

ent to past, but the structure of his presentations is apparently determined by the primacy of the future, which is nowhere fully established.

Although this volume makes no pretensions of approximating a definitive work, it reveals the major themes in Pannenberg's thought and is a useful steppingstone to the discussion focusing on the future, which Pannenberg, along with Moltmann, has done so much to advance. While critical comparison of the two on the part of English readers awaits the futher translation of their works, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* indicates that there are themes common to both, such as the challenge to Kantian concepts of reality and history, the recasting of theological categories in light of the eschaton, and an emphasis on the social obligations of the Church. The latter stands in contrast with the individualism with which the thought of Rudolf Bultmann may be charged by the use it makes of corporate categories. While not echoing the optimism of the social gospel, future-oriented theology is an important summons to the Church to fulfill a paradoxical task—the affirmation of a world destined in some sense to pass away. This volume is a provocative introduction to the stimulating possibilities such a position suggests.

Riverside, California

RICHARD RICE

Slusser, Dorothy M., and Gerald H. Slusser, *The Jesus of Mark's Gospel*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967. 157 pp.
\$ 2.25.

This small paperback commentary, the product of a husband-and-wife writing team, deserts the usual format of its genre. The conventional approach of introduction and verse-by-verse exegesis is eschewed; instead the authors sweep through whole sections of Mk at a time, concentrating singlemindedly on exposing the contribution of each section to the theology of the evangelist. They firmly lay to rest the notion that Mark (who is identified without elaboration as Peter's secretary) was a sloppy, semiliterate editor who put together "a mere patchwork of reminiscences" (p. 11). They cite approvingly the growing appreciation of Mark's creativity found in the treatments of Austin Ferrar, R. H. Lightfoot, John Bowman, *et al.*, and add their own emphatic judgment that "Mark's work . . . was a carefully engineered piece of literary art done by a man of great skill with an extraordinary knowledge of the Old Testament and its subtleties" (p. 12). This literary and exegetical craft was used by the evangelist to express his understanding of the meaning of the life of Jesus. Yet, though the Gospel presents the story of the life and death of Jesus, "it is no less the story of the death of the orthodox Judaism of that day" (p. 13), replete with references, both explicit and veiled in symbolism, to the crescendoing tension between Jesus and the professional exponents of the Jewish faith. Indeed, it is the Slussers' thesis that the chief purpose of Mark's Gospel was to show the dissolution of the

orthodox Judaism of Jesus' day and the emergence of the new Israel in light of the mission of Jesus.

This thesis contains a measure of validity insofar as it expresses a general truth about *one* feature of the Gospel material; all of the Gospels, Mk included, testify to the tension existing between Jesus and Judaism, between the old order and the new. This is hardly a novel insight. What *is* novel about the Slussers' interpretation (and herein lies both the originality and the vulnerability of their enterprise) is the central role which they assign to the Markan treatment of this tension as the controlling influence on the structure and content of the Gospel.

After stating their thesis, the Slussers proceed to marshal evidence from Mk in its support. Exorcisms, healing stories, and other incidents in the Markan account are examined and found to be symbolic representations of the collision of Jesus with Judaism, the collapse of the old Israel, and the emergence of the new Israel. Throughout the highly evocative and symbolic fabric of his material, Mark, the authors contend, has ingeniously woven numerous references (usually implicit rather than explicit) to the OT which give design and shape to the finished product.

Basic to the study is the premise "that Mark used historical events as symbols whose meaning is not dependent upon the fact that they happened" (p. 12). It is apparent from their subsequent elaboration that what the authors mean by this is not that Mark was wholly indifferent with regard to the historical roots of his material (though they do not exclude the possibility that he may have consciously invented some of the incidents he narrates to supplement the material which he found in the tradition in order to serve his theological intentions). Rather, the authors are suggesting that since Mark used his material not to narrate "facts" for their own sake, but to provide his readers with an interpretation of the tradition, the interpreter of Mark's Gospel may discover its meaning without needlessly entangling himself in the issue of its historicity.

The general principle enunciated here is respectable enough (though we might be somewhat more equivocal than the Slussers have been in speaking of Mark's use of events as "symbols"). However, implementing even an impeccable principle can be tricky, especially where exegesis is involved, and particularly where theological exegesis of the Gospels is involved. To say that the Gospel writers wrote testaments of faith rather than chronicles of fact is to lead exegesis out of the blind alleys and dead-end streets of a discredited historiographical approach to the Gospels. But once out of that hopeless labyrinth, exegesis finds itself in a limitless expanse with few clearly-marked roads and fewer maps. Once the point is conceded (and it must be) that there is a large area of meaning beyond the recitation of "facts" in the Gospels, the exegete must explore that theological territory. The rub is that the boundary between interpretation which is trenchant and that which is merely bizarre is not always clear.

This fact should not immobilize the exegete, but it should function as a restraint to keep him from "finding" more than the Gospel writers intended!

As one reads the Slussers' commentary, one cannot shake off easily the impression that the authors have "found" too much in substantiation of their thesis. An example of this may be seen in their interpretation of Jesus' baptism. In their exegesis, the obvious Christological significance of the Markan story withers away. The authors conclude that, for Mark, Jesus is a symbol of Israel; it is Israel which is baptized. This remarkable conclusion is reached after the authors assert that Mark has the Septuagint of Is 42: 1 in mind when he reports the voice from heaven declaring the divine approval of Jesus as the "beloved Son" (Mk 1: 11). Since the Septuagint in the Isaiah passage speaks of "my Son," "Jacob," "Israel," and "my elect" (interchangeable titles all referring to Israel) as the object of divine approval, it is contended that Mark must have intended that Jesus, likewise designated as "Son," be regarded in the baptism account as a symbol of Israel. Thus, the Slussers would have Mark say to his readers "that Jesus was not merely a preacher from Nazareth, or even a promised Messiah come to deliver God's people—he was himself Israel, and his baptism was the symbol of the passing away of the old Israel!" (p. 26).

Such exegesis is as tendentious as it is agile and ingenious. Unfortunately, the foregoing is not an isolated instance of dubious interpretation in the book under review; examples abound. This is not to say that the Slussers' treatment of Mk is without merit. In fact, it offers suggestive exegetical analysis at many points, though even in such places the wheat is not always free of tares. For instance, it may be possible to see, as the authors have (pp. 36 ff.), some symbolic meaning in the fact that the exorcism reported in Mk 1: 21 ff. takes place in a synagogue. But the subsequent argument (worked out at considerable length, but to no great effect) that Mark intentionally modeled the story after the account of the revolt of Korah, Dathan and Abiram in Num 16, is far-fetched. The recurrence of this sort of unconvincing interpretation throughout the study places a heavy tax upon its credibility.

The fact of the birth and vigorous growth of the Christian movement, with Jesus as the focus of its faith, was already a matter of history when Mark wrote his Gospel. The independence of the Church from institutional Judaism was likewise a *fait accompli*. Undoubtedly, the evangelist, along with his Christian fellows, believed that the Church was the new Israel, and that the Jewish nation had ceased to be God's true covenant people. Moreover, it is made plain enough in the parable of the vineyard in Mk 12 (as the Slussers have correctly noted) that Mark closely connected the life and death of Jesus with the break-up of literal Israel's covenant relationship with God and the appearance of new, spiritual Israel. But the Slussers have erred in exaggerating the extent to which the Gospel of Mk has been molded by this particular connection of ideas in the mind of its author.

Two notable formal deficiencies of the book under review are the lack of a bibliography and the absence of any indexes (subject and scriptural indexes would have been useful). A further weakness is the lamentable paucity of notes, a circumstance which at least provides a measure of the book's independence!

A brief appendix treating the long, spurious ending of Mk (16: 9-20) concludes the work. In the appendix, the Slussers note a parallel between the spiritual tone of Is 11 and the genuine ending of Mk. They suggest that "some discerning spirit" added the spurious ending to the Gospel because the variant ending likewise was similar in tone to Is 11 (especially vs. 6-9).

Whatever its deficiencies, this little book at least serves to remind us again of what so much recent Gospel research has been insisting: that the writers of the Gospels were much more than witless editors who merely assembled the Gospel material without shaping it. In fact, the evangelists were men of faith who unabashedly permitted their convictions to control their work and contribute to the form and substance of the tradition they handled. It is possible to speak, as the Slussers have, of Mark's "understanding of Jesus" (p. 12), as a distinctly Markan entity. Each of the Gospel writers has left his own ideological signature on the tradition. Sometimes the influence of the evangelist's point of view on his material is conspicuous; as often, it is barely discernible, almost subliminal. It is the latter quality of the Gospels as much as the former which so tantalizingly has drawn scholars into the always adventuresome—but sometimes risky—business of Gospel interpretation. The Slussers' genuine insights and daring departures evoke the sense of adventure; their interpretative excesses expose the risks.

Andrews University

LAWRENCE ELDRIDGE

Smith, John E., *Experience and God*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968. viii + 209 pp. \$ 4.75.

This book is a persuasive argument for putting the concept of experience at the center of philosophical discussions concerning the meaning of "God." Claims to religious truth within the context of an understanding of man as religious will become irrelevant to man as a living and thinking human being. We must examine experience to see if there are "signs" of a divine reality present within it. We must take reality as it is presented to us within human experience and by reflecting upon it, assisted in this task by the traditions available to us, come to understand its significance as medium of the reality of God.

The question concerning God is the question concerning the meaning of human life as a whole. There are certain "occasions" when this question presses itself upon man, where life is not ordinary but where the question about and concern for the ground and goal of human