

What is the value of this book? Very different, I think, according as the reader is a believer or an agnostic. True enough, both will find an accurate, neat account of the doctrine of *privatio boni debiti* for Abbé Journet shows clearly how the notion of 'privation' maintains a razor-edged position between opposing viewpoints, between those who would err by denying importance and reality to evil and those who would err by considering it as having positive metaphysical being. The traditional view is exceptionally well set out and this is the chief value of the book for every serious reader. But, for the believer, there is much more than this, for the author writes as a theologian and so relates evil to the doctrines of creation, the angels, the fall, redemption, the last things, and so on. However, the agnostic will hardly fare so well for this book is a theologian's work, written for theology students or at least for believers. True enough, there is an impressive account of various trends in European philosophy and their relationship to the Thomist theology of evil. References are frequent to such names as Plato, Plotinus, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and many other continental philosophers but I do not think that it is mere British insularity to find it rather odd that the index contains no mention of that very cogent objector, precisely on the topic of God and evil, David Hume. Of course, as is pointed out in the first words of the foreword, the book is written from a theological viewpoint. As such, it succeeds very well but it remains one for the converted. It would be worse than churlish to complain that it does not happen to be the particular sort of book that we in Britain stand in need of at the moment. We cannot blame the author for not writing a book he never intended to write. But the absence of Hume's name is symbolic; it serves to remind us that, as long as we rely so heavily on translations of continental works, just so long Catholics will remain intellectually juvenile in the eyes of the general academic public of Britain. Perhaps the best success that this translation from the French could achieve would be to inspire one of our own growing number of scholars, trained in speculative theology and analytic philosophy, to produce a book more directly beamed at the thought patterns of our Anglo-Saxon contemporaries, more easily adaptable as a basis for discussion with them.

JOHN SYMON

THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL, by Aidan Pickering; Darton, Longman and Todd, 25s.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?, by J. M. Paupert; THE SOURCES FOR THE LIFE OF CHRIST, by François Amiot and others; Faith and Fact Books; Burns and Oates; 8s. 6d. each.

Here are three books to remind us that the Gospel is ever new and to help us to know and savour it even more. *The Glorious Gospel* is best assessed in terms of what it sets out to be, namely, a more complete set of Teachers' Notes to

*Your Life of Our Lord* by the same author (p. xiii). Very rightly there is an insistence on reading the text first, and the appropriate references are given at the head of each section. Characteristics of each gospel are simply but well set out in a chapter entitled 'The Gospel Makers', and in general we are given a refreshing and original introduction to the reading and understanding of the gospels. Yet there is a curious fusion of new knowledge and the less defensible. Thus the Qumran chronology for our Lord's passion is presented as a possible alternative (p. 168-170), and this indeed is a point of considerable interest; but the dates of the writing of the gospels (p. 12) might well be differently estimated; see for instance Wikenhauser or the Jerusalem Bible. And a reference to the Holy Shroud (p. 179) as evidence for details of the crucifixion does not make us feel at ease. The work is enhanced by illustrations of the gospel scenes which are all African, Chinese or Indian, and so the catholicity of our gospel is stressed.

On quite a different plane are the two *Faith and Fact* books. *What is the Gospel?* is calculated to make us think afresh. A first part, the more valuable, is on the intrinsic character of the gospel, its paradoxes, tensions, etc. All this section should serve to make us read the gospel 'with new eyes', and that is sheer gain. A second section traces very briefly an outline of evangelism or gospel tradition in the Church, from the beginning up to today. This very rapid flight through history inevitably, perhaps, ends with a particularly French emphasis: Pascal, Fénelon, Bossuet . . . Ancel and Godin are all there. Admittedly there is no such continuous Catholic tradition in England, and English readers can learn from the French experience. Still, a more complete picture of the leaven of the gospel in other lands and literatures, and outside the Church too, is surely called for. A curious impression comes from 'endosmosis' (p. 19), and 'hindsight' (p. 122); while 'passing over Jerusalem' (p. 122) should presumably read 'passing over Jansenism.'

*The Sources for the Life of Christ* is the work of well-known writers and scholars who have combined to focus on the one subject which no doubt arose from the rather ageing question about the historicity of our Lord; the result however is a very effective and pithily condensed contribution to New Testament introduction. So we have a chapter on Jesus as an historical person (Amiot), then on the silence of contemporaries, which chiefly shows that they were not always silent (Daniel-Rops). Then the Dead Sea Scrolls evidence is masterly compressed in a fascinating chapter (Daniélou). The greater part of the book is taken up with the 'Gospel: basis of all our knowledge' (pp. 33-95, Daniel-Rops), with an appended note of the transmission of the text (Amiot). The Acts and St Paul are treated as 'the Gospel before the Gospel' (Brunot). Finally comes a note on the ancient Christian texts relevant to gospel origins. Much can be learnt from this little book which packs a great deal of information into its 125 pages, and is valuable for anyone keen to learn.

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