

Reviews

PAUL AND PALESTINIAN JUDAISM by E. P. Sanders. *SCM Press, London 1977,*
pp. xviii + 627. £15

To judge from the confusions of preachers and, more culpably, of scholars there exists no consensus about Paul's relationship with the world of his time. Was he a Palestinian Rabbi pure and simple, or were his views antithetical to the Judaism of his time? Both these positions have had their preachers in every university, and there is even a grey area between them. Considering that until the question is answered some of his thought is incomprehensible, one might have hoped that the scholarly world would have directed itself to its solution. The work of W. D. Davies, first published in 1948, was a gesture in this direction. Now, with the publication of the book under review, we have a treatment of the question which leaves little to be desired whatsoever, and which the publishers may well be right to call "the most important book on its subject to appear in a generation".

The fact that something has been awry with Pauline exegesis has largely escaped the German exegetes who have dominated the field, as well as the English scholars in peonage to them. To be sure, some Jewish scholars perceived the absurdity of the whole undertaking, and Dr. Schechter spoke out as early as 1909: "Either the theology of the Rabbis must be wrong, its conception of God debasing, its leading motives materialistic and coarse, and its teachers lacking in enthusiasm and spirituality, or the Apostle to the Gentiles is quite unintelligible". But warnings like this made no impression on the Bultmanns and Conzelmanns, and error perpetuated itself with monstrous results.

The simple fact is, if the truth be told, that the scholars of Germany, the only figures of any real importance in this area, had no sympathy with the Judaism of Paul's, and even less with that of their own

time. There is no evidence, for example, that Bultmann had independent access to Rabbinic literature. Laughable as it may appear to discuss a literature snatched violently from its context, this was what was happening for many years in New Testament scholarship, and there are still livings to be made out of it. How, refreshing, then, in Professor Sanders' book, to find a non-Jewish scholar who has immersed himself in Jewish learning, and made short work of the German commentators. Obligated to deal with such people as Bousset, Billerbeck, Schürer and Kittel, he declares them as "far as they deal with Rabbinic religion, completely untrustworthy. They cannot be corrected by new editions citing different views or by mitigating some of their harsher and more ill-founded remarks. They proceed from wrong premises, they misconstrue the material, and they are, like those Jews who cast off the yoke, beyond redemption" (p. 234). Dr. Sanders has produced a description in 400 pages of Palestinian Judaism which will be of lasting use to Jewish scholars, historians and Christian theologians, and which constrained him "to destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism which is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, New Testament scholarship" (p. xii). Correctly, he has ruthlessly excised all references to Jesus as the Messiah, so profoundly distasteful to some Jewish scholars, thus elevating the work from Christian theology to true scholarship.

Even the author himself appears to have had difficulty in summarising his book, although I would recommend the essay on pages 543-556 as a good attempt. As I have mentioned, the first 428 pages are a thorough treatment of all that we know of Palestinian Judaism from around 200 b. c. e. to around 200 c. e. After that

follow a hundred or so pages trying to fit Paul into this picture and finding (if I am not stealing the author's thunder) that Paul "presents an essentially different type of religiousness from any found in Palestinian Jewish literature" (p.543). On the journey Sanders has to cut a swathe through the obfuscations of the German scholars, sometimes with considerable polemic, but this has the advantage of enlivening the first 238 pages, where most of it is concentrated.

Some random comments on this admirable book. There are suspicious gaps in its treatment of books published after 1971. The new *Encyclopaedia Judaica* is not noticed, and the English translation of Urbach's monumental *The Sages of Blessed Memory* only creeps into the footnotes. The author, however, unlike most

New Testament scholars, was clearly able to make use of the original version in modern Hebrew. I attribute a headache to the cramped style of the English, more noticeable when the author quotes from other writers, whose more elegant style startles the concentration. The book is beautifully printed, and the very few misprints occur surprisingly not among the jargon of Hebrew scholarship but in the rump of the text. Every virtue of Jewish learning is to be found on these pages, save humour. Finally, one wonders who will be able to read the book. Undergraduates will be incapacitated by it, in company here with most of their teachers. But it is this fault, precisely, which the author is hoping to remedy.

RICHARD JUDD

JESUS THROUGH MANY EYES by Bishop Stephen Neill, Lutterworth Press, £4.25

The sub-title tells us that this is an "introduction to the theology of the New Testament". So our author asks himself very rightly: how does one write a New Testament theology? After a quick glance at previous endeavours, he suggests first a reference to the great centres of Christianity as they were about 50-60 A.D. these would be Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Alexandria and Rome. Even if we establish these the approach remains difficult, because we cannot at all easily attach New Testament texts to one or other centre. So writes our author. Yet there is reasonably good evidence for John in Ephesus, and Mark in Rome.

We fully agree with the statement that the New Testament 'canon' came to be in less than one brief century, at the end of which would be still living those who knew Our Lord, or knew of others who had seen and heard him. This seems to be forgotten by many scholars who have in mind a long slow development for the New Testament where it does not apply, as it does for the Old Testament.

A study of traditions is certainly legitimate and can prove useful. However in this book pride of place goes to the identification of five periods of *response to the message of Jesus*. Thus we get:

- 1 The earliest disciples,
- 2 Oral tradition, 29-49 A.D. with an expectation of the early return of Jesus.

- 3 The period of the epistles (49-69 A.D.) in which we are "in touch with living history".
- 4 Gospel writing: partly overlaps 3; a new stress on what Jesus did and said.
- 5 A final period covered Pastorals, 2 Peter, Jude, 80-100 A.D.

The author opts for a combination of this fivefold response together with a grouping of New Testament books. This is the most original part of this work. The earliest period draws much on Acts when the information can be checked and is summed up in resurrection, Spirit, reconciliation (p. 16). Then turn to the pauline grouping which represents a quarter of the New Testament. Once again the teaching of the pauline corpus can be summed up in resurrection, Spirit, and reconciliation (pp. 46,48,52). Next is set out the early gospel or Marcan grouping with which is put 1 Peter. We can note here that everyone agrees that we have lost the ending of Mark; our author goes even further and argues that we have lost the beginning of Mark as well (pp. 77-78). A Hebrew group or tradition brings together Matthew, James, Hebrews and Apocalypse. This is certainly a new way of envisaging these books which we, all too often, read singly and separately. A 'Gentile' grouping puts together Luke and Acts. No one would query this. A last grouping puts together 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter and Jude.