

Peaceful or Violent Eschatology: A Palestinian Christian Reading of the Psalter

Recent Psalm studies have rightly moved away from overlooking the intentional order of the final form of the Psalter to studying its theological significance.¹ Wilson in particular argues that the fourth and fifth Books (Pss 90-106; 107-145) respond to the problem raised by the first three books (Pss 2-89).² These first three books point out the collapse of the Davidic covenant while the last two books provide an answer from the perspective of wisdom. Wilson points out that the psalms at the seams of the books are theologically significant. Therefore, theologians should pay more attention to the intentional placement of these psalms (Pss 1-2, 41-42, 72-73, 89-90, 106-107 and 144-145).³ He adds that Psalm 2 is the foundation of Davidic Zion theology, Psalm 72 is a pointer that the promises to David are transferred to his descendants, and Psalm 89 is a lament that bemoans the failure of the traditional Davidic theology. Then he affirms that Psalms 1, 90, 107, and 145, provide a frame in which the sages answer the challenge raised by the first three books. These wisdom Psalms frame the royal Psalms (Psalms 2, 72, 89, and 144) providing a *relecture* in which the final composition points out that God is the true and lasting King recalling the foundational pre-monarchical faith of Israel and directing the faithful to trust in Yahweh as King, rather than in fragile and failing human princes.

Wilson's insights are very helpful but he overstates his case. His arguments would have been stronger if he had heeded McCann who had earlier suggested that the first three Books have already started answering the challenges raised by a militant Davidic theology.⁴ Nevertheless, Wilson's theological insights are worth engaging, especially in light of recent eschatological interpretations of the Psalter that support a restorative eschatology and argue

¹See David Howard, "Editorial Activity in the Psalter: A State-of-the-Field Survey," pages 52-70 in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*. Edited by J. Clinton McCann. Sheffield: JSOT, 1993; "Recent Trends in Psalm Study," pages 329-368 in *The Face of Old Testament Studies*. Edited by David Baker and Bill Arnold. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999; Jinkyu Kim, "The Strategic Arrangement of Royal Psalms in Books IV-V," *WTJ* 70 (2008): 143-157.

²Wilson explains his compositional reading in several publications. See for example, Gerald Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalm," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. Clinton McCann; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 72-82; Gerald Wilson, "King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (ed. Peter Flint et al.; VTSup 99; Leiden: Boston, 2005), 391-406.

³Other scholars argue that the placement of Psalm three is also theologically significant. See Rolf Rendtorff, "The Psalms of David: David in the Psalms," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (ed. Peter Flint et al.; VTSup 99; Leiden: Boston, 2005), 63.

⁴J. Clinton McCann, "Book I-III and the Editorial Purpose of the Psalter," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 93-107.

that the Davidic kingdom is reestablished by conquering the nations militarily. Israel and God's promises to her are at the heart of this ethnocentric or Israel-centered approach. Both Robert Cole and David Mitchell support a restorative eschatological reading.⁵

However, in this paper, I will point out some of the deficiencies within their understanding of eschatology and argue for a theocentric eschatological reading in which the past is transformed in light of a new divine spatiotemporal reality.⁶ A theocentric eschatological approach is simply a meeting between the spatiotemporal divine reality and the human reality. This meeting that is embedded in a theocentric cosmic worldview is not only informative but is also transformative. It integrates previous elements into new contexts highlighting the divine reality and deconstructing previous perceptions of that reality. Stated differently, our reading advocates a canonical intertextual reading which is more than a canonical interpretation, for it attempts to find the editorial traces in the final canonical redaction; it highlights the importance of the role of the redactor(s)/reader(s) as she or he decontextualizes then contextualizes antecedent texts.⁷ Vorndran argues that a proper interpretation should involve descriptive analysis followed by a synthetic interpretation.⁸ After the interpreters identify and describe the *hypotexts* (the linked texts) found in the *hypertext* (the hosting text with hyperlinks), they discuss the contributions of the hypotexts to the meaning of the hypertext. In addition, the intertextual interactions create repeated patterns and themes that should guide our reading strategy, response and attitude, i.e., what Firth calls "thematic modeling."⁹

⁵This militant and restorative approach is foundational for Christian Zionists.

⁶Scholem points out that Rabbinic Judaism has conservative, restorative, and utopian visions of the future. The conservative focuses on the "construction and continuing preservation and development of religious law," the restorative vision is "directed to the return and recreation of a past condition which comes to be felt as ideal," and the utopian vision might go beyond the restorative vision presenting "a past transformed and transfigured in a dream brightened by the rays of utopianism." Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism: And Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 3-4.

⁷For a list of bibliographical works on intertextuality see Jürgen Vorndran, *Alle Völker werden kommen* (Berlin: Philo, 2002), 290-292. For a short and helpful introduction to the issues, see Paul Koptak, "Intertextuality," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin Vanhoozer et al.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 332-334.

⁸Vorndran, *Alle Völker werden kommen*, 137-143.

⁹Firth has introduced me to thematic modeling, i.e., the idea in which repeated themes shape the response of the reader. David Firth, "The Teaching of the Psalms," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (ed. Philip Johnston and David Firth; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 171.

Indeed, our reading is not an epistemological approach that is divorced from an ontological reality, for we cannot encounter God properly without a theology of humility. In this approach, God alone establishes his Kingdom and the depiction of David as the militant king fades, while his portrait as the righteous servant dominates. The ideal situation of Psalms 1-2 or 72, in which the righteous prospers and the militant Davidic king conquers the nations, needs to be reread in the context of the failure of the Davidic covenant in Psalm 89 and the suffering of the righteous in Psalm 73. The orientation of Psalms 1-2 and 72 is influenced by a state of national and personal disorientation, especially in Book III (Pss 73-89). Both Palestinians and Israelis experience this state of disorientation. Both of them are faced with a choice. They need to choose between advocating a militant ethnocentric approach and a theocentric reading that advocates life instead of death. Should they propagate the worldview of Psalm 72, i.e., traditional militant Davidic theology or reread it in light of Psalm 86? This choice is at the heart of this paper.

(1) *Robert Cole*

Cole argues that Psalm 72 is the basis for understanding the canonical and rhetorical message of Book III.¹⁰ He believes that the dominant theme of Book III is the postponement of the fulfillment of the promises of Psalm 72, which portrays a militant Davidic figure who subdues the nations.¹¹ The pertinent theme is seen through a pattern of questions and answers. More specifically, Cole points out that Psalm 73 presents the opposite conditions of Psalm 72. Psalm 74 starts a string of questions that compose the major ingredients of the rhetorical links in Book III. These questions are found in Pss 74:9-11, 77:8-10, 79:5, 80:5, 82:2, 85:6, and 89:47.¹²

Cole believes that these backbone links are basically concerned with the temporal dimension of the fulfillment of the promises of Psalm 72. Psalms 75-76 reaffirm these

¹⁰Please note that I use the Hebrew text unless I specify otherwise.

¹¹Robert Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III* (JSOTSup 307; Sheffield: Sheffield, 2000), 61.

¹²According to the NIV, in which verse numbers are sometimes different from the Masoratic Hebrew text, these verses ask: "How long will the enemy mock you, O God? Will the foe revile your name forever? Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand?" (Ps 74:10-11); "Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" (Ps 77:8-9); "How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire?" (Ps 79:5); "O Lord God Almighty, how long will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people?" (Ps 80:4); "How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked?" (Ps 82:2); "Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations?" (Ps 85:5); "How long O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?" (Ps 89:46).

promises and answer the time questions of Psalm 74. They point out that the peace of Psalm 72 will come only after judgment, and that the destroyed Zion of Psalm 74 will not “cease to exist forever.”¹³ On the contrary, there will be a restored Zion in which deliverance will occur. Moreover, in response to the question of Psalm 77 about the duration of God’s wrath, Psalm 78 points out not only the duration of Israel’s rebellion, implying their just judgment, but also the choice of Zion as God’s eternal dwelling. In response to the questions raised in Psalms 79-80, Psalms 81 and 82 provide a divine response questioning the duration of Israel’s rebellion and injustices, and pointing out the exact opposite of the conditions of Psalm 72. The question of Ps 85:6 and the requests in Psalm 84 find answers in Ps 85:9-14. The question of Ps 89:47 about the duration of God’s wrath on his Messiah is answered in Psalm 90 in which “God’s extra-temporal perspective” is highlighted.¹⁴

Cole argues that Book III is best interpreted “as prophetic of the eventual restoration of the monarchy.”¹⁵ He says: “Just as Psalm 72’s delayed promises of a kingdom are lamented throughout Book III, so is the non-appearance of its king.”¹⁶ Within this conceptual framework, the verb “כלו” in Ps 72:20 “should be rendered ‘are perfected’, in the sense that the previous description represented the perfection, culmination and fullest outworking of the promise of David.”¹⁷ In other words, “Psalm 72 at the end of Book II is the last word on the subject of the promised eschatological kingdom to David’s house, surpassing any previous or subsequent descriptions within the Psalter.”¹⁸ Further, “prayers” in Ps 72:20 should be understood as prophecies.¹⁹

Cole has advanced the discussion concerning the purposeful placement of Book III. He points out several important lexical and thematic links, such as the righteous-walking in Psalms 84-86, and the theme of Sheol in Psalms 86-89. He demonstrates that the rhetorical questions found in Psalms 74:9-11; 77:8-10; 79:5; 80:5; 82:2; 85:6; and 89:47 play an important role in the cumulative message of Book III. In addition, he raises many thought-provoking questions related to the eschatological interpretations of Book III. It is, however, important to point out that Cole’s arguments have serious shortcomings.

¹³Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III*, 47.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 199.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 138-139.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 138.

First, against ancient manuscripts and the consensus of scholars, Cole hastily dismisses the possibility that the sentence **כלו תפלות דוד** in Ps 72:20 means the end of the prayers of David.²⁰ Against the *prima facie* evidence, he sees it as the perfected prophecies of David. In other words, he reads into the text his own ideas without demonstrating the falsity of the dominant perspective or the plain sense of the text. Cole, further, fails to recognize distinctions, tensions or paradoxes in the Psalter. He appeals, instead, to selective evidence and does not present other legitimate views. For example, he assumes that a literal interpretation of the Hebrew phrase “לעולם” as “forever” is the only valid understanding of perpetual promises. Otherwise, the promise of an eternal throne will fail. This understanding of time is different from the informative studies of Verhoef or Tomasino.²¹ In short, Cole unjustifiably confines himself within one theme that cannot explain every link within Book III.

Second, Cole fails to define clearly his eschatological assumptions and how they shape his interpretation. His insistence on using a “slippery” word (eschatology) without a clear definition is a major shortcoming and an unintended invitation to theological confusion.²² By framing the question as promise/prophesy and fulfillment, Cole has created unnecessary problems. These are:

(1) Cole assumes a fixed promise and a one-time fulfillment that is restorative in nature. Both assumptions are restrictive. They restrict the freedom of God and the way He brings about the fulfillment of promises. The eschatological kingdom advocated by Cole is, at best, part of Israel’s traditional and popular theology (*vox populi*) that promotes a *Realpolitik* aiming at advancing her power, institutions, and values without giving God the freedom to deconstruct her beliefs and reconstruct them by His words and actions. In other words, the Kingdom of God is not a static construct that is contingent to Israel’s reality, faithfulness or disobedience. Israel’s reality or dissonance should be adjusting to the reality of fulfillment

²⁰Ibid., 138.

²¹P. A. Verhoef, “Time and Eternity,” *NIDOTTE* 4:1252-1255; Anthony Tomasino, “עולם,” *NIDOTTE* 3:345-351.

²²Although Marshall warns his readers about the slippery terminology of eschatology in New Testament discussions, his caution concerning the different confusing uses of the term “eschatology” is also applicable to Old Testament scholars. More recently, Sauter points out the different meanings of the term “eschatology” and its changing nature. Gerhard Sauter, *What Dare We Hope? Reconsidering Eschatology* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 1-26. See also Joachim Schaper, *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995) 26-30.

as advocated by God.²³ Through the new divine reality, the people of God experience a radical transformation.

(2) By insisting on restoring the kingdom of Psalm 72 or by advocating a restorative eschatology, Cole misses the importance of the utopian vision of Psalm 87 and its powerful language that invites the reader into a new reality, i.e., Zion is the city of God and the mother of the nations.²⁴ It would have been better if Cole had brought together the various visions into dialogue. The vision of Psalm 87 stands in tension with the *vox populi* that sees the nations as the enemies.

(3) Cole's insistence on understanding Book III only from a prophetic eschatological perspective is plagued with reductionism. Unfortunately, Cole overlooks, *inter alia*, the theological movement of the text, i.e., the transformations in the characterizations of the identity of God and the move towards monotheism and universality in the Psalter.

(2) David Mitchell

Similar to Cole, Mitchell reads the Psalter eschatologically. He argues that the final redactor(s) advocate an eschatological agenda or message. He thinks that the meaning of eschatology is basically predicting a program of future events.²⁵ Based on his studies in Zechariah 9-14, Ezekiel 34-38, Joel 3-4 and other texts, he suggests that the eschatological program includes the following events:

Yhwh will gather scattered Israel to the land promised to their forefathers. Thereafter an alliance of hostile nations will gather to attack them. Yhwh will destroy the invaders and save Israel. Then Israel will worship Yhwh on Zion, together with the survivors of the nations.²⁶

This conceptual grid shapes his understanding of the Psalter. It is possible to suggest that this is a case of *petitio principii*, for it seems that Mitchell assumes what he tries to prove or is begging the question. Anyway, Mitchell argues that the aforementioned eschatological events are matched by the following thematic progression in the Psalter. (1) The Asaph Psalms start with the ingathering of Israel in Psalm 50 and end with the ingathering of the

²³I have adopted the terms "*vox populi*" and "*Realpolitik*" from VanGemeran. My understanding of eschatology is indebted to his insights. Willem VanGemeran, "Prophets, the Freedom of God, and Hermeneutics," *WTJ* 52 (1990): 79-99.

²⁴See Yohanna Katanacho, "Jerusalem is the City of God," Jerusalem: Musalaha, forthcoming.

²⁵David Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Books of Psalms* (JSOTSup 252; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1997), 15.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 165.

nations that attack Jerusalem in Psalm 83. (2) The temporary Messianic kingdom of Psalm 72 ends with the death of the king in Psalm 89 and with the exile of Israel in the wilderness in Book IV. (3) Israel is rescued by its heavenly Messiah in Psalm 110 and she experiences the joy of victory in Psalms 111-118. (4) The songs of ascents point out the “recent divine deliverance from a massive foreign attack” and the “joyful ascent to the Feast of Sukkoth in the aftermath of war.”²⁷

More recently, Mitchell confirms this understanding as he discusses the Korahite Psalms. He argues that the “Korahite tradition and the Korah Psalms feature the theme of redemption from Sheol.”²⁸ After reconstructing the Korahite tradition, he asserts that redemption from Sheol is not only dominant in their tradition but is also foundational for understanding the Korah Psalms (Pss 42-49; 84-85; 87-89). He points out the Korah Psalms interest in the underworld and the “accumulated Sheol imagery” at the end of the two Korah groups.²⁹ Then, based on his observations, he suggests that the Korah Psalms should be understood within the Psalter’s eschatological program. First, he argues saying that low-key Sheol imagery first appears in Psalms 42 to 44, where it represents Israel’s exile, for which they long and from which they pray to be redeemed.³⁰ The second component of the eschatological program appears in the catastrophic day of Psalm 46 when the nations will fall alive into Sheol. Mitchell says,

In Psalm 47, after delivering Jerusalem amid cataclysms, the king receives the homage of the nations at his Jerusalem throne. Psalm 48 then returns to the Jerusalem deliverance: God will redeem his people and carry them over Death-Sheol. Finally, to close the first Korah group, Sheol language appears full-on in Psalm 49.³¹

²⁷Ibid., 126-127, 296-298. On pages 243, 257, 262, and 268, Mitchell adds that the aforementioned thematic progression is also seen in the following royal psalms: (1) Psalm 45 indicates the initial appearance of the cosmic Messiah-King who reigns with righteousness as seen in Psalm 72. (2) The nations attack Israel and its king. Although the latter is supposed to live forever, he is cut off (Psalm 89) even though he begged God to preserve his life (Psalm 86). (3) The Messiah-King reappears in Psalm 110 “as the agent of divine deliverance.” The language of birth in this psalm reflects the resurrection of the faithful ones. (4) After the deliverance, the Messianic age dawns (Psalm 132) and “Yhwh’s covenant with David, which in Psalm 89 appeared to be abrogated, is reaffirmed. . . .”

²⁸David Mitchell, “‘God Will Redeem My Soul from Sheol’: The Psalms of the Sons of Korah,” *JSOT* 30 (2006): 383.

²⁹Ibid., 376.

³⁰Ibid., 381. See also Yohanna Katanacho, “From Depression to Hope,” *Cornerstone* 46 (2007): 16-17.

³¹Ibid., 381.

Further, he highlights the Sheol imagery in the second Korah sequence, arguing that placing Psalm 86 in the midst of that collection is related to Sheol imageries. The David of Psalm 86 needs redemption from Sheol for, in Psalm 88, he is in the realm of the death, suffering its terrors and, in Ps 89:49, he is the one who can be redeemed from Sheol, as has already been suggested by the combination of his righteousness in Ps 86:2 and the assertion of Ps 49:16.

Several aspects of the aforementioned criticisms leveled against Cole apply also to Mitchell. Indeed, Mitchell presents a reductionistic view of eschatology that is event and future centered. The Psalmist's perception of eschatology is different from Mitchell's narrow understanding, i.e., a future program of events or, at the risk of redundancy, eschatocentric eschatology.³² VanGemeran rightly asserts that the "psalmists show generally little interest in eschatology in the narrow sense, that is, in how the future will unfold. The psalmists have a theocentric understanding of eschatology."³³ Theocentric eschatology generates not only future expectations but also transforms the reader into a wholehearted worshiper who honors God, lives now a godly life, and actively anticipates the in-breaking of the divine reality. By choosing to step into the theocentric chronotope or spatiotemporal reality, the psalmists give God the freedom to define or redefine their theology and to restructure their perception of space, time, and the theology associated with them. These correspondences generate joy and lament: through reflection they give birth to wisdom.

A Theocentric Eschatological Approach

We have seen how a restorative eschatological reading is marked with reductionism. It is fitting now to present a different reading in which a militant royal perspective is reread in the Psalter. Psalm 86 plays a significant role in this new reading as we shall argue below. First, the Psalm eliminates perceiving the nations as enemies, a perspective that dominates Book III. Second, it expands God's covenantal mercy to include all the nations. Sinai theology is reread in light of Zion Theology and the role of the nations is seen in light of a Davidic figure who intercedes for the nations instead of subduing them. Third, David becomes the representative of the whole creation, not just Israel, as he presents a monotheistic worldview in which there is one global true God (Ps 86: 10) who is interested in all of his creation. Indeed, the eschatological vision of Psalm 87 and the worldview of holy space in Psalm 85 are intimately related to a significant theological shift in Psalm 86. We shall unpack these points after affirming the intentional placement of Psalm 86.

³²The label "eschatocentric eschatology" is adapted from William Loader, "Simple Choices? A Response to John Dominic Crossan," *Colloq* 31 (1999): 70.

³³Willem VanGemeran, "Psalms," in *Psalms-Song of Songs* (ed. Frank Gaebelien and Richard Polcyn; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 570.

This Psalm has a significant placement. It is the only Davidic Psalm in Book III and it is placed in the midst of the second Korahite sequence (Pss 84-85; 87-88).³⁴ Further, its editorial placement is clear in light of the postscript of Psalm 72 which asserts that the prayers of David are concluded. Interestingly, Psalm 86 starts with a prayer of David and it is connected with Book IV (90-106) which also starts by a prayer, albeit by Moses. In addition, Ribera-Mariné studies the “anthological” nature of Psalm 86, suggesting that it is an intentional means for creating a dialogue with a set of texts and for rereading these texts.³⁵ More specifically, this rereading is a “sapient reflection of the former tradition.”³⁶ Let us now unpack some of this sapient reflection.

First, the enemies are not the nations but the arrogant. Throughout Book III Asaph Psalms complain about the nations who want to destroy God’s holy places (Ps 74:8). The nations are mocking the power and protection of the God of Israel (Ps 79: 10), plotting the elimination of Israel’s existence (Ps 83:5), and scheme to inherit the pastures of God (Ps 83:13). But Psalm 86 stops the drums of war against the nations, advocating a different worldview. Moreover, in light of juxtaposing Psalm 86 to Psalms 85 and 87 that present a utopian multicultural vision of holy space, the intentional omission of the enmity of the nations in Psalm 86 is significant. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* brings to our attention the similarities and differences between Psalms 54:5 and 86:14. Psalm 54 states that the nations

³⁴The first Korahite sequence is Pss 42-49. For a detailed study of the purposeful placement of Psalm 86 see, Yohanna Katanacho, “Investigating the Purposeful Placement of Psalm 86,” Ph.D. diss., Trinity International University, 2006.

³⁵Ramon Ribera-Mariné, “Significat d’un Poema Antològic: Salm 86,” in *Tradició i traducció de la paraula: Miscel·lània Guiu Camps* (ed. Frederic Raurell, Damià Roure, and Pius-Ramon Tragan; Montserrat: Associació Bíblica de Catalunya, 1993), 101. On pages 99-101, Ribera-Mariné points out the anthological nature of each verse. Following are the verse numbers with their correspondences: verse 1 (Ps 17:1, 2 Kgs 19:16, Isa 37:17, Ps 102:3, and Ps 109:22), verse 2 (Ps 25:20, Ps 119:167, Jer 3:12, Ps 4:4, Ps 16:10, Ps 18:26, 2 Sam 22:26, Jer 31:7, Ps 31:15, 1 Chr 17:25, Ps 32:10), verse 3 (Pss 6:3, 9:14, 31:10, 51:3, 56:2, 57:2, 123:3, 61:3, 3:5, 28:1, 30:9, 25:5, 32:3, 35:28, 37:26, 38:13, 42:4, 42:11, 44:9, 44:16, 44:23, 52:3, 56:2-3, 56:6, 71:8, 71:15, 71:24, 72:15, 73:14, 74:22, 88:18, 89:17, 119:97), verse 4 (Pss 109:28, 25:1, 143:8), verse 5 (145:9, 86:15, Exod 34:6, Num 14:18, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, Ps 145:18), verse 6 (55:2, 17:1, 5:2, 66:19, 28:2-6, 31:23, 116:1, 130:2, 140:7, verse 7 (Gen 35:3, Pss 77:3, 50:15, 17:6, 138:3), verse 8 (2 Sam 7:22 (=1 Chr 17:20), Exod 15:11), verse 9 (1 Sam 1:19, Ps 22:28, Ps 115:1), verse 10 (Jer 10:6, Exod 34:10, Ps 136:4, Isa 37:16, Isa 37:20 (=2 Kgs 19:15, 19), Ps 98:1), verse 11 (Ps 27:11, 119:33, 1 Kgs 8:36 (2 Chr 6:27), Ps 25:5, 26:3, Jer 32:39, Ps 61:6, Neh 1:11), verse 12 (Pss 9:2, 43:4, 111:1, 138:1, 86:9), verse 13 (Pss 57:11, 56:14, 120:2, Deut 32:22), verse 14 (Pss 54:5), verse 15 (Exod 34:6), verse 16 (Pss 25:16, 119:132, 29:11, 116:16, 20:10, 28:9, 60:7 = 108:7), and verse 17 (Judg 6:17, Pss 35:19, 38:20, 41:8, 25:19-20, Isa 49:8, Isa 49:13).

³⁶*Ibid.*, 101. In Catalan, it reads, “. . . el poema és una reflexió sapiencial de la tradició anterior.”

are the enemies, while Psalm 86 rereads the “same” text asserting that the arrogant are the enemy, not other ethnicities.³⁷ The two variants, “arrogant” or זדים and “strangers” or זרים, are interesting. Instead of seeing their differences as scribal errors, i.e., confusing the *dalet* ד and *resh* ר, it is possible to argue that Ps 86:14 rereads Ps 54:5, eliminating any negative connotations associated with the nations. Konkel points out that זר could imply a “stranger in the ethnic or political sense.”³⁸ Thus, its absence is theologically significant. It disappears when David is extending God’s loving kindness to the nations, when he describes them as God’s creation that honors Him, and when he points out that the nations are equal citizens of Zion (Psalm 87). They are not the nations of Psalm 72 who bow down, lick the dust, offer gifts, and serve the militant king. While David in Ps 72:11 expects all kings to bow down (ישתחוו) to Israel’s king and all nations (כל גוים) to serve him, Ps 86:9 wants all nations (כל גוים) to worship (ישתחוו) Yahweh and to honor his name. The cosmic rule of Psalm 72 points out the defeat of the nations but the cosmic worship of Yahweh in Psalm 86 is shaped by the uniqueness of God and his works (ואין כמוד. . . ואין כמעשׂיד; Ps 86:8), as well as by his great loving-kindness (Ps 86:13). The David of Psalm 86 is not concerned with rescuing Zion but with “the rescue of the nations through Zion/out of Zion.”³⁹ It seems that the interest in holy space is subordinate to the interest in holy people, i.e., all the nations who call upon the name of the Lord.

Second, not only are the nations not the enemies in a theocentric worldview but are, in fact, God’s people who call upon Him. Vorndran rightly argues that the grace formula of

³⁷Ps 54:5 says: אלהים זדים קמו-עלי ועדת עריצים בקשו נפשי ולא שמוך לנגדם but Ps 86:14 has כי זרים קמו עלי ועריצים בקשו נפשי לא שמו אלהים לנגדם סלה

³⁸A. H. Konkel, “זר,” *NIDOTTE* 1:1142. The pertinent lexeme occurs four times in the Psalter (Pss 44:21, 54:5, 81:10, 109:11). Two occurrences are related to a foreign god (Pss 44:21, 81:10). The occurrence in Ps 109:11 has a strong negative context but does not explicitly relate the foreigners to the nations. Ps 54:5 also is not explicit about relating the foreigners to the nations. However, the context of Book III perceives the nations as the enemies and the ones who don’t know God (Ps 79:6) and even conspire against him (Ps 83:6). If the word זר is used in Ps 86:14 then the nations will be one of the first candidates. By using the term “arrogant” Psalm 86 not only avoids the tension with the positive picture of the nations in Ps 86:8-10 but also asserts that the arrogant are David’s true enemies not the nations.

³⁹Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100* (ed. Klaus Baltzer et al.; trans. Linda Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 144.

Exodus 34:6-10 is expanded in Psalm 86:5 to include all the nations.⁴⁰ As a result, Sinai theology is reread in the context of a Zion theology that is multicultural and non-militant. Put differently, Ps 86:15 is a quotation from Exod 34:6. In Exodus 34, we observe that God's merciful nature is the basis for the Mosaic covenant and for God's patience on rebellious Israel. The merciful nature and covenantal loving-kindness are now read in light of God's concern for the poor and for all those who call upon him (Ps 86:1, 5). This interpretation is further confirmed as we trace the grace formula (Exod 34:6) that emphasizes the mercy of God. The expression "merciful" (רחום) occurs only thirteen times in the Old Testament, of which there are six psalms (Pss 78, 86, 103, 111, 112, and 145).⁴¹ The linguistic and thematic similarities in these psalms are impressive. Psalms 78, 103, and 111 combine the following elements: the language and themes of God's mercy (רחום; Pss 78:38; 103:8, 13; 111:4); his covenant (ברית; Pss 78:37; 103:18; 111:5, 9); the language of remembrance (זכור - זכר; Pss 78:39; 103:14; 111:5); and the ephemeral nature of humanity (Pss 78:39; 103:14).⁴² The expansion of the recipients of God's mercy is implicit in Psalms 78, 111 and 112 but is explicit in Psalms 86, 103 and 145. In other words, there are several psalms that explicitly assert the expansion of God's covenantal mercy and instruct readers of the Psalter to adopt this theological component as part of their worldview, avoiding a myopic ethnocentric superiority that is xenophobic and ignorant of God's nature as the merciful creator.

Third, Psalm 86 redefines the eschatological agent and mission of Psalm 72. The Davidic figure of this psalm asserts a God-centered worldview that is central to the theological movement in Book III.⁴³ The names of God in Book III play an important role in

⁴⁰ See also Num 14:17-20, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, Ps 103:8, Ps 111:4, Ps 145:8, Neh 9:17, Neh 9:31, and 2 Chr 30:9. After investigating these formulas in their contexts, he asserts that Psalm 86 should be seen as "*Gebet erneuerte Sinaiologie.*" Vorndran, *Alle Völker werden kommen*, 209.

⁴¹ Exod 34:6; Num 4:31; Pss 78:38, 86:15, 103:8, 111:4, 112:4, 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Neh 9:17, 31; 2 Chr 30:9.

⁴² Psalm 111 does not mention the ephemeral nature of humanity but emphasizes the perpetual nature of the elements associated with God (cf. Ps 111:3, 5, 8, 9, 10). Further, the juxtaposition of Psalm 112, another acrostic psalm, develops this theme and points out the perpetual nature of the righteous one. The combination זכר and רחום are now associated with the unending establishment of the righteous one.

⁴³ Note that the language and content reflect the theocentric worldview. The psalm employs the second masculine suffix (22 times), the imperative verbal form (14 times), the vocative case (10 times), the second independent pronoun (6 times), the perfective form (4 times), and the imperfective form (1 time) in order to point out that God is the one who can help and save his creation.

advocating a theocentric worldview and mark a turning point in the Psalter. This interest in God's name can be seen, *inter alia*, by the repetition of the lexeme שם (Pss 74:7, 10, 18, 21; 75:2; 76:2; 79:6, 9, 9; 80:19; 83:5, 17, 19; 86:11, 12; 89:13, 17, 25), the variety of epithets that are used in Book III, the ways these epithets help in structuring Book III and their association with theological assertions.⁴⁴ Further, the Asaph Psalms in Book III have the absolute form אלהים at the beginning of every psalm (Pss 72:1; 73:1; 74:1; 75:2; 76:2; 77:2; 79:1; 81:2; 82:2; 83:2), except Psalms 78 and 80. The latter two psalms have unique divine epithets. For example, the epithet אלהים עליון occurs in Ps 78:56 and is a *hapax legomenon*. The same psalm describes God as אל עליון (Ps 78:35), an expression that occurs only five times in the Bible.⁴⁵

Simply put, אל עליון is more than a god (אל): he is the highest God, as well as the superior global God. He has rejected Israel completely (Ps 78:59), abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh (Ps 78:60), and rejected the tents of Joseph and Ephraim (Ps 78: 67). The language of rejection can be overturned, not through the election or re-election of Israel, but through choosing a servant Davidic figure and through proclaiming Zion as the city of God (Ps 78:68-72; Ps 87). This depiction of a rejected Israel is highlighted again in Psalm 80; however, the psalmist there prays for restoration through the son of man (Ps 80: 18) who can help the people of God to call upon the name of the Lord (Ps 80:19; cf. Ps 86:5). Interestingly, Psalm 80 is the only text in the Bible that hosts the expression: אלהים צבאות (Ps 80:5, 15).⁴⁶ It also has Yahweh God of hosts (יהוה אלהים צבאות) which occurs four times in the Bible (Pss 59:6; 80:5, 12; 84:9), of which three are in Book III.⁴⁷ Even in the midst of destruction, the text is still presenting images of warfare, a theme that comes to a climax at the end of the Asaph Psalms when many nations attack Israel in order to obliterate its name. However, the sphere of death fades in light of the potential favor that God might show to his anointed one (Ps 84:9), as well as in light of a Korahite contribution, employing a new epithet that reflects the identity of God, i.e., a living God (אל חי).

⁴⁴All of the references related to the lexeme שם describe God except Ps 83:5.

⁴⁵The other four are in Genesis (Gen 14:18, 19, 20, 22).

⁴⁶In addition, Psalm 80 starts with the *hapax legomenon* רעה ישראל, a suitable expression that brings the theme of shepherding in Book III to its climax (cf. Pss 74:1; 77:21; 78:22; 79:13).

⁴⁷Ps 59:6 informs us that יהוה אלהים צבאות is the God of Israel. Further, a similar expression, but not identical, occurs in Ps 89:9 (יהוה אלהי צבאות).

Both Psalms 80 and 84 associate the God of hosts with life, albeit in different ways. Ps 80:19 wants God to give life to Israel. But Psalm 84 presents a living God who overflows with goodness to all those who trust him. Associating the God of hosts with the living God is significant because of contextual reasons. First, the epithet **אל חי** appears only two times in the Psalter.⁴⁸ One occurs in the first psalm of the first Korah sequence (Ps 42:3) and the other in the first psalm of the second Korah sequence (Ps 84:3). The linguistic and thematic similarities between these two psalms as well as their thematic parallelism have been pointed out.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the contextual value of placing the epithet “the living God” at the beginning of the two Korah sequences has not been discussed. It is important to point out that both Psalms 42 and 84 are preceded by plots for eliminating the names of those who are associated with God. Ps 41:6 points out that the enemies of David want to obliterate his name (**מתי ימות ואבד שמו**). They plot together to keep him in the realm of death (Ps 41:8-9). Nevertheless, the Psalmist believes that Yahweh is the one who gives life (Ps 41:3) and is able to establish David forever (Ps 41:13). Consequently, the living God of Psalm 42 is the antidote to the forces of death that try to obliterate the name of David. Similarly, the living God of Psalm 84 is presented after the attack of the enemies. Again, they plot together to wipe out the name (Ps 83: 5). This time, they want to obliterate the name of Israel (**ולא יזכר שם ישראל עוד**) but a living God will keep all those who trust in him, whether they are gentiles or descendants of Israel.

Second, a living divinity is the mark of true divinity. Ps 82:7 has shown that all false gods die like people and fall like one of the princes. God is different from all the other gods. He is the only global God (Ps 83:19) and the living God (Ps 84:3). The theme is further developed in Ps 86:8, which says there is none like God among the gods. He is the only true God, or more explicitly, the only true divinity (Ps 86:10). He alone can bring the nations or his works.

Third, both Psalms 80 and 85 point out that Israel needs life from God. Ps 80:19 sees this life as the means to full restoration, elaborating on Israel’s state of death. Similarly, Ps 85:7 sees the life given by God as the means to restoration. However, instead of elaborating on the state of death, it describes the full force of life, i.e., living in the land of God, the land of glory, peace, truth, and righteousness (Ps 85:1, 9-14). It is a theology of life and the end of exile in the Eden of God. It explains the implications of receiving life from God, i.e., God will restore the fortunes of Jacob, forgive their sins, eliminate the state of wrath, and grant joy, peace, loving-kindness and salvation.

⁴⁸It is a rare epithet that occurs only four times in the Bible (Josh 3:10; Hos 2:1; Pss 42:3; 84:3). See also Ps 42:9.

⁴⁹Mitchell, “‘God Will Redeem My Soul from Sheol’: The Psalms of the Sons of Korah,” 365-384.

Fourth, the living God or God of hosts of Psalm 84 overflows with life: goodness to birds and to all humanity (אדם). All those associated with this living God reflect signs of life. The birds put (שית), or better give birth to, their young in God's house. The pilgrims transform the valley (שיתורה) into a spring (מעין), or an "oasis."⁵⁰ The land of God produces goodness and it sprouts with truth (Ps 85:12-13): the nations of Psalm 87 are born in the city of God. This theme of life is also seen in the springs (מעיני) that are found in the latter psalm.

Psalm 86 contributes to this argument. Like Ps 80:19, it correlates the divine name with life (Ps 86:12-13). Ps 86:8-13 points out that the spread of God's name or his cosmic reputation is rooted in his divinity, not in the military program of the royal seed. It is rooted in his identity as the creator of the whole world whose works should bring honor to his name. He alone is truly divine (אתה אלהים לבדך). His works alone are unmatched. Eschatology is founded on theology proper. In other words, the return of the nations to God is meaningful and possible only in light of the divine identity. He is a living God but the other gods die like men (Ps 82:7). The death of the gods in Psalm 82 is followed by the release of the nations in Psalm 86.

Similarly, the restoration of David from lower Sheol into life is embedded in a wholehearted fearing and honoring of God's name. This release from the realm of death is founded on the identity of God. He is a merciful and a compassionate God, abundant in loving-kindness. Put bluntly, God is the only one who can conquer Sheol and give life even when David is in the worst possible situation (Ps 86:13). God brings both the nations and David to himself because God is great. He is interested in their life not their death. The saving of the Davidic figure from Sheol is matched by the birth of the nations in Zion. Ps 86:17 confirms that God did help David and Psalm 87 shows that he helped the nations and granted them life in the city of God. A theocentric eschatology is embedded in granting life, justice, peace, and righteousness to all God's creation, not only to Israel. It advocates a global God whose covenant is available equally to all of his creatures who call upon his name. It associates the saving of the nations with the saving of the Davidic figure. This depiction can best be seen in Jesus Christ, whose life and resurrection from Sheol is the key of salvation for all who call upon the name of the Lord. Consequently, Christocentric eschatology is the New Testament reading of the Psalter's theocentric eschatology.

Conclusion

In conclusion, traditional Davidic theology presents a militant eschatology. It arguably has led its proponents to a theology that produces death, for it seeks to subdue the enemies by the sword and to kill our neighbors. It cannot resonate with giving both Palestinians and Israelis equal rights in the Holy Land. On the other hand, theocentric eschatology advocates a theology of life to all God's creation. It leads to a living God and expects us to be

⁵⁰Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (WBC 20; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 350.

transformed into meek servants of justice, peace, and righteousness for all of God's creation. Thankfully, Psalm 86, with the help of the second Korah sequence, has reread Psalm 72 and granted both Palestinian and Israelis an opportunity to pursue the dream of Psalm 87 in which the enemy is transformed into a brother who has equal inheritance in holy space. Last, I pray that Palestinian, Israelis, and others will stop propagating a violent militant ethnocracy in the name of eschatology and will, instead, choose a theocentric eschatology that seeks to destroy enmity not the enemies.

Bibliography

- Cole, Robert. *The Shape and Message of Book III*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 307. Sheffield: Sheffield, 2000.
- Firth, David. "The Teaching of the Psalms." Pages 159-174 in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*. Edited by Philip Johnston and David Firth. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005.
- Hossfeld, Frank-Lothar, and Erich Zenger. *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*. Edited by Klauz Baltzer. Translated by Linda Maloney. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.
- Howard, David. "Editorial Activity in the Psalter: A State-of-the-Field Survey." Pages 52-70 in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*. Edited by J. Clinton McCann. Sheffield: JSOT, 1993.
- _____. "Recent Trends in Psalms Study." Pages 329-368 in *The Face of Old Testament Studies*. Edited by David Baker and Bill Arnold. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999.
- Katanacho, Yohanna. "From Depression to Hope." *Cornerstone* 46 (2007): 16-17.
- _____. "Investigating the Purposeful Placement of Psalm 86," Ph.D. diss., Trinity International University, 2006.
- _____. "Jerusalem is the City of God," Jerusalem: Musalaha, forthcoming.
- Kim, Jinkyu. "The Strategic Arrangement of Royal Psalms in Books IV-V." *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (2008): 143-157.
- Koptak, Paul. "Intertextuality." Pages 332-334 in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Edited by Kevin Vanhoozer, Craig Bartholomew, Daniel Treier, and N. T. Wright. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.
- Loader, William. "Simple Choices? A Response to John Dominic Crossan." *Colloquium* 31 (1999): 67-74.
- McCann, J. Clinton. "Book I-III and the Editorial Purpose of the Psalter." Pages 93-107 in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*. Edited by J. Clinton McCann. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 159. Sheffield: JSOT, 1993.
- Mitchell, David. "God Will Redeem My Soul from Sheol': The Psalms of the Sons of Korah." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30 (2006): 365-384.

_____. *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Books of Psalms*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 252. Sheffield: Sheffield, 1997.

Rendtorff, Rolf. "The Psalms of David: David in the Psalms." Pages 53-64 in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*. Edited by Peter Flint, Patrick Miller, Aaron Brunell, and Ryan Roberts. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 99. Leiden: Boston, 2005.

Ribera-Mariné, Ramon. "Significat d'un Poema Antològic: Salm 86." Pages 97-115 in *Tradició i traducció de la paraula: Miscel·lània Guiu Camps*. Edited by Frederic Raurell, Damià Roure, and Pius-Ramon Tragan. Montserrat: Associació Bíblica de Catalunya, 1993.

Sauter, Gerhard. *What Dare We Hope? Reconsidering Eschatology*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999.

Schaper, Joachim. *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995.

Scholem, Gershom. *The Messianic Idea in Judaism: And Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*. New York: Schocken Books, 1971.

Tate, Marvin. *Psalms 51-100*. Word Biblical Commentary 20. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990.

VanGemeren, Willem. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.

_____. "Prophets, the Freedom of God, and Hermeneutics." *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 79-99.

_____. "Psalms." Pages 1-880 in *Psalms-Song of Songs*. Edited by Frank Gaebelein and Richard Polcyn. The Expositor's Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.

Vorndran, Jürgen. *Alle Völker werden kommen*. Berlin: Philo, 2002.

Wilson, Gerald. "King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter." Pages 391-406 in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*. Edited by Peter W. Flint, Patrick D. Miller, Aaron Brunell, and Ryan Roberts. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 99. Leiden: Boston, 2005.

_____. "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalm." Pages 72-82 in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*. Edited by J. Clinton McCann. Sheffield: JSOT, 1993.