

Book Reviews

THE CALLING OF A CUCKOO: NOT QUITE AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

David E. Jenkins

London: Continuum 2002 192 pp £18.99 hb ISBN 0-8264-4991-3

The Church of England has a long and ignoble tradition of appointing radical liberals to its bench of bishops—men such as R. D. Hampden, John Colenso, Hensley Henson, E. W. Barnes, John Robinson and now Rowan Williams. David Jenkins stands firmly within that succession, the ‘unbelieving bishop’ par excellence. This slim volume contains Jenkins’ reflections on the controversy surrounding his appointment as Bishop of Durham in 1984—the sort of book that Archbishop Williams might write in twenty years time.

Jenkins stirred up a storm of protest. Only a month after his appointment was announced, he appeared on television to say that ‘precise dogmas’ about Jesus Christ are a thing of the past. He proclaimed that the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus and the resurrection were not historical events; and that those who think Jesus was a mere human being acting as God’s agent should be welcomed as Christians. His notoriety was assured when York Minster was struck by lightning two days after his consecration and burst into flames. Jenkins admits that the reaction to his appointment undermined his confidence in the Church of England and brought him to the verge of atheism—the most profound challenge to his faith that he has ever encountered in his life.

What is most remarkable is that Jenkins was surprised by the opposition he provoked. His views had sadly been standard fare in theological colleges and faculties for more than a generation, so he naively took it for granted that they were accepted by the church at large. Yet he need not have worried since the Church of England has another ignoble tradition—to dismiss the concerns of faithful church members. One petition to prevent Jenkins’ consecration received 14,000 signatures but was simply ignored. He knew his position was safe because most of his episcopal colleagues came from the same theological stable, like John Habgood at York and Robert Runcie at Canterbury. Indeed Runcie privately praised Jenkins’ ‘courageous’ stand. In such company the new Bishop of Durham could reckon himself ‘an impeccable Anglican’ (p. 44).

Jenkins does deserve praise on several counts—

1. He is honest, knowing that it would be a sham to believe one thing in private and teach another in public. He makes no attempt to disguise his true opinions. Unlike many of his episcopal colleagues, Jenkins does not subscribe to the 'anything for a quiet life' party. Reports by the House of Bishops, such as 'The Nature of Christian Belief' (1986) and 'Sexuality and the Church' (1987), are rejected for their deliberate 'fudge'. Thus this book is frank and preciously free of humbug.
2. He tackled social and political issues, such as the miners' strike of 1984-85, and became something of a thorn in the side for the Tory government. The book's title is taken from Margaret Thatcher's ridiculing of Jenkins as a 'cuckoo'.
3. He has a genuine desire to engage with secular society. It is partly because of this missionary instinct that he lambasts the church for being inward-looking and oblivious to the real world. Jenkins maintains that the church's defensive attitude and internecine quarrels are the best advocate for atheism.
4. He identifies clearly the issues at stake. He sees that the dispute surrounding his appointment was not just a question of theological emphasis or different perspectives on the same truth, but a genuine 'contest over fundamentals' (p. 84). The Church of England is divided not just by a few minor fault lines but by a giant 'abyss'.

The fact remains, however, that Jenkins is on the wrong side of the abyss. He often writes of his 'simple belief' in God, but this is not the God of the Bible. Indeed the bishop claims that God has moved on since the days of the Bible and Christians need to catch up. To see the world from the New Testament's point of view is to keep Christianity 'locked in past formulations' (p. 78) and to live like faithful ostriches with our heads buried 'in the deposits of the religious past' (p. 80). He insists that we must stop 'clinging on to interpretations of truth and authority that were shaped by dead worlds' (p. 31). With similar logic Professor Dennis Nineham preaching at Jenkins' consecration, argued that for a theologian to teach the same doctrines today as the Reformers once did, would be like a modern doctor still applying leeches to suck your blood.

Jenkins abhors words like certainty, authority or dogma, and prefers metaphors of pilgrimage, exploration and progress. He dismisses theological conservatives as 'certainty-wallahs' and proclaims with great certainty that there are no certainties in the Christian faith. So having cut himself free from

the historical events of the Bible, he is left with a different gospel altogether. What good is it encouraging belief in ‘the resurrection’ if you still reject the empty tomb? All his bold endeavours to make Christianity more palatable to a secular world merely enervate the gospel of its transforming power. Jenkins’ book is intended to be a manifesto to wake up the Church of England—instead it is a tragic display of an elderly man’s continuing pursuit of a fruitless agenda.

ANDREW ATHERSTONE

Abingdon

NOW MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOU

Robert S. Fyall

Leicester: Apollos 2002 208pp £10.99 pb ISBN 0-85111-498-9

Certain texts from the book of Job are well known, perhaps because of their use in the Prayer Book funeral service. Yet most pastors will find the prospect of preaching a series from this book very daunting. Questions such as the book’s methodology, its primary purpose and its relationship to the rest of the Bible demand some clear thinking and guidance.

If that is your position then this book may well be the one which will encourage you to take on that challenge. Robert Fyall has not written a commentary on Job. The aim of this work is rather to explore the themes of the book and to relate its message to the wider context of the whole Bible. It is an appreciation of these issues that will give the preacher the confidence to speak from it.

Thus Fyall addresses the issue of the genre of Job, its basic image of the court in heaven, as well as themes such as the ‘raging sea’ and so on. He makes a good case for the creatures Behemoth and Leviathan being images of Death and Satan. The author demonstrates a thorough acquaintance with the literature on Job as well as an appreciation of the significance of Canaanite myths. He is not afraid of using that literature with discrimination and understanding the book of Job as interacting with its wider contemporary culture. The book originated from doctoral work but that should not put off the prospective reader. The material bears all the signs of having been preached and taught for real.

The nature of Job is such that the reader will not necessarily agree with all that Fyall says. However the great value of this work is that it is a sure guide to the

thought world of the book of Job. It shows how Job is not so much a book with answers to the problem of suffering as a book which demonstrates that the experience of suffering can be a door to a deeper understanding of God, of evil and of ourselves. It is one of those books which can be wholeheartedly recommended.

MARK BURKILL

Leytonstone, London

THE EDGE OF LIFE. Dying, Death and Euthanasia John R. Ling
Epsom, Surrey: Day One, 2002 273pp £8.99 ISBN 1 903087 30 9

In eastern Europe, twelve years after the fall of Communism, life remains cheap. The old die for lack of routine medical care, there is little willingness to care for the handicapped, and the unborn are not safe. But is western Europe any different?

This book suggests that the gap is closing and that the movement is on the western side. Ling, a lecturer and broadcaster, combines evangelical doctrine with sensitive understanding of complex problems, an awareness of international perspectives and a ruthless exposure of bad logic. He observes that what was unthinkable has become tolerated, then permitted, then expected, and now required. That means Britain has 'easy abortion, secret infanticide and hovering euthanasia' (p. 57). In 'a post-Hippocratic, post-Christian age of medicine' (p. 59) he scrutinises these three subjects.

First, abortion. The 'Bible makes no distinction between the unborn and the born child' (p. 107). But prenatal diagnosis and sampling 'are the modern expressions of the search-and-destroy mentality of the old negative eugenicists' (p. 139). Second, infanticide. The John Pearson case established its legality. He was born in 1980 with Down's Syndrome, rejected by his parents, and given a lethal injection. The doctor was acquitted of attempted murder. Such lack of care 'diminishes us all' (p. 172). Third, euthanasia. This 'confuses compassion with convenience' (p. 87). The case of Anthony Bland (in a permanent vegetative state for nearly four years after being crushed at the Hillsborough football disaster in 1989) established that provision of food and water by artificial means is medical treatment and could be withdrawn. But the better way is that of the hospice

movement where ‘the thing to do is to kill the pain, not the patient’ (p. 239).

So what can we do? We can prepare for our own death and seek to persuade the non-Christian that his presuppositions are wrong ‘and to assure him that the acceptance and exercise of the Christian position would be better, far better, for him, and for society too’ (p. 189).

The freedom with grammar and sentence structure that so enlivens the text and engages the reader may irritate some. Also, the reference to Luke 1:14 should be 1:41 (p. 107). But the author deserves our thanks for clarifying the issues and calling us to swim against the tide. Give copies to all medical staff you know. The former Soviet states are still in an ethical mess. It would be good if Britain did not join them.

JONATHAN FRAIS

Ukraine

JERUSALEM’S GLORY. A Puritan’s view of what the church should be
Thomas Watson

Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2002 153pp £5.99pb
ISBN 1-85792-569-6

How hard it is to stay enthusiastic for truth! And how grateful we should be for the inspiration of good teachers. One such is Thomas Watson. He writes about the church from his own puritan era and context. His work is refreshingly biblical and uncluttered by other views. He says that the church is oppressed by a ‘Babylonian exile’ and is in a battle for truth. Also, it is a people who fight daily for obedience to God. The church is the temple in which God lives here on earth and the Lord’s relationship with his people is held together by the covenant of grace. In an era of ecumenism we need such reminders.

As the title suggests, the author understands the church to inherit the promises of God to Israel and her capital. We are ‘the heavenly Jerusalem’ (Heb. 12:22) and ‘the new Jerusalem’ (Rev. 21:2) and this ‘Jerusalem that is above is free’ (Gal. 4:26). Jerusalem’s glory is the church’s glory which is the glory of the body and bride of Christ. Watson does not write with dry academic detachment. He speaks from the heart as well as the head. So he laments, ‘Oh England, England, have

you forgotten what the prophet complained of, that they draw near God with their mouths, but their hearts are far from observing his ways' (p. 127)?

The book is full of scriptural quotations and allusions. It is not anchored in one era of time and so speaks easily across the years. Nevertheless it is a curious half-translation. The English is brought up to date only in part and we are presented with some awkward sentence structures and Bible verses in the KJV. This is a great little book—a breath of fresh air from the seventeenth century. May it excite many readers to be zealous for the Lord and his truth again.

JONATHAN FRAIS

Ukraine

THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER. The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann
Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz
Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2001 262pp £14.95pb ISBN 0-8006-3437-3

This is a clear and readable introduction to one of the twentieth century's most influential theologians. German liberal theology is notoriously difficult to read; but Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz has done a thorough job of making Moltmann intelligible. I suspect that the obscurity that is present is due to the latter rather than the former. An excellent translation by John Bowden is marred only by the lack of an index, and some occasional bad editing.

The book takes us through Moltmann's major writings in chronological order, beginning with *The Community Against the Horizon of the Rule of Christ* in 1959, *The Theology of Hope* in 1964, and ending with *The Coming of God* in 1995, but also including reflections on Moltmann's more recent works. Müller-Fahrenholz emphasises the historical context of Moltmann's work (vital for understanding a theologian so concerned with 'conversation' with those outside the academy), notably its roots in the events that lead to Moltmann's conversion: the horror of the fire bombing of Hamburg, followed by incarceration in a POW camp, and his encounter there with the Bible, especially the Psalms of lament. Müller-Fahrenholz points out that there was no 'Philip' to help Moltmann understand what he was reading. This is an important point: it seems that Moltmann has always been something of a theological loner, and has never been deeply rooted in classical orthodoxy.

Release was followed by the impact of Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*. Müller-Fahrenholz argues that the seeds of much of Moltmann's later thought can be found in those early experiences of suffering and hope. However, he also points to the crucial influence of others: the liberation theologians, Moltmann's wife (the feminist theologian Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel) and, interestingly, Jewish mysticism. Indeed Müller-Fahrenholz argues controversially, but I think very perceptively, that Moltmann's work is best understood as mysticism.

Müller-Fahrenholz was one of Moltmann's first students in the early 1960's, and is very sympathetic to him. This is not intended as a criticism of the book; someone who is in broad agreement with their subject is often the best situated to explain the ideas of a major thinker. It does mean that Müller-Fahrenholz assumes that liberation theology and feminism are good things, and that 'patriarchy' and all forms of hierarchy are bad.

The author is certainly not afraid to criticise Moltmann. He believes that Moltmann is disappointingly vague about the practical consequences of his ideas, and that his universalism should be taken even farther. There are areas where Moltmann could be pushed much harder. For instance, his relationship to process theology is not mentioned. Also, Moltmann's concepts of a God 'whose essence is futurity', who is in a process of development and becoming, along with creation, and of a Trinity whose unity is social could be pushed much harder. Do they lead to tritheism? Likewise, at the end of the chapter on christology, I was left asking exactly who Moltmann thinks Jesus Christ is, given that he has rejected the Chalcedonian definition. I have a strong suspicion here that his ideas might lead to adoptionism. Perhaps Müller-Fahrenholz could have outlined more clearly the vast gulf that separates Moltmann from classical orthodoxy. One suspects that this is due to the solipsism of liberal theology; orthodoxy is not considered worthy of consideration. Above all, there is no criticism of the exegetical basis of Moltmann's work, which is so flimsy that it is almost invisible. In this respect, Müller-Fahrenholz does note that Moltmann has a habit of making very definite theological statements, without giving much basis for them, and suggests that his work is finally a piece of 'imagination' (the German title of this book is *Phantasie für das reich Gottes*).

Why would evangelicals be interested in this work? First, Moltmann has had a major influence on contemporary liberalism. Moreover, he has had a

conversion experience and he uses the language of orthodoxy. This makes him attractive to many evangelicals. Indeed, I suspect that it is only a matter of time before he is taken up by the ‘Openness of God’ theologians (if only because he has said the same things, but in a much more thorough and profound way). This means that it is important to understand him. Finally, Moltmann remains a stimulating and challenging thinker. Eschatology should, as he has said, be at the centre of Christian life and theology. We must say that the direction he has taken has led him into what can only be called heresy. But then it is up to us to show that Scripture and classical orthodox trinitarianism provide better answers to the questions he has asked. *The Kingdom and the Power* is a good starting point and guide to understanding Moltmann.

STEPHEN WALTON
Thurnby

GOSPEL IN ESTHER

Michael Beckett

Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2002 156pp £7.99 ISBN 1 84227-137-7

Is it enough for the health of the church to have a Bible-teaching ministry? Let us go further: is it enough to preach the gospel, search the Scriptures and seek to teach Christ even from the Old Testament?

The answer may be ‘no’. For example, consider this set of ten sermons on the Book of Esther given at a church in a university city in 1997. Mr Beckett introduces Esther as a short story ‘of sexual politics, violence, vengeance, political intrigue and murder’ (p. xii) and seeks to understand it typologically. He admits that some of his interpretations ‘may be too fanciful’ (p. 8) but writes with enthusiasm (and self-consciousness).

King ‘Xerxes represents God’ (p. 7) although he is ‘indecisive’ (p. 83). ‘Esther represents a female Christ figure’ (p. 7) because of her access to the inner court of the king. This has implications for ‘female priesthood’ (p. 7) and the status of women (he claims male leadership was established in Genesis 3 rather than Genesis 2, (p. 9). Mordecai, whom the author dislikes, (p. 15) is a hypocrite for flaunting his own Jewishness while telling Esther to hide hers (despite his desire to protect her), and is selfish for asking her to save him (and other Jews). Haman is Satan (p. 29). The book is about the lack of intervention of God (the

victory for the Jews being a human achievement and down to ‘accident, chance, fate’, p. 73).

Authorship is Esther’s and the message is bold: ‘Accommodation in this world, not separation, is the way for the people of God to live’ (p. 45). Mr. Beckett says he teaches universalism (p. 134) but his view may be nearer arminianism (‘It is not that God won’t accept any of us, but that some will not believe and incredibly will refuse his generosity,’ p. 61). However, truth is relative: ‘whether our understanding is “right” or not, we shall be found by him’ (p. 24).

There is an error in the date on page iv and ‘began’ is spelt wrongly on the back cover. The material in between, I regret, was not much more helpful. Mr. Beckett may have done better to focus on the themes of exile, faith, timing and deliverance and be more cautious elsewhere. Although there are no Esther-specific New Testament controls, he was not wise to ignore other verses on similar themes. It is not enough to have a Bible-teaching ministry. We need a ministry that checks our interpretation of one part of Scripture by another.

JONATHAN FRAIS
Ukraine

WHAT ANGLICANS BELIEVE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

David L. Edwards

London: Continuum 2002 119pp £10.99pb ISBN 0-8264-6539-0

David Edwards is well-known as a leading exponent of liberal Anglicanism and a prolific commentator on church affairs. This simple book is a revised version of his 1974 ‘classic’, *What Anglicans Believe*. Unfortunately it has not improved with age. The title is somewhat misleading, since Anglicanism barely gets a mention before page 81—instead it is a general introduction to the Christian faith. Its target audience is young believers and it is more dangerous for that fact. Readers who need an explanation of words such as ‘amen’, ‘evangelism’ or ‘Sabbath’, are unlikely to smell the rat when Edwards discusses the cross, revelation or the character of God.

To make matters worse, this is an insipid and boring book. It is difficult even to get through a hundred pages. The writing is bland, the doctrine anaemic,

and there are almost no illustrations to help us along. Perhaps in an attempt to remain uncontroversial, Edwards cloaks the whole subject in a depressing fog. We are often left wondering what he actually thinks. For example, we are told that the Bible's account of the empty tomb must be 'taken very seriously', although the resurrection of Jesus was not 'physical in the ordinary sense' (p. 20). So does Edwards believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus or not? We are told that hell is 'a terrible possibility', but hopefully 'everyone will in the end choose God, light, love and life' (p. 47). So is Edwards a universalist or not? His doctrine of the Trinity is equally foggy. Jesus Christ is apparently both 'eternally the Son' and also 'the climax of all God's creation' (p. 25).

There are some valuable passages, such as in the chapters on prayer and the church, but you have to search hard for them. Most sections are ruined by old-fashioned liberal error—not brazenly displayed, but nonetheless peeping through. For instance, Edwards notes in passing that the one true God is called by many names and worshipped alike by Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. He addresses God as both Father and Mother. The cross of Christ, we are told, is merely a demonstration of God's love, a sign of solidarity with human suffering, nothing to do with the satisfaction of God's wrath. In what sense then did Christ bear punishment on the cross?—in the same way that a boxer receives 'punishment' in the ring! When it comes to holy living, Edwards advises that 'loveless promiscuity' is best avoided, but he will not condemn sex outside marriage either homosexual or heterosexual (p. 38).

As with most polemicists of his school, Edwards claims for liberalism an exclusive right to such virtues as intelligent scholarship, the freedom to think, scientific research and the use of our brains. In contrast anyone who holds to the 'crude' doctrine of biblical infallibility is obviously a naïve and dim-witted fundamentalist (for which read 'evangelical'). Every intelligent person, Edwards explains, knows that there are many contradictions and mistakes in the Bible. We are assured that Scripture is authoritative only so far as it agrees with 'modern knowledge' (p. 52). There is nothing new here, merely passé 1960s liberal theology re-hashed in a new disguise. If this really is what Anglicans believe, is it any surprise that the Church of England is struggling to win the nation for Christ?

ANDREW ATHERSTONE

Abingdon

THE FAITH OF ISRAEL: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament
William J. Dumbrell

Leicester: Apollos 2002 347pp £16.99 pb ISBN 0-85111-280-3

Perhaps like me you belong to a generation of theological college students who valued Dumbrell's *The Faith of Israel* but knew it only as an increasingly tatty volume borrowed from a library. IVP have finally brought this helpful overview of each Old Testament book back into print, in a second edition.

A redactive reading of the two editions side by side reveals vast similarities between the editions, although occasionally analysis has changed in terms of its structure (e.g., Micah, Song of Songs), its approach (see p. 252 regarding the Psalms, and p. 324 regarding Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah), or its content (e.g., Mal. 3:13-4:3). Comparisons of the final pages of the book will show development in thought about the place of Israel. In places changes indicate the author's interaction with more recent scholarship—for example, the work of Sweeney on Habukkuk and Zephaniah. This reflects the preface's recognition that the second edition reflects more recent scholarship and 'new insights as to the purpose of the canon and how individual units contribute' (p. 10). Other recent influences are harder to trace, given the limited referencing within the text of the books and articles listed in the bibliography.

The changes between the editions are best summarised by their differing subtitles. The 1988 edition of *The Faith of Israel* is subtitled 'Its Expression in the Books of the Old Testament', whereas the 2002 edition represents 'A Theological Survey of the Old Testament'. Such a shift results in a book approximately ten per cent longer than its predecessor: whether the result is satisfying will depend upon the needs of the beholder. Something of the concise overview form is sacrificed in what is a rather more clipped style of writing that sometimes tends to a more dense prose; on the other hand, certain books, e.g., Isaiah, Job, and Ezra-Nehemiah, receive far fuller treatment in the new edition. Occasionally the expansions appear out of proportion to the biblical book as a whole, and risk creating an overall imbalance for an overall 'survey' of that biblical book, e.g., Proverbs 1-9.

Overall, this reviewer was used to, and valued, the 'overview' style of the first edition, turning to other surveys and commentaries for a more in-depth

analysis of individual biblical books. At times the second edition appears to be trying to move more into the latter territory, but with some loss of clarity as an overview. In this regard, the second edition suffers from what appear to be the pressures of space. Sometimes headings are inexplicably lost (e.g., for Ruth 1); elsewhere, the frequent loss of introductory outlines and the incorporation of concluding summaries to biblical books as a whole into the discussion of the final section of that book is regrettable. Somewhat strangely, the introduction to wisdom literature comes at the end of the chapter on the Psalms.

These comments notwithstanding, IVP have done a new generation a great service by bringing this very helpful book back into print—and with more anglicised spellings. It is unlikely, though, that many owners of the first edition will rush out to buy a copy of the second with its incorporated changes—unless, of course, their own copy is worn out from lending it to those who couldn't get to a library.

MATTHEW SLEEMAN
London

SHADES OF SHEOL: DEATH AND AFTERLIFE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Philip S. Johnston

Leicester: Apollos 2002 288 pp £14.99 pb ISBN 0-85111-266-8

Death is a complex and profound subject, about which every ancient society had beliefs. The *prima facie* reason for this study is simply that 'every serious religious belief merits careful scholarly enquiry' (p. 15). But the Old Testament (OT) lays a foundation for Christian belief in resurrection 'according to the Scriptures', and as such also deserves closer scrutiny. Johnston's aim in reviewing the primary and secondary literature is to read the Old Testament texts in their own context. His is the first major work on the subject since Martin-Achard's in the 1950s, and engages particularly with scholars who read other Ancient near-East (ANE) mythologies into the Old Testament. He is also careful not to read later Jewish and Christian ideas back into the Old Testament texts.

The analysis follows the three key ideas of death, the underworld (where the dead are said to reside), and the afterlife (to which the dead are destined) and

leads to a surprising conclusion. While the Hebrew word for death (*mwt*) is not rare in the Old Testament, its use is distinctly low-key. Death is simply the end of this life. It is rarely seen as an enemy to be vanquished, let alone personified like the Akkadian god *Mot*. The connection between sin and death made in Genesis 2 is unique among ancient literature, yet remains rare in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Israel's concern for the living only is in contrast to her neighbours, with their burial practices that include sustenance for the departed.

The underworld is an infrequent theme and an unwelcome fate in the Old Testament. Instead of the underworld epics common to the ANE, we find a unique Hebrew term, *Sheol*, to describe a place of no return which is predominantly the fate of the wicked and envisaged by saints only when facing unhappy or untimely death. The cult of the dead may have been widespread in the ANE, but Johnston argues that evidence for Israel's veneration of ancestors is unconvincing, and any occurrences were marginal. There is no evidence that the dead maintained intimate contact with *Yahweh*, nor that they were at all active. Eight references to the *rephaim* suggest they form an assembly at rest, which simply exists—quite unlike the cognate *rpum* in Ugaritic literature.

It is strange to note that there is no clearly articulated alternative to *Sheol*. *Yahweh* clearly has power over life and death, as the song of *Miriam* and the experiences of *Enoch* and *Elijah* testify. Yet these paradigms remain curiously peripheral. Johnston's reading of references to ransom from *Sheol* understands each to relate to a ransom to life, rather than to some alternative afterlife. There is simply no great concern with the ongoing fate of the dead, a tension which remains unresolved until the end of the Old Testament period.

The surprising conclusion is that the Old Testament deals with life and barely with death. It is therefore not the book to read if you want to know 'what happens when you die'. Old Testament Israel's explicit beliefs on death and the underworld are few, and many allusions are shown to refer in their own context to this life rather than the next. The study of Semitic and other cultures greatly enhances our ability to read and understand the Old Testament: but it does not demand that we read their beliefs into the Old Testament. Time and again Johnston challenges an apparently tacit scholarly assumption that cognate usage of a word implies an overlap in mythology and belief. He also notes that the rise of the belief in the resurrection began to take hold of Jewish

theology and writing from the second century B.C. onwards, which influenced their reading (and possibly transmission) of the ancient passages.

Johnston excludes without comment the practice of reading later beliefs into the earlier texts—which begs the question of how he would comment on the New Testament's use of the Old Testament or indeed on Jesus' use of Exodus 3:6. (Mark 12:26 par.) Johnston has cleared the ground to expose a gap between the Old Testament and Christ Jesus who abolished death and brought life and immortality to life through the gospel. The answer seems to lie—tantalisingly—in the period immediately after the end of the Old Testament.

ED MOLL

Basingstoke

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR TODAY Brian H. Edwards
Epsom: Day One, 2002 (rev edn.) 280pp £8.99 ISBN 1 903087 333

How would British society re-write the Commandments today? Perhaps like this: 1. No God is more significant than another; 2. Idolatry is healthy; 3. Don't offend any religion except Christianity; 4. Profit is more significant than stable families; 5. Dogmatic instruction leads to emotional instability; 6. A murderer has rights but not an unborn child; 7. Marriage should not limit pleasure; 8. Petty theft satisfies; 9. Spin is necessary; 10. Greed is good for the economy (pp. 28-29, abridged).

With such awareness of the challenge before us, Mr Edwards has written a readable book full of helpful biblical references and illustrations. He says we need God's law: 'Far from law and love being opposites, the law actually defines and describes love' (p. 49). But the effect of law varies. Consider passengers on an aeroplane. Law-abiding ones feel at ease with the safety regulations which are there to protect them. But the hijacker fears being caught. 'Law is only a tyrant to the law-breaker' (p. 49).

If 'the first Commandment is against worshipping a false god, the second Commandment is against worshipping the true God in a false way' (p85, after Thomas Watson). 'Idolatry is the graffiti of Satan written right across humanity' (p. 90). Edwards knows that the Eastern Orthodox use icons as aids

to worship but says that God 'is forbidding the making of anything that is likely to be worshipped' (p. 85).

Blasphemy includes false or careless worship. The Sabbath is a creation ordinance (contrary to Carson's view) and the Jew would have seen little difference between rest and worship. As there is no Hebrew word for grandparent, the honouring of parents refers to all one's forefathers.

Murder starts in the heart but television and war toys do not help. Adultery should be vigorously challenged but remarriage can be permissible. The opposite to theft is generosity: 'Not what we can spare, but what we dare' (p. 234); 'To keep a pastor in poverty is robbing God' (p. 235). 'False witness' includes gossip, slander and silence in the face of lies. The chapter on covetousness is an exhortation to develop a Christian mind.

As we are all law-breakers, Edwards repeatedly writes of God's mercy. 'Grace and law are only opposites for those who are on the outside of grace. Once we are on the receiving end of grace the law itself becomes grace...a friendly force to keep us in check' (p. 134). And then we will love the Commandments as originally given.

JONATHAN FRAIS
Kiev

THE WAY OF A PILGRIM

Translated by Gleb Pokrovsky

London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003 138pp £9.95

ISBN 0-232-52475-0

This book explains and commends a certain way of prayer. It also makes a great claim for those who use it: 'No godless thoughts will besiege you, and you will acquire faith and love for Jesus Christ' (p. 47). Could this be the secret of victorious Christian living? This new edition of a Russian spiritual classic offers a practical (if demanding) way to improve your prayer life. The book is the biography of a Russian Orthodox monk on pilgrimage (initially within nineteenth century Tsarist Russia and then to Jerusalem).

The monk wants to know what it means to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thess.

5:17). The answer is to repeat ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner’ (called here the Jesus Prayer but sometimes known as the Sinners’ Prayer) in time with your heartbeat until it becomes constant within you. More detail is found in the *Philokalia* (a collection of Russian spiritual writings) which contains ‘enlightened explanations of what is mystically contained in the Bible’ (p. 17).

The influences on this practice may be broad. In his Foreword, Andrew Harvey suggests similarities with Hindu scriptures (‘the pure sober note of mystical certainty and rigour that had thrilled me in the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*, p. viii). There may also be the suggestion of pantheism. Harvey adds that this way of prayer is the ‘unfolding of a profound mystical initiation into the ecstasy and truth of what Jesus called “the Kingdom,” that state of divine knowledge and love that reveals the world as sacred and all beings as inherently divine that is the true goal of the Christian life’ (p. ix).

Such use of ‘the Jesus prayer’ is Christ-centred and humble. But critics say it can be mechanical and may induce hypnosis (as the copious notes are aware). The notes also add information on other Eastern Orthodox practices (e.g., the value of relics, list of feasts, and prayer to Mary).

Despite claims that this discipline is not just for monks, it favours solitude over fellowship, silence over speech and may even promote idleness over good works. One wonders whether it strengthened or weakened the Orthodox Church before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

The book does not make the gospel clear. Perhaps the Orthodox need a Protestant-style reformation which will take them back to the centrality of Scripture. Then the hunger of the soul for closer communion with God will be satisfied by the knowledge of his will as revealed throughout his word. Other routes need to be treated with scepticism.

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