

- A discussion of John's use of the word 'sign' over against the word 'miracle' as used by the other evangelists.
- Attention to the (potential) offensiveness of texts such as 8:44. The issue of anti-Judaism is ignored.

In conclusion it can be said that this is a sound evangelical commentary which is not very user-friendly.

Mark Edwards' book is totally different. It is not a traditional commentary but a digest of comments and reflections by previous readers. The material covered will overlap with that in the IVP series *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (to which Edwards himself contributed the volume on Galatians–Philippians), but in the present volume Edwards also looks at medieval and modern-critical sources, including composers and British poets. He shows great erudition; yet the resulting mishmash of opinions is not a complete commentary but a series of jottings from all times and places.

According to the editors, the Blackwell series is based on the idea that the history of the interpretation of a text is just as important as its original meaning (ix). Edwards would seem to disagree for in his brief 'Introduction' he is far from uncritical regarding the material he has collected. The said introduction gives an account of his choices and it is also a very condensed history of the interpretation of John's Gospel which is only understandable for those who already know what Edwards is talking about. The author apparently lives in a world without evangelicals for although he purports to cover "the best of modern historical research" he manages to ignore Morris, Smalley, Carson and Blomberg (*The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*, Leicester: Apollos, 2001), to name just a few. Instead he quotes Swedenborg, C. G. Jung, and Robert Taylor for whom the Gospel was an allegory of the zodiac. No wonder that in the acknowledgements Edwards warns the reader to be prepared for 'a great deal that seems to us tangential, false, misleading or bizarre'.

Pieter J. Lalleman, London, England

Waiting for Antichrist: Charisma and Apocalypse in a Pentecostal Church

Damian Thompson

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 216 pp., h/b., £26.99, ISBN: 0-19-517856-4.

SUMMARY

A sociological study of millenarian and other eschatological views held in the congregation of Kensington Temple, one of London's largest Pentecostal churches. This book gives an interesting insight into the sociological study of contemporary religion and religious phenomena.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Eine soziologische Studie von millenaristischen und anderen eschatologischen Ansichten, die in Kensington Temple

vertreten werden, einer der größten Pfingstgemeinden in London. Dieses Buch liefert einen interessanten Einblick in die soziologische Untersuchung zeitgenössischer Religion und religiöser Phänomene.

RÉSUMÉ

Voici une étude sociologique des opinions eschatologiques, notamment millénaristes, adoptées dans l'Église de Kensington Temple, l'une des Églises pentecôtistes les plus importantes de Londres. Ce livre nous donne un aperçu intéressant des études sociologiques sur les religions contemporaines et les phénomènes religieux.

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This book is an examination of eschatological beliefs at the turn of the millennium in Kensington Temple, a pentecostal church in London. The author utilises field research and interprets matters from a sociological perspective. The study is introduced in chapter one. In chapter two, Thompson discusses why people choose to believe in a millenarian belief from the perspective of sub-cultural deviance, rational choice theory and disconfirmation by experiment. The third chapter discusses Pentecostalism's relation to eschatology, noting some aspects of its historical development with its move towards routinization and institutionalisation, and its (especially present) diversity and differences from such views as dispensationalism and fundamentalism. The fourth chapter describes and analyses the organisation and charismatic theology of Kensington Temple. The fifth chapter looks into the varieties of millenarian belief in Kensington Temple based on a questionnaire. The sixth chapter makes a few case studies of strong millenarian believers in the congregation, analyses the psychology of these people in the context of their beliefs, and attempts to relate millenarian belief to demographic factors. The seventh chapter analyses how the leaders and the congregation of the Kensington Temple related to the change of the millennium some five years ago. The final chapter draws the study together. Thompson concludes that there is a diversity of millenarian belief in the congregation, and most people do not consider it a factor that directly affects them. For Thompson, the marginalisation of such belief is an aspect of secularisation, or a pull towards the societal consensus in the modern world.

The main strength of the book is its application of sociological analysis. This provides many insights into the study of religion, and the overall thesis has much to contribute to our understanding. However, it can be asked whether a particular sociological theory can explain everything. For example, one could ask whether a possible conviction about the correctness of an issue can always be tied in to a concept of rational choice (Thompson in essence follows rational choice theory), and this has a direct link, for example, to people's experience of the divine and a resulting ethical conviction and action even at great personal cost (such action based on

ethical conviction is of course not limited to religious people). Also, while Thompson has a fairly clear overall picture of relevant theological issues, some nuances which a theologian could have brought in are perhaps lacking. For example, it might have been helpful to point out that the millenarian concepts and questions described in the book, while of course having relevance to lay believers, are largely abandoned in serious contemporary professional theological discussions. Also, some aspects of biblical studies brought in are representations of single, even if often quite prominent theologians and may not reveal the full breadth of variety of opinions, or debates about the matters drawn in. Finally, as a minor point, aspects of the statistical analysis in chapter six seemed to be based on rather small differences and thus one might be slightly cautious about taking them at face value (e.g. the conclusions on p. 135 seem to be based on rather small differences). But, these criticisms aside, in my view, definitely a good book worth reading.

Pekka Pitkänen, Cheltenham, England

Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil

James L. Crenshaw,

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, x + 275 pp.,
h/b, £22.99, ISBN: 0-19-514002-8

SUMMARY

This study of the age-old problem of theodicy is largely based on the careful study of the Old Testament by a Wisdom scholar of some standing. Crenshaw takes a systematic approach and examines various issues connected with the whole question of human suffering and the character of God.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Arbeit über das uralte Theodizee-Problem basiert größtenteils auf einem sorgfältigen Studium des Alten Testaments durch einen Fachmann für Weisheitsliteratur von gewisser Bedeutung. Crenshaw wählt einen systematischen Ansatz und untersucht verschiedene Fragen, die in Verbindung zu der ganzen Frage des menschlichen Leides und des Charakters Gottes stehen.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude du problème séculaire de la théodicée nous vient d'un spécialiste d'envergure de la littérature sapientiale et se fonde sur une étude minutieuse de l'Ancien Testament. Crenshaw adopte ici une approche systématique pour aborder divers problèmes liés à toute la question de la souffrance humaine et à celle du caractère de Dieu.

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James L. Crenshaw's *Defending God* is a digest of a lifetime of study (p. viii). In it, he tackles the age-old problem of theodicy based on an examination of the Old

Testament (or the Hebrew Bible, with a few occasional references to the New Testament as well). Crenshaw takes a synchronic approach where aspects of the problem are divided into sections within which possible answers are discussed. The first section considers the response of denying God's existence. The second discusses a shift to monotheism and the problem of attributing evil to other gods in this context. The third takes a look at the concept of Satan. The fourth is about putting the blame on human freedom. The fifth discusses the issues of justice and mercy in God's character as a basis for dealing with the world. The sixth looks into suffering as having a disciplinary and nurturing function. The seventh treats the concept of seeing suffering as a punishment of sin. The eighth considers whether suffering could be seen as atonement for someone else. The ninth discusses the central issue in terms of looking forward to having justice in the afterlife. The tenth discusses the proposition of the inscrutability of God's ways from the perspective of humans. Finally, the eleventh section considers the suggestion that God is beyond theodicy, owing nothing to humans. Crenshaw then concludes that one possible way of looking into theodicy could be to see life as a gift from God and humans as debtors, and therefore humans should love God without expecting anything in return.

The book is of very high academic level and is not for the fainthearted if one were to approach it from a faith perspective. In essence, Crenshaw completely disassembles the Hebrew belief system into a set of human projections about God. As a whole, the book is very well argued and raises (or restates!) a number of problems that anyone thinking about the testimony of the Old Testament in particular must face if one wants to tackle any real problems relating to theodicy. The exegetical work and the reflections are very interesting and stimulating. However, this reviewer would not quite share Crenshaw's pessimism. For example, one might read Romans 9:15-21, a passage to which Crenshaw does not refer, based on an existential commitment rather than on logic as such (this might remind one of Crenshaw's Chapter 10, however). It is also worth noting that, interestingly, while Crenshaw speaks against the logicity of the biblical representation, he nevertheless admits that he feels drawn by it (p. 182).

The presentation of the book is somewhat cryptic in places (cf. Crenshaw's own comments in the Preface, p. viii), but only on the sentence level and this does not detract from a clear presentation as a whole. At the same time, the book makes an entertaining read with some delightful and snappy comments especially towards the end of the book, even if some people less accustomed to dealing with problems relating to theodicy might find them slightly offensive on occasions. There were a number of places where I did not necessarily agree with Crenshaw's exegetical readings, the exact basis for which, unfortunately, as the book is in many ways a digest of work and thinking over a long period of time, was often not referenced as much as might have been desired in