

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.

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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

existence come to be raised. That the question is raised is a universal phenomenon. This proposition is the basis for the argument for the essential rationality of the concept of God.

Smith holds that the process by which the move is made from the apprehension of the "sacred," given in the concerned questioning about the meaning of human existence as a whole, to the conviction of the reality of the religious object is not by a process of deductive argument. The Anselmian conception of reason is proposed as an alternative to such rationalism. Within human experience one finds the "signs" of the presence of God. The task of reason is to read these signs, not by a process of inference coming to the conclusion of a reality hitherto unknown, but by reflection upon a reality present but not understood, perhaps indeed unrecognized. The logical process is one not of demonstration but of *interpretation*.

The arguments for the existence of God (so-called) are not to be seen as syllogistic processes wherein one makes the move from a reality other than God in a deductive process to the necessary existence of a reality not yet known. They represent processes of interpretation through which certain data given in experience come to be understood. The making intelligible of experience must be given an essential role in *determining* commitment to the reality of the divine presence (p. 155). "The intelligible development of experience makes an indispensable contribution, and . . . *the very intelligibility itself* is a factor, and indeed the most important factor, in bringing the self to accept and commit itself to the reality of the divine presence." The appeal to experience, as sign, via appropriate processes of understanding is thus essentially rational, and is proposed by Smith as an alternative to different forms of irrationalism (*e.g.*, that of Kierkegaard and Barth).

The appeal to experience has a further aspect. We have seen that the interpretative means for the understanding of the signs of the presence of God are provided by traditions known and preserved within specific communities. Since he has proposed a generic concept of religion, he must show this concept to be applicable to different particular religious traditions. Smith proposes a theory of a common "experiential structure" of the great religions in terms of the schema of "ideal," "need," and "deliverer." The basic concept is that of "need." The way in which the obstacle which stands in the way of fulfillment is conceived has its counterpart in the particular kind of deliverer proposed. Although the great religious communities define the problem differently, and thus the ideal and remedy in different ways, there is still a basis of comparison in the similar structure of experience involved. The different religions represent varying responses to the same problematical situation: The situation which the book had earlier analyzed in terms of question and concern about the ground and goal of human existence.

We have found Smith's suggestion of an alternative between the "absolute distinction between immediacy and mediation, or between immediate experience and inference" (p. 52), to be a most helpful one.

The category of *interpreted experience* recognizes both elements of immediacy and rational mediation of the reality of God as essential. Experience of God is rational since mediated through structures of interpretation.

What Smith has shown is that a rigorous philosophical treatment, which cannot be required to answer all the theological questions involved, may employ the concept of God with vigor and with decision. It is refreshing when so much undisciplined and uncritical language is spoken about God, or his death, about experience and the self, that a book of such caliber as this offers an alternative way of opening up the question on fundamental lines of empirical grounding for religious commitment. It is the presuppositions that must be re-examined, the question of the burden of proof driving us beyond explanation and attempted theoretical justification to the issue of experienced and experienceable. The book taken as a whole presses the question: Taking the full range of human experience into consideration, does such experience and such consideration not provide for meaningful symbols for the understanding of "God" and of propositions concerning God, whether there is not a piece, a quality, a dimension of our human experience which may be the legitimate occasion for "God-talk" ? Smith's book is an invitation to take a second look, to see whether empiricism cannot be rescued from narrowness, experience from subjectivity, and reason from rationalism.

Because of the empirical grounding of faith and the rationality of the media of experience, faith is capable of an explicit philosophical definition, which can be further determined within specific religious communities. The self, in the midst of the world which impinges upon it, finds itself existing in different dimensions, (*e.g.*, the moral and the aesthetic) and one of these is the religious. Here the matter rests within the realm of assertion. Further definition of the tricky conception of the self seems called for, especially since so much of the argument rests upon it.

A most important issue which the book raises is as to where the burden of proof lies. To a restrictive, logical empiricism which would rule out "God-talk" Smith says: "Show me your credentials. The burden of proof lies with you." But he knows that this is also what the opposite side has been saying. His answer is that an adequate looking at experience will give the lie to such restrictiveness. Since this is the case, the job of the philosopher is to point the way, to point to what is assumed. One cannot go beyond experience; the question concerns its definition. The way to get such a definition is to take into account all the "experiencing" delivers and when the definition is proposed it is an "end-of-the-line" appeal.