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Book Notes

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Book Notes

WILLIAM R. FARMER. *The Synoptic Problem*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1964. 308 pp., \$10.00.

Although the subtitle promises a critical analysis, Professor Farmer devotes the bulk of his space to a history of scholarship on the synoptic question. The book is noteworthy, therefore, as a challenge to the establishment (which maintains the priority of Mark and assumes document "Q" to explain correlations of Matthew and Luke) rather than as a work which proves its point. The latter, as a matter of record, was not really intended (pp. xi, 233), whether from discretion or simply lack of evidence. Be that as it may, the heart of the book is Chapter VI, which emerges as an oasis of concise persuasiveness. Clear verbal interrelationships of Matthew, Mark, and Luke rule out all possible sequences but six, setting aside hypothetical sources (a decision that relegates Matthew's *logia* of Jesus—noted by Papias—to this category). After this point Farmer is best on reasons that establish the priority of Matthew to Luke: e.g., Matthew's Jewishness as most primitive, Luke's intention in his preface to revise the existing "narrative," and "the unanimous testimony of the Church Fathers that Matthew was written before the other canonical Gospels" (p. 224). It is hard to see why these same reasons do not compel Farmer to add Mark after Matthew in sequence before Luke, but his cause is defending the theory of Mark as the redactor of Matthew and Luke.

While Farmer is considered perverse in such analysis by many with standard synoptic convictions, he adds another great dissent, claiming a "widespread" mandate of colleagues "to have the Synoptic Problem reopened" (p. xi). That his methods have injected greater certainty into the question is not likely, in view of the thin presentation of his own thesis, combined with admission of ambiguous phenomena (p. 219), intrinsic "unresolved questions" (p. 253), and realization that statistical patterns cannot be wholly expected from spontaneous authors (p. 217). Farmer's contention that alternative explanations are possible to the usual synoptic analysis is also true of his own solution. In the long run the work may stand as evidence of

the inconclusiveness of the literary analysis which it emphasizes and foreshadow a return to the historical techniques which it adopts to establish the chronological priority of Matthew to Luke.

DONALD GUTHRIE. *New Testament Introduction: The Gospels and Acts*. Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1965. 380 pages, \$5.95.

The final volume of Guthrie's trilogy reviewing the entire New Testament is welcomed by many who have come to appreciate the British professor's wide grasp of secondary literature and gift for lucid expression. An "introduction" to the New Testament may be a technical work for the specialist or a survey of the field. Guthrie fits the latter category, but his lack of superficiality dictates review. It is characteristic of this age of literary saturation that the author has adopted the bibliographical approach to his subject of treating issues in terms of modern proponents of various theories. Consequently, a treatment of a New Testament book in Guthrie reads like a well-written law case, citing, criticizing, and distinguishing its authorities. This can result in the false impression that answers are to be found through books about the New Testament instead of through the primary evidence of the New Testament and the early Christian period. On the other hand, this approach is particularly helpful in dispelling any illusions which persist concerning a supposed consensus of New Testament experts.

While generally conservative in his own conclusions, Guthrie is unerringly fair to all points of view, and faithfully records strengths and weaknesses of every position, including his own. His methods are characterized by a suspicion of *a priori* assumptions, a cautious respect for ancient testimony (see pp. 195-6) as superior to inconclusive literary analysis, and a disdain of the probative value of recurrent arguments from silence. He is candid enough to label theories as such on the basis of evidence and in the face of professional popularity. All this is not to argue perfection for the author. This final volume is too quick to identify Matthew's *logia* with the present Gospel. Goodspeed's *Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist* (1959), contending that Matthew is certainly the Gospel's author, is not discussed, and failure to mention the most cogent of his arguments is a glaring omission. One would also expect to find in a competent introduction the citations to actual evidence on the Theophilus question rather than footnoting of merely secondary discussions. But on the whole, Guthrie is a competent, up-to-date, and reasonably comprehensive analyst of the authorship and background of New Testament literature.