

Psalm 40 and the Construction of Individual and Collective Identity*

Johannes Schnocks

1. Introduction

Psalm 40 is a remarkable text near the end of the first Davidic psalter. It begins with a short thanksgiving psalm and ends with pleas for salvation. Regarding form criticism especially, it seems to be composed, in a sense, the wrong way around. This peculiar structure seems to be easily explained by the fact that Ps 40 is apparently a composite text containing parts which in some cases existed beforehand. The closing verses v. 14–18 recur in the Book of Psalms with very few alterations as Ps 70, i. e. in the final composition of the second Davidic psalter. But even if we regard Ps 40 as a composite text, this does not explain its uncharacteristic and unexpected structure. In this short article, I attempt to understand the logic of this psalm as a text deliberately brought into its present shape and to investigate the shifts in meaning at different stages of growth of the text. My thesis is that the psalm's position within the final composition of the first Davidic psalter is the reason for its formation and its particular structure. Further, an understanding of the text in its current characteristic style is possible if one is not methodically misled by form critical questions predefining an understanding.

2. Translation of Ps 40

In my translation of the psalm, I want to propose an unusual interpretation of the syntax especially in v. 13–14, which I will explain below.¹

Ps 40:1 For the choir master, regarding David; a psalm.

- 2 I persistently awaited YHWH , /
and he inclined to me
and he heard my cry for help.

* Translated by Eva-Maria Taphorn and Maria E. Ritter, Münster. This is the revised version of a paper formerly published as: SCHNOCKS, J., Psalm 40 und die Konstruktion von individueller und kollektiver Identität, in: Grätz, S./Graupner, A./Lanckau, J. (ed.), Ein Freund des Wortes, FS U. Rütterswörden, Göttingen 2019, 311–324.

¹ The numbering of verses follows the Masoretic text (BHS), thus leading to a numbering different from most English translations.

- 3 He led me up out of the pit of destruction,
out of the mire of sludge //
and he set my feet upon a rock,
made firm my steps.
- 4 And he put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God, //
many will see it and fear /
and they will trust in YHWH.
- 5 Blessed is the man who made YHWH his trust /
and did not turn to the enemies und to those who enmesh themselves in lie.
- 6 Many are, which you have done,
you, YHWH, (are) my God,
your wonders and your thoughts towards us, //
there is none to compare with you,
I want to proclaim and to speak – /
they are more than can be counted.
- 7 Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
ears you have dug for me, /
burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.
- 8 Then I said: Behold, I have come, /
(like) on a scroll of a book was written on me.
- 9 To do your pleasure, my God, I desired /
and your instruction (is) amidst my bowels.
- 10 I have proclaimed uprightness in the great congregation,
behold, I have not restrained my lips, /
YHWH, you, you have recognized it.
- 11 I have not hidden your righteousness amidst my heart,
I have pronounced your reliability and your salvation, /
I have not concealed your grace and your dependability from the great congregation.
- 12 You, YHWH, shall not restrain your mercy from me, /
your grace and your dependability shall preserve me forever.
- 13 In case that evils will have encompassed me without number,
my iniquities will have overtaken me and I will not have been able to look, /
they will have been more than the hairs of my head, and my heart will have failed me,
- 14 (then) be pleased, YHWH, to deliver me, /
YHWH, to my help make haste!
- 15 Let those be ashamed and disgraced altogether who seek to destroy my life, //
let those retreat backwards and be insulted /
who delight in evil for me.
- 16 Let those be appalled because of their shame /
who say to me: "Ha, ha!"
- 17 Let rejoice and be glad in you all who seek you //
Let say forever: "Great will be YHWH!" those who love your salvation.
- 18 And I am poor and needy,
the Lord will think of me. //
My help and my savior are you,
my God, do not delay!

3. Structure

There are some observations which have a bearing on the structure of the psalm as a whole. There is a change from reporting speech about YHWH in v. 2–5 to direct speech addressed to YHWH from v. 6 onwards. As the beatitude in v. 5 has a closing effect for v. 2–5, the focus shifts at the same time from the individual fate of the speaker to its function as a more general example in v. 4–5. This slightly shifted perspective is also characteristic for the text beginning in v. 6 where the speaker seems to refer to aspects of a relationship to God that is deeply rooted in the traditions of Israel: the wonders of God, sacrifices, God's instructions, and life in a congregation. Therefore, a second part starting with v. 6 can be assumed. The question where this second part ends and a third containing the quotation of Ps 70 in v. 14–18 begins is more controversial. Various suggestions exist.² In my opinion, the most significant structural observation is the change of the verb forms from past tense (up to v. 11) to forms taking a future perspective into account (from v. 12 onwards). In addition, v. 12 begins with an emphasized *אֲתֵּהּ יְהוָה*, reminding of the second line of v. 6. The second part ends with v. 10–11, which are framed by the reference to the *קְהֵל רַב* (“great congregation”) as addressees of the supplicant's proclamation. Thus, the intent of the proclamation frames the whole second section (v. 6–11). In contrast, the congregation is no longer mentioned as of v. 12. Instead, the focus shifts to the supplicant hoping for YHWH's

² There are suggestions for a two-part as well as a three-part structure combined with different diachronic interpretations. For example, EERDMANS, *Book of Psalms*, 231.234–235, defends the homogeneity of the text and divides it into three sections (v. 1–6, 7–11, 12–18). In contrast, KRAUS, *Psalmen*, 456–459, translates and comments on two parts, v. 1–12 and v. 13–18. However, he only discusses the first twelve verses in his commentary on Ps 40 and assumes that instead of an intended attachment of the final verses Ps 70 was just copied seamlessly after the last verse. He thus shifts the text's literary issue to the level of textual transmission. HOSSFELD/ZENGER, *Armen*, 29–33; EIDEM, *Psalm 1–50* (NEB 29), 252, represent the opposite position by defining v. 12 as the beginning of the third section of the psalm – both synchronically and diachronically. BRAULIK, *Psalm 40*, 230, argues for an intermediary position regarding redaction criticism. He sees v. 12 as the original conclusion of the section v. 2–12 but continues: “By attaching v. 13 and v. 14–18, v. 12 was given a new character. It now functions as the introductory invocation of YHWH, followed by the uplifting lament of v. 13. ... In other words: *The redactional composition converted v. 12 from an original expression of trust into a plea.*” (emphasis in German original: “Durch die Anfügung von V. 13 und der V. 14–18 erhielt V. 12 einen neuen Charakter. Er fungiert nun als einleitende Anrufung Jahwes, gefolgt von der motivierenden Klage des V. 13. ... Mit anderen Worten: *V. 12 wurde von einer ursprünglichen Vertrauensäußerung durch die redaktionelle Komposition zu einer Bitte umfunktioniert.*”). STICHER, *Rettung*, 137, refers to this position approvingly, yet divides the final text into the sections v. 2–5, 6–12, 13–18. HAAG, *Psalm 40*, 59, votes for two parts (v. 2–13 and 14–18) under the headings of “Die Retterhilfe Gottes als erfüllte Hoffnung” and “Die Retterhilfe Gottes als zu erfüllende Hoffnung”. He dismisses Zenger's position by introducing a new genre, the “Vertrauensbekenntnis eines leidenden Gerechten” (*ibid.*, 61). By doing so he postulates that a certain point in postexilic history is most important for salvation history and at the same time most complicated and strained. He implies that the psalm does not speak, as it seems, about the affliction of an individual but about the community it represents. In this reading, many differences in the text are seen as an expression of this complicated background – an approach which is not fit to foster an accurate understanding.

action. This action, in turn, has consequences for other groups of people in v. 15–17 – consequences which, however, differ from those in previous verses.

4. The Individual Sections in the Context of the Psalm

4.1 The Section v. 2–5

Form-critically, the first section (v. 2–5) is a short individual thanksgiving psalm. The salvation story reports the supplicant's salvation by God, who heard their cry for help. The salvation itself is reminiscent of motives from Jeremiah³ and uses several contrasts:

“Down” and “up” are explicitly juxtaposed through the retrieving (עלה hi.) from the pit (בור) and the uplifting (קים hi.) onto a rock (סלע). Furthermore, the images of sinking into sludge (טיט היין) and of a firm stand (בון polel) evoke a contrast between “insecure” and “steady”. Lastly, the mention of the בור שאון (“pit of destruction”) – a nonrecurring incidence – refers to the שאול.⁴

Apart from this imagery, this short thanksgiving psalm has three features important for the understanding of the whole psalm.

According to v. 4a, God did not only save the supplicant but also put a song of praise into their mouth. Therefore, that many (רבים) hear the supplicant's salvation story is God's work. In this context, “to see” in the second half of the verse is an odd reaction. The play on words in combining “to see” and “to fear” evokes prophetic associations regarding the parallel in Isa 41:5,⁵ which involves the isles' reaction to God's salvific action in history. In contrast, further occurrences in Zech 9:5 and Ps 52:8 speak of reactions to God's judicial and destructive action. None of these examples contain reactions to a verbal statement. This raises the question whether v. 4b is about the reaction of “the many” to the “new song” of v. 4a and its content⁶ or rather about the perception of the supplicant's salvation by YHWH in v. 2–3. This second option allows for the assumption of a secondary expansion in v. 4a as, for example, Frank-Lothar

³ This applies particularly to the pit (בור) filled with sludge (טיט), into which Jeremiah is thrown in Jer 38:6 and from which he is pulled out in v. 13 (עלה hi. followed by מין and בור).

⁴ In contrast to older dictionaries (BROWN/DRIVER/BRIGGS, *Lexicon*, and GESENIUS, *Handwörterbuch*¹⁷; BEYSE, Art. s' h), more recent ones (KÖHLER/BAUMGARTNER, *Lexikon*³ and GESENIUS, *Handwörterbuch*¹⁸) suggest a broader differentiation of the verbal root שאר and the noun שאון accordingly. GERLEMAN, Art. Totenreich, 838, does not follow suit. HUFFELD, *Psalmen*, 295, had already opted for a separation of meanings. Thus, Ps 40:3 is the sole occurrence of שאון I “destruction”. This lexeme was, in turn, seen as directly etymologically dependent on שאול by KÖHLER, *Wortforschung*.

⁵ BRAULIK, Psalm 40, 113–114, points out this connection.

⁶ BRAULIK, Psalm 40, 113, assumes a genetic dependency of the first half of the verse on Isa 42:10, which matches the dependence of the second half on Isa 41:5. This observation would level the literary-critical gap between v. 4a and 4b. He, therefore, opts for the homogeneity of not only v. 2–5 but of v. 2–12 as well (*ibid.*, 77).

Hossfeld and Erich Zenger have suggested.⁷ If one, by contrast, emphasizes that “to see” and the resulting fear of God is used as a reaction to a verbal incident on the level of the final text, one could – again on the level of the final text – refer to Exod 20:18 and, less explicitly, to Deut 5:24b. This would emphasize the new song’s revealing nature. Though still a prophetic perspective, it would also contain associations to the revelation at Sinai and Horeb, respectively. The latter sparks increased interest if one focuses on v. 8–9 and considers the debate about reading Ps 40 as a Torah psalm.⁸

A beatitude follows in v. 5 which draws universal conclusions from the experience of salvation. At the same time, aspects not yet mentioned are added to this universal teaching, particularly the confrontation with enemies and liars.⁹

The major topic of this first section is trust in God. The section starts with the *figura etymologica* קיה קיית (“I persistently awaited”) and twice concludes in v. 4, 5 with the root בטח (“to trust”).

4.2 The Section v. 6–11

The following section, v. 6–11, can be divided into three parts: v. 6 deals with the proclamation of the unparalleled God; v. 7–9 contrast sacrificial cult with the Torah written into the supplicant; and finally, v. 10–11 are concerned with proclamation within the great congregation. The verb חפץ (“to desire”), both with God and the supplicant as subjects, frames v. 7–9, and קהל רב (“great congregation”) frames v. 10–11. Both framings are at the end of the first and last line of the verse, respectively. Furthermore, the keyword רב refers to the first part of the psalm, which mentions the רבים (“many”) learning of the supplicant’s salvation story.

⁷ Cf. HOSSFELD/ZENGER, *Armen*, 30 note 19; EIDEM, Psalm 1–50 (NEB 29), 253.255. Concerning the assumptions about the formation of the psalm it is less decisive whether v. 2–12 are seen as an original unit (Braulik) or as the product of a *Fortschreibung* of v. 2–5* (Zenger). It is more important for a proper understanding to emphasize the redactional process in which Ps 70 was placed at the end of this unit (here Zenger concurs with Braulik). The observations on v. 4 mentioned above and the closing character of v. 5 in combination with the change from reporting to direct speech commend the assumption of a differentiation into v. 2–3, 4b–5 and v. 4a, 6–12. The different profiles of these sections add to a certain plausibility of this option. While v. 2–3, 4b–5 focus on the lucky events which happened to the supplicant and the generalization which follows for the witnesses, v. 4a, 6–12 deal with a process of religious communications which is much more multidimensional. This difference also shows in the anthropological semantics of both sections. The later addition no longer deals with the newly gained security of the supplicant alluded to by mentioning the feet (v. 3) but focuses on parts of the body which are connected to deliberation and to promulgation: mouth (v. 4a), bowels (v. 9), lips (v. 10) and heart (v. 11).

⁸ Cf. STYGER/STEENKAMP/HUMAN, Psalm 40. However, v. 4 is irrelevant for this article, since it is concerned with reviewing the concept of obedience towards the written Torah in contrast to sapiential concepts. In my opinion, this approach does not work regarding the overall conception of the psalm. Nevertheless, these considerations illustrate how polyphonic connections within the final biblical text can be heard. Diachronically, one must consider that this Torah aspect is a result of combining the two half-verses v. 4a, 4b and the sections v. 2–5, 6–11.

⁹ Reading the psalm not as the prayer of an individual but as an expression of salvation history, HAAG, Psalm 40, 63–64, assumes that רהבים means pagan empires – primarily Egypt – whereas שטי כזב refers to those who apostatized during the exile.

All three parts of this section are phrased peculiarly. Each of them follows two trains of thought. However, they do not develop them successively, but interweave them and let them interrupt each other.¹⁰ This elaborate technique has, at first glance, a confusing effect, and has led to text critical interventions in some translations.¹¹ If one, however, adheres to the Hebrew text, it becomes obvious that these different trains of thought refer to each other. The first thought in v. 6 can be paraphrased: “You have done many wonders for us. I want to proclaim them but they are too numerous.” This statement is interrupted twice by the two halves of the sentence: “You, *YHWH*, (are) my God, there is none to compare with you.” By connecting both thoughts, one understands that talking about God’s wonders and about God’s nature are connected. One can only speak of this incomparable God if one also speaks about his salvific deeds for humankind – even though one will never accomplish this task. Simultaneously, the verse focuses on the relationship between God and humans by intertwining individual and collective perspectives: he is “my God” and he acts “towards us”.

The second part in v. 7–9 is structured correspondingly. Two parallel lines containing the first statement of v. 7–9 about God not demanding sacrifices (v. 7aα, 7b) are interrupted by the sentence “ears you have dug for me” (v. 7aβ), which marks the beginning of a second statement. Thus, the second train of thought is put in opposition to an understanding of religion which is limited to cult but disregards ethics (Amos 5:21–24 et al.). The psalm incorporates imagery based on Jer 31:31–34 as well as Deut 30:10–14 and Ezek 2:8–3:3 into the second train of thought. “Your Torah, my God, has been inscribed through my ears deep within me, making me like a book and desiring to do your pleasure” is a possible paraphrase for this statement. Connecting both lines of thought results in an obvious opposition between the Torah, which should be internalized and lived, and sacrificial cult. At the same time, both statements deal with the relationship between God and humans again, expressed – as in v. 6 – by a verbal parallel (*קָרַבְתִּי*): God does not desire offerings whereas the supplicant desires doing what pleases God.

Finally, the statement that the supplicant proclaims God’s characteristics in the great congregation determines v. 10–11. This, too, is interrupted, namely by the sentence “*YHWH*, you, you have recognized it” (v. 10b). Again, the intertwining of two different lines results in a statement about the relationship between God and humans: the proclamation of God’s nature by humans affects God. The combined use of *אָתָּה* and *יְהוָה* – albeit in reverse order – reminds of the “interruption” in v. 6a (“you, *YHWH*, are my God”). The supplicant had previously professed God, now God ought to recognize and accept the supplicant’s proclamation. This combination furthermore shows that the second lines of thought in v. 6, 10–11 refer to each other as well: in v. 6

¹⁰ Already HUPFELD, *Psalmen*, 301, felt tempted to rearrange the text but resisted “as these parentheses seem to belong to the psalm’s peculiarities”. (German original: “da diese Parenthesen zu den Eigenheiten des Ps. zu gehören scheinen”).

¹¹ One example is the deletion or reinterpretation of *אֱלֹהֵי* in WEISER, *Psalmen*, 224; KRAUS, *Psalmen*, 457–458.

the supplicant wanted to speak of God's wonders and thoughts, even though they are too numerous; in v. 10–11 he proclaimed God's characteristics. Thus, the topic of proclamation frames – with some shift in its emphasis – the whole section, and corresponds to the hearing, internalizing, and doing of the Torah in the middle part.

Three aspects of this second section (v. 6–11) have an impact on the understanding of the psalm as a whole:

1. The content of the “song of praise to our God” in v. 4 is in its immediate context a song of thanksgiving for the personal salvation experienced in v. 2–3. At the same time, when reading v. 4 in connection with v. 6–11, the emphasis on “our God” – in contrast to “my God” in the second line of v. 6 – corresponds to the proclamation of God's wonders and thoughts “towards us” (v. 6), i. e. his relationship-based actions towards the community of the faithful. Thereby, the supplicant's experience of salvation in the first section is collectivized and the “new song” is complemented by what might be called the old song: the traditions of the community. V. 10–11 list God's characteristics as manifested in these experiences: his “uprightness” (v. 10), “righteousness”, “reliability”, “salvation”, and “grace” (v. 11).
2. The רבים (“many”, v. 4) from the first section, who were supposed to witness the supplicant's fortune of salvation, are discernable in the קהל רב (“great congregation”, v. 10–11), thus specifying the group of listeners and witnesses to the song of praise.
3. The supplicant's characterization of their relationship to God has clearly changed. In the first section, very personal attitudes were expressed through the verbs קוד (“to persist”) and בטח (“to trust”). These can serve universally as a positive example – as it is expressed in the beatitude in v. 5. In contrast, the second section significantly transforms this personal relation of the supplicant to the saving God. It is a matter of a mutual relation between God, who works wonders, expresses his will in the Torah, and recognizes human effort, and the supplicant, who professes this miraculous God, internalizes and observes his Torah, and proclaims his nature. The relationship between God and humans is, thus, deeply embedded in Israel's religious traditions and institutions. It is not subjective and even less dependent on a personal religious experience such as the story of salvation of an individual in v. 2–3. Nevertheless, it requires personal commitment, acting according to the Torah, and praise of God within the community.

On the level of the final text, these transformations are apparent and should not be minimized. A literary-critical option interpreting v. 4a, 6–11 as a *Fortschreibung* of v. 2–5* is a possible ramification.¹²

¹² Cf. HOSSFELD/ZENGER, Armen, 29–30; EIDEM, Psalm 1–50 (NEB 29), 252, and above note 7.

4.3 The Section v. 12–18

The third section continues as direct speech addressed to God. Beginning in v. 12, however, the verb forms change and instead of looking back at the past the supplicant looks – with wishes and pleas – towards the future. V. 12 itself refers repeatedly to the preceding verses. Similar to the parallel use of חפץ (“to desire”) in v. 7, 9, the verb כלא (“to restrain”) is used both regarding God and the supplicant: the supplicant did not restrain the lips to proclaim truth in the great congregation (v. 10) and God ought not to restrain his mercy from the supplicant in turn. The nouns חסד (“grace”) and אמת (“dependability”) are incorporated from the immediately preceding verse. No longer merely the content of the supplicant’s proclamation, God’s characteristics are asked to protect him or her תמיד (“forever”). This time a perspective of continuity frames the third section of the psalm as תמיד is used again in v. 17.

If one considers this section according to form-critical criteria as a psalm of lament, one must consequently assume – as Baethgen did¹³ – that the supplicant suffers another distress (beginning in v. 13) after the misery from which they had been rescued according to v. 3. In my opinion, the form-critical approach reaches its limits in a composition like Ps 40.

V. 13 determines the understanding of the entire psalm. Many translations from the Septuagint and the King James Version to the New Revised Standard Version consider the introductory כִּי to be causal: “For evils have encompassed me without number” (NRSV). There is, however, no point of departure for this causal explanation in v. 12. Even if one, as I do, understands the verb forms as wishes, they refer to a continuous state (תמיד) of a good relationship with God. This relationship typically appears as dysfunctional in psalms of lament and is expressed in pleas following a description of misery such as “Return, YHWH, rescue my liveliness” (Ps 6:5). This is not the case here. Ps 40:13 instead talks about a situation characterized by distress and sin. Considering the psalm’s previous statements, it can only mean an acute hardship, not a permanent condition. Therefore, one should consider a conditional translation of כִּי in this verse.¹⁴ As a result, the surrounding v. 12, 14 specify a future context for v. 13 which suggests an understanding of the verse’s perfect forms as a *futurum exactum*.¹⁵

¹³ Cf. BAETHGEN, Psalmen, 115.

¹⁴ Cf. EERDMANS, Book of Psalms, 231: “The last part of the psalm vv. 12–18 is no description of a present state of affairs, but of a future eventuality. The author calls his song a ‘new song’, a *tehillah* (song of praise) inspired by gratitude for his personal good fortune, because Jahu has set his foot on a rock and has steadied his steps. In view of this happy situation v. 13 cannot be a complaint of countless evils, which would beset him at the same time. The particle כִּי has conditional sense here and is followed by the Perfect tense as Numb. v. 20.” This solution, however, is used by Eerdmans to justify the homogeneity of Ps 40 (cf. *ibid.*, 234–235). Thus, Ps 70 would be an extract of the final verses as a separate text. This hypothesis has been refuted convincingly (see below). But why should a conditional translation of כִּי – and, thus, a meaningful final text of the psalm – contradict the interpretation of v. 13 (and v. 12) as a redactional linking of the following verses to Ps 40:2–11?

¹⁵ For the translation of conditional clauses with Hebrew perfect and imperative in the consecutive clause in line of a *futurum exactum*, i. e. as conditions conceptualized to be completed in the

Thus, the citation of Ps 70 beginning in v. 14 receives a different function regarding the whole psalm than usually assumed:¹⁶ a prayer serving as a paradigm in case of distress. One could paraphrase: "If ever evil things will have surrounded me, then be pleased, YHWH, to rescue me."

Upon close examination of v. 14–18, the verses show a few differences to Ps 70. It has been proven that all differences are adjustments in Ps 40, i. e. that Ps 70 is used in Ps 40 secondarily.¹⁷ Some of these adjustments constitute meaningful connections within the psalm making their analysis – including their effect on the psalm's overall statement – particularly worthwhile.

future, cf. GESENIUS/KAUTZSCH, *Grammatik*, § 159n and § 106o. The example for י followed by perfect tense in the conditional clause in *ibid.*, § 159aa, Num 5:20–21, uses jussive in the consecutive clause. This example, however, presents a condition which is conceptualized to have been completed in the past.

¹⁶ If an interpretation of the psalm as a whole is devised at all, there are essentially two options: On the one hand, the emphasis of the final section of the psalm in v. (12,) 13–18 is stressed, which turns the entire psalm into a psalm of lament. The distresses of v. 2–3 and of v. 13 are interpreted as hardships in the past and in the present. For example, BAETHGEN, *Psalmen*, 115, writes: "verses 2–5 are most naturally interpreted regarding the liberation from exile. Reaching the homeland again, however, sufferings without number were waiting for the people. The purpose of the psalm is to request that the God who rescued from Babylon may complete his work of liberation to the faithful people." (German original: "die Verse 2–5 lassen sich am natürlichsten auf die Befreiung aus dem Exil deuten. Aber in der wiedererlangten Heimat warteten Leiden ohne Zahl des Volkes. Zu erbitten, dass der Gott, welcher aus Babel geholfen hat, sein Werk der Befreiung an dem treuen Volke vollenden möge, ist der Zweck des Psalms.") RIDDERBOS, *Psalmen*, 289, states that gratitude, praise, and trust in v. 2–12 structurally serve the plea for salvation: "Thus, he [i. e. the supplicant, J. S.] has built a foundation onto which he can place himself to pray with strength, v. 13–18." (German original: "So hat er ein Fundament gelegt, auf das er sich stellen kann, um mit Kraft zu beten, V. 13–18."). On the other hand, OEMING, *Buch der Psalmen*, 221, incorporated a speculation presented by KRAUS, *Psalmen*, 460, that the prayer songs were put up in the sanctuary, resulting in an, in this respect, unusual reading: "In accordance with the characteristic style of the previous verses, v. 13–18 are the immediate fulfillment of the promise made in the sermon. For this purpose, the supplicant recites his own prayer which he had spoken to God in the former distress and which he now has with him on a little scroll. ... Apparently, people brought their written prayers to the community assembly ... and deposited them in the house of God" (German original: "V. 13–18 sind nach dem Duktus des Bisherigen die unmittelbare Einlösung des Predigtversprechens. Der Betet rezitiert dazu sein eigenes Gebet, das er in der damaligen Notsituation zu Gott gesprochen und nun in der kleinen Buchrolle bei sich hat. ... Offenbar brachten Menschen ihre Gebete in schriftlicher Form in die Gemeindeversammlung mit ... und deponierten sie im Gotteshaus"). Thereby, the psalm as a whole turns into a thanksgiving song; the distresses mentioned in v. 2–3, 13 are the same. WEBER, *Werkbuch I*, 192, also considers the psalm as a thanksgiving song "provided that it has to be interpreted – chronologically or regarding its content – in reversed order, i. e. from back to front. ... Perhaps, 14–18 (= Ps 70) served as a 'form' which the hassled repeated, with which he laid down his distress to God, and awaited him (2), and, finally, experienced salvation (3)." (German original: "wobei er zeitlich bzw. inhaltlich betrachtet umgekehrt, d. h. von hinten nach vorn, zu interpretieren ist. ... Möglicherweise diente 14–18 [= Ps 70] als 'Formular', das der Bedrängte nach-betete, mit dem er seine Not Gott hinlegte und auf diesen harrte [2] und schließlich die Rettungserfahrung machte [3].")

¹⁷ Cf. BRAULIK, *Psalm 40*, esp. 234–240; HOSSFELD/ZENGER, *Psalms II*, 188; MULZER, *Doublette*. Against these convincing arguments CRAIGIE, *Psalms 1–50*, 314, and GERSTENBERGER, *Psalms*, 172, reject the priority of Ps 70 and understand Ps 40 as a genuine unity. They opine that all differences in the psalm should be understood from its usage as a liturgy.

The most important alteration is the first word in Ps 40:14. V. 14 prepends רצה (“be pleased”) to the introductory cry for help of Ps 70:2 and, thus, takes up v. 9, in which the noun רצון refers to God’s pleasure which the supplicant gladly did. Therefore, the supplicant’s consent to God’s pleasure is subtly manifest in the plea for salvation and ought to motivate God to intervene and save.

A minor change compared to Ps 70:5 consists in the adjustment of the form תשועתך in Ps 40:17. It thereby matches the keyword in v. 11. This adjustment is important, for it associates the community of v. 17, which rejoices and praises God, with the “great congregation” in v. 11.

In Ps 70:6 the supplicant wishes God to “hasten (חושה) to me”, which frames the entire psalm together with a parallel in Ps 70:2. The modification in Ps 40:18 is significant. The supplicant wishes the Lord to “think (יחשב) of me”, thus forming a connection to “your thoughts (מחשבתך) towards us” in v. 6.

5. The Function of v. 12–18 in the Psalm as a Whole

Especially this last modification underlines that the connections built up in the second section are of high importance for the understanding of the psalm as a whole. But what is the function of the psalm’s third section and what was the purpose of attaching Ps 70 in its slightly changed form if this process greatly complicates the psalm’s structure? In my opinion, there are two answers to this question, which supplement each other. Hossfeld and Zenger gave the first answer 25 years ago by outlining the function of Ps 40:14–18 for the end of the group of psalms Ps 35–41 and thereby for the end of the first Davidic psalter.¹⁸ There is, for example, a frame of multiple references between Ps 40:14–18 and Ps 35 (particularly notable in v. 4, 25–27) which was probably created by a redaction. This explains the reason for the form of Ps 40, but not its meaning.

Retracing the psalm’s train of thought reveals that it describes the supplicant’s identity on the one hand and speaks about relationships on the other hand. The prayer starts with the very personal experiences of God and his salvation made by the supplicant, making the description of identity subjective. The central statements are “to persist” (v. 2) and “to trust” (v. 4, 5) in God. These statements are generalized by the beatitude in v. 5, although they are still formulated personally. A dissociation of “enemies” and of “those who enmesh themselves in lie” occurs, establishing an opposing group that might also include the worship of false gods. As shown above, v. 6–11 expand on this psalm of thanksgiving by incorporating the subjective experience of salvation into Israel’s traditions. The verses’ universal topics are God’s miracles “towards us”, life according to the Torah which has taken root within humans, and the testimony of faith in front of the great congregation. This significant conceptual contrast can

¹⁸ Cf. HOSSFELD/ZENGER, *Armen*, 31–34.

only be explained diachronically. In accordance with Hossfeld and Zenger, v. 4a, 6–11 can be understood as a *Fortschreibung* of v. 2–5* which has inserted v. 4a to embed itself into the first section.¹⁹ Furthermore, the contrast to the personal experience of salvation in the first section raises the question whether this type of relationship with God, which is traditional and refers to a community, will be able to sustain the individual should it encounter distress or even entangle itself in its own sins. The question is if a relationship with God which was adopted in a process of religious learning stands the test in a case of real emergency and if the experiences to which the community refers prove to be relevant then. In its last section, the psalm does not answer this question theoretically, but voices the trust already phrased in v. 2: God's mercy and grace shall preserve all who trust in him forever (v. 13). Accordingly, just in case it should be needed (v. 13), the cry for help is also formulated. As shown, it is a citation of Ps 70 beginning in v. 14 which has been modified into a prayer fitting the previously constructed identity.

Therefore, the following redactional process is feasible: The redaction which composed a group of psalms (Ps 35–41) at the end of a composition which is now the first Davidic psalter (Ps 3–41) created the present psalm by integrating Ps 70 from the end of the second Davidic psalter at the end of an already existing psalm (Ps 40:2–11). This was achieved by v. 12–13, which allow a seamless transition and by adjusting Ps 70 selectively to the new context. As all adaptations especially respect the concept of v. 6–11, it is possible that the redaction deemed Ps 40:2–11 to be a text representing its own ideas, or even created it.

6. Conclusion

In this psalm, the construction of religious identity changes from a subjective experience of salvation within an intimate, personal relationship with God into the traditional and, to an extent, institutional transformation of this identity. But is this collective identity religiously as plausible as the personal one? Amid the reality of our religious communities today, we are often very aware of this problem. Do we need the community, the *communio sanctorum*, to be religious, or does it come down to a personal feeling of nearness to God? Is it not possible that collective religiosity is incapable of mitigating the individual's distress and sin? The psalm's last section protects the relationship of the "great congregation", which celebrates God's salvation, grace, and reliability, both against individual sin and against physical and social attacks on the individual (v. 15–16). Therefore, God's salvation is neither only a personal experience of the pious nor a tradition of faith passed down in Israel, but it can also be a reality experienced in person by "traditional" believers. In Ps 40:18, the supplicant describes this attitude of anticipating God's salvation when faced with personal distress

¹⁹ Cf. HOSSFELD/ZENGER, Armen, 29–30, and note 18.

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