

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.