

REVIEWS

THE PROBLEM OF JESUS. By Jean Guitton. Translated by A. Gordon Smith. (New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons; \$3.75. London: Burns Oates; 21s.)

This work is an abridgment, made by the author, of a French original published in 1953. It presents itself as 'a free-thinker's diary', but almost its only resemblance to a diary is a soliloquizing tone. For the rest, it is a straightforward, well-knit argument. It contains indeed a good deal of free thought, but not in the sense that its conclusions are unorthodox. It has, incidentally, an *imprimatur*. The free thinking here is two-fold. There is the author's fiction, very well maintained, that he is not a believer but simply an honest enquirer whose only predisposition to Christianity is the moral one implied by such honesty of purpose. And behind this fiction there is a Catholic mind using, I would say, another kind of freedom which consists in letting the intellect speculate without hindrance on the meaning of the New Testament data, as these have been interpreted by the Church, whether definitely, in the manner of dogma, or provisionally in the manner of theological opinion. This is a speculation *within* the faith, and in one sense, of course, 'within' must signify a restriction; but in another sense it connotes a wider sphere of activity than would be open to the sceptic or the heretic: in the sense that the particular data of New Testament narrative or doctrine can now be correlated within the general system of Christian thought. For, since this system is the conceptual articulation of the faith in an incarnational union of the finite with the infinite, it compels the mind which accepts that faith to reconsider its concepts in a new light, in the perspective of new possibilities of meaning. In this sense theology liberates the mind; and in M. Guitton's book (though it is certainly not formal theology, but a very personal essay in apologetics) one can see that exhilarating process at work; and particularly in respect of the two concepts of 'history' and 'body', and more especially of 'body'. M. Guitton's intense concern with the Resurrection, not only as an event but also as a sign, a manifestation, leads to an analysis of the notion of 'body' which I find extremely suggestive, though it hardly pretends to be more than provisional.

This analysis is presented explicitly as a sample of Christian philosophizing, as the following passage shows: 'Just as speculation on the Trinity has deepened our knowledge of the human soul, as speculation on the Eucharist has taught us the meaning of substance . . . on Grace the meaning of freedom . . . on the Blessed Virgin a knowledge of

womanhood . . . so reflection on “resurrection” (or on “assumption”, which is a preparation for it) will teach us perhaps the nature of a (human) body.

But primarily M. Guitton’s work is an essay in apologetics, presented as a ‘free-thinker’s’ approach to belief in the divinity and resurrection of Christ. Naturally, the approach is through the New Testament, and here M. Guitton knows his way extremely well. He has genuine learning and also—what many scholars lack—a supple and searching intelligence. In fact he is a philosopher, but one whose special interest is in actual experience and the data of history. With this goes a great aptitude for sympathetic understanding of dramatic situations, in this case of the shock and wonder felt by those blessed people who encountered the risen Christ. M. Guitton’s reasoning, supple, sophisticated and close-knit as it is, never strikes one as academic in a bad sense, as spiritually remote from the real issue. One does not often meet a mind at once so sophisticated and so religious.

His argument can hardly be summarized here, but its general plan may be indicated and one or two criticisms proposed. The book is in three parts. Part I sketches and criticizes two possible and opposed approaches to the ‘Christian testimony’ from the unbeliever’s point of view. Perhaps the abridgment of the French text has been overdone here: the argument seems excessively involved, and at times even confused. Part II begins with reasons for taking the theme of Divinity before that of Resurrection, and continues with a brief but brilliant analysis, first of the synoptic *logia* in which Jesus speaks of himself, and then of the developments in St Paul and St John. M. Guitton’s main idea here is that of a ‘virtual’ revelation of the divinity of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. With Part III, on the Resurrection, the book reaches a sort of climax, because here, as I have suggested, the author’s deepest and most original thought is found. His attention alternates between the *fact* and the *idea* of the Resurrection, scrutinizing each theme from different points of view, turning each over and over again with a kind of alert patience which, one must admit, is rather exhausting as well as exhilarating. But the reader’s efforts will be well rewarded, and particularly, I suggest, in two ways. (1) A chief difficulty, for M. Guitton’s free-thinker, in accepting the New Testament witness to the Resurrection is the ‘increasing tendency to historicize’ (i.e. to add concrete detail) discernible in the later accounts of St Luke and St John. This difficulty is honestly faced, and the conclusion established that ‘the Resurrection . . . was a statement of fact before becoming a narrative, a dogma of faith before a narrative supporting faith. Hence so many gaps in the surviving accounts.’ (2) But it is with regard to the ‘strangeness’ of the risen Christ’s appearance to the dis-

ciples (his not being at once recognized on three of the stated occasions, his passing through closed doors and vanishing, etc.) that M. Guittou has his most interesting and, seemingly, perhaps audacious things to say. These I shall not attempt to summarize here, for fear of misrepresenting an admittedly tentative but profoundly suggestive approach to the mystery of the glorified Body.

Touching St Paul's vision on the road to Damascus, M. Guittou seems to contradict on page 191 what he had said on page 183. This is the chief flaw I notice in his argument. Elsewhere too statements are left unsupported by sufficient evidence; but this may be due to abridgment. There are some misprints, and one bad one (p. 66).

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HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE MIDDLE AGES. By Etienne Gilson. (Sheed and Ward; 42s.)

THE PHILOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY. By Fernand Van Steenberghe. (Nelson; 15s.)

M. Gilson's latest book is in part a translation of *La Philosophie au Moyen Age* (1944), but this scarcely lessens its value, since the new material that it contains is both abundant and of high quality. Those who already know the 1944 volume may be interested in a brief comparison. Omitted from the new work, or abridged, are three sections of chapter II of the former work, and one section of chapter III; all concerned with the cultural background of medieval thought. At the end of the book the omission of sections on the 'retour des lettres' in Italy and France leaves a wider gap than before between scholasticism and the Renaissance, despite a new and brilliant section on Nicholas of Cusa. Part of the old chapter on St Thomas is reproduced, but with important additions. Siger of Brabant gets a fuller treatment than before, especially touching his positive metaphysical positions. Here the new book seems to benefit by coming after *L'Etre et l'Essence* (1948), rather as the section on St Thomas presupposes much of the work that went into the later editions of *Le Thomisme* (5th ed., 1948). In general the new work has less than the old about the cultural setting of medieval ideas, but seems correspondingly more close-knit and clear as a series of analyses of those ideas.

But the most obviously useful addition is a great block of Notes (250 pages in double column) at the end of the volume, comprising, besides extensive bibliographies, many further analytical summaries and second thoughts set out with the lucid and searching thoroughness for which M. Gilson is justly famous. The notes on Siger of Brabant and the question of the 'double truth' seem particularly interesting.

History is concerned with past time and metaphysics with principles