

Ptolemaic Empire. In actual fact, the social and religious critique that rightly highlights does not really require this kind of strict historical rootage since the issues themselves transcend time, being (unfortunately) common to all human experience.

One of the frustrations for this reviewer, and probably for many readers, is the lack of detailed discussion of a number of keywords and phrases. For example, when treating the keyword *hebel*, traditionally rendered as “vanity,” the commentary suggests a meaning “breath.” It then notes that its meaning “is not univocal,” giving some examples of its use in Israel and surrounding cultures. But as to its specific use within Qoheleth, all we are told is that “Verse 2 throws readers into a world whose conceptual system invites them, and yet remains cloaked in darkness.” This is hardly a helpful comment, especially when the word is used more than 30 times, and at key points, usually in summary conclusions, throughout the book. Or the fundamental question “What do people *gain* ... ?” (1.3) that recurs throughout and plays at least some minimal structuring role, is essentially passed over with little more than a note to say that “the question of 1.2 [*sic*] is answered in the negative” in 2.11, and again in 2.22 and 3.9.

Bible translators will certainly profit from consulting this commentary, but its value for them is limited. It certainly was not written with translators in mind, but like so many commentaries, there is very little specific information about lexical items and phrases that translators require to have clarified. Additionally, the level of language is rather high and its expression complex, so many translators for whom English is a second language will have considerable difficulty in using it to advantage.

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Krüger, Thomas. *Qoheleth: A Commentary*. Translated by O. C. Dean, Jr. and edited by Klaus Baltzer. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004. xix + 306 pp. US\$52.00. ISBN 0-8006-6036-6.

A much more substantial work and one much more able to meet the needs of Bible translators is this recent volume in the Hermeneia series. The fact that the author was set the task of translating Qoheleth for the revision of the Zürcher Bibel no doubt had a specific contribution to make to the content of the commentary. O. C. Dean has translated it from the German MS completed in October 1999.

This volume in the beautifully-produced series of Hermeneia commentaries maintains the high standard of other works in the series. Krüger opens his commentary with an Introduction that opens up the difficulty posed by the book as a whole, pointing to the way in which, following no clearly visible structure, it seems at times to offer contradictory reflections. He then states that his purpose is to answer the two questions about the point of the book and its purpose. There follows a wide-ranging summary, over 38 pages, of the themes of the book as Krüger identifies them. Interestingly, he begins this summary with the theme, “Eating, Drinking and Pleasure as the Highest Good.” Of course, this is one of the primary and repeated conclusions Qoheleth sets forward as a result of his search for what is “good” for a person to do while living in this world. K identifies this as hedonism, but a hedonism that is nonetheless a gift of God. From there K turns to the theme of God and human beings. While there is much about God that to

humans is unknowable, there is still much that can be discerned in what the Creator has made, and in his ongoing activity in the world. There are also thematic sections that deal with some of the keywords, such as “Futility and Fleetingness,” and a discussion of the keyword *hebel*, otherwise rendered as “vanity.” “Time and Chance,” “Gain and Portion,” and “Work and Toil” are given a preliminary treatment at this point in the commentary, introducing readers to some of the major bipolarities of the book from the outset.

K sees “a clear framework” in the book with the words of Qoheleth in 1.1 and 12.9-14, as well as in 1.2 and 12.8. However, like most other scholars, he struggles to discover any “planned structure” in the main body of the work, 1.3–12.7. He recognizes that this corpus consists of rhetorically cohesive units, some of which do seem to have a connection with the surrounding context.

The section dealing with Genres is lengthy as K attempts to show the relationship between a number of Q’s genres and those of Greek-Hellenistic literature. He also deals with the issue of perceived contradictions within Q’s thought in a section “Tensions and Contradictions.” K notes that some of the alleged tensions arise from the fact that Q is apparently quoting statements with which he wishes to engage in dialog or to dispute. Contemporary readers would have identified them immediately as quotes and not as Q’s own thoughts.

K then deals with the possible date and the historical context within which the book arose, placing it within the Ptolemaic period. He locates its composition in Jerusalem at around the close of the third century B.C.E. K also treats the relationship between Q and traditional wisdom, noting how Q “accentuates ... more strongly the ambivalence of wisdom and its limits ...” More technical issues of Language and Text conclude the Introduction.

The commentary proper offers K’s own translation with textual and translational notes accompanying. The commentary then moves to a general overview of each section or unit, followed by a relatively detailed discussion of each verse, its key terms and phrases. The general overview and detailed notes deal with rhetorical and literary features, and the structure of the argument within that section. The extensive footnotes contain further valuable information for translators.

Hebrew and Greek fonts are used but transliterated and translated so there is no need for sophisticated knowledge of either on the part of translators.

The Bibliography is extensive (217-72) and up-to-date as of 1999. Various indexes complete the book, making it a simple matter to find references to various authors and other texts.

For Bible translators this is a masterly commentary that deals with the major issues that concern them. It offers translators exegetical and interpretational insights into specific texts that will enable them to render the message of the book more adequately.

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The following is a very slightly revised version of a review which appeared on the SBL website *Review of Biblical Literature (RBL) Newsletter*, September 13, 2004, and is used with permission from SBL.