

to read it, given the fact (which Barr recognizes) that such alternative modes of reading the scriptures as this book represents are hardly likely to be well publicized in fundamentalist circles. One must also ask whether, in spite of Barr's attempt to communicate straightforwardly to his chosen audience, the discussion in this book may in parts be pitched too high and assume more familiarity with theological matters than is appropriate for its intended readership. Nevertheless, Barr here attempts to meet an important need and it is earnestly to be hoped that many will indeed read this book and find in it the stimulation and encouragement to explore alternatives to fundamentalism.

The book includes a list of suggestions for further reading, an index of names and subjects and an index of biblical passages.

PAUL JOYCE

JUDAISM IN THE BEGINNING OF CHRISTIANITY by Jacob Neusner, *SPCK*, London 1984. Pp. 112. £3.95.

Students of the New Testament are often (and quite properly) reminded that they will not understand Jesus or the emergence of Christianity until they have some grasp of Judaism. But where should they turn for guidance? Treatments of early Judaism tend either to be very technical, or to dissipate their value in polemical statements about Christian faith. Professor Neusner's introductory essay suffers from neither of these faults, and should be welcomed as a lucid and stimulating contribution.

The first chapter ('The World of Jesus' People') is a wonderfully clear treatment, which should give beginners a good grounding in what it was like to be a Jew in the first century. Teachers who use the volume will, however, wish to expand on certain points. Neusner points out that the generation which lived at the time of the Temple's destruction was not particularly sinful, despite the impression given by both the New Testament and rabbinic literature. That is a fair comment, but it leaves the student wondering why sin was ascribed to that generation. Neusner might have observed that 'sin' is sometimes used in our sources more as a theological justification of events than as a description of people's actions. Then, too, Herod is portrayed in a very positive light by Neusner, against the grain of Jewish and Christian evaluations of him. If Herod was able, why was he consistently charged with corruption? There is an answer to that question, but it should be spelled out. By the way, Neusner places Herod's death somewhat earlier than is conventional (p. 21), for reasons that he should have stated. A brief section on 'education' (23, 24) seems to combine the ordinary religious training of Jews with what more advanced study might have entailed; the result gives the impression that the generality of Jews were more scholarly than the evidence suggests. At points such as these, the book's brevity becomes a flaw. Perhaps for the same cause, 'Zealots' (pp. 26, 27) are treated as a distinct revolutionary group which existed at a period earlier than our sources suggest.

Chapter two deals with 'Sage, Priest, Messiah' as three sorts of holy men. Neusner treats them as three interacting 'ideal types' of piety. The language of 'ideal types', derived from Max Weber, is currently fashionable in the United States; they are taken to be formal patterns by which historians judge particular phenomena. The issues involved in such analysis are complex and Professor Neusner unfortunately does not explain his method at this point. The chapter on the Pharisees does, however, take account of the considerable difficulties of definition and description. In the end, it is rather inconclusive, but at least the ridiculously negative portrayal of the Pharisees by Christian scholars is roundly condemned. The fourth chapter deals with the literary and historical problems of rediscovering Hillel, the near contemporary of Jesus. Scholars will probably find this the most interesting part of the book, but I cannot imagine students being anything but perplexed. In the absence of any introduction to the literature of Judaism and the techniques used for studying it, this sudden foray into source and form criticism is far too demanding. The last chapter reverts to the normal

lucidity of the book in describing the impact of the temple's destruction on Jewish faith, and the consequent emergence of rabbinic Judaism proper.

The reservations I have expressed should not be taken as trenchant criticism. They are offered on the assumption the book will be used, not to recommend against reading it. There is room for improvement, and teachers will need to use the book carefully, but it is quite serviceable. My only serious complaint is that Neusner's advice for further reading at the close of the volume does not mention such works as those of John Bowker and Geza Vermes. Perhaps such omissions, and the flaws here mentioned, will be rectified in the future editions we shall no doubt see.

BRUCE CHILTON

MOTHERHOOD AND GOD, by Margaret Hebblethwaite. *Geoffrey Chapman*, London, 1984. £3.95.

If theology can be defined as articulate reflection on humankind's experience of God in faith, Margaret Hebblethwaite's account of her adventures in motherhood constitutes a significant contribution not only to contemporary spirituality but to theology itself. As the young mother of two lively sons and a vivacious daughter, the wife of an eminent Catholic journalist and theologian, an author and scholar in her own right, having read theology and philosophy at Oxford and spirituality at the Gregorian University in Rome, Hebblethwaite was particularly well qualified to undertake such a richly interdisciplinary exploration of contemporary Christian experience. Reminiscent of Rosemary Haughton's theologies of experience, *Motherhood and God*, is less scholarly in tone and more directly concrete, written less for academic theological readership than for a more general audience attuned to the language of everyday life. The first and larger part of the book consists of thirteen chapters illustrating aspects of motherhood and family life from the viewpoint first of a mother and then of the theological and spiritual writer. The emphasis is primarily on experiences themselves—of pregnancy, birth, and childrearing, with their inevitable delights, crises and trials—interspersed with short reflections on related scriptural and spiritual themes. Hebblethwaite's treatment of homecoming and homemaking is particularly noteworthy. The second, shorter part contains four chapters which tug out the theological and spiritual implications of those experiences in a more systematic fashion, but without sacrificing their rich human color. Specific applications are made in regard to prayer, especially the home retreat, and the sacraments of baptism, eucharist and reconciliation. The final chapters reconsider the theological enterprise itself and the recovery of what can here most appropriately and concretely be called *tradition*—“handing on the faith”.

Overall, *Motherhood and God* contributes most valuably to the contemporary effort to think out the human encounter with God in inclusive terms, ultimately centering on the most basic of all human relations, those of mothers and children. As a motif, the maternity of God is less new than neglected, as Hebblethwaite acknowledges. (A bibliography of relevant material for further reading would have made a very useful appendix.) What is new today are the political, social and ecclesiastical ramifications of inclusive theology for both women and men.

Some readers may be unnecessarily put off by Hebblethwaite's consistent use of feminine pronouns in referring to God. But the corrective here is finally no more odious than the problem it addresses, if initially more jarring. For all God-language is ultimately inadequate. Some is simply more so than the rest, especially when custom endows it with spurious and injurious sacrosanctity.

A more serious problem is her descent to a kind of nursery catechesis, which for all its charm weakens the force of her effort to refresh both experience and meaning. Several meditations on life in heaven, the beatific vision, guardian angels, the “souls of infants”, and qualities of the risen body seem to harken back to a conventional and simplistic vision of Christian beliefs future generations could well do without and are