

## *Structure and Meaning in Psalm 50*

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This article marks my final contribution to *Vox Evangelica* written while a member of the faculty of London Bible College. My academic interest in Psalm 50 was sparked by an expository sermon I preached in the college chapel in November 1980. I contribute this study as a thank offering to the Lord (cf. Psalm 104:34) in gratitude for all I have learned during my twenty-three years of teaching and ministering there.

### *Translation*

The rendering which follows has been made with Hebrewless readers in mind, so that they will be able to follow most of the subsequent discussion of stylistic and other matters. Notes and comments on the translation will be left to appropriate points in the discussion.

- 1 *A Psalm of Asaph*  
El, Elohim, Yahweh,  
speaks and calls the earth  
from where the sun rises to where it sets. 3+3+3
- 2 From Zion, perfection of beauty, Elohim appears in  
radiance;
- 3 our God comes, unable to stay silent. 4+4  
Fire in front of him consumes  
and round him a storm rages. 3+3
- 4 He calls to the heavens above  
and to the earth, in order to try his people: 3+3
- 5 'Gather to me my lieges,  
those who have ratified my covenant by sacrifice.' 3+3
- 6 The heavens proclaim his righteousness,  
for Elohim, he is the judge. *Selah* 3+3
- 7 'Listen, my people, and I will speak,  
Israel, and I will give evidence against you:  
Elohim, your God, am I. 3+3+3
- 8 Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you  
nor for your burnt offerings, constantly before me. 3+3

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- 9 I need accept from your homestead no steer  
nor goats from your folds. 3+3
- 10 For mine is every beast in the forest  
and cattle by the thousands on my mountains. 3+3
- 11 I know every bird in those mountains,  
and what moves in the fields is with me. 3+3
- 12 If I were hungry, I need not tell you,  
for mine is the world and what fills it. 3+3
- 13 Do I consume bull's flesh  
and goats' blood do I drink? 3+3

14	Sacrifice to Elohim a thank offering and pay to Elyon your vows;	3+3
15	and if you call on me in time of trouble and I deliver you, then you can honour me.'	3+3
16	But to the wicked person Elohim says, 'What do you mean by reciting my laws and taking my covenant on your mouth,	3+3+3
17	when you have hated my instruction and thrown my terms behind you?	3+3
18	If you have seen a thief, you made friends with him, and with adulterers have you thrown in your lot.	4+3
19	Your mouth you have directed into evil and your tongue you train in deceit.	3+3
20	Continually against your brother you speak, with your own mother's son you find fault.	3+4
21	These are the things you have done—and should I stay silent? You thought I was just like yourself. I rebuke you and set out my case before you.	3+3+3
22	Realize this, you who forget Eloah, or else I will tear you apart beyond rescue:	3+3
23	one who sacrifices a thank offering honours me, and one who gives heed to my way, him I will let see the salvation of Elohim.'	3+2+3

***Overall structure in previous study***

The structure of a piece of literature is determined by close examination of its content. An important aspect of content is form, whereby knowledge of comparable literature discloses patterns into which the piece falls. On this evaluation Psalm 50 falls basically into two parts, a larger one consisting of a divine speech of reprimand, vv.7-23, and a short introduction announcing in hymnic terms God's appearing in a theophany to speak, vv. 1-6. There are more complex issues lurking beyond this definition, which will call for consideration later.

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Another dimension of structure is measured by stylistic criteria. Above all, repetition of words, motifs and morphological and syntactical features affords clues to the movement of the piece and the stress which the communicator apportioned to aspects of his message. Stylistic analysis may reveal a different structuring from that suggested by form, and especially a more intricate one. Form is subservient to the communicator's overall purpose. It is a material which he may manipulate for his own ends. Therefore it does not necessarily determine the divisions in the development of the piece. Stylistic observations can yield better indications of intention and reveal signposts the communicator himself erected to point to his meaning.

Another and more obvious factor in the determination of structure is that of theme. In the case of Psalm 50 thematic considerations point to a division within the divine speech. Sacrifice is under discussion in vv.8-15. Then there is a thematic break at v.16, signalled in the present Hebrew text at least by a fresh introduction. What might be called ethical matters are henceforth in view. However, in v.23a there is a brief and evidently summarizing return to the

subject of sacrifice. It precedes what appears to be a parallel summary of vv.16-22. Accordingly v.23 might be regarded as isolated to some degree from what precedes.<sup>1</sup> If one did take this view, v.22 should probably be linked with it, among other reasons as a foreword drawing attention to v.23: 'this' in v.22a seems to be precisely the double statement of v.23.

On grounds of theme, the divisions within the divine speech could consequently be described as vv.7-15, 16-21, 22-23, the latter two verses being a conclusion. An impressive array of interpreters of the psalm, among them Kirkpatrick, Rhodes, Weiser, Kuntz, Sabourin, Anderson, Kidner and Rogerson and McKay, may be paraded as partisans of this structuring.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, a rival scheme. Gunkel, Gese, Kraus, Johnson and Craigie have opted for a more simple bipartite division of the speech, vv.7-15 and 16-23.<sup>3</sup> A variant of this position is proffered by Bos, who takes v.7 with vv. 1-6.<sup>4</sup> In her focus upon certain aspects of the psalm she chose not to justify her preference in explicit detail, but clearly she pushes the thematic perspective to a logical conclusion: strictly v.8 begins the theme of sacrifice.

A supporting argument adduced by Bos concerns the poetic structuring of the whole psalm. While some other scholars call the three or four parts of the psalm strophes, she has reserved the term for smaller units. She finds in the psalm twelve strophes which fall into six pairs, vv. 1 + 2-3, 4-5 + 6-7, 8-9 + 10-11, 12-13 + 14-15, 16-17 + 18-20, 21 + 22-23. Each of the three parts of the psalm consists of two pairs of strophes. Mostly, each strophe consists of two lines of poetry, but sometimes three, vv.2-3 and 18-20. In principle Bos is following the lead of Gunkel.<sup>5</sup> Typically, however, he adopted a rigidly regular structure: twelve pairs of two-line strophes, each line being a bicolon, i.e. consisting of two cola or half lines.

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This end he achieved with the aid of a number of textual adaptations, especially by transposing the colon 'I rebuke you and set out my case before you' from v.21 to a position after v.7a; the *Jerusalem Bible* concurs. Consequently his strophic pairing was largely the same as the later one of Bos, but diverged in taking vv. 1-3a, 3b-4, 5-6, 7, 18-19 and 20-21 as strophes.

Another consistent scheme, in terms of small poetic and thematic units, has been proposed by Gese, for whom each of the three parts of the composition subdivides into three sections.<sup>6</sup> In the first part there are three pairs of lines, vv.1-3a, 3b-4, 5-6, as in Gunkel's analysis. In the second part vv.8-9, 10-11, 12-13 are three accusatory sections, while vv.7 and 14-15 serve as respectively an introduction and a hortatory conclusion outside their structure. The line-

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<sup>1</sup> V.23 is separated from the foregoing by K. Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge* (Sheffield 1978) 38; J. H. Eaton, *Vision in Worship* (London 1981) 44.

<sup>2</sup> A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge 1902) 276; A. B. Rhodes, *Psalms* (London 1961) 84-85; A. Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (London 1962) 393-394; J. K. Kuntz, *The Self-Revelation of God* (Philadelphia 1967) 192; L. Sabourin, *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning* (New York 1969) 2, 311-312; A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (London 1972) 1, 381; D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (London 1975) 186-188; J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay, *Psalms 1-50* (Cambridge 1977) 236.

<sup>3</sup> H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen 1926) 215-218; H. Gese, 'Psalm 50 and das alttestamentliche Gesetzesverständnis', *Rechtfertigung. Festschrift für E. Käsemann* (Göttingen 1976) 61-62; H. -J. Kraus, *Psalmen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1978) 526; A. R. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody* (Cardiff 1979) 24-28; P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (Waco 1983) 363.

<sup>4</sup> J. W. H. Bos, 'Oh, When the Saints: A Consideration of the Meaning of Psalm 50', *JSOT* 24 (1982) 66; earlier C. A. and E. G. Briggs, *The Books of Psalms* (Edinburgh 1906) 1, 416-418.

<sup>5</sup> *Die Psalmen* 213-214.

<sup>6</sup> 'Psalm 50' 61, 65, 68-69, 74.

pairing is broken in the three sections of accusation to be found in the third part: vv. 16ab ('What...?')-17 (two lines), 18-20 (three lines), 21 (one line). The first clause of v.16 is introductory and vv.22-23 have the same role as vv.14-15.<sup>7</sup> Significant parallelism is thus claimed for the structuring of the second and third parts; it binds together the parts covering the divine speech and so differentiates them from the first part, which has very little divine speaking.

### ***Overall chiasmus***

An overall scheme of a different nature may be suggested for consideration, that of chiasmus, whereby the composition moves toward a middle point and then recedes along a similar route to a final position approximating to that of the beginning. On the outer edges of the psalm lie a cluster of divine names in vv.1-2 and a corresponding pair in vv.22-23. Near the edge lies the verb 'be silent' used with God as subject in passionate explicit or implicit negations at vv.3<sup>8</sup> and 21.<sup>9</sup> Close by occurs what is evidently a pair of legal statements, short clauses made up in the Hebrew of cohortative verbs with first person divine subject and accompanying prepositional terms specifying the defendant: in v.7 'and I will give evidence against you' and in v.21 'and I set out my case before you'. The former verb is sometimes rendered 'admonish' and a forensic force is denied, often on the ground of its usage at Psalm 81:8 in a psalm closely related in some respects to this one.<sup>10</sup> If chiasmic parallelism is rightly found here, it points to a legal connotation in the present context. The next pair of parallel terms consists of identical verbal forms 'I rebuke you', denied in v.8 and affirmed in v.21. If they do belong to a chiasmic structure, Gunkel's transposition of the second instance to v.7, mentioned above, is shown to be wrong<sup>11</sup> and his neat poetic scheme of paired lines falls to the ground. Perhaps a further chiasmic pair is the motif of continuance in vv. 8, 20, used of sacrifice and slander respectively.<sup>12</sup> There follows a twin use of the preposition 'with' in vv. 11 (in the sense of possession) and 18 (twice), and double use of the conjunction 'if' in vv.12, 18. These last three pairings appear to be of cosmetic rather than thematic value, serving to

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keep the chiasmic pot boiling, as it were, till the centre of the scheme is reached. This centre is attained in vv. 15, 17, in a polarized motif of honour and dishonour. The ideal of Israel's honouring God by means of a thank offering is coupled with a practice of worshippers' tossing away God's terms, doubtless a reference to the Decalogue. The latter phrase is a striking one for dishonour. In 1 Kings 14:9 it is used of apostasy and contrasted with following Yahweh with all one's heart. In Ezekiel 23:35 it is coupled with forgetting Yahweh, while in Nehemiah 9:26, the closest parallel, it concerns God's law and is associated with verbs of rebellion and disobedience. Accordingly, dishonouring God (cf. 'honour me with their lips', Isaiah 29:13) and honouring him are conjoined in vv.15, 17. The apparent chiasmic

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<sup>7</sup> The observant reader will have noticed discrepancies between the way Bos and Gese allocate lines. Bos evidently secures two extra lines in vv. 1-3a by taking v. 1 b as a 2 + 2 line and vv.2-3a as a pair of 2+2 lines. More commonly v.1b is regarded as a colon of 4 or 3 beats, and vv.2-3a as a 4+4 bicolon. She also has apparently taken v.21 as two bicola. Others, including Gese, generally take it as a tricolon, a tripartite line. Bos has not actually given a detailed metrical analysis, but the layout of her translation is not difficult to interpret.

<sup>8</sup> cf. Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford<sup>2</sup> 1910) 109e; Kuntz, *Self-Revelation* 198.

<sup>9</sup> cf. Gesenius 112cc; *NEB*.

<sup>10</sup> e.g. A. Cohen, *The Psalms* (Hindhead 1945) 157; Gese, 'Psalm 50' 68 n.26.

<sup>11</sup> So too is Johnson's transposition to v.16 (*Cultic Prophet* 28).

<sup>12</sup> cf. D. W. Thomas, *The Text of the Revised Psalter* (London 1963) 19, with reference to Genesis 49:24; Leviticus 12:4-5; 1 Kings 22:1.

scheme serves to expose the issue of God's honour as the throbbing heart of the psalm. The objective of the psalm is to show how honour due to God was being implicitly withheld from him, behind the observance of ritual forms of respect. The material which leads up to and follows this main charge is a detailed description of two ways of dishonouring God. What might have been established on thematic grounds and via actantial analysis is reinforced by the stylistic means of a chiasitic structure.<sup>13</sup> In more general terms, the chiasmus underlines key factors of the psalm: the divine subject, the inevitability of his breaking silence and bringing charges against his people, the nice distinction of what are and what are not the grounds of his rebuke, and lastly the crucial principle of divine honour.

### *Strophe two*

The main part of the psalm is the divine speech of vv.7-23. It is preferable to examine its constituent portions individually and together before turning to the subsidiary introduction to the speech in vv. 1-6, the first strophe. The extent of the second strophe is most probably vv.7-15. Gunkel described its formal content as an introduction to the speech in v.7, accusation in vv. 8-13 and a short positive exhortation (or 'Torah') in vv.14-15.<sup>14</sup> In fact an accusing note is already struck in v.7 with the terminology of incriminating evidence. The stylistic device of *inclusio*, or identity of beginning and ending, discloses the overall topic of the strophe to be sacrifice: a plural noun occurs in v.8 and an imperative verb in v.14. Another example of *inclusio* is the term 'Elohim' ('God') in vv.7 and 14.<sup>15</sup> Within these outer borders a divine negative evaluation is supplied in vv. 9-13. Negative sentiments dominate the section: negative particles appear in vv. 9 and 12, followed by causal clauses in both cases, while the question of v.13 has a negative implication. The section is marked by its own *inclusio*: 'goats' as sacrificial victims are specified in vv.9, 13. Vv.14-15 are differentiated from the foregoing by a positive tone, expressed in the triad of imperatives (in the Hebrew) and in the use at v. 15b of positive indicative verbs with God and Israel as reciprocal subjects. The imperative verbs deftly echo the initial 'hear' of v.7 in inclusive fashion, as do to a

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lesser extent the following positive verbs with a divine subject in vv.7 and 15. All these symmetrical features seem to indicate that the first half of the divine speech falls into three parts, the introductory vv.7-8, the main vv. 9-13 and the climatic vv. 14-15. An indication of a break between v.8 and v.9 is the quite different use of their negative statements, the first indicating qualified approbation and establishing that sacrifice in principle is not the object of God's reprimand. It is possible to avoid this differentiation by taking v.8 as a question, as the *NEB* does, but Kidner has rightly judged this interpretation to be a strain upon the reader: the similar construction of v.9 points to double statements.<sup>16</sup> The difference in meaning does point to a sectional pause after v.8.

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<sup>13</sup> The chiasitic order is flawed slightly by the positioning of the verb 'be silent' at v.21 a: it should have followed v.21b for strict sequence. However, parallelism with v.3 does seem to be clearly intended.

<sup>14</sup> *Die Psalmen* 216.

<sup>15</sup> It is widely assumed that 'Yahweh' underlies revised 'Elohim' in the psalm as throughout the 'Elohistic Psalter' (Psalms 42-83). But R. G. Boling, ' "Synonymous" Parallelism in the Psalms', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 5 (1960) 221-255, has demonstrated that the evidence is too complex to permit simple substitution.

<sup>16</sup> Psalms 1-72 187 n.1.

The blatancy of vv.8-9 can be overstressed. V.9 speaks not so much of an absolute rejection of sacrifice, implied by the *RSV* ('I will accept no bull'), as of a dialectic one.<sup>17</sup> The verb has a modal significance 'I need not accept',<sup>18</sup> as does the verb in v.12, 'I need not tell you.'<sup>19</sup> This lack of need is amplified by the three comprehensive references in vv.10-12: God owns 'every beast', 'every bird' and 'the world and what fills it'. Structurally the body of the strophe, vv.9-13, has an outer casing, vv.9 and 13, delineated by its double reference to sacrificial goats, and an inner core, vv. 10-12.<sup>20</sup> This core is itself framed by the repeated 'for mine is' in vv. 10 and 12. The central role played by vv. 10-12 is indicated by the ending *-î* ('with me') in the Hebrew of the middle line (v. 11), which is parallel in the strophe's first and final sections, in v.7 by the last syllable of the final word *'ānōkî* ('I'),<sup>21</sup> and in v.15 ('honour *me*'). The significance of this stress upon the divine first person will be discussed later in relation to the third strophe. Within the present strophe the ironic point is made in vv.9-13 that God is not impoverished so that he requires Israel's generous supply of his needs. The change of construction in v.13, from direct to implicit negation by means of a question, indicates a climactic role, although the factor of food has been adumbrated in v.12. The question is a rhetorical one and has an air of surprised incredulity (cf. Micah 6:7). Of course God does not require food, just as he does not need gifts. The climactic role of v.13 is matched by an initial stress in v.9. The verb at the beginning of v.9 has a special nuance, detected by Eaton, who paraphrased 'But I cannot be bribed' and compared the usage of the verb in 1 Samuel 12:3-4.<sup>22</sup> Jeremias has indeed discerned in the verb a cultic flavour, but significantly none of his examples relate to sacrifice.<sup>23</sup> It is more likely that the verb has the connotation of gaining material advantage. It is regularly used of accepting an obligating gift, such as a bribe. Particularly relevant instances of determined refusal of such gifts are in Genesis 14:23 and 2 Kings 5:16. Just as Elisha, in the role of Yahweh's representative, refused to be treated as Naaman's social inferior, so God will not be beholden to Israel or put in their debt. His people were in breach of a basic principle as they brought their gifts of sacrifice: 'What comes from your own hand have we given to you' (1 Chronicles 29:14).

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Structurally, then, the divisions of the strophe appear to be vv.7-8, 9-13, 14-15, rather than those adduced by both Gese and Bos,<sup>24</sup> with whose analysis the present one has only vv. 14-15 in common. Vv. 14-15 recall vv.7-8 not only by explicit mention of sacrifice and by the use of imperatives but also by a contrast of particularity with earlier generality. Over against sacrifices in general one sacrifice is commanded, the thank offering. Similarly over against the continuousness of their being offered ('constantly', v.8), the aftermath of 'a time of trouble' is featured in v.15. Inverted synonymous parallelism seems to mark vv. 14-15, so that its coordinated statements can be subordinated, as in the translation.<sup>25</sup> The resumptive

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<sup>17</sup> H. Kruse, 'Die "dialektische Negation" als semitisches Idiom', *VT* 4 (1954) 385-400 esp. 397; Sabourin, *The Psalms* 2, 313; cf. Th.Booij, *ZAW* 94 (1982) 396-399.

<sup>18</sup> cf. *NEB, NIV*.

<sup>19</sup> D. Michel, *Tempora and Satzstellung in den Psalmen* (Bonn 1960) 131.

<sup>20</sup> Heb. 'mountains of thousand' in v.10 is syntactically unparalleled. The solution of E. König, *Die Psalmen eingeleitet, übersetzt and erklärt* (Gütersloh 1927) 315 n.4, is followed in the translation, as in *JB* and *NEB*, revoicing *hry* as 'my mountains'. The expedient often advocated, to read *'ēl* or *'ēl p* 'God (and)' for *'lp*, violates the structural pattern of divine names in the psalm.

<sup>21</sup> It was evidently for this stylistic reason that the pronoun in this formula is uniquely positioned in this case.

<sup>22</sup> *Vision* 44 and n.8.

<sup>23</sup> J. Jeremias, *Kultprophetie and Gerichtsverkündigung in den späten Königszeit Israels* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1970) 126 n.3 His pertinent examples relate to Levites as object of the verb: Numbers 3:12; 8:16, 18; 18:6.

<sup>24</sup> cf. Kuntz, *Self-Revelation* 192, who divided into vv.7, 8-11, 12-15.

<sup>25</sup> cf. Johnson, *Cultic Prophet* 27; Eaton, *Vision* 44; *NEB*.

summary in v.23aa confirms this proposal. V.14a corresponds to v.15bb: to sacrifice a thank offering is to honour God. V 14bb aligns with v. 15a: the vows are those made in time of crisis. It was characteristic of Israelite religion that in the course of a lament ('call') votive promises were made to participate in a thank offering (cf. Psalm 56:13/12; 116:17-18). Underlying this sacrifice was a gut sense of need. Yahweh as explicit deliverer was given the role of the superior party, in fact as 'Elyon' or 'Most High'. The example of the thank offering is used to point the way to a correct theology of sacrifice in general, in terms of grateful response rather than of obligating beneficence.<sup>26</sup> A sense of human need and of divine patronage—certainly not of divine need—was to underlie Israel's use of the sacrificial system.

### *Strophe three*

The final strophe may be regarded as extending from v.16 to v.23. Its separate introduction in v.16aa has been judged a gloss,<sup>27</sup> although less so in recent study. At least it might be regarded as a correct gloss insofar as the second person singular references in this strophe now relate to individuals, but in the previous one to Israel.<sup>28</sup> Gunkel analyzed the strophe in terms of accusation in vv. 16ab-21 and a positive exhortation in vv.22-23.<sup>29</sup> If v.16aa were retained, there would be *inclusio* in the references to 'Elohim' in vv. 16 and 23. Moreover, 'the wicked person' would be a good inclusive parallel to 'you who forget Eloah' in v.22: in Job 8:13 an almost identical phrase, 'those who forget El', is synonymously parallel to 'the godless person'. A further parallel to the phrase of v.22 could be 'you have thrown my terms behind you' in v.17: as noted earlier, the verbs are juxtaposed in Ezekiel 23:35. There is thus correlation between vv.16-17 and 22-23. Vv. 16-17 are themselves bound together by their fourfold parallelism of objects, 'my laws', 'my covenant', 'my instruction',<sup>30</sup> 'my terms', all apparently in the precise sense of the Decalogue.<sup>31</sup> Vv.18-21 are then isolated as a middle section, reasonably so since an obvious break occurs between v.17 and the explanatory vv.18ff., and between v.21 with its backward pointing 'these things' and v.22 with its fresh imperative and forward looking 'this'. V.18 corresponds to v.21 in ending with a second singular suffix ('you', 'your'): in this respect the similar endings in

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vv. 16-17 ('you', 'your') are echoed. Another correspondence is that the anthropomorphism attributed to God in v.21 precisely relates not to the deceit and slander of vv. 19-20 but to approval of and association with evildoers mentioned in v.18. The man-like image of God as the complacent friend of sinners is the point of reference in v.21. Vv. 19-20 are left as the central pair of lines in the strophe, v.20 being a blatant example of the general sentiments of V. 19.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Material sacrifice (spiritually offered) appears to be envisaged in view of the specific verb 'sacrifice' and the cultic flavour and setting of the psalm: cf. R. Pautrel in *Mélanges bibliques rédigés en l'honneur de André Robert* (Paris 1957) 237, 240; Gese, 'Psalm 50' 70-71; D. Bach, *VT* 28 (1978) 13-14.

<sup>27</sup> Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* 220; Kraus, *Psalmen* 527 et al.

<sup>28</sup> Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* 217.

<sup>29</sup> *Die Psalmen* 215.

<sup>30</sup> sc. the pronominal suffix (M. Dahood, *Psalms 1-50* [New York 1965] 308; J. L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* [Newhaven 1981] 22).

<sup>31</sup> cf. Deuteronomy 4:13 for 'covenant'.

<sup>32</sup> cf. 104:10 for 'direct into'; cf. Jewish Aramaic  $\text{ܣܥܡܝܕ}$  'attached to, addicted to, in the habit of for 'train'.

After the deprecated behaviour of vv.16-21, vv.22-23 turn to exhortation. More strictly, the exhortation of v.22a is defined, after a dire warning in v.22b, in terms of a double statement of approved behaviour, the second of which is couched in tones of promise. Vv.22b and 23b stand in external antithetic parallelism: impossibility of rescue from God and salvation wrought by God are eloquently contrasted. In v.23a there is a clear resumption of vv.14-15, which may be considered later. In v.23b language used earlier in the third strophe is repeated or echoed. The positive prospect to be seen contrasts with the deprecated seeing of v.18, while God's 'way' recalls the words for his ethical standards used in vv.16-17.<sup>33</sup> The latter case is a further instance of correlation between vv.16-17 and 22-23. As the final section alludes to earlier content, so an element in the first section is resumed later in the strophe: 'your mouth', so decorously occupied in v.16, shockingly reappears in a contrary context in v.19. What then is the structure of the third strophe? It appears to be vv.16 (or 16ab)-17, 18-21 and 22-23. Gese and Bos concur in initial and final pairing of lines;<sup>34</sup> the middle section diverges from their analysis.

### *Strophes two and three*

That the second and third strophes are not independent passages is clear from the resumption of the conclusion of the second at the end of the third. The clause 'one who sacrifices a thank offering honours me' is a direct repetition of terminology found in vv.14-15, with the person changed from second to third and the initial verbal form from imperative to participle. The contact prompts enquiry as to whether there are not other links between the strophes. It is evident that there is a high degree of symmetry. Especially the final positive pairs of verses, to which Gunkel pointed,<sup>35</sup> seem to demand that vv.23-24 be regarded as the climax of the third strophe rather than detached from it. The resumptive element does not reveal the section's subsidiary role as a climax to the divine speech as a whole. Nevertheless the primary function of vv.22-23 is to conclude vv. 16-21: so indicate the initial imperative, parallel to v.14, and the elements which bond with the earlier parts of the third strophe.

Not only are vv. 14-15 parallel with vv.22-23. Both strophes also have a matching middle section, vv.9 + 10-12 + 13 and vv. 18 + 19-20 + 21, one line less in the third strophe. It is significant that anthropomorphism is rebuked as a misrepresentation of God at the same point in each strophe,

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at the climax of the middle section, in vv. 13, 21. In the first case physiological anthropomorphism is ironically derided, and so in the second is what might be called moral anthropomorphism. In both cases the concept of anthropomorphism is treated in a sophisticated way. At v.13 it is an absurdity, a logical deduction from Israel's underlying attitude to sacrifice, which accordingly is itself branded as absurd. At v.21, in the light of vv. 16-17, it is a conscious reversal of the norm of human lives being based upon God's

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<sup>33</sup> cf. Exodus 18:20; Deuteronomy 11:28; Job 23:11-12; sc. a first singular pronominal suffix with 'way' (Dahood, *Psalms 1-50* 310). The second line of v.23 is difficult. *RV* margin accords with the Massoretic accents: 'and prepareth a way that I may show him...' (cf. Bos, *JSOT* 24, 69, 'I will prepare a way to show him...'). Kirkpatrick, *Psalms* 284, rightly categorized this treatment as 'grammatically unexceptionable, but [it] does not fit the context'. J. A. Alexander, *The Psalms Translated and Explained* (Edinburgh 1864) 227, realized that what is required is synonymous parallelism coupling the messages of vv.7-15 and 16-21. The links between v.23 b and vv. 16-18 suggest this structuring. See further n.36 below.

<sup>34</sup> cf. Kuntz, *Self-Revelation* 193, who analyzes as vv.16-17, 18-20, 21 and then a coda, vv.22-23.

<sup>35</sup> *Die Psalmen* 215.



standards. Instead, God is dragged down to man's level of, tolerating immorality. In both instances mental attitudes are at fault. This is explicitly the case in v.21, for which a new mental attitude must be substituted according to the direct continuation in v.22 and the moral prescription of v.23ab.<sup>36</sup> There must be second thoughts! It is implicitly the case in the second strophe, where an incorrect understanding of sacrifice is the charge. Wrong thinking about God is at the root of the two types of defect criticized in the strophes.

As for the initial sections, the introduction at v.16aa, specifying the addressee, would match well the introduction of v.7a, as well as providing a divine term ('Elohim') parallel to that of v.7b. The fact that one introduction lies within the speech and the other outside, is not a significant objection. Both initial sections move from a cultic form which of itself is acceptable to God, the bringing of sacrifice and the recitation of the Decalogue, to an underlying inconsistency which, by implication, casts doubt upon the initial performance or at least upon the performers. This juggling with what is cultically acceptable and yet rejected in both strophes serves to confirm the usual interpretation of v.8. It needs to be emphasized that both strophes are concerned with criticism of cultic activity, or at least its motivation. This is obviously the case in the second strophe, but the focus of the third is usually seen to be upon wrong extra-cultic behaviour. Rather, the point at issue is the inappropriateness of reciting a kind of moral creed. Participation in this cultic performance is reprehensible. 'How dare you do this when you do that!' is the pattern of vv. 16ff., as of Isaiah 29:13, rather than directly 'How dare you do that!'. Cultic impropriety is the target of both strophes.

In the third strophe the implicit background seems to be a failure to take the entrance liturgy seriously. The same fault appears to lie behind Isaiah's attack on the sacrificial cult in Isaiah 1:10-17.<sup>37</sup> Examples of the entrance liturgy are Psalms 15 and 24:3-6 and a prophetic imitation, Isaiah 33:14-16. It was intended to check the moral standards of would-be worshippers. (The words of Jesus in Matthew 5:23-24 echo it in spirit.) There are a number of terminological links between Psalm 50 and the biblical examples of the entrance liturgy.<sup>38</sup> The clue to the truth that the standards of the entrance liturgy are in view in vv. 17-21 is the proliferation of past tenses, in accord with Psalms 15 and 24.<sup>39</sup> As in Ezekiel 18, 'wicked' in v.16 appears to be a term used for one upon whom the priestly formula used after the entrance liturgy, 'he is righteous', cannot be pronounced.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Gese, 'Psalm 50' 59-61, most reasonably resolves the crux by taking 'sām as elliptic for 'sām 'al libbō 'he who considers', comparing Job 24:12 (cf. too Psalm 119:30, as explained by G. R. Driver, *Harvard Theological Review* 29 [1936] 191). The consequent triple reference to thinking is appropriate. *EVV* 'ordereth/orders... aright' goes beyond the possible meaning of the Hebrew verb.

<sup>37</sup> cf. O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12* (London 1972) 15; H. Wildberger, *Jesaja 1-12* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1980) 49.

<sup>38</sup> v.3 'devouring fire' cf. Isaiah 33:14; v.16 'wicked' cf. Isaiah 33:14; v.19 'evil' cf. Psalm 15:3; Isaiah 33:15; 'tongue' cf. Psalm 15:3; v.20 'speak' cf. Psalm 15:2; Isaiah 33:15; v.21 'do these things' contrast Psalm 15:5; v.23 for the moral 'way' cf. Psalm 15:2; Isaiah 33:15; 'salvation' cf. Psalm 24:5; and for the promise of v.23b in general cf. Psalms 15:5b; 24:5; Isaiah 33:16.

<sup>39</sup> The imperfect verbs of vv. 19b-20 are paralleled in Psalm 15:4ab, bb.

<sup>40</sup> cf. W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1* (Philadelphia 1979) 374-377 J. W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (London 1969) 108, relates the formula to the recitation of apodictic law at a covenant renewal festival rather than to the entrance liturgy. His suggestion is particularly interesting in view of the covenantal associations of Psalm 50.

It is a commonplace of exegesis of vv. 18-20 to observe their evocation of the eighth, seventh and ninth commandments of the Decalogue.<sup>41</sup> In a perceptive study of the entrance liturgy, Koch has stressed the connection between 'decalogical' apodictic commands ('Thou shalt not...') and the worshipper's affirmations in the entrance liturgies: the imperfect future verbs of the former were transformed into perfect past forms, as the worshipper professed his obedience (cf. Deuteronomy 26:13b-14).<sup>42</sup> Here in vv. 18-20 the negative declarations of the entrance liturgy ('I have not...') are significantly changed to positive statements ('you have...'). The question may be raised whether v.16 is not a direct reference to affirmations of obedience dishonestly made in the entrance liturgy. However, the psalm as a whole appears to point to a specifically covenant-oriented service as the occasion of its usage. At least echoes of the entrance liturgy underlie the cultic perspective of the third strophe, a phenomenon facilitated by the organic relationship of both cultic professions in terms of content. Here previous behaviour inconsistent with covenant standards should have disqualified their perpetrators as 'wicked'. Yet they have entered the temple courts and improperly participated in recitation of the Ten Commandments. At this juncture God intervenes and exposes the false pretences behind their presence.

Scrutiny of the ends of the strophes discloses an anomaly: firstly divine deliverance is the prelude to the God-honouring thank offering (v. 15b) and secondly its synonym, salvation, is the sequel to taking covenantal ethics seriously (v.23b). The difference of perspective hints at a contrast which on closer examination runs right through the two strophes. Its first sign is the polarity of the two explicit Hebrew pronouns which stand at or near the head of the strophes, 'I' in v.7<sup>43</sup> and 'you' in v.17. This interstrophic antithesis is one of a number of indications that pace Briggs and Bos v.7 does not end the first strophe but begins the second. The respective stress is repeated in a phenomenon already noted, the first singular references at the ends of vv. 11 and 15 and the second singular references at the ends of vv. 16, 17, 18, 21. In fact the verbal forms and pronominal suffixes throughout the speech indicate an 'I' dominance in the second strophe and a 'you' dominance in the third. The contrast is by no means total: an essential relationship between the two parties is demonstrated by the opposite references in each strophe. Certainly, however, an initial focus is reversed after v.15. The pronominal polarity is set in a surprisingly symmetrical framework. Both strophes move from the main character's initial apparent acceptance of the other's concerns, to his rejection of them and onward to a description of the main character. In this sequence the last element, description, plays a major part. In the second strophe acceptance of Israel's sacrificing is followed by a rejection of their motivation and then by a long description of God as he really is, his real nature. In the third strophe the 'wicked person' has seemingly accepted God's moral demands, then is stated to have rejected them. From v.18 there is an

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extended description of him as he really is, his real behaviour. Both strophes end in salvation, but the perspective is necessarily different in the light of the preliminaries. In v.15 it is God's activity to which Israel is to respond, while in v.23 it is a divine response to the person's moral behaviour. In other words, in v.15 it illustrates God's nature and so prompts Israel to

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<sup>41</sup> M. Mannati, 'Les accusations de Psaume 50:18-20', *VT* 25 (1975) 659-669, oversubtly interprets vv.18-19 in terms of religious syncretism and v.20 of Judah's judgemental attitude to the Northern Kingdom. Cf. Gese's brief comment in 'Psalm 50' 77.

<sup>42</sup> K. Koch, 'Templeinlassliturgien and Dekaloge', *Studien zur Theologie der alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1961) 45-60.

<sup>43</sup> cf. 'he' of God in v.6, to which Johnson, *Cultic Prophet* 24-25, draws attention.

offer sacrifice acceptable to him; in v.23 it is an incentive and sequel to human acceptance of God's ethical demands. In terms of the overall motifs of cult and honour, in v.15 sacrificial honour of God is the result of salvation from crisis and in v.23 such salvation is the result of honour paid to him via the covenant stipulations celebrated in the sanctuary. In a consistent manner the divinely spoken strophes are respectively God-oriented and man-oriented. Yet human misrepresentation of God is present in both. In the second strophe it dominates the description of God in the form of denial of his material or physical deprivation. God has no such needs for his patronizing people to satisfy. In the third strophe the concept of divine misrepresentation can surface only near the end of the man-oriented unit. At v.21 it is exposed as the underlying cause of the unethical behaviour described earlier. As if to compensate for the late appearance of this element, the notion of (re)thinking is mentioned no less than three times.

### *Strophe one*

Vv.1-6 are of a different character from those that follow: only v.5 consists of divine speech. The strophe mainly provides a narrative setting for the psalm. Its identity as a unit appears to be guaranteed by the feature of chiasmus which pervades it. Most obviously its presence can be detected by the crisscrossing pattern of 'earth' and 'heavens'. The terms occur separately in vv.1, 6 and together in v.4 in an A/BA/B scheme. In the Hebrew the pattern is accentuated by the absence of the definite article in vv. 1, 6 and its presence before the terms of v.4. Further chiastic indications are 'Elohim' in the first and last lines<sup>44</sup> and a common cultic reference in vv.2 ('Zion, perfection of beauty') and 5 ('ratify my covenant by sacrifice'). Nearer the centre of the strophe 'our God' in v.3a clearly matches 'his people' in v.4b. This chiastic scheme, like the overall one running through the psalm, serves to enhance major motifs. God has a triple role: 1) he is the cosmic God who relates to heaven and earth, 2) he is the cultic God present in Zion and receiving sacrifice and 3) he is the covenant God who relates to his people, as the use of the common double covenant formula indicates. These three theological truths the poet has arranged into a striking pattern of chiasmus, to serve as a key to the understanding of the psalm as a whole.

There are also signs of a division into smaller units. Those of Gunkel, Gese and Bos have been mentioned earlier. It might be added that Gese justified his threefold division into vv. 1-3a, 3b-4, 5-6 as a series of double alternating motifs, speech and theophany, in an AB/BA/AB pattern.<sup>45</sup>

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Kuntz affirmed Gunkel's division into vv. 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, finding a climax at the end of each unit.<sup>46</sup> Yet another pattern may be offered for the reader's judgement, a bipartite one of vv. 1-3, 4-6.<sup>47</sup> Harvey observed that v.4. is a fuller statement of v. 1, in particular adding the purpose of God's calling to the earth.<sup>48</sup> In other words, v.4 repeats and develops v. 1. In so doing v.4 transcends the relation it has to v. 1 in the chiastic scheme, and reveals a role in a bipartite division. Likewise is not v.3a developed in v.5a? Announced speech ('unable to stay silent') becomes direct speech, and a motif of interpersonal encounter moves from a mainly divine

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<sup>44</sup> Kuntz, *Self-Revelation* 192 The term in v.2 belongs to a different scheme.

<sup>45</sup> 'Psalm 50' 65-66.

<sup>46</sup> *Self-Revelation* 192.

<sup>47</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (London 1888) 143-145, divided thus.

<sup>48</sup> J. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l'alliance* (Bruges 1967) 49.

perspective to a more manward one. Finally, v.3b corresponds to v.6, each shifting from direct consideration of God to an indirect one and highlighting created elements, which in fact serve to reflect his attributes. The fire and storm manifest his power, while the heavens proclaim in praise his judicial righteousness. As in Psalm 97:3-4a, 6a the phraseology is characteristic of the description of a certain type of theophany, the theophany of judgement.<sup>49</sup> The note of judgement, struck for the first time in v.4 as a newly mentioned element in comparison with v. 1, is repeated in v.6, so that it is used in a device of *inclusio*, marking the start and end of a second unit, vv.4-6. Thus is stressed the development of thought in the first strophe: God appears in theophany, but that theophany is in due course revealed as one of judgement. Trapped as it were within the double mention of judgement are the people of God as its object.<sup>50</sup>

If the second unit of the strophe focuses upon the purpose of the theophany, the first has more of an emotive quality. Although Kuntz divides the strophe otherwise, his description of vv. 1-6 as depicting the manner and purpose of divine advent is significant.<sup>51</sup> Vv. 1-3 are a bombardment of dramatic noises. Who is the dominant character? Not one divine term is sufficient to introduce him, three must be used.<sup>52</sup> Whom does he summon as witness? Not simply the earth, but the earth in its totality. Whence does he appear? Not merely from Zion but from the 'perfection of beauty'. Who comes? Not only God but fire and storm ominously dancing attendance upon him. (It is the ominous note of v.3b that is developed in vv.4-6.) Time after time the hearer is overwhelmed into awed appreciation. Undoubtedly this is the language of hymnic praise, but not simply so. God and all that pertain to him are deliberately surrounded with an aura of mystery and magnificence, of power and passion. So the scene is set for the divine speech of vv.7-23. 'The point of the whole psalm is the powerful experience of man's encounter with God and the conclusions which are to be drawn therefrom.'<sup>53</sup> To this sovereign God man must react with submission and dependence.

### *Strophes one, two and three*

It was observed above that the second and third strophes have a parallel structure. From this parallelism the first strophe clearly diverges, with its

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two-part scheme. The structural difference underlines the difference in role between the introduction to divine speech and the speech itself. The first strophe has a subordinate role in relation to the other two. Corresponding to their importance is the shortness of the first strophe, six lines over against nine and eight respectively, or eleven cola over against two sets of nineteen cola. The introductory role is indicated by an explicit forking of the material at the

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<sup>49</sup> cf. R. Knierim, *VT* 18 (1968) 54-55; Eaton, *Vision* 49-50 It is quite feasible that in contrast to 97:6 the verb of v.6a has a forensic sense, in view of the accent on judgement in vv.4-6: the heavens as witnesses declare that he is in the right (E. Lipiński, *La royauté de Yahwé dans la poésie et le culte de l'ancien Israël* [Brussels 1965] 261, with reference to Proverbs 12:17).

<sup>50</sup> E. Beaucamp, 'La théophanie du Psaume 50 (49)' *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 81 (1959) 897-915, and Mannati, 'Le Psaume 50 est-il un *rib*?' *Semitica* 23 (1973) 27-50, interpret vv.1-6 as a theophany of vindication, but Nielsen, *Jahve som anklager og dommer* (Aarhus 1977) 123-124, has rightly queried whether they have taken the context of the rest of the psalm sufficiently into account. I am grateful to Mrs. Suzanne Laszlo for a running translation of the Danish.

<sup>51</sup> *Self-Revelation* 190.

<sup>52</sup> cf. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* 219; Kraus, *Psalmen* 526.

<sup>53</sup> Weiser, *The Psalms* 394.

end of the first strophe. The key term of the second strophe is 'sacrifice', mentioned at head and climax, vv.8 and 14. A major phrase of the third is 'my covenant' at its beginning, in the sense of covenant stipulations (v.16). Both these terms appear together in v.5.<sup>54</sup> Accordingly the end of v.5 provides headlines introducing the next two strophes.<sup>55</sup> These elements in v.5 are related to God's people, and this factor too is a clue to what follows: the second strophe explores their attitude to sacrifice, and the third the attitude of certain members of the people to his covenant in its cultic expression and practical outworking.

Yet there is a certain amount of parallelism between all three strophes. It might be claimed that the bipartite nature of the first one is mirrored in the divine speech. Kuntz has observed that each strophe has an initial tricolon, vv. 1, 7, 16.<sup>56</sup> Each begins and ends with the term 'Elohim' in vv. 1, 6, 7, 14, 16, 23.<sup>57</sup> An imperative occurs in the prefinal line of each strophe, in vv.5, 14 (also 15), 22. These parallel elements seem to suggest that the first strophe somehow provides a model which the next two should match in fact as well as in structure. This impression is perhaps confirmed by the phenomenon that word-based chiasmus appears not only in the psalm as a whole but also separately in the first strophe, as if the whole is required to reflect the initial representation. If so, style is used to convey pathos. Despite all similarities the second and third strophes are more firmly united in their differences. Nevertheless the first strophe does stand as a model of expectation: God's call of vv. 1, 4, issued in the imperative of v.5, meets with accord. The imperative, here capped with an affirmative response, is by comparison left hanging in the air at the ends of the next strophes. The careful reader is left reflecting: if heaven and earth comply, should not God's people?

The element of pathos is increased by the note of unequal reciprocity pervading the psalm. If God and his people are covenant partners, there should be attunement in action and speech. In the realm of speech there is no such harmony. The Hebrew stem *db'r* 'speak/word' marks the beginning of each strophe. God 'speaks' (v.1): 'I speak' (v.7), eventually about 'my words' (v.17). Yet God's 'words' of the covenant have been dishonoured and his new word has to be one of judgement. Human discord prompts negative divine intervention. The play is developed by a further instance of the verb in v.20: 'you speak' slanderously. A similar point is made by repetition of the verb 'call'. God 'calls' to earth and heaven (vv. 1, 4) and they respond. In Israel's case he has to urge them to 'call' upon him with a sense of need (v.15), a call that has been sadly absent and warrants

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his call of judgement. In both wordplays there is a note of alienation initiated by the human party.

The hearer of the psalm is invited to share God's pained surprise by means of the build-up of divine grandeur in vv. 1-3. It is obviously picked up by the statements concerning divine terrestrial wealth in vv.10-12. They function as a riposte to the image of a needy God which, it is claimed, underlay Israel's understanding of sacrifice. Despite abundance of sacrifice<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The repetition is enhanced in the second case in that "lê'by, on' follows in both vv.5 and 16.

<sup>55</sup> cf. A. D. Rittersprach in *Rhetorical Criticism. Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (Pittsburgh 1974) 73 for the phenomenon of a strophe building on the closing note of the previous one.

<sup>56</sup> *Self-Revelation* 191 n.43.

<sup>57</sup> The instance in v.23 is thus safeguarded against the emendation proposed by Kraus, *Psalmen* 526, et al.

<sup>58</sup> cf. Isaiah 1:11 S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (Oxford 1962) 2, 22, renders v.8a 'I blame thee not for lack of sacrifice'.

there was a hidden programme which required to be exposed as alien to the true God of glory. In the third strophe the echoing of the first is climactically delayed till the end. The God of theophany power can intervene in destruction (v.22b; cf. 104: 1-4, 32, 35). Overall the glory of the cultic centre (v.2) and the cultic expression of fellowship on the part of the covenant people (v.5) are not matched by the cult-based truths exposed in vv.9-13, 16-21. In various ways vv.1-6 act as criteria for vv.7-23. The divine aim in vv. 1-6 and so throughout the psalm is to establish truth in a dynamic sense, a matching of cultic action and motive, of cultic profession and integrity. God's exposure of discrepancy is a means of establishing 'righteousness' in his sphere of authority.<sup>59</sup>

In a study of the genre of theophany Kuntz has seen in Psalm 50 a number of its elements,<sup>60</sup> which accordingly constitute a unifying pattern. For Kuntz theophany essentially has divine speaking as its purpose, on the lines of the patriarchal 'Yahweh appeared to... and said' (e.g. Genesis 26:24).<sup>61</sup> So vv.1-6 combine descriptions of visual theophany with announcement of divine speech. Another characteristic element is the divine self-asseveration, here in the form 'Elohim, your God am I' (v.7), as a preface to further divine speech, the hieros logos of vv.8-23. Corresponding to a common affirmation of divine presence is the promise of deliverance in v.15b. The basic theophany form has evidently been adapted, but a number of its elements have been preserved in the course of the psalm.

Various scholars have found in Psalm 50 incongruity between vv. 1-6 and what follows. Mowinckel has expressed it thus:

In Psalm 50 the 'act of judgement', announced in the introduction and prepared through the stately description of the epiphany, passes off in a way rather different from what might have been expected; we are prepared for a real judgement with a purging of sinners from the congregation, but we merely hear an admonitory scolding with pedagogical instruction. The contents seem to be out of proportion to introduction and framework: to 'judge', to the psalmist, actually here means simply 'rebuke and admonish'—after all, Yahweh is bound by the covenant.<sup>62</sup>

Mowinckel blamed the attenuation on post-exilic Judaism, rather unfairly. The speeches of Psalm 50 bear some relation to the *rib* or so-called 'covenant lawsuit' found especially in the prophets. Harvey has

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analyzed the psalm in terms of this literary genre and adduced parallels with other texts.<sup>63</sup> Psalm 50, rather than being a direct example of the form, re-uses it for paraenetic ends. It does contain a number of its elements, notably the following. In vv. 1, 4 heaven and earth are summoned (cf. Deuteronomy 32:1; Micah 6:2). Vv. 7-15, 23a and vv. 16-22, 23b employ two different types of *rib*. The first is addressed to parties to the covenant, rebuking their attitude to sacrifice (cf. Isaiah 1:13-15; Micah 6:6-8a) and concluding in a positive injunction (cf.

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<sup>59</sup> cf. Knierim's perception that in the OT heaven supremely bears witness to divine order ('righteousness'), whereas on earth God's lordship is contested (*Horizons in Biblical Theology* 3 [1981] 72, 78-80, 85-88); cf. too on Yahweh's role as cosmic judge R. L. Hubbard, *ZAW* 94 (1982) 267-279.

<sup>60</sup> *Self-Revelation* 193.

<sup>61</sup> In this respect his study of Psalm 50 is distinguished from that of J. Jeremias, *Theophanie: Die Geschichte einer alttestamentlichen Gattung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn<sup>2</sup> 1977) 62-64.

<sup>62</sup> Mowinckel, *The Psalms* 2, 71.

<sup>63</sup> *Le plaidoyer* 49-54.

Isaiah 1:16-20; Micah 6:8) to sacrifice the thank offering to God as saviour. The second, because it confronts rebels against the covenant, necessarily takes a stronger line, asking indignant questions (cf. Deuteronomy 32:6; Isaiah 1:11-12), indicting for breach of covenant (cf. Jeremiah 2:7-11) and threatening with destruction (cf. Deuteronomy 32:19-25).<sup>64</sup> The usefulness of the parallels with the *rib* form is that it accommodates divine judgement to admonition and threat and so to suspended sentence, the execution of which may be avoided by means of reformation. The double formulation is of a piece with the explicit change of addressee in v.16aa, whose authenticity or at least appropriateness is thus further confirmed. Theologically, the apparent incongruity is to be explained in terms of Yahweh's dual relationship with Israel as their protector and judge, as Nielsen has recognized in the *rib* form:

By using [the] image [of a legal action] and by in a number of cases omitting the verdict which ineluctably must follow, or by altering it to a note of final warning, the ultimate ambivalence becomes evident: of Yahweh's will to punish, which is grounded in his righteousness; and of Yahweh's will to save, which is grounded in his love.<sup>65</sup>

The psalm itself gives evidence of this tension beyond the relative mildness of the conclusions of the judgement speeches. The double covenant formula 'our God—his people' of vv.3, 4 may attest both the care and claim of God (cf. 81:9/8, 11/10; 95:7). The label 'lieges' attached to the two parties in v.5 refers to the reciprocal bond of steadfast love between the two parties to the covenant and is not to be regarded as simply ironic.<sup>66</sup> Restoration of covenant propriety is the divine aim. God's righteousness works within parameters established by his love. In the hands of such a God, threat of judgement becomes the tool of grace to refashion his people into conformity to his will.

Finally, closer consideration must be given to the covenant theme that pervades the psalm. It is customary to observe that Psalms 50, 81 and 95 represent a triad of psalms which belong to some kind of covenant tradition perpetuated in the Jerusalem cult.<sup>67</sup> All three feature a challenge to take the covenant seriously, delivered most probably by a cultic prophet.<sup>68</sup> Each has its own emphasis and perspective, but they are one in calling the people back to obligations laid upon Israel at its birth as a covenant

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people. Each intervenes in a scenario of cultic worship with a disturbing call to obedience. As noted above, the twin covenant phrases in vv.3, 4 are paralleled in 81: 9/8, 11/10; 95:7. In some respects Psalms 81 and 95 are closer to each other, but Psalm 50 has obvious connection with Psalm 81 in the identical phraseology of 51:7 and 81: 9/8, 11/10, concerning the extended call to hear and the formula of self-asseveration associated with the Decalogue

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<sup>64</sup> However, it does end on a note of admonition and promise, as Nielsen, *Jahve som anklager* 125, notes, and so is by no means a consistent representative of the type.

<sup>65</sup> *Yahweh as Prosecutor* 83.

<sup>66</sup> Mannati, *Semitica* 23, 45-46, is right in this respect. K. D. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible* (Missoula 1978) 243, has categorized its use here as relating to 'the entire people as recipients of God's *hesed* [steadfast love]'.  
<sup>67</sup> cf. e.g. Mowinckel, *The Psalms* 1, 160-161, 2, 70-72; Jeremias, *Kultprophetie* 125-127; Eaton, *Vision* 40-45; Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor* 51-53.

<sup>68</sup> cf. Johnson, *Cultic Prophet* 28-29; Eaton, *ibid.* But Jeremias, *ibid.*, considers Psalms 50, 81, 95 to be the product of Levites using prophetic forms (cf. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* 215). The dating of the psalm is a material factor: the present writer would opt for a late preexilic or early post-exilic date. For the related issue as to whether vv. 1-6 represent an account of a vision or simply an expression of this literary form see N. H. Ridderbos, *OTS* 15 (1969) 219.

(Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6). Curse and blessing associated with the covenant feature in both, at 50: 22b, 23b and 81:13/12, 15-17/14-16, while curse is represented at 95:11.<sup>69</sup> It does seem that the three psalms attest the existence at some period of some kind of commemoration of, and recommitment to, the Sinaitic covenant in the Jerusalem Temple, perhaps at the Feast of Tabernacles (81:3/2; cf. Deuteronomy 31:9-13).<sup>70</sup>

Psalms 81 and 95 do help the reader of Psalm 50 to relate it in general to a common cultic setting at which the covenant was celebrated. With the aid of this background, tentative as it must be, he can better understand particular covenantal references in the psalm and recognize them as a valid sustained pattern conforming to its cultic context. Ridderbos has explored the psalm's links with the Sinaitic traditions.<sup>71</sup> He and others have found reference to Exodus 24:3-8 in the covenant sacrifice of v.5, recapitulated in later times. The order to 'gather' the people is compared with Deuteronomy 31:12, 28, where the people are summoned (another Hebrew verb) to hear the law, and heaven and earth are called to witness (cf. Deuteronomy 4:26; 30:19). Besides the self-asseveration of v.7, vv. 16/17, 18-20 refer in general and in particular to the 'ten words' (Deuteronomy 4:13) of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. In v.2 Zion is a new Sinai from which God reveals himself in theophany to deliver his law (cf. Isaiah 2:3). The divine message is a re-presentation of the Sinai revelation, affirming that the God of Sinai still lives and presses his claim upon contemporary Israel. Ridderbos envisaged the reading of the Torah as cultic background to the psalm.

Gese has developed the comparison with covenantal traditions. Following Mannati, he relates the gathering of v.5 to the cultic constitution of the covenant people, in the light of Joshua 24:1; 2 Kings 23:1; 2 Chronicles 29:30; 34:29.<sup>72</sup> The imperative and second vocative of v.7 recall the deuteronomic 'Hear, O Israel'.<sup>73</sup> The two themes of the divine speech correspond to the Decalogue's division into God-oriented cultic commands and man-oriented ethical demands.<sup>74</sup> Kuntz has stressed the psalm's alignment with Sinaitic theophany traditions.<sup>75</sup> The fire and storm in v.3 reflect that theophany. V.12b echoes the claim 'for all the earth is mine' in Exodus 19:5. Kuntz affirmed that 'It is Israel's Lord who appeared at Sinai in the self-giving of his name, nature and will who now draws near to the present generation in cultic assembly to issue anew these same divine aspects.'<sup>76</sup> Jeremiah has noted in passing the close similarity between v. 15a and 81:8/7aa, 'In trouble you called and I delivered you.'<sup>77</sup>

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The similarity raises the question whether the former wording, like the latter, was intended to evoke Israel's experience in Egypt. Did the hymnic or narrative context in the cultic usage of Psalm 50 make such an allusion clear? Was mention of calling upon God in time of need and

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<sup>69</sup> For the word links between Psalms 50:15a and 80:8/7aa see below.

<sup>70</sup> For discussion see Kraus, *Psalmen* 527-530. Psalm 50 cannot bear the weight of the hypothesis of a 'covenant lawsuit' against the people as a standard cultic phenomenon: cf. Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor* 50-53. M. Weinfeld, 'Pentecost as Festival of the Giving of the Law', *Immanuel* 8 (1978) 7-18, esp. 10, has suggested that the Feast of Weeks was the occasion. I must thank my colleague Dr. Deryck Sheriffs for this reference. Nielsen, *Jahve som anklager* 130, 158, seems less inclined to attribute the psalm to an annual covenant festival than to a ceremony of repentance in a situation of acute crisis (cf. *Yahweh as Prosecutor* 55-61).

<sup>71</sup> 'Die Theophanie in Psalm 50:1-6', *OTS* 15, 213-226.

<sup>72</sup> 'Psalm 50' 65.

<sup>73</sup> 'Psalm 50' 61.

<sup>74</sup> 'Psalm 50' 68.

<sup>75</sup> *Self-Revelation* 196-202.

<sup>76</sup> *Self-Revelation* 198.

<sup>77</sup> *Kultprophetie* 126.



experiencing deliverance meant to refer to individual actualization of Israel's basic experience?

Not all these alleged links are equally convincing, but a persistent pattern of re-application of covenant traditions obviously emerges. The particular setting of this prophetic contribution is difficult to clarify. Craigie offers an attractive reconstruction of the ritual phases behind the psalm.<sup>78</sup> It had an initiatory role (cf. v.5a) at dawn (cf. vv. 1-2) in preparation for a covenant renewal ceremony later in the day, when a covenant sacrifice would be offered ('those about to make a covenant', v.5) and the covenant stipulations would be recited (v.16). Is not v.16 a weak point in the reconstruction in terms of form and content? Questions in the *rib* form elsewhere never relate to the future. In fact the verb 'taking' in v.16b represents a past tense in the Hebrew. Before the psalm was spoken, recitation had apparently already occurred, and so also presumably had the sacrifice of v.5, which recalled Israel's basic relationship with God established at Sinai. The psalm is more in the nature of an epilogue than a prologue. It even resembles the comment of the chorus in Greek drama upon preceding action. The psalmist is a commentator upon the cultic happenings, who in quasi-sermonic fashion corrects the attitudes of those who have participated.

Psalm 50 is a literary tapestry in which stylistic, thematic and form-critical patterns have been artistically interwoven. The casual reader overlooks the single threads which have been intricately entwined in this composition. Study of the various structures, forms and patterns running through the psalm serves to clarify its meaning. The individual tracing of different trajectories enables aspects of meaning to emerge with greater force. The devices of chiasmus and *inclusio* have been used to convey the psalm's movement and emphases. Overall chiasmus discloses divine honour as the issue of the psalm, to maintain which God must intervene as judge. On a smaller scale the chiasmus of the first strophe sets the tone for the divine oracle by relating God to the spheres of cosmos, cult and covenant. The parallel structuring of the two parts of the oracle frames their common criticism of making God in man's image. This unity is accompanied by different perspectives of theme and role: in the offering of sacrifice divine lordship must be safeguarded, while the cultic recital of the covenant terms must be the crown and climax of human obedience. Ritual deed and ritual word are of no avail unless they are true to the characters of both the divine and human partners in the covenant. Two literary forms converge to convey the divine rebuke in a most impressive way, that of theophany accompanied by a speech and the *rib* form. The psalm is dominated by cultic and covenantal content, in eloquent repro-

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duction of its apparent setting. Yet its message transcends both its setting and era. It stands as a call for informed and honest worship, worship which squares with reality. It ever challenges worship devoid of heartfelt truth and credal confessions devoid of social caring. It confronts all who profess to worship and serve God with his care and claim as loving Lord or else reluctant Judge.

### Abbreviations

<i>EVV</i>	English Versions
<i>JB</i>	<i>Jerusalem Bible</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>

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<sup>78</sup> *Psalms 1-50* 364-366.

<i>NEB</i>	<i>New English Bible</i>
<i>NIV</i>	<i>New International Version</i>
<i>OTS</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studien</i>
<i>RSV</i>	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
<i>RV</i>	<i>Revised Version</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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