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UMI

SYNCRETISM OR CONTEXTUALIZATION
IN THE PSALMS
OR
"WHAT'S THIS CANAANITE STUFF DOING
IN GOD'S BOOK?"

by
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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
PROVIDENCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

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To Hendrik and Rebecca Michels
Who first taught me to study God's Word
And
To Janice
Who challenges me each day to live it

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible Commentary
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
BA	Biblical Archeologist
BASOR	Bulletin of American Schools of Oriental Research
BHS	Biblical Hebraica Stuttgartensia
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
IDB	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
NCB	New Century Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary of the Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library
TB	TynBul
UT	Ugaritic Textbook
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTsup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

Transliteration Key

Hebrew Text

aleph	'	beth	b	gimel	g
daleth	d	he	h	waw	w
zayin	z	het	ḥ	tet	ṭ
yod	y	kaph	k	lamed	l
mem	m	nun	n	samek	s
ayin	ʿ	peh	p	sadeh	ṣ
qop	q	res	r	sin	ś
shin	š	taw	t		

The spirant forms of b g d k p t are not indicated in the transliteration. The Ugaritic cuneiform texts will be similarly transliterated. These transliterations are included to allow the reader, without a background in Hebrew and Ugaritic, the benefit of comparing the words and phrases under consideration. This author seeks to avoid the error of comparing English translations with English translations and finding correspondances which do not exist between the same texts in their original languages.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Religious Change

It has been suggested that whenever a new system of faith is introduced into an older environment, which already has a system of faith, a process called syncretism occurs. Syncretism is a term which describes both a process and the result of a process. At its simplest level, syncretism is the blending together of two unlike things in a way that creates something new and different. Both the blending and the result of that blending are called syncretism. This is somewhat of an oversimplification which will require additional study in chapter two below.

Elaborating on earlier theories, Frank A. Salamone, professor of Anthropology at St. John University, suggested that there are "five non-mutually exclusive processes involved in religious change; oscillation, scrutinization, combination, indigenization and retroversion."¹ These processes sound extremely complex, but in actuality, they are steps which most converts struggle through as they adopt

¹Frank A. Salamone, "A Continuity of Igbo Values After Conversion," Missiology 3:1 (1975): 33-43.

a new faith. The convert will become attracted to the new faith offered, and will seek to understand it more fully. Yet the convert does not meet this new faith as a clean slate. He already possesses a way of looking at the world, his own worldview, with a system of morals and religious practices. Therefore, he/she will attempt to find ways to integrate this new system of belief into his/her previously established way of living. She/he is trying to make this new change as comfortable as possible. When this integration is complete, the new system of faith will no longer be something new and foreign. It will have become part of the life of the convert.

However, the parts of the old system which have been replaced by this new faith are usually not eliminated immediately. These patterns have been engraved upon the heart of the convert for a long time, and they resist change. It is not unlikely then, to find these old patterns resurfacing, often in new ways, and reasserting their previous influence. The convert, and the offerer of the new faith, must work to ensure that the new faith is effectively integrated into the convert's life in order to minimize the possibility of the old ways reasserting control. If this is done well, gradually these conflicting ideas in the convert's worldview may be systematically eliminated. This is syncretism the process. If the conflicting ideas are not eliminated, but somehow merged permanently, then this would

be an example of syncretism the result.

An illustration of syncretism the process, perhaps closer to Canadian readers, might be the conversion of a person from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism. Though both systems fall within the realm of what is considered Christianity, there are quite a number of specific differences in belief and practice. If an individual has been raised in a devote and traditional Catholic home, the practice of reciting prayers, such as the Rosary, would probably be part of his/her regular personal worship. At some point after, or perhaps at the time of conversion, the individual may be informed that prayers such as "The Hail Mary" are incompatible with the Protestant faith she/he now espouses. It would not be unusual, however, for the convert to simply substitute or retain prayers which are not considered opposed to Protestant beliefs. These might be the recitation of the "Lord's Prayer" or the "The Twenty-Third Psalm." In time, the convert will likely replace most of these prayers with more spontaneous and personal prayers, as are encouraged in many Protestant churches. The speed of this process will depend on two factors: 1) how deeply engrained are these original patterns of personal worship, and 2) the specific teachings of the convert's new local church on the subject of personal prayer. This change is seldom simple, and to hasten it unduly can cause extreme stress on the convert.

These are essential steps in a process which has been described as cultural "santification"- the making sacred of the unsacred. Old terms, concepts and practises are drained of their previous meanings, and are simultaneously refilled with new meanings. As above, the practise of personal prayer remains, but the nature of those prayers is gradually changed. Oft cited examples of this process are the names for God. The missionary/theologian must determine when it is acceptable to translate the Judeo-Christian idea of God by a term for God in another language. The Jewish Elohim was translated by the Greek Theos, even though, for a period of time, some connotations of the older Greek meanings of this word, Theos- God, would undoubtedly linger. Likewise the adoption of the German Gott or the Kiswahili Mungu for the name of the Judeo-Christian God, for a time, mingled older and perhaps contradictory ideas about God with the new meaning attached to these words. Charles Kraft, quoting Nida, wrote "the Greek word theos, the Latin deus, and the Gothic guth, could hardly be termed exact equivalents to the concept of God as taught in the Bible".² {Kraft has chosen not to capitalize these terms reflecting their usage as general rather than proper nouns.} Rather than coin a entirely new word, the missionary adopted the closest equivalent and, to use Nida's idea, transformed it for

²Charles Kraft, Christianity in Culture (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 358.

his/her use.

Such difficulties are also present in the adoption of concepts and practices by the new religious faith. Catholic anthropologist Louis J. Luzbetak confirms the widespread view that, "as anthropology states, syncretistic combinations are a very normal process in religious change and growth".³ Just as when a word is adopted, old ideas cling to it and are mixed with the new ideas, likewise when a concept or practice is adopted, old aspects can mix with the new. This is to be expected and not necessarily dangerous.

These theories are not new to our century. Pope Gregory directed the missionary Augustine not to destroy pagan Britain's temples and rituals but to give them new meanings. His belief was that "whiles [sic] some outward comforts are reserved unto them, they may be brought the more readily to agree to accept the inward comfort."⁴ Thus temples became churches and pagan festivals became church holy days with the hope that the former meanings would soon fall away. Regardless of one's assessment of Pope Gregory's relative success, it seems obvious that, even at that point in the church's history, it was understood that radical

³Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1988), 369.

⁴Bede, Historical Works Trans. J.E.King (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 163.

change and a complete break with the past, was seldom possible, and to demand it was often counter-productive. This does not contradict any belief in a spontaneous spiritual change at conversion, but recognizes that lifestyles take much longer to transform.

Syncretism the process then appears to be an inevitable first step in introducing a new faith into a different environment. Therefore one must accept that both aspects of the new faith and the older will continue to exist, at least partially and temporarily, side by side.

The Psalms

It has been suggested that within the Psalms there can be found evidence of literary and/or conceptual dependence on the Canaanite cultural and religious ideas. William Albright demonstrated what he believed were stylistic and linguistic similarities between Israelite and Canaanite poetry. These were sufficient to suggest that Israelite religion had been strongly influenced by the surrounding and related cultures. He proposed that a period of demythologizing pagan myths had occurred, so that within the Psalms there are "...vestiges- what might be called 'debris' of a past religious culture."⁵ These evidences in the

⁵William Foxwell Albright, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1968) 185.

Psalms have led some to suggest that this does, in fact, demonstrate that syncretism the process has occurred. Aspects of Canaanite faith have been "borrowed" and used in the Psalms. Therefore, a process of "santification" has taken place; older Canaanite ideas clinging to the borrowed material were gradually drained and replaced by Israelite ideas. Now Albright qualified his statements. He said,

"we celebrate Easter, which bears the name of the Anglo-Saxon goddess Eoster without intending to venerate her at all. If anyone insists that these etymologies prove the mythological character of our beliefs, we have every right to laugh him out of court, and yet such reasoning is still common among historians of religion."⁶

For Albright the use of even the names of Canaanite deities and motifs need say nothing about the nature or origins of Israelite faith other than they served to communicate some image or idea important to writer. There was a process of syncretism, but what resulted was not syncretism. This does presuppose that there was a "pure" Israelite faith which did not originate from Canaanite sources but was only later influenced by such cultural and religious sources.

Not everyone was convinced by Albright. The use of such terms was viewed by many as evidence of the Canaanite origin of much of Israel's faith and worship. Mark S. Smith wrote, "Israelite monolatry developed through conflict and compromise between the cults of Yahweh and the other

⁶Ibid., 185.

deities."⁷ For him the Israelite concept of one God was the result of a process of development from the belief and worship of many gods. By the absorbing and combining of the characteristics of many gods into one God, Israel arrived at the belief in only one deity, Yahweh Elohim (the LORD God), in the period of the exile. The stages of this syncretistic process are evident, according to Smith, in the collection of Psalms. For Smith, the Psalms themselves, as preserved in the biblical canon, would represent syncretism the result. Older and diverse mythologies and concepts were continually recombined and adapted through the worship of Israel until at some point they became "fixed". This would suggest that a substantial and profound process of evolution had taken place during the period prior to the Psalms being collected together into their present form.

Now evidence does exist to suggest that many Psalms were adapted and developed for various purposes in Israel. There does appear to have been a period of fluidity in the form and content of the Psalms before they became fixed in the canon. Ps. 2, for instance, appears to have been expanded with Messianic imagery at some time after its initial composition, perhaps for liturgical or theological reasons. Ps. 14 and Ps. 53 are almost identical with only

⁷Mark S. Smith, The Early History of God (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), xxv.

minor differences except for the replacement of Elohim in Ps. 53 for the divine name Yahweh used in Ps. 14. The purpose of this change has been lost in antiquity. One must remember that the composition of the Psalms did span over a substantial period of time and that these Psalms were written to serve many purposes as their contents would suggest. Yet the inclusion of these Psalms into the canon was a recognition of their status as divinely originated. What Smith proposes are Psalms whose evolutionary history have taken them far from their diverse original Canaanite sources. Their messages have substantially changed.

The Problem

From a cultural perspective, the suggestion that Israel was influenced by the religious culture of the Canaanites, even to the point of intermingling their faith with that of their Canaanite neighbours, does not cause significant concern. Any student of the Old Testament is aware of the historical and prophetic accounts of Israel's long struggle with the influences of Canaanite faith and practice.

This author sees a problem in suggesting that, within the book of Psalms, there are texts which reflect some point along this timeline of the process of sanctification. Above it was stated that within a process of cultural "sanctification," it is possible to have both older religious ideas and practices and new religious ideas and

practices, unsanctified and sanctified material, intermingling for a time. If such a process is indicated in the Psalter, is it then possible that one can say that the Psalter may contain sanctified and unsanctified material intermingled? One must ask these questions: when an Israelite considered the psalms in question, what was it that he saw? Would that reader see concepts, language and motifs with Canaanite notions still attached? Were those concepts, that language and those motifs, the source of Israel's faith, were they absorbed into the faith which Israel already possessed, or did they merge with earlier ideas to become the faith of Israel? And if these ideas were absorbed into Israel's faith did they then result in a new type of Israelite faith, distinct both from the former faith of Israel and the faith of the Canaanites? On the other hand, did the reader see that language, those concepts and those motifs, used in a way which would prevent Canaanite notions from remaining attached? Would the Psalm build upon the faith of Israel enhancing and applying it in a way that would maintain the fundamental teachings of a revelation based faith of Israel?

The Purpose

The question to be considered in this thesis is: should the Canaanite elements in the Psalter be classified as evidence of syncretism or, rather, as evidence of another

process called contextualization? Contextualization is a process of communicating from one context to another which is meaningful for the receiving context while remaining faithful to the intended communication. This process will be considered at greater length below as an alternative classification. This study will examine key texts from the Psalter alongside various Canaanite texts, with the intent to determine the nature of the elements often cited as syncretism. This will be accomplished by comparing the characteristics of these elements with the characteristics of both syncretism and an alternative process, contextualization.

Statement of Objectives

1) To define the terms syncretism and contextualization, focusing on their characteristics as they would apply to Israel within a Canaanite environment, so that these definitions may function as criteria for evaluation.

2) To contrast and compare specific texts from the Psalter which have been identified as having been influenced by Canaanite literature, and relevant texts from Canaanite literature.

3) To compare the characteristics of these elements within the Psalter texts with the characteristics of syncretism and contextualization in order to determine if

and how either process is indicated.

4) To propose a solution to the problem of the impact of Canaanite elements on the faith of Israel as expressed in the Psalms.

Statement of Assumptions

The following assumptions will be made in the writing of this paper:

1) It will be assumed that it is indeed possible to determine that some form of literary dependance has occurred solely by examination of the relevant texts. There will be no attempt to defend the premise of literary dependance since sufficient studies exist that argue and defend this position.

2) It is assumed by this author that the texts of the Psalter were composed by both human and divine activity. Notwithstanding the belief in divine inspiration, this author assumes that the task of composing these texts was not the result of divine "dictation" but that the minds and hearts of the human authors were fully involved in this process of composition as they were carried along by the Spirit of God. Revelation, in order to communicate, uses the language and ideas of the intended audience.

I.H.Marshall has proposed that there must be two complementary ways of considering Scripture. From one perspective, Scripture is fully divine, communicating that

which is otherwise unknowable to God's finite creation. It is therefore perfect and authoritative. From another perspective, Scripture is fully human, communicated by humans, for humans, using human means of expression.⁸ Gordon R. Lewis has suggested that being human, contrary to the old adage, does not equal error anymore than Christ must have erred because He possessed a human nature. The conception that humanness must function with complete autonomy is not required. The divine component functions along with the human such that: 1) these humans were dependant upon God as their Creator and Sustainer, 2) they were prepared for their task by God's Spirit which molded and directed their perspectives, 3) they received their teaching from God and 4) they were supervised by the Spirit of God. This is how this author understands the human element of this process. Marshall writes, "on the human level we can describe its composition in terms of the various oral and literary processes that lay behind it- the collecting of information from witnesses, the use of written sources, the writing and editing of such material, the composition of spontaneous letters, the committing to writing of prophetic messages, the collecting of various documents

⁸ Gordon R. Lewis, Inerrancy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 240-264.

together and so on."⁹ For this author, this is how the Scriptures themselves understand their composition, and this is accepted by faith as being true. This study does not seek to explore this belief, but rather to understand the mechanics of the human part of this process of writing.

3. This study must assume that there is, in fact, special revelation. It is believed that because of the finite nature of humankind, it is necessary for God to reveal Himself to humankind if it is to possess any knowledge of Him. Revelation has been divided into two categories: General Revelation and Special Revelation. General Revelation has been defined as "...God's communication of himself to all persons at all times and in all places."¹⁰ In contrast, Special Revelation has been defined as "...God's particular communications and manifestation of himself to particular persons at particular times, communications and manifestations which are available now only by consultation of certain sacred writings."¹¹ The biblical record presents the view that it's human authors believed that they possessed knowledge and understanding which originated from God and which was

⁹Dr. I. Howard Marshall, Biblical Inspiration (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 41-42.

¹⁰Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), 153.

¹¹Erickson, 154.

intended to be preserved and passed on. The Reformer Calvin summed up this view:

"But whether God became known to the patriarchs through oracles and visions or by the work and ministry of men, he put into their minds what they should then hand down to their posterity. At any rate, there is no doubt that firm certainty of doctrine was engraved in their hearts, so that they were convinced and understood that what they had learned had proceeded from God. For by his Word, God rendered unambiguous forever, a faith that should be superior to all opinion. Finally, in order that truth might abide forever in the world with a continuing succession of teaching and survive through all ages, the same oracles he had given to the patriarchs it was his pleasure to have recorded, as it were, on public tablets."¹²

If it is then believed that there has been a Special Revelation of God to Moses at Mt.Sinai, then there it is also assumed that one will not find the source of this revelation within the religious and cultural framework of the Canaanites. The source of this revelation is God. This is a significant assumption. Many scholars, such as Mark S. Smith noted above, reject this premise and seek to discover the sources of apparently distinctive beliefs within the religious framework of surrounding peoples. Smith makes the assumption that since Israel is largely indistinguishable from surrounding Canaanite peoples culturally, there also

¹²John Calvin, Institutes of Christian Religion Vol.1 (Phildelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Book 1, ch.vi, para.2. Although Calvin does not elaborate on the process of inspiration, as John T. McNeill, the editor of this edition, notes, the language used seems to suggest that Calvin believe the process not to be a mechanical dictation. See J.T. McNeill, "The Significance of the Word Of God for Calvin," Church History XXVII (1959), 131-146.

must be significant commonality religiously.¹³ This assumes that Israel could not and did not receive any Special Revelations which the neighbouring peoples did not also receive. The reader must be aware that it is assumed below that Israel did in fact receive unique and particular Special Revelation, which source was God, and which was crucial to the formation of Israelite faith. The two areas being examined are the nature and source of the forms, idioms, and language which have been appropriated to express and transmit these revelations and how these forms, idioms and language have shaped and changed the message being communicated.

4. This author holds a particular view of the proper approach to contextualization, but this study does not focus on how to contextualize. Rather, since the question is whether or not any contextual approach was taken in the past by the Psalmist, this author will assume that his personal position is largely irrelevant to this study.

5. In light of Dr. Peter Craigie's principles of comparative studies,¹⁴ certain assumptions will be made regarding the texts being used. Craigie suggested four principles which would determine if such an undertaking were beneficial. 1) Determine the relationship between the

¹³Smith, 7.

¹⁴P.C. Craigie, "The Poetry of Ugarit and Israel," TB 22 (1971): 3-31.

languages being compared. Is Ugaritic foreign to Hebrew or is it part of the same dialectical group? The likelihood of literary interaction increases with the closeness of the languages but the ability to distinguish what has been borrowed may decrease since the elements common to both languages become more numerous. It will be assumed that Ugaritic and Hebrew are different languages, but that they, as Northwest Semitic languages, are related closely enough that comparisons of syntax, vocabulary and patterns of speech can be made and relationships demonstrated. 2)

Determine the chronology of the texts. Usually the earlier text is used by the latter, and if they were written concurrently, the possibility of other common sources which influenced both increases. It will be assumed that the Canaanite texts being considered from Ugarit can be dated somewhat accurately, meaning that it is known that Ugarit was destroyed in the thirteenth century B.C. and that these were the forms in use at the time of destruction. It will also be assumed that the earliest Psalm texts, though not as easily dated, likely do not precede the twelfth cent.B.C., and could have easily been dependant on this literature. 3)

Determine the possibility of polygenesis (many sources) or monogenesis (one source). As noted above, there may be other possible sources for this type of literature. Some similarities between epic poetry, like the literature from Ugarit, and lyric poetry, like the literature of the Psalms,

might suggest nothing more than they were both literary forms developed out of oral poetry. It will be assumed that, although both types of literature are poetry, they are different types of poetry.¹⁵ As Craigie states, "the Hebrew text, in its present form, is neither 'descriptive ritual' nor 'mythological'."¹⁶ Ugaritic poetry is "descriptive ritual" and "mythological." This would suggest that there would be sufficient differences between these types of poetry to assume that many similarities are more than simply coincidences, being characteristics common to poetry in general. 4) Determine the geographic relationship of these texts. The likelihood of influence increases with closer proximity of the texts in question. This includes the trade patterns of cultures which might bring together otherwise remote peoples. It will be assumed that, although Ugarit in Syria is some distance geographically from Palestine, this literature from Ugarit is representative of Canaanite literature in general. It is easy to demonstrate that the gods of the myths of Ugarit were known throughout the ancient Near East and therefore, it is assumed that some

¹⁵There appears to be no examples of psalms, in the biblical sense, to be found at Ugarit. Baruch Margulis has suggested that Ugaritic text RS 24.252 is a psalm. However, with only nine readable strophes, it is difficult to make any definitive conclusions. See: JBL, vol 89 (1970) 292-304.

¹⁶Ibid., 14.

basic patterns of the religion of Canaan were also known. It has been suggested that Ugarit might have been an important driving power in the spreading of this particular mythology and temple practice.¹⁷ It is, therefore, likely that Israel, in Palestine, had access to material much like Ugaritic literature.

Statement of Delimitations

This present work will not explore the dynamics of cultural change in depth nor critique the theories of anthropology. The information used will only reflect theories of missiological anthropology commonly in use, since these best deal with issues of religious change. Later in this work, the writings of Stephen Bevans will be used quite extensively. The reader will note that no attempt will be made to critique Bevans' personal position since it is only his presentation of current approaches that is specifically relevant here.

This work cannot and will not give account for non-Canaanite influences cited in the Psalter. This work, as

¹⁷ Johannes C. DeMoor, The Seasonal Patterns in the Ugaritic Myth of Ba`lu According to the Version of Ilimilku (Neukirchen: AOAT 16, 1971), 54. This author of this thesis believes that the written text of the Ba`al cycle might have served as the beginnings of a Canaanite canon, suitable from the purposes of religious expansion, and the standardization on the worship of Ba`al throughout the region. This would be seen as essential to the preservation of this faith, within the religious diversity thrust upon Ugarit, by its strategic economic and military situation.

well, will deal with only literary evidence of Israelite and Canaanite beliefs and practice, though other archeological data may be used indirectly to illuminate certain concepts referred to in the texts. Finally, it should be noted that there is only a limited amount of material available for this study and, at points, some of this will be difficult to accurately date. Nevertheless, it is the belief of this author that although this limitation of the available data places some restrictions on this study, there is sufficient information available to reach realistic conclusions.

CHAPTER 2
DEVELOPING CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

Essential to the discussion of the later chapters is an understanding of the manner in which both syncretism, and a related anthropological concept, contextualization, will be used in this study. It is necessary to explore the particular characteristics of these concepts as they might relate to the situation of Israel's entrance and development within the Canaanite context of Palestine. These concepts, then, will be used as the criteria to determine the nature of the elements which will be later studied.

Syncretism

i. Definition

Mark S. Smith, in dealing with the idea of biblical syncretism defined syncretism as, "...the union of religious phenomenon from two historically separate systems or cultures."¹⁸ This definition appears too vague to adequately deal with this concept. It fails to describe the nature and result of this "union."

¹⁸Smith, XX.

Robert J. Schreiter,¹⁹ in handling the topic of syncretism and dual religious systems proposed that "syncretism...has to do with the mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point of where at least one, if not both, of the systems loses both basic structure and identity".²⁰ One will notice that Schreiter headed in a certain direction but fell short, here, of offering a definition. This is intentional. He wrote, later on, that precise defining was not helpful for the missiologist since "the phenomenon is amorphous and subject in its interpretation to the judgement and temperment of the investigator."²¹ Now, he did see value in Louis Luzbetak's definition from the perspective of christian missions, which is also concerned with theology. Luzbetak suggested, first, the general notion of syncretism:

¹⁹Robert J. Schreiter is the Dean and Associate Professor of Theology at the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago.

²⁰Robert J. Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 144.

²¹Ibid., 146. Schreiter raised questions such as: "At what point does syncretism become a new religion?", "At what point does a system of belief compromised enough to be considered syncretistic?", and "Who defines what is the essential uncompromisable doctrine?". The answers to these questions are based on the beliefs of the investigator and the nature of the religions involved. This can make the quest for universal principles which describe the phenomenon of syncretism very difficult.

"Syncretism, as understood in anthropology is any synthesis of two or more culturally diverse beliefs or practices especially if of a religious character. In as much as it is a synthesis, syncretism is a terminal process."²²

However, he offered a more precise definition which evaluates that synthesis. He wrote that syncretism was "a combination of beliefs and practices that are theologically untenable."²³

It is important to notice one more distinction which Luzbetak made. Syncretism, as was noted in the introduction, can refer to both a process and the product of that process. In describing the process of syncretism itself, he stated that the process might be terminal or intermediate. By this is meant that, in the first case, the process combines theologically incompatible practices and concepts, and results in a contradictory amalgamation. The intermediate process involves the adding and replacing of practices and concepts over time, but moving toward a "pure" result. At points along the timeline of the process, there may be mixed incompatible ideas, but these elements are gradually replaced until a pure faith is the result.²⁴

²²Luzbetak, 360.

²³Ibid., 360.

²⁴Ibid., 370.

Perhaps one more distinction can be made. Alan Tippett²⁵ has recognized that much that has been broadly labelled syncretism can be separated into two categories. The first category he suggested is comprised of unions altering basic theological content. The second category is comprised of unions altering the ways in which beliefs are expressed. Tippett's illustration of the second category is "the singing of, say, a western Calvinistic theology in an unfamiliar chant to a drumbeat previously used only for pagan dances."²⁶ For Tippett the term syncretism only should apply to those unions which result in "...confusion in the essential content, the metaphysical, the theological, for the fusion of belief systems so that the supracultural gospel is contaminated, leaving us with a new kind of animism."²⁷ This would be the unions of the first category. As is apparent from the statement above, Tippett believes in a "core" of truth which is absolute, and distinguishable from the cultural means of expressing that truth. That is, he believes that there are values and standards which are found in the biblical text, and that can

²⁵Alan Tippett served twenty years as a missionary in Fiji and from 1966-1977 taught at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is now retired.

²⁶Alan Tippett, "Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?" Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity, ed. Charles Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena California: William Carey Library, 1979): 404.

²⁷Ibid., 404.

be discovered and extracted from their Old or New Testament backgrounds. These can be applied to any and every time and culture with equal authority. This is, by no means, accepted by all missiologists, and this would cause many to question his methods for distinguishing these two categories. However, the distinction, taken generally, may be useful: some combinations fundamentally change the basic beliefs while other combinations simply express these beliefs differently. One must determine at what point the line is to be drawn where the methods of communicating the message begin to change the content of the message.

ii. Three Categories of Syncretism

Schreiter saw many problems with too rigidly defining syncretism. Alternatively, he offered three categories of the kind of phenomenon which are, for him, clearly syncretistic. These categories describe the ways that two faiths can combine syncretistically. These can serve as models to aid the reader in forming his/her concept of syncretism.²⁸

1) The first category comprised instances where Christianity and another tradition have come together to form a new reality, with the other tradition providing the basic framework. Schreiter cited various combinations of

²⁸Ibid., 146-148.

West African religion and Christianity which are found throughout the Caribbean and South America. The most well known of these groups are the Voodoo cults which incorporate many elements of Catholic tradition into traditional African rituals and practices.

2) A second category grouped together phenomena where Christianity provides the framework for the syncretistic system, but it has been reinterpreted and reshaped substantially. Schreiter noted that this is usually done outside of any dialogue with what would be considered orthodox Christianity. An example offered in this category was the Independant Churches in Africa. Schreiter wrote, "Throughout Africa, men and women have had visions that have caused them to found a church. There is generally a heavy use of Christian elements."²⁹ Utilizing ritual practices borrowed from African Traditional Religion, and emphasizing healings and miracles, these churches have attracted thousands of followers.

Now it might be profitable to interject a caution at this point; because of the independant nature of these churches, the degree of syncretism varies. Some churches may be largely orthodox while others might be Christian only in name.

3) The third category is comprised of situations where

²⁹Ibid., 147.

selected elements of Christianity are incorporated into another system. The Japanese interest in things western, provided this illustration. Schreiter noted how the popularity of Christian weddings have resulted in many Japanese receiving Christian instruction and baptism, in order to have a Christian wedding. However, most have no intention to practise Christianity.

iii. Identifying Cultural Characteristics Which Encourage Syncretism.

Using as a case study an autobiography of a small village peasant from Latin America, Tippett drew out four "anthropological concepts." He hoped these would provide some insight into what syncretism is and how it can occur. Like Schreiter, Tippett seemed to feel it was best to begin with an example of what can be clearly identified as syncretism. Tippett proceeded to explain the cultural characteristics which led to the development of syncretism. It must be noted, in fairness to Tippett, that he stated that time limited him to only four, and that the subject was hardly exhausted. Now, although Tippett's illustration is from twentieth century Latin America, he stressed that these experiences and obstacles are applicable to many cultures throughout the history of Christianity. (This author would suggest that these are applicable to early Israelite

religious culture.)³⁰ Tippett listed the four characteristics of cultures that can lead to syncretism as:

- 1) The Capacity of Cohesive Cultural Complexes for Survival
- 2) The Orientation of Mythical Thinking and Belief
- 3) The Demand for a Therapeutic System
- 4) The Notion of the Living Dead³¹

- 1) The Capacity of Cohesive Cultural Complexes for Survival

Tippett noticed in his study that even after the acceptance of Christianity, old practices continued to survive. And along with these practices, related older ideas and beliefs continued to exist. Tippett recounted from the autobiography:

"Three hours later the sky grew bright and the sun came up behind the mountains. My mother put some coals into a clay incense burner and went out to greet the first rays of the sun. She dropped some pieces of copal into the burner, knelt down to kiss the ground, and begged the sun to protect us and give us health."³²

This Tippett interpreted as obvious sun worship by people who

³⁰Ibid., 407. See also Alan Tippett, Introduction to Missiology (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1987), chp 20: "Testing History by Church Growth Theory: People Movements of the Middle Ages". Here Tippett elaborates on the theory that Church history needs to be reexamined in light of the present understandings of religious change and people movements.

³¹Ibid., 407.

³²Ibid., 407. P. 47 in the autobiography itself.

would call themselves Christians. The point which he wished to make is that syncretism might not be just an intermingling of beliefs. In the example he used of sun worship, these rituals were continued alongside Christianity much as they had for centuries. No contradiction was seen between the old and new beliefs and practices; they continued in separate corners of the worshipper's life. Thus, many such compartments might continue within the convert's life, some Christian and some non-Christian, without the convert seeing any discrepancy.

2) The Orientation of Mythical Thinking and Belief

Tippett wrote, "...no part of a religion of a people shows up its basic animism more quickly than its mythology-- in other words, its faith formulation."³³ Here the results of the fusing of Christianity and the previous religious faith are Tippett's focus. He recounted a rather garbled account of the life of Christ which made the point that the former perspectives of the convert will affect how he/she hears the new message. Tippett recounted the "confessional" statement from Juan:

"He tells us that the Saviour watches over people on the road. He died of a cross to save the wayfarer from the Jews, whom he equates with devils, and who were cannabalistic. Originally the sun was as cold as the moon, but it grew warmer when the Holy Child was born. He was the son of a virgin among the Jews, who sent her

³³Ibid., 408.

away because they knew the Child would bring light. St. Joseph took her to Bethlehem where the child was born. The sun grew warmer and the day brighter. The demons ran away and hid in the mountain ravines. Their activity was confined to night, because the Saviour watches over the day, for the sun is the eye of God. After three days the Holy Child started work as a carpenter...."³⁴.

In this case the old orientation toward mythology and storytelling caused the new converts to "convert" the Christian gospel and creeds into forms with which they were comfortable, and which would deal with issues which were of concern to them. They filled in "gaps" with information from their previous mythologies while the basic framework of this "gospel" story is derived from traditional Christian teachings.

3) The Demand for a Therapeutic System

The theories regarding sickness were for Tippett means of discerning whether syncretism has taken place within a particular culture. Tippett recounted:

"Each person has a chulel (a representative animal in the mountains) which shares his fortunes-- health, sickness, fatness, hunger and so on. Some hostile chulels prey on those of ordinary people, that the latter sicken. If a demon ties up a chulel, the person whose chulel it is sickens. The ilol [the individual represented by the animal] has to sacrifice a rooster to untie the chulel and set it him free..."the following prayer is offered: Holy Earth, Holy Heaven; Lord God, God the Son, ...take charge of me and represent me; see my work, see my struggles, see my

³⁴Ibid., 408.

sufferings. I place the tribute in your hands..."³⁵ In this illustration there has been an intergration of shamanistic practices and Christian theology, though the latter seems to be little more than an added afterthought. Tippett believed that the Christian faith, originally brought to these people, failed to address this very important felt need within the community. It opened the door for syncretism to occur. When a community has a need which is not perceived to be met by the new faith, it will look elsewhere for solutions. It may not reject the new faith but will add to it the solutions which it uncovers or retains from an earlier system.

4) The Notion Of The Living Dead

"Does Christianity offer a credible 'eschatology' to the new converts?" This is an important issue for the missionary who wishes to prevent the occurrence of syncretism according to Tippett. The idea of the perpetuating existence of the dead is vital to the structure of community, family and inheritance in many cultures and a faith which cannot offer a meaningful alternative will be resisted. As in the example used by Tippett, such questions are not abstract; to ignore the dead would be little

³⁵Ibid., 410. This and the detailed account of the ritual of sacrifice make it plain that the theory of sickness was essentially unchanged with the conversion to Christianity except for the object of the appeal for divine assistance.

different than ignoring one's living family. Tippett recorded:

"`Everything is the same as when I was little', says Juan, when I die and my spirit comes back here, it will find the same paths I walked when I was alive, and it will recognize my house'." ³⁶

These four characteristics of cultures can lead to syncretistic combinations like the three categories outlined by Schreiter above. These definitions, types of combinations and cultural characteristics contributing to syncretism, shall provide some criteria for identifying syncretism in the Psalter.

Contextualization

There may be an alternative understanding of the nature of these Canaanite elements in the Psalter. There is another process that can take place when faith must cross from one cultural setting to another. This process is contextualization.

i. Definition

Defined at the simplest level, something which is contextualized is "in, relating to, determined by, or conformed to a context."³⁷ Contextualization is the

³⁶Ibid., 412.

³⁷Webster's 3rd ed.

process of making something contextual. In the narrower use of Missions studies, contextualization is concerned specifically with issues of faith and practice. Stephen Bevans defines the contextualization of theology as "the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context."³⁸ Louis J. Luzbetak suggests that "Contextualization, although always based on Scripture, nonetheless utilizes as much as possible local symbols, genres, and media, especially such that have the greatest impact on a given society."³⁹ The latter definition is useful, in that it conveys the sense of contextualization as being a form of communication. There is something that has to be communicated within the particular culture or context. The former definition is broader, in that it does not presuppose any theological understandings of the nature and content of Christian faith. In other words, it neither attempts to define that which needs to be communicated nor suggests the source of that which needs to be communicated. The importance of this will become apparent, as various models of contextualization are presented below.

These definitions, and the models to be discussed, focus on the communicating of Christian faith in twentieth

³⁸Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 1.

³⁹Luzbetak, 83.

century contexts. They also can be applied to the analysis of past communication of Israelite faith in a Palestinian context. This is possible, because the same types of questions are being asked. For instance: "How can the faith that was essential to the community of Israel in the wilderness remain relevant to the community making a transition to a settled agricultural life, and then later to a monarchy?" Charles Kraft, in considering this task of making faith relevant within other contexts, wrote: "Theology when it is perceived as irrelevant is in fact irrelevant."⁴⁰

Israel needed to have a relevant faith, and in part this was the task of the Psalmist. By examining how the Psalmist sought to make his/her faith relevant, one may discover if the process might have been one of contextualization. If the Psalmist made his faith relevant by contextualizing it, then the next step is to ask, "Can it be determined how the Psalmist chose to contextualize his faith?"

ii. Models of Contextualization

When discussing the task of communicating from one context to another in a relevant manner, the question is naturally raised: "How does one create theology which is

⁴⁰Kraft, Christianity in Culture, 296.

truly contextualized?" There is no real consensus, but there is a variety of proposals based on different presuppositions. These proposals are often set up as "blueprints" or "models" which help one understand how each approach works. Since this study does not propose to determine which approach is best for contemporary missions, but rather which approach, if any, the Psalmist used, it is necessary to briefly present the most common and pertinent models.

Stephen Bevans has introduced what he described as five models of contextualization which are representative of the principle approaches.⁴¹ Bevans adopts the definition of model, proposed by Avery Dulles, as "a relatively simple, artificially constructed case which is found to be useful and illuminating for dealing with realities that are more complex and differentiated."⁴² Bevans states that these are descriptive models, that is, they describe ideals but are not complete in what they say about reality. They are

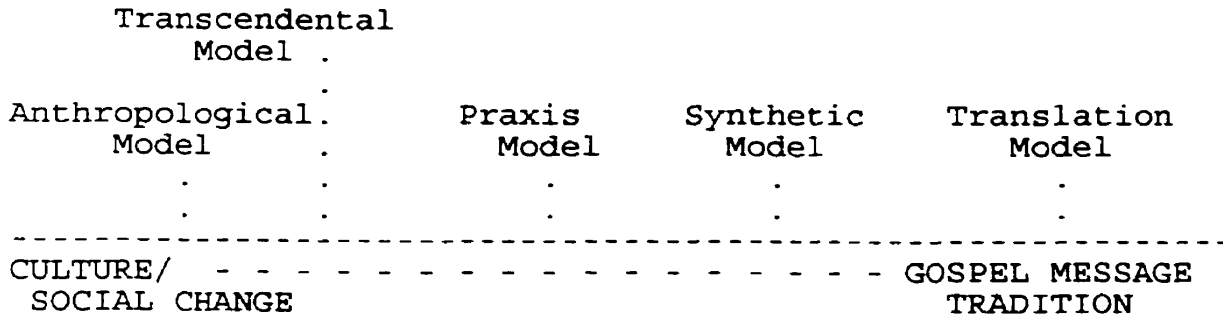
⁴¹The titles for these approaches are Bevans and others would title them differently. Others would also arrange this spectrum of approaches differently. The use of Bevans here is not a particular endorsement of his titles or arrangements although when searching for a structure from which to proceed, Bevans appeared best suited to the task a hand and seemed to fairly present the diversity which exists when discussing contextualization.

⁴²Bevans, 24.

"models of operation, models of theological method."⁴³ The models will be presented individually with a definition, underlying presuppositions, and examples proposed by those Bevans identified as proponents of each of the approaches.

Below is a diagram which Bevans used to communicate how these models relate to each other. The farther to the right one moves, the greater priority is given to the role of Scripture and the church's traditional teachings in shaping contextual theology. The farther to the left, the greater the role of the culture itself in shaping the contextual theology. The following is the core of his diagram:

core of A Map of Models of Contextual Theology⁴⁴



A) The Translation Model

1. Description

The Translation Model, as Bevans describes it, is much more than simply translating biblical truth word for word. Bevans explains this model with reference to Charles Kraft's

⁴³Bevans, 27.

⁴⁴Ibid., 27.

discussion of the Dynamic Equivalence Model of translation. Kraft argues that any translation which requires the reader to bring substantial knowledge of the original language to the text or requires the assistance of experts, is an inadequate translation. The goal of the translators then is "to produce translations that are so true to both the message of the original source documents and the normal ways of expressing such a message in the receptor language that the hearers/readers can, by employing their own interpretational reflexes, derive the proper meaning."⁴⁵ The translator is concerned with faithfulness to the exact words of the text, but also desires to put it into the everyday words (and ideas) of the people. This approach asks "what is the closest equivalent concept in this culture?" This also can apply to the production of theology. For Kraft "theologizing, like all Christian communication, must be directed to someone if it is to serve its purpose. It cannot simply be flung out into thin air."⁴⁶

2. Presuppositions

There are, however, a number of important presuppositions behind this model. Bevens describes the key presupposition of this model as the belief that the

⁴⁵Kraft, 269.

⁴⁶Ibid., 297.

essential message of Christianity is supracultural. There must exist a core of truth which is independent of, and stands above all cultures. A second presupposition is the belief that this core of truth can be separated from the means used to express it. There is debate however over how to determine this essential core. What is the essential truth and what are the cultural trappings? In any event, the application of this approach remains the same: first separate the core from the cultural ways of communicating, and then re-express it in the ways of communicating relevant to the audience.

This model's proponents also presuppose that this core is not only definable but absolute, unchanging and authoritative. The implications of this are apparent in the statements from the Lausanne Covenant and Manila Manifesto which Bevans noted:

"Culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture...The Gospel does not presuppose the authority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness and insists on moral absolutes in every culture." also "We must understand the context in order to address it, but the context must not be allowed to distort the Gospel."⁴⁷

3. Example

Hesselgrave and Rommen outline an approach which they

⁴⁷Bevans, n.20, 122.

believe balances faithfulness and meaningfulness⁴⁸. They demonstrated this approach by applying to communication of the Gospel message in a Chinese context. The illustration was of a tract which had been literally translated into Chinese for use in Hong Kong. They outlined a variety of difficulties which range from cultural insensitivity to the use of ideas which, although understood by Westerners, would convey different and even contradictory concepts to Chinese readers. It did not respond to Chinese felt needs. The alternative built upon the experience of new parenthood and the obligations which this entails. The new baby needs more than care for its physical life, it also needs spiritual care. This begins with the condition of the spiritual life of the parents. The door is now opened for the gospel presentation which is concrete-rational, as the Chinese tend to think, and answers real questions which the Chinese are asking. The gift of New Life offered through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God, is still presented, though there is no need for substantial proof-texting since most Chinese are not biblically literate enough for this to be helpful. Notice that the gospel has not changed though its approach has been adapted.

⁴⁸David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, Contextualization: Meanings, Methods and Models (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 222-224.

b) The Anthropological Model

1. Description

Bevans described this model as being anthropological in two principle ways: first, by centering on the value and goodness of the 'anthropos', the human person, and second, by its use of the insights of the social science of anthropology. This model proposes that "it is within every person, and every society and culture, that God manifests the divine presence, and so theology is not just a matter of relating an external message- however supracultural- to a particular situation."⁴⁹ One, then, is not to bring something to that context but to discover the hidden presence of God. This model also attempts to understand the particular context of the audience: the meanings and relationships, so that the God can be seen in them and thus theology will be true and faithful to that culture.

2. Presuppositions

This model holds that human nature and therefore human culture is good, holy, and valuable. The Bible is itself not understood as divinely inspired but thoroughly conditioned by the western cultural and sociopolitical concerns. Here Bevans makes a distinction between what he describes as redemption-centered theology and creation-centered theology, like this model.

⁴⁹Bevans, 48.

Since the theology must be drawn out of the culture, the prime participants must be part of that culture. Additionally, it must be the people, untouched by western models if possible, rather than the theologian who develops this contextualized theology. Where the translation model sought to extract the supracultural "Word of God" from the Biblical text, the anthropological model seeks to uncover the "Word of God" embedded in the culture since creation. The Biblical text and the tradition of the Church are meaningful as illustrations of that "Word" uncovered and nurtured in past cultures.

3. Example

Bevans proposed that an advocate of the position outlined above would be Robert E. Hood, Professor of Church and Society at General Theological Seminary. In one intriguing work, Hood asked the question: "Must God remain Greek?" He contended that the Biblical concepts have been framed in Graeco-Roman forms which are not essential to the faith. He wanted the revelation of God in Jesus Christ to be understood from other perspectives than simply "Greek metaphysics." He wished to discern whether "the thought patterns and worldviews of Afro-cultures can be molds for reconfiguring the Christian vision of God, Jesus Christ, and the Spirit/spirits."⁵⁰

⁵⁰Robert E. Hood, Must God Remain Greek? (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 10.

One area which Hood focused on was African understandings of God, in this case, ideas about a supreme deity even within polytheistic systems. Considering the attributes of God, Hood wished to avoid using Western ideas such as omniscience, instead he pointed out that African Traditional Religion speaks of the God who is "Watcher of Everything" (Burundi), "He who sees all" (Ghana), and "He is not surprised by anything" (Burundi).⁵¹ Tracing through a variety of African concepts, Hood did demonstrate that if these concepts can be used to speak about the Christian God then they would add a new and rich dimension to the faith.

c) The Praxis Model

1. Description

This model attempts to focus on action and activity. Bevans prefers to use this term rather than "liberation model." Though similar in approach, Bevans does not see this model necessarily having liberation themes. The focus must remain on the method. Virginia Fabella is quoted as having outlined four aspects of this model: it is a dynamic process, it combines words and actions, it is open to change, and it looks to the future.⁵² It recognizes that

⁵¹Ibid., 129.

⁵²Bevans, 63. Virginia Fabella in the introduction to the Proceedings of the Asian Theological Conference held in Sri Lanka in 1979. Quoted from Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1980), 4.

doing theology is a continual process; cultures do not remain the same but grow and change. This model, in recognizing that cultures change, also seeks to play a role in that process of change. God is not seen as much as a God of culture as He is a God of history.

2. Presuppositions

Action must precede words in developing a theology for a context. This theology is not a system of doctrines, as much as it is a way of living. Bevans quotes the concluding statement of one gathering of Third World theologians,

"We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action. We are prepared for a radical break in epistemology which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on praxis of the reality of the Third World."⁵³

It is by reflecting on the action taken, that theology can be made thoroughly a part of the cultural context. Culture, as a part of creation, is seen by the Praxis theologian as essentially good and God's spirit continues to be present in creation and history. Culture can, however, be perverted and might need restoration; an activity, in which, God invites people to join Him.

For the Praxis theologian, "revelation is the presence

⁵³Bevans, 67. Bevans is quoting from the "Final Statement", S. Torres and V. Elizondo, eds., The Emergent Gospel (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978), 269. This statement was made the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, August 5-12, 1976.

of God in history- in the events of everyday life, in social and economic structures, in situations of oppressions."⁵⁴

The process of theology writing, is seen as having three stages: 1) A committed action is undertaken. 2) The action and the situation are reflected upon, and the Bible and Christian traditions are reread, resulting in a theory being formed. This theory is described as a tool, which guides further actions. These actions will be more refined, more biblical and more culturally relevant. 3) This leads to the last step in this cycle, and the first step in a new cycle, which is continued action.

3. Example

Bevans proposed Douglas John Hall as an advocate of this approach. Hall, a professor at McGill University, suggested that the church is in decline due to a crisis in thinking. He wrote, "our faith, however heartwarming it may sometimes have been, has been lacking in intellectual depth- in theology! -and it has seldom been carried into the arena of corporate life."⁵⁵ His task was to describe what it would mean for the Canadian Christian to actively "think" the faith.

Hall offered as his starting point "the theology of the

⁵⁴Bevans, 68.

⁵⁵Douglas John Hall, Thinking The Faith (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 13.

cross" which for him expresses the belief that "God is concerned about the world and shares its fate."⁵⁶ The themes of commitment to the world and the freedom of humanity are important to this belief. He called attention away from the future glory and called the true Christian to be concerned with today and the task at hand. Hall rejected the idea that the Bible contained some absolute and timeless truths which must be contextualized for each culture. Only God is absolute and above culture. The Bible, as statements about God, is thoroughly conditioned by culture and tainted by the limitations and sinfulness of humankind.⁵⁷ Theology is created by the interaction between "God's story of the world" which is approximately but not limited to the Bible, and humankind's stories of itself which is forever changing.⁵⁸ It must be stated that, for Hall, God's story of the world cannot be understood apart from the stories of people. God speaks afresh continually because humankind's stories change. God then is a responder to humans and not an imposer of His will even though He passionately desires to love, free, redeem and restore.⁵⁹ If the ever changing and personal stories of people interact with God's story and

⁵⁶Ibid., 27.

⁵⁷Ibid., 85.

⁵⁸Ibid., 91.

⁵⁹Ibid., 101.

through this God responds to people then theology is already contextual.

d) The Synthetic Model

1. Description

Bevans wrote, "This is the model that tries to balance the insights of each of the three models presented thus far and reaches out to insights from other cultures and ways of thinking."⁶⁰ It has also been called the "dialogical model", the "conversational model", and the "analogical model". Another title, which is perhaps more descriptive of the goal of this model, is the "dialectical model."⁶¹ Movements and beliefs are refined in the context of history and culture. Likewise here, the intent is not to reach a compromise, but to "test" the elements of the essential gospel message, and the traditional doctrines, with the insights of culture, to produce a strong and pure theology. It is more than "translating" the message into that culture's concepts and language, as Bevans noted. The culture guides the whole process and direction of the

⁶⁰ Bevans, 81.

⁶¹This reflects the dialectic of Hegel. Hegel's idea was that theories are proposed to answer particular problems. The theory is called the thesis. The theory would then be refined by means of tests, which would exposed the inadequacies of the thesis. The test was called the antithesis. The thesis, refined after testing, was called the synthesis. This synthesis became the new thesis and the process repeated until the ideal thesis was proposed. Hegel applied this process to historical movements as well.

creating of theology.

2. Presuppositions

There is a belief in both the aspects of a culture which are unique to that culture, and the aspects of a culture which are shared with other cultures. Consider an example Bevens used:⁶² the Indonesian culture has been influenced by the broad aspects of Asian culture. But apart from the parts of its culture which it shares with all Asians, Indonesian culture has aspects which it shares with, specifically, Malaysian culture. Being predominately Muslim, Indonesia shares many aspects of culture which are common to other muslims such as religious beliefs and festivals. Having been colonized by the Netherlands, other aspects of their culture will be strongly influenced by Western European culture such as law and government. There are many aspects which Indonesians share with other cultures. Conversely, there are elements which are purely and distinctly Indonesian. This model holds that it is possible for one to learn, and to borrow from other cultures without giving up what is unique about the borrower's culture. And since every culture has unique features, there is always something to be learned from one's neighbour.

It is believed that some aspects of culture are morally neutral, some are good, and others are bad. Therefore a culture is never to be rejected as totally bad, though one

⁶²Bevens, 83.

might reject bad aspects. It is held that the neutral aspects can be used and developed for either good or evil. An illustration from Canadian culture might be the growing belief in healthy living and physical fitness. This belief and the activities it produces are neither morally good nor evil. The reasons behind this belief (responsible stewardship means taking care of oneself or strength means power) can certainly be good or bad, and the way one achieves that goal can be good or evil (regular exercise and responsible eating habits or obsessive workouts and steroids).

Revelation is seen as having been given through the Scriptures at particular times and in the particular cultures of the biblical world. In that sense it is complete. But revelation, according to this model, is also continuing in and through all cultures. This revelation in culture is said to motivate individuals within that culture toward perfecting that culture. Perhaps in light of this, this model does not require that only those within or outside the culture can develop contextual theology. Both the foreign "experts" and the local community have rolls to play in this process.

2. Example

Kosume Koyama began his approach with waterbuffalos and

sticky rice.⁶³ These things have meaning and relevance to his rural Thailand congregation. The needs of those to whom he presents the gospel are paramount so, for him, theology cannot be done at the table of Martin Luther but in the fields of Thailand if it is to be theology for Thai farmers. Koyama points out how the patterns of nature seem to point to a circular rather than a linear concept of history. This is how Koyama viewed the Thai understanding of life and how life should be lived. He wrote, "There is always a second, third, fourth, fifth... chance for man and nature to accomplish what they intended to do...Remember no case is a terminal case!" There is a sense of peace and tranquility which results from this perspective. Now introduce into this situation the Bible with its very linear, once-for-all perspective. For the Thai, this perspective seems to introduce a tension to life and seems to move counter to the flow of nature itself. Koyama made reference to Psalm 29 which pictures God above nature and its ruler. Nature is not independant of Him but is established by Him.

Koyama's response to the farmer of Thailand is to present a God who has established the cycles of nature. But God does not step back and allow nature to cycle through undisturbed. He invades history again and again so that each day is not the same. There is evil in nature and

⁶³Kosome Koyama, Waterbuffalo Theology (London: SCM Press, 1974), viii.

without such a God, that evil must be accepted along with the good. The God of the Bible is aware of that evil and acts against it. Koyama does not abandon the Bible but begins his theology from the perspective of his Thai congregation. The result is that both perspectives are maintained and "we see the glory of God both in history and in nature. Circular nature shows God's glory as much as linear history."⁴⁴

e) The Transcendental Model

1. Description

The idea behind this model is that what is most needed to do theology is a transformed mind. Using Jesus' parable about new wine in old wineskins (Mk. 2:21-22), Bevans wrote that proponents of this model are less concerned with the product of writing theology as they are concerned with the state of the one producing the theology. There is a need to turn away from any quest to find truth "out there" and look at oneself to discover what is real.

2. Presuppositions

One cannot do contextual theology by studying texts or cultures. The starting point transcends the gospel message, the traditions, and even the culture. The concern is with personal religious experience. Bevans wrote,

"From this transcendental starting point, theology is

⁴⁴Ibid., 41.

conceived as the process of bringing 'to speech' who I am as a person of faith who is, in every possible respect, a product of a historical, geographical, social and cultural environment."⁶⁵

Those who use this model seek to understand themselves, their biases, their religious experiences and how their language best articulates these religious experiences. Why is this necessary? Because it is believed that by communicating one's experience, one discovers that others share this seemingly personal and private experience. These experiences touch the souls of others who, regardless of their contexts, share these transcendent experiences.

For this model, revelation is not found in words, traditions or culture but in the personal experiences of individuals. Bevens writes, "revelation is understood as an event, not as content; it is something that happens when a person opens himself or herself to reality."⁶⁶ The goal of revelation is the establishment of relationships between God and His people and this happens by recognizing the voice of the Spirit of God within our hearts. When His ever speaking voice is heard, revelation has occurred.

It is held that the minds of all people are fundamentally the same despite the cultural diversity. Each person processes information the same way and puts together

⁶⁵Bevens, 98.

⁶⁶Ibid., 99.

concepts the same way, though the thoughts and concepts themselves might be different. This process transcends all cultures and communities.

Who then, according to this model, should do contextual theology? Any Christians who are attempting to understand themselves and their own faith experiences, and how to authentically articulate that faith within their own contexts, can and are doing contextual theology.

3. Example

Justo Gonzalez, Adjunct Professor of Theology at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia, applies this model in a manner which is less abstract. Gonzalez described his experiences as a member of, first, a religious and, then, an ethnic minority. He endeavored to demonstrate that many individuals among these minority groups have looked into the pages of Scripture and the theology of the Church and found little place for themselves as women or Afro-Americans or Native Americans etc. What Gonzalez hoped to do was to call attention to those who have not abandoned the Scriptures but have looked at them through their own eyes as, for instance, Hispanics, and not through Anglo-American eyes. He wrote,

"Among women and the various ethnic minorities, there are also an increasingly significant number of people who believe that when one reads Scripture correctly, one comes out with different conclusions- conclusions that are both liberating and true to the biblical

message."⁶⁷

Here is his starting point. If indeed these perspectives result in valid understandings of Scripture, then what can be determined about the commonalities shared by this minority perspective? What are the characteristics of this perspective which would permit the formulation of an Hispanic theology? Gonzales examined a variety of common characteristics of the religious worldview of Hispanics. The Catholic heritage provides a distinctive background to Hispanic thought even among those who were not raised Catholic. And as Gonzales pointed out, the Catholicism of Hispanics is not and never was the Catholicism of Anglos. The matrix of language, history (with its poverty and suffering) and religion have all shaped a unique worldview which must by its nature approach Scripture and faith differently.

⁶⁷Justo Gonzales, Manana: Christian Theology From a Hispanic Perspective (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 26.

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CHAPTER THREE

EVALUATING THE PSALMS

In the previous chapter the concepts of syncretism and an alternative classification, contextualization, have been considered. That study will provide the criteria by which the relevant ideas and motifs in the Psalms texts will be evaluated. As stated in the introduction, it is certain that, in their personal and national life, many Israelites did worship many gods. Some of these gods were perhaps from the time of their ancestors, and other gods were new to them. The question that must be asked is: over and against that mixing of faiths in Israel's daily life, was there a "faith of Israel" which remained independent and "pure"?

The Psalms will serve as the product of the process of writing relevant theology for Israel. The texts of Ugarit will serve as examples of the type of Canaanite literature that perhaps influenced the Psalm writings. What remains to be proposed is the theology of Israel possessed by the psalmists as they approached the writing of the Psalms. To some extent, this will be done both by comparing and contrasting individual biblical and Ugaritic texts and by comparing and contrasting broader themes and motifs in the two collections of texts.

It must be said that there is early evidence that the

Israelite community did possess authoritative religious texts which were essential to the formation of their theology. The psalm writers were not writing in an environment devoid of Israelite theological ideas. The Hebrew Bible, even as it was still developing as an authoritative body of literature, provided a source of truth and the foundation for what was considered the historical faith of Israel. This idea has been demonstrated by Roger J. Beckwith who traced the practice of setting aside certain texts within holy places. He argued that by "laying up" these texts, the early Israelites indicated that they possessed an early idea of official canonical documents.⁶⁸ By this he means texts which are affirmed by the faith community as valuable for faith and practise. Beckwith suggested that what gave these texts their status as sacred was either their origin, their subject matter or perhaps both of these reasons.⁶⁹ The extent of the use of these texts is difficult to determine for the earliest periods. Nevertheless, there is certainly the belief that these texts originated, in some manner, from God. The introductory formulas affixed to texts such as the Ten Commandments: "Now God spoke all these words saying..." (Exod 20:1) and the use of divine speeches in the first person confirm this idea.

⁶⁸Beckwith, 41.

⁶⁹Ibid., 42.

This would indicate that these texts themselves were considered holy and played some special role. Beckwith wrote:

"The earliest Israelite examples are those concerning the tables of the Ten commandments and the book of Deuteronomy, laid up, respectively, in and beside the Ark of the Covenant inside the Tabernacle (Exod 25:16, 21; 40:20; Deut 10:1-5; 31:24-6); the record of Joshua's covenant with the people, written in a copy of the book of the Law at the sanctuary at Shechem (Josh 24:26); and Samuel's account of the manner of the kingdom, laid up before the Lord, apparently at the sanctuary at Mizpah (1 Sam 10:25)."⁷⁰

This tradition of storing up sacred writings continued into the Second Temple Period and it would be within the Temples that these sacred writings would be safeguarded. These laid up writings were also now available for the use of the Priests and Levites who both taught the people and led them in worship. Certainly by the end of the period of composition of the individual Psalms, in the post-exilic period, substantially more texts had been laid up in similar fashion and had entered regular use.

It is apparent that there existed within Israel, at its earliest stages as a nation prior to and during the monarchy, some corpus of theological truth; sacred documents laid up in the centers of worship. From the nature of the first texts, said to have been laid up as holy, certain

⁷⁰Roger J. Beckwith, "Formation of the Hebrew Bible", Mikra: Text, Translation, reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, ed. Martin an Mulder (Philedelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 41.

theological beliefs of the Israelite people are evident. Consider the following accounts of the texts said to have been laid up as Beckwith lists them:

Exod 25:16, 21; 40:20	-The Testimony given by God and stored in the Ark
Deut 10:1-5	-Ten Commandments
Deut 31:24-26	-Book of the Law stored beside the Ark of the Covenant
Josh 24:26	-The covenant written in the Book of the Law of God stored at Shechem
1 Sam 10:25	-Samuel's account of the manner of the Kingdom stored up at sanctuary at Mizpah ⁷¹
1 Kgs 8:9; 2 Chr 5:7-10	-Tablets in Ark from covenant at Horeb transferred to the Temple
2 Kgs 22:8; 23:2, 24	-The Book of the Law found in the Temple

The texts above each relate to the covenant relationship which existed between Israel and its God, and the kingly obligations under God's rule. The act of covenant making and the nature of the covenants are central to the theology of Israel during the time of the composition of the Psalter. These ideas of covenant are rooted in the uniquely Israelite experiences of the Exodus and Sinai. These influences will be considered at a later point in the consideration of Psalm 82, in particular. The theology of covenant based on the unique experiences of Israel, the particular relationship

⁷¹The nature of this document is difficult to determine. It has been suggested that this "is the right which regulated the earthy monarchy in the theocracy, and determined the duties and rights of the human king in relation to Jehovah the divine King on the one hand and the nation on the other." Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on Joshua, Judges, Ruth and 1&2 Samuel (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 108.

with its deity, and the independent tradition of sacred texts which recorded this theology, all distinguish Israel as a distinct religious community apart from that of the Canaanites. The distinctiveness of these elements will be explored below.

The Psalter, as it developed, played an important part in the corporate and personal worship of the people of Israel. However, the Psalms appear also to contain many ideas, terms and concepts similar to those found in the Canaanite literature of Ugarit. Can it then be said that this shows that this portion of the standard of the faith was open to the inclusion of Canaanite beliefs and practises? If so, then how far did the Psalm writers take this including of Canaanite ideas? Far enough to perhaps significantly alter that which was called the faith of Israel? This chapter must consider what was included and how it might have affected the beliefs, concepts and practices of Israel.

PSALM 29:

Psalm 29 has been called "A Hymn to God's Glory"⁷² which described its function, and "The Psalm of Seven

⁷²Peter C. Graigie, Psalms 1-50 , Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983), 241.

Thunders"⁷³ which described its contents. Perhaps its most controversial title has been Dr. H.L. Ginsberg's "A Pheonician Hymn".⁷⁴ Ginsberg's hypothesis was that Psalm 29 was originally a Pheonician hymn which had been adapted for the worship of Yahweh. The bases of this hypothesis have been summarized as:

- 1) The pagan notions in the Psalm,
- 2) The Pheonician nature of the toponomy and topography,
- 3) The Canaanite linguistic features and
- 4) The formula of Baal's victory.⁷⁵

Though many support the hypothesis of a Canaanite origin of this Psalm (Gaster, Cross, Dahood, etc.), others like Peter Craigie feel the evidence is insufficient to arrive at such a conclusion. Rather than speak about it as having been borrowed and adapted, Craigie prefers to speak only of it as having been influenced by Canaanite poetry⁷⁶. Loren R.

⁷³C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, vol.5 Psalms (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrikson Publ., 1989), 366.

⁷⁴H.L. Ginsberg, "A Pheonician Hymn in the Psalter" Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti (Roma, 1935), 472-476, cited by Mitchell Dahood, Psalms I, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1966), 175.

⁷⁵Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 244. See also for a brief history of this hypothesis: Craigie, TB 20:15-19.

⁷⁶Craigie, "The Poetry of Israel and Ugarit" TB, 28-30.

Fisher has presented a compilation of nine word pairs found in the texts of Ugarit which are also found in Psalm 29. The use of parallelism, that is, the use of words that complement and contrast with each other in consecutive lines of poetry, is perhaps the chief characteristic of Hebrew poetry and Semitic poetry, in general.⁷⁷ Fisher interpreted the presence of these Canaanite word pairs as indicating that this psalm was indeed adapted directly from a Canaanite original.⁷⁸ Evaluating these parallels, one discovers that many are inconclusive. Yet others add weight to the argument for Canaanite influences in Psalm 29. However this matter is decided, the question which must be answered below is whether that influence is enough to constitute syncretism or contextualization.

In each of the following analyses, the words of the Hebrew text will be written with English consonants and without the vowel markings. There will also be an English translation accompanying it. In the case of the Ugarit texts cited, there will be a similar style of transliteration and English translation.

⁷⁷Wilfred G. E. Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1984), 114.

⁷⁸Loren R. Fisher, ed., Ras Shamra Parallels (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1972), vol.I, 352. See note 545, h.

Psalm 29

- 1 mzmr ldwd
 hbw lYHWH bny 'lym
 hbw lYHWH kbwd w`z:
 2 hbw lYHWH kbwd wśm
 hśthww lYHWH bhdr̄t-qdś:
 3 ql YHWH `l-hmym
 'l-hkbwd hr`ym
 YHWH `l-mym rbym:
 4 ql-YHWH bkh
 ql YHWH bhdr̄:
 5 ql YHWH śbr 'rzym
 wyśbr YHWH 't-'rzy hlbwnn:
 6 wyrqydm kmw-`gl lbnwn
 wśryn kmw bn-r'mym:
 7 ql-YHWH hşb lhbwt 'ś:
 8 ql YHWH yhyl mdr̄
 yhyl YHWH mdr̄ qdś:
 9 ql YHWH yhwll 'ylwt
 wyhōp y`rwt
 wbhwklw klw 'mr kbwd:
 10 YHWH lmbwl yśb
 wyśb YHWH mlk l`wlm:
 11 YHWH `z l`mw ytn
 YHWH ybrk 't-`mw bślwm:

Translation:

- 1 a psalm of David
 Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of God/gods,
 Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name.
 Worship the LORD in holy attire.
 3 The voice of the LORD is upon the waters.
 The God of glory thunders.
 The LORD is upon the mighty waters.
 4 The voice of the LORD is powerful;
 The voice of the LORD is majestic.

- 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars,
and the LORD breaks up the cedars of Lebanon.
6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
- 7 The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of
lightning.
- 8 The voice of the LORD makes the desert writhe;
The LORD makes the holy desert writhe.
9 The voice of the LORD makes hinds writhe in travail,
and He strips bare the forests.

But in His temple, everyone is saying: "Glory!"

- 10 The LORD sat enthroned over the flood,
and the LORD will sit enthroned as king for ever.
- 11 The LORD will give protection to His people;
The LORD will bless His people with peace."

THE CENTRAL FIGURE OF PSALM 29: YAHWEH (THE LORD)

If the hypothesis of those such as Ginsberg is correct, the name of the Israelite god, Yahweh, has replaced the name, Baal/Hadad, in the Canaanite original of this Psalm. If this was the case, then the original Psalm depicted the Divine Warrior Baal standing amidst the assembly of the god, El, who headed the pantheon of Ugarit. The term "'lym" in verse 1 which has the plural suffix "m", will be assumed to be translated as the singular term "el/god". The rationale for this translation, rather than the plural form "gods", will be discussed below, in the examination of the phrase "bny 'lym" (sons of God/gods).

1. Is "el" a personal name?

This study will begin with the phrase "the sons of

El/el (god or God)". An issue to be addressed is whether this use of the name "el" should be considered a personal name, as it was used in the Ugaritic texts, where it referred distinctly to the deity "El", or rather should be understood as simply the name of a being which is designated as "god". In contemporary Judeo-Christian thought, the general term, "god" is used as a proper name usually without noting the distinction. Here more precision is required.

Now in both the biblical texts and Ugaritic texts, the term "el" may be both a proper name and the general name of a divine being. It is necessary here to understand how a Canaanite hymn might have used it. Cross has noted that, "while 'il may be used, of course, as an appellation of deity, for example in such an expression as 'il Haddu, 'the god Haddu,' such usage is relatively rare. In mythic texts, in epic texts, in pantheon lists and temple records, Il is normally a proper name."⁷⁹ Cross calls attention to the work of Marvin H. Pope who also explored this question, and also concluded that, in the majority of cases, the term applied to a specific deity, namely El, the head of the pantheon.⁸⁰ Thus, if a Canaanite original existed, the reference probably would have been to "sons" of El, a

⁷⁹Cross, 13.

⁸⁰Marvin H. Pope, El in the Ugaritic Texts, Suppl. to *Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955), 6.

specific deity. It would further be concluded that in any Canaanite original that the Divine Warrior Baal was distinguished from the deity, El.

2. Who is El in relation to Yahweh?

Now in Psalm 29 it must be asked: what relationship existed between Yahweh and El? Smith has contended that, "the original god of Israel was El."⁸¹ Yahweh was later identified with El and El's attributes. He provides a number of proofs of the original worship of El, though most are unconvincing. Perhaps the most problematic is the text of Deuteronomy 32:8-9, which Smith proposed indicated that Yahweh was a son of the god, Elyon. The text, as he rendered it, is as follows:

"When the Most High (Elyon) gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated humanity, he fixed the boundaries of peoples For Yahweh's portion is his people, according to the number of divine beings. Jacob his allotted heritage."⁸²

Elyon is depicted, in this translation, as establishing the nations, and giving them each to a god as an inheritance. As Cross suggested, the name, Elyon, should be considered an epithet of the god, El. He wrote, "such epithets expand and contract in a variety of lengths

⁸¹Smith, 7.

⁸²Smith, 7.

suitable to metrical form in orally composed poetry."⁸³

One of these gods receiving his allotment is Yahweh, and his inheritance is the nation of Israel.

There are a number of difficulties in this translation which Smith has chosen only to mention in an endnote. The Masoretic Text tradition does not retain the phrase "bny 'lm" (sons of El) but rather "bny yśr'l" (sons of Israel). The Greek Septuagint has the phrase "the angels of God" and a text from Qumran has "bny 'lhym" (sons of Elohim). There is additional support, from the translation of Symmachus and the Old Latin, that the Qumran reading may be an older and perhaps original reading. Michael Fishbane has included this citation among those he considers to be "pious revisions and theological addenda".⁸⁴ Fishbane's argument is that the change to the reading, in the Masoretic Text tradition, was an intentional move to eliminate apparent pagan notions in the biblical text. However, he fails to discuss what theological considerations would have given rise to this new reading of "sons of Israel". That the wording of this text had been revised to prevent misinterpretation is not unlikely; that it was revised without regard for the current understanding of this passage

⁸³Cross, 52.

⁸⁴Michael Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 69.

is unlikely. (The interpretations of these passages will be taken up below.) Smith's reconstruction made a variety of assumptions about the original text and the nature of the "sons of Elohim". He also ignored the most obvious intention of later editors and translators to indicate that this passage was not to be understood in the manner which Smith is proposing. Assuming that the Qumran reading is the more original, the passage could indicate the belief in the idea of some form of angelic guardian over each nation, as the Septuagint reading suggests. But, as J.A. Thompson pointed out, the emphasis is on Israel's special status, not the commonality it possessed with other nations. Thompson writes, "In any case, Israel recieved special treatment, for Yahweh chose her for Himself."⁸⁵ It was not then an angelic guardian, but the Creator himself who is their guardian. Smith's reconstruction presupposes his conclusion, and has far too many difficulties with it. These arguments fail to provide a solid case that Yahweh and El(ohim) were not considered the same.

3. Was El always identified with Yahweh?

It has been proposed that the biblical text itself states that there existed a time when Yahweh, as a name of

⁸⁵J.A. Thompson, Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary (Downers Grove, Illinios: Intervarsity Press, 1974), 299.

Israel's god, was unknown to Israel. In Exodus 6:2-4 it is recorded:

"And God (Elohim) spoke to Moses and said to him, 'I am the LORD (Yahweh). I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty (El Shaddai), but by My name LORD (Yahweh) I was not known to them. I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings, in which they were strangers.'"

In addition to this account, it is recorded three chapters earlier at the burning bush, in Exodus 3:13,

"Moses said to God (Elohim), 'When I come the children of Israel and say to them, "The God (Elohi) of your fathers has sent me to you," and they say to me, "what is his name?" what shall I say?'"

At first reading this seems to indicate that the name Yahweh was unknown to Israel, and that the usages of that name by the patriarchs in Genesis (e.g. Gen. 14:22) were later interpolations into the text. This was Smith's contention. He wrote, "this passage reflects the fact that Yahweh was unknown to the patriarchs. Rather they worshipped the Canaanite god El."⁸⁶ However, Nahum Sarna has provided a better understanding of these texts. He wrote,

"God's response to Moses' query cannot be the disclosure of a hitherto unknown, for that would be unintelligible to the people and would not resolve Moses' dilemma. However taken with the statement in 6:3, the implication is that the divine name YHWH only came into prominence as the characteristic personal name of the God of Israel in the time of Moses."⁸⁷

⁸⁶Smith, 8.

⁸⁷Nahum Sarna, Exodus, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 18.

The "I am" formula was used in royal inscriptions, according to Sarna, to enhance the credibility of a promise. Umberto Cassuto, in support of the same interpretation, offers this explanation: "Such a formula was customary in the ancient East in the declarations of kings, when proclaiming their deeds and their might, as their inscriptions testify."⁸⁸ He offered particular examples of this formula, such as "I am Mesha, son of Chemosh....king of Moab..." The use of the "I am" formula with an unknown name would then undermine rather than confirm a promise. Sarna contended that what was new to Israel was not the name, but the significance which was now to be associated with it. Israel's forthcoming experience of the power of God through the Exodus was something unknown to the patriarchs.⁸⁹ Sarna supports this interpretation with two passages from Isaiah 52:6 and Jeremiah 16:21, where it is written that Israel shall learn that God's name is Yahweh through the future manifestations of His power. Brevard Childs has pointed out that Ezekiel 20:5 seems to clearly indicate that Israel understood the revelation of the Divine Name in Exodus as a

⁸⁸U. Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967), 76.

⁸⁹Sarna, 31.

solemn oath committing God to be the LORD of Israel.⁹⁰

This is an important consideration for this study: reference to God(Elohim) by use of the name Yahweh emphasizes His covenant relationship with Israel and the exercise of His saving power. There seems to be insufficient data to demonstrate Smith's claim that, at any point, Yahweh was considered a deity distinct from El, in the faith and practise of Israel.

It can be concluded that in the biblical psalms, including Psalm 29, Yahweh and El are the same deity. This would suggest a distinct theological change from any Canaanite original of this psalm which might have existed. Yahweh stands among the "sons" as king, as Baal did, but He also stands as "Father" of these "sons" unlike Baal.

4) What are the characteristic similarities and differences between the Canaanite El and Yahweh?

Now as Smith demonstrated, Yahweh was described from the earliest accounts using the characteristics and epithets of El. Drawing on the texts of Ugarit, he presents an impressive list of parallels between the characteristics of the biblical Yahweh and Canaanite conception of El. He proposed that El was depicted in the texts of Ugarit as an

⁹⁰Brevard S. Childs, Exodus, OTL (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1974), 115.

elderly bearded figure enthroned sometimes before the individual deities and sometimes before the divine council. Consider the following descriptions of El which Smith cites:

-ageless one "drd{r}", KTU 1.10 III 6

-eternity of his wisdom affirmed, KTU 1.3 V & 1.4 V

-father of years "'ab šnm"

-Asherah addresses El: You are great, O El, and indeed, wise: your hoary beard instructs you, KTU 1.4 V 3-4

Smith contended that this is the image of Yahweh presented in the Hebrew Bible. He offered the following passages to confirm this view:

- 1) That he is an aged patriarchal figure: Ps. 102:28, Job 36:26, Isaiah 40:28, Ps. 90:2,⁹¹ etc.;
- 2) That he is enthroned among the council/before the divine beings: 1 Kgs 22:19, Isa. 6:1-8, Pss. 29:1-2, 82:1 etc.

That parallels can be drawn between biblical conceptions of Yahweh and the Canaanite conceptions of El is significant. It suggests that, at the least, it could be considered acceptable to use imagery, commonly used in Canaanite religion, to describe the God of the Israelite faith. But it is also necessary to examine the characteristics of the Canaanite El which were apparently not acceptable for descriptions of Yahweh. For this, it is helpful to consider Marvin Pope's survey of the conception

⁹¹Smith's list included Ps. 90:10. This appears to be in error. The verse in question is 90:2.

of El in the texts of Ugarit.

Pope divides his study of El in the texts of Ugarit into eleven categories. These are:

- 1) El as nominal king of the gods,
- 2) El as ex-king of the gods?,
- 3) El's seniority and senility,
- 4) El as Bull; His marital relations,
- 5) El's wisdom,
- 6) El as Holy,
- 7) El's temperament,
- 8) The graphic depiction of El,
- 9) El as Father of gods and men,
- 10) The Pantheon, the Assembly, the family of El,
- 11) El as Creator.

There are a number of evident parallels between many of the Ugaritic El's characteristics and those of Yahweh. The concepts of kingship, seniority, wisdom, holiness and the role of creator can be applied to both. But there are also concepts which cannot be applied to Yahweh.

In the Ugaritic texts, El is pictured as declining in his role as king, and being supplanted by Baal. Though El's special status is evident repeatedly (e.g. Baal must obtain El's position in order to establish his palace)⁹², his power and authority as king and lifegiver do not seem to be beyond the grasp of the other deities. Pope has illustrated this by outlining what appears to be the decline of the role of El in the Baal myths, highlighting episodes of apparent cowardice and powerlessness. El's acquiescence to the

⁹²DeMoor, 52.

demands of Prince Sea⁹³ and Anat's threats of bodily violence⁹⁴ are but two examples of this decline. The brazen insolence toward El is seen in the account of the presentation of Sea's demands before the council of the gods presided over by El. The myth stated that:

"Then the messengers of Sea arrived, the envoys of Judge River. They did not fall at the feet of El, did not prostrate themselves in the congregation assembled."

In the accounts of the building of Baal's palace the goddess Anat declares concerning El:

"I shall make sure I drag him like a lamb to the ground, I shall make his grey hair run with blood, the hair of his old age with gore, if he does not give a house to Baal like the other gods have..."

There is no perception of the decline of the kingly status of Elohim/Yahweh in the biblical narrative. His status is pictured as eternal and unchanging:

"The LORD (Yahweh) is king forever and ever; the nations have perished out of His land." (Ps 10:16)

As was noted above, the idea of the seniority of El is well attested in the literature of Ugarit, and these concepts were also applied to Yahweh. But there is here a particular distinction. Pope noted, "the O.T. portrayal of God as ancient probably derives from the tradition of the venerable El, but here also he is ageless and eternal and

⁹³Ibid., 32-33.

⁹⁴Ibid., 15-16.

his antiquity only enhances his majesty."⁹⁵

An important characteristic of the El of Ugarit is his role as the Bull. A common epithet of El is "tr" (Bull) which represents his procreative powers. Marvin Pope pointed out the expression "sons of El" is used in phrases which describe the pantheon of gods in the religion of Ugarit.⁹⁶ This idea of the Fatherhood of El is more than figurative in the texts of Ugarit. As Pope noted "El and his consort Asherah are clearly represented as the parents of the gods who are collectively called the seventy children of Asherah...with the possible exception of Baal, who is commonly called Dagan's son, there is no evidence in the Ugaritic texts that any of the Semitic gods stand outside the family of El."⁹⁷ Although El was also considered the father of humans as well, this seems more figurative and based on the idea that El was the creator (implied by his titles) and the bestower of fertility. Text KTU 1.23⁹⁸ records, in extremely explicit detail, El's seduction of two

⁹⁵Pope, 35.

⁹⁶Marvin Pope El In The Ugaritic Texts Supplement to Vetus Testamentum (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955) 48. Please note the references Pope uses correspond to Virolleaud's (and Gordon's) numbering not Herdner's. Therefore (Viro.) Text 2= (Herd.) Text 32, and (Viro.) Text 107= (Herd.) Text 30.

⁹⁷Ibid., 47.

⁹⁸Herdner, 96-101; DeMoor, 117-128.

young women, suggesting that although the goddess Asherah was his consort, El is not entirely monogamous. The account also describes the conception of divine or semi-divine beings through sexual intercourse.⁹⁹ The offspring of El seem all to share in his divine nature and are described in similar anthropomorphic terms. This is not how Yahweh is understood in the biblical tradition. Though some archaeological evidence has been uncovered suggesting that Asherah was believed to be Yahweh's consort among some groups within Israel,¹⁰⁰ and possibly Anat-Yahu was also associated with Yahweh in some circles,¹⁰¹ there appears no evidence in the biblical texts that Yahweh was ever conceived of as having a consort. There is also no evidence in the biblical text that Yahweh was thought of as procreating. The equivalent Hebrew term "šr" (bull) is never used as an epithet of Yahweh in the biblical record. The creation of a calf image by Aaron, as recorded in Exodus 32,

⁹⁹DeMoor, 125.

¹⁰⁰William Dever, "Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntilet `Ajrud," BASOR 255 (1984): 21-37. See also: D.N. Freedman, "Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah," BA 50 (1987): 241-9.

¹⁰¹W.O.E.Oesterley, The Psalms: Translated with Text-Critical and Exegetical Notes (New York: S.P.C.K., 1955), 374. Oesterley's reference is to Anat-Yahu in the Elephantine Papyrus.

was perhaps intended to associate this idea,¹⁰² but such a representation was harshly condemned. The direction which the Bible develops its concept of God, moves away from the idea of attributing a male gender to Him, though much (but not all) of the references to Him use masculine language and images.

The role of El as Creator is not a prominent theme in the texts of Ugarit. There is no explicit account of his activity of creating, and his status as Creator is largely implied by such titles as "bny bnwt/Creator of Creatures".¹⁰³ Conversely, Pope wrote, "The tradition of YHWH as a Creator God, however, is a prominent feature in the O.T. and YHWH was almost certainly identified with El."¹⁰⁴ Psalm 8 is one of the many accounts which praises Yahweh as the Creator and Lord over that creation: (v.1,3)

"O LORD (Yahweh), our Lord
How excellent is Your name in all the earth,
You who set Your glory above the heavens!

.....
When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars which You have ordained,...

The role that Yahweh plays as Creator in the Bible is much

¹⁰²Sarna, 203.

¹⁰³4.II.11: Herdner, 23; DeMoor, 47.

¹⁰⁴Pope, 49.

stronger than the role played by El in the Ugaritic texts.

There remains one more concept which must be considered: the idea of the family/assembly of El. This will be dealt with in the following discussion of the phrase, "bny 'lm" in Psalm 29:1. The above study should, however, present a sufficient outline of the conceptual differences between the central figure of Psalm 29, Yahweh, and the figure of El in the Ugaritic texts.

The conclusion which can be reached from the above comparisons is that the biblical conception of Yahweh does bear distinct parallels with the Ugarit conception of El. The biblical tradition also presents unique aspects to its conception of Yahweh, which, at points, extends beyond the characteristics of the Canaanite El, and, at other points, moves counter to the Canaanite conception. This would indicate an independant idea of who Yahweh was, and a certain selectivity in the concepts and images borrowed from the Canaanite conception to describe the biblical Yahweh.

THE SONS OF GOD IN PSALM 29:

1. How should this phrase be read?

Psalm 29 begins in verse one with the call to the "bny 'lym" to ascribe to the LORD the glory and honour that is due His name. The most literal translation "the sons of gods" most obviously conflicts with the strict monotheism

which developed in the Hebrew faith. A means to deal with this problem was to suggest some form of textual corruption. It was proposed very early that the text should be read as "bny 'lym"- "sons of rams" as is the case in a few Hebrew manuscripts.¹⁰⁵ The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, also preserves this reading as a duplicate of the first line. The Hebrew text behind this text would then read:

"hbw lYHWH bny 'lym

hbw lYHWH bny 'ylym"

"Give to the LORD you sons of God,

Give to the LORD you sons of rams;"¹⁰⁶

This evidence would suggest that this proposed correction of the text was in circulation prior to the Septuagint translation of the Psalms in the early second or late third century B.C..¹⁰⁷ Why such a change? The Hebrew term for "rams" is similar enough to the term "gods" to make this type of error possible. The term "rams" is also used metaphorically in Scripture as "a man of power". It is used in this manner in Exod 15:15, in reference to the chiefs of

¹⁰⁵BHS (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990), Psalm 29:1 n. 1b pc mss.

¹⁰⁶Septuaginta, ed. Alfred Rahlfs (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft).

¹⁰⁷Emanuel Tov, Textual Criticism of The Hebrew Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 137.

Edom. If the dating of the Song of Moses is indeed early, then the use of this expression, in this manner, could also be very ancient.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, the related title "leaders of the land" is used in 2 Kgs 24:15. The change is only in one letter which acts just as a vowel marker.¹⁰⁹ The plural of "rams" exists in two forms that are used interchangeably ('ylym/'lym).

Another way to interpret the text was to understand the term "'lym" as a form of the term for God, Elohim. Delitzsch points out the reference to the "sons of Elohim" of Job 2:1, who came to present themselves before the LORD.¹¹⁰ But Delitzsch recognizes a problem with this interpretation. Yahweh is never called "'lym" in the Hebrew Bible, only "El" or "Elohim". "'lym" is consistently translated "gods". His solution was to propose that this was a form of double plural.¹¹¹ Delitzsch cites two other

¹⁰⁸William L. Holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ., 1988) 12. It should be noted that this passage itself has inspired much discussion about its relationship to Canaanite literature. For a brief survey of this discussion see Craigie, "The Conquest and Early Hebrew Poetry." TB 20:19-26, esp. 22(c).

¹⁰⁹Gesenius, Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), 37 & 20.

¹¹⁰C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament Psalms vol.5 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publ., 1989), 368.

¹¹¹Gesenius, 108.3.

examples of this phenomena (Ps 89:2, Deut 32:8) but provides no firm grammatical evidence that this particular expression should be translated "sons of God" rather than "sons of gods". The arguments are entirely theological (e.g. this cannot mean x because it is known that they believed y).

The discovery of the Ras Shamra inscriptions provided an additional proposal for the interpretation of this expression. In the Baal myth there is found the use of the expression "bn ilm" translated as "the sons of El".¹¹² There appears no distinction between the translation of "bny 'l" and "bny ilm" in the Ugaritic texts.¹¹³ It appears that the final "m" does not indicate that the term is plural as is usually the case, but it is enclitic, that is, it aids pronunciation and accentuation. This is also how Cross reads this expression in Psalm 29.¹¹⁴ So, although there is no confirmed evidence in Hebrew that such a translation is possible, there does exist evidence in Ugaritic that it occurred.

Depending on whether the translation is "sons of God"

¹¹²ed. Andree Herdner Corpus Des Tablettes En Cuneiformes Alphabetiques (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1963) CTA 4.iii.14. Trans. Johannes DeMoor An Anthology Of Religious Texts From Ugarit (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 49.

¹¹³Cyrus H. Gordon Ugaritic Textbook: Glossary and Indices (Analecta Orientalia 38, 1965) n. 481.

¹¹⁴Cross, 46.

or "sons of gods", and the former seems best, one still must determine who these individuals are. In the case of the former translation, the texts of Ugarit use this expression in reference to the deities who are the offspring of the supreme god, El, and who comprise the divine council. If this is the expression in Psalm 29, how many of the Canaanite understandings have been transferred with it?

2. How should this phrase be interpreted?

Beginning with the Psalm itself there is little indication that these Canaanite conceptions of the "sons of El" are present. As was suggested above, the biblical conception of Yahweh does not carry the same ideas of Father as the Canaanite El. Here they are clearly in submission to the power and work of Yahweh; it is He who is worthy of praise and worship.

The other area to consider is the interpretation of this expression in Scripture and the later use of these texts. Is there any indication that this expression was understood in the Ugaritic sense?

In his examination of the phrase "bny 'lym" in Psalm 29, Dahood writes, "In the Canaanite mythology the bn ilm, "the sons of El," are the minor gods who form part of the pantheon of which El is the head. In the Old Testament the term was demythologized and came to refer to the angels or spirit beings who are members of Yahweh's court and do His

bidding."¹⁵ He offers several examples of the demythologized concept used in the Hebrew Bible:

Ps. 89:7,

"God, dreaded in the council of the holy ones,¹⁶
And to be held in reverence by those who are around Him."

"'l n`rş bswd-qdšym
rbh wnwr' `l-kl-sbybyw."

Psalm 103:20-21,

"Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength,
who do His word, heeding the voice of His word.
Bless the LORD, all you His hosts,
You ministers of His, who do His pleasure."

"brkw YHWH ml'cyw, gbry kḥ `śy dbrw, lśm` bqwl dbrw
brkw YHWH kl-šb'yw, mšrtyw `śy rşwnw."

Psalm 148:2,

"Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts!"

"hllwhw kl-ml'kyw, hllwhw kl-šb'w."

I Kings 22:19,

"Then he said to them, `Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left.'"

"wy'mr lkn šm` dbr-YHWH r'yty 't-YHWH yšb `l-ks'w wkl-šb'
hšmym `md `lyw mymynw wmsm'lw."

Job 1:6, (2;1).

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them."

¹⁵Dahood, 175.

¹⁶This translation follows that of Marvin Tate, Psalms 51-100, WBC (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, 1990), 407.

"wyhy hywm wyb'w bny h'lhym lhtyşb ʿl-YHWH wybw' gm-hštn
btwkm."

In the case of the final example, which quite explicitly uses the phrase, "sons of El", there seems to be little doubt that it should be interpreted along with the other examples as referring to the servants of Yahweh and not independant deities. John E. Hartley, commenting on this passage, has written, "...in the OT the complete dependance of these sons of God on God Himself and their total submission to Him is not questioned."¹¹⁷ There seems to be a traditional reinterpretation of this motif, as these previous passages suggest. What needs to be determined is whether this was a later development or does this reinterpretation appear to occur at the earliest use of this motif. To help answer this question two other passages may be considered: Deuteronomy 32:8, and Exodus 15:11. The Deuteronomy passage was introduced earlier in response to Smith's suggestion that it depicted Yahweh as a son of Elyon. At that point, the textual problems that occur in this passage were discussed. The textual variants seemed to move the interpretation of this text away from the idea of an assembly of deities, as was the case in Ugarit. The sense seems to be heavenly beings i.e. angels. Peter Craigie relates this passage with Deuteronomy 33:2 where

¹¹⁷John E. Hartley, The Book Of Job, NICOT (Grand rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publ., 1984), 71.

there is a reference to "myriads of holy ones" who are called the "warriors of God" in the next stanza.¹¹⁸ These have been traditionally interpreted as angelic beings, and Craigie suggested that this passage lies behind the New Testament idea of the Law being mediated by angels (Acts 7:53, Gal 3:19, Heb 2:2). The role they seem to play is that of administering Yahweh's creation, and, in Deut 33:2-3, assisting Moses in the mediating the Law to the people. Gerhard Von Rad sees the depiction of Deut 32:8 as a great King assigning administrations to His satraps, with the exclusion of Israel, which He will administrate Himself. Though Von Rad does understand this as a reference to other deities besides Yahweh, he does note that it is peculiar that these heavenly beings should hold such significant roles in administrating Yahweh's creation.¹¹⁹ This, for Von Rad, is an unusual idea in the theology of the Hebrew Bible.

Exodus 15:11 says: "Who is like you O LORD (Yahweh), among all the gods?" This is part of perhaps one of the oldest of the biblical hymns and it also features the Divine Warrior motif which has already been considered. This passage and others like it (e.g. Ps. 97:7, 9) seem to focus

¹¹⁸Peter Craigie, The Book Of Deuteronomy NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1976), 393-6.

¹¹⁹Gerhard Von Rad, Deuteronomy OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 197.

on demonstrating the incomparableness of Yahweh, rather than establishing that He is but one among many. Sarna suggests that the use of such expressions is in keeping with common Near Eastern comparative language. He writes, "Moreover, many biblical texts utter similar statements along with an explicit denial of the reality of deities worshipped by other nations." He offers as evidence: Psalm 86:8,10 which can state, "There is none like you among the gods, O LORD," and then add, "You alone are God". The author of Deuteronomy can write that "the Lord alone is God in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other" (4:39) and can refer to God's "powerful deeds that no god in heaven or on earth can equal."¹²⁰ His solution is to take the traditional interpretation of these beings as created angelic beings.

There is another possibility to the interpretation of expressions such as "sons of God" and the "council of God". Along with the literal interpretation of actual deities and the more figurative understanding of created heavenly beings, there is the possibility that in many cases they may refer to human beings, particularly rulers and leaders. The gospel of John records what appears to be the interpretation of Psalm 82:6 "You are gods" as referring to humans. From the manner by which Jesus presents this teaching, it seemed

¹²⁰Sarna, 80.

that this interpretation was neither novel nor new.

Psalm 82

- 1 God(Elohim) stands in the congregation of the God(El);
He judges among the mighty ones(elohim):
- 2 How long will you judge unjustly,
And show partiality to the wicked?
- 3 Defend the poor and the fatherless;
Do justice to the afflicted and the needy.
- 4 Deliver the poor and the needy;
Free them from the hand of the wicked.
- 5 They do not know, nor do they understand;
They walk about in darkness;
All the foundations of the earth are unstable.
- 6 I said "You are mighty ones(elohim),
And all of you are children of the Most High(Elyon).
- 7 But you shall die like men,
And fall like one of the princes."
- 8 Arise, O God(Elohim), judge the earth;
For You shall inherit all nations.

Historically, there have been five particular interpretations of these phrases, which Julian Morgenstern has outlined¹²¹. The first was to interpret the references to the elohim in the second and twelfth lines as judges. This was the view offered in the Targum and the Midrash Tehillim and by Rashi. Morgenstern suggests that most modern interpreters have rejected this. Secondly, the interpretation of the elohim as Asmonean kings was offered by Duhm who wished to date the writing of this Psalm to 140-60 B.C.. This interpretation (and its dating) has also been

¹²¹Julian Morgenstern, "The Mythological Background of Psalm 82," HUCA (1939): 29f.

largely rejected. A more common interpretation is that this refers to foreign kings and kings of the heathen nations which were oppressing Israel. Gesenius, DeWette, Ewald, Hitzig, Kosters, Briggs, and Kittel subscribed to this view. A fourth proposal was offered by Mowinkel, Staerk, Gunkel, and Budde who understood elohim as "gods" of the foreign nations. The last view discussed by Morgenstern was to interpret it as angels. This was maintained by Bleek, Hupfeld and Kent.

Morgenstern understood the question to really be: are these human or divine beings?¹²² In studying verses 2-4, Morgenstern suggested that the terminology was typical of terminology of judicial procedures used in Psalms, prophetic, legalistic and wisdom literature. He felt that these verses should be interpreted quite literally. He wrote:

"Careful consideration of vv. 2-4 should convince one that they deal with human beings and not with gods or angels, and, furthermore, human beings who are not rulers of foreign oppressive nations but human beings who are actually professional judges, and this too, judges within the narrow confines of the Jewish people, Jewish judges who favour "the wicked" and withhold justice and thus crush the "poor" within their own Jewish community."¹²³

It can be observed in a cursory survey of the key terms of these verses such as: injustice, wicked, lowly, poor and

¹²²Ibid., 31.

¹²³Ibid., 32-33.

righteous, that Morgenstern is correct in his assessment of the background of this language. Each of the terms listed above are most commonly used in the Psalms, wisdom literature and prophetic writings though not exclusively. To illustrate: "injustice" is used twenty times in the Hebrew Bible, nine of these times in Ezekiel¹²⁴. "Helpless/low" is used some forty-seven times, thirty-seven of these in psalms, wisdom and prophetic writings¹²⁵. Additionally, it can be seen that, contrary to the view of Dahood¹²⁶, the use of these terms in the Hebrew Bible appear to make reference, in most circumstances, to those within the nation of Israel and not pagans outside Israel.

Now verses six and seven seem certain to refer to divine beings according to Morgenstern¹²⁷. He based this conclusion on the use of "elohim" which he stated always referred to either God or gods. Secondly, he sees the declaration of verse seven as an imposition of a sentence of

¹²⁴Gerhard Lizowski, Koncordanz zum Hebraischen Altn Testament (Stuttgart: eutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1981), 1031.

¹²⁵Ibid., 361.

¹²⁶Dahood, 269. It appears that Dahood is attempting to defend the position that the indictment is against foreign rulers in verses 2-4, and that the elohim of verses 1 and 6 are these nations dieties.

¹²⁷Morgenstern, 33.

immortality upon those who were previously immortal. Gerald Cooke has also rejected the rendering of "elohim" as human judges in Ps 82 on the basis of two studies done on "elohim" in Ps 29.¹²⁸ Although he noted that BDB allows for such a meaning, he also noted that C.H.Gordon¹²⁹ and Draffkorn¹³⁰ have refuted this idea and demonstrated that the Targum and Peshitta are in error. He also supported Morgenstern's conclusion that the pronouncement in verse seven presumed that the beings were previously immortal¹³¹ Cooke cited both O'Callaghan and Ginsberg who read "nwtwmt" in verse seven as "become mortal" rather than "shall die"¹³². There appears to be no lexical foundation for such a rendering which would thus give a meaning to the verb "twm", to die, unattested outside this context.

Cooke suggested that Ps 82 reflects a Canaanite myth about the fall of a god. He saw the same myth used in Isaiah 14:12. He wrote,

"In Is 14:12 we are given a picture of the fall of the Babylonian king- or of all proud and oppressive rulers. Was "Helal ben Sahar"- Day Star, son of morning- a god

¹²⁸Gerald Cooke, "The Sons of (the) God(s)," ZAW 76 (1964): 22-47.

¹²⁹C.H.Gordon, "myhl in its Reputed Meaning of Rulers and Judges," JBL LIV (1935): 139.

¹³⁰Draffkorn, "Ilani/Elohim" JBL LXXVI (1957): 261.

¹³¹Gerald Cooke, 31.

¹³²O'Callaghan, "The Canaanite Background of Psalm 82, CBO XV (1953): 311. Ginsberg, BASOR XCVIII (1945): 21.

who had overstepped his appointed limits in the heavenly company and been cast down? Could there have been a mythological account of this event which served as the background for both, Is 14:12 and Ps 82:7?"¹³³

It is very possible that such a myth existed. There are contemporary commentators who would see, behind the historical context of the Isaiah passage, a prophetic picture of the angelic fall. Nevertheless, it becomes far too speculative to presume the influence of an hypothetical Canaanite account on Ps 82 and then to interpret it in this light.

The evidence seems to indicate that the "elohim" are indeed heavenly beings, perhaps conceived of as gods or as created beings, angels. It is difficult to determine how precisely the Psalmist understood these references. It also seems likely that verses 2-4 refer to humans, and particularly those of the Jewish community. The terminology of the indictment brought against these heavenly beings, seems reminiscent of that of the terminology of the prophetic declarations against the rulers of the Jewish people. The difficulty which arises is to bring together these two apparently conflicting ideas. The solution seems to be to move away from forcing the two ideas together, and to look for a more representative literary solution. To do this, one can consider the later interpretations of this

¹³³Cooke, 34.

Psalm.

In the New Testament, in John 10:31-39, one finds Jesus quoting from Ps 82 in defence of His role as the Son of God, an important messianic title. Jesus makes the connection here between these "gods" and the human rulers of the people. Anthony Hanson has warned, "If we are to understand this passage we must be prepared to read Psalm 82 as a whole. John is not lifting four words out of context in order to score a point. He has the whole psalm in mind and also the traditional interpretations of it."¹³⁴

As Hanson outlined the traditional Jewish understanding of this psalm, it was associated, in many rabbinic writings, with the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. The fall which this psalm seems to present was the fall of Israel when, having received the Torah and become free of the dominion of the angel of death, they worshipped the golden calf and thus fell back under death. This view was more recently supported by Ackerman, "What we have here is a new fall story."¹³⁵

R. Jungkuntz has defended the interpretation that this Psalm was directed toward human judges in Israel.¹³⁶

¹³⁴Anthony Hanson, The Prophetic Gospel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 144.

¹³⁵Ibid., 146.

¹³⁶Ibid., 145-146.

Noting Jesus' earlier remarks to the unbelieving Jewish leaders, that He was indeed the good Shepherd whose sheep recognize His voice, Jungkuntz draws in Ezekiel 34. This is a prophetic judgement passage against irresponsible shepherds by God, the true shepherd. Thus in John 10, Ps 82 functions as a judgement against unfaithful shepherds, the rulers and judges in Israel. These ideas all reinforce the premise that Ps 82, despite the obvious difficulties, was, at some level, applied to human rulers.

W.O.E.Oesterley wrote in his commentary on Ps 82, "The psalmist has not yet attained to a full and complete monotheism."³⁷ However, as it was demonstrated above (p.81), the psalmists could make use of expressions and motifs common to the thought world of the ANE without accepting all the full theological implications of these. Often in the same breath, they use these motifs and then reject unacceptable conclusions which may be drawn from them. It is proposed that this seems to be the case in this Psalm. Perhaps behind this psalm there is a mythological account of a fall of divine beings. Perhaps it reflects an early account of an angelic fall. Regardless of the background, it seems that the plight of the downtrodden of the Jewish community has inspired its writing. How does this imagery then help develop this pronouncement?

³⁷Oesterley, 375.

Theodore Mullen has proposed that the idea behind the Divine Council motif in Ugaritic texts is that of the pronouncement of judgement. The council was where judgement and sentence was metted out by El. In a prophetic context, where an indictment from heaven is about to be made, this imagery establishes both the gravity of the situation and the nature of the proclamation even before the words have been spoken. Now Mullens clearly denies that the "gods" here are human rulers.¹³⁸ For him this departs too far from the Canaanite models. However, one questions the value of a psalm which passes condemnation on negligent deities, in a canon which increasingly denied the existence of other deities. That Psalm 82 remained a part of the canon indicates that another application and interpretation existed, if not from the outset, certainly at an early stage. By analogy the statement is made: amidst the Council of God, even the "gods" are judged for injustice!

It can be concluded that although the motifs of "sons of God" and the Divine Council had specific meanings within Canaanite literature, the biblical usage can allow other interpretations. These phrases can be used as poetic language of comparison or to establish the setting for a pronouncement of judgement, without necessitating a literal

¹³⁸E. Theodore Mullens, The Assembly of the Gods HSM, 24 (Harvard: Scholars Press, 1978), 237.

interpretation. These phrases can be used to refer to angelic servants and messengers, and at some point in Israel's interpretive history, as references to human rulers. There seems no evidence that the Canaanite interpretations of these motifs were ever used by the Psalm writers.

A HYMN TO THE DIVINE WARRIOR:

Ginsberg had proposed that Psalm 29 was originally a hymn to Baal which had been appropriated for use by the cult of Yahweh. The theme of Baal's victory was viewed as the background of this Psalm. John Day has summarized the three proposed parallels with Baal mythology as: 1) the theophany of Yahweh in the thunderstorm, 2) his exaltation in the divine assembly, and 3) the enthronement as king over the cosmic sea. To this list he adds: 4) the voice of Yahweh resounding in the thunder seven times.¹³⁹ Consider the following Ugaritic texts which describe these aspects of the Baal mythology.

A) Baal's defeat of Prince Sea (Yam): 2.iv.7b-10, 19b-20.

.....ktr. wḥss. lrgmt
lk. lzbl. b'l. tnt. lrkb. 'rpt. ht. ibk
b'lm. ht. ibk. tmḥs. ht. tṣmt. ṣrtk

¹³⁹John Day, "Echoes of Baal's Seven Thunders and Lightnings in Psalm XXIX and Habakkuk III 9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in Isaiah VI," VT XXIX (1979): 142-151.

tqḥ. mlk. 'lmk. drkt. dt drdrk

(omitted 1.11-19a)

..... aymr. mr. ym. mr. ym
lkss 'ih. nhr lkḥt. drkth....¹⁴⁰

.....But Kotharu-and-Khasisu said:
"Truly I say to you, O Highness Ba'lu,
I repeat, O Rider of the Clouds:
Now, o Ba'lu, your enemies-
now you should slay your enemies,
now you should silence your foes!
Take your eternal kingship,
your everlasting dominion!"

".....Ayyamur¹⁴¹, expel Yammu,
expel Yammu from his chair,
Naharu from the throne of his dominion!"¹⁴²

B) The Thundering Voice of the Warrior Baal: 4.vii.25a-31.

..... ypth. ḥ
ln. bbhtm. 'urbt
bqrb. hk{lm. yp}tḥ
b'l. bdqt {. 'rpt}t
qlh. qdš{.} b{'l.y}tn
ytny. b'l. s{---}pth
qlh. q{---}r. 'arṣ
{-----}grm...¹⁴³

"Let a window be opened in the mansion,
a lattice in the middle of the palace!"
Ba lu opened a rift in the clouds.
Ba lu gave forth his holy voice,
Ba lu repeated the utterance of his lips.
His holy voice made the earth quake,

¹⁴⁰Herdner, 11.

¹⁴¹In the omitted section the craftsman Kothar-w-Hasis has fashioned and named weapons for Baal. Ayyamur was the axe.

¹⁴²DeMoor, 39-40.

¹⁴³Herdner, 29.

the utterance of his lips the mountains.¹⁴⁴

C) The Seven Thunders of Baal:Ugar.V.3(obv).1-4; RS 24.245

b'l. ytb. ktbt. gr. hd. r{--}
 kmdb. btk. grh. 'il spn. b{tk}
 gr. tliyt. sb't. brqm. {--}
 tmnt. 'isr r t. s brq y{--}¹⁴⁵

Ba'lu was seated, as immoveable as a mountain,
 Haddu rested like the ocean,
 on his mountain, the divine Sapanu,
 on the mountain of victory.
 Seven lightnings he had,
 eight storehouses of thunder,
 the shafts of lightning he { }.¹⁴⁶

F.M. Cross also believed that the imagery of Yahweh's theopany was borrowed from Baal. Using texts like those above and others, he presented the case for Baal's role as storm god in Canaanite religion. He wrote concerning Baal, as storm god, that he is, "on the one hand, the dread warrior before whom all nature blanches and dies, on the other hand, the god whose sway brings the fructifying rain which makes the desert bloom."¹⁴⁷ Cross is thoroughly convinced that this psalm is borrowed with little adaption from Canaanite literature. He describes two patterns or

¹⁴⁴DeMoor, 63.

¹⁴⁵John Gibson, Canaanite Myths and Legends (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1978) 138.

¹⁴⁶DeMoor, 3.

¹⁴⁷F.M. Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Press, 1973) 151.

genres which he sees evident in this psalm: the first is the march of the Divine Warrior, the second is the enthroning of the victorious Divine Warrior. The Ugaritic texts above are excerpts from the larger myth concerning Yam's (Prince Sea's) attempt to usurp the kingship of the gods and creation. The council is terrified except for Baal who marches off to fight Yam. With his awesome arsenal of weapons and his voice of thunder, Baal succeeds and defeats Yam. He returns in triumph to assume the kingship over the gods and creation. Yam represents, in this mythology, the forces of chaos, whereas Baal the storm-god represents order and fruitfulness for the creation he rules. Baal's enthronement on the sacred mountain highlights his victory over Yamm, the ancient flood. As Cross described it, the parallels seem apparent. The march of Yahweh against the chaos of the sea is a theme of Psalm 29. His coming in the storm with His voice of thunder also parallels the Baal myth. He is seen in verse 9 as victorious and receiving praise from those gathered in His temple. Verse 10 depicts Him sitting enthroned over the, now subject, Flood. The term used in Ps. 29:10 for flood "mbl", is used in only one other passage of the Bible; this being the flood account in Genesis 6-9. Although this gives the psalm a more cosmological flavour, it should be remembered that the flood narrative in Genesis is presented as historical rather than mythological. But there are other elements that must be considered.

Cross did admit that such descriptions of the theophany of Yahweh already existed in the hymns of Israel. This is one reason why Cross believes this supposedly Canaanite hymn was so easily absorbed by Israel.¹⁴⁸ He goes on to list a number of biblical texts which he understands as possessing this kind of descriptive language. At this point it will be helpful to draw in several of these psalm passages that fit this pattern.

Psalm 24:1-2, 7-10

The earth is (Yahweh's) the LORD's,
and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell in it.
For He has founded it upon the seas (Yamim),
And established it upon the rivers (Naharim).
.....

Lift up your heads, O you gates;
Be lifted up, you everlasting doors!
And the King of Glory shall enter.
Who is this King of Glory?
Yahweh (the LORD) strong and mighty.
Yahweh (the LORD) mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O you gates;
Be lifted up you everlasting doors!
And the King of Glory shall enter.
Who is he, then, the King of Glory?
Yahweh (The LORD) of Hosts,
He is the King of Glory!

Psalm 68: 1-4, 7-8, 17

Let God (Elohim) arise,
Let His enemies be scattered;
Let those also who hate Him flee before Him.
As smoke is driven away; so may you drive them away,
As wax melts before the fire,
So may the wicked perish before God (Elohim).
But let the righteous be glad;
Let them rejoice before God (Elohim).

¹⁴⁸Cross, 156.

Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly.

.....
 O God(Elohim), when You went out before Your people,
 When You marched through the wilderness,
 The earth shook and the heavens poured rain,
 Before God(Elohim), the One of Sinai,
 Before God(Elohim), the God(Elohim) of Israel.

.....
 The chariots of God are twenty thousand,
 Even thousands of thousands;
 The Lord(Adonai) is among them, the One of Sinai,
 In the holy place.

Notice the similarities to motifs in the Ugaritic texts. There is the march of the Divine Warrior Yahweh and the vanquishing of His adversaries. His march shakes the heavens and the earth. He is enthroned as King over the defeated Sea. Life and fruitfulness, often with reference to the rains in many psalms, are results of Yahweh's victory. Psalm 24 includes the statement "Lift up your heads, O you gates!"(s'w s`rm r'wkm). This bears similarity to the statement in an Ugaritic text which Cross translates, "Lift up your heads, O you gods!"(s'w 'ilm r'astkm).¹⁴⁹ Here Baal is reassuring the gods that he can defeat his enemy Yam(Sea). However similar the idea may be, there is a change in the context; Yahweh is not going into battle, he is being enthroned, having been victorious. It would be helpful to recall as well that the use of the divine name, Yahweh, suggests saving activity for His covenant people.

¹⁴⁹Cross, 98. Text 2.3.19-37; DeMoor, 31-33 (particularly 1.31).

This idea does not appear in the Baal accounts of his activities. Psalm 68 does not use the divine name, Yahweh, preferring Elohim as is the case in most of that collection of Psalms. However, in this case there is a specific connection with the Sinai event. Elohim is the God of Sinai. Again the focus is more historical than mythological.

SOURCES OF THE DIVINE WARRIOR MOTIFS

1. Are there Israelite sources behind these motifs?

Since Cross suggests the Divine Warrior motifs already existed in the hymns of Israel prior to the inclusion of Psalm 29, it would be profitable to consider the source of these elements. The similarity in terminology between these biblical accounts and the Ugaritic texts would suggest at least some Canaanite influence. But are there exclusively Israelite elements? Both Day and Cross make special note of the similarities between Psalm 29 and Habakkuk 3:3-15, where Yahweh is depicted as the marching Divine Warrior. Here, however, there are clear references to the events of the Exodus and Sinai. C.F. Keil has noted that the introduction to the Habakkuk passage does seem dependant on the account of Deuteronomy 33:2. However, rather than describing a past event, Habakkuk is using it to describe a future appearing

of God.¹⁵⁰ The role that the Exodus/Sinai traditions play appears essential to understanding these theophany accounts.

2. What role does Sinai play?

It is interesting to note Mark S. Smith's brief reference to Sinai and the Exodus. After relating the vast religious and cultural dependence which Israel had on the surrounding Canaanite civilizations, he noted that neither the Sinai accounts nor the accounts of the Exodus from Egypt appear to be Canaanite.¹⁵¹ These are then considered purely Israelite. This is significant since these experiences are pivotal to the theology of Israel as shall be demonstrated below. Both Israel's conception of their God and themselves in relation to their God are substantially based on these revelatory encounters.

It has been demonstrated above that who God was to Israel, is largely established on God's self-revelation in the Exodus and at Sinai. It also provided an historical rather than mythological account of the exercise of His power on behalf of His people. In the event of the Exodus, Yahweh demonstrates His power against the Pharaoh who is worshipped as god in Egypt. Here Yahweh is shown victorious in this contest of the gods and their powers. This is a

¹⁵⁰C.F. Keil, Minor Prophets, Commentary on the Old Testament (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publ., 1989) 97.

¹⁵¹Smith, The Early History of God, 3.

theme replayed continually in the psalter. There is the parting of the Sea at Yahweh's command and it's control by Him as a weapon for the destruction of His enemies.

Yahweh's power over the chaotic sea is a theme already considered within the Psalter. There is the Sinai theophany where Yahweh sat victorious, enthroned in glory, veiled amid the storm, lightning and earthquake. The account describes how the mountain was unapproachable and the voice(ql) of the trumpet loudly sounded. It is recorded that Moses spoke and God answered him by voice(ql) from the cloud. Much of the theophany descriptions used in the psalms could have found their origins in these historical accounts. Since these conceptions of Yahweh were shared by all of Israel, being embedded within the fabric of their covenant, it would be probable that these images would become standard means of speaking of the presense and activities of Yahweh.

3.What role does the covenant established at Sinai play?

The importance of the establishing of the covenant and the events which brought it into being, are important for interpreting of the motifs used in the psalms. A specific illustration of this importance can be seen for the interpretation of Psalm 82.

It was argued above that the references to the "gods" in this psalm have been applied by comparison in the Bible itself as being humans, perhaps rulers. This interpretation

fits the nature of the revelation of God's judgement given to Israel. Where does such a judgement find its basis if the psalm is interpreted in this direction? In the cosmology of Ugarit, there would be, for the gods, a fundamental order and law set into the cosmos under which they are even subject. For human rulers, there stands the covenant relationship established at Sinai. This is reflected in the psalms. The question which must now be addressed is the manner in which the notion of covenant influenced the Israelite theology behind the writing of the Psalms. Any reading of the Hebrew Bible should make the reader aware of the tremendous importance of the idea of covenant to the theological history as it is presented.¹⁵² G.E. Mendenhall has defined covenant as, "a solemn promise made binding by an oath, which may be either a verbal formula or a symbolic action."¹⁵³ Covenants as he understood them in the Ancient Near East (ANE) usually had both political and religious aspects. There were a variety of forms of covenants in the ANE and they were vital components to most civilizations. Of these various types,

¹⁵²It is the belief of this author that the Hebrew Bible can and must be read as having a unified theme and for all practical purposes as a single story. It is not "history" in the most common usage of the term but communicates a theological message from an historical perspective to the reader.

¹⁵³G.E. Mendenhall, "Covenant", IDB 1:714.

the covenants most useful for understanding the Biblical idea of covenant were "those that regulate relationships between two distinct social or political units, international treaties."¹⁵⁴ Though he points out evidence for these types of covenants dating back to the mid-third millenium B.C., the texts which he found most useful were the suzerainty treaties of the Hittite empire (ca. 1400-1200 B.C.). These were as the title suggests, treaties between a suzerain of an empire and his vassal. Mendenhall also noted that sometimes the mere existence of the written text was sufficient to make the covenant binding while in other circumstances there was the need for swearing of formal oaths.¹⁵⁵ J.A. Thompson agrees with Mendenhall's assessment and believes the structure of the book of Deuteronomy to have been formed around this model of the suzerainty treaty.¹⁵⁶ The existence of the covenant presupposes the events of the Exodus and Sinai. In Psalm 82 it provides a reasonable basis for Yahweh's judgement against these rulers. It establishes His right and their responsibility. It follows that if the terms of the

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 714.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 715.

¹⁵⁶J.A.Thompson, Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 13.

covenant can be appealed to in the psalms, then the images of the events embedded in the covenant would also be called to mind.

It can be concluded from the above, that there are sufficient sources in the Exodus and Sinai events, embedded in Israel's foundational covenant, to provide much of the Divine Warrior imagery used in the Psalms. It is not unreasonable to assume that Canaanite motifs were also used, but there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that they governed substantially Israel's conception of Yahweh and His activities. Israel had its own unique Divine Warrior experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR
COMPARING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TEXTS FROM THE PSALMS
WITH THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SYNCRETISM
AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

In the previous chapters, characteristics of syncretism and contextualization have been outlined, and the nature of the ideas, concepts and motifs borrowed from the Canaanite religious culture has been explored. In this chapter the characteristics of those borrowed concepts will be classified as belonging to either syncretism (and then what type of syncretism) or, on the other hand, contextualization (and then what type of contextualization).

SYNCRETISM

The study of syncretism in chapter 2 began by suggesting several aspects which should be taken up in any definition of the syncretism. The character of the evidence gathered from the study of chapter 3, can now be evaluated in light of the aspects of that definition.

A. Definition:

1. Is the religion of the Canaanites and the religion of Israel, as recorded in the Psalms, distinct religious

systems?

It has been suggested above that Israel did possess a tradition of preservation and transmission of sacred texts from its earliest periods. These texts expounded the idea of a covenant between God and the nation of Israel. It has also been demonstrated that the idea of covenant played a central role in the theology of Israel and has also made its impact on the Psalms. The covenant was established upon experiences unique to the history of Israel, for which there are no parallels in the mythology of Ugarit. The conception of the God of covenant was also described using terms which bear parallels with Canaanite conceptions such as divine agelessness. Other descriptive terminology extends in directions unparalleled in the texts of Ugarit such as the more prominent role of Creator. Some of this terminology moves contrary to the Canaanite conceptions and suggests a distinct Israelite conception of God. An illustration of this which was considered above was the genderless nature of Yahweh especially in terms of procreation. That there are abundant similarities between Israelite and Canaanite cultures is not contested. However there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the beliefs concerning the God of Israel and Israel's relationship with that God, are dissimilar enough from Canaanite theological thoughts to establish that the religions of Israel and Ugarit were distinct.

2. Is there a mixing of elements?

It has been demonstrated that many ideas concerning Yahweh have been expressed in concepts used commonly in Canaanite religions. Descriptive terms about His age and kingship particularly seem similar to the texts of Ugarit. Ideas about the divine council have been borrowed and reinterpreted to express prophetic pronouncements, and the poetic comparative formulas (i.e. Ex. 15:11 "who is like you O Yahweh among all the gods") were also borrowed to express the supremacy of Yahweh. The Canaanite patterns of the march and enthronement of the Divine Warrior seem to have served as the framework for such descriptions of Yahweh, though the details were available from Israel's own epic history. It does seem apparent that some Canaanite and Israelite ideas were mixed. This does not mean the mixing was done without intent and reinterpretation. Not all ideas were apparently acceptable and many of those which were borrowed were adapted substantially.

3. Does, at least, one or both systems lose basic structure and identity?

There seems to be no evidence that the faith of Israel, as recorded in the Hebrew Bible, lost its identity to Canaanite concepts or ideas. The underlying foundation of covenant remained central to Israelite religion and there was no progression of the unique conception of Yahweh toward

the Canaanite conception of El or Baal. It would be necessary to demonstrate that the Israelite religion of the monarchy was different from the religion of the post-exilic period, not just in form, ritual and practise but at its most basic beliefs about God and Israel's relationship to Him. Having done this, it would be necessary to demonstrate that the religion of the Canaanites was instrumental in affecting that change. This has not been demonstrated.

4. Are the systems which are mixed theologically untenable?

There seem to be few ideas, if any, which having been borrowed and used by the individual psalmists, were theologically incompatible with the faith of Israel. There are motifs which, if taken in the sense which the texts of Ugarit used them, would be incompatible. However, it has not been apparent that the psalmists intended their readers to read the Psalms from the perspective of a Canaanite worldview. In any exchange of communication, when there is room for a variety of possible interpretations, it is the probable ones which are considered first. It is unlikely that the reader would choose an interpretation which runs contrary to the faith held by the community which produced this religious text in the face of other more acceptable ones. It is proper to, at least, admit that some passages, particularly those which seem to permit a pantheon, need to

be interpreted awkwardly in order to avoid this kind of conclusion. This seems to have been recognized very early since textual variants, likely intending to guard against improper interpretations, are common for many of these texts (i.e. Ps 29 "gods/rams"). This does not lead however to the conclusion that the way in which these passages were traditionally interpreted were not the ways which were intended by the psalmists. Thankfully, these passages are few.

There is sufficient evidence to conclude that most borrowed elements do not contradict the religion of Israel into which these elements were introduced. The few incidents which at first reading do present contradictory ideas also show evidence of histories of alternative interpretations which move to eliminate potentially incompatible elements.

After the discussion of definition in chapter 2, there followed a discussion of categories or types of syncretism. These categories were refined from clearly recognizable occurrences of syncretism in the hope that these would be used as patterns of recognition for other cases under consideration. The patterns of literary borrowing in the Psalter can now be examined in light of these patterns.

B.Categories:

1.Is the result an entirely new faith based on a Canaanite framework with Israelite elements?

There is no evidence that the borrowing and adaption of Canaanite motifs and concepts has resulted in a new religion structured around the Canaanite framework. Central to Canaanite religion was the idea of the Pantheon. There is little evidence that the use of these texts drew the psalmists into advocating a plurality of worship. The fertility practises so prominent in Canaanite religion, though adopted in the daily practise of many Israelites, are not evident in the theology of the psalms. The conception of Yahweh's care for the prosperity of His people does not appear different from that described in the Covenant texts. The perception of forces beyond the control of the gods in Canaanite texts is not evident within the Psalms where Yahweh is pictured as all powerful. There seems no evidence that the theology of the psalmists became structured around a Canaanite belief system.

2.Is the result a Israelite framework which has been substantially reinterpreted and reshaped?

There is no evidence that the faith of Israel has been substantially reinterpreted and reshaped. There is evidence that it has been expressed in new terms and motifs like the Divine Warrior. Perhaps new elements have also been

developed such as the judgement themes of the divine council where judgements for forsaking the covenant are pronounced. These themes allow the faith of Israel to further expand but cannot be said to have substantially reshaped this faith into a new form.

3. Is the result a Canaanite faith in which only select elements of the Israelite faith have been adopted?

There is no evidence in the Psalter that these borrowings indicate that the faith of Israel has been abandoned for a Canaanite religion. There is far too much of the theology of the Exodus and Sinai in the Psalter to indicate that this is the case. To propose that perhaps these are only token items saved from their former faith is unacceptable for these ideas are too prominent and too foundational. To retain these is to retain the very heart of the faith.

Finally, there was a discussion of cultural characteristics which can promote syncretism in any particular society or circumstance. The theological milieu in which the Psalms developed, will be briefly considered in light of the four characteristics which Tippet has offered.

C.Characteristics which lead to syncretism:

1.Are there cohesive elements which would tend to survive?

The issue which Tippet wished to raise by this question was, the tendency for older beliefs to continue parallel and independent of newer beliefs. It has been raised earlier that polytheism was normative in the Ancient Near East. It is not unlikely that the families which were part of the Exodus not only believed in many gods but worshipped many gods. The older Canaanite religion certainly embodied polytheistic worship. A case may be made for the survival of poetic expressions, such as the Divine council, as being evidence of the tendency for older worldviews to cling on even when contradicting the newer beliefs. However, as demonstrated above, there is insufficient evidence that the use of such expressions implied a competing concept of polytheism in the psalms of Israel.

2.Is there an orientation toward mythical thinking?

The faith of the Canaanites and perhaps most of the earliest Israelites was oriented toward mythical thinking. This would propose that "gaps" in the faith of Israel were filled in with existing mythological ideas. Again there is a tendency apparent in the psalms to use mythological language when moving from a specific to a general victory psalm. The march of the Divine Warrior and the descriptive

ideas about the person and kingship of el, are two areas where borrowing of mythological language occurred in the Psalms. However, the use of mythological language does not imply the adoption of those mythological stories into the faith of Israel. The depiction of Yahweh's battle with the Sea using Canaanite images does not mean an adoption of the Canaanite accounts of the establishment of Baal's kingship.

3. Is there a need for a therapeutic system?

It has been suggested that Israel's introduction into this new land would have required the adoption of Canaanite patterns of farming, which typically included fertility rituals. When in Canaan, do as the Canaanites do. There is evidence that this occurred among many Israelites. The absorption of fertility practices is sufficiently documented. However, is there a need for such adaptation apparent in the theology of the Psalms? Perhaps not. The supremacy of Yahweh over not only history, but nature as well, is abundantly documented. Yahweh's commitment to His creation and the welfare of His people is also a prominent theme. Yahweh's concern for His people individually and His supremacy over the forces of chaos and death would also render an additional system of ritualistic healing unnecessary. These factors would seem to suggest a reduced need for the adoption of a Canaanite therapeutic system, which itself had a much greater element of uncertainty.

4. Is there a credible eschatology?

The topic of the afterlife and the continuing existence of one's dead ancestors is not dealt with extensively in the theology of the Psalms. Some ideas are raised inasmuch as Yahweh's rule extends over the forces of death and therefore the covenant bond between Yahweh and His worshippers seems secure. The Canaanite conception seems somewhat more in doubt. The idea of the realm of the dead is present but the unresolved conflict between the Canaanite god of death, Mot, and Baal, would suggest that any allegiance, on the part of those worshipping Baal, is not secure after death. Though Israelite faith in the psalms does not have a detailed idea of the afterlife, what exists seems better than the competing concepts.

Contextualization

After considering syncretism, the concept of contextualization was considered. There were two elements of the definition proposed which shall be compared with the relevant elements of the Psalms. After this there will be an attempt to discern which models, if any, of contextualization resemble the model used by the Psalmists.

A. Definition:

1. Has there been an attempt to communicate faith?

There has been attempt by the psalmist to express the

religious worldview of himself or the community. Since these expressions are in the form of hymns, it is assumed that they were intended either for personal or community worship. In that these hymns were preserved and transmitted, there is an indication that they in some manner adequately reflected the faith of the community, and were useful for the community. Communication of faith has occurred.

2. Was there an attempt to make that communication relevant to specific contexts?

The Psalms extend beyond the concepts expressed by the covenant texts, and often seek to make more general statements about Yahweh and His activities (i.e. the move from specific battle hymns like the Song of Moses to more general victory hymns such as Ps 46: "He makes war to cease to the ends of the earth". The use of ideas, motifs and language outside that earlier tradition, but which are understood by the broader audience, would suggest that the psalmists intended to make these communications of faith comprehensible to a wider audience and applicable to wider circumstances. They intended that people who understood certain types of language and ideas, should understand these messages.

B. Models of Contextualization:

1. Was the message made relevant by focusing on translating a supracultural message into relevant terms and concepts?

It is impossible to know with certainty, what the intentions of the many psalmists were as they attempted, through their psalms, to write relevant theology. There are some indicators which might suggest their intentions. It was demonstrated that the borrowing of Canaanite material was not haphazard. The use of this material seemed highly selective. The concept of Yahweh presented in the Psalms used only certain parallels with the Canaanite El when describing Yahweh. It was concluded, then, that there appeared to be some overriding concept, concerning who Yahweh was, which influenced how the theology would be expressed in the individual psalms. The radical reinterpretation of other concepts like the "sons of God", would indicate an external standard which these new elements would need to conform to, if they were to be used. This must be balanced with the realization that there were ideas in the Psalter, which appear to extend beyond the earlier Israelite writings, using compatible motifs gleaned from the Canaanite culture.

2. Was the message made relevant by uncovering and expressing how God manifests Himself in culture?

There appears an idea that the concepts and motifs of

the Canaanites were not wholly without merit. The fact that there was an attempt to express new images of God using ideas previously embedded in Canaanite culture, would suggest that the psalmists believed that, in some respects, the Canaanite culture did correctly understand many religious ideas. But the Canaanite conceptions always appear to have been analyzed alongside established Israelite concepts. Certainly, Canaanite culture played a subservient role in the communicating of relevant theology.

3. Was the message made relevant through prior reflection on the activity of living the message?

This is difficult to determine without additional knowledge about the process of the composition of the psalms. Certainly the importance for this model of understanding God as a God of history, is well entrenched in the Psalter. As well, the very composition and development of the psalms recognizes the belief that theology writing is a continuing and dynamic process. The Psalms were written for use in worship, and not as a systematic theology for scholarly reflection. However, the conception of revelation in the psalms appears different than that of the praxis model. There is a conception of revelation being truth spoken and actions divinely interpreted. Though the events of God's intervention in history were significant, God's revealed interpretation of those activities is what gives

them their greatest application for the psalmists.

4. Was the message made relevant by focusing on translating the message into relevant terms and concepts as directed by the natural patterns of the culture?

As was pointed out when considering the Translation and Anthropological models, the psalms provide evidence that motifs from Canaanite culture were important in communicating theological truth in relevant ways. Yet, despite the use of Canaanite cultural ideas as a source of literary imagery, it would be overstating this usage to say that the Canaanite culture directed the development of this theology. There is, in the psalms, a sense of completed revelation, and perhaps a sense of continuing revelation of a fuller understanding of who Yahweh is within the context of Canaan.

5. Was the message made relevant by attention to the common faith experience of the people of faith seen through individual faith experiences?

Again, without more insight into the process of composition, it is impossible to know the beliefs of the psalmists and their personal role in this process. It must be assumed that the individual psalmists shared in the covenant relationship Israel had with Yahweh, and in that sense their personal experiences would strike responsive

chords in each member of the community. But for the psalmists, their theology was done with consideration of texts and cultures. Their faith was, apparently, very much grounded in the revelational accounts possessed by the community. Many of the psalms are deeply personal and their perceptions of God's responses are also very personal. Yet these responses seem always in keeping with the earlier accounts of who God is and His relationship with His people.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the borrowing of Canaanite motifs and ideas in the Psalter, appears for the most part not to constitute syncretism according to the definition outlined above. The pattern of borrowing does not correspond with any of the patterns of syncretism presented above. There is evidence that the theology of Israel, as presented in the Psalter, may reflect some of the cultural characteristics which might lead to syncretism. However, for most of these, there appears sufficient responses to the characteristics to make syncretism unlikely, though possible.

It can also be concluded that the elements considered from the Psalter, have been borrowed with the intention of contextualizing the faith of Israel for an audience familiar both with these concepts and ideas and how they should be best interpreted in the Israelite context.

There is insufficient evidence to conclude whether one particular model of contextualizing best describes the approach used by the psalmists. Several models can reasonably be rejected. One first must consider that the psalmist demonstrated a particular view of revelation by how they used their theology in the composition of their psalms. In light of this idea of revelation, the psalmists apparently

did not understand the task of contextualizing their faith the way the the Praxis or Transcendental theologians would.

It is apparent that although the images and motifs of Canaanite culture were used by the psalmists, this culture was not the dominant guiding factor in the development of relevant theology in the Psalter. The remaining models which were considered above were the Translation and Synthetic models. These both allow for the use of an established conceptual tradition of God and His activities within Israel. There is also room for input from the surrounding cultural storehouse of ideas. The role that this external source played is too difficult to precisely define. Either of these models could describe the psalmists' approach though perhaps the synthetic model is best.

This study concludes that the psalms which have been traditionally described as syncretistic, have been mislabeled. This is largely due to an insufficient conception of forms and processes of religious syncretism. The psalms examined, exhibit characteristics which would suggest that motifs from Canaanite sources have been borrowed, adapted and reworked. These new elements did not move outside of the Israelite religious system, but have been used to facilitate communication of a relevant faith to the Israelite community.

These composers seemed to have approached this task as one of contextualization, and the Psalter indicates that this task was accomplished. Faith has been made relevant and has not been compromised. A secondary conclusion of this study might be to propose that the approaches of the psalmists to contextualize their material can also indicate directions valuable for contemporary composers of theological material. This does not by necessity exclude other approaches, nor does it deny value in them, since this is a descriptive accounting of the Psalms rather than a didactic one. This study can suggest historically validated approaches to contextualization. Theology which is not relevant has little use. Theology which has given up its message has little value.

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