Book Review:
Gary Brady, Heavenly Love – The Song of Songs Simply Explained

Heavenly Love is one of five commentaries on the Song of Songs that Evangelical Press has published in recent years, and it is certainly one of the best. While three of the five have taken an exclusively – and sometimes rather extreme – allegorical view of this much-overlooked Book of the Bible, Brady’s commentary (in the popular Welwyn series) provides a beautifully-balanced commentary that faithfully expounds both the natural and spiritual meaning of the Song.

In dealing with the natural interpretation of the Song, Brady is appropriately frank, but at the same time suitably modest (perhaps occasionally more modest than the text he is expounding!). At times he declines to elaborate on the Song’s imagery, and instead invites the reader to “be wise enough to take a hint” (p.137) where it is especially graphic. It is refreshing to read a contemporary Christian book that celebrates human sexuality and manages to avoid the common extremes of “Victorian” prudery on the one hand and the crass sensationalism of many “emergent church” offerings on the other. “It is no easy task”, Brady comments, “but as Christians we ought to be active in reclaiming this area for Christ. He is sovereign over every part of life, including this one” (p.155). Overall, the author’s contribution to this endeavor is superb, and provides much helpful material for the married and single alike.

When it comes to the spiritual interpretation of the Song as an allegory of Christ’s love for the Church, Brady is equally balanced. While some of his interpretations seem a bit of a stretch at times, he nevertheless lets Scripture interpret itself and wisely rejects some of the most extreme allegories that have been suggested. Brady weaves together the two methods of interpretation by making clear that problems in the marriage relationship are usually preceded by problems in our relationship with Christ. His chapter on spiritual desertion (ch.6) is particularly excellent.

Brady’s writing style is clear, and is illustrated with dozens of song excerpts, from Scottish metrical psalms to Bob Dylan, though he mainly cites Christian hymns. There are also lots of quotations (particularly from the Puritans) though unfortunately there are no references. An interesting appendix outlines the history of interpretations of the Song and a select bibliography of commentaries denotes which interpretation is held by each. The now almost-complete Welwyn Commentary series is one of the best tools on the market for personal devotions, and is also useful for message-preparation for Bible study leaders and pastors. This addition is highly recommended.

David Whitla