

THE KINGS AND THE COVENANT, by Hamish Swanston. *Burns and Oates*, London, 1968. 207 pp.

In the note of acknowledgment Fr Swanston refers to this book as an 'account of the Hebrew Monarchy'. It is certainly that. After a brief fifteen-page sketch of Israel before the Kings, he plunges quite deeply into the history of Israel under its kings and the narrative is taken on through the Babylonian captivity to the destruction of Jerusalem.

One gets the feeling that Fr Swanston enjoyed writing this book. He is evidently fascinated by the details of the kings, their courts, their battles and the rest. At times, however, I feel that his fascination runs away with him. Despite bold sub-headings we do tend to get bogged down in a plethora of names of persons and places and a maze of incident. I am not clear whom the author had in mind as likely readers, although in a note at the beginning he says that he has been 'encouraged to think that such a book would not be despised by intelligent members of senior school classes'. That is a rather vague category—how senior? how intelligent?

Certainly I can visualize some intelligent fifth- or sixth-formers delving into the book for information, but I should think that if it formed the staple diet of a year's religious course it might soon become despised.

Although the main body of the book is history with many interesting insights into recent interpretations, there is an attempt to go beyond mere history. That is to say, Fr

Swanston looks back from the standpoint of the monarchy to the beliefs that have evolved among God's people. Thus in chapter III, 'The Yahwist of Solomon's Court', we are led to an examination of the accounts of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, the Exodus, the Covenant and then to Creation, Cain and Abel, the Flood story and the Ziggurat.

This is valuable, for it sets these parts of the Bible in their literary context and so enables the reader to understand how they are to be interpreted. It is here that the author makes most obvious what is the relevance of all this ancient Hebrew history to our own situation.

But it is on this point that I find the book most disappointing. Surely the interest of senior students in the Hebrew monarchy and its literary works is rightly primarily concerned with what light all this can shed on our present lives as God's new Covenant People. Only rarely is the connexion made and then we plunge off once more into the battles and the intrigues. The later sections dealing with the prophets naturally have a more obvious relevance.

Given the fact that 'A' level Scripture is at present still heavily biased towards this sheer history and sheer Bible study, this book could be useful for examination students. But one wonders if such an examination and such a book really serve the best interests of religious education.

DEREK LANCE

PRAYER, by Abhishiktananda. *Indian S.P.C.K.*, revised ed. 1969. 78 pp. 4s.

CONVERSATIONS: CHRISTIAN AND BUDDHIST, by Dom Aelred Graham. *Collins*, 1969. 206 pp. 30s.

Abhishiktananda is actually a French Benedictine (author of *A Benedictine Ashram*), and this little book, written in his hermitage in the Himalayas, is a delightful indication of what can happen if we really allow ourselves to learn from Hindu thought even to the extent of in some way submitting ourselves to their scriptures. It is well worth four shillings, but

the supply is rather erratic (through the S.P.C.K. in London).

This is not just another book about the Jesus prayer, although that inevitably comes into it; it is about prayer as a mode of life, not only open to but proper to all Christians. God is not far from us, to be sought by effort and complete separation from everything else. True