

conception of the term. In clearing up what mysticism is not, however, Smith, like many current writers, hesitates to commit himself to what mysticism is, thus leaving unresolved the issue of Eckhart's own mysticism. His treatment of evil and suffering is excellent. Occasionally, Smith's commentary moves well beyond Eckhart, as in his discussion of the eucharist, in which, he says, we are eaten by God rather than vice versa. But if not the letter, at least the spirit is Eckhart's, who would have doubtless delighted in the inversion.

The last chapter, 'Echoes', summarizes Smith's book and Eckhart's doctrine in a few, admirably succinct pages. Smith is especially alert to the paradoxical and dialectical character of Eckhart's thinking, as well as its radiance. The image he suggests of a stained-glass window is apt, for with Eckhart's teaching, like a rose window, the whole achieves its effectiveness by the juxtaposition of fragments, each of which has its own hue and translucence. Seen together, a greater unity and coherence redefines each element. The short bibliography provides helpful references for readers eager to deepen their acquaintance with Eckhart's spiritual doctrine.

Among the book's few weaknesses, Smith appears to disregard Eckhart's emphasis on justice, especially with regard to the birth of the Word. For Eckhart, this birth occurs in the heart of the just person as just, a point which links the Meister's teaching not only with its biblical and patristic antecedents but with contemporary Christian concerns. Similarly, the overuse of male pronouns for God is bound to be off-putting to the growing number of Christians sensitive to sexist language. Ironically, in a single paragraph on p. 53 which begins 'God is utterly transcendent,' the words 'he', 'him', 'his', and 'himself' occur twenty-one times. Apparently God has not quite transcended the anthropomorphic bias that, as Smith elsewhere observes, Eckhart himself rose above with his astonishing images of God in labour and giving birth.

The Way of Paradox is a personal, even pastoral interpretation of Eckhart's spiritual doctrine rather than an attempt to synopsise that doctrine. It succeeds well in its intention. As an appreciation by a gifted writer, it is an excellent introduction and a safe guide to the teaching of a great spiritual master and should attract many serious readers to a fuller acquaintance with the Meister.

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THE LIVING VOICE OF THE GOSPEL: The Gospels Today by Francis J. Moloney. Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1987. Pp. 252 + xi. Price: £6.95.

Fr. Moloney succeeds very well in showing how the Gospels should be read as theology. He does this in the present work with a dense chapter on each evangelist, and he discusses in introductory and concluding chapters what he understands by 'the living voice' which figures in the book's title. Thus he sets out the main lines of theological thought in each gospel and includes a special consideration of themes specific to each of them. On Mark he writes about the Way of the Son of Man, describing some of that evangelist's characteristic approach to discipleship. In Luke he concentrates on the main thrust of the infancy narrative. He devotes special attention to the cross and resurrection in the two final chapters of Matthew, and he develops an understanding of faith in John's first four chapters in a quite original way. He never veers from his main interest, namely to show how the evangelists were theologians, and how they operated in contexts which today's scholars postulate as their most probable setting. The evangelists wrote primarily for the believing public, well versed in the religious background of Israel, and they each convey a profound contemplation of the Person and message of Jesus appropriate for the community to which they themselves belonged.

It is hard to know the intended readers of Fr. Moloney's book since it is a mix of specialisation and popularisation. In a note on p. 3 he specifically recommends two popular introductions to Scripture, yet thereafter he refers often to specialised studies in French and Italian, and in English and English translation. Effectively he recommends sound reading for all

tastes and capacities. Nearly all of this reading has to do with the theological exposition of Scripture. As the author states, 'modern Gospel study is surely correct when it insists that the documents are *primarily* theological' (p. 3). He then proceeds with his very competent work without much further discussion of 'theology', or what he calls 'the four stories of Jesus' (p. 18). His exposition is systematic and convincing. The texts are made to reveal their theological trove; they disclose the meaning of Jesus and the implications of belief in him. Early Church problems are acknowledged, and diversity of concern is indicated. It is well done.

Some conceptual clarification, however, would have been useful. What is theology in the Scriptures, and what can be included under it legitimately? To what extent is history part of the theological enterprise of the Bible? It would be misleading to think that only theological concerns occupied the New Testament writers then, or indeed biblical commentators today. The literary medium through which theology is practised in the Bible has been receiving a great deal of attention for some time now. The art of biblical narrative is of especial interest. The Bible can make an historical narrative also carry a lot of theological meaning, and it can do this without necessarily minimising its importance as history. This may not be our way of doing history, but neither is it our way of doing theology. Rhetorical criticism, or literary criticism, or however one names it, concentrates on the literary properties of 'story', or 'narrative', or 'poem', or any other preferred literary form. It does not favour theology to the detriment of history; it is available to both. The recent collective work edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, Collins, 1987, does show this approach can be a sign of 'the living voice of the Gospel' in today's world. This literature carries the message of the inspired writers into the secular world and makes it accessible to the trained reader. Interpreting the Gospels today involves a lot of things. 'Story' and 'narrative' are helpful categories for 'the living voice' today but this does not involve any underestimation of the historical aspects of the enterprise. History keeps concrete contact with what was said and done in the past. To say that the Gospels are not 'biographies' might imply that they have little interest in history, and to describe them as stories can be misleading in this respect. They very often reflect the concrete experiences of Jesus, and of the primitive Christian communities, and the interests of the evangelists in both. When history is presented as literary narrative it can read like a 'story' and carry polyvalent meanings; but it still can convey the concrete facts and interpretations associated with history. The passion narratives are excellent illustrations of this. Current Gospel interpretation shows the necessary complementarity of the literary, historical, theological and spiritual approaches to the texts. The more the reader is experienced in all these disciplines the greater will be the capacity to appreciate how the same texts are laden with compatible meanings. The pooling of collective experience is also the way of Tradition.

Fr. Moloney says that some of the material in the present book had been published before by him in article form. One gets the impression also that much of it had been delivered in lecture form. Several times the style changes, and the reader is addressed with 'Notice that' (e.g. at pp. 105, 106, 109, 126). This may also explain the preference for current colloquial description of things worthy of concentrated attention, as 'beautiful', 'radical', 'absolute', 'incredible' (the most favoured of all). He also speaks about the 'risk' of faith accepting revelation, and its 'challenge', and one cannot help wondering if this language will not soon dull ears to the message it is trying to convey. The concluding sentence on pp. 219–220 illustrates fairly typically why some reserve is engendered by the overuse of such words: 'The fourth gospel issues a challenge to take the risk of accepting that a God of love has been revealed through the word of the Cross.... The Cana Story ... is told so that we may recognise where we are in our journey of faith away from our absolutes—through a multiplicity of 'intermediate stages'—towards a total gift of ourselves into the mystery of God's ways'. This needs to be said more clearly, simply and elegantly if the intended audience is to profit from the undoubted expertise of the author. It would be a pity to think that it has all been said before. In fact this volume will be read with profit by those who are seeking that 'adult faith' which Fr. Moloney does so much to promote theologically.

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