

# Reviews

**THE JOHANNINE CIRCLE**, by Oscar Cullmann. *SCM Press, London, 1976.* xii + 124 pp. £3.50

This book is written with beautiful lucidity, a quality it owes not only to its distinguished author but also, doubtless, to John Bowden, its translator. The argument moves gently and unhurriedly, step by step, laying out assumptions and conclusions fully, so that the reader can weigh them fairly and see exactly what he is being led to accept. Just as a piece of work, then, this is in itself an education in the ways of good New Testament scholarship.

But what of its contribution to the study of John? Anyone unacquainted with recent (and indeed not so recent) scholarship on the subject will find here an easily assimilable and judicious introduction. It is fair, perceptive, and, on the whole, comprehensive, without falling into tangled complexity.

Like much modern study of the Gospels, this book focuses on the setting in early Christianity, and more widely, which produced this writing. What sort of Christians were they? How typical of the Church in general? And what had been their formation in their pre-Christian days?

Many of Cullmann's answers to these questions would be generally accepted or at least reckoned as strong candidates. The background lies in the heterodox Judaism of the first century, with its opposition to the Temple, its emphasis on its own rites,

and its speculative tendencies in theology. John the Baptist was from such a background, and the Gospel reflects a meshing of the Johannine Christians with his followers which meant both similarity and distinction. So were the Samaritans, and the same kind of relationship is discernible with them.

Starting from this basis, the writer saw the Jesus of history and the developed guidance of Jesus to his followers in the writer's own time within a single perspective. He fuses together the past events of Jesus' life and death and their continued influence in the present.

All this is well said and impressively argued. Less well grounded is the connection seen between the Christianity of the Johannine circle and the Hellenists who appear in the early chapters (mainly) of Acts. Cullmann has presented this case before. It depends on decisions about the evidence of Acts which cannot be taken easily. Similarly, his theses that the writer of the Fourth Gospel (represented by 'the beloved disciple') was himself a disciple of Jesus in his lifetime, a man formed in heterodox Judaism, somewhat off the main track occupied by the Twelve, and that Jesus himself taught in this man's idiom as well as in that expressed in the Synoptic Gospels, hover some way above the ground, well argued though they are.

J.L. HOULDEN

**MAKING THE MOST OF THE MISSAL**, by John Ainslie. *Chapman. 1976. 110 pp.* £1.80.

John Ainslie's introduction to the new Missal is heartily welcome. As he says, "the liturgical renewal has hardly started", because few people, especially clergy, have really studied the new books to see just what they actually contain in the way of texts and practical directives and suggestions. In principle, there is a wealth

of liturgy there, waiting to be activated. Ainslie's book is intended as a practical introduction to such study and use of the Missal, especially the ICEL Missal. One may disagree with some of his views and it is unfortunate that, in his chapter on translation, he commits himself to a veritable howler of a mistranslation (p.27 - *in*