nature of the material discussed and the technical character of the discussion. A detailed bibliography and an index enhance the value of this fine work.

F. García Martínez

Warren C. Trenchard, Ben Sira’s View of Women. A Literary Analysis (Brown Judaic Studies 18), Scholars Press, Chico, Cal. 1982, x and 341 pp., large paperback $15.75 (members $10.50).

Ben Sira’s view of women has received only passing treatment in commentaries, monographs and articles. The present volume fills this void by analyzing the text passages in Sirach’s book which deal with woman as good wife (ch. I), woman as mother and widow (ch. II), woman as bad wife (ch. III), woman as adulteress and prostitute (ch. IV), and woman as daughter (ch. V). By means of a careful exegesis of the relevant passages the author convincingly shows that Ben Sira does not merely reflect the low view of women that characterized his age, but that he was personally negative towards them. He is ‘often not content to let traditional material about women, whether positive or negative, stand unaltered in the text. When he edits such material, he does so in a negative direction. He deals with negative topics about women that are not contained in the biblical wisdom or other literature. He makes remarks about women that are among the most obscene and negative in ancient literature. He shows himself to be negative towards women, no matter what type of woman he discusses. That is particularly true of his treatment of the bad wife and climaxes in his consideration of the daughter.’ In order to limit the scope of his study, the author has chosen not to address questions like personal experiences which might explain Ben Sira’s negative bias, the implications of his view for his academic teaching, the influence he had on later Jewish and Christian writers etc. The study, however, provides a solid basis for broaching these and similar questions. More than 130 pages of notes attest to the thoroughness of the work which is concluded by an up-to-date bibliography on reference works, texts and versions, commentaries, and monographs and articles on Sirach. An index of subjects and one on Sirach passages help as reference guides to the many texts and passages discussed in the course of the study. A fine piece of work!

A. S. van der Woude

Geza Vermes, The Gospel of Jesus the Jew (Riddell Memorial Lectures 48), University of Newcastle upon Tyne 1981, viii and 64 pp., paper £2.— (copies may be purchased from the Registrar’s office, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 6 Kensington Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU).
This booklet contains the annotated text of three lectures delivered by the author in March 1981: a. A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels; b. The Father and the Kingdom; c. Jesus and Christianity. The author deals with a multitude of problems; we cannot pass them all in review here. One of his basic assumptions is ‘that if we accept that the intention of the evangelists was, to some extent at least, to recount history, and if it seems reasonable to assume that the resurrection and parousia material is attributable to the doctrinal and apologetic needs of the early church, our understanding of Jesus must derive basically from an analysis of the synoptic data relating to his actual ministry and teaching that are unaffected by accretions deriving from the creative imagination of nascent Christianity.’ In the author’s opinion ‘Jesus’ religious deed was done in accordance with Jewish Law and laws, but was invested with an added dimension of effectiveness and power through his genial perception of the Law’s inmost significance.’ He states that ‘Jesus’ ministry suffered a radical transformation once Paul was acknowledged ‘apostle to the Gentiles’ and a specifically Gentile mission sanctioned by the church leadership came into being.’ At the time, the Torah, ‘the source of Jesus’ inspiration and the discipline ruling his religious life,’ was revoked and superseded. The simple Jewish person of the Gospels gave way to the rich and majestic figure of the church’s Christ!

I regret to say that the author’s arguments have conveyed little conviction to me. His methodological approach to the gospels runs counter to present-day New Testament research. The post-Pauline gospels cannot but be read in the ecclesiastical context of first century Christianity. The author is too confident that he is able to find a historical basis for the description of the ‘real Jesus’ just by eliminating elements ‘attributable to the doctrinal and apologetic needs of the early church’. His selection of facts about Jesus seems to be largely dependent on preconceived ideas of what Jesus the Jew could have been. Take for instance his thesis that Jesus’ Jewishness sometimes amounted to downright chauvinism by calling the non-Jews dogs and swines. Can anybody be sure that we have to do in Matthew 7:6 with authentic words of Jesus? VERMES answers this question in the affirmative but he cannot prove that he is right. He underlines how Paul transformed Jesus’ ministry, reminding us of the obsolete views of liberal Protestantism. But he does not explain satisfactorily how Jesus could become (at least ten years after his death) the messiah of the Pauline church, if this Galilean hasid was essentially just a Pharisaic Jew. Even our knowledge of Jesus’ geographical and spiritual environment is not of a great help as long as we have not been able to decide whether Jesus shared the ideas (e.g. regarding Jewish Law) of his time or not. VERMES fails to give a satisfying historical explanation of the rise of Christianity.