

became her friends: Helmut Gollwitzer, one of Barth's most celebrated students, preached at her funeral. Barth's students revered her.

While it is clear that the *Church Dogmatics* would not exist in its present form, if at all, but for her collaboration, Selinger is sceptical about suggestions that she actually wrote a lot of it herself. Her own writings recently appeared in translation: *The Question of Woman*, edited with an introduction by Eleanor Jackson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996). Selinger, described as a Barthian and a feminist on the cover, compares what von Kirschbaum writes about the male-female relationship as the site of the image of God with what Barth writes and brings out the differences as well as the likely interdependencies. Barth's remarks about marital fidelity, the difficulties of marriage, adultery, etc., become even more painful; his (and her) insistence on the Song of Songs as the supreme celebration in Scripture of what it is to be human, in the mutual love of man and woman, becomes even more powerful. A well documented study (though with a poor index), Selinger's book takes up a central theme in theological anthropology, treated by Barth and von Kirschbaum in interesting ways, though readers are more likely to be interested in the extent of the collaboration, and in this very remarkable woman.

FERGUS KERR OP

**THE VENERABLE BEDE** by **Benedicta Ward SLG** *Geoffrey Chapman*, London. 1998. Pp. iv + 160, £10.99 hbk.

This excellent book is a welcome re-issue of that first published in 1990; it contains an up-dated bibliography and some additions to the chapter on the cult of Bede. Its six well and clearly-written chapters examine Bede's life and times, his writings and his enduring influence on later generations.

Bede's best known works are the *Ecclesiastical History* and his writings on the saints, but he had a very wide range of interests, and wrote on time, mathematics, language, history, hagiography, the Fathers and Scripture. These were not separate areas of interest for him, but parts of a wider whole. The unifying link in all that he wrote is his understanding of Scripture. The value of Scripture for Bede is discussed by Dr Ward in her important chapter on Bede and the Bible; here she discusses not only the contents of Bede's scriptural writings, but how Scripture lay at the heart of his understanding of salvation history, of God's working in the world. His writings on Scripture are among the least known and read, but for him they were the basis of his understanding of reality, of God's creation; the text of Scripture was for him the 'bread of life.' His writings, in whatever field, were always a commentary on the Scriptures, had always a

pastoral intent and were a continuing expression of the working out of the process of salvation history.

It is in this context that Dr Ward examines Bede's greatest and best loved work, the *Ecclesiastical History*, 'the greatest work of history produced in the barbarian world', and without which our knowledge of early English history would be so much the poorer. Bede was a master of word-craft, and the *History* is very carefully crafted. Bede is writing not only history, but theology; he is describing how the English people were gradually brought from the darkness of paganism to the light of the gospel, guided patiently by the hand of God. It is an exciting story, vividly told. Bede is aware that the process of growth is difficult, hence his story is one of the triumph and occasional failures, as he recounts how the new Christians struggled to adapt themselves to the new life opened to them. He is writing of a world dominated by power, where the ancient Germanic understandings of power engage with, and are finally replaced by, the power of the kingdom of God. Kings, good and evil, and saints rub shoulders, and are frequently in conflict. Behind the apparent chaos and the brutality of wars lies the guiding hand of God, imposing order; everyone and everything becomes part of the divine plan of salvation, even those who oppose the gospel. Bede wrote a history, but he also wrote, for later generations, an account of how the English people were graced, so that they could read of how they came to be part of the kingdom of God, and give thanks for the gift of grace.

Bede wrote lovingly and elegantly of how the Good News of salvation came to the English people, especially to his own beloved Northumbria. Dr Ward, herself a distinguished teacher, writer and translator, has written an elegant book which anyone wishing to approach Bede for the first time, or to learn more about this great writer and teacher, will read with profit and delight.

ROBERT POLLOCK OP

**THE HEROIC FACE OF INNOCENCE; THREE SHORT STORIES BY GEORGE BERNANOS trans. various Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans and Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999. Pp. xii + 150. £12.50 pbk.**

Death is life-giving as every christian ought to know (but doesn't want to know too soon). Life is for giving (away) and when it is not given, already bears an unmistakable resemblance to death. George Bernanos never tired of disclosing for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, man's uncanny ability to confound death and life. *The Heroic Face of Innocence* is a retrieval — another in the *Ressourcement* series — of three short works of Bernanos, all of which have been translated and published previously but never before together. From the collection's title (supplied for this edition), the reader will expect