

given the excellent translations available by Maurice Walshe, Edmund College, Bernard McGinn, Frank Tobin, and Reiner Schürmann, ignores the results of real progress in understanding the Meister's doctrine.

Even so, the regression would have been misleading had Ms. Fleming succeeded in her intention to avoid 'quoting from pieces which M. O'C. Walshe' in his three-volume translation of Eckhart's German works (Element Books, 1987) 'states are not truly by Eckhart' (p. 13). For included are at least fifteen citations from sermons Professor Walshe considered doubtful enough to find substitutes for—those marked as being taken from pages 39–41, 146–49, 169–171, and 196–198 among them.

The damage to the strength of faith and knowledge of truth of Ms. Fleming's ordinary, intelligent readers should be slight, however; the disputed passages sound sufficiently like Eckhart to represent his doctrine. They were undoubtedly meant to, and are probably by his students. But they still sound a bit strange and tend to obscure Eckhart's point, e.g., 'God dwells in the nothing-at-all that was prior to nothing, in the hidden Godhead of pure gnosis whereof no man durst speak' (p. 135).

It was mildly disconcerting to find Eckhart once again rechristened 'Johannes' on p. 14, more than a generation since Josef Koch demonstrated the error of that peculiar conceit. His name was simply Eckhart. With luck, Ms. Fleming's book will be the last to perpetuate the mistake.

Apart from any unintentional ire detected in the previous remarks, I hope that this small anthology will in fact introduce a new generation of ordinary readers to Eckhart, whose teaching has much to offer ordinary, intelligent people as well as academics and hippies. To that end, Ms. Fleming has prefaced her anthology with an adequate introduction containing the outline of his career as a Dominican friar as well as a short report on the commission to 'rehabilitate' Eckhart established in 1983 by the Dominican Order, partly because of her own efforts. There is also a brief glossary of terms found in Eckhart's writings. These are, however, less definitions in any strict sense than descriptive remarks which the Meister was quite happy to contradict in other places. The citations themselves are arranged in a loose order according to a thematic structure based on some of Eckhart's characteristic preoccupations—God; Method (in approaching God); the Just Man and the Unjust Man; Suffering, Images, Time, and Unity; the (spiritual) Weapons We Have; the Soul; and the Ending (i.e., the Godhead and union). Each section is generally introduced by a short commentary which relates the citations to current issues and problems.

For anyone not inclined to purchase a two or three-volume translation of Eckhart's German works, and not too fussy about accuracy, they would do well to consider this short anthology, which has the merits of being inexpensive, readily accessible, and organized into convenient subject headings.

RICHARD WOODS OP

THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE by T.R. Wright. *Basil Blackwell*. 1988. Pp 243., £8.95.

Knowing how to read a book, and thus how to judge it, is to know not least the kind of use you are being asked to put it to, and the games you should play with it. Each branch of literature, each trade, has its tricks; and the art of good reading is to know which tricks to look for as well as the meaning that they effect. (Which is only to say that you don't count the syllables, or attend to the rhythm, in a line by Delia Smith, and wish you hadn't in a line by Matthew Arnold). This particular book by T.R. Wright belongs to the larger series produced by Basil Blackwell of 'Signposts in Theology' and as such we might expect a twofold aim: to map out the landscape in this neck of the theological and literary woods, by outlining the major positions taken up by literary theorists and theologians; and secondly to guide us through the trees by assessing the relative strengths and weaknesses in each position. The first aim has been admirably realised. T.R. Wright introduces his reader to all sorts of views,

with copious quotation, reference and a very helpful bibliography. With respect to the second, he argues that 'the whole point of reading literature ... beyond that of giving pleasure (which is by no means unimportant), is that it says something about life which cannot be said in any other way. Literary devices ... are not just ornamental ... they have the capacity to generate new meaning by stretching language beyond its ordinary uses' (p. 4), while 'these meanings, as I keep insisting, are not paraphrasable' (p. 82). From this basic view of literature he moves on to state that 'poems, stories and plays ... in some respects provide a more acceptable means of talking about God than does systematic theology since they recognize more fully their own limitations as constructs of imagination and ideology' (p. 2). Indeed he believes there to be a 'central tension between systematic theology and literature' for 'in literature meaning is never fixed; any "complete" interpretation would render the literary "work" redundant' (p. 12). Much of the book then proceeds to paraphrase the unparaphrasable, to reveal the theological meaning in great works of literature, discussing St Mark's Gospel, St Augustine's *Confessions*, the Metaphysical Poets, medieval drama, renaissance tragedy, and the work of Samuel Beckett.

But this is not enough as a guide. The author fails to explore the difference between saying that the meaning of a text is given in how it employs form, and saying that there are meanings that can only be expressed in certain forms. If the meaning of a literary text is always ahead of and beyond our ability to paraphrase, how do we understand its meaning at all? Could two people ever come to agree as to just what that extra bit of meaning might be? Between the merely ornamental and the generation of new meaning, whatever that may be, lies apt expression as itself a strength of thought. Between the pleasurable fix and the cognitive parcel lies the work which elicits sympathy, or contrition, teaches respect or circumspection and fulfils particular roles in the community. A great hymn has a meaning. There is the meaning of its words, and the relation of music to those words, the occasions on which it is sung. And we can say what its meaning is, how a hymn of praise differs from a song of lamentation, without it becoming in any sense redundant. For the praise is in the singing of it and not the knowing of the song. Where T.R. Wright insists mistakenly on what only literature can tell us, he might have asked what literature can best *do* for us. There is much that is good in this book, for example its discussion of the 'readability' of Genesis, one that alerts us to just how many different tricks the literary trades can play; but its understanding of literature is finally unconvincing and it peters out as a potted introduction to how a few important works of art portray the Maker of us all.

RICHARD FINN OP

THE LIBERATION THEOLOGY DEBATE by Rosino Gibellini, *SCM Press, London, 1987. Pp. 120. £4.95.*

The developing, highly varied body of thought, writing and (especially) praxis that is associated with liberation theology; the history of Latin America and other Third World countries and their Churches; the sometimes stormy relationships between theologians and pastors engaged in this liberation struggle and Church authorities in Rome—all this must be one of the areas of interest most systematically misrepresented in the Western media, by both the friends and the enemies of liberation theology, and so the most consistently misunderstood. How many times have we heard it said: 'Of course, the Pope is opposed to it'? And this can either mean that the Pope is a right-wing goon (though one may excuse this in a Pole) or that liberation theology is not a legitimate option for a devout Catholic. The fact that the Pope himself says he thinks liberation theology is 'opportune and necessary' is forgotten or ignored.

This book, at its price and size, must be a useful antidote to such widespread disinformation. It is an excellent review of the origins and method of liberation theology, gathers together several important writers' work in Christology, ecclesiology and spirituality, and includes some discussion of the kinds of areas in which Latin American liberation

510