Andersen, Francis I., and David Noel Freedman: **Hosea.** (The Anchor Bible). New York: Doubleday 1980. 696 pp, $14.00.

This recent volume in the Anchor Bible series offers the reader an extraordinarily full discussion of practically all the problems he is likely to face in seeking to interpret that rather enigmatic portion of the Old Testament, as well as a great deal of background material not very closely related to Hosea's message. However, Hosea is a book which calls for detailed treatment if full justice is to be done to its problems.

Immediately before the Introduction, a translation of the whole book is supplied. As might be expected in a commentary which deals with minute points of exegesis, the translation does not adopt the principles of dynamic equivalence, but follows closely the form of the Hebrew text, even where the word-order is unnatural in English.

As Mays remarks in the Introduction to his own commentary on Hosea, "It has the well-deserved reputation of being the worst preserved (*sc.* prophetic book) in the Old Testament." The authors of the Anchor Bible commentary do not agree. The text, they maintain, "is basically sound" (p. 59), though later (p. 66) they admit that "The text of Hosea competes with Job for the distinction of containing more unintelligible passages than any other book of the Hebrew Bible." The writers of this commentary reconcile the apparent contradiction involved in these two statements by drawing upon wider knowledge of ancient Semitic languages than was available to earlier scholars. Nevertheless, they do not accept the view that the peculiarities in the language of Hosea are due to variations between standard biblical Hebrew and the dialect of northern Israel which might be used by such a northerner as Hosea.

One problem which faces all those who study the book of Hosea in any depth is the relation between the prophet and his wife Gomer, and this involves the further question of the identity of the unnamed woman in chapter 3. In a lengthy discussion of the Hebrew words in 1.2 which RSV translates as "a wife of harlotry" and NEB as "a wanton", this commentary follows the same line as GNB in seeing here a description of "a wife who becomes promiscuous, not a prostitute or promiscuous woman who becomes a wife" (p. 159).

GNB offers two possible interpretations of the opening words of chapter 3, and this commentary favours the interpretation in the margin, "Then Yahweh said to me once more, 'Go love the woman' . . . " In other words, the woman in chapter 3 is still Gomer, not some other woman, and the events described in that chapter follow upon those in chapter 1 and are not a variant account of the same events. So NEB's translation of 2.7, "I will go back to my husband again", is to be preferred to GNB's "I am going back to my first husband", since, in spite of her adultery, Hosea was Gomer's only husband.

Perhaps the most controversial feature of this commentary is its treatment of chapter 11, the eighth verse of which is quoted in the introduction to Hosea in GNB. There the questions that God asks are taken as an expression of the unchanging love of God for Israel, and that is certainly the traditional interpretation, especially as in verse 9 the Lord says, "I will not punish you in my anger. I will not destroy Israel again." In contrast to GNB's traditional interpretation, Andersen and Freedman translate verse 9 as "I will certainly act out my burning anger. I will certainly come back to destroy Ephraim."

They base this translation mainly on theological considerations, and they ask the question, "When Yahweh reminds himself that he is a god, and not human, what aspect of the divine character resolves the dilemma for him?" (p. 589). The customary answer to this question has been that God's love is so much greater than man's love that his compassion determines the nature of his treatment of Israel. But the commentary views the contrast between divine and human reactions to Israel's sin in terms of justice, based on God's holiness, and refers the reader to such passages as Numbers 23.19 and 1 Samuel 15.29. To base a translation of a verse of the Bible on "a theological expectation" (p. 589) is a subjective and dangerous procedure, especially when, as here, the traditional interpretation has such a long history.

Earlier in the same chapter, the traditional picture of Yahweh as the loving father who teaches his little child, Israel, to walk, and lifts him up when he is too tired to go any further, is abandoned. The Hebrew word which is usually translated as "child" is to be understood in the sense which it more often bears elsewhere, namely, "youth": "a *na'ar* is not an infant that must be taught to walk" (p. 579). So the first part of 11.3 is translated as "I was a guide for Ephraim."

It was observed earlier that Andersen and Freedman's translation of 11.9 was based mainly on theological considerations. But a further prop to their translation is the so-called "asseverative *I*", a construction which has the effect of altering a negative statement to a strong positive one. Several other examples of this are found in Hosea by these commentators, the most notable being 4.14, "I will punish your daughters because they are promiscuous." By invoking this construction interpreters of the Old Testament can often reverse the apparent meaning of a sentence, changing it from a negative to a positive statement, without having to plead guilty to tampering with the text (the Hebrew consonants at any rate!) Mention was made earlier of the long history lying behind the traditional interpretation of 11.9. The vowel-points of the Hebrew here clearly indicate that the Masoretes understood verse 9 in a negative sense: "I will not destroy Israel." Andersen and Freedman are here more provocative than convincing.

One particular merit of this commentary is its full treatment of the meaning of Hebrew words or groups of words. Examples of such detailed discussions may be found on pp. 149–151, "word of the Lord"; pp. 157–163, where several words relating to sexual misconduct are investigated; pp. 355–358, the verb "to exchange"; pp. 414f, "lion"; and pp. 486–489, "because."

One could scarcely hope for a fuller treatment to any book of the Old Testament than is provided by Andersen and Freedman in this volume. The discussions of controversial passages and obscure words will be of immense value to any translator fortunate enough to have access to this book, which, in these days, is good value for money at $14.00.

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