

Roger E. Van Harn and Brent A Strawn, eds. *Psalms for Preaching and Worship: A Lectionary Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009. 506 pages. \$35.

The goal of this volume is to encourage preaching as well as praying the psalms. It includes commentaries on the psalms appointed for each Sunday by the Revised Common Lectionary. It completes a series, *The Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Texts*, which did not include a volume on the psalms and canticles. The commentaries are arranged by the number of the psalm, but headed with the Sunday for which a given psalm is designated in the three-year lectionary and a listing of the other three selections for that Sunday. There is no indication of when a given psalm is appointed in Track Two for the Season after Pentecost or even commentary on psalms that are unique to Track Two. For example, Psalm 113 is appointed for the Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost in Track Two, but no commentary is provided. The commentaries on the psalms are bracketed by commentaries on the canticles: Ex 15:1-21 and 1 Sam 2:1-10 before and Isa 12, Lam 3 and Luke 1 after. The commentaries are by a variety of nearly thirty contributors and are varied in what they offer. Some are purely description of the form and content; others make links to the other texts for the day or days on which it is used, or to hymns or poetry; still others to contemporary struggles and experiences.

The entire collection of commentaries is bracketed by two articles. The first is "The Psalms: Types, Functions, and Poetics for Proclamation," by Brent Strawn. This essay succinctly orients the preacher to the importance of the psalms through history and gives a brief account of the history of modern study that differentiates various forms and functions. This history includes reference to Walter Brueggemann's very helpful theological classification of psalms of praise, lament, and thanksgiving, which arise from and provide language for expressing experiences of *orientation*, *disorientation*, and *reorientation*. Strawn then goes on to review parallelism and imagery, the basics of the poetics of Hebrew poetry. His comments on the imagery of the psalms are especially important. Imagery is often overlooked, yet it generates the affective impact of the psalm as well as inviting contemplation, interpretation, and application. Strawn also calls attention to the recent contribution of archaeology to psalm study and interpretation in the form of artistic remains, some of which are depicted in the individual commentaries. For example, in the commentary on Ps 110:1, "The LORD says to my lord (the king): 'Sit at my right hand,'" J. Ross Wagner includes a drawing of a 14th Century B.C.E. limestone sculpture showing the god Horus sitting on a throne and the pharaoh sitting on his right.

The article that closes the volume is entitled "Worship with the Psalms: An Introduction and Guide to Resources," by John D. Witvliet. This is the unique contribution of this volume for preachers and worship leaders. It is a wide-ranging essay on a host of particular features of the psalms that constitute the "basic grammar of Christian worship," followed by specific suggestions for uncovering the wealth of the psalms in liturgy. These suggestions constitute an ecumenical survey of the ways the psalms have been used in different worship traditions. The last two thirds of this essay is virtually an extended annotated bibliography of psalm resources. This bibliography includes resources about the great variety of translations available and what might lead a worship leader to choose a particular translation, where a psalm might be used in the liturgy, various ways the congregation may be invited to participate in the psalms, how to script a psalm for participation in ways that exploit its poetic features, and creative uses made of the psalms in worship throughout history. At the beginning of this essay, Witvliet comments that he has chosen to offer a broad survey rather than open the reader to the riches of a particular tradition. The aim is to encourage readers to broaden their use of the psalms beyond their own

traditions. The essay closes with a “Pastoral Postscript,” in which Witvliet reminds us of the opportunity worship leadership have for offering hospitality to “the guest, the seeker, the weak and the strong,” and for being profoundly sensitive to their needs. The psalms themselves are a rich feast for those who come to worship. This essay encourages and helps equip those of us who host worship week after week to be imaginative in preparing an appetizer or an entrée in a way that accents one or more of its exquisite flavors and to serve it in a style that invites the guests to partake.

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