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William Goodman

Assured Lament

U2 Sing the Psalms

The influence of the Psalms can be detected in many of the songs and live performances of the Irish band U2. Longing and anger are recurring themes, as is the interplay between the individual and the corporate. I discuss some important examples of this Psalmic influence, arguing that the songs offer a mixture of assured praise and anguished lament which intertwine and are held together in tension. Rather than attempt its explanation or resolution, these songs and their presentation indicate a willingness to live with the resultant dissonance.

Prelude: "Let me in the Sound"

Music engages us personally and passionately. It needs to be heard and experienced; ideally also seen in a live performance, and shared with others. It is something to feel in our body, in the guts, not simply to survey

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intellectually from a safe distance.[1] A line from one of U2's most recent songs, which became a catch-phrase of their *U2 360°* tour, reflects this: "Let me in the sound!"[2] When first presenting this paper to an audience, I was able to play the songs which it discusses to those who attended. Reduced, as they are now, simply to text on a page, these songs become pale shadows of their true selves, unable to convey the visceral impact of the percussion and bass line or the emotional vista opened up by a particular chord. Where is the passionate intensity poured out as the singer's voice reaches the high note, or the sense of surrender as the melody line descends? Analysis of lyrics does no justice to the emotional and sensual heat which gives a song its power to please and to threaten.[3] I can only urge readers to minimise these shortcomings by finding ways to hear the songs alongside reading my analysis.

Suggestions of Scripture

Identifying the influence of biblical texts such as the Psalms on later works is not always straightforward. A quotation or paraphrase may be easy to recognise, but an oblique allusion, or a new poem inspired by one biblical verse or metaphor is a different matter, not to mention an implicit or distant echo. In John Donne's Holy Sonnets or George Herbert's *The Temple*, readers may recognise a range of emotion from delight to anguish, expressed in relation to God in ways that are strongly reminiscent of the Psalms, although not clearly quoting the Psalms. "Such poems strike the reader as what David might well have said under similar circumstances, had he been burdened by Donne's particular sense of guilt or able to praise God with Herbert's 'utmost art.'"[4]

[1] Cf. Mark Roncace and Dan W. Clanton, "Introduction: Teaching the Bible with Music," in *Teaching the Bible Through Popular Culture and the Arts*, ed. Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray (Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 10. Their comment about opera's holistic demands and impact on the listener can be applied to other types of music.

[2] "Get On Your Boots," *No Line On the Horizon* (Island Records, 2009).

[3] Cf. Susan McClary and Robert Walser, "Start Making Sense! Musicology Wrestles with Rock," in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (London: Routledge, 1990), 287, 290; also Umberto Fiori, "Listening to Peter Gabriel's 'I Have the Touch'," in *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, ed. Richard Middleton (Oxford University Press, 2003), 183–91; Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 141–42.

[4] Peter S. Hawkins, "Singing a New Song: The Poetic Afterlife of the Psalms," in *Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical, and Artistic Traditions*, ed. Harold W. Attridge and Margot E. Fassler, SBL Symposium Series 25 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 384. See also his comments about the influence of biblical lament on some

That the Psalms and other biblical voices may be heard in U2's songs is undisputed. The extent to which they are heard, on the other hand, is much disputed, not least among their fans. The songs tend to allude to biblical texts rather than quote them directly; the number of such allusions varies, depending on whose analysis you are reading.[5] U2's songs abound in language which is opaque and ambiguous, suggestively spiritual; how often a biblical allusion may be heard is a subject of disagreement. Some proposed links with the Bible can seem forced, due to the very general vocabulary involved.[6] At times, however, the biblical voice is more overt; I shall focus on a few songs in which I judge that the language of the Psalms may be clearly heard.

The 1980s: Glory and Longing

"Gloria"

The challenge of precisely locating biblical allusions is evident in an early U2 song, "Gloria." The refrain around which the song revolves proclaims:

> Gloria
> In te domine

of Gerald Manley Hopkins's sonnets (384–85). Hawkins also notes the influence of the Psalms on U2's lyrics (394), but does not explore this.

[5] See Deane Galbraith, "Drawing Our Fish in the Sand: Secret Biblical Allusions in the Music of U2," *Biblical Interpretation* 19, no. 2 (2011): 183, 187, 196, 207–9, 217–22. On the biblical allusions in the early albums see Andrew Davies, "The Bible under the Joshua Tree: Biblical Imagery in the Music of U2," *SBL Forum*, January 2009, http://www.sbl-site.org/Publications/article.aspx?articleId=795.

[6] For example, the link suggested by Steven Garber between U2's "When I Look at the World" and verses in Ps 123 which speak of looking to God and seeking God's mercy seems tenuous, and ignores the song's unease about those whose religious certainties blind them to some of life's harsh realities ("To See What You See: On Liturgy & Learning & Life," in *Get Up Off Your Knees: Preaching the U2 Catalog*, ed. Raewynne J. Whitely and Beth Maynard (Cambridge: Cowley, 2003), 13–14). Similarly, a link between the song "Rejoice" and both Ps 33 and the lament tradition, proposed by Greg Garrett, is attractive in that it supports the case which I am arguing here, but rests on insufficient evidence (*We Get to Carry Each Other: The Gospel According to U2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 29–30). Bono himself hesitantly describes the song "Drowning Man," from *War* (Island Records, 1983), as a psalm, but this song presents the voice of God in words suggestive of the prophets, rather than any clear allusion to the Psalms (Niall Stokes, *U2: The Stories Behind Every U2 Song* (London: Carlton Books, 2009), 41; Robert Vagacs, *Religious Nuts, Political Fanatics: U2 in Theological Perspective* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2005), 18).

Gloria
Exultate.[7]

The use of Latin points to one source of inspiration, an album of Gregorian chant. Reflecting on the writing process some years later, Bono (Paul Hewson, who wrote these and most of U2's other lyrics) mentions the influence of Gregorian chant, while speaking of "Gloria" as simply "a psalm."[8] This liturgical tradition would, of course, draw on New Testament texts such as Luke 2:14 and 21:27, which in turn draw on older traditions from the Hebrew Bible declaring praise to Yahweh.

The voice of various psalms of praise can be heard here: perhaps "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. / Let your glory be over all the earth" (Ps 57:5); "sing the glory of his name, / give to him glorious praise" (Ps 66:1–2); "Ascribe to Yahweh the glory due to his name" (Ps 96:7–8).[9] Assured praise seems evident in the mysterious elegance of the Latin; the singer lingers over the words "gloria" and particularly "exultate," as if savouring them in full. He sings the refrain in two different ways, one full-throated and apparently triumphant, the other gentler and more reassuring.

However, this chorus closes with the phrase "O Lord, loosen my lips." This is strongly reminiscent of the psalmist's "O Lord, open my lips, / and my mouth will declare your praise," a verse from one of the best known psalms of lament (Ps 51:15).[10] This hint of lament leads into the verses of "Gloria," both of which present a desperate struggle, set to an urgent, driving rhythm. The singer tries to find words, to sing, speak up, stand up, but feels unable to find his feet, to find a door. A mixture of panic, anger and desperation

[7] U2, "Gloria," from *October* (Island Records, 1981). My quotations of lyrics here and throughout derive from the official website, U2.com.

[8] Bono, The Edge, Adam Clayton, Larry Mullen Jr., with Neil McCormick, *U2 by U2* (London: HarperCollins, 2006), 113. "Gloria" is also influenced by Van Morrison's song of the same name, with its strong sexual overtones; see Stokes, *U2*, 23.

[9] Biblical quotations from New Revised Standard Version here and throughout, except where noted, with the name of God changed to "Yahweh."

[10] Bono quotes the liturgical version of Ps 51:15, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise" (which was spoken regularly as part of the liturgy in his Church of Ireland upbringing) when describing how he composed early song lyrics in a spontaneous charismatic experience (Bono et al., *U2 by U2*, 136). On the abiding influence and impact of Ps 51 in Christian worship, see Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston [with Erika Moore], *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 446–62.

come through, expressing inner turmoil.[11] Yet completeness is possible, and it is "only in you"; when the singer himself cannot "find the door," he immediately finds that "the door is open, / You're standing there, you let me in." Here is renewed hope, expressed at the end of each verse, which leads back into the chorus. Set among these verses, however, the chorus seems less assured, more an expression of self-abandonment in praise, despite (or in response to) the dire situation.

Scholarly study of the Psalms has moved in recent years from a narrow focus on their setting in the worship of ancient Israel to seeing in them broader reflections on life, which use language and imagery symbolic and stereotypical enough to be applicable to a variety of situations. This gives resonance with life-settings in each era, including our own: "A life-centred reading allows the psalms—like the score of music—to have innumerable performances beyond one ancient cultic setting."[12] In "Gloria," Bono appropriates the language of the Psalms to express his own personal experiences in terms that are vivid and broad enough to connect with the experiences of others in his audience. In his lack of specificity and use of Latin he also retains something of the enigma and ambiguity evident in biblical poetry, which tends to conceal as much as it reveals. The ebb and flow of this early U2 song blends lament and praise, anguish and exaltation. A profound sense of personal inadequacy is evident (although not concerning personal sin, as in Ps 51); yet with it comes a voice of determined and defiant praise to a "lord" who is worthy to receive what little the singer can give. The progression evident in Ps 51, from lament and petition (vv. 1–12) to obedience, testimony and praise (vv. 13–19) is not so clear cut in the U2 song; but praise, in the repeated final refrain, does have the last word.[13]

[11] As time ran out in the recording studio, Bono was under considerable pressure to produce lyrics in a hurry, after his originals were lost: see Bono et al., *U2 by U2*, 109–10, 113.

[12] Susan E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 189; also J. Clinton McCann, *The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, New Interpreter's Bible 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 646. On the Psalms in the cult, see Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), particularly 1, 1–22; Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (London: SCM Press, 1962), particularly 35–40.

[13] On the turning point in Ps 51, see Waltke and Houston, *Psalms as Christian Worship*, 465–66. Walter Brueggemann suggests a turning point after v. 14 (*The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 101).

"How Long?"

Tension between assurance and anguish in a contrasting verse and chorus is evident in another early song. For most of the 1980s, the final encore at each live U2 performance was "40." The verses quote directly from the opening section of Psalm 40, which proclaims: "I waited patiently for Yahweh, / he inclined to me and heard my cry," then declare a desire to "sing a new song," as in verse 3 of the psalm (cf. Ps 144:9). But the chorus asks repeatedly:

> How long to sing this song?
> How long, how long, how long
> How long to sing this song?[14]

After completing their performance of the song, the band left the stage one at a time: singer first, then the guitarists, and last of all, after a final flourish, the drummer. But the audience continued singing: "How long to sing this song?" even as the house lights came up and people began streaming towards the exits. Other bands of the day would happily give the vocals over to the audience in the middle of a song, to encourage a rousing singalong; but invariably the lead singer would then reclaim control of the song and lead the audience to its conclusion—the performers would always have the last word. With U2, it seemed as if they handed over the song to the audience, giving them the privilege and responsibility of the final word. My own response to this experience was to wonder what I was supposed to do with this song (and when I should stop singing). Faced with this lack of closure, I felt a mixture of bewilderment and excitement, wondering whether further verses needed to be written and sung. In U2's version, as befits the name of the band, engagement and response was required from the hearer of this psalm. The interplay between "I," "our," and "us" in vv. 1–5 of the psalm may indicate a representative individual performing the psalm on behalf of a congregation.[15] U2's lyric highlights the "I" verses, suggesting the experience of an individual; but the interaction between singer and audience in the song's live presentation conveyed something far more corporate, as if "we" had a major role to play.

[14] U2, "40," from *War*. The song's title reflects the psalm on which it is based, but also expresses the frenetic experience of writing and recording it with only forty minutes of recording time left in the studio; see Stokes, *U2*, 47.

[15] Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, New International Biblical Commentary: Old Testament Series 11 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 190.

This final encore experience felt disconcerting, yet also soothing, thanks to the gentle lullaby of the melody and reassurance expressed in most of the words.[16] As already mentioned, the verses quote Ps. 40, with verse two proclaiming assuredly that "You set my feet upon a rock, / and made my footsteps firm," and that "many will see and hear" (amending the psalm's "see and fear/revere," perhaps to emphasise the experience of hearing the music). The chorus, however, looks elsewhere in the Psalter, drawing on a recurring phrase: it could be from Ps 6, or Ps 13, with its fourfold "how long?" A dissonance can be felt between verse and chorus. The verses convey serenity as they look to God's rescuing work in the past, and to a promised response of singing and witness in the future; all this suggests assurance that God is acting in the life of the singer in the present, or else can be trusted to do so. The chorus, by contrast, vocalises repeatedly the anguished question, "How long?"—a cry from biblical contexts which speak of life's bitterest and most painful moments. In "40," as in "Gloria," U2 combine assurance and lament, agony and serenity.

Others, too, seem to have found this combination disconcerting. Bono sees in Ps 40 an ideal future in which grace will replace karma, and love will fulfill the laws of Moses. Commenting on the refrain of the song, and the way audiences responded by singing it back to him so strongly, he says:

> I had thought of it as a nagging question—pulling at the hem of an invisible deity whose presence we glimpse only when we act in love. How long … hunger? How long … hatred? How long until creation grows up and the chaos of its precocious, hell-bent adolescence has been discarded? I thought it odd that the vocalising of such questions could bring such comfort; to me, too.[17]

A blend of painful longing and comforting assurance is not unfamiliar to the Psalms themselves. The seminal work of Hermann Gunkel and his

[16] Others who experienced "40" as a final encore speak of a similar sense of reassurance. Jamie Howison, for example, refers to the "almost surreal" peace and hope engendered in him by the experience. Curiously, he makes no comment on the anguish suggested in the "How long?" refrain, even while urging contemporary churches to discover the psalms of lament; see Jamie Howison, "The Psalms, the Blues, and the Telling of Truth," in Whitely and Maynard, *Get Up Off Your Knees*, 33–36; also Garrett, *Carry Each Other*, 26.

[17] *The Book of Psalms*, with an introduction by Bono, Pocket Canons (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1999), xi–xii.

successors sought to identify distinct forms of Psalms; thus laments were to be distinguished from hymns and thanksgivings.[18] Psalms which combined elements of these different forms were seen by some as composite types indicating later, secondary development, or else as indications of liturgical developments in the worship of ancient Israel.[19] Discussion of the different forms focused on historical issues: while some argued for the primacy of hymns, others emphasized lament as structurally pivotal, with certain forms derived from or responding to the lament.[20] But recent study has focused more on ways in which such distinctions break down or blur together in various psalms which combine praise or thanks and lament (alternatively termed "protest" by some or "disorientation" by others).[21]

Generally in the Psalter, lament leads into praise or testimony: thus Ps 22 begins with "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and ends with praise and declaration of God's deliverance (vv. 21–31). Similar movement is seen in Pss 4, 13, 31, 54, 69, 73, 102, and 130. The Psalter as a whole reflects this pattern, with more lament in the first three books and an increasing expression of thanks and praise in the final two. Rather less common is a turn from praise or thanks at start of a psalm to protest/lament at the end. Pss 9–10 do this, as do Pss 27 and 89, and Ps 40.[22] The comforting testimony of the first part of Ps 40 unexpectedly gives way, in the final verses,[23] to profound discomfort and the urgent plea: "Be pleased, Yahweh, to save me, Yahweh hasten to my help." The speaker feels threatened by enemies seeking his/her life. Hans-Joachim Kraus affirms the proposal of Gunkel that these final verses were originally a separate psalm, and their reappearance in Ps 70 suggests that this view may be correct.[24] However, this approach fails to offer

[18] See Hermann Gunkel, *An Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, completed by Joachim Begrich, trans. James D. Nogalski, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), 1–250.

[19] See the discussion in Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship* 1, 95–97; 2, 74–78.

[20] Claus Westermann, "The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament," *Interpretation* 28, no. 1 (1974): 20–38; Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 52–81.

[21] John Goldingay, *Psalms*, 3 vols., Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006–2008), 1:44–45, 61–63, 68; Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 51–58.

[22] Goldingay, *Psalms* 1: 568.

[23] Vv. 11–17, or 13–17; compare ibid., with Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 130.

[24] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 421–28. Kraus declines to offer any commentary on the second part of Ps 40, reserving his analysis for Ps 70 only.

a satisfactory explanation for why two such diverse psalms came to be united in the first place. It also ignores close linguistic ties between the two parts of Ps 40, in words such as רצון for "will" (v. 8a) and רצה "be pleased" (v. 13a), חפץ for "delight" (v. 8) and "desire" (v. 14), תשועה for "saving" (vv. 10, 16) and כלא for "restrain" (vv. 9b, 11a); these suggest that the lament part was composed with precise reference to the thanksgiving.[25] Whatever its history, the canonical psalm as it stands invites the reader or singer to hold together confidence and lament. It indicates that a joyful experience of God's deliverance may be placed alongside, or even abruptly followed by, a new predicament and sense of despair. It prompts the reader to draw on memories of God's goodness during a previous crisis in order to build faith and assurance for that of the present.[26] Thus the movement from assurance to lament which can be observed in the U2 song echoes some aspects of the original Psalm. "How long?" is not found in Ps 40, but can be compared to the urgent call to Yahweh to "save me," "hasten to my help" (v. 13), and to rescue without "delay" (v. 17), which frame the lament section of the psalm.

At the Live Aid concert in London (1985), the crowd repeatedly launched into U2's "How long?" refrain during the hiatus between different acts. This may well have been a reflection on the number of U2 fans in the audience that day; but it also serves as a reminder of the effectiveness of psalms of lament in expressing people's feelings about the horrors of famine in Africa.[27] One of the songs U2 performed on that day, "Sunday Bloody Sunday" also features the question "How long?" as it rages against violence, injustice and suffering:

> How long, how long must we sing this song?
> How long, how long?
> 'Cos tonight
> We can be as one, tonight … [28]

The cry "How long?" reflects not a desire for information but a complaint that "this has gone on long enough!" In the Psalms it usually expresses a sense

[25] See the discussion in Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 99–102; Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 130–31. Note also the structural analysis of Ps 40's successive triads and short "arias," suggesting inner coherence, in Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 238. Peter C. Craigie argues for the unity of the psalm as a royal liturgy (*Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary 19 (Waco: Word, 1983), 317).

[26] Cf. Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 131; Goldingay, *Psalms* 1:579.

[27] Cf. Bono et al., *U2 by U2*, 137.

[28] U2, "Sunday Bloody Sunday," from *War*.

of unanswered prayer: Yahweh seems to be ignoring the people's need and the psalmist's pleading (Pss 13:1–2; 35:17; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 94:3, 119:84).[29] In U2's songs, the cry retains that original godward dimension, but can also be heard addressing the wider world, echoing a usage found more rarely in the Psalter ("how long will you love vain words, / and seek after lies?" [Ps 4:2]; "How long will you assail a person, / will you batter your victim, all of you?" [Ps 62:3]).[30] It was this latter sense which became prominent in the way "How long?" was heard at Live Aid, sung by both the band and the crowd. The "How long?" of "Sunday Bloody Sunday" challenges any who will listen to turn from escapism and indifference to the needs of millions, which has gone on too long. Apathy at human need is lamented, while an assured alternative of victory and oneness is offered, "tonight." U2 have continually urged fans to join them in involvement in social and political issues relating to dignity and justice for Africa, the release of prisoners of conscience, peace in Ireland, and peace further afield.[31] The anger of biblical psalmists and prophets, as perceived by the band, is refocused on contemporary struggles through the lens of their music. How to handle and express anger is another important issue in these songs, as became evident in the decade that followed.

The 1990s: Waking the Dead

U2 of the 1980s, the angry young men with an urgent need to help save the world, morphed into something more laid-back and playfully ironic in the 1990s. A different final encore emerged, as the voice of the Psalms became more subdued. Bono sang repeated "Halleluias" during live performances of "Running to Stand Still," but these proved heavily ironic, as the song paints a bleak picture of life on a dead-end Dublin estate, where there was "only one way out"—perhaps the escape of addiction, perhaps only in death.[32] Similarities between the drug-induced ecstasy of the addict and the religious ecstasy

[29] See Craig C. Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplementary Series 52 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 100.

[30] "How long will you judge unjustly, / and show partiality to the wicked?" (Ps 82:2) might also be included, although the identity of the addressees is unclear (see Goldingay, *Psalms* 2:559–60).

[31] For examples of the band's own involvement in such matters of social justice, see Garrett, *Carry Each Other*, 87–88.

[32] U2, "Running to Stand Still," from *The Joshua Tree* (Island Records, 1987).

of the mystic have long been observed and debated; not least the agony and despair which may arise with the ending of the ecstatic experience. In performances of the song during the early 1990s, the catchword of triumphant praise heard repeatedly in the Psalter's own finale (Pss 146–50) was co-opted as the cry of the downward-spiralling addict; lament trumped assurance.

Exploration of the transient and the superficial was a theme of this decade which, in a suitable irony, turned out to lack conviction: while embracing playfulness, U2 still felt compelled to ask bigger questions.[33] Bono refers to the "Zoo TV" era in the early 1990s as a shift "from Psalms to Ecclesiastes."[34] Biblical influence continued, but now other texts were emerging. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes was heard exploring and searching the world, even talking with Jesus.[35] Judas was heard, speaking to Jesus about betrayal in their relationship.[36] The prodigal son was seen leaving by the back door and throwing away the key.[37] The grief, frustration and sadness expressed in these songs serves as a reminder that some of the concerns of biblical lament are pervasive in the canon, emerging outside the obvious territory of the Psalter, the prophets, or Lamentations.

Shouting at God

Overt arguments with God featured strongly on 1997's "Pop" album, which Bono suggests should have been called "Shouting at God."[38] Anger, and how to handle it (an undercurrent in some of their earlier songs), emerges here as a major concern.[39] While conceding that "If God Will Send His Angels" is

[33] "It's like the university professor who just can't dance. Deep down we weren't as shallow as we'd like" (Bono et al., *U2 by U2*, 269).

[34] Bill Flanagan, *U2 At The End of the World* (London: Transworld, 1995), 397. On the influence of Ecclesiastes in the "intellectual wanderlust" of U2 in the 1990s, see also Bono's remarks about the song "The Wanderer" in Bono et al., *U2 by U2*, 249.

[35] U2, "The Wanderer," from *Zooropa* (Island Records, 1993). The influence of Ecclesiastes 3 is also evident in the repeated 'Is there a time for … ?' of the song "Miss Sarajevo" (U2, *Passengers: Original Soundtracks 1* (Island Records, 2005)).

[36] U2, "Until the End of the World," from *Achtung Baby* (Island Records, 1991).

[37] U2, "The First Time," from *Zooropa*; see Stokes, *U2*, 116.

[38] Bono et al., *U2 by U2*, 266.

[39] The turmoil of adolescent grief and anger feature in songs such as "Boy," "Out of Control," and "The Electric Co.," from *Boy* (Island Records, 1980) and "I Threw a Brick Through a Window," from *October* (Island Records, 1981). This develops into anger at injustice in the wider political arena expressed in the opening trio of *War*: "Sunday Bloody Sunday," "Seconds" and "New Years Day."

"a song of quiet anger at the way the world is and God's failure to intervene," the singer insists that he does not blame God for earthquakes, tsunamis and the rest of the world's ills, preferring to see them as "what happened when we threw God out of the garden [of Eden]."[40] Here is an ambivalence about who to blame for the world's ills, which re-emerges in the album's final song, "Wake Up Dead Man." Although presented in a sparse, stripped down fashion, the hard-hitting nature of the song is evident from the opening words:

> Jesus, Jesus help me,
> I'm alone in this world,
> And a fucked-up world it is too.

The song's protagonist is "waiting here, boss," longing for "an order in all of this disorder" that will help "hope and peace try to rhyme." The insistent and repeated refrain, "Wake up, wake up dead man," suggests that God is dead, yet refuses to accept this death as the last word. While clearly addressed to Jesus, who died but then rose again, the one whose "Father made the world in seven" and is "in charge of heaven," the song also suggests a psalm of lament. Although he does not point to a specific biblical psalm, Bono describes "Wake Up, Dead Man" as "in the tradition of the Psalms of David, which offer an honest dialogue with God." He admires the directness of those psalms which cry out, "Where are you when you're needed? Call yourself God? Look, I'm surrounded by my enemies. You got me into this, get me out of here!" He acknowledges the anger in this song, but he also sees devotion expressed in it.[41]

The refrain of "Wake Up Dead Man" may carry echoes of Ps 143's "Hear my prayer, Yahweh … Answer me quickly, Yahweh" (vv. 1, 7).[42] A more likely inspiration is Ps 44: 23–26, with its abrasive and shocking demands:

> Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord?
> Awake, do not cast us off forever!
> Why do you hide your face?
> Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?

[40] Bono et al., *U2 by U2*, 266.

[41] Ibid., 269. Terrien also indicates devotion when he comments that the psalmist's boldness reveals a certain intimacy with the divine (*Psalms*, 361).

[42] See Beth Maynard, "Pursuing God as Absent," in Whitely and Maynard, *Get Up Off Your Knees*, 187–88.

For we sink down to the dust;
our bodies cling to the ground.
Rise up, come to our help.
Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love.

The psalmist sees God as answerable to those who are God's covenant partners. Convinced that the people have not broken faith with God, the psalmist concludes that it is God who has broken trust, and makes that accusation openly (vv. 20–22). God is directly accused of sleeping, rejecting, hiding the face and ignoring, and is called instead to get up, wake up, rise up.[43] Although we cannot be sure of the significance of the use of the generic term "God" (*Elohim* /אלהים) rather than the divine name "Yahweh" (יהוה) in psalms such as this one, it effectively serves to emphasise a sense of mystery and distance from God.[44] Some of today's commentators are struck by the speaker's lack of meekness and acquiescence, describing it as "insolent" or "a tone of brusque familiarity … near blasphemous audacity."[45] Observing the contrast between God's mighty deeds on His people's behalf in the past (vv. 1–8) and the distress of their current situation, Ps 44 expresses conviction that God is the true source of the blows which have devastated the people (note the repeated "you have … " accusations levelled against God in vv. 9–14), and hence only God can reverse the distress, as happened in the past.[46] The psalm and the U2 song both repeat their urgent demands that God should wake up, and both end without any reply from God. Yet by choosing to address God so directly, both indicate some degree of hope and trust in the continuing presence of one who is in the darkness as well as the light (cf. Ps 139:12).[47]

The specific crisis of Ps 44—defeat in battle (see vv. 10–11, 19, 22)—is not evident in the U2 song, which laments a more general "disorder" in a

[43] See Goldingay, *Psalms* 2:47, 49.

[44] On the terms used for the divine in the so-called "Elohistic Psalter" (Pss 42–83) and their possible significance, see Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 5; John Day, *Psalms*, OT Guides (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 13–14.

[45] Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 334; Terrien, *Psalms*, 361.

[46] Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, trans. J. R. Porter (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 23, 40. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*, trans. James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), 48.

[47] Vagacs, *Religious Nuts, Political Fanatics*, 57–58; also Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 54.

world gone awry. Nor is the corporate nature of the psalm heard; "we" and "us" are effaced in favour of a very personal "I-thou" expression. Another difference, noted by Brian Walsh, is the way the U2 song avoids the unequivocal directness of the psalm, by tempering accusation with suggestions that God may have excuses for inaction ("maybe your hands weren't free … were you working on something new?")[48] Laying aside the strong possibility of sarcasm in the song lyric (which Walsh does not consider), we detect again in U2's lyrics a daring directness in calling on God, combined with ambivalence about directing anger at God. The "dead man" is called upon to "wake up," but with something less than the direct accusation ("Why have you forsaken me?": Ps 22:1) and blame ("you have lifted me up and thrown me aside": Ps 102:10) directed at God in some of the psalms of lament. In his analysis of lament psalms, Craig Broyles distinguishes between God-lament (the psalmist complains to God about God) and other laments (which complain to God about the situation, and often plead for God to act). The latter kind imply or state that God is behaving negligently, by failing to come and help, while the former kind indicate that God is behaving wrongly: God is hostile, causing the distress, betraying the trust of the psalmist.[49] In Ps 44, Broyles observes both accusations being leveled at Yahweh, who opposes his people (vv. 1–22) and is also negligent towards them (vv. 23–26).[50] In songs such as "Wake Up, Dead Man," U2 are bold in accusing God of being an absent deliverer or aloof bystander, appealing to God against God in the way that Broyles observes. But U2 avoid confronting God as active antagonist and cause of the distress. Unlike Ps 44, which demands God's help because of God's commitment (v. 26) and the people's innocence (vv. 17–22), U2 follow the more common pattern in the Psalter, pleading for God's help simply because they are afflicted, appealing to divine pity and compassion.[51]

[48] Brian J. Walsh, "Wake Up Dead Man: Singing the Psalms of Lament," in Whitely and Maynard, *Get Up Off Your Knees*, 37–42.

[49] Broyles, *Conflict of Faith*, 52–53; 111–12. Noting the number of imperatives in certain laments, Gunkel also comments on their assertive tone; he suggests that the complaints are intended to "irritate" Yahweh and thus inflame his wrath against the enemy (Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms*, 90–91, 158–60).

[50] Broyles, *Psalms*, 204.

[51] Cf. Broyles, *Conflict of Faith*, 125; 220, 223, 225; also John Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 13.

Blues and Gospel

As the new millennium approached, Bono produced some personal reflections on the Psalms, not in song but in prose. As part of Canongate's Pocket Canons series (which featured individual biblical books in the grandeur of the King James translation, with a celebrity introduction aimed at wider appeal) Bono was invited to write the introduction to the Psalms. He reflected on his own reception of the Psalms which, along with hymns, gave him his first taste of inspirational music, as he sat in church with his mother as a child:

> At the age of 12, I was a fan of David. He felt familiar … like a pop star could feel familiar.… He was forced into exile and ended up in a cave in some no-name border town facing the collapse of his ego and abandonment by God. But this is where the soap opera got interesting, this is where David was said to have composed his first psalm—a blues. That's what a lot of the psalms feel like to me, the blues. Man shouting at God—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me?" (Psalm 22).…
>
> Abandonment, displacement is the stuff of my favourite psalms. The Psalter may be a font of gospel music, but for me it's in his despair that the psalmist really reveals the nature of his special relationship with God. Honesty, even to the point of anger. "How long, Lord? Wilt thou hide thyself forever?" (Psalm 89), or "Answer me when I call" (Psalm 5).[52]

While acknowledging the element of thanks and praise evident in the Psalter, and equating it with the upbeat, celebratory nature of much gospel music, Bono expresses a clear personal preference for psalms of lament. Here he finds a biblical "blues" which resonates with the musical genre of that name. In these psalms he hears the voice of an individual expressing agonies which resonate with his own personal passions and experiences. This understanding of the Psalms is reflected in some of his own song lyrics, as already noted.

[52] *The Book of Psalms*, vii–viii. Bono ends his introduction with a brief nod to questions of authorship: "it is not clear how many of these psalms David or his son Solomon really wrote. Some scholars suggest that the royals never dampened their nibs and that there was a host of Holy Ghost writers. Who cares? I didn't buy Leiber and Stoller—they were just his songwriters. I bought Elvis."

The 2000s: Take This Heart

"You Elevate My Soul"

As the 90s gave way to the new millennium, a different tone came to the fore. "The goal is soul" and "you elevate my soul" became the catchphrases of the Elevation tour. In the opening phase of the tour launched in the USA, towards the climax of each evening Bono would recite to the crowd verses from Ps 116 (in *The Message* translation):

> What can I give back to God
> for the blessing he's poured out on me?
> I'll lift high the cup of salvation–
> A toast to God!
> I'll pray in the name of God;
> I'll complete what I promised God I'd do
> And I'll do it together with his people.[53]

Here was thanksgiving, a psalm which seems to arise from recovery from illness, chosen by a singer who had himself recently recovered from a career-threatening illness. The whole tour took on a celebratory feel; even the song "40" was improvised to include cries of "Halleluia" and "thanks to the Almighty" as the final word.

Then came the events of 9/11. After some consideration, the second leg of the US tour went ahead in October 2001; but the tone changed sharply. The choice of songs was rethought, in response to the perceived mood and needs of the audiences. Now grief became much more prominent, in songs such as "Peace on Earth," a lament of subdued anger at the destructiveness of violence, written in response to another terrorist atrocity and addressed to Jesus.[54] Yet the sense of assurance and thankfulness enjoyed at the start of the tour was not abandoned: the heartache of "Walk On" was embellished with a chorus of halleluiahs, while the experience of "digging up my soul" involved "going down," but then led on to feeling "like I can fly, / So high,

[53] Ps 116:12–14, in Eugene H. Peterson, trans., *The Message: Psalms* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994).

[54] U2, "Peace on Earth," from *All That You Can't Leave Behind* (Island Records, 2000). The song was written in response to the Omagh bombing in Northern Ireland in 1998; see Bono et al., *U2 by U2*, 285.

elevation."[55] Once again, anguish and exaltation were interwoven, drawing on the emotional extremes held together in the Psalter. The mixed feelings of an Irish wake crept in, mourning tempered with celebration, laughter and tears blended together as part of the grieving process.[56]

Finding appropriate responses to 9/11 has been a struggle for many, not least in the United States. While observing and celebrating a recent flood of scholarly and devotional writings which explore lament, particularly the Book of Lamentations, Walter Brueggemann bemoans a continued avoidance of lament in the dominant social and political discourse of his native United States since 9/11. He casts the USA during the past decade in the role of the biblical Babylon, doing what empires instinctively do in a crisis: denying the need to take time for reflection, which could lead on to asking some hard self-critical questions. This in turn, Brueggemann hopes, would lead down the path of lament, which is anathema to the powerful. Instead, the need for lament and self-criticism is denied. The empire quickly leaps into a posture of recovery, bravado and an aggression towards all perceived enemies fuelled by a suppressed anxiety and insecurity; hegemony must be restored, and dissenters brought to justice. Brueggemann calls readers to tread a dissenting path which does regularly embrace lament.[57] U2's songs during this decade have continued to offer such a path, while avoiding the converse danger of losing hope and thankfulness and simply wallowing in anguish.

"Yahweh"

Directness and boldness in addressing God is evident in "Yahweh," the song which formed the climax of the next album. Requests to "take these shoes … and make them fit," "take this shirt … and make it clean, clean," "take this soul … and make it sing," lead into the high point of the chorus:

> Yahweh, Yahweh
> Always pain before a child is born
> Yahweh, Yahweh
> Still I'm waiting for the dawn.[58]

[55] U2, "Elevation," from All That You Can't Leave Behind; Vagacs, *Religious Nuts, Political Fanatics*, 8.

[56] Steve Stockman, *Walk On: The Spiritual Journey of U2* (Orlando: Relevant Books, 2005), 181, 185–86; Garrett, *Carry Each Other*, 72–73.

[57] Walter Brueggemann, *Out of Babylon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 11–16, 33–49.

[58] U2, "Yahweh," from *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (Island Records, 2004).

Further requests follow, to "take these hands" which are prone to "make a fist," and to "take this mouth" which is "so quick to criticise," and "give it a kiss." All this is framed by a short, reflective bridge section and repetition of the chorus. While "40" uses direct quotation from a psalm, in "Yahweh" what emerges is like a psalm written in the singer's own words.[59] Here is self-offering, similar to that glimpsed earlier in the words taken from Ps 116. Like many biblical psalms, U2's "Yahweh" addresses God directly and boldly, using the divine name (as is so common in the Psalter), looking for a divine response.[60] The multi-dimensional nature found particularly in psalms of lament is seen here: experience is related in a kind of narrative, yet within a metrical structure, as poetry. Requests from God are made, indicating that this is a prayer. Faith is expressed in the self-offering of the speaker. The voice of an individual is heard speaking to God in a way that seems very personal; yet the language of mouth, hands, soul and clothes are general and accessible to the large crowds who sing along in a concert setting. The use of symbolic and stereotypical imagery which can resonate with a variety of people and situations, which we noted earlier with regard to the psalms, is evident here in the songwriter's approach.[61]

Does the angst of lament predominate in "Yahweh," or the assurance of thankfulness? The tempo is upbeat, with a delivery suggesting confidence and expectancy when speaking to God. Assurance seems to underlie its structure, assurance that the singer is in close relationship with Yahweh, who is listening, willing and able to take, repair, transform and redirect the supplicant.[62] Yet with the pleas comes a sense of lament over personal inadequacy, the mouth that is so quick to criticise, the soul that needs to be clean. The passion that breaks through in the vocal delivery of the chorus (particularly the divine name) has an edge to it suggesting desperation. The song's imagery indicates an experience of darkness, emphasised by the question "why the dark before the dawn?" The bridge section lingers on the phrase "still waiting for the dawn," as the tempo slows to idling. But the word "dawn"

[59] Cf. Garrett, *Carry Each Other*, 26. If a more recent intertextual influence can be traced, it might be in echoes of an old hymn: "Take my life and let it be / consecrated Lord to thee.… Take my hands and let them move, / at the impulse of thy love. / Take my feet and let them be, / swift and beautiful for thee" (Francis Ridley Havergal, "Take My Life").

[60] Although aware of Jewish sensibilities about the use of the divine name, Bono persisted in using it, offering the following rather flimsy reason: "It's not meant to be spoken. But I got around it by singing it. I hope I don't offend anyone." See Stokes, *U2*, 162; Bono et al., *U2 by U2*, 329.

[61] Cf. Broyles, *Conflict of Faith*, 13, 19; Gillingham, *Poems and Psalms*, 189.

[62] Cf. Garrett, *Carry Each Other*, 27–28.

is itself suggestive of more to come; the tempo picks up again with the repeated words "the sun is coming up." Anguish is present in the "pain before a child is born" (a phrase which seems to echo the Johannine Jesus in John 16:21–22); yet the suffering of childbirth points inexorably to a wonderful outcome, when eventually the child is born. Here lament leads on to hope.

But the song ends on a note that is both anti-climactic and jarring: "Take this heart / And make it break." The earlier hope and any accompanying triumphalism seems crushed by this unexpectedly abrupt ending. As with "40," lament seems to have the last word. The way to renewal, that is, to being taken and remade by Yahweh, which initially sounded quite comforting and reassuring, turns out to involve heartbreak.

The closing words of "Yahweh" echo Ps 51:10, 17:

> Create in me a clean heart, O God … [63]
> The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
> a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Bono clearly has a penchant for this particular psalm: he read verses from it during U2's performance at the US Super bowl in January 2002, and the reference to it in "Gloria" has already been noted. The psalm begins with a strong emphasis on personal sin and the need for repentance, before moving to a more godward focus.[64] U2's "Yahweh" retains a strong focus on the self throughout, from the shoes, shirt and soul of the opening to the heart with which it closes. The self needs to be transformed by the other. Here we can glimpse the contemporary western culture of which U2 are a part, in its focus on the "subjective life," that is, life lived in accordance with the individual's own inner experience, needs, and desires, in order to achieve growth and become the unique "me."[65] But while much contemporary spirituality reflects what Gordon Lynch terms "the sacralization of the self," in which the struggle and growth of the individual's interior life take on a sacred aura without any reference to a transcendent religious authority,[66] U2's "Yahweh" points

[63] Note "make it clean, clean" earlier in the U2 song.

[64] Words for sin come twelve times in vv. 1–9, and only twice in the rest of the psalm, while God is named only once in vv. 1–9 and six times thereafter; see Goldingay, *Psalms* 2: 140.

[65] Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 2–4.

[66] Gordon Lynch, "What is this 'Religion' in the Study of Religion and Popular Culture?" In *Between Sacred and Profane: Researching Religion and Popular Culture*, ed. Gordon Lynch (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 136.

the individual to transformation through relationship with God. In a way that may seem incongruous to contemporary perceptions, the song indicates a powerful, personal sovereign other than the self, as does Ps 51.[67]

"Magnificent"

A note of praise and assurance can be heard on U2's most recent album in a song called "Magnificent," whose title carries a deliberate echo of "Magnificat," Mary's song of praise in Luke 1. The latter, in turn, resonates with various psalms of praise for God's saving work in the Hebrew Bible, particularly Hannah's song (1 Sam 2:1–10). U2's "Magnificent" declares that "I was born to sing for you, / I didn't have a choice but to lift you up"; even "from the womb my first cry" was "a joyful noise." The chorus ends with the ringing assertion "justified till we die, you and I will magnify / the Magnificent."[68] The phrase "a joyful noise" suggests Ps 100:1 (KJV, "Make a joyful noise unto the LORD"; cf. NRSV), while "you and I will magnify" borrows the language of Ps 34:3, "O magnify Yahweh with me, / let us exalt his name together" (cf. Ps 69:30). The imperatives of these psalms, encouraging and admonitory in tone, are replaced in the U2 song by an autobiographical slant; but the anthemic nature of the song (particularly as presented in live performance) cries out for the audience to sing along, with "you and I" magnifying together. Praise is clearly in the ascendant, emphasised by the upbeat tempo, and the prolonged "oh, oh" which leads into each rendition of the chorus.[69] But ambivalence and ambiguity are never far away with U2. The celebratory confidence of the verses gives way to the repeated chorus line: "Only love, only love can leave such a mark, / But only love, only love can heal such a scar." It seems that love impacts us, sometimes scarring us more deeply than anything else; yet still, ironically, we long for more love, as the only way for the scars to be healed.[70] Here is pain and a wistfulness reminiscent of lament,

[67] Cf. James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook of the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 9–10.

[68] U2, "Magnificent," from *No Line On the Horizon* (Island Records, 2009). The allusion in the title "Magnificent" to the Lukan "Magnificat" reflects the songwriters' attempt to modernise the tradition of Bach and choral music with a piece of "devotional disco … a gospel song that transforms into the carnal, then into a song for family, for children' (see Stokes, *U2*, 166).

[69] On Bono's regular use of "oh-oh" as "an inarticulate but jubilant response to what cannot be put into words," see Garrett, *Carry Each Other*, 21–32.

[70] We might hear echoes in this of the woman in the Song of Songs, complaining of feeling weak and sick from love, yet still craving more of her lover to heal her affliction (Song 2:3–7).

woven into (and tempering) exultant celebration. Yet this, in turn leads into the assertion "justified till we die," with its Pauline resonance (Rom 3:21–31; Gal 2:16–17), which proclaims confidence.

Finale: Angst & Exaltation

U2's songs often blur boundaries and blend apparent contrasts in intriguing ways. For example, numerous songs express desire in language which could be about sexual desire and could be about desire for God.[71] In their references to the Psalms, U2 hold together assurance and lament, angst and exaltation. Sometimes the dial is turned more strongly towards the one, but then sooner or later it turns back the other way. Along with pain and grief, their songs retain a sense of assurance and hope, and a passion for justice not simply for oneself but for the wider world; without these, lament may degenerate into an unhealthy self-absorption and self-pity. They show a certain ambivalence towards anger, expressing it openly towards injustice and its human causes, but avoiding psalms which depict human vengeance (e.g., Pss 137:9, 58:10), and tempering accusations against God. But generally life's realities and emotional extremes surface openly in their songs, sometimes evoked in the language or tone of the Psalms.[72] Individuality is emphasised in the singer's use of "I', yet a strong corporate sense is engendered when crowds sing along with him. This may be part of the reasons for U2's continuing popularity, not least in the cathartic experience of their live shows. The shows provide great entertainment, but for many people something deeper

The agonies of loving relationships, human and divine, as depicted in Hosea may also come to mind (Hos 1–3 and 11:1–11), or perhaps the impassioned cry, "I can't live with or without you" from one of U2's earlier hits, "With Or Without You," from *The Joshua Tree* (Island Records, 1987). On the reception of "Magnificent," and disagreements about the extent of its religious allusions, see Galbraith, "Drawing Our Fish in the Sand," 217–22.

[71] See, for example, "Mysterious Ways," from *Achtung Baby* (Island Records, 1991); "Elevation," "Grace" and "The Ground Beneath Her Feet," from *All That You Can't Leave Behind* (Island Records: 2000); "Vertigo" and "A Man and a Woman," from *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*. Also Brian Froese, "Comic Endings: Spirit and Flesh in Bono's Apocalyptic Imagination, 1980–83," in *Call Me the Seeker: Listening to Religion in Popular Music*, ed. Michael J. Gilmour (New York: Continuum International, 2005), 61–78; Michka Assayas, *Bono on Bono: Conversations with Michka Assayas* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 120, 128; William Goodman, *Yearning for You: Psalms and Song of Songs in Conversation with Rock and Worship Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, forthcoming in 2012).

[72] Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms* (Minneapolis: St. Mary's Press, 1986), 27–28.

is also going on; a number of fans describe the event as a source of spiritual energy and hope, some calling it simply "church."[73] Some cultural analysts have noted a tendency in recent decades to move the Psalms from traditional sacred contexts to secular ones (for example, from church to concert hall, in the works of composers such as Britten and Stravinsky).[74] U2 take the supposedly secular context of the live concert and create in it a spiritual or sacred atmosphere, finding some of their resources in the Psalter.

Rock has often been good at expressing pain, sometimes in a form akin to a secularised lament. This is evident in the young person's journey of existential angst which recurs in "rock opera/oratorio" concept albums such as the Who's *Tommy* and *Quadrophenia* in the early 1970s, Pink Floyd's *The Wall* (1979), and more recently Green Day's *American Idiot* (2004). But assurance and hope are hard to find on such albums; the exploration of angst and lament predominates. Those who seek words of hope and exaltation are more likely to find them in religious lyrics, such as those of numerous contemporary Christian worship songs. But such songs sometimes seem to offer a shallow superficiality or triumphalism which alienates many listeners, including Christians who seek a deeper kind of worship. Acknowledgment of life's pain through the rawness of lament is missing from these songs, and is missed.[75] Walter Brueggemann has long bemoaned the "costly loss of lament" in contemporary Christian worship and wider society.[76] He sees the tendency to bypass lament and opt simply for thanks and praise as a significant mistake, partly indicative of a culture which tries to ignore or deny such realities, promoting instead the delights of pleasure-seeking. Praise should be welcomed, but pain also needs to be acknowledged, rather than ignored or denied: "The praise has power to transform the pain. But conversely the present pain also keeps the act of praise honest."[77]

[73] Christian Scharen, *One Step Closer: Why U2 Matters to Those Seeking God* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 188–89. U2's latest tour, which ended in August 2011, involved 110 shows on five continents, with a total audience of about seven million.

[74] Susan E. Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, vol. 1, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (2008), 301–3; also 220–22 on the Romantic movement.

[75] Inevitably exceptions come to mind, such as Matt and Beth Redman's "Blessed Be Your Name," written partly in response to 9/11 (see Matt Redman, *Blessed Be Your Name: The Songs of Matt Redman vol. 1* [Survivor Records, 2005]); but such songs are rare.

[76] Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 11, no. 36 (1986): 57–71, esp. 58. See also Garrett, *Carry Each Other*, 28–30.

[77] Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 139. See also André LaCocque's comments on balancing de-

Another of Brueggemann's influential works on the Psalms proposes that the life of faith is expressed there in terms of movement, from settled orientation (God is known, and life is coherent) into a season of disorientation (coherence disintegrates into chaos), which in turn leads to a new orientation (God breaks through in surprising ways) and songs of new life.[78] John Goldingay melds this idea with Westermann's stress on declarative praise to produce a spiral: here the movement is from praise into protest and then plea, leading on through trust, thanks and obedience into renewed praise, now at a higher (or deeper) level.[79] It is tempting to map such approaches onto U2's career, as Robert Vagacs does with Brueggemann's grid.[80] It can be argued that there is a broad sense of progression from the confident orientation of U2's music at the end of the 1980s, through disorientation expressed for much of the 1990s, into to a new coherence and confidence in the first decade of the new millennium. The danger in such an approach, however, is that it is too simplistic; Brueggemann himself concedes that life is not as regularised and cyclical as his schema might suggest.[81] As we have seen, from the earliest to the most recent, U2's songs have offered a mix of orientation and disorientation; if a particular song gives greater emphasis to one of these, we are likely to find another leaning in the opposite direction, often on the same album. Thus U2 consistently provides songs which resonate with listeners who find themselves at different stages in Brueggemann's cycle or Goldingay's spiral.

U2's approach has affinities with that of Craig Broyles. Observing the juxtaposition of conflicting elements such as praise and lament in certain psalms (particularly what he terms "complaint psalms"), Broyles notes that these psalms abandon any attempt to resolve the resulting dissonance. Even

spair and arrogance in André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 189.

[78] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 20–22.

[79] Goldingay, *Psalms* 1: 68–69.

[80] Vagacs, *Religious Nuts, Political Fanatics*, 10–14.

[81] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 22. Vagacs, having argued that U2's season of "orientation" opens with *The Joshua Tree*, immediately undermines his argument by conceding that this particular album lacks a sure sense of settled orientation: "instead, orientation is envisioned and hoped for—and even celebrated—in the midst of the moments of disorientation. U2 always seems to be singing 'How long?'" (*Religious Nuts, Political Fanatics*, 14; cf. 44–45; see also his comments on the mixture of heartache and hope in "Walk On," 66). Vagacs also fails to fit U2's earlier albums into Brueggemann's typology.

in psalms where the progression is from lament to trust, complete abandonment of what came before is not indicated; apparently contradicting experiences may be held together, and each psalm should be read as a whole. The preservation of such psalms by the community of worshippers in ancient Israel, and the diversity of the Psalter as a whole, indicates a willingness to live with dissonance, rather than to explain it away or to insist on radical alteration of received beliefs and expectations in light of current experience.[82] U2's songs express trust in the goodness of God along with experience which seems to negate that trust, and the pain of living with both. Rather than a dialectical approach which seeks to resolve the tension, they choose a dialogical one which acknowledges and embraces the tension, or perhaps simply surrenders to it.[83]

Encore: Songs of Ascent?

On the last night of the *U2 360°* tour, for the final encore of the final show, U2 turned the clock back and played "40," still a favourite with the band and their audience after nearly thirty years. They sang it that night in much the same way as in the earlier years: the band members departed, one by one, singer first and drummer last, with the song handed over to the audience. Once again "How long to sing this song?" was given the last word.

As for what follows, various ideas have been mooted for the next album, prominent among them a long promised collection of largely devotional songs. If these do finally see the light of day, one suspects that biblically aware listeners will again hear the influence of the Psalms, since the album is provisionally entitled "Songs of Ascent." If the past is any indicator of the future, assurance and lament will continue to dance, embrace, and wrestle with each other in the songs of U2 in the years to come.

[82] Broyles, *Conflict of Faith*, 32, 224–25. Cf. Paul Ricoeur's comments on the ending of Ps 22 in LaCocque and Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically*, 219.

[83] Surrender is a recurring U2 motif, evident in the lyrics of songs such as "Surrender" (from *War*), "Bad" (from *The Unforgettable Fire*: "If I could, I would let it go, / surrender, dislocate"), "Zoo Station" (from *Achtung Baby*: "ready to let go of the steering wheel"), "Love and Peace or Else" (from *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*: "lay down your guns") and "Moment of Surrender" (from *No Line on the Horizon*); also in Bono's ambiguous gestures such as the white flag waved in earlier gigs and the raised hands of more recent ones. Vagacs notes and begins to explore the theme of surrender (*Religious Nuts, Political Fanatics*, 75–76).