

early monastic texts that complement each other. The comments Athanasius makes here on the psalms present one theme in the Christian use of the psalter, that of the personal identification of the person reading the psalms with the emotion of the psalmist, so that any feeling or reaction to experience can find its reflection and resolution in the repetition of appropriate verses; a limited and prosaic approach, perhaps, if set beside the great phrases of Augustine on the psalms as the prayer of Christ to the Father. The translation is suited to the text in its plain pedestrian tone; it is welcome rather for presenting in English an untranslated work of Athanasius than for any dramatic light the content throws on the psalms.

As is usual in this series, the translator has provided an introduction and someone else has written a preface. 'What' asks the preface writer, 'can all this ancient spirituality mean for moderns?' (p xx) 'The answer' he continues 'can be brief' and indeed it can (though in fact it is not), for when one has read the paragraph which contains his answer, it can be summarized as 'very little if anything', a discouraging beginning for the reader who has been promised on the cover 'one of the foremost classics of

Christian asceticism'. The preface is a sad disappointment, clumsy in expression, vague in ideas and with little understanding of the texts. The Introduction on the other hand is a valuable addition to the study of the text, and balances the pessimism of the preface by indicating both the intrinsic value of the *Life of St Antony* and its effect on those who have read it through the centuries.

Perhaps a post-script to this review may be permitted: the Classics of Western Spirituality is concerned to present many invaluable texts in translation, but its policy in this volume as in the others continues to diminish their value in one unnecessary way: the use of the pronoun 'he' is outlawed in the introductions and where possible, it seems, also in the texts. In this case, the word 'men' is always followed by 'and women', and 'sons' by 'and daughters', a needless irritant and a grammatical misunderstanding. In the case of the *Life of St Antony*, the more appropriate gesture to feminism (if such is desirable) might have been to replace the *Letter to Marcellinus* with the *Life of St Syncretica*, an ancient parallel to the *Life of St Antony*.

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LE COURAGE DU FUTUR, by V. de Couesnongle. *Du Cerf*. 1980. pp 168.

This is a collection of pieces written by the Master of the Dominican Order since 1975, most of them addressed to Dominicans and all of them clearly entitled to a particularly serious hearing from Dominicans.

As the title of the book suggests, one of the Master's main concerns is that we should face the future without undue timidity. He recalls for us the courage of St Dominic, who left his familiar home with the canons of Osma to follow an unknown path, who established himself in the very heart of the heretics' own territory, who scattered his few brethren instead of consolidating his young foundation. It is this kind of courage that we need, which can escape from the cramping conservatism which seeks only to maintain what the past has given us, precisely because it rests on certain eternal and unchanging values,

especially hope in God.

The Master is evidently afraid that we shall fail to respond to the real challenge of our time either because we are too much entangled in the works which we have inherited from the past, or because we lack the courage to explore uncharted apostolates. In particular, he reminds us that our religious poverty ought to mean a real freedom to undertake tasks which do not guarantee us the kind of financial remuneration which we easily take to be necessary. The only really important question is the one which provides the title of the last chapter of this book: Who are our Cumans? Just as St Dominic dreamed of going off to bring the gospel to the Cumans, and was sustained throughout his life by this desire, so we ought to be haunted by some apostolic dream, whether or not we man-

age to realise it in practice. The Dominican Order exists solely to proclaim the gospel wherever it is needed. And this means that it ought not to confine itself to preaching to the converted; it ought not, as the Master puts it, devote all its attention to the one sheep which has not gone astray, forgetting the ninety-nine which have wandered from the fold.

If the Order is to serve the world and the church, we need to recapture something of this original apostolic passion, and this will mean examining some of our priorities. Have we sometimes been too concerned simply to maintain our institutions, and so have lost sight of the value of a more footloose, itinerant style of preaching? Have we lost our nerve about talking about God and Jesus Christ, hiding behind a more secular kind of self-presentation? Or have we sometimes failed to engage with the world to which we are meant to be preaching, contenting ourselves with the tired platitudes of our ancient pieties?

The Master warns us repeatedly that unless there is a real seriousness both in our engagement with the world and in our engagement with the word of God, we shall never rediscover the vitality which should be ours as followers of St Dominic, nor shall we be able to attract, much less retain, new members for the Order.

In face of a widespread sense of disillusionment, it is encouraging to read these warm and ambitious words, which face up realistically to the dangers and difficulties, but which refuse to be cowed by them. If we do not believe in the value of our own vocation, then we have no right to expect that anybody else will either. We need to rediscover the sound theological hope which fired St Dominic and his associates.

And this requires, first of all, a serious intellectual endeavour. The Master recalls

Paul VI's injunction to the Order to remain faithful to its theological inheritance from St Thomas. The church looks to us for a certain kind of theological seriousness and profundity, and this cannot be maintained without a courageous intellectual confrontation both with the traditional sources of theology and with the present day intellectual needs and excitements of our contemporaries.

It also needs a rediscovery of prayer. Possibly the Master's repeated adversion to the evidence of prayer groups needs to be balanced by the evidence of other people who look to the traditional Orders partly because they are disillusioned with or put off by the rather evangelical earnestness of some of the more modern types of Catholic piety, but the essential point surely still stands: unless our religious life can be known to be a real life of faith and communion with God, it must sooner or later be seen to be pointless. If we are too coy about this, we do ourselves a disservice.

These are only some of the things which are touched on in this book. The most important thing in it, perhaps, is its overall tone of confidence and realism, which cannot be adequately captured in a brief review like this; I would expect this to be welcomed not only by Dominicans but by others too who are wondering how to face the future as Christians and as religious. And maybe the most important message to the Dominicans is the reminder that the Order exists for its mission, and it must therefore allow itself to be shaped and directed by the needs of whoever the modern "Cumans" are. It is not just by looking at ourselves that we shall discover what we are: we must discover what we are *for* in looking at the world to which we must preach the gospel.

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