

The Da Vinci Code

Way back in *BSB 29* (over two and a half years ago) readers were told to get ready for Dan Brown's bestseller. Tom Wright's Grove booklet on it (B39) sold 4000 copies in two weeks and is already headed towards a reprint. Other good resources I've used in preparing to lead discussions at church are Steve Hollinghurst's booklet for the Grove Evangelism series (Ev 73), *Coded Messages: Evangelism and the Da Vinci Code*, and Darrell Bock's *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* (Thomas Nelson).

Book Reviews

Antony F. Campbell, SJ, *2 Samuel* (The Forms of the Old Testament Literature VIII; Cambridge/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), ISBN 0-8028-2813-2. This is a helpful middle-of-the-road commentary, complementing its author's *1 Samuel* which appeared in the same series in 2003 (at points the reader is referred to that volume for further information, but enough is included in this book that it can be used on its own).

In keeping with the format of the series, the structure of each section of the text is outlined, then this is followed by Textual Issues, Discussion, Genre, Setting and Meaning. The longest section is always the Discussion, which presents a sensitive exegesis of the text well aware of its literary dimensions and its place in the wider narrative. The classic concerns of form criticism, such as the importance of generic distinctions and concern with sociological life-setting of the texts certainly do not dominate this commentary (the Setting section is more interested in general historical questions of the origin and transmission of each story than with linking genres to particular settings). Whether this represents a modern version of form criticism, an incorporation of its main insights into a wider interpretative method or its rejection as an interpretative key may be an interesting question for scholars—but certainly the result is a good general middle-weight commentary.

Campbell takes moderate positions on many central issues. He sees the text as theological interpretation rather than reportage ('story' more than 'history'), but allows that considerable parts arose in the time of David or shortly thereafter. He is concerned both with the final form of the text (the 'product', p. xii) and with stages in its development (the 'process'). He therefore investigates both literary and historical dimensions of the text.

The style of the commentary is often to invite readers to consider issues for themselves rather than to state dogmatically. But then this is what Campbell believes often to be the intention of the books of Samuel, and indeed the function of the whole Bible (see the afterword).

Keith Beech-Grüneberg, Director of Studies for the Diocese of Oxford

William Loader, *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005) viii + 288pp, ISBN 0-8028-2862-0. This is a learned and attentive discussion of a range of NT texts on sexuality and relationships. The style assumes some competence in following scholarly argument. One could commend the book to

a third-year student, who had studied the NT, and now wanted to use this in looking at ethical questions. Loader is cautious about moving too easily from first century cultures to the twenty-first—‘societies of these times were much more concerned with corporate well-being than they were with an individual’s sense of fulfilment or even the happiness of a married couple’. Yet he does reflect at times on the values within and behind the texts, in ways that prompt the reader to recall and review our own commitments and attitudes.

The first chapter (of three) discusses gospel texts on sexual conduct. Jesus’ concern for religious and social inclusion required men to behave responsibly to women (Matt 5.27f). And Mark 9.42 is about child protection, a warning about the gravity and danger of pederasty.

Chapter Two deals with divorce texts in the gospels and Paul. Loader is informed about the Jewish background, but it leads him to different conclusions to those of Instone-Brewer, the author of *Divorce and Remarriage in the 1st and 21st Century* (Grove Biblical Booklet no 19).

The third and longest chapter follows a trajectory of texts that seem to bear on celibacy: for example, Mark 12.25 (no marriage in heaven), 10.12 (eunuchs for the kingdom), 3.34 (these people are my family), 1 Cor 7.8 (good to stay single), and Rev 14.14 (they have not defiled themselves with women). The roots of this idea probably lie, thinks Loader, in Jewish views about heaven, sacred space and the life to come.

Loader ends by speaking of attitudes, respect and love that go beyond the strict letter of the text (251f). And if some want to speak for a tighter textual control in our ethics than this, their effective contribution to church discussion may depend on having the patience to work through the sort of argument that Loader has offered. For sure, these debates will not go away.

John Proctor, Westminster College, Cambridge

Comments on Commentaries—

An assessment of commentaries on books of the Bible to keep you up to date with what will help in preaching and teaching in the local church.

An Update on Series—

Tried and tested commentary series, many of them mainstays of the *BSB* ‘Comments on Commentaries’ notes, are in some cases nearing completion (**Word**) or just finished (**Interpretation**, with **Robert Jenson**’s systematic theologian perspective on Song of Songs in 2005). Other series of note will doubtless still be in production come the eschaton. Despite inevitable variations in quality within all series, readers know approximately what to expect within such well-established frameworks. In recent years, however, several new commentary series have arrived, and some of these are perhaps not yet as well known as they ought to be.

The **Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries** are medium length and take the text section by section, with good summaries of theological and ethical content. Begun in 2001 with **Brueggemann** on Deuteronomy and **Gowan** on Daniel (both

good), this series has just blossomed into rapid publication of substantial works. **Louis Stulman's** 2005 Jeremiah commentary is a very good account of the book as a 'symbolic tapestry' woven into a two-part theological drama: the dismantling of Judah's idolatrous world (chs 1-25) followed by the rebuilding of hope out of the ruins (chs 26-52). Stulman makes good sense of a notoriously complex finished product.

Also beginning with Deuteronomy and Daniel is IVP's **Apollos Old Testament Commentaries**. This is a substantial up-grading of the size and ambition of the old Tyndale series, something akin to the NT 'Pillar' volumes. Judging by the first two (from **Gordon McConville** and **Ernst Lucas** respectively) it is also a relaxing of IVP's iron grip on historical background questions as the key to interpretation. Good theological focus. A shorter series appearing in quick succession is from Baker Academic: the **Baker Commentary on the Old Testament** Wisdom and Psalms, which will include 3 volumes on the Psalms by **John Goldingay**.

The **New Cambridge Bible Commentary** is a completely different product from the older CBC, and early volumes bode well: the goal is an interpretation of the finished form of the text using whichever critical methodologies best illuminate the book, and there is frequent use of 'A Closer Look' and 'Bridging the Horizons' sections, which will alert some to the presence of **Ben Witherington III** as general editor (and whose Revelation opened the series in 2003). A recent highlight is **Carol Meyers** on Exodus (2005), striking just the right balance of overview, detail, and contemporary relevance.

A major project too little known in the UK is the **Smith & Helwys Commentary** series: massive productions characterised by lavish presentation and layout, lots of illustrations and side-bar information boxes, all presented as hypertext linked to the main text. Each book is accompanied by a CD containing a pdf version of the whole book, where word-searching and hypertext jumping are available, and there are on-line corrections (and rumoured updates) on the series website (www.helwys.com/commentary/index.html). The series also began in 2001 with the prolific **Brueggemann** on 1 & 2 Kings, and includes **Fretheim** on Jeremiah and now also **Ben Witherington** on Matthew, though I must admit to ignorance on many of the volumes of this (somewhat expensive) series.

Some series which strike out in non-standard ways: the **Two Horizons New Testament Commentary** has just been launched by Eerdmans with **Stephen Fowl** on Philippians and **Marianne Meye Thompson** on Colossians and Philemon (both 2005). Fowl argues for a Christian theology of friendship from Philippians, and seems to be more or less successful in aiming to bridge the disciplines, although sometimes one senses the gravitational pull of the need to provide comprehensive exegetical coverage of options. A counterpart OT series is mooted. Causing much inter-disciplinary raising of eyebrows, Brazos Press have announced a complete OT and NT commentary series written entirely by systematic theologians. **Jaroslav Pelikan** on Acts (2006) sets a commendable opening standard, perhaps helped by having a historical theologian engage a book that is both historical and theological, but the desire to talk systematics rather than socio-economic background will surely be welcomed by preachers. The one everyone is waiting for is **Stanley Hauerwas** on

Matthew, which will doubtless generate its own reception history. The **Blackwell Bible Commentary** project, meanwhile, focuses on the reception history of the book under discussion, making it fascinating and (arguably) a source of erudite sermon illustrations, but it may not help you make a decision on the text before you. The **Rowland/Kovacs** volume on Revelation set a good standard, and recent entries on Exodus and on Judges indicate that it looks interesting for the OT too. From Eerdmans comes the **Church's Bible** series, begun on Song of Songs by **Richard A. Norris Jr** (2003). One wonders how long some of the other volumes will be given that this one runs to 344 large pages for just 8 chapters, although **Judith Kovacs** on 1 Corinthians (2005) is the same length.

Finally, the stimulating **Readings** series from Sheffield is about to be relaunched by the (itself relaunched) Sheffield Phoenix Press, with old volumes being reissued, and new ones beginning with **Stanley Porter** writing on Romans.

Richard S Briggs, Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham

Translation Matters

Keith Binns from Australia writes:

I have a translation bugbear. I'm not sufficiently erudite to give examples, but I understand that a lot of the Bible is very robust and earthy in its language. This virtually never comes out in the translations. The only example I can give is the one about 'there was no one left to piss against a wall.' None of the translations use that crude language. It is sanitised. Another form of sanitisation is the leaving out of sexual references. In Proverbs 5.19 the AV has a reference to breasts, so I assume it's in the Hebrew (Strong's has it). The RSV leaves it out.

You are correct in your first example. The earthy phrase (1 Sam 25.22, 34; 1 Kings 14.10; 16.11; 21.21; 2 Kings 9.8) is elsewhere translated 'male' by most modern versions. The NRSV has restored the 'breasts' that the RSV left out. The Bible is indeed robust and direct in much of its language, and the AV is one of the most literal, if archaic, translations.

Roy Cartwright from Newent writes with reference to 1 Cor 13.12 (see BSB 39):

When Paul wrote this did he have in view (perhaps literally) an accidental or deliberate glimpse of another person caught in an angled mirror? The image would be back to front and distorted by the angle, while movements would be particularly confusing. Our brains quickly 'decode' these images, but Paul's contemporaries would have been less used to mirrors, and would not have been familiar with Newton's optics.

Um, I haven't heard that one before...

Martin Wakefield writes from Taunton:

I have just seen the note by John Oakley in BSB 39 regarding the out-of-date analogy faithfully reproduced in translations of 1 Cor 13.12. I hope that somebody has spotted that Eugene Petersen has provided an alternative rendering in *The Message*:

'We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!'

The Message is a good way of escaping from familiar words, whose meaning can have dulled for us over the years. Quite often I find that it helps me to see a message that has been hidden in traditional readings of a familiar text, but is there as plain as day once one's attention has been drawn to it.

Computer Corner

- Those wishing to keep their Hebrew up will find help at Daily Hebrew (<http://www.dailyhebrew.com>), where each day 4-8 verses from the Old Testament are provided as a daily reading, together with lexical and syntactical notes to aid in translation.
- Need a block of text from an English Bible and either don't have the version or the time to type it? David Instone-Brewer's latest Tyndale Tech note has a number of useful links (www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Tyndale/TTech.htm).
- Years ago when I was a curate and before we moved to the UK, my wife and I used to fight over who got to read the next issue of *The Wittenburg Door* first. It's a Christian satire magazine with some excellent, serious interviews as well as a collection of humour similar to what you might find at Ship of Fools (www.shipoffools.com). Amazingly it's still in print, and you can access the website for interviews and humour going back to 1997 (www.wittenburgdoor.com).

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