

the form of a return to the past.

In this review, there is no opportunity to examine volume II as it deals in great detail with aspects of French civil law, with a good deal of historical information. For all its '*jacobinisme*', the administration of French territories at home and overseas has not been juridically monolithic.

As for volume III, there Durand turns to the evolution of freedom of religion and of association in France, once more giving a strongly historical account. 1901 is a pivotal year, the concept of a '*congrégation déclarée*' is a crucial term. The author might have made his sketch of significant developments in Catholic thinking in the decades leading to Vatican II less like a bare list with very lengthy references (p.239f). The origins of these volumes in a doctoral thesis mean that there are few concessions to the nonspecialist reader. It should be said that the bibliography of 168 pages constitutes a valuable research tool in itself.

Durand is quite correct in noticing a certain unfinished quality about contemporary theology in this area. The notion of 'the people of God' does not offer, unlike that of 'the perfect society', the same juridical resources needed to transform into institutions the doctrinal principles renewed by Vatican II. The subsequent revision of the universal canon law witnessed to this difficulty, and it is not only in France that the Church has had to cope as best it can in negotiating with the state over the civil regulation of religious groups.

In all these shifts and negotiations, from time to time chronicled in great detail by Durand, we can see how both Church and state are concerned to regulate what can broadly be called consecrated life, but for different purposes. Durand is also concerned with future possibilities and improvements within the framework of French civil law, and this not just for Catholics. To the accompaniment of some surprisingly lyrical phrases for such an erudite work, the general conclusion to this trilogy recalls a passage in *Lumen gentium* so as to counter any unduly restrictive understanding by Church or state. Vatican II taught there (n.39) that through the inspiration of the holy Spirit the practice of the evangelical counsels has been undertaken by many Christians, either privately or in some condition or state authorised by the Church, and provides in the world, as it should, an outstanding witness and example of holiness.

European countries, let alone governments worldwide, show a great diversity of approaches to religions and their organisation. An eminent British ecclesiastical lawyer recently spoke of the '*laïcité*' of the French Republic as an oddly compromised one. Durand would say it is '*laïcité à la française*'.

ROBERT OMBRES OP

EMPRESS AND HANDMAID: ON NATURE AND GENDER IN THE CULT OF THE VIRGIN MARY by Sarah Jane Boss *Continuum International Publishing Group, London, 2000. Pp x + 253, £19.99 pbk.*

This excellent book appears when domination and subjection are at the forefront of the ecological and theological debate, and when our relation to God's created world and to each other is coming under increasing scrutiny. In *Empress and Handmaid* Boss addresses the links between particular and different perceptions of the Virgin Mary and their historical context. Using Weber's concept of domination, an account of which she sensibly

includes as an Appendix, she explores two questions. First, what social and economic developments have contributed to this change in the cult of the Virgin, and secondly, whether this process occurs in reverse and whether contemporary Marian devotion could inspire economic and political transformation in society? Although her approach is deliberately open-ended, her central argument is that throughout Christian tradition Mary is a representative figure for the creation in relation to the Creator.

In the main body of her work she gives an erudite, well argued and convincing account of the strong links between the image and perceptions held of the Virgin and the way in which particular societies function. Starting with Genesis these links are especially true of patriarchal interpretations of the domination of woman and nature. As Boss points out, 'the domination of nature, both external and internal, easily gives rise to the domination of other men and women and in the first instance, to the domination of women by men' (p.16). This in turn can lead to pornography, which renders the human being as an object of manipulation.

Boss argues that until around the 13th century Mary was viewed as the mistress of the world, and as such was portrayed as the Virgin in Majesty, frequently enthroned, looking at, and commanding the viewer. Modernity, however, particularly in its use of the pornographic image, surrenders the command to the observer, rendering the victim voiceless and powerless. As the book argues, this tallies well with an image of Mary bereft of power and motherhood, standing virginal, humble and with downcast eyes before the viewer's gaze.

Next Boss discusses the decline of Mary's motherhood in visual images and written texts. She gives a detailed interpretation of the 13th century wall painting in St. Mary's at Great Canfield, where Mary is depicted as crowned Queen and mother. This is contrasted with later images where Christ disappears as the symbol of Mary's motherhood, and where from the mid-nineteenth century there emerges the familiar image of Lourdes, Knock and many modern churches. This Mary, young, pale-featured, with bowed head and in an attitude of prayer, carries neither the authority of the medieval Virgin nor any visible sign of her motherhood. Boss then looks at the correlation between the image and the written texts. Here she notes the challenge to the authority of Mary's motherhood that came with the Reformation, and how this led in the Catholic Counter-Reformation to a stress on the Rosary. This in turn meant that much contemporary Marian devotion and theology has emphasised Mary's humble assent to God's will as the predominant motif, rather than, as in the Middle Ages, an intense reflection on the relationship between mother and son, her physical motherhood.

She then deals with the cult of the Virgin in the rationalisation of Western civilisation. Starting from the theological understanding of Mary as representing creation in its right relationship with the Creator, Boss probes humanity's relation to the 'natural' world, as she points out this 'relationship has changed dramatically over the last millennium with the invention and deployment of new technology' (p.73). Increasing domination over human and non-human nature has caused an alteration in the Christian understanding of the relationship between God and creation.

Marina Warner considered that Mary's Immaculate Conception

illustrated how 'the ascetic strain in Catholic doctrine has struggled with its incarnational and life-affirming aspects for centuries' (p.123). Boss, however, sees this as a partial reading of the evidence, and herself wants to argue that the doctrine follows a similar pattern to that of Mary's motherhood. In which, an earlier theological emphasis on Mary as Godbearer gives precedence to spiritual symbols rather than to the more concrete images of physical contact. She then proceeds to flesh out the background to the doctrine and to put forward some of the arguments in its defence.

Finally, she deals more fully with the problems of how domination and repression affect psychological changes in Marian devotion, and the effects of Virginity and sorrow for Mary's childbearing. Then in a short conclusion Boss sets out some provisional pointers to how this history of Marian devotion can be taken forward in a world where the dominating leitmotif is one of materialism and the consumer culture.

There is a comprehensive bibliography, but it is a shame in the age of computerisation that the book uses endnotes after each chapter instead of the more reader-friendly footnotes.

ANTONIA LACEY

TRINITY AND TRUTH by Bruce D. Marshall *Cambridge University Press*
Cambridge, 2000. Pp. xiv + 287, £40.00 hbk, £14.95 pbk.

Bruce D. Marshall, who teaches at St Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, the leading Lutheran school of theology in the United States, has published much-discussed essays in *The Thomist*. His contention that the notion of truth needs to be 'robustly trinitarian' may sound Barthian. 'Most of all', however, he tells us, he has 'learned to think about truth and justification of beliefs in a trinitarian way by reading Thomas Aquinas, especially his profound and unjustly neglected commentary on the Gospel of John'. Moreover, 'on the questions at issue here, as on most others, [Thomas] presents a far different and more compelling figure than is often supposed nowadays by his admirers and detractors alike'.

The book opens with John 18: Jesus himself is the truth—as Aquinas says: *Ille homo [est] ipsa divina veritas*. Chapter 2 insists that, contested as it may be, the primary Christian doctrine is the doctrine of God as Trinity. We are taken through the American Lutheran eucharistic liturgy: whatever Christians believe about anything has to fit with the priority of liturgical identification of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Chapter 3 analyzes presuppositions about truth in modern theology: beliefs are true when they express certain inner experiences; beliefs are justified when grounded on incorrigible data; Christian beliefs, anyway, must meet the same criteria for deciding the truth of any beliefs whatsoever. In chapter 4, Marshall demolishes these moves one after the other, in an exhilarating and rigorously argued display of familiarity with recent work on truth in the Anglo-American analytic tradition (Frege, Tarski, Quine, Davidson, Dummett *et al.*).

Chapter 5 insists that coherence with the central Christian beliefs is what counts when it comes to deciding about truth—any truth. This 'sweeping epistemic claim' is not unprecedented: 'Whatever is not in