

Testament understand the context in which these writings came to life that these writings will continue to be used to defend anti-semitic attitudes and behaviour. We need to help readers understand that the struggle between developing Judaism and developing Christianity resulted in some pretty harsh statements from both sides.

I agree with the recent statements by Urban C. von Wahlde that: once we have listened to this rhetoric [concerning the Jews in the Gospel of John], we must be careful not to repeat it ourselves, today. What may have been an understandable form of rhetoric in the first century has no place in the twentieth. The situation of persecution and separation from the synagogue with all the perils that that could entail and the very likelihood that many of the Johannine community would not find the strength to confess their convictions in these circumstances called for efforts to identify clearly the issues and the opponents. However to repeat the polemic today would only lead to the very hostility and rejection that the New Testament in its larger dimensions seeks to avoid.<sup>1</sup> (82)

Mr Benhayim says (correctly) that the Old Testament prophets attacked their own people but that does not make them "anti-Jewish." So, he argues, the New Testament writers were Jews attacking Jews, but that doesn't make them anti-Jewish. But there is a marked difference. The prophets who attacked religious practices in their day were not standing in the doorway of a new religion. The New Testament writers were right on the edge of writing as outsiders who belonged to a separate religion (for example, "their synagogue" in Matthew 4.23; 9.35; 10.17; 12.9; 13.54; 23.34 represents this attitude of separate identities). Yes, they may have been Jews, but they were first of all Christians, and Christianity was fast becoming a religion distinct from and separate from Judaism, and a religion dominated by Gentiles and not by Jews.

## REVIEW ARTICLE

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### COMMENTARIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS

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When asked to write linguistic and translation comments on the Song of Songs, I did not even own one commentary on this enigmatic and controversial book. When I began ordering materials, I was immediately struck by the incredibly large number of articles, commentaries, and books which have been written on the subject. Pope was correct in his assessment "No composition of comparable size in world literature has provoked and inspired such a volume and variety of comment and interpretation as the biblical Song of Songs" (17). The questions we need to ask ourselves when beginning a study of the Song are the same as we would ask for other

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<sup>1</sup> "The Gospel of John and the Presentation of Jews and Judaism", in *Within Context: Essays on Jews and Judaism in the New Testament*, ed. by D. P. Efraymson et al. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 67-84.

biblical books - Who wrote the book? Was there one author or many? When was the book written, and for what purpose? For this particular book, we can ask if it has its origins in marriage rites or fertility cults. Is it heavily influenced by other types of poetry (Egyptian, Ugaritic, or even Indian)? Finally, what is the real intent of the collection? Here probably the most divergent opinions emerge. Some believe the Song contains the most sublime spiritual truths in Scripture, while others see it, rather, as finely crafted poetry of a very erotic nature.

Here is an overview (in alphabetical order) of some of the latest and/or most well-known commentaries, with notes as to their usefulness for translators and translation consultants.

Athalya Brenner *The Song of Songs*. Old Testament Guides, JSOT Press. Sheffield Academic Press, 1989, 106 pp. \$9.25; £5.95.

As a handy reference guide, this short work is very helpful. It does not give a verse-by-verse commentary but briefly addresses almost all important issues, including dating, authorship and literary structure of the book. It also discusses parallels to non-biblical literature and links to the rest of the Old Testament. It provides bibliographical references according to subject, and adds an interesting touch: a chapter on feminist readings of the Song.

On the subject of extrabiblical parallels, Brenner rightly points out that not all parallels are relevant or meaningful to the study of the Song. She chooses to highlight those characteristics which link the Song to other cultures, but at the same time make it unique, for example, the theme of lovers in harmony with nature, especially prevalent in Egyptian poetry, the statue-like descriptions of the young man, reminiscent of Ugaritic statuary, and the unique use of dialogue, also found in Egyptian samples.

Brenner provides simple but convincing arguments for the late dating of the book and a non-Solomonic authorship. She dismisses allegorical or cultic interpretations, and views the work as a "collection of love lyrics rather than a single poem" (p. 14). She seems to push her claim too far, however, suggesting that a unified structure and a "verbal" (or surface) reading are mutually exclusive (pp. 74-5). Even if the Song can be shown to have literary unity, this fact would not force a reading of "'higher' significance, that transcends the basic level of erotic love". She also contends that the Song represents many couples, not just one woman and one man (p. 29), though this view hardly seems justified.

Her points about the feminist nature of the work are well-taken. The young woman portrayed here is bold, independent, and openly expressive of her love. It could be, as Brenner and others have suggested, that the author(s) are women.

F. Delitzsch. *The Song of Songs* (translated by M. G. Easton). Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 1984, 176 pp.

This translation of a work completed in 1872 is of course a classic. In some ways, the analysis is quite modern. "It is a love poem," Delitzsch declares in the second paragraph of the 15-page introduction. In others, it seems naive. The young woman is presented as "a pattern of simple devotedness, naive simplicity, unaffected modesty, moral purity, and frank

prudence" (p. 5) which hardly coincides with the woman portrayed here. Delitzsch thinks the poem describes a marriage between the historic King Solomon and a foreign bride, a claim called into question by most modern commentators.

Delitzsch favours an early dating of the work and a probable Solomonic origin. He points to detailed descriptions of nature, geographical references, and the mention of exotic plants and luxury items as evidence of this link. Unlike Brenner, he sees the poem as a unit and characterises it as a "dramatic pastoral", which he divides into six acts.

The verse-by-verse commentary is detailed, but not easy for the novice to follow. Many references are made to untransliterated Hebrew and Greek forms, as well as Latin equivalents. Word studies are complete and often helpful, with citations from the Versions and classical literature as well. But reading through the studies is often hard going, due to complex grammatical explanations and a very dense writing style. This book is not recommended for anyone who does not know biblical languages. But it will be helpful to those who wish to do an in-depth study, especially including past scholarship.

Michael V. Fox *The Song of Songs and the Egyptian Love Songs*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, 454 pp.

For the lover of literature, this book is a delight to read. Egyptian Love Songs are described as a backdrop and reference point for the Song itself. In the first part of the book, the reader is treated to full translations of a representative sample of Egyptian songs. These are followed by detailed textual notes, nicely set out, which can be easily skipped over by the non-expert. Then Fox presents his own translation and verse-by-verse commentary of the Song. The notes are short, to the point and illuminating. They contain information which is definitely of help to the translator of the Songs.

The second part of the book presents literary, historical and socio-cultural evaluations of both Egyptian love poetry and the Song. Fox subtly argues for unity of the Songs and probable single authorship by pointing to numerous recurrences of similar expressions, associative sequences, consistency of character portrayal, and the loose narrative framework. He discusses discourse forms and dialogue, touching briefly on the difficult question of enallage, the sometimes puzzling shifting of grammatical person which characterises parts of the Song.

The short commentary section (only 95 pages) is worth the price of the book, and if one is interested in literary questions, the book is of real value.

Michael Goulder *The Song of Fourteen Songs*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986, 94 pp. \$12.00; £9.50.

This short paperback contains Goulder's own translation of the Song in true English verse, serving as an interesting model for translators. Each poem is followed by a short verse-by-verse commentary, which is often quite helpful, but due to its brevity, does not treat all the issues a translator could raise. Along with most commentators, Goulder considers the Song to be written in the late biblical period, but he adheres to a rather strict

dramatic analysis, with the main characters being King Solomon and his foreign princess.

Goulder's approach is definitely original. More than other commentaries and translations, he draws out and emphasises the very erotic nature of the Song. His hypothesis is that along with other biblical books like Ruth, the message of the Song is that intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles is acceptable. He points out numerous interesting – if not conclusive – associations between the Song and other parts of Scripture (in particular the stories of Joseph and Tamar, as well as Hosea).

This book alone does not contain enough for all the textual and translation problems a translator faces, but it would be a good companion to another weightier commentary.

Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs. A commentary on the book of Canticles or the Song of Songs.* (Edited by S. Dean McBride, Jr.) Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990, \$21.95; London: SCM Press, £20.00.

As with other commentaries in this series, this book is laid out in such a way that it is extremely easy to use and consult. The first 119 pages of the book provide a good introduction, including detailed summaries of the history of interpretation and a discussion of parallels between the Song and Sumerian poetry. But he dismisses a cultic interpretation proposed by some: "We are on more secure grounds," he states, "in taking the text for what it seems to be - a delightful poetic exploration of human love, unencumbered by mythological drama, marriage sacraments, or rites of fertility" (p. 57).

Murphy devotes much time to a description of the literary characteristics of the work. Like Fox, Murphy sees a "remarkable coherence of literary style and language throughout the Song" including common refrains, themes, and motifs, arguing in favour of "common authorship of most, if not all, of the poetry included in the work" (p. 67). Going beyond many commentaries, Murphy gives us several pages of detailed description of the book's poetic devices, including patterning of couplets, alliteration, etc.

In the second part of the book we find Murphy's translation, given in blocks, followed first by detailed textual notes and then by a verse-by-verse discussion on interpretation. Hebrew terms are given in Hebrew script rather than transliterated. Though the language in the commentary section is somewhat technical, the discussion is usually clear.

This commentary has the advantage of being extremely thorough but concise, the work of a very competent, but also very cautious scholar.

Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs. A new translation with introduction and commentary.* New York: Doubleday (The Anchor Bible), 1977, 743 pp. \$22.00.

This is by far the most extensive commentary written on the Song. Included are the author's own translation and an introduction which discusses date, literary integrity and form criticism of the book, as well as a 140-page presentation on "Interpretations of the Sublime Song". Following this is a very complete bibliography (55 pages), arranged in chronological

order beginning with the second century AD and continuing through “post 1800”. Then Pope gives 410 pages of verse-by-verse commentary.

Again the notes on each verse are extensive, making frequent reference to transliterated Hebrew terms. What is unique to this commentary is the detailed study of each element. To take just an example, in verse 1.1, the word *shir* “song” is introduced in its biblical use. Then there is a discussion of a related Ugaritic verb, which is used to celebrate a lunar goddess, and three extracts of ancient poetry given to show its use in context.

Comments on textual variants are extensive, as well as background on how various commentators have interpreted each expression. Following this detailed examination of each sub-component, there is a further summary of the history of the interpretation of the verse, including notes from the Targum, rabbinic Midrash, church Fathers, among others! More than most other commentators, Pope sees connections between the Song and many cultures and customs: marriage rites, funeral feasts, literatures of those near and far (and in particular India).

For its widespread treatment, this study cannot be matched, but for the translator, it may be overwhelming. It takes time to wade through the details, to zero in on what would be relevant for translation. The translation itself is quite literal, so it is less helpful as a model for the translator.

Raymond Jacques Tournay, *Word of God, Song of Love. A commentary on the Song of Songs*. (Written in 1912; translated into English by J. E. Crowley). Paulist Press, 1988, 194 pp. \$11.95.

Despite its title, this book is not a verse-by-verse commentary but rather a series of discussions on various topics. The first pages are given to the author’s translation, which, though quite literal, is helpful for its original divisions of the text. The rest of the book is divided into chapter discussions that are short, readable, and well-documented. Some of these include more general discussions (chapter 1, “Structure and Divisions”, chapter 10 “Implicit historical Allusions”, chapter 11 “Polysemy and Double Entendre”), while others are detailed and to the point (chapter 7, “the Chariots of Aminadab”, chapter 8, “The Davidic-Solomonic Messiah”).

Tournay’s interpretation of the songs differs from the other commentators discussed here. He acknowledges the “surface” reading of the poem as an erotic love poem, depicting “the passionate love which draws a man and a woman with a mutually inexhaustible and never quenchable thirst” (p. 166). But at the same time, he sees a very close tie to other books in the Old Testament, expressed through multiple allusions. More importantly, he claims there is an intentional ambiguity, which allows us to read the Song at a “double level”. The poem presents itself as a love song between King Solomon and the daughter of Pharaoh, but it is also expressing the yearning of the chosen people for a new David and a new Solomon – the long-awaited Messiah. Tournay briefly suggests that the Song is one of the major backdrops for New Testament imagery.

This book will not help the translator in his or her verse-by-verse translation task, but it does provide food for thought. Its strongest point

is that it shows how extended readings could have come into being and offers the author's own unique interpretation.

In terms of commentaries, the translator of Song of Songs is certainly well-served, but I am confronted with the task of selecting the best. If my choice were restricted to just two, I would opt for Murphy for its thorough but direct discussions, and for Fox for its insight and inspiration.

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Note: Brenner cites the following as useful commentaries. These were unavailable to me at the time of writing this survey:

R. Gordis. *The Song of Songs and Lamentations* New York: Ktav, 1977.

C. D. Ginsberg. (1857, 1861). *The Song of Songs and Coheleth*. S. H. Blan, New York: Ktav, 1970.

### Review Symposium of GNT<sup>4</sup>

*The Greek New Testament. Fourth Revised Edition* edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger in cooperation with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Münster/Westphalia. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies 1993. xiii 61\* +918 pages, no price stated.

The appearance of the Fourth Revised Edition of the United Bible Societies *Greek New Testament* in 1993 marks the culmination of a project that began in the mid-1950s. From the outset, the Bible Societies were aware of a need for an edition of the Greek New Testament that provided adequate help on textual matters for the growing list of Bible translations undertaken throughout the world. In 1955, an international and interconfessional team of editors was appointed to prepare a new edition which would include a critical apparatus that was restricted primarily to variant readings significant for translators with an indication of the relative degree of certainty for each variant. The rating system was designed as a help to translators who are aware of text-critical issues, but may not have been in a position to make sophisticated judgments, and could benefit from knowing the Editorial Committee's opinion on the relative certainty of each textual variant. As an additional benefit to translators, a punctuation apparatus was included to provide information on sentence-level structure in both published Greek New Testament texts and major Bible translations. The first edition of the UBS Greek New Testament, published in 1966, included a discussion of a number of textual variants which had little or no effect on translation. At the time, this was nevertheless a valuable resource, since the thoroughly revised apparatus of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th Edition, would not be published for another 13 years. The Second Edition of the UBS Greek New Testament, published in 1968, contained only a few, although significant, textual changes. The Third Edition (1975) provided a more thorough revision of the Greek text, while the Third (Corrected) Edition, published in 1983, adjusted the punctuation