

**THE POPES AND THE PAPACY IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES** by Jeffrey Richards  
RKP 1979. pp 422 £15.00

**CONSUL OF GOD: LIFE AND TIMES OF GREGORY THE GREAT** by Jeffrey Richards. RKP 1980. pp 309 £9.75

Dr Richard's last book was entitled *Swordsmen of the Screen*: the book on the papacy is dedicated (I think) to Aston Villa Football team as it then was: his style is occasionally inflated and frequently cliché-ridden – the papacy was in an on-going situation in the eighth century (it still is, I suppose) and there are two 'very real senses' and one 'very real threat' on page 1 of *Consul of God*. Further, neither of the bibliographies is calculated to still doubts. Original sources are cited frequently in old, usually inferior, editions. In the first book the Rule of St Benedict is not listed. In the second, it is, in Abbot McCann's edition. Dr Richards should not only have cited, but mastered, Don Adalbert de Vogue's nine volumes of edition and commentary of both the Rule of St Benedict and the Rule of the Master. He does cite Dom Penco's edition of the *Rule* and quotes from Dom Penco's editorial remarks but since he includes it in the secondary sources it hardly seems he knows it at first hand. Very unfortunately he does not know D. H. Green's *The Carolingian Lord* and this is a disaster for a biographer of Gregory the Great. Dr Richard's, then positively invites the reader to take him as a trendy lightweight but there is more to it than that.

In the first place, Dr Richards, when he will let himself, writes very lucidly and both these books will be of great value to teachers and students of more than one discipline. Secondly, with some courage, he has tackled a field of enquiry that Professor Walter Ullmann has made peculiarly his own (in more senses of the word than one). He will not have it that the papacy of his period was a captive of Byzantium or that its history can be seen as the elaboration of an ideology that served for the rejection of Byzantium and its replacement by a papacy that itself commanded the dominant heights of medieval culture and society. He lays great and proper stress

on the element of contingency and he wants to insist on the importance of what went on 'in the smoke-filled rooms'. I think he overdoes the contingency a little. Smoke filled rooms are for politicians with more freedom of action than most of these popes had: it is fair to note that Joseph Lash took about four times as much space to deal with the career of Eleanor Roosevelt than Dr Richards needs for three centuries of papal history – and his coverage is pretty comprehensive. But he does provide a counterweight to Ullmann and this has been much needed. He hasn't said the last word and Dr Ullmann is a more subtle historian than he is here given credit for, but at least Dr Richards has interrupted a monologue and turned it into a debate.

*Consul of God* exhibits the same strengths and weaknesses as the first book. Gregory's world view is firmly depicted as Mediterranean centred and classical and traditional and so on. As it happens Dr Richards has read quite a lot, though not all, of what he should have done and he does show the many ways in which Gregory was original and even revolutionary, but without seeming quite to see how radical Gregory's policies were or the reasons for the violent reactions they provoked. On p 19 Dr Fisher points out quite properly the strength and tenacity of the agrarian round on the religion and ethics of the peasantry: "Not all the disapproving decrees of Church councils or the puritanical sermons of a gaggle of sainted preachers could reshape the spiritual and psychological profile of agrarian society." It depends on your time scale. They did in the end. Not completely and not with quite the results that they expected and not quickly but they did it, and not altogether in the way Dr Richards believes. On p 60 we are told "the cult of St Peter was sedulously advanced until by the time of Gregory

people actually talked of 'visiting Peter' when they meant 'going to Rome.' But in a world without mass media, even the mass media available to and used by the classical emperors (I mean the coins particularly) I do not think that "sedulously advanced" has much force here. There was fertile soil already there for the cult of Peter in the sentiments and needs of the sort of people who visited Peter. I do not think this was a matter of peasants but of the feelings and requirements of the Germanic warrior aristocracy, whom Dr Richards, like a good Byzantinist, regards with distaste, unlike Gregory the Great who didn't like them much but knew they had to be lived with. Dr Richards is not very good, because he is not in this matter learned enough, on St Benedict. He tells us the monastic vocation "was specifically non-priestly and monks were not permitted to celebrate Mass". On p 156 he tells us correctly that "in many monasteries monks were ordained to say Mass". He himself points out how Gregory relied on monks, particularly from his own monastery, as candidates for the episcopate. By contemporary standards, he promoted more bishops than popes were wont to and he brought a monastic element into the hierarchy for the first time. When one realises that for most, especially conservative Roman clergy, monks were a collection of hippies, it is not difficult to see why Gregory was so unpopular in Rome by the time

of his death (though Dr Richards does give an admirable account of the anti-Gregorian reaction without fully understanding it).

Dr Richards gives a good account of the misunderstandings between Rome and Constantinople over the title ecumenical patriarch and clears up the constitutional implications. He misses one quite important point I thought. Gregory certainly claimed a position superior to any living bishop and Dr Richards is very good on just what this entailed. But he certainly did not want to call himself universal bishop and repudiated the title with horror (unlike Gregory VII). I do not think he was making a tactical ploy. He accused the Patriarch of seeking a "solitary pre-eminence". What I think is at issue is his view of the Church. By 'Church' in Gregory's day was meant the community of the faithful, especially the faithful departed. The pope himself was then in this perspective merely one of a succession of bishops of Rome however great the authority or prestige of the see. So was the patriarch in the Church of Constantinople and this is what Gregory was reminding John IV of. In conclusion it needs pointing out that this is the first book on Gregory in English for seventy years and the most serious since Dudden was published in 1905. For all its faults, and they are more than there ought to be, this is a stimulating book that deserves to be read.

ERIC JOHN

**I, CATHERINE: Selected Writings of Catherine of Siena, edited and translated by Kenelm Foster and Mary John Ronayne. Collins, 1980 £7.95**

If 1980, which marks the sixth century of the death of Catherine of Siena, had passed without the publication, in English translation, of any of her works, English-speaking admirers of the saint (and they are many) would not only have been disappointed, but would also have experienced a certain frustration of their efforts to appreciate better – and at closer quarters – this remarkable Italian woman and her message. Fortunately, however, this is not the case, for, with the publication, ear-

ly this year, of a translation of *The Dialogue* (based on the Italian critical edition), and more recently, of *I, Catherine*, a translation of selected writings, the opportunity to convert distant admiration into genuine appreciation, and even familiarity, has been offered.

*I, Catherine* is well-titled, for the book is mainly a selection from the letters of Catherine of Siena ("I Catherine . . . write to you" is her stylized salutation); what is possibly misleading is the sub-title, "Sel-