

MIRACLES AND THE MEDIEVAL MIND: THEORY, RECORD AND EVENT, 1000–1215 by Benedicta Ward. Scholar Press, London. 1982. pp.x + 321.

Miracles were once the very stuff of church literature—when that meant literature *tout court*. Fashion shifted, slowly in the late middle ages, then with a bang at the Reformation. Luther laughed at the legends as *Lügende*. The polemical stances of his time endured, creating—together with a lot of heat and blood—a useful mass of critical scholarship centring on the *Acta sanctorum*. Newman's *Apologia*, 140 years ago, was sparked off by a dispute about whether certain miracles in a saint's *Life* should be read as true. Sectarian passions have cooled. But meanwhile new sciences, like anthropology, have lent their specific impetus to historical study. Miracles, *lügende* or otherwise, have been rediscovered, this time as a rich historical source to be plundered and analysed. Their mere bulk (saint's *Lives* number 28,000, to say nothing of other miraculous genres) is enough to recommend them, especially since most come from a period notoriously thin in record. And they probe areas—like medicine, peasant conditions, private grief and joy—usually neglected by what records there are. So historians have moved in, with some magnificent results. The best example is Franticek Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger* (Prague 1963). There are others. But now we have the first book entirely devoted to the subject of 'Miracles and the Medieval Mind', by Sister Benedicta Ward of the Convent of the Incarnation at Oxford.

Sister Benedicta starts with two theoretical chapters. 'The theory of miracles' reviews definitions of miracle from St. Augustine onwards, and ends by considering two special cases of divine intervention, the Eucharist and the Judicial Ordeal. Chapter 2 extends this exploration of miracle-theory to its exposition in, by turns, bible commentary, sermons, and the prefaces to miracle collections. Sister Benedicta then embarks on a series of eight chapters which together make up the bulk of the book. They describe cults as seen through the books of *Miracula* composed to promote them. Thus chapter 3 explores the cults of St. Faith of Conques, St. Benedict of Fleury and St. Cuthbert of Durham, all saints who died well before the year 1000, but whose cults developed around then and share certain features, notably that they centred on relics and on particular shrines. Chapter 4 moves from such 'traditional' cults (the author's term) to more 'modern', twelfth-century saints. These include William of Norwich, object of a bizarre, localized, anti-Jewish cult. This was soon eclipsed by that of Becket, who fittingly gets a chapter (No. 5) to himself. There follows a chapter on the miracles, or lack of them, associated with Santiago, Rome and Jerusalem. A brief chapter 7 is given to cults which failed, among them those of 'Fair Rosamund', Henry II's mistress, and of a William Longbeard who was executed for treason in 1196. A long chapter 8, by contrast, examines the most successful of saint-cults, that of the Virgin, whose miracles came to form a literary genre on their own. Chapter 9 explores the relationship between miracles and sanctity, tracing first the impact on hagiography of the great models—Christ, of course, and, far behind, Antony, Benedict and Martin—and, second, how the canonization-process tended to discipline both the type of miracle (it had to show moral virtue) and the way it was reported (it must be authenticated). The author's marathon through *Miracula* concludes, in chapter 10, with those collections of miracles designed to exalt, not an individual, but the ideals and policies of monastic families, notably the Cluniac and the Cistercian. The book as a whole closes with one more analytical chapter, chapter 11, which considers the relationship between 'Miracles and Events'.

The strong part of this book is in the middle chapters. They are full of unexpected riches. For instance, the fact that Canterbury cathedral was put out-of-bounds after Becket's murder meant that any miracles effected by him had to happen away from the shrine, a displacement which precipitated a new trend for 'remote-control' miracles, a trend to reach its peak with the miracles of the Virgin. Again, we learn with

astonishment that the No. 1 shrine of western Christendom, the tomb of Saints Peter and Paul in Rome, left record of no miracles at all,—as if such a *sanctum sanctorum* was above these accessories. There is a lot more like this.

Whether these chapters are all, entirely and strictly, about 'miracles and the medieval mind' as distinct from about life in general, seen through a particular literary genre—remains doubtful. And the chapters which definitely are on that subject, namely chapters 1, 2 and 11, are noticeably the weaker ones. They give guidelines and useful quotations. But they remain small chapters on big subjects, leaving many questions unanswered and some unasked: such as whether everyone (writers included) really 'believed' all those miracles; and the question which nearly brought Dante down in his examination by St Peter in *Paradiso* 24: 100—11 (namely 'How can Christ's miracles authenticate his teaching when it is the same book which records them both?'). These questions remain for future studies. Those are birds on the bush. The one in the hand is a lucid, well-researched book which any medievalist can read with pleasure and instruction.

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L'OEUVRE LATINE DE MAÎTRE ECKHART: COMMENTAIRE DE LA GENÈSE PRÉCÉDÉ DES PROLOGUES, ed. Fernand Brunner, Alain de Libera, Edouard Wéber, Émilie zum Brunn. Ed du Cerf, Paris, 1984. Pp 694. 326.00 FF.

Since the pioneering studies of Denifle it has been clear that no serious interpreter of Eckhart can afford to ignore the Latin works, but it is still the German works which receive a disproportionate amount of attention. It is a pleasure, then, to welcome the first volume of a projected bi-lingual (Latin-French) edition of all the surviving Latin works. The first volume contains the very important Prologues (of which an English translation exists, published by PIMS, Toronto) and the first Genesis commentary (of which extracts were published in English in the *Classics of Western Spirituality* Eckhart). So far as I know, this is the first complete translation into any modern language of the Genesis commentary, except for the German translation included in the Stuttgart edition. The text here is taken from the Stuttgart edition. It is marred by a certain number of misprints, of which the most serious is the omission of nine words near the top of page 268 (*licet non praecesserit ipsum tempore. Sic cor est principium* should be added after *principium* in line 2). The translation is careful, without being over-literal; it is clearly meant to be an aid to the interpretation of the Latin text, and it should ideally not be used in isolation from the Latin. I notice a few places where the translation is questionable: for instance in *Exp. Gen.* 137 the rather convoluted Latin seems to have been misconstrued because of a failure to see that the second *esse* in line 2 is meant to be in the dative; and 207, which is admittedly not at all clear in the Latin, seems to have gone astray. There is a substantial commentary on the Prologues, which is very useful. Otherwise there are generous notes, which often contain material not drawn from the Stuttgart edition; many of them also provide useful suggestions about the interpretation of Eckhart's doctrine and its intellectual content. Sometimes, though, pertinent references given in the Stuttgart edition are not reproduced, so the new edition does not supercede the old one. One particularly useful element in the notes is the constant reminder of Eckhart's dependence on Albert the Great and on St Thomas. The editors perhaps slightly underestimate the influence of Proclus, but they are right to point out that in important ways Eckhart does not accept Neoplatonist principles (for instance in refusing to treat *Unum* as a higher notion than *Esse*).

All in all, this is a useful edition, and we must look forward eagerly to the remaining volumes in the series.

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