Reading the Psalms with the Church: A Critical Evaluation of Prosopological Exegesis in Light of Church History

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Throughout church history, the Psalter has played a central role in shaping the church at worship. Publicly and privately, these inspired psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, have fueled faith, expressed lament, directed praise, and preserved messianic hopes. Some have used the Psalms as the sole hymnbook for their worship services. Others have employed them for counseling, meditation, and theological devotion. Truly, all who swim in their waters find a delicious taste for God, expressed with the deepest emotions of the human soul. Like honey, the Psalter's sweetness is self-evident. Yet, the question remains: How should we read the Psalms?

Over time, the answer to that question has shifted. And it is worth learning how modern turns in Psalm studies have guided Christians (theologically

liberal and conservative) to read the psalms individually, instead of together. Moreover, by learning this history and the recent recovery of canonical exegesis (i.e., reading the psalms as a unified whole), we can better understand the problem of interpretive strategies that call readers to find unnamed personal voices in the Psalms—even if those persons are the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Materially, this essay will provide a brief history of Psalm studies, as it compares the way Psalms have been read by the church before and after the Enlightenment and the rise of modern approaches to Scripture. This historical review will set the stage for understanding why reading psalms in isolation is a characteristic of modern hermeneutics (i.e., higher-criticism). While current trends in interpretation are smitten with patristic methods of interpretation, many pre-critical approaches continue to employ the tools of historical criticism. Hence, recent calls for pre-critical exegesis are not wholly divorced from the critical tendency to analyze (lit. "break apart") Scripture. Even more, approaches like prosopological exegesis (defined below), combine modern commitments with ancient practices, all the while advocating a postmodern commitment to the interpretive community.

Formally, my contention is that advocates of prosopological exegesis (PE) who ground the doctrine of the Trinity in the biblical canon—a practice I firmly applaud and commend—have nevertheless undermined the unity of the Psalms and the author's original intention. Looking at passages like Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:1, 4 in isolation from their literary context, scholars like Matthew Bates, Craig Carter, and Madison Pierce invite readers to look behind the text to find meaning.

Such an approach, I will argue, is not consistent with the observable unity of the Psalter, nor necessary for upholding classical theism. Instead, this novel practice in interpretation brings doubt upon the biblical text and opens a door for a creedal magisterium to superimpose its doctrines on the text.[1] This is what the Protestant Reformation stood against, and in this study of the Psalms, I will argue the same. As we uphold orthodoxy in biblical doctrine, we must uphold orthodoxy in biblical hermeneutics.

To put it most simply, this essay will argue for a classical theism that depends upon a canonical reading of the Psalter.[2] But more specifically, as this issue of *SBJT* is focused on the Psalms, I will argue in this essay and my other essay,[3] that discovering a biblical typology in the Psalter is a far better approach to the text of Scripture than applying the tools and techniques

of PE. Others have engaged with PE more directly, and I will cite them throughout, but here, I will restrict the discussion to the Psalter and the way God's Word invites us to read it.[4]

Missing the Bigger Picture: Herman Gunkel and Sigmund Mowinckel

The place to begin a history of Psalm studies in the modern era is with the works of Herman Gunkel and Sigmund Mowinckel. First, Herman Gunkel (1932-1862) pioneered an approach to the Psalms which classified every psalm into particular genres (e.g., individual lament, corporate praise, messianic, etc.). At the same time, Sigmund Mowinckel (1884–1965), a Norwegian Old Testament (OT) scholar, argued for the cultic setting of the Psalms. He sought to place every Psalm in its original setting—namely, in the temple worship of Israel.[5]

For more than a generation, the scholarship of these two men informed much of the research on the Psalms.[6] Accordingly, Psalm studies focused on individuals psalms—their genre and historical background—real or imagined. What was not considered was the literary shape of the Psalms as a whole. This was due in part to the atomistic spirit of the age and the way critical scholars sought to break Scripture down to its original source (source criticism), form (form criticism), or historical setting (historical criticism). It was also partly due to the outright suspicion against reading the Psalms (and the entire Bible) as a literary whole. As Gerald Wilson reports,

> [Gunkel] is skeptical of finding any uniform principle governing the arrangement of the [psalms], since the final form of the Psalter is the end product of a long history of development and not the result of the plan and activity of a single editor (or group of editors).[7]

Likewise, he observes,

> Mowinckel also contributes to this trend toward fragmentation in the study of the Psalter. While he does deal with the arrangement of the [psalms] in more thorough fashion than most, he too is primarily concerned to delineate the major collections within MT 150. At most he speculates on how, in what order and for what purpose these were brought together. Ultimately, however, Mowinckel is

> unable to conceive of the Psalter as a unified whole with a connected purpose.[8]

For both of these scholars, and the commentators who followed their lead, they sought to address individual psalms and to organize the Psalter to fit their extra-biblical systems—either genre classification or Israelite worship. The result, therefore, was an approach to the Psalms which primarily considered each psalm as individual and isolated units. To be sure, collections can be found within the Psalter (e.g., the psalms of sons of Korah, the Psalms of Ascent, etc.), but on the whole, Gunkel and Mowinckel took the psalms out of their literary context and arranged them by other categories. Such was the scientific spirit of higher-criticism. This approach of studying the psalms by classifications and not canon has continued to have its impact. That said, many things have change and are changing.

A Watershed in Psalm Studies: Gerald Henry Wilson

In the decades that followed Gunkel and Mowinckel, many voices began to discuss an intentional arrangement of the entire Psalter. Of those voices, Gerald Henry Wilson's dissertation took the first step toward positing a comprehensive proposal for the Psalter's arrangement.[9] Influenced by Brevard Childs, who had begun treating the Bible in its final form (i.e., canonical criticism), Wilson argues for a canonical reading of the Psalter based on three comparisons.[10]

First, through a comparative study with various Mesopotamian texts, he makes a strong case that books like the Psalter were typically arranged according to genre, authorship, or some other criteria (e.g., liturgical concern or the deity addressed).[11] Examining the catalogues of Sumerian Temple Hymns and others hymn collections, he shows how texts recorded in one context could be "loosened" from their original context and set into another canon. From this kind of comparison, he begins to explain the plausibility of the Psalter's literary order.[12]

Next, he surveys the Psalms at Qumran to show how the Psalter may have developed over time. While not making final conclusions about the process for arrangement, he again strengthens the case for an intentionally organized canon, one that developed in the latter stages of Israel's history, after the exile and before the Incarnation.[13] In short, by examining all the

material found at Qumran (at least all the material available in the 1980s), he shows how various psalms may have moved from the Temple to the final form in the Psalter.

Third, from an inductive study of the Psalter itself, he shows many ways in which the Psalms demonstrate order and arrangement. As he observes, there are many tacit evidences of arrangement (e.g., "author, genre, manner of performance, instrumentation and the like"), but only one explicit mark of editing—the comment in Psalm 72:20 that the prayers of David are ended.[14] Making careful distinctions, he shows how the Psalms are not organized like other ancient Near Eastern documents. For instance, the Psalms are not solely arranged by authorship, by genre, or by historical setting.[15]

In the Psalms, subsets are arranged by author, genre, and theme, but these do not explain the Psalter as a whole. These observations are significant because they raise questions about the explanatory power of Gunkel and Mowinckel's approaches.[16] Wilson also pays great attention to the superscripts, which begin many psalms.[17] He argues these superscripts function in multiple ways across the Psalter. Even when missing, as in the case of Psalms 1–2, they play a role, for the lack of superscription distances the Psalter from the original setting of the individual psalm. In this way, superscriptions are not the sole determiner for the Psalter's arrangement.

In the end, Wilson argues for the Psalm's arrangement based on a number of basic features. He writes,

> I have focused my attention thus far on demonstrating individual instances of editorial activity within the Hebrew Psalter. The results of the study have been considerable. I have been able to show (1) that the 'book' divisions of the Psalter are real, editorially induced divisions and not accidentally introduced; (2) the "separating" and 'binding" functions of author and genre groupings; (3) the lack of a s/s as an indication of a tradition of combination; (4) the use of pss to indicate the conclusion of segments; (5) the use of *hwdw* pss to introduce segments; (6) the existence of thematic correspondences between the beginning and ending pss in some books. All of these findings demonstrate the presence of editorial activity at work in the arrangement of the pss.[18]

To these, he adds the function of Psalm 1 as an introduction,[19] the five book division of the psalter,[20] and the Davidic Psalms as a thematic element which gives the whole Psalter a royal theme.[21] From these observations, Wilson makes his case that the Psalter is a well-ordered book and not just a "storage cabinet" for music, as Hossfield and Zenger would later put it.[22]

In sum, the work of Wilson served as a watershed in understanding the Psalms as a unified whole. To be clear, he did not denounce the higher critical tools that he learned under Childs, but he did move away from the analytical aims of dividing the Psalms into extra-biblical categories. In their place, he used the tools of comparative analysis to begin finding ways that the Psalms were unified. Accordingly, his dissertation played a large role in advancing a canonical approach to the Psalms.

In fact, today, among conservative Bible scholars, the canonical approach to the Psalms has gained great traction. Among some of the scholars who advocate this approach are Michael Barber, Stephen Dempster, O. Palmer Robertson, James Hamilton, and many others.[23]

Still, this unified approach to the Psalms, one that finds its genesis in a reaction to higher critical scholarship, raises the question: Is a canonical approach to the Psalms historically tenable? Has anyone else in church history read the Bible in this way? Or is a canonical approach just the latest trend in critical scholarship? To that question we turn to another recent advocate of the canonical approach, David Mitchell.

Back to the Beginning: David Mitchell's Historical Survey

After Wilson published his dissertation, David Mitchell contributed his own volume on reading the Psalms canonically. In his monograph, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms,* he argues for understanding the Psalms as book that moves from historical David to a future, eschatological David. And hence, he develops the message of the Psalter by pointing it forward to the coming Lord. In fact, in the first fifty pages of his book, he traces the history of psalm interpretation.[24] In this survey, he shows that a unified reading of the Psalms is not new but a recovery of reading the Psalms as God's Word. So let's consider.

In his survey, Wilson begins with the LXX to show how, "the first monument of Jewish exegesis," preserved the order of the Psalms and even

interpreted them eschatologically, i.e., looking for a coming messiah.[25] Likewise, the Dead Sea Scrolls also gave evidence to the importance of arrangement, as their scrolls both kept the arrangement of the Psalms and demonstrated the importance of arrangement in other scrolls that combine biblical and extra-biblical Psalms.[26] Such findings follow the point made by Wilson, that ancient communities who collected Psalms would expect their collections to have an intentional ordering.

After the LXX and the Dead Sea Scrolls comes the New Testament (NT). Does it reflect an awareness of Psalm arrangement? Mitchell answers positively. First he cites Acts 1:20, which refers to the Psalms as the "Book of the Psalms." The singular "book" denotes a unified entity, much like Luke 24:44 speaks of the Psalms as one of three parts of the Tanak—where the Psalms stand in for the Writings. Then he lists five other proofs for an intentional arrangement.[27]

1. "The known prominence of that arrangement, as demonstrated in its being selected as the basis for all the translations [e.g., LXX, Peshitta Psalms, etc.], would make it likely."
2. "The majority of NT quotes from Psalms come verbatim from LXX, which, of course, has the MT-type sequence."
3. "All NT citations from 'psalms' are found in the MT-type Psalter; the term is not used of non-biblical lyrics, such as those in 11QPs^{a}."
4. "Acts 13:33 cites from Psalm 2 and refers to its being written *en the Psalms . . . the second* [= "the second Psalm"]."
5. "No other arrangement of Psalms has passed into Christian tradition."

From these proofs, he makes the point that the "New Testament seems to regard the MT-type Psalter as definitive."[28] Because his thesis is to prove the eschatological nature of the Psalms, he also gives ample evidence to describe how the NT read the Psalms as a forward-looking eschatological book.[29] In this way, the unity of the Psalms tells the singular account of God's covenantal relationship with Israel and God's people looking for a messiah arising from David's house. Such a theological emphasis adds credence for reading the Psalms as one unified whole.

Moving from the nascent Christian community to early Jewish communities, he shows how both "have the same psalms as MT in the same order,"[30] but also how they repeatedly defend that order and arrangement.[31] Mitchell

gives many examples of this,[32] including the way *Midrash Psalms* 1.2 identifies the five books of David with the five books of Moses: "As Moses gave five books of *Torah* to Israel, so David gave five books of psalms to Israel."[33]

After the Rabbis, Mitchell turns to the early church, where he also finds evidence of endorsement for the Psalms arrangement. Though less prominent than the rabbinical tradition, he cites Origen, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and Hippolytus as examples of pastor-theologians who considered various aspects of the Psalms' arrangement.[34] In fact, Jerome reports that Athanasius "wrote a commentary now lost, *De psalmorum titulis*," which is presumably about the titles or superscriptions in the Psalter.

Next, Mitchell turns to the Reformation. Here, he cites Luther, Bucer, and Calvin as recognizing the arrangement of the Psalms and the inspired nature of the Psalm superscripts. For instance, Calvin commented on the placement of Psalm 1 as an introductory psalm,[35] Luther observed various author tendencies in the Psalms,[36] and Bucer "regard[ed] the headings, especially those containing historical information, as relevant to correct interpretation."[37]

Thus, until the Enlightenment and the introduction of higher-criticism, the uniform approach to the Psalms was more or less canonical. Sadly, that changed when methods of interpretation changed and the interpreter began to treat the Bible like any other book. With a hermeneutic of suspicion, biblical scholars began to look for and posit different voices behind the text. Thus, as Mitchell reports, "revisionist approaches" to the Psalms began to isolate and extract individual psalms. The superscriptions were believed to be fabrications by later scribes and the overall unity of the Psalms was rejected. Hence, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the NT and rabbinic respect for the Bible was lost.

What was the effect? Until the end of the twentieth century, most Psalm studies refused to consider the Psalms as a whole. A few exceptions persisted (e.g., Hengstenberg, J. A. Alexander, F. Delitzsch), but on the whole every commentary until the mid- to late-twentieth century rejected or ignored a canonical reading.

As we noted above, this changed with Brevard Childs and Gerald Wilson, but the effect remained. Most scholars, and those who read their commentaries, approached the Psalms as a collection of isolated songs. After the Enlightenment, few evangelicals explained the Psalms like their theological forebears. Most treated the Psalms like a collection of praises and laments.

Even as evangelicals held to conservative views of the Bible, many employed a method of Psalm interpretation that mirrored the higher-critical scholars.

As a result, the full understanding of the Psalms and an appreciation of its prophetic message has been missed. And it will be missed again, if current practices of PE teach readers to look for God's voice behind the text. While canonical approaches to the Psalms have flourished in the works of Dempster, Robertson, and Hamilton, the gains of those studies will be hindered if we do not retain the literary and theological unity of the Psalms. This is my animating concern with PE, and the rest of this article will consider the effect of PE on the Psalms.

The Modern Tendencies of Prosopological Exegesis (PE)

In his seminal work on the subject, *Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation,* Matthew Bates picks up the Greek word *prosōpon* ("face," "person") and defines prosopological exegesis as "a reading technique whereby an interpreter seeks to overcome a real or perceived ambiguity regarding the identity of the speakers or addressees (or both) in the divinely inspired source text by assigning nontrivial *prosopa* (i.e., nontrivial vis-à-vis the 'plain sense' of the text) to the speakers or addressees (or both) in order to make sense of the text."[38]

This definition suggests that in Scripture, there are places, especially in the Psalms, where we hear the voice of God directly. Or, to put it more precisely, "Prophets, such as David and Isaiah, were enabled to overhear conversations between God the Father and God the Son. The prophets took on the *prosopa* of the members of Trinity and spoke in character in their writings."[39] In Craig Carter's "primer" to PE, he depends entirely on Bates and his development of this hermeneutical approach.[40] And in his summary, he outlines four facets of PE, which I will engage with here.[41]

First, PE derives its origins from "ancient literary criticism, classical Greek drama, and classical rhetoric."[42] This means, that the authors of NT employed this Greco-Roman method of interpretation, applying it to divine speech in various OT passages. Moreover, ancient readers, and this would include the Apostles, would have known to look for speakers interrupting the flow of thought in ambiguous texts. On this point, Bates observes three kinds of "markers" found in ancient texts (e.g. "explicitly introduced," "marked," and "unmarked" prosopological exegesis), each of which provide more or less

clarity about who is speaking in the text.[43] Carter builds on Bates, as well, arguing that Paul's "Greco-Roman milieu" is as important as the background of Second Temple Judaism.[44] The rationale for this "diachronic intertextuality" is based on Bates' belief that a full contextual reading includes what came before the text, what comes alongside the text, and what comes after the text.[45]

Second, PE rejects a typological reading of Scripture as a modern invention of the Enlightenment. As Hans Frei, Frances Young, and others have defined typology, it was a "bridge" invented by Enlightenment scholars to fill the gap between the "literal sense" of the text and the theological/ethical meaning of the text.[46] Because the ancient authors assumed the historical veracity of the (supernatural) events they reported, and critical scholars do not, typology is an acceptable way to turn history into theology and ethics.

Accordingly, PE rejects a typological reading of Scripture as a product of anti-supernaturalism. Channeling Bates, Carter inveighs, "In the end, typology is a modern solution to modern problem and we would be wise to heed Bates warning not to 'foist our peculiar modern notions of history and referentiality onto Paul.' Modern concepts of typology serve more to mask the problem then to solve it."[47] In the place of typology, a prosopological reading is offered, which rejects the modern practice of typology and affirms the divine nature of God's Word.

Third, PE offers the reader a theological explanation for trinitarian orthodoxy. This is why Psalm 2, 45, and 110 are three of the passages most commonly cited when explaining PE. In these passages, we find proof texts for eternal generation and eternal relations of origin, so it is argued. Accordingly, theologians like Bates, Carter, and Madison Pierce, have appealed to PE over against "Biblicist" interpretations that deny classical theism.[48] In truth, PE lends itself to a robust theological interpretation of Scripture, but at what cost? We will have to consider below.

Fourth, PE appeals to Hebrews as the biblical model for reading the Psalms. As Bates notes about the citation of Psalm 40 in Hebrews 10:8-10, there is considerable ambiguity about who is speaking in Psalm 40.[49] Defending Bates' interpretation, Carter writes, "The words of Psalm 40 make perfect sense when read as the words of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, which is exactly what the author of Hebrews does. But how can Jesus Christ be speaking in Psalm 40, a millennium prior to the incarnation of God in the birth of Jesus? This is the question answered by prosopological exegesis."[50]

In fact, in her chapter on the "Son" in Hebrews 1, Madison Pierce says the same thing concerning Hebrews 1:5: "In each of these quotations from Scripture, first Psalm 2:7 and then 2 Samuel 7:14, the author of Hebrews capitalizes on an ambiguity or tension within the text or its subsequent interpretation in order to identity the addressee of the speech as Jesus."[51] This ambiguity in the text is what permits the author of Hebrews to employ PE, so she argues.[52] Similarly, in his book on the Trinity, Bates makes the same case, showing how the NT, including Hebrews, reads Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:1 and other passages as "divine dialogues from the dawn of time."[53]

Without describing every detail of PE, it is clear PE will have a significant impact on the Psalms—how they are read, interpreted, and applied theologically. Therefore, the question becomes: Will PE improve our reading of the Psalms and the unity found therein? Or will PE actually have the negative effect of analyzing the Psalms by separating them into various stratifications of speech? My questions frame the answer. Without intending to, PE undermines the unity of the Psalms, which impacts its message, meaning, and theology. In what follows, I will attempt to show how this happens and why PE is not as helpful as it purports itself to be.

Responding to Prosopological Exegesis

In attempting to retrieve pre-critical methods of interpretations, the purveyors of PE are still pursuing modern and postmodern methods of interpretation. By looking for voices behind the text and meaning in theological community who is reading the text, PE combines ancient practices with modern and postmodern hermeneutics. Additionally, by changing the way authorial intent is pursued, and by inserting divine speech that may or may not fit the context of the original psalmist, PE is dividing the canon of Scripture and creating a caste of proper interpreters (e.g., hermeneutical priests) who can rightly see the voices behind the text. These are just a few of the problems that PE creates, as I will show in the four following responses.

First, Peter Gentry has rightly observed that the Greco-Roman origin of PE is anachronistic for the prophets of Israel and the first generation of Christians. Concluding his evaluation of PE, he writes,

> First, it is unlikely that the Apostles were aware of the methods promoted in the rhetorical handbooks. This is anachronistic. Certainly, the Church Fathers were trained in these techniques, but the evidence that Jews in the First Century interpreted texts this way is untenable. The evidence from the Aramaic Targums is also anachronistic. And why should we look for inspiration from Greek and Roman handbooks on rhetoric popular from the 2nd to 4th centuries AD and favor this over evidence, for example, from Second Temple Judaism?[54]

Even if it can be proven that PE was practiced concurrently with the NT, as Dernell cautiously allows in his appraisal of PE, the influence on the NT writers remains a question.[55] Moreover, the influence on OT prophets is even more unlikely. If the provenance of PE proves anything, therefore, it proves that PE is a method of reading, more than a self-conscience practice of the OT prophets. For those who uncouple divine authorial intent from human authorial intent,[56] and for others who understand typology and allegory as methods of interpretation, as opposed to the way Scripture is written, this may not be a problem.[57] But, if we believe that there is a meaning in the text, and that meaning is found in the words of the original author, then such a method of interpretation cannot work without doing damage to the Bible itself.[58]

Because PE places meaning in the mind of the interpreter, instead of the original author, we have returned to modern approach to the Bible. Equally, because PE engages in a "non-contextual form of exegesis,"[59] it opens the door to a postmodern reading where meaning is supplied by the community who holds the text. Currently, scholars like Bates and Carter offer a theologically correct interpretation in the texts where they find personal ambiguities. While such orthodoxy, governed by the Great Tradition, may appear valid, it means the reader must supply the meaning. And that meaning will depend upon the tradition (i.e., the Great Tradition or something else) from which the reader comes.

As Bates understands interpretation, it is appropriate to read the text of Scripture in light pre-texts, co-texts, and subsequent-texts, which he defines the latter as "any sociohistorical discourse that emerges in the wake of the text."[60] Pushing the envelope of interpretation which only depends on pre-texts, Bates opens the door to understand passages based upon the way they are used by later readers. He calls this approach "diachronic intertextuality," and it is bedrock for his hermeneutical method.[61] In other words, he builds his entire approach to Scripture on the fact that later texts and interpreters

(i.e., reception history) can and should inform the meaning of earlier texts.[62]

Again, this is anachronistic, but worse, it threatens the canonical enterprise of interpreting Scripture with Scripture. The Reformation principle of *Sola Scriptura* leads us to read the text on its own terms and not to define the terms of Scripture by the later traditions of the church. This dependence on later traditions (i.e., reception history) is what the Reformation stood against, and it is something that stands against PE too. We will consider this further below, but for now, it is important to recognize how seismic Bates' proposal is. What is at stake is not just the interpretation of a few verses, although interpretation of the Psalms is at issue. What is at stake are the principles of the Reformation itself.

Second, if a typological reading of Scripture is a modern invention, created to resolve the fact-value problem that exists between a Bible replete with supernatural claims and anti-supernatural scholarship, then PE is absolutely correct to reject typology. However, there is another approach to typology which arises from the text of Scripture itself. As Graeme Goldsworthy, Ardel Caneday, Steve Wellum, Brent Parker and others have demonstrated, typology is not just a method of interpretation, it is the way Scripture is written.[63] Therefore, to prefer PE over against all kinds of typology, because one typology is errant, is a red herring.

The first question that needs to be answered is: What is typology? And who gets to define it? In the case of Bates, he is championing PE by condemning typology fabricated by those who deny the divine inspiration of the Bible and the supernatural work of God.[64] At the same time, he does not consider other advocates of typology who share his supernaturalism and commitment to Scripture as God's Word.

So, Bates rightly affirms God's action in the world and the supernaturalism of Scripture. But he does so ignoring the way typology is found in Scripture, and has been articulated by Protestants for centuries. Sadly, by only interacting with modern interpreters and then retrieving interpretive practices from the Greco-Roman world, he throws the baby out with the bathwater. And worse, by not engaging with the principles of the Reformation, he conjoins ancient and modern methods of interpretation, with the result that the clarity and unity of Scripture is undermined.

Indeed, the entire project of PE depends upon ambiguity in the text. Instead of letting concentric circles of biblical context inform our interpretation of difficult texts, PE suggests that there is voice behind the text that we can and must identify.[65] This move is of a piece with higher criticism. In

source and redaction criticism, the question is: What community, school, or human voice is speaking behind the text? In PE, the question is similar: What member of the Trinity is speaking behind the author? By his own standards, he judges critical scholars as errantly seeking an "indubitably pristine" pre-history. But he does the same thing in the annals of eternity.

Comparatively, PE is far better than JEDP, but is it true to the nature of God's Word? Does PE rightly uphold the unity and clarity of Scripture? Moreover, for those who still claim to be courageously Protestant, does it permit the Reformation principles of *sola Scriptura,* where Scripture interprets Scripture? I would argue not. Instead, it requires creedal statements to provide the orthodox interpretation of passages like Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. Theologically, this may maintain theology proper, but only for so long. Ultimately, bad hermeneutics undermines good theology.[66]

The third point follows directly from the second—namely, that it is impossible to maintain doctrinal orthodoxy when biblical unity is compromised. For a time, the church may be able to confess the creeds without proper biblical exegesis, but for those creedal statements to endure and have their intended effect—to maintain the faith of the saints—they must draw life from God's Word.

Ironically, many of those who are appealing to PE simultaneously criticize advocates of eternal functional subordination (EFS) for proof-texting their views on the Trinity. But what is PE but a more elegant attempt at proof-texting? When PE suggests that Psalm 2:7 or Psalm 40:6–8 is divine speech, independent of the surrounding context, they find texts to support true doctrines, but without finding meaning in the texts themselves.[67] To put it differently, advocates of PE are permitting (or affirming) ambiguity in the text of Scripture, instead of showing how apparent tensions are resolved in the text itself. Again, this may work in the short term, but in the long term, it castrates Scripture's clarity and bids an uncertain Word to produce clear doctrine. It cannot work that way. Clear doctrines depend upon a clear Bible, not the other way around.

Fourth, Hebrews gives us a model for interpreting the OT. On this point all sides agree. The question is: How does Hebrews use the OT, and especially the Psalms? As noted above, PE sees in Hebrews a direct connection between the Psalms and the Messiah. Downplaying typology, advocates of PE prefer to see Psalm 40:6–8 and other texts as immediately placed in the mouth of the Messiah.

In other words, instead of seeing the incarnate Son taking up these Psalms and putting them in his mouth, they perceive that these verses were always and for eternity

the words of the divine Son. Again, this approach denies the progressive nature of revelation and biblical typology as a predictive reality in the OT. Simultaneously, it affirms the rhetorical use of divine persons and anachronistic reading of the text.

Such an approach fails to appreciate the original unity of the Psalms, as well as, the progressive nature of Scripture that leads from the prophets to the incarnate Son (Heb 1:1-3). It also raises more questions about the unity and clarity of Scripture. If we learn anything from Church history, it is the fact the Roman Catholic Church came to formulate doctrines based upon apostolic tradition, the magisterium, and papal authority. In short, what PE offers in a pre-critical reading of Scripture, it takes away in its appeal to the Great Tradition, which is not located too far from Rome.

To put it more sharply, if *sola Scriptura* means anything, it means we must go back to Scripture and evaluate what it says, what it means, and which interpretation best handles all the biblical data—from the smallest unit of meaning (the sentence or stanza) to the largest (the whole canon). This Reformation principle of interpretation, often maligned and misunderstood, does not deny the place of tradition in the ministerial sense. It only denies Tradition in the magisterial sense.[68] And as it relates to interpreting the Psalter and the use of the Psalms in places like Hebrews, we need to be unashamedly Protestant—which is to say, we need to let Scripture have the first and last word. This is what PE does not do.

Instead of leading the reader to see what the Scripture says at the textual, epochal, and canonical levels, or to see what the Psalms say at the level of psalm, Psalter, and canon, it permits and requires the interpreter—for the sake of theological orthodoxy—to look behind the text, remove verses from context, and espouse ambiguity in the Bible.[69] To be fair, Bates and his followers argue for a canonical reading of the Psalms too. That canonical reading, however, does not proceed through the various concentric circles in context.[70] Rather, their canonical reading is closer to a "ruled reading" that lets the *regula fide* (rule of faith) govern the final interpretation of a passage.

Again, this may be doctrinally helpful for those who are new to Scripture, just like a Study Bible provides instant understanding (rightly or wrongly) of the Bible. Methodologically, however, this is the way to Rome and its first-order dependence on Tradition. For this reason, the pre-critical reading strategies espoused by Bates, Carter, and others is not as helpful as they submit. Nor does their method of interpretation best interpret the Psalms or any part of Scripture.

Reading the Psalms as They Were Written

For the four reasons listed above, I do not find PE a tenable option for reading the Psalter. More generally, I contend that PE, while advertising itself as a pre-critical method of interpretation, continues to proffer a thoroughly modern reading of the Psalms. As evidenced by a comparison with the critical tendencies of modern interpreters (e.g., Gunkel, Mowinckel, etc.), PE continues to look behind the text for a pristine word from God. It also divides up the Psalms into smaller, disconnected units, with the effect that it eliminates the unity of the Psalter, which in turn misses the message of the Psalms.

As more recent Psalm studies have demonstrated, the Psalms are a canonical whole. And any approach to the Psalms that ignores this fact or runs rough shod over them should be questioned. PE pays little attention to the historical context of the Psalms or the way in which the entire message of the Psalter moves eschatologically towards the Messiah. Rather, at the expense God's work in history or in the literary message of the Psalter, PE finds isolated verses echoes from eternity. Surely, there is a better way to unite the historical unity and eschatological message of the Psalter with the ultimate revelation of the triune God in the world. Indeed, if those who have followed the path PE are adamant about proper interpretation, then they should go back to the Psalms with the question: What is the best way to read them?

Ultimately, we must let Scripture speak. And in Church History, when interpreters have done that and followed the interpretive principles of the Reformation—both before and after 1517—they have seen a canonical unity in the Psalter and have heard 150 voices leading to them Christ. Classical theism is not in jeopardy if we deny PE, because classical theism depends upon the whole Bible. What is in jeopardy, if we accept PE, is the clarity of Scripture, which threatens all doctrines and the majesty of the Word of God.

Indeed, if prosopological exegesis tells us to look for the eternal voices of the Father, Son, and Spirit in a few places in the Psalms, I am calling for the need to hear the voice of God in every verse of the Psalter—from Psalm 1:1 to Psalm 150:6. And the way to do that is to read and understand the text in its literary, epochal, and canonical contexts. This canonical method of interpretation has been the burden of this essay. But another essay is

needed—one that shows how reading the Psalter canonically bears better theological fruit than prosopological exegesis.

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1. The novelty of this view is recognized by Matthew Bates, *Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation: The Center of Paul's Method of Scriptural Interpretation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 10, as he puts forward his own hermeneutical project in 2013, saying, "I will show how my own project arises from certain perceived weaknesses in this ongoing conversation about Paul's use of the Scriptures by setting forth a novel diachronic intertextual method grounded in reception history—a method that results in a new thesis regarding the center of Pauline hermeneutics."
2. For those keeping up with Eternal Functional Subordination (EFS) debate, my approach also eschews the "biblicism" that often supports that view. Ironically, those who support EFS with various prooftexts and those who reject EFS by means of prosopological exegesis are making the same interpretive error—i.e., they both take verses out their literary context and apply them immediately to matters of trinitarian doctrine. As Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 238–42, cautions, we should be far more circumspect in our applications of texts to the ontological trinity.
3. See my "Reading Psalms 2 and 110 with the Text of Scripture: A Constructive Proposal for Reading the Psalter Canonically," in this issue of *SBJT*.
4. See e.g., Peter J. Gentry, "A Preliminary Evaluation and Critique of Prosopological Exegesis," *SBJT* 23.2 (2019): 105–22; William James Dernell, "Typology, Christology, and Prosopological Exegesis: Implicit Narratives in Christological Texts," *SBJT* 24.1 (2020): 137–61; James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology: Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), 144–46.
5. Herman Gunkel with Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of* Israel (trans. James D. Nogalski; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020); Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas; Nashville: Abingdon, 1967).
6. For a brief introduction to the "Psalm types" identified by Gunkel and Mowinckel, see Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms,* Vol. 1 (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 57–75. Cf. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 45–46.
7. Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 1.
8. Ibid., 2.
9. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter.*
10. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 511–22. In his dedication, Wilson says, "To ... Brevard Springs Childs, who taught me to respect the canon" (*The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter,* vi).
11. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, 59–60.
12. Ibid., 13–60.
13. Ibid., 63–138.
14. Ibid., 139. Wilson registers surprise at "the almost total absence of any explicit statement of organizational intent," save the note following Psalm 72: "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended" (v. 20).
15. Ibid., 139–228.
16. Ibid., 139–45. Interestingly, Childs adds this criticism: "With all due respect to Gunkel, the truly great expositors for probing to the theological heart of the Psalter remain Augustine, Kimchi, Luther, Calvin, the long forgotten Puritans in Spurgeon's Treasury, the haunting sermons of Donne, and the learned and pious reflections of de Muis, Francke and Geier" (*Introduction to the Old Testament,* 523).
17. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter,* 146–81.
18. Ibid., 199.
19. Ibid., 204–07.
20. Ibid., 207–08.
21. Ibid., 209–28.
22. Frank-Lothar Hossfield and Eric Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary 51–100* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). The full context of Hossfield and Zenger's statement is found here: "Because we do not regard the Psalter, as some other commentators have, as nothing but a 'storage cabinet' for individual psalms, but rather as a

successively developed, but nevertheless compositionally structured entity whose form gives an additional dimension of meaning to each individual psalm, the 'introduction' can be meaningfully composed only when we have analyzed all the individual psalms" (xi). Hossfield and Zenger demonstrate the growing prominence of scholars reading the Psalms canonically.

23. *Singing in the Reign: The Psalms and the Liturgy of God's Kingdom* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2001); Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015); James M. Hamilton, Jr., *Psalms*, Vol. 1–2 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021).
24. David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (Newton Mearns, Scotland: Campbell Publications, 2003).
25. Ibid., 19.
26. Ibid., 21–26.
27. Ibid., 26.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 27.
30. Ibid., 28.
31. Ibid., 28–30.
32. Ibid., 30–31
33. Ibid., 31.
34. Ibid., 33–38.
35. Ibid., 40.
36. Ibid., 39.
37. Ibid., 40.
38. Bates, *Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation*, 218. This definition has been followed by Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 192. Cf. Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
39. Carter, *Great Tradition,* 193.
40. Ibid., 192–201.
41. While I will engage Bates throughout this section, I cite Carter to show how other are depending upon and using his methodology.
42. Carter, *Great Tradition,* 194.
43. Bates, *Apostolic Proclamation,* 218.
44. Carter, *Great Tradition,* 200. The
45. Bates, *Apostolic Tradition,* 54–55. Actually, he lists nine different "inter-texts" that readers should consider in their interpretation (53–54).
46. Carter, *Great Tradition,* 195.
47. Ibid., 196. Cf. Bates, *Apostolic Proclamation,* 135.
48. Madison Pierce, "Hebrews 1 and the Son Begotten 'Today,'" in *Retrieving Eternal Generation,* ed. Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 117–31.
49. Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christians Interpretations of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.
50. Carter, *Great Tradition,* 194.
51. Pierce, "Hebrews 1," 120.
52. Ibid.
53. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity,* 41–84. For my response to this chapter, see my second article.
54. Gentry, "A Preliminary Evaluation and Critique of Prosopological Exegesis," 119.
55. Dernell, "Typology, Christology, and Prosopological Exegesis," 139–40.
56. See Carter, *Great Tradition,* 44.
57. For an appraisal of making allegory and typology a matter of interpretive method, see Brent Parker, "Typology and Allegory: Is There a Distinction? A Brief Examination of Figural Reading," *SBJT* 21.1 (2017): 57–83.
58. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).
59. Ibid., 140.
60. Bates, *Apostolic Proclamation,* 54.

61. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity*, 58.

62. Engaging with critical scholars in his *The Birth of the Trinity*, 56–58, Bates criticizes the tendency to look for an "indubitably pristine" history behind the text. "The irony," he writes, "is that in spinning stories of Christian dogmatic development, scholarship has by and large significantly *overvalued* the evidence of the hypothetical pre-history and redactional layers that we do not actually possess (and about which there is lack of scholarly agreement), but has *undervalued* the non-hypothetical coeval and subsequent Christian texts that we do actually have" (58). He then qualifies himself, but further discloses his commitments to higher-criticism, "This is not a drumbeat for uncritically back-reading later ideas into earlier texts, nor is it a rejection of source, form, and redaction criticism, but it is a call for methodological rebalancing by incorporating early reception history into our historical-critical toolbox" (58).

    Importantly, Bates is describing the way doctrine is developed in church history more than way Scripture speaks. But that is the point. He does not make a sufficient allowance for the difference between the way we read Scripture and Tradition, which only reaffirms my concern that his method list towards Rome.

63. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006); A. B. Caneday, Covenant Lineage Allegorically Prefigured: "Which Things Are Written Allegorically" (Galatians 4:21–31), *SBJT* 14.3 (2010): 50–77, esp. 65–66; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 102–08; Parker, "Typology and Allegory," 57–83.

64. It is striking that among the scholars he chooses to interact with in his first book, none are advocating typology in the Reformed Protestant tradition. Accordingly, he is responding to critical scholars with an approach that maintains many critical presuppositions (e.g., looking behind the text, denying authorial intent, and dividing the unity of the text), even as he affirms (thankfully) the divine inspiration of the Bible and classical theism. This is worlds apart from critical scholarship, and yet, because it methodological origins are reacting to certain tendencies in the academy (not unlike Neo-Orthodoxy), it is not wholly divorced from critical practices of interpretation.

65. On the three contexts of Scripture, see Nicholas G. Piotrowski, *In All the Scriptures: The Three Contexts of Biblical Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021).

66. Ironically, this is a driving concern for Bates too. Raising the question of PE's validity, he writes, "As this question is posed, much of Christianity itself is suspended over a precipice, hanging by a slender thread, for the question touches upon matters of supreme concern to all it holds dear. For if the thesis argued throughout this book is correct, that a specific theodramatic reading technique, prosopological exegesis, was irreducibly essential to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, then if this method cannot find adequate hermeneutical footing, Trinitarian dogma as central as it is to every dimension of Christianity as currently conceived—might be undermined." (*The Birth of the Trinity,* 176)

    Bates question is vital, as it rightly understands a connection between biblical interpretation and doctrinal formulation. But his answer jumps the shark, as it puts too much weight—indeed the whole of Christianity—upon his hermeneutic proposal. Is it true that if prosopological exegesis is wrong, the whole doctrine of the Trinity collapses? I think not. Dernell's assessment of the Early Church is far better, in large part, because it is more modest: "The Fathers often intuited biblically warranted connections, but the warrant is better explained in the trajectories established in Scripture itself. These are the ancient paths we should tread, and we honor the legacy of the Fathers by holding their methods accountable to the Scriptures they sought to explain and defend." (Dernell, "Typology, Christology, and Prosopological Exegesis," 154). In agreement with Dernell, we should search for and make plain the trajectories of Scripture, with appreciation for but not enslavement to the Patristics.

    Ultimately, the doctrine of the Trinity depends upon the triune God who speaks in Scripture and a Spirit-led reading of the whole canon. It moves too quickly, and in the wrong direction, to say that PE is that right reading, just because the Patristics arrived at the right doctrine. If a wrong method resulted in a right doctrine, we can give thanks to God for his abundant mercy and providence. But we dare not hold fast to an errant method of interpretation if the Scripture leads us to a different conclusion. And that is the point at issue—What does Scripture say?

67. This is not to say, advocates of PE do not care about *sensus literalis*, it is only to say that like the Early Church, there is permission for the text to have multiple meanings. The question at issue is one of authorial intent. For those who affirm the need to find the author's intent, as I do, PE cannot be adopted without significant qualification. On various forms of PE, see Dernell, "Typology, Christology, and Prosopological Exegesis," 141–42.

68. On this difference between tradition as ministerial and tradition as magisterial, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 151–85.
69. On the importance of reading Scripture along the lines of textual, epochal, and canonical horizons, see Richard J. Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 293–310. Applied to the Psalms, see John C. Crutchfield, *Psalms in the Their Context: An Interpretation of Psalms 107–118* (Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2011).
70. So Lints and Crutchfield.