

religionists: 'The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.' This saying is echoed several times in the book: the church was not made for the pope, but the pope for the church; the world was not made for the church, but the church for the world. Ecumenism will come to nothing if the oikumene is the church rather than the world. Liberation theology has provided an illustration of this point. 'God so loved the world...' Not surprisingly it is when Christians embody the love of God for His world that they discover themselves graciously to be members of the Body of Christ. Modern Catholicism, as defined in this book, should be a sign of hope to all Christians. It frequently happens that those who wish to acknowledge the achievements of the modern world commit themselves to principles which are in fact much older and more fundamental than those rigid and relatively recent positions guarded as tradition.

ALISTAIR KEE

**THE RESURRECTION: NARRATIVE AND BELIEF** by J.I.H. McDonald, SPCK. 1989, Pp. xii + 161. £15.00

In his foreword to this book James P. Mackey says, 'I asked the Scripture scholar if he could show how "risen" life could be attributed to Jesus before his death and consequently felt by us before ours.'

He then summarizes the argument of the book (viii—ix): From the opening chapter ... the unique character of Christian faith becomes obvious: instead of idealized figures ... we have a future already effective for us in a man who is victorious precisely by living and dying like all of us.... This one Paul encountered, much in the way any of us can encounter him, by granting entry ... to the life, the spirit, that made Jesus what he was and is, 'God with us' ... This one Mark depicts in metaphorical story. ... if only by refusing to add any final and unambiguous encounter with a risen and victorious Lord, Mark lets us know that we can encounter this one still in the obstacles and failures of life. ... With Matthew and Luke, scenes from the ends of the Gospels are shown to contain the key to the whole structure of the Gospels ... Matthew's sense of power ... of Jesus from his great closing scene ... Luke's equally powerful sense of the glory of the Lord ... in the structure of a journey, the interpretation of Scripture, the fellowship of a meal.... ... the main point of the book: that resurrections are ends, in the true sense of emergences of what was there all along; and so ... beginnings of what is always there for us all. And finally ... John's ... deployment of symbolism in order to reveal what Jesus revealed: eternal life, like eternal beauty, ... underneath the fragility of all finite existence.'

In his own Introduction the author makes the all-important point that to interpret the New Testament is 'to be drawn into its world and to find meaning there.' The reader is throughout challenged by it; and it is a description of a world which has already reached considerable sophistication compared with its Old Testament roots: the simple morality of Deuteronomy is reworked into an understanding of history which requires hope for the re-creation of the nation as an integral part of the divine purpose. Ideas about the after-life, overlapping with Old

Testament ideas but often new became explicit in the intertestamental literature, and this mixture affected the New Testament. Thus details of interpretation cannot be certain. *How* the dead are raised is clearly a puzzle to the Corinthians, and interweaving of diverse Jewish with diverse Hellenistic conceptions of man remain, making them ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what body?'

McDonald emphasises that resurrection language is 'essentially eschatological.' To the modern reader it is a strange world but Jesus and his immediate followers used this language as their frame of reference. How far Christians presupposed and in the light of their experience modified this frame is part of the most important matter with which the book deals. Have the historical elements in the story of Jesus been submerged in a tidal wave of cosmic speculation expressed in Jewish apocalyptic terms?

Some important parts of the New Testament are then surveyed. Paul claimed to have *seen* the risen Jesus and this seeing was simultaneously life-transforming encounter, apostolic commission and divine revelation, at once existential and cognitive. It is not only an awareness of Jesus beyond the grave, but a vision and a grasp of the whole Gospel story and its significance, so that it can be condensed into the statement of Phil. 2.5–11. The dynamics of resurrection faith as Paul knew them means operating with and living under the fundamental polarity of life and death—dying and rising with and in Christ.

It is here that the argument of the book, so far completely persuasive, may seem to come to falter; certainly resurrection life is life 'in Christ' and not only may but must be entered into now, but does the eschatological dimension belong only to the apocalyptic mode of the New Testament or is it integral to the reality which that mode expresses? In other words, can there be a non-eschatological Christianity? The book's answer is not altogether clear. For example, when mentioning 'the final resurrection when all who belong to the victorious Christ shall be raised' (1 Cor. 15. 23) M. does not mention 'at his coming'. It is correct to say that 'the eternal solidarity is' with God 'in Christ' but Christ is considered by Paul not only as the Head whose body is the corporate body of those 'in Him', but also as the Messiah whom he expected to come again to establish his Kingdom. Moreover, for him the idea of resurrection was prior to that of the Christ (1 Cor. 15. 13). Surely Paul's messianic expectation was false? The resurrection of which Christ was the firstfruits has not been completed. Paul himself can offer a way of understanding Christ's relation to us which renders this fact of no account. If we know Christ 'according to the spirit', as M. says, the liberating dynamic of the reconciliation which he effects may work in us and we may have a spiritual union with Christ, an idea which is the Pauline counterpart of John 14. 21–23. But M. does now draw attention to this as an *alternative* way of understanding the Christian hope.

In discussing Mark M. is very clear about the ministry of the Cross in the Resurrection and one might expect a reference to the cosmic dimension expressed by the earthquake of 15. 38; but M. interprets the crucifixion scene rather through the centurion's words in 15. 39., the

rending of the temple veil being mentioned in connection with Matthew.

On Luke/Acts M. is at his best, especially in the section on table-fellowship, which sees the Emmaus story as a climax: table-fellowship, always related to the salvation process in Christ, is from now on a celebration of joy and thanksgiving. It is interestingly noted that the meaning of Scripture as interpreted by the risen Lord is not self-evident. Perception and insight are required to see the importance of suffering. Thus it would seem that there must be a radical reinterpretation both *of* and *by* the events. The scripture witness to Jesus and he to them in depth not seen before.

It seems fair to say with this book that in the Lucan eschatology the penultimate not ultimate age has come with Jesus' being 'received up.' 'Jesus' death, resurrection and saving work are held together in an indissoluble unity', and M. sees that the proclamation of forgiveness and the resurrection of the dead stand together in the Lucan Narrative. He is surely right to be astonished at the view of some commentators that in Luke the death of Jesus (in the very act of forgiving) has no saving significance. M's final judgment about the relevance of the New Testament eschatology is surprising. To confess Christ as Lord is among other things 'to believe that ultimately—though it is not for us to know the times or seasons—the signals will give way to the total reality and that Christ will come in like manner to his going.' We have already suggested that an alternative understanding is available in John 14. 21–23., which is discussed in the following chapter but only briefly. The crucial question of Judas not Iscariot surely does more than 'query the distinction between the community and the world.' Does it not introduce an entirely new way of knowing Christ? Such a view would be consistent with M's own approach to the Gospel of John, in which 'the word of Jesus is the word of the resurrection'. But resurrection has indeed become a way of expressing complete union with Christ. 'I am the Resurrection and the Life'. Symbols derived from the Gospel coalesce with symbols from Jewish traditions. Life—resurrection life, life in Christ, in God—given under those symbols includes but is infinitely more than existence. The latter is grounded in the finite order but is open to light, to transformation into life. Life so understood is not an extension of earthly life but its transformation by the power of the eternal order. This seems a long way from the primitive eschatology which seemed at first to have been retained, but nearer to Christian experience and truth.

None of this criticism should deter anyone from reading this very valuable treatment of such an important question.

A.R.C. LEANEY