PART ONE

The Categories of the Psalms

What does it mean in the Psalms to "praise God"? An exhaustive answer to this question cannot be found simply through an investigation of the vocabulary of praise as it occurs in the Psalms.[2]

Indeed, this investigation must take second place. The words for praise are to be found to an astonishing degree, more so than any other verb in the Bible, in the imperative (including the voluntative, cohortative, and jussive). The greatest part of this vocabulary, therefore, exhorts to praise.[3]

Praise takes place in words. This can occur in two ways. A teacher who wants to praise a pupil can say to him, "I praise you!" But we immediately feel that this is not the real way to praise. It sounds wooden, stiff, pedantic. But the teacher can also say, "That was well done!" This is the real way to praise (of course there are many possible forms it may take). In that sentence, then, praise *occurs*.

This real way of praising, in words or sentences that do not even contain the word "praise," is also present in the Psalms. We thus are confronted with the question, which are these words or sentences in the Psalms in which God is praised? What do *they* say to us about the praise of God in the Psalms?

This is the question concerning the categories in the Psalms: In which Psalms is God praised? Only in recent times has re-

2. This must be reserved for special investigation.
3. The expressions "I praise . . ." or "we praise . . ." which are frequent in our liturgies and hymns, are not encountered in the O.T. prior to the work of the Chronicler.

search into the categories become a serious undertaking. At the end of this development stands Gunkel's *Einleitung in die Psalmen,* which, after his death, was completed and published by Begrich (Göttingen, 1933). In this book the results of the form-critical work on the Psalms are united in a masterful whole, which enables us to see all the comprehensive range of the structure of the Psalms in their various categories, from the basic forms to the most distant branches, which grow out of the given elements of form into ever new variations.

According to Gunkel (pp. 27, 30), the major categories of the Psalms are the following:

Hymns
Laments of the people
Laments of the individual
Songs of thanksgiving of the individual
"Spiritual poems" ("the real treasure of the Psalter").

In addition there are smaller categories, including the "songs of thanksgiving of Israel" and the "Torah."

With this may be compared Kittel's "Introduction" (D. R. Kittel, *Die Psalmen,* 1929); he was already acquainted with and approved of Gunkel's earlier work:

The hymn (song of praise)
The prayer of thanksgiving
The prayer of petition
The didactic poem
The spiritual song (as highpoint of the poetry of the Psalms).

The distribution is, apart from minor differences, identical. Some typical examples of earlier attempts to divide the Psalms into classes are given in Gunkel's work ("Introduction," pp. 8 f.).

In Gunkel, as also in Kittel, Hempel, and others, the "hymn," the Psalm of praise, stands in the first position. This is not entirely obvious. At first glance the Psalms of petition are certainly more numerous (Kittel: "prayer petitions"; Gunkel: "laments of the people," and "of the individual"). Gunkel occasionally refers to the great significance which the "hymn" apparently had (pp. 83, 433: the hymns are "the most important part of the collection"). This is seen especially in that this category had the greatest influence on other—actually on *all* other—categories, although Gunkel does not specifically establish this. Later it must be asked whether this formulation entirely fits the facts. In any case Gunkel asserts again and again throughout his entire work that the "hymnodic" (can one say this?), hymnodic elements, small hymns, are encountered everywhere in the other categories. This wide-reaching influence cannot be established for any other category. Thus here the priority of the "hymn" over all other categories is clear. In the survey it stands with good cause in the first place.

Now, however, the unbiased reader of Gunkel's "Introduction" notices a remarkable irregularity. Why is it that songs of thanksgiving are not divided into those of the people and those of the individual as the laments are? Gunkel has a category "songs of thanksgiving of Israel" (pp. 64, 265, 315) and includes it among his "smaller categories" (p. 315, no. 28). On page 315 he explains their small number by the tendency of the human heart, which, after deliverance, forgets to thank the helper.[4]

The same reason also explains to him why the songs of thanksgiving of the individual are so much fewer in number than the laments (p. 235). The remark, however, that the "songs of thanks of Israel" are related to the hymns, leads in another direction. Indeed, "such songs of thanks and hymns merge into one another: Pss. 65:1-8; 66:5-12; 67; 75" (p. 64). This agrees with the presentation of the "songs of thanks of Israel" individually and as a special group among the enumeration of the hymns, p. 32. So Gunkel too really counts them as hymns.

In the same way, the boundary between the "songs of thanksgiving of the individual" and the hymns is a fluid one. The definition on page 272, "To sing a song of thanks means to proclaim

4. Essentially the same reason is given by Balla, *Das Ich der Psalmen,* Göttingen, 1912, p. 66, and is taken up by Joh. Döller, *Das Gebet im Alten Testamente,* Wien, 1914, p. 51.

Yahweh's grace before all the peoples," defines, as will become clear, precisely not a song of thanksgiving, but a hymn! Gunkel deals explicitly with the mixture of style with that of the hymn on pages 272-274. The remark on page 276 is decisive: "The difference is that the songs of thanks shout for joy (note this verb!) over the specific deed which God has just done for the one giving thanks, while the hymns sing the great deeds and the majestic attributes of God in general" (cf. p. 83).

Does not this observation say quite clearly that there exists between hymn and song of thanksgiving really *no* difference of type, or category, and the song of thanks, of the individual and of the people, is really another type of hymn? The result is then, that in the Psalter there are two dominant categories, the hymn (including the Psalm of thanks) and the lament.[5]

5. This comes very close to an old division of the Psalms represented by Hupfeld's work (Hupfeld²-Riehm, *Psalmen* I², pp. 3 ff.: songs of praise and thanks, songs of lament and petition, didactic songs).

Merely in order to present material for reflection, I will here show at a few points that Gunkel has not succeeded in clearly separating the two categories from each other.

The real meaning of the hymn is most clearly expressed on p. 70: "The hymn is sung for God alone." Similarly on pp. 71, 72, 39, 41, etc. The meaning of the hymn is lauding, praising, glorifying God. In the context where Gunkel recalled the biblical term *tehillāh* (pp. 58 f.), he himself said once, "song of praise." And to be sure, in a song of praise it is a matter of "the whole fullness of the majesty of God," p. 41. The difference between hymn and song of thanks is described well and clearly on p. 276. (Cf. the last quotation before this note.)

According to this the two categories are clearly designated and distinctly separated from each other. The "song of thanks" refers to a specific, unique act of God that has just been experienced by the singer; the "hymn," to "the great deeds and glorious attributes *in general*." The two categories are distinguished, not by the difference of the predicates but by the objects. It is not a question in them of different forms of speech, as asking and giving thanks are different, but the difference lies in that which is spoken of. In any case it is thus clear that "hymn" and "lament" are to be distinguished from each other in a different way than are "hymn" and "song of thanks."

The designations of the categories, however, give the impression that they are intended to distinguish here and there the way of speaking. Here it should be asked further, what then is the difference between "praising" and "giving thanks," and what do they have in common? But this question does not permit the term "hymn" to appear. In reality, Gunkel's way of speaking is determined generally not by that good and clear distinction, but by the fiction of a "hymnodic" expression which is differentiated from giving thanks. Here the hymn is raised to a higher plane. It belongs to the hours of pious solemnity; again and again the word "mood" was used (pp. 34, 68, 83, 178, 243, 276, 280, etc.), or "inspiration" (pp. 37, 48, 70, etc.), or "awe and reverence" (p. 75). All these modern concepts are contained *in* the vocabulary of praise. All these things exist for the men of the Old Testament only in this total turning of man to God. The vocabulary and the phrases of the praise of God are still strong enough to express this for him. But here Gunkel became involved in insolvable difficulties.

On pp. 79 and 84 the definition of "song of thanks" serves almost word for word

But just what is a hymn? In what realm does it belong? There are three possible answers to this question: It is a literary unit, or a cultic unit, or a mode of prayer.

In the various realms and phases of research that are concerned with the "hymn," one of these answers is always tacitly presupposed, without a real clarification having been reached.

In Heiler's great work[6] the hymn is one of the types, or main forms, of prayer. In this the literary hymn is understood as a development of the priestly cultic hymn, which was in turn preceded by the "primitive song of prayer." (It is significant that the concept "hymn" is avoided for this first step; apparently this means that only the song of prayer that has developed into a cultic or literary stage can be called a hymn!)

In literary investigations, the hymn is generally understood as primarily a literary form, as, for example, Hempel considers it.[7]

In Gunkel's introduction the literary and the cultic designation of the hymn are brought together. The hymn, as it is found in the sources, is first of all a literary document, and to this extent the term "hymn" designates a literary category. This category,

as that of a hymn. On p. 79 Exod. 15:21 is dealt with among other passages. On what grounds is this called a hymn? It corresponds exactly to his own definition of a song of thanks, which had just been cited. To be more exact, Exod. 15:21 belongs under the correct definition of a song of thanks of the people, p. 316, which agrees in the important particulars with the definition on p. 276. (I can only imagine that he let himself be misled through the introductory word *šīrū*, which is really the introduction of a "hymn." But the song also has been transmitted with another introduction, Exod. 15:1, "I will sing." [LXX reads, "Let us sing."])

At the beginning Gunkel said that the category could be recognized most clearly by the introduction (p. 25), but according to p. 83 the hymn and the song of thanks generally agree in the introduction and in the conclusion. (This is said more sharply on p. 267.) This confusion could have been avoided if Gunkel had maintained the distinction, according to which the two types can be clearly distinguished in the main part of the song. The "song of thanks" reports one specific action of God, and the "hymn" praises God's activity and his being for us in their fullness. In other respects Gunkel's assertion is only partially valid in the introduction, and in the conclusion only in rare and exceptional cases.

In other places where Gunkel spoke of the relationship of hymn and song of thanks to one another, the same thing happened. He spoke almost only of what they have in common. "Song of thanks and hymn have the same rules of form" (p. 251). He spoke often of their agreement in form (pp. 267, 274, 275, 276), and on p. 285 said the same thing of the Babylonian psalms. (1 Sam. 2 is called a song of thanks on p. 5, and on p. 32 it is included among the hymns.) But he also said that hymn and song of thanks agree in their basic mood (pp. 275, 267, 276). They are related to each other, p. 42, and they merge with each other, p. 64.

6. Fr. Heiler, *Das Gebet*, fifth edition, 1923.

7. "Die althebräische Literatur," Potsdam, 1930, pp. 30 ff.

however, does not have its real position in literature. Gunkel goes behind the literary stage and looks for the "Sitz-im-Leben": "What then was the Sitz-im-Leben of the Psalms? Judaism made use of them in the cult, as the term *tehillīm*, i.e., hymns, shows. The Babylonian psalms belong together with certain cultic practices. . . . Thus we may venture the supposition that they were originally derived from the Israelite cult." What is said here in the beginning of the Psalms in general, Gunkel said specifically for the hymns, p. 59, and for the other categories, pp. 175, 181, 182, 117, 260. Mowinckel then carried the cultic interpretation of the Psalms far beyond this approach of Gunkel's in a comprehensive investigation of the cultic bases of the Old Testament Psalms in their environment.[8]

This became the starting point for a new direction in research that explained not only the Psalms out of the cult, but also in addition vast areas of the Old Testament writings. For the Psalms, reference should be made on the one hand to Aage Bentzen's work (see the bibliography) for the development of this line of research in Scandanavia, and on the other hand to A. Weiser's introduction to his exposition of the Psalms in the new Göttingen commentary series as a representative example.[9]

This whole line of research has taken a road that has as good as forsaken the original question that was raised by Gunkel. In the foreground there now appeared the question concerning the cultic myth or the cultic ideology which generally stood behind the texts which were explained in terms of the cult. In contrast to Gunkel, who sought to grasp each of the Psalm categories in its peculiar character and its many-sided existence, a tendency became dominant which tried to fit everything into the same mold. It began with Mowinckel, who attributed about a third of all the Psalms (of the greatest variety of categories) to the en-

8. S. Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien*, I-VI, Kristiania, Schriften der Wissenschaftsgellschaft, Histor.-philos. Klasse, 1921-1924. Cf. now S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, tr. D. R. Ap-Thomas, Oxford, 1962 (2 vols.).

9. An example of the cultic explanation of a complex from the historical books is to be found in Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, III-IV, London, 1940, Appendix I, pp. 728-737, where the account of the exodus from Egypt is explained as the historicizing of a cultic legend. An example of the invasion of the prophetic books by this explanation is Engnell, *The Call of Isaiah*, 1949, a study in which the author seeks to explain the call of Isaiah in terms of purely cultic elements. For further literature, see the surveys mentioned in the bibliography.

thronement festival which he discovered. And in Bentzen's area of research it led to the extreme results, wherein on the one hand practically all Psalms became royal Psalms, and on the other hand fundamental significance was ascribed to a cultic pattern which was held to be valid for the whole of the ancient East, and to be widely determinative for Israel's Psalms. The same tendency, moreover, is to be seen at work in milder form in Weiser's introduction to *The Psalms*, when he observes "that the cult of the covenant festival is to be assumed as the Sitz-im-Leben of the vast majority of the individual Psalms and their categories" (p. 18), and when he regards as the central point of this covenant festival the dramatic presentation of the theophany, reflexes of which are to be found in a large number of the Psalms.

This whole tendency to explain as many as possible or even all of the Psalms either by the "ideology" of a specific (and only just discovered) festival, by a cultic schema, or by the connection of a basic myth with a specific ritual (Hooke), seems to me, in spite of all the effort that has been expended on it in the last thirty years, to have produced meager results for the understanding of the individual Psalms. The concept "cult," which is basic for all the branches of this line of research, became in the process more limitless and confused. It is high time finally to ask soberly what is regarded as cult in the Old Testament and what the Old Testament says about cult. It will then be impossible to avoid the fact that in the Old Testament there is no absolute, timeless entity called "cult," but that worship in Israel, in its indissolvable connection with the history of God's dealings with his people, developed gradually in all its various relationships, those of place, of time, of personnel, and of instrumentality, and that therefore the categories of the Psalms can be seen only in connection with this history. All the work on the Psalms along the lines which Mowinckel indicated cannot excuse us from taking up again the task set for us by Gunkel of research into the individual Psalm categories in their development and in the history of their various component parts,

It is impressive to observe in Gunkel's work the way in which

the texts of the Old Testament resist with a strength of their own our occidental concepts, which are the products of entirely different situations. For there, where Gunkel inquires into the origins of the hymn which has its place in the cult, this concept and this definition both fail him. Heiler also avoided the name "hymn" for the earliest stage; he spoke there of a "prayer song." In reality it is not a question here of a literary or of a cultic hymn. Rather it becomes clear what the hymn is in its original significance: praise of God.

On p. 89, in a section that begins with the assertion that hymnody grew out of worship, Gunkel gave as three of the oldest examples: the Song of Miriam, the Song of Deborah, and the Song of the Seraphim in Isaiah 6. No one of these three can be called cultic in the strict sense. The Song of Miriam and the Song of Deborah (the latter belongs to the special category of songs of victory) show, rather, with unmistakable clarity what the Sitz-im-Leben of the hymn is: the experience of God's intervention in history. God has acted; he has helped his people. Now praise *must* be sung to him.

Isaiah 6:3 is also no cultic song in the strict sense, but it is nevertheless nearer to what is called cult. In what way is it different from the other two examples? The difference is clear and almost leaps out at the reader: there it is a specific, single intervention of God in history which calls forth praise; here in Isaiah 6:3 it is God in the fullness of his being and his dealings with the world. Those two have the structure, "Yahweh has done," and this, "Yahweh is."

Here Gunkel, without realizing it, placed side by side the two basic types of the Psalm of praise in their earliest and simplest forms: the declarative and the descriptive Psalm of praise. They have in common the essential fact that in them God is praised. There he is praised for a specific, unique intervention, and here for the fullness of his being and activity.[10]

It is already clear in these two examples that the descriptive

10. This is precisely the distinction which Gunkel makes on p. 276 between a hymn and a Psalm of thanks. See above.

Psalm of praise has a clearer affinity to that which is really cultic than the declarative does. The latter very clearly has its location "out there," in the midst of history, yes, while still on the battlefield—in the hour and the place where God has acted. It might be said that both were sung in a service of worship which was held after the battle, but it is obvious that such a service of worship has a different character from that which shines through Isa. 6:3. If these are both called "cultic," then this distinction is erased and the concept of the cultic, which was intended to include both, is already unusable from the start.

At the end of the same section, p. 89, Gunkel assumed "that Israel learned the art of hymnody as it gradually came to be at home in Canaan." After the three above-mentioned examples this sentence sounds very strange. In order to utter the words in Exod. 15:21 or Isa. 6:3 is it necessary to be instructed by another nation? Apparently Gunkel means here not these words but the great songs of praise, as for example, Judg. 5. It is certainly to be assumed that they were influenced by Babylon and Egypt, probably by way of Canaan.[11]

But in such statements the decisive element has been overlooked. It is not necessary to study how to praise God. The fact here is that a great deal depends on the terminology. Hymns can be learned. When this word is used one almost inevitably thinks of a fine, cultivated, artistic creation with harmony and euphony, that is, of a literary unit. Is that, however, what either of these two examples is intended to be? Is it not actually inadmissible to designate such a single, short sentence by the literary term "hymn"? It is intended to be praise of God and nothing more. And the fact that the praise of God is something that cannot be learned is certainly an essential feature of this praise. To a certain degree the form that is given to the words can be taken over and learned, but the simple act of praise that can be comprehended in a single sentence would lose its genuineness and its significance if it were borrowed.

11. Gunkel's surmise was validated in relation to the Song of Deborah by the discoveries at Ras Shamra. Cf. N. H. Snaith in *The O.T. and Modern Study*, p. 94. Additional literature is listed there.

In another place Gunkel too sees that. Where he speaks of the Psalms, not as literary or cultic creations, but as prayers, he does not recognize such a literary or cultic dependence. On p. 261 Gunkel says of the question of the dependence of the Israelite Psalms on the Babylonian psalms, which agree with them so astonishingly, "Should we believe that before the time of the Babylonian influence in Canaan no one prayed to God amid the exigencies of life? Everywhere where a man raises his hands in prayer, the same component parts of prayer and the same sequence of these components appear. . . . Thus regarded, the relationship rests . . . on the peculiar nature of prayer as such."

Is that, however, not also valid for lament and petition? On pp. 282 f. Gunkel speaks of the relationship of the songs of thanks to the laments and says they "correspond to one another like the shells of a mussel," and after he has developed that, on p. 284 he says, "In the alternation between lament and song of thanks there unrolls the whole life of the pious." With this may be compared p. 181, ". . . they transport us into the midst of life, but not into the service of worship."

In these two sentences, which are astonishing in the light of Gunkel's basic thesis, recognition begins to dawn that somehow the observation that the life situation of the Psalms is the cult really cannot be right. For that which really, in the last analysis, occurs in the Psalms is prayer. Gunkel himself sees that here. There is a good reason why this recognition to some extent appears only in an occasional flash and then disappears again. What takes place in these Psalms as men turn to God is in essence something different from what we of the present day name prayer (thus Gunkel p. 47). It must be conceded that Gunkel was right in this. That which he designates as "hymn" somehow does not fit into our general concept of "prayer," for our concept of prayer is actually determined in its essentials by thanks and petitions. Does, however, Gunkel's statement which was just quoted, fit for the Psalms or for the entire O.T., where the whole life of the pious is passed in the alternation of songs of lament and of thanks? If so comprehensive a statement may be

attempted, would it not be truer to the O.T. to say, between lament and *praise*? This would mean then that precisely in the place of our contrast of petition and thanks there stands in the O.T. the contrast of lament (supplication) and praise.

Therefore we must inquire into the relationship of thanks and of praise to each other.

PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

The fact that there is no word for "to thank" in Hebrew has never been properly evaluated. The ignoring of this fact can be explained only in that we live so unquestioningly in the rhythm between the poles of thanks and request, of "please!" and "thank you!", and the thought does not occur to anyone that these concepts are *not* common to all mankind, have *not* always been present as a matter of course, do *not* belong to the presuppositions of human intercourse nor to those of the contrast of God and man. We are compelled to imagine a world in which petition plays a thoroughly essential and noteworthy role, but where the opposite role of petition is not primarily thanks but praise. And this praise is a stronger, more lively, broader concept which includes our "thanks" in it. Thanking is here included entirely within praise.

Perhaps it will be easier to understand this if we remind ourselves that even today none of our children learns on his own to express thanks. He has to be told a hundred times, "Say thank you!", and he still does not say it without being reminded. In addition, where the polish of good upbringing disappears, the expression of thanks soon falls by the wayside. In male society, the harder the life is, the less expression of thanks there is. I have established this point again and again in the war and as a prisoner. Even under the worst circumstances someone will always beg a cigarette, but he very quickly forgets to say thank you.

At the basis of this there is a linguistic process that has long been known, but which has a much greater significance than has generally been assumed. In primitive languages all the force

and intensity of linguistic formations is found in concrete expressions. In the African languages there is an amazingly large number of verbs for the way a man walks, and they represent the many nuances of meaning in walking. On the other hand our so-called abstract words are here essentially more complex, for the differentiation is secondary. For example, "good" and "beautiful" have not been differentiated in טוב, and depending on the context it can mean either. There are, however, other passages where the meaning should not be differentiated (as in Gen. 1). The same unity is still to be found today in the Russian хороший. In our modern languages there are whole lists of words for which there is, in Hebrew for example, no single corresponding word (for example, "modest"). And among these is "to thank." This word developed from a secondary differentiation of meaning, and what we mean by it was once contained in a verb that appears to us as complex. This is not hard to understand. A glance at our languages shows at once that this verb is not a primary formation. The German word is a variant of the verb *denken* (to think), and so is the English. In Latin it is a nominal formation, and in Greek a denominative from the corresponding noun (*gratia*-χάρις), which basically has a different meaning. At this point the Russian language is again interesting, where there is still used to express thanks a word that properly means "to give honor," благодарить. These references are enough to show that "to thank" is clearly a secondary formation in many languages. (I know of no language in which "to thank" has its own root.) It would appear then that it became an independent verb by a later development out of a more complex verb.[12]

In the Old Testament this differentiation has not yet taken place, and there is as yet no verb that means only "to thank." *Hōdāh*, which is usually translated as "to thank," is not used in the Old Testament a single time for an expression of thanks

12. H. Schurtz, *Urgeschichte der Kultur*, Leipzig-Wien, 1900, p. 186, refers to the primitive languages in which there is no word for "to thank." This is cited by Heiler, p. 44, where we read further, "This reminds one of the rich vocabulary of the Rigveda in which there is no word for thank."

between men. Thus it is clear from the start that this *hōdāh* cannot be equated with our "to thank," which can be directed equally to God or to man. In those places in the O.T. where our "thank" as something taking place between men is most clearly found, the verb used is *bērēk*, which does not have the primary meaning of "praise" but means "bless."[13]

In view of these facts, it is clear that the O.T. does not have our independent concept of thanks. The expression of thanks to God is included in praise, *it is a way of praising*.[14]

Thus Wendel in his investigation of lay prayer in Israel contrasts the prayer of petition or lament not with the prayer of thanks, but with the prayer of praise (p. 170).

Those elements which characterize modern thanks, now independent of praise, may be characterized briefly.

1. In praise the one being praised is elevated *(magnificare)*; in thanks the one thanked remains in his place.

2. In praise I am directed entirely toward the one whom I praise, and this means, of necessity, in that moment a looking away from myself. In thanks I am expressing *my* thanks.

3. Freedom and spontaneity belong to the essence of praise; giving thanks can become a duty.

4. Praise has a forum and always occurs in a group; giving thanks is private, for it need concern no one except the one thanking and the one being thanked.

5. Praise is essentially joyful; giving thanks can take on the character of something required. Praise can never, but thanks must often, be commanded.

6. The most important verbal mark of difference is that thanking occurs in the speaking of the words, "thank you," or in shortened form, "thanks"; genuine, spontaneous praise occurs

13. Examples are Deut. 24:13; 2 Sam. 14:22; Job 31:20; Neh. 11:2. The falling down of one person before another can have the meaning of thanks: Gen. 23:7, 12; 2 Sam. 9:8; 14:22; 16:4; 1 Kings 1:31; Ruth 2:10. Before God: Gen. 24:26, 48, 52; 47:31 (?); Exod. 4:31; Judg. 7:15.

14. B. Jacob, "Beitrage zu einer Einl. in die Ps.," *ZAW* 17, pp. 263-279. P. 276, "Finally it is very questionable whether *tōdāh* ever means thanks, but rather it always means praise, recognition, confession." According to Jacob, a proof for this is to be seen in that Modern Hebrew felt required to form a special word for "thanks": הודיה or הודאה. So also Quell, *op. cit.*, p. 94, note 3: "There is no proof that in the Old Testament *tōdāh* meant thanks; cf. LXX αἴνεσις."

in a sentence in which the one being praised is the subject, "thou hast done," or "thou art . . ."[15]

What was it that led to this differentiation of thanks from praise? Thanking presupposes that the community is no longer primary and no longer self-evident. It presupposes that the community is no longer prior to the individual. The differentiation of thanks from praise presupposes a certain development of individualism. In the giving and receiving of thanks, the man who has become an individual must continually be assured of community. It would therefore be foolish, on the basis of the late differentiation of thanks or of the fact that there is no single word for it in the O.T., to draw the conclusion that in our dealings with one another we might replace thanks by praise. A change, however, takes place in our evaluation of things when it becomes clear that in its essence thanking is something secondary, one way of praising. What makes this word so valuable to modern man is just that element in which it differs from praise or goes beyond it. We speak of "thankfulness," and this is the main thing. Spoken thanks is only an "externality," the expression of the feeling of thankfulness. The important thing is the thankful attitude. All this cannot be expressed by the vocabulary for praise. Surely the main difference lies here. The thankful attitude has its origin in a gift or in a helping or saving deed which someone does for me. It can then be expressed in a great variety of ways, by a word, or by a deed, but the decisive factor is the permanence of the thankful attitude. In primitive thought it is otherwise. For us thankfulness stands in a line; for the primitive man only the first and last points of this line are of interest. Both of these appear more sharply in primitive thought. That is, the beginning and end of what we

15. This distinction between "thanks" and "praise" and the relation of the two words to one another has received very little attention in research. Reference may be made to the work of Frants Buhl, "Über Dankbarkeit im A.T. und die sprachlichen Ausdrücke dafür," *Baudissin-Festschrift*, Giessen, 1918, pp. 71-82. Here our concept of thanks was the starting point; it was assumed without reservation for the O.T. and passages were cited for reference. The same uncritical attitude toward the concept is seen in a statement of Mowinckel (*Ps. Studien*, II, p. 143), "Deepened and spiritualized, humble thankfulness becomes worship."

call thankfulness are contained in the vow and the performance of the vow.[16]

This occurs from time to time in a relationship; thankfulness, the line between these two points, is something that I have, or that I have in me; it is something that I possess as a feeling or as an attitude. For primitive man an attitude does not exist except in its expression, for man does not exist "in himself," but only in community with other men (the Hebrew *'ādām* means "mankind"). The same holds true for the relationship of man and God. Modern individualistic thought has interpreted the rejection by the prophets and many of the Psalms of specific cultic acts as meaning that it is not a matter of outward works, but of the "attitude of the heart." This interpretation does not have any basis in either the prophets or the Psalms. In the place of sacrifice the Psalms placed praise and obedience, not an attitude, but activity directed toward God. In relation to God, the concept of thankfulness and that of giving thanks are liable to be misunderstood when they are divorced from the concept of praise. The vocabulary of praise never expresses anything like an attitude or a feeling of gratitude. Where a worshiper in the Psalms says, "I will praise the Lord . . . ," he does not mean, "I will be thankful to God," but, "I will respond to him for what he has done for me."[17]

It comes to this, that in the vocabulary of thanks man remains subject, while in the sentences of praise God is subject: "Thou hast done . . . thou art . . . God is . . ."

Thus today when we translate Psalm 118:1 as "O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!" this sentence must of necessity be understood in a false manner. An uninstructed member of the congregation can scarcely understand this in any other sense than that because God is good, and his steadfast love endures for ever, we are called upon to

16. This is the reason why the vow at the end of a petition is an essential, inseparable part of the prayer. This is so not only in the O.T., but also in Babylon and in primitive prayers, while in our prayers it is wholly or almost wholly absent.

17. Wendel, *op. cit.*, p. 172: "Thanks as a thankful attitude that is not expressed is unknown to the O.T."

thank him. That is, (a) we should be grateful to him, (b) we should express our thanks for what God has given us: "I thank thee, O God, that thou . . ." This is not what is meant. Where is there to be found in the entire Psalter a prayer of thanks with this type of structure? What there is in the Psalter, however, seems at first to be a minimum, but it strikes deep. With this *hōdū* we are not called to a sentence in which *I* am the subject, but to one in which *God* is subject. There is such a sentence in the same Psalm a few lines later in verse 5. This difference, that in the thanks of the Psalter God is always the subject, but in our thanks almost always "I" or "we" is the subject, can scarcely be overestimated.

The third factor is that all the vocabulary of praise contains a forensic element. This is particularly expressed in the vow of praise, "I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee" (Ps. 22:22). That is what we are called on to do in Ps. 118:1. This is a further reason why the translation "give thanks" is false here, for today no one considers this element to be a part of giving thanks. How different it would be, if everywhere, where in our translations of the Psalms we are called on to give thanks, the forensic element were also heard. Then it would be clear that this call, "give thanks . . . ," has been truly heard only by the one, who in addition to having a deep feeling of gratitude in his heart and to thanking God in private, also tells *in public* what God has done for him.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We began with the question, What is a hymn?, and then considered the three possible answers. We have seen from this that it cannot be completely comprehended under any of the three main concepts. It is only secondarily a literary unit, and for the most ancient and very short hymns the concept of a literary unit is not at all appropriate. On the other hand it cannot simply be said that it is cultic, that its Sitz-im-Leben is the service of worship, even though this is certainly true of

the great hymns of the postexilic era, for example, Ps. 136. Certainly the Song of Miriam cannot be so described. The general concept "prayer" fits best that which occurs in a hymn, but the caution must be made that our modern concept of prayer cannot be simply applied to the content of those passages in the Psalms. This is conditioned above all by the fact that in the Psalms, as in the O.T. generally, giving thanks is surrounded by praise, is contained within praise, that therefore instead of our contrast of thanks and petition, there stands in the Psalms the contrast of praise and lament (supplication).

It will be then necessary to replace the designations "hymn" and "song of thanks" with other terms for the categories of the Psalms. In view of the present status of Psalm research this demand must be made unconditionally, for it exists quite apart from the results and proposals of this present work. Both these concepts are inadequate. I do not believe it is possible to avoid recognizing this. "Hymn" is determined by form, "song of thanks" (or Psalm of thanks) by content. Hymn is a literary (or cultic) designation; giving thanks is a means of prayer. The designations of the categories as such would not be so important if certain preconceptions were not already contained in them. The inadequacy of the designations of the categories has been an important contributing factor to the failure to let the appropriate categories and their relationship to each other be seen clearly.

Since the essential occurrence in both of these groups of Psalms is the praise of God, I propose to call them both Psalms of praise. The difference between the two groups lies in the fact that the so-called hymn praises God for his actions and his being as a whole (descriptive praise), while the so-called song of thanks praises God for a specific deed, which the one who has been delivered recounts or reports in his song (declarative praise; it could also be called confessional praise).

The term "declarative praise" is simply a reproduction of that which actually lies before us in this group of Psalms. Gunkel too saw this, although he retained the traditional terminology:

". . . the song of thanks of Israel, like the song of thanks of the individual, was originally a report of God's help" *(Einleitung,* p. 318). Declarative praise corresponds to the Hebrew verb *hōdāh.*[18]

The other mode of praise, descriptive praise, corresponds to the Hebrew *hillēl.* It does not praise a unique act of God that has just occurred, but summarizes his activity in its fullness and praises God in the totality of his dealings with men and of his being. It does not have, like declarative praise, a specific, unique occasion; it is not a confession of the one saved, but it looks at the "mighty God's great deeds" in all times and in all places and praises him for them all. This designation is also derived from the actual content of this group of Psalms.[19, 20]

18. Cf. H. Grimme, "Der Begriff von hebräischem hōdāh und tōdāh," *ZAW* 58, 1940/1941, pp. 234-240. "The basic meaning is confess; this is to be divided as follows:
(a) confess, i.e., recognize.
(b) confess, i.e., declare, make known."
(That these two meanings originally belonged together is shown by Horst in relation to Josh. 7, "Die Doxologien im Amosbuch," *ZAW* 47, 1929, pp. 45-54: "Doxology and confession thus belong here of necessity to the public, legal act." See also Wendel, *Laiengebet,* p. 164.)
I agree with Grimme's main thesis: the basic meaning of *hōdāh* is to confess, to affirm. Still, it does not seem to correspond to the vocabulary of the O.T. to say with Grimme that in relation to God, confession is primarily a "confession of the existence of Yahweh," to which is added then a "confession of his principle attributes" (can one confess attributes?). A further development would then be the citing of individual passages where these attributes are mentioned (p. 236). In my opinion it can be clearly proven that confession originally had as its object an act of God, just as the confession of sin (Josh. 7 or Ps. 32:5) had as its object an act of man. The strongest proof of this is the fact that *hōdāh* as used in the Psalms originally belonged to declarative praise, not to descriptive. When Grimme himself equates this "confess" with "proclaim" he thereby indirectly confirms what has been said here. In any case proclamation always has as its primary object an occurrence, an event; not, however, being or attributes, which can be called events only when accurate usage has decayed. A later reference of Grimme's is, however, to be noted, in which he says, pp. 239 f., that *hōdāh* often stands in the O.T. in places later taken over by the concept of faith.
19. The distinction between declarative and descriptive praise is seen also outside the Psalter in the Israelite personal names. (Cf. the work of Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen,* Stuttgart, 1928.) In the names that express praise the two groups are clearly distinguished: names which report an act of God (or confess an act of God), such as Elnathan, Jochanan, and names which describe God, such as Abram, Tobijah, Achihud. Declarative praise is much more common in names. A more thorough comparison between the praise of God (and the confession of confidence) in names and in the Psalms is needed. As far as I know, there is no motif from the Psalms that is not reflected in personal names also.
20. This distinction between declarative (or confessional) and descriptive praise is also of significance for the history of Christian hymnology. It is not accidental that Luther's songs have for the most part the character of confessional praise. The hymn of the Reformation, "Nun freut euch . . ." ["Dear Christians one and all rejoice . . ."] corresponds to the structure of the declarative Psalm of praise. (See below, p. 110.) Moreover his Christmas hymn, "Vom Himmel hoch . . ." ["From Heaven Above to Earth I Come"] is declarative praise. On the other hand, the hymns of the Enlightenment, insofar as they are praise of God, are almost entirely descriptive praise, usually very reflective, nearer to the Psalms of the Apocrypha than to those of the Psalter; e.g., "Wenn ich, o Schöpfer, deine Macht . . ." (Gellert). The descriptive songs of praise of the Middle Ages, however, are much nearer the canonical Psalms, as for instance the song of Meissner, "Gott ist gewaltig, vielgestaltig . . ." (musical setting of Albert Becker, "Ein neues Lied").

In order to see the total picture, let us look at the changes that would result in the categories of the Psalms. All "thou-Psalms," that is, all that speak to God in the second or third person, are governed by the polarity of petition and praise. These are further divided into Psalms of praise and Psalms of petition.

The Psalms of petition may be divided according to subject as follows:

Lament or petition of the people. (LP)
Lament or petition of the individual. (LI)

Here an observation is necessary concerning "petition." Since in the place of our contrast of petition and thanks there is in the Psalms another, that of petition and praise, "petition" must then be understood somewhat differently from our present concept. It would be more accurate to designate the contrast as that of supplication and praise. In "petition" two elements are present which are clearly distinguished in Hebrew: (a) The (transitive) petition for something *(šā'al).* This petition voices specific requests. A prayer of petition (tautology!) is generally understood as the listing of various requests. There is nothing like this in the Psalms. Occasionally a single request for something (e.g., intercession for the king) is added to a Psalm. There is never a prayer of petition that summarizes various requests: (b) Supplication in time of need (intransitive) is something entirely different (Hebrew *hithpallēl).*[21] This supplication does not have an object like that of a petition, but is always supplication for salvation. The "object" of supplication is determined by the situation of the suppliant. We might also say that the

21. The word originally meant "to make intercession."

"object" of this supplication is the lament. Thus lamentation is a necessary part of this supplication. It is not every request for something, but this supplication in time of need, that is the opposite pole of praise.

Thus in the interest of accuracy one should always say "supplication" instead of "petition" in the Psalms. Since, however, our word "petition" includes both concepts it would be very difficult to displace entirely the terms "petition" and "Psalm of petition."* They will therefore be retained with the reservation expressed here. From this point of view the designation "Psalm of lament," which has gained general acceptance in O.T. studies, has a certain justification. The petition which is meant here receives its distinctive character from the lament. Even though the core of all these Psalms, their σκόπος, is not lament but petition (or supplication), the justification of the customary designation "Psalm of lament" cannot be disputed. I shall follow this designation in the abbreviations which I use in this work.

The petitions of the individual constitute by far the largest category in the Psalter. Here however a further classification is necessary; for a large number of petitionary Psalms this designation is no longer accurate, for they are not *merely* lament and petition but petition that has been *heard.* At the end of these heard petitions there is a part that breaks over into declarative praise.

The *Psalms of praise* fall into two groups on the basis of the two different modes of praise (see above p. 31):

Declarative praise (God has acted);
Descriptive praise (God is . . . does) (P).

Of these, only the declarative Psalms of praise may be distinguished by categories:

The declarative Psalm of praise of the people (PP);
The declarative Psalm of praise of the individual (PI).

* Translator's note: "Petition" as a noun and as a verb has been adopted as the translation of the German "Bitte" and "bitten," and "supplication," etc., for the German "Flehen." Although these terms do not reproduce all the connotations of the German original they seem to be more adequate than any others.

In the descriptive Psalm of praise, the praise of the people (or of the congregation) and the praise of the individual are combined. Only a few of these Psalms can be distinguished by subject, and this distinction cannot be made on the basis of categories.

All the "smaller categories" are not to be placed alongside these two great categories, but are to be included in them or can be derived from them. That is to say, in them a motif from one of the two major categories has become independent. (These smaller categories must be omitted from this discussion.)

In this analysis of the Psalms, "category" is primarily neither a literary nor a cultic concept. It is both of these, but only secondarily. This analysis is determined by the two basic modes of speaking to God: praise and petition.

This basic thesis is not derived from the exegesis of the O.T. Psalms alone, but from the larger environment of which they are a part, and out of the study of which the history and distinctive character of the O.T. Psalms become clear. This can be shown first of all by an investigation of the praise of God in the Babylonian-Assyrian psalms.