

NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY, Vol. 1: 'The Proclamation of Jesus', by Joachim Jeremias. SCM New Testament Library, 1971. xviii + 330 pp. £3.50.

New Testament Theologies are likely to tell us as much about their authors as about the New Testament. A comparison between the chapter on Jesus in Bultmann's famous New Testament Theology and this volume by Jeremias is illuminating: whereas Bultmann dealt with the message of Jesus in thirty pages, Jeremias needs over 300 pages for the same subject! By German standards, of course, Jeremias is a 'conservative'; for him, the following principle of method still applies: 'In the synoptic tradition it is the inauthenticity, and not the authenticity, of the sayings of Jesus that must be demonstrated' (p. 37). Nevertheless, his conclusions may surprise some English readers: for example, though he believes that Jesus used the term 'Son of man', he accepts only a few of the occurrences of the title as authentic—and those are all sayings referring to future vindication; though he believes that Jesus spoke of his coming death, he regards the passion predictions in their present form as *vaticinia ex eventu*. Professor Jeremias' work demonstrates that it is still possible (contrary to the impression occasionally given by some scholars!) to take up a position regarding the evidence of the gospels about Jesus which does not belong to either the conservative or the radical extreme. The danger of such an approach is, of course, that one will inevitably be attacked on both flanks! However, most of the arguments in this book repeat what Professor Jeremias has written elsewhere, and he will be accustomed to such attacks.

In attempting to reconstruct the teaching of Jesus, Professor Jeremias rightly rejects the method used by so many today of regarding only that material which is without parallel in Jewish writings and early Christian beliefs as the kernel of his message, and points to the significant fact that the teaching of Jesus is subject to far less alteration in the gospels than the narrative material. Professor Jeremias' own great contribution to the study of the sayings is his knowledge of Jewish sources, and he uses this to illuminate much of the material; however, this material can lead one astray, since most of it is later than the time of Jesus; moreover, Professor Jeremias sometimes seems to forget that our Jewish sources do not give us the whole picture of Judaism, and to assume that any similarity between words of Jesus and rabbinic tradition must be significant. But on the whole his exegesis is helpful: though he

seems to have nodded when writing on Matthew 10, 9-14, since on page 236 he reminds us that those whom Jesus sent out as messengers were 'to renounce cloaks', but two pages later assures us that 'to shake the dust off their feet' means in fact 'to shake the dust which their feet have stirred up from their cloaks'!

Professor Jeremias' confidence regarding the background of Jesus' teaching is seen in his well-known interpretation of Jesus' own understanding of his death in terms of Isaiah 53. It is, he maintains, impossible to understand either the words of institution at the Last Supper or the saying found in Mark 10, 45, apart from the figure of the 'suffering servant'. But Professor Jeremias fails to deal with the many criticisms of this view which have been brought forward in recent years; his arguments in his previous work on this subject are simply repeated. He may be right in saying that 'Jesus was convinced that his suffering would fundamentally alter the situation of his followers' (p. 241), but to be told that 'this conviction is brought out most clearly in Luke 22, 35-38' does not inspire confidence in this conclusion, since this passage is a notoriously difficult one. It is significant that the Jewish material which Professor Jeremias appeals to is in fact a development of Daniel, not of Isaiah 53, and this development interprets martyrdom as ushering in the End.

It is a sign of the change that has come over New Testament scholarship in recent years that consideration of the titles of Jesus is left until the end of the book, and even then only 'Son of man' is considered relevant: one can no longer begin with the 'messianic self-consciousness' of Jesus, but must begin with the evidence for Jesus' teaching. The difference between Professor Jeremias and many other New Testament scholars today is that while they think it impossible to go further, he still feels able to be positive about Jesus' own understanding of his call and mission. Whether or not one agrees with this position, one is grateful to have this presentation of it to set alongside statements of other views.

The book has been admirably translated by John Bowden. An index to authors, as well as the one to scriptural references, which is provided, would have been useful.

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