

upon this latter type of holiness, purity most visible in the severing of marital ties to the nations. Levering's contention is that while these post-exilic leaders began to fulfil 'the word of the Lord by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah' (Ezra 1.1) and restore the temple and God's people for God to once more dwell among them, such restoration is only completed in Christ, in whom Torah obedience and God's dwelling place are perfectly united: holy person, holy place. The goal is eschatological restoration. This is why Nehemiah's restoration ultimately fails to take root (Nehemiah 13).

Levering's interpretation is stimulating and his arguments persuasive although I think he relies too much upon the unity of biblical revelation to legitimise some textual comparisons. The least successful is his clause for clause parallel of Nehemiah's covenantal oath (Nehemiah 10) with the Lord's Prayer as found in Matthew 6.9–13. Although bolstered by other New Testament references, the comparisons are so general as to make the specificities of each text, and so the interpretative undertaking, irrelevant. Such a stretch in the imagination is only occasionally required however. On the whole, generous use of the vast resource of biblical revelation confirms and expands this exciting interpretation of Ezra and Nehemiah. Levering's new book fulfils its goal exceptionally and fully exhibits the qualities sought for in this new Brazos commentary series. It certainly provides an aid in preaching and teaching, and suitably demonstrates the continuing intellectual and practical viability of theological interpretation of the Bible.

BRUNO CLIFTON OP

TALES FROM ANOTHER BYZANTIUM by Jane Baun, (*Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2007*). Pp.xii + 461, £52.25.

To the modern reader, the *Apocalypse of Anastasia* reads like a hybrid, in content and social function, of a chain letter, the Miraculous Medal, and the *Left Behind* series. 'Blessed is that person', it concludes grandly and, as far as manuscript circulation is concerned, rather usefully, 'who takes this epistle and copies it in another city and land: even if he should have sins exceeding the hairs of his head, I myself will wipe them out and number him among my saints, and I will bless him upon the earth' (§53).

The *Apocalypse of Anastasia* and its sister text, the *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos*, are two now little-known but once extremely popular pseudepigrapha of the Middle Byzantine Period, presented to the English-speaking reader in new translations and a comprehensive study as *Tales from Another Byzantium*. They describe the ascent of two women — an apocryphal nun and the Virgin Mary, respectively — to the divine places of judgement, reward and punishment. These journeys, like those of more well-known travellers such as Enoch and Dante, are 'apocalyptic' according to the definition of the SBL's Genres Project: "'Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world' (*Semeia* 14:9 [1979]). Like 2 Enoch and the *Commedia*, the Middle Byzantine Apocalypses purport to unveil the transcendent origin or structure of the world, and so naturally, and with a bluntness unique to this genre, deal with their authors' and readers' most vital concerns.

The other-worlds projected by the Apocalypses of Anastasia (mid-tenth century) and the Holy Theotokos (ninth to eleventh centuries) are those of a popular and distinctly medieval imagination. In both, the places of primary interest are the

zones of punishment and the divine throne room. The sins punished are mainly those of lay people and secular clergy rather than of monks, and primarily concern social and ecclesiastical order. Thus, in the *Theotokos*, the multitude (*ho plethos*) of sinners is immersed in a boiling river for eavesdropping, slandering, quarrelling, fornicating, ploughing or reaping beyond their furrow, weighing falsely, or taking interest; others are set upon clouds or benches of fire for failing to wake on Sundays or rise upon the entry of the priest. Interestingly, only a few — among them the Jews, those who commit incest with close relations or godparents, and women who ‘suffocate babies’ — are consigned to the ‘outer fire’ which is ‘everlasting’ (§23). This raises the intriguing question, never directly addressed by the texts, whether the majority of punishments witnessed are eternal or temporal: whether the place described is hell, Hades or even — contrary to (at least modern) Eastern Christian orthodoxy — purgatory.

This is compounded by other potential marks of a distinctly Eastern medieval outlook; above all, the role of Mary as intercessor for mankind before a distant, imperial, angry God. In one of *Theotokos*’ most vivid scenes, Mary, moved with pity for her punished children, asks the Archangel Michael to ‘command the armies of the angels and raise [her] up to the height of Heaven and break [her] through into the presence of the invisible Father’ (§26), where she sways a reluctant ‘Master’ first not to forsake those who call upon her name (§26), and then to grant rest to all souls in torment during the fifty days of Easter (§29). In *Anastasia*, the visionary similarly returns with the divine message, ‘I wanted to destroy you utterly from the earth, but through the entreaty of my wholly undefiled mother . . . I was reconciled’ (§48). (Not to appear too lenient, God hastens to warn that ‘whosoever does not believe these things, and blasphemes, shall have the curse of the 318 God-bearing Fathers, and his portion shall be with Judas’.)

The bulk of Jane Baun’s work is a comprehensive study of the Apocalypses of Anastasia and Theotokos. Her guiding argument is that the texts present ‘another Byzantium’ not only in the sense of projecting a heavenly version of the earthly Empire but also — and here more fundamentally — in the sense of constituting a different type of historical evidence from that which has shaped the study of medieval Byzantine society and culture so far. These ‘paracanonical’, popular texts, whose provenance and concerns lie outside the world of the urban and monastic elites, reveal an ‘other’ Byzantium of local communities characterised by a high degree of social cohesion and self-reliance, and by a distinctive religiosity shaped by their experience of a distant imperial administration and focused on the preservation of social, moral and ritual norms within the community. The author deftly deploys a wide range of arguments — generic, cultural, sociological, and textual — in favour of her thesis, and grants the reader a rich sense of the texts within their literary, social and cultural contexts. This is not a work of theology, and Baun serves the theological meat of the texts strictly as *hors d’oeuvre*, but she leaves no doubt that it has the making of a feast.

JUDITH TONNING

DEIFICATION AND GRACE by Daniel A. Keating (*Sapientia Press: Naples FL, 2007*). Pp. 124, £16.94.

The doctrine of deification has become popular – even fashionable – in many scholarly circles, but it is just not evident to most people outside those circles what ‘deification’ actually means. For whatever reason, this doctrine is more evidently in need of explanation than most Christian beliefs. In this volume, Keating attempts to make the meaning of deification available to an educated but