

Poetry and Perlocution in Psalm 26

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ABSTRACT

Psalm 26 has been described as a late pre-exilic prayer of innocence. In it a speaker professes innocence, invites Yahweh to put him to the test, and expresses dissociation from certain groups of people who behave unethically. In contrast to this type of behaviour, the speaker expresses a strong desire to visit the temple in order to praise Yahweh among co-believers. This article investigates its poetic and literary features and speech-act potential. Its form and the connections it displays with the work of the post-exilic wisdom editors of Psalms and the Deuteronomistic works are used to argue that it is an argumentative text rather than a liturgical remnant. Its purpose seems to have been to inspire members of the post-exilic in-group of the author to imitate David and Hezekiah in their wholehearted dedication to Yahweh, since Yahweh would eventually vindicate their uprightness.

1 INTRODUCTION

Psalm 26 seems to be notoriously difficult to classify in terms of its genre and Sitz im Leben.¹ Proposals about the purpose for which it was composed have ranged from that of the prayer of an ordinary individual or a king in crisis,² a liturgy for a purification rite,³ the prayer of a pilgrim,⁴ the protest of an unjustly accused,⁵ a confession to be used in conjunction with a ceremony for admission to the temple, and a prayer of preparation of a priest for temple service.⁶ In

¹ See the list of diverging opinions compiled by Paul G. Mosca, "Psalm 26: Poetic Structure and the Form-Critical Task," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 212–237, 219.

² So John H. Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 131, who finds royal motifs in most psalms.

³ Theodor Lescow, "Textübergreifende Exegese: Zur Lesung von Ps 24-26 auf redaktioneller Sinnesebene," *ZAW* 107 (1995): 65-79, 77 describes vv. 1-7 as a "Reinigungseid."

⁴ As was proposed by Ernst Vogt, "Psalm 26, ein Pilgergebet," *Bib* 43 (1962): 328-337.

⁵ So Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen I* (BKAT 15.1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), 215, and Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen* (HAT I/15; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996), 111; cf. also William H. Bellinger, "Psalm 26," *RevExp* 86 (1989): 577-582, 577 and Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms* (vol. 1; NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 471 when he refers to the "original context."

⁶ Cf. the list provided by Beat Weber, *Die Psalmen 1 bis 72* (vol. 1 of *Werkbuch Psalmen*; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 137. Weber chooses the last of these options,

simple terms it can be described as a prayer of association with the temple and the true worshipping community (vv. 6-8, 12), and of dissociation from certain people and practices (vv. 4-5, 9-10), supplicating Yahweh to intervene on behalf of the suppliant and vindicate him or her (vv. 1-3, 11). Because the identification of a certain "Gattung" can so easily lead to preconceived ideas about the meaning of a psalm text, it would perhaps be better to analyse the poem as best as one could and only afterwards venture to identify a context of origin, be it cultic or literary.

This article also concerns the perlocution of the poetry in Ps 26. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, "perlocution" is "an act of speaking or writing which has an action as its aim but which in itself does not effect or constitute the action, for example persuading or convincing." As John L. Austin explained in his book *How to do things with words*, the perlocutionary effect may be thought of as the result of the illocutionary act – the psychological consequence of an utterance such as persuading, motivating, inspiring, or enlightening a hearer.⁷ This article is therefore on the poetic and other literary characteristics of Ps 26 and, since it is a persuasive text, on the way its literary features seek to persuade Yahweh to act. From the poetic analysis, however, the inference is made that Ps 26 is, at least in its present form, a literary creation rather than a spontaneous prayer. The author or editor, it seems, had intended this work of art also as an instrument of communicating with a particular audience. The article therefore also seeks to determine how the author or editors intended it to impress certain ideas on the minds of its human readership. In or-

namely "das Vorliegen eines priesterlichen Gebets- und Bekenntnistextes," because only the priests had access to the vicinity of the altar (v. 6) and they had to wash their hands (and feet) in the bronze basin between the altar and the temple (v. 6). Mosca, "Psalm 26," 231-36 has the same view. It is possible, however, that the poet uses these descriptions of cultic activities merely as a way to refer to the temple or the cultus, e.g. the altar as a symbol of the presence of Yahweh. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalm 1-50* (vol. 1 of *Die Psalmen*; NEchtB 29; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1993), 167 similarly object to such an interpretation by noting that the description of conduct of the author contains no specific reference to the ethos of priests or Levites and that the description of the cultic activities does not refer to activities limited to priests or Levites and are, according to them, not even typical for official temple service.

⁷ John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (2nd ed. edited by James O. Urmson & Marina Sbisa; Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1962], 1990), 109. In terms of the Hebrew Bible, Andreas Wagner has done pioneering work in the field of speech acts. Cf. Andreas Wagner, *Sprechakte und Sprechaktanalyse im Alten Testament: Untersuchungen im biblischen Hebräisch an der Nahtstelle zwischen Handlungsebene und Grammatik* (BZAW 253; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997). Cf. the discussion of Beat Weber, *Theologie und Spiritualität des Psalters und seiner Psalmen* (vol. 3 of *Werkbuch Psalmen*; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010), 131-137 as well.

der to fathom for whom it was composed or edited to have its present shape and effect, intertextual connections and its setting within the cluster of psalms from 25-34 will also be considered. The first step will, however, have to be a stichometric and poetic analysis of the text of the psalm.

2 STICHOMETRIC AND POETIC ANALYSIS OF PSALM 26

			לְדָוִד ¹ Of David.
I	A	1	שְׁפָטֵנִי יְהוָה כִּי־אֲנִי בְּתִמְי הִלְכֹתִי וּבִיהוָה בָּטַחְתִּי לֹא אֶמָּעַד: 2 בַּחֲנֻנֵי יְהוָה וְנִסְגִּי צָרְפָה כְּלִיּוֹתַי וְלִבִּי: 3 כִּי־חֲסִדְךָ לִנְגִיד עֵינַי וְהִתְהַלֵּכְתִּי בְּאֱמֻנָתְךָ: II B 4 לֹא־יִשְׁבַּתִּי עִם־מְתֵי־שׁוֹא וְעִם זֹעֲלָמִים לֹא אָבוֹא: 5 שִׁנְאַתִּי קֹהֶל מְרַעִים וְעִם־רָשָׁעִים לֹא אֵשֵׁב: C 6 אֲרַחֵץ בְּנִקְיוֹן כַּפִּי וְאֶסְבְּבָה אֶת־מִזְבִּיחֶךָ יְהוָה: 7 לְשַׁמֵּעַ בְּקוֹל תוֹדָה וּלְסַפֵּר כָּל־נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ: 8 יְהוָה אֶהְבֵּתִי מִעוֹן בֵּיתְךָ וּמִקוֹם מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדְךָ: III D 9 אַל־תִּאָּסֶף עִם־חַטָּאִים נַפְשִׁי וְעִם־אֲנָשִׁי דָמִים חַיִּי: 10 אֲשֶׁר־בִּידֵיהֶם זִמָּה וְיָמִינָם מְלֵאָה שָׁחַד: E 11 וְאֲנִי בְּתִמְי אֵלֶיךָ פָּדֵנִי וְחַנּוּנִי: 12 רַגְלִי עַמּוּדָה בְּמִישׁוֹר בְּמִקְהָלִים אֶבְרָךְ יְהוָה:
			Do justice to me, Yahweh, for I walk in my integrity and I trust in Yahweh; I do not falter. ² Test me, Yahweh, and try me, examine my kidneys and my heart, ³ for I keep your faithfulness before my eyes and I walk continually in your truth. ⁴ I do not sit with deceitful people and I do not go about with dishonest ones. ⁵ I abhor the assembly of evildoers and do not sit with the wicked. ⁶ I wash my palms in innocence and want to go about your altar, Yahweh, ⁷ to proclaim thanksgiving loudly and to tell of all your miracles. ⁸ Yahweh, I love your dwelling place, yes, the place where your glory dwells. ⁹ Do not gather my life with sinners or my breath with people who shed blood, ¹⁰ who have wicked schemes in their hands and whose right hands are full of bribery. ¹¹ But I will keep on walking in my integrity: Rescue me and have mercy on me. ¹² My foot stands on level ground, in the assemblies I will praise Yahweh.

Remarks on the text and the translation:

- In v. 2, the *Qere*' version צָרְפָה is preferred above the *Kethib*. Both forms are a Qal imperative masculine singular.
- In v. 7, לְשַׁמֵּעַ is read as a Hiph'il infinitive construct לְהִשְׁמִיעַ ("to proclaim"), although the text is not changed (contraction is surmised). This fits in better with the parallel in 7b, "to tell."

Each and every verse line in Ps 26 has an internal parallelism of certain elements and some of these parallels are also arranged chiastically. Verse lines 1 in conjunction with 2-3, 4 with 5, and 6-7 with 8 also display an external par-

allel, while there are inner-stichic parallels in cola 2a, 2b, and 11b. Chiastic arrangement of parallel elements can be found in verse lines 3, 4, 5, and 12.

Verse line 1 has rhyme of *יָנִי* (which extends to verse line 2) and of *בִּתְּיָי* which becomes *בִּנְיָי* in 2a. The parallel use of the causative particle *כִּי* and the stem *הִלֵּךְ* establishes a parallel between verse lines 1 and 2-3. Verse line 2 not only has a parallel between 2a and b, but also two internal parallels in each of the two cola. The suffixes/verbal ending of verse line 3 form chiasmus.⁸ The internal parallel in verse line 4 is arranged to form chiasmus and the same applies to verse line 5. In addition to that, verse lines 4 and 5 as complete units also form a parallel, and there is inclusio in this combination (strophe B) formed with the help of the stem *יָשַׁב* (4a second word and 5b last word).

Verse line 6 has a fourfold parallel between its two cola. Verse line 7 contains wordplay with the similar sounding stems *קוֹל* and *כָּל*: In this way a connection is established between "thanksgiving" and "all your wonders" (cf. also the rhyming of *וִיד* and *אֹזֹת* within the two respective words). In verse line 8 there is an interesting occurrence of alliteration of *m*, *n*, *k*, and *o* sounds in the hendiadys-hendiatris⁹ sequence *מֵעוֹן בֵּיתֶךָ מְקוֹם מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדֶךָ*. In this way, a connection is established between "place" and "glory," describing the temple metonymically as the place where Yahweh's honour resides.

Verse line 11 forms antithesis with verse lines 9 and 10. Verse line 11b contains a parallel within the same colon, while verse line 12 has chiasmus of the preposition *בְּ*, the verbs, and the two nouns beginning with *מ*, so that an association is formed between "level ground" (*מִישׁוֹר*) and "the assemblies" (*מִקְהָלִים*).

Concerning its strophic structure, Ps 26 can be easily demarcated into five strophes,¹⁰ but it is more difficult to gather the strophes into stanzas. Solid

⁸ Nic H. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen: Stilistische Verfahren und Aufbau, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Ps 1-41* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972), 208.

⁹ The use of two nouns (hendiadys) and then, in the second colon, of three nouns (hendiatris) to refer to one and the same place, namely the temple.

¹⁰ This would not seem to be the case if one compares the analyses of the 16 authors Mosca ("Psalm 26," 218) summarised already many years ago (only Delitzsch and Kraus had exactly the same demarcation of strophes according to him). Mosca's own analysis (I: 1-3; II: 4-5; III: 6-8; IV: 9-10; V: 11-12) has, however, helped towards greater consensus, although he does not move beyond these basic units which he calls "sections" or "verse paragraphs." J. Henk Potgieter, "Psalm 26 – 'Lees maar, er staat niet wat er staat,'" in *In Mensetaal oor God se Woord: Huldigingsbundel Opgedra aan Professor A. H. van Zyl* (ed. Willem S. Prinsloo & Wil Vosloo; Kaapstad: Lux Verbi, 1988), 105-131, 106-107 has the stanzas right, but is mistaken in demarcating vv. 2-3 already as the second strophe. The strong parallel between v. 1 and vv. 2-3 argues against this (so also Mosca, "Psalm 26," 223). Potgieter proposes the following sections: I: 1 and 2-3; II: 4-5 and 6-8; III: 9-10 and 11-12. Pieter van der Lugt, *Cantos*

arguments can be lined up why strophes A-C should be combined and demarcated as stanza I and strophes D-E as stanza II: After the initial supplication for justice in strophe A, the rest of strophe A consists of reasons why the poet is not afraid of close scrutiny by Yahweh (note the double occurrence of the causal conjunction כִּי in verse lines 1b and 3a).¹¹ Strophes B and C implicitly continue with these reasons, since the subject of the verse lines is still the first person singular, and the metaphor of life as travel on a road is also continued ("sit," "go about," "go around," see Ps 1 for "walk," "stand," and "sit"). But in the analysis proposed above, strophes B and C are nevertheless separated from strophe A as belonging to stanza II. This is done because strophe A has an inclusio which serves to demarcate it strongly from B and C (הלך ב in verse lines 1b and 3b). The second person suffixes referring to Yahweh and the second person address of Yahweh which characterises strophe A also disappear in strophe B (they reappear in C), while there is an antithesis formed between strophes B and C ("I hate" in 5a forms a contrast with "I love" in 8a) linking them together closely. Strophe B itself also has inclusio ("not" and "sit"), but B and C together form a parallel with D and E together (there is dissociation from all kinds of evildoers in B and D, and there are positive declarations of the intention to praise Yahweh in C and E).

Verse line 9, similar to verse line 4, thus begins a new strophe (D) but also a new stanza (III), since it resumes the supplication found in stanza I and strophe A, now using a jussive instead of imperative. Strophe E reconfirms the dedication of the suppliant and is considered to constitute stanza III together with D because of the *waw*-adversative in v. 11a: The author dissociates himself from the groups of bad people mentioned in strophe D and provides reasons why Yahweh should not gather his life with those of sinners as he asks in strophe D.

Strophe A and strophe E in totality also form an inclusio which brings about a fitting closure to the poem: the emphatic use of the first person singular pronoun אני (v. 1b and v. 11a) and of the expression to "walk in integrity" (הלך בתם, vv. 1b, 3b, 11a, cf. 12a), as well as the wordplay involving מעד ("falter," v. 1c) and עמד ("stand," v. 12a) establish a close connection between them.¹² Furthermore, as was indicated above, there is a parallel between stanzas II and III: strophe B shows connections with strophe D because of the use of the nega-

and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry, with Special Reference to the First Book of the Psalter (OtSt 53; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 273-279 has the demarcation of strophes right but is (in my view) on the wrong track with his demarcation of stanzas or "cantos" (I: 1-3 and 4-5; II: 6-8 and 9-10; III: 11-12). See the discussion *infra*.

¹¹ So also Mosca, "Psalm 26," 223.

¹² I borrow this insight from Weber, *Die Psalmen 1 bis 72*, 137. Pierre Auffret, "La voix de l'action de grâce: Étude structurale du Ps 26," *NRTh* 111 (1989): 217-27, 219 seems to have been the first to note this.

wanted to express.¹⁴ The positive statements of innocence, love for the temple, and the desire to proclaim the glory of Yahweh take precedence above the supplication for justice (strophe A) and the request not to be taken away accidentally with sinners and murderers (strophe D).

The structural analysis proposed here, however, does not deny the correspondences pointed out by Auffret, Mosca and Weber, but highlights other, equally important parallels. It is based on the subjects of sentences, semantic parallels and morphological correspondences, as well as a poetic analysis. It is not uncommon for a biblical psalm to display two different structural arrangements (based on different sets of criteria) simultaneously. The poet most probably intended to portray a concentric structure in Ps 26, although this should not be used as a basis for the demarcation of strophes and stanzas. Psalm 1¹⁵ and Ps 33 have similar concentric patterns which do not coincide perfectly with the stichometric demarcation of strophes and stanzas. Neither structure is invalidated by the existence of another.

The most conspicuous poetic characteristic of Ps 26 is perhaps the masterful way in which the poet uses positive and negative connotation as a persuasive tool. In the representation provided here, commands are represented with exclamation marks, plus signs indicate words with a positive connotation, and minus signs indicate words with a negative connotation. The words that have connotation are underlined to facilitate identification. As in mathematics, two negatives form a positive whole, for example, "I do not (–) sit with deceitful people" (–) can be described as a positive statement (v. 4a), while a plus and a minus form a negative whole, for example, "do not (–) gather my life (+) with sinners" (–) (v. 9a). In isolation, the two negatives in this colon form a positive request to be saved. The connotative patterns can be summed up as follows:

Of David.		
I	A	1 Do <u>justice</u> to me, <u>Yahweh</u> , ! + Yahweh
		for I walk in my own <u>integrity</u> , for +
		yes, I <u>trust</u> in <u>Yahweh</u> , I do <u>not</u> <u>falter</u> . (for) + Yahweh, – –
II	B	2 <u>Test</u> me, <u>Yahweh</u> , and <u>try</u> me, ! + Yahweh ! +
		<u>examine</u> my kidneys and my heart, ! +
		3 for I <u>keep</u> your <u>faithfulness</u> before my eyes for + +
		and I walk <u>continually</u> in your <u>truth</u> . (for) + +
		4 I do <u>not</u> sit with <u>deceitful</u> people (for) – –
		and I do <u>not</u> go about with <u>dishonest</u> ones. (for) – –
		5 I <u>abhor</u> the assembly of <u>evildoers</u> (for) – –

¹⁴ As Mosca, "Psalm 26," 229 noted, in this section the speaker circles around the altar, while the poem circles around the section.

¹⁵ Cf. Phil J. Botha, "The Junction of the Two Ways: the Structure and Theology of Psalm 1," *OTE* 4 (1991): 381-396.

		and will <u>not</u> sit with the <u>wicked</u> .	(for) – –
C	6	I <u>wash</u> my palms in <u>innocence</u> and want to go about your <u>altar</u> , <u>Yahweh</u> ,	+ + + Yahweh
	7	to <u>proclaim</u> <u>thanksgiving</u> loudly and to <u>tell</u> of <u>all your miracles</u> .	To + + To + +
	8	Yahweh, I <u>love</u> your <u>dwelling place</u> , yes, the <u>place</u> where your <u>glory dwells</u> .	Yahweh + + + + +
III	D	9 Do <u>not</u> gather my <u>life</u> with <u>sinner</u> s or my <u>breath</u> with people who <u>shed blood</u> ,	! – + – ! + –
	10	who have <u>wicked schemes</u> in their hands and whose right hands are full of <u>bribery</u> .	– –
E	11	But I will keep on walking in my <u>integrity</u> : <u>Rescue</u> me and <u>have mercy</u> on me	+ ! + ! +
	12	My <u>foot</u> stands on <u>level ground</u> , in the assemblies I wil <u>praise</u> <u>Yahweh</u> .	+ + Yahweh

The poet moves from positive requests and statements about his own fidelity (strophe A) to negative statements about dissociation from the wrong people. The only words with a negative connotation in strophe A occur where the author says that he “does not (–) falter (–)” (v. 1d). In that case, the denial (–) of a negative (–) renders the effect the same as that of a positive statement. The whole of strophe B consists of the denial (–) of association with the wrong people (–). This adds up to four cola of the denial of what is negative, thus tantamount to four positive statements. The central strophe or stanza, C or II, consists of doubly positive statements, but strophe D is unique in the fact that it is the only strophe which uses a combination of negative and positive connotations in each of its four cola. This combination of positive and negative produces four negative requests, implying how discordant it would be to treat a person with such positive qualities the same as those who deserve negative treatment. The poem finally ends in strophe E with three positive pronouncements about continued loyalty to Yahweh, mixed with one last request for intervention and mercy. Between the dissociation from the evildoers and the attachment to the gathering of the worshippers, a strong polarity is generated by using words with the same stem (קהל, v. 5 and מקהל, v. 12).¹⁶

This investigation shows that strophe B and D are not really parallel in terms of their perlocutionary effect – although both of them focus on the activities of the wrong kind of people, dissociation from their activities amount to positive statements, while the request not to receive the treatment they deserve, strikes a discordant note, suggesting that it would not be concordant with the character of Yahweh to treat the suppliant in this way.

¹⁶ Seen also by Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen*, 209. Wilson, *Psalms*, 476 n.27 sees in the use of this last-mentioned word a possible reference to the “places of assembly” among the exilic communities, in other words, the synagogues.

Another technique the poet uses to strengthen his arguments is to suggest comprehensiveness in a number of ways. His conduct, to begin with, is described as being comprehensively positive. This is done, in the first place, by creating inclusio with the general metaphor of life as travel on a road.¹⁷ In strophe A the author says, "I walk in my own integrity." The word **תָּמִיד**, "perfection, completeness" already suggests that the suppliant not only did not transgress, but also that his life is completely above criticism. This notion is strengthened when the statement is repeated in v. 11a, but then with an imperfect instead of a perfect.¹⁸ The implication of this inclusio is that the suppliant lives a complete life, beginning in the past, and carrying on into the future. This idea is further enhanced by stating in v. 1d that he "does not falter" (**מַעֲדָה**), and by reiterating in v. 12a that his "foot stands (**עָמַד**) on level ground." Mosca¹⁹ also sees comprehensiveness in the many words from the semantic field of the body: kidneys, heart, eyes, hands, feet, and person (**נַפֶּשׁ**).

Comprehensiveness of good conduct is further also suggested by using a combination of references to external action ("walk") and internal thought ("trust") in v. 1. The same effect is also reached by asking Yahweh to examine both his "kidneys" (feeling) and his "heart" (thinking processes) in v. 2, and finally by telling Yahweh that he "keeps" Yahweh's faithfulness before his "eyes" (in his mind), and continually "walks" in Yahweh's "truth" (complies with it in his actions).

Comprehensiveness is finally also suggested by the concentric pattern found on one specific level in the psalm. In strophe C (stanza II) in the middle of the prayer, love for and dedication to the temple is confessed by referring to the washing of hands, circumambulation of the altar, proclamation of the fame of Yahweh, and love for his temple. Flanked by this declaration, one finds dissociation from people with despicable conduct (strophe B) and a request not to be judged together with the same group of people (strophe D). In the widest horizon from the central declaration, one finds the two strophes about the complete life of the suppliant (strophes A and E). This arrangement suggests that the poet "walks" in integrity (strophe A) and avoids getting caught up (cf. the use of **יָשָׁב**, "sit," inclusively at the beginning and end of strophe B), so as to arrive at the temple, where the proper cultic actions are performed (strophe C), and where the prayer not to be confused with the sinners (strophe D) will be heard, before the poet promises to keep on walking in integrity and joining the

¹⁷ Noted also by Mosca, "Psalm 26," 220. He adds to this inclusio (221) the imperatives in 2a and 11b, and makes a special note of the emphatic use of **אֲנִי** in both v. 1 and v. 11.

¹⁸ Cf. also the combination of perfects and imperfects in vv. 4-5, which suggests past and present dissociation from the wicked. Wilson, *Psalms*, 474 n.16 also describes this as giving the statement a sort of "completeness of effect."

¹⁹ Mosca, "Psalm 26," 222.

assembly of the righteous when he returns to daily activities (strophe E). Very aptly, the poet refers to the "washing" of hands in innocence at the beginning of strophe C (v. 6a), as if to remove the stigma which the mentioning of groups of criminals²⁰ in strophe B could bring about! Integrity (1c and 11a) and innocence (6a) are mentioned at the beginning, middle and end (so also Weber).²¹

3 THE PROBABLE PERLOCUTIONARY EFFECT OF PSALM 26 AS A POEM

On the surface, Ps 26 can be described as the prayer of an individual who supplicates Yahweh for preservation on the grounds of innocence and dissociation from groups of bad people and a corresponding attachment to the temple and the worshippers found there. It contains directive speech acts (vv. 1-2, 9); representative statements (vv. 1, 3, 4-8, 11-12), as well as commissives (vv. 1, 12). In this regard, the psalm displays similarities with Pss 7, 17, 18, and 44.²² This individual confesses that he leads an upright life and finds joy in the presence of Yahweh at the temple, and in the performing of typical cultic activities such as praying, the washing of hands, and proclaiming the honour of Yahweh in the presence of other believers. His problem is that he feels there is a slight chance that he might be associated with or confused with people who partake in criminal activities. For that reason, and to that purpose, he prays in Ps 26 that Yahweh will take notice of his innocent lifestyle, indeed, that Yahweh will subject him to meticulous scrutiny, since he is confident of the purity of his actions and thoughts. When Yahweh judges him (accords him justice, v. 1), he should also rescue him and show mercy to him (v. 11b). The dogmatic point of departure of the suppliant is that one who leads an upright life will eventually be vindicated by Yahweh,²³ while those who engage in criminal activities will meet with judgement, that is, they will be killed (v. 9ab). His dedication to the truth of Yahweh is not for his personal benefit in this regard, however. He truly finds joy in being in the presence of Yahweh (v. 8b) and in proclaiming his glory (vv. 7, 12b). At face value, the aim (or "perlocution") of Ps 26 therefore is to convince Yahweh of the sincerity of the suppliant and to motivate Yahweh to intervene on his behalf.

²⁰ Cf. the description of Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1-50*, 169 of these people as "mafia-artige Gruppen" "die verboten oder offen ihr Unwesen trieben und dabei, wie ^{9f} sagt, vor Mord, Vergewaltigung und Erpressung nicht zurückschreckten..."

²¹ Weber, *Die Psalmen 1 bis 72*, 137.

²² Cf. the investigation by Gert Kwakkel who treats these psalms as a group of prayers for deliverance which use upright behaviour as a shared ground for the supplication. Gert Kwakkel, *According to my Righteousness: Upright behaviour as Grounds for Deliverance in Psalms 7, 17, 18, 26 and 44* (OtSt 46; Leiden: Brill, 2002).

²³ This is called by Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1-50*, 170 in this same context a basic axiom of biblical teaching, especially of prophetic, chokmatic, and apocalyptic theology.

But there is another dialogical situation involved in Ps 26 as well. This is already implied by the heading, which calls it "a psalm of David." This dialogical situation is also suggested by the fine literary quality of the prayer. The meticulous composition and the way in which the psalm revolves symmetrically around the central verse in which the poet says that he wants to circumnavigate the altar, suggest that the psalm in its present form was meant to be read rather than recited. The Davidic heading itself implies that this is a prayer composed by David in the form of a song. The editors who inserted the heading possibly also edited the psalm or the history of David so as to establish pertinent links between the two. Kwakkel refers to David's leading an honest life, trusting in Yahweh, refusing to be the friend of wicked people, and his exertion of himself for the sake of Yahweh's house as points of similarity between the psalmist and David.²⁴

Why would such a prayer be collected and preserved, one might ask. The answer is that it could be used as a model prayer by other people in a similar situation, or because it provided insight into the relationship between David and Yahweh. Such insight could be described as teaching or dogma; it could serve to edify readers of the Psalter. The implied author of the psalm therefore communicates through this text with those who are implied as the readers of the psalm. They are those who share the implied author's convictions about the worth of a lifestyle in dedication to Yahweh, in acknowledgement of his steadfast love and truth (vv. 1-3). They are not explicitly identified, but the text does contain hints about the identity of the implied readers. They are those who also abhor criminals (vv. 4-5), but love the temple because Yahweh's glory is present there (v. 8). They are those who gather to celebrate the "miracles" of Yahweh, who praise him in "assemblies" (vv. 7, 12b).²⁵ The intended effect (the "perlocution") with these readers in mind seems to be to encourage them in their convictions and in their lifestyle. The implied message of the psalm is for them that it is worthwhile to stay true to the principles of the group of Yahweh-worshippers, that it is honourable to stand upright and invite inspection by Yahweh because one avoids the ways of the criminals in society. To these co-religionists, the psalm serves as a confirmation of the consensus that Yahweh will eventually judge the criminals and stop them in their tracks, and that he will vindicate the righteous and allow them to find joy in worshipping Yahweh in the temple or another place of worship (v. 12b, cf. Ps 68:27 where we find a

²⁴ He refers to 1 Sam 17:37; 30:6; 2 Sam 1:13-16; 7:2; 1 Kgs 9:4; Ps 78:72; and 1 Chr 22, 28, and 29 as parallel texts. Cf. Kwakkel, *According to my Righteousness*, 145 n.159. The fact that the psalm makes explicit mention of a building as place of worship (v. 8) did not deter the editors from ascribing it to David.

²⁵ This verse proves that the psalm is from a much later date than the time of David. Note Wilson's understanding of this as a possible reference to the exilic "synagogues" (Wilson, *Psalms*, 476 n.27). The editors nevertheless chose David as the implied author.

parallel phrase *and* a more precise description of the intended audience as "those from the fountain of Israel").

4 THE SOCIAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF PS 26

Christoph Levin²⁶ has suggested in 1993 that Ps 26 consists of at least three clearly distinct literary phases. The original form of Ps 26, consisting of vss. 1a, 2-3, and 6-7, is described by him as a "Protestation of Innocence" ("Unschuldsbeteuerung"). This, according to him, is a genre which forms a subdivision of the Laments, and which had its *Sitz* in the judicial negotiations at the temple. Verses 8 and 12 were later appended to this original prayer, and these two verses served to express the desire of the suppliant to be present in the temple and as a second assertion of innocence. The rest of the psalm in its present form, namely vss. 1b, 4-5, and 9-11, are described by him as additions which formulate an express dissociation from the wicked. In this way Levin endeavours to distinguish between a pre-exilic "Grundbestand" and a "spät-nachexilischer Aktualisierung" of that by the final redactors of the Psalter.²⁷

Two important objections should be brought in against this view of Levin. When one considers the parallels and symmetry in the composition of Ps 26 in its present form, it seems that it would have required superhuman abilities to produce such a finely balanced piece of poetry by simply adding material to an already existing composition. The artistry of Ps 26 decisively points in the direction of a unitary composition in a late post-exilic phase of editorial activity. The structural similarity with other compositions from the late post-exilic era, for example Ps 33, confirms that it probably was composed by one person or group of persons in the form it has now.

A second objection to the view that Ps 26 is layered is the fact that all the phases of its "growth" display the same close connections to wisdom theology, a feature which it also shares with Ps 33 and other "wisdom" and "torah" psalms. Even its "basis" displays influence from post-exilic wisdom circles. The expression to "walk in integrity" in v. 1 is an example of this. The combination of הלך and תם occurs in only a limited number of places in the Hebrew Bible: 2 Sam 15:11; 1 Kgs 9:4; Pss 26:1, 11; 101:2; Prov 2:7; 10:9; 19:1; 20:7; and 28:6. From this list it is clear that the expression, as a description of human conduct, is at home in wisdom thinking. In Ps 26:1b, guileless conduct is described in parallel to this as a trusting (בטח) in Yahweh. This is also a typical

²⁶ Christoph Levin, "Das Gebetbuch der Gerechten: Literargeschichtliche Beobachtungen am Psalter," *ZTK* 90 (1993): 355-381, 368-369.

²⁷ He uses these descriptions as general designations in the introduction to his article. Cf. Levin, "Das Gebetbuch," 358.

expression in Proverbs,²⁸ from where it has found wide application in the Psalms, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.²⁹

It is, however, in Ps 26:2 (also supposed to belong to the original layer of Ps 26) where Gosse³⁰ finds the closest link with Proverbs. The words, "test me, Yahweh, and try me, examine my kidneys and my heart," were inspired, according to him, simultaneously by Prov 17:3 ("a crucible is for refining silver and a furnace is for gold, but Yahweh tests hearts") and 30:5 ("every word of God is purified; he is like a shield for those who take refuge in him"). Psalm 26:3 ("...for I keep your faithfulness before my eyes and I *walk* continually in your *truth*") is also seen as part of the pre-exilic basis of the psalm, but it shows proximity to Ps 86:11 ("teach me, Yahweh, your way, I will *walk* in your *truth*; unite my heart to fear your Name"). In the wisdom acrostic Ps 25 (which displays several connections with Ps 86),³¹ there is the closely related supplication "let me *walk* in your *truth* (הַדְרִיכֵנִי בְאֱמֶתָהּ) and teach me" (Ps 25:5). Apart from the confession of Eliezer in Gen 24:48, that Yahweh had led him (דֶּרֶךְ *hi*) in the right way to find a wife for Isaac, the combination of דֶּרֶךְ and אֱמֶת occurs only in 1 Kgs 2:4, Ps 25:5, and Ps 86:11. To "walk (with הֵלֵךְ instead of דֶּרֶךְ) in Yahweh's truth" is a characteristic specially associated with David and his dynasty (cf. 1 Kgs 2:4), as was acknowledged by Solomon (1 Kgs 3:6) and later displayed by Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:3 and Isa 38:3). In the case of these verses, the expression is slightly different, since it involves walking "*before*" Yahweh "in truth," while the two psalm texts speak of walking "*in* your truth."

The connection with Ps 86 is important, since it is known that there is a close relationship between Pss 25 and 86. The neighbour of Ps 25, Ps 26, seems to display a similar affinity for Ps 86,³² and this last-mentioned psalm presents itself as a typical expression of the poor pious people who were responsible for editing the end stage of the Psalter,³³ while Ps 25 is a late post-exilic acrostic with much evidence that it was composed in wisdom circles.

²⁸ Cf. Prov 3:5; 16:20; 28:25; and 29:25.

²⁹ In 2 Kgs 18:5 (cf. also vv. 22 and 30 and Isa 36:15), it is the one characteristic of Hezekiah which singles him out from all other kings of Judah. Its presence in Jer 17:5 and 7 can most probably be ascribed to the wisdom influence in this chapter. Cf. the many connections Bernard Gosse, *L'influence du livre des Proverbes sur les rédactions bibliques à l'époque Perse* (Supplément no 14 à Transeuphratène; Paris: Gabalda, 2008), 170-174 finds between Jer 17 and Proverbs.

³⁰ Bernard Gosse, *L'influence du livre des Proverbes*, 67.

³¹ See my article, Phil J. Botha, "The Relationship between Psalm 25 and Psalm 37," *OTE* 20/3 (2007): 560-561.

³² Cf. the occurrence of בָּטָח, חָנָן, חֶסֶד, נֹגַד, פְּלֹא, קוֹל and שֹׁנֵא in both psalms, in addition to the words already mentioned.

³³ Cf. the reference to the suppliant of Ps 86 as "poor" and "needy" (v. 1) and as a "devout" person and "servant" of Yahweh (vv. 2, 4, and 16). Cf. also the article of

The metaphor of life as travel on a road, and the expression of dissociation from wicked people as "not sitting" with them in vv. 4-5 are strongly reminiscent of the torah-wisdom Ps 1.³⁴ Affection for the temple here takes the place of affection for the torah as it is expressed in Ps 1, but the dedication to Yahweh is the same in both psalms. Given the connections between Ps 26 and Ps 25 which were described above, together with the links to wisdom, the conclusion is unavoidable that Ps 26 was also composed in its entirety by exponents of late post-exilic wisdom theology. The wisdom motif of walking in integrity and trusting wholeheartedly in Yahweh, which was used in the Deuteronomistic books to describe the uprightness of especially David and Hezekiah, is used here to describe the loyalty of the suppliant. In this way David, who is noted as the author of the psalm in its heading, was used as a role-model of dedication to Yahweh by its late post-exilic authors.

Psalm 26 thus displays similarities to other wisdom psalms of the late post-exilic era (such as Pss 25, 34, and 37) and also to the torah-wisdom psalms (Pss 1, 19, 119) in its use of the phraseology of Proverbs and the rest of the emerging Hebrew canon of scripture. This gives the hint that it also served, like these wisdom compositions, as a kind of explicatory text which provided teaching by alluding to and creatively combining a variety of "biblical" contexts from the Hebrew Bible. The teaching it provided in the late Persian period was that true piety consisted of emulating David and Hezekiah by walking in integrity, avoiding the company of wicked people, and by praising Yahweh and giving thanks to him in the congregation of believers.

Ulrich Berges, "Die Knechte im Psalter: Ein Beitrag zu seiner Kompositionsgeschichte," *Bib* 81 (2000): 153-178, in which it is described how a section of the post-exilic community in Judah contributed to the editing of the Psalter. In the first three books of the Psalter, David is the exemplary "servant" of Yahweh; in the last two books, this role is taken over in part by the "servants" (plural form, see the exchange of "servant" in Ps 89:40 for "servants" in Ps 89:51). Cf. also the excursus on the servant/servants in the Psalter in the book of Alphonso Groenewald, *Psalm 69: Its Structure, Redaction and Composition* (ATM 18; Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003), 168-175.

³⁴ Johannes P. M. van der Ploeg, *Psalm 1 t/m 75* (vol. 1 of *Psalmen*; BOT; Roermond: J. J. Romen & Zonen, 1973), 175 describes Ps 26 as related to Ps 1 in mentality.

5 PSALM 26 IN THE CONTEXT OF PSALMS 23-34

The larger literary context of Ps 26 can also possibly provide an idea of its intended readership and therefore its implied message to these people. It can be read in *lectio continua* by someone coming from Ps 23,³⁵ where the expectation is expressed by a Yahweh-worshipper to be able to "stay" in the temple or "return" to it for a long time to come (23:6),³⁶ through Ps 24 where the Yahweh-worshippers are promised that they, who have a similar code of conduct as that expressed in Ps 26 (cf. 24:4 with 26:4, 6), are the ones who will receive justice from Yahweh (24:5 and 26:1) in his temple (24:3), and a blessing from him (24:5); and then through Ps 25, where a suppliant expresses the same kind of longing for Yahweh (25:1-3) as is expressed in Pss 24 (vv. 4, 6) and 26 (v. 1).³⁷ The author of Ps 25 requests to be led in Yahweh's truth (v. 5), and the author of Ps 26 confirms that this prayer was answered (26:3). He has experienced the same steadfast love and care from Yahweh (26:3) which the author of Ps 25 speaks about (25:10).³⁸ The request to be led by integrity (תָּם, 25:21) was granted to him (26:1, 11).³⁹ The road on which the author of Ps 26 travels (הַלֵּךְ, vv. 1, 3, 11) is the road (דֶּרֶךְ) taught by Yahweh according to Ps 25:12.⁴⁰ It is because Yahweh has led his feet out of the net (25:15) that he is able to walk without faltering (26:1, 12), and it is because his enemies hate him (שָׂנְאוּהוּ, 25:19) that the author of Ps 26 hates the convocation of evildoers (שֹׂנְאֵי, 26:5).

³⁵ Lescow, "Textübergreifende Exegese," 65-79, 68 has attempted a structural reading of Pss 24-26 in which he experiments with his "Stufenschema," a correspondence between Ps 24 and Ps 26 "als Tora und Reinigungseid, die in Form einer Ringskomposition Ps 25 umschliessen." Psalms 15-24 are usually considered to be a compositional unit, and the same with Pss 25-34. Gianni Barbiero, *Das erste Psalmenbuch als Einheit: Eine synchrone Analyse von Psalm 1-41* (ÖBS 16; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), does not investigate any connections between Ps 23 and Ps 26, but it would seem natural that reminiscence of Ps 23 would play a role in the understanding of Ps 26.

³⁶ Even if the Qal of שׁוּב is read and not the infinitive of יָשַׁב, the auditory association between שְׁבִתִּי in 23:6 and לֹא-יִשְׁבִּתִּי in 26:4 (as the inverse of 23:6) cannot be disputed. The metaphor of life as a road (הַלֵּךְ), the motif of the "house" (בֵּית) of Yahweh, the motif of Yahweh's blessings being "before" the suppliant (נֶגֶד), and the revival or preservation of the "life" of the suppliant (נִפְשׁ) also present mnemonic links from Ps 26 back to Ps 23.

³⁷ For an explanation of the expression נֶשֶׂא נַפְשׁ in these contexts, cf. Lescow, "Textübergreifende Exegese," 67.

³⁸ פָּדָה and חָנַן form a similar connection between Ps 25:16 and 22 and 26:11. Cf. also Lescow, "Textübergreifende Exegese," 79, who considers 26:11b a redactional insertion to facilitate the editorial unity of Ps 24-26.

³⁹ Lescow, "Textübergreifende Exegese," 79 also points out the correspondence of תַּמְדִּישׁוּר (25:1) and בְּמִישׁוּר (26:12).

⁴⁰ As Lescow, "Textübergreifende Exegese," 79 remarks, דֶּרֶךְ is a central motif in Ps 25 and it connects Ps 24 and 26 through this metaphoric description.

Read like this, Ps 23 assumes a communal colour, and we realise that these psalms were used as prayers by people who saw themselves as representing the true Israel, Jacob (cf. Ps 22:24, 24:6, 25:22), and who prayed on behalf of the community of true seekers of Yahweh (24:6).⁴¹ It is the true Israel, people who trust in Yahweh (בטח, 25:2, 26:1, 27:3) and who are driven by the desire to stay in the temple (ישב, 23:6 in the LXX's *Vorlage* and 27:4) rather than with criminals (26:4, 5) and who continually search the face of Yahweh (בקש, 24:6, 27:4, 8).⁴² Psalm 26 therefore probably does not provide the text for some or other liturgy in association with Pss 15 or 24,⁴³ neither for a process of divine judgement at the temple,⁴⁴ but simply forms part of the prayer of the true Israel found in Pss 23-30.⁴⁵

To complete the ring-composition of Pss 25-34 (apart from the fact that 25 and 34 were probably composed and inserted as "twins" by the editors),⁴⁶ connections were established editorially between Ps 26 and the combination of 32-33. Among those easily recognisable, the insertion of Ps 32:7 can be mentioned ("You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me against distress, you surround me with shouts of liberation"). The verb "to surround" (סבב) reaches back to Ps 26:6, the pivotal colon of the psalm ("I want to go around your altar") and explains how Yahweh responds to the desire to make him the centre of one's life. The same word (and thought) is also expressed in the editorially

⁴¹ Wilson, *Psalms*, 477 reads the connection between Ps 25:22 ("redeem Israel") and Ps 26:11 ("redeem me") as proof that in the postexilic reading of such psalms, singular voices could be understood as mirroring the collective concerns of all Israel.

⁴² For an explication of the structural links between Ps 26 and 27, cf. Auffret, "Étude structurelle du Ps 26," 226-227. Van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, 276 makes the interesting remark that the "pivotal colon" of Ps 26, v. 6b ("I want to go about your altar, Yahweh") has a conspicuous resemblance with the pivotal colon of Ps 27 (v. 6c, "I will sing and psalm-sing to Yahweh"). Lescow, "Textübergreifende Exegese," 77-79 lists some of these and also other correspondences between Ps 24 and Ps 26. He finds a mirror-image between Ps 24 and Ps 26 which, according to him, was given to the two originally unrelated psalms when they became the frame for a ring-composition around Ps 25.

⁴³ So Vogt, "Psalm 26, ein Pilgergebet," 331, who reads it as a "Gegenstück zur priesterlichen Weisung, die wir aus Ps 15 und 24 kennen."

⁴⁴ As Walter Beyerlin, *Die Rettung der Bedrängten in den Feindpsalmen der Einzelnen auf institutionelle Zusammenhänge untersucht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 117-122 would have us believe.

⁴⁵ As Wilson, *Psalms*, 470 has remarked, Ps 26 shares with Ps 25 a concern with vindication and is linked with the sequence of Pss 23-30 through a common focus on the "house" or "dwelling" of Yahweh. Editorial connections were established, inter alia, by inserting a reference to the "people" of Yahweh in 29:11, and to the temple in Ps 29:9 and the heading of Ps 30, "a song for the dedication of the house."

⁴⁶ Cf. my article, Botha, "The Relationship between Psalm 25 and Psalm 37," 543-566 on the relationship between Pss 25 and 37 as well.

inserted Ps 32:10 ("The wicked have many sorrows, but he who trusts in Yahweh, with constant love he will surround him"). The keywords "wicked" (רשע), "trust" (בטח) and "constant love" (חסד) are applied here as well (cf. Ps 26:1 "I trusted in Yahweh," 26:5 "I will not sit with the wicked," and 26:3 "Your steadfast love is before my eyes"). Psalm 33 was linked to Ps 32 (cf. the motifs of the "horse" in 32:9 and 33:17, "eye" in 32:8 and 33:18, and "trust" in 32:10 and 33:21) and in this way it acquired connections with Ps 26 as well ("trust" occurs in 26:1 and "eye" in 26:3).

6 CONCLUSION

Psalm 26 is a carefully composed wisdom psalm from the post-exilic era. It is presented as a prayer to Yahweh in which the suppliant confesses innocence and an upright life-style, completely the opposite of the way in which criminals in his society live. It uses the antithesis between wicked people with blood on their hands and the upright with clean hands to enhance the supplication that Yahweh must not inadvertently take the life of the suppliant together with the wicked which he punishes. But, as a wisdom psalm, beneath its surface, the psalm also contains teaching for the community of upright people. The focus of this teaching is very similar to that of Ps 1 – that dissociation from certain people with immoral conduct, and association with the community of righteous people, will guarantee the ability to lead a life of productive dedication to Yahweh and will save one from being judged with the immoral. This message is implied *inter alia* by using the wisdom metaphor of life as a journey on a road which permeates the book of Proverbs (see also Ps 1),⁴⁷ and further by alluding to the blessed reign of two successful kings from the Davidic dynasty, namely David himself and also Hezekiah. The implied message is that, if one emulates David and Hezekiah, the outcome will be the privilege to abide with Yahweh in his sanctuary and praise him in the meeting of believers.

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⁴⁷ The time of origin of Ps 1 and Ps 26 is probably close together – so close, that it is not necessary to speculate about the direction of influence. Both were composed by late post-exilic authors who were profoundly influenced by wisdom thinking.

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