

torian, and the question is whether he has given us reliable history. That he has made an important contribution to the historical quest I do not doubt. But he leaves me with three reasons for disquiet.

Firstly, his decisions about the authenticity of sayings of Jesus appear to me arbitrary because they are not based on any firmly held theory of Synoptic relationships. For example, he argues that the 'scholastic debates' of Matthew's gospel come from the later Palestinian church, yet he prefers the Matthaean form of sayings to the Marcan and Lucan on the ground that they have Jewish parallels.

Secondly, if the Jewish Jesus was really the pietistic idealist of Vermes's portrait, I cannot see why anyone should have wanted to crucify him. Granted that he refused to be a military leader, it does not follow that he took no interest in politics. If he took God's sovereignty with utter serious-

ness, he must have been concerned with Israel's call to be God's holy nation; and the gospels represent him as clashing with the authorities on precisely that question, and as giving repeated warnings that the nation was set on a disaster course.

Thirdly, Paul was not only a Jew but a Pharisee. His evidence about first-century Judaism and about the beginnings of Christianity cannot be so lightly brushed aside. Samuel Sandmel is surely right in holding that the debate between Paul and the synagogue was a debate within Judaism. If Dr Vermes were to lay aside his hostility to Paul and to engage as a historian in a sympathetic quest of Paul the Jew, I am convinced he would be able to paint a fuller and truer portrait of the greater Jew to whom Paul gave his heart's allegiance, and of whose teaching Paul was the great expositor.

GEORGE B CAIRD

OLD TESTAMENT WISDOM: AN INTRODUCTION by James L Crenshaw, London 1982. SCM Press, pp 286 £5.95.

James Crenshaw of Vanderbilt University is one of the leading interpreters of ancient Israelite wisdom in modern English-language scholarship. This book is intended by him as an introductory textbook, and it fulfils that role excellently. The presentation is clear and the thought behind it profound. The material is expounded directly from the texts and discussion with other scholarly opinions is appropriately left to the notes. The simplicity of Crenshaw's statement does not conceal his enormous expertise in this field.

The book divides simply into ten sections. The introduction discusses the problem of defining what wisdom is. A first chapter describes the 'World of Wisdom', a 'different thought world', so different that its contents form an 'alien body within the Bible' (p 29). It is accepted that the 'wise' constituted a special professional class. A second chapter on 'the Sapiential Tradition' discusses why Solomon in particular was cast as the central personal figure in Wisdom. There follow chapters on Proverbs ('The Pursuit of Knowledge') on Job ('The Search for Divine Presence'), on

Ecclesiastes ('The Chasing after Meaning'), on Sirach ('The Quest for Survival'). The next is on 'The Widening Hunt', referring to Wisdom of Solomon and other documents; and then there follow chapters on 'The Legacy of Wisdom' and finally on Egyptian and Mesopotamian Wisdom, the value of which for the understanding of Old Testament Wisdom is fully underlined.

There are a few questions about detailed interpretations. *Mashal* 'proverb' can hardly mean 'powerful saying' (p 67) from the root 'to rule'. Can Job really stand for 'everyone' in ancient Israel (p 116)? Surely Qoheleth cannot really mean 'gatherer of women', even if Solomon was such a gatherer, and the Greek rendering as Ecclesiastes surely did not mean 'churchman' or 'ecclesiastical figure' (p 147). Is it really a redundancy, and totally against Hebrew syntax, if one says 'commit adultery with a woman' (pp 21-22)? It is striking and impressive if the sayings of Agur begin with the words 'I have no god' (Pr. 30:1; pp 203, 261n.), but the reader should perhaps be warned that this is a fairly adventurous philological interpretation.

There are also some minor errors of a typist or printer: the first name of O. S. Rankin was Oliver, not Orvid (p 11); the Maccabaeian revolt began in Modiin, not in Medina (p 159); *consensus* (p 113) should be *consensus*. The serious and solemn prose of Professor Crenshaw is occasionally broken by the bathos of what, at least to the British reader, seems like a colloquialism: the power of the tongue gets 'equal billing' with actual physical violence (p 90), Sirach's teaching was, we are told, 'more than an ego trip' (p 159), Tennyson is described as having been 'on target' (p 192) and Jung is said to 'touch base' (p 121).

These are, however, minor anomalies in a carefully thought out and well expressed text, which will very probably become the standard work for beginners in the subject. The inclusion of the books like Sirach and Wisdom is welcome, for the development as a whole cannot be fairly discerned if we confine ourselves to the 'canonical' books; and the inclusion of the Egyptian and Meso-

potamian material at the end, even if it is earlier in date, is also a sensible approach. Wisdom, according to Crenshaw, was never purely secular even in its earliest stages; from the beginning it was religious. Its religion, however, was widely different from that of the mainstream Old Testament books: Yahwism was, as the author understands it, quite alien from the sapiential approach – perhaps one of the assertions of the book that will provoke most dissent. The tales of Solomon's originality in Wisdom are late legends (p 53). Even if scholars disagree over certain particular assessments made by the author, his book is likely to be widely accepted as an excellent introduction, and it will continue to accentuate his reputation as an outstanding interpreter of the subject. Crenshaw truly thinks himself into the Wisdom mode of thinking; and his scholarly productivity is remarkable. Scholars everywhere will be pleased by this evidence of his continued energy.

JAMES BARR

Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the 'Church Dogmatics', by David Ford. Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 27, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 1981. pp 194. No price given.

If, as Lukacs said, the novel is 'the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God' (p 59), what kind of tale would serve as the epic of a world that we discover (perhaps to our surprise) *not* to have been thus abandoned? The simple answer might be: the Bible retold. As Karl Barth said to some of his students: 'If I understand what I am trying to do in the Church Dogmatics, it is to listen to what Scripture is saying and tell you what I hear' (p 11).

But what *kind* of 'telling' would this be: factual or fictional? I suspect that many English theologians would still agree with Harnack that there is no 'third way between basing one's faith on knowledge gained from investigation which aimed to discover the historical Jesus, and having a subjectivist faith which has no safeguard against an imaginary picture of Jesus' (p 21). Is that the end of the matter? Is there really no 'third way'? David Ford

quotes an American commentator on Solzhenitsyn: 'The historian and the novelist work on parallel lines which never meet, the former telling us what happened and the latter helping us to see it happen. In *August 1914* the lines converge' (p 68).

The heart of Dr Ford's sensitive, dense, complex and powerful account of what is going on in the *Church Dogmatics* is the ten pages of Chapter Four in which he argues that literary-critical techniques appropriate for the handling of the 'realistic novel' (Auerbach, especially, is standing just behind him) afford the best way of coming to grips with Barth's use of Scripture, and thus with the character and content of his entire theology.

There follow three chapters in which these techniques are put to use in the analysis of three main themes of the *Church Dogmatics*: the doctrines of election, crea-