

because the sources of recovery are eternal. As for the internal history of the churches, Dr White offers an analysis in terms of an oscillation between a theology which is pessimistic about human nature and concentrates on the atonement, and a rival theology which is optimistic about human nature and regards the incarnation as the critical event in Christian activity. Social and economic circumstances favoured the optimistic, liberal theology for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but as free-market capitalism threatens to destroy the planet the Augustinian tradition is becoming dominant once again.

This is a rather passive view of church history, one which has much truth in it, but also leaves the impression that with the aid of the occasional supernatural push the Church is bound to fall in the right place in the longer run. Himself more influenced by contemporary opinion than perhaps he realises, Dr White takes it for granted that what he has to do is to show that nineteenth-century Christians were somehow innocent, were not doing anything 'wrong', in the sense that Professor E.R. Norman, for example, thinks that they were 'wrong' to dabble in left-of-centre political opinions: instead, Victorian religious leaders were simply being 'Christian' in a social context over which they had little control and which inclined them to share the political judgements of those around them. If the sources of the 'great decline' are beyond Christian control then the Churches are not to be criticised. Such a conclusion is itself open to criticism. 'World Missions', for example, are discussed here chiefly in terms of Africa, not of China, where a passive view of 'Church History' is more difficult to sustain. And when Dr White devotes a chapter to the farcical internal conflicts of 19th-century Wesleyanism he pays too much attention to sociology: the root of the sickness was religious. But the idea of the Church whose errors are always passive, and whose virtues are always active, is one that the church historian will not easily abandon.

JOHN KENT

DYING WE LIVE: A NEW ENQUIRY INTO THE DEATH OF JESUS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT by Kenneth Grayston. *Darton, Longman & Todd*. 1990. Pp. viii + 496. £30.

This is a large book in every way, a text of 369 pages, four appendices, 59 pages of notes, plus the usual indices, though strangely lacking one of modern authors. Grayston introduces himself as neither a preacher nor a systematic theologian 'even if the language I use may sometimes suggest that I hope to be both.' Rather, the substance of the book serves as an exegetical enquiry where readers are invited 'to enter with understanding and imagination, into the thoughts of people whose view of the world was very different from ours.' If preachers and theologians draw out the consequences of Grayston's proposals, 'I think they should find themselves with room to move, liberated from the tight restraints of stock theories (which often now seem implausible or offensive). No

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longer under obligation to devise a theory of atonement that is but one part of a doctrinal formulation, they may be able to discover in the death of Christ a critical and interpretative principle for the whole of theology.'

These are strong claims, but one reviewer at least warms to Grayston's overall promise. But what are the proposals which are going to give such freedom? For these, one has to turn to the concluding chapter. 'He died and rose' indicates 'a double event, not separate events in sequence.' As he writes much earlier, 'It goes without saying that references to death and resurrection must be taken together.' This assertion then leads to the point that 'the primary question to ask about any N.T. statement of Christ's death and resurrection is not what theory of atonement it supports but how it affects the community.' The pre-Pauline understanding was largely eschatologically conditioned whereby, 'since we acknowledge our sins and Jesus who died for us is our protector, we shall be safe from the wrath and shall live with the risen Lord in the new age.' Paul did not depart from that scheme and those who are in Christ are part of a new creation. To counter excessive enthusiasms and imbalances brought about by such an exciting set of images, Paul 'found it necessary to bring the cross more explicitly into the centre of his pastoral instruction', to make the death of Christ 'a critical principle for assessing the formation of Christian conduct in relation to fellow-Christians and to the world.' Nevertheless, Paul continued to work at the Cross of Christ understood in itself 'as an action that in some way changed the prospects of Jews and Gentiles, as an action marked by God as definitive and binding.' Christ's blood is a means of atonement, understood by Grayston as 'an inducement for God to do for us what he may rightly do on our behalf.' The death of one is substituted for the many, though 'the beneficiary of this exchange is not God but Sin; and even Sin loses when Christ is raised from the dead.' Alternatively, God's action in Christ can be understood as that of a great king who by acting against his enemies who put his son to death relieves the plight of his people.

Apart from Paul, Grayston puts his trust in Mark and John who bring out the real profundity of Christ's death. Hebrews is given a half cheer. Other N.T. writings are not ignored, but their contribution is found primarily in their interpretation of the death of Christ in terms of its social implications for the situations of the early Christian communities. Grayston emphasises these in order to 'counter the impression that his death belongs chiefly to a transaction with God carried out on our behalf, that it is primarily a feature of atonement theology concerned with the removal of guilt.' Mark's gospel was concerned primarily to show that all the experiences of the community could and should be read within the context of the crucifixion of Jesus. John saw the death of Christ present when the community ate the flesh and drank the blood of the Son of Man. Yet it is almost absent from Jesus' relations with his disciples so that, for the Fourth Gospel, 'the prominence of Christ's death is somewhat qualified. 'Nevertheless, in that gospel, 'the death of Christ protects the

boundary between the community and the world.' Grayston acknowledges that 'of course Christ's death has to do with forgiveness.' The early church emphasised this because, first, they needed to demonstrate that they really were God's people and, second, because, in disclosing the seriousness of sin, the cross and resurrection of Christ enables the Christian to overcome its power. So Grayston concludes, 'All the stories essentially contain the death and resurrection of Jesus not only as the story of a unique person but as the story of us all: AS DYING AND BEHOLD WE LIVE.'

All in all, this is a grand exposition and one which will be pondered over, gratefully though not uncritically, by every student of the New Testament. There is always illumination in Grayston's method which is to take the documents in turn and to give careful exegetical attention to them in their entirety. The writers' thoughts are always set in context and passages of particular interest are discussed in the light of the writers' whole concerns. If this makes for complexity of treatment, it nevertheless does justice to them as a whole and clearly demonstrates the partiality, indeed the nonsense, of that selective, isolating approach which characterises so many treatments of the subject.

Nevertheless, gratitude of this reviewer at least is tempered by two reservations, one regarding method and the other concerning the actual conclusions. Whilst applauding the determination to set a writer's thinking about the cross in the context of his overall exposition of the Gospel as he understands and applies it, and allowing that this does make for a necessary all-embracing treatment, I wonder if the discussion is not just too diffuse, too un-focussed, and therefore is at times in danger of becoming too uncontrolled. The book obviously presents the fruits of a life-time's study, but Grayston is at times so concerned that nothing of that study be lost that the vital thread of the argument is in danger of being obscured. Discussion of the structure of Mark, for instance, demands either expansion or (better) contraction if the old hand is to be satisfied and the new student to be helped. Grayston does not always appear to avoid the danger of self-indulgence.

More seriously, I wonder whether his concern to avoid the partiality of many so-called theories of atonement means that he does less than justice to those places where the New Testament writers suggest something like an objective act at the Cross. Whilst allowing for the influence of Jewish martyrdom theology, Grayston never actually commits himself to its significance at Mark 10.45, and his discussion avoids any conclusions. He does not really draw out the significance of his understanding of Mark 14.24 as 'my blood required by the covenant that God made with me'. APOLYTROSIS in Romans 3.24 may not refer to any payment and may be rendered as 'liberation' to make the ransom metaphor 'nothing more than a dramatic way of indicating the demand made on Christ', but does this do justice to Grayston's own understanding of HILASTERION as 'God himself has made plain the one inducement he will accept from suppliants who appear before him, namely that trust in Christ Jesus

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