

ISAIAH 13-39, by Otto Kaiser (Old Testament Library). *SCM Press*, London, 1974. 412 pp. £5.75.

This volume completes the Old Testament Library commentaries on Isaiah, the other two volumes being Isaiah 1-12 by Kaiser, and Isaiah 40-66 by Klaus Westermann. For many people this is the least devotional part of Isaiah, having neither the thrill of the Book of Emmanuel nor the presage of the Suffering Servant songs, but being very largely taken up with the oracles against the nations and eschatological promises which do not seem too relevant now that we have settled in to the era of the new covenant. Traditionally these chapters (with the exception of 24-27 and 34-35) are ascribed directly to the prophet Isaiah, not merely to his school, as are the later chapters in the book of Isaiah.

Probably the most interesting feature of Kaiser's commentary, at any rate to one comparatively ignorant of Isaianic studies, is the widespread questioning of this assumption. To begin with, the stories about Isaiah at the end of this part (36-39), taken from the Book of Kings, 'are of no importance for the knowledge of the historical activity of the prophet' (p. ix), since they are in conflict with what we know of Hezekiah (p. 368) and of the history of the Assyrian invasions. They are legends, based on a good deal of circumstantial knowledge, so probably pre-exilic. It is, however, the view given of the prophecies themselves which is infinitely more fascinating. No one would to-day dispute that over the ages in which the prophecies were read in the Jewish liturgy they were meditated and re-interpreted by means of minor additions (most obvious are the prose additions to poetic passages). Once the presumption is questioned that a particular passage is from Isaiah the floodgates are open. Convincing reasons can be given why 19.16ff cannot be long before the second century when Jews were settled on a basis of equality in Egypt and had an open, proselytising outlook (p. 111 is interesting on why this tendency withered away): the poem in 32.1-8 expresses a wisdom attitude which must also be sought

about this time (p. 329); the superb taunt on the death of a king (14.4b-21) could have been intended as well for Alexander as for Sargon II (p. 30).

Being composed across the centuries, this part of the book of Isaiah gives a continuous series of glimpses of Israel's oppression and hope. With all kinds of rich poetry and imagery Israel cries to the Lord as blow succeeds blow and misery gives way to misery, as one nation follows another in despoiling the Lord's people and treading them under foot. It is a marvellous story of perseverance, as this series of anonymous prophets in the tradition of Isaiah take up their master's themes and use his imagery to express their own undaunted hope in the eventual destruction of their enemies. Kaiser always succeeds in drawing some homiletic application for the present day from each passage, but to me it is the sweep of history which is most moving. As nations lost their identity, and a fortiori their national gods, under the upheavals caused by the great world empires, one nation alone held firm: far from diminishing, her hope grew and broadened into a conviction that Yahweh held sway over the whole universe and all its powers.

One may find fault with individual views, for instance Kaiser hardly brings sufficient evidence for denying 28. 1-4 to the prophet Isaiah (p. 237), but the persuasiveness of the general picture is equalled only by its clarity. One continually comes across attractive interpretations: the haunting but seemingly pointless oracle 'Watchman, what of the night?' is interpreted as a figure of hope for the night of oppression to end (p. 131). The gibberish 'Sav laSav. Oav laOav' is seen as a teacher spelling out the alphabet (p. 245). In general the author succeeds in bringing to life what might otherwise seem a dead and dreary desert of imprecations against nations long forgotten.

HENRY WANSBRUGH

JESUS THE JEW: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels, by Geza Vermes. *Collins*, London, 1973. 286 pp. £3.15.

THIS IS MY GOD: The Jewish Way of Life, by Herman Wouk. *Collins*, London, 1973. 320 pp. £2.75.

Non-extant or non-existent scrolls lie behind *The Secret Gospel*, *The Jesus Scroll* and *Mark of the Law*, popular studies which have recently followed in the wake of Irving Stone's *The Word*. In contrast to these efforts to derive

insights from arcane sources, Dr Vermes's aim is to place the Gospel accounts of Jesus within the framework of what is known of the history, institutions, languages, culture and literature of Israel, both in Palestine and the

Diaspora' (p. 9). This book, on the setting and titles of Jesus, is the first of a two-part study. A second volume, on his teachings, will follow. It is written with a minimum of technical vocabulary in the text; this is largely confined to 36 pages of notes.

The author argues that Jesus's execution was the result not of a Jewish religious indictment but of a secular accusation; however, Jesus is not identified as a Zealot. Vermes discusses the attitudes of Galileans, both to Judean religious authorities and to Roman rulers, as the background of Jesus's own independent attitude, and concludes that he did not belong to any large 'movement' within contemporary Judaism, but may be characterised as a Galilean charismatic.

There is a scrutiny of 'those basic christological titles which appear explicitly in the Synoptic Gospels, i.e., those which could derive from Jesus himself or from his Palestinian contemporaries: though . . . this equation of Synoptic tradition and primitive Palestinian usage is not meant to exclude the possibility—and in many cases the fact—that the same title was to acquire in the course of the Gospel transmission and redaction more advanced non-Palestinian theological connotations' (p. 84). The titles considered are prophet, lord, Messiah and son of God, with excursions on prophetic celibacy, Jesus son of David, and virgin birth. The position on 'son of man' presented as an appendix in the third edition of M. Black's *Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* is developed further.

After a sharp critique of positions held by some modern scholars, Dr Vermes assembles linguistic evidence from Hebrew and Aramaic sources to show that in all probability Jesus was addressed as prophet, lord and son of God—but he emphasises that the content of these terms does not resemble the definitions of Christian theology. Certainly the various terms used to describe Jesus's person and work did not spring full-blown onto the Palestinian scene, and, as is only to be expected, efforts to

describe him took their roots from biblical material and contemporary speech. Moreover, the Fourth Gospel *explicitly* refers to the new appreciation of earlier events in the light of the resurrection (2.22; 12.16) and this, the author stresses, implies that, while the Gospels preserve historical facts, they are primarily written as documents of faith.

However, is there no relationship between the events and teachings of Jesus's public ministry and their interpretation more than a generation later? It is noteworthy that the theological development concerning Jesus began early in the life of the Christian communities. While the author's purpose is to investigate from the viewpoint of history what the Synoptic Gospels tell us of Jesus (p. 16), it seems unfortunate that his references to Paul's letters are so perfunctory.

Although Dr Vermes's explanation of faith in Jesus's resurrection adds up to no more in essence than a 'collective conviction (of the disciples) of having seen their dead teacher alive, combined with the initial discovery of the empty tomb' (p. 41), his work ends with a sensitive appreciation of Jesus 'the Jew'. Here is a book that will provoke a great deal of thought and discussion; on a number of points New Testament scholarship can perhaps start on a new path, away from extreme scepticism concerning the Semitic basis for the titles of Jesus in the Synoptic tradition.

The American novelist Herman Wouk wrote his account of the Jewish way of life in 1959; the revision of 1970 includes an Afterword on the Six-Day War and this British edition has a short preface dated 1972. Such a popular presentation of a religious faith as lived by one man and his family has value, although it delves into theological questions only superficially. It discusses various aspects of Jewish life in the United States and, through flashbacks, in eastern Europe. All non-Jewish readers could learn from it; there is a book list included for those interested in more detailed or deeper studies.

LAWRENCE FRIZZELL

THE EASTER JESUS, by Gerald O'Collins, S.J. Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1973. xiv + 142 pp. £1.50 paper.

Since the second century the resurrection has been overshadowed in the history of theology and in Christian iconography by the passion and crucifixion of Jesus, and classical christology has been dominated by a theology of the incarnation. The theology of the last twenty years, however, has attempted to atone for the neglect of centuries by producing a mass of material on the exegesis of the biblical texts which testify to the reality of Jesus's

resurrection and on the dogmatic theology which develops from those texts. One indication of an earlier preoccupation with the suffering of Christ is the number of religious orders that dedicated themselves to some aspect of those sufferings. 'Where', Gerald O'Collins asks, 'are the Fathers of the Resurrection?' The answer to that is that they are alive and well and living in Mirfield. But one takes his general point that for far too long