

84). Since Jesus' call to follow him cannot be derived from Judaism, nor ascribed to the Church (since the verb 'to follow' is appropriate only in speaking of an earthly figure), it has a good claim to authenticity. The unique summons is characteristic of the 'authority' which many scholars regard as the authentic stamp of the Jesus of history. So we may confidently trace this radical summons back to Jesus himself, and not treat it as part of the theologizing of the later Church.

Professor Hengel's study is a healthy reminder that the attractions of redaction criticism – which is far more widely used now than when he wrote the original German version – must not entice scholars to abandon asking questions about Jesus alto-

gether, and cause them to lapse into 'general commonplaces about the historical Jesus' (p 86). If he is right in his analysis, then his investigation leaves us with more questions than it solves (though this is no criticism), since we are left asking about Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom of God, and the urgency of its proclamation which led him to summon men to discipleship. And we are left pondering the steps which led men and women to transfer the call from Jesus as the proclaimer of the Kingdom to Jesus as one who was followed for his own sake, so that 'following Jesus' became identified with faith in him, and the small band of disciples came to be seen as types of all who responded to the Gospel.

MORNA D HOOKER

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS THE JEW by Geza Vermes. (Riddell Memorial Lectures, 48). University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1981. pp 64. £2.00

In *Jesus the Jew* Dr Vermes attempted to show that scepticism about the quest of the historical Jesus is unnecessary for anyone who succeeds in placing him firmly in his Palestinian background. In these lectures he sets out to do the same for Jesus' teaching. Jesus belonged to the familiar class of figure, the charismatic prophet; but an examination of his teaching discloses his 'incomparable superiority'.

The distinctive quality of the teaching of Jesus, Dr Vermes argues, arises directly out of the closeness of his own relationship to God. He was the supreme example of the *reshuvah* (repentance) for which the Baptist had called, he had put his own life unreservedly at the disposal of the divine sovereignty and expected others to do the same, he therefore enjoyed a peculiarly intimate relationship with God as son to Father; and the heart of his ethical teaching was the *imitatio Dei*. Dr Vermes dismisses with some asperity the long debate between 'consistent' and 'realised' eschatology. 'This situating of Jesus' Kingdom of God in a context of time has been the subject of much learned, and to my mind futile, controversy. (p 23). God's sovereignty is realised on earth in the surrender of the self to his will. In Jesus'

passionate devotion to that will he became the agent for God's own care and love towards the needs of his creatures.

The evidence of the gospels is handled with sensitivity and affection, and is illuminated by many parallels from Jewish writings. Dr Vermes leads us along a road full of interest to the conclusion 'that the world may not have heard the last of the holy Galilean'. But his own conviction is that 'the simple Jewish person of the Gospels' will not again come into his own until he has been disencumbered of all the adventitious trappings of the Church's Christ. Like many another scholar in the past he lays the 'long exile' of the Jewish Jesus firmly at the door of the villain Paul, and he spares a sympathetic nod to those Judaeo-Christians who withdrew so quickly from the main body of the Church in which they saw 'a fatal misrepresentation of Jesus, a betrayal of his ideals, and their replacement by alien concepts and aspirations' (p 9).

The wise Christian reader will not be repelled by the negative side of this argument, but will welcome the chance to look at Jesus afresh through admiring eyes. But there are other and more important grounds on which the lectures may be criticized. Dr Vermes claims to be writing as a his-

torian, and the question is whether he has given us reliable history. That he has made an important contribution to the historical quest I do not doubt. But he leaves me with three reasons for disquiet.

Firstly, his decisions about the authenticity of sayings of Jesus appear to me arbitrary because they are not based on any firmly held theory of Synoptic relationships. For example, he argues that the 'scholastic debates' of Matthew's gospel come from the later Palestinian church, yet he prefers the Matthaean form of sayings to the Marcan and Lucan on the ground that they have Jewish parallels.

Secondly, if the Jewish Jesus was really the pietistic idealist of Vermes's portrait, I cannot see why anyone should have wanted to crucify him. Granted that he refused to be a military leader, it does not follow that he took no interest in politics. If he took God's sovereignty with utter serious-

ness, he must have been concerned with Israel's call to be God's holy nation; and the gospels represent him as clashing with the authorities on precisely that question, and as giving repeated warnings that the nation was set on a disaster course.

Thirdly, Paul was not only a Jew but a Pharisee. His evidence about first-century Judaism and about the beginnings of Christianity cannot be so lightly brushed aside. Samuel Sandmel is surely right in holding that the debate between Paul and the synagogue was a debate within Judaism. If Dr Vermes were to lay aside his hostility to Paul and to engage as a historian in a sympathetic quest of Paul the Jew, I am convinced he would be able to paint a fuller and truer portrait of the greater Jew to whom Paul gave his heart's allegiance, and of whose teaching Paul was the great expositor.

GEORGE B CAIRD

OLD TESTAMENT WISDOM: AN INTRODUCTION by James L Crenshaw, London 1982. SCM Press, pp 286 £5.95.

James Crenshaw of Vanderbilt University is one of the leading interpreters of ancient Israelite wisdom in modern English-language scholarship. This book is intended by him as an introductory textbook, and it fulfils that role excellently. The presentation is clear and the thought behind it profound. The material is expounded directly from the texts and discussion with other scholarly opinions is appropriately left to the notes. The simplicity of Crenshaw's statement does not conceal his enormous expertise in this field.

The book divides simply into ten sections. The introduction discusses the problem of defining what wisdom is. A first chapter describes the 'World of Wisdom', a 'different thought world', so different that its contents form an 'alien body within the Bible' (p 29). It is accepted that the 'wise' constituted a special professional class. A second chapter on 'the Sapiential Tradition' discusses why Solomon in particular was cast as the central personal figure in Wisdom. There follow chapters on Proverbs ('The Pursuit of Knowledge') on Job ('The Search for Divine Presence'), on

Ecclesiastes ('The Chasing after Meaning'), on Sirach ('The Quest for Survival'). The next is on 'The Widening Hunt', referring to Wisdom of Solomon and other documents; and then there follow chapters on 'The Legacy of Wisdom' and finally on Egyptian and Mesopotamian Wisdom, the value of which for the understanding of Old Testament Wisdom is fully underlined.

There are a few questions about detailed interpretations. *Mashal* 'proverb' can hardly mean 'powerful saying' (p 67) from the root 'to rule'. Can Job really stand for 'everyone' in ancient Israel (p 116)? Surely Qoheleth cannot really mean 'gatherer of women', even if Solomon was such a gatherer, and the Greek rendering as Ecclesiastes surely did not mean 'churchman' or 'ecclesiastical figure' (p 147). Is it really a redundancy, and totally against Hebrew syntax, if one says 'commit adultery with a woman' (pp 21-22)? It is striking and impressive if the sayings of Agur begin with the words 'I have no god' (Pr. 30:1; pp 203, 261n.), but the reader should perhaps be warned that this is a fairly adventurous philological interpretation.