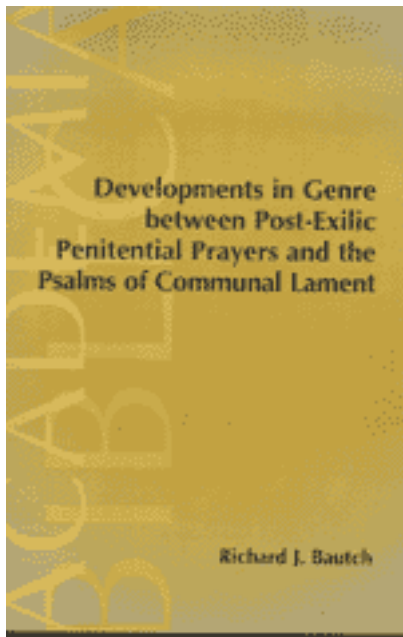


RBL 07/2004



Bautch, Richard J.

Developments in Genre between Post-Exilic Penitential Prayers and the Psalms of Communal Lament

Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica 7

Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature; Leiden: Brill, 2003. Pp. xiv + 201. Paper/cloth. \$33.95/\$95.00. ISBN 1589830474/ 9004127127.

Jacob L. Wright
Georg-August-Universität
Göttingen, Germany 37073

With the publication of his dissertation, written under direction of Joseph Blenkinsopp at the University of Notre Dame, Richard J. Bautch has made a substantial contribution to the discourse on penitential prayer that has been conducted throughout the last years in the monographs of V. Pröbstl (1997), D. Falk (1998), R. Werline (1998), M. Boda (1999), and J. Newman (1999), as well as in the consultation on this subject at the national SBL meetings (2003–5). Turning from the orientation to *Traditionsgeschichte* that has characterized this discourse, Bautch's work endeavors to provide an in-depth treatment of the literary form and the social setting of postexilic laments as a resource for those studying the traditions and sources in these texts. To achieve this goal, Bautch employs the form-critical method, which he understands as “inquiry into the genre and setting of a text” that aims to “advance our knowledge less of a [its] historical origins and more of its literary evolution” (11). Thus, instead of searching for the ultimate source of postexilic penitential prayer, Bautch focuses on its immediate predecessor, which he identifies with the preexilic psalms of communal lament, and how it is transformed into a new genre. He concerns himself, however, not just with these prayers' history of composition, but also with the *Sitz im Leben* of each. Inasmuch as this gifted exegete presents the findings of long hours of literary analysis and interacts with past research,

even scholars who question the usefulness of form criticism, at least as it is conventionally practiced, will find much of value in his work. Particularly helpful is the way in which Bautch connects form-critical study to the discussion of innerbiblical exegesis, which often has been confined to ideas and phrases to the neglect of the larger forms and genres.

In chapter 1 (1–27), Bautch places his research in its scholarly context and defends the methodology he adopts. In addition to the many insightful remarks on Second Temple prayer and intertextuality in the fifth and sixth centuries, the reader would have greatly appreciated a clearer presentation of the thesis of the book. Moreover, a reference to Klaus Koch's standard work on form criticism, *Was ist Formgeschichte?* (4th ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), is noticeably absent in the discussion of this method.

The study continues in chapters 2–4 (29–136) with analyses of three exemplars of penitential prayer: Isa 63:7–64:11; Ezra 9:6–15; and Neh 9:6–37. Each begins with a translation and treatment of the text-critical issues, moves to a form-critical evaluation, and concludes by establishing the setting in life for the respective texts. In general, Bautch discusses the individual prayers in the same intelligent and even-handed manner known to his *Doktorvater*, and he omits many of the extraneous details that so often find their way into published dissertations.

By concentrating on the confession of sin in the prayers he studies, Bautch successfully demonstrates the genetic relationship between them and the psalms of lament, and future research on these texts cannot afford to neglect his findings. They are, however, not beyond dispute on several important points.

With regard to Isa 63:7–64:11, Bautch proposes a history of growth that began in the seventh century or earlier (63:15–19a), a composition from the mid to late sixth century (64:4b–11), and a historical section (63:7–14) and a call for epiphany (63:19b–64:4a) that were added not long thereafter. The prayer appears indeed to have matured over a lengthy period, and one can only respect Bautch's courage to engage in redaction criticism at a time when biblical scholarship is only beginning to reacknowledge that this method is essential to the exegetical enterprise. Nevertheless, I find it difficult to embrace the dates he suggests. For instance, if one should understand the description of the destroyed sanctuary in 63:15–19a as referring to a situation in the seventh century or earlier, more probative evidence than the presence of several terms that may have been used by the classical prophets is required, especially as Bautch himself admits that these terms appear also in much younger texts (58). With regard to 63:7–14, one must ask, How does the fact that this historical recital focuses on the exodus story indicate that this section

“presupposes a redaction of pentateuchal material that predates P’s final form of the five books” (56)? Would it not be easier to explain the attention given to the exodus themes as the author’s selective use of the biblical material? For a definitive answer to this question, see a study that demonstrates the post-P character of the language in this passage: J. Goldenstein, *Das Gebet der Gottesknechte: Jesaja 63,7–64,11 im Jesajabuch* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001). This work, which Bautch surprisingly does not mention, follows O. H. Steck in proposing a much later date for the prayer and displays the great extent to which it derives its contents from young passages in the book of Isaiah itself.

For Ezra 9:6–15, Bautch argues that the Chronicler “had the prayer available to him as he was writing the final portion of Ezra and . . . wove the prayer into his own composition” (92). The view that the Chronicler had a hand in the writing of Ezra 9–10 departs from the growing consensus that Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 and 2 Chronicles originated separately. While Bautch demonstrates a certain proximity in the formulations of the narrative framework of the prayer and passages from 1 and 2 Chronicles, many scholars will need more substantial arguments to accept the unity of authorship of these texts and to deny the unity of authorship for Ezra 9:6–15 and its narrative introduction. A fundamental problem that he does not address is why the editor would leave Ezra 9 in the first-person without reformulating Ezra 10, which is in the third-person. Comparison of Ezra 9 with the rest of the book reveals that this whole chapter incorporates many salient features from the first and final passages of Nehemiah’s Memoir (1:1ff. and 13:23ff.), rendering it probable that it represents an unified literary creation preparing the reader for Nehemiah’s report of his subsequent accomplishments (see my dissertation on Nehemiah’s account of the restoration and its reception in Ezra-Nehemiah [Universität Göttingen, R. G. Kratz, 2003]).

With respect to Neh 9:6–37, Bautch suggests again that this prayer was composed for a different setting and later appropriated by the Chronicler (i.e., the editor of Neh 8–10). That Neh 9 antedates its present context is not a new idea, yet it deserves to be seriously questioned. Although rarely noticed, the lengthy recital of Israel’s history remarkably never mentions the temple, while the theme of adherence to the Torah dominates. Similarly, the narrative introduction to the prayer in Neh 8–9 incorporates central aspects of the account in Ezra 3 yet replaces all references to the temple and the priests with an emphasis on the Torah and the scribe Ezra. It is thus likely that a later hand composed also this prayer for its present literary setting, especially as one finds it difficult to conceive how it was transmitted for a century or more before it gained acceptance into the book. In searching for the sources of inspiration for the prayer, Bautch unfortunately fails to devote attention to the book of Ezra-Nehemiah itself. Even after concluding that

the prayer represents an older “source,” one must still explain why the authors selected precisely this text for their work instead of drafting a new one.

The final chapter (137–72) is in many ways the most successful one. Not only does it helpfully summarize the results of the foregoing literary analyses, but it also reflects upon them with the aim of examining “The Form-Critical Legacy of the Communal Laments in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods.” Important are the several points of discontinuity Bautch ably delineates between the prayers studied in chapters 2–4 and those from the late Hellenistic age. Despite the degree of difference between the former and the latter, one wonders whether the temporal gap separating the two groups is as wide as Bautch maintains.

While many will not be able to embrace all its conclusions, this book promises to advance future research on penitential prayer and the theologies they present.