

Notwithstanding having such a critical mind, Orsy can be, shall we say, excessively optimistic about the strength of his own assessments. This optimism takes different forms. In the case of the law on mixed marriages it underplays the restrictive nature of the current legislation. When canon 1025 says that permission for a mixed marriage can be granted if there is 'a just and reasonable cause' it will not do to comment that the honest decision of the parties to marry amounts to such a cause. More is demanded surely, and one recalls that Paul VI's *Matrimonia Mixta* of 1970 had simply envisaged 'a just cause'. (Wags will remember the *ben trovato* story that Pius IX on being asked for a certain dispensation, smiled and said, 'The Pope cannot grant that dispensation. You must go to an American bishop for it'. Possibly, the story is less funny these days). Another kind of over optimism surfaces in dealing with canon 1055:2, a canon raising a whole cluster of problems that have taxed even the International Theological Commission. The canon states that between the baptised there can be no valid matrimonial contract that is not by that very fact a sacrament. Here Orsy seems over-optimistic in minimising the weight of the views contrary to his. Yet another kind of optimism is shown in the lengthy treatment of question 13 on the delicate and pressing question of the reception of the eucharist by those in irregular marriages. Orsy's account of the position of those couples appears excessively optimistic in largely ignoring their inability to receive sacramental absolution in addition to being excluded from receiving the eucharist. The requirement that a couple should live as 'brother-and-sister' as a condition for returning to full sacramental life is ascribed by Orsy to the authors of 'manuals'; no mention is made of such evidence as there is of the requirement actually working in practice, nor is it mentioned that the requirement is endorsed by John Paul II in the very document, *Familiaris Consortio*, quoted for other purposes by Orsy.

In sum, the main achievement of this stimulating book does not lie in being a consistently thorough exposition of the canons but rather in showing in detail and with learning just to what extent the present law of marriage is a *construct*, or even a series of constructs, that is a provisional fitting together of assorted elements. Guided by Orsy, the reader is invited to identify if each element expresses a point of dogma, a philosophical position, an exhortation or whatever, to assess it, and not to close any debate prematurely. Canon law studies *can* be intellectually respectable.

ROBERT OMBRES OP

**THE THOUGHT OF GREGORY THE GREAT by G.R. Evans. Cambridge, 1986.  
164pp. £25.**

This is a very indifferent book. It adds virtually nothing to our understanding of Gregory the Great and charges £25 for it into the bargain. I associate Dr Evans with Anselm and the twelfth century rather than the world of the early middle ages. She has in fact followed a method of studying Gregory that would have been richly rewarding when applied to Anselm: that of summarising and presenting the essence of his *opus* for the interested reader. But Gregory was simply not an original or very striking thinker and most of his 'thought' was commonplace or derivative. Dr Evans does, to be fair, dig out a few plums: an interesting use of astrology for instance. What was interesting and original about Gregory were his radical reversals of the policies of the Roman Church and his reluctant but firm change of perspective on the way he looked at his world. It is the 'historical' aspect of Gregory that matters not his 'thought'. It is the application of his powerful intelligence to the task of changing his world that matters. On these matters Dr Evans has little to say. The bibliography is very revealing for what isn't in it. The *Liber Pontificalis* is used in Mommsen's incomplete and inferior edition instead of Duchesne's classic edition. There is nothing of the late J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, though there are any number of points of discussion that call for his insights. Worst of all she does not seem to know D.H. Green's

remarkable study *'The Carolingian Lord* which pointed to the radical innovation of using Germanic military words for theological purposes—notably the Germanic *drhythen* for God that emanated from somewhere near to Gregory. The object was to promote a new acceptance of the continuing presence of people of Germanic descent and the need to bring them into the Church. The conversion of England was part of the same policy. The means Gregory proposed to use to break with the ossified and stultified Roman traditions he inherited—and sometimes hankered after—were the monks. He proposed to take up what had been a sort of hippy movement—monasticism—and use it to cope with the new, barbaric, world he had to live in. He seems to have been the first pope to regard the monks as clergy and to appoint them as bishops and senior members of the Roman curia. The *Liber Pontificalis* obituaries underline the bitter power struggles of radicals and conservatives in Rome that ended with the temporary defeat of the radicals after the indiscretions of Honorius I. Dr Evans is poor on the monks. The Rule of St Benedict is cited in an out of date edition instead of Dom de Vogué's masterly edition. This is perhaps why she thinks the priority of the Rule of St Benedict and that of the Master is an open question. She does not cite Dom Wandsworth's important article on the interpretation of the second book of Gregory's Dialogues or the discussions to which it has given rise. Had she read Heinrich Dannenbauer's book on the foundations of the middle ages she would have seen how much Gregory receded from Roman traditions and the degree to which he was open to the needs of the barbarians. It is as if someone writing about Latin American theology ignored the Liberation theologians and contented themselves with an anthology of received ideas from conservative manuals.

ERIC JOHN

**ECKHART'S WAY** by Richard Woods OP. *Michael Glazier, Wilmington, Delaware, 1986.*

There has long been a need for a clear and comprehensive exposition of Eckhart's thought as a coherent whole, for the benefit of the English-speaking world. This book answers the need admirably. It covers the subject fully, yet in language which is simple and direct; it also avoids excessive length, since the whole book, including preface, introduction, indices, bibliography and appendices extends to only 246 pages. It thus serves as an eminently readable introduction to the Meister, and anyone who wishes to embark on a deeper and more detailed study will find here the initial directions he needs.

The author is right in presenting Eckhart's thought as an organic unity, in which both Latin and German writings, abstract speculation and concrete spiritual counsel, are meant to fit together. This is not to say that Eckhart presents us with any kind of 'system'—the great Opus Tripartitum in which he planned to do this was never completed—but neither is his work a mere random collection of disconnected aphorisms and insights. His thought has a very definite shape and architecture of its own; Richard Woods' own word for this is 'architectonics'; and he has shown very clearly the foundations on which it rests: on the one hand there is the rhythm of Emanation and Return, whereby God 'speaks Himself out' in Trinity and Creation, and whereby the created universe is drawn back into its Source through Redemption and the Birth of God in the Ground of the Soul; on the other there is the metaphysical dialectic of Being and Nothingness, the absolute and unconditioned 'Isness' of God over and against the relative, conditioned and transient being of creatures, which makes the creatures 'nothing' from God's point of view, and God Himself 'nothing' from the point of view of the creatures. This is shown to be no arbitrary grafting of Neoplatonism on to an alien Biblical stem; Neoplatonism provides only a kind of metaphysical amplification of fundamental ideas which, not only in themselves, but also largely in their development and style of expression, are clearly Biblical, having their roots in the Letters of Paul and the Gospels of John and Luke.

The book itself is very clearly structured, being divided into three parts: the first,

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