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PSALM 4 AND THE POOR IN THE POST-EXILIC PROVINCE OF JUDAH: A TEXTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL READING

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the interpretation of Ps 4 as a psalm which addresses the plight of poor people in post-exilic Judah as it was proposed by Erich Zenger and recently confirmed by Johannes Bremer. Psalms 1-3 are taken seriously as literary context and, in view of its connections with the preceding psalms, Ps 4 is explained as reflecting a divided post-exilic society in which irreverent Jews probably questioned and ridiculed the dedication to Torah by a minority of faithful of whom some probably also suffered deprivation. It is argued that the editors of the Psalms sought to exhort members of the in-group to hold on to their faith in Yahweh, their only source of true safety and blessing.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is still a lack of consensus about the interpretation of this seemingly straightforward short "prayer" (תפלה, 4:2) which seems more like a declaration of trust than a supplication for help (Goldingay 2006:124). What caused the present distress (צר, 4:2) of the suppliant? Many interpreters have sought to explain the psalm as a cultic formulary intended for use by an individual who was falsely accused (e.g. Kraus 1978:165-173) or who was unfairly persecuted and obliged to seek vindication or asylum in the temple in Jerusalem (e.g. Seybold 1996:38).

Various forms of this view, that it was designed for use by an individual in a pre-exilic institutional context (such as the temple), were evaluated and challenged by Erich Zenger (1990:377-403). He concluded that no cultic or other institutional setting could reasonably be considered as the matrix of interpretation for the psalm. Instead, he argued – based on an analysis of the speech acts in the psalm as well as the semantic fields of some words used in it – that Ps 4 is a prayerful controversy reflecting a theological crisis in the early post-exilic community, caused by the disintegration of the Jewish social order (Zenger 1990:390-391).

According to Zenger, a faithful follower of Yahweh had to contend with fellow Israelites who were abandoning their belief in the power of Yahweh and were turning to idols instead (Zenger 1990:393-394). In contradistinction to the "many" (v. 7) around him who observed the break-

down of social order and who interpreted this as a sign of renunciation on the part of Yahweh and the reason why he refused to provide his promised blessings, and who then lapsed into resignation, the suppliant assails Yahweh with his prayer to prove himself to be the "God of righteousness" through the reestablishment of a harmonious society (Zenger 1990:394-395). The speaker's address to the "mighty" in verses 3-6 is therefore a fictive dialogue which does not necessitate an institutional context (Zenger 1990:396).

According to Zenger, the context is probably also not the individual fortune of one suppliant, but the fundamental truth of biblical faith in God, relating to the situation of doubt and social crisis in the early post-exilic era. There was namely a clash between returning clans (with "old" land claims) and people who had settled on the land during the exile. This clash, together with the taxes imposed by the Persian administration, had caused extreme hardship to small-scale farmers, labourers, slaves, foreigners, widows and the fatherless (Zenger 1990:396-399). The speaker in Ps 4 would then be one of the elite, but someone who was disturbed by the social disintegration of Jewish society and the religious decay of Yahwism, so that the psalm could be described as the supplicating protest of a member of that minority against the change in the social value-scale which no longer considered social solidarity and justice to be the supreme good of the people of Yahweh, but rather propagated the accumulation of riches as the ideal of a felicitous life (Zenger 1990:399-400).

In Hossfeld & Zenger's 1993 commentary, Zenger (who was responsible for commenting on Ps 4) adopts a "social" interpretation of the psalm and assert that it is the prayer of a poor person for deliverance from individual distress as proof of the righteousness of God in the midst of people who taint the credibility of Yahweh through their practical atheism and resignation in the face of social abuses (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:59). It seems that Zenger was convinced about his reinterpretation of כבוד as referring to the personal honour of the suppliant (rather than being a reference to Yahweh as in his earlier essay) by the social connotations attached to כבוד in the neighbouring psalms (3:4; 7:6; and 8:6; Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:59). In his two treatments of the psalm, however, Zenger consistently argues that Ps 4 is a "psalm of the poor," whether it is a prominent figure who speaks on behalf of the poor (Zenger 1990:395), or whether it is the prayer of a poor person himself which was utilised by the redaction of the Psalter as part of the composition 3-7 to give a paradigmatic

description of the problems which suppliants faced, in the case of Ps 4 specifically those of a poor person (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:59).

In 2016, Johannes Bremer published a comprehensive investigation of the theology of the poor in the Psalter. He prefers to speak about "psalms with a theology-of-the-poor alignment" rather than "psalms of the poor" (Bremer 2016:333). "Theology" comes into play in terms of the way in which God reacts to the "poverty" mentioned in a psalm or group of psalms (Bremer 2016:334). Bremer identifies Ps 4 as one of the psalms which display connotations of the theology of the poor, but no terminology of the poor (2016:336). He lists the following reasons to regard Ps 4 (in agreement with Zenger) as a psalm which displays the theology of the poor: The "righteous sacrifices" which the psalmist demands from the powerful people in society imply that they should show social justice to the psalmist (as also Zenger insisted, 1990:394); the reference to his opponents as בני איש ("sons of man") implies that the psalmist is one of the poor, since the antithesis between the בני אדם and the בני איש in Ps 49:3 and its (chiastic) antithetic parallel between "rich" and "poor" people, imply that בני איש refers to rich or powerful people; the fact that כבוד in Ps 4:3 could be regarded as a synonym for Yahweh, so that the complaint to the opponents about his "honour" being turned into shame entails a plea that they must recognise the divinity of Yahweh in the daily praxis of living together (Bremer 2016:336-339). With reference to this last-mentioned aspect, it seems that Bremer thus holds on to both positions which Zenger defended one after the other, that of כבוד referring to Yahweh and its referring to the personal honour of the suppliant, while Zenger abandoned his erstwhile opinion in favour of a social interpretation.

Although I do not agree with Zenger's interpretation in his first essay discussed above (or, for that matter, Bremer's view), in which he adopts a theological understanding of the word for "honour" (כבוד) in Ps 4:3, both his expositions contain valuable notes for the interpretation of Ps 4 on its own. But, because of our recognition of the fact that they were arranged in a particular order, the exegesis of psalms will henceforth always have to consist of an exposition of the individual psalm as well as an interpretation of its meaning within its literary context (Zenger 2010:17-65). This article therefore does not focus only on the meaning of Ps 4 as an individual prayer, but its meaning as part of a continual, synchronic reading of Pss 1-4. It asks the question whether the editors wanted to portray specific problems facing the poor when Ps 4 is read in succession after Pss 1-3, and whether they possibly had a different objective with its inclusion.

The investigation will begin with a brief textual and structural analysis of the psalm and then proceed to a discussion of how it was possibly intended to be understood as part of the beginning of the Psalter. Psalm 4 should, of course, also be interpreted in terms of its position within the cluster 3-7 and eventually the cluster 3-14. For these aspects, the excellent analysis of Barbiero (1999) can be consulted, and his remarks also compared to the findings of Hartenstein (2010:229-258) into the theological and anthropological profile of the cluster 3-14.

In this article, Pss 1-3 are considered as the preparatory context for a literary, synchronic reading of Ps 4. The psalms coming after it would have served to fine-tune its understanding within a linear reading. Within the context of Pss 1-7, it seems that Ps 4 could be interpreted as an exhortation to fellow members of the in-group to hold on to their faith in Yahweh, their only source of true happiness and safety in trying circumstances. Those circumstances probably included poverty and deprivation. Through its heading, the psalm is also presented as a prayer of "David" (cf. 3:1, 4:1) in which the historical king confesses his trust in Yahweh and gives advice to his detractors, but beyond its face value, the editors probably used it to communicate a similar message to the readers of the Psalter. In their context (that of the editors), it is possible that the success and prosperity of some irreverent (and unethical) compatriots gave the impetus for (poor) members of the in-group to abandon their faith. This necessitated a call to the powerful in society to reconsider their actions and an exhortation to the exploited members of the Jewish society to stay true to the God who saved the Israelites[1] in the past and who alone could guarantee a truly felicitous life.

2. TEXTUAL AND LITERARY ANALYSIS OF PSALM 4

		1	לַמְנַצֵּחַ בִּנְגִינוֹת מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד׃	[1] To the music director: with stringed instruments. A psalm of David.
I	A	2a	בְּקָרְאִי עֲנֵנִי .	[2] When I call, answer me,

1 The description of singling out the suppliant for special treatment in Ps 4:4 is elsewhere only used in connection with Yahweh's treatment of the Israelites in Egypt (Goldingay 2006:121.) The expression in Ps 4:9, to let the psalmist "dwell in safety", similarly reflects a promise to Israel in Deut 33:28, cf. Jer 32:27 and Van Uchelen (1971:30). Deut 33:28 also refers to Israel's having "grain and wine" (דגן ותירוש), cf. the same expression used to describe the plenitude of "*others*" in Ps 4:8.

		b	אֱלֹהֵי צִדְקִי	O God of my righteousness!
		c	בַּצָּר הִרְחַבְתָּ לִּי	In distress, you have made space for me;
		d	חָנֵּנִי וּשְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי׃	be gracious to me and hear my prayer!
II	B	3a	בְּנֵי אִישׁ עַד־מָה כְּבוֹדִי לִכְלִמָּה	[3] You **prominent people**, how long shall my honour be turned into shame;
		b	תֶּאֱהָבוּן רִיק	will you love emptiness;
		c	תְּבַקְשׁוּ כָזָב סֶלָה׃	will you seek falsehood? Selah.
	C	4a	וּדְעוּ כִּי־הִפְלָה יְהוָה חָסִיד לוֹ	[4] But know that Yahweh has singled out a faithful one for himself –
		b	יְהוָה יִשְׁמַע בְּקָרְאִי אֵלָיו׃	Yahweh will listen when I call to him!
		5a	רִגְזוּ וְאַל־תֶּחֱטָאוּ	[5] Tremble and do not sin,
		b	אִמְרוּ בִלְבַבְכֶם עַל־מִשְׁכַּבְכֶם וְדֹמּוּ סֶלָה׃	speak in your heart on your bed and remain silent. Selah.
		6a	זִבְחוּ זִבְחֵי־צֶדֶק	[6] Offer righteous sacrifices
		b	וּבִטְחוּ אֶל־יְהוָה׃	and put your trust in Yahweh!
III	D	7a	רַבִּים אֹמְרִים מִי־יַרְאֵנוּ טוֹב	[7] Many say: "Who will show us good?"
		b	נְסָה־עָלֵינוּ אוֹר פָּנֶיךָ יְהוָה׃	Lift up the light of your face over us, Yahweh!
	E	8a	נָתַתָּה שִׂמְחָה בְלִבִּי	[8] You gave more joy in my heart
		b	מֵעֵת דְּגָנָם וְתִירוֹשָׁם רָבּוּ׃	than the time when their grain and new wine abounded!
		9a	בְּשָׁלוֹם יַחְדָּו אֶשְׁכְּבָה וְאִישָׁן	[9] In peace I will both lie down and sleep,
		b	כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה לְבָדָד	for you, Yahweh, alone
		c	לָבֶטַח תּוֹשִׁיבֵנִי׃	let me dwell in safety!

Table 1: A Stichometric Analysis of Ps 4

2.1 Notes on the Text and Translation

2b The expression **אלהי צדקי** probably implies that the psalmist has an expectation that injustices suffered by him will be put right (Van Uchelen 1971:31).

3a According to Dietrich & Arnet (2013:24), the expression בני איש is to be understood as "distinguished people" ("Vornehmen"). Zenger (1990:388 n. 40) originally insisted that this is a fundamentally anthropological expression ("humans") which intends to express the antithesis between man and God, but later used the translation "mighty people" ("Mächtigen") and interpreted it as referring to "rich people" (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:61). The use of this expression in Ps 49:3 indeed seems to refer to "rich people," while Ps 62:10 implies that the term means "people of rank" and the psalmist then says that they are a "delusion" or a "lie" (Van Uchelen 1971:29).

7b נסה is understood as a variation of נשׂא and one MS seems to have this reading. The LXX translator obviously also had difficulty with the *Vorlage*. The suggestion of Koehler & Baumgartner (1994-2000, entry 6362) under נשׂא to read נָס would imply that a parody of Num 6:26 was intended by the "many". It is not certain whether this sentence is to be understood as part of the quotation of what the "many" are saying or whether it is to be seen as part of the supplication of the psalmist. Since verses 8a-9c contain a direct address to Yahweh, and he is not identified anew as the addressee in verse 8a, verse 7b is understood in this article to be part of the supplication of the psalmist. The (sceptical) quotation of the "many" in verse 7a thus stands in contrast to the prayer in 7b.

2.2 The Segmentation of Ps 4

The interpretation of how Ps 4 should be segmented depends on the weight one gives to different sets of criteria. Based on the repetition of certain roots (קרא vv. 2, 4; שׁמע vv. 2, 4; צדק vv. 2, 6; משׁכב with שׁכב vv. 5, 9; and בטח vv. 6, 9), Van der Lugt (2006:112) identifies two stanzas or cantos (I, 2-5 and II, 6-9) each consisting of two strophes (2-3 and 4-5; 6-7 and 8-9). This segmentation clashes, however, with the distinction between various addressees as well as with the modes of the verbs used within the psalm (v. 2: addressed to God and using masculine singular imperatives and one perfect; vv. 3-6: addressed to humans, first with second person plural imperfects and then masculine plural imperatives; vv. 7-9: addressed to Yahweh – at least from v. 8 onwards – with second person masculine singular forms). The series of six imperatives and a negative command to fellow human beings in verses 4-6 does not support separation into two strophes, much less two stanzas.

I A	(v. 2)	Addressed to God; masculine singular imperatives and a perfect. Requests founded on help in the past.
II B C	(vv. 3-6)	Addressed to humans: Second person masculine plural imperfect forms, then masculine plural imperatives. 3-fold rhetorical question about the conduct and value system of the "men of rank." 7 commands to put matters right: "Know"; "tremble"; "do not sin"; "think"; "keep quiet"; "offer righteous sacrifices"; and "trust Yahweh."
III D E	(vv. 7-9)	Addressed to Yahweh; Second person masculine singular forms. A despairing quote of the "many." A request to enact the blessing. A declaration of trust.

Table 2: The Segmentation of Ps 4

The four cola of stanza I, coinciding with strophe A (v. 2a-d), are arranged chiastically, with two requests (v. 2a and d) arranged around two direct addresses to God (v. 2b and c) which refer to previous occurrences of salvation (cf. Zenger 1990:387-388).

Stanza II is addressed to the opponents, "men of rank." According to the Masoretic segmentation, it begins with a threefold rhetorical question with interrelated parts: The honour of the speaker is denigrated because the opponents "love emptiness" and "seek falsehood." In view of the similarities with Ps 62, this could imply that they attach value to material prosperity and had fallen into the trap of using slander, lies, oppression and robbery to pursue the wrong goals in life.[2] In response to their slander and pursuit of empty values (v. 3abc), the speaker gives three commands (each with two elements) to the enemies to put matters right: They should know that the suppliant enjoys special protection from Yahweh and will respond to his call for help (v. 4ab); consequently, they should show reverence to

2 Cf. the similar rhetorical question about attacks from the enemy in Ps 62:4 (עד־אנה); the use the opponents make of lies (כזב) in Ps 62:5; the psalmist's keeping silent (דמם) and waiting for God to act in Ps 62:6; God as the protector of the honour (כבוד) of the psalmist in Ps 62:7; and the advice to trust (בטח) in God alone in Ps 62:9, rather than in wealth (חיל, Ps 62:11).

Yahweh by keeping quiet (דמם) and not sinning (v. 5ab); and they should respond by actively offering righteous sacrifices and putting their trust in Yahweh (בטח, v. 6ab).

Stanza III is again a direct address to Yahweh. It uses the critical pronouncement of "many" followers of Yahweh, who ask despairingly who could change their fortune again, to address Yahweh directly in a request that he would enact the priestly blessing (strophe D). The implied answer is thus that Yahweh can change the fortune of the people again (Van der Ploeg 1973:50). The psalmist subsequently declares that he, personally, has no lack of joy even though he may also experience a lack of the good things in life (v. 8) and that he can go to sleep peacefully because he knows that Yahweh causes him to dwell in safety (v. 9). Zenger (1990:390) points out the similarities between stanzas II and III, since both contain a question, a description of Yahweh's actions towards the suppliant, and a pronouncement about trust in Yahweh. In both stanzas, the suppliant also distances himself from a certain group of people, or possibly groups of people – the "men of rank" and those who critically ask about the lack of good things they experience (Zenger 1990:390).

3. A CONTEXTUAL AND METATEXTUAL READING OF PSALM 4

Weber (2010:834-845) has noted that Ps 3 is the first real *prayer* in the Psalter, but that it actually does double-duty as a link between the preface to the Psalter (Pss 1-2) and the first group of prayers in 3-7 (and eventually also those in the cluster 3-14). In the cluster consisting of Pss 3-14, Ps 8 originally formed a structural centre-piece with an arrangement in the form 3-7.8.11-14, but Pss 9/10 seem to have been inserted later as a unit into this collection (probably during the Hellenistic period) to form a new centre for the cluster (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:14; Hartenstein 2010:253).

From the titles superimposed by the editors above Pss 3-7 it is also clear that these psalms were intended to be read as a group of "Davidic" prayers. Psalms 3 and 7 both have a "biographical" superscript referring to David's time of great distress when he had to flee from Absalom – in the case of Ps 3 from the time at the beginning of his flight and in Ps 7 from its end, when David received the message about the death of Absalom. "David" is thus made into a type of the persecuted righteous person, not only in Pss 3 and 7 at the opposite ends (with their superscripts forming an inclusion), but in the whole group of 3-7 (Barbiero 1999:65). This Davidic perspective seems to me to be an important (metatextual) hermeneutic key for understanding what Ps 4 was supposed to communicate in its present shape and place.

There are intertextual connections to the description of David's flight from Absalom in 2 Samuel. The psalmist's complaint about the "sons of man" in Ps 4:3 could be understood as "David's" reaction to the insults he had to endure while he was leaving Jerusalem barefoot (cf. 2 Sam 16:5-8, 13); the "many" who "say" in verse 7 imply that many of his own loyal followers were perhaps disheartened by the adversity that struck them all,[3] and the declaration of verse 9 about confidently going to sleep could be connected to the threat which "David" narrowly escaped during the first night of his flight.[4]

But the context of Pss 1-4 is similarly important to understand what the editors wanted Ps 4 to mean. Psalm 1 describes the conduct of a righteous person, while Ps 2 describes the promises Yahweh gave to his "anointed". Through the headings of the individual psalms 3-7 which link them to David, and through the editorial integration of Pss 1 and 2, it would be natural to assume that "David" should be seen as the ideal righteous person described in Ps 1 and the "anointed" who received the promises in Ps 2. The idea was then to "democratize" the image of "David" – each Yahwist should emulate the example set by this "David".

In view of the verbal and thematic connections between Pss 1-3 and 4, I would like to explore the implications of a contextual, linear-synchronic reading of Pss 1-4 on the meaning of Ps 4. While Ps 4 is thus interpreted from the hermeneutic horizon constituted by Pss 1-3, Ps 4 in turn modifies the understanding of the preceding psalms. The reader's understanding of Ps 4 is subsequently modified again when the context for its interpretation is expanded yet again by the addition of other psalms in the immediate group (3-7) and it is again reinterpreted within the cluster 3-14. In this present linear reading, however, only the context provided by Pss 1-3 will be used because of the constraints of space.

Barbiero (1999:71-72) has drawn attention to the important links Ps 4 has with the prologue of the Psalter (Pss 1-2). These "loose" (in his view) connections are the following:

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3 Cf. the beds, basins, earthen vessels, wheat, barley, flour, parched grain, beans, lentils, honey, curds, and cheese which Shobi, Machir and Barzillai brought to David and his followers at Mahanaim because they supposed that "the people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness" (2 Sam 17:27-29).

4 Cf. 2 Sam 17:16-22. His first intention was to spend the night on the western side of the river Jordan, but after he was warned, everybody in his troop of followers crossed the river before sunrise.

- Connections with Ps 2: The suppliant of Ps 4 ("David") already knows that he is the "son of Yahweh" (2:7 thus informs the understanding of 4:1) and he can answer the "sons of man" (rich or powerful people, 4:3) with this certainty, since Yahweh laughs at the (mighty) rulers of the earth (cf. 2:4). Yahweh who "sits/dwells (ישׁב) in heaven" also enables his anointed to "dwell (ישׁב) in security" (4:9) because the plans against God and his anointed are "empty" (ריק 4:3; cf. 2:1). The required conversion of the mighty should be accompanied in both Pss 2 and 4 by "trembling" before Yahweh (רעד in 2:11b; רגז in 4:5), but also by trust in him (חסה in 2:12; בטח in 4:6).
- With Ps 1: The image of grain and new wine (thus of a harvest) in Ps 4 (4:8) reminds the reader of the image of "chaff" (1:4) but also of the tree with abundant "fruit" (1:3). According to Barbiero, this connection emphasises a particular wisdom accent in Ps 4: People should "know" (ידע) (4:4) where joy and goodness are to be found. In both psalms the theme of success in life also plays an important role (4:7-8; cf. 1:3), but only one "knows" (ידע) the way there (1:6; 4:9).

This already provides ample proof of how the preceding psalms impact on the interpretation of Ps 4 when they are read successively. But when one reads linearly through the first four psalms, there seems to be more semantic connections between them which create a context for interpreting Ps 4. The impact of Pss 1-3 on the interpretation of Ps 4 will now be reviewed.

When one reads through Pss 1-4, it becomes clear that the society for which these psalms were relevant was characterised by an experienced enmity between the in-group and those whom they regarded as objectionable or dangerous to them, the "out-group". Words from the semantic fields of dissociation (1:1), antagonism (2:2; 3:2), shaming (4:3), and even violent engagement (2:9; 3:8) are used to describe the relationship between them and the "others", the "out-group". These descriptions, like the epithets used to describe the members of both groups, of course also serve to further define and delineate them and to outline the desired reaction and conduct of the in-group.

According to Ps 1, members of the in-group should not associate with members of the out-group (they should not listen to the counsel of "wicked people," converse with "sinners" or live with "mockers", 1:1), while members of the out-group (described as "wicked people" and "sinners") are to be denied association with members of the in-group (1:5). Real happiness

and true prosperity are depicted in Ps 1 as only attainable through association with and subjection to the Torah of Yahweh, and this is incompatible with friendship with those who consider themselves to be independent from Yahweh. At the same time, this disassociation serves to constitute the "congregation" (עדה) of the "righteous", the in-group (1:5). Barbiero says that the "righteous" (צדיקים) in Ps 1 should probably be identified with the חסידים of the Hellenistic era (cf. the use of this Hebrew word, חסיד, in 4:4), while the "wicked" (רשׁעים) probably refers to apostate Hellenizing Jews of the same era (Barbiero 1999:46).

The out-group introduced in Ps 1 is expanded in Ps 2 to include not only apostate Jews, but foreigners as well. Animosity against Yahweh and his anointed from foreign "nations" and "peoples" is described. These nations are represented by their "kings" and "rulers" (2:2, 10). But the editors probably added Ps 2:10-12 to an earlier royal psalm in order to integrate Pss 1 and 2 (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:51). In this way they gave a wisdom slant to Ps 2 (cf. שׂכל Hi; יסר Ni in 2:10) and integrated it with the wisdom Ps 1 (cf. the inclusion formed by אשׁרי in 1:1 and 2:12). Through this editorial addition to Ps 2, the out-group mentioned in 2:1-2 is fused with the out-group of Ps 1. The "nations" and "peoples" (with their "kings" and "rulers") are now associated with the "wicked", "sinners" and "scoffers" mentioned in Ps 1:1 and 1:4-6.

Psalm 2 thus widens the circle of the out-group to include the foreign rulers and officials (Persians and/or Greeks) which the pious Jews had to contend with in the post-exilic period. The out-group is simultaneously defined theologically as those who do not want to subject themselves to the Torah of Yahweh (2:3), all those who do not recognise their dependence on God (Barbiero 1999:48). The "bonds" and "cords" which the rulers want to discard according to 2:3 in this context refers to the Torah of Yahweh (cf. the use of מוסרה in the meaning of "bonds" as designation of the Torah in Jer 5:5). The "anointed" of Yahweh is depicted as the one who proclaims the Torah of Yahweh, since "decree", חק, in 2:7 also acquires the connotation of "Torah" (Barbiero 1999:39). The verb "to serve" in 2:11 (עבד) similarly belongs to the semantic field of Torah piety (Barbiero 1999:39) and therefore Ps 2 in its present form extends an invitation to the out-group to stop being stubborn and to be wise instead (שׂכל Hi), by subjecting themselves to the authority (the Torah) of Yahweh (2:10). Although Ps 2:9 offers the possibility of violent suppression of those who rebel against the "anointed," in the current form of the psalm the speaker in Ps 2:10-12 (the "anointed") is presented as a wisdom-teacher who

reprimands (יסר Ni) the out-group about the impending ruin if they follow the road of the wicked as it is described in 1:6 (אבד, 1:6 and 2:12).

In Ps 3, the in-group is depicted as a minority, a group who is isolated more and more (cf. the repeated use of words from the root רב to describe the growth of the out-group in 3:2, 7; Barbiero 1999:70). The animosity of the out-group, people who oppose and therefore "rise up" (קום, 3:2) against the psalmist, is presented as being especially painful because it comes from within (cf. also Barbiero 1999:67): It is "David's" own son who is the leader of the "adversaries" (צרים, 3:1-2). Members of the out-group are depicted as Israelites since they say that there is no "salvation" (ישׁועה) for the suppliant from Yahweh: They recognise Yahweh's ability to save but deny his willingness to do it for the psalmist. However, the psalmist remains confident about Yahweh's help (again with ישׁועה, 3:9), reminding himself that Yahweh in the past "shattered" (שׁבר Pi, 3:8) the teeth of the wicked, thereby silencing them. This remark is reminiscent of the promise in 2:9 that the anointed will be able to "break" (רעע) and "smash" (נפץ Pi) his enemies like a potter's vessel. By describing his "enemies" (איבים, 3:8) in the parallel part of the verse (3:8) as "wicked people" (רשׁעים), a connection is established with Ps 1:1, 5 and 6 and (because of the unity of Pss 1 and 2) also to the people organising the "international" uprising in Ps 2:2-3. Yahweh's solidarity with the in-group is, however, also reiterated. Yahweh, who "knows" the way of the righteous (1:6), who is amused by the plans of the world leaders (2:4), is a shield who protects the suppliant according to 3:6. He is thus able to "scatter" the wicked (cf. 1:4), to help his anointed to "break" and "smash" peoples even at the ends of the earth (2:9), and to save his anointed by "striking" the enemies on the cheek and "breaking" their teeth (3:7).

Through these connections, the reader is prepared for the interpretation of Ps 4. When the psalmist, represented as "David" (4:1), refers to "the God of (his) righteousness" who has given him "relief" when he had been in distress in the past (4:2), the rebellion of the out-group in 2:2 and also that of Absalom in 3:2 come to mind (cf. the צר of 3:2 with the צר of 4:2).[5] But it is especially the "men" (בני איׁש) of the out-group whom he addresses in 4:3 – people who cause his "honour" (כבוד) to be turned into shame through the "vain words" (ריק) which they "love" and "lies" which they "seek after" – that are clearly delineated by this time. It was, after all, the "peoples" who devised "vain things" (ריק) in 2:1. The "lies" therefore must be the words of the "many" who say in 3:3 that "there is no salvation for him in God". In

5 Barbiero (1999:69) refers to this as repetition of צרר in 3:2 and 4:2.

that prayer, the psalmist confesses the truth that Yahweh is the shield around him, his "honour" (כבוד) and the one who "lifts his head" (3:4), thus the one who protects and restores his honour. The psalmist is therefore the "pious one", the חסיד, whom Yahweh has set apart for himself (4:3). Part of that special treatment is that Yahweh hears when the suppliant calls to him (4:4), as this was confessed also in 3:5, namely that Yahweh answers the suppliant from his "holy mountain" (מהר קדשׁו), the same "holy mountain" (הר קדשׁי) where he had set his king (2:6).

The most prominent problem which the editors of these psalms wanted to address, it seems, was the idle talk (ריק) of members of the out-group that Yahweh makes no difference. Instead of "meditating" (הגה) on the Torah as 1:2-3 advises, they "meditated" (הגה) "vain" (ריק) words (2:1) and those words were that Yahweh does not give "salvation" to the members of the in-group (3:3). That is why the psalmist of 4:5 gives the same advice to his detractors as the "anointed" speaker of 2:10-11 gives: "Tremble" (רגזו) and "do not sin". In 2:11, the advice was to "serve (עבד) Yahweh with fear and rejoice with "trembling" (ברעדה). The detractors should rather "speak" (אמר) in their hearts on their beds and "be silent" (4:5). To speak in one's heart on one's bed is in any case what the "righteous" of Ps 1:2 does when he "meditates" on the Torah during the night. But if the opponents keep on giving voice to their lies about Yahweh's (in)ability to help, they would sin (חטא, 4:5) and thus become included in the category of the "sinners" (חטאים) of 1:1 and 1:5. The psalmist therefore advises them to keep silent (דמם) and to not be like the "sinners" (חטאים) and "scoffers" (לצים) of 1:1, those who form the opposition to the righteous who would rather meditate on the Torah. The advice of 4:6, to offer sacrifices of *righteousness* (צדק) and to put their trust in Yahweh (בטחו אל־יהוה) thus invite them to be one of the "*righteous*" (צדיק) (1:6) and to take refuge in Yahweh (חסה ב) (2:12).

The same problem, namely that people expressed doubt about the ability of Yahweh to care for the in-group, is mentioned in 4:7. By using the same expression "many say" (רבים אמרים) in 4:7 as was used in 3:3, this time to describe the rhetorical question "Who will show us some good?", a clear connection is established with the formulation of doubt in Yahweh's willingness to protect the psalmist in the previous psalm. It is in reaction to both these (idle) utterances from people of the out-group that the psalmist then prays in 4:6: "Lift up the light of your face upon us, Yahweh!" This prayer is followed by a confession of the psalmist that Yahweh provides more joy in the heart of the worshiper than "they have when their grain and wine abound" (4:8). This comparison between prosperity (or lack thereof)

and happiness also has antecedents in Pss 1-3. In Ps 1:3, true success (being blessed, אשׁרי) is described as drawing power from the presence of Yahweh through the Torah (being like a tree planted next to streams of water which originate in the presence of Yahweh, cf. Ezek 47:1, 12) and in Ps 1:6 it is described as enjoying the caring oversight of Yahweh. As was already noted, the connection between the tree with its fruit "on time" (בעתו) in 1:3 (thus harvest time) and the abundance of wheat and new wine mentioned in 4:8 (also during harvest time) is highlighted by the repetition of the word "time" (מעת) in 4:8.

Psalm 4 ends with another reference to time, namely the night: In contrast to the members of the out-group who question the ability of Yahweh on their "beds" (4:5 by implication), the psalmist expresses the confidence that he will be able to lie down and sleep immediately because he knows that it is Yahweh who lets him "dwell" (ישׁב Hi) in safety (4:9). Because he does not "sit" or "dwell" (ישׁב) with the out-group (1:1), his security is guaranteed by Yahweh who "sits" or "dwells" (ישׁב) in heaven.

If Ps 4 is read in a linear, synchronic reading from the beginning of the Psalter, it thus seems that the biggest concern of the editors was to demarcate the righteous, pious followers of Yahweh from the rest. The members of the in-group are defined as those who meditate on the Torah of Yahweh, who seek refuge in him, who trust him for salvation because they have experienced his intervention on their behalf in the past. These psalms describe the out-group as all those who do not accept the authority of Yahweh expressed in his Torah, who regard him as unable or unwilling to help the faithful. By ridiculing the members of the in-group, they rebel against Yahweh. These people had to be reprimanded and the truth of faith in Yahweh had to be re-iterated, that belief in him does make one happy, even though it may be that his followers experience austerity. Zenger probably correctly inferred that at least some members of the in-group experienced hardship and needed encouragement.

Through Ps 4, the editors could exhort the small in-group to remain true to their faith in Yahweh and to desist from making critical remarks about Yahweh or surrendering their faith in him. Yahweh had more than once saved "David" from distress and he would also come to their rescue. The address to the "humans of rank" in Ps 4:3 was probably not primarily meant for the ears of arrogant and irreligious fellow Jews but was intended to characterise them as the out-group in wisdom terms. They were identified with the unwise, arrogant scoffers and wicked people from Proverbs. Some of these opponents were possibly unscrupulous, greedy for unjust gain (cf.

the description of this problem in Ps 12:6 and Prov 1:19)[6] and, as Zenger has argued, had complete disregard for the fragmentation of the Jewish community. The in-group therefore had to be reminded that Yahweh really would make a distinction between those who worshipped him and those who ridiculed his faithful followers. These members of the in-group could therefore be exhorted by Ps 4 to refrain from making such critical remarks (4:7, cf. 3:3) and encouraged to remember that worship of Yahweh brought joy and peace which could not be matched by material prosperity (3:6; 4:8-9).

4. CONCLUSION

Is it possible to understand Ps 4 as a psalm with an alignment to the plight of the poor? The rhetorical question in 4:7, the emphasis on the "joy" and "peace" of those who trust in Yahweh and the reference to the material prosperity of "others" (4:8-9) suggest that hardship most probably impacted on the lives of at least some members of the in-group. But Ps 4 on its own (and if it is read within the context of Pss 1-4) suggests that there was another theological problem which the suppliant and his colleagues had to face: questions about the ability of Yahweh and ridicule experienced by the in-group (4:3-5). The call to God for help in Ps 4:2 (cf. also 4:7b) and the psalmist's declaration of faith and trust in Yahweh (4:8-9) are sincere and genuine: Yahweh's intervention was urgently needed, but it was needed so that the psalmist and the in-group could cope with the "insurrection" of those Jews who wanted to throw off the restrictions of belief in Yahweh and the Torah (2:3; cf. Barbiero 1999:39). Some of them scoffed at the faithful and openly expressed the belief that worship of Yahweh did not make any difference (4:4, 7; cf. the same attitude referred to in Mal 3:14). This conviction was a lie (4:3b-c) as far as the psalmist was concerned. Yahweh did single out his faithful for special treatment (4:4a). Even if they did not always enjoy material prosperity (4:7-8), the privileges of a close relationship with Yahweh, namely joy and peace under his protection (4:8-9), did count as the most important blessings.

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6 Ps 12 forms part of the cluster Pss 3-14, and Prov 1:10-19 served as one source of inspiration for the author of Ps 1 which has connections with Ps 4 in turn.

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