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## The Living Psalms

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faith in a Christ whose identity the historical Jesus would have eschewed as a blasphemous violation of the first commandment. The Jesus of the Chalcedonian definition is a denial of the Jesus of history and, based as it is on the false and dangerous witness of John's christology, is profoundly anti-semitic. Casey's prescription is as radical as the diagnosis: the church ought to jettison the historical error of a high christology and recover an appreciation of Jesus more in harmony with Jesus' own ideals and those of his earliest followers.

The thesis is vigorously and soberly argued, supported by careful, if sometimes laboured, exegesis of texts. There are certain points where one would like to quibble: is Jesus' self-designation as Son of Man merely a circumlocution for human being; can we ever really recover Jesus' self-understanding or his intentions; is it not reductionist to treat New Testament christologies functionally as means of establishing community cohesion and identity; did they not express and create human experience of God; is John's Gospel as high in its christology as Casey argues (J. A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John* [London: SCM, 1985] suggests a different picture); is it not a genetic fallacy to argue that because John's christology was shaped as part of a strategy to argue for God's rejection of Israel that wherever that christology is appropriated the result is necessarily anti-semitic? But all this is indeed to quibble. Far more questionable in my estimation is the classical liberal agenda of establishing a religiously satisfying christology on the basis of a historical-critical reconstruction of Jesus' intentions and self-understanding, or those of his first followers. Casey would have us look behind the texts to get at historical origins; I prefer to stand in front of the texts and allow them to produce new meanings and creative new ways of responding to the world as community horizons and needs change. Far from being limited by the self-understanding of Jesus or trapped in the vicious debates of ancient Christians and Jews, the reader is invited to rediscover in the Christian Testament stories of Jesus ever new christologies, scarcely conceived by New Testament authors, relevant to the contemporary situation of his or her community. To rephrase a saying from Leo the Great, the formulator of the Chalcedonian definition: *lex legendi, lex credendi*.

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### The Living Psalms

Claus Westermann (Trans. J.R. Porter)

Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989

306 pp.

This volume, a translation of *Ausgewählte Psalmen* (originally published, 1984, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen) is now available to the English reading public.

Claus Westermann, professor Emeritus of Old Testament at the University of Heidelberg, brings his long experience and his usual incisive judgments to this volume on Psalms.

The present work is composed of a short introduction followed by main groupings of psalms under a variety of types. A final division illustrates how the psalms are related to the work of Christ.

In the introduction, Westermann makes several important observations. He places the psalms in the larger context of the Old Testament itself. They reflect the history of Israel, not only its official functions, but the whole of its existence. "What makes the psalms so distinctive is that they mirror the whole of that life (Israel's national existence), from the Creator, through His Creation and its history, down to the personal suffering of the individuals" (3).

Central to that life totality of Israel was worship, "the heartbeat of the whole community" (4), i.e., it pertained to the nation's politics, its economics and culture. Worship, therefore, was not an isolated institution with an independent existence. In this setting the psalms (living expressions) arose. But features of psalms such as praises, laments, expressions of trust, already evident in patriarchal worship led to individual psalms with their basis in personal and family life, e.g. Hannah, I Sam. 1. These psalms together with communal ones arising from Israel's national history form a main division in the psalter in which both forms existed side by side. That they were oral for some time, as Westermann observes, is something of which biblical scholars have long been aware.

The introduction also deals with subjects such as growth of collections, classifications, the history of prayer and a discussion on the "Psalms as Poetry".

There are eleven groupings comprising 50 psalms as follows: Communal Psalms of Lament, Communal Psalms of Trust, Royal Psalms, Individual Psalms of Lament, Individual Psalms of Trust, Individual Narrative Psalms of Praise, Descriptive Psalms of Praise (Hymns), Liturgical Psalms, Songs of Zion, Psalms of Blessing, Psalms of Wisdom.

Psalms in each division are presented with texts, annotations and a discussion on the structure and content. The structures have arisen, not as an artificial analysis, but from a living setting of some human being in exchange with God. Thus, it is not something "thought up" by an author. Rather the dialogue between God and the human, an appeal by the human and God's response, has long since been put in forms and is used generation after generation. Each type has an established pattern and an established structure (2-3). It is these assumptions that have led Westermann to his description of structures, a feature of much assistance in understanding each psalm.

A few observations on how the Psalms relate to Christ. Psalm 113 speaks of God as "Lord in heaven and earth", who looks far down. These words foreshadow Christ, says Westermann, in that Christ humbled himself as servant. Another observation pertains to the suffering of Christ. He

shared in the language of the lament psalms, e.g. Psalm 22, the latter appears in the passion narrative. Thirdly, Psalm 22, affirms deliverance from suffering. The evangelists view the entire psalm, suffering and salvation from it, hence the element of praise.

The reviewer finds this book a welcome addition to psalm studies, not least the insights of the introduction and the incisive analyses of structure in each of the psalms presented.

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### **Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel**

Frederick W. Danker

Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988

xx + 410 pages

Danker has revised his *Jesus and the New Age* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1972). He argues that the evangelist's "linguistic versatility and compositional technique combine with keen perception of the substantive issues of history to produce a unique work permeated with dramatic sensitivity" (3). Danker recreates the non-Jewish cultural setting in which the Gospel was composed and for which it was chiefly addressed, utilizing contemporary Greco-Roman sources. This revised edition contains additional parallels which he discovered revising the English edition of W. Bauer's *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Through references to the Hebrew Bible Danker demonstrates that Luke likewise addressed those steeped in Jewish tradition as well as teaching gentiles about the roots of Christianity. Danker argues that Luke portrays Jesus as "Benefactor", a Greco-Roman literary ideal of superior excellence, persons or deities concerned for the welfare of the city and citizenry above personal considerations (3). Jesus announces a "New Age", both for the future and for those who believe.

Danker designed this verse-by-verse commentary for the non-professional reader and uses minimal "technical jargon" (21). There is an extensive introduction, as well as introductions and summaries for the various units. Optional portions of commentary are set off to be read for deeper understanding (1). The Revised Standard Version is used except where he corrects its renderings. He utilizes inclusive terms for God and the community of faith. Unfortunately, the texts of the various units are not reprinted, making a companion Bible a necessity. Numerous parallels and cross-references to other books of the New Testament are included and help the reader make quick comparisons. Special attention is given to the book of Acts, the second work of Luke, to demonstrate parallels and theme development. Danker also takes particular concern to provide background for passages which involve women.