

PSALM 73 : AN ANALYSIS

By Leslie C. Allen

Any who have attempted to do consecutive work in the Book of Psalms will be familiar with their discouraging diversity. There are at least two tools available to the exegete to aid him in his task of letting a particular psalm speak to him: form criticism and rhetorical criticism. It is proposed to analyse Psalm 73 from these two aspects in order to shed light upon the path of the exegete. Form criticism, a particular method of comparing scripture with scripture, endeavours to find in the Psalter points of contact with other psalms and to deduce the type of composition employed. It is a useful approach so long as it is not allowed to obscure the individuality of a piece of literature. A helpful counterbalance to form criticism is rhetorical criticism. Putting individuality to the fore, it looks for the sign-posts the author himself erected to guide the hearer or reader on the right track.

I RHETORICAL CRITICISM

The structure of Psalm 73, by which is meant its arrangement in parts according to criteria discernible on literary grounds, should not be difficult to ascertain if a statement made by J. P. Ross in 1978 is correct. He wrote: 'There is general agreement on the structure of the psalm'.¹ Doubtless he meant that on the whole the subject matter gradually unfolds in a clear and logical progression. Ross himself has divided the psalm into two halves, vv. 1-14 and 15-28; each half he subdivided into five parts, vv. 1, 2-3, 4-9, 10-11, 12-14 and then vv. 15-17, 18-20, 21-22, 23-26 and 27-28, with appropriate labels for each subdivision. In fact general agreement proves to be an elusive quarry. Some sample analyses of Psalm 73, based on sequence of thought, will illustrate

1. 'Psalm 73', *Israelite Wisdom, Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, edited by J. G. Gammie *et al.* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978) 161-175, esp. 163.

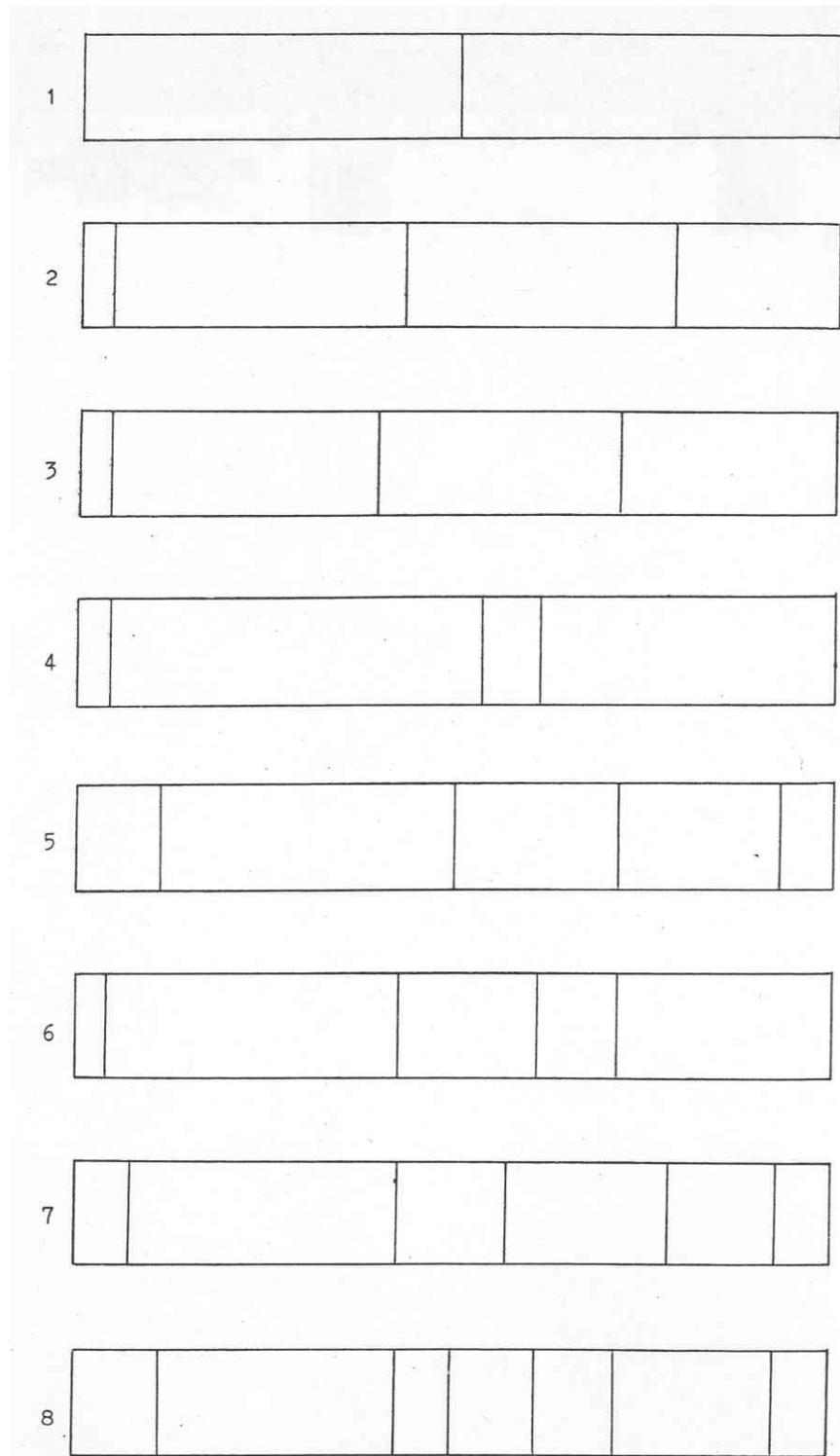


Figure 1
The Logical Structuring of the Psalm

a large measure of variation. These examples of logical structuring are graded in terms of complexity.

A. F. Kirkpatrick (figure 1.1) divided the psalm into two main parts, vv. 1-14 and 15-28, like Ross.² Martin Buber (figure 1.2) found four divisions, a foreword in v. 1, a description of the wicked in vv. 2-12, the story of the psalmist's reactions in vv. 13-22, and his confession of faith in vv. 23-28.³ M. Mannati (figure 1.3) has also found a fourfold structure, an introduction in v. 1 and then three main sections, vv. 2-11, 12-20 and 21-28.⁴ D. Michel (figure 1.4) has likewise favoured a division into four units.⁵ Verse 1 gives the theme of the psalm, which is then illumined from the psalmist's own experience. In vv. 2-15 he relates how he thought otherwise - God is not good - because of the prosperity of the wicked. Verses 16-17 are the turning point in his understanding; verses 18-28 develop the theme of v. 1 in a positive way. A. B. Rhodes (figure 1.5) has opted for a fivefold division.⁶ He too found a statement of the theme, but comprising vv. 1-3. Then vv. 4-14 describe the dark night of doubt, vv. 15-20 the bright day of faith, vv. 21-26 the continual grip of God, and vv. 27-28 the grateful response of witness.

J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay (figure 1.6) have also suggested a fivefold structure, but one which matches Rhodes' at only one point: v. 1 is the psalmist's conclusion, vv. 2-12 relate how his faith was undermined, vv. 13-17 speak of his despondency and mental confusion, vv. 18-20 the fate of the wicked, and vv. 21-28 his own new relationship with God.⁷ A. Weiser (figure 1.7) discovered a sixfold structure: vv. 1-2 the theme, forming a framework with a conclusion in vv. 27-28, vv. 3-12 the distress of the wicked, vv. 13-16 the

2. *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1902) 431.
3. *Right and Wrong. An Interpretation of Some Psalms* (ET, London: SCM, 1952) 35-43.
4. *VT* 21 (1971) 62.
5. *Tempora und Satzstellung in den Psalmen* (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1960) 210.
6. *Psalms* (London: SCM, 1961) 108-109.
7. *Psalms 51-100* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977) 120-123.

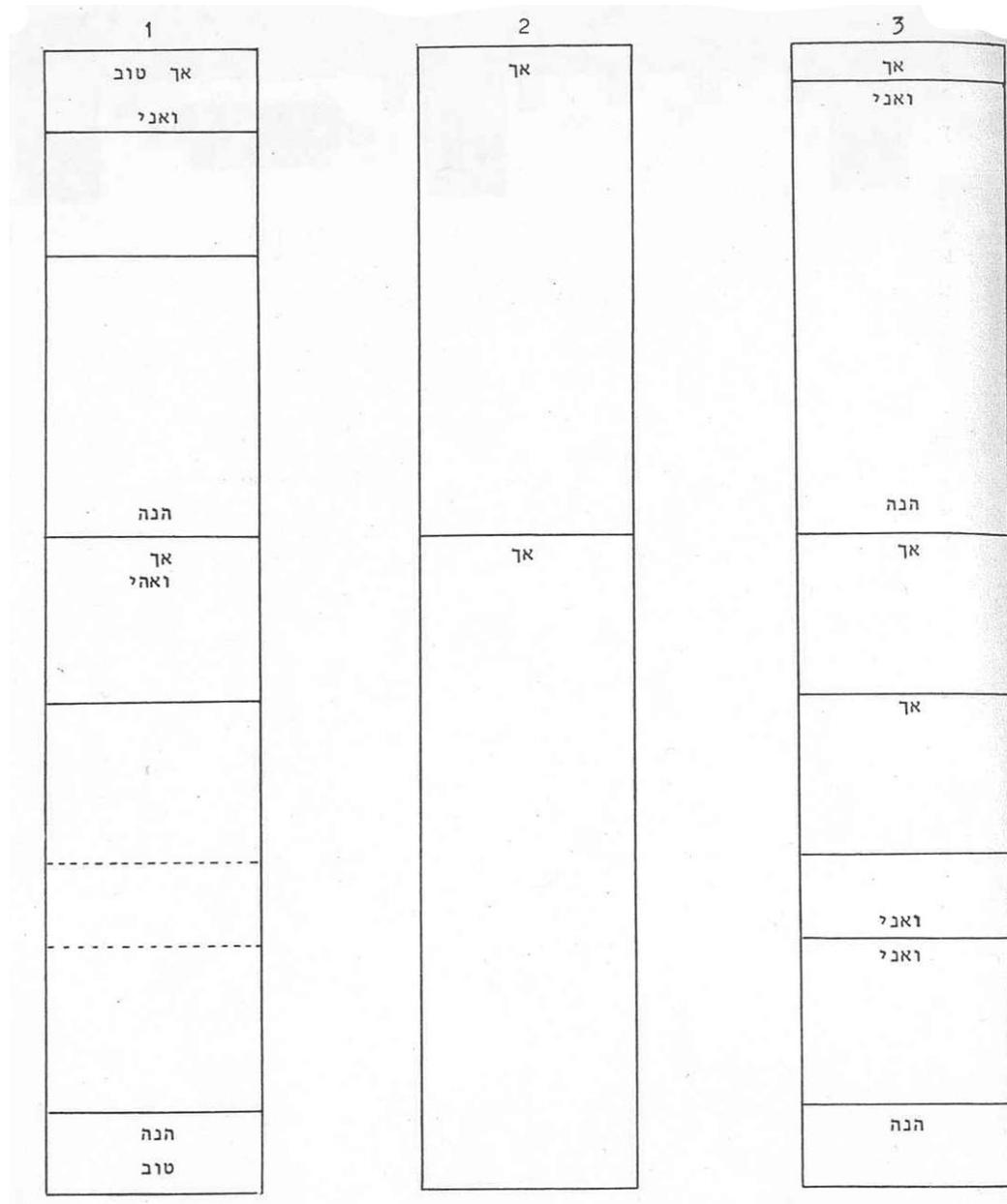


Figure 2
The Stylistic Structuring of the Psalm (A)

psalmist's own calamity and doubts; then from v. 17 everything is seen in a new light, as regards the wicked in vv. 17-22 and in respect of his own relationship to God in vv. 23-26.⁸ Finally in this present list David J. Clark (figure 1.8) in 1979 privately suggested to the writer a sevenfold structuring, a concentric one: the outer circle comprises vv. 1-3 and 27-28, while the next one is vv. 4-12 and 21-26, and inside that lie vv. 13-14 and 18-20. There are alternating themes of weal and woe. At the centre of the psalm is a pivot or key, in vv. 15-17.

Eight samples have been examined without finding the general agreement of which Ross spoke.⁹ The most which can be concluded is that five of the eight examples isolate v. 1; four find a common break after v. 12; and four - not the same four - make a break after v. 20.

All the examples thus far have been based on logical structuring, the formation of units in terms of the thought content of the psalm. Cases of stylistic or rhetorical structuring may now be examined. These new examples have not ignored the psalm's logical development, but they have also taken into account hints of a different kind scattered through the psalm. There are rhetorical devices which to various scholars have appeared to mark separate units of the psalm.

E. Baumann (figure 2.1) has the distinction of being the first (to the writer's knowledge) to apply stylistic principles to Psalm 73.¹⁰ The scheme is complicated by his attaching vv. 21-22 to vv. 13-16. He drew attention to the repetition of the particle אַךְ 'surely, nevertheless' in vv. 1, 13, followed by וְאֲנִי 'and I' and וְאָדָּי 'and I was' respectively in vv. 2, 14. In v. 12 הִנֵּה 'behold' indicates a conclusion and also introduces the concluding unit in v. 27. The device of inclusion whereby the composition ends as it began finds

8. *The Psalms* (ET, London: SCM, 1962) 508.

9. In fairness, it must be stated that further on Ross mentioned the possibility that there might be some questions about details of the analysis ('Psalm 73' 165).

10. *ZAW* 62 (1949/50) 126-132.

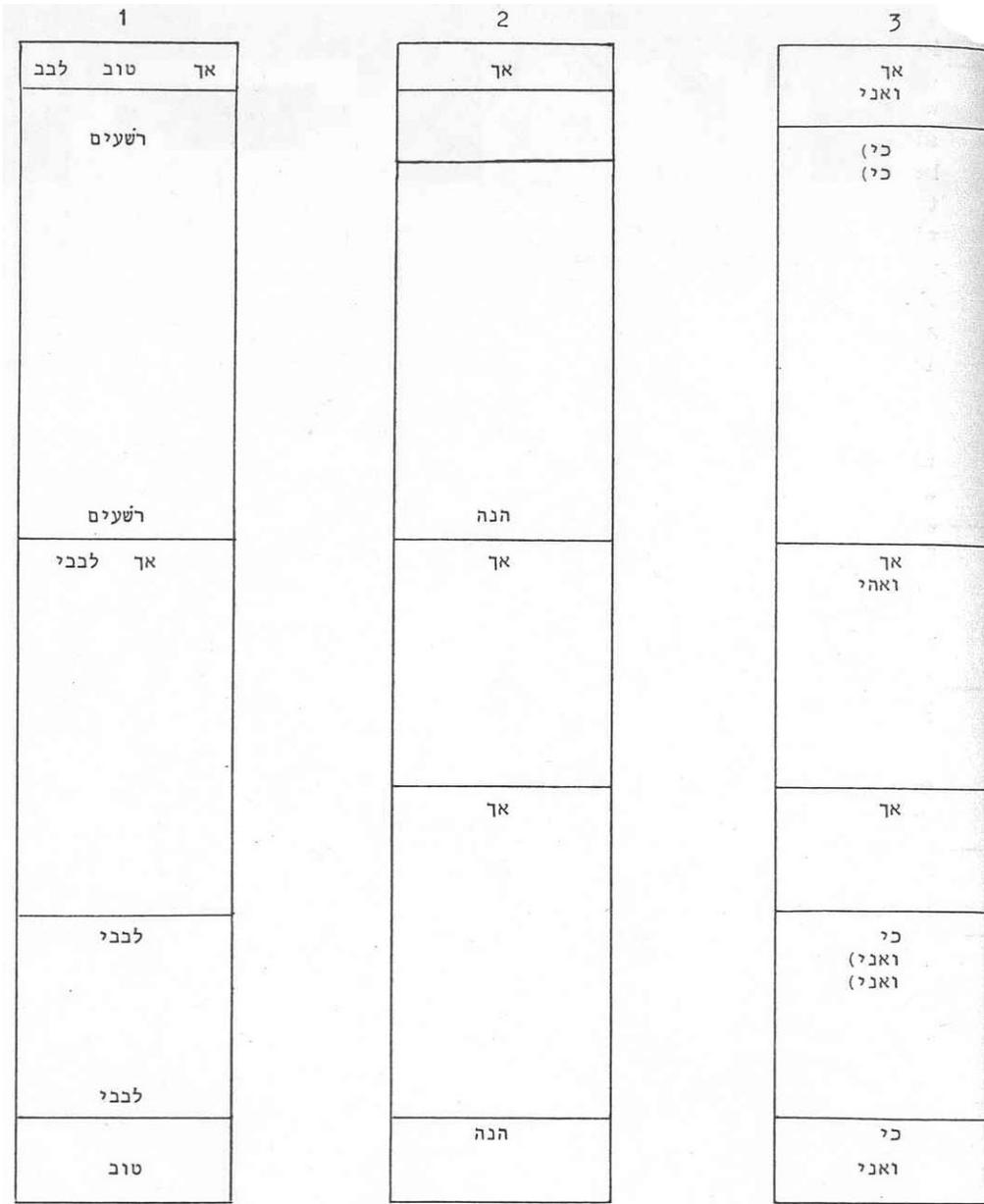


Figure 3
The Stylistic Structuring of the Psalm (B)

illustration in the repetition of טוב 'good' in vv. 1, 28. One of these phenomena was highlighted by A. Caquot (figure 2.2): the repetition of אֵךְ in vv. 1, 13 indicates that the psalm falls into two halves; moreover, in the first half God is mentioned in the third person, while in vv. 12ff. he is addressed in the second person.¹¹ A. Schmitt (figure 2.3) saw a sevenfold division in the psalm.¹² He too drew attention to אֵךְ, in v. 18 as well as in vv. 1, 15, and to הִנֵּה in vv. 12, 27. He considered that וַאֲנִי introduced new sections; to achieve this end he had to reverse vv. 21 and 22.

L. G. Perdue (figure 3.1) has found five divisions with the aid of rhetorical features.¹³ He has stressed inclusive devices, טוב in vv. 1, 28, רשעים 'the wicked' in vv. 3, 12 and לִבִּי 'my heart' in vv. 21, 26. Also he discovered correspondence between vv. 1 and 13: אֵךְ...לִבִּי and אֵךְ...לִבִּי. B. Renaud (figure 3.2) has divided the psalm into six units, vv. 1, 2-3, 4-12, 13-17, 18-26, 27-28, to a large extent on stylistic grounds.¹⁴ He mentioned that he had no access to K.-J. Illman's work.¹⁵ That was unfortunate since Illman (figure 3.3) has produced a most impressive stylistic analysis.¹⁶ In each case a particle introduces a unit, either אֵךְ or כִּי 'for, when' (twice in vv. 3, 4). In three cases the initial particle is followed by וַאֲנִי, in vv. 2, 22-23 (twice) and 28. In one case וַאֲהִי is used as the second term, in v. 14. He has supported this structuring with appeal to unit lengths: vv. 3-12 devote a total of ten lines to the wicked, while vv. 13-17 give five lines to the psalmist's experiences. This proportion is

11. *Semitica* 21 (1971) 44.
12. *Entrückung Aufnahme Himmelfahrt. Untersuchungen zu einem Verstellungsbereich im AT* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1973) 261-263.
13. *Wisdom and Cult. A Critical Analysis of the View of Cult in the Wisdom Literatures of Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977) 288-289.
14. 'Le Psaume 73, méditation individuelle ou prière collective?', *RHPR* 59 (1979) 541-550, esp. 543-544. He drew attention to the crucial positioning of אֵךְ in vv. 1, 13, 18 and of the conclusive הִנֵּה in vv. 12, 27.
15. 'Le Psaume 73', 541 note 2.
16. 'Till tolkning av Psalm 73', *SEA* 41-42 (1976/77) 120-29, esp. 123-124.

maintained in reverse form in the following two units: vv. 18-20 describe the fate of the wicked in three lines, while vv. 21-26 use six lines to depict the psalmist's happy lot.¹⁷ Illman was able to harmonize his stylistic conclusions with a logical approach. Verses 1-2 and 27-28 are the introductory and closing framework of the psalm. The intervening material falls into two halves: the first is vv. 3-17, which deal with the apparent conditions of the wicked (vv. 3-12) and of the psalmist (vv. 13-17), and the second is vv. 18-26, which reveal the true state of affairs for the wicked (vv. 18-20) and for the poet (vv. 21-26).¹⁸

In the present writer's judgment it is hardly possible to fault this structuring. Illman might have supported his analysis by reference to הנה in vv. 12, 27 and to the inclusive טוב in vv. 1, 28. It is to be noted that repetition is the key which has unlocked this structural door. However, there are very many other cases of repetition in the psalm. It has been observed that Perdue appealed to usage of לבב. In all, the term occurs six times at five places in the Massoretic Text; Buber regarded it as the dominant key word of the psalm.¹⁹ It may be said that the problem the psalmist had to solve was not simply some objective experience such as sickness or persecution: it was a matter of the mind and heart. To the writer's knowledge no scholar has done justice to the totality of repeated terms and motifs in Psalm 73. Schmitt has made passing reference to half a dozen cases in his discussion of v. 24; but he has related them hardly at all to his structural analysis.²⁰ A fresh examination of vv. 1-20 reveals a distinct pattern of repetition in units formed by vv. 1-4, 5-12, 13-17 and 18-20.

17. 'Tolkningen' 124.

18. *Ibid.* 123.

19. *Right and Wrong* 37.

20. *Entrückung* 263, 292.

Notwithstanding (אך),²¹ God is good
to the pure in heart (לבב),
yet I nearly fell
because of their prosperity (שלום)
and physical wholeness (תם*).

and because of their lack of toil (עמל)
and trouble (ינגעו)
and because of their defiant speaking (ואמרו).

Notwithstanding (אך),
I endeavoured to be clean in heart (לבבי),
yet I had trouble (נגוע)
but could not speak (אמרת);
so I had mental toil (עמל).

Notwithstanding (אך),
they will fall
and incur destruction (לשמדה)
and perish (תמו).

21. For the adversative sense of אך here see N. H. Snaith, *VT* 14 (1964) 223.

Verses 1-4 stand over against vv. 18-20, while vv. 5-12 contrast with vv. 13-17. There is a chiasmic pattern ABB'A'. The break after v. 12 is accentuated in vv. 1, 13 by the repetition of אָךְ and of the motif of pure-heartedness. At the end of the fourth unit there is a sense of climax and completion. The basic problem of envy of the prosperity of the wicked (v. 3) has been solved by looking into God's future for the wicked. Their end will be the reverse of their present prosperity. There is an effective use of repetition: simple repetition of terms, word-play (תָּם/*תָּמוֹר and שְׁלוֹם/לְשִׁמָּה) and the repetition of the motif of falling. This motif is used in two different ways, first concerning the psalmist's fall from faith and secondly concerning the fall from life which the wicked are to experience.²²

If this analysis is correct, three observations may be made. First, in v. 4 support is found for the generally adopted division of MT לְמוֹתָם 'to their death' into תָּם לְמוֹ 'to them; sound'.²³ The second observation is that although חֲלָקוֹת in v. 18 has been understood by some scholars in terms of Ugaritic *hlq* and Akkadian *halāqu* 'die, perish'²⁴, a sense '(smooth and so) slippery places' corresponds well with the parallel motif of stumbling in

22. Cf. too the two terms for images, מִשְׁכִּירוֹת, v. 7, and צִלָּם, v. 20; the similes of vv. 2 and 19; also perhaps בְּעֵינָמוֹ v. 7, and בְּעֵינֵי, v. 20, although in v. 7 the reading בְּעֵינָמוֹ based upon LXX and Syriac (cf. BHS) may be preferable.
23. Cf. BHS. It has been objected by H. Ringgren, *VT* 3 (1953) 266, that the adjective is used only in an ethical sense and cannot mean 'healthy'. However, M. Mannati, *VT* 22 (1972) 424 note 2, has observed that the noun תָּם is used of physical wholeness in Jb. 21:23, while the verb is used in a variety of senses of completeness beyond that of moral integrity; accordingly an understanding of an here in terms of physical health may not be excluded. See further note 99 below.
24. M. Dahood, *Psalms* 2 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968) 192; N. J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the OT* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969) 83; A. K. Jenkins, *Three Wisdom Psalms? A Consideration of the Classification 'Wisdom Psalms' with Particular Reference to Psalms 37, 73 and 49* (unpublished London University M.Th. thesis, 1969) 96 note 2.

v. 2. A third observation may already have occurred to the reader. Earlier it was accepted with Illman that vv. 1-2 go together as the first unit of the psalm. Now evidence is found that the first unit is vv. 1-4. It does appear that vv. 1-2 have a dual role. Ultimately they will become the introduction to the complete psalm, but they also function as part of a smaller scheme in relation to the material up to v. 20. One may compare the structural analysis of Psalm 74 made by J. P. M. van der Ploeg.²⁵ He has argued that on the one hand 74:1-3 function as an introduction to the whole psalm; on the other hand vv. 1-11 are an integral unit marked by inclusion, and vv. 1-3 are woven into this latter scheme. The present writer's as yet unpublished work in the Psalter has uncovered dual schematization in Psalms 111, 137 and 140.

As one listens to the stylistic drumbeats of Psalm 73, a major pause is sensed after v. 20. Then the psalmist adds a finale in the form of vv. 21-28. Thus may be explained the apparent awkwardness of vv. 21-22. A number of commentators have felt that these two verses interfere with the smooth development of the psalm and have been misplaced from a position near vv. 15-16.²⁶ Structural analysis suggests that at v. 21 the psalmist begins afresh. His basic problem of the prosperity of the wicked has been settled to his satisfaction in his understanding of their eventual fate (v. 17), which he has spelled out in vv. 18-20. He could have stopped there, but evidently regarded the point he has reached as only a provisional climax. Earlier in his poem he had raised a related problem, that of his own misfortunes (vv. 13-16). They constituted for him a

25. 'Psalm 74 and its Structure' in *Travels in the World of the OT. Studies Presented to M. A. Beek*, edited by M. S. H. G. H. van Voss et al. (Assent Van Gorcum, 1974) 204-210, esp. 208.
26. E.g. H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926) 319; W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: SPCK, 1939) 341; E. Baumann, *ZAW* 62 (1949/50) 128.

further obstacle to faith in God,²⁷ To this subsidiary but no less real problem the psalmist turns in vv. 21-28. His traumatic experience and his relationship with God are as yet stumbling-blocks. He has mentioned the relation of the religious community to God in v. 15, but he has spoken as a comparative stranger. He proceeds to reconsider his own relation to God from v. 21. Stylistically vv. 21-28 supply a series of reversals of what has been said earlier in the psalm. Word-play and simple repetition are used to this end.

	vv. 1-20	vv. 21-28
לִבִּי	1, 7, 13	21, 26 (bis)
עִם	5	22, 23, 25
שָׁמַיִם . . . אֲרֶץ	9	25
יָדַעְתִּי	11, 16	23
הִנֵּה	11	27
עוֹלָם	12	26
כֹּל	14	27, 28
סָפַרְתִּי	15	28
אֲחֵרִית	17	24
חִלְקִי	18	26

27. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial* (London: Inter Varsity Fellowship, 1965) in his preface defined the problem of the psalm as 'Why should the godly frequently have to suffer, especially in view of the fact that the ungodly frequently appear to be most prosperous?'. This definition appears to be a recasting to accord with modern thinking. For the psalmist the reverse order of the two elements is true (cf. Jer. 12:1). The book is to be commended as a contribution to expository study of Psalm 73.

The heart and mind (לִבְּךָ) in vv. 1-20, apart from a context of moral purity in v. 1, were those of the wicked (v. 7) and of the self-pitying psalmist (v. 13). Now the term is used in tones of reverent contrition (v. 21 in the light of v. 22) and of confident trust (v. 26). Heaven and earth (שָׁמַיִם . . . אֲרֶץ) were earlier cited in accents of lament as the objects of the ill-speaking of the wicked (v. 9); in v. 25 they are associated with the psalmist's unrivalled faith in God.²⁸ The disturbing conclusion of v. 11 concerning the wicked, introduced by הִנֵּה, gives way to an orthodox conclusion in v. 27, which is introduced by the same particle. The seeming permanency of the wicked (עוֹלָם, v. 12) is replaced by the psalmist's affirmation of the permanency of God's gracious dealings with him in v. 26.²⁹

The poet appears to be deliberately ranging over earlier vocabulary and reversing its contexts. The grim end of the wicked (אַחֲרֵיתָם, v. 17) has as its counterpart a happy end for the psalmist. H.-J. Kraus has observed the correspondence between אַחֲרֵיתָם and אַחֲרֵיתָא 'after' in v. 24.³⁰ The correspondence may now be seen as part of a pattern running between vv. 1-20 and vv. 21-28. The MT is hereby vindicated against attempts to emend אַחֲרֵיתָא in v. 24 to אֲרֶץ 'path'³¹ or to regard it as a preposition 'after (glory)' or even 'with (glory)'.³² H. Ringgren noted that אֲרֶץ 'to declare' in v. 28 is used as a

28. For the motif of incomparability in association with 'heaven and earth' see C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the OT* (Leiden: Brill, 1966) 86 note 2.
29. At v. 12 G. R. Driver, cited by A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (London: Oliphants, 1972) 532, revived (cf. Gunkel, *Psalmen* 318) a repointing to עֲוֹלָיִם (= NEB 'rogues'). The pattern of echoes supports MT.
30. *Psalmen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978) 672. E. Würthwein, 'Erwägungen zu Psalm 73' in *Festschrift A. Bertholet zum 80. Geburtstag*, edited by W. Baumgartner *et al.* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950) 532-549, esp. 540, also found the double usage meaningful.
31. Gunkel, *Psalmen* 319; Driver, *JTS* 44 (1943) 12.
32. Thus LXX and Vulgate; R. B. Y. Scott, *JTS* 50 (1949) 178; Dahood, *Psalms* 2. 195; Jenkins, *Three Wisdom Psalms?* 99; Schmitt, *Entrückung* 298-299.

contrast to **אספרה** in v. 15.³³ The refusal of the psalmist to narrate his lament is replaced by a resolve to narrate his new theme of joy and praise before the congregated community (v. 28). The presence of **חלקי** 'my portion' in v. 26 appears to be caused by a desire to make a word-play on **חלקות** in v. 18. The slippery places reserved by God for the wicked are contrasted with a gracious portion from God for the psalmist. It may even be suggested that the negative associations of the comprehensive term **כל** 'all' in v. 14 are replaced by its triumphant usage in vv. 27, 28.³⁴ The preposition **עם** 'with, in relation to', used in v. 5 of a horizontal relation to mankind, now has a triple occurrence with reference to God in vv. 22, 23, 25. Lack of knowledge, attributed to God by the wicked (**ידע**, v. 11) and used despairingly of the psalmist in v. 16 (**לדעת**), is again related to himself in v. 22 (**אדע**), but now as part of a context of restoration to God.

The evidence suggests that vv. 21-28 intentionally counterbalance vv. 1-20. By adding the second part the poet refashioned the whole into a new and complementary structure, which Illman was able to discover. From one point of view the psalm may be regarded in terms of piecemeal development whereby first vv. 1-12 were given chiasmic completion in vv. 13-20, and then the whole was itself completed by the reversals of vv. 21-28. From another aspect the psalmist artistically wove his final composition into a new pattern so that (for instance) vv. 27-28 match vv. 1-2 by their inner contrasts (**ואני**, vv. 2, 28) and by echoing God's goodness 'in affirming how good it is for the psalmist to be near God (**טוב, אלהים** in vv. 1, 28). Rhetorical criticism helps the reader to burrow into the psalm and to reconstruct the thought processes of the one who composed it.

33. 'Einige Bemerkungen zum 73. Psalm', *VT* 3 (1953) 265-272, esp. 271; also Schmitt, *Entrückung* 292.
34. Does the double occurrence by way of climax support the doubled **לכבי** in v. 26? Scholars often delete the second case on metrical grounds, reading **צורי** for **לכבי צור** (e.g. Kraus, *Psalmen* 664) or deleting the whole phrase (e.g. BHK). However, metre by itself is never a safe criterion.

Psalm 73 exhibits three cases of extended parallelism by echoing words, sounds and motifs.³⁵ The purpose for which the poet made liberal use of this stylistic device was to enhance related content by related form. At the centre of the first set of contrasts, in vv. 5-17, the psalmist ruefully contrasts the wicked with himself as to experience and religious morality. Surrounding this inner contrast is an outer one, in vv. 1-4 and 18-20, which finds an answer to his religious doubt in an assurance concerning eventual retribution for the wicked. These two sets of contrasts are capped by a third in vv. 21-28, where the whole gamut of the poet's earlier attitude and his observations about the wicked is offset by the resolving and exploring of his relation to God. Rhetorical criticism has been able not only to expose these stages of development but also to show how style was employed for the passionate reinforcement of meaning.

II FORM CRITICISM AND SITZ IM LEBEN

In the examination of structure a profusion of answers was encountered. A similar variety characterizes definitions of genre and setting. No fewer than four replies have been given to the question of the basic form of the psalm. It was categorized by Gunkel as an individual psalm of lament.³⁶ The description of the wicked in vv. 2-12, the profession of innocence in vv. 13-14, and the affirmation of trust in vv. 23-26 are all features which find parallels in the lament form. Moreover, Ross regards v. 28 as typical of the vow frequently found at the end of a lament.³⁷

A second classification is that of a psalm of confidence, a form which developed out of part of the lament into a separate category, an expression of trust in God in a situation of stress. C. Westermann has described Psalm 73 as on the borderline between a lament

35. For examples of verbal parallelism in English poetry see G. N. Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (London: Longmans, 1969) 79-86. Mention of this book was kindly made to the writer after the lecture.
36. H. Gunkel and J. Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933) 388-389.
37. 'Psalm 73' 168.

and a psalm of confidence.³⁸ Schmitt has analysed the psalm in detail from a form-critical perspective. He admits that lament ingredients are present in the psalm, but regards vv. 23-26 as the climax of the psalm, for which all else is preparatory. Accordingly it is an individual psalm of confidence.³⁹ U. Kellermann has followed Schmitt in this description.⁴⁰ A. K. Jenkins was uncertain whether Psalm 73 is a psalm of confidence or a thanksgiving psalm, but he inclined to the former categorization.⁴¹

The third classification is that of an answered lament. Such psalms start like a lament but finish on a note of triumph, with the conviction that God has heard the prayer and in due course will change the situation of distress which prompted the lament. It may well be that in each case a divine oracle given at the sanctuary underlies the change of tone. Perdue considers that the answered lament is the model used for Psalm 73.⁴² He does not go into detail, but is presumably taking into account the twin factors of the lament features of the psalm and its positive mood of joy. Here too Würthwein should be classed. He actually called the psalm a royal song of confidence, but held that v. 17b referred to the receipt of a divine oracle, which was echoed in the personal terms of vv. 23-24.⁴³ Accordingly a better label would be an answered lament.

The most favoured grouping is that of an individual psalm of thanksgiving. Kraus has observed that Psalm 73 contains elements of thanksgiving: the backward-looking narrative of vv. 2-12 and reference to an account associated with thanksgiving in v. 28b.⁴⁴ S. Mowinckel in his various writings has consistently regarded Psalm 73 as a thanksgiving psalm, though perhaps

38. *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (ET, Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1965) 80.

39. *Entrückung* 277.

40. *ZTK* 73 (1976) 276.

41. *Three Wisdom Psalms?* 150.

42. *Wisdom and Cult* 286, 324.

43. 'Erwägungen' 546-549.

44. *Psalmen* 666.

not delivered orally but written and deposited in the sanctuary as a votive offering.⁴⁵ R. E. Murphy has compared the psalm with a thanksgiving song, noting that it begins with a conclusion that is the reason for the psalmist's grateful prayer.⁴⁶ J. K. Kuntz has called it a thanksgiving composition because of its 'strategic opening and closing cola', vv. 1 and 28.⁴⁷ Weiser too regards it as a thanksgiving song.⁴⁸ Renaud considers that the psalm has undergone collective re-interpretation, but that originally it was an individual psalm of thanksgiving.⁴⁹ He has noted like Kuntz that v. 1 corresponds to the cultic invitation to render thanksgiving 'Give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good . . .', found for example in Psalm 106:1, while v. 28b affirms the psalmist's resolve to testify before the cultic community to the salvation which he has come to experience, just as in a thanksgiving psalm. Moreover, vv. 2-15 and 16-26 correspond to the recital of temptation and deliverance characteristic of the thanksgiving psalm. Jenkins, as already noted, hovered between the classifications of a psalm of confidence and a thanksgiving song. He too regarded v. 1 as reminiscent of the liturgical formula associated with the thanksgiving service, but he called attention to its unique perspective: elsewhere one finds an invocation calling for thankful worship. Jenkins observed too that the account of past troubles is a feature of the individual thanksgiving psalm, although he claimed that it is usually addressed to God;⁵⁰ also vv. 27-28 resemble the concluding testimony of a thanksgiving psalm. However, he could find no specific mention of thanksgiving in Psalm 73 and for this reason was inclined to classify it

45. *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962) 114; also A. Bentzen, *Introduction to the OT*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1948) 161.
46. 'A Consideration of the Classification "Wisdom Psalms"', *Congress Volume Bonn 1962* (SVT 9) (Leiden: Brill, 1963) 156-167, esp. 163.
47. 'The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel: Their Rhetorical, Thematic and Formal Dimensions', *Rhetorical Criticism. Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, edited by J. J. Jackson and M. Kessler (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974) 186-222, esp. 207.
48. *Psalms* 89.
49. 'Le Psaume 73' 545-546.
50. On this issue see note 83 below.

as a psalm of confidence.⁵¹

With these four form-critical options apparently open, can we decide in favour of any one? Or should it be concluded with Ross that the psalm is a multiple one of lament, trust and thanksgiving?⁵² Before an answer can be attempted, a further problem requires investigation. Is Psalm 73 a wisdom poem, a product of the wisdom schools which re-used cultic models for didactic purposes? This question has been vigorously denied, affirmed and qualified. In 1962 Murphy did sterling work in examining so-called wisdom psalms. He set out a list of criteria for determining this classification. With regard to Psalm 73 he granted that it contained one wisdom theme, that of the problem of retribution, but he considered it insufficient to warrant the classification, especially in view of its thanksgiving features.⁵³ Murphy's pronouncement was echoed by Kuntz in his own re-evaluation of wisdom psalmody. He stated that the retribution motif was found outside wisdom writings and so did not demand a wisdom classification in this case. He applied a further test, one devised by R. B. Y. Scott, that of wisdom vocabulary.⁵⁴ He found that Psalm 73 contains nine words characteristic of wisdom literature.⁵⁵ As a result he allowed that the psalm was composed with wisdom influence, but in view of its thanksgiving elements he could go no further.⁵⁶

Weiser, although aware of the problem, does not discuss it but claims that the psalm was recited before the congregation in the sanctuary where the author received the answer to his problems: he claimed support from vv. 17 and 28.⁵⁷ Likewise Würthwein has denied that Psalm 73 is a wisdom composition in view of the references in the psalm to the cultic community: he understands the psalm to be a royal psalm.⁵⁸ Similarly Ringgren stressed cultic features of the psalm,

51. *Three Wisdom Psalms?* 150.

52. 'Psalm 73' 170.

53. 'Wisdom Psalms' 163.

54. *The Way of Wisdom in the OT* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) 121-122.

55. They are רשע, עצה, עמל, לבב, חשב, דעת, בער, בין, תוכחה.

56. 'Canonical Wisdom Psalms' 206-207.

57. *Psalms* 89, 507.

58. 'Erwägungen' 544-549.

considering that its speaker was perhaps the king and its cultic context was the ritual drama of the New Year festival in which the king participated.⁵⁹ Illman has also denied that the psalm is a wisdom poem. He could accommodate its clear didactic purpose as a cultic function, judging that it was composed by a Levite.⁶⁰

Other scholars have given a completely different set of answers and affirm that Psalm 73 is a wisdom poem and was not composed for cultic use. This view is sometimes associated with three textual and exegetical decisions. First, in v. 1 לִישׁרֵאל is divided into two words לֵאלֹהֵי יֵשָׁרִים 'God to the upright', thereby removing a communal reference; or the verse is regarded as a later addition.⁶¹ Secondly, in v. 17 מִקְדְּשֵׁי אֱלֹהִים is re-interpreted in a non-cultic sense 'the mysteries of God' or emended to מִקְשֵׁי אֱלֹהִים 'the snares of God', *i.e.* traps laid for the wicked.⁶² Thirdly the last colon of v. 28 is deleted as a later accretion.⁶³ Gunkel may be taken as representative of the group who identify Psalm 73 as a wisdom psalm.⁶⁴ The personal narrative of the psalm is understood in terms of the autobiographical

59. 'Bemerkungen' 271-272. Cf. J. H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (London: SCM, 1976) 75-78. It was in opposition to this royal categorizing that Weiser, *Psalms 507-508*, asserted that the psalm was composed by 'an ordinary member of the community of the godly'.
60. 'Psalm 73' 128-129; cf. his book, *Thema und Tradition in den Asaf-Psalmen* (Åbo: Research Institute of the Åbo Akademi Foundation, 1976) 41. Levitical authorship was also urged by P. A. Munch, *ZAW* 55 (1937) 41, and G. von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (ET, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965) 260-266.
61. Cf. Gunkel, *Psalmen* 316.
62. Cf. *ibid.* 318.
63. Cf. *ibid.* 320.
64. Cf. O. Eissfeldt, *The OT: An Introduction* (ET, Oxford: Blackwell, 1965) 125; G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the OT* (ET, London: SPCK, 1968) 289; G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (ET, London: SCM, 1972) 203-206; Kellermann, *ZTK* 73 (1976) 276; Kraus, *Psalmen* 665-666. Westermann's stance is equivocal. In *Praise* 80 he treated Ps. 73 in terms of cultic forms, while in *The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980) 114-115 he deals with it as a wisdom poem.

style adopted by teachers of wisdom.⁶⁵ The clear didactic aim of Psalm 73 suggests its sapiential nature. Perdue has argued that the psalm was not written for cultic usage. He finds the form of the psalm too diverse from a cultic composition to be regarded as such. It cannot be a cultic thanksgiving psalm since essential formal ingredients are missing, namely the announcement of the psalmist's intention to praise Yahweh, the invoking of the congregation to join him, and his urging them to regard his salvation as an example for them.⁶⁶ On the positive side Perdue claims that the psalm is based stylistically upon a proverb, cited in v. 1, like other wisdom poems, and that it uses the characteristic autobiographical style.⁶⁷ It employs no less than twelve wisdom terms.⁶⁸ Its wisdom motifs are not only the justice and retribution of God, as Murphy argued, but also the contrast of the wicked and the righteous and a theological answer to the problem of theodicy which is centred in the notion of 'nearness to God' (v. 28), as in the book of Job. Yet he does admit that a cultic experience underlies the psalm at v. 17.

It is this cultic experience that has encouraged a third group of scholars to give a qualified answer to the question of the wisdom nature of Psalm 73. It is claimed to be both sapiential and cultic. Mowinckel regarded the psalm as a thanksgiving psalm composed by a wise man for cultic use.⁶⁹ Similarly Renaud considers its original form to have been a cultic psalm of thanksgiving written by a sage.⁷⁰ M. Dahood seems to agree when he briefly describes the psalm as a wisdom psalm uttered before the religious assembly, appealing to vv. 1 and 15.⁷¹ Jenkins

65. Gunkel, *Psalmen* 312, referred to Ps. 37:25f; 35f; Pr. 4:3f; 7:6ff; 24:30ff.

66. *Wisdom and Cult* 291.

67. *Ibid.* 287-288.

68. *Ibid.* 287. He adds *אֱחָרִית*, *גְּאוּדָה* and *יִשְׁרָר*. The first two do feature in wisdom literature, but also outside it; the third depends on a slight change of text in v. 1, referred to above.

69. 'Psalms and Wisdom' in *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (SVT 3) (Leiden: Brill 1960) 205-224, esp. 211-212.

70. 'Le Psaume 73' 546.

71. *Psalms* 2 188-189, 191.

like Perdue, re-analysed the motifs of the psalm in the light of Murphy's five criteria. He too found more sapiential motifs than Murphy did, in fact two more: the contrast of the wicked and the righteous, and the motif of the two ways which underlies v. 2 - and surely, one may add, vv. 23-24. Accordingly more than wisdom influence must be claimed. Yet the psalm seems to reflect cultic tradition as well as wisdom tradition (v. 17). The psalm emerged, Jenkins argued, from a wisdom milieu but was intended for a cultic setting.⁷² Ross has seen in the psalm both a wisdom poem and a psalm of lament, trust and thanksgiving. He explains a combination of wisdom and cultic features by reviving H. L. Jansen's thesis that a wisdom school was attached to the temple.⁷³ Accordingly the plural form in v. 17 refers to the cultic area of the temple and also to the school within its precincts. The psalmist visited both and 'on one and the same day in a closely connected series of structures he may have participated in a public service, heard a psalm of lament and its closing affirmation and encountered [wisdom] teachers'.⁷⁴ He also points to parallels of motifs and vocabulary with the books of Job and Proverbs.⁷⁵

This last group of scholars is surely correct in finding both strong wisdom, features and cultic elements in Psalm 73. One has certain reservations about Ross's explanation. More evidence for a temple school at a comparatively early date is required. The plural *מִקְדָּשֵׁי* in v. 17 may simply accord with a number of plural terms used in the Psalter for the temple precincts.⁷⁶ But the question still remains concerning the mixture of cultic forms, if an alternative to Ross's explanation of the psalm as a reaction to multiple experiences is felt to be desirable. The question can be answered only by a detailed analysis of the psalm in form-critical terms.

72. *Three Wisdom Psalms?* 150-151.

73. *Die spätjüdische Psalmendichtung. Ihr Entstehungskreis und ihr 'Sitz im Leben'* (Oslo: J. Dybwad, 1937) 138, 140.

74. 'Psalm 73' 169.

75. *Ibid.* 167-168.

76. Cf. Kraus, *Psalmen* 670, and also Ross's list in 'Psalm 73' 169.

In v. 1 it is surely correct to follow Perdue in finding the form of a proverb.⁷⁷ It is not addressed to God in prayer nor is it addressed to the congregation, which seemingly is mentioned in the third person as 'Israel'.⁷⁸ The saying presented in proverbial form is based on the liturgical formula used at the thank-offering service (*cf.* Jer. 33:11). In terms of cultic thanksgiving it corresponds to the general praise usually put at the end of the thanksgiving psalm.⁷⁹ Here it is placed at the head because it echoed an initial liturgical call.⁸⁰ It is characteristic of a thanksgiving song to put near the beginning a short summary of deliverance, which is followed later, sometimes immediately, by an expanded report.⁸¹ In this case v. 2 may be regarded as the preliminary brief narrative: there is focus upon the terms for 'almost,' in both clauses, as the Hebrew order suggests.⁸² Similarly vv. 3-20 can be viewed as the long narrative passage reciting the cause of distress and how deliverance was found. In vv. 2-12 a generalization concerning the wicked stands in place of the normal reference to threatening enemies. Schmitt has rightly explained this change in terms of a wisdom perspective,⁸³ In v. 13 there occurs a profession of innocence. Such professions are associated elsewhere with narratives of distress and deliverance,⁸⁴ although in other places the profession is a contributory cause of deliverance, whereas here it exacerbates the distress

77. *Wisdom and Cult* 287-289.

78. Dahood, *Psalms* 2 188, regards the *lamed* as a vocative particle. For a critique of its presence in the Psalms see P. D. Miller, 'Vocative Lamed in the Psalter: A Reconsideration', *Ugarit Forschungen* 11 (1979) 617-637.

79. *Cf.* Westermann, *Praise* 104, 111-112.

80. *Cf.* part of the same call re-used at the end of a thanksgiving psalm, 138:8.

81. See Gunkel, *Einleitung* 271; Westermann, *Praise* 103, 106; *cf.* Pss. 18:4,5-20 (Eng. 3, 4-19); 116:2,3-4; Jon. 2:3, 4-8 (Eng. 2, 3-7)..

82. *Cf.* the fuller 94:17, where כמעט recurs.

83. *Entrückung* 266. He has described vv. 2-12 as a lament, but in its context it looks back upon past distress, as in a thanksgiving song. Jenkins, *Three Wisdom Psalms?* 85, as noted earlier, objected that such an account is usually addressed to God, but see Gunkel, *Einleitung* 268, who referred to 18:4, 7, 9-15, 17f, 42 (Eng. 3, 6, 8-14, 16f, 41).

84. Pss. 18:21-25 (Eng. 20-24); 41:12f; *cf.* 9:5. *Cf.* Gunkel, *Einleitung* 271.

as part of what is distinctively a wisdom problem. Verse 14 is a common enough statement of personal suffering. Jenkins has observed in respect of vv. 15-17 that in the thanksgiving psalm after an account of distress there is usually reference to an appeal to God for help, whereas here the approach is not direct but couched in meditative terms.⁸⁵

Verses 18-20 read like part of an answered lament in that the passage looks forward to God's future intervention instead of looking back as a thanksgiving song would. A typical parallel in an answered lament is 6:11 (Eng. 10): 'All my enemies will be put to shame and greatly troubled; they will turn back and be put to shame in a moment'. It is characteristic of such future expectation in an answered lament that the verbs not only occur in the imperfect with reference to the future but also appear as perfects to stress the certainty of fulfilment.⁸⁶ One case, Jeremiah 20:11, is interesting in that it has both imperfects and perfects; as does Psalm 73:18-20. It is necessary to ask why a psalm of thanksgiving, if Psalm 73 is such, would include an element from the answered lament. The solution surely lies in the nature of the psalmist's problem. The immediate issue is one of envy (v. 3). This issue is eventually solved and the poet can look back upon it as a thing of the past. However, behind this subjective issue lurks a related but more profound one, the objective circumstance of the prosperity of the wicked. In the sanctuary the psalmist somehow receives assurance that this underlying problem will be resolved.⁸⁷ It is because of the twofold nature of his problem that he looks back with relief and also looks forward with certainty.

85. *Three Wisdom Psalms?* 93. Cf. 18:7 (Eng. 6) for a normal appeal.

86. See Gunkel, *Einleitung* 245. For the use of perfects he referred to 36:13 (Eng. 12) and also to 26:12a; Jer. 20:11b.

87. Weiser, *Psalms* 511, and Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult* 103, have suggested that a cultic theophany was the medium. G. von Rad, *Wisdom* 205, urged the witnessing of a sacral lawsuit. Würthwein, 'Erwägungen' 548, opted for the receipt of a personal oracle, which perhaps is the best of the suggestions.

Verses 21-22 resume v. 17 by reverting to past narrative. These two verses serve to qualify the profession of innocence in v. 13. The confession of a wrong attitude to God corresponds to the expressions of regret encountered at times in thanksgiving songs.⁸⁸ Perhaps the best example for the present purpose is Job 33:27: 'And he sings before men and says "I sinned and perverted what was right"'. Verses 23-26 are affirmations of trust in Yahweh. Although they are characteristic of the individual psalms of lament, there are parallels in the individual thanksgiving psalms, viz. Psalms 18:29-30 (Eng. 28-29); 118:6-7,14. Here again does not the complex nature of the psalmist's problem explain the presence of such future-oriented affirmations? He is looking beyond the solution of the immediate issue of envy to an assurance of ongoing blessing. Finally vv. 27-28 contrast the expectations of the wicked and of the righteous psalmist. Again this is more commonly a feature of the lament, but it does occur in a song of thanksgiving at Jonah 2:9-10 (Eng. 8-9). Once more its perspective appears to correspond to the psalmist's underlying problem. Verse 28 accords with the renewed vow of praise which characteristically closes the psalm of thanksgiving.⁸⁹ The language of the final colon is paralleled in such thanksgiving contexts as Psalms 9:2, 15 (Eng. 1, 14); 26:7.

For the most part the psalm can be understood as an individual song of thanksgiving. Such peculiarities as there are in form and content comport with the intellectual preoccupations of a person trained in a wisdom school. A cultic setting is indicated by several factors. First, vv. 1 and 15 exhibit a communal concern. In favour of MT in v. 1 is the linking of the basic liturgical formula with Israel in Ezra 3:11 and Psalm 135:3-4.⁹⁰ Secondly, the reference to entering the sanctuary in v. 17 echoes a technical term in the Old Testament.⁹¹ Thirdly, the expression in v. 28 קרבת אלהים

88. Gunkel, *Einleitung* 270-271, referred to 30:7, 107:11, 17.

89. E.g. 118:28; cf. Westermann, *Praise* 104, 110, and also Gunkel, *Einleitung* 273.

90. Cf. A. R. Millard's claim in *Tyndale Bulletin* 17 (1966) 115-117 that in this formula טרב has a covenantal connotation.

91. Schmitt, *Entrückung* 281, refers to Lv. 12:4; 2 Ch. 30:8; Is. 16:2; Ezk. 23:39; 44:9, 16 for the phrase

is used in a cultic sense in its other occurrence (Isaiah 58:2). Inman has analysed the OT use of the verb קרב and noted that most of its uses are cultic.⁹²

It is possible that more may be said in support of a cultic setting. Würthwein regarded לבי לברי in v. 1 not as a limitation of ישראל but as a synonymous expression for cultic participants: he compared Psalm 24:3-4, verses which belong to a passage in the form of an entrance liturgy, laying down ethical conditions for worshippers at the sanctuary.⁹³ The reference is a significant one since 24:4 also speaks of being נקי כפים, which may be echoed in the phrase בנקיון כפי in 73:13. The clause at v. 13b recurs in Psalm 26:6 and may refer to a literal cultic rite of handwashing to establish innocence. Verses 1 and 13 suggest that in the first half of the psalm the poet regarded himself as having fulfilled conditions for worship.⁹⁴ On the other hand he appears to view the wicked as unworthy of cultic participation. Other entrance liturgies, Psalm 15 and the prophetic adaptation in Isaiah 33:13-16, provide striking points of contact with the description of the wicked in vv. 2-12. They 'speak' immorally (ידברו, v. 8) and so disqualify themselves from worship according to Psalm 15:2; Isaiah 33:15.⁹⁵ They engage in 'oppression' (עשק), v. 8) in contravention of Isaiah 33:15. The promise of bread and water in Isaiah 33:16b may well shed light upon the notorious textual crux in Psalm 73:10. Perdue has adapted an old emendation.⁹⁶ It is possible to revise

בוא אל מקדש. The only difference here is that a plural form is used.

92. 'Tolkningen' 126-128.

93. 'Erwägungen' 537. For a NT approximation to the form see Mt. 5:23-24.

94. Cf. too דור in v. 15 and 24:6, ממרום in v. 8 and מרומים in Is. 33:16, and the cultic entry of v. 17a with 118:19-20.

95. Cf. the reference to לשון in vv. 9 and 15:3.

96. BDB 240b, 241a cited ישבעמו לחם satisfies them with bread'. Perdue's own proposal (*Wisdom and Cult* 288, 336 note 96) is ישבעמו לחם (left unpainted) which he renders 'bread satiates their hunger'. He appears to take לחם as the subject, but no such usage of the verb can be traced by the present writer.

it to a form corresponding to Hebrew usage and very close to the consonantal text of MT by postulating **יִשְׂבְּעוּ מִלֶּחֶם** 'they have their fill of bread'.⁹⁷ MT **עַמּוֹ** 'his people', although at first glance echoing other communal references in the psalm, creates difficulty. In the context **וַאֲמַרְוּ** in v.11 must refer to the wicked, but my provides an intrusive new subject.⁹⁸ If the emendation is correct, v. 10 has a sarcastic ring: the wicked enjoy the blessings reserved by rights for the psalmist.⁹⁹ The consequent sense of grievance accords well with vv. 13-14. There seems to be a number of significant allusions to the contents of the entrance liturgy form. The cumulative effect of these cult-oriented terms, thanksgiving forms and references to the religious community and the sanctuary makes it difficult to deny that the psalm was composed for cultic testimony. The wisdom elements in the psalm present no obstacle to cultic usage since wisdom and cult need not be regarded as mutually exclusive entities.

97. In v. 10b **יִמְצוּ** should probably be repointed as an active verb from the stem **מִצֵּץ** with a personal subject (cf. BHS). For parallelism of **שָׂבַע** and **מָלֵא** see BDB 959b; for that of **שָׂבַע** and **מִעֵץ** see is. 66:11.
98. Ringgren, 'Bemerkungen' 267-269, related v. 10 or at least v. 10b to his discovery in v. 9 of a mythological parallel to two Ugaritic texts, *Baal* 5. 2:2-4 and *Shachar and Shalim* 61-62, concerning the ability of Mot, god of the underworld, to devour the world. Dahood, *Psalms* 2 190, used the parallel as a basis for the reconstruction of v. 10. Among opponents of Ringgren's thesis H. Birkeland, *ZAW* 67 (1955) 102, objected that, unlike v. 9, the Ugaritic material has nothing to do with speech.
99. Is **בְּרִיא** in v. 4 intended as a sardonic adaptation of **בְּרִי**, in v. 1, as if to say 'The nearest they get to fitness is fatness'? Then ***תָּם**, for which cf. **וְנָמִים** in 15:2, may have been deliberately used because it so often refers to moral soundness.