Honest to God (139:1–24)

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Translation

[1] Director's collection.[a] Davidic. A Psalm. (2+2)
Yahweh, you examine me [b]
and you yourself [c] know me,
[2] *you know when I sit down and get up,[a]* (3+3)
you sense my thought from far away,

[3] *you analyse [a] when I travel and when I rest; [b]* (3+3)
in fact, with all my behavior you are familiar.
[4] *For example, a word does not need to be on my tongue* (3+3)
for you to know all about it, Yahweh.
[5] *Back and front you enclose me,* (3+3)
you put your hand upon me.[a]
[6] *Such knowledge [a] is wonderful and beyond me,* (3+3)
it is so transcendent I cannot attain it.

[7] *Where could [a] I go to avoid your spirit? [b]* (3+3)
Where could I get away from your presence?
[8] *If I went up to heaven, you would be there.* (3+3)
If I lay down in Sheol,[a] there you would be.
[9] *Were I to use [a] the wings of the dawn [b]* (3+3)
and go and live at the farthest part of the sea,
[10] *your hand would be even there to guide [a] me,* (3+3)
your right hand would take hold of me.
[11] *Or were I to ask [a] the darkness [b] to cover [c] me,* (3+3)
the light around me to turn into night,
[12] *even darkness is not too dark for you,* (3+3+2)
night is as light as the day,
light and dark are just the same.[a]
[13] *Indeed [a] you yourself created [b] my kidneys,[c]* (3+3)
you wove me together [d] in my mother's womb.
[14] *I give you thanks because* (2+2+2)
you [a] are awesomely [b] wonderful,
so wonderful are the things you have made.[c]

You have known [d] my being through and through; (3+3)
[15] *my bone structure was not concealed from you*
when I was being made in secret, (3+3)
worked in motley fashion deep down in the earth.[a]
[16] *Your eyes saw my embryo,[a]* (3+3)
and in your book [b] are all written down
days that were planned [c] (2+3)
before any of them occurred.[d]
[17] *How difficult [a] I find your thoughts of me,[b] God!* (4+3)
How vast they are in their totality!
[18] *If I tried to count them, they would be more than grains of sand.* (3+3)
If I came to the end,[a] I would not have finished with you.[b]

[19] *I wish you would kill the wicked,[a] God,* (3+4)
and that bloodthirsty men [b] would leave me,[c]
[20] *men who mention [a] you maliciously,* (3+3)
who talk [b] falsely, your foes.[c]
[21] *Do I not hate those who hate you, Yahweh? [a]* (4+3)
Don't I loathe those who attack [b] you?
[22] *I do hate them, hate them utterly,* (3+3)
I regard them as enemies of mine.

23 *Examine me, God, and know my mind,* (4+3)
probe me and know how anxious I am,
24 *see if I have been behaving as an idolator* [a] (3+3)
and guide me in the ancient [b] *path.*

Notes/Comments

1.a. For discussion see H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen,* 25; A. A. Anderson, *Psalms,* 48. J. F. A. Sawyer ("An Analysis of the Context and Meaning of the Psalm-Headings," *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 22 [1967/68] 35–36), on the basis of instructions in Accadian ritual texts which specify the official appointed to utter them, has rendered "to be recited by the official in charge."

1.b. The perfect and imperfect consecutive verbs are best regarded as present in force (D. Michel, *Tempora,* 244), just as those in vv 2–5 always are. The reference is to Yahweh's general insight into the psalmist's life. The imperatives of v 23 imply willing submission on the latter's part. In a similar way תנחני "would guide me" at v 10 is taken up by the imperative נחני "guide me" in v 24. Kraus (*Psalmen,* 1094) has interpreted the verbs as past and relating to a previous judicial examination, which vv 19–24 anticipate as a quotation. J. L. Koole ("Psaume 139," 177) has drawn attention to his inconsistency in thus isolating the verbs of v 1 from the ones that follow. M. Dahood (*Psalms III,* 285–86) takes the first verb as a precative perfect and the second as jussive (וְתֵדַע "and know"): "examine me and know me. . . .' " This achieves parity between vv 1 and 23; but the existence and frequency of usage of the precative perfect are still very much a matter of debate. J. Krašovec (*BZ* 18 [1974] 227 note 9) has observed that Dahood's treatment violates the development of the psalm as a whole, which rises to a crescendo, beginning in low narrative key and closing with a passionate appeal.

1.c. With Dahood (*Psalms III,* 286) the personal pronoun at the head of v 2 in MT is to be attached to the end of v 1: "both verses profit metrically." For the pronoun following the verb cf. GKC § 135a, b.

2.a. Krašovec (*BZ* 18 [1974] 232–33) has studied the polar expressions used in the psalm to express totality: in vv 2a, 3a, 5a they are used within single cola, while in vv 8, 9, 11 they extend to whole lines. In this connection J. Holman (*VT* 21 [1971] 301) has noted the contrast between the representations of man and of God in vv 1–12. On the one hand there is the multiplicity of the psalmist's activities and the agitation of various human possibilities; on the other is the majestic superiority of God's knowledge, expressed in sober, calm tones, comprehending everything by the mere fact of his presence.

3.a. Lit. "scatter, winnow, sift," here used metaphorically. The verb has also been explained as a denominative of זֶרֶת "span" and so meaning "measure off, determine" (cf. *HALAT,* 268b, 279a).

3.b. Heb. רבע has usually been explained as an Aramaism for the standard רבץ "lie down." Dahood (*Psalms III,* 287) has related to Ugar. shaphel of *rbṣ* "bring (?)" and so basically "come, arrive"; but the quite different meaning assigned by J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths,* 107, 157, is to be noted.

5.a. The force of the expressions of v 5a, b is ambiguous. Heb. צור used in v 5a is often used in a hostile sense "besiege," but it can be employed of protection. Similarly Yahweh's כף "palm" or hand can refer to his loving care or punishment. Probably the verse is to be pressed to neither extreme but is simply a neutral statement of God's absolute control of the psalmist's movements (Dahood, *Psalms III,* 288).

6.a. MT דעת may be an error by haplography for הדעת "the knowledge" (*BHS*). For the anarthrous noun cf. אור "light" in v 11, where, however, G. R. Driver (*JTS* 44 [1943] 22) reads האור, also via haplography.

7.a. The verbs of v 7, like that of v 6, have a modal force (Michel, *Tempora,* 244). The psalmist did not want to escape Yahweh; "escape would be impossible if he wished it" (A. F. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms,* 787). E. J. Young (*Psalm 139,* 45), comparing v 24, considered that a consciousness of his own sin made him want to escape, but this misunderstands the whole psalm. Rather, the text is an implicit protestation of innocence: the psalmist rejoices in God's presence (cf. v 10; Anderson, *Psalms,* 907). Amos 9:2–4 treats the motif of human inescapability from

God in a way similar to that of vv 7–10, rhetorically instancing contrasted areas to build up an impression of the inevitability of punishment for sin. There the "Hound of heaven" pursues fugitives from justice. Here the perspective is different: the psalmist, wherever he went, would find himself confronted with a God who was already there. As a man he can be at only one place in the world at once, but God is everywhere.

7.b. The vital power of Yahweh's personal activity (רוחך "your spirit") and his "face" (פניך) express the immediacy of the divine presence in the world: it takes the form of constant encounter rather than automatic immanence (D. Lys, *Rûach, le souffle dans l'AT. Enquête anthropologique à travers l'histoire théologique d'Israël.* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962] 281). According to W. I. Wolverton (*CJT* 9 [1963] 92), there is no concept of universal immanence here, but simply Yahweh's personal presence with the individual believer, as in 23:6.

8.a. The accessibility of Sheol to Yahweh receives a dual treatment in the OT. It is often denied in a stress that fellowship with God and enjoyment of his blessing are confined to this life (85:6 [5]; Jonah 2:5 [4]). While it is not within Yahweh's sphere of blessing, it is within his sphere of sovereignty (Job 26:6; Amos 9:2). Cf. H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology,* 106–8; N. J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions,* 199–201.

9.a. The imperfect verb has a concitional force here and also in v 18 (GKC § 159c).

9.b. Underlying the imagery is a mythological concept (cf. F. Stolz, *Strukturen,* 210), but for the psalmist it has become a vivid metaphor. LXX *S* took the object as כְּנָפַי "my wings (to the dawn i.e. the east)." The attractiveness of this pointing, adopted by JB, NEB and GNB, is that it provides two parallel areas, as in v 8, but probably the contrast is here more subtle for stylistic variation.

10.a. The emendation of תנחני "guide" to תלחני "take" (H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 591; Kraus, *Psalmen,* 1093; *et al.*) to improve the parallelism and avoid a positive sense of providential care is not warranted nor is Dahood's repointing to תְּנַחֵנִי "you would lower (your hand) upon me" (*Psalms III,* 290). *S,* claimed by Gunkel to support the former change, simply inverted the two verbs of v 10. The resumptive נחני in v 24 (cf. note 1.b.) guarantees the present text.

11.a. For the imperfect consecutive see GKC §§ 11x, 159f. Kraus (*Psalmen,* 1098) and others have found reference to a magic spell here. However, K.-H. Bernhardt ("Gottesvorstellung," 23 and note 20) has observed that vv 8–11 cover a range of human impossibilities.

11.b. Despite 88:13 (12) an interpretation in terms of Sheol (G. A. Danell, *Psalm 139,* 16; Dahood, *Psalms III,* 291) is unlikely (Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions,* 95–96).

11.c. The semantic thought is fairly clear from the context, but the etymology of ישופני is most uncertain. Generally the text is emended to ישוכני "cover me," with the presumed support of σ′ Hier (*BHS*). G. R. Driver ("Some Hebrew Verbs, Nouns and Pronouns," *JTS* 30 [1929] 375–77) suggested that שוף be related to Arab. *šaffa,* used (in the fourth form) of a cloud approaching close to and skimming over the earth, and thus here "sweep close over"; he observed the close relationship between double *'ayin* and *'ayin waw* verbs. Dahood (*Psalms III,* 291), restructuring the clause, has related to Arab. *šāfa* "watch."

12.a. The last clause is commonly rejected as a gloss (cf. *BHS*). For a thorough presentation of the case for and against see Holman, *BZ* 14 (1970) 62–64. He finally accepts its authenticity, as a rhetorical climax (cf. J. Muilenburg, "A Study in Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style," in *Congress Volume Copenhagen 1953* [VTSup 1; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953] 108). S. Wagner ("Theologie," 365–66) finds the clause theologically significant as the conclusion to vv 11–12a: the dualism of a contrast between light and darkness is transcended and neutralized by Yahweh, unlike the gods of surrounding nations.

13.a. Heb. כי "indeed" is probably the affirmative particle here (Dahood, *Psalms III,* 292) rather than causal.

13.b. For the stem קנה see Anderson, *Psalms,* 909; cf. 104:24.

13.c. These organs function here, as elsewhere in the OT, as the seat of the conscience (Wolff, *Anthropology,* 65–66, 96).

13.d. The homonymous stem סכך "cover" is less likely than the one meaning "weave together," a byform of שכך: cf. Job 10:11. The allusion to cloth woven with different colored threads in v 15 (רקמתי "I was worked") lends support.

14.a. MT "I am wonderful" (". . .wonderfully made" in KJV and RV is a rather forced rendering) is a minority reading in the total witness to the ancient text: LXX* *S* Hier imply נִפְלֵיתָ, which the parallel v 6 favors. 11QPs[a] נורא אתה "you are awesome" lends some support (for נפליתי it has נפלאות "wonders").

14.b. Heb. נוֹרָאוֹת "awesome" is adverbial (GKC § 118p).

14.c. V 14aβ has been regarded as a gloss (cf. *BHS*). Holman (*BZ* 14 [1970] 67) has compared the semantic field of Exod 34:10 with that of v 14a.

14.d. The need for a colon parallel to v 15aα suggests a fresh division of lines and that the consonants of יִדְעַת "know" be pointed יָדַעְתָּ: cf. vv 1–6 (Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 591; *et al.;* see further *Form/Structure/Setting*). Holman (*BZ* 14 [1970] 68) has aptly compared 69:6 (5); the non-plene writing ידעת in 11QPs[a] may lend support. A change of מאד "much, exceedingly" to מאז "from of old" (Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 591) is not necessary nor is Dahood's interpretation of MT as מָאָד, a dialectal form of מאז (*Psalms III,* 293–94).

15.a. For this individual treatment of creation see Wolff, *Anthropology,* 96–97. The final phrase appears to be based upon a folk belief of man's creation within the earth (cf. Wolff, *Anthropology,* 96–97). Either the psalmist speaks of his origin in primeval terms of that of mankind (cf. Job 10:9), giving a quite different perspective to that of v 13 (Danell, *Psalm 139,* 18), or else he simply uses it as a metaphor for the earlier one (cf. JB "in the limbo of the womb"; W. Eichrodt, *Theology,* vol. 2, 141). R. Pytel (*Folia Orientalia* 13 [1971] 262–66), since the final phrase is elsewhere associated with death (63:10 [9]; cf. Ezek 26:20), has interpreted the verse as a survey of life from the womb (v 13aβ), reading עָשִׂיתָ "you made it" (cf. LXX), to the grave רַקָּבְתָּ "(and) you allow it to rot."

16.a. Heb. גלם "embryo" is thus used in Talmudic Hebrew. V 16aα has a staccato ring (see note 16.b.): it is possible that it is to be taken with v 15aβ1-b as a tricolon (3+3+3), in which case the latter of the two explanations offered in note 15.b. is the correct one (T. H. Gaster, *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East* [New York: Schuman, 1950] 349), and the rest of v 16 forms another tricolon (3+2+3). Yet v 15aα does seem to look forward to v 15aβ. Attempts have been made to tie the first two cola of v 16 more closely in sense, notably by Gunkel (*Die Psalmen,* 592) who read גְּמָלַי "my deeds" with the apparent support of *S pwrʿny* "my recompense" (cf. *HALAT,* 186b) and by Dahood (*Psalms III,* 295), reading גָּלַי-ם "my life stages," with an enclitic *mem.* Either provides an antecedent for כלם "all of them," which otherwise has to be taken as anticipatory.

16.b. For God's "book" in the OT see W. Schottroff, *Gedenken,* 303.

16.c. The stem יצר "mold, devise" is used of the divine purpose in the qal elsewhere (BDB, 427b, 428a). For the determinism of this verse see G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel,* 263, 282). He commented that in the pre-apocalyptic concept the individual's freedom was scarcely affected; in this psalm v 4 seems to confirm his comment. Here determination of length of life is evidently in view: cf. Exod 32:32–33; Job 14:5; Ps 69:30 (29) (Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 588; A. Weiser, *Psalms,* 806).

16.d. V 16b is of uncertain meaning, not helped by the dual tradition in MT, לו "to him" (Q) and לא "not" (K). E. Würthwein (*VT* 7 [1957] 179 note 1) took as a gloss referring to the Sabbath "and to him [God] belongs one of them." M. Mannati (*ZAW* 83 [1971] 259) took אחד "one" as referring to man with LXX: "and no man was in them," i.e. before any man had taken part in the succession of days.

17.a. An Aramaic sense "be difficult" for Heb. יקר "be precious" (cf. Dan 2:11) is demanded by the structural parallelism with the stem פלא "be wonderful, difficult" in vv 6, 14 (cf. *Form/Structure/Setting*). Krašovec (*BZ* 18 [1974] 226) envisages a *double entendre:* God's thoughts are difficult where toleration of the wicked is concerned (v 19), but also precious to the psalmist who gladly takes God's side (vv 21–22). His exegesis is linked with his structural view of v 17 as beginning a strophe, vv 17–22 (see *Form/Structure/Setting*). It appears unduly complicated, especially since v 18 seems to interrupt the presumed development of thought.

17.b. Heb. לי "to/of me," put at the beginning for emphasis, is probably governed by רעיך "your thoughts": cf. חשב ל 40:18 (17); 41:8 and חשב אל 40:6 (5); Hos 7:15.

18.a. MT "I awoke" is problematic. A reference to a morning trial (cf. 17:15; cf. W. Beyerlin, *Die Rettung,* 144–46), though possible in the total context of the psalm, would be abrupt. H. Schmidt who explained similarly (*Das Gebet,* 26 note 2) later abandoned this interpretation (*Die Psalmen,* 244). The traditional Christian understanding in terms of resurrection (so σ′ *Tg.*), revived by Dahood (*Psalms III,* 296), is both contextually inappropriate (J. G. S. S. Thompson, "Sleep: An Aspect of Jewish Anthropology," *VT* 5 [1955] 424), who noted that death has not previously been mentioned in the psalm) and probably theologically anachronistic. Revocalization as הֻקְצֹתִי "come to an end" (cf. three mss. cited by *BHK* as reading הקצתי) would at least fit the context, though it requires the postulation of a second stem קצץ as a (hiphʿil) denominative from קֵץ (KB, 849a): cf. Sir 18: 4–7; 43:27–30 (Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 589). Rashi so understood the verb (Danell, *Psalm 139,* 19). The perfect then has a conditional force (cf. GKC § 159h): cf. the imperfect consecutive at v 11. Michel's objection that v 18a states that no end would be possible (*Tempora,* 245) is prosaic: the progression of thought may be as in Hos 9:11–12, 16; Mic 6:14.

18.b. Lit. "I (would be) with you still."

19.a. E. Baumann (*EvT* 11 [1951] 187–90) observed that the psalmist desires not so much the destruction of persons but of their pernicious influence, while Kirkpatrick (*Psalms,* 790) commented that evil for him was no abstract idea, it was embodied in evil men.

19.b. N. A. van Uchelen has concluded from his study of the phrase in the Psalter that it has a figurative sense (*OTS* 15 [1969] 210–12).

19.c. Only here in the whole psalm is direct address to God abandoned. It is possible that emotion has caused the change, but the abruptness of the reversion to divine address in v 20 suggests that the third person imperfect form implied by *S Tg.* (יסורו "they leave") is original (cf. *BHS*). MT may betray the influence of 6:9 (8; Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 592) and/or 119:115.

20.a. An emendation יִמְרְךָ "defy you" is often advocated on the evidence of ε′, a Greek translation used by Origen (*BHS*). The rarity of a personal object with the verb אמר "say" (cf. BDB, 56a) might favor it. However, it is noteworthy that the phrase אנשי דמים "men of blood" in v 19b is closely associated in the Psalms with wrongful speech (cf. van Uchelen, *OTS* 15 [1969] 208–10).

20.b. Heb. נשא "lift up" is either an orthographical variant or a scribal slip for נִשְׂאוֹ: cf. Jer 10:5 and 11QPs[a] נשאו. In consequence of the former note it is probable that an ellipse of קול "voice" is to be assumed, as in Isa 3:7; 42:2, 11.

20.c. Heb. ערין ("your cities"?—thus H. Junker, *Bib* 30 [1949] 207) is generally emended, either to עליך "(rise) against you" (Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 593; *et al.*) or to שמך "(utter) your name" (cf. BDB, 670b). The latter, however, although it neatly echoes Exod 20:7, is too far from MT consonantally (Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 593). G. R. Driver, (*JTS* 44 [1943] 22) read עדיך with several Heb. mss., taking it as עָדְיְךָ "(take in vain) your onset" and comparing Arab. *ʿadwa* "onset." The older view that equated it with Aram. עד "enemy" (Dan 4:16) is worth reviving: α′σ′ Hier *Tg.* so interpreted. It is not necessarily the counterpart of Heb. צר: it may be derived from the stem ערר (L. Delekat, *Asylie und Schutzorakel am Zionheiligtum* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967] 105 note 2, following Levy and Jastrow; cf. the comparison of Aram. ערר "objection" in BDB, 1108a). Then it is to be construed appositionally (cf. Danell, *Psalm 139,* 20).

21.a. Kraus (*Psalmen,* 1100) has drawn attention to the psalmist's concern for Yahweh's honor: his hatred is by no means simply egotistic. Weiser (*Psalms,* 807, cf. 77) regarded the petition of vv 19–22 as "a kind of renunciation or protestation of innocence," dissociating the psalmist from the wicked, and so they are "not to be understood as expressing merely human hatred and vindictiveness."

21.b. Heb. ובמתקוממיך is to be read with a few mss. (*BHK;* cf. 11QPs[a] ומתי). Cf. especially 59:2(1): Holman (*BZ* 14 [1970] 219) has compared with vv 19–22 the semantic field of 59:2–3 (1–2).

24.a. The repeated דרך "way" indicates a reference to the common biblical concept of the two ways, one wrong and the other right (Weiser, *Psalms,* 808; cf. 1:6; Prov 12:28; Matt 7:13–14). More precise identification of the ways is here less certain. Heb. עצב "pain" (cf. 1 Chr 4:9; Isa 14:3) is difficult to relate to the context of denial of faithlessness. Is it a "hurtful way" (BDB, 780b) and, if so, is it a way that brings pain to others or one that leads to the pain of punishment (Weiser, *Psalms,* 807)? Delekat (*Asylie,* 255 note 5) suggested reading עָצָב, with reference to literal sickness: no guilt has made the psalmist ill. All such ambiguity is obviated by recourse to the homonymous term meaning "idol" (Isa 48:5; cf. Hos 10:6). A Jewish tradition to this effect is represented in *Tg.* (טעי "those who go astray," esp. idolators) and also in 11QPs[a] עצב. The latter apparently reflects an understanding as עָצָב "idol" (R. Tournay, "Recension de *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave II* par J. A. Sanders," *RB* 73 [1966] 261). KB 730a emended to עָקֹב "insidiousness" on the basis of Hier "deceit" and *S* "lying" (cf. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 593), but more probably both these translations and LXX "iniquity" reflect attempts to make עצב "pain" meaningful.

24.b. If the former phrase has been rightly understood, it is probable that עולם be rendered thus: cf. Jer 6:16; 18:15 (in a context of idolatry) and *Tg.* "the way of upright men of old."

Form/Structure/Setting

An obvious break occurs in the psalm between vv 18 and 19 in both form and tone. The passionate outburst of vv 19–22 and the appeals within vv 19–24 contrast strangely with the quieter statement of the preceding material. H. Schmidt (*Die Psalmen,* 246) considered that vv 19–24 were a subsequent addition by the same author. M. Buttenwieser (*The Psalms Chronologically Treated* [New York: KTAV, 1938] 535–36) judged that vv 19–22 were misplaced, vv 19–20 originally belonging after 140:12 and vv 21–22 after 141:4. Both these suggestions appear influenced by cultural considerations. It has been claimed that the psalm would be one of the most beautiful in the Psalter if it finished at v 18 (E. Reuss, cited by Würthwein, *VT* [1957] 170). In fact, an impression of integrity is given by the device of inclusion, evidenced especially in the stems ידע "know" and חקר "examine" in vv 1, 23. Holman (*VT* 21 [1970] 301, 308) has cited too דרך, דרכי "way(s)" in vv 3, 24, the divine name in vv 1 (4), 21 and the stem קום "rise" in vv 2, 21.

The two unequal parts into which the psalm falls have been subjected to thorough analysis by Holman. He finds in vv 1–8 a parabola or concentric structure (*VT* 21 [1970] 302–7). At the center stands v 10, and it is surrounded at equidistant points by mutually echoing material. The note of praise in v 6 is matched at v 14, both including the terms ידע "know" and פלא "be wonderful." Heb. (ך)רעי "thought(s)" occurs in vv 2, 17, though for Holman only homonymously. Vv 7, 13 introduce new material, while vv 4, 16 both contain כל "all" and the motif of divine knowledge.

Holman has traced a fascinating network. However, it must be asked whether the content of v 10 is as important as so crucial a structural role would suggest. Moreover, the hymnic asides of vv 6, 14 seem to be further matched in vv 17–18, which find no comparable role in the above scheme. Holman does not need to do so because his understanding of v 17 removes the motif of direct praise of God, but as usually understood the passage cries out for some alignment with vv 6, 14. He has rendered a valuable service in demonstrating the close interlocking of vv 1–18 and also the role of vv 19–24 as a climax, both radical and integral, to the foregoing.

A common way of dividing the psalm is to find four units or strophes, vv 1–6, 7–12, 13–18, 19–24 (e.g. J. A. Montgomery, *JBL* 64 [1945] 383; Würthwein, *VT* 7 [1957] 176–78; S. Wagner, "Theologie," 359). It is easier to substantiate this structuring in some parts than in others. Vv 1–6 are bound together by the key word ידע "know" with Yahweh as subject (a noun in v 6), no less than four times. V 6 forms a fitting devotional conclusion. V 7 takes a new turn, with its rhetorical questions as prelude to statements concerning the psalmist's inability to hide from the omnipresent God. A third strophe could begin at v 13 with the new theme of God's creation of the psalmist, developed in subsequent verses. The conclusion of devotional praise in vv 17–18 neatly matches the end of the first strophe. Its greater length marks the climax of three parallel strophes before a fourth, which is different from the others, like the fourth beast of Dan 7. However, a difficulty arises in the presumed third strophe: v 14 like vv 6, 17–18 contains the motif of direct praise. Holman's scheme made some allowance for this phenomenon,

but the present analysis ignores it. M. Mannati (*ZAW* 83 [1971] 257–61) has attempted to deal with this anomaly. She observes that vv 15–16 continue the theme of v 13, while v 14 breaks the chain of thought, appears to possess no metrical rhythm and has the maladroit repetition of the stem פלא "be wonderful." Accordingly v 14 may be judged a secondary prose comment. Then all the strophes have the same pattern, size and proportion: an introductory line (in the first case a colon) prefaces a central unit of three lines with strong unity of theme and form, which is followed by two concluding lines which have a change of construction and theme (vv 1 + 2–4 + 5–6; 7 + 8–10 + 11–12; 13 + 15–16 + 17–18; 19 + 20–22 + 23). A similar concern for uniformity of size encouraged Würthwein (*VT* [1957] 179 note 1) to delete v 14a and the first three words of v 16 as glosses, so as to achieve strophes of six lines throughout. Mannati's scheme is attractive, apart perhaps from a flaw that v 20 seems closer to v 19 than to vv 21–22. Metrically v 14 can be treated as in the *Translation* and in *Notes/Comments* above. The doubled term can be explained as emotional exuberance (cf. כל "all" in vv 3–4). Heb. מעשיך "your works" in the sense of works of creation (cf. 104:24) fits the preceding context.

R. Lapointe (*CBQ* 33 [1971] 401 note 40) has made a significant attempt to do justice to v 14. He has briefly suggested that the second strophe ends at v 14a. Then the first three all conclude in similar fashion, with a wondering exclamation (v 6) or with hymnic phrasing (vv 14a, 17–18). The suggestion is worth developing. At first sight it cuts across the thematic divisions cited above. It may be, however, that they were defined too sharply. Thematic overlap appears in v 5, which heralds the motif of the divine presence celebrated in vv 7–10, before the praise of v 6 which closes the first strophe. Likewise it is feasible that before the praise of v 14, v 13 introduces a motif to be developed in the next strophe. A. D. Rittersprach ("Rhetorical Criticism and the Song of Hannah," in *Rhetorical Criticism,* ed. J. J. Jackson and M. Kessler [Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1974] 73) has observed that a strophe may build on a closing note of the previous one. The merit of this scheme is that, like Holman's, it recognizes as strategic the parallelism of vv 6–14, including the occurrence of the term פלא. Repetition is frequently a key to structure (cf. J. Muilenburg, "Hebrew Rhetoric," 97–111).

The dimensions of the fourth strophe have been variously determined. Dahood (*Psalms III,* 285, 296) makes it run from v 17 to v 22 on stylistic grounds, לי "to me" in vv 17, 22 being regarded as an inclusion (cf. Krašovec, *BZ* 18 [1974] 226). The layout in *BHS* links vv 17–20. Dahood (*Psalms III,* 284–85) has taken vv 23–24 together with v 1 as the frame of the psalm in consequence of his own grammatical analysis of v 1 (see note 1.b.). Rather than forming a specific frame the verses are better taken as exhibiting overall inclusion (see above). In strophic analysis there is always a danger of confusing minor divisions with major ones (cf. Anderson, *Psalms,* 911, who has distinguished vv 19–22 from vv 23–24).

Holman has observed correctly that a deep caesura lies between vv 18 and 19. The preceding material belongs closely together, marked inclusively by the repetition of רע "thought" in vv 2, 17. It may be divided into three strophes, vv 1–6, 7–14a, 14b–18, each concluding on a note of direct praise

in vv 6, 14, 17–18, with the last and longer passage functioning besides as a conclusion. In the first two strophes vv 5, 13 anticipate the next ones; this element is necessarily lacking in the third. In the first strophe the body of material in vv 1–4 is introduced in the first line (N.B. the divine name in vv 1, 4), and likewise in the second v 7 introduces vv 8–10 (cf. Würthwein, *VT* 7 [1957] 177), but there is a further development of thought in vv 11–12, which is what makes it a longer strophe. In the third strophe the initial colon serves as a preface to vv 15–16. This strophe has its own marks of inclusion: the stems עצם ("bone," "be many") in vv 15, 17 and ספר ("book," "count") in vv 16, 18. In the first and third strophes the main material consists of four lines; in the second there is an extra two.

In vv 1–18 there is evidence of a loose chiastic structure, which is akin to Holman's concentric scheme. The second strophe is longer. In its main part it looks back: distance (vv 8–10, cf. v 2) is no security against God. It also looks forward: God has unimpeded vision (v 12, cf. vv 15–16). In the first and third, of uniform length, כל "all" in vv 3–4, 16 and the negative clauses of v 4a, 16b both emphasize the completeness of Yahweh's knowledge. This parallelism supports taking ידעת "know" in v 14b with the third strophe (see note 14.d.). The key word of the first then reappears in the third, which has a resumptive and reinforcing role.

Holman (*VT* 21 [1970] 307) has finely analyzed vv 19–24 as consisting of two antithetically parallel sub-units, vv 19–20 and 23–24, separated by a synonymously parallel pair of verses, vv 21–22; each of the three sub-units employs a different divine term, אלוה, יהוה and אל. The third term significantly concludes not only this second major part of the psalm but also the first, at v 17, while לי "to me" is associated with the ends of both, at vv 17, 22 (*VT* 21 [1970] 308). It may be added that this section gathers up material from the earlier one. It recapitulates the key verbs of its three strophes and repeats them as imperatives: ידע "know" from the first strophe (also the third), נחה "guide" from the second (v 10) and ראה "see" from the third (v 16).

Structural analysis provides a strong argument against E. Baumann's interpretation of the psalm (*EvT* 11 [1951] 187–90, followed by Eichrodt, *Theology*, vol. 1, 491), developing a suggestion of Weiser's (*Psalms*, 805). He postulated a turning point at v 13. In vv 1–12 the psalmist relates his former resentment at God's patronizing, intolerable control of his life; he contemplated fleeing like Jonah but judged it impossible. It was only when he gained a new insight into God's creative care that he was converted to identify with God's purposes. However, there is no structural indication of a break at this point within the tightly knit vv 1–18. It is preferable to try to view the section in terms of an even development of an overall theme from various angles.

The issue of the form of Ps 139 has engendered considerable discussion. Basically it is an individual prayer, in that it is addressed to God throughout. From the standpoint of primary genres it exhibits a mixed form. Vv 19–24 read like an individual complaint. The negative appeal of v 19 echoes that which regularly occurs in the complaint (cf. 17:13–14; 74:22–23). The two-sided perspective of vv 19–20, 23–24 is reminiscent of the double wish or petition used in the complaint (cf. 5:11–12 [10–11]; 35:26–27). Vv 21–22

are a strong assertion of innocence (Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 589). The earlier and longer portion of the psalm is quite different. It takes the form of a hymn or at least a meditation employing hymnic features. It has hymnic forms, rhetorical questions in vv 7, 17 and a verb of praising with a causal clause in v 14; it has hymnic material, such as praise of Yahweh's wonderfulness and awesomeness in v 14, of his works and thoughts in vv 14, 17 and of creation in vv 13, 15–16 (Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 587; cf. too H.-P. Müller, "Gattung," 346–49). Striking features, however, are the unusual but not unparalleled lack of an introduction and a subjectivity of treatment which breaks out of the form of the genre (Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 587). Müller ("Gattung," 349–51) has also drawn attention to wisdom motifs, which are found elsewhere in hymns (cf. Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung*, 87): the phenomenological rather than historical treatment, divine knowledge and presence and the ethic of the two ways.

To establish the overall unity of the psalm, to which the dominant "I—you" perspective of both sections points, it is necessary to subordinate one of the two types to the other. Thus G. Fohrer (*Introduction*, 292) has briefly characterized it as a (cultic) individual complaint, while C. Westermann (*Praise*, 139) has with almost equal brevity taken it as a psalm of praise majoring in the motif of creation. In support of Westermann might be cited Ps 104, which he links with this psalm: it concludes in vv 31–35 with complaint elements which are re-used as vehicles of praise and so are integrated into the hymn. However, in this case the complaintlike ending functions as a demarcated climax, as the study of structure has shown. Psalm 90 is a more fruitful parallel (S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, vol. 1, 24, 91). It is a communal complaint addressed to Yahweh, which delays its appeal until vv 13–17; the earlier and larger part of the psalm serves as a basis for the concluding appeal. The earlier portion is dominated by the concept of God's eternity, which is applied by contrast to the people's plight as a motivation for him to intervene. In the light of this parallel, vv 19–24 may be regarded as the key to the earlier part (R. Pytel, *Folia Orientalia* 13 [1971] 259). The psalm can be viewed as an individual complaint in a developed form, prefaced by a long passage praising divine attributes which the sufferer finds relevant to his situation. Comparable is Kraus's definition as an individual song of thanksgiving, to which his own view of the relationship between vv 1 and 23 compels him (see note 1.b.).

More precisely Mowinckel (*Psalmenstudien*, vol. 5, 91 note 1) defined Ps 139 as a complaint expressing innocence. The literary type of protestations of innocence, in the course of which the psalmist strongly affirms his loyalty to God, has been identified elsewhere in the Psalter, notably in Pss 5, 7, 17 (Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung*, 238–39, 251). Mowinckel explained the references to divine omniscience as a motif of innocence: God knows that he has been faithful. The protestation of innocence is here enlarged to cover most of the psalm, vv 1–18, in an extended treatment of different aspects of omniscience. Kraus (*Psalmen*, 1095) has characterized the section as containing elements of "judgment doxology," in which God's judgment is praised as infallible. Koole ("Psaume 139," 177) has fairly objected that this form is associated with confession of sin; but at least it invites comparison with

that form. Müller ("Gattung," 353) has claimed that vv 1–18 contain no references to guilt or innocence, punishment or sparing. If, however, it does feature motifs associated with a claim of innocence (see further *Explanation*), they constitute implicit references.

Can a setting for the psalm be established? H. Schmidt (*Das Gebet,* 26 note 2) briefly included the psalm in a group of "prayers of the accused," for which he envisaged a judicial trial in a religious setting (cf. Exod 22:7–8 [8–9]; Deut 17:8–13; 1 Kgs 8:31–32); later he explained the psalm otherwise (*Die Psalmen,* 244–46). L. Delekat (*Asylie,* 253–56) and W. Beyerlin (*Die Rettung,* 11) have revived his forensic thesis in different forms. The former has reconstructed a complex procedure of an accused man seeking asylum at the temple, undergoing an ordeal and devoting the rest of his life to temple service (cf. v 18b). The latter did not include Ps 139 in his study, on the ground that it refers not to direct enemies of the psalmist but to God's enemies who have become his own. He conceives of a religious court which handled special cases. In general he is much less speculative than Delekat; in particular he attacks his notion of asylum in the Psalter as a literalization of metaphor. He claims that the eleven psalms he places in this category are statements made by the accused at various stages in the court proceedings, such as at a preliminary investigation.

The most notable exponent of Schmidt's basic thesis with regard to Ps 139 has been Würthwein (*VT* 7 [1957] 165–82), who was anticipated in some respects by A. Bentzen and Danell (*Psalm 139*). His conclusions have been largely followed by Weiser (*Psalms,* 802), Kraus (*Psalmen,* 1093) and Dahood (*Psalms III,* 284). The psalmist, accused of idolatry, faces trial at a religious court and indirectly calls upon Yahweh to attest his innocence by appeal to his complete knowledge of him and his circumstances. Vv 1–18 are comparable to the self-cursing of Job 31. Holman (*VT* 21 [1970] 309–10) has specified the type of idolatry as sun worship. Developing a suggestion made by Danell (*Psalm 139,* 31–32) he has found solar aspects ascribed to Yahweh in vv 1–18 and the concept of the sun god as god of justice underlying the appeal in vv 19–24. All powers ascribed by others to the sun god are attributed to Yahweh in a dramatic affirmation of orthopraxis. However, Bernhardt ("Gottesvorstellung," 24–25), pointing to vv 11–12, has denied any intended relation to a pagan sun god in the psalm. J. M. Bullard ("Psalm 139," 147), while accepting the psalm's setting as a cultic trial, is reluctant to specify the charge.

Quite a different cultic setting was postulated by Danell (*Psalm 139,* 32–33), who characterizes it as the king's avowal after his enthronement, comparing 1 Kgs 3:5–15. More generally J. H. Eaton (*Kingship,* 83–84) suggested that it was composed for a king under attack from his enemies (cf. Dahood's reference [*Psalms III,* 284] to a religious leader).

Würthwein's conclusions have not gone unchallenged, perhaps because they have met with widespread appeal and endorsement. Gunkel's characteristic assessment of the psalm as a non-cultic, private psalm in which older, cultic forms have been re-used, dismissed by Würthwein as the superimposing of a Protestant ideal (*VT* 7 [1957] 167; cf. in general K. Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method* [Tr. S. M. Cupitt; London: A. & C. Black, 1969] 177), has been developed in a sapiential direction. O. Eissfeldt defined the psalm as a wisdom poem, "a devotional reflection . . . perhaps occasioned by the suspicion . . . that [the worshiper] has associated with the impious" (*Introduction,* 125; cf. G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel,* 40, 48). Müller ("Gattung," 354) similarly associates it with the wisdom school as an example of wisdom piety intended for theological instruction (cf. Wagner, "Theologie," 374–76). Koole ("Psaume 139," 176–80), comparing the psalm's motifs and vocabulary with nature material in Job, interpreted it as a (non-cultic) defense of a wisdom teacher who as an exponent of international wisdom has fallen under suspicion of importing foreign religion. The psalm presents Israel's natural science and is the first evidence of a conflict between faith and science. H. Schüngel-Straumann (*BZ* 17 [1973] 46–51) has related the psalm even more closely to Job. Its setting is polemic within the wisdom schools and the issue is the right attitude to God. She lays weight on v 6, as an echo of Job 42:2–3. Using the individual complaint form, the psalmist describes God as essentially full of mystery and intensely personal in his relation to man. In vv 19–24 he is attacking those wisdom teachers who speak of God from a theorizing standpoint, like Job's friends. They are in fact God's enemies and teach what is alien to true faith and doctrine.

The basic issue of a cultic or sapiential setting is not easy to resolve. As in all cultures, primary forms were capable of straying to a new habitat. But the traffic need not be reckoned as one way. One can conceive of wisdom elements in psalms as well as pure wisdom psalms; in such cases there is no necessity to see a clear-cut demarcation between wisdom and cult. R. E. Murphy ("Wisdom Psalms," 156–67) has argued on these lines and expressly excluded Ps 139 from the wisdom category: rather, it has wisdom elements incorporated in it. Similarly J. K. Kuntz ("Canonical Wisdom Psalms," 206–8), finding nine wisdom terms used in the psalm, urges that "it lacks sufficient stylistic and ideological peculiarities to warrant inclusion in the wisdom psalms category." "Its strikingly personal utterances and sustained and personal address to the deity signal its ineptness as a wisdom psalm. The sage was not the only individual in ancient Israel who was given to thinking about the omniscience and omnipresence of the deity."

Apart from Job 10:11, the parallels which have been adduced between the psalm and Job do not compel dependence; most can be found too in non-wisdom literature. Similarity of dramatic situation—and how typical in this respect is the book of Job?—provides reason for some overlap. A common tradition may underlie Job 10:11. It is significant that in Job 10:8–11 quite different images are used in quick succession, behind which "perhaps several quite lengthy creation stories lie" (F. I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* [London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976] 154).

There are no anti-cultic features in the psalm. Bernhardt ("Gottesvorstellung," 25–31) has shown that there need be no conflict between divine omnipresence and the concept of a holy place (cf. 1 Kgs 8:27). It is noteworthy that even within a wisdom milieu scholars have found it necessary to account for the psalm's background of accusation. The setting of a cultic trial would provide a reasonable explanation for this and for the psalm's mixed form of complaint and innocence motifs: cf. E. Gerstenberger's judicious acceptance

of a religio-forensic setting in general ("Psalms," 204–5). The psalm provides no evidence permitting a precise reconstruction of its role within forensic procedure. In fact it is doubtful whether so particular a cultic setting is necessary. Beyerlin's omission of Ps 139 from his own list of juridical psalms (see above) cannot lightly be dismissed. It is more likely that the psalm is simply an individual complaint, as the similarly structured Ps 90 is a communal complaint. More precisely it is a psalm of innocence. In the background lies false accusation of some kind, but its nature is left unrevealed. The negative reference to idolatry in v 24 is merely a general profession of loyalty. The speaker brings a complaint to the temple, seeking to obtain vindication via a divine oracle and to this end affirming his innocence and faithfulness to God.

Parallels between the psalm and non-Israelite religious literature have been observed with respect to an omniscient god of judgment. Strikingly close in sentiment is the Indian hymn to Varuna in Atharva-Veda 4:16. H. Hommel (*ZAW* 47 [1929] 110–24), who cited, too, a Hittite parallel and an El Amarna one concerning the divine Pharaoh, thought in terms of Hittite culture as a bridge between India and Israel. However, the parallels are better judged as independent, natural religious developments (R. Pettazzioni, *The All-Knowing God,* 107–8, in the course of a comparative religious study; Bernhardt, "Gottesvorstellung," 26–28).

The date of the psalm has been considered beyond determination, e.g. by Kraus, *Psalmen,* 1095. Those who stress wisdom features tend to put it in the post-exilic period, as do those who link it closely with Job, although Dahood (*Psalms III,* 285) observes that the book has been assigned to the seventh century B.C. The Aramaisms of the psalm have been variously evaluated. Although early use of מלה "word" in v 2 (cf. Dahood, *Psalms III,* 287) can be established, it is less easy to explain away רע "thought" (with *lamed* as object sign?) in vv 2, 17, רבע "lie" in v 3, סלק "go up" in v 8, יקר "be difficult" in v 17 and קטל "kill" in v 19 (cf. the late אורה "light" in v 12). These forms, pervasive as they are, may well suggest a post-exilic date. The Davidic ascription, easily explicable in a royal setting (see above), is otherwise less so. The psalm exhibits but one possible early feature, the two preterite verbs in vv 13, 16, which in the presence of later ones give an impression of archaizing (D. A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence,* 54, 143, cf. 148). It may be that the psalm was taken into the Psalter from an earlier, Davidic collection to which it had been added by way of supplement.

Explanation

The speaker of the psalm has come to the sanctuary to present his prayer, hoping for a divine oracle to vindicate him. He protests his innocence of certain charges evidently brought against him, before Yahweh who has insight into the whole of his life. Every detail of his daily routine, every unspoken thought, is known to him. God knows him inside and out. In the OT such terms as "know," "examine," "see" (vv 16, 24) and "probe" (v 23) are used with God as subject to refer to his providential role as judge—not necessarily in a formal sense but by way of metaphor—punishing the guilty and acquitting

the innocent. These associations of the terms used in the psalm indicate that the psalmist is in some situation of attack. The psalm is comparable with Jeremiah's appeal for vindication: "You know me, Yahweh; you see me and probe my attitude toward you. Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter" (Jer 12:3; cf. 15:15). The psalmist is not engaged in quiet reverie on a divine attribute, but pleading for justice to be done. A polemical element is implicit from the outset.

Yahweh is far away, as the transcendent God who observes all from heaven (cf. 11:4–5; Jer 23:23). He is also close by, surrounding the psalmist and controlling his movements. The psalmist reacts to God's omniscience with wonder: it is beyond his ken and too sublime to comprehend. In the area of knowledge a gulf lies between Yahweh and himself. He is driven to avow his own sense of limitation and inadequacy (cf. Job 42:2, 3b).

God's closeness, broached in v 5, is developed in the second strophe. The rhetorical question of v 7 is amplified into a series of examples: hypothetical locations above and below the earth and movement from east to west as speedy as the light of dawn. The key to the intent of the passage is the related statement of man's accessibility to Yahweh at Jer 23:24, in a divine threat of judgment: "Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? . . . Do I not fill heaven and earth?" So said the God who was great enough to see through the subjective claims of rival prophets (Jer 23:25–32). In similar fashion the psalmist states his awareness of his own availability to the divine judge. He cannot escape God: "before him no creature is hidden" (Heb 4:13; cf. the kinship of 4:12 to Ps 139:2, 4). Vv 7–10 imaginatively amplify Yahweh's knowledge of all his ways (v 3) from a different perspective. The personal life of the psalmist is related spatially to divine universality. More commonly in a treatment of God's judicial knowledge it is Yahweh's eyes that survey the world (cf. 11:4–5; Jer 16:17), but Jer 23:24b provides a parallel. The psalmist can hide nothing from God, and it is by this principle that he has lived. He has not tried to "hide deep from Yahweh" his "counsel" (Isa 29:15). The divine presence means God's personal control: if vv 7–10 develop v 3, they also amplify v 5. He controls not only the psalmist but the whole world, so that nowhere in God's world could anyone evade him: "Sheol and Abaddon lie open before Yahweh, how much more the minds of men!" (Prov 15:11).

V 11 veers to a related motif belonging to the sphere of divine judgment, as in Job 34:22: "There is no gloom or deep darkness where evildoers may hide themselves." Divine vision is a common variation of Yahweh's judicial knowledge (cf. Job 22:13–14). The superhuman character of divine sight irrespective of light—contrast Job 22:11a—is being affirmed. The link between the implicit reference to God's seeing in v 12 and mention of the kidneys as the organ of the conscience in v 13 may be found in Jer 20:20, an appeal to Yahweh as "you who test the righteous, who see kidneys and heart." The sequence of thought is as follows: God sees the psalmist at all times, even in the dark, and he sees into the depths of his being, into his conscience—and that is no surprise since God was responsible for its creation. The thought moves from facet to facet of divine judgment. Again the speaker confesses himself overwhelmed by awe at the majestic conception of Yahweh's relation-

ship to himself and to the rest of the world (cf. vv 8–9) by right of creation.

He returns in the third strophe to express his underlying theme, God's complete knowledge of himself, varied in parallelism by reference to non-hiding, as in 69:6 (5). Inability to hide from Yahweh, treated from spatial and temporal aspects in vv 9–12, is now applied to the making of the individual, thus developing the motif of v 13. It is a further facet of the manifold concept of the divine judicial scrutiny, which finds expression in Isa 29:16: "Shall the potter be regarded as the clay?" (cf. the semantic field of 29:15 with the earlier part of the psalm). The statement there that "he has no understanding" is a repudiation of divine insight and human culpability (cf. Ps 94:7 and also 33:15). With similar (but positive) reasoning applied personally, the psalmist regards himself as the object of God's creative workmanship before his birth. The explicit reference to seeing is a reminder of the overall judicial theme.

Divine insight is matched by foresight. The motif of God's book can have forensic overtones: cf. Dan 7:10. The exhortation in *Pirqe Aboth* 2:1, "Know what is above you: a seeing eye and a hearing ear and all your deeds written in a book," is a significant parallel, except that the book reference is not prospective. Yahweh knows all the psalmist's days, the period of his life (cf. Gen 25:7).

In vv 17–18 the speaker draws the strophe and the whole psalm thus far to an end with a final exclamation of praise. If his own thoughts are an open book to God (v 2), God's are incomprehensible. He is filled with a sense of the divine mystery as a result of Yahweh's intense concern for him. His little mind is baffled by confrontation with the comprehensive, infinite mind of God. This is his reaction to a variety of motifs associated with the overall theme of God as the judge who knows men's hearts and holds them responsible. There is little new in the psalm, viewed atomistically: traditional motifs clustering around this concept and involving a number of theological ideas for this single end, are taken up. The contribution of the psalm is their skillful amassing in continuous array. The psalmist is trying to clear his name and establish his integrity in the spirit of the disciple Peter: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you" (John 21:17).

All this material proves to be the prelude to a more direct protestation of innocence in vv 19–22. He can safely call upon Yahweh to "kill the wicked." His appeal reveals that he does not identify himself with such, those who are utterly opposed to God's moral purposes. He utterly repudiates their company and attitude. Differentiating himself from all such, he aligns himself with Yahweh as his ally in the cause of morality. If God hates the wicked (11:5; cf. 5:7 [6]; Jer 12:8; Hos 9:15), the psalmist enthusiastically pledges his likemindedness (cf. 26:5). So he appeals to Yahweh as his moral champion who will vindicate his integrity, evidently impugned in some way. Just as in 26:1 a direct appeal for such vindication ("Vindicate me, Yahweh, for I have behaved with integrity") is followed by surrender to the divine scrutiny in 26:2, so in similar vein the psalmist here welcomes with a good conscience God's investigation. As too in 26:1 unswerving loyalty is professed, likewise the poet refers to idolatry as conspicuous by its absence. His dominant desire is rather to stay within the sacred traditions of Yahwistic faith, and to this

end he needs to pray that divine guidance of his life, enjoyed hitherto (cf. v 10), may continue unabated.

The motif of innocence may strike the Christian as evidence of a pretentious spirit. However, as in the book of Job, there is no claim to moral perfection. The psalmist pleads not guilty to some charge, and it is in this relative light that his protestations are to be understood. The apostle Paul in turn knew the heartbreak of false blame. In a polemical context he took refuge in the positive theme of God's fair judgment and protested his integrity: "We preach not to please men but to please God who tests our hearts" (1 Thess 2:4; cf. 2 Cor 11:11; Gal 1:20). This opening of the conscience toward God brought with it a humbling, the psalmist found (vv 6, 14, 17). It also prompted praise, such as Paul too discovered when under attack: "The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I do not lie" (2 Cor 11:31).

The psalm is remarkable for its subjective understanding of divine activity or, more precisely, its appreciation of the role of the individual as its object. The theology of the psalm is applied theology, the meaning of God for the believer in a particular situation of stress. It is God-consciousness not neatly intellectualized but let loose in his life in a frighteningly (v 14) pragmatic way. Not omniscience but constant exposure to divine scrutiny (Heb 4:13), not so much omnipresence as confrontation with an unseen Person at every turn, not omnipotence but divine control of a creature's life—these are the heart-searching themes of the psalm. Above all there is a sense of the existential reality of God: the divine "you" is as significantly real as the human "I." The Christian who professes faith in Immanuel may discover that his faith means something more, but certainly it should not mean less.