

THE PSALMS

An Introductory Commentary

by

MICHAEL FALLON, MSC

By the same author

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A NOTE ON THE FORMATTING OF THE TEXT

The text of the Psalms is presented in narrow columns on the outer side of the page. The commentary is presented in wider columns towards the inside of the page. When the commentary extends beyond the page on which the Psalm text is presented, the whole page is given over to it.

Cover photo: King David, sculptured by Adamo Tadolini, at the base of the famous column of the Immaculate Conception located to the south-east of the Piazza di Spagna, in Rome

Photo: Paul Stenhouse MSC

PREFACE

As is perhaps the case with many of you readers, the psalms have been part of my prayer since I can remember. For me, this has been so in a more systematic way in the last fifty years since I made my profession as a Missionary of the Sacred Heart. I have read numerous commentaries on the psalms over the years and I suppose each of them has contributed to my knowledge and enjoyment of them as prayer. It was when I was studying Scripture in Rome that I met a wonderful professor, Luis Alonso Schökel SJ. I would have loved to study the psalms under his guidance, but unfortunately he was not lecturing on the psalms at that time. When I returned to Rome some years later I discovered his two volume commentary. The original is in Spanish. I purchased and consumed the Italian translation *I Salmi*, Editioni Borla 1992. I have been lecturing on the psalms ever since. If there is anything of value in the commentary that I have written it is largely due to this man. Over and above the scholarly information in the 1,954 pages of his commentary, there is his remarkable ability to examine the psalms as literature. If you read Italian and are perusing this book wondering whether or not to buy, leave this and buy his. I have used his work also as a guide in choosing the translation of the psalms that you will find in these pages.

My other main source of help has been the multi-volumed *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Editors Botterweck, Ringgren & Fabry, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974-2004).

My special thanks goes to my brother Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, those who taught me and those who freed me to study and teach Scripture. I thank the people of Adelaide and then Canberra who attended lectures and whose interest, faith and prayer have helped refine the material presented in this book.

My work in preparing this commentary will be amply rewarded if it helps you pray and appreciate the Judeo-Christian religious culture. These prayers were born within Judaism, they formed an important part of Jesus' religious education, and Christians have used them in the public liturgy and for personal prayer from the beginning right up to the present. The psalms vary in the depth of their insight, and often the sentiments which they express and their understanding of God fall short of what we have learned through Jesus' life and words. However, they remain an amazingly rich source of prayer and I hope this commentary will give you as much pleasure as I have had in preparing it.

– Easter Sunday, 2005