

Bruce Milem, who is one of the younger generation of Eckhart scholars, has given us, in his first book on the work of Meister Eckhart, a very different book from McGinn's. It is basically about his use of language, which the author sees as being of crucial importance for an understanding of his thought. Through a carefully annotated commentary on four important German sermons of Eckhart (52, 2, 16b and 6 in the Quint numbering) Dr Milem considers how, having committed himself to belief in the absolute ineffability of God, the Meister confronts the challenge of talking about something that cannot be grasped in language. He does it by using paradox, wordplay and imagery to bring his hearers into a new way of discerning themselves and of how they relate to God — into an awareness of their utter contingency, of their total dependence on God. And 'since the soul is in some respects indistinct from God, any image of the soul's being must also be to some extent an image of God as well' (p.86).

Not surprisingly, Milem is much more hesitant than McGinn to call Eckhart a 'mystic', and he in fact distrusts any emphasis on the importance of religious experience. He says Eckhart 'obliquely suggests that one need not pursue union with Christ through extraordinary measures, since that union eternally occurs in the intellect' (p.58). He is, in fact, of the opinion that Eckhart's theology 'presents God according to how we can know or think God, rather than to how God actually and truly is' (p.175). This leads our author to consider the argument of writers such as E.M.Cioran 'that there is nothing in the perspective expressed in Eckhart's sermons that could not be given other, non-Christian formulations (p.178). However, he goes on to say: 'Here, I think, is where faith enters the discussion. Eckhart's paradoxes become signs of transcendent mystery rather than disposable absurdities if one believes that God has already revealed God to human beings' (p.178). Reading Eckhart is not after all an alternative to Christian faith. Though this is a finely written book which discusses in a fresh way some much-discussed topics like Eckhart's understanding of the image, it is not a particularly easy book for a newcomer to Eckhartian studies to get to grips with. Nevertheless here is a new voice, one especially welcome today, when a widening range of people is discovering the teachings of this fourteenth-century friar.

JOHN ORME MILLS OP

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN. THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF MONARCHY by Ian Bradley, *Darton, Longman and Todd*. 2002. Pp. xxii + 218, £14.95 hbk.

This is a study of the sacrality of monarchy against a backcloth of contemporary British culture—at first sight, as the author remarks, not only an implausible but also a thankless undertaking. (At any rate the courtiers around the heir to the throne are wary of it). It

497

begins from two presuppositions. The first, as befits a Presbyterian minister, is biblical. Monarchy cannot be eliminated from the written record of Judeo-Christian revelation. For the Old Testament, Israelite kingship is of divine institution, a crucial component in the covenant relation of the Lord and his people, and this is reflected in the New Testament conviction that Jesus Christ is truly king. (He is, one might say, the concrete universal of kingship.) Bradley's second presupposition is a matter of social anthropology. Despite media efforts to focus attention on the soap-operatic aspect of the present Royal Family, a significant proportion of the population appears to experience the monarch within an aura of sacrality, employing a religious idiom when describing encounters with her. This is not entirely surprising, given the large number of royal engagements which involve church services, but more may be involved than merely the association of ideas. The lifelong dedication of a person to inherited duties on behalf of the population as a whole constitutes her a symbolic person. Thanks to its features of sacrifice and inherited destiny, her role—it is hardly excessive to say—resonates with and recalls that of Christ. Bradley's study contains a good deal of basic information about biblical and extra-biblical kingship, focussing especially on the development of the institution in the British Isles against a background of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon usage. It portrays the further evolution of the English (and subsequently British) monarchy through the medieval period and the Reformation to early modern and modern times, culminating, if that is the word, in the 'welfare monarchy' of the present day, with its concentration on sanctioning and celebrating voluntary initiative in the service of civil society. (Things opened by the Queen or started by the Prince of Wales tend to fall within this category.)

Much of the material is common knowledge. The book's novelty lies not in its information but in its advocacy which points in the direction of a re-sacramentalising of kingship within a civic culture regarded as centrally, though not exclusively, Christian. An exegesis of the 1953 Coronation rite explains the symbolic content of Christian kingship but, as Bradley realises, the full inhabiting of such a rite and the symbolic cosmos it represents turns on the functioning of a corporate metaphysical and religious imagination. If I read him correctly, he proposes that, owing to a widespread, residual religiosity (a memory of Christendom, one might call it), there is in fact a latent desire for rule by a compassionate king/queen, to which the 'grieving for Diana' phenomenon bore witness in its own tacky way. Bradley argues that societies that reject monarchies of the kind the Coronation rite specifies do so because they are in the process of degenerating from communities into associations. Their cultures tend to pure liberalism, that is, to co-existence by means of tolerance, the agreement to differ with one's neighbour. In such societies the neighbourliness which gives fellow-citizens their rightful

name becomes brittle and hard to sustain. A fuller bonding is required for this virtue's flourishing. Of course not all bonds are good merely because they are strong. If they were, either tribal or fascistic societies would be our *beau idéal*. That is why the Coronation rite, and the form of public life which flows from it, has to be adequately controlled by the Judeo-Christian revelation and the reasonable humanism it sponsors. At that rite, Queen Elizabeth II was invested with (among other things) the *baculus*, the dove-surmounted sceptre which represents equity and mercy. It is the task of the king to represent an equity which the common law and the statute law may at times fail to uphold. Ian Bradley should note that, if this is to be our public doctrine, an apology for the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 would be fitting. *Floreat rosa alba*.

AIDAN NICHOLS OP

THE CONVERSION OF EDITH STEIN by Florent Gaboriau, translation and preface by Ralph McInerny, *St Augustine's Press, South Bend, Indiana, 2002. Pp. xi + 136, £9.00 hbk.*

This short and attractively presented book intersperses extracts from its subject's writings with what may best be described as biographical meditations on the significance of her conversion viewed under three headings: her Jewish background, feminist leanings and philosophical calling.

'Calling' might be the sufficient word for all these, because the categorization is, in the view of this reader, over-laboured. Stein had long given up the Jewish practice maintained by her widowed and much loved mother, when a night's reading of Teresa of Avila (herself, as is now known, part-Jewish) convinced her that 'This is the Truth'. Nonetheless, it was in the context of the ancestral faith that Edith, youngest of seven children surviving out of eleven births, was able to apprehend the logic and entailments of the incarnation of the God of Israel. She thus points up for our age an important and long obscured truth which Gaboriau allows to emerge: namely that Judaism, as it was historically, so it remains conceptually *the* incomparable preparation for the gospel.

Stein's philosophical writings and teaching in the university of Freiburg i.B., where she was a student and 'assistant' of the phenomenologist Husserl, and later as professor with the Dominicans at Speyer, revealed a discriminating intellect, the limitations of which she herself became particularly conscious after her late encounter with Aquinas, whose *Quaestiones Disputatae* she translated into German. Perhaps the distinction of her mind is most evident in her feminist writings, speeches and broadcasts, strikingly ahead of her time in the Germany of the 1930s. Canonised on 11 October 1998 and declared a Patron of Europe by a pope who shares much of her philosophical background and approach, Edith

499