).⁸⁴ But to be able to name one’s orientation is a necessary step for one to claim it. The Psalms of orientation, when engaged in practice, can provide the space, the respite, for us to know what we believe and where we stand.

The Psalms of disorientation, comprised of the individual and corporate Psalms of lament, reflect and nuance different levels of distress, whether the psalmist “has *accepted and embraced* the dislocation and how much *resistance or denial* remains.”⁸⁵ “In the various psalms of lament and in the various parts of these psalms, the speaker is located at various places in the movement of living into and emerging out of disorientation.”⁸⁶

the Old Testament, lists them in this way, following Westermann’s view of the Psalms: Hymns – Pss 24, 29, 33, 100, 103, 105, 111, 113, 114, 117, 135, 136, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150; Enthronement Psalms – Pss 47, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99; Songs of Zion (including Songs of Ascent) – Pss 48, 84, 87, 120, 121, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134; Royal or Messianic Psalms – Pss 2, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144; Creation Psalms – Pss 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 19 (a mixed type, also considered a wisdom Psalm), and 104 (see Kenneth Barker, “A Call to Praise God,” [Helpmewithbiblestudy.org](http://helpmewithbiblestudy.org), 2001, http://helpmewithbiblestudy.org/5Bible/HermPsalms_Barker.aspx (accessed November 15, 2016).

⁸²Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 156.

⁸³Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 155.

⁸⁴Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 174.

⁸⁵Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 156.

⁸⁶Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 156.

Correlated with the hermeneutic of suspicion, the Psalms of disorientation “warn against an easy hermeneutic of symbols and myths or an easy psychology of growth through symbolization.”⁸⁷ The Psalms of lament are important to “demystify,” “disenchant,”⁸⁸ and dismantle the old worldviews, the old language, and the old symbols which are no longer meaningful. As Brueggemann eloquently states, “Until the idols have been exposed, there is no chance of the truth of the true God.”⁸⁹ The dispossession from inadequate perspectives can lead to the recovery of new power in what we thought were already exhausted symbols.

Westermann traces a movement from petition (or plea) to praise in the Psalms of lament.⁹⁰ In this, we can also see the broad strokes of the movement of orientation—disorientation—new-orientation:

The plea still looks back to the old orientation, still yearning for it and grudging its loss, while the praise element begins to look forward and to anticipate. ... The lament as plea and petition regresses to the oldest fears, the censured questions, the deepest hates, the unknown and unadmitted venom, and a yearning; whereas the lament as praise anticipates and is open to gift. It looks ahead, consents to receive, and intends to respond in gratitude.⁹¹

The gift comes with the dawning of a new way of looking at things celebrated in the Psalms of new orientation. In Westermann’s classification, the Psalms of new orientation would be counted as “declarative praise,” Psalms which praise God for a

⁸⁷Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 166.

⁸⁸Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 174.

⁸⁹Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 165.

⁹⁰See Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 52, 55, 64.

⁹¹Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 168.

specific deed or act of deliverance.⁹² The Psalms of new orientation “do not *describe* what has been but assert what has just now been wrought. This function speaks of surprise and wonder, miracle and amazement, when a new orientation has been granted to the disoriented for which there was no ground for expectation.”⁹³

In the Psalms of new orientation, it is a hermeneutic of representation which is active. There is a “restoration” and a “recollection,” so that even if we go back to the old symbols, what happens is not a simply a return. The old symbols now have fresh meaning.⁹⁴ The old orientation can be considered a first and pre-critical naïveté. It might already have been the fruit of much critical reflection, but it is “pre-critical” in the sense that it believes the present orientation fully. The new orientation is post-critical. It has been through the experience of the pit of chaos but now hopes again in a God makes all things new. However, Brueggemann still calls this second stance, though more cautious now because of pain, a naïveté: “The ones who give thanks and sing genuinely new songs must be naïve or they would not bother to sing songs and to give thanks. But it is a praise in which the anguish of disorientation is not forgotten, removed, or absent.”⁹⁵ The naïveté of the new orientation is one of wizened innocence. It has been chastised but is still

⁹²Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 31.

Barker lists the Psalms of declarative praise in this way: Individual Thanksgiving – Pss 18, 30, 34, 40:1-10 (mixed type (with elements of descriptive praise and declarative praise), 66:13-20 (mixed type), 92, 116, 118, 121, 138; Community Thanksgiving – Pss 46, 65, 66:1-12 (mixed type), 67, 107, and 124 (see Barker, “A Call to Praise God”).

⁹³Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 159.

⁹⁴Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 166-167, 172.

⁹⁵Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 169.

expectant, and perhaps has become even more trusting rather than just resigning to be jaded.

From pre-critical to post-critical, from the hermeneutics of convention to suspicion to representation, and yet another way Brueggemann uses to discuss the movement of orientation—disorientation—new-orientation (or at least the latter two-thirds of the dynamic) is through the metaphors of exile and homecoming.⁹⁶ Richard Clifford sees in the Old and New Testaments an organizing principle to unite the Christian Bible – three Exodus moments.⁹⁷ The first Exodus is the foundational thirteenth-century B.C.E. event of Israel being freed from slavery in Egypt and coming to the Promised Land. The second Exodus is the sixth-century renewal when Israel’s exile in Babylon ended and the Israelites returned to Jerusalem. The third Exodus is Jesus’ reconstitution of the People of God through his life, death, and resurrection. These Exodus moments are not just about liberation (from Egypt, from Babylon, from sin) but the creation of a people. Aside from the narratives of these three Exodus moments, the theme of the Exodus has echoes in the Prophets, the Gospels, and the Psalter. Pss 44:7-14, 74:12-17, 77:12-21, 80:9-12, 83:10-13, 89:2-38 remember the foundational Exodus event in the hope that remembering the past will make it present liturgically. The communal laments pray that God renew the Exodus.⁹⁸ Ps 106, which ends Book 4 of the Psalter, and Ps 107, which marks the beginning of Book 5, can be read one after the other

⁹⁶Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 175.

⁹⁷See Richard Clifford, “The Exodus in the Christian Bible: The Case for ‘Figural’ Reading,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002), 345-361.

⁹⁸Clifford, “The Exodus in the Christian Bible,” 349-350.

to show the fruitfulness of the Exodus event.⁹⁹ The first Exodus, because of the sin of the people, might not have ended in real and lasting liberation:

[The Lord] gave them into the hand of the nations,
so that those who hated them ruled over them.
Their enemies oppressed them,
and they were brought into subjection under their power.
Many times he delivered them,
but they were rebellious in their purposes,
and were brought low through their iniquity (Ps 106:41-43).

But God still “remembered his covenant, and showed compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love” (Ps 46:45). Ps 107 alludes to a new Exodus:¹⁰⁰

[The Lord] turns a desert into pools of water,
a parched land into springs of water.
And there he lets the hungry live,
and they establish a town to live in;
they sow fields, and plant vineyards,
and get a fruitful yield.
By his blessing they multiply greatly,
and he does not let their cattle decrease (Ps 107:35-38).

The Psalter is not a straight recounting of the First and Second Exodus from Ps 1 to Ps 150, but the Psalter can accompany us through our many exodus moments, from our liberation from paradigms that we think might have ended in failure and have lost meaning towards the creation of new paradigms that give us more light. With this we begin to see what is “done” in the practice of the Psalms.

2.2.3 What Do the Psalms Do?

⁹⁹Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, 16.

¹⁰⁰Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 73-150*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 162.

Let us return to Brueggemann's question: "What was being done when the Psalms were 'done'?" The first lengthy quote of Brueggemann which we used above already gives us clues: The Psalms "articulate" and "bring to speech" the seasons of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. As we stressed in the discussion on the hermeneutic of convention, naming an experience helps us claim it. The Psalms, of course, do not really describe our concrete and particular experiences, but they give us words that evoke what we are going through – a more than helpful aid especially in what Brueggemann calls "situations of regression," when we are most vulnerable in hurt, most sensitized to life, pushed to the extremities of life and faith, and when we most probably do not have words at hand.¹⁰¹ Even if the Psalms do not capture our situation accurately, they can help by eliminating what is not our experience. But more frequent are the times when we resonate with the Psalms.

The Psalms are "limit-expressions" (laments, songs of thanksgiving) for "limit-experiences," (disorientation, new orientation) says Brueggemann, taking off again from Ricoeur.¹⁰² On laments and disorientation, Brueggemann adds:

Persons and communities are not fully present in a situation of disorientation until it has been brought to speech. One may in fact be there but absent to the situation by denial and self-deception. Specifically, until the reality of "the pit" is spoken about, with all its hatred of enemies, its mistrust of God, its fear of "beasts," its painful yearning for old, better times, its daring questions of dangerous edges – until all that is brought to speech – it is likely that one will continue to assume the old, now-discredited, dysfunctional equilibrium that, in fact, is powerless. ... But to speak first the words to the disoriented, and then to have the disoriented actually speak the words, can be a new recognition and embrace of the actual situation. The censorship of the old orientation is so strong that the actual situation may be denied and precluded. The "language event" of the lament thus

¹⁰¹Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 152.

¹⁰²Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 171.

permits movement beyond naïveté and acceptance of one's actual situation critically.¹⁰³

Furthermore, once the disorientation is brought to speech, it becomes harder to deny it. The process becomes more difficult to reverse. Mirroring the “work” that laments do, the Psalms of declarative praise and new orientation can lead us to fully embrace our new contexts and rejoice in them.¹⁰⁴

The Psalms help us realize our situations in two ways. First, with their words, they help us recognize what is happening to us. Second, still with their words, they *realize* – make more real to us that which for us did not really exist until they were born linguistically. This is the creative power of language.¹⁰⁵

What else do the Psalms do? The words of the Psalms accompany us through the seasons of orientation—disorientation—new-orientation. This is how the Psalms teach and transform – not really by giving us new data but by accompanying us through transformation. As the words of the Psalms are repeated in sustained practice, the Psalms can also accompany us throughout our lives. This is how the Psalms are a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps 119:105). The accompaniment the Psalms can give is better seen when we “thicken” Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning with Robert Kegan’s insights on how our consciousness becomes more complex.

¹⁰³Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 171-172.

¹⁰⁴Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 172.

¹⁰⁵Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 172.

2.3 TRANSFORMATION THROUGHOUT LIFE

2.3.1 Kegan's Subject-Object Theory and the Orders of Consciousness

Mezirow is a constructivist. He is of the conviction that people actively “construct” or make sense of their experiences and reality. Robert Kegan is a constructivist-developmental. With constructivists, he believes that we do not just “passively ‘copy’ or ‘absorb’ already organized reality; instead, we ourselves actively give shape and coherence to our experience” and our apprehension of reality.¹⁰⁶ But to constructivism, Kegan adds that the way people construct reality changes and develops over time, evolving towards increasing complexity.

Kegan advocates a broadening of TL theory from the province of adulthood to our whole lifespan.¹⁰⁷ This widening can happen, Kegan writes, if we narrow the concept of TL more explicitly on epistemological changes rather than on behavioral adaptations or on mere increases in the fund of knowledge.¹⁰⁸ Kegan wants to focus more on the “form” that transforms, a “form” that is a way of knowing.¹⁰⁹

TL theory began as addressing the distinctively adult ways of learning. How can we justify its application to other developmental stages in life? The goal of TL is

¹⁰⁶Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 199.

¹⁰⁷See Robert Kegan, “What ‘Form’ Transforms? A Constructive-Developmental Approach to Transformative Learning,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 35-69.

¹⁰⁸Kegan, “What ‘Form’ Transforms?” 48.

¹⁰⁹In his subject-object theory, which can be seen as TL theory applied to different life stages, Kegan does go beyond the epistemological and touches on the sociocultural. As will be explained below, Kegan’s theory incorporates how the world and one’s culture presses in on an individual, presents a curriculum, and makes demands.

emancipation, removing constraints and freeing ourselves from forces that limit our options.¹¹⁰ In Kegan's subject-object (S-O) theory, which spans a person's whole life, development happens when what we are "subject" to (i.e., what we are controlled by, what we are identified with, what we cannot yet see) becomes "object" to us (i.e., controllable by us; can be thrown in front of us – the literal meaning of the Latin *ob* (in front) and *ject* (throw); that which we can reflect upon and be held responsible for). In short, growth happens when what constrains us is removed; TL theory and S-O theory have the same goals. "When a way of knowing moves from a place where we are 'had by it' (captive of it) to a place where we 'have it,' and can have a relationship to it, the form of our knowing has become more complex, more expansive."¹¹¹ This, for Kegan, is the meaning of transformation. Similar to the definition of transformation that is used in this study, Kegan's transformation involves a change in the way we see things towards an enlarged horizon that is more adequate to experience.

Some may counter that the process of TL (which includes critical reflection, questioning assumptions, and exploring alternatives and their implications) requires advanced cognitive functions that children are not capable of. The young may not be able to think critically in the same level as adults, but many studies have shown that children can be taught and guided to think critically.¹¹² But the best proof that TL can be applied

¹¹⁰Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 16.

¹¹¹Kegan, "What 'Form' Transforms?" 53-54.

¹¹²This is the conclusion of Shari Tishman, David N. Perkins, and Eileen Jay, *The Thinking Classroom: Learning and Teaching in a Culture of Thinking* (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1995); Ron Ritchhart and David N. Perkins, "Learning to Think: The Challenges of Teaching Thinking," in *Cambridge Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning*, eds. Keith J. Holyoak and Robert G. Morrison (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 775-802; Ron Ritchhart and David N. Perkins, "Making Thinking Visible," *Educational Leadership* 65, no. 5 (2008): 57-61; Angela K. Salmon, "Promoting a Culture of

to different developmental stages and not just in adulthood is that children do change their ways of thinking and become more complex in their ways of knowing – as most of us have experienced.

Kegan’s S-O theory identifies six ways of knowing or orders of consciousness. By ways of knowing, Kegan is not just referring to thinking processes alone but to how a person organizes meaning and the “selective, interpretive, executive, construing capacities that psychologists have historically associated with the ‘ego’ or the ‘self.’”¹¹³

The first way of knowing or order of consciousness, termed “impulsive,” describes the meaning-making of children from two to six years old. These children hold as object their reflexes but are subject to their impulses and perceptions. The second order, designated as “instrumental,” was once thought to span the ages of six through adolescence, but there is evidence that this order can still continue in adulthood.¹¹⁴ Those

Thinking in the Young Child,” *Early Childhood Education Journal* 35, no. 5 (2008): 457–61; and Angela K. Salmon, “Engaging Children in Thinking Routines,” *Childhood Education* 86, no. 3 (2010): 132–37.

“Cognitive researchers have become much more sophisticated in probing children’s capabilities. In the process, they have uncovered much richer stores of knowledge and reasoning skills than they expected to find in young children. Studies show that even children in kindergarten have surprisingly sophisticated ways of thinking about the natural world based on direct experiences with the physical environment, such as watching objects fall or collide, and observing animals and plants. Children also learn about the world by talking with their families, watching television, going to parks, or playing outside. Children apply their understanding when they try to describe their experiences or persuade other people about what’s right or what’s wrong. In trying to understand and influence the world around them, they develop ideas about how the world works and their role in it (Sarah Michaels, Andrew W. Shouse, Heidi A. Schweingruber, *Ready, Set, Science!: Putting Research to Work in K-8 Science Classrooms* (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2007), 6-7).

Children are guided to think critically by using techniques that “make thinking visible,” asking “What makes you say that?” (which makes them justify their interpretations), completing statements like “I used to think... now I think...” (which helps them reflect how their thinking has changed), and engaging in activities that encourage sharing different viewpoints (see Angela K. Salmon, “Tools to Enhance Young Children’s Thinking,” *Young Children* 65, no. 5 (September 2010): 26-31).

¹¹³Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 29.

¹¹⁴See Adult Development Research Group, *Toward a New Pluralism in ABE/ESOL Classrooms: Teaching to Multiple “Cultures of Mind,”* (Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, 2001).

in this order hold as object their impulses and reflections but are subject to their own needs, interests, and desires. The third order, named “socializing,” influences in whole or in part the meaning-making of roughly 1/2 to 2/3 of adults.¹¹⁵ People in this order hold as object their needs, interests, and desires, but are subject to interpersonal relationships. The fourth order, labeled “self-authoring,” impacts the meaning-making of between 1/2 to 3/4 of adults. People in this order hold as object interpersonal relationships, but are subject to their own ideologies and sense of identity. Numbering much less (only 3% to 6% of all adults) are the people in the fifth order, designated “self-transforming.” These people hold as object their own ways of self-authoring and their own ideologies but are subject to the dialectic between different ideologies. As can be seen, one is able to move from one order of consciousness to another when what one was once unable to take a perspective on, or what one was once embedded in becomes something we can examine, manipulate, and act upon.¹¹⁶

Mezirow warns us of epistemic distortions that can cloud our meaning perspectives. One epistemic distortion is reification, or “seeing a phenomenon produced

¹¹⁵This and the next estimates of the distribution of the orders of consciousness among adults are taken from James K. L. Hammerman and Rebecca Mitchell, “Measuring Adult Developmental Differences Using a Survey Instrument,” Technical Education Research Centers, 2007, https://www.terc.edu/download/attachments/3179563/Support_Beliefs_Hammerman1.pdf (accessed October 11, 2016), 3. Hammerman’s estimates summarize Kegan’s report on the distribution of subject-object interview scores for 282 people drawn from twelve dissertation studies (see Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 188-197). For more details on his interpretation of Kegan’s report, see James K. L. Hammerman, “Experiencing Professional Development: A Constructive-developmental Exploration of Teachers’ Experiences in a Mathematics Teacher Professional Development Program” (doctoral dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA, 2002), 17-18. Because people in transition between adjacent orders are counted twice, the estimates do not total 100%.

¹¹⁶A very helpful summary of Kegan’s orders of consciousness is Peter W. Pruy’s “An Overview of Constructive Developmental Theory,” *Developmental Observer*, 2010 <http://developmentalobserver.blog.com/2010/06/09/an-overview-of-constructive-developmental-theory-cdt/> (accessed December 8, 2014). This blog is no longer online, but Pruy’s article is archived on <https://litlrc.hackpad.com/LRC-oriented-presentation-of-Kegans-developmental-model-Tw2CIJXeKYr> (accessed October 11, 2016).

by social interaction as immutable, beyond human control.”¹¹⁷ Another is “using as prescriptive knowledge that is based on description; for example, using what psychologists describe as life stages as standards for judging a particular individual’s development.”¹¹⁸

Heeding Mezirow’s warning, we have to remind ourselves that Kegan’s outline of the orders of consciousness is only one way of describing life and reality. His observations come from general trends he has studied, but they are not the only ways by which people grow or are hindered in their growth. The orders of consciousness are aids for us to understand development; they are not laws set in stone that disallow exceptions.

While the third, fourth, and fifth ways of knowing are indeed more complex in what they are able to take into account, we cannot just judge people as higher or lower, as better or worse. Those in the later orders are not always ethical people; though they can consider more factors, it is not assured that they will act in the best interests of everyone concerned. While we always desire that people are able to see more rather than less, we have to take people where they are.¹¹⁹ People are where they are in response to their experiences and in response to their surroundings. Kegan paints portraits of how more and more are demanded of us as we enter committed relationships, as we serve as parents or mentors, as we move into leadership positions in our places of work, and so on. We cannot expect the same “maturity” or wider vision from adolescents, for example, who

¹¹⁷Mezirow, “How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning,” 15.

¹¹⁸Mezirow, “How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning,” 15.

¹¹⁹“Taking people where they are” also plays an important role in my views on inspiration. I tackle this in chapter 4.

have yet to face the demands of these experiences. The point of reflecting on orders of consciousness is not to establish a hierarchy of people but to be able to see how to support people in their different capacities and to cultivate environments where they can grow.¹²⁰

I now discuss aspects of the second, third, fourth, and fifth ways of knowing.¹²¹ The presentation below is far from exhaustive of all the characteristics of these orders. What I address are some of the general features to which the Psalms and the practice of praying with the Psalms can speak.

2.3.1.1 The second order of consciousness

The person who is in the instrumental way of knowing thinks in terms of concrete behaviors, actions, and consequences. He or she tends to maintain a “what-do-you-have-that-can-help-me/what-do-I-have-that-can-help-you” perspective on life. Instrumental knowers recognize that other people have preferences and beliefs different from their own, but another person’s needs and interests only enter consideration when they interfere with the instrumental knowers’ purposes and plans. People in the second order also do not yet have the capacity to accommodate both theirs and another person’s perspectives at the same time.¹²²

¹²⁰Jennifer Garvey Berger, “Exploring the Connection Between Teacher Education Practice and Adult Development Theory” (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA, 2002), 66.

¹²¹I do not discuss the first order of consciousness because I would like to focus on those aged six and above – those who can already read and engage in a practice of the Psalms. The second to the fifth ways of knowing are also what Kegan focuses on in *In Over Our Heads*.

¹²²Eleanor Drago-Severson, *Becoming Adult Learners: Principles and Practices for Effective Development* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004), 23-24.

In *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton outline the creed of the religion that emerged from their interviews with U.S. adolescents:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when he is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.¹²³

This religion, C. Smith and Denton have given the label of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism:

[It] is first, about a moralistic approach to life. It believes that essential to living a happy life is being a good, “moral” person – which means to teens not much more than being kind, nice, pleasant, courteous, responsible, at work on improving oneself, taking care of one’s health, and doing one’s best to be successful. Second, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is about providing therapeutic benefits to its believers. It is finally about feeling happy, good, safe, at peace. It is about achieving subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along nicely with other people. Finally, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is about belief in a specific kind of God, one who exists, created the universe, and defines our overall moral order, but who is not particularly personally involved in one’s life dealings – especially dealings in which one would prefer not to have God involved. Most of the time the God of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism keeps a safe distance. He is frequently described by teens as “watching over everything from above” and “the creator of all and is up there now.” For many, God does sometimes get involved in one’s life, but normally only when one calls on him, mostly when one has some trouble or problem or bad feeling which one wants God the Cosmic Therapist or Divine Butler to fix. Otherwise, God can keep his distance. As one fourteen-year-old white Catholic boy I quote in my book said, “If you ask God for something I believe he gives it to you. Yeah, he hasn’t let me

¹²³Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-163.

down yet. God is a spirit that grants you anything you want, but not anything bad.”¹²⁴

When C. Smith’s description of the religion of U.S. teenagers first came out, many were alarmed and asked, “What is happening to our youth today?” But what is happening is that they are going through the second order of consciousness. If their main concerns are their own well-being and happiness and if their God is someone who gives them what they want – as long as it is not bad – it is because they are still subject to their own needs. Adolescents cannot really see beyond these and concrete behaviors and actions. C. Smith verifies Kegan’s description of instrumental knowers. On the one hand, C. Smith’s findings should not make us think that we are witnessing the end of religion for future generations. On the other hand, we should not stop challenging the youth to see beyond their needs. However, we should also balance challenge with support. One of the main objectives of Kegan in *In Over Our Heads* is to temper our expectations of those still developing – which includes all of us. We have to make sure that what we expect from ourselves is “sensible, fair, [and] appropriate.”¹²⁵

2.3.1.2 The third order of consciousness

Persons who are in the socializing way of knowing have the capacity to subjugate their own needs and desires in favor of the needs and desires of others. Socializing knowers can identify with and internalize the feelings of others. Other people are not just

¹²⁴Christian Smith, “Is Moralistic Therapeutic Deism the New Religion of American Youth? Implications for the Challenge of Religious Socialization and Reproduction,” in *Passing on the Faith: Transforming Traditions for the Next Generation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*, ed. James Heft, Abrahamic Dialogues Series, vol. 5 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 64-65.

¹²⁵See Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 3.

resources who can help fulfill what I want but sources of internal validation and authority. Thus, the approval and acceptance of others is of paramount importance. People in this third order of consciousness are defined by their relationships with others. Many times, those in the third order also repress anger and avoid conflict because these threaten their interpersonal relationships. Socializing knowers also find it difficult to deal with ambiguity.¹²⁶ They have internalized the ideas and feelings of others as well as the ideologies and values of groups and institutions they belong to. One difficulty that they have is when the ideas, feelings, ideologies, and values of those who are close to them come into conflict. They can feel torn and not able to make a decision because they lack a sense of what they want outside of societal roles and expectations.¹²⁷

2.3.1.3 The fourth order of consciousness

The person who is in the self-authoring way of knowing has his or her own internal authority independent of what others may say or think about them. Self-authoring knowers are able to have a “relationship to their relationships,” to put their interactions and connections with others in a larger context where they can make meaning of them.¹²⁸ But people in this fourth order of consciousness are embedded in the ideologies they

¹²⁶Drago-Severson, *Becoming Adult Learners*, 25-26.

¹²⁷Berger, “Exploring the Connection Between Teacher Education Practice and Adult Development Theory,” 43-44.

¹²⁸Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 92.

construct.¹²⁹ They find it difficult to question the assertions and principles they have authored.¹³⁰

¹²⁹Drago-Severson, *Becoming Adult Learners*, 27-28.

¹³⁰From her experience of teaching, counseling, and consulting, Sharon Daloz Parks has observed a stage between the third and fourth order of consciousness that she thinks merits description beyond transitional terms. Between the conventional thinking of the third order and the more critical knowing of the fourth, there is “a kind of equilibrated integrity that itself constitutes a distinct form of faith – a developmental balance worthy of attention” (Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 61). She calls this stage the time of “probing commitment.”

This stage may seem to be merely a transition because of the ambivalence that pervades this period, but it is this ambivalence which is its defining characteristic. This period is concretely seen in the behaviors Parks observed in her students who had confidently gone beyond authority-bound knowing before they graduated, but who would periodically return, seeking the authority of former teachers as young alumni. This apparent vacillation Parks compares to a two-year-old who has just learned to walk and goes off exploring, but who also needs to touch base every now and then with a parent before going off again. During the time of probing commitment, the young adult recognizes that one can make choices about oneself beyond what others may expect of him or her. With this newly discovered power comes a dual responsibility for the self and for one’s world. The young adult not only sees that the self can compose himself or herself; the self must also integrate himself or herself into an increasingly complex society with integrity. The time of probing commitment is qualitatively different from adolescent experimentation in search of identity and self-definition. The young adult is more self-aware and explores critically. He or she probes the strengths and weaknesses of the self that he or she is becoming, the self with all its vulnerabilities and potentialities. At the same time, he or she probes the world and what society asks for and allows. While this is already quite a development and achievement, it also comes with risk and fear. Juxtaposed with the different forms of dependence, the time of probing commitment can be said to also be the time of fragile inner-dependence. Fragile here is not meant to connote weakness. Parks points to the fragility of a young plant – full of promise yet vulnerable. The young adult starts to see who he or she is and what he or she can contribute to a world that he or she knows is much more than what has been seen. And so there is a tentativeness and wariness as the young adult asks, “What shall I do? To what shall I commit myself? How shall I author my life?” (See Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 60-84.)

Again, Parks comes from her many years of working with young adults. It does not seem too far-fetched if those closely working with people in other age groups are also able to identify other unique in-between stages. The stage of “probing commitment” is evidence of how complex transitions between stages can be; there are vacillations in the in-between. This is seen in the way Kegan, Lisa Lahey, and their colleagues have mapped out the transitions between orders:

$$\begin{aligned}1(2) - 1/2 - 2/1 - 2(1) \\2(3) - 2/3 - 3/2 - 3(2) \\3(4) - 3/4 - 4/3 - 4(3) \\4(5) - 4/5 - 5/4 - 5(4)\end{aligned}$$

X(Y) denotes that one is in order X but order Y is beginning to exert influence. X/Y and Y/X are meant to show that both orders are present but the order that comes before the “/” is more dominant. Y(X) signifies that Y in a person is strong, but the effects of X still linger (see Lisa Lahey, Emily Souvaine, Robert Kegan, Robert Goodman, and Sally Felix, *A Guide to the Subject-Object Interview: Its Administration and Interpretation*, (Cambridge, MA: Minds at Work, 2011), 26-27.)

The visualization of transitions above also gives us a glimpse of how long transformations between orders can be. In fact, it is in the in-betweens, in transitions from one order to the next, that most of our lives are spent.

Moving from the third to the fourth order of consciousness might, from one point of view, seem like a regression: From having started to pay attention to the needs of others in your own thinking, you go back to just your own way of construing things. But the next stages or orders always incorporate the previous ones; “each successive principle subsumes or encompasses the prior principle.”¹³¹ Those in the self-authoring stage are not just being selfish in stepping out of the demands of a particular relationship; they are just able to see that the particular relationship does not define them and that there is a bigger picture.

2.3.1.4 The fifth order of consciousness

The person who is in the self-transforming way of knowing refuses to see his or her ideology or principles as complete. Conflict in this order of consciousness is seen as a probable sign that one has identified with a false assumption of wholeness.¹³² Conflict is an invitation to revise one’s own position, to consider how it can be integrated with another’s, and so come up with a more complete perspective.

Moving from the fourth to the fifth order of consciousness might also seem like a regression. But again, succeeding stages or orders always include and build on what came before. We can say that those in the self-transforming stage are not just bowing to the demands of a bigger and more diverse community (a return to the third order of consciousness from the fourth) when they see that their way of authoring the world is not everything there is. Those in the fifth order of consciousness question their construals

¹³¹Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 33.

¹³²Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 321.

because they are incomplete, but this does not mean they are false or worthless. There is truth in them –just not the whole truth. There is an even bigger picture that those in the fifth order can admit they still have not seen.

2.3.1.5 The Curriculum of the World

It is not just the individual's way of knowing that evolves. The world, too, changes, and the demands it places on us change as well. Kegan traces three eras in the world's development and calls these traditionalism, modernism, and postmodernism. In traditionalism, "a fairly homogenous set of definitions of how one should live is consistently promulgated by cohesive arrangements, models, and codes of the community or tribe."¹³³ The traditional world is where the people you meet are more or less the same and have the same set of values and norms, where people find their identity in conformity with the community. In modernism, it is not enough to have been well socialized into your environment; "we must also develop the internal authority to look at and make judgments about the expectations and claims that bombard us from all directions."¹³⁴ The modern world is where we are not only allowed but many times pushed to not just follow the community but blaze our own trails and paths. In postmodernism, we are challenged to "win some distance even from our own internal authorities so that we are not completely captive of our own theories, so that we can recognize their incompleteness, so that we can even embrace contradictory systems simultaneously."¹³⁵ The postmodern world shakes us out of our own meaning-making and wakes us to other possible ways of

¹³³Kegan, "What 'Form' Transforms?" 68.

¹³⁴Kegan, "What 'Form' Transforms?" 68.

¹³⁵Kegan, "What 'Form' Transforms?" 68.

making meaning which can deepen our own. Our consciousness evolves, and the culture that surrounds us evolves as well. Attempting to fuse these two horizons together complicates what is expected of us today. For example, it is the traditional world that can support the third order of consciousness. The modern world is where those in the fourth order can feel quite at home, and the postmodern world is for the fifth. While there are still pockets of the traditional world today, those who are presently in the second order of consciousness are being called to live not in traditionalism but in postmodernism – a world three orders of consciousness beyond them! Adolescents today – and still many adults – are really “in over our heads.” At the same time, it is the inadequacy in the face of these demands that can serve as the motor for change and growth. No wonder that Kegan calls contemporary culture as a kind of “school” and the complex set of expectations placed upon us by present life as a “hidden curriculum.”¹³⁶

2.3.2 The Psalms and How They Can Accompany the Journey Through the Different Orders

In the Psalms’ accompaniment of the movement of orientation—disorientation—new-orientation, there does not have to be a one-to-one correspondence between what you are going through and what kind of Psalm you are using (although a sustained engagement with the large variety of Psalms guarantees that at one time or another, there will be such a correspondence). Someone undergoing orientation or a new orientation can still pray with a Psalm of disorientation. Such a Psalm can remind him or her of what was just undergone or steel him or her for what happens next. Someone undergoing

¹³⁶Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 3, 9.

disorientation can still pray with a Psalm of orientation or new orientation. This can serve as a promise or a way to renew hope and strength so that one can persevere until more light is actually seen. As Brueggemann writes, “Psalms permit the faithful to enter at whatever level they are able.”¹³⁷

2.3.2.1 *A holding environment for the different orders of consciousness*

For people to move from one way of making meaning to another, there is a need for a good “holding environment.”¹³⁸ A holding environment must have three characteristics. First, it must “hold well” – it must provide support for the person and his or her current way of looking at the world. Second, it must “let go” and permit and stimulate a person to move beyond his or her present frame of reference. Third, it must “stick around” and give stability to a person in the process of growth.¹³⁹ In other words, a good holding environment must confirm, challenge, and continue.¹⁴⁰ Kegan uses the metaphor of a bridge that must be “well-anchored on either side” to provide the necessary support.¹⁴¹ But there must also be some challenge that will push and encourage us to

¹³⁷Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*, 3.

¹³⁸Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 342.

¹³⁹Drago-Severson, *Becoming Adult Learners*, 35.

¹⁴⁰On how to “artfully” coach someone through the curriculum of life, Kegan writes: If I were asked to stand on one leg, like Hillel, and summarize my reading of centuries of wise reflection on what is required of an environment for it to facilitate the growth of its members, I would say this: people grow best where they *continuously* experience an ingenious blend of *support and challenge* [emphasis added]; the rest is commentary. Environments that are weighted too heavily in the direction of challenge without adequate support are toxic; they promote defensiveness and constriction. Those weighted too heavily toward support without adequate challenge are ultimately boring; they promote devitalization. Both kinds of imbalance lead to withdrawal or disassociation from the context. In contrast, the balance of support and challenge leads to vital engagement (Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 42).

¹⁴¹Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 37.

cross that bridge of transitions. The Psalms can provide this holding environment and this bridge for people in different orders of consciousness.

2.3.2.2 From the second to the third way of knowing

Many Psalms make a petition that God act decisively. Many times, this petition is spoken as an imperative. Brueggemann writes:

No suggestion of either reticence or deference appears here. The speaker assumes some “rights against the throne” (Job 31:35–37), and so the urgency of the speech has a judicial quality. The speaker does, of course, ask for attentive compassion, but the speaker also insists on his rights. It is a plea for justice as much as mercy, with the suggestion that the unjust situation has arisen because of Yahweh’s lack of attention.¹⁴²

The Psalms also provide the reasons for God to act. Some of these reasons are “less than noble, but it is the speech of a desperate voice that has not time for being noble. At times, the motivation comes peculiarly close to bargaining, bribing, or intimidating.”¹⁴³

Among the motivations are: The speaker is innocent, and therefore, he or she is entitled to God’s aid. The speaker is guilty, but he or she now repents and seeks forgiveness and restoration. The speaker recalls God’s goodness to an earlier generation, the precedent for God’s goodness now; thus, God should do once again what God has done in the past. If the speaker dies, the speaker will cease to praise God, and this will be a loss for Yahweh. Yahweh will also be perceived as being unable to care for his own

¹⁴²Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*, 32.

¹⁴³Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*, 32.

people.¹⁴⁴ “Thus the motivation runs the spectrum from conventional covenantal concerns to a less ‘honorable’ appeal to Yahweh’s self-interest. The speaker has no time for theological niceties, but must secure action for his own well-being.”¹⁴⁵

Those in the second order of knowing who are very much concerned about their needs and interests can relate to the range of these motivations. The Psalms meet second order knowers where they are and confirm them there.

Again, because of the great variety of Psalms, those engaged in a sustained practice of praying with them will surely encounter Psalms that anchor them where they are. But when the Psalms do not align with what one is currently going through, this can remind one that he or she is not alone. In the Liturgy of the Hours, for example, we pray Psalms of sadness even when we are happy. This can awaken us to the fact that someone else somewhere in the world is unhappy. Similarly, one praying a Psalm of disorientation when one is actually not in any dilemma can help one empathize with the plight of those who are not at peace. This is one reason why the Liturgy of the Hours is not just the prayer of the individual but is called the Prayer of the Church, the Body of Christ. As we read in the General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours (GILH), “Those who pray the psalms in the name of the Church nevertheless can always find a reason for joy or sadness, for the saying of the Apostle applies in this case also: ‘Rejoice with the joyful, and weep with those who weep’ (Rom 12:15)” (GILH, chapter 3, no. 108). This can serve

¹⁴⁴Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*, 32-33.

¹⁴⁵Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*, 33.

as an invitation and challenge to second order knowers to consider not just their needs but the needs of others as well.

2.3.2.3 From the third to the fourth way of knowing

Psalms of thanksgiving portray a relationship between God and humans that has nothing amiss. This can be an entry point for those in the third order of consciousness, the socializing knowers, for whom relationships are very important. But what if something goes awry in the relationship? What if the Psalmist starts speaking about being abandoned by God and left alone to suffer without any help? Psalms of lament portray this kind of trouble in the relationship. While this can unsettle the third order knowers, it can also invite them to make sense of their relationship with God in a new way, to make meaning beyond external events. Psalmists witness to the possibility of maintaining a relationship even without tangible proof of God's continuing love. In the Psalms of lament, there is always (with the lone exception of Psalm 88) a great leap from complaining to God to trusting in God again. In this gap, those in the third order can work out their relationship with God and transition into the fourth order of consciousness, the self-authoring way of knowing.

When the Psalms present the righteous and the wicked, the righteous is usually in the singular, and the wicked are in the plural to heighten the contrast between them. For example, Ps 3 begins: "O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me." This convention can be a signal to those moving from the third to the fourth way of knowing that sometimes, to be righteous, one has to be prepared to go against the many, the community. One must be ready to author one's life and blaze one's own trail.

2.3.2.4 *From the fourth to the fifth way of knowing*

A peculiarity of Hebrew poetry is that a verse or line or even section is often paralleled by the next verse, line, or section. For example, “The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me” (Ps 18:4). The Psalms say something from one angle then attack the same message from a slightly different position. As N. T. Wright interprets parallelism in the Psalms:

The important point here is that some of the most important things we want to say remain just a little beyond even our best words. The first sentence is a signpost to the deep reality; the second, signpost from a slightly different place. The reader is invited to follow both and to see the larger, unspoken truth looming up behind... (Something similar is achieved elsewhere in the Bible – for instance, in the provision in Genesis of two creation stories, offering two picture-language images for a reality that lies beyond either.)¹⁴⁶

This can be a good reminder especially to those in the fourth order who can get stuck in their own authored perspectives and a great affirmation for those in the fifth order who know that their own ways of seeing things are always incomplete.

As we have seen above, one of the phases of TL according to Mezirow involves “exploring options for new roles, relationships, and actions.” For transformation to happen, we must see that there is another way of looking at things. Perhaps the Psalms’ way of presenting one thought in more than one way can encourage us to keep on looking for alternative ways of seeing things. Moreover, when the Psalms accompany

¹⁴⁶Nicholas Thomas Wright, *The Case for the Psalms: Why They Are Essential* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 3-4.

transformations, alternative options are presented by the Psalms' vision of God, the human being, and what constitutes right relationships.¹⁴⁷

2.3.3 Celebrating Through Transitions

The Psalms not only accompany us through transitions; they also allow us celebrate through them. Earlier, the empowerment the Psalms can give was discussed. Part of that empowerment must also be the aspect of celebration. James Loder emphasizes this in his own conception of transformation.¹⁴⁸

Loder's interest lies in people's experiences of God. More specifically, he wanted to study "experiences of dawning conviction and unexpected, deep insight that changed the way [we] perceived and lived [our] lives."¹⁴⁹ In these experiences of "dawning conviction," energy is released in the form of a celebration:

Celebration in transformation is not an isolated outburst; it is not a temporary self-indulgence in random selection of instant gratification, but the repeated awakening to, and profound appreciation of, the fundamental but hidden order of all things undergoing transformation into the glory of God... One tends to learn what one celebrates or whatever generates energy and enthusiasm. Hence what order or whose order one celebrates is the all important consideration since that is

¹⁴⁷I tackle the vision of the Psalms – their theology, anthropology, and ethics – in chapter 4.

¹⁴⁸For Loder, transformative learning consists of five steps: (1) a conflict borne with persistence (similar to Mezirow's disorienting dilemma); (2) interlude and scanning (analogous to Mezirow's early searching and reflection phases); (3) insight felt with intuitive force – the convictional experience or transforming moment (Loder's focus); (4) release and redirection of the psychic energy bound up with the original conflict – a celebration; and (5) interpretation which tests the insight for coherence with the terms of the conflict and for correspondence with the public context of the original conflict (analogous to Mezirow's later phases of testing and reintegration). (See James E. Loder, "Transformation in Christian Education," *Religious Education* 76, no. 2 (1981): 208 and James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981). For a summary of Loder's steps, see Young, "Transformational Learning in Ministry," 325-326.)

¹⁴⁹Young, "Transformational Learning in Ministry," 325.

the order which will be learned and driven deeper into the learner with every repetition.¹⁵⁰

The celebration Loder describes here is many times expressed in gratitude and in worship.¹⁵¹

Loder gives celebration a separate heading or phase in the process of transformation (see footnote 148 below), but I do not in my own framework. This is because letting the Psalms accompany us through the phases of transformation means celebrating throughout the process. Although there is a significant surge of vitality when we develop a new paradigm or perspective, we can also celebrate minor victories. That we are able to continue to look for a new way of understanding is already reason to celebrate. As Loder also stressed above, celebration is not an isolated outburst but a “repeated awakening to, and profound appreciation of, the fundamental but hidden order of all things.” Energy is released not only in praise and thanksgiving but also in lament, in the venting out of all our complaints and frustrations. This is part of the process of awakening. To lament is also worship.

The Hebrew title for the entire Book of Psalms is *Tehillim*, which means “songs of praise.” Laments, not just the hymns which call to worship and the songs which express joy and thanksgiving, must have been considered by the Israelite compiler or compilers of the Psalter as ways of praising God. Most of the Psalms of lament end with a vow to worship God and a doxology, but the whole lament can be seen as praise. In the lament, a cry of suffering is brought before God. Westermann writes, “The true function

¹⁵⁰Loder, “Transformation in Christian Education,” 218-219.

¹⁵¹Young, “Transformational Learning in Ministry,” 327.

of the lament is supplication; it is the means by which suffering comes before the One who can take it away. Seen from this perspective, we can say that the lament as such is a movement toward God.”¹⁵² And because the lament is a movement toward God, Westermann concludes that it is a component part of worship.¹⁵³

Is it not a compliment to the one we are complaining to that we are able to tell him or her what we are feeling without holding anything back? One of the best examples of a complaint in Scripture is Job’s: “Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul” (Job 7:11). Job also settles any doubt that this complaint is directed to God; it is not just a rant thrown into an abyss as we see in Job 21:4: “As for me, is my complaint addressed to mortals? Why should I not be impatient?” Yet God in the end defends Job to Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite and says that Job, not his “friends,” have spoken rightly of him: “Go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done” (Job 42:8).

In our complaints and laments to someone, are we also not telling that someone that we believe he or she is dependable, trustworthy, merciful, and willing and able to help? “*In the confession of trust [which is in the structure of the lament Psalm], the lament of the people is open toward praise.*”¹⁵⁴ Because we believe that the God we call

¹⁵²Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 273.

¹⁵³Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 273.

¹⁵⁴Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 58-59.

upon is always there listening, how can we not celebrate? And as we celebrate, though in the midst of not yet having a new paradigm, we are given strength and hope to continue our seeking.

2.3.4 The Need for Sustained Engagement with the Psalms in Practice

Once we are able to develop a new way of thinking and move on to the next order of consciousness, can we not stop praying the Psalms that have helped us cross over? Why would we need to return to them and keep on practicing the Psalms?

First, though we may have developed a new way of knowing that has allowed us to see beyond our needs, beyond our relationships, or beyond our own ways of making sense of things, it does not mean that the temptation to just attend to our wants, to just go with the flow of the community, and to just be caught up in our own paradigms disappears. They are still there and we need to be reminded of what we have learned.

Second, as discussed in chapter 1, the *habitus* the Psalms can give us results in a familiarity with them that also empowers us to improvise and change the way we interpret them. Thus, Luther was able to continue deepening his understanding of the Psalms even after he already taught courses on them. The meaning of the Psalms and the meaning of our experiences are inexhaustible. Gadamer writes, “The discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process. Not only are fresh sources of error constantly excluded, so that all kinds of things are filtered out that obscure the true meaning; but new sources of understanding are continually emerging that reveal unsuspected elements of meaning.”¹⁵⁵ Not only should this confirm

¹⁵⁵Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 298.

those in the fifth order of knowing, it should also encourage those in all the other orders to keep on practicing the Psalms. There will always be something new that we can see as the process of transformation and learning continues.

Above, it was said that we cannot distinguish in advance which prejudices help us to understand and which lead us to misunderstand. What impedes our understanding now might not have always done so. A prejudice or a paradigm that has helped us see in the past may be a hindrance now or may become one in the future. We continue to learn.

Kegan ends his discussion on the curriculum of the world with the postmodern. What age will come after this? Will there be a sixth order of consciousness which will better address this coming age? What way of knowing will it promote? We continue to learn, and the Psalms can continue accompanying us on this journey.

2.4 EXCURSUS: MORE INPUTS FROM NEUROSCIENCE

That adolescents are not able to see what adults want them to see, that they are locked in certain modes of thinking can be attributed to what neuroscience has observed: “Research on the adolescent brain indicates that the prefrontal lobe, responsible for executive functions, impulse control, and consequential thinking, may not be fully developed in adolescents.”¹⁵⁶ If adolescents are “immature,” it is not because they just want to be selfish or rebellious. There are physiological reasons why there are some things they just cannot understand. Their brains are still developing.

¹⁵⁶Holly J. Inglis, Kathy L. Dawson, and Rodger Y. Nishioka, *Sticky Learning: How Neuroscience Supports Teaching That's Remembered* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 36.

The development of the brain also does not end with adulthood. Before the 1990s, the so-called “decade of the brain” because of the number of studies and discoveries that happened then, many scientists believed that the brain contained all its neurons at birth and that the number could not be modified by experiences in life. Neuroscience today has shown that neurons and connections between them are produced until death.¹⁵⁷

Neuroplasticity, the brain’s ability to change structure and function, continues as we have new experiences. We can move through the orders of consciousness Kegan identifies even later in life, and these orders can also go beyond the fifth way of knowing. An “old dog” can learn “new tricks.” However, even as new connections are made in specific areas that are stimulated, areas that are not stimulated can lose the connections that were once there.¹⁵⁸ We have to be aware that there is always something we are probably not seeing and that there are always more things to see.

Kegan traces not only the evolution of the individual’s consciousness but also of cultures and the world. The world makes “mental demands” on us. This is part of what social neuroscience, a movement within brain studies that focuses on “the processes and structures the brain employs to relate to others, as well as identifying the social processes that help shape neural development, function, and organization,”¹⁵⁹ aims to study.

¹⁵⁷Matthieu Ricard, “Inner Experience and Neuroscience,” trans. Francis McDonagh, *Concilium* 2015/4, 19.

¹⁵⁸James E. Zull, *The Art of Changing the Brain: Enriching Teaching by Exploring the Biology of Learning* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2002), 120-122.

¹⁵⁹David Hogue, “Brain Matters: Neuroscience, Empathy, and Pastoral Theology,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 20, no. 2 (2010), 31.

Neuroscience has also shown that stress affects how we learn. It is impossible to avoid fear, anger, guilt, and shame during the process of TL as Mezirow has pointed out. But the good news is that stress does not always have a negative result. Sometimes, stress can even promote learning.¹⁶⁰ As Holly Inglis and her partners write:

When you intentionally create stress in the learning environment, you are asking your students to produce neurotransmitters that can enhance the experience and provoke new approaches to problem solving. The more intense the experience, the more adrenaline is emitted, and the stronger the likelihood that the experience and the learning that takes place during the experience will stick with the student.¹⁶¹

But we still have to be careful with stress and balance it with the right encouragement and support to help people transform.

2.5 LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

In this chapter, I sharpened what I meant by transformation and presented it as a change in paradigm, perspective, or way of knowing. I outlined a framework for transformation based on Mezirow's constructivist theory of transformative learning, "thickened" it with Kegan's insights on how this happens in different developmental stages, and highlighted the roles a practice of the Psalms can play in transformation. The Psalms can teach and transform us by accompanying us through transitions in our ways of knowing, providing a holding environment, and allowing us to celebrate. In this chapter, I also pointed out the weakness of TL theory – in particular, the lack of attention

¹⁶⁰Inglis, et al., *Sticky Learning*, 31-33.

¹⁶¹Inglis, et al., *Sticky Learning*, 33.

given to the extra-rational and the relational. In the next chapter, I show how a practice of the Psalms addresses these two aspects.

3.0 “I WILL SEE YOU FACE TO FACE” (PS 17:15): EMBODYING, EMOTING, ENVISIONING, ENCOUNTERING

One assumption in transformative learning is that individuals cannot be forced to transform. People need to be willing and able to engage in activities and experiences that can potentially lead them to enlarged and more adequate perspectives. An area in TL theory that needs more attention involves the question of what can help people have the desire to change and the motivation to continue learning and transforming.¹

In the previous chapter, the importance of the extra-rational and relational aspects of TL especially in the context of faith was stressed. In this chapter, I show how a practice of the Psalms can address these aspects. Moreover, connecting these aspects to the issue pointed out above, I make the case that these same aspects can be the spark plug for and the engine that drives TL. Embodiment, emotions, images, and encounters can trigger and help sustain the process of transformation and motivate us towards growth.

3.1 EMBODYING

3.1.1 Embodiment in the Bible, Especially in the Psalms

¹Edward W. Taylor and Patricia Cranton, “A Theory in Progress? Issues in Transformative Learning Theory,” *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 4, no. 1 (2013), 40-41.

As human beings, we should not need to be reminded that we are embodied, but many times, we do need more than gentle reminders. Perhaps we can trace this to the influence of Cartesian philosophy, the dualism of body and soul it promoted, and the emphasis it placed on the *cogito*. Or perhaps this goes even further back to Platonic thought and its claim that “[w]e are most truly ‘souls,’ immaterial beings who have fallen into the world of sense and matter.”² In the *Phaedo*, Socrates asks Simmias:

Surely the soul can best reflect when it is free of all distractions such as hearing or sight or pain or pleasure of any kind – that is, when it ignores the body and becomes as far as possible independent, avoiding all physical contacts and associations as much as it can, in its search for reality... The man who pursues the truth by applying his pure and unadulterated thought to the pure and unadulterated object, cutting himself off... from his eyes and ears and virtually all the rest of his body as an impediment... to truth and clear thinking. Is not this the person... who will reach the goal of reality, if anybody can?³

But this is not at all biblical. We need only look at Genesis 1 and 2 to see the importance of the material world and the physical body. God creates and everything he has made is not just good but very good (Gen 1:31). In the Pauline epistles, when spirit is opposed to “flesh,” what is actually meant by flesh is everything contrary to the Spirit of God. The intended contrast is not therefore between body and spirit but between two attitudes in life. A “spiritual person” was simply someone within whom the Spirit of God dwelt or someone who lived under the influence of the Holy Spirit.⁴ In 1 Cor 2:14-15, we read, “Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are

²Steven R. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 64.

³Plato, *Phaedo*, in *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1959), 48-49.

⁴Philip Sheldrake, *A Brief History of Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 3.

foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are discerned spiritually. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny." This is also seen in Rom 8:13-14: "[I]f you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." In Jn 1:14, the Word becomes flesh and lives among us. When Christ rises from the dead and appears to his disciples, he eats –showing he is flesh and bones and not a ghost (see Lk 24:36-43). In Jn 20:24-29, he has wounds that can be touched. All these provide clues regarding our eschatological future and the role the body will play in it. In the First Letter of John, it is declared that when Jesus appears again, we will be like him (1 Jn 3:2). Creation, incarnation, the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the body – central beliefs of the Christian faith – all point to the goodness of the body.

The significance of the body also suffuses the Psalms. We hear the psalmists cry out: "I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God" (Ps 69:2-3). "Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy" (Ps 126:2). "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you..." (Ps 137:5-6).

Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher notes that there are more than a thousand explicit references to embodiment occurring in all but seven of the Psalms. The semantic domain of the body is one of the most widespread and frequently used figures of speech in the Psalms; only Pss 1, 29, 87, 93, 113, 117, and 150 have no mention of the body. Although

body images also occur in the other books of the Bible, the Psalms offer a unique concentration.⁵

The Psalms are “embodying” in the sense that they remind us we are embodied subjectivities. This is one of the things that body language in the Psalms is able to do. The simplest utterances of the Psalmist mention the body: A person sees with his or her eyes, hears with his or her ears, and speaks with his or her mouth, tongue, and lips. These remind us that we cannot do anything without our bodies.

Body language in the Psalms also results in more concrete, less abstract language. Vivid descriptions of our corporeality focus our attention, invite us to join what is happening in the text, and add our own imaginations and experiences. The aspect of embodiment in the Psalms intensifies what the psalmist is trying to say.⁶ The body also facilitates self-perception. Physical observations give us an insight into what is happening to us. In Gillmayr-Bucher’s interpretation of Ps 31:9-11, the “darkening” of the eye, which moves down to the throat and belly, and then to the bones which support the body, combine to make clear the misery of the psalmist.⁷ This we see also in Ps 22:14-17: “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my

⁵Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, “Body Images in the Psalms,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28, no. 3: 301-302.

For each Psalm, Gillmayr-Bucher counts the occurrences of words naming body parts. In Ps 13, for example, 13.7% of all the words (not counting participles, articles, pronouns, and conjunctions) refer to a body part. Sixteen Psalms have a frequency of 10% or higher. The average frequency of words connected to the body is 5.7 (for a graphical representation and a more detailed explanation, see Gillmayr-Bucher, “Body Images in the Psalms,” 302).

⁶Gillmayr-Bucher, “Body Images in the Psalms,” 302-303, 310, 314.

⁷Gillmayr-Bucher, “Body Images in the Psalms,” 310-311.

jaws... My hands and feet have shrivelled; I can count all my bones.” This is what feeling abandoned is like. The body has a way of knowing and manifesting what we are going through. The Psalms are “embodying” also in the sense that they help us get more in touch with our embodied selves.

While body language helps us get closer to knowing ourselves, body language in the Psalms also allows us to be able to gain some distance needed for reflection.

Gillmayr-Bucher writes, “[S]ingle actions can be separated and closely examined. Furthermore, the complex connections and interactions of the thoughts are disentangled and reduced to a more easily conceivable line of experiences.”⁸ In Ps 39:1-3, the psalmist’s efforts to “keep a muzzle on my mouth” “that I may not sin with my tongue,” only causes the heart to “become hot within.” Keeping silent has only worsened the distress until the psalmist can no longer control his tongue. Unraveling a knot of interior events through their exterior manifestations can help us understand what is happening to us. “[I]nterlocked mental processes may be illustrated. Readers can follow the interaction of the body parts and thus are enabled to perceive, to follow, or even to re-experience the shown reflections.”⁹ The knowledge the body offers can help in the self-examination that is important in TL.

3.1.2 The Paradox of Embodiment

The first paradox of the body is that it is so central to our humanity, so essential to how we experience and learn, and yet it is so easily discarded and forgotten in our

⁸Gillmayr-Bucher, “Body Images in the Psalms,” 320.

⁹Gillmayr-Bucher, “Body Images in the Psalms,” 324.

thinking and philosophizing. To address this, Friedrich Nietzsche called upon philosophers to listen to the “big sagacity” or the great wisdom of the body.¹⁰ In a journal entry dated October 23, 1920, thirty-five years after Nietzsche’s challenge, Gabriel Marcel posed this problem: “What is the relation between myself and the instrument that I make use of – i.e., my body? Obviously I do not restrict myself to making use of my body. There is a sense in which I am my body, whatever that may mean.”¹¹ Marcel would continue his wrestling with this problem in the Gifford lectures he delivered in the University of Aberdeen from 1949 to 1950. Going deeper into the nature of reflection, Marcel implied that Cartesian dualism was a necessary step.¹² To say “I *have* my body” is to acknowledge the experience of being able to control my body, to go beyond pain, for instance. But to say “I *have* my body” is the result of primary reflection only – the detachment that “tends to dissolve the unity of experience.”¹³ Primary reflection needs to be followed by the recuperative function of secondary reflection and “reconquer that unity.”¹⁴ The fruit of secondary reflection is to be able to say “I *am* my body.” While I can control it sometimes, my body also resists being mastered completely. My body is

¹⁰The relevant lines go: “But the awakened one, the knowing one, saith: ‘Body am I entirely, and nothing more; and soul is only the name of something in the body.’ The body is a big sagacity, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a flock and a shepherd” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Thomas Common, eBooks@Adelaide, <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/n/nietzsche/friedrich/n67a/chapter4.html> (accessed 12 August 2016)).

¹¹Gabriel Marcel, as quoted by Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 61.

¹²Gabriel Marcel, “Primary and Secondary Reflection: The Existential Fulcrum,” in *Mystery of Being I: Reflection and Mystery* (London: Harvill Press, 1950), 93. Marcel also notes here that in one obscure passage, Descartes talks about the union of body and soul as a third substance.

¹³Marcel, “Primary and Secondary Reflection,” 83, 92.

¹⁴Marcel, “Primary and Secondary Reflection,” 83.

not just an instrument I can dispose of. There is an identity between me and my body. One way I can approach a greater awareness of myself is through my body. I do not just tell it what to do; it can tell me what and who I am when I listen to what it is telling me. But we must be wary of just letting secondary reflection have the final word. To say “I *am* my body” can lead to a coarse materialism and ignore the transcending aspects of the bodily experience mentioned above. “I *have* my body” and “I *am* my body” are two statements that must always be held in dynamic tension. This is also another “paradox of embodiment” – as commentators of Marcel have referred to this conundrum. It can also be stated in this way: “I cannot separate my intersubjectivity from its embodiment, but I also cannot reduce it to its embodiment.”¹⁵ This second paradox of embodiment underlies the discussion of the body that follows.

3.1.3 What Is the Body?

Colleen Griffith answers the question “What is the body?” with her threefold construal of the body as vital organism, as socio-culturally inscribed, and as the enactment of consciousness and will.¹⁶ This threefold description of bodiliness helps us have a more balanced view of our bodies.

¹⁵Eduardo Jose E. Calasanz, “My Body,” in *Philosophy of Man: Selected Readings*, ed. Manuel B. Dy, Jr., 3rd. ed. (Manila: Katha Publishing Co., 2012), 97.

¹⁶In this section, I follow Griffith closely. See a fuller presentation of her theology of the body in Colleen M. Griffith, “Practice as Embodied Knowing: Epistemological and Theological Considerations,” in *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions*, ed. Claire E. Wolfteich (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014), 52-69. My reflections here spring from a course taught by Griffith, *Theological Anthropology of the Body* (TM78501), at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, Boston, MA in the spring of 2014. See also Colleen M. Griffith, “Spirituality and the Body,” in *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, ed. Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 67-83.

The body as “vital organism”¹⁷ refers to the many physiological aspects of the body that make it an environment for encounter and, at the same time, a vehicle of representation of the self. Those who put too much emphasis on abstract reasoning and see the body only as a tool for the mind to manipulate are reminded by the body being a vital organism that the body has its own way of knowing and understanding. The body has its own wisdom that resists just being controlled by the mind – which in itself has a distinctive biological base and is situated in the body, too. Our bodies tell us when we are tired and must stop to rest and recharge. Unexpected boosts of energy can signal that we are happy or at least coming to terms with a situation. Nervous ticks can be signs of anxiety and unease with certain experiences. All these are examples of extra-rational knowing which can help the process of TL.

The body as a “sociocultural site”¹⁸ points us to the realization that we carry in our bodies the influences of others. Those who see themselves as autonomous and self-sufficient are reminded by the body being socially and culturally inscribed that the body is enmeshed in the network of relationships we find ourselves in. Our contexts – another important aspect of TL touched on in the previous chapter – can be manifested corporeally. Blue-collar workers can have rougher hands than those who work in offices. Those who spend many hours in front of a computer can develop carpal tunnel syndrome. In Asian countries like the Philippines and Cambodia, skin whitening creams and injections are very profitable products because both women and men desire to have fairer

¹⁷See Griffith, “Practice as Embodied Knowing,” 62-63.

¹⁸See Griffith, “Practice as Embodied Knowing,” 63.

skin and the higher social status it implies. In temperate countries, tanning salons and bronzers help achieve the same end goal.

But the body is not merely a product of biology and sociology; we also have a measure of freedom and agency – a measure, not absolute – to say yes and to say no to these factors that impinge upon us. This is what the body as the “enactment of consciousness and will”¹⁹ reminds us. More than just acting against physical and cultural influences on the body, the exercise of our consciousness and will allows us to choose to do the practices which can shape and mold our body closer to what we aspire it to be. When we commit to lifting weights or running, we chisel our muscles and increase our capacity to do even more exercise. When we more intentionally listen to the sharing of others, our bodies comport to receive more of what the other has to say and also communicate our desire to reach out – we bend closer to the person, our ears perk up, our eyes focus. When we direct our consciousness and will to meditate, our heart rates can decrease, and we can feel more relaxed even in a stress-filled environment.²⁰

The three aspects are three strands of a braid that must not be taken separately from each other, and these three strands are also “porous” to each other. For instance, the vital organism which is the body knows how to walk. This may seem like a trivial example until we are reminded that only recently were engineers able to figure out how to make a bipedal robot walk not just on even surfaces but on inclined planes with

¹⁹See Griffith, “Practice as Embodied Knowing,” 63-64.

²⁰One study that supports this is Geoffrey W. Melville, Dennis Chang, Ben Colagiuri, Paul W. Marshall, and Birinder S. Cheema, “Fifteen Minutes of Chair-Based Yoga Postures or Guided Meditation Performed in the Office Can Elicit a Relaxation Response,” *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, vol. 2012 (2012), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2012/501986> (accessed January 14, 2017).

varying slopes. But this technology is still in its infancy, and staircases and different surfaces like hard gravel and soft sand present puzzles that have yet to be solved. Complex algorithms and fuzzy logic²¹ have been employed for something the human body can do without even consciously thinking about it. The body has an intelligence that the fastest computers are still too slow to figure out. It is not just the physical environment and our bodies that are involved in our walking. Society and culture affect our gait and stride as well. Pierre Bourdieu writes how socioeconomic status inculcates durable dispositions which are expressed in bodily hexis or language, in our posture and bearing, and in our ways of walking and standing.²² We walk with heads held high or hung low, with chests expanded or shoulders hunched, and many times we are not even conscious of this and how our experiences and society are written all over the way we move. But we are not completely constrained by socio-cultural inscriptions on our bodies. As agents with a degree of freedom, we can enact our consciousness and will on the way we comport our bodies. We can deliberately change our posture, though this may seem strange to our bodies at first. But as our bodies become more comfortable in a certain pose, there are also psychological effects that follow.²³ Holding your chin up can boost

²¹See Utku Seven, Tunc Akbas, Kaan Can Fidan, and Kemalettin Erbatur's "Bipedal Robot Walking Control on Inclined Planes by Fuzzy Reference Trajectory Modification," *Soft Computing* 16, no. 11 (November 2012): 1959–1976.

²²Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 123–124.

²³See Dana R. Carney, Amy J. C. Cuddy, and Andy J. Yap, "Power Posing: Brief Nonverbal Displays Affect Neuroendocrine Levels and Risk Tolerance," *Psychological Science* 21, no. 10 (October 2010): 1363–1368.

Carney, et. al. found that assuming power poses resulted in a psychological sense of power.

your confidence. Keeping your eyes glued to the ground can be a drag on your self-esteem. These psychological effects in turn influence how we enact our freedom.

The paradox of embodiment can also be seen in Griffith's threefold construal of the body. The body as vital organism is not just a slave of the mind and makes us say, "I *am* my body." The body as the enactment of consciousness and will asserts itself and proclaims, "I *have* my body." What Griffith adds is the recognition of the influences society and culture exert on the body also.

3.1.4 Embodied Practices

In the first chapter, I stressed that in trying to discern the pedagogy of the Psalms, I will look at not only the text of the Psalms but the practice of the Psalms. This is because transformation is a lifelong process that needs the sustained engagement of practice to accompany it. The aspect of embodiment highlights the importance of practices even more. For Bourdieu, the *habitus* that comes from practice is an "embodied rhythm."²⁴ Griffith, making a case for the under-appreciated type of knowing that exists in practice, a kind of knowing that is affixed to doing, asserts that Christian faith as operative in people's lives finds "bodily lodging and expression through spiritual practices."²⁵ Practices stimulate new commitments and knowledge of faith, as well as create a new consciousness in the faithful. Practices are not understood as the result of theological or doctrinal insight alone, but they themselves arouse insight. Griffith writes:

²⁴Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

²⁵Griffith, "Practice as Embodied Knowing," 54.

When studying spiritual practices, one is able to observe palpable human desires and needs... [People] bring their lives to their practices eager to find embodied ways of underscoring hopes, yearnings, and commitments... Examining practices, one finds not only observable hopes and desires but socio-cultural-religious presumptions apparent as well, lively assumptions regarding what faithful response to specific circumstances in particular historical times and places involves, according to the best lights of a particular community of faith. Taking notice of spiritual practices makes it possible to see if, where, and how the needs and capacities of persons are being oriented by a religious community's sacred stories and visions, and to observe what specific aspects of a religious tradition and community life are proving more or less helpful for people. One is able to detect transformational elements emerging in persons too, as a result of the knowing embedded in and born of practice. Practitioners so often come to see their worlds and their potential for agency differently as a result of their practice. The best of practices manage to turn people not only to their present in light of their faith community's past, but also toward a hoped-for future approached with a fresh set of eyes.²⁶

3.1.4.1 Singing the Psalms

The book of Psalms is considered the Jewish hymnbook; many of the Psalms were sung. In Greek, *psalmos* literally means song. Eleven Psalms (Pss 42, 44-49, 84, 85, 87, 88) are ascribed to the Sons of Korah, who were eminent musicians during the time of David and Solomon. Heman was one known Korahite singer (see 1 Chron 6:33-38) who with his kindred “[played] on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise loud sounds of joy” (see 1 Chron 15:16-17). Twelve Psalms (Pss 50, 73-83) are attributed to Asaph, a Levite who was appointed a chief minister of the ark of the Lord and tasked “to invoke, to thank, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel” with cymbals (see 1 Chron 16:4-5). In 2 Chron 29:30, “King Hezekiah and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David and of the seer Asaph.”²⁷

²⁶Griffith, “Practice as Embodied Knowing,” 54-55.

²⁷For more information on the Korahite and Asaphite Psalms, see C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 62-64.

Fifty-five Psalms begin with an inscription, *lamenasseah*, which can be translated as “to the leader,” “to the chief musician,” or “to the choirmaster.” Another clue to the musical roots of the Psalms lies in the headings of the Psalms: “According to The Hind of the Dawn” (Ps 22), “To the tune of Do Not Destroy” (Pss 57-59 and 75), and “To the tune Lilies of the Covenant” (Ps 80) are a few of the inscriptions which, scholars guess, point to what must have been well-known melodies in ancient Israel. We also see general terms for songs in the headings: *tehillah* (song of praise), *mizmor* (psalm), and *sir* (song).

Martin Luther wrote, “I would allow no man to preach or teach God’s people without a proper knowledge of the use and power of sacred song.”²⁸ What makes songs so powerful? Athanasius already recognized “the unifying effect which chanting the Psalms has upon the singer” when he wrote: “For to sing the Psalms demands such concentration of a man’s whole being on them that, in doing it, his usual disharmony of mind and corresponding bodily confusion is resolved, just as the notes of several flutes are brought by harmony to one effect.”²⁹ Relevant to our discussion of the paradox of embodiment above, singing allows us to transcend what we sometimes experience as the separation of mind and body.

3.1.4.2 *Speaking the Psalms*

²⁸Martin Luther, quoted in Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories: The Inspiring Stories Behind 101 Favorite Hymns* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1982), 14.

²⁹Athanasius, “The Letter of St. Athanasius to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms,” in *On the Incarnation: The Treatise “De Incarnatione Verbi Dei,”* trans. a religious of C.S.M.V., rev. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), 114.

If the Psalms were not sung, they were at least spoken. This can be seen, for instance, in Ps 118:2-4:

Let Israel say,
“His steadfast love endures for ever.”
Let the house of Aaron say,
“His steadfast love endures for ever.”
Let those who fear the Lord say,
“His steadfast love endures for ever.”

Many scholars see in the phrase “Let ____ say” a liturgical instruction that has been preserved in the text of the Psalm, much like the liturgical instructions in the Roman Missal (usually printed in red) for the priest to extend his hands then join them or for the congregation to reply with certain words. In Ps 118 then, one can imagine groups of people engaging in an antiphonal exchange. This is also seen in Pss 124:1, 129:1, and 24:8 (though without the liturgical instruction).³⁰

The importance of giving voice to the words of the Psalms is also seen in Ps 42:9, “I *say* to God, my rock, ‘Why have you forgotten me?’” and Ps 91:1-2, “You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will *say* to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust’” [emphases added]. It is not enough to think these words or contemplate them in the silence of one’s heart. Something changes when they are said out loud.

In antiquity and in the Middle Ages, people read not only with their eyes but with their lips, pronouncing the words on the page. Reading involved one’s ears, too; words were given voice and heard. The murmuring of the lips of John of Gorze while he prayed

³⁰I use Ps 24 as an example in chapter 5.

the Psalms was described as resembling the buzzing of a bee. To pray the Psalms then was an activity of the whole body as well as the whole mind. Mental memory is augmented by a visual memory of the written word, aural memory of the heard word, and muscle memory of the lips pronouncing the words.³¹

What else can happen when we bring the Psalms to the embodied practice of speech?

3.1.5 Speech-Act Theory

Gordon Wenham, studying the “unique claims of prayed ethics” asserts that liturgy has a distinctive impact on ethical thought:

[W]hat worshipers say in prayer ought to have a profound effect on them because these words are addressed to God, who can evaluate their sincerity and worthiness. If we praise a certain type of behavior in our prayers, we are telling God that this is how we intend to behave. On the other hand, if in prayer we denounce certain acts and pray for God to punish them, we are in effect inviting God to judge us if we do the same. This makes the ethics of liturgy uniquely powerful. It makes a stronger claim on the believer than either law, wisdom, or story, which are simply subject to passive reception: one can listen to a proverb or a story and then take it or leave it, but if you pray ethically, you commit yourself to a path of action.³²

³¹Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, rev. ed., trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 19, 90.

³²Gordon J. Wenham, *Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song Ethically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 57.

Wenham develops his point by using the speech-act theory of John L. Austin³³ and its particular application to theology and worship by Donald Evans,³⁴ one of Austin's students.

Speech is not just the exchange of information; it changes situations. Many of our remarks are not just statements of fact but create new possibilities. An example of a speech-act is the oath: "I solemnly swear that the evidence that I shall give, shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God." This promise binds the one who makes it to an obligation and creates an expectation in the one who hears it. Another case in point is the marriage vow: "I, _____, take you, _____, to be my lawfully wedded husband / wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part." Spoken before God and before the community, this speech-act establishes a new relationship.³⁵

Evans, adopting the terminology of Austin, the founder of speech-act theory, characterizes worship language into two main categories: commissives and behabitives. In a commissive, the speaker commits himself to a course of action. Examples of commissives are "accept," "undertake," "engage," "declare as policy," "pledge," and negatively, "threaten." In a behabitive, the speaker expresses an approach or outlook. Examples of behabitives are "thank," "welcome," "commend," "praise," "worship," "glorify," "confess," "apologize," and negatively, "blame," "accuse," "reprimand," and

³³See John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. James Opie Urmson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

³⁴See Donald M. Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement: A Philosophical Study of Everyday Language with Special Reference to the Christian Use of Language About God as a Creator* (London: SCM, 1963).

³⁵Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*, 65.

“protest.”³⁶ Behabitives can also be considered as weaker commissives. They relate the speaker to another in the context of behavior and social relations without explicating a commitment. “The speaker implies that he has certain attitudes in relation to the person whom he addresses, or towards what he is talking about. In saying, ‘I thank you,’ I imply (but do not report) that I am grateful to you; in saying, ‘I apologize for my behaviour,’ I imply (but do not report), that I have an unfavourable attitude towards my behaviour. Behabitives imply attitudes.”³⁷

Commissives and behabitives are found throughout the Psalter: “I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people” (Ps 116:14) and “I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being” (Ps 104:33) are examples of commissives. “I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness, and sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High” (Ps 7:17) and “I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’, and you forgave the guilt of my sin” (Ps 32:5) are examples of behabitives.

The change in situation and relationship that a speech-act makes is evident in the last example of Ps 32. Before the psalmist confessed, his state was one of anguish: “While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer” (Ps 32:3-4). But after the psalmist’s confession, there came the “joy of forgiveness,” as the NRSV entitles this Psalm.

³⁶Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement*, 29.

³⁷Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement*, 34-35.

Even verses that at first glance seem like simple statements become powerful commitments when uttered in the context of worship. Ps 104:19-20 proclaims God as creator: “You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.” But to say God is creator is to acknowledge myself as creature and to accept my role in creation.³⁸ To state “For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods” as Ps 95:3 does is to pledge my allegiance to him as a follower. To say “the Lord our God is holy” (Ps 99:9) is not just a simple attribution of holiness to God but is a worshipper’s expression of a sense of awe and wonder. “The words are used performatively to perform an act of praise and to commit oneself to various attitudes of supreme and exclusive devotion to God.”³⁹

The power of speech-acts is not a new insight. Already in Rom 10:9-10, Paul wrote, “[I]f you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.”⁴⁰ As Paul implies, all this assumes that the speech is done with faith and conviction.

What has been discussed about speech, of course, also applies to song, and what is vocalized with melodies or without becomes more powerful when done not only in the presence of God but others. Speaking the Psalms out loud to God is tantamount to committing oneself to God. Moreover, speaking them in communal worship enlists other

³⁸Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement*, 155.

³⁹Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement*, 183.

⁴⁰Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*, 75.

faithful as witnesses to this commitment. Speaking the Psalms affects my relationship not only with God but with the community that is implicitly charged to help in guaranteeing the promise.

Speech-acts, as Evans succinctly puts it in the title of his book, are “self-involving.” The act of saying or singing something out loud increases my self-investment and propels me forward not merely as an observer but as a responsible agent. In this way, the embodied practice of the Psalms can help sustain and motivate me in the process of transformation.

Speech-act theory is easily applied to the Psalms that resonates where one is. A Psalm of orientation said during a season of orientation roots one more deeply in the current paradigm. A Psalm of disorientation spoken during a season of disjoint can heighten one’s self-involvement in questioning the old worldview and looking for a new one. A Psalm of new orientation sung in the corresponding season can lead one to venture farther in exploring a new way of making meaning. But what happens when one is not in synch with the Psalm that he or she is praying with?

3.1.6 Cognitive Dissonance Theory

More than half a century ago, social psychologist Leon Festinger pioneered cognitive dissonance theory,⁴¹ and today, it is still being discussed and developed.⁴² In a

⁴¹See Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957).

⁴²See, for example, Joel Cooper, *Cognitive Dissonance: Fifty Years of a Classic Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 2007).

Rolf Jacobson references this theory in his own pastoral reflections on the liturgical use of the Psalms. See Rolf Jacobson, “Burning our Lamps with Borrowed Oil: The Liturgical Use of the Psalms and the Life of Faith,” in *Psalms and Practice: Worship, Virtue, and Authority*, ed. Stephen Breck Reid (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 90-98.

nutshell, this theory states that holding conflicting attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors produces a feeling of discomfort which must be reduced. Human beings do not like incongruences. The tension resulting from experienced inconsistencies has drive-like properties,⁴³ and this tension is eased by changing one's attitudes, adding new thoughts, or changing one's behavior.⁴⁴

When one is disoriented and prays with a Psalm of orientation or new orientation, the tension can be the motivating force to continue looking for more adequate ways of meaning-making – to add new thoughts or to change an attitude: How can I approach the coherence these Psalms proclaim? When one is oriented or settling into a new orientation and prays a Psalm of disorientation, the tension can be a trigger that can start one's questioning: Perhaps not all is right in the world. Combining cognitive dissonance theory with speech-act theory, we can say the Psalm which is spoken or sung can increase the tension by heightening our self-involvement. Of course, one way to decrease the tension is to stop praying the Psalm, but this study assumes a committed practice of engaging the whole Psalter on the part of the pray-er.

When one continues engaging the Psalms in practice, the tension can multiply. According to cognitive dissonance theory, the more people are committed to their behavior and to a position (such as a conviction held in faith), the greater the tension. And when one is publicly identified with an incongruent position (such as when the Psalms are prayed in community), the tension increases even more.⁴⁵

⁴³Cooper, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 7.

⁴⁴Jacobson, "Burning our Lamps with Borrowed Oil," 92.

⁴⁵Cooper, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 63, 73

Rolf Jacobson gives the example of creating even more dissonance when two Psalms of different seasons interact in our prayer. What happens when a Psalm of orientation like Ps 1 is prayed not long after a Psalm of disorientation like Ps 22? Ps 1:6 believes that “the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” But Ps 22:1, which has been interpreted many times in history, as “the painful cry of a loyal friend of the Lord who is persecuted and ostracized for being loyal,”⁴⁶ gives a counter-witness: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?”

Jacobson writes:

Because liturgy places words in the mouth of people, liturgy has an added creative capacity and an extra measure of hermeneutical leverage that sermons and lectures and reading do not. It is easy for the mind to distance itself from the theoretical, abstract words in a sermon in which the pastor may seek to *teach* worshipers about the reality of suffering, but the mind’s defenses will be much more vulnerable when it speaks phrases in the first person. “My God, why have you forsaken me?” Once such words become my own, once they sink into my heart and mind and soul, it will be impossible for these words to coexist peacefully with the stable cognitions of orientation.

Recall that two of the main ways that the human mind resolves cognitive dissonances are to add new cognitions and to change attitudes. In the present example, the pastoral goal might be something of both. Perhaps the person in a happy state of orientation might add the new cognition, “Sometimes the righteous do suffer.” Or a different new cognition might be added, such as: “Perhaps suffering is not a sign of personal failure.” Accompanying these new cognitions there may be a new attitude towards those who suffer. Rather than judging sufferers or fearing them, compassion and love might take seed. Such newly added cognitions or newly changed attitudes could serve the subject well also, in the inevitable event of his own suffering.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 129.

⁴⁷Jacobson, “Burning our Lamps with Borrowed Oil,” 96.

Embodiment in the Psalms has shown us a different, extra-rational way of knowing and source of knowledge that can help us in our search for more justifiable perspectives. Speech-act theory and cognitive dissonance theory together have shown us how an embodied practice of the Psalms can increase self-involvement and drive us to continue the process of transformation. And the body in the Psalms has even more to offer.

3.2 EXCURSUS: ADDITIONAL INPUTS FROM NEUROSCIENCE

In 2004, neuroscientists in Parma, Italy who were studying the activity of individual cells in the brains of macaque monkeys discovered a specialized class of neurons that fired either when a monkey was performing a certain task or was just observing the same activity performed. They stumbled upon this distinct type of neurons when sensors tracking neurons that activated when a monkey grasped for food detected the same activity in the same neurons when the monkey saw a laboratory assistant reach for food. At first, the neuroscientists thought of calling these specialized neurons “monkey see – monkey do” cells because what the monkey saw was registered as what the monkey did. They later decided to name these cells “mirror neurons,” to highlight the ability of these cells to “mirror” the brain activity of actions observed. Current technology is not yet able to monitor individual cells in the human brain as accurately as in animal studies. To add to the complications of drawing direct correlations between monkey and human brain research, human neurons are able to perform more than one function and switch between functions easily. Still, studies have been able to demonstrate

mirror-like activity in what neuroscientists term as “mirror neuron systems” in the human brain.⁴⁸

In human studies, neuroscientists found that the mirror neuron systems were activated not simply by the motion of the observed action but by the motivation or intention the subjects intuited. In monkey studies, neuroscientists also saw that purposeless motions observed by monkeys did not fire mirror neurons. The brain apparently is wired to detect goal-related activities. David Hogue writes:

These data provide several tantalizing clues to the ways in which we human beings are able to understand the intentions of people around us. Well below the level of awareness, our brains are quickly and automatically mimicking the actions of persons important to us, who hold our attention. In doing so, it is as though the brain is re-creating the internal state of the other, but this time within itself. It is, in a sense, “trying out” the behavior it is observing and in some sense “trying on” the experience and intent of another human being.⁴⁹

Put in another way, our mirror neuron systems allow us to “parallel” in our brains what may be happening in the brains of those we are observing.

It is not just in the realm of intentions that mirror neuron systems are helping us appreciate how we understand others. Mirror neuron systems are also helping us figure out how we are able to comprehend the emotions of others. When we see a smiling face, for example, our brains reconstruct our bodies’ experience of a smile. “The brain’s logic goes something like this: I will try on that particular facial expression and then consider

⁴⁸David Hogue, “Brain Matters: Neuroscience, Empathy, and Pastoral Theology,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 20, no. 2 (2010), 33-34.

⁴⁹Hogue, “Neuroscience, Empathy, and Pastoral Theology,” 34-35.

how my body feels when I look like that.”⁵⁰ Neurologist Antonio Damasio concisely summarizes what is happening in the brain here when he calls this an “as if body loop.”⁵¹

What has all this to do with the Psalms? The Psalms with their vivid descriptions of the body allow us to “observe” and enter the processes that the psalmists are going through. In our brains and in our imaginations, we are able to reconstruct what is happening in the body of the psalmist and “try on” the psalmist’s experience. In a certain sense, we are not just able to put ourselves in the psalmist’s shoes; we are able to put ourselves in the psalmist’s body, or more in line with the function of mirror neuron systems, we are able to put the psalmist’s body in our own. Through the body as depicted in the Psalms, we are able to understand the psalmist’s emotions, which is the second extra-rational aspect to be discussed in this chapter.

3.3 EMOTING

⁵⁰Hogue, “Neuroscience, Empathy, and Pastoral Theology,” 36-37.

Using experiments involving pain-related neurons as their resource, Paula M. Niedenthal and her colleagues arrived at a similar conclusion. By considering the bodily expressions of emotions of others (e.g., facial expressions, posture, and vocal intonations), we are able to comprehend their emotions. This comprehension does not remain in the abstract but is also embodied or felt in the body of the one considering and trying to understand them. These embodied emotions then produce emotional states. In other words, by considering the physical signs of the emotions of others, our bodies are able to feel what they are feeling, and we come closer to empathizing with others (see Paula M. Niedenthal, Lawrence W. Barsalou, François Ric, and Silvia Krauth-Gruber, “Embodiment in the Acquisition and Use of Emotion Knowledge,” in *Emotion and Consciousness*, ed. Lisa Feldman Barrett, Paula M. Niedenthal, and Piotr Winkielman (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 21-44). A simple example of this is when we flinch even though we are just watching somebody experience pain.

⁵¹Antonio R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1999), 281-284.

More than any other book in the Bible, emotions play a central part in the Psalter.⁵² The composers of the Psalms wore their hearts on their sleeves: “I am lonely and afflicted” (Ps 25:16). “My life is spent with sorrow” (Ps 31:10). “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” (Ps 42:5). “Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud” (Ps 123:4). “You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound” (Ps 4:7).

The Psalms encompass the whole gamut of human emotions. To name but a few, the Psalms present: joy (e.g., Ps 4:7, 33:1); reverence (e.g., Ps 5:7, 8:1); shame (e.g., Ps 44:9); fear (e.g., Ps 56:3); sadness (e.g., Ps 6:6-7); anger (e.g., Ps 109:8-10); doubt (e.g., Ps 73:3-5); confidence (e.g., Ps 46:1-3); trust (e.g., Ps 20:7); and love (e.g., Ps 18:1, 116:1).

The Psalms give us words to express our emotions, and beyond single words for feelings, the Psalms also give us body imagery so that we can feel those emotions and enter more deeply into them. The body allows us to know things beyond the rational; emotions, too, are extra-rational ways of knowing that TL must take into account.

3.3.1 The Power of Emotions

Throughout history, thinkers have pointed out the power of emotions. Aristotle taught, “The orator persuades by means of his hearers, when they are roused to emotion

⁵²Harm van Grol, “Emotions in the Psalms,” in *Emotions from Ben Sira to Paul*, ed. Renate Egger-Wenzel and Jeremy Corley, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook 2011 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 69.

by his speech; for the judgments we deliver are not the same when we are influenced by joy or sorrow, love or hate.”⁵³ William James wrote:

[I]f we look on man’s whole mental life as it exists, on the life of men that lies in them apart from their learning and science, and that they inwardly and privately follow, we have to confess that the part of it of which rationalism can give an account is relatively superficial. It is the part that has the prestige undoubtedly, for it has the loquacity, it can challenge you for proofs, and chop logic, and put you down with words. But it will fail to convince or convert you all the same, if your dumb intuitions are opposed to its conclusions. ... The truth is that in the metaphysical and religious sphere, articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusion.⁵⁴

Research has substantiated what many teachers have implicitly known: Learning environments with positive emotional experiences promote increased personal involvement in learning and broaden the students’ thought processes.⁵⁵ But even negative emotions can drive learning. The disorienting dilemmas that act like a spur in Jack Mezirow’s phases of TL are not just mental conundrums but very emotional experiences as seen in the most typical example of what can cause disorientation – the death of a spouse. Feelings are not just inner psychological states; feeling are always *about* something or someone. This, as sociologists Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead point out, is part of what makes emotions “intrinsically motivating, and the motivation affects the

⁵³Aristotle, *Rhetorica* I, II.5, as quoted by Nico H. Frijda, Antony S. R. Manstead, and Sacha Bem, “The Influence of Emotions on Beliefs,” in *Emotions and Beliefs: How Feelings Influence Thoughts*, ed. Nico H. Frijda, Antony S. R. Manstead, and Sacha Bem (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

⁵⁴William James, “The Varieties of Religious Experience,” in *Writings 1902-1910* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1987), 73-74.

⁵⁵Luzelle Naude, Tobias J. van den Bergh, and Isabella Susanna Kruger, “‘Learning to Like Learning’: An Appreciative Inquiry into Emotions,” *Social Psychology of Education* 17, no. 2 (June 2014), 223-224.

intentional object and the situation as a whole.”⁵⁶ The power of emotions to start up and catalyze the process of reflection have also been shown in the interviews Shirley Swan and Andy Bailey have conducted with managers.⁵⁷

But emotions have also been disparaged many times in history. Immanuel Kant repeatedly used the metaphor of sickness to describe feelings: “To be subject to emotions and passions is probably always an illness of mind because both emotion and passion, exclude the sovereignty of reason.”⁵⁸ Kant, of course, was coming from a rationalist background. Today, that bias still exists as not many scholars consider emotion to be integral to the meaning-making process.⁵⁹ In Western societies, it is still common to see how emotions are subordinated to propositional thought and rational discourse.⁶⁰ Charles Taylor, echoing William James, warns, “Rationalism gives an account of only part of our mental life, and one that is ‘relatively superficial.’”⁶¹ We need to expand TL theory into the extra-rational (versus irrational) part of our lives that involve the emotions because the power of our feelings can be a dynamic motor to keep TL running.

⁵⁶Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21.

⁵⁷See Shirley Swan and Andy Bailey, “Thinking with Feeling: The Emotions of Reflection,” in *Organizing Reflection*, ed. Michael Reynolds and Russ Vince (Hampshire, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 105-125.

⁵⁸Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology* 73.155, as quoted by Robin May Schott, *Cognition and Eros: A Critique of the Kantian Paradigm* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 106.

⁵⁹See John Dirkx, “Engaging Emotions in Adult Learning: A Jungian Perspective on Emotion and Transformative Learning,” *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* no. 109 (2006), 15-26.

⁶⁰See Lyle Yorks and Elizabeth Kasl, “Toward a Theory and Practice for Whole-Person Learning: Reconceptualizing Experience and the Role of Affect,” *Adult Education Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (2002), 176-192.

⁶¹Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 52.

That emotions can motivate TL can be seen even in the words we use that are related to feelings. We are *moved* by our emotions. The roots of the word emotion can be traced to the Latin *emovere* (*ex* (out) + *movere* (move)) and the French *émouvoir*, which means to stir up.⁶² The very term itself shows movement – *e-motions*,⁶³ and popular psychology today has given us the catchphrase “E-motion is energy in motion.”⁶⁴

3.3.2 Feeling as a Way of Knowing

Theologian Edward Vacek, though he is critical of how the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) treats emotions,⁶⁵ does laud it for its claim that “[b]y his emotions, man intuits the good and suspects evil” (CCC 1771). “This claim counters one of the most common misunderstandings of emotions – namely, that they are simply physiological or psychological movements within ourselves that signify nothing beyond themselves, such as chills down the spine or a sinking feeling in the stomach. Rather, the *Catechism* makes the crucial point that our emotions are cognitions.”⁶⁶ This is also the dominant position in emotion studies today, exemplified by the works of Robert Solomon

⁶²Robert Lewis Wilson and Rachel Wilson, *Understanding Emotional Development: Providing Insight into Human Lives* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 12.

⁶³“‘Emotion’ is good at conveying the dynamic, motivating force of ‘e-motion’” (Riis and Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, 20).

⁶⁴Scholars use many different terms for emotions and make distinctions that contribute to the point they are trying to make. For example, “‘passions’ conveys the power of emotions, ‘feeling’ their embodied aspect, ‘sentiments’ the way they relate to character and education, while ‘affect’ suggests their passive and reactive dimension” (Riis and Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, 20). But there seems to be no general consensus in the use of these terms. In this study, I will use the different terms for emotion just mentioned interchangeably.

⁶⁵See Edward Collins Vacek, “Orthodoxy Requires Orthopathy: Emotions in Theology,” *Horizons* 40 (2014), 221-222.

⁶⁶Vacek, “Orthodoxy Requires Orthopathy,” 221.

and Martha Nussbaum.⁶⁷ Emotions are seen as appraisals which allow us to judge whether something is good or bad. Our emotional cognitions can inform us of certain features of our surroundings and prepare us to act in certain ways.

If emotions are cognitions, what do they allow us to recognize?

Before anything else, as Vacek describes in his phenomenological inquiry into emotions, many times, we first feel something and then only subsequently become more conscious of what the object of the emotion is. In other words, emotional knowing can precede conceptual knowing.⁶⁸ For example we arrive at a place and feel a certain peace. We do not know what caused this until we remember that the place smells like the vacation home where we spent many summers as a child. As cognitions, emotions can lead us to recognize what we may not have even noticed without them. Our affective experience not only precedes but can also drive and guide our theological reflection. Vacek uses the resurrection story that happened on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-25) as an illustration.⁶⁹ The disciples felt their hearts burning within them even before they knew that the man they were talking to was Jesus. It was not the stranger's explanations of Scripture that first drew the disciples to him. It was a feeling they had as he talked with

⁶⁷See, for example, Robert Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993) and Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁶⁸Vacek, "Orthodoxy Requires Orthopathy," 224. In Baruch Spinoza's philosophy, human beings are emotional first and rational second (see Riis and Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, 26; they also say that "[r]ational reflection comes last, not first, in the cognitive process and is dependent on prior sensory-emotional processing, rather than antagonistic to it (though it can modify and provide feedback on it)").

⁶⁹Vacek, "Orthodoxy Requires Orthopathy," 224-225.

them. It was a feeling that probably made them ask questions also as they walked. It was a feeling that also urged them to say, “Stay with us.”

What do emotions allow us to recognize? As cognitions, emotions communicate to us the dimension of *value*. “Beyond its effects on our body, the principal feature of an emotion is to inform the subject of the significance objects and events have for her. Emotions reveal to us a world imbued with value.”⁷⁰ Other scholars would use the term *salience*, which helps us navigate through what would otherwise be a chaotic plethora of objects and interpretations all competing for our attention.⁷¹

In *Descartes’ Error*, Damasio describes the process of trying to make an appointment with a person who suffered damage to his prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that handles emotions:

I suggested two alternative dates, both in the coming month and just a few days apart from each other. The patient pulled out his appointment book and began consulting the calendar. The behavior that ensued, which was witnessed by several investigators, was remarkable. For the better part of half an hour, the patient enumerated reasons for and against each of the two dates: previous engagements, proximity to other engagements, possible meteorological conditions, virtually anything that one could think about concerning a simple date. ... [He was] walking us through a simple cost-benefit analysis, an endless outlining and fruitless comparison of options and possible consequences. It took enormous discipline to listen to all of this without pounding on the table and telling him to stop, but we finally did tell him, quietly, that he should come on the second of the alternative dates. His response was equally calm and prompt. He simply said: “That’s fine.”⁷²

⁷⁰Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni, *Emotions: A Philosophical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 66, as quoted by Vacek, “Orthodoxy Requires Orthopathy,” 222-223.

⁷¹Riis and Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, 20.

⁷²Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994), 193-194.

The patient was unable to make a decision on his own. With impaired access to his emotions, he could not decide what was for him more significant or more important.

Research in adult learning and critical reflection also confirms the key role that emotions play in sifting through and filtering an abundance of things to consider: “Learners need emotions to direct their actions toward particular goals by focusing attention on them and the processes that lead to their realization. Emotion drives attention, which drives learning, memory, and problem-solving behavior. Purely objective reasoning cannot determine what to notice, what to attend to, and what to inquire about.”⁷³

Our emotions can reveal to us what we implicitly value, and this can be a first step towards making our prejudices and silent assumptions more explicit – a movement that is at the core of TL. Furthermore, the value or salience that emotions allow us to discern is not just an “add-on” to experience but fundamentally changes an experience.⁷⁴ Guilt helps us see the gravity of what we can objectively describe as the utterance of a false statement. The guilt also reveals to us how we value being truthful. Awe helps us see that we are not just before any other being but God.⁷⁵

⁷³Marianne van Woerkom, “Critical Reflection as a Rationalistic Ideal,” *Adult Education Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2010), 348.

⁷⁴Mark Wynn, “Religious Emotions and Religious Experience,” in *Religious Emotions*, ed. Willem Lemmens and Walter Van Herck (Newcastle upon Tyne, U.K.: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 28-29.

⁷⁵These are taken from the examples Vacek paints (see Vacek, “Orthodoxy Requires Orthopathy,” 224).

Aside from value, emotional cognitions also allow us to perceive *connections*. Connections spell the difference between “God” and “my God.”⁷⁶ It is not just being truthful that I value but being truthful to a friend. Emotions play a significant role in establishing and deepening – or destroying – valued relationships.

Emotional connections open us to empathize with others, to feel what they are feeling. This can allow us to see that the process of transformation is shared (Mezirow’s fourth phase of TL). Empathy “provides the motivation (altruistic interest) to ‘listen’ to others”⁷⁷ and go beyond our pre-judgments, which helps us to better understand their perspectives, identify with them, and consider their paradigms as alternative options for meaning making (Mezirow’s fifth phase).

3.3.3 Educating Emotions

Because of what our emotions can help us do, it becomes imperative that we form and educate our emotions. It is not just orthodoxy (right seeing) and orthopraxy (right doing) that we should be concerned with, but also orthopathy (right feeling).⁷⁸ But can we really form or educate our emotions? Vacek’s distinction between short- and long-term emotions can help shed light on this question:

It is a common mistake to think that emotions involve only short-term experiences such as the anger we feel now toward someone who has just offended us. Some of our most effective emotions are longer-term dispositions, such as the anger we

⁷⁶Vacek, “Orthodoxy Requires Orthopathy,” 225.

⁷⁷E. Taylor and Cranton, “A Theory in Progress?” 38.

⁷⁸Vacek invents this word from *pathos*, the Greek word for feeling. “The prefix “ortho-” suggests that there is a right or good set of emotions as well as a wrong or bad set of emotions. As Aristotle observed, a crucial part of education is learning to feel the right emotions” (see Vacek, “Orthodoxy Requires Orthopathy,” 220).

continue to have toward an uncle who long ago insulted us, or the disdain that reappears each time we meet a person of a different race.⁷⁹

Even if it may prove trying and taxing, we can mold our long-term emotions. Giving ourselves time to lick our wounds and grieve through the pain of insult, then exerting effort to see the situation from our uncle's point of view can help in assuaging our anger towards him. More contact and maybe even friendship with people of other races, or maybe pushing ourselves to experience what it is to be in a foreign country can lessen the disdain we may feel towards people who do not share our skin color.

But can we exercise control over our short-term emotions? When a large black dog bares its teeth, how can we not feel fear and run away? It may seem that we can influence only our longer-term dispositions, but influencing our longer-term dispositions can give us some control over our short-term emotions. Continuing the example above, when we get to know that large black dog, give it the name Fido, and spend time playing with him, when he bares his teeth, we will sense that it is probably because something (not us) is agitating him. Then, worried about Fido, we try to address what is troubling him. Short-term emotions are affected by the context provided by longer-term dispositions.

A sustained, committed, and *faith*-ful practice of the Psalms can help us form our long-term dispositions and provide a better context for our short-term emotions. In the Psalter, we have 150 Psalms that can serve as models of how people have dealt with their experiences and emotions. These models can support and challenge how we deal with our

⁷⁹Vacek, "Orthodoxy Requires Orthopathy," 222.

own experiences and emotions – as has already been discussed in the previous chapter. The emotions of the psalmist are in full display for the pray-er to see, but as the pray-er *looks at* what the psalmist is going through, the pray-er is also led to *look through* the psalmist's experience and see himself or herself in the Psalm. If the Psalm resonates with the pray-er, he or she sees a mirror reflection of himself or herself. This strengthens the feeling that in whatever he or she is going through, he or she is not alone, that his or her experiences are shared – an important phase in TL. Emotions connect us to the psalmists. Empathy invites us to see where the process the Psalm traces will bring the psalmist. We connect with the psalmist's process and connect deeper with our own processes.

The 150 Psalms model for us what we should feel and what we should value. In Ps 67, as the psalmist rejoices because “the earth has yielded its increase” and “God, our God, has blessed us” (v. 6), we learn that we should feel joy as we value God's providence in creation. In Ps 119, as the psalmist “find[s] delight in [God's] commandments because [he] love[s] them,” we learn to feel that obeying God is not just an obligation but something that can bestow gladness – if we value the Lord's statutes and the Lord himself. In Ps 38:4-6, the psalmist agonizes: “For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me. / My wounds grow foul and fester / because of my foolishness; / I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; / all day long I go around mourning.” This models for us that we should feel sorrow because of the gravity of our sin. In Ps 94:5-6, the psalmist pleads for God's vengeance: “They crush your people, O Lord, / and afflict your heritage. / They kill the widow and the stranger, / they murder the orphan.” This models for us that we should feel angry and not be indifferent to situations of injustice.

Psychoanalyst Karen Horney warns that one of the causes of neurosis is the “tyranny of the should.”⁸⁰ With all of the “shoulds” above, are the Psalms actually a trap? Horney describes the neurotic poisoned by the should as one who holds before himself or herself an image of perfection and unconsciously tells himself or herself, “Forget about the disgraceful creature you actually are; this is how you should be; and to be this idealized self is all that matters. You should be able to endure everything, to understand everything, to like everybody, to be always productive.”⁸¹ The inner dictates of the should continue: “I should be the utmost of honesty, generosity, considerateness, justice, dignity, courage, and unselfishness. I should be the perfect lover, parent, citizen. I should love God, family, and country, yet I should not be attached to anything or anybody, and nothing should matter to me. I should never feel hurt, and I should always be serene and unruffled.”⁸²

We can go on, but it is already clear – this is not the psalmist! The psalmist – and the pray-er of the Psalm also – reveals hurts and pains, sometimes to embarrassing, if not exaggerated, detail: “I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping” (Ps 6:6). One answer to the tyranny of the should is freedom of expression,⁸³ which the Psalms encourage and enable.

⁸⁰See Karen Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Towards Self-Realization* (New York: W. W. Norton & company, Inc., 1950), 64-85.

Though Horney’s work was last published in the 1950s, her writings continue to influence contemporary forms of psychotherapy such as cognitive therapy and interpersonal psychotherapy and generate scholarship about this even in the 1990s and 2000s (see Bernardo J. Carducci, *The Psychology of Personality: Viewpoints, Research, and Applications*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 182.

⁸¹Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth*, 64-65.

⁸²Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth*, 65.

⁸³Carducci, *The Psychology of Personality*, 180

We cannot do away with the should because there are areas in ourselves that need to be improved. Neurosis though can be caused by the should when its demands are too difficult and too rigid, when there is an unrealistic and irresponsible disregard for the person's present psychic condition and "an overemphasis on the idealized self to the point of ignoring the real self."⁸⁴ But the psalmist dares to bare the true self not only to himself or herself but to God, to whom, the psalmist knows, nothing is concealed: "O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you" (Ps 69:5). This God is also the salve to the should. To the should of always being serene and unruffled, the Psalms offer peace: "You will not fear the terror of the night, / or the arrow that flies by day, / or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, / or the destruction that wastes at noonday" (Ps 91:5-6). But this peace is not based on the psalmist's own courage or strength. It is a peace that comes from God as the first verses of the same Psalm attest:

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust.'
For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler (Ps 91:1-4).

We can locate emotions in the body. Feelings are also in our cognitions, judgments, and appraisals which allow us to see value and connections. Images like refuge, fortress, shield, and buckler, as seen in the last Psalm quoted above, can also hold emotions. Metaphors and symbols have their origins in embodied experiences that are

⁸⁴Carducci, *The Psychology of Personality*, 180.

repeated, experiences which we value and with which we have made connections. Images, metaphors, and symbols are repositories of emotions, but they are not just passive containers of feelings. The emotions that were first deposited in them are not the only feelings that can come into play when these symbols are used. Slightly modified or totally new emotions can be aroused by images and metaphors when they are used in different situations.⁸⁵ In this way, the same images and metaphors never really grow old as they also continue to receive and be reformed by new feelings. Symbols may have been created by people, but symbols can also recreate people in the sense of leading them to new insights and ways of making meaning. Images, metaphors, and symbols comprise the third extra-rational aspect to be discussed in this chapter.⁸⁶

3.4 ENVISIONING

Emotions are “objectified” in symbols. Riis and Woodhead use the term “objectification” to refer to “the expression of personal emotions in a symbolic object.”⁸⁷ Feelings are crystallized in metaphors that resist rigidity and can continue to shine bright in dynamism and polysemy. The other pole of “objectification” is “subjectification” – when an image, metaphor, or symbol affects the subject who brought it into being⁸⁸ in

⁸⁵See Riis and Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, 7, 38, 44.

⁸⁶Though many scholars have drawn distinctions among images, metaphors, and symbols, I use these terms synonymously here.

⁸⁷Riis and Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, 96.

⁸⁸Riis and Woodhead define “subjectification” in this way: “‘Subjectification’ involves more than perceiving the object through the senses and understanding its emotional message intellectually, and more even than altering bodily practice in response to a material setting. In religious subjectification, an object provokes an emotional reaction that is considered religious” (see Riis and Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, 99).

unexpected and unpredictable ways. What increases the complexity of this topic is that symbols are not just personal but communal.⁸⁹ In fact, what increases the power of symbols is that they are shared. “[T]he capacity of symbolic objects to evoke powerful emotions seems to increase with the size of the group for which the symbol is moving. The most powerful of all are those that symbolize and help constitute an entire society.”⁹⁰

As noted in the previous chapter, for Jane Regan, TL in the context of faith must include engagement with the images and symbols of that faith tradition. The Psalms give us not only words; the words point to many images and symbols which the faithful throughout history (co-opting Regan’s words) have “grasped and been grasped by.” I have already highlighted the symbol of the Exodus, which Richard Clifford stresses, as well as the many images of hope in the Psalms discussed by Daniel Harrington. The subject of images, metaphors, and symbols is dense – much like the subject of embodiment and emotions. I cannot expect to make much headway into it in the limited space here – again much like in my treatment of embodiment and emotions.⁹¹ What I

⁸⁹See Riis and Woodhead’s discussion of this in chapters 3 and 4 of *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*. Riis and Woodhead place symbols in three relationships: self and symbol; symbol and society; and self and society. These relationships are dialectical, interacting and mutually shaping. Furthermore, these three sets of relations are not separate and self-contained processes. Each set “relates to, feeds back on, informs, and reinforces the other” (*A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, 9).

⁹⁰Riis and Woodhead follow David Émile Durkheim and Randall Collins here (see *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, 38).

⁹¹Just to name two of the fields that have tried to reflect on image, metaphor, and symbol, we have philosophical hermeneutics and theological aesthetics. In the field of TL theory and practice, we have the depth psychology approach represented by Robert Boyd (see Robert D. Boyd, ed., *Personal Transformation in Small Groups: A Jungian Perspective* (London, England: Routledge, 1991) and John Dirkx, (see Dirkx, “Engaging Emotion in Adult Learning,” 15-26), which involves the integration of affect, symbol, intuition, and imagination into the learning process. The aesthetic approach (see for example Alexis Kokkos, “Transformative Learning Through Aesthetic Experience: Towards a Comprehensive Method,” *Journal of Transformative Education* 8, no. 3 (2010), 155-177) is another direction worth considering.

would like to do in this section relates to the big question that is behind this project, the question of how to teach Scripture to future pastors. If the images and symbols in the Psalms are communal in character, do we need to know how communities throughout history – from the communities that produced these songs and handed them on to the later communities that received them – interpreted them? Do we need to know what Zion meant to the Israelites who prayed the Psalms in Jerusalem or in exile in Babylon in order to enter the psalmists’ process? Do we need to know the historical background of the Davidic king to pray the Messianic Psalms? The answer, as I show below, can also help us with the question about motivation with which this chapter began.

3.4.1 Images as Transformational Objects

The psychoanalytic theories of Christopher Bollas assert that our first experiences of growth-enhancing relationships, from as early as when we were newly born, are preserved deep within our psyche through childhood and into adulthood.⁹² We do not have them as clear memories but they exert their influence as tendencies to search for and connect with people, places, and things that can facilitate our growth and continuing transformation. There is in us an urge for experiences that transform us and for objects that can function as agents towards transformation.⁹³ This drive for “transformational objects” can help sustain the process of TL that engages a practice of the Psalms.

⁹²Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 27.

⁹³Religious educator Elizabeth Berne DeGear connects the theories of Bollas to Bible study because, for her, “it widens the space in which the psychoanalytic encounter can take place, and thus expands the potential for healing and transformation” (see Elizabeth Berne DeGear, “The Bible as Transformational Object: The Psychoanalytic Theories of Christopher Bollas and Their Relevance for Religious Educators,” *Religious Education* 111, no. 5 (2016), 471). In this section, I am indebted to DeGear’s work and grateful for her bringing Bollas to my attention.

This predilection for transformational objects can help us latch on to images in the Psalms that resonate with us and that can lead us to grow. Thus, the Psalms are supportive of existing paradigms. But these same paradigms not only reveal; they also conceal certain aspects of our experience from us, aspects which do not fit neatly into the paradigm's configuration of the world. How can we not be locked into images that preserve the present perspective? The practice of the Psalms can serve as a corrective. Engaging the whole Psalter assures us of being exposed to images that we may not resonate with. These discordant notes can, as cognitive dissonance theory asserts, challenge us to consider new thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors.

It is not through conscious recognition that we know if something is a transformational object but through an embodied type of experiential knowing. Bollas writes of an "aesthetic moment"⁹⁴ when a person engages in deep, subjective rapport with an object when there is a sense of oneness with the object. In the presence of a transformational object, we experience a type of *déjà vu* that connects us to our earliest experiences growth.⁹⁵ We do not need an extensive historical-critical background on the Psalms' symbols to experience an aesthetic moment or a deep rapport with an image. Our drive for transformational objects is enough to make a connection.

Talking about the felt experience of disorientation while praying a Psalm of lament, Walter Brueggemann writes:

[W]e may have a fresh appreciation for some metaphors often used – for example, "pit," and the various references to "enemy." This rich array of language in which the words tumble out becomes, then, not an exegetical problem to be solved but a

⁹⁴Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object*, 28.

⁹⁵DeGear, "The Bible as Transformational Object," 473.

pastoral opportunity to let the impressionistic speech touch the particular circumstance of dislocation. For the truth of the matter is that the listener to such a psalm in a time of actual dislocation will have no doubt as to the meaning of the references and will find such exegetical speculation both unnecessary and distracting. To fall into “the pit” is indeed to lose one’s old equilibrium. The “enemy” is quite obviously the one who has caused the loss. David Clines has seen that the identity of the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah is not a code to be cracked but an open-ended statement that allows for and encourages multiple interpretations.⁹⁶

To this, Riis and Woodhead would add:

Individuals can objectify emotions in new ways, or can appropriate collective symbols and run away with their meaning, turning it in new directions, and to new ends. In the process they can change that meaning, adding new layers of emotional significance in the process.⁹⁷

3.4.2 The Dynamism of Symbols

The discussion above does not mean that we can just do away with how communities in the past have read a Psalm. Knowledge of this can amplify the feeling of being part of a tradition, of not being alone in whatever we are going through, and of being part of something bigger than we are. But we do not need to have this knowledge in the foreground all of the time. In moments of prayer, they can creep in inconspicuously and influence, perhaps widen, our appreciation and comprehension of a Psalm. Knowledge about the traditional communal aspect of a psalmic image also does not just come to us through historical-critical research. This knowledge can also come to us through a symbol’s relationship with other images the community has canonized. We must remember that symbols do not exist in isolation but in a complex network that

⁹⁶Walter Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 157.

⁹⁷Riis and Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, 69.

makes them even more dynamic. Here the practice of engaging the whole Psalter again gives us an advantage. The other images in the other Psalms which communities in the past have handed on can and should shape how we grasp a psalmic symbol. There is always the danger of abusing one image and just focusing on what we need it to be for us, a stumbling block that can make us fall towards self-serving heresy or idolatry (in the sense of the worship of a God different from the one our faith tradition professes). The merciful God in Ps 51 who washes away iniquity (v. 2) can be taken for granted without the same righteous God in Ps 7 who lets the evil of the wicked come to an end (v. 9). The silent God in Ps 83 who in Ps 44 mysteriously seems to be sleeping (v. 23) amidst the people's tribulation is also the God in Ps 121 who is our help and keeper (v. 2, 5) and never slumbers (v. 4).

For a long time, as a non-native English speaker, I did not really know what the phrase “apple of the eye” meant in Ps 17:8. I thought it was an apple that caught the Lord's eye because, as any apple that would catch my eye, it was probably rounder, redder, and shinier. Praying this and applying it to me made me feel special. After an introductory course on the Old Testament, I learned about how the Israelites were supposed to offer the first fruits of their harvests to God and so they kept an eye out for the actual first fruit that their trees bore. This colored my reading of the Psalm, and because I was then already preparing for priesthood, I thought, “God has his eye on me because I will be offered to him.” I concluded that what makes anyone “special” is not any superior characteristic but the generous offering of self. This challenged me to give of myself even more. After studying the language of the Psalms more closely during graduate Scripture study – a year after serving as a chaplain in a government hospital

where more than half of the patients were in charity wards, dying because though there were no doctor's fees, they still had to shell out money for medicine they could not afford – I found out that the apple of the eye was the “vulnerable center of the eye and face that one protects instinctively.”⁹⁸ My understanding of and feelings involving Ps 17:8 changed again, building on my previous interpretations: God has his eye on the weak. Because I have offered myself to God, I must also keep an eye on the weak and help them realize they are special to God. This made me feel solidarity not only with the vulnerable but with the God who protects them.

I cannot say that my earlier readings were invalid – they were inaccurate from the point of view of scholarship, but not without worth. In these readings, the image of the “apple of the eye” met me where I was. I cannot also say that my most recent reading, even if it is now based on more solid exegetical foundations, will not be supplanted by another interpretation. The image continues to accompany me as I also journey with it in engaged practice. Here we see an example of the fusion of horizons discussed in the previous chapter: The horizon of one possible interpretation and the horizon of what someone is going through presently mutually influence each other, expanding on previous horizons from the past and opening up to more possible horizons for the future.

As Paul Ricoeur's famous maxim goes, “The symbol gives rise to thought.”⁹⁹ And not only to thought but to embodied emotions, shared meanings, and other symbols which give rise to more embodied emotions and emotional cognitions both private and

⁹⁸Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, 102.

⁹⁹See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969) 347-357.

communal. The symbol gives us access to the ineffable. While we can attempt to articulate what a symbol means, we can never pin it down with words. In Ps 80, the psalmist tries to persuade God to restore the people not with cogent arguments but with something even more powerful because of (not in spite of) their ineffability – a parade of symbols:¹⁰⁰ the shepherd leading his flock (v. 1), the divine face shining down salvation (v. 3), the vine grower that drove out nations to plant (v. 8), and so on. This is a reminder to God, but more so for the ones praying the Psalm. The pray-ers are invited to return to the ancient symbols of their community¹⁰¹ and believe in them in the present though not exactly in the same way. Pray-ers today may also add their own symbols. Christians will probably add the crucified Messiah and the risen savior. Though the symbols do not spell out guarantees of what God will do step by step, they can inspire the pray-er and the community that God honors his promises and will be there for them¹⁰² in some way – as he has before.

One of the critiques against TL is its focus on conscious thought, knowledge, experience, and assumptions. But there are aspects of experience that are unconscious. In Sigmund Freud's metaphor of the mind as an iceberg, what we are conscious of is only the tip, but the greater mass of the iceberg lies beneath the surface; the greater part of the mind is in the realm of the unconscious. The unconscious may play a greater role than has been acknowledged in learning.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 73-150*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 57.

¹⁰¹Clifford, *Psalms 73-150*, 58.

¹⁰²Clifford, *Psalms 73-150*, 58.

¹⁰³van Woerkom, "Critical Reflection as a Rationalistic Ideal," 345.

Professor of psychiatry and religion Ann Belford Ulanov and her husband, interdisciplinary author Barry Ulanov see the relationship between symbols and the unconscious in this way:

[Symbolic understanding] stirs up a person's unconscious associations and brings them into play with the themes gathered around the symbol. Most often the unconscious areas of experience thus stirred up are exactly the ones the ego needs. They are areas fallen into disuse through forgetfulness, lack of nurture, or active repression. In every case, they take with them large amounts of psychic energy, so that after a time the ego feels depleted, mechanical, and enervated, all but dead. It is to such death-like states of living that religious symbols speak, because they address the distant unconscious just as much as they address the highly present ego. The forgotten realms of the person are once again clearly recognized. The repressed aspects of a person are liberated, the unused portions of the personality surge forward to be used in daily living.¹⁰⁴

The metaphor is “the language of the unconscious.”¹⁰⁵ Robert Kegan notes the advantages of metaphors in therapy sessions: They combine the linear and the figurative, the descriptive and the participative, the concrete and the abstract. “A metaphor is interpretive, but it is an interpretation made in soft clay rather than cold analysis. It invites the client to put his hands on it and reshape it into something more fitting to him.”¹⁰⁶ This the client can do over and over again in different stages of his journey. But Kegan also cautions that metaphors, by themselves, do not effect transformation. A metaphor is not a silver bullet, or better, a magic word that makes problems disappear

¹⁰⁴Ann Belford Ulanov and Barry Ulanov, *Religion and the Unconscious* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 99.

¹⁰⁵George Lakoff, “Metaphor: The Language of the Unconscious; The Theory of Conceptual Metaphor Applied to Dream Analysis” (paper presented to the Association for the Study of Dreams, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA, June 24, 1992).

¹⁰⁶Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 260.

and solutions appear. Rather, metaphors reveal a new way of seeing an experience that, with critical reflection on what we are conscious of, can lead to new ways of meaning-making.¹⁰⁷ TL must involve dialogue between the complementary faces of the conscious and the unconscious which images, metaphors, and symbols wear.¹⁰⁸

For Maureen O’Connell, our theologizing can profit much from the experience of aesthetic appreciation.¹⁰⁹ Aesthetic appreciation helps us perceive our reality more attentively and more wholly through *embodied* sensorial experiences. We more affectively and more effectively interpret these experiences by engaging them with our *emotions*. Finally, with the use of our imagination, we are able to *envision* a “something more” in the world.¹¹⁰ This embodying-emoting-envisioning approach is what we have been tracing in the first three quarters of this chapter: attention to what is happening inside and outside our embodied selves, attention to emotions and what they tell us about our values, and attention to images which connect us to the ineffable and the unconscious.

A practice of the Psalms though is not just an exercise of aesthetic appreciation. The Psalms are not just sung poetry or artistic compositions. The Psalms are prayers that can lead us to encounter God and encounter other people of faith. This is the fourth aspect of the Psalms to be discussed in this chapter.

¹⁰⁷Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 264.

¹⁰⁸Kokkos, “Transformative Learning Through Aesthetic Experience,” 156.

¹⁰⁹See Maureen H. O’Connell, *If These Walls Could Talk: Community Muralism and the Beauty of Justice* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 200.

¹¹⁰O’Connell, *If These Walls Could Talk*, 201.

3.5 ENCOUNTERING

3.5.1 Lessons from Ps 73

The first verse of Ps 73, “Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart,” can be seen as an echo of the first verse of Ps 1, “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers.” Ps 1 is seen by many scholars as introducing not only the first of the five books of the Psalms but the whole Psalter itself. Ps 73, beginning the third book of the Psalms and coming almost at the Psalter’s midpoint, is not just a repetition of Ps 1. Ps 73 pushes and challenges what Ps 1 asserts.

Going beyond traditional formulae, verses 3b to 12 of Ps 73 speak out what the psalmist has observed is happening in the world:

...I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
For they have no pain;
their bodies are sound and sleek.
They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not plagued like other people.
Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them like a garment.
Their eyes swell out with fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.
They set their mouths against heaven,
and their tongues range over the earth.
Therefore the people turn and praise them,
and find no fault in them.
And they say, ‘How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?’
Such are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches.

In the meantime, the psalmist, presumably a righteous person, “hav[ing] kept [his] heart clean and washed [his] hands in innocence” (v. 13), is plagued all day long and punished every morning (v. 14). Has his righteousness been in vain as verse 13 laments?

In verses 15 to 17, the psalmist considers the options that his thoughts have presented to him. First, the psalmist can continue talking this way and tell others of God’s injustice. This is what Job does when his friends visit him. But the psalmist rejects this option because this might scandalize people.¹¹¹ Second, in the tradition of Wisdom literature contending with the problem of theodicy, the psalmist can seek to understand the whys and wherefores of his condition, but this “seemed to [him] a wearisome task” (v. 16), too costly physically and psychically, as Clifford says.¹¹² The third alternative, the climax of the options, is to go to the מִקְדָּשׁ־אֵל (*miqdash*, sanctuary or sanctuaries (if interpreted in the plural, this can refer to the Temple precincts), of *El*, God) (v. 17a). This is the option the psalmist chooses, and it changes him as he perceives the end of the wicked (v. 17b).

Bible commentators Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger point out that verse 17a is controversial among scholars. The difficulty lies partly in the text itself, because it only indicates *that the psalmist entered the sanctuary / sanctuaries of God*, but it does not say at all *what really happened* when the “I” entered into the sanctuary / sanctuaries of God.¹¹³ The controversy can be summarized in the two possible alternatives for what

¹¹¹Clifford, *Psalms 73-150*, 18.

¹¹²Clifford, *Psalms 73-150*, 18.

¹¹³Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 230.

happened in verse 17a: (1) The psalmist is speaking of an actual visit to the Jerusalem Temple; or (2) the psalmist here is speaking only of figuratively or metaphorically entering into the mysteries of God or of having a mystical experience of God.¹¹⁴

Those who hold the first option argue that that the word combination of “come to / enter into” and “sanctuary” refers to an entry into the sanctuary for worship. Perhaps there the psalmist either received a divine revelation or was confronted by the reality of God in a theophany.¹¹⁵ Or maybe, something else moved the psalmist. Othmar Keel, quoted by Hossfeld and Zenger, writes: “How could the visit to the Temple have such an effect [on the psalmist]? The visit to the Temple, which especially for people outside the capital city would have been a fairly infrequent occurrence, conveyed not only the experience of the attentive countenance of God (Ps 27:4), but, according to Pss 42:5; 55:15; 122, also an experience of the most intense human community. On passing through the gates of righteousness, by which only righteous people with a hope of blessing could enter (Ps 118:19–20), the generation of those who seek his face (Ps 24:6) took on flesh and blood and from a burdensome chain became once more a fascinating reality in face of which the successes of the unscrupulous faded to nothing.”¹¹⁶ Following the thought of Durkheim again, Riis and Woodhead point out how emotional experiences are intensified by their being shared. Emotional engagements with a religious image are also intensified when a crowd of individuals become one in their being moved by a common symbol. There arises a common passion which energizes people to do things

¹¹⁴Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 230.

¹¹⁵Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 230.

¹¹⁶Othmar Keel, *Schöne, schwierige Welt – Leben mit Klagen und Loben: Ausgewählte Psalmen* (Berlin: Evangelische Haupt-Bibelgesellschaft, 1991), 41, as quoted in Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 230.

they would not do on their own.¹¹⁷ Compare watching a New England Patriots game on television alone to going to Gillette Stadium in Foxborough with other die-hard fans. Compare reading the Stations of the Cross in a pew with only a reflection guide for company to doing it in a procession down your street with many of your neighbors.

Or maybe what happened in Ps 73:17a was much simpler, similar to Hannah's experience in the shrine at Shiloh (1 Sam 1:9-18). After "pouring out [her] soul before the Lord" and "speaking out of [her] great vexation and anxiety" (vv. 15-16), Hannah is told by the priest Eli, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him" (v. 17). This Hannah must have taken as an assurance of being heard and maybe even a blessing for from being deeply distressed, from weeping and not eating, "her countenance was sad no longer" (v. 18).

The second option, the metaphorical alternative, is based on a reading of the "sanctuaries of God," as the mysteries of God or the secret purposes of God – in line with Wisdom 2:22. Those who argue for this option (e.g., Diethelm Michel¹¹⁸) say that the change in the psalmist must have come from a self-presentation before God done in contemplation and combined with the inmost immersion in God's thoughts and will and a surrendering of one's own thoughts. Hossfeld and Zenger also subscribe to this option because of the metaphorization of the Temple in the Psalter coupled with the other metaphors used in the last part of Ps 73 (God as "the strength of my heart and my portion

¹¹⁷Riis and Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, 104.

¹¹⁸See Diethelm Michel, "Ich aber bin immer bei dir: Von der Unsterblichkeit der Gottesbeziehung," in *Im Angesicht des Todes*, *Pietas Liturgica* 3, ed. Hansjakob Becker, Bernhard Einig, and Peter-Otto Ullrich (St. Ottilien, Germany: EOS, 1987), 637-658.

for ever” (v. 26); God as refuge (v. 28)) and the motif of Temple theology in the background.¹¹⁹

Whether the visit to the sanctuary / sanctuaries of God was actual or metaphorical, what cannot be denied is that there was an encounter that happened. Whether the encounter was through a divine theophany, or through people who had great faith in the Lord, or through even just one representative of God like the priest Eli, the psalmist was brought into a very real contact with God. This we can see from the way the psalmist changed from talking *about* God (“Truly God is good to the upright” (v. 1); “I went into the sanctuary / sanctuaries of God” (v. 17) to talking *to* God in v. 18-27:

Truly *you* set them in slippery places;
 you make them fall to ruin.
How they are destroyed in a moment,
 swept away utterly by terrors!
They are like a dream when one awakes;
 on awaking, *you* despise their phantoms.
When my soul was embittered,
 when I was pricked in heart,
I was stupid and ignorant;
 I was like a brute beast towards *you*.
Nevertheless I am continually with *you*;
 you hold my right hand.
You guide me with *your* counsel,
 and afterwards *you* will receive me with honour.
Whom have I in heaven but *you*?
 And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than *you*...
Indeed, those who are far from *you* will perish;
 you put an end to those who are false to *you* [emphases added].

From great preoccupation with the wicked and what is happening to them, also from great attention paid by the psalmist to himself, the focus shifts to God – and not just as an idea, but as a “you” who is present.

¹¹⁹Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 231.

What happened here can be likened to Job's experience. Job, a righteous sufferer like the psalmist of Ps 73, questions God and his ways. Many too quickly dismiss God's answers to Job as an intentionally irrational rebuke of Job's rational queries, but there is rhyme and reason to God's responses. God's first speech (in Job 38:1-40:5) is an answer to Job's charge that God did not create in wisdom (the opening line, which can be considered the "topic sentence," of this speech proves this: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:1)). God's second speech (Job 40:6-42:6) is an answer to Job's charge that God did not create in justice (the "topic sentence" of this speech is: "Will you pervert my justice?" (Job 40:8)).¹²⁰

Still, God's answers, though ordered and not just a rant, can be said to be unsatisfying, especially if the one who questions is in the throes of suffering. However, there must have been something in God's answers that moved Job because Job repents. Why – if God's answers were not satisfying? What happened? Job says, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5, NRSV). In a word, encounter has happened. Talking about God, "hearing of God by word of mouth" (the NAB translation of Job 42:5), as seen in the speeches of Job and his friends, can get one only so far. In the end, one must encounter God in order to truly *see*. In a certain sense, Job received a better ending than the psalmist of Ps 73. The Lord restored the fortunes of Job and even gave him twice as much as he had before (Job 42:10). But for the psalmist, nothing has concretely changed. As Clifford notes, "In one sense, the divine visitation

¹²⁰See Richard Clifford, "The God Who Makes People Wise," in *The Forgotten God: Perspectives in Biblical Theology*, ed. A. Andrew Das and Frank J. Matera (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 64.

The quotations from Job in the paragraph above are Clifford's translations.

does not alter the situation; the wicked are still carefree and the righteous are still afflicted. Rather, the new understanding makes it possible to bear these afflictions, for God is now recognized to be there.”¹²¹

We can look at Ps 73 as an illustration of Mezirow’s phases of TL. There is a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow’s phase 1) when the psalmist lets what he has assumed in the past (that God is good to the upright) be confronted by what he sees in the present (that the wicked prosper). By the end of the Psalm, there is a change in his meaning perspective. God’s goodness to the upright is no longer interpreted in terms of lack of problems (“they have no pain” (v. 4)). God’s goodness is now seen in terms of God’s presence (“Nevertheless, I am continually with you” (v. 23) – the “nevertheless” is a very important conjunction). As verse 28 summarizes this transformation and new learning, “for me it is good to be near God.” The psalmist had to enter a process to get to this new perspective, which comes with a new of relating with God and with others (from envy of the wicked (v. 3) to seeing how “those who far from [God] will perish” (v. 27)) – Mezirow’s final phase. The Psalms do not provide instant solutions but, like TL, invite us to undergo a process. This process includes a self-examination and a confrontation of one’s feelings (I was envious of the arrogant (v. 3)) – Mezirow’s phase 2. The psalmist’s observations contradict his assumptions and he attempts to understand why (v. 16). We can connect this to Mezirow’s phase 3, a critical assessment of previously held beliefs. This, as the psalmist confessed, can be “a wearisome task” (v. 16). The psalmist, if we are to hold the position of the actual visit to the sanctuary / sanctuaries of God, goes to

¹²¹Clifford, *Psalms 73-150*, 19.

the Temple. There, in an intense experience of human community, as Keel noted above, he would have recognized that he was not alone; Mezirow's phase 4 involves seeing that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared. Whether actual or metaphorical, the psalmist's visit to the Temple would have given him an encounter with God which led him to his new insight. Thus, he acquired the new knowledge to move on (similar to Mezirow's phase 7). His encounter with God also gave him confidence (Mezirow's phase 9) to continue. Not all of Mezirow's phases of TL are seen in Ps 73, but as Mezirow says, not all of the phases need to appear for every case. What is important to see here is one of the motors that helps drive the many of the phases of TL: encounter, either with other faithful or with God.

Many scholars classify Ps 73 as a wisdom psalm. Ps 73 deals with themes and ideas associated with Old Testament wisdom literature (e.g., theodicy and the problem of evil). Ps 73 can also be seen as having a didactic character (see v. 15 (talking to the circle of God's children) and v. 28 (telling others of God's works)). This didactic character puts it in the pedagogical *Sitz im Leben* in which the authors of wisdom literature were situated. But Ps 73 also goes beyond the pronouncements and pithy sayings of wisdom literature. Again, we note how the metaphorical or actual visit to the Temple brings the element of encounter. And because in this case, the encounter involves God, we must interpret it through the lens of worship.

This shows how wrestling with ultimate realities cannot be done with logic alone. As Pope Francis has said many times, theology must be done on one's knees. We can get lost in our observations and in the implications we draw from them. We need to bring our

thoughts *about* God *to* God. We need to see God as a “you” and not just as an abstract idea.

Reading Ps 1 as a meditation on the law that introduces a whole book that meditates on the law strengthens what has been called the “scripturalization” of the Psalter. But before the Psalter was bound in Scripture, it was used more in worship practices. We need to bring the Psalms out of the confines of text and bring them into the “Temple” (actual or metaphorical) again to really feel their power.

Ritual, as Victor Tuner has shown, can be a great aid in situations of liminality,¹²² when people are going through transitions and transformations. Ritual goes beyond rational discourse in its involvement of the body, emotions, and images. But ritual is also encounter. Ps 73 gives us one case study of this even if the ritual itself (if there was an actual visit to the Temple) is not described.

Ps 73 also exhibits characteristics of a thanksgiving psalm. Hans-Joachim Kraus sees the thanksgiving from the very beginning and reads the first two verses as a confession done in gratitude¹²³ – the psalmist *almost* stumbled and *nearly* slipped, but he did not. The thanksgiving is especially seen in the very last verse when the psalmist professes to tell others of the Lord’s works. This is beyond just saying “Thank you” to God, and it is the way of thanking God in the Old Testament.¹²⁴

¹²²See Victor Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*,” *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society* (1964): 4-20.

¹²³Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989), 86.

¹²⁴See Claus Westermann’s discussion of this in *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 25-30.

Telling others – a way of involving them – teaches us something more profound. Interacting with others can lead us to greater truth. Proclaiming to others the works of the Lord can strengthen the new learning the psalmist received about God’s presence. It is in telling others, as he promises in verse 28, that the psalmist can be more confident and grow in this new insight (Mezirow’s phase 9). We see the advantage of involving others in verse 15 also. Thinking of the scandal that his envy of the wicked might bring to others made the psalmist reconsider his thoughts: “If I had said, ‘I will talk on in this way,’ I would have been untrue to the circle of your children.” Compare this to what was happening in the psalmist when he was just considering things alone: “All in vain *I* have kept *my* heart clean and washed *my* hands in innocence. For all day long *I* have been plagued, and am punished every morning” (v. 13-14). The “I” in these verses stands out more after the wicked are treated in the plural: “*They* have no pain; *their bodies* are sound and sleek. *They* are not in trouble as others are; *they* are not plagued like other people (v. 4 to 5 and so on until verse 11). Separated from the “they” of the circle of God’s children and even the “they” of the wicked, the “I” is trapped in self-pity, self-loathing, and self-centered thinking. Ps 73 challenges us to bring our thinking about God to the presence of God and to the presence of others – again, to encounter.

3.5.2 The Power of Encounter

Encounter is not limited to Ps 73. It is in the other lament Psalms as well. In Ps 6, we observe a similar change in the psalmist. In Ps 6:7, the psalmist is dejected, “My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of all my foes.” But in verse 8a, he is already able to say to these foes, “Depart from me, all you workers of evil.” How? What effects the change in him? Verse 8b gives us the answer: “[T]he Lord has *heard* the

sound of my weeping.” Verse 9 repeats this (a good measure just in case we missed it):
“The Lord has *heard* my supplication.”

Claus Westermann has noticed that in almost all of the lament Psalms that show a transition from plea to praise, at the place where the shift occurs, there is a *waw* adversative, a “but” that signals a new beginning in the drama of the Psalm. The change comes from an assurance of being heard.¹²⁵

Brueggemann amplifies the importance of being heard and what it can do in a beautifully poetic expression: “[W]e are heard into newness.”¹²⁶ In his own discussion of lament Psalms, Brueggemann elaborates:

This practice of speaking and hearing is richly attested in the laments, in the full articulation of our life before the one from whom no secrets are hid. When we practice such disclosure, we find that in having our truths heard and known, we are transformed and empowered to new life and well-being. This was, of course, the great insight of Freud in the twentieth century, but it was no accident that Freud was a Jew who knew this script.¹²⁷

It is not just in the lament Psalms that turn from plea to praise that speaking and hearing are assured. Even in Ps 88, which many consider as the only Psalm that ends on a negative note (“You have caused friend and neighbour to shun me; my companions are in darkness” (v. 18)),¹²⁸ there is still a silent trust that one is being heard – otherwise, why speak out this Psalm at all? Even when God seems to hide his face (Ps 88:14), the

¹²⁵See Westermann’s detailed discussion in *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 64-75, 80.

¹²⁶Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 31.

¹²⁷Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 32.

¹²⁸It can be argued that Ps 137 also ends seemingly without redemption: “Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!” I dive deeper into Ps 137 in the next chapter.

psalmist still cries out and addresses him, faithfully – maybe even defiantly – believing that God is still listening.

It is also not just in the lament Psalms but in all the Psalms that this speaking and hearing, these encounters in worship, happen. It is in the Psalms of thanksgiving. After all, who are we thanking? It is in the Psalms of praise. After all, who are we praising? It is in the Psalms of trust. After all, who are we trusting? In these and all the other Psalms, the pray-er must have the conviction that God is listening. And not only God. If the Psalm is prayed in communal worship, the other faithful hear – and even join their voices – as well. And all can be made new.

Theresa O’Keefe, studying interreligious learning models involving Christians and Jews, concludes that encounters and relationships among participants have the potential to generate disorienting dilemmas.¹²⁹ In their own research, Laurent Parks Daloz and his colleagues have determined that transformation develops not necessarily through reflection but in encounters with others.¹³⁰ Encounters can both trigger and sustain TL.

In the first chapter, I introduced three witnesses to the power of the Psalms: Augustine, Luther, and Kathleen Norris. But at that point in this study, it was not yet

¹²⁹See Theresa O’Keefe, “Relationships Across the Divide: An Instigator of Transformation,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 5, no. 1 (2010), 1-22, <http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/scjr/article/view/1553/1558> (accessed December 1, 2016).

¹³⁰Laurent A. Parks Daloz, Cheryl H. Keen, James P. Keen, and Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 215.

clear what made the practice of the Psalms so powerful for them. I now try to answer the questions I left hanging.

In the first chapter, I asked, “What did Augustine see in the Psalms that not only did he walk his Christian journey with them by his side but he allowed himself to be led by them?” One answer is not a what but a who. For Augustine, the purpose of the Psalms (and the Prophets and the Law) is to see Christ. And in the Psalms, Augustine met the *totus Christus*, “the whole Christ,” the Head and his Body, the Lord and his Church.¹³¹ In the Psalms, Augustine encountered Jesus and his faithful. Augustine scholar Mary T.

Clark expounds on the *totus Christus* in the Psalms according to Augustine:

Jesus Christ, who on earth prayed the psalms, now prays them with his members. He won these members by his life and death on the cross (EnP [*Enarrationes in Psalmos*] 138:12). With us, therefore, as we pray the psalms, he offers to the Father praise, gratitude, sorrow for our sins, petitions for grace. In some psalms Christ alone speaks as invisible Head of the Church (Ps 91:14-16; 34:12-23). At other times the “total Christ” speaks – Head and members. “For the voice is that sweet voice, so well known to the ears of the church, the voice of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the voice of the church toiling, sojourning upon earth....” Sometimes the voice of the Church alone can be heard (EnP 5:1).¹³²

For Augustine, whenever we pray the Psalms, Christ prays with us, unites himself to us, shares our emotions, needs, and desires, and transforms them into faith, hope, and charity.¹³³ Encounter with the “total Christ” helped Augustine go through the lifelong process of transformation.

¹³¹Jeffrey S. Lehman, “‘As I read, I was set on fire’: On the Psalms in Augustine’s Confessions,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 16, no. 2 (Spring 2013), 163.

¹³²Mary T. Clark, “St. Augustine’s Use of the Psalms,” *The Way Supplement* 87 (1996), 92.

¹³³Clark, “St. Augustine’s Use of the Psalms,” 92.

In the first chapter, another question I asked was if “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” a hymn based on Ps 46, could come out of the turmoil that Luther went through in 1527. Our discussion above can help us answer with a confident yes – if in Ps 46 Luther felt that all his suffering, from his dizzy spells to his depression, from many of his friends dying because of the bubonic plague to the illness of his own son, was not falling on deaf ears but was being heard by God. Yes, if there was an encounter.

In the first chapter, I also asked what could have kept Kathleen Norris, a married woman raised as a Protestant, someone who confessed to not having gone to church for some twenty years after high school, attending the Liturgy of the Hours with Benedictine monks. Norris answers that when routine exposure numbs us to the Psalms, “what often happens is that holiness reasserts itself so that even familiar psalms suddenly infuse the events of one’s life with new meaning.”¹³⁴ Simply put, the answer lies in encounter with the Divine. Another help is the gift of communal worship. A Benedictine sister shared with Norris how, when she did not want to pray or go to choir, she felt others keeping her faith for her and pulling her along.¹³⁵ And so she went to pray with the community. It is encounter both divine and human that kept Norris praying with the Psalms. Norris quotes mysticism scholar Evelyn Underhill, “The spiritual life of individuals has to be extended both vertically to God and horizontally to other souls; and the more it grows in both directions, the less merely individual and therefore the more truly personal it will be.”¹³⁶

¹³⁴Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), EPUB, 191.4-193.1.

¹³⁵Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, 196.6.

¹³⁶Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, 194.8.

3.6 LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

“I will see you face to face.” In the phrase “face to face” in the New Living Translation’s rendering of Ps 17:5, we can revisit the four extra-rational aspects discussed in this chapter.

Face: If we desire to see God and want to see a paradigm that is more adequate and more authentic to our experiences, the path must go through the face, the body. The face is one of the most expressive parts of the body, capable of manifesting emotions. More than just a canvas for feelings, the face can also stand as a portrait, a representation, a symbol of the person.

Face to face: One important function of body images in the Psalms is to establish relationships among the characters in a Psalm: the pray-er, God, and other people. The body makes communication possible.¹³⁷ In the Psalms, the most commonly used body part to communicate is the face. To turn one’s face towards another is the first step in communication.¹³⁸ A face to face encounter needs the body, engages emotions and the values and connections feelings help us recognize, and involves images, metaphors, and symbols – and all these the Psalms address.

Though this chapter discussed the extra-rational aspects of embodiment, emotions, images, and encounter in four different parts, they cannot really be separated from one another as our treatment of them also showed. Our bodies express and allow us

¹³⁷Gillmayr-Bucher, “Body Images in the Psalms,” 305.

¹³⁸Gillmayr-Bucher, “Body Images in the Psalms,” 306.

to understand emotions. Emotions are objectified in images. Encounters are embodied and emotional interactions that employ images. And all these have roles in driving the process of transformation.

How do the Psalms teach? In the second chapter, I answered this with the help of Mezirow's transformative learning theory. The Psalms teach by accompanying us through the process of transformation. In this chapter, I expanded on my answer and tackled four different aspects that TL theory needs to address more, four extra-rational aspects that the Psalms actually capitalize on. Now, if we follow how the Psalms teach, what are we taught?

In the first chapter, I pointed out how formula prayers can teach by their words, their vision, and their practice. When the words of the Psalms are repeated in practice, what visions do they reveal? This is the main question in the next chapter.

**4.0 WHO IS THE KING OF GLORY? (PS 24:8)
WHAT ARE HUMAN BEINGS? (PS 8:4):
THEOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY, AND ETHICS
FROM A PRACTICE OF THE PSALMS**

Why the Psalms? Yes, they are able to tap into our experiences as embodied subjectivities. Yes, they are able to engage our emotions. Yes, they are able to help us envision a world richer with meaning through images, metaphors, and symbols. And yes, they are able to facilitate encounters with God, other people, and creation. But do not other poems serve us in similar ways? What, if any, is the difference the Psalms provide?

Ps 19:1-2 in the Good News Translation (GNT)¹ wakes us to see God's glory in the everyday sight of the sky:

How clearly the sky reveals God's glory!
How plainly it shows what he has done!
Each day announces it to the following day;
each night repeats it to the next.

Can we not encounter God in creation as artistically, if not more accessibly, through the works of Mary Oliver?

Why do people keep asking to see
God's identity papers
when the darkness opening into morning
is more than enough?²

¹I use the Good News Translation (GNT) where indicated in this section because it provides language that allows me to draw clearer parallels with the poets I discuss here.

²Mary Oliver, "I Wake Close to Morning," in *Felicity* (New York: Penguin Press, 2016), 19.

Does Oliver not also help us turn our faces towards God?

Do you bow your head when you pray or do you look
up into that blue space?³

To sanctify the whole day, the Psalms have been collected, with other readings, in the Liturgy of the Hours. Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy have entitled their collection of Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*. It is a title that gives us an insight to how Barrows and Macy understand what Rilke was trying to say. In Ps 42:7, the psalmist expresses how the innermost depths of his being call out to innermost depths of God (or maybe it is God who has been reaching out to us from the very beginning): "Deep calls to deep" (NRSV). Rainer Maria Rilke, in "I am praying again, Awesome One" plumbs the same depths of self and God:

You hear me again, as words
from the depths of me
rush toward you in the wind.⁴

Ps 42:1-2a (NRSV) describes a yearning:

As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.

But Rilke's longing goes a step beyond mere sentiment and kneels in oblation:

I yearn to belong to something, to be contained
in an all-embracing mind that sees me
as a single thing.

³Mary Oliver, "Whistling Swans," in *Felicity* (New York: Penguin Press, 2016), 29.

⁴Rainer Maria Rilke, "I am praying again, Awesome One," in *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, trans. Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), 137.

I yearn to be held
in the great hands of your heart –
oh let them take me now.
Into them I place these fragments, my life,
and you, God – spend them however you want.⁵

Walter Brueggemann describes the faith expressed in the lament Psalm as “nerve” – “it is a faith that knows that honest facing of distress can be done effectively only in dialogue with God who acts in transforming ways.”⁶ This distress is clear in Ps 77:2a (GNT): “In times of trouble, I pray to the Lord.” And the psalmist faithfully continues the dialogue even though he does not seem to get an answer from God:

[A]ll night long I lift my hands in prayer,
but I cannot find comfort.
When I think of God, I sigh;
when I meditate, I feel discouraged (Ps 77:2b-3 (GNT)).

As desolate as Gerard Manley Hopkins’ “Sonnets of Desolation”⁷ are, we see in his poems the same type of faith that continues to wrestle with God. Hopkins is in the same, or perhaps even more dire, distress:

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief
Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing –⁸

⁵Rilke, “I am praying again, Awesome One,” 137.

⁶Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 69.

⁷Also called the “Terrible Sonnets,” these are six untitled poems known commonly by their first lines: “To Seem the Stranger,” “I Wake and Feel,” “No Worst,” “Carrion Comfort,” “Patience, Hard Thing,” and “My Own Heart.” These were written by Hopkins from 1885-1886.

⁸Gerard Manley Hopkins, “No Worst,” in *Poems: 1876-1889* (Omaha, NE: William Ralph Press, 2014), EPUB, 94.0.

He is as restless and sleepless as the psalmist is:

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!⁹

And though “with [his] tormented mind tormenting yet,” Hopkins still “cast[s] for comfort [he] can no more get.”¹⁰ Commentators are split whether Hopkins was going through depression from 1885-1886 when he wrote these “Terrible Sonnets,”¹¹ but what is clear is that Hopkins never let go of his God:

Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, chéer.
Cheer whom though? the hero whose heaven-handling flung me, fíot tród
Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each one? That night, that year
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God.¹²

In the Psalms, the psalmists look back and remember better days (see Pss 77:11-12, 143:5) and even ask God to remember his past deeds (see Ps 74:2,13-15). This remembrance sustained them in times of trouble. Hopkins depended on the memory of happier times also:

Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise
You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile
Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size
At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile
's not wrung, see you; unforeseen times rather—as skies

⁹Gerard Manley Hopkins, “I Wake and Feel,” in *Poems: 1876-1889* (Omaha, NE: William Ralph Press, 2014), EPUB, 96.0.

¹⁰Gerard Manley Hopkins, “My Own Heart,” in *Poems: 1876-1889* (Omaha, NE: William Ralph Press, 2014), EPUB, 98.0.

¹¹Hilary E. Pearson, “The ‘Terrible Sonnets’ of Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Spirituality of Depression,” *The Way* 46, no. 1 (January 2007), 23.

¹²Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Carrion Comfort,” in *Poems: 1876-1889* (Omaha, NE: William Ralph Press, 2014), EPUB, 93.0.

Between pie mountains—lights a lovely mile.¹³

So why do we give pride of place to the Psalms over Oliver, Rilke, and Hopkins?

Gadamer expands the meaning of “classical.”¹⁴ A narrow understanding of “classical” limited it to pertain to works that come from a certain period in history. “Classical” in this sense also had a normative value attached to it, “rather naïve, rather oppressing for us: the classics represented the insurpassable summits of the mind and *models* to imitate.”¹⁵ For Gadamer, the “classical”

is something raised above the vicissitudes of changing times and changing tastes. It is immediately accessible, not through that shock of recognition, as it were, that sometimes characterizes a work of art for its contemporaries and in which the beholder experiences a fulfilled apprehension of meaning that surpasses all conscious expectations. Rather, when we call something classical, there is a consciousness of something enduring, of significance that cannot be lost and that is independent of all the circumstances of time – a kind of timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present.¹⁶

This expanded concept of the “classical” though does not take away the normative element. The “classical” will always be held in high regard not because it is written or composed or painted in a particular style but because it has been given great value, “canonized” as it were by past communities, and preserved and handed down in history as worth preserving and worth handing down. The Psalms can be considered classics in this sense, but what differentiates them from the classic – even “divine” – compositions

¹³Hopkins, “My Own Heart,” 98.0.

¹⁴See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 286-291.

¹⁵Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, trans. Kathryn Plant (Montreal: McGill-Queen, 2003), 98.

¹⁶Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 288.

of Dante Alighieri, the mystical writings of St. Teresa of Avila, and the religious-themed works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning which, in their being preserved and handed down, also have a normative value? What is distinct about the normativity of the Psalms?

The normative element of the Psalms, for people of faith, comes from reading them under the rubric of inspiration. In the last chapter, it was already pointed out that a practice of the Psalms is not just an exercise of aesthetic appreciation. The Psalms are not just sung poetry or artistic compositions. The Psalms are “inspired prayers.” In the previous section on encounter, the aspect of “prayer” was highlighted – as prayers are essentially encounters with God and other people. Now, I focus on the “inspired” aspect of the Psalms.

4.1 INSPIRATION AND THE PSALMS

Catholic scholars studying the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation,” customarily referred to as *Dei Verbum* (DV), comment that while DV asserts the fact of inspiration, DV does not explain the way it works.¹⁷ In DV, no particular theory of inspiration is canonized, and the question of the *how* of inspiration remains open.¹⁸ In 2010, forty-five years after DV was issued by the Second Vatican Council, Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical *Verbum Domini* (VD) called for a “deeper study of the process of inspiration” for “a greater understanding of the truth contained in the sacred books,”

¹⁷See for example Ronald D. Witherup, *The Word of God at Vatican II: Exploring Dei Verbum* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 27.

¹⁸See John R. Donahue, “Scripture: A Roman Catholic Perspective,” *Review & Expositor* 79 (1982): 237.

“in order better to respond to the need to interpret the sacred texts in accordance with their nature,” and to “bear fruit both for biblical science and for the spiritual life of the faithful” (VD 19). This was what the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC) sought to do in *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word that Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World* (ITSS), which was published in 2014. At the conclusion of this document, the PBC admits that it has not come up with “a definitive and exhaustive examination of the difficult problems found in the Scriptures” and ends with its own call for further reflection on the mystery of inspiration.¹⁹ In this section, I add to this conversation by looking at the apparent difficulties in ascribing inspiration to the Psalms and by presenting a way of understanding how the Psalter can be inspired. Because we do not have the space here to discuss the entire Psalter, I focus the discussion on what can seem to be a particularly hard Psalm to consider to be inspired – Ps 137:

By the rivers of Babylon –
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there
we hung up our harps.
For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’

How could we sing the Lord’s song
in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,

¹⁹Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word that Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World*, trans. Thomas Esposito, Stephen Gregg, Fearghus O’Fearghail, and Gerhard Ludwig Müller (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014) Kindle edition, locations 3090-3093.

if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy.

Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem's fall,
how they said, 'Tear it down! Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!'
O daughter Babylon, you devastator!
Happy shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us!
Happy shall they be who take your little ones
and dash them against the rock!

4.1.1 Difficulties with Regard to Inspiration, the Psalms, and Ps 137

Raymond Collins locates the core of DV's teaching on inspiration in DV chapter 3, paragraph 11:²⁰

Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see Jn 20:31; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19-20, 3:15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him, they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation. Therefore "all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

²⁰Raymond F. Collins, "Inspiration," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 1024.

In the first part of the quote above, DV makes it clear that the books considered Sacred Scripture have “God as their author” and that “God chose men,” acted *in* them and *through* them, but still “made use of their powers and abilities” so that they were “true authors” also. As Matthew Ramage writes, “these human authors were not puppets in God’s hands, but neither were they self-sufficient in the process of composing scripture. It was a work which entailed the full use of the faculties and gifts of scripture’s human authors, put to use in order that God’s own ineffable words might be put into human words which his people could understand.”²¹ This dynamic is taken up again in DV 13 using an analogy with the incarnation:

For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.

The characteristically Catholic “both-and” rather than the “either/or” type of thinking coupled with the Christological analogy above give us confidence to say that Sacred Scripture is not word half-God and half-man but word *fully* divine and *fully* human. While DV does not canonize any theory of inspiration, this does discount certain possibilities. We cannot hold a dictation theory of inspiration (that human authors were like secretaries taking down whatever God said) because this makes the human authors passive instruments. Inspiration in this way would not be fully human. We cannot hold a negative assistance theory (that God only intervened when the human authors were about to make mistakes) because this limits God’s participation. Inspiration in this way would not be fully divine. For the same reason, we cannot hold a theory of subsequent

²¹Matthew J. Ramage, *Dark Passages of the Bible: Engaging Scripture with Benedict XVI and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 56.

approbation (that God, while not actively composing Sacred Scripture, allowed into the canon only those books that mirrored his will).

Sacred Scripture, the word of God, as fully divine and fully human similar to Jesus Christ, the Word of God, being fully human and fully divine may be conceptually neat, but it becomes messy especially with the Psalms. Scripture is supposed to be, as a traditional formulation puts it, “the words of God in the words of men.” In the Psalms, the dynamic seems to tip heavily on the side of the human. There are only five Psalms where God speaks (Pss 50, 75, 81, 87, 95); most of the Psalter are words directed to God. How can God be the author of the Psalms? A common solution to this problem proclaims that God gives us the words with which to address him. It is easy to see this in hymns of praise and thanksgiving, but what kind of God would want to be worshipped with the last verse of Ps 137, “Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock”?

DV 12 reminds us:

To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to “literary forms.” For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.

With this, DV – and later on, the PBC document “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” (IBC), which like DV built upon Pope Pius XII’s *Divino Afflante Spiritu* –

emphasizes the importance of historical criticism, rhetorical criticism, form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, and other modern methods of analysis. Can we explain the harshness of the ideas and words of Ps 137 as part of its poetry and the horror in its images as hyperbole? But does this recourse not address only the human side of the dynamic of inspiration? How can God be the author of Ps 137?

Collins points out that the “author” formula does not necessarily ascribe literary authorship to God. In Latin, *auctor* has a wider range of meaning than the English “author.” *Auctor*, especially in ecclesial tradition, has been used to mean producer, source, or originator.²² But how can God be the producer, source, or origin of the sadness, anger, and desire for revenge in Ps 137?

In the second part of DV 3:11 quoted above, DV clarifies that inspiration is, as Ronald Witherup comments, “not a blanket approval of literal *inerrancy*,” but an acknowledgment of “the lack of errors regarding the essentials for salvation.”²³ Inspiration is not about historical or scientific truths; inspiration is about salvific truth. But what is salvific in Ps 137? Benedict XVI sees in Ps 137 a “heartfelt invocation to the Lord” that also expresses “the sentiments of hope and expectation of salvation.”²⁴ After all, the psalmist still is able to turn to the Lord even in sorrow and rage. There is also trust in the Lord as the psalmist does not take matters into his (or her) own hands but leaves vengeance to another: “Happy shall *they* be who take your little ones and dash them

²²Collins, “Inspiration,” 1027-1028.

²³Witherup, *The Word of God at Vatican II*, 36.

²⁴Benedict XVI, “General Audience,” Vatican Website, November 30, 2005, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20051130.html (accessed July 1, 2016).

against the rock!” While there is definitely something salvific here, why is it allowed to exist side by side with a cry for revenge? Many scholars reading the Hebrew text of Ps 137 understand from the use of the perfect tense in the first verses as well as the repeated use of the adverb “there,” that the psalmist is already separated in time and space from the exilic conditions in Babylon. Verses 1-4 are in the past; in verse 5, the psalmist addresses Jerusalem directly as already present there.²⁵ Why is the psalmist allowed to hold on to anger instead of moving on? What is salvific about letting fury ferment? And what can be salvific in desiring the death of not just babies but a whole future generation of people?

How can God be the author of Ps 137? How can Ps 137 be salvific? We leave these questions for the moment and turn to the insights of Ormond Rush and the PBC’s latest document on inspiration to gain better perspective.

4.1.2 Ormond Rush and Inspiration

In Ormond Rush’s view, inspiration is best understood in terms of the Holy Spirit working through what the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” or *Lumen Gentium* (LG), has called a *sensus fidei* – “a supernatural discernment in matters of faith” (LG 12) or a sense of the faith. For Rush, the *sensus fidei* is a “Spirit-given capacity” which enables the faithful to “synthesize their faith with all they know and experience” within the struggles of daily life. The *sensus fidei* is the “imaginative capacity” with which the faithful, within their daily reception of God’s self-communication, “in some relatively

²⁵Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, revised edition, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21 (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 304.

adequate way (at least adequate in terms of salvation), ‘make sense of’ their lives and ‘make sense of’ the God reaching out to them in their lives.”²⁶ Relating this to an earlier discussion, *habitus* and our practices must play a role in this “making sense of.” *Habitus*, as was said in chapter 1, functions like a “practical sense,” an implicit know-how that we “inhabit” as a way of seeing and feeling things.

Rush nuances his treatment of the *sensus fidei* by making a distinction between the sense of the faith of a bigger body of the faithful or a community (which he calls the *sensus fidei fidelium* or *sensus fidelium* for short) and the sense of the faith of an individual believer within that community (which he calls the *sensus fidei fidelis* or more briefly, *sensus fidei*).²⁷ While Rush makes a distinction between these two senses, there is no real separation; instead, as will be seen below, there is a dynamic interplay of giving and receiving.

With our terms clarified, we can now dive deeper into Rush’s proposal: “[T]he continuous interpretative and evaluative activity of the *sensus fidei* / *fidelium* throughout the production, canonical selection, and ongoing reception / traditioning of the set canonical text constitutes its inspiration by the Holy Spirit.”²⁸

²⁶Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church’s Reception of Revelation*, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 66.

²⁷Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 66.

²⁸Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 153.

Rush expands this concise summary of his proposal by pointing out that an adequate theology of inspiration needs to give attention to three dimensions of Sacred Scripture:

- (1) the historical process of its production and canonization,
- (2) its ecclesial function as a fixed authoritative text,
- and (3) its reception in history.²⁹

Rush sees the Holy Spirit as active through the *sensus fidei* of individuals and the *sensus fidelium* of communities in each of the above three dimensions:

- (1) as a generator of the reception and traditioning process that produces the writings and the canon;
- (2) as a “quality” of the canonical texts, as agreed upon *through a consensus fidelium*, and functioning as a *consensus fidelium* – a normative ecclesial collection of diverse “senses of the faith”;
- and (3) as a generator of the ongoing reception of canonical Scripture into the future.³⁰

4.1.2.1 Inspiration of the production

Applying the thought of Rush,³¹ how can we trace the formation of the texts we now consider inspired? An individual, whose *sensus fidei* has been formed by the *sensus fidelium* of the community, receives God’s revelation in daily life, puts into expression (either orally or in writing) how he or she is making sense of God’s self-communication and gives it to the community whose *sensus fidelium* can learn from it and whose *sensus fidelium* can at the same time correct it or modify it. The community here is not a

²⁹Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 156.

³⁰Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 156.

³¹See chapters 5 and 6 of *The Eyes of Faith*, 116-172.

monolith that acts like a solid block but a gathering of people that acts through the actions of unique individuals. On the one hand, it is easier to track the movements of an individual versus a community of individuals; you only have to follow one person. But on the other hand, in the production of Scripture, individual writers disappear, but the texts we have received through history can give us a glimpse of the community and what they discerned and valued as authentic reflections of their faith.

How do we know if a community approved of a particular text? It was disseminated, and if individuals found value in it, they asked to hear it again or read it again (most probably in liturgy and worship) and copied it for others to profit from. In short, it was passed on. In the passing on, modifications and corrections were made not only in the text but also in the *sensus fidei* of individuals and the *sensus fidelium* of the community. A tradition was formed that also formed those who took part in it until finally, we have the communally approved texts gathered into a canon.

The two previous paragraphs describe what Rush means with the “reception and traditioning” that produces the writings and the canon. This does not happen in a clearly defined sequence of events but in a complex process working through the *sensus fidei* and the *sensus fidelium* with the Holy Spirit enabling both senses the whole time.

The interplay of *sensus fidei* and *sensus fidelium* can be read as Rush giving a nod to the more social and communal theories of inspiration.³² But what I wish to highlight in Rush’s proposal is the element of *process*. The texts we have in Sacred Scripture are

³²Rush does cite what other scholars consider the seminal work on the social model of inspiration, Karl Rahner’s *Inspiration in the Bible* (London: Burns and Oates, 1964); John L. McKenzie, “The Social Character of Inspiration,” *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 24 (1962): 115-124; and Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972).

products of a process, but they do not always reflect finished and polished resolutions. They should be seen more as “snapshots” of moments in the process. Some are like candid pictures; some are like posed portraits. Continuing the analogy of photographs, though these “snapshots” have already gone through a Spirit-guided “brightness, contrast, color, and white balance correction” – collectively known in digital imagery as “processing” – to make the image they contain clearer or closer to the reality they wish to portray, they still are “snapshots” that are part of a bigger process. Though there are “snapshots” or texts we privilege more than others (a “canon within a canon,” as these have been called), no individual text or book presents the whole story of God’s revelation and our response in faith.

4.1.2.2 *Inspiration of the text*

The process does not end with the production of the texts and their collection into the canon. Through the give-and-take of the *sensus fidei* of individuals and the *sensus fidelium* of communities, the Spirit worked in the processing of different *biblia* (or books) which includes their being assembled into our Bible today. Now canonized, the Spirit works in and through these texts in a unique way that brings in a whole different aspect to the inspiration of these texts. “That uniqueness relates not only to the intrinsic worth of each work but also to their intrinsic worth as a collection.”³³ As discussed before, the individual texts are products of the *sensus fidei* of persons and the *sensus fidelium* of their communities. These individual texts must now be brought into a dialogue with the *sensus fidei* of other persons and the *sensus fidelium* of other communities in the other texts of

³³Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 159.

the canon. In the same way that the *sensus fidelium* of a community and the *sensus fidei* of persons mutually corrected each other in one text, the different texts in the Bible must now mutually norm one another. “In this way, the Bible, as a whole, is self-correcting.”³⁴ The aspect of inspiration brought out here by Rush is how an individual work in the Bible must always be considered as part of a whole. This becomes part of the process of inspiration, and the faithful reading the Bible today are invited to take part in the process.

4.1.2.3 Inspiration of the reception

The process still does not end with the dialogue between texts; the faithful reader is asked to let the Bible dialogue with history, with the events of daily life. We must also try to see how the Bible has been received in the past, how it is being received in the present, and so catch a glimpse of how it can be received in the future. From a dialogue between texts, now we enter a dialogue between texts and life and between how texts have been received. Why? Rush writes:

The history of reception of the Bible over two millennia has inspired rich tapestry of spiritualities, theologies, saints, religious orders, reform movements, works of art, writings traditions, identities, and styles of Christianity. [And again, these are products of the *sensus fidei* of persons and the *sensus fidelium* of communities.] The history of theology and the history of doctrine could be narrated in terms of a history of diverse receptions of the Bible. Each reception brings to the fore elements that others may leave in the background; each reception, in its particular selection, is a distinctive configuration of the Christian tradition. No one reception exhausts the full meaning of what was originally given and originally received in revelation.³⁵

³⁴Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 159.

³⁵Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 159.

In the same way that an individual text in the Bible is just a “snapshot” in the process and does not tell the whole story, any particular reception also does not “exhaust the full meaning” of revelation. Rush extends the process of inspiration to include the reader and his or her reception. But in the same way that not every text written about faith is considered to be inspired, not every reception can be considered inspired.

How can we talk of an inspired reader and an inspired reception? Such inspiration – similar to the inspiration of the production of texts – can only be determined retrospectively. Here, Rush brings in the concept of approbative reception.³⁶ This is similar to the approbation in the early stages of the canonization process when the *sensus fidei* of individuals is normed by the *sensus fidelium* of the community.

DV 12 asserts that “Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written.” How can we know if such reading or reception is in the same spirit of the text? DV 12 gives us three criteria: (1) The reader or interpreter of Scripture must keep in mind “the content and unity of the whole of Scripture.” (2) “The living tradition of the whole Church” down through the centuries and the diverse ways in which Scripture has been received in diverse contexts must be taken into account. (3) Finally, the interpreter must attend to the whole of the Church’s teachings which have been officially formulated in the light of past readings of Scripture – the *analogia fidei*, as expressed by DV 12. Who does the application of the three criteria above? Rush turns to

³⁶Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 165.

DV 8 and points out the three voices we need: the people's contemporary experience of salvation, theological scholarship, and the guidance of the magisterium.³⁷

In the three criteria to be applied and the three voices to be heard, it is easy to see the central role of the *sensus fidei* of individuals in dynamic interplay with the *sensus fidelium* of communities – and of course, the Holy Spirit which enables these two senses.

Looking at inspiration through the lens of the sense of the faith, we are able to see how Sacred Scripture can be fully divine and fully human. As defined above, the sense of the faith of individuals and communities is a “Spirit-given capacity” which enables the faithful to “synthesize their faith with all they know and experience.” The capacity is given by God, but we still have to enact the potential and do the synthesizing. This capacity, too, is not given just one time but “aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth” (LG 12). Furthermore, the sense of the faith of individuals and communities is “constantly being ‘attuned’ and ‘calibrated’ by the Holy Spirit, so that the church may more acutely recognize in the signs of the times the new things God is doing.”³⁸ Needless to say, this requires the continuous cooperation of the faithful also.

4.1.3 The Psalms as a Product of the Sense of the Faith

Applying the proposals of Rush regarding inspiration, we can see more clearly how the Psalms are a fruit of the dynamic interplay between the *sensus fidei* of individuals and the *sensus fidelium* of communities, which are both guided by the Holy

³⁷Ormond Rush, “Dei Verbum Forty Years On: Revelation, Inspiration, and the Spirit,” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 83 (2006): 410-411.

³⁸Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 294.

Spirit. Hans-Joachim Kraus speculates that the origin of the Psalms stands between the extreme of the Psalter being a collection of private poems and the alternative extreme of the Psalter being an exclusively cultic and priestly book.³⁹ Many of the Psalms would have been the work of individual priests and temple singers drawing on their *sensus fidei* but being normed by the *sensus fidelium* of their guilds and the larger Israelite community. But the priests and singers would have derived many of the Psalms from the reports of individuals in distress, those who have recovered from threatening experiences, and those who wanted to express their thanksgiving and praise. The priests though would have couched these reports in “conventionalized formulations.”⁴⁰ Behind these conventions of expression would have been how the community synthesized and made meaning out of the experiences, a synthesis that was also influenced by the experiences of many individuals through time. The products of these exchanges would have been sung in the temple and later on in the diaspora, expressing the *sensus fidelium* of communities and forming the *sensus fidei* of individuals. The dynamic relationship between the sense of the faith of individuals and of the community plays out in a long process throughout which the Holy Spirit is active.⁴¹ It is a process that continues today

³⁹Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1988), 66.

⁴⁰Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 66.

⁴¹One may raise the objection that if the Holy Spirit was sent only after Jesus Christ’s resurrection, how could the Spirit have acted in the sense of the faith of the people during the production of the Psalms? To this objection, we can answer with DV 11 and its attestation that both the Old and New Testaments “in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” 2 Tim 3:16-17 holds that “all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” Many exegetes read “scripture” in this quote as pertaining to a set of texts comparable to what we now call the Old Testament – the scripture which the New Testament writers would have known. But even before DV and even before the New Testament, the Old Testament had already attested to the action of the Spirit during those times. In Gen 1:2, we read of how the Spirit of God hovered over the waters during creation. In Neh 9:20, Ezra talks about how the ancestors of the Israelites were

as the Psalms and the other books in the canon, all products of the *sensus fidelium* of past communities, are read, interpreted, and synthesized by our individual *sensus fidei* and then applied to our everyday lives, which contribute to the *sensus fidelium* of the Church.

4.1.4 The PBC and Inspiration

What the PBC highlights in its recent document on inspiration that is most useful in our discussion is the aspect of *relationship*. The process of inspiration we have discussed above does not unfold impersonally but in a relationship. As the ITSS states, “In our enquiry on the indications of the divine provenance of the various writings [which is another way of talking about inspiration], we established as fundamental the living relationship with God.”⁴² The relationship with God is manifested in a myriad of ways in the Bible. In the Psalms specifically, the PBC sees this relationship in this way: “The suppliant listens to the voice of God, heard above all in the great events of creation and of the saving history of Israel, but also in some particular personal experiences.”⁴³ Inspiration happens in a relationship with God, and this relationship is experienced, nourished, and realized not only in individual prayer but in relationship with our

instructed by the Spirit. And as one final example in a list of many other possible examples, Ps 139:7 professes (or maybe complains of) the constant presence of the Spirit of God: “Where can I go from your spirit?” This reading of the verses mentioned here is already influenced by Trinitarian belief, but Trinitarian theology also allows us to say that the God the Father never acted without God the Son and God the Spirit. The Spirit certainly must have been active during Old Testament times. An intriguing question is: How is the activity of the Spirit before Pentecost different from after Pentecost? How can we express that something entirely new happened at Pentecost while still honoring and valuing what happened before it? This though is already beyond the scope of this study.

⁴²PBC, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*, 1204-1205.

⁴³PBC, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*, 1177-1178.

community. Here we see again the inextricable link between the *sensus fidei* and the *sensus fidelium*.

Rush's reflections and the PBC's most recent document have highlighted for us the importance of *process* and *relationship* in inspiration. We are now ready to return to the questions of divine authorship and biblical inerrancy in terms of salvific truth which were left hanging above: How can God be the author of Ps 137? How can Ps 137 be salvific?

4.1.5 How Can God Be the Author of Ps 137?

We can say that God is the author of Ps 137 because God is the origin of the world where Ps 137 happened and the source of the life that experienced the trauma related in Ps 137. But can we find a better answer than this?

The Latin *auctor* does not only mean literary author, origin, or source. Grammarians have traced its connection to *augere* – to increase, to augment, to strengthen, and to grow. In fact, all twentieth-century etymological dictionaries of the English language agree that “author” and “authority” come from *augere*.⁴⁴ Author-ity, therefore, is not just a Creator causing the beginning nor a general commanding soldiers. Author-ity or author-ship should also call to mind the image of a gardener helping his or her plants to grow.

⁴⁴Stephen Donovan, Danuta Fjellestad, and Rolf Lunden, “Introduction: Author, Authorship, Authority, and Other Matters” in *Authority Matters: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Authorship*, ed. Stephen Donovan, DQR Studies in Literature, vol. 43 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 2.

2 Tim 3:16-17 tells us that Scripture is for “teaching” and “training.” As a teacher or trainer, you have to meet your student where he or she is. This is part of relating with someone. One must enter the other’s process. This is how growth begins. We can say that God is the author of Ps 137 in the sense that God enters our process, a process involving the dynamic relationship of the *sensus fidei* of individuals and the *sensus fidelium* of communities. God relates with the pray-er where he or she is. God also relates with the community where it is. And God helps the pray-er and the community to grow. In Ps 137, we have a snapshot of the “raw edges in our lives that do not easily submit to the religious convictions we possess on good days.”⁴⁵ But if this is where our sense of the faith is, the Holy Spirit still comes to be with us and shows care for us there.

4.1.6 How Can Ps 137 Be Salvific?

What is salvific in Ps 137’s cry for vengeance is the assurance that we have a God who allows us to be sad and angry and weak in God’s presence, a God who respects our process and relates to us where we are. God also gives us a community where we can vent all our negative feelings. Walter Brueggemann wisely writes, “There is a way beyond the psalms of vengeance, but it is a way through them and not around them.”⁴⁶ God knows we need to go through certain stages and is patient with us.

But what is salvific in Ps 137 is also in how it must be read with other parts of the Bible. As Rush asserts, the inspiration of one text in the Bible is seen most clearly in the light of the other texts in the canon. The Psalms that “sandwich” Ps 137 draw us out and

⁴⁵Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 85.

⁴⁶Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), 80.

help us grow. Ps 136 seeks to prepare us for the trauma in Ps 137 by repeatedly reminding us twenty-six times – once every verse – that no matter what happens, God’s “steadfast love endures forever.” Ps 138 ends by giving us a model of trust: “Though I walk in the midst of trouble... the Lord will fulfill his purpose for me.” And we hear again the constant refrain from Ps 136: “Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever!” Before it and after it, behind it and in front, Ps 137 is buttressed by the steadfast love of God which endures forever. While learning English, I was often warned about being redundant. “God’s steadfast love enduring forever” would definitely have brought out my teacher’s red pen. Say God’s love is steadfast. Say it endures. But to say God’s steadfast love endures – and that it endures forever – is laying it on thick. And this becomes thicker still in the context of being bookended by Pss 136 and 138. But maybe this is exactly what the pray-er in Ps 137 needs.

The point of going through the sadness and anger in Ps 137 is to mourn, lament, and dwell on the sadness and anger, and then to go beyond them – even if this might take a longer time than we expect. But an inspired reception, an inspired “going through,” must also be held in tension with loving one’s enemies and blessing persecutors (Mt 5:44; Rom 12:14) as well as other texts in the same Old Testament that speak about treating our enemies kindly (Ex 23:4-5; Lev 19:17–18; Pro 24:17 and 25:21). If being in a relationship means entering the other’s process, this means that as God enters our process, we must also try to enter God’s process and see where God desires us to go. And perhaps, when we have finally gone beyond the trauma of Ps 137, we can still go back and pray the Psalm again and again to see how we have grown, how God supported our growth, and how to better connect with others who might still be stuck in Ps 137’s throes.

DV 13 can serve as a summary to our whole discussion:

In Sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remains intact, the marvelous “condescension” of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, “that we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which words cannot express, and how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature.”

In one sense, we can say that the insights of Rush and the PBC, the importance of process and relationship, are already in DV. What “new” thing did Rush and the PBC add? They were able to highlight and develop what DV contained. The movement here is similar to what happens when we interpret Scripture. Any “new” thing that we find, we find already embedded in the text, but it could not really be seen until a certain time, without the focus given to it by our experiences and present context and without the support of previous interpretations.

DV 13 takes on St. John Chrysostom’s expression “marvelous condescension.” In our context today, and in light of what was said about how the Psalms transform, it may be better to see this as accompaniment. Our God enters a relationship with us, meets us where we are, leads us through a process using our sense of the faith, and helps us to grow. How can we not be inspired by this?

4.1.7 Process, Relationship, the Sense of the Faith, and the Practice of the Psalms

The foregoing discussion amplified the notes played by process, relationship, and the *sensus fidei / fidelium* in the inspiration of the Psalms. These are notes heard more loudly not in the silent, sterile study of the Psalms but in the noisy, messy practice of praying with the Psalter. Each and every act and experience can contribute to the process, to the relationship, and to the formation of the sense of the faith, but it is committed and

engaged practice which can form a *habitus* that opens us up to entering our processes and entering relationships with God and community more readily, and to having our sense of the faith formed by the Holy Spirit. As process, relationship, and the sense of the faith are key to the inspiration of the Psalms, engaging these inspired prayers can also be key in diving into our processes, relationships, and the formation of our sense of the faith more deeply.

Nigerian theologian Anne Arabome, writing from her experiences in Kibera, a slum area in Nairobi, stresses the “communality” of the faith as inseparable from the sense of the faith.⁴⁷ This “communality” is in the Psalms, as we already saw affirmed above. Arabome would add this to our discussion: “*Sensus* is not mere insight or instinct affirming or rejecting a truth minted in abstract and extraneous context; *sensus fidelium* represents a *plurality of senses* of the people of God by which they perceive and live the reality of their faith, vocation, and ministry.”⁴⁸

Included in the “plurality of senses” are the senses that allow us to smell, taste, hear, feel, and see the action of the Spirit at work. In Kibera, “the smell of putrid open sewers, the sight of naked hordes of children, the endless cacophony of energetic voices and activities, the acrid taste of dust mixed with charcoal, the unforgiving heat of the midday sun with hardly a tree shade for cover” are part of what would “assault” the five bodily senses.⁴⁹ The “embodying” aspect of the Psalms, especially when engaged in practice, also afford us an entry into these physical senses.

⁴⁷Anne Arabome, “How are Theologians Challenged and Informed by Their Engagement with the Sense of the Faithful in the Local / Global Church?” *CTSA Proceedings* 70 (2015), 67-68.

⁴⁸Arabome, “How are Theologians Challenged...?” 67.

Another component of the “plurality of senses” is the sense of the context or condition of people of God.⁵⁰ Quoting the International Theological Commission’s document, “*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church” (SF) 127 and *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) 24, Arabome makes the point that for theologians, “to be challenged and informed by the senses of the faithful is to get ‘involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives...’ to embrace ‘human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others...[S]tanding by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be.’” This, as seen in the discussion on inspiration above, God has done in the composition and collection – and God continues to do – in the praying of the Psalms. This, the pray-ers of the Psalms, also do in practicing the Psalms. The words of the Psalms allow us to be involved with the psalmists from of old, to embrace other pray-ers of the Psalms throughout history, and to stand with those who are currently going through what the Psalms describe, even though our experiences may be different. In embracing the contexts of others, our horizons can be widened, and we can also become more sensitive to and aware of the nuances of our own contexts. What else can praying the Psalms in a sustained way bring us to?

4.1.8 An Approach Towards a Theology, Anthropology, and Ethics from Psalm Practice

In previous chapters, it was pointed out how formula prayers can teach by their words, practice, and vision. To what vision can the words of the Psalter when engaged in committed practice lead us?

⁴⁹Arabome, “How are Theologians Challenged...?” 66.

⁵⁰Arabome, “How are Theologians Challenged...?” 67.

Psalms scholar William Brown warns:

Difficulties abound in any attempt to discern theological and anthropological coherence across the Psalms. In addition to its eclectic character, the Psalter's very medium – poetry – is by nature allusive and multivalent. The language of metaphor, so replete in the Psalms, resists conceptual uniformity. Complicating the task, also, are the differing levels of theological discourse evident among the Psalms.⁵¹

There is first-order discourse in the Psalms, and this is mostly found in complaints and petitions that convey a situational immediacy. And there is also second-order discourse, when the psalmist is able to take a step back from the exigencies of the everyday and reflect on a broader view of God and the human condition. This we see in extended hymns of praise, songs of trust and thanksgiving, and the Psalms of instruction.⁵²

Because the Psalms resist “conceptual uniformity,” the word “vision” is important. The picture of God and the picture of the human being which the Psalms offer are not photographs in sharp focus but “visions.” There may be some haziness, but the “vision” is able to give us a clear enough direction we can pursue. Blurry edges in the “vision” may prevent precise definitions, but they also allow diverse thoughts to blend with one another.

In discerning the theology of the Psalms, Gerhard von Rad holds this position:

The subject-matter which concerns the theologian is, of course, not the spiritual and religious world of Israel and the conditions of her soul in general, nor is it her world of faith, all of which can only be reconstructed by means of conclusions

⁵¹William P. Brown, *The Psalms*, Interpreting Biblical Texts Series (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), Kindle edition, locations 2913-2916.

⁵²Brown, *The Psalms*, 2916-2920.

drawn from the documents: instead, it is simply Israel's own explicit assertions about Jahweh. The theologian must above all deal directly with the evidence, that is, with what Israel herself testified concerning Jahweh.⁵³

In this study, I go beyond the boundaries set by von Rad and paint a theology, anthropology, and ethics based on a committed engagement with the Psalms in practice. What visions of God, the human being, and what we should do in relationship with this God arise when we practice the Psalms?

Von Rad's position was a reaction to what professor of the Old Testament Carl Bosma has called the "mirror of the soul" approach.⁵⁴ Bosma traces this approach to Athanasius who wrote in his letter to Marcellinus on the interpretation of the Psalms:

[T]he grace of the one Spirit is common to every writer and all the books of Scripture, and differs in its expression only as need requires and the Spirit wills. Obviously, therefore, the only thing that matters is for each writer to hold fast unyieldingly the grace he *personally* has received and so fulfil perfectly his *individual* mission [emphases added]. And, among all the books, the Psalter has certainly a very special grace, a choiceness of quality well worthy to be pondered; for, besides the characteristics which it shares with others, it has this peculiar marvel of its own, that within it are represented and portrayed in all their great variety the movements of the human soul. It is like a picture, in which you see yourself portrayed, and seeing, may understand and consequently form yourself upon the pattern given. Elsewhere in the Bible you read only that the Law commands this or that to be done, you listen to the Prophets to learn about the Saviour's coming, or you turn to the historical books to learn the doings of the kings and holy men; but in the Psalter, besides all these things, you learn about yourself. You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries.⁵⁵

⁵³Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology I: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans. David Muir Gibson Stalker (Edinburgh, Scotland: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 105.

⁵⁴See Carl J. Bosma, "Discerning the Voices in the Psalms: A Discussion of Two Problems in Psalmic Interpretation Part 1," *Calvin Theological Journal* 43 (2008), 183-193.

⁵⁵Athanasius, "The Letter of Athanasius, our Holy Father, Archbishop of Alexandria, to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms," ed. Athanasius Schaefer, <http://www.athanasius.com/psalms/aletterm.htm> (accessed December 13, 2016).

Because we find ourselves in the Psalms, Athanasius sees the Psalter as a “mirror”:
“[J]ust as in a mirror, the movements of our own souls are reflected in them and the words are indeed our very own, given us to serve both as a reminder of our changes of condition and as a pattern and model for the amendment of our lives.”⁵⁶

The “mirror of the soul” approach, also found in the works of Augustine and John Calvin,⁵⁷ continued to be taken up in the nineteenth century as exemplified in the popular biographical-psychological approach of Friedrich Schleiermacher, an approach that can be characterized as romantic, individualistic, and personalized. “As a result of Friedrich Schleiermacher’s influence, the practitioners of the historical-critical approach were more interested in the individual psalmist’s inner feelings and his psychological and religious condition.”⁵⁸ This is the “development” rejected by von Rad who asserts that “in their phraseology these psalms are in no sense whatever to be understood as personal outpourings... but as discourses bound to the cult and the liturgy.”⁵⁹

One clue to the Psalms’ ties to cult and liturgy can be seen in the use of stereotypical and formulaic language like “the wicked” being contrasted with “the righteous.” If the Psalms were compositions written by individuals for individual use, one would expect specific names and maybe even particular places and events mentioned rather than just generic categories. Another clue to the Psalms’ use in communal worship is the observation of subtle changes in the voice and address in a Psalm. When a Psalm

⁵⁶Athanasius, “Letter to Marcellinus.”

⁵⁷Bosma, “Discerning the Voices in the Psalms I,” 189-190.

⁵⁸Bosma, “Discerning the Voices in the Psalms I,” 186.

⁵⁹von Rad, *Old Testament Theology I*, 399-400.

changes from “I” to “we” language, one can easily imagine that the intended speakers have changed. The “I” parts could have been spoken by the king or another representative and the “we” parts were the community’s response. In the Psalms as they were transmitted to us, we simply lack the identification of which part was supposed to be taken by whom – as we see in liturgical and even film or stage scripts today.⁶⁰

Von Rad’s approach is an important corrective to overly-individualized interpretations. For von Rad, the Psalms are best characterized as “Israel Before Jahweh.”⁶¹ The Psalms were the responses of Israel – not just of individual Israelites – to God.

In my going beyond von Rad’s approach, I am not just going back to the individual / personal approach. As can be seen in the discussion on inspiration and *sensus fidei / fidelium*, the aspect of community undergirds this study, and the “mirror of the soul” approach can still be valid as long as it does not forget the importance of communality.⁶²

This is a very important reminder especially for us today. In chapter 1, I asked how a sustained engagement with the Psalms might be able to lead us out of the

⁶⁰For more examples of these clues, see Bosma, “Discerning the Voices in the Psalms I,” 193-199.

⁶¹This is how von Rad entitles chapter D of his *Old Testament Theology I*. See 355-459.

⁶²This is also Bosma’s conclusion in “Discerning the Voices in the Psalms I,” 193-199. Interestingly, in his evaluation of von Rad’s approach, a corollary question presents itself: If the Psalms are to be seen as explicit assertions of Israel about God, how can they be the words of God? This Bosma tries to answer in the second part of his article (see “Discerning the Voices in the Psalms: A Discussion of Two Problems in Psalmic Interpretation Part 2.” *Calvin Theological Journal* 44 (2009), 127-170). I presented my own answer to this question in the discussion above on inspiration.

“buffered” and disengaged self and its individualism and atomism. An answer lies in the communal aspect of the Psalms.

Committed engagement with the whole Psalter – and not just with the Psalms that directly speak to our feelings and thoughts of the moment – can help us see that it is not just about “me, me, me.” When a Psalm is about sadness, and we are in situations of happiness, praying this Psalm reminds us to reach out to others and spread our joy. When a Psalm is about joy and we are in the midst of sorrow, praying this Psalm reminds us that the world does not revolve around our problems alone. Praying the Psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours with this mindset makes the Divine Office truly the Prayer of the Church.

Many who pray the Divine Office may have privatized the practice, but the Psalms were not meant to be prayed alone. One indication of this is the word *selah* scattered throughout the Psalter seventy-one times not as part of the text of a Psalm but more like a notation in the margin of a hymnbook. No one today is certain of what *selah* means, but many Hebrew scholars guess that it refers to a pause or a moment of silence for benediction. A minority speculate that it means “louder here” or *fortissimo*. What seems to be a safe guess is that *selah* is evidence of corporate liturgy.⁶³

Romano Guardini, in his famous letter to the Third German Liturgical Conference in April of 1964, prophetically pronounced: Modern man and woman have forgotten how to perform the liturgical act. One reason he says this is because the modern person has forgotten how to be communal:

⁶³Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 83.

Of particular importance for the liturgical act is the action and full participation of the congregation as a body. The act is done by every individual, not as an isolated individual, but as a member of a body which is the “we” of the prayers. Its structure is different from that of any other collection of people meeting for a common purpose. It is that of a corpus, an objective whole. In the liturgical act, the celebrating individual becomes part of this body and he incorporates the circumstances in his self-expression. This is not so simple if it is to be genuine and honest. Much that divides men must be overcome: dislikes, indifference towards the many who are “no concern of mine”, but who are really members of the same body, lethargy, etc. In the [liturgical] act the individual becomes conscious of the meaning of the words “congregation” and “Church.” ... The communal body of the congregation is more than a mere sitting together, but rather a solidarity of existence.⁶⁴

Guardini may have written those words more than fifty years ago, but they still ring true today. And a practice of the Psalms, even if prayed without other people present, can help us recover this communality again. The Psalms were born from a communal practice. If we try to be more conscious of this, a practice of the Psalms today can help connect us with an even larger community beyond our current space and time. With community physically there or present at least in our imagination, we can already appreciate aspects of the Psalms which we would never see as individual pray-ers, aspects which can also help us connect more closely with God.⁶⁵

4.2 A THEOLOGY FROM A PRACTICE OF THE PSALMS

⁶⁴Romano Guardini, “On the Essence of the Liturgical Act,” Corpus Christi Watershed, September 5, 2013, <http://www.ccwatershed.org/blog/2013/sep/5/1964-letter-romano-guardini/> (accessed December 1, 2016).

⁶⁵In chapter 5, I suggest some ways of praying with the Psalms to capitalize on their communal aspect.

The Psalms cultivate a desire for God. As we recite and sing them, as we proclaim God's mighty deeds but also complain about what has happened, our worship shapes our desires.⁶⁶ How desirable is the God that we meet?

In the discussion on inspiration and the Psalms, we could already glimpse a certain theology: God is a God who relates with us and respects us and the processes we need to go through. God is a God who works through individuals and the community and the traditions of the community. What other vision of God arises from a practice of the Psalms? First of all, what I try to do below is not a comprehensive listing of characteristics of God that can be gleaned from a practice of the Psalms. The more one practices, the more one learns, and there is no telling in advance exactly what we will see as we continue with our practice. I have also selected below the aspects of the vision of God which I think can prophetically address the postmodern world. What follows is far from exhaustive. It is more evocative.

These evocations assume an encounter with God and other people of faith. Karl Barth writes that the object and theme of theology "is neither a subjective nor an objective element in isolation. This is to say, it is neither an isolated human nor an isolated God, but God and man in their divinely established and effective encounter, the dealings of God with the Christian and of the Christian with God."⁶⁷ I would add "and the dealings of the Christian with other people, Christians or not." Kraus would stress the aspect of encounter even more: "Only in our encounter with the Psalms are we brought to

⁶⁶Brown, *The Psalms*, 1726-1744.

⁶⁷Karl Barth, as quoted by Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, trans. Keith Crim (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 13.

the basic recognition that anything said of God in the third person is inauthentic; explicitly or implicitly, God can be thought of and spoken of truly and authentically only in the second person of direct address.”⁶⁸

4.2.1 Theocentricity

In a sustained practice of the Psalms, we go to God at least once every day. We approach the Lord in thanksgiving, in lament, and in all the other situations we find ourselves in. And in all these situations, we are formed to praise God,⁶⁹ an act that in the postmodern world has seen decline.

Following Brueggemann’s article “The Costly Loss of Lament,”⁷⁰ Rolf Jacobson mourns “The Costly Loss of Praise.”⁷¹ Praise is a response not only to a call to worship but to God’s action in the world. Praise paints a world where God is not only powerful but active, and it makes the pray-er look up and out of himself or herself. Praise is also both polemical and political; it is praise *for* God and praise *against* false gods:

Our God is in the heavens;
he does whatever he pleases.
Their idols are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.
They have mouths, but do not speak;
eyes, but do not see.
They have ears, but do not hear;
noses, but do not smell.
They have hands, but do not feel;
feet, but do not walk;

⁶⁸Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 14.

⁶⁹In chapter 2, I already discussed how even lament can be praise.

⁷⁰This article was touched on in chapter 2. See Walter Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (October 1986), 57-71.

⁷¹See Rolf Jacobson, “The Costly Loss of Praise,” *Theology Today* 57, no. 3 (October 2000): 375-385.

they make no sound in their throats.
Those who make them are like them;
so are all who trust in them (Ps 115:3-8).

The psalmist, in the tradition of Wisdom literature, proclaims that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps 111:10). There is a negative fear that terrifies and paralyzes, but the “fear of the Lord” here is more positive. The Hebrew noun *yirah*, which is translated as “fear of the Lord,” should be understood as respect, reverence, and wonder for the Lord or YHWH *alone*.

But in today’s world, Jacobson laments, the language of congratulations has replaced the language of praise. For example, a new baby is born into a family and the parents are often congratulated as if the gift and miracle of life were all their doing. God, the author of life, is seldom praised. Jacobson identifies the root cause of the loss of praise as epistemological in nature:

The dominant epistemological myth of our time is that of the autonomous individual: the myth that we are rugged individuals who are responsible for ourselves and our successes. In the thought-world of this myth, the autonomous self has replaced God – and all other lords – at the center of the universe. Therefore, when things go well for supposedly autonomous individuals – when a person gets a new job... or recovers from an illness, or succeeds in some endeavor – we do not praise God for that success; rather, we commend or congratulate the individual.⁷²

Many of us today are also embarrassed to praise God for specific blessings. We can give credit to God for abstractions like forgiveness or metaphorical rescue as when the psalmist says, “I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up, and did not let

⁷²Jacobson, “The Costly Loss of Praise,” 380.

my foes rejoice over me” (Ps 30:1). But the next verse we will have trouble with when meant literally: “O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.” Our scientific minds have trouble with the God who makes the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the dead come to life again – the God of the Impossible. And so we have difficulty with praise Psalms, which Brueggemann has aptly called “songs of Impossibility.”⁷³ The world becomes much poorer when it is limited only to what science allows.

“Praise that names God as the author of specific actions or blessings trespasses into territory that the autonomous self wants to preserve for itself. That is, it credits God with actions for which the self wants to take credit.”⁷⁴ With the loss of praise, the self becomes the center. But the Psalms remind us that God is supposed to be the center.⁷⁵ This is easily seen in Psalms of praise. But this is in the lament Psalms, too. Even though they are colored by complaint, laments typically begin with a cry to God and end with trust in God. Interestingly, in laments, the psalmist does not ask God to strengthen the people so that they can take matters into their own hands. No, the psalmist asks God to be the one to rise and act. Moreover, the reason for God to come to our rescue, the basis for the pray-er’s appeal, is not in the character of the psalmist but in the character of God: a

⁷³See Walter Brueggemann, “‘Impossibility’ and the Epistemology in the Faith Tradition of Abraham and Sarah (Gen 18:1-15),” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 167-88.

⁷⁴Jacobson, “The Costly Loss of Praise,” 380.

⁷⁵See Richard Clifford’s introductions to his commentaries on the Psalms, *Psalms 1-72* and *Psalms 73-150*, Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986).

noblesse oblige (God's character obliges God to act).⁷⁶ The focus of the Psalms is always God.

All of this should remind us that the focus of worship should also be God. Yes, we can feel inspired or gain new insights when we worship, but the point is not having consolation or fresh ideas. The point is to worship God. This is something which many modern and postmodern people have also forgotten. Guardini stresses this very point when he writes that liturgy “does not exist for the sake of humanity, but for the sake of God. In the liturgy, man is no longer concerned with himself; his gaze is directed towards God. In it man is not so much intended to edify himself as to contemplate God's majesty.”⁷⁷

The practice of the Psalms can help us put God right back in the center of our lives. Above, in the section on the communal aspect of the Psalms, I again took up the discussion of the buffered self which I started in chapter 1. But the buffered self is not just buffered against other people; it is also buffered against God. The dynamic of praise in the Psalms can also help “un-buffer” us against God.

In the first chapter, Charles Taylor's “maximal demand” was presented as a religious dilemma to the postmodern world: When religion emphasizes transcending our humanity, we let slip the ordinary happiness within our reach, and we miss out on the simple joys of being human. But when religion holds on too much to humanity, it must

⁷⁶Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 22.

⁷⁷Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. by Ada Lane (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1935), <http://www.sanctamissa.org/en/spirituality/the-spirit-of-the-liturgy.pdf> (accessed May 1, 2015).

contend with the horrible and the terrible in the human which we cannot just ignore, and this can be a crushing blow to our humanity. How can we hold the highest spiritual or moral aspirations for human beings while also remaining grounded in what is essential to our humanity?⁷⁸ Count how many times the words human and humanity were used in the last three sentences and see what James K. A. Smith incisively points to as the root of this predicament: anthropocentrism.⁷⁹

The Psalms can help us find a way of this dilemma. First, the Psalms are not just about “transcending our humanity.” The Psalms embrace it. One can see this in the embodiment and in the very human emotions depicted in the Psalter. In the Psalms, “the horrible and the terrible in the human” are not just wished away. But at the same time, the Psalms do not lose hope. Why? Because they are not centered on the human but on God. And this is the way out of the quandary the postmodern world finds itself in: To take ourselves out of the center and place God there again. The Psalms’ answer is through a recovery of theocentrism.

The problem with putting God in the center again is that we cannot just “undo the anthropocentric turn.”⁸⁰ We cannot simply turn back time. The Psalms again give us a way out of this conundrum: While the Psalms are theocentric, the human being is not just set aside. We must remember that in the Psalms, we dare speak to God because we know that God is always turned to us and listening to us. This is a God who allows us to

⁷⁸See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 623-640.

⁷⁹James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2014), 113.

⁸⁰C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 651.

complain like little children, who allows us to vent, and who allows us to address God in our joy, sadness, and anger. We are dust; our days are like grass (Ps 103:14-15). But still, with the Psalmist, we ask God, “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” (Ps 8:4).

The Psalms may be theocentric, but the God they reveal is not a self-centered God. This God is concerned about us. When we cry to him, God rides on a cherub and flies, coming swiftly on the wings of the wind (Ps 18:10) to deliver us – because he delights in us (Ps 18:19). This is why we can also keep on going to him at least once every day and approach him in all the situations we find ourselves in.

4.2.2 The Feeling God

“God behaves in the psalms in ways he is not allowed to behave in systematic theology.”⁸¹ The idea of the impassibility of God, that God does not feel or experience emotions, has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy.⁸² But this is not the God we meet in the Psalter. He can get angry: “Rise up, O Lord, in your anger; / lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies” (Ps 7:6). He even laughs at those who conspire against him: “He who sits in the heavens laughs; / the Lord has them in derision” (Ps 2:4). He has compassion on his chosen: “For the Lord will vindicate his people, and have compassion on his servants” (Ps 135:14). But he has hatred for his foes: “The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and his soul hates the lover of violence” (Ps 11:5). He can be saddened: “How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert” (Ps

⁸¹Sebastian Moore, as quoted by Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), EPUB, 175.9

⁸²Jason C. Whitehead, *Redeeming Fear: A Constructive Theology for Living into Hope* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 15.

78:40). But he can also be filled with happiness: “You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures for evermore” (Ps 16:11). In the last verse of Ps 16, it is hard to imagine how there can be “fullness of joy” in God’s presence if God himself is stone-cold and stoic. God in the Psalms has desires:

For the Lord has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his habitation:
“This is my resting-place for ever;
here I will reside, for I have desired it” (Ps 132:13-14).

More importantly for us, God in the Psalms desires us: “For the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself, / Israel as his own possession” (Ps 135:4).

The concept of the impassibility of God came from a view of emotions as outside forces that derail us or even enslave us. Thus, philosophers sought to protect God’s perfection by making him the “Unmoved Mover.”⁸³ With a better understanding of emotions today, it is time to rethink our ideas about God and feelings. If emotions are about what we value and how we connect, then it makes sense to think of God having feelings about us whom he values and with whom he wants to connect. Biblical scholar Harm van Grol, surveying the emotional map of God, concludes that generally, God’s feelings are relational in character and serve to qualify how he engages with his people.⁸⁴

⁸³Whitehead, *Redeeming Fear*, 15.

⁸⁴Harm van Grol, “Emotions in the Psalms,” in *Emotions from Ben Sira to Paul*, ed. Renate Egger-Wenzel and Jeremy Corley, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook 2011 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 84.

Though van Grol limits his detailed survey to the fifth book the Psalter, the particular conclusion cited above can be seen in the other four books as well.

Jason C. Whitehead, a clinical social worker and minister who studies religion and psychology, draws on process theology and proposes to replace impassibility with “empath-ability.” He writes,

To see God as “empathically-able” we must understand the meaning of empathy. Simply put, empathy is the ability to put yourself in another’s shoes and “get” what they are feeling or experiencing. ... To say that God is empathic is to believe in God’s ability to experience the suffering, joy, pain, anger, hurt, fear, happiness that humans experience on a daily basis. It is to call God intimately immanent, yet at the same time that immanence is shared throughout all of humanity and the world.⁸⁵

For professor of pastoral care and counseling Carrie Doehring, empathy is “making a connection with another person by experiencing what it is like to be that person, and... maintaining separation from the other person by being aware of one’s own feelings and thoughts.”⁸⁶ This definition allows God to be closely connected with us and yet without being at any risk of manipulation by us.

This is a God we can keep on approaching every day and experience intimacy with. The feeling God is the God we encounter in the practice of the Psalms and the God who can keep us motivated in this practice. Van Grol writes:

[God’s emotions] give God’s attitude, actions, and preferences a natural character. They make him recognizable to the reader. Moreover, they give the reader entry to his or her emotions. When the reader should be emotional with God, God should be emotional with the reader. Finally, some of God’s emotions are there to participate in them. His triumph is our triumph.⁸⁷

⁸⁵Whitehead, *Redeeming Fear*, 16-17.

⁸⁶Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 18.

⁸⁷van Grol, “Emotions in the Psalms,” 98.

Why would we, after all, engage with someone whose sorrows and joys we cannot identify with or someone who cannot be one with us in our own sorrows or joys? But this God is not just swallowed up by our emotions. There is an independence in him because he is God. Our motivations in relating with God can be purified by knowing we cannot control God.

4.2.3 The Mysterious and Familiar God

Continuing the theme of the God who is near yet far, let us look at the forms, or the vessels, into which the Psalms pour our prayers to God. There is no unanimity among scholars when classifying the Psalms under genres, but there is, more or less, a general trend that can be followed. Based primarily on their form, more than half of the Psalms can be categorized under one of three major types: hymns, laments (individual and communal), and songs of thanksgiving. The other Psalms can be grouped according to their subjects or topics (e.g., enthronement Psalms, royal Psalms, wisdom Psalms, *torah* Psalms, and so on.)⁸⁸

The hymns (Pss 8, 29, 33, 47, 66:1-12, 93, 95-100, 103-105, 107, 111, 113, 114, 117, 135, 136, and 145-150, to name some) follow a simple structure: Beginning with a call to worship, these Psalms then continue with an invitation to praise that is often repeated in the final verse. The body of the hymn gives the bases for praising God and is normally introduced by a “because” or “for” clause.

⁸⁸Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, 20-26. I follow Clifford’s categorizations here.

Laments (Pss 3-7, 9-10, 13-14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27:7-14, 28, 31, 35-36, 38-39, 41-43, 51, 53-54, 56, 57, 59, 61, 63, 64, 69-71, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 130, and 139-143 are for the individual; Pss 44, 60, 74, 77, 79-80, 83, 85, 89, 90, 94, 123, 126 are communal) generally begin with a cry to the Lord, continue with a complaint that describes a problem (e.g., sickness, injustice, or the treachery of former friends), affirm trust in God, petition the Lord for rescue or the downfall of one's enemies, and conclude with statements of praise. Because the main purpose of these Psalms is to persuade God to act in favor of the psalmist, it is perhaps more appropriate to call them petitions rather than laments.⁸⁹

Songs of individual thanksgiving (Pss 18, 21, 30, 32, 34, 40:1-10, 41, 92, 108, 111, 116, 118, 138) can be seen as continuations of individual laments because they describe God's response to a pray-er's cries for help and proclaim the Lord's salvific acts to others – the Old Testament way of giving thanks to God (“I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord,” as Ps 40:9 declares).

Form criticism allows us to identify the type of a Psalm even from just the first few verses. The genres function like an “early warning system” or a way to put numbers on doors in what can seem like a labyrinthine building of one hundred and fifty apartments.⁹⁰ But the point of form criticism is not just the categorization of Psalms. Genres give us an entry point, but once we get our foot in the door, we still have much to

⁸⁹Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, 21. To keep in line with majority of Psalm scholars, this paper will continue referring to these Psalms as laments.

⁹⁰I am indebted to Richard Clifford for these two metaphors.

do to go deeper into the Psalms.⁹¹ And what do the genres and the structures which help us identify them disclose to us about God when we make use of them in practice?

The Psalms, like much of ancient literature and the prayers of long ago, are compositions of convention. The structures they typically follow reveal a kind of “protocol” for dealing with the Divine. The practice of praying the Psalms at least once every day can allow us to develop a certain closeness with God. While there are benefits to seeing God as an intimate friend as many spiritualities today promote, the protocol of the Psalms reminds us that we cannot just treat the Lord like a bosom buddy. God is still infinitely Other: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord” (Isa 55:8), and Ps 40:5 echoes, “Your thoughts are very deep!” Protocol reminds us that God is different from us, but again, we should not think that the Lord is cold and distant to us. After all, as the psalmists testify, the Lord listens to us – or else, the psalmists would not even compose the Psalms in the first place.

The practice of the Psalms invites us to know that God is both near and far, familiar and strange. Daily contact with God leads to intimacy, but greater intimacy opens us up to his deeper mystery. That the Psalms present a God who resists conceptual uniformity beckons us to explore his mysteriousness further.

In Ps 95 and 67, two of the four invitational Psalms used to begin the Liturgy of the Hours every day, we are called to worship God: “Come, let us sing to the Lord / and shout with joy to the Rock who saves us. / Let us approach him with praise and

⁹¹For more on the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of a form critical approach, see Bellinger “Psalms and the Question of Genre” (cited previously) and Anthony F. Campbell, “Form Criticism’s Future,” in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 15-31.

thanksgiving / and sing joyful songs to the Lord” (Ps 95:1-2); “Let the peoples praise you, O God; / let all the peoples praise you” (Ps 67:3,5).⁹² Ps 24, a third invitatory option, summons us to pray: “O gates, lift high your heads; / grow higher, ancient doors. / Let him enter, the king of glory” (Ps 24:7). Every day, we are asked to enlarge the doorways of our expectations and hopes to let the king of glory in. We open our minds and hearts and prepare to welcome a God who becomes bigger and bigger every day. If we alternate Ps 24 with Ps 100, a fourth invitatory option, the image of the ever mysterious God is balanced with the God who wants us to know him: “Know that he, the Lord, is God. / He made us, we belong to him, / we are his people, the sheep of his flock” (Ps 100:3). And this is the point of worship to which all the invitatory Psalms call us – to realize that God is ever greater but also ever closer.

4.3 AN ANTHROPOLOGY FROM A PRACTICE OF THE PSALMS

What becomes clear when one begins to engage the psalms in a profound way – and the Benedictines insist that praying them communally, every day, is a good place to start – is that it can come to seem as if the psalms are reading and writing us. This concept comes from an ancient understanding, derived from the Hebrew word for praise, *tehillah*, that, in the words of the Benedictine Damasus Winzen, “comes from *hallal* which does not only mean ‘to praise’ but primarily means ‘to radiate’ or ‘to reflect.’” He states that “the medieval Jewish poet Jehuda Halevi expressed beautifully the spirit of the Psalter when he said: ‘Look on the glories of God, and awaken the glory in thee.’”⁹³

⁹²In this paragraph, I use the Grail translation of the Psalms which is used in the Liturgy of the Hours.

⁹³Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, 203.1.

Seeing God in the Psalms can allow us to see ourselves better – even if it is not always glory that we see but our flaws and foibles, too.

4.3.1 Humanity in Grays / Grace

The words of the Psalms allow us to confront ourselves. We discover sin in our hearts (Ps 36:1), but God can also incline our hearts to him (Ps 119:36). Though evil can dwell in our hearts (Ps 28:3), the *torah* of the Lord can dwell within them also (Ps 37:31). Kraus says that “[i]n the entire Bible, Old and New Testaments, there is hardly any group of texts so well-suited for the study of aspects of anthropology as the Psalms.”⁹⁴ Whom we find though is not “the eternally unchanging human” but again, as von Rad has said, Israel before God⁹⁵ – humanity growing as we journey with and towards God.

In chapter 3, we already glimpsed certain aspects of the human being: We are embodied. We are emotional. We are attuned to understand through images. And we are formed by encounters with God and others. These aspects I described as extra-rational. But lest we emphasize these too much – the other extreme of the criticism against Jack Mezirow’s transformative learning theory – we must not forget that we are rational beings also. The Psalms, as said in chapter 2, accompany us as we go through the transformation of our perspectives. They can provide us with encouragement or challenge as we critically work out our silent assumptions.

The heart in the Psalms is where thinking (see Ps 10:6) and planning (see Ps 20:4) take place. But as Kraus cautions, “What the heart thinks and plans does not lie at the

⁹⁴Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 143.

⁹⁵Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 143.

surface of human existence. The process of reflection, planning, and deciding takes place in hidden depths. No one is able to penetrate to the final depths of his or her own heart. Yahweh alone can try the ‘hearts and minds’”⁹⁶ (see Pss 7:9, 17:3, 26:2). God knows the secrets of our hearts (Ps 44:21), and as Ps 139 proclaims, no one knows us like God. Maybe this can also motivate us to turn to him more in praying the Psalms.

4.3.2 People of Protocol

Above, I explored what the protocol of the Psalms can tell us about God. This can also tell us something about humanity. The protocol of the Psalms reveals not just a structure we must follow but a process which we are invited to undergo. In chapter 1, it was already pointed out how the Psalms of lament allow us to go through a process so that from crying out to God, we can somehow find ourselves praising him. We move from articulating our hurt and anger, to submitting them to God, and then to relinquishing them. But functionally and experientially, there can be no relinquishment or letting go without the prior voicing out and surrendering in faith. And only after relinquishment can there be praise.

The protocol of the Psalms also extends our encounter with the Lord. Without the words of the Psalms, what would we say after “Thank you” or “I need this”? We need time in order to process things, to plumb depths rather than just skim surfaces. This also gives us a glimpse into God’s character according to the Psalms: The Lord must be a God who wants to spend time with us. Are we creatures who also desire to spend time with our Creator? Today, “spending time” must be seen again not as a waste but as a gift both

⁹⁶Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 145.

when given and received. This is very important for us who are not used to waiting anymore. We want things done in an instant. The Psalms tell us that we cannot just “fast forward” to the end. There are no shortcuts. We have to be patient and relearn how to relish and savor. Norris writes, “If the psalm doesn’t offer an answer, it allows us to dwell on the question.”⁹⁷ And I might add, in the Psalms, we dwell on them with God.

4.3.3 People in Need

In the practice of the Psalms, we find ourselves complaining to God and presenting to him our petitions in the Psalms of lament. This can slowly help us realize our profound need for God. This need is not just in the lament Psalms but also in the Psalms of praise and thanksgiving. In these, there is no language of self-abasement; instead, reliance on God is celebrated. God is our refuge and our strength (Ps 46:1), and this we sing aloud and shout with joy (Ps 81:1). Dignity *and* dependence (and, not despite) are part and parcel of the human condition.⁹⁸

Our need for God is also seen in the use of the word *nepes* in the Psalms. Often translated as soul, *nepes* in its basic meaning points to the throat area, the center of the body in the Jewish imagination because it is where the signs of life – breathing, the heartbeat – are most palpable. When we lift up our *nepes* to God (in Ps 25:1, for example), we are admitting our reliance on God, a confession that involves the risk of

⁹⁷Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, 201.2.

⁹⁸See Brown, *The Psalms*, 2941-2942, 3195-3196, 3211.

being spurned. This is why such an admission is immediately followed by a plea: “Do not let me be put to shame” (Ps 25:2).⁹⁹

In *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, theologian Hans Walter Wolff identifies the *nepes* with “Needy Man.” The throat is the organ that takes in food. Even its deeper needs, in the end, can only be satisfied by God: “For he satisfies the thirsty *nepes*, / and the hungry *nepes* he fills with good things” (Ps 107:9, Wolff’s translation).¹⁰⁰

We have a need for God, and we also need to speak of this with him and with others. Von Rad identifies the two fundamental complexes of traditions in the Old Testament as Israel becoming God’s people and receiving the Promised Land (as we read in the Hexateuch) and the choice of David (as the fulcrum for the “historical” presentation of the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler). Von Rad sees the Psalms as hinging on these two complexes also:

When these saving acts had happened to her, Israel did not keep silent: not only did she repeatedly take up her pen to recall these acts of Jahweh to her mind in historical documents, but she also addressed Jahweh in a wholly personal way. She offered praise to him, and asked him questions, and complained to him about all her sufferings, for Jahweh had not chosen his people as a mere dumb object of his will in history, but for converse with him.¹⁰¹

We may disagree with von Rad’s foci regarding Israel’s history, but what is undeniable, as we see from the Psalter, is that Israel spoke to God about what was happening to her. And God allowed Israel to speak. This was not a dialogue between

⁹⁹See Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, 138.

¹⁰⁰See Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974), 10-25.

¹⁰¹von Rad, *Old Testament Theology I*, 355.

equal partners, but though the Lord is high, he still regards the lowly (Ps 138:6).¹⁰² We, today, must speak also with God and with others. In our speaking, just as Israel was defined as a people before God, we will also discover who we are.

4.4 ETHICS FROM A PRACTICE OF THE PSALMS

In this chapter, I have been trying to discern a theology, anthropology, and ethics from a practice of the Psalms. It is impossible though to discuss these three topics independently of each other – as can be seen above, with ethical aspects flowing from what has been said about God and about us. Our vision of God should affect our vision of the human being. For Kraus, “anthropology must have a theological orientation, that is to say, it must investigate how man in Israel is seen in the presence of God.”¹⁰³ And any anthropology and theology must also have an ethical dimension. How we see God and how we see ourselves cannot be separated from what we should do in response to him. For example, in the section on inspiration, we met a God who entered whatever process people were in and related with them there. This is the God we meet in the Psalms, too. This makes a demand on us that we must also be people who should respect the processes of people and relate with them as they are.

4.4.1 Responding to and Imitating God

¹⁰²See Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 11-12.

¹⁰³Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 143.

In the Psalms, we meet a God who is attentive to the cries of the poor. The “poor” are those who find themselves helpless and in need. They are “above all those who are persecuted, slandered, and falsely accused, who are not able to defend themselves against the superior power of their foes. They flee to Yahweh for refuge and in the sanctuary present their lost cause to Yahweh, the righteous judge.”¹⁰⁴ The “wicked” think that God has forgotten the poor, that he has hidden his face and will never see how the poor are ambushed, seized, and dragged (see Ps 10:2, 8-11). But God always remembers the oppressed, hears the needy and does not despise his own who are in bonds (see Pss 9:18, 10:12, 35:10, 69:32-33). This is not just the belief of the psalmist but something proven by experience – or else, why would the psalmist continue to turn to God? The practice of the Psalms invites the pray-er today to see and experience the same divine help.

“For ancient Israel, the basic motive for ethical action of a particular kind is the obligation to respond to the activity of God on her behalf.”¹⁰⁵ A practice of the Psalms does not just drill God’s providence into our minds with the repetition of words. A practice of the Psalms can help us become more aware of how God responds to us in our need. For example, when we witness the resolution of a problem and, shortly after, pray the Psalms, we will be better able to connect what happened to us and God’s actions in our lives. As Jacobson suggests above, this can move us from a language of congratulations to a language of praise. If we pray a Psalm of thanksgiving, then we may be moved to feel more grateful to God for the “miracle” we experienced. “Miracle” here is defined not as something that breaks the laws of science but as something that shows

¹⁰⁴Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 151.

¹⁰⁵Verne H. Fletcher, “The Shape of Old Testament Ethics,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24, no. 1 (1971): 52.

God's activity. Seeing "miracles" in the everyday can prove to be challenging to the modern mind dominated by the epistemological myth of the autonomous individual – as Jacobson warns above – but a practice of the Psalms can slowly dispose us to this. Now, if we believe in the God of the "poor" – moreover, if we have experienced and seen how this God has cared for us when we found ourselves "poor," helpless, and in need – then in response to this God's actions, we must constantly ask who today are the "poor." Whose cries must God be listening to – the financially disadvantaged who find themselves more oppressed by labor laws that work against them, the marginalized who are pushed farther out into the peripheries because no one speaks for them, the forgotten people of society who are seen only as parasites draining the economy? What would God want us to do for them?

God's actions in the Psalms serve as a model for the king. In Ps 72:1-2, the psalmist prays:

Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.
May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.

If the king will rule and judge God's people, it should be with God's justice and God's righteousness. It is not only the king who should personify God's characteristics. From the very beginning of the Psalter, it is clear that this is what the righteous do – and it is part of the reason why they are happy and blessed:

Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the *torah* of the Lord,

and on his *torah* they meditate day and night (Ps 1:1-2).

The righteous meditate on the instruction and words of the Lord as presented in the Psalms (see chapter 1 for an explanation of this interpretation of *torah*), and they come to imbibe the words of the Lord into their own character.¹⁰⁶

In the Psalms, God is a God of *hesed*, of steadfast love. Of the 245 times that the word *hesed* occurs in the Old Testament, more than half, 127 to be exact, are in the Psalter. “If the imitation of God is a significant principle in the ethics of the Psalms, it is to be expected that humans should also exhibit *hesed*.”¹⁰⁷ However, the word *hesed* itself is rarely predicated of humans in the Psalms.¹⁰⁸ Gordon Wenham though points out that occurrences of the word *hasid*, the adjective derived from *hesed*, are quite concentrated in the Psalms. Of the thirty-two times *hasid* appears in the Old Testament, twenty-five are in the Psalter. It is easy to miss this in the Psalms because *hasid* is variably translated as merciful, godly, kind, and holy. The *hasidim* in Pss 30:4, 31:23, 37:28, 50:5, 149:5 are depicted as the “faithful ones” or the “faithful saints” in some church hymns. Ps 18:25 shows how the Lord’s *hesed* is reflected in the *hasid*: “With the merciful [Wenham’s translation of *hasid*], you [God] show yourself merciful [Wenham’s translation of *tithassad*, (note the common *hsd* root)]. This is a relationship that goes beyond reciprocity and connotes rootedness.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶See Gordon J. Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013) Kindle edition, locations 2146-2190.

¹⁰⁷Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed*, 2193-2194.

¹⁰⁸The lone example is in Ps 109:16, and here it is presented negatively – the wicked man does not remember to show *hesed*.

¹⁰⁹See Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed*, 2253-2269.

The First Letter of John asserts that we love because God first loved us (1 Jn 4:19). Our ability to love and show *hesed* is preceded by, grounded in, and made possible by God's love, God's *hesed*. God's acts do not merely inspire a response from us; they create the ability for us to respond. They are "both the reason and the power for the response."¹¹⁰ The practice of the Psalms can help us get more in touch with this reason and power. Praying the Psalter can challenge, encourage, and inspire us to imitate God, and the intimacy with God that the practice of the Psalms can help develop in us can enable, support, and sustain us in our ethical action.

4.5 LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

In this chapter, I sketched a theology, anthropology, and ethics that come from a practice of the Psalms: What visions of God, the human person, and the proper response to God arise when we have a sustained and committed engagement of the Psalms? Many components of my answers to this question flow from the view of inspiration presented in the first part of this chapter – the God who journeys with us, people who are members of a community, and how we should listen to the sense of faith in us and in others. The theological, anthropological, and ethical visions presented here are also some of the possible new orientations the Psalms can lead us to. If we let the Psalms accompany us through the different seasons of our lives, these orientations can challenge our existing ones and open our eyes to more fruitful paradigms.

¹¹⁰See Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) Kindle edition, locations 406-463.

Now that we have a clearer view of how the Psalms teach from chapters 2 and 3 and what the Psalms teach in chapter 4, we are better equipped to answer the question, “How, in practice, do we capitalize on how the Psalms teach?”

5.0 “TEACH ME WISDOM IN MY SECRET HEART” (PS 51:6): HOW WE CAN PRACTICE THE PSALMS IN A TRANSFORMATIVE WAY

In the previous chapter, we already heard Hans-Joachim Kraus caution us that “[w]hat the heart thinks and plans does not lie at the surface of human existence. The process of reflection, planning, and deciding takes place in hidden depths. No one is able to penetrate to the final depths of his or her own heart.”¹ The psalmists know that Yahweh alone can plumb our hearts (Pss 7:9, 17:3, 26:2). God may be able to see us clearly and discern our thoughts wherever they are hidden as Ps 139 professes, but our own thinking is not always transparent to us.

Psychologists Charles G. Lord, Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper support what Kraus has found in the Psalms. We do not just take in information, process it, and judge objectively from the evidence before us. We do not always learn in rational way. Our preconceptions and vague impressions – our implicit assumptions, as transformative learning (TL) theorists have termed them – greatly influence our decisions and, even before these are made, our evaluation of the data we are given.² Part of the process of TL is making our implicit assumptions explicit and critically reflecting on them, a process which can begin when an experience is so jarring, so disorienting, that we cannot deny

¹Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, trans. Keith Crim (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 145.

²See Charles G. Lord, Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper, “Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: The Effects of Prior Theories on Subsequently Considered Evidence,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37, no. 11 (1979), 2098-2109.

how it does not confirm our present worldview anymore. While we can keep on striving to make our implicit assumptions explicit, it seems naïve and overly optimistic to expect that there will be a point when we are aware of all our preconceptions and prejudices. To echo Kraus, there will always be something hiding in the deepest parts of our hearts.

Gadamer's philosophy is in line with Kraus' insight and the findings of Lord, Ross, and Lepper. In the "miracle of understanding," we cannot really discern in advance what assumptions are hindrances and what assumptions will ultimately help us see farther. This is why instead of outlining the process of how we understand, Gadamer only tries to clarify the "conditions of possibility" of understanding.³

Jack Mezirow's list of the phases of TL has been mistaken as a step-by-step procedure of how transformation takes place. But as discussed in chapter 2, not all of these phases have to be present nor must they be undergone sequentially. These phases which are less linear and more "recursive, evolving, and spiraling in nature"⁴ can also be seen as only the conditions which can lead to transformation and which make transformation possible.

In the introduction, I said that in answering the question "How do the Psalms teach?" I will also refrain from outlining a procedure and only identify the conditions for learning which the Psalms make possible. This is what I tried to do in the previous chapters. From the preceding reflections, we can say that the Psalms teach through their

³Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 295.

⁴Edward W. Taylor, "Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory," in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 290.

words, but it is when the words are repeated in sustained practice that a vision of God, humans, and the relationship between God and his people really emerges. It is also in engaging the Psalms in a committed way that they are able to accompany us through the process of orientation—disorientation—new-orientation and provide a holding environment that both supports and challenges. The Psalms are also able to aid us in our transformation by giving us access to our bodies, to emotions, to images, and to encounters with God and the community. These four facets can help in making us more aware of our implicit assumptions and our present modes of thinking when what they bring to our attention is reflected on and we ask questions of why and how. This can then lead us to new paradigms and broader horizons. Now, after seeing how the Psalms can make transformation possible, how do we capitalize on these “conditions of possibility” in practice? How do we let the inspired words of the Psalms, how do we let God, “teach us wisdom in our secret hearts” (Ps 51:6) in the ways not just hidden to others but also hidden to us?⁵ In practice, how can we capitalize on the conditions made possible by the Psalms?

⁵“You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart,” petitions the psalmist in Ps 51:6. If there is one thing scholars agree on regarding this verse, it is that the Hebrew here is uncertain.

Mitchell Dahood translates this verse as “Since you indeed prefer truth to both cleverness (*tūḥōt*) and secret lore (*sātūm*), teach me Wisdom!” Dahood connects the obscure word *tūḥōt* with the name of the Egyptian god of knowledge, Thoth, “the clever-minded one.” Because of its possible Egyptian root, *tūḥōt* or cleverness has a pejorative connotation for him. *Sātūm*, which he translates as secret lore, Dahood relates Ezek 28:3: “You are indeed wiser than Daniel; no secret [lore] (*sātūm*) is hidden from you.” Daniel here is not the prophet for which the Book of Daniel is named. According to the Ras Shamra tablets, Daniel is a Canaanite sage, and this suggests that *sātūm* refers to Canaanite secret magical arts. Dahood then sees in this verse a contrast between the “true Wisdom” of the Israelites and the “cleverness” of the Egyptian wizards as well as the secret magic of the Canaanites. (See Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 17 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 1-5.)

Marvin Tate translates Ps 51:6 as “Though you wanted faithfulness even in the womb (*tūḥōt*), and while in the uterus (*sātūm*) you caused me to know wisdom.” Tate defends this translation by leaning on the Talmudic tradition that the *Torah* was taught to the person while still an embryo in the womb, but it was forgotten at birth. He admits though that the verse is far too uncertain for any confidence in any

5.1 DWELLING ON THE WORDS

5.1.1 Memory

The Psalms teach us through their words, but we cannot just skim them and expect to be transformed. We need to dwell on the words – an exercise that people today with short attention spans made even shorter by the consumption of modern media do not always find easy. Sustained engagement with the Psalms in practice disposes one to remember certain passages, if not whole Psalms. There are also aids in the Psalms that lend themselves to being memorized – e.g., the acrostic structures of Pss 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119 and 145 and the parallelism that characterizes Hebrew poetry. Beyond passively remembering verses, to help us dwell on the words, perhaps we can try actively memorizing the Psalms in practice.

In this age when one, with a few keystrokes or even a voice command, can search for and, depending on the speed of one's connection to the Internet, almost instantly have

interpretation. In his commentary, Tate focuses on faithfulness (or truth) and wisdom. What is usually translated as truth, *'emet*, Tate renders as faithfulness to stress the reliability and the relationship facets of this word rather than just an abstract idea of truth. At the core of *'emet* is the essential quality of reliability which is necessary for a proper relationship with God. Though wisdom as a concept is elusive, it is generally seen as the coping ability to deal with those skills, temptations, responsibilities, and sufferings which are common to human life in ways that enhance the performance of healthy and successful living. Wisdom can also be understood as the art of succeeding in life, practical knowledge based on experience, or even an intellectual tradition. (See Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 3-20.)

In the NRSV translation, the word heart is added (though it is not in the Hebrew), to make “secret heart” (*sātūm*) better parallel with “inward being” (*tūhōt*). Based on the NRSV translation and emboldened by the uncertainty in this verse, I would like to hazard a reading that sees Ps 51:6 as a petition for wisdom, for transformative light, that comes in a way that is not fully transparent to us.

any text that has been digitized at one's fingertips, does memorizing Scripture still have value?

Scripture scholar Gordon Wenham, following theologian Paul Griffiths, laments how people today read in a consumerist fashion: "You read what you like, read when you like, and accept what you like in what you read. Then you discard what you have just read and move on to read something else."⁶ Sadly, and I speak now from my own experience and practice, this is how many pray the Liturgy of the Hours – going through the words just to get through them, and many times not finding anything that they like in them at all. This is not real engagement with the Psalms.

Consumerist reading spits out what does not catch the fancy of the consumer. In contrast, Paul Griffiths presents the practice of religious reading and describes this activity using metaphors of ruminating and eating, following the works of Bernard of Clairvaux (who says Scripture is tasty matter that fattens the stomach) and Anselm of Canterbury (who urges us to "[c]hew the honeycomb of [Christ's] words, suck their flavor, which is more pleasing than honey, swallow their health-giving sweetness" and to "[c]hew by thinking, suck by understanding, swallow by loving and rejoicing"). Consumerist reading discards; religious reading digests and lets the text enter the self more deeply. This attitude comes from a faith in the inexhaustibility of the text when allowed to dialogue with life, and the God animating the text and the very same life.⁷

⁶See Gordon J. Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013) Kindle edition, locations 237-238.

⁷For a more detailed discussion and for the quotations cited above, see Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 40-46.

Whether the text is sweet in our mouths and remains so (as in Ezek 3:1-3) or it becomes bitter in our stomachs (as in Rev 10:9-10), religious reading contends with the text and does not let it go until, like Jacob wrestling with the angel (Gen 32:24-32), it blesses the reader. Again, wrestling with the text over and over in prayer can passively result in memorization. But today, actively trying to memorize a text through constant repetition can help us dwell on the text and lessen the temptation to just discard it.

For Griffiths,

[a] memorized work (like a lover, a friend, a spouse, a child) has entered into the fabric of its possessor's intellectual and emotional life in a way that makes deep claims upon that life, claims that can only be ignored with effort and deliberation. Just as spouses make claims upon each other that can only be ignored or removed with pain and intentional action in divorce, so also memorized works are present and efficacious until uprooted by forgetfulness or deliberate erasure. In this they differ in degree, and probably also in kind, from works that have been read only as a consumerist reader reads. Those works sit inert upon the shelf, usually forgotten, and remembered, if remembered at all, not for their flavor and fabric, but for their title and place of publication. The claims of such works are minimal and strictly instrumental; the claims of memorized works are much greater and are properly moral.⁸

That the Psalms were sung also give us a clue as to how the Israelites might have been able to memorize them. The emotionality of the Psalms also make it easier to commit them to memory. "Experiments in humans and animals indicate an advantage in memory for emotional as compared with neutral items."⁹ If the Psalms lend themselves to being memorized, it is not that far-fetched to think that maybe they Psalms were intended

⁸Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, 47. For Griffiths' treatment of the importance of memorization, see Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, 46-48.

⁹Mark P. Richardson, Bryan A. Strange, and Raymond J. Dolan, "Encoding of Emotional Memories Depends on Amygdala and Hippocampus and Their Interactions," *Nature Neuroscience* 7, no. 3 (March 2004), 278.

to be memorized.¹⁰ Let us also remember that the Psalms were composed during a time when writing materials and writing itself was not that common. Other ancient texts like Homer's poems were memorized. Abridged versions of Greek classics were produced in olden times so that ordinary people could memorize them. In 100 C.E. in India, anthologies of the Buddhist scriptures were compiled for the same reason.¹¹ Why not the Psalms? As Pss 23:6, 27:4-5, and 61:1-4 attest, in the Psalter, dwelling in the temple is an object of great desire. Today, having the text of certain Psalms memorized can be our way of dwelling in the temple.

5.1.2 Translation

Another way of enlarging our capacity to dwell on the text is by translating them. This applies not only to those who know Hebrew but to those who know two or three languages or dialects as many people do in the Philippines. Most Filipinos who have graduated from high school can speak and read English. Those who live in the Greater Manila Area, the environs of the capital, must know Tagalog. And if one originated from a province outside the National Capital Region, one's mother tongue would be a dialect like Bisaya, Bicolano, or Ilocano. Translating a Psalm from one language to another, whether one's philosophy is that of formal or dynamic equivalence, would necessitate spending time on individual words to be able to decide what captures it best.

Retreat master and spiritual director Blaise Arminjon gives us an example of the type of reflection that can happen in translation, as one decides whether "weaned child"

¹⁰That the Psalms were intended to be memorized is also the opinion of Wenham (see Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed*, 234-235).

¹¹See Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed*, 175-213.

or “contented child” is the better equivalent for *kaggamul* in Ps 131:2 (“But I have calmed and quieted my soul, [like a / even as a] *kaggamul* with its mother”):

Both translations are possible. Those who choose to translate “an infant who is weaned” argue that the infant who has been weaned no longer makes demands, does not yearn for the mother’s breast and thus gives up a certain possessiveness and greed. Hence, the infant might then be likened to one who no longer depends on the sweetness of sensible consolation. It is something like a stage on the path toward adulthood. Who could ask for more?

Nevertheless, to understand “an infant who is content” seems preferable. The baby who is content is also gratified and rests in the arms of the mother but is not fully weaned for all that. Weaning results in a certain well-defined separation from the mother's breast. But the child presupposed in Psalm 131, while certainly nourished to the full, is not expecting to be permanently deprived of the mother’s milk. He still desires to be fed; he wants to remain always with God like a little one being nourished and sustained by him. ... The Psalmist has no notion of being self-sufficient or of going on with his life all alone. Though content with God, he continues to yearn for him just the same, and to depend on him for life itself.¹²

Arminjon may be inclined towards “contented,” but this may be the better translation only for those who are more mature in the spiritual path. For young people, for those who are just discovering their independence from their parents, “weaned” may speak to them more. One must first explore and experience the forward movement and the drawbacks of independence before one can fully appreciate the wisdom and truth of dependence. Translating one Psalm is not a once-and-for-all type of activity but one that needs to be revisited multiple times during one’s life. Maybe dependence is not the final word and the person who prays with Ps 131 will find a translation for *kaggamul* that will speak of interdependence. As one grows older, one’s understanding of a Psalm may

¹²Blaise Arminjon, *Remembering Your Deeds: The Psalms and the Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Francis C. Brennan (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 5-6.

change. One's translations, if kept in a journal then compared later on, can also help chart one's transformations and one's journey.

The words of the Psalms already reveal images of God, the human person, and our relationship. But when the words of the Psalms are repeated in sustained practice *throughout one's life*, a multi-faceted vision of God, the human person, and our relationship is ingrained and at the same time allowed to evolve and deepen even more. Practice inculcates a *habitus* that allows us to dwell on the Psalms not only for certain discrete periods of time but constantly, even when we are not consciously practicing the Psalms. In practice, we might also discover visions of God and human being that we would not be able to see except in practice. To capitalize on the possibilities the Psalms give us, it is important to engage the Psalter in committed practice.

5.2 EMBODIED PRACTICE

The Psalms give us access to the body's way of knowing not only through words which invoke the physical but through actual bodily movements. When the Psalms talk of lifting up our hands (Pss 28:2; 134:1-3), clapping (Pss 47:1; 98:8), and dancing with timbrel and lyre (Pss 149:3,4; 150:4), perhaps it would be good to really lift up our hands, clap, and dance. As I consider the congregations I minister to in Boston, Massachusetts, I realize how difficult it would be to get them moving during worship. What can perhaps help is if we form the faithful to worship with their bodies as children. The youth may be more open to a more active style of praising God, and hopefully, they will bring this with them as they grow older.

There are also certain Psalms that make more sense when they are embodied in action. Ps 95, one of the invitatory Psalms suggested in the Liturgy of the Hours, has struck me as strange for the longest time. It ends with God saying:

For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, “They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they do not regard my ways.”
Therefore in my anger I swore,
“They shall not enter my rest.”

Why would we want to begin our daily prayer with this? The answer becomes clear when we consider that Ps 95 is an enthronement Psalm probably sung as the people were entering the temple. The last line then has an ironic flavor: “God said we would not enter into his rest (and he rests in the temple), but here we are! God is so good to us!” And this is why we can begin our daily prayer with Ps 95. One need not know the background of Ps 95 to appreciate this if instead of sitting down and reading it, we had it memorized and said it as we walked to the chapel to begin our prayer. In Catholic elementary schools, instead of just herding children silently to the chapel for liturgy, we can lead them in this Psalm as we all process to the place of worship – maybe even with clapping and cymbals.

I volunteer at a Catholic nursing home in Cambridge. There is one thing I have noticed with the residents there who have been devout Catholics all their lives. Even in the advanced stages of Alzheimer’s disease, when mental memory fades away, the body retains certain memories. On Good Friday, during the veneration of the cross, when the crucifix is brought to those suffering from dementia, their lips automatically purse, and the caregivers take that as the signal that the patients want to kiss the feet of Jesus. Praying the Psalms with the body can give us access to this type of physical knowing and remembering.

5.3 EMOTIVE PRACTICE

In Ps 24, there seems to be a question and answer between an officiant and the people in verses 3 to 10. In verse 8, it is not hard to imagine a leader asking, “Who is the King of glory?” and the people chanting, “The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle!” We can catch a glimpse of this possible original *Sitz im Leben* today when we pray this Psalm antiphonally. But when we do, we usually do so without much emotion. Can we not pray this as we cheer loudly and proudly in sporting events: “Who’s number 1?” “We’re number 1!”

Again, I cannot see the congregations I minister to in Boston shouting in church. It would be hard to get them to emote with the Psalms – to be angry, to complain with bitterness, to weep in sadness, and to jump for joy. Surveys have shown that, from Brazil to Beijing, it is the emotionally “hot” forms of religion that are doing better today in the world. Even in increasingly secular Europe, religions that engage feelings rather than just the intellect are attracting converts.¹³ One of the advantages of praying the Psalms is their emotionality. How can we capitalize on this today?

One way might be through song. A well-composed melody can stir up emotions as we sing even without our being overly dramatic. In the Philippines, we are blessed with a young group of Jesuit composers, Fr. Manoling Francisco and Fr. Arnel Aquino just to name two, who have brought a significant number of the Psalms to music. One

¹³Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

comment though about their compositions is that they tend to be slow and sentimental.

Perhaps this is because of the Filipino proclivity for the *kundiman* type of melody.

Kundimans are traditional love songs characterized by smooth, flowing, and dramatic movements; they are very appropriate for laments. While the melodies of Francisco and Aquino definitely resonate with Filipinos, our composers must also be challenged to bring more lilt and lift to their songs to heighten the joy of some of the Psalms.

Singing the Psalms, because we have to respect their meter and rhythm, can also slow us down and aid in our dwelling on the words. Moreover, singing the Psalms can remind us that there are some things we want to express that cannot be given justice by spoken prose. We need poetry set to music. We lower our voices or try to hit higher pitches because we know that what we are dealing with lies in a totally different key, in a different level – deeper and at the same time transcendent. David Ford has commented:

What does [singing] do with the crucial Christian medium of words? It does with them what praise aims to do with the whole of reality: it takes them up into a transformed, heightened expression, yet without at all taking away their ordinary meaning. Language itself is transcended and its delights and power are intensified, and at the same time, those who join in are bound together more strongly. ... The social power of music in general (for good or ill) is well known, and it moves at levels and in ways that nothing else can.¹⁴

Singing, an embodied activity, allows us to grasp the words more and also go beyond them. Singing, too, helps us get more in touch with our emotions as well as the community around us.

¹⁴David F. Ford and Daniel W. Hardy, *Living in Praise: Worshipping and Knowing God*, rev. ed. (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 2005), 19.

5.4 IMAGINATION IN PRACTICE

The images in the Psalms go beyond words, and so when we dwell on them, we should also go beyond the words. We should imagine the sights of verdant pastures as well as their smells, the sound of running streams as well as the taste of the cool fresh water on our tongues. Pausing to savor these images with our imagination can also help us enter more deeply into the Psalms. Using our imagination in this way is actually an important part of Ignatian contemplation.

5.4.1 St. Ignatius, the *Spiritual Exercises*, and Contemplation

Ignatius (1491-1556) was a Basque noble from Loyola in Spain. His military and courtly career was cut short when, in 1521, his right leg was shattered by a cannonball during the battle of Pamplona. While recuperating in the family castle, Ignatius underwent a religious conversion. After his leg healed, he lived as a hermit in a cave in Manresa for several months. During this time, he experienced mystical insights and felt that God was teaching him “just as a schoolmaster treats a child.”¹⁵ Ignatius thought of himself as a *peregrino*, a pilgrim, and what he learned in Manresa, he made use of to journey with others through exercises meant to prepare people to rid themselves of their disordered attachments and devote themselves to God. This process was later published as a series of practical notes for other retreat-guides and was called the *Spiritual Exercises* (SpEx).

Ignatius is best known as the founder of the Society of Jesus or the Jesuits. Central to the formation of all Jesuits is the full experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* over

¹⁵Ignatius of Loyola, *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Joseph O’Callaghan (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 37.

thirty days. But from the beginning, the *Exercises* were meant for a broader spectrum of Christians – lay, religious, and priests. Though the ideal form of the *Exercises* is a month-long retreat, there are modifications to give them in a shortened version or in the midst of daily life.

One way of praying that is utilized in the *Exercises* is contemplation. Contrasted with more discursive styles of reflection that mainly involve thinking through things, contemplation is more imaginative and leads the pray-er to immerse himself or herself in a scene from the Bible. As a method, contemplation consists in entering faith memories recorded in Scripture in such a way as to experience oneself as present in biblical episodes. God, Jesus, and other characters are met as real persons “face to face.” How can using the imagination in this way already be considered prayer and not just an exercise of fantasy? Essential to an imaginative contemplation of Scripture is the belief that the Bible is the Word of God. In the terms which were used in our discussion on inspiration, the process of inspiration continues in the reader’s reception of Scripture. The events contemplated belong not only to the past but to the present of every believer. In contemplating Scripture, a believer in honest search of the Divine encounters God who continues to reach out to us, drawing us into union with Godself, and sharing God’s vision and desires for the world with us.¹⁶ This will be made clearer when examples of contemplations are presented below.

5.4.2 The Experience of Contemplation

¹⁶Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary; A Handbook for Retreat Directors*, Inigo Texts Series, vol. 4 (Herefordshire, England: Gracewing, 1998), 90.

The quotations from the Spiritual Exercises I use here and in the rest of this study are from Ivens’ text and are his translations.

All Ignatian contemplations begin with a preparatory prayer “to ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be directed purely to the service and praise of his Divine Majesty” (SpEx 46). Part of the preparation is a “composition of place.” An example from the contemplation of the Nativity of Christ tells us what Ignatius would want the exercitant to do: “Here this will be to see with the eyes of the imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem, considering the length and the breadth of it, whether it is a flat road or goes through valleys or over hills; and similarly to observe the place or grotto of the nativity, to see how big or small it is, how high, and what is in it” (SpEx 112). In other contemplations, aside from seeing the persons (SpEx 106), Ignatius encourages the retreatant to listen to what the characters in the episode are saying and how they talk (SpEx 107), and to be immersed in the scene by paying close attention to images, imagining smells and tastes (SpEx 124) and what sensations may be brought to touch (SpEx 125). The purpose of imagining what the body may sense is to stir up the emotions. In Ignatian contemplation, the pray-er must use not only his or her understanding but must also wrestle with emotions, “inner feeling,” and “affections” (SpEx 2-3). For example, in contemplating Jesus’ prayer and agony after the Last Supper, after composing the place and seeing with the eyes of the imagination Jesus sweating blood (Luke 22:39-44), the exercitant is directed to ask for the grace of “grief with Christ in grief, to be broken with Christ broken, for tears and interior suffering on account of the great suffering that Christ endured for me” (SpEx 203).

As discussed in chapter 3, neuroscience has shown that by imagining bodily expressions of emotions (e.g., facial expressions, posture, and vocal intonations – and even sweating blood), we are able to understand the emotions of others. These emotions

then can become embodied or felt in the body of the one imagining and produce emotional states. When we imagine the physical manifestations of the emotions of others, our bodies are able to mirror what they are feeling, and we are able to empathize with them.¹⁷

Physical senses and feelings are effective ways to trigger the imaginative process, but they also serve a greater purpose. Knowing through our bodies and knowing through our emotions (two ways of knowing which cannot easily or clearly be separated and even distinguished) are not supposed to end only in sentimentalism or the acquisition of new thoughts and ideas. The point of these bodily and emotional preludes, as already seen in the preparatory prayer, is to facilitate an encounter with the God we desire to know.

Sheldrake shares the contemplation experience of one retreatant:

She was contemplating the incident of Peter walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-33). At the start, she had no difficulty in imagining herself in a boat, as she had sailed when she was younger. She was familiar with the frustration and fear of fighting against a strong wind and current. This helped her to “get inside” the scene. (Here we see how bodily memories can help the imagination.) Jesus was there, and she, like Peter, had a strong desire to join him on the water. However, she also felt unable to get out of the boat. Though she tried, she could not imagine herself stepping out of the boat and so the prayer, according to her, “went wrong at that point.” Why did she feel that the contemplation had broken down? Up until then, she could identify with the actual events in the Gospel, but when she could not get out of the boat, the story took an unexpected turn. She said to Jesus, “I cannot get out of this boat.” She felt Jesus asking her why, and she had to admit that I was scared, “I can sail, but I can’t swim very well.” She then felt that Jesus was asking her whether she thought that he would make her do something beyond her capacity. Her answer: “Yes, you would... you often have.” This experience led the person to spend the remainder of the prayer sitting and talking to Christ about

¹⁷See Paula M. Niedenthal, Lawrence W. Barsalou, François Ric, and Silvia Krauth-Gruber, “Embodiment in the Acquisition and Use of Emotion Knowledge,” in *Emotion and Consciousness*, ed. Lisa Feldman Barrett, Paula M. Niedenthal, and Piotr Winkielman (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 21-44.

the fact that she did not really trust him because she did not know him well enough.¹⁸

It would help us to understand contemplation better by noting a few observations. First, the retreatant was not just a spectator in the story; she was fully involved. Though she identified with Peter, the experience was not just a retelling of Peter's story but an unfolding of her own, which included her present context and all of her concerns – conscious and unconscious. While bodily sensations were strong in the beginning, they gradually faded. These can help one enter into contemplation, but they are not the point of the prayer. These are also only one aspect of the imagination. She did not hear Jesus speaking to her. She “felt” Jesus asking her things and conversing with her. This is the purpose of imaginative contemplation: an encounter with the Lord that engages our deepest realities. But did the prayer go wrong because it did not follow the text of the Gospel? The experience was still set in the general parameters of the passage, but from what was offered in the text of Scripture, there was a shift to what was relevant in the “text” of the retreatant's life, a “text” that must also be part of interpreting Scripture. In her contemplation, the retreatant faced her most pressing needs, which she may not have been aware of or at least not been able to articulate until that time. Sheldrake writes, “Imaginative contemplation, when it works, takes on a life of its own – and [this] life is that of the person praying.”¹⁹

But what if something happens in contemplation that is, from the Christian point of view, obviously wrong? Sheldrake recounts the experience of another retreatant who,

¹⁸Philip Sheldrake, “Imagination and Prayer,” *The Way* 24, no. 2 (April 1984), 92.

¹⁹Sheldrake, “Imagination and Prayer,” 93.

in prayer, “felt” Jesus tell him, “I am not going to start loving you, until you learn how to love me.”²⁰ While what happens in contemplation always has validity and a measure of truth, this must still be evaluated and interpreted. This will be tackled below in the processing of the experience of contemplation.

The final step of the contemplation is not just an appendage to the prayer but is its culmination.²¹ Underlining the importance of encounter, Ignatius directs the exercitant to make a colloquy with God. “A colloquy, properly so called, means speaking as one friend speaks with another, or a servant with a master” (SpEx 54).²²

From how Ignatian contemplation has been described above, we can see how this method of prayer works best with stories. But it can also be used in the Psalms. For example, one can imagine being led by a shepherd while praying Ps 23 and then letting the story develop from there. Or one can imagine being part of a procession to the temple while praying an enthronement Psalm, noticing who is part of the procession, being aware of how one is behaving during the procession, and then just letting a narrative come from these elements, or simply just dwelling on the images of the procession and spending time with the Lord. Or while praying a Psalm of lament, one can imagine

²⁰Sheldrake, “Imagination and Prayer,” 94.

²¹Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 53.

²²While the point of the colloquy is to converse with God, the colloquy can have an added benefit: A 2009 study conducted by Gabriel Trionfi and Elaine Reese found that children with imaginary friends create richer narratives. The children, they observed, could also better relate their past and present experiences to the stories. Imaginary conversation – imaginary not in the sense that our dialogue partners do not exist but in the sense that these involve the faculty of the imagination – can enhance our ability to contemplate. See Gabriel Trionfi and Elaine Reese, “A Good Story: Children with Imaginary Companions Create Richer Narratives,” *Child Development* 80, no. 4 (July - August 2009), 1301-1313.

arguing with God, being part of the drama, or watching someone argue with God and just being a witness to the confrontation.

5.4.3 Processing the Experience of Contemplation

“After finishing the exercise, I will either sit down or walk around for a quarter of an hour while I see how things have gone for me during the contemplation...” (SpEx 77). This is when the exercitant can do some journaling about the contemplation experience and interpret it. This “review of prayer” is a transitional space of processing which would have been inappropriate during the prayer itself.²³ During prayer, the exercitant should try to lose himself or herself in the experience and not yet be concerned about its meaning or interpretation, which is essential to the experience but which must be dealt with only subsequently.

Interpretation post-prayer is also a work of the imagination. Interpretation is a way of seeing things that seeks to grasp them and make meaning out of them. And making meanings is one step towards what Ricoeur speaks of as “redescribing reality,” which for him is another way of defining imagination.²⁴ For example, a tragic accident involving the loss of limbs and mobility can be interpreted as the end of someone’s life. But later on, that same person can interpret his or her loss as the impetus to discovering new things about himself or herself and the beginning a new life. The undeniable fact of the accident is given new meaning, and with this new meaning, reality is redescribed.

²³Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 68.

²⁴Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 144.

“I am not going to start loving you, until you learn how to love me,” were Jesus’ words as reported by one of Sheldrake’s retreatants. Christian tradition does not support this image of God, and what Christian tradition says is included in what the faithful imagination or interpretation must take into account. Perhaps what the retreatant felt Jesus was telling him was a reflection of a hurtful experience festering in the retreatant’s memories. There is still something true in his contemplation; it is true because it is what the retreatant feels. But it is a truth that must undergo interpretation and hopefully, reality will be redescribed in a way that is more life-giving.

There are good and there are better interpretations. For better interpretations, we must be open to interpretations and input coming from others. The retreat director, in this case, must clarify Christian tradition and help the retreatant discern the meaning of his prayer experience.

At the end of each day of contemplation, Ignatius suggests the prayer that has come to be called the application of the senses. The exercitant is supposed to go through the contemplations of that day and just remember and relish the bodily sensations he or she experienced. It is an exercise of relishing and intensifying what was experienced, feeling the emotions connected with these bodily senses again (as discussed above), and dwelling on them. This dwelling, though more extra-rational than rational, can be considered part of the processing of the experience. To try to feel what you felt earlier but this time with the benefit of further reflection or your conversation with the director can lead to more solid convictions or to further nuances in the interpretation of your experiences.

Towards the end of three-, five-, eight-, and thirty-day retreats patterned after the *Spiritual Exercises*, there are usually sessions for the retreatants to share their most important contemplations or those that they still have to figure out. These can become opportunities for pray-ers to hear other interpretations of similar experiences and to challenge or further deepen their own.

The *Spiritual Exercises*, of which Ignatian contemplation is a major part, have “as their purpose the overcoming of self and the ordering of one’s life” (SpEx 21). The *Spiritual Exercises* and Ignatian contemplation are aids for transformation, for entering into new orientations that are wider, more inclusive, and more life-giving. These new paradigms are formed through the use of the imagination combined with rational thinking done in conversation with Scripture, with the spiritual director and other pray-ers, and the God behind it all. This discussion of Ignatian contemplation, while centering on the imagination, has also touched on aspects of dwelling, embodiment, emotions, and with the conversations just mentioned, encounter. Here we see the how the practice of Ignatian contemplation can integrate the transformative aspects we have identified.²⁵

5.5 ENCOUNTER IN PRACTICE

We can encounter God in the Psalms. We can encounter other people – the psalmists – in the Psalms. We can encounter God in individual prayer, but it is also a powerful experience to encounter him when we encounter other people in communal prayer. The Benedictine monks have known this for the longest time, but to their way of

²⁵I take up the practice of Ignatian contemplation again in the final chapter.

praying the Psalms, I would like to add another component. To capitalize on the encounters the Psalms can make possible, I imagine a small group that is made up of members as diverse as possible but still sharing a connection (whether this be a common parish, school, or even just the common belief that there is a God who wants to communicate with us). On a regular basis, this group will meet and engage the Psalter just one Psalm at a time. After taking some time to settle down, they will prayerfully read out loud or sing, as one group or antiphonally, a Psalm and ask themselves two main questions:

1. *What word or phrase or image struck me or caught my attention?*

To answer this question, one can be helped by paying attention to his or her body. What word or phrase or image made my eyes widen or my ears perk up? Did anything make me do a double-take, knit my eyebrows, or make me sit up straighter? After identifying the word or phrase or image to himself or herself, each member will mouth the word or phrase silently several times or imagine sensations connected to that image. What do his or her bodily reactions say about how that word or phrase or image makes him or her feel? Before the mind comes up with explanations, each member must first listen to his or her emotions. What do these emotions say about what he or she values or holds significant? What do these emotions say about his or her connections and relationships?

2. *Why did this word or phrase or image strike me?*

In answering this question, the members will be asked to go back to their experiences. Did something happen in the past day, week, month, or even in their childhood that is linked to this word?²⁶ “All learning is rooted in experience.”²⁷ To start with and honor individual experiences is important in our postmodern world. Moreover, this step can also help one tap into his or her unconscious, which Mezirow admits is important to consider in transformative learning.²⁸ Here, the members of the group will be asked to couch their answer in the form of a story. Narrative approaches have been

²⁶See the discussion on Christopher Bollas’ theory about transformational objects in chapter 3.

²⁷Jane Regan, *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 77.

²⁸Jack Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 5-6.

shown to be potentially more effective in transformative learning than other more linear or quantitative approaches.²⁹

After a few moments of silent reflection, the members will be asked to share their word or phrase or image, their feeling or feelings about it, and if they are comfortable enough, the story connected to it. As people listen to each other, we gain more models for dealing with life beyond the 150 models we already meet in the Psalms. These new models with their different experiences and their different ways of dealing with them can give us more guidance as we go through the different orders of consciousness and as we either become more settled in our existing orientation or continue to challenge a paradigm that does not seem to hold anymore. This suggested practice is essentially *lectio divina* augmented with conversation – conversation with the text that flows to conversation with others, and hopefully, as Jane Regan believes, this conversation will also lead to maturing in faith.³⁰ On the importance of sharing in a group, Regan writes:

It is very difficult, and for many impossible, to engage in the process of reflecting on and critiquing one's present meaning perspective without being in conversation with others. Many people try out new perspectives by talking about them with others or making small steps in hope for affirmation or, at least, acknowledgement. A supportive context in which hospitality and mutual respect are paramount is essential.³¹

In these conversations, it is important to share one's feelings not only to give voice to the Divine working in you for others but also to hear God active in you – for

²⁹Colleen Aalsburg Wiessner and Jack Mezirow, "Theory Building and the Search for Common Ground" in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 338.

³⁰Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 25.

³¹Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*, 92.

yourself. Sometimes, we need to hear ourselves voice out what is going on inside us to understand ourselves better. Speaking out in the presence of others, as discussed in chapter 3, can also increase our conviction in what we have just said.

Many times, too, “critical reflection can only begin once emotions have been validated and worked through.”³² This includes not only recognizing one’s feelings but having them recognized by others. The affect can also direct reflection to focus on the more fundamental basis underlying meaning perspectives. Emotions not only provide the trigger for critical reflection, they often “provide the gist of which to reflect deeply.”³³ Sharing emotions can also lead to a greater sense of self-confidence and self-worth, which is needed for someone to risk taking on a new meaning perspective.

The type of encounter described here can open one’s mind. Hearing diverse stories can make one more sensitive to different contexts. They can also allow one to “try on another person’s point of view” – which Mezirow has identified as another way of learning.³⁴

Again, it is important to stress that the engagement with the Psalms that is envisioned here should be sustained. If this practice which involves conversation is continued, there is a greater possibility that mutual respect and hospitality will be

³²Edward W. Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 303.

³³E. Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” 304-305.

³⁴Lisa M. Baumgartner, “Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning from 1975 to Present” in *Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Edward W. Taylor and Patricia Cranton (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 109.

developed among the group members. Hopefully, people will be able to feel safe enough to share deeper emotions, paving the way for wrestling with even deeper personal assumptions. Deeper relationships may also be formed. The importance of relationships cannot be overstressed. As studies have shown, learning is not as autonomous and formal as once thought; learning is much more dependent on the creation of support, trust, and friendship with others.³⁵

If this practice is sustained over an extended period of time, one will definitely encounter a particular Psalm more than once. It may help also if one records what different words have struck him or her in the same Psalm. This may help one to tell the story of his or her life: Why did this word in Psalm X strike me last year? Why did another word in Psalm X catch my attention this year? Or why am I still struck by the same word? Is it still for the same reasons?

5.6 LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

In chapters 2 and 3, I identified the transformative conditions which the Psalms make possible. In this chapter, I suggested ways of capitalizing on those conditions on practice. One suggestion I highlighted in this chapter involved Ignatian contemplation. I take this up again in the final chapter when I return to the “big question” and see how we can capitalize on the transformative elements of Scripture in the way we teach them in seminaries and other formation institutes.

³⁵E. Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” 308.

6.0 LETTING THE WORD OF GOD UNFOLD: HOW WE CAN TEACH SCRIPTURE IN A TRANSFORMATIVE WAY

We may have “Eureka!” moments of great insight, but for the most part, transformation takes time. As we have seen in Jack Mezirow’s phases of transformative learning (TL) and in the framework of orientation—disorientation—new-orientation, learning for transformation can be a long drawn-out process – just like the inspiration of Scripture.

Alongside rational reflection, the slow process of TL is facilitated by the extra-rational elements of embodiment, emotions, images, and encounter. Another facet that must not be overlooked and cannot really be separated from the four just mentioned is that of relationship. Our bodies, after all, are what allow us to be with others. Our emotions enable us to connect. Images are born from our relationships, which develop from our encounters. Relationship is also central in biblical inspiration and in the formation of the sense of the faith.

How can we capitalize on the aspects we have identified so as to dive into our own processes of transformation and our relationships more deeply? We now return to the big question we posed in the introduction. Informed by how the Psalms teach, how then should we teach the Psalms – and the rest of Scripture – to future ministers in Christian seminaries and other institutes of formation?

6.1 BEGIN WITH A THEORY OF INSPIRATION

At the start of a course on Scripture, it would be beneficial if the teacher expounds on his or her view on inspiration. Making explicit one's assumptions on how Scripture is inspired can help set the tone for the class. If the particular theory of inspiration espoused is the one presented in this study, the roles process and relationship fulfill in engaging the Bible and entering transformation can already be emphasized. With this view of inspiration, the students can also be both empowered and challenged.

In one of the first Scripture classes I taught at the graduate level, a compliment I received ultimately became a source of shame. After what I thought was a particularly well-researched presentation, one lay student came up to me and said that she was just amazed at how much I knew about the background of the Bible. I was beginning to get smug when she also confessed, "After listening to you, I am now afraid to read and interpret the Bible by myself because I might be saying something totally wrong." This told me I had failed in my task as a Scripture teacher.

As a teaching assistant of Fr. Daniel Harrington, I asked him how I should grade the exegeses he required from his students. What if someone comes up with a totally unconventional reading? He told me to, first and foremost, try to see if the student really tried to wrestle with the text. Is there evidence that he or she was engaging Scripture? For Fr. Harrington, what was more important was that the student read the text and listened to what the text was telling him or her rather than just consulting a commentary and echoing whatever the recognized experts said.

The view of inspiration in chapter 4 can empower Bible readers of all levels by telling them that God in Scripture talks to them using the text and their lives. The inspiration of Scripture continues in one's personal reading. At the same time, the view of inspiration that is rooted in the dynamic interplay of the *sensus fidei* of the individual and the *sensus fidelium* of the community offers a corrective to an overly personalized reading. It gives the student the responsibility to listen to the sense of the faith of the Church that is in the other books in the canon and in how other people have interpreted these texts throughout history. The student is therefore challenged to read the other books of Scripture and study their reception history.

6.2 ENCOURAGE INTIMACY WITH THE TEXT

As a teaching assistant of Fr. Nicholas King, I heard a lot of students complain about the short quizzes he would give on the chapters and verses to be taken up for each session. On the one hand, you could say they were low level questions because if you just memorized the passages, you would get a perfect score. On the other hand, as students get older, memorization becomes harder. Fr. King would ask about the minutest details in the text, and this irked some students because they felt they were back in grade school. The students who got annoyed by this style of testing and resisted were also the ones who scored the lowest. I did not understand why Fr. King was doing this myself until I read the exegeses that he later assigned. The students who scored the highest in the quizzes, those who had become so familiar with the text that they had certain passages almost memorized, were also the ones who had the richest reflections and who saw the most connections in the threads that ran through the text. What Fr. King was doing was not

merely getting the students familiar with the text but intimate with it. He was promoting a dwelling in the text. A close reading that committed parts of Scripture to memory was key to all of this.

Dwelling in the text creates space for us to become more settled in our present orientations, or to be spurred towards disorientation, or to explore new orientations. We do not just rush through words; we pause and let the words trigger insight and imagination. What else happens when we come close to memorizing passages? Intimacy with the text that borders on committing it to memory is discussed by Benedictine monk and scholar of monastic culture Jean LeClercq under the rubric of reminiscence,

whereby the verbal echoes so excite the memory that a mere allusion will spontaneously evoke whole quotations and, in turn, a scriptural phrase will suggest quite naturally allusions elsewhere in the sacred books. Each word is like a hook, so to speak; it catches hold of one or several others which become linked together and make up the fabric of the exposé.¹

The biblical reflections of the Fathers of the Church and many monastic authors who reflected on Scripture were shaped partly by reminiscence. With reminiscence,

[t]he mere fact of hearing certain words, which happen to be similar in sound to certain other words, sets up a kind of chain reaction of associations which will bring together words that have no more than a chance connection, purely external, with one another. But since the verse or passage which contains this word comes to mind, why not comment on it here? ... The plan really follows a psychological development, determined by the plan of associations and one digression may lead to another or even to several others.²

¹Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 91.

²Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 91-92.

Some of the connections formed may be more allusive than logical, tangential rather than direct, but if this type of exegesis flows from intimacy with the text, then biblical education in the seminary must make room for it. This is, after all, a similar type of exegesis to that which has been practiced by the rabbis for so many centuries in *midrash*. It is also a type of exegesis that may readily tap into the unconscious and open new horizons and ways of seeing. It may be the type of exegesis that proves to be more transformative for some students.

6.3 FOSTER ENCOUNTERS WITH GOD THROUGH EMBODIMENT, EMOTIONS, IMAGES, AND ENCOUNTERS WITH OTHERS

Insofar as the rest of Scripture is like the Psalms in giving us access to our bodies, feelings, images, and relationships, how do we teach Scripture to capitalize on these? One way, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is through the practice of Ignatian contemplation integrated into the study of the Bible.

Below, I describe from my own experience how Jesuit novices are prepared for and then guided through the experience of contemplation during the Spiritual Exercises (SpEx). Based on this, I then propose a way to incorporate elements of this process into classroom teaching. Before going any further, I stress again that I write this for Scripture professors in Christian graduate institutions that are strongly rooted in their confessional character. In these schools, majority of the students are often being prepared for ministry. The focus, therefore, is not just in forming exegetes but pastors who can help others read the Bible.

6.3.1 How Are Jesuit Novices Prepared for and Guided Through the *Spiritual Exercises*?

6.3.1.1 Remote preparation

It should be expected that preparation for a thirty-day retreat would include workshops on the what, the why, and the how of prayer. But aside from these, there are also modules on the historical-critical aspects of the Bible and primers on revelation and Christology. These can possibly be a distraction in prayer, and so these must be used while employing the Ignatian principle of *Tantum-Quantum*: to use all things in so far as they help us towards our goal.

For Ignatius, intellectual reflection and rational thinking are not foreign to spiritual experience. Official Catholic teaching also promotes the use of historical-critical methods in reading and praying with Scripture. If Scripture is God's words through human words, then we must study these human words with all our human faculties.

Filipino biblical scholar and auxiliary bishop Pablo David, in a course on the role of imagination in biblical interpretation, couches imaginative reading in terms of interpolative reading: Interpolation is "connecting the dots" and finding upward, downward, or sideward trends. But before you can connect the dots, the dots must first be found and taken seriously.³ For Paul Ricoeur, imagination is not just free play where anything goes but "a rule-governed form of invention or, in other terms, as a norm-governed productivity."⁴ David's "dots," in Ricoeur's terms, are some of the norms or

³Minerva Generalao, "Viewing Last Supper Through Imagination," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 2, 2015, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/682948/viewing-last-supper-through-imagination> (accessed December 29, 2016).

rules that govern the imagination. Historical-critical methods help us see more clearly some of the dots in the text. These dots can also serve to make our imagination more vivid. For example, archaeological studies of the Jerusalem temple can give us a better picture of Jesus turning over the tables of the money changers and driving out those selling animals for sacrifice. But historical-critical dots are not the only dots we need to connect. As Scripture scholar Luke Timothy Johnson urges, we cannot just be preoccupied with the world that produced the Bible. We must enter the world that the Bible produces.⁵ And this world that Scripture invites us to enter *includes us*.

Part of the remote preparation for the *Exercises* are psycho-spiritual sessions to help the novices process possible issues involving family and relationships, sexuality, and personal vocation. No one today can deny that a reader's context and preconceptions affect his or her interpretation. We cannot completely take away the subjective element in reading anything – nor should we try to, especially in reading Scripture. But we must always seek to be more humbly aware of where we are coming from and what our assumptions may be. Many times, too, it is precisely in the act of wrestling with a text that these assumptions come to light. A novice may ask, "If I have difficulty imagining God as a father, is it because of something in my family history? If so, what can I do then to retrieve or re-conceive this central image of God?" These psycho-spiritual realities are part of the dots which govern our imagination, dots which we need to connect.

⁴Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 144.

⁵Luke Timothy Johnson, "Imagining the World Scripture Imagines," *Modern Theology* 14, no. 2 (April 1, 1998): 165.

Shortly before the thirty-day retreat begins for the Jesuit novices, films on the stories of the Bible are made available for their viewing. These movies and their portrayals of well-known narratives play their part in triggering the imagination. Whether we agree with their depictions or not, they make us more aware how Scripture invites imagination and needs the reader to flesh out its narratives. As the last verse of the fourth Gospel states, “There are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (Jn 21:25). We know that Jesus taught, healed, and prayed. But what did he do in between? We are familiar with his parables, but *how* did he tell them? With a glint of humor in his eye? With sarcasm dripping heavily in his tone? What if the seven woes attributed to Jesus in Matthew 23 were not said with anger but with genuine sadness?

6.3.1.2 Immediate preparation

During the thirty-day retreat, each Jesuit novice is assigned a spiritual director who, like Ignatius the pilgrim, journeys with him, lays out the prayer points and Scriptural texts he should consider, and helps him discern whether or not it is time to move on to the next set of points and texts or to stay with the present ones longer. Once the Bible texts are given, the novice is expected to familiarize himself with the passage. The texts themselves and their actual contents should be the first “dots” or “rules” that must be considered by the imagination.

The night before or even shortly before praying, the novice should have already read the passage more than once and allowed it “to sink in.” More theoretical questions (e.g., “What is the point of this pericope in the broader setting of the chapter and the

book?") are better addressed during this stage to avoid their possibly sidetracking intrusion during prayer time.

Ignatius also suggests that retreatants, immediately before prayer, mark the beginning of the session with a mental act and bodily ritual: "A step or two before the place where I have to contemplate or meditate, I will stand for the space of an Our Father and, with my mind raised up, consider how God our Lord is looking at me... I will then make a genuflection or some other act of humility" (SpEx 75).

6.3.2 How Can We Integrate Ignatian Contemplation in Classroom Teaching?

What may have been unexpected in the preparation for the *Exercises* – the turn to historical-critical methods – is, of course, very much expected in and should comprise a major part of the classroom experience of graduate Scripture study. What I propose to include in classroom teaching is the element of prayer.

Before each class, students should be assigned a passage (the shorter the better) that will be part of the discussion. They are then expected to familiarize themselves with it and its context and perhaps read one commentary about it. At the start of each meeting, the teacher can begin with a simple ritual similar to what Ignatius suggests above to briefly consider God looking at the class. It can be as simple as the teacher saying, "Let us open our Bibles and prepare to listen to God," and then pausing for a few moments with heads bowed. This ritual already begins and emphasizes the aspect of encounter.

A member of the class can then be asked to read the passage slowly. As a student of Fr. Harrington, I used to wonder why he had students read passages aloud in class when all of us had our Bibles already before us. Was this just a waste of time? It was not.

Students in Christian seminaries will be engaging the Bible in the future many times in the context of liturgy, and the experience of liturgy involves mouthing, voicing, and listening to Scripture. Moreover, as seen in chapter 3, reading Scripture aloud in public can increase our self-involvement in it or unearth a cognitive dissonance that we can mine for insight.

If the class is on the passion of Jesus, the short passage to be read can be Jn 18:15-18, the first time Peter denies Jesus. After a few moments of silence, the teacher can ask the students to focus on one image in the passage. It would be good if this part of the passage can be connected to an important point in the discussion that day. The teacher can ask the students to engage their bodily senses as they put themselves in the scene. In our sample passage, the image can be the charcoal fire that Peter stood close to in order to warm himself. Let this detail be the entry point to the contemplation. The students can then be asked to imagine themselves in the scene. After a few minutes, the teacher can end the short contemplation by asking the students, “What feelings have been aroused in you during this short prayer experience?”⁶ Feelings, as already mentioned in previous chapters, can also help us navigate to the parts of Scripture that are most relevant to where we are currently. Otherwise, the sheer richness of the Bible can be a forest we can

⁶“What do you feel?” is a question rarely asked in graduate Scripture study, and this may be a reason for dryness in reading the Bible. Adam Zeman, a cognitive neurologist from the University of Exeter Medical School, using state-of-the-art functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) technology, mapped the way the brain responds to poetry and prose. He scanned and compared the brains of volunteers while they read two types of material: literal prose such as an extract from a heating installation manual, and more poetic writings such as evocative passages from novels and sonnets. He found that more emotionally charged texts aroused areas on the right side of the brain which had previously been shown to give rise to the sensation of having “shivers down the spine.” This reaction was also seen in volunteers listening and being moved emotionally by music. See Rick Nauert, “Poetry: Music to the Mind,” PsychCentral, October 10, 2013, <http://psychcentral.com/news/2013/10/10/poetry-music-to-the-mind/60555.html> (accessed December 28, 2016).

just get lost in. We must remind ourselves again though that the point is not just to be moved to feel but to dispose ourselves more to an encounter. An important question follow-up question therefore is, “What do you think God is communicating to you through these feelings and through what you just imagined?”

Regarding the feelings and personal concerns which may be brought to light by Ignatian contemplation, we cannot expect the teacher to do any psycho-spiritual processing during class, but it is valid to ask: Should not a Christian graduate institution preparing future pastors ensure there are venues and opportunities such as counseling, genogram or enneagram workshops for the students to know themselves more deeply? Essential to Ignatian prayer is the need for a spiritual director. The Scripture professor in a graduate institution cannot be expected to engage in spiritual direction during class, but again, in an institute of formation, it is valid to ask: Should there not be offered venues and opportunities for spiritual direction? Should we also not expect that what is taken up in class – in our case, in a Scripture course – also come up in spiritual direction?

About the retreat director, Ignatius writes:

Someone who gives to another a way and a plan for meditating and contemplating must provide a faithful account of the history to be meditated or contemplated, but in such a way as to run over salient points with only brief or summary explanations. For if the other begins contemplating with a true historical foundation, and then goes over this history and reflects on it personally, he or she may by themselves come upon things which throw further light on it or which more fully bring home its meaning. Whether this arises out of the person’s own reasoning or from the enlightenment of divine grace, more gratification and spiritual fruit is to be found than if the giver of the exercises had explained and developed the meaning of the history at length (SpEx 2).

The graduate Scripture professor should, of course, say more than the retreat director especially in providing an account of the text from a historical-critical

perspective. As expected, much time should be spent on this in the classroom. But the caution to both spiritual director and Scripture professor remains. Saying too much and leaving nothing for the exercitant to discover for himself or herself impedes not only the contemplative process but the whole process of learning as well. The retreat director's job is to point out a vein which the exercitant can mine for himself or herself. The teacher's task is similar. More than just about student-centered learning and the teacher being a "guide-on-the-side" rather than a "sage-on-a-stage," what should also be stressed here is the fact that even with volumes and volumes of scholarly research published, there is still much to be said about Scripture. There are good and not-so-good commentaries, but there has been no final word yet about the Bible. Nor will there ever be in this world. The teacher must not give the impression that in saying much, everything can be said. Open-endedness is an invitation to mystery and can be an incentive for the imagination.

Another reason for the open-ended quality of Scripture is because it continues to speak to our circumstances today. The teacher must always endeavor to show students how the Bible though ancient in its history still addresses the present world. Here we have a reminder that will also serve those giving and those undergoing the *Exercises*. There is a danger that Ignatian contemplation can end up only being about *my* feelings, *my* desires, and *my* relationship with God. This is actually part of the disordered attachments the *Exercises* seek to free us from. Ignatian spirituality always tries to look outside of oneself to the world where God continues to labor. The needs of the world are also part of the "dots" and "norms" the imagination must consider.

Integrating Ignatian contemplation in Scripture study in the classroom should not just be treated as a gimmick or as an attention step that is quickly discarded once the

formal lecture begins. The fruits of the contemplation should help direct the conversation in class. The teacher should slowly form the students in the skill of contributing what happened in their prayer at the points in class when it is most appropriate. There can be no formula for this though and many times, what may seem like a good clue towards unlocking a part of Scripture may end up only a red herring. But this is also part of exegesis – from *eksegeomai* in Greek, *ek* + *hegeomai*, to lead out, which has also been translated as explain, relate, declare (see Lk 24:35 and Jn 1:18 for related forms of *eksegeomai*). In the sample passage above, focusing on the charcoal fire in Jn 18:18, in the scene when Peter denied Jesus three times, can make a stronger connection to the charcoal fire in Jn 21:9, in the scene when Jesus gave Peter three chances to atone for his denial by thrice answering the question, “Do you love me?” This is one of the reasons why the sample passage above was chosen. The teacher must also slowly develop the art of choosing the best short passages for the class to contemplate.

But more than just content, integrating Ignatian contemplation in Scripture study is about process. It is a process that from beginning to end emphasizes a pray-er’s encounter with God which the text facilitates, and the relationship with God and the world the Bible hopes to deepen. When we study the text, it is not just to learn about Israel during biblical times or to learn about the early Church in the first century. It is more about seeing what God wishes to reveal to us in the dynamic interaction of Scripture and our lives. Future ministers should be trained in this process because they will hopefully be facilitating encounters with God using Scripture.

During the class discussion, the teacher can show video clips from different films portraying the scene just contemplated. Trying to discern a filmmaker’s preconceptions

about a certain scene can also help students be more aware of their own silent assumptions. Sharing in small groups after viewing these clips or after strategic points in the discussion can open students to even more possible interpretations as well as reveal their own prejudices (in the Gadamerian understanding of that term).

To end the class, a short exercise of dwelling can be done. Similar to the prayer of the application of the senses described in the previous chapter, the students can be asked to focus on one bodily sensation or feeling from their contemplation or from an insight from any part of the session and just savor it. A colloquy with God can then serve as the culmination of the class.

Too often, graduate Scripture classes depreciate into activities of mere “informational” rather than “formational” reading. Scripture professor Robert Mulholland makes this distinction, and his description of these two ways of reading are summarized in the table below:⁷

| Informational Reading | Formational Reading |
|--|--|
| - covers as much material as possible as quickly as possible | - focuses on smaller portions |
| - linear, moving from the first element to the next | - non-linear, concerned with depth; comfortable with multiple layers of meaning (even if they are paradoxical) |
| - aims to master the text and gain control of interpretation | - the text masters the reader makes himself or herself vulnerable to the text; a disposition of receiving and responding |
| - the text is an object; we must maintain our distance | - the text is a subject; we relate with it |
| - analytical, critical, judgmental | - open, indwelling, loving |
| - problem solving | - diving into mystery |

⁷Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1985), 30.

There are aspects of “informational” reading which are helpful and important. Ignatian contemplation incorporated in graduate Scripture study balances these aspects with a more “formational” intention. Making space for dwelling in the text, though this certainly takes up time, ensures we do not just engage in a consumerist reading of the Bible. Knowing Scripture is not just about gaining new ideas and insights. To really know Scripture is to have a deep appreciation of it and a greater desire for God. The goal should be not just be knowledge of but deep love for the Word and for God.

To integrate Ignatian contemplation in the classroom is also to raise graduate Scripture study to a communal practice. Aside from just sharing the actual experience of contemplating, students in small groups can share with each other the fruits of their prayer. In forming future pastors, inculcating a *habitus* of prayerfully reflecting on texts together and sharing with one another can be more important than dispensing facts and opinions which are easier to forget. This *habitus* may also be what these future pastors will best impart to the people they will serve in the future.

There is a trend in Scripture study that has sometimes led to an “over-historicization” of the Bible: finding the original text, the original context, and the original intention of the author. In this obsession with “originals” what is many times left out is a consideration of the original way of engaging Scripture. If we take the general lack of literacy and the great expense of producing texts into account, it is very easy to imagine communities gathered together around one manuscript being read out loud by one member. There are many clues in Scripture that tell us these texts were read in worship (the Psalter makes this very clear). Scripture was originally experienced in

communal prayer. Perhaps it is time to retrieve this type of communal practice in the study of the Bible.

Integrating Ignatian contemplation in the classroom may be considered part of a student-centered pedagogy. From the point of view of biblical scholarship, Ignatian contemplation may be considered part of reader-response criticism. But we cannot just end with this pole. Methods of studying Scripture are usually classified under approaches which focus on the writer or redactor, the text, and the reader. There is a fourth focus that must be considered: the biblical reality which God invites us to enter. It is a reality that is communicated in the text, made vivid by historical-critical methods and communal practices, and addresses our own personal realities and the world's. It is a reality that is found in an encounter which takes place in the inventive and interpretative imagination. And it is this encounter that will also be the final norm for the imagination.

Imagination is a creative activity. The imagination in Ignatian contemplation though is not a *creatio ex nihilo*, a creation out of nothing. We have the raw material of texts – the text of Scripture and the text of our lives. There are “rules” that guide our engagement with the text: the fruits of historical-critical study, the interpretations of others, the traditions we take on, and so on. We cannot just imagine anything that we want and expect it to be made real. Imagination “encounters limits to its own free play when confronted with the irreducible otherness of the other.”⁸ Imagination is still answerable and responsible to the other. To foster the imagination in reading Scripture, we must see it as an encounter and a response: a response to the text, to the deep realities

⁸Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Modernity: Toward a Hermeneutic Imagination* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanity Books, 1995), 101.

inside us, to the undeniable realities of the world outside us, and to the God who invites us to redescribe these realities with God.

If we integrate Ignatian contemplation in Scripture study in seminaries, what kind of exegeses will we expect from students? Here our rubrics will have to be very clear so that we do not just get prayer journal entries but personal reflections that show engagement with the text and how it has been received by others, as well as enlightenment from the fruits of historical-critical research. However, we should also not be too quick to dismiss an account of what happened in one's contemplation. We may get a strange story from the students, but is this also not the way Jewish rabbis from of old wrestled with the stories from Scripture – with other, many times strange, stories that now fall under the umbrella of *midrash*? As a student and teaching assistant of Fr. Richard Clifford, I have heard him say many times that when we ask the writers of the Bible a question, they do not answer us with a treatise – they tell us a story. He has also explained this by describing the biblical writers as “one-paragraph” writers. Modern people are “two-paragraph” thinkers. We describe an event with a first paragraph then attempt to explain its possible causes and provide an interpretation with a second paragraph. Biblical writers, in one narrative paragraph, convey an event already with an interpretation incorporated in the details they include.⁹ If in the Bible, thinkers did

⁹See Richard J. Clifford, “The Original Testament,” *America: The National Catholic Review*, September 29, 2008, <http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/669/article/original-testament> (accessed December 30, 2016) and Richard J. Clifford, “Did It Happen? Is It True?” *America: The National Catholic Review*, January 2, 2006, <http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/556/article/did-it-happen-it-true> (accessed December 30, 2016).

philosophy and theology through the art of storytelling, perhaps we should also consider exegeses that are artful stories.

Ignatian contemplation integrated in graduate Scripture study in Christian seminaries stresses encounter. This is because the future ministers being formed there must also facilitate encounters – encounters with the text; encounters with others who produced and have read the texts throughout history; encounters with our deepest selves through our bodies, emotions and the images that strike us; and encounters with God. In these encounters, we can catch a glimpse of wider horizons and new orientations. In these encounters, we can be led to transformation.

6.4 LET SCRIPTURE STUDY BE A CELEBRATION

In chapter 2, the importance of celebration, the release of energy, in the process of transformation was discussed. This celebration is not always done in jubilation but can also be experienced in lamentation – do we not also consider funeral Masses as celebrations? The celebration here, as treated previously, is the repeated awakening to and appreciation of the God present in all things, at all times with us, and guiding our lives. And this realization leads us to praise and thank God.

There are many laments in the Psalms, but almost all these end in praise. The whole Psalter, too, ends in praise. Pss 145 to 150 are dominated by celebratory doxology. Every verse of Ps 150 is an outburst of joy. “Psalm 1 declares happy those who recite the divine words of the Psalter. ‘Happiness’ comes not only because the psalms satisfy the deepest desires of the human heart but also because the psalms turn one toward God, the

Lord of the universe.”¹⁰ The Psalms end in happiness, but it is not a happiness that is blind to pain or that simply redirects its gaze to more pleasant things. Kathleen Norris writes:

A writer, whose name I have forgotten, once said that the true religions of America are optimism and denial. The psalms demand that we recognize that praise does not spring from a delusion that things are better than they are, but rather from the human capacity for joy. Only when we see this can we understand that both lamentation (“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord” [Ps. 130:1]) and exultation (“Cry with joy to the Lord, all the earth” [Ps. 100:1]) can be forms of praise. In our skeptical age, which favors appraisal over praise, the psalms are evidence that praise need not be a fruit of optimism. . . . Women in American society are conditioned to deny their pain, and to smooth over or ignore the effects of violence, even when it is directed against them. As one sister said to me, “Women seem to have trouble drawing the line between what is passive acceptance of suffering and what can transform it.” This is the danger that lies hidden in Emily Dickinson’s insight that “Pain – is missed – in Praise”: that we will try to jump too quickly from one to the other, omitting the necessary but treacherous journey in between, sentimentalizing both pain and praise in the process.¹¹

The joy in the Psalms can look at pain straight in the eye because God is, as can be implied in the last verse of Ps 150, the Lord of everything. And this God, as the practice of the Psalms can help us see, will never leave us alone. The joy in the Psalms is not always a jumping-up-and-down type of joy. It is also many times silent but ever constant – as steadfast as God’s *hesed* – which is also the root of the human capacity for joy.

As joy and God’s *hesed* are found in the Psalms, so it should be sought in all the other parts of Scripture. The teaching of the Bible should also be suffused with this deep joy as both student *and* teacher discover more of God’s *hesed*. This is probably the most

¹⁰Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 73-150*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 320.

¹¹Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), EPUB, 182.6.

important lesson I learned from being a student and teaching assistant of Fr. Harrington. In the section of the St. Peter Faber Jesuit Community library where the books Fr. Harrington wrote are kept, there is a quote from him that summarizes his life of reading, teaching, studying, and praying with Scripture: “The old saying that ‘if you love what you are doing, you will never work a day in your life’ certainly applies to me... For forty years I have been able to write about, research, and preach on what is aptly called the word of God. It has all been a joy.”

6.5 LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

Scripture study involves aspects of literary theory and history. What I have tried to do here is to highlight how Scripture study must also be a way of doing practical theology. Practical theology takes off from the life of the people and returns to our lived realities enlightened by Scripture and tradition.¹² Scripture has its beginnings in the life of people – in their experiences of God and how they have tried to make sense of these. The faith memories and reflections of the human authors of Scripture were written and gathered not just to be a historical documents but to address particular life situations. One can consider Scripture as early records of people doing practical theology. This way of doing theology must continue in our study and practice of Scripture today. It is the way we can also continue forming “earnest Christians.”

¹²This, in summary, is Thomas Groome’s “life to Faith to life” approach. See Thomas H. Groome, *Will There be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 261-337.

The unfolding of God's Word in the Psalms happens in conversation with the text. And if the text is engaged in sustained practice, the conversation will be deeper. The unfolding relies not only on rational thinking but also on the extra-rational aspects of embodiment, emotion, imagery, and encounter. It is an unfolding that can lead to transformations of paradigms and new orientations. And it is an unfolding that does not really end but continues to reveal more and more to us.

Lex orandi, lex credendi. So goes the Latin maxim that emphasizes the centrality of worship in the life and identity of the Church. Literally, this maxim says the law of prayer is the law of belief. A better translation may be "The way we pray shows what we believe." A fuller formulation of this maxim is *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi* – how we worship reflects what we believe and determines how we live.¹³ It is not just *what* we pray but *how* we pray that is important. In this study, I have tried to show that the Psalms, if we pray them in sustained practice engaging our thoughts as well as our bodies, emotions, and other people, then what we believe (about God, the human person, and how we should conduct our relationships) and how we live can be transformed.

In this study, I have relied much on the works of Jack Mezirow and Robert Kegan, whose researches have been made in the North American context. How well will these translate to the Philippine context? Sadly, no similar type of research has yet been done in my country. To try to find out what particularly helps Filipinos transform and

¹³Keith Fournier, "Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi. As We Worship, So We Believe, So We Live," Catholic Online, November 8, 2010, <http://www.catholic.org/news/hf/faith/story.php?id=39029> (accessed December 31, 2016).

mature through different orders of consciousness can be of great benefit not only to teachers but to the Philippine Church.

As already mentioned in chapter 4, the Psalms develop a desire for God. How do we inculcate a desire to pray with the Psalms today? One of the aims of this study is to revivify the devotional practice of the Psalms. One way to do this is to show how the Psalms can be transformative when I teach them to future ministers. Another way is by encouraging these ministers not to just preach on the Psalms¹⁴ but to highlight them more, when appropriate, during the Mass. In the Catholic Sunday lectionary, the Gospel and the First Reading are always connected, and the Responsorial Psalm always responds in some way to the First Reading. Perhaps one way to tie up the Sunday readings is to use the response in the Psalm as the interpretative key, or as a refrain, or even as a rallying cry. For example, on the thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year C), the Gospel is from Lk 9:51-62. Jesus tells a would-be follower who wants to bury his father first, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (v. 60). To another who wanted to say farewell to those at his home first, Jesus says, “No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (v. 62). The second request is mirrored in the story of Elijah calling Elisha in the First Reading (1 Kgs 19:16b, 19-21). Why is God so demanding? One answer is the response in the Psalm (Ps 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11): “You are my inheritance, O Lord!” The price we pay to follow the Lord is high because the return is greater than we can ever dream of – God himself! The response also tells us what we should value above all else – above family, above

¹⁴J. Clinton McCann has a whole essay on this entitled “Thus Says the Lord: Thou Shalt Preach on the Psalms” in *Psalms and Practice: Worship, Virtue, and Authority*, ed. Stephen Breck Reid (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 111-122.

home, above our own dreams: God himself. Throughout the Mass, “You are my inheritance, O Lord!” can take on many roles: (1) as a point for the examination of conscience before the Kyrie (Do we see the Lord as our inheritance? Do we value God above all things? Or do we chase after other inheritances?); (2) as a point for reflection after receiving Communion (We have just received Christ, our inheritance. Can we say that Jesus alone is more than enough for us?); (3) as encouragement and as a challenge during the dismissal (Go now, the Lord is your inheritance. Seek only his will.). With the constant refrain of “You are my inheritance, O Lord!” the congregation will hopefully have memorized a line from the Psalms which they can repeat to themselves during the week.

In my suggestions in this chapter, I have combined “informational” and “formational” readings of the Bible. Peter Enns uses the terms “critical” and “spiritual” and asks how these two types of readings related – if they are at all? Enns elaborates:

On one level, one can say that there is no strain between them, or at least there need be no strain, but I am not sure critical readings let us off the hook that quickly. One can conclude that these two approaches are after different things and designed for different reasons. However, a critical reading casts doubt on the integrity of readings that are not rooted in historical contexts... Spiritual readings of Scripture are not beholden to basic contextual issues. Instead, verses, clauses or individual words are used as fertile soil for spiritual contemplation... I consider spiritual readings of Scripture to be a core Christian path to spiritual growth. But biblical criticism has introduced a compelling approach to reading Scripture that by definition precludes readings that do not pay attention to literary or historical contexts. The point of biblical criticism is to say, “No, you can’t just read this psalm or this verse in Genesis in any way that strikes you as spiritually significant.” As far as I am concerned, biblical criticism is in no position to make such a sweeping determination, but if your focus is on how religious and critical readings can co-exist, the relationship between the two will have to be articulated in a compelling way. To put it differently, one would need to lay out how spiritually sensitive and critically informed readers could flip the switch inside of them, to move from one type of reading to another. How does one justify one reading over the other at any given time? On one level, it may be enough to say,

“A spiritual reading is going to happen now, because I am in church, or alone in my living room.” But this, too, brings the problem to the fore: critical scholarship questions (directly or indirectly) the legitimacy of spiritual readings.¹⁵

The practice of Ignatian contemplation integrated in graduate Scripture study attempts to straddle spiritual and critical readings. I would say that in this practice, a *habitus* can be developed that will tell us there is no need to “flip the switch” – there is no strictly critical reading and no strictly spiritual reading. The two influence and balance each other. But as Enns says, the relationship between the two still has to be “articulated in a compelling way.” This can be a future project that will hopefully be informed by observations and the experiential knowledge that comes from practice when I try to integrate Ignatian contemplation in my own teaching.

¹⁵Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 116-117.

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