The Letter to Marcellinus---The Psalms

- *The Letter to Marcellinus* is the earliest handbook for using the Psalms for personal devotional meditation as distinct from the congregational singing of the Psalms.
  - St. Basil’s famous example of his monks singing Psalm 50 the beginning of each day.

- Psalms had already been used in the worship setting with many memorizing the Psalter
  - The Liturgy of the Hours is still filled with Psalmody
  - The prayers Jesu used.

- This book offers systematic instruction concerning the nature and use of the Psalms.
The Psalms

- The Psalms summarized the Old Testament, as it prepared us for the New Testament.
- The Psalms present the perfect image for the souls' course of life (para 14).
- Athanasius was a departure from the Alexandrian School of theology demonstrated by Clement of Alexandria and Origen.
- This is not a polemical writing, but it offers insight into the vigilance Athanasius exhibited to keep heterodox ideas out of the Church.
Marcellinus

- Perhaps a deacon or a monk who lived an aesthetical existence.
- During an illness, he has taken to studying the Bible.
- He wishes to know “the meaning of each Psalm.
- Marcellinus is interested in discovering what the meaning of the Psalter is in relation to the rest of Scripture and when individual Psalms are to be used in the life of Christians.
Interpretation of the Psalms

- By the Fourth Century, Christian thinkers developed several different ways of analyzing the Psalm texts

- Alexandria was famous for an approach that moved the reader from a simpler to a more sophisticated interpretation of the Scriptures.

- The biblical texts could then be used as “proof texts” in doctrinal disputes.
  - Ex. Ps 35:10—In your light we shall see light—proof of the eternal nature of the Word.
Design of the Letter

- Chapter 1: The master of the Psalter reveals the plan of his remarks.
  - The Psalms are like a garden. It possesses the things found in other books of the Bible, but also treasures of its own.

- Chapters 3-8: A demonstration of the Psalters recap of themes found in the Law and the Prophets.

- Chapters 10-13: Argument for the uniqueness of the Psalter
  - The Psalms are immediate and capable of being spoken in one’s own words.

- Chapters 14-26: Classification of the Psalms

- Chapters 27-33: Misunderstandings and abuses of the Psalter are corrected.
Effect of the Psalms

- The Psalter is not more Holy than the other writings in the Bible
- God does honor the supplications made in the words of the Psalm.
Chapter Review

- Chapter 1: The Old Master—Athanasius himself?
- Chapter 2: All Scripture is inspired by God, but the book of Psalms has a “winning exactitude for those who are prayerful”.
- Chapter 3: The Pentateuch
- Chapter 4: Joshua, Judges, Ezra
- Chapter 5: The Prophets
- Chapter 6: The Psalter proclaims Christ as the Coming One.
- Chapter 7: The Word would become man, and would die on the cross
- Chapter 8: Foretells His bodily ascension into heaven.
Chapter Review--Continued

- Chapter 10: The Psalms have a triple effect:
  - They educate
  - They cause an emotional response
  - The reader can conceptualize better because he can put himself in the place of the Psalmist.

- Chapter 14: Types of Psalms and classification
- Chapter 20: Recite Psalm 50 for confession and repentance.
- Chapter 29: Chanting of the Psalms
- Chapter 30: Read the Psalms in their entirety
Chapter 6: Rules out docetic beliefs and the Demiurge
- The Demiurge is a lesser being that created the World.

Chapter 18: Argues against determinism, a Gnostic heresy
- Man has free will
- His fate is not determined by his nature.
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