

law is rooted in experience and in the recognition of the influence of culture and historicity. Lisa Sowle Cahill acknowledges that natural law can appeal across cultures for consensus and commitment to the global common good, dignity of all persons, mutual rights and duties, just government and peaceful co-existence. However, she notes insufficiency in recognising equality and the experience of women. Moreover, she says that the document does not fully take account of the need for re-evaluation of certain teachings, notably those concerning sex and gender. Joseph Capizzi points to the contemporary increased senses of interdependence and diversity of values. He advocates political reflection beyond the state to the global common good, that takes account of individual flourishing within the whole human family.

The final five essays explore some stock issues. Steven Long surveys the document's insight that the roots of moral antinomianism lie in seeing human and divine freedom in competition. Martin Rhonheimer usefully distinguishes between formal and material considerations of the natural law. He brings attention to the natural law as a work of the created intellect such that its universality is grounded in anthropology. William Mattison looks at how the document affirms the natural law as something both discerned by and constituted by human practical reason and the way in which the document uses other terms alongside inclination to go beyond a physicalist understanding. Livio Melina is inspired by the document to draw on an analogy between language, grammar and human action. Sherif Girgis and Robert George work on the perceived gap in the document on the complementary relationship of faith and reason.

Overall, these twenty one essays, written in a spirit of charity by critical friends of the ITC document, touch on many of the perennial questions related to the natural law such as the tensions between theology and philosophy, the possibilities of dialogue with religious and secular traditions, the place of virtues, experience and principles, human anthropology, the relationship of faith and reason, the difference that Christ makes. Many of the essays complement or counteract others. As Porter points out, the document is directed to all people of good will and it would be regrettable if it does not reach them. This book is an important contribution to making that happen.

PIA MATTHEWS

**JESUS: EVIDENCE AND ARGUMENT OR MYTHICIST MYTHS?** by Maurice Casey, *Bloomsbury*, London, 2014, pp. xi + 272, £19.99, pbk

Well, this is a hoot. Professor Maurice Casey, emeritus professor of New Testament Languages and Literature at the University of Nottingham takes on the internet. At least he takes on some of the bloggers on

the internet, the ones who deny that Jesus existed. The unevenness of the fight is obvious, but in the field of argument, the imbalance between the foes does not guarantee a victory. A fight between a heavy weight boxer and a welter weight is only going to end in one way, at least in real life. When someone of Professor Casey's distinction takes on bloggers, a better analogy would be a heavy weight boxer trying to fight a balloon. However hard he hits it, it just floats away. The bloggers might not even know there is a fight.

So why bother? Well for one thing, the book is a sign of transition from books to the internet. One form of media does not necessarily replace another. Theatre continues, alongside the cinema, which itself continues alongside the television. The dominance can change. What would happen if the bloggers take over? That favourite dismissal of academic scholars, used by Casey in this book, the 'no serious biblical scholar would accept that' argument, becomes unusable. There are valuable bloggers around, but there are so many confident amateurs. The balloons proliferate and punching them away grows tiresome. Between the blog and the scholarly book there lies a middle way, the e-book, and this book is available in that format. However, I note that the price is only one pound less than the printed version, something lamentably common in works of theology. Apart from the unfairness, and self-defeating nature of this over pricing, it also suggests a real indifference in the theological world to the need to communicate. The academic world as a whole presents itself as disconnected from the realities of the word market, which is so much more than the printed word now, through these pricing tactics. For them, the media really is the message.

There is another way of reading this book which is to see the bloggers as a convenient sounding board to demonstrate what is known about the historical existence of a person who is called Jesus in the New Testament. Casey, proclaims himself an unbeliever, but sees the devastation that denying the existence of Jesus would bring upon academic New Testament studies. Bard D. Ehrman, among other non-Christians, has also written on the subject in his book *Did Jesus Exist?* It is possible to say that someone existed, without being committed to say what that person was. We can walk along a path to someone or something, to be close enough to see them but not to make out any details.

In the case of Jesus, there are many converging paths towards him. Yet these paths seem to reach him, to let us see him vividly in all the gospels. For people who take Casey's point of view, which means accepting the gospels as containing valid truth, but who do not believe he was the Messiah, still less the incarnate Word of God, the case might be something like this. 'From a distance we can see writing on a wall. Some people can read or think they can read the writing from this distance, but I think that if we could get closer, the writing would mean something else. Since the writing cannot be read, I can reject your interpretation without having to provide my own.

So the question to ask is how close are we to the writing, that is to the real Jesus?' For Casey this is quite close indeed. Professor Casey was an Aramaic scholar and on this basis, his lifelong work is to argue that the *Gospel of Mark* contains translations from Aramaic originals. This disposes Casey to see *Mark* as fairly early. He agrees with James Crossley, who has argued for a date c.40 CE for the *Gospel of Mark*, which is earlier than for many conservative Christians. From the early date of *Mark* we can go on to earlier dates than usual for *Matthew*, 50–60 CE rather than 75–85, though he agrees with what he calls the conventional date of *Luke* as 80–90 CE. He then goes on to argue that these three gospels can be used as historical texts which tell us something about the events of Jesus's life. St Paul too has historical value, though here Professor Casey has to invoke the idea of the 'high context situation' where St Paul does not have to repeat to his epistles' recipients, information which they already know.

The last chapter deals more directly with the whole idea of 'mythicism', as he calls it. The title of the chapter so admirably sums up the absurdity of the mythicist view that it almost makes the chapter superfluous. This is the title: 'It all happened before, in Egypt, India, or wherever you fancy, but there was nowhere for it to happen in Israel'. If St Paul lived and wrote in a 'high context situation' to use Professor Casey's phrase, mythicists seem to live in a world with no context at all. The ancient world is itself part of the context, and this makes it difficult to convey to people who have not spent a lot of time reading ancient texts. Biblical scholars are themselves not guiltless of failing to have any sense of the larger ancient world which surrounded the world of Israel. It was not a primitive world, but highly developed where educated people might travel thousands of miles in their lives and communicate through Greek and Latin with their own caste. Events taking place hundreds of miles away might be known in a matter of a few days. The key word here is immersion. Anyone who wants to understand the ancient world needs to be immersed in it. The sort of blogger Professor Casey is trying to bring down to earth, float away in their imaginary world. I doubt he will have much impact on them. For anyone interested in the nature of the New Testament as history though, this is very valuable book indeed.

EUAN MARLEY OP

**A SOCIOLOGY OF PRAYER** edited by Giuseppe Giordan and Linda Woodhead, *Ashgate*, Farnham, 2015, pp. xix + 239,

This book is a very fine and wide ranging illustration of what academic sociology can say about prayer. Giuseppe Giordan and Linda Woodhead have put together a thorough and wide-ranging collection of papers which together show how the practices of prayer are variable