

***The Psalter as Witness: Theology, Poetry, and Genre.* Edited by W. Dennis Tucker, Jr. and W. H. Bellinger, Jr..** Pp. 216. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2017. ISBN 9781481305563 (hardback). \$49.95.

In the *Preface*, W. Dennis Tucker Jr. outlines the genesis of this volume as the proceedings of the inaugural Baylor University - University of Bonn Symposium on the Book of Psalms, hosted in Waco, Texas, in May 2013. The twofold intention of the gathering was to “engage in scholarly deliberations on the book of Psalms” and to “provide a venue for increased interaction between North American psalms scholars and their counterparts in Germany”. Both editors and contributors are to be congratulated on their work in engineering such a meeting and sharing that conversation more widely through publication in this format. The opening pages suggest this as a promising basis for a collection of excellent Psalms essays, offered by long-experienced and emerging scholars alongside one another.

Indeed, the collection does not disappoint. The only real weakness - as is often the case in publishing proceedings - would seem to be that the title and subtitles to the whole were put in place after the initial contributions had first been heard, and the papers variously acknowledge the notion of “The Psalter as Witness” in different ways and to different extents as if some essays had more work done on them post-symposium than others. It is nevertheless an engaging lens which has thus been chosen, and the subheadings to the tripartite structure - “Theological Approaches to the Psalms”, “Theological Themes in the Psalms”, and “Genre and Theology” - at the very least cause the reader to try and understand why the essays have been organized in this way. With five contributions in each of the very closely-related Parts One and Two, and only two essays in the clearly differing Part Three, the result is a somewhat imbalanced collection seen in this light, and one wonders quite how much the subdivisions lend to the whole.

The opening paper, ‘Poetry and Theology in the Psalms: Psalm 133’ by W. H. Bellinger Jr. offers a very close poetic reading of the selected short text, and helpfully places canonical criticism clearly on the agenda for this collection. Nancy deClaissé-Walford’s chapter, ‘Feminine Imagery and Theology in the Psalter: Psalms 90, 91, and 92’ opens up some real possibilities for the future of psalms exegesis attempting to hear the feminine voice in the texts. Her contribution is especially memorable with striking translations such as God’s רחמים as “womb-love” (p.17). Harry P. Nasuti brings to the collection ‘ “Who Is Like the Lord Our God?”: Theology and Ethics in the Psalms’ with a focus on the positioning of Ps 113 within the contexts both of the Hallelujah series of Pss 111-113 and the Hallel of Pss 113-118. In ‘David and the Political Theology of the Psalter’, Stephen Breck Reid draws out Pss 18, 78, 89, 132 (at greater length), and 144 to explore “the dangerous memory of David as an anti-imperial metaphor for political agency” (p.62). Till Magnus Steiner closes Part One with ‘Spatial Theory and Theology in Psalms 46-48’, offering complex textual criticism to support a reading of these psalms as “Zion Trilogy”.

Part Two opens with ‘Human Transience, Justice, and Mercy: Psalm 103’ by Johannes Schnocks which, with reference to issues of human transience in Pss 90-92 and 102, implicitly reminds the reader of deClaissé-Walford’s chapter while taking the theology in a different direction. Editor W. Dennis Tucker Jr. perhaps unsurprisingly pays closest attention to the theme of “The Psalter as Witness” in his piece ‘The God of Heaven in Book 5 of the Psalter’. Beginning by touching on Zion theology, there are some links for the reader to make with Steiner’s earlier contribution, before a development of Zion theology as read in Book 5. Canonical concerns continue in Johannes Bremer’s essay, ‘The Theology of the Poor in the Psalter’, as he examines this topic according to different

collections of psalms, starting with the First and Second Davidic Compositions, moving through the Asaphite Psalms, considering the poor within other matters of arrangement *en route*, before growing to the large-scale canonical canvas of Pss 2-89, and then Books 4-5 of the Psalter. A brief diachronic overview concludes the piece with reference to his doctoral thesis. Two chapters now follow on the Elohist Psalter: first, 'The Elohist Psalter: Formation and Purpose' and second, 'The Elohist Psalter: History and Theology'. The latter author, Joel S. Burnett, before drawing insightful connections between the "Elohim" of the Elohist Psalter with the "Ilahin" of the Deir Alla plaster inscription, rightly acknowledges the immense output of the former author, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, in whose memory the final collection has been published. Professor Hossfeld's contribution appropriately stands out within the volume as an important essay to be read by any Psalms scholar engaging with canonical criticism. Indeed, reference to the work of both Professor Hossfeld and his colleague Erich Zenger is a staple throughout, despite the rich variety of German and English bibliographic details offered by this convergence of two universities and schools of theology.

Finally, Part Three opens with Egbert Ballhorn's 'The Psalter as a Book: Genre as Key to Its Theology', with the thesis that the whole is a "book of instruction... [which] teaches Torah" (pp. 168-9), yet surprisingly in this well-referenced paper there is no sign of the (by then) very recent work of Gordon Wenham arguing along similar lines. 'Genre, Theology, and the God of the Psalms' closes the collection, with its dual focus on the genre of prayers of help and the theological issue of God's impassability on the one hand, and on the genre of royal psalms and the theological issue of divine election on the other. This is a fittingly powerful finale contributed by Rolf Jacobson. The whole is an enjoyable and rewarding read.