CHRISTIANITY IN ART. By Frank and Dorothy Getlein. Milwaukee. Bruce Publishing Company. $4.50

In two hundred pages, this book encompasses the history of western art. Indeed, there are available many textbooks on the subject, extra-thick ones printed on extra-thin paper, that manage to cram in a thousand pages or more what dates and names are the backbone of this vast topic. The worth of this slimmer work, however, resides in its telling the oft-told tale with a slant and with a shift in emphasis.

The academic orthodox tendency has been to define, sort and emphasize matters concerning style. Less often is it bold enough to probe for the inspiration that is at the marrow of art-making and of which style is but the outer shell. Typical of the acdemic trend is the popular and often used slide that shows side by side a Cezanne still-life and Titian's "Entombment." The professor points to the sagging Body and to the sagging tablecloth; their curves are similar. He shows how the apples of Cezanne and the heads of the mourning apostles echo each other as spheres set in space. Ergo: both artists, faced with problems of significant form and dynamic balance, found the same solution. Ergo: to simplify a little more as students want to do, both pictures, "Entombment" and "Still-life," are pretty much the same.

In academic circles there is a coquetterie in thus being able to talk at length about a picture with only a token reference to its subject-matter. Yet subject-matter is one of the best clues we have as to what went on in the artist's mind, and is also an illuminating link between the artist and his times.

It is to combat such a narrow use of the letter of art that it denies its spirit, that the authors, bravely, chose to tell the whole story all over again. They extract from the work of art the individual hue of the artist's devotion. They read into the work what kind of society it was that the artist lived in, with Church and State engaged in an endless tug-of-war for power. Historical names and dates, devotional approach, the wrestlings of the Church and State over two millenniums, make of this book a multilane speedway, with each subject racing ahead to cover enough ground for a much larger and heavier volume.

The immensely ambitious project forces the authors to summarize at breakneck speeds, with attendant spills at the turns. Elliptical statements such as "Giotto's successor, Masaccio," meaningful for the authors who digest in three words their reading and understanding of many books, meaningful also for the specialist who can reconstruct their path of thought, is meaningless or misleading for the average reader cheated, in our curt assertion, of a full century of art-making.

Forced simplifications may amount to distortions. To contrast Michelangelo's anguished nudes with 'the placid forms of Greek sculpture', is to ignore one of the sources of his art, the theatrically dramatic hellenistic fragments from which he learned much, and undoubtedly a Greek achievement.

To pinpoint such details out of context could be misleading. They hardly marr the clarity of a thesis which emerges eloquently as one surveys here the span of western art without ignoring the obvious, and that is what its subject matter has to say. The new focus, or rather the forgotten and rediscovered focus, shows how the history of western art is also the history of liturgical art, art conceived as an adjunct to devotion. From the catacombs to Giotto, this is accepted fact. Where the authors are at their most lucid is when they show the art of the Renaissance to be also well within this devotional tradition. In spite of its pagan disguise so proudly flaunted, what it had to say was Christian. Even when it uses the nude, it is in praise of the Creator.

One wishes that a same constructive approach had been brought to bear on later periods, and especially the eighteenth century. Its charm and its gaiety are attributes no more pagan than was the heavier sensuality of the Renaissance. They are moods not incompatible with true piety, and may even open up for us theological domains that up to then had remained partially unexplored. Such is the case with the art of Tiepolo, singled out here as a weak and an obviously greedy character who painted 'wealthy patrons being drawn into the clouds . . . in direct flattery of the people who were paying the bills'. There is more to his art than that, even from the specialized devotional approach. Tiepolo is the master of infinite vertical vistas in which airy bodies, not flesh as we know it but color and light, disport themselves weightlessly. Perhaps no other master, excepting Corregio, has prefigured as well in a visual equivalent the resurrected state of the flesh in glory.

To read this book should shatter the narrow boundaries, the pedantic statements of men who wish to tie the notion of a correct liturgical style to one style exclusively. In this regard, it is usual to damn the lovers of gothic, but are not some of our advocates of the modern also guilty? To survey two millennia of art-making proves that no artist was ever short of grace because of the times he lived in. The language may be gothic, or rococo, or fauve, but each man in turn has his chance to labor at his art in praise of God. Grace infuses with its timelessness every moment and every fashion.

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ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY. By Étienne Gilson. New York: Doubleday — Catholic Textbook Division. 1960. $5.50.

This book, the first in a new series of college philosophy texts, is certain to arouse controversy. Most of it will center on Etienne Gilson's conception of the role of the Christian philosopher.

In an 1879 encyclical letter, *Aeterni Patris*, Leo XIII described Christian philosophy as one in which the Christian faith and the human intellect joined forces in a common investigation of philosophical truth. Ever since, many philosophers who were also Christians have debated whether this would not simply reduce philosophy to theology.

Now Professor Gilson, after many years meditation on the writings of Thomas Aquinas, proposes that not only is it possible for a Christian to philosophize within his theology, but that this is the best way to philosophize. He has an example ready to hand in Saint Thomas, whose writings contain a philosophy developed solely for the sake of advancing his theology.

Gilson's colleagues may point out that there are many ways to philosophize other than within the context of a theological elaboration of Christian revelation. His reply to this would be that, for the Christian, these are decidedly inferior ways. "It is somewhat distressing," he observes, "that the same men who preach that grace can make a man a morally better man refuse to admit that revelation can make a philosophy a better philosophy" (page 283, note 11).

Already the debate on Gilson's thesis has begun in the philosophy journals. I