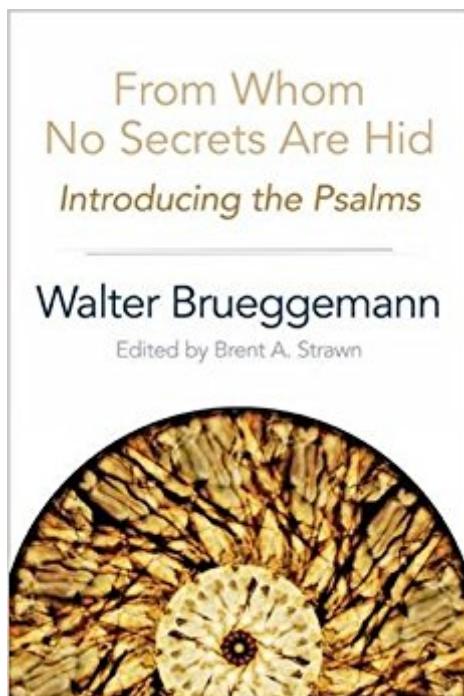


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From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing The Psalms



Synopsis

The Psalms express the most elemental human emotions, representing situations in which people are most vulnerable, ecstatic, or driven to the extremities of life and faith. Many people may be familiar with a few Psalms, or sing them as part of worship. Here highly respected author Walter Brueggemann offers readers an additional use for the Psalms: as scripted prayers we perform to help us reveal ourselves to God. Brueggemann explores the rich historical, literary, theological, and spiritual content of the Psalms while focusing on various themes such as praise, lament, violence, and wisdom. He skillfully describes Israel's expression of faith as sung through the Psalms, situates the Psalmic liturgical tradition in its ancient context, and encourages contemporary readers to continue to perform them as part of their own worship experiences. Brueggemann's masterful take on the Psalms as prayers will help readers to unveil their hopes and fears before God and, in turn, feel God's grace unveiled to them.

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Customer Reviews

I have learned that the Psalms do three things to us. They orientate us. They disorientate us. They then re-orientate us. All these are necessary in order to reveal our true selves to God, and for God to be revealed to us. For Brueggemann, the Psalms open us up. Those who really want to understand Psalms, cannot simply approach it via a liturgical ritual, a psychological insight, or an intellectual exercise. They need to be honest and to let Psalms tease the fearful selves within us out toward an awesome God. This idea is succinctly described in the title of the book, which was

inspired from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, "ALMIGHTY God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen." In one word, the Psalms is about self-disclosure. It helps build community as secrets are shared. It dispels aloneness as people come together in common unity. It prepares one another for change. There are meaningful connections of disclosure for inner well-being. It ushers us into the presence of the Divine. The Psalms bring together a complex range of emotions and spirituality. They are pluralistic, "highly stylized," and "designed for reperformance." There are prayers of thanksgiving and songs of praise. There are also psalms of lament and complaint. The beginning of each Psalm reveals the theological focus. Like Psalm 1 which points to the focus on the Torah or Psalm 2 on the significance of David and Israel's faith. Brueggemann also notes the five distinct books of the 150 psalms, which parallels the five books of the Torah.

The best way I know to describe "From Whom No Secrets are Hid: Introducing the Psalms" is to ask you to imagine Walter Brueggemann returning to rewrite his theological commentary, "The Message of the Psalms" (Augsburg, 1984) thirty years later. Do not misunderstand; I am not belittling the value of the new book, quite the opposite. Although many chapters return to the same themes and many of the same psalms, "From Whom No Secrets are Hid" gives us the further maturation of what was already a fine wine in 1984. The aging process of the nascent ideas present in 1984 has produced an exceptional wine and a (new) theological introduction to the Psalms. A thesis could (should, and will) be written about the development of Brueggemann's interpretation of the Psalms between 1984 and 2014. I have space to touch on just a few ideas. The reader will find many similar "chapters" that treat the same psalms, e.g., the enthronement psalms (1984: 140-152; 2014: 49-55), the creator (1984: 28-38; 2014: 56-79), Jerusalem - psalms 74 and 79 (1984: 68-74; 2014: 80-85), description of lament (1984: 51-58; 2014: 86-93), violence and psalm 137 (1984: 74-77; 2014: 94-99), psalm 23 (1984: 154-156; 2014 [now with ps 22]: 100-105), psalms 51 and 32 (1984: 95-102; 2014: 106-112), psalm 88 (1984: 78-81; 2014 [with ps 10]: 113-119), wisdom psalms (1984: 42-44; 2014: 120-126), psalm 73 (1984: 115-121; 2014: 127-132), psalm 135 (1984: 159-160; 2014: [with other psalms of remembering] 133-139). Finally, the retrospect from 1984, "Spirituality and Theodicy" (pp. 168-176) is now somewhat a part of chapter 14 and the issue of theodicy that arises in psalm 73 (pp. 127-132). A reprint of Brueggemann's JSOT essay from 1980, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith (A Suggested Typology of Function)" aptly concludes the book.

Another book from Walter Brueggemann, edited by Brent A. Strawn and published by [...]! This is not Brueggemann's first on the Psalms, but he thinks of this one as "an invitation to growth in faith" and he hopes that it will "lead some to a deeper sense of worship in churches that read, sing, or chant the Psalms." I hope with him that this book will help expand the number of Psalms that are used in worship. He's right. Only a few of the Psalms among the 150 are a part of weekly worship and sometimes the Psalm of the day is skipped over with no comments. The title of Brueggemann's book is part of a well-known and often used prayer in worship (BCP 355). God knows our secrets, even when we have not shared them with anyone else. Brueggemann reminds us that the Psalter includes the secrets of the human heart and community, and when spoken "out loud in speech and song in the midst of the community," these words are important, even "indispensable," he writes, "for the social and economic health of the body of faith and the body politic." The Psalter that was important for the Israelites, is important for Christians as well. We may know only a few of the Psalms by heart, and Brueggemann notes that we are drawn to the Psalms, and yet we flee from them. Why? Perhaps because we are part of two worlds, our "closely held world," that is, our every day world that we both welcome and dread, and the other world, the Psalms'"counter world," where voices and words call us to a world in tension with our every day world. We want a new, improved world where the Good Shepherd will be near. And so we cling to the Psalms and the God who occupies that counter world "scripted for us in the Psalms.

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