

THE COVENANT AND THE KINGDOM, by Joseph Rymer. *Sheed and Ward, Stagbooks, 1968. 15s.*

A subtitle aptly tells us that this book is 'a way through the Old Testament', and such it is, admirably lighting up and making vivid those ancient Hebrew narratives which go from Joshua to Solomon. It is good, e.g. to be told that 'The Temple building . . . was about the size of a village hall but with thicker walls, and, of course, a good deal more impressively decorated than the average village hall' (p. 116).

The volume is the third of a series planned to cover all the Old Testament. We should say booklet rather than volume, for *The Covenant and the Kingdom* is compressed into 144 pages. It is a model of such compression, and never loses its character of *haute vulgarisation*. Certainly, too, is it a kind of reading that is much wanted for so many who know so little about the Scriptures,

and who might light upon this book and be induced to go from it to the full text of the Old Testament books.

The history covered goes from Canaan and the Philistines and the other neighbours to the Hebrew or Covenant people settling in those unpromising enemy-held surroundings—which were to be Promised Land in hope and then in fact. The stories of the Judges, of Saul, David and Solomon are outlined for us historically and critically, and all the while with a sense of God at work in the sacred history. God writes straight with crooked lines, and eventually is revealed to us as Redeemer of Israel and Saviour of the world. It is the sacred history that is so well suggested in this book, in a way which is both Catholic and critical.

ROLAND POTTER, O.P

PRAYER AND PROVIDENCE, by Peter Baelz.

This book is a courageous attempt to solve the age-old problem of God's unchanging providence and man's petitionary prayer. During the course of it the author uncovers the various layers of the problem with considerable skill like an expert cook dismembering an onion. On the one hand for those of a philosophical frame of mind there is God who in order to be God must be absolute, unchanging and all-loving, with a universal providence which inspires confidence in man. The religious response which this concept of God evokes is that of contemplation of the absolute God, a more or less passive acceptance of his will, and a tendency to talk in impersonal metaphors about God coupled with a reverent agnosticism about his own transcendence. So far so good, but what about the reality of evil in the world, and man's evident duty to do something about eradicating it? Therefore on the other hand there is the concept of God which draws upon the personal metaphors of the Bible, and emphasizes the need for petitionary prayer to the Father who can change the course of events in this world and inspire men to do something about making it a better world to

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live in. The religious response proper to this idea of God is morality, the pursuit of that which ought to be rather than the contemplation of That Which Is. The trouble with this concept of God's providence is that it offends the philosophical mind unless it is taken as sheer myth. Is there a way out of the dilemma? The author suggests with disarming humility that all he has done is to sharpen the difficulties of the problem rather than solve it. However, at the end of the book he offers three courses to the reader. Either to plump for the changelessness of God's purpose and 'point to self-sacrifice as the hall-mark of a truly religious dependence on God'; or to choose to retain the antinomies side by side; or to take the discussion a stage further and develop a notion of the passibility of God whereby divine involvement in the world could be retained alongside belief in God's never-failing providence by concentrating on the weakness as well as the strength of love. The author prefers the third course, though the crude analysis above does less than justice to his meticulousness of thought and his fairness of mind.

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