

Thought for the Day 4th August - John Thew

The latest edition of Eternity News reports that James Innell Packer, after 93 years in this world, has been promoted to glory.

In a survey of *Christianity Today* readers, JI Packer was named as one of the most influential theological writers of the twentieth century, second only to C.S Lewis.

Jim Packer is probably best known for his book, *'Knowing God'*. It has now sold more than 1.5 million copies and continues to be bought and read by many. Alistair McGrath in his biography of Packer *'To Know and Serve God'*, notes that many have found it a turning point in their lives.

Billy Graham wrote, "Dr. Packer has the rare ability to deal with profound and basic truths in a practical and highly readable way. This book will help every reader grasp in a fuller way one of the Bible's greatest truths: that we can know God personally because God wants us to know Him."

Biblical scholar John G. Stackhouse, in *Christianity Today* in 2013, wrote: "Forty years after its publication in 1973, *Knowing God* continues to bless readers around the world. It continues to inspire authors, too, as it does what very few books have been able to do: present page after page of carefully nuanced Christian doctrine in a style that people actually enjoy reading."

My copy of *"Knowing God"* is old, stained and tired, but still quotable. In his Foreword, Packer writes:

'As clowns yearn to play Hamlet, so I have wanted to write a treatise on God. This book, however, is not it. ... It is a string of beads, a series of small studies of great subjects ... separate messages [that] seem to coalesce into a single message about God and our living.

In 'A Preface to Christian Theology', John Mackay illustrated two kinds of interest in Christian things by picturing persons sitting on the high front balcony of a Spanish house watching travellers go by on the road below.

The 'balconeurs' can overhear the travellers' talk and can chat with them. They may comment critically on the way that the travellers walk; or they may discuss questions about the road, how it can exist at all or lead anywhere, what might be seen from different points along the way, and so forth. But they are onlookers, and their problems are theoretical only.

The travellers, by contrast, face problems which, though they have their theoretical angle, are essentially practical – problems of the 'which-way-to-go' and 'how-to-make-it' type, problems which call not merely for comprehension but for decision and action too.

Balconeurs and travellers may think over the same areas, yet their problems are different. Thus (for instance) in relation to evil, the balconeur's problem is to find a theoretical explanation of how evil can be consistent with God's sovereignty and goodness. But the traveller's problem is how to master evil and bring good out of it.

Or again, in relation to sin, the balconeur asks whether racial sinfulness and personal perversity are really credible, while the traveller, knowing sin from within, asks what hope there is of deliverance.

Or take the problem of the Godhead. While the balconeer is asking how one God can conceivably be three, what sort of unity three could have, and how three who make one can be persons, the traveller wants to know how to show proper honour, love and trust towards the three persons who are now together at work to bring him out of sin to glory. And so we might go on.

Now, this book is for travellers, and it is with travellers' questions that it deals. End quote.

'Knowing God' is a worthy read. Available through Koorong Books. But if you are desperate enough, you can borrow mine. (johnthew@gmail.com)

Heavenly Father, Lord and Guide, we look to you for direction, strength and courage as we navigate this life towards glory. Help us, we pray, to travel well through the things that bring us perplexity and pain, as well as the things that bring us comfort and joy. Help us to know in practice that you are our God, our salvation, our hope and our glory.