

## Shorter Notices

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*Das Hohelied der Liebe.* By Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger. Freiburg: Herder, 2015. Pp. 173. €17.99.

For centuries, both Jewish and Christian tradition recognized the soaring language of the Song of Songs to be an expression of the love of God for his people. With the advent of modernity, however, the text was fundamentally reconceived as a collection of profane, human love songs. This interpretative revolution, outlined at the outset of Schwienhorst-Schönberger's provocative little book, captures the situation he sets about to reverse. Professor of Old Testament at the University of Vienna, S.-S. here mounts his argument in the form of a loose, popular commentary on the Song. Above all, he seeks to show that the allegorical reading endorsed by the tradition is not a (prudish) aberration and that the modern reduction of the Song to a specimen of ancient Near Eastern erotica is insensitive to robust textual signals pointing in a theological direction.

Drawing on a variety of sources, including contemporary psychological science (which he uses to critique reductive sexualization), S.-S.'s thesis finds its greatest force in his intertextual method. Specifically, highlighting the many points at which the Song appears to know and interact with earlier biblical traditions and motifs, he illuminates key passages and poetic themes. Thus, for example, S.-S. reads the Song's vineyard imagery in the light of the "Israel as a Vineyard" trope (for instance, as seen in Isa 5) and the bridal language as belonging to the prophetic metaphor of the people's marriage covenant with the Lord (as found in Hos 2:16–22). In this way, S.-S. shows that the essential elements of the traditional interpretation are, in fact, fully native to the biblical mind and plausible historically as the ideological background of a Second Temple text.

S.-S. is swimming boldly against the exegetical current and resistance to his thesis is to be expected. Nonetheless, as he himself observes, his is not an entirely isolated voice. Other contemporary scholars have contributed important elements to his argument (e.g. Zakovitch, Kingsmill, Nissinen), even if he remains a special spokesman for the position. A sign of the success and promise of S.-S.'s vision is the remarkably favorable reception his ideas received at this past summer's AGAT conference on the Song of Songs.

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