extensively with Jewish literature. Part 1, now published, deals with Jewish literature composed in Hebrew or Aramaic and with literature composed in Greek. Part 2, expected later this year, will deal with literature of which the original language is uncertain. This is a magnificently comprehensive account, arranged on quite a different principle from Charlesworth.

The oldest document in the present book is *Ahiqar,* perhaps 6C BCE, the story-part probably originating in Mesopotamia, the proverbs in northern Syria (and nothing to do with the Old Testament) translates not the later versions (as in Charles) but the Aramaic text from Elephantine. *Joseph and Asenath,* on the way to a new Greek Text, has very instructive notes and a good introduction to the present study of this important document. The *Biblical Antiquities* of *Pseudo-Philo,* with a carefully determined text, are now again available and should emerge from obscurity. The *Syriac Menander* appears in its first English translation—from a Dutch scholar. The important *Psalms of Solomon* (possibly Essene, possible Pharisaic) are well up-dated from the splendid edition of Ryle and James (1891), and that extraordinary collection of Christian hymns, the *Odes of Solomon,* is presented with the latest thoughts of Charlesworth who has been working on them for twenty years. And so it goes on. Some texts in this volume are merely fragmentary—indeed all that remains of *Eldad and Modad* is a four-word sentence in Hermas, here solemnly provided with more than two pages of introduction. An appendix to the volume contains fragments of lost hellenistic Jewish writings from the period 3C BCE to 1C CE. The range of material—poetry, drama, philosophy, chronography, history and romance—show a lively though derivative culture which goes beyond the more familiar religious and cultic forms of Jewish writing.

No one will read steadily through these two volumes. They will be consulted for particular information. For that purpose the 86-page index of topics and names will be invaluable—though not sufficient and not perhaps exhaustive. For it will be essential to allow each document to make its own impression. So consultation may lead to browsing, and browsing to confrontation. If so, the editor and his colleagues have given massive help.

K GRAYSTON

HOW CAN WE KNOW? by A.N. Wilson. *Penguin Books.* **1986. Pp. 118 x 6. £2.95.**

This book is a statement of personal religious conviction, which disarms criticism by acknowledging the author's embarrassment and the book's origin in conversation.

A.N. Wilson claims that 'Jesus did not simply enunciate a moral code ...; he offers himself to be our helper when we fail to live up to that standard.' (p. 48) There is heavy emphasis on the alleged moral code, and great stress on receiving Holy Communion as the main form of Jesus' help.

The assumption that the Sermon on the Mount is a moral code is of course not new. Wilson offers a variation on the theme by claiming that the teaching turns out to be common sense; but this hardly elucidates the more outrageous sayings. He does not connect his view of the sermon or of the eucharist with his hint at the very end that what is decisive is the awakening to the living God. So Mr. Wilson seems to remain in the grip of a tyrannous moralism and a sadly individualistic and passive piety which in unhappy combination suggest the opposite of Christian freedom and responsibility.

The book is flawed by recurrent bouts of sneering, largely at theologians and clergy. A strange abstraction called 'Modern Christianity' also collects a passing swipe for its 'relentless tendency to be silly' (p. 108). Wilson reveals an overwhelming nostalgia for the Tridentine Mass, praised especially for its uniformity of language in every place, which made it 'the sign of unity with Jesus Christ.' (p. 75) Here a defensive cultural and spiritual imperialism is mistaken for such a sign. There is an odd, angry reluctance to engage with

present reality.

Mr. Wilson would be wise to take more seriously the appeal to experience with which his book ends. He writes of 'God coming to us and making his presence unambiguously clear' (p. 118). To stay with this realisation might free the author from the tragically distorted and impoverished form of Christianity which much of his book commends. In face of the possibility that experience of God's presence might prove a delusion, he points to the fruits of the Spirit manifested in the lives of many Christians. It is a pity he stops there. Sebastian Moore hints at where this emphasis might lead when he writes of the Sermon on the Mount:

> The stringent, impossible demands in the Sermon are expressions not of strictness but of phenomenal freedom. If you will let the real God come into your life, you will be free of the anxiety that makes it impossible to forgive injuries, to lend on demand, to 'turn the other cheek', and to look at an attractive person without lust. ... Once you're on course with this God, you will want to throw out anything that is going to stop you from reaching his Kingdom. The brutal hyperboles about plucking out the eye, cutting off the hand or foot, that confuse you, become understandable in this context—*and in no other*. Jesus' teaching is full of wild exaggerations. For Jesus is a wild man. He is not restricted by our human fears.'
>
> (*The Inner Loneliness* pp. 82—83) (Reviewer's emphasis)

A.N. Wilson recognises that it is timidity which deters us but leaves it there, characteristically regarding a morally descriptive statement as if it were an explanation. I enjoyed this author's biography of Belloc, but found this book sadly hollow.

PETER HARVEY

ENCOUNTERS: EXPLORING CHRISTIAN FAITH, Michael Mayne, ed., *Darton, Longman and Todd*, 1986, £3.50.

Encounters began life as talks for the University Mission in Cambridge, February 1985. The theme of 'encounter' was chosen to unite and guide the talks, and was meant to signify encounters with God, with other people and with the self 'which take us out of ourselves and reveal a reality and a truth we had not previously seen.' (p. 2) As is usual with such intentionally broad schemes, the quality of the eleven short papers is uneven; their connections with each other are often tenuous, while at the same time there is a fair amount of overlapping material. Nonetheless, the simplicity and the intensely personal quality of much of the writing makes *Encounters* an interesting collection of modern spiritualities.

The contributors come from a wide variety of theological and pastoral backgrounds, and most are well-known Christian writers. Those familiar with the more abstract works of Una Kroll, Timothy Radcliffe and David Sheppard (for example) will find these more direct and personal statements illuminating. The informal approach of the several items by Robert Runcie sheds useful light on his more structured statements as Archbishop of Canterbury. Taken as a whole, the articles reveal certain continuities of concern between varied styles and backgrounds: the nuclear debate, our treatment of the earth, the plight of the poor in this country and abroad, and perhaps most noticeable, an uneasy awareness of the restraints placed upon us by class, culture and upbringing and the need sensitively to see beyond these.

This collection of disparate articles reaches no climax and comes to no conclusions. Nevertheless, *Encounters* provides an illuminating view of the reasons for belief and the consequences of that faith which are highly individual, yet share common contemporary Christian concerns.

KATE MERTES