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

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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)
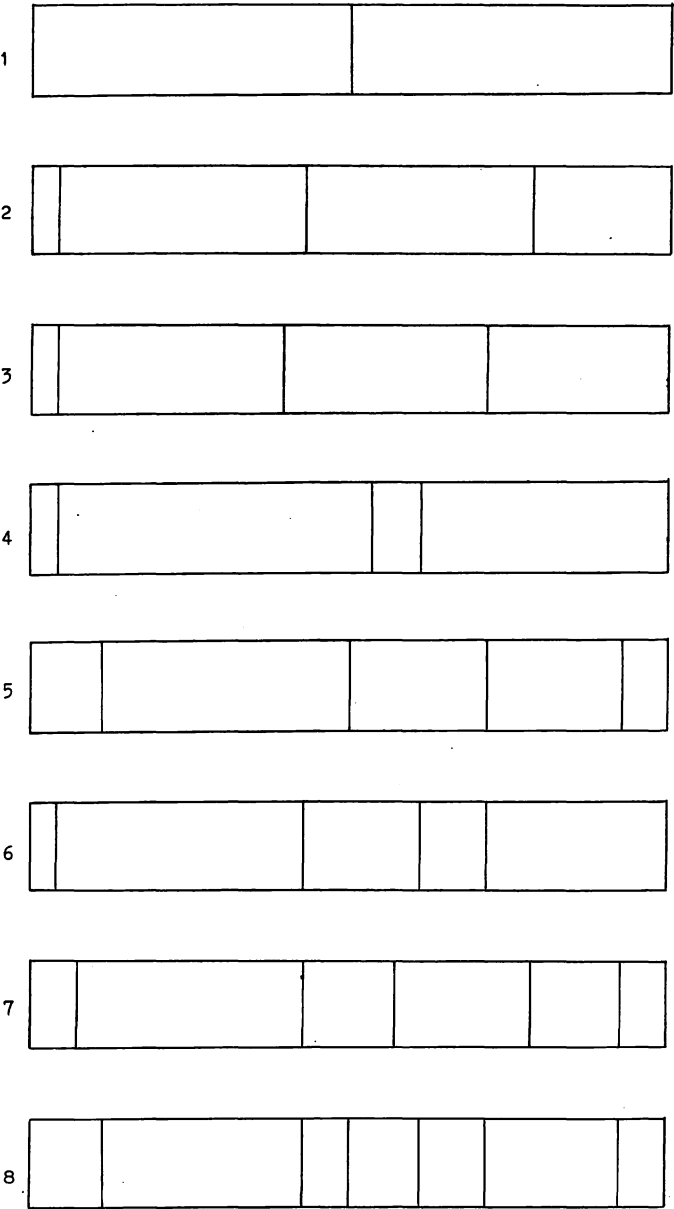   161-175, esp. 163.

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Figure 1
The Logical Structuring of the Psalm

a large measure of variation.   These examples of
logical structuring are graded in terms of com-
plexity.

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 fore-
word 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.
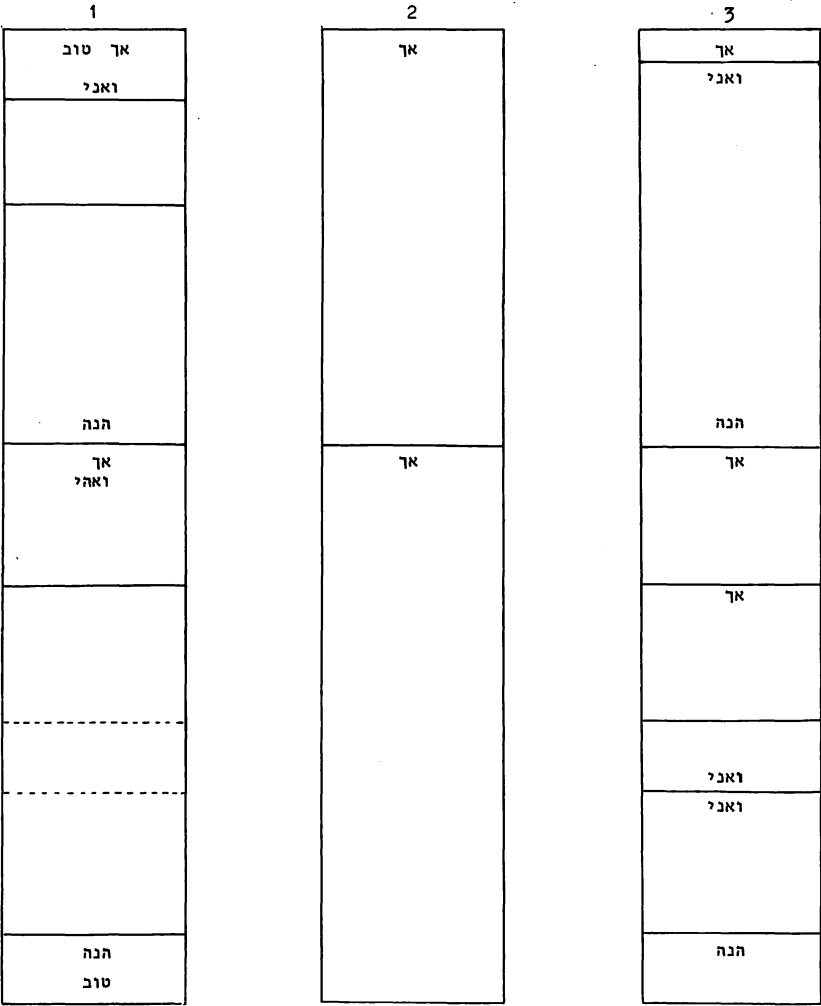7. *Psalms 51-100* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977) 120-123.

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 relation-
ship 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 develop-
ment, 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 אך
'surely, nevertheless' in vv. 1, 13, followed by ואני 'and
I' and ואהי 'and I was' respectively in vv. 2, 14. In v.
12 הנה '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

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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.

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אך טוב לבב
רשׁעים
רשׁעים
אך לבבי
לבבי
לבבי
טוב

2

אך
הנה
אך
אך
הנה

3

אך ואני
כי) כי)
אך ואהי
אך
כי (ואני (ואני
כי ואני

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 אך 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 אך, in v. 18 as well
as in vv. 1, 15, and to הנה in vv. 12, 27. He considered
that ואני 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 לבבי 'my heart' in vv. 21, 26. Also he
discovered correspondence between vv. 1 and 13: אך ...לבב
and לבבי... אך. 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 אך or כי
'for, when' (twice in vv. 3, 4). In three cases the
initial particle is followed by ואני, in vv. 2, 22-23
(twice) and 28. In one case ואהי 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

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11. *Semitica* 21 (1971) 44.
12. *Entrückung - Aufnahme - Himmelfahrt. Untersuchungen*
    zu einem Verstellungbereich 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 אך
    in vv. 1,13,18 and of the conclusive הנה in vv. 12, 27.
15. 'Le Psaume 73', 541 note 2.
16. 'Till tolkningen 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 הגה 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 persécution: 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.

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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 (שׁלוֹם)

and physical wholeness (חם*)

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and because of their lack of toil (עמל)

and trouble (יגעו)

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 (אמרתי);

so I had mental toil (עמל).

Notwithstanding (אך),

they will fall

and incur destruction (לשׁמה)

and perish (תמו).

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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 chiastic
pattern ABB'A'. The break after v. 12 is accentuated in
vv. 1, 13 by the repetition of אך 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 (תמו/*תם and
שׁלום/לשׁמה) and the repetition of the motif of falling.
This motif is used in two different ways, first concern-
ing the psalmist's fall from faith and secondly concern-
ing 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 למותם 'to their death'
into למו תם 'to them; sound'.[23] The second observation
is that although חלקות in v. 18 has been understood by
some scholars in terms of Ugaritic ḫlq and Akkadian ḫalāqu
'die, perish'[24], a sense '(smooth and so) slippery places'
corresponds well with the parallel motif of stumbling in

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22. *Cf.* too the two terms for images, משׂכיות, v. 7, and
    צלם, v. 20; the similes of vv. 2 and 19; also
    perhaps בעינמו, v. 7, and בעיני, v. 20, although in
    v. 7 the reading בעוננו 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 תם 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 תם here
    in terms of physical health may not be excluded. See
    further note 99 below.
24. M. Dahood, *Psalms 2* (Garden City, New York: Double-
    day, 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 tó 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

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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*. (Assen: 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 rever-
sals of what has been said earlier in the psalm. Word-
play and simple repetition are used to this end.

<div align="center">vv. 1-20   vv. 21-28</div>

	vv. 1-20	vv. 21-28
לבב	1, 7, 13	21, 26 (*bis*)
עם	5	22, 23, 25
שׁמים ... ארץ	9	25
ידע√	11, 16	23
הגה	11	27
עולם	12	26
כל	14	27, 28
ספר√	15	28
אחר√	17	24
חלק√	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 (לבב) 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 (שׁמים ...ארץ) were earlier
cited in accents of lament as the objects of the ill-
speaking of the wicked (v. 9); in v. 25 they are associ-
ated with the psalmist's unrivalled faith in God.[28] The
disturbing conclusion of v. 11 concerning the wicked,
introduced by הנה, gives way to an orthodox conclusion
in v. 27, which is introduced by the same particle. The
seeming permanency of the wicked (עולם, 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 (אחריתם, v. 17) has as its counterpart
a happy end for the psalmist. H.-J. Kraus has observed
the correspondence between אחרית and אחר '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 אחר in
v. 24 to ארח 'path'[31] or to regard it as a preposition
'after (glory)' or even 'with (glory)'.[32] H. Ringgren
noted that לספר 'to declare' in v. 28 is used as a

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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
    עֲוָלִים (= 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 com-
prehensive 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
chiastic 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.

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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 לבבי in v. 26? Scholars often delete the
    second case on metrical grounds, reading צורי for
    צור לבבי (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 character-
izes 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

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35. For examples of verbal parallelism in English poetry
    see G. N. Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry
    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

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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 thanks-
giving '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 thanks-
giving 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 thanks-
giving 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

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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 investiga-
tion. 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,

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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, חשב, לבב, דעת, בער, בין,
    תוכחת.
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 some-
times associated with three textual and exegetical
decisions. First, in v. 1 לישׂראל is divided into two
words לַיָּשָׁר אֵל 'God to the upright', thereby removing a
communal reference; or the verse is regarded as a later
addition.[61]   Secondly, in v. 17 מקדשׁי אל is
re-interpreted in a non-cultic sense 'the mysteries of
God' or emended to מוקשׁי אל '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

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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 author-
    ship was also urged by P. A. Munch, *ZAW* 55 (1937) 41,
    and G. von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other
    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* (Minnea-
    polis: Augsberg, 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 invok-
ing 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

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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 אחרית, גאוה and ישר. 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 influ-
ence 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 מקדשׁי 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 מקדשׁי
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
be desirable. The question can be answered only by a
detailed analysis of the psalm in form-critical terms.

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72. *Three Wisdom Psalms?* 150-151.
73. *Die spätjüdische Psalmendichtung. Ihr Entstehung-
    kreis 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 thanks-
giving 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

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77. *Wisdom and Cult* 287-289.
78. Dahood, *Psalms* 2 188, regards the *lamed* as a voca-
    tive particle. For a critique of its presence in the
    Psalms see P. D. Miller, 'Vocative Lamed in the Psal-
    ter: 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 inter-
vention 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 affirma-
tions of trust in Yahweh. Although they are character-
istic 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 affirma-
tions? He is looking beyond the solution of the immedi-
ate 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 intellec-
tual 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

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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 טוב 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).   Illman 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 ברי לבב 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 dis-
qualify 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 יַשְׂבִּיעֵמוֹ לָחֶם '[God] satisfies them
     with bread'.   Perdue's own proposal (Wisdom and Cult
     288, 336 note 96) is ישבעמו לחם (left unpointed)
     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 שָׂבְעוּ מֶחֶם
'they have their fill of bread'.[97]   MT עמו 'his people',
although at first glance echoing other communal refer-
ences in the psalm, creates difficulty. In the context
ואמרו in v. 11 must refer to the wicked, but עמו 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, thanks-
giving 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.

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97. In v. 10b ימצו should probably be repointed as an
    active verb from the stem מצץ with a personal
    subject (cf. BHS). For parallelism of שבע and מלא
    see BDB 959b; for that of שבע and מעץ 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 mytholo-
    gical 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 בריא in v. 4 intended as a sardonic adaptation of
    ברי in v. 1, as if to say 'The nearest they get to
    fitness is fatness'? Then *תם, for which cf. תומם
    in 15:2, may have been deliberately used because it
    so often refers to moral soundness.