

various gospels which free much that is in them to make an impact upon the modern reader. It is when Pheme Perkins passes through the level of a story to devote chapters to 'the Life of Jesus', the Preaching of Jesus', and 'the Resurrection of Jesus' that one's hesitations come to the fore. Real historical problems are not discussed with enough rigor to satisfy the reader. Perkins doesn't really come clean on these so that her discussion of the Resurrection opens insights and a way in to a possible approach only to leave one slightly stranded as to what really is the significance of the stories of the empty tomb.

There is a need of a more rigorous theology in some of the sections on 'the preaching of Jesus'. Perkins gives an excellent explanation of the significance of Jesus' eating with sinners. On the other hand, her explanation of Jesus' meaning in his teaching about lending to those who would borrow, and her contrast, of his attitude to Ben Sirah's seems naive and unresolved: 'This does not mean that Jesus was blind to the kind of human failings treated in Ben Sirah.... But Jesus' preaching springs from the presence of God's reign. It is not simply good advice about how to maintain one's integrity in a world of fools and less than honest people.' This sounds fine but it did not in fact help me when later in the day I was accosted with a demand that I should 'lend' some money to meet some less than clear need. I did not lend and I have no doubt that I was right not to. Dissatisfaction with the whole scenario was my lot. Jesus' preaching does indeed 'spring from the presence of God's reign' but just what does that mean? In what way is the kingdom present and in what way is its presence still limited? Here, theology—both that of Jesus and of us—needs more attention. It just will not do to mention the 'puzzling' saying of Mark 9<sup>1</sup> only to say, 'Jesus' contemporaries might have assumed that he meant that the final manifestation of the reign of God, judgment and new creation, was right round the corner.' The future dimension in Jesus' teaching as well as the reality of the present world need to be taken with more respect.

So, all in all a thoroughly stimulating way of reading the New Testament but one which needs a critical response even while the responder remains open to receive. I would hesitate to give it to a beginner: it is too difficult and too angled for that. But for the group leader who knows something about the subject already and who might hope to enthuse others, it is superb. To rekindle interest and to carry interest forward, it is excellent.

ERIC FRANKLIN

**JESUS: THE UNANSWERED QUESTIONS** by John Bowden, SCM, London, 1988, pp. 259.

'This is a book of questions. They arise out of a wide variety of areas of Christian thought, practice and experience: study of the Bible, doctrine, ethics, the history of Christianity, liturgy, personal prayer, pastoral work, the use of Christian belief as a source of manipulation within society and the relationship between Christianity and other faiths...'

The author is an Anglican priest, who is also Editor and Managing Director of SCM Press. In the Preface, he makes a profession of faith in

God: 'For all its questioning, this book is written out of a deep and positive faith in God, to whom I cannot say no, a faith which I have to acknowledge originated through the Jesus about whom I ask so many questions'.

What kind of faith does he still have in Jesus? The question is difficult to answer. Commenting on the words of Jesus in the Gospel attributed to St John: 'I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me', he expresses doubts about the statement that Jesus is the truth, or 'the criterion of the truth, the truth of how things are' (p. 16).

These doubts about one statement of Scripture are linked with more general doubts about the meaning and value of all the texts of the Gospels. Chapter III puts the question: 'What can we really know about Jesus?' We have the answer in the first lines: 'There is a good deal that we probably do know about Jesus; the trouble is that we can rarely, if ever, be sure precisely what it is'.

Do we have perhaps something more certain in the statements of the Church?

The Chalcedonian Definition, 'a classic statement of the doctrine of the Incarnation', 'is the foundation stone of the whole theological system of the Christian church'. But its authoritative status may not be admitted: 'We can look at the doctrinal statements of Christianity as human constructions, negotiated by fallible human beings against the background of the culture of their time as a result of particular developments (which could have been otherwise) and on the basis of particular presuppositions (which are open to critical examination)' (p. 74). The way is very open to 'The Myth of God Incarnate' (p. 88).

Every chapter brings a lot of questions and new doubts. The author steadily refers to other authors, with quotations which are often superficial. He does not study the matters he is treating; he tells us what others say; he quotes sentences like: 'O Christianity, Christianity, why do you not answer our difficulties?' (p. 105).

I am afraid a discussion would be useless. But there are perhaps other unanswered questions. Why such a book, with only questions, without any attempt to answer? Why does the author everywhere choose a sceptical position? On the question of Christ's sexuality, why does he quote Canon Hugh Montifiore on a possible 'homosexual explanation', and the novel of Kazantzakis on a marriage between Jesus and Mary Magdalen (p. 95)? Why does he collect so many strange opinions, without a critical evaluation?

Those who seriously want to reach the truth will find the book disappointing.

JEAN GALOT SJ

**CATHERINE OF SIENA'S WAY** by Mary Ann Fatula OP, *Darton Longman and Todd, 1987. P. 219, £5.95 p.b.*

This book, which is one of the useful *Way of the Christian Mystics* series being published by DLT under the general editorship of Noel Dermot O'Donoghue, offers an introduction to Catherine of Siena as 'friend, sister and guide in the journey of mysticism' (p. 14). After a brief general

155