

religious is that it gives vivid expression to the destiny of every human being' (209).

The very humanism and humanity of such a remark of course suggests the book's wider appeal. Just as, over twenty years ago, Abbot Basil Hume's conferences on stability and perseverance found unexpected wider audiences, so may these pages on poverty and mission, the rosary and inculturation, freedom and responsibility. There are recurrent themes: 'our world is being reduced to a cultural desert through the triumph of consumerism' (77); the need to revalue words and language and not to give up on the search for meaning or on serious study; the need to appreciate again within the Church the place of debate, knowing with St. Thomas that there is no 'opponent' from whom one cannot learn some truth; the dangers of renascent fundamentalisms; the ubiquity of violence; the surpassing value of a witness such as that of the Cistercian monks of the Atlas Mountains or of the Dominican Bishop of Oran. Much more besides. On page 27 comes the fine remark: 'I have learnt [that is, from being Master] just a little more about what it means to celebrate the eucharist.' If that were the gift of this book to all who read it, it will not be wasted.

HUGH GILBERT OSB

**ELEANOR OF PROVENCE: QUEENSHIP IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND** by Margaret Howell *Blackwells*, Oxford, 1998. Pp. xx + 349, £45.00 hbk.

'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.' So writes Jane Austen in the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*. What is true of lesser mortals is definitely true of kings. At various points in the history of the nations which make up the British Isles the stability of the realm turned on the marriage or celibacy of Queens regnant. In this regard Mary, Queen of Scots, proved an imprudent suitor, whilst her cousin Elizabeth I was much more canny in her choice of state. Most people with an historical memory reinforced by recollections of *1066 and All That* would be able to name the Queens who have sat on the English throne, or in the case of Mary, the Scottish throne, but not many would be able to perform the same service for those kings' wives who have wielded considerable influence over the past 1000 years. Attempts have been made to turn the finely woven tapestry of European history over to reveal the underside of rough knots, tufts and running stitch which sustains the pattern presented to the viewer. In this regard, not simply chronological, political and administrative factors in the evolution of the nation's destiny are studied, but the wider ranging social, anthropological, ritual, personal and even gender-governed features of common life are exposed to view. In this way we are being reminded of the veiled but significant contribution of women in the unfolding of Western history.

Over the past decade a number of studies have been devoted to

the examination of significant women in various historical periods. We have greeted monographs on female saints and mystics, abbesses and noblewomen. This genre has also included studies of queens such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, Blanche of Castille and Margaret of Anjou. All of them powerful women, all of them operating in a world constructed around patterns of power, wealth, display, territoriality and property which often seem far removed from the eighteenth-century drawing-rooms of Jane Austen's England, but it is perhaps the language and the ritual which is different rather than the substance of human relations. In both worlds the relationship to men is of paramount importance. Many of those who have concerned themselves with 'women's history' are themselves women and are members of a burgeoning feminist historical movement. Margaret Howell is aware of this trend in modern historiography, but does not associate herself with it. This brilliantly clearly-written and disciplined work gives us a picture of an highly intelligent, shrewd and dedicated woman who disposed of considerable power partly through the privilege she inevitably enjoyed as the king's wife, but also through her own store of personal gifts. It has often been fashionable to treat women, royal women, as dependents of their husbands. Margaret Howell shows how this could not be the case with Eleanor of Provence.

Trends in historical research vary from generation to generation; it comes as a relief to see the classical techniques of finely-honed analytical skills being sharpened further by Margaret Howell on the variety of documentary sources concerned with Eleanor and thirteenth-century England. Dr Howell is at her best when she recovers the ritual and symbolic framework of the Plantagenet court. The role of monarch, of the fundamental relationship between king and queen and its place in the commonwealth of the realm, stand out clearly in Dr Howell's magisterial reconstruction of Plantagenet court life and ritual. Similarly, she shows how Queen Eleanor had her own political agenda, which, whilst it was not designed to undermine her husband's, at times did not entirely march with it. Eleanor usually knew how far she could go and what resources were available to her, sometimes she miscalculated. Her moment of greatest danger was during the crisis of 1263 when those policies with which she had been associated with or blamed for were opposed by a large portion of the English baronage. She was decried for insinuating foreigners, principally Savoyards patronised by her, into positions of influence. She was also condemned for regaining the support of her son, the Lord Edward, for his father, and for supporting the king in his expensive and vainglorious foreign adventures. Some of these charges were undoubtedly justified, but the violence with which they were pursued shocked the Queen and affected her for the rest of her life.

Eleanor's family did well out of marriage; her sister Margaret was Queen of France, her uncle Boniface of Savoy became Archbishop of Canterbury, whilst another uncle was Archbishop of Lyons. Eleanor was

part of a dynastic network which affected the peace and stability of Europe and protected the fortunes of Christendom. Eleanor was keenly conscious of her own dignity and of the vocation of monarchy, she did not hesitate to use the resources which her position gave her. At times she could be single-minded in pursuing what she thought to be right, but of her affection and respect for the King there can be no doubt. It was the complementary nature of their personalities which allowed her a greater role in national and international affairs than she might otherwise have exercised. Margaret Howell has done all those interested in the political, religious and social history of medieval England a service in this book which represents all that is best in the English historiographical tradition.

ALLAN WHITE OP

**THEOLOGY AS THE ROAD TO HOLINESS IN ST BONAVENTURE** by Charles Carpenter *Paulist Press, New York, 1999. Pp. 222, \$23.95 hbk.*

I sometimes point out to my students that theology, at least as it is often practised today, is one of the few, if not the only, subject one can study, teach, and write about without actually knowing the subject matter — GOD. Yes, it is possible to study a great deal about God— about what one thinks God is like or what others have said about him. One can even study and consider various things he is reported to have revealed about himself and about his relationship to human beings and the cosmos. Yet, it is this ‘about’ that makes it possible, at least on one level, to do theology without actually knowing God. This ‘about’ can make the study, the teaching and writing of theology one step removed, and a huge step it is, from actually knowing God and so pondering, teaching and writing from one’s own knowledge of him.

Doing theology as a study ‘about’ God and ‘about’ his propounded revelation would have been thought a strange, if not misguided, way of doing theology to the Fathers of the Church. St Bonaventure, as with Aquinas, and most medievals as well, would have agreed. Charles Carpenter has written, then, a timely study on Bonaventure’s notion of doing theology as a road to holiness. Carpenter clearly demonstrates that, for Bonaventure, the proper study of God and of his revelation leads, by necessity, to holiness, for in such study one is progressing in a deeper knowledge of and union with subject-matter itself—God himself. Or to state this thesis the other way round and in a complementary fashion, only as one progresses in holiness can one properly do theology for one cannot actually do theology if one does not know the subject-matter —God— and one cannot know God if one is not holy. As Carpenter states

The purpose of this book, then, is to call on St Bonaventure’s teaching to demonstrate why theology should be undertaken solely for the purpose of spiritual progress. This means that theology, unless it informs and, more importantly, is informed by