

gratitude. The answer is that they were rescued by two modern Christian nations, Britain and America, neither of which was directly threatened by Germany and its persecution of the Jews when they chose to oppose fascism. One of the themes from liberation theology which Ellis has yet to take on board is that one must eschew the 'elephant and the Polish question' syndrome, exalting one's own experience into a criterion for the whole of mankind.

Notwithstanding this, Ellis's book is a creative work of real theological significance, prophetic and courageous. It will also be clear why Cohn-Sherbok's work represents part of the problem which Ellis struggles to resolve.

ALISTAIR KEE

THE WAY OF PARADOX: SPIRITUAL LIFE AS TAUGHT BY MEISTER ECKHART, by Cyprian Smith, O.S.B. Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1987. 131 pages. £3.95.

Popularization largely functions as a term of contempt in the academic circles whose excrescences require it. On a deeper level, popularizers make remote and difficult areas of thought and achievement accessible to those who are the ultimate and intended beneficiaries—the people. Socrates, the Buddha, and Jesus were popularizers in this sense. So was Meister Eckhart, one of the leading theologians of the fourteenth century and its greatest preacher. So also is Cyprian Smith, who has undertaken to render 'a clear and balanced account' of Eckhart's spiritual teaching. This is not an easy task, if a worthy one, considering the distance between Eckhart's century and our own, and also the inherent problems of trying to cope with a philosopher, theologian, and above all, a preacher of uncommon depth, brilliance, and creativity, much of whose doctrine survives only in outline form or as fragmentary notes preserved by his hearers.

A monk of Ampleforth Abbey where he teaches, Smith modestly disclaims in the end that his 'exposition of Eckhart's teaching is neither exhaustive nor particularly deep' (p. 131). His book nevertheless provides a solid, readable, informative, and surprisingly comprehensive account of the Meister's spiritual doctrine. Smith does not attempt to translate into ordinary language Eckhart's more obscure and convoluted philosophical and theological speculations. Thus, his sources are almost exclusively the German sermons and treatises, for which he wisely relies for the most part on Maurice Walshe's superb three-volume translation from Element Books (1987).

Two introductory chapters summarize Eckhart's life in the context of the turbulent fourteenth century and the place of his 'way' to God in the context of our own times. The section on the ways of knowing in chapter two is particularly interesting, especially in light of a later discussion on the similarities and differences between Eckhart's doctrine and that of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Eckhart was an intellectualist. His way looked ahead to final vision—but in this life, the knowing is an unknowing, the vision of God a dark one.

Chapters three through six present an overview of themes central or significant in the Meister's spirituality—God paradoxically transcendent and immanent, internal and external, image and emptiness; the dynamic 'boiling' and 'melting' of God; the origin of the Word by divine speech and birth; and the birth of the Word in history and human hearts. Most of Eckhart's major themes are presented in capsule form—the spark or ground of the soul; *abgeschiedenheit*; God as Godhead; living 'without why'; the soul's identity with the Son. For those unfamiliar with the focal point of Eckhart's spirituality, the birth of the Word in the soul, Smith's discussion will help immeasurably, especially with regard to the achievement of emotional equilibrium, which follows as its emblem.

In the final three chapters, Smith applies the main principles of Eckhart's teaching to the situation of contemporary Christians attempting to develop a solid but practical spirituality. His discussion of mysticism begins from a modern and, as he notes, erroneous

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.

RICHARD WOODS OP

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