

*A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89).* Allen P. Ross. Pp. 841. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2013. ISBN 9780825425639 (hardback). **\$44.99.**

The second volume of this projected three-volume commentary is, as the first, impressive and full. It is best studied in combination with volume one (Psalms 1-41, published in 2011), which features a number of introductory essays clarifying the intention and style of the whole commentary. Professor Ross outlined there his primary focus “on the chief aim of exegesis, the exposition of the text” (I.11), with his anticipated audience of “pastors, teachers, and all serious students of the Bible who wish to develop their understanding of the Book of Psalms and to improve their ability to expound it with precision and depth” (I.12). Thus crucial to his commentary is the development of the exposition from the exegesis (I.17). His second volume continues the hermeneutic work begun in volume one, covering Books II and III of the Psalter, with the ongoing emphasis of informing homiletics and the general communication and teaching of the Psalter.

His commentary on Pss 42-89 maintains and further exemplifies the sturdy exegetical and expository methods he introduced in volume one, both in the opening essays and commentaries offered of Pss 1-41. His method, consistently applied and thoughtfully developed, causes the reader to reflect on the movement from exegesis to exposition, and to evaluate this particular hermeneutic and homiletic relationship. Each psalm is treated as a unit in his method (it is noteworthy therefore that he chooses to consider Pss 42 and 43 as one at the outset of this volume). He offers his own translation which is close to the MT, and in his footnotes to the translation he highlights textual-critical matters, with many references to the LXX and Syriac versions in particular. Next he suggests reflections on “Composition and Context”, within which he normally makes observations about form, and historical-critical considerations, often well-informed by other commentaries and OT cross-references.

His exegetical analysis forms the core of his commentary. His discipline is to begin with a descriptive summary of the psalm; he then gives an outline, usually broken down into stanzas and then further divided into individual verses or short groups of verses, each of which he summarises. Sometimes these subdivisions are further broken down, and occasionally (e.g. Ps 78 (652)) a fourth level of division introduced. He bases his “Commentary in Expository Form” on this outline, rewording each summary and grouping the divisions so that he writes according to just the first two levels of this chunking. Within these paragraphs he then develops the expository outlines and explores the text. Alongside his notable word-studies, he incorporates syntactical and grammatical analysis, and analysis of the poetics. His following “Message and Application” is then an unfolding of some views on the theology of the passage, and a connecting of these exegetical reflections with the readers’ possible present context. Within this he now refines his writing to a one sentence application of the expository idea.

Professor Ross’s envisaged readership as those learning about the Psalter from a standpoint of faith, and for those who will in turn teach about the Psalter in this context, may not be the only ones who will benefit from his commentary. One contribution relevant to the academy however is his robust method of intertwining serious text-critical study with application of these texts in the context of the

Church. Ross writes in a style sometimes reminiscent of preaching (any reader who dislikes sentences, or indeed paragraphs, begun with a conjunction, should be warned); and sometimes with repetitions that evoke a spoken style (e.g. the manifold revisiting of the connections of Ps 71 with Ps 31 (516-518)). His references to church life (e.g. on modern believers' expressions (183); on the Church's season of Epiphany (161)), appear naturally. His use of pastoral theologians furthers the expository dialogue (e.g. a Lutheran hymn (83); C.S. Lewis (167); and Bonhoeffer (814)). The Christian tone is perceived for example in language of "calling to faith" (80), or in reference to "the apostle" whose identity it is assumed the reader will understand (666). Indeed, wider Biblical links are frequently made, to both OT (e.g. 127) and NT (e.g. 79) alike. While this is aimed at Christian expositors of the Bible, Ross's threading together of hermeneutics and homiletics is thus also informative to academics interested in Biblical reception.

One aspect of this is the theological stance espoused in this commentary. Engaging in the theological thorniness of original sin (187) and oft-debated issues of the understanding of marriage (61), Ross sometimes appears to reveal something of what he and his own tradition of faith might bring to the text. For a reader of faith, words such as "if they are righteous, then their fervent prayers will be effectual" (404) may be an emotive and comforting statement. Believers are also challenged to connect the texts with their faith (680). There is much offered here for a preacher to select and communicate as appropriate to his or her own congregation. Whether or not the particular details and theological slant is a preacher's own inclination, at the very least it can prompt one's own application. What is worthwhile for a preacher and helpful for a Christian learner may again be of interest to the scholar.

Indeed, this is a volume which is both accessible and learned. With some good summaries of selected scholarship (e.g. 297 on Ps 58), with easily assimilated references to varying textual traditions (e.g. 135 on Ps 49:13), with engagement in different readings (e.g. 755 on Ps 84), with indications of other ANE religions (e.g. 109 on Ps 47:2), and with thoughtful and sometimes arresting translations (e.g. 750 on Ps 84:1 where "Lord of armies" renders the better-known "Lord of hosts"), this is the work of a diligent scholar who cares deeply about communicating the Psalms to the Christian today. Ross's grammatical and syntactical analyses may even educate a reader more broadly: for instance he highlights three metonymies of adjunct in swift succession (110-111) and he is sensitive to the perpetual difficulty of Hebrew tense and aspect (e.g. 417 on Ps 65:5). Any student reader is likely to learn from his work. He may not show much attention to canonical criticism within the main commentary text but such a volume cannot be expected to cover all areas.

An historical aspect of the relationship between church and academy is also visited by means of Ross's word studies. Such analysis in a commentary genre goes some way to satisfying Barr's contention of dealing with semantics in context. Further exploration of wider semantic domains however necessarily falls beyond the scope of this particular work. It can be frustrating to have a word study cross-referenced to the forthcoming volume, although when a cross-referencing is found to the same volume it may be instructive (e.g. 164 on Ps 50:7 calls attention to Ps 45:10 where a footnote gives a word study of שמע, "hear").

It is imagined that the value of volume two is therefore going to be even more substantial with the addition of volume three, just as it is enhanced by reading it with the first volume. Yet given that volume two deals simply with the texts of 48 psalms, and it is planned that indices and other aids will be printed in the third volume (along with the projected word-studies), the notion that 61 psalms (of which one is Ps 119) may be treated in just one final volume seems somewhat overwhelming. Certainly Ross is endeavouring to do a great deal in his commentary: his sometimes prolix homiletic style, along with a degree of repetition engendered by his particular expository methods, make this a volume that could initially be attractive as a spiritually enlightening book, but which after a few hundred pages may be set aside as a reference book instead.

As an aid to Christian exposition of the Psalms it is imagined that all three volumes will be an informative and thought-provoking addition to the shelves of a preacher; it also offers something for the scholar who is prepared to be selective and take on board one particular approach to the Psalms. Indeed, it is not every preaching aid or faith-based commentary that makes plentiful reference to Aquila, Symmachus and modern scholars alike; or that lists useful articles pertaining to individual psalms. Ross is to be commended for his combined scholarship and passion in a volume that conveys something of the power and value of the Psalms to his intended ecclesiastical readership, and informs an academic readership of current trends in relating hermeneutics to particular faith-based applications of such a text.

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