




RESEARCH ARTICLE

Towards a theology of the Psalm titles: The Davidic voice and the *totus Christus*

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Abstract

This article explores the ways in which the thirteen ‘biographical superscriptions’ which are found throughout the Psalter contribute to the blending of the Davidic voice which they invoke and the corporate voice of the community which receives them. It suggests that by receiving these thirteen Psalms, the canonical community enters an intensive identification with David and participates in the Davidic life and experience. Once this is established, the discussion turns to examine these insights in a Christian theological context in conversation with Augustine’s *totus Christus* principle. It is suggested that the hermeneutical situation created by the biographical superscriptions provides a way for the *totus Christus* principle to be re-invoked in contemporary interpretation.

Keywords: Augustine; Davidic voice; Psalm titles; Psalms; *totus Christus*

Thirteen of the Psalms have ‘biographical’ superscriptions assigning them to some more or less specific moment in the life of David.¹ Throughout the early and middle portions of the twentieth century, these titles received relatively little attention. The essential rationale for their neglect lay in the fact that they were widely assumed to be late additions to the Psalter which offered little or no assistance in specifying their historical setting. Indeed, at times they were considered to be actively misleading in this respect.² The concern with the Psalms’ original cultic usage compounded this neglect.³ In the

¹These Psalms are: Pss 3; 7; 18; 34; 51; 52; 54; 56; 57; 59; 60; 63; 142. There is some debate as to whether Ps 7 should be included in this list as it departs from the normal grammatical formula used to introduce the historical incident (נ+ infinitive construct) and introduces the subject of David’s song using לָּ which elsewhere is used to indicate the rendering of the Psalm. See Brevard S. Childs, ‘Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis’, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 16/2 (Autumn 1971), pp. 137–50.

²A striking example of the suspicion directed towards the Psalm titles is their omission from the New English Bible (the translation of the Old Testament was published in 1970).

³The most influential figures in this regard were, of course, Herman Gunkel and Sigmund Mowinckel. See Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998); Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962); cf. the assessment at the opening of Childs, ‘Psalm Titles’, p. 137.

latter part of the twentieth century, concerns shifted somewhat. A greater interest arose in the final shaping of the Psalter and what concerns this shaping might display.⁴ Naturally, in this context interest in the function of the Psalm titles has experienced something of a rejuvenation. In particular, David's presentation in the Psalter has been reviewed in relation to his portrayal in 1 and 2 Samuel.⁵ In what follows, I want to try to extend this latter line of enquiry by considering how the biographical Psalm titles connect the characterisation of David and the community which worships through the Psalms situated in his history.⁶ The intention, then, will be to reflect on this connection in Christian theological terms, assisted in particular by Augustine's hermeneutical concept of the *totus Christus*.

Psalm titles and the canonical community

Historical background

What, then, is taking place when a biographical superscription is added to a Psalm? The questions around the dating of these titles are complex, but the contribution made by Brevard Childs in the early 1970s remains the most significant discussion to consider. For Childs, the biographical superscriptions do not reflect historical traditions, but exegetical insights.⁷ In this regard, the biographical superscriptions 'represent an early reflection of how the Psalms as a collection of sacred literature were understood'.⁸ Childs carefully outlines a fairly fixed superscription form which is used in all but

⁴See for instance, Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), pp. 504–25; Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984); Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, *Reading from the Beginning: The Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997); Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller (eds), *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Redaction* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); cf. David Willgren, *The Formation of the 'Book' of Psalms* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

⁵James Luther Mays, 'The David of the Psalms', *Interpretation* 40 (1986), pp. 143–55; James D. Nogalski, 'Reading David in the Psalter: A Study in Liturgical Hermeneutics', *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 23/1 (2001), pp. 168–91; Rolf Rendtorff, 'The Psalms of David: David in the Psalms', in Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller (eds), *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Redaction* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 53–66. Vivian L. Johnson, *David in Distress: His Portrait Through the Historical Psalms* (London: T&T Clark, 2009); Robert C. Culley, 'David and the Psalms: Titles, Poems, and Stories', in Tod Linafelt, Claudia V. Camp and Timothy Beal (eds), *The Fate of King David: The Past and Present of a Biblical Icon* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 153–62; R. Christopher Heard, 'Penitent to a Fault: The Characterization of David in Psalm 51', in *The Fate of King David* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 163–74; Adrian H. W. Curtis, '"A Psalm of David, When...": Reflections on Some Psalm Titles in the Hebrew Bible', in James K. Aitken, et al. (eds), *Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J. A. Clines* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2013), pp. 49–60; Andrew C. Witt, *A Voice Without End: The Role of David in Psalms 3–14* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2021). The concerns here are almost exclusively with David as he is presented through the Psalm titles. David only makes a significant appearance as a figure in the body of the text in Pss 78; 89; 132; see Melody D. Knowles, 'The Flexible Rhetoric of Retelling: The Choice of David in the Text of the Psalms', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67/2 (April 2005), pp. 235–49.

⁶There are comparable concerns in Howard N. Wallace, 'King and Community: Joining with David in Prayer', in Bob Becking and Eric Peels (eds), *Psalms and Prayers: Papers Read at the Joint Meeting of the Society of Old Testament Study and Het Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland en België, Apeldorn August 2006* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 267–77.

⁷Childs, 'Psalm Titles', p. 143.

⁸Ibid., p. 137.

two of the Psalms which contain a biographical superscription.⁹ Childs describes this form as follows: ‘The infinitive construct, introduced by the preposition *b^e*, occurs in a noun clause. Then the subsequent coordinate or subordinate clause reverts to the use of the finite verb’.¹⁰ Ps 54:1–2 displays this formula with some clarity: למנצח בנגינת משכיל לדוד : בברא הזיפים ויאמר לו שאול הלא דוד מסתתר עמנו. Childs notes that, while this stereotyped form is found in Isa 38:9 and Hab 3:1, the Chronicler shows no awareness of it. The significance of this for Childs seems to be that the insertion of a fixed literary composition might have been amenable to the Chronicler’s interests. Consequently, Childs suggests a *terminus a quo* after the Chronicler with a *terminus ad quem* found with the Qumran Psalm scroll.¹¹ Childs thus dates the titles to the late post-exilic period.

If Childs’ dating is broadly accepted, then the biographical superscriptions can be seen as part of a wider Davidisation of the Psalter, further evidence of which is found in the Septuagint.¹² If this is the case, then the scribal circles which affixed the titles may have been working with texts which had some earlier communal function. In addition, or alternatively, they may have affixed titles to Psalms which were in wider communal use in the Second Temple Period.¹³ This all seems plausible enough and might offer some historical background to one of the persistent features of Psalm usage through to the present, namely, the conjunction of the individual and communal. By being situated at particular moments in the life of David, these thirteen Psalms have their individual dimension intensified. As such, they highlight nicely a hermeneutical question which occurs throughout the Psalter; namely, the canonical community’s reception of texts spoken in the first-person singular as their own ‘answer’ to God.¹⁴ The reality of this hermeneutical question stands regardless of what decisions we

⁹The exceptions being Ps 7 (see note 1 above) and Ps 18. The idiosyncrasies of Ps 18 can be explained through its connection with 2 Sam 22:1. *Ibid.*, pp. 138–9.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 138.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹²For a detailed chronicling of the Psalm titles in different witnesses, see W. Staerk, ‘Zur Kritik der Psalmenüberschriften’, *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 12 (1892), pp. 91–151; cf. Elieser Slomovic, ‘Toward an Understanding of the Formation of Historical Titles in the Book of Psalms’, *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 91/3 (1979), pp. 350–80, especially pp. 356–64; Albert Pietersma, ‘David in the Greek Psalms’, *Vetus Testamentum* 30/2 (April 1980), pp. 213–26, especially pp. 218–9; Willgren, *Formation of the ‘Book’ of Psalms*, p. 186.

¹³The evidence for the Second Temple as the centre of Psalm compilation is gathered in Susan E. Gillingham, ‘The Zion Tradition and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter’, in J. Day (ed.), *Temple and Worship: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2005), pp. 308–41; Susan E. Gillingham, ‘The Levites and the Editorial Composition of the Psalms’, in William P. Brown (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), pp. 202–13; cf. Mark S. Smith, ‘The Levitical Compilation of the Psalter’, *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 103 (1991), pp. 258–63. Something like this scenario is sketched in Willgren, *Formation of the ‘Book’ of Psalms*, pp. 376–84. The biographical superscriptions are added, with the exception of Ps 142, to Psalms in Books 1–2 of the Psalter, which were probably the earliest portions to find a fixed form. For an account which seeks to make the case for pre-exilic use of certain Psalms, see Gary A. Rendsburg, ‘The Psalms as Hymns in the Temple of Jerusalem’, in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Temple: Textual and Archaeological Explorations* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), pp. 95–122.

¹⁴The vague term ‘canonical community’ is used here deliberately. Initially the dynamic that I look to describe is one which could apply to any community which received the Psalms as their authoritative answer to God. I will, later, take up the specific concerns of a Christian theological account. In speaking of the community’s ‘answer’, I am recalling Gerhard von Rad’s consideration of the Psalter under the category of ‘Israel’s Answer’; see Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. David M. G. Stalker, vol. 1

make about the historical processes which led to the Psalter's formation; although the brief historical sketch above does suggest that this hermeneutical question may have its genesis in the formation of the Psalter itself.¹⁵ In what follows I want to tease out the theological significance of this hermeneutical arrangement.

Hermeneutical significance

The question of the relationship between the 'I' and the 'we' in the Psalms exercised earlier commentators.¹⁶ The concern here, however, does not turn on original cultic practice, as it did for Mowinckel and others, but on the hermeneutical scenario created by the canonical community's reception of Psalms welded to a specific moment in David's life.¹⁷ What particular role do these Psalms play for the canonical community?

It is quite common to see the Psalm titles as highlighting David's role as an example for the community.¹⁸ In this sense, David's exemplary voice lends authority to the Psalter, in much the same way as Mosaic and Solomonic invocations bolster the authority of the Law and Wisdom writings. This seems true, as far as it goes, and may provide some explanation for why the superscriptions tend to position David in moments of risk or need. Only Pss 18 and, to a lesser extent, 34 clearly strike a triumphant note. In other words, David sets an example, not as an overly accomplished figure of tranquil piety, but as one harried, troubled and penitent.¹⁹ As such, those who receive the Psalms are asked to witness and learn from David's response in situations of difficulty and danger.²⁰

Still, it is worth noting the distinction between the Davidic ascription in the Psalter and the Mosaic and Solomonic ascriptions in the Law and Wisdom writings. By and large, the names of Moses and Solomon are attached to texts which address the reader (or hearer) and, as such, Moses and Solomon have a direct pedagogical significance as

(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), pp. 356–70; an excellent account of the community reception of the Psalter is found in William L. Holladay, *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 95–190.

¹⁵As I note, Childs' suggestion seems plausible and offers a reasonable starting point for the conjunction of the intensive individualisation of certain Psalms and their communal use. Still, I am sceptical of the possibility of providing an account which moves from the plausible to the probable. A case for a slightly earlier dating can be found in Nogalski, 'Reading David in the Psalter', p. 190. See the scepticism of Slomovic, 'Formation of Historical Titles', p. 351; Slomovic suggests that it is 'very difficult, if not impossible' to fix the date of the various Psalm titles.

¹⁶See the critique of Rudolf Smend ('Ueber das Ich der Psalmen', *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 8 (1888), pp. 49–147) in Emil Balla, *Das Ich des Psalmen* (Göttingen: Huth, 1912). In Balla's view, Smend exaggerated the corporate nature of the first-person singular in the Psalms. For a mediating position, see Mowinckel, *Psalms*, pp. 42–6.

¹⁷Cf. Wallace, 'King and Community', pp. 270–1.

¹⁸Wilson, *Hebrew Psalter*, p. 173; James Luther Mays, *Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), p. 13; Rendtorff, 'Psalms of David', p. 63; Johnson, *David in Distress*, p. 142; Willgren, *Formation of the 'Book' of Psalms*, p. 186. Much of what can be said about the biographical superscriptions could also be said about the more broadly used לדוד formula. However, by specifying the circumstances of the Psalm, the biographical superscriptions intensify the association.

¹⁹So, it seems probable that the Psalm superscriptions allude to the text of Samuel or something like it, rather than to Chronicles, which depicts David in rather different terms; see the discussion of the superscriptions' dating above.

²⁰Hence, more than half of these Psalm titles refer to situations when David was pursued by Saul (see Pss 34; 52; 54; 56; 57; 59; 142).

part of their exemplary role. The text instructs the reader and, so, the reader receives the text as an addressee who looks to Moses or Solomon as an authoritative figure who could reasonably instruct them in wise or holy living. In the case of the biographical superscriptions, the scenario is slightly more complex. Each of the thirteen Psalms which is accompanied by a biographical superscription uses the first-person voice in an address to God.²¹ In this way, the reader is drawn into the dialogue between the voice of the Psalm and God as the addressee. David's exemplary role is, therefore, more implicit than that of Moses and Solomon, as the process of reading itself draws the reader into a participatory experience of this exemplarity.²²

Something of this dynamic is perhaps glimpsed when scholars link David's exemplarity with a view of him as a kind of 'everyman' in the biographical superscriptions. So, for instance, in his influential study Gerald H. Wilson, speaking of the biographical superscriptions, notes, 'the final effect within the Psalter has been to provide a hermeneutical approach to the use of the ps by the *individual*. As David, so every man!'²³ Under this account, the biographical superscriptions grant access to David's internal experience and witness to 'all the common troubles and joys of ordinary human life in which all persons participate'.²⁴ Again, there is probably an element of truth here. The biographical superscriptions seem to bind the canonical community more tightly to David. However, the implications of this binding for 'ordinary human life' do not seem to be adequately outlined in the David as everyman account.

The account offered below seeks to take more seriously the canonical community's role as the means by which David's words are uttered. Or, put differently, the canonical community, in reading these thirteen Psalms, does not simply witness David as an example nor hear from David as an instructor, they speak words which are placed in the mouth of David. In receiving and appropriating a Psalm which is spoken in David's voice and located in David's life, the canonical community enters a more intensive experience than that of witness to David's exemplarity. Rather, in the reception of these Davidic Psalms, the voice of the canonical community is blended with David's voice in a particularly striking way.²⁵ For, when the canonical community, or its individual members, recites, sings, prays or meditates on a Psalm located in David's life, they play the part of David. David's voice is sounded in their voice. In the active reception of the Psalm, the canonical community *is* David. In that sense, all that is said of

²¹Twelve of the thirteen Psalms use the first-person singular. The exception is Ps 60 which I discuss below. Of course, these thirteen Psalms are not exceptional in using the first-person voice but here I am teasing out the significance of its conjunction with the superscriptions.

²²The role of authorial attribution as a strategy of authority conferral has been intriguingly challenged, through an examination of the Psalms, by Eva Mroczek who helpfully warns against conceiving of authorial attribution in any one way. See Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), pp. 51–85. While authorial attribution may not have always carried the legitimising function it has sometimes been thought to have, the exemplary role of figures like Moses, David and Solomon still seems pertinent; cf. Hindy Najman, *Secoding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 1–40.

²³Wilson, *Hebrew Psalter*, p. 173; cf. Childs, *Introduction*, p. 521. Childs was criticised for this move by James Barr, 'Childs' Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 5/16 (1980), pp. 12–23, especially p. 19; and Roland E. Murphy, 'The Old Testament as Scripture', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 5/16 (1980), pp. 40–4, esp. pp. 43–4.

²⁴Childs, *Introduction*, p. 520.

²⁵Gary A. Anderson explores the implications of the connection with David for the canonical community in slightly different, but perhaps complementary, terms; see Gary A. Anderson, 'King David and the Psalms of Imprecation', *Pro Ecclesia* 15 (2006), pp. 267–80.

David within the Psalm (and its intertextual counterpart in 1–2 Samuel) may be said of the canonical community. It appears, then, that in appropriating these thirteen Davidic Psalms, it is not the case that an analogy is drawn between David's experiences and the (apparently) more mundane experiences of the community. Rather, in receiving a Psalm located in David's biography and articulated in David's voice, the community enters into David's experience. As such, the trials, difficulties and sins of the community's life are given the significance of those trials, difficulties and sins narrated in the life of David. In responding to them through the Davidic words of the Psalms, the community may experience YHWH's protection and rebuke as David did. Thus, the canonical community's experience of life is raised to take on Davidic significance: David's experience is not democratised; the canonical community's experience is monarchised.²⁶

There are two moments within these thirteen Psalms themselves which serve as adumbrations of this wider dynamic of a blending of the individual Davidic voice with the wider communal voice. The most explicit instance of this is found in Ps 60. The Psalm is 'a corporate prayer for help'.²⁷ Throughout, the voice of petition is couched in the first-person plural.²⁸ Thus, the Psalm itself invites readers to view David as a corporate personality whose voice is the voice of a community. More subtly, perhaps the most famous Psalm headed by a biographical superscription, Ps 51, concludes with a communal postscript. In vv. 20–21 we read, 'Do good to Zion in your favour, build the walls of Jerusalem; then you will delight in sacrifices of righteousness, burnt offerings and whole offerings, then bulls will be offered up on your altar'.²⁹ With what appears to be an editorial addition to the Psalm, the penitential voice of the preceding verses is resituated within a national context.³⁰ In this respect, the postscript opens the possibility of hearing the voice in the Psalm as that of the wounded and erring nation or city of which David is the paradigmatic king.

These two examples illustrate the ways in which the individual voice of David, located in a specific situation, and the communal voice of David's people can be blended. The suggestion here is that something similar takes place through the reception of these texts by a community which recognises their canonical status. As I intimated earlier, I suspect that this dynamic was present even as the biographical superscriptions were initially added; but this assumption is not a necessary prerequisite for my wider suggestion. Rather, much as those of who have seen the biographical superscriptions as establishing David as an exemplar or everyman, here, I have sought to consider what effect might be produced by their placement.

²⁶There might be an analogy here with the way in which the generation listening to Moses on the plains of Moab is identified with those who heard God speak from Horeb in Deut 4–10. Here Moses identifies his hearers as those who had been at Horeb when, in terms of the Pentateuchal narrative, they could not have been. Presumably part of this chronological collapse is to invite the reader to also identify with the generation at Horeb. See Stephen D. Campbell, *Remembering the Unexperienced: Cultural Memory, Canon Consciousness, and the Book of Deuteronomy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).

²⁷Mays, *Psalms*, p. 213.

²⁸The possible exception being v. 11; but it seems plausible that this statement is actually part of the divine oracle of the preceding verses. See Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), p. 107.

²⁹Biblical translations are my own.

³⁰Cf. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 506; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 16.

The *totus Christus*

We turn now to consider how all that I have outlined above may be appropriated in an explicitly Christian theological frame.³¹ I want to draw out the possible implications of my account in conversation with one of the central texts of Christian Psalms interpretation, Augustine of Hippo's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. One of the central concepts developed by Augustine in this text for handling the Psalms is the *totus Christus* ('whole Christ').³²

Augustine is intent on understanding the whole Psalter with reference to Christ. Indeed, Michael Fiedrowicz notes, 'The fundamental point for Augustine's interpretation of the psalms is that he understood them as a prophecy of Christ'.³³ Like many of his predecessors and contemporaries Augustine worked out his exploration of the prophetic nature of the Psalter through prosopological exegesis. Prosopological exegesis, as has often been rehearsed, is the practice of seeking to discern who is speaking and when throughout a text, in this case the Psalter.³⁴ As such, Augustine is ready not only to apply the words of the Psalter to Christ, but to place the words of the Psalter in the mouth of Christ. For instance, at the outset of the *Enarrationes*, Augustine identifies the righteous man of Ps 1 with Christ, but in Ps 3 Augustine finds Christ speaking in the voice of the Psalm.³⁵ As we read across the *Enarrationes* Augustine identifies a number of different voices speaking in the Psalter; at times it seems clear that Christ is speaking, at other times the Church, while elsewhere Augustine's concern with the speaking voice takes a different turn.³⁶

³¹The observations in Part 1 could be developed in a Jewish framework in conversation with the kind of statement found in *Midrash Tehillim* 18.1, 'R. Yudan taught in the name of R. Judah: All that David said in his Book of Psalms applies to himself, to all Israel, and to all the ages'. *The Midrash on Psalms*, vol. 1, trans. William G. Braude (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 230. Cf. also *Song of Songs Rabbah* 4.4; although I am not qualified to assess this further.

³²For useful treatments of Augustine's approach to the Psalms and the *totus Christus*, see Rowan Williams, 'Augustine and the Psalms', *Interpretation* 58 (2004), pp. 17–27; Michael C. McCarthy, 'A Ecclesiology of Groaning: Augustine, the Psalms and the Making of the Church', *Theological Studies* 66 (2005), pp. 23–48; Aaron Canty, 'Augustine's *Totus Christus* Hermeneutic for Interpreting the Psalms', *Biblical Research* 53 (2008), pp. 59–67; Michael Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), pp. 165–212; Susannah Ticciati, 'Wellness in the Light of the Eschaton: Reading the Psalms with Augustine', *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 42 (2020), pp. 208–25, especially pp. 210–2; and Kevin Grove, *Augustine on Memory* (Oxford: OUP, 2021).

³³See Michael Fiedrowicz, 'General Introduction', in *Expositions of the Psalms: 1–32*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 2000), p. 44. See also, his book-length treatment in Michael Fiedrowicz, *Psalmus vox totius Christus: Studien zu Augustins 'Enarrationes in Psalmos'* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 1997). On Augustine's christological approach to the Old Testament more generally, see Michael Cameron, 'The Christological Substructure of Augustine's Figurative Exegesis', in Pamela Bright (ed. and trans.), *Augustine and the Bible* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), pp. 74–103.

³⁴See the helpful account of Augustine's prosopological exegesis and in particular the distinction between prosopological exegesis and *prosopopoeia*, in Cameron, *Christ Meets Me*, pp. 171–85; cf. also Adam Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church: A Reading of the Anti-Donatist Sermons* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), pp. 59–66.

³⁵See Augustine *Enarrationes in Psalmos* [hereafter *en. Ps.*] 1.1; 3.1.

³⁶Fiedrowicz notes that, for Augustine, a Psalm can be read as 'a word to Christ (*vox ad Christum*)', 'a word about Christ (*vox de Christo*)', 'a word spoken by Christ himself (*vox Christi*)', 'a word about the Church (*vox de ecclesia*)' or 'a word spoken by the Church (*vox ecclesiae*)'. Fiedrowicz, 'Introduction', pp. 44–5; cf. *en. Ps.* 21(2).3; 24.1; 68(2).1.

This mode of operation is hardly exceptional in a patristic context. However, the central innovation of Augustine's Psalms exegesis is the way in which his prosopological concerns are charged with his wider ecclesiology. This ecclesiology is given definitive shape with reference to certain key New Testament texts, namely, 1 Cor 12:12–31, Matt 25:31–46 and Acts 9:4.³⁷ By invoking the New Testament imagery of the head and the body, Augustine is able to thicken his account of Christ's speaking voice in the Psalms. At times in the Psalter, we attend to Christ the head speaking, at other times the body of Christ is speaking, but in both instances, it is Christ speaking.³⁸ As such the voices of the head and the body are bound together into one *totus Christus*.³⁹ So, while Augustine is often intent on discerning the speaking voice which may be present in any particular Psalm, the voices identified can be brought together under one overarching persona. It is Christ who is speaking and, as such, Augustine can posit a unity to the speaking voice.⁴⁰

This dynamic is never given a systematic articulation by Augustine, and the *totus Christus* is not universally applied; one has to follow Augustine's moves carefully across the *Enarrationes* to get a sense of these commitments.⁴¹ Still, one point where Augustine draws out some of the implications of the *totus Christus* most clearly is in his exposition of Psalm 37.⁴² Augustine is puzzling over the question of how the sinless Christ can say, 'There is no peace in my bones because of my sin'. Augustine's answer gives us a clear articulation of the *totus Christus* principle:

The need to make sense of this forces us to recognise that 'Christ' here is the full Christ, the whole Christ; that is, Christ, Head and body (*plenum et totum Christum, id est caput et corpus*). When Christ speaks, he sometimes does so in the person of the Head alone (*ex persona solius capitis*) ... but at other times he speaks in the person of his body (*ex persona corporis sui*) ... The body of Christ is speaking as one with its Head. How can they speak with one voice? Because, says scripture, *they will be two in one flesh* (Gn 2:24). The apostle confirms it: *This is a great mystery, but I am referring it to Christ and the Church* (Eph 5:32) ... Since [Christ] himself declared that *they are two no longer, but one flesh*, is there anything strange in affirming that the one

³⁷See for instance, *en. Ps.* 26(2).11; 32(2).2; 34(1).1; 37.6; 44.20; 91.11; 140.3.

³⁸Ticciati, 'Light of the Eschaton', p. 211. Ticciati quotes from *en. Ps.* 37.6 ('We have to distinguish as we listen, but the voice is one.') to capture the *totus Christus* hermeneutic 'in a nutshell'.

³⁹Cf. Williams, 'Augustine', pp. 20–1; *en. Ps.* 85.1.

⁴⁰See for instance, *en. Ps.* 3.9; 17.51; 34(2).1; 39.5; 40.1; 87.13; 91.10; 140.3.

⁴¹[Augustine] does not seem to have applied the *totus Christus* statically, as a grid placed over the text, but was a careful reader who could hear nuanced Christocentric persona [*sic*] speaking through the prophet David'. Witt, *Voice Without End*, p. 47. McCarthy notes some of the ways Augustine's hermeneutic develops; see McCarthy, 'Ecclesiology of Groaning', pp. 30–4.

⁴²Here I follow the numeration of Augustine's Latin Psalter. Augustine's Psalter followed the numbering of the LXX, which combined Pss 9 and 10, such that for Augustine Ps 38 is Ps 37. The numbering evens out again at Ps 147, which in the LXX is split into 146 and 147. On Augustine's relationship with the LXX, see *De civitate Dei contra paganos* 18.42–43; Edmon L. Gallagher, 'Augustine on the Hebrew Bible', *Journal of Theological Studies* 67 (2016), pp. 97–114; Colton Moore, 'Graeca Veritas: Saint Augustine's Historical and Theological Rationale for the Septuagint as Authoritative Scripture', in Mariusz Szram and Marcin Wysocki (eds), *The Bible in the Patristic Period* (Leuven: Peeters, 2021), pp. 155–64; cf. Anne-Marie La Bonnadière, 'Did Augustine Use Jerome's Vulgate?', in Bright, *Augustine and the Bible*, pp. 42–51.

same flesh, the one same tongue, the same words, belong to the one flesh of Head and body?⁴³

Thus, in Augustine's account, the words of the Psalms can be a means through which the church enters the intercessory life of Christ. The speaking voice of the Psalter at times points to two distinct personae. However, both personae, head and body, can be seen in a full christological aspect.

Towards a theology of the Psalm titles

It may be apparent at this point how Augustine's approach to the *totus Christus* could have points of resonance with the account of the biographical superscriptions given above.⁴⁴ However, before I draw any wider conclusions on a theology of the biographical superscriptions, a word or two needs to be said to clarify what is being attempted here. It should be clear from the outset that I am not attempting an exegetical defence of Augustine's *totus Christus*. There is much in Augustine's account which is no longer exegetically workable. To take only the most obvious example, part of Augustine's understanding of the prophetic nature of the Psalter seems to rest on the assumption of complete Davidic authorship (see *De civitate Dei* 17.14). Rather, I am seeking to work out how one might go about the task of *ressourcement* or retrieval for the purposes of contemporary interpretation in an exegetically responsible way.⁴⁵ The point here, then, is to try and bring a careful reading of the possible function of the biographical superscriptions into conversation with Augustine's highly influential approach to the Psalter to produce a fresh and theologically lively account.

In his exposition of Augustine's account of the Psalms, Rowan Williams writes, 'What is distinctive about any hermeneutic of singing the Psalms is that singing them is quite simply and literally an appropriation of Christ's life, in history and eternity'.⁴⁶ Williams has made the link between Augustine's appeal to the Psalms in his *Confessions* as comparable to a life's history (*Conf.* 11.28.38) and the way in which the divine and human voice are unified through Augustine's work in the *Enarrationes*, most particularly through the *totus Christus*. In this sense, the Psalms can display 'a structure for telling a unified story of the soul', because in the Psalms we hear the unified divine and human voice of the life of Christ. On Williams' reading, the *totus Christus* opens a way for one to learn what it means 'to inhabit the body of Christ and to be caught up in Christ's prayer', because in praying the Psalms one participates in the life of Christ.⁴⁷

In my account of the biographical superscriptions, I have attempted to highlight how the intensive identification with David's experience, which is produced through the

⁴³*en. Ps.* 37.6; the English translation here is taken from Saint Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms: 33–50*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 2000), pp. 150–1; the Latin text is found in *CCSL* XXXVIII, pp. 386–7.

⁴⁴Another account which might have been fruitfully engaged is that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Das Gebetbuch der Bibel: Eine Einführung in die Psalmen* (Bad Salzungen: Verlag für Missions und Bibel-Kunde, 1940); given the limited scope of this discussion I have confined my engagement to Augustine's *totus Christus*.

⁴⁵See for instance, the classic appeal of Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), especially pp. 96–131.

⁴⁶Williams, 'Augustine', p. 21.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

biographical specificity of these superscriptions, invites the reader of the Psalm and the community that appropriates the Psalm to embrace a thick identification with David. Thus, the experience of the community is parsed in terms of the Davidic experience and takes on Davidic significance. There is, then, an appropriation of the Davidic life for the community which receives the Psalter. They do not simply witness David's life with God, but through the reading of the first-person text, they enter this life, as their voice articulates David's words.

However, much as I have emphasised the identification of the community with David in the reception of these Psalms, some distinction is maintained. One of the traditional difficulties posed by the biographical superscriptions is the apparent awkwardness which tends to exist between the content of the Psalm and the situation to which they are ascribed.⁴⁸ Yet part of the effect of this awkwardness is to allow the Psalm to hold two contexts: that of the biographical superscription and that of the reader without totally collapsing one into the other. The biographical superscriptions, therefore, do allow the community's experience to take on Davidic significance, but not at the expense of the distinctives of the community's life.

Within a Christian frame, one can see how the dynamic described in the previous two paragraphs can be extended in terms of Williams' point quoted earlier. For the Christian willing to offer a figural account of the Psalter, the identification with David, produced by the biographical superscriptions takes on an extra dimension.⁴⁹ The appropriation of the Davidic life can figure the 'appropriation of Christ's life, in history and eternity'.⁵⁰ Thus, the hermeneutical dynamic created by the biographical superscriptions may be extended towards the work traditionally ascribed to Christian Psalmody.⁵¹ This is so precisely because of the way in which the biographical superscriptions allow the community to participate in the life of the representative figure, David. As such, the entering into the Davidic experience which is facilitated by the biographical superscription can be understood as an entering into a wider christological experience. But within an Augustinian account which upholds the *totus Christus* principle, the community's identification with David can run in one of two directions. On the one hand, the Davidic identification can take the community up into the heavenly life of the head, where David is the figure of his son according to the flesh (Rom 1:3). On the other hand, the Davidic identification can root the community in its life of earthly waiting as the body, with all the attendant sin, fragility and confusion this entails.⁵² Part of the insight of Augustine's account is that the christological concern

⁴⁸This point is made repeatedly in the scholarly literature, but see Slomovic, 'Formation of Historical Titles', pp. 350–1.

⁴⁹On the figural reading of the Old Testament, see Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), pp. 3–10; Ephraim Radner, *Time and the Word: Figural Reading of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2016); Don C. Collett, *Figural Reading and the Old Testament: Theology and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020).

⁵⁰Williams, 'Augustine', p. 21.

⁵¹For the language of figural extension, see Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 724.

⁵²This distinction may go some way to offsetting some of the difficulties with seeing David as a type of Christ. These are helpfully laid out in Stephen B. Chapman, *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), pp. 246–51. As we saw illustrated in *en. Ps.* 37.6, Augustine is sensitive to the difficulties of identifying Christ with sinful humanity, indeed, this is one of the issues that the *totus Christus* addresses.

can be retained in both cases, that both moves continue to subsist within the life of Christ. In other words, it is through the figure of David, as he is presented in the superscriptions, that the two voices which make up Augustine's *totus Christus* find concrete expression. The community's participation in the life of David is the door through which the community's voice is blended with that of Christ.

I have focused throughout on the biographical superscriptions in part because it is through them that the identification with David is created most strongly. It is possible that this kind of account could be extended to other parts of the Psalter associated with David. Still, here it seems appropriate to proceed modestly. The dynamic created by the biographical superscriptions can be extended christologically in ways that cohere with the *totus Christus*, although it is surely not the only way they can be appropriated. But my account here perhaps goes some way to illustrating how ancient existential perspectives articulated in traditional practices of interpretation might be re-expressed within a contemporary setting.