Prayer, Ritual, and Silence:
The Psalms as Worship in Biblical Scholarship
and the Phenomenology of Religion

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Biblical scholars in this country often have positions in departments of religion, so it is ironic that, to judge from their publications, few biblical scholars draw upon or contribute to the phenomenological study of religion or the field of history of religions. Happily, Michael Fishbane has always bucked this trend. Already in his earliest publications, such as his 1975 essay on the sacred center in the Bible, Buzzy *has* drawn upon work by theorists of religion. It is thus appropriate that he took a chair here in Swift Hall, a locus widely regarded as an ὀμφαλός for the academic study of religion.

I'd like to talk today about the relationship between biblical criticism and religious studies by examining the way three seminal biblicists— Hermann Gunkel, Sigmund Mowinckel, and Yehezkel Kaufmann—describe the relationship between psalms and sacrifice. We will see that their descriptions line up with approaches to prayer and ritual among theoreticians of religion, even though the three scholars I discuss tended not to refer to theoreticians. Contextualizing Gunkel, Mowinckel, and Kaufmann within a theoretical discourse sheds light on what these scholars were really up to, even if they didn't *realize* the links between their work and larger trends in the academy. This context can help us to evaluate the ways these scholars—and students of scripture generally—think about the nature of worship in the Bible.

Many readers of the Bible presume that the Psalter and Leviticus represent two fundamentally different types of religiosity. For these readers, the beauty and song of the one are at odds with the blood and guts in the other. This judgement reflects a broader presumption common in modern Western culture: True prayer is far removed from mere

ritual. Ritual is, at best, a pale reflection of prayer, useful perhaps for the inarticulate among us. Of course, this attitude misrepresents how psalms functioned in ancient Israel as well as in traditional Judaism and most forms of Christianity. There was no divide between prayer and ritual in the ancient Near East. Understanding psalms as a type of ritual helps us appreciate the religious experiences psalms reflect and encourage. Positing an opposition between prayer and ritual prevents scholars from recognizing those experiences.

The three scholars I discuss today approach these issues in different ways. For **Gunkel**, psalms and sacrifice inhabit opposite ends of a polarity. As genuine religious poems, psalms were independent of the Temple cult, though they imitated the forms of older texts that once played a role in the Temple. **Mowinckel** represents an antithesis to Gunkel's perspective. He argued that psalms accompanied rituals in the Temple. Thus Mowinckel encouraged biblical scholars to adopt a more capacious understanding of how worship functions in actual religions. In his respect for what we might term priestly religion, Mowinckel is more sympathetic to Jewish and Catholic perspectives than Gunkel. Surprisingly, **Kaufmann**, one of the most influential Jewish biblical scholars in the modern era, initially seems closer to Gunkel. Kaufmann claimed that sacrificial worship in Leviticus and Numbers shunned psalmody and prayer. I shall propose, however, that Kaufmann's approach synthesizes elements found in Gunkel and Mowinckel. Although Kaufmann speaks of an opposition between psalmody and sacrifice, his work helps us realize that prayer is a type of ritual, and that silence can be a type of prayer—indeed, a sacrificial form of prayer.

Prayer in the Phenomenology of Religions

In order to understand the place of these three figures in the history of scholarship, it will be useful to realize that various phenomenologists of religion display diametrically opposed understandings of prayer that reflect divergent conceptions of religion itself.

The classic that everyone loves to hate is Friedrich Heiler's *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion*. Heiler makes a strong distinction between prayer on the one hand and ritual, magic, and sacrifice on the other. Thus he writes (handout, page 1):

> Prayer was originally quite independent of sacrifice, [skipping ahead:] ... Originally, sacrifice was completely at the service of prayer...But it gradually rose out of a subordinate into a commanding position.

Heiler proceeds from the assumption that prayer and sacrifice are separate and hostile, so that each must be in either a commanding or a subordinate position. The possibility that they may work together is not addressed.

"Prayer vs. sacrifice" is not the only dichotomy Heiler presents. He contrasts spontaneous, free prayers uttered by individuals with formulaic prayers imposed by a communal hierarchy. This dichotomy appears in the opening sentences of Heiler's work (again, page 1 of the handout): "The free spontaneous petitionary prayer of the natural man exhibits the prototype of all prayer...[skipping ahead:] ... it is strongly repressed by ritual prayer and the fixed forms of exorcism and the magic spell." Heiler regards free prayer as true prayer, and he has less regard for what we might call liturgical prayer—that is, communal, standardized prayers. Heiler claims that free prayers were the original prayers, while liturgical prayer merely imitates true prayer. He writes:

> Prayer is at first a spontaneous emotional discharge, a free outpouring of the heart. In the course of development it becomes a **fixed formula** which people recite **without feeling or mood of devotion, untouched** both **in heart and mind.** At first prayer is an intimate intercourse with God, but gradually it becomes **hard, impersonal, ceremonial, a rite consecrated by ancestral custom**...The factors

> conditioning...this process of **petrification** are the frequent recurrence of the occasions for prayer as well as their close connection with definite ritual acts...In origin prayer is a direct communion...with God. But when **petrified into a ritual formula**, the consciousness of God's presence and of immediate contact with Him threatens to disappear.

In the judgmental vocabulary I've highlighted on the handout, Heiler implies that prayer worthy of the name is exceedingly rare outside low-church Protestant settings. True prayer seldom occurs inside temples, synagogues, mosques, and most churches; in those structures, formulaic prayer is the norm. Heiler discounts the possibility that a worshiper who engages in "intimate intercourse with God" might utilize "a fixed formula." In fact many informants or observers could have told Heiler that "a rite consecrated by ancestral custom" can serve as the vehicle for worship carried out with deep "feeling" and a "mood of devotion." The anthropologist Tanya Lurhmann speaks of the "combination of the very personal and the stereotyped" that is characteristic of religious expression around the world. Our honoree makes a similar point in *Sacred Attunement* when he writes (page 2 of the handout),

> Although tradition may give formal expression to...topics of human life, it does not exclude spontaneous prayer or the revitalization of traditional wording through new intentions or understanding...The life of prayer must register—not only through the communal and historical voice of traditional prayers, but also by the new intentions one may give these old words.

Emphasizing that multiple levels of meaning emerge from the coming-together of communal text and individual devotee, Buzzy shows there is no need to set individual

worship against traditional or communal worship. For Heiler, however, "old words" inherited from a liturgical tradition are a token of spiritual plagiarism and shallowness.

Marcel Mauss' study, *On Prayer*, contests the type of attitude Heiler represents, though Mauss published it a decade before Heiler's book first appeared. Mauss emphasizes that prayer is not opposed to ritual; it is a type of ritual, which he defines (towards the bottom of page 2) as "an efficacious traditional act" that is "performed in conformity with a given prescription." So frequently and insistently does Mauss comes back to the idea that there is no opposition between prayer and ritual and that prayer is a social act that it is clear he is polemicizing against the opposite point of view. (I provide a few examples on pages 2–3 of the handout.) The realization that a prayer is one type of ritual reminds us that we can put too much emphasis on a prayer's wording, while neglecting its ritual context. For Mauss, a prayer is not only a text [pause] to be analyzed; it is an activity [pause] that has a function. Focusing exclusively on its verbal content turns our attention to an arena that may be of little importance to a worshiper. Mauss criticizes scholars who, when studying prayer, seek "to determine the meaning of the words uttered by the worshipper rather than to explain their efficacy." These scholars, he complains (towards the top of page 3) "scarcely went beyond the realm of belief. Prayer, which is a rite, escaped their notice." To understand a prayer as poetry, one looks to its verbal sense, but to understand prayer as prayer, one attends to the results it is believed to engender. Similarly, Mauss realizes that prayer can be non-verbal; certain bodily actions—fingering a rosary or winding phylacteries around one's arm—are as much a prayer as the Our Father or the Amidah. Mauss objects to scholars who misunderstand ritually-oriented prayer in non-Protestant (or even high-church Protestant) communities. That misunderstanding reached its apotheosis in Heiler's book.

In *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* Gerardus van der Leeuw similarly notes the intimate connection of praise and sacrificial ritual, rejecting the assumption that these phenomena are in tension with each other. Unlike Heiler, he regards ritual as more basic

and more archaic than prayer. We see the same trend in Philip and Carol Zaleski's book, *Prayer: A History*. Like van der Leeuw, the Zaleskis suggest that sacrificial rituals are older than prayer; indeed, prayer sometimes functions as a substitute for sacrifice. They also reject Heiler's avowal that free prayer is more commendable than liturgical prayer. The Zaleskis explain that reciting a prayer one did not compose is an exercise in humility. By praying the words of a common liturgy rather than one's own words, at a time tradition dictates rather than a moment one chooses, worshipers confess that they are connected to something larger, to which they yield some autonomy. The Zaleskis speak (on the bottom of page 3) of "the self-effacement needed in order to say prayers in unison with others..." They continue: "To perceive oneself as part of a book authored by God—to learn that one is written, not writer; passive, not active... serve as gestures of submission." Abraham Joshua Heschel makes very similar statements (on page 4) about liturgical prayer, which requires self-limitation; worshipers restrain themselves so that a more august authority speaks through them. Liturgical prayer is thus a type of sacrifice. For van der Leeuw (back on page 3), it is also a form of silence:

> The standard terminology of the liturgy...is...an approximation to silence; and it is the experience of every celebrant and liturgist that while repeating the words of the liturgy he must himself be silent...The strangeness of liturgical language is also an approach to silence...

The insight that formulaic prayer is related to silence is not new. Maimonides, in *The Guide* discusses the line from Psalms, *Silence is praise to You* (see page 4 [לְךָ דֳמִיָּה תְהִלָּה אֱלֹהִים בְּצִיּוֹן וּלְךָ יְשֻׁלַּם־נֶדֶר , Ps 65:2]). Maimonides points out there that any attempt we make to praise of God is at best deficient. "Accordingly," he writes, "silence and limiting oneself to the apprehensions of the intellects are more appropriate." But Maimonides does not disavow formulaic prayer. On the contrary, he regarded it as a daily requirement for

all (male) Jews. Addressing free individual prayer, he describes people who, not satisfied with the formulaic texts of the liturgy, "spoke at great length and spent great efforts on prayers that they composed...through which they, in their opinion, came nearer to God." Such free prayers, Maimonides maintains, are not commendable. Those who utter them are "truly ignorant." For Maimonides as for van der Leeuw, worshipers who recite the liturgy's wording ritually enact their own silence. The understanding of religion at work in Maimonides and van der Leeuw is the opposite of Heiler's: the truly religious act is not finding one's voice but sacrificing it in the presence of something infinitely greater.

Okay, let's get back to biblical scholarship.

Gunkel, Mowinckel, and Kaufmann

The approaches to Israelite worship found in the writings of Gunkel, Mowinckel and Kaufmann correspond to the perspectives of Heiler, of Mauss, and of van der Leeuw and Maimonides respectively. I say "correspond to," not "result from"; there is no indication that the biblical scholars were heavily influenced by these authors, though Kaufmann of course read Maimonides.

Gunkel's approach to the Psalter recalls Heiler's view of prayer as distinct from ritual. Gunkel acknowledges that psalms were recited alongside sacrifices in the pre-exilic Jerusalem temple. But, he claims, most of those psalms disappeared from the textual record. The texts found in the canonical Psalter, according to Gunkel, utilized the forms of the earlier temple-psalms but were composed to be recited on their own. Thus Gunkel refers to them as "cult-free spiritual poetry," for they did not accompany sacrificial rites. The extant psalms are as distant from sacrifice as Heiler's free prayers are removed from ritual. Gunkel describes the era that produced our psalms—that is, the psalms found in the Psalter—as "the period of piety" and says of it (page 5):

> The psalmists [of this era] learned from the prophet's exalted models to evaluate the external worship service as inferior. ... psalmody experienced a decisive change. Originally, psalmody arose from the cult and was closely bound to it, but now turned its back on it. **Pious individuals** had learned to sing songs in which they **disregarded** every **external action**. These songs were no longer designated for **public worship**. [Skipping ahead] ... the individual appeared before God **alone**. Thus arose **spiritual poetry**, the particular treasure of the Psalter.

For Gunkel, as for Heiler, "external action" is something that "pious individuals" learned to "disregard." True prayers are no longer designated for "public worship," because religion as manifest in the Psalter is a matter of what he calls "massive individualism."

For Heiler, prayer was originally separate from ritual, but it fell from what we might call its state of grace when it was supplemented by sacrificial rites and then subordinated to them. Free prayers uttered at the dawn of religion were replaced by liturgical compositions that mimicked true prayers. Gunkel's reconstruction seems different: for him, the spiritual prayers found in the canonical Psalter imitated and improved upon pre-exilic cultic songs. These two historical reconstruction present no contradiction. Heiler spoke of prayer among humanity's forebears in prehistory. He focuses on a prelapsarian world of worship wherein humans had not eaten from the tree of ritual. Gunkel attends to a much later period. The canonical psalms Gunkel discusses are not among humanity's original prayers. They exemplify what we may call reformed prayer: their authors restored prayer to something closer to what it had been in the prelapsarian world Heiler imagines.

A peculiarity in Gunkel's history of psalmody demands comment. Gunkel emphasizes that a text's genre directly reflects its life-setting and function in the temple cult. Yet Gunkel insists that the psalms in the Psalter are divorced from those settings; their authors merely imitated older, temple-based texts now lost to us. I think that Gunkel

wants to treat the contents of the Psalter with esteem, which means (for someone with his Heilerian view of prayer that is opposed to ritual) that the psalms found in scripture cannot be too closely related to the temple cult. At the same time, Gunkel developed the paradigm-shifting insight that the psalms' genres are linked to settings and functions—a truly brilliant idea which, however, linked the canonical psalms with ritual and the Temple. Hence Gunkel's insistence that the canonical psalms imitate rather than exemplify literary genres rooted in the cult. If one does not begin with a Heilerian view of prayer, then one can simply acknowledge the obvious: psalms, as prayers, are intimately bound up with ritual. The reason they look like the sorts of texts that were probably used in the temple is that they were probably used in the temple.

It is precisely that approach that Mowinckel adopts in writings on psalms that span his career. He follows Gunkel in viewing genre, setting, and function as an integrated complex, but, unlike Gunkel, he does not quickly break this three-fold cord. In this sense, Mowinckel is more loyal than Gunkel to Gunkel's paradigm-shifting insight. Mowinckel thought that psalms belonging to a genre functioned in the setting that produced the genre. He devotes a considerable portion of his *Psalms Studies* to refuting Gunkel's argument that most of the texts in the Psalter are noncultic songs. His attacks on Gunkel's reasoning employ a number of strategies. Above all, Mowinckel points to wording in the psalms that connects to ritual. Psalms were sung by professional (i.e., Levitical) choirs; their phrasing is often stereotypical; through their superscriptions, many psalms associate themselves explicitly with Levitical families that performed music in the temple; psalms often speak favorably or longingly about the temple—all these characteristics confirm Mowinckel's point that psalms were temple-based. Mowinckel's thesis here recalls Mauss' insistence that prayer is itself a type of ritual. We saw earlier that in making this claim, Mauss serves as a foil to Heiler. In a similar way, Mowinckel functions a foil to Gunkel. Thus it is no surprise that for Mowinckel ritual and communal elements of a prayer do not compromise the prayer's spiritual value or inward emphasis. He maintains

(I'm about four lines from the bottom of page 5) that Gunkel's argumentation presupposes

> that actual cultic songs reveal nothing personal. ... This may be an unjustified assessment...Even cultic songs were composed by living people...whose hearts were in cultic religion and who had, or at least could have had, religious experiences during festive cultic occasions... Why should they, too, not express...their experiences and perceptions in their poems?

Mowinckel's polemic here recalls Mauss' insistence that the ritual nature of an act does not prevent it from being spiritual as well as Luhrmann's argument that the stereotypical can become deeply personal.

Let's move on to Kaufmann. In his eight-volume masterwork, *Toledot Ha'emunah Hayisraelit*, Kaufmann famously, and controversially, maintains that the Aaronide priests performed their sacrifices in utter silence. Thus he appears to posit a divide between prayer and ritual that recalls Gunkel's view of the canonical psalms as completely separate from the temple cult. In fact, we will see, Kaufmann's approach more closely matches Mowinckel, because he, too, regards the psalms as ritual texts.

While Kaufmann contests many aspects of Mowinckel's work on the psalms, both scholars emphasize that the psalms functioned together with rituals inside the temple complex. Kaufmann writes (page 6): "Like dance and the procession, song and psalm were part of the popular cult...Psalmody tended to become formalized, more like cultic forms and less like prayer." Kaufmann's acknowledgment that psalmody played a role in the temple cult may come as a surprise to some, since he is associated with the idea that the Temple was "the sanctuary of silence." Here a misunderstanding needs to be cleared up. Contrary to the assumption of many biblical critics who reject Kaufmann's approach but seem not to have read his work, Kaufmann never claims that song was absent from

the Israelite temple. When he introduces his idea of a silent sanctuary, it's clear that he's speaking about the sanctuary as the Pentateuch's Priestly document imagined it, the cult that Priestly law prescribes. He never says that the Jerusalem temple in its entirety was a sanctuary of silence. Note his deliberate phrasing (middle of page 6):

> מדה אפינית ביותר של מהקדש הכהני הישראלי היא, ששוררת בו **דממת קודש**. המקדש הכהני הישראלי הוא **מלכות הדממה**. הכהונה הישראלית הוציאה מתוך פולחנה את הלחש ואת המזמור ויצרה טופס של פולחן, שאין **הדבור**, השירי או הפרוזאי, תופס בו מקום...בטקס הפולחני של ס"כ כל פעולותיו של הכהן נעשות **בדממה**, בלי לואי של לחש, מזמור וכל דבור.
>
> An especially distinctive characteristic of the Priestly-Israelite sanctuary is that a *sacred silence* reigns within it. The Priestly-Israelite sanctuary is a *kingdom of silence*. The Israelite priesthood removed spells and psalms from its midst, fashioning a configuration of cult in which no *speech*, whether poetry or prose, has any place...In the cultic ceremonies of the P document, the activities of the priest are carried out in *silence*, without any accompaniment of spell, psalms, or speech.

This passage mentions the Priestly sanctuary twice. It further refers to the P document (ס"כ), the priesthood, and the activities of the priest. Kaufmann describes not Israelite worship generally but worship as P thought it should be carried out. It is specifically the P document that wants to keep sacrifice separate from verbalization and music. Kaufmann maintains that the priests did not speak or sing as they performed rituals at the Temple's altars. But he acknowledges that prayer and song occurred away from the altars but within the temple complex. There, other officiants—namely, Levites—sang psalms.

In short, Kaufmann's claim is that *Priestly* ritual at the altars knows no prayer. But for Kaufmann, Israelite religion was broader than Priestly religion; indeed, even temple-religion was broader than Priestly religion, since the priests were not the only ritual

practitioners inside the temple complex. At a short remove from the altars, P's austere worship was not the norm. Thus Kaufmann writes (page 6):

> בתחום הפולחן גופו לא יכלה המסגרת הכהנית להכיל את כל שפע היצירה הדתית. מסביב לשטח הדממה הקדושה של בית־האלהים נבראה ספירה של פולחן עממי, כולו תנועה וקול ורגש סוער. יסודות, שהפולחן הכהני פלט אותם, מצאו להם מקום בספירה זו.
>
> Within the arena of the cult itself the priestly limitations could not contain all the abundance of religious creativity. Around the zone of sacred silence of the temple building, the popular cult created its own sphere, brimming with movement and voices, tumult and excitement. Elements banished by the priestly cult found themselves a place within this sphere.

Priestly and non-Priestly worship, he makes clear, were distinct but adjacent realms. Kaufmann's claims about silent sacrificial worship apply only to the former. (Some of you will have noted Kaufmann's no doubt deliberate choice of loaded vocabulary to describe the popular-levitical cult: שפע and ספירה, which I rendered as "abundance" and "sphere," of course serve as technical terms in kabbalistic literature. I think Kaufmann intends here to paint the priestly traditions as rationalist and the popular-levitical traditions as inclinded towards mystic enthusiasm.)

Kaufmann's distinction between two arenas in the Temple recalls an observation Mowinckel made (in a passage in the middle of page 5): the temple cult consisted of more than bloody sacrifice. For Mowinckel, psalms were at home especially in aspects of temple ritual beyond those immolations. Indeed, Mowinckel points out, "the psalms speak little of sacrifice." Thus, in spite of Kaufmann's surface similarity to Gunkel in dividing sacrifice from song, Kaufmann comes closer to Mowinckel in claiming that psalms were non-sacrificial but nevertheless cultic. This understanding of psalms comes to the fore when Kaufmann explains that formulaic elements of the psalms attest to their cultic

setting. The psalms' language, Kaufmann notes, was far more stylized than the language of ad-hoc prayers recorded in biblical narratives. Psalms were often sung by professionals, the Levites. To put these insights into more recent scholarly language: psalms were highly ritualized in a way that distinguishes them from both the ad hoc prayer that Heiler values and from the spiritual poetry that Gunkel imagines the psalms to be. To use Mauss' terminology, both Mowinckel and Kaufmann understand psalms as efficacious, traditional acts. If Gunkel correlates with Heiler, and Mowinckel with Mauss, then Kaufmann's view, on closer inspection, aligns less with the former and more with the latter.

But in another respect, Kaufmann's discussion of worship is closest to the Zaleskis, Heschel, van der Leeuw and Maimonides. The reason P expels all forms of linguistic expression from sacrifice, Kaufmann asserts, is because of the association between magic and incantation. Magic in the ancient world involved the use of language along with ritual acts to control matter. It is for this reason that Priestly authors refuse to combine verbalization or song with sacrificial rites. While a popular cult that used psalms was present in the temple complex, as one approached God's actual dwelling-place beyond the altars, the popular cult receded and Priestly hegemony took hold. There—in a restricted, refined, elite domain, at a location understood quite literally to be close to God—the priests performed rituals that shunned language. The priests favored silent worship, Kaufmann holds, because using language in worship was both dangerous and inappropriate. It was dangerous because, when combined with ritual action, it resembled the magic that Israelites were prohibited from practicing. It was inappropriate because the purpose of Priestly worship was not to engage in barter with God, nor to precipitate the granting of divine grace, but only to express awe towards God. For such a goal, language is likely to be a stumbling block. The words in which praise and petition are couched can flatter and beseech, and thus they orient prayer towards the human being's needs. The

proper execution of a ritual sequence, on the other hand, serves as a pure expression of subservience. Thus Kaufmann states:

> With the passing-away of the magical justification [for ritual acts], these acts were transformed entirely to a matter of a decree (חוקה), a divine commandment (מצוה אלהית), which has no reason (טעם) and whose function is exclusively to symbolize submission of human will to divine will. The striving to distance the magical justification, with its accompanying speech,...led to the stillness of the Priestly cult (הפולחן הכני). Silence (דממה) took the place of speech, a silence which conveyed awe towards the holy.

Physical, as opposed to verbal, ritual works especially well for this enactment of submission precisely because it carries no intrinsic meaning. A similar point was famously made by the anthropologist Frits Staal:

> A widespread but erroneous assumption about ritual is that it consists in symbolic activities which refer to something else. It is characteristic of a ritual performance, however, that it is self-contained and self-absorbed. The performers are totally immersed in the proper execution of their complex tasks. Isolated in their sacred enclosure, they concentrate on correctness of act, recitation and chant. Their primary concern, if not obsession, is with rules. There are no symbolic meanings going through their minds when they are engaged in performing ritual.

Actions performed in silence, then, are the highest form of worship in the basic sense of the word: they show reverence; they serve the divine Other. Words have meanings that may focus more on the worshiper than the Object of worship. Pure, non-linguistic ritual—what Mauss terms manual as opposed to oral rite—escapes this danger. Just as the priest

sacrifices his voice to perform cultic ritual in Kaufmann's depiction of the silent sanctuary, so too the worshiper committed to liturgical prayer gives up her voice to recite a set text dictated by tradition according to the Zaleskis, Heschel, van der Leeuw, and Maimonides. For all these thinkers, the pinnacle of worship leaves language behind, whether by replacing language with bodily ritual or by limiting language to formulas that tradition provides.

A similar perspective, surprisingly enough, gets the last word in the Psalter. Psalm 150 calls on all living creatures to praise God. The whole world, the psalm proclaims, should praise God with trumpets and harps, with drums and cymbals, with whole body in dance—but not with song. Conspicuously absence in the psalm's catalogue of musical instruments is the human voice. Psalm 150 challenges the logocentrism of both liturgical and free prayer. In its climactic finale, the Psalter encourages a type of worship reminiscent of the non-verbal veneration Kaufmann finds in P. When we utilize the findings of biblical scholarship along with the insights of phenomenologists of religion, it becomes clear that Leviticus and Psalms, are not opposites. They are two manifestations of a single religious impulse. For some biblical thinkers (and I use this term to include both ancient Israelite authors and Jewish and Christian sages who draw upon their writings), language is a frail and all-too-human vehicle for religion expression, and various approximations of silence are the best way to convey one's love of God.

32 min.