

who shed his blood at God's behest'?

Overall, Grayston seems to try just too hard to reduce that strand in the New Testament which contributes to atonement theories which he himself finds uncongenial. In the end, however, one suspects that he protests too much. Perhaps he does not really do justice to that principle which he announces at the beginning of the book and which allows for the strangeness, even the uncongeniality, of at least some parts of the New Testament outlook. There is much more culturally conditioned thought there than Grayston allows and perhaps he would have given a clearer and less uneasy exegesis of some of its parts if he had made more allowance for this.

ERIC FRANKLIN

WHAT CAN WE KNOW ABOUT JESUS? by Howard Clark Kee. **THE WORLD OF JESUS. FIRST-CENTURY JUDAISM IN CRISIS** by John Riches. **JESUS AS TEACHER** by Pheme Perkins **JESUS AND THE FUTURE** by David Tiede. *Cambridge University Press. Hb £17.50, Pb £4.95 each volume.*

This set of crown octavo books, with the series title 'Understanding Jesus Today', has been edited (by Kee, Emeritus Professor of Boston University) and printed in the USA. Riches teaches in Glasgow University, and Perkins at Boston College; Tiede is president of Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. In English terms the books are written—and well written—at the level of prospective teachers in Colleges of Higher Education. Each book gives information about further reading and proposes questions for discussion. Riches has a very helpful historical table of significant dates, events, and writings. The aim of the series is to develop an understanding of Jesus, not as he may be perceived by modern theology or spirituality, but as he was perceived by people of his own time.

It would clearly be instructive not to pick and choose but to read all four books. I suggest beginning with Tiede who asks what Jesus intended should happen to his people in the future. He begins with the troubled times in Israel when Jesus was born and the failure (exploited by Greeks and Romans) of various groups of Jews to rally behind a unified vision of the future. Jesus, interpreting the prophetic heritage, announced that the future belonged not to the ritually pure but to the poor. The writings of the New Testament are confident that God had vindicated Jesus and the future he declared; and in particular the Book of Revelation used that faith to pose a challenge to the Roman order itself.

From that survey, the reader could then move on to the fuller discussion of Judaism by Riches (known also from his admirable book on Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism 1980). He shows how Zealots, Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes, while trying to remain true to their own traditions, were hoping to find ways of adjusting to changing circumstances. He then shows Jesus standing on the edge of this process, a prophetic figure whose vision of the

future was remarkably rich and attractive. His teaching and demonstration of the Kingdom of God clearly gave expression to the longings of his people for release from their trials, and may be seen as a contribution to the wider search for new cultural and social forms of life in a united Mediterranean world.

Professor Kee asks what we can learn from sources outside the New Testament (Jewish and Roman writings), from early Christian writings outside the Gospels (the rest of the New Testament and the apocryphal Gospels and Acts), from our oldest Gospel source (the sayings collection Q), from our oldest gospel (Mark), and from the other Gospels. Clearly he does not yield (nor do I) to those who now tempt scholars to abandon Q and renounce the priority of Mark. But if the intention is to display the range of contemporary opinion, readers ought perhaps to be warned that an earlier reliance on source criticism is now somewhat undermined by uncertainty about the sources and by an ever-debatable attempt to trace the editorial and social history of every episode and saying. What the author does say, however, about the sayings tradition, the achievement of Mark, and the variant perspectives of Matthew, Luke and John is lucid and good.

Thus instructed, the reader may come with heightened interest to Dr Perkins' book which begins with teaching and learning in antiquity: the philosopher-teachers of Greek city-states; the sages and wisdom teachers of hellenistic Judaism; the scribes, pharisees, and rabbis devoted to Torah; the prophets and visionaries. Jesus is classed as a charismatic teacher and prophet. His style of teaching is described (proverbs and parables, legal sayings and prophetic images) and its adaptation within the community is explored. Finally characteristic themes are set out: justice and solidarity, wealth, forgiveness, prayer, and love of enemies.

These four books provide much information set within a method of historical enquiry that is regarded by most competent authorities as essential for interpretation. Since the history is at least part of our own western heritage, it is not beyond our modern awareness to profit from.

KENNETH GRAYSTON

REDATING MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE: A FRESH ASSAULT ON THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM, BY John Wenham, *Hodder and Stoughton*, 1991, xxviii + 319 pp. £9.95.

John Wenham is perhaps best known for the lifeline provided to the despairing theology student by his excellent *Elements of NT Greek*. But his mastery of the sources and his frequent reference to little-known but important recent literature show that the synoptic problem is no new interest to him. The issue of redating is not the most central issue in the book, but rather a consequence of the author's views on the interconnection of the synoptic gospels. The author's thesis is founded on two piers: the conviction that the literary evidence shows the connection between the synoptic gospels to be oral rather than written, and the conviction that the external evidence of early Church writers about the