

ON THE TRIAL OF JESUS, by Paul Winter; Studio Judaica, Vol. I; de Gruyter, Berlin DM.22; distributed by B. Blackwell, Oxford.

In the eyes of Paul Winter the Romans alone were responsible for the death of Jesus and the motive for his condemnation was of a political nature. This is not a new thesis, especially from the pens of Jewish writers; it is distinguished here in that it takes the form of a scientific exposition and in that it removes all Jewish responsibility. Let us judge the text.

Between two chapters that together give a view of the whole (*The Trial of Jesus* pp. 1-15 and 136-148) Winter proceeds to do some probing at sensitive points. The night session of the Sanhedrin is pure apologetic invention designed to convict the Jews and acquit the Romans (pp. 20-30). Two points are alleged to confirm this: the High Priest would not then have had the official sacerdotal garments (pp. 16-19); gospel tradition is not united on the identity of the High Priest (pp. 31-43). Again, it was the Romans and not the Jews who proceeded with Jesus' arrest (pp. 44-50); it was Pilate who conducted the proceedings, a Pilate whose cruel face the historian knows in spite of the Christian legend which ends in giving him the halo of virtue (pp. 51-61). Finally, contrary to Jn. 18, 31 the Jews did have the right to put to death (pp. 62-90). Many incidents have little or no historical value, such as the Barabbas episode (pp. 91-99), or the mocking (pp. 150-156). On the other hand the inscription over the cross attests to the true, political motive for the death of Jesus, the King of the Jews (pp. 107-110). In conclusion rigorous literary criticism shows that the gospels have been constructed entirely to further this trial, or more exactly to put blame on the Jews: in the same way, the exchanges with the Pharisees have been all purely invented. In reality, Jesus would only have been a good Jew, even a Pharisee, a victim of excesses in the political sphere in which some of his disciples were concerned, and of the behaviour of Sadducean collaborators (pp. 111-135). Putting together the results of his research, Winter writes: 'It can be affirmed with assurance that Jesus was arrested by Roman military personnel (Jn 18, 12) for political reasons (Mc 14, 48; Jn 18, 20) and then conducted to a local Jewish administrative authority (Mc 14, 53a; Lc 22, 54; Jn 18, 13a) during the same night. The following morning, after a brief deliberation by the Jewish authorities, he was handed back to the Romans for trial (Mc 15, 1; Lc 22, 66; 23, 1; Jn 18, 28a). The procurator sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion (Tacitus; Mc 15, 15b, 26), the sentence being carried out in accordance with Roman penal procedure (Mc 15, 15b, 24a, 27)'. Following on these certainties, here are some probabilities. A little before that deliberation, some members of the Sanhedrin doubtless proceeded to an examination in order to compose a brief for the charge (Josephus; Mk. 15, 1a; Lk. 22, 66). After the condemnation by Pilate, the Roman soldiers inflicted some maltreatment on Jesus (Mk. 15, 16-20). Finally, no certainty can be arrived at on the following points: What was the immediate cause of the action taken against Jesus? Who took the initiative in arresting Jesus? What did Jesus do to provoke this action against himself

(pp. 137-138)? In spite of that last reservation, Winter has replied in a manner which leaves no doubt as to his own way of thinking.

We cannot here criticise in detail all these assertions, and have expounded elsewhere our critical opinion (*Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément*, Vol. VI (1960), col. 1419-1492). On the other hand in a review it is necessary to examine the author's method in order to appreciate its results.

Winter rightly makes use of literary criticism. He concerns himself with discovering through the gospel accounts the facts such as they must have occurred. But this kind of criticism requires delicate handling: it leads to undue scepticism if one systematically opts for radical opinions without giving the least chance to moderate ones. For example, the gospels are certainly not written for a scientific historical purpose, but this by no means allows one to judge them as written from an apologetic perspective, and intended to whitewash the Romans. The Romans undoubtedly participated in Jesus' arrest, but should one on the strength of this eliminate the Jews, or reduce their role to that of men constrained by Roman authority? How can it be claimed that Pilate was the instigator of the secret meeting mentioned in Jn 11, 47-50? Certainly his appearance before the Sanhedrin took place at dawn and not during the night, but (with J. Isaac) how can one deny its existence if one admits that there really was a decision? Certainly it is highly likely that the judicial death sentence was not within the competence of the Sanhedrin, but how can one eliminate its taking part in the affairs? Can the insults of the servants (whether before Annas or at the Sanhedrin) be regarded in reasonable criticism as doublets of the maltreatment inflicted by the Romans? How can the nocturnal scene at the house of Annas be eliminated if one admits the transference of the prisoner to the High Priest's house (as does J. Isaac)?

Let us add to these abuses in literary critical method, which recall its worst periods, some surprising examples of historical generalisation. The Barabbas episode suggests a custom difficult to verify (moreover, one ought to take into account Blinzler's study which appeared in *J.B.L.* 60, (1941), 273-278). But isn't it as realistic to admit this as to have recourse to the conjecture proposed by Winter, which reads more like a novel: Pilate, surprised by the presence of Jesus-Barabbas, of whose arrest he was ignorant, allegedly asked the crowd which Jesus it meant. The portrait of Pilate given by the gospel accounts corresponds after all to some historical characteristics that are certain; some of them are even found in Josephus or Philo (see also E. Bammel's article in *T.L.Z.* 77, (1952), 205-120). Why put a stop to the process of Pilate's canonisation in the time of Constantine if not to insinuate that the only motive that he obeyed was sycophancy of the Romans? Now the Copts really canonised him in the sixth century! If Pilate always behaved according to the picture of him that is said to be historical, why then did he stop striking coins of an idolatrous kind after the fall of Sejanus? Finally, isn't it an oversimplification to reduce Jesus to the level of a man who had no messianic pretensions, to make of him an ordinary Jew?

If only the writer troubled to discuss contrary opinions! But, having silenced the opposition to his majesty, he quotes only those authors tending in the same direction as his thesis, taking for preference material from Loisy, Dibelius, or Bultmann, systematically ignoring less radical articles such as those of Jeremias, or the work which is an authority on the subject, that of Blinzler? How can one escape from the feeling that in Dr Winter's eyes the dispute has been decided in advance? The Jews had no hand in the death of Jesus, except in so far as Pilate forced them into it.

We say this with even more regret in that a dialogue with the late Jules Isaac (for example, *Problèmes de la Passion d'après deux études récentes* in *Revue Historique*, 459, (1961), 119-138, and in the last little book he wrote before his death *L'enseignement du mépris*, Paris 1962) could usefully have been entered into. There are many of us who wish that the anti-semitic mentality, so deeply contrary to the Christian faith, should disappear. But one must use the right methods; if it is to be scientific a work should widen the literary enquiry and refute contrary opinions, those of a Blinzler, for example, point by point. Otherwise it is an appeal *pro domo* which at this time deserts the common cause of the fight against anti-semitism.

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THE MEN AND MESSAGE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, by Peter F. Ellis, C.S.S.R.; Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, n.p.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE, by Ignatius Hunt, O.S.B.; Gill and Son, 18s.

A GUIDE TO READING THE BIBLE (2), by Daniel E. Lupton; Sheed and Ward (Canterbury Books), 11s. 6d.

Father Ellis clearly longs to encourage and help people to become thoroughly familiar with the scriptures. So it is distressing to have to say that the resulting book is extremely dull, despite its very attractive appearance and the useful diagrams it contains (including a splendid 'Panorama of Biblical History' inside the back cover, which one longs to see pinned up along a class-room wall: obtainable, it seems, from *Editions de l'École*, 11, Rue de Sèvres, Paris). I cannot imagine anyone, having made full use of this book to guide him through the Old Testament, failing to feel that all he has done is to inflict upon himself a heavy burden of unenlightening reading in addition to the already heavy burden of the scriptures themselves. It would be quite unfair to accuse Fr Ellis of fundamentalism: indeed, he is as anxious as anyone else to cure the common reader of this disease. But fundamentalism seems to cling and clog in unexpected places. His book, for instance, contains a discussion of 'the historical character of Gen. 1-11' which, while clearly and unmistakably part of a larger section on the Yahwist author, gives as evidence for the 'intention of the author to write history' a series of references to the 'These are the generations of . . .' verses. Yet only thirty pages earlier we find page after page given up to a multi-