

Reviews

GENESIS 12-50 by R. Davidson. Cambridge 1979. pp. xii + 323. hardback £14.50 paperback £4.95.

I and II ESDRAS by R. J. Coggins and M. A. Knibb. Cambridge 1979. pp. xii + 314. hardback £15. paperback £5.95.

These three commentaries provide technical information which both the theologian and the historian will find useful. They contain little theological reflection, but this almost inevitably follows from the structure which breaks up the NEB text into short sections interspersed with comment, a structure appropriate enough for works like lawcodes, but less satisfactory for books like Genesis and I and II Esdras.

The short, lucid and balanced introduction to Professor Davidson's commentary on Genesis 12-50 asserts: 'This is no bald chronicling of an event: it is an interpretation of an event in terms of God's initiative.' (p. 18). This encourages the expectation that the commentary will help to draw out the theological implications of the story and the hope that some evaluation will be made of theology presented as family saga. They are disappointed. Most comments concern etymological and geographical details which could have been supplied more conveniently in an appendix. Even so, some of the strange details, like the great age of Abraham and of Sarah when Isaac was born, or the custom of building an altar, or the presentation in many of the chapters of a straightforward dialogue between God and man, receive no comment or explanation. Theological reflection of a general and repetitive kind is squeezed into a few lines. The only exceptions are the discussions about the binding of Isaac (chap. 22) which covers three pages, about Isaac's blessing of Jacob (chap. 27, 1½ pages), and about Jacob's struggle with God (chap. 32, 2 pages), and even in these discussions there is no real dialogue with the text. Consequently, a good story is made tedious.

The commentary by Dr Coggins on I Esdras is disappointing for similar reasons. Painstaking comparison is made bet-

ween I Esdras and relevant parts of the Chronicler's work and other writings relating to the historical period covered, from the reign of Josiah to the ministry of Ezra, but theological ideas receive scant attention. The combination of ideas, about sin and cultic purity, about religious fidelity and racial purity, about military defeat and political independence, and about prophetic teaching as the expression of God's will, in a survey of Israel's history, needs comment and assessment. How faithfully does it reflect the earlier beliefs of the Chronicler, and why was it reiterated or modified? What effect did it have on subsequent periods of Israel's history? And, most important, does it have any validity or significance? None of these questions is raised or tackled except the first, and that only in a piecemeal fashion. Both these commentaries exhibit a great concern for historicity, even when it is being denied.

Dr Knibb's commentary on II Esdras, a work wholly concerned with theological issues: election, sin, punishment, God's justice and mercy, eschatology, also focuses attention on the problems of dating the three sections of the book and ascribing each to an author: chapters 1 and 2, Israel's rejection and replacement by the church, written by a Jewish Christian in the second century A.D. chapters 3 to 14, a Jewish apocalypse wrestling with problems arising from the Roman destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. chapters 15 and 16, a Christian appendix to the apocalypse dating from the third century A.D. He is content to summarise the teaching without discussing it, merely pointing to similarities in other Jewish and Christian writings, although without reference to the important discussions by E. P. Sanders in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, SCM 1977. In the postscript, Dr Knibb remarks, on chapters 3-14: 'It represents a very serious

attempt, at a specific point in time, to grapple with the difficulties of belief in God, and it provides a valuable picture of the kind of theological ideas which were current in some Jewish circles at more or less the same time as that at which many New Testament writings were composed.' (p. 304); on chapters 15-16: 'The fact that he (the author) should have made this addition is an indication that, nearly two centuries after it was originally composed and in rather different circumstances, II Esdras 3-14 was still thought to have a relevant message to convey.' (p. 305); and on chapters 1-2: 'The author takes up the question of the relationship of the church to Judaism. His answer that Israel has been completely rejected, and that the church has taken her place, is no

longer satisfying, but the question he raises is one of fundamental importance to practising Christians and Jews.' (p. 305). On what grounds these brief assessments are made is not clear from the commentary. Are ideas worth summarising but not worth discussing?

The commentaries are useful in matters of detail. Each takes the form established for the series, including a brief introduction, a note on further reading and an appendix of names and subjects. In addition, the commentary on Genesis 12-50 contains two line maps. The publication of these two volumes completes the series on the Old Testament and on the Apocrypha. The New Testament series was completed in 1967.

MARGARET PAMMENT

VOICES FROM THE GODS by David Christie-Murray. *RKP*. pp. 280 £6.95

Any conceivable kind of glossolalia is grist for Mr Christie-Murray's mill, with the result that his book makes fascinating reading, but leaves us, as the author probably intends, intellectually unsatisfied. There are just too many different kinds of phenomenon involved. There is the kind of pseudo-language used by witch doctors, there is the alleged language of departed souls in spiritism, there are the tongues of men and of angels in Pentecostalism, there are the odd manifestations reported by doctors and psychiatrists, there are the alleged 'recordings' of praeternatural voices. It is certainly useful to remind those who regard speaking in tongues as a sure sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit that there is an awful lot of speaking in tongues going on in circumstances not, on the face of it, plausible occasions for such a supposed visitation from on high. But if we are to gain anything in understanding a far more thorough investigation of all the different phenomena in their own settings is called for, with far more readiness to

make distinctions. For instance, Christie-Murray discusses psychological and religious arguments for and against the use of tongues in Pentecostalism, but he never attempts to isolate tongues: the alleged effects in every case could be due to something else associated with tongues in Pentecostalism. It would be very valuable to know, for instance, whether the close association found by Kildahl between psychological dependence and glossolalia is found among glossolalists outside neo-Pentecostal prayer groups.

The theological debate about Christian glossolalia is sympathetically discussed, but with very little reference to the abundance of available literature.

The author finds no solid evidence of genuine miraculous xenolalia, though he acknowledges that it is impossible to rule it out in the present state of research. Nor, it seems, has reincarnation yet been proved.

SIMON TUGWELL O. P.

WHAT WERE THE CRUSADES? by Jonathan Riley-Smith. *Macmillan*, London. 1977. £4.95.

THE ALBIGENSIAN CRUSADE by Jonathan Sumption. *Faber*, London, 1978 £7.95.

The worst fault of Mr Riley-Smith's modest but expensive 80 pages is his title. What he has set out to do is to tidy up

some of the background questions books on the larger themes of the crusading movement tend to take for granted. He