

ECUMENICAL COUNCILS AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. An Historical Survey.

By Hubert Jedin. (Herder-Nelson; 21s.)

The usefulness of this small handbook is guaranteed by the learning of its author, well known for his monumental history of the Council of Trent, and the skill of his translator, Dom Ernest Graf, O.S.B.

It is not a collection of texts, nor does the author give copious references to sources, though there is a good, but not of course exhaustive, bibliography. It deals with all the important Councils of the Church in East and West, dividing into four sections: (1) The eight Ecumenical Councils of Christian Antiquity; (2) The Papal Councils of the Central Middle Ages; (3) The Council above the Pope; (4) The Religious Division and the Council of Trent. Each Council has a synopsis of matters dealt with and background of events. The Councils of Trent and Vatican are specially well treated. There is a useful introduction, 'Explanation of Terms', which summarizes the historical development of Councils and what distinguishes them from each other, and their place in the teaching magisterium of the Church.

This handbook should be used by amateur students of history who have not got access to larger works, though it will be of use to many who have. It should be in the hands of Sixth-formers too, to accompany the study of the Church history they ought to be being taught and often unfortunately are not.

HENRY ST JOHN, O.P.

ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY. By Etienne Gilson. (Doubleday; \$5.50.)

As a historian of medieval philosophy and theology M. Gilson is without a rival. He has helped our understanding of so many major figures, and put us greatly in his debt with accurate accounts of the minor ones whose original texts none but the professional medievalist would think worth the trouble of examining in their entirety. But his philosophical thinking is less satisfactory, as has become increasingly evident with successive editions of *Le Thomisme*. The present work develops the more controversial parts of that book's later form. 'Christian Philosophy' is only St Thomas' philosophy, and in justice the publishers ought to indicate that in the title by adding 'according to St Thomas Aquinas', should a further edition be called for.

In the first half of the book Gilson's historical sense is seen at its best, for if any man has helped us to see St Thomas straight, without the crowd of buzzing commentators, it has been he, and though this very success makes his work seem, in 1960, less exciting than once it did, he is hardly to blame for that. In Part I we must, I think, agree with the view that for St Thomas *sacra doctrina* ('theology') was not restricted to revelation in the narrow sense, but contained much that has since been separated as philosophy. For St Thomas, however, though it did not cease to be rational, this philosophical matter was seen and judged in the light of faith, and presented in the order proper to theology. Gilson disagrees with the common practice of botching-up a philosophy *ad mentem Sancti Thomae*; he presents here a Christian philosophy that differs both in content and in order from its sources in

Aristotle and the Arabs. Hence in Part II he begins immediately with a discussion of the existence of God. Unlike most theists he tells us what is actually said about the *five ways* in the text of St Thomas, and so avoids the usual howlers, especially over the *third way*. His knowledge of the sources enables him to clear up a number of doubtful points most helpfully.

The second half of the book (Parts III and IV) gives us that almost continuous rhapsody upon the verb 'to be' (*esse*, as he never fails to note) which has been a feature of so many of his books since existentialism became the continental fashion. Now of course it is important that, for example, St Thomas saw clearly how different it is to ask what kind of a thing something is, and to ask whether in fact anything of the kind exists in some given situation; for other philosophers have surprisingly often taken existence to be a property common to existing things. It is important too that he saw it was no longer sensible to make this distinction in the case of God, for he was thus helped to give a coherent account of creation. It is one of St Thomas' great merits to have treated the word 'existence' correctly, and in particular to have talked straightforwardly and unmysteriously about it.

What is alarming about Gilson's treatment is that through a hundred or more repetitious pages he never tries to show, by his own analyses and examples, just what is involved in affirming or denying this 'act of being' at the heart of things, which for him is the key to St Thomas' philosophy. The impression unhappily given is that terms are being used as counters: profound intuitions that cannot be expressed are, in philosophy, better not written. Even more unfortunately this *idée fixe* prevents adequate treatment being given to many other features of St Thomas' thought which are at least as interesting. There is, for example, a chapter called 'Man and Knowledge'. We might have expected it to contain some discussion of why it is important that St Thomas insisted on an active element in knowing, or some criticism of the curious doctrine of 'abstraction' that is commonly fathered on him. But what do we find? A further discussion of *esse*. It is painful to have to say this of a man for whose past work I have the greatest admiration; but neither truth nor Thomism is well served by the second part of this book.

LAURENCE BRIGHT, O.P.

THE EARLY LITURGY TO THE TIME OF GREGORY THE GREAT. By Josef A. Jungmann, S.J. (Darton, Longman & Todd; 50s.)

A COMMENTARY ON THE DIVINE LITURGY. By Nicholas Cabasilas. Translated by J. M. Hussey and P. A. McNulty. (S.P.C.K.; 18s. 6d.)

It is unfortunate that its high price is likely to limit the circulation of this useful series of lectures delivered by Fr Jungmann at the University of Notre Dame in 1949 and intended as an introduction to the oldest and most important period in the history of liturgy. Adroit in its avoidance of controversy, the book is, perhaps, as a consequence lacking in the illumination of any sudden and telling insights, but the author doubtless thereby achieves his purpose of giving, without the technicalities of scientific research,