

names of Irish Dominicans selected to take the lectorate between 1603 and 1646 at the Roman *studium generale* of the Minerva, which possibly included his name, went missing in Rome about 1980. In the meantime, this book gives a wonderfully detailed account of the kind of life that Primrose must have led in the 1640s in one or other of the houses that welcomed friars of the Irish province. For the student of Irish history and the general reader, the author offers an intriguing and often moving record of suffering and resilience, which does honour to the memory of his predecessors in the Order.

FERGUS KERR OP

AMBROSE OF MILAN AND THE END OF THE ARIAN-NICENE CONFLICTS by D.H. Williams, Oxford, *Clarendon Press*, 1995 xi + 259 pp. £35.

That Ambrose has not recently achieved the even modest popular renown of his contemporaries Augustine and Jerome, both the subject of lively and scholarly general biographies as well as of much specialised study, may in part be due to the views of some of his earlier twentieth century admirers. Apart from glorying in his apparently easy victories over the secular authorities, in the persons of the emperors Valentinian II, Magnus Maximus and Theodosius I, his modern biographers presented his Arian opponents in Milan as little more than proverbial paper tigers: a gaggle of uncouth Goths and a vindictive woman, the empress Justina. Admittedly, they were doing little more than re-telling the story they themselves received from Ambrose's first biographer, the Milanese notary Paulinus, who wrote his *Vita Ambrosii* in Africa probably in 422 at Augustine's request. However, such untaxing triumphalism is now likely to be as unappealing to the general reader as its lack of source criticism is to the scholar. It is a pleasant paradox that Ambrose may come to be more justly appreciated thanks to renewed interest in and understanding of the Arian theology and its supporters that he so much detested.

The last ten to fifteen years have seen a virtual revolution in the study of Arianism, to which the author of this book has already contributed through his joint editing, with M.R. Barnes, of a valuable collection of articles (*Arianism after Arius*, Edinburgh, 1993) and in his own publications. To this he has now added probably the best study of Ambrose to be written this century. His book is, however, more than that, in that its subject does not take centre stage for nearly a hundred pages. What comes first is a vigorous and thorough-going re-assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Homoian position in the western half of the Roman empire from the time of the Council of Rimini in 359 up to Ambrose's election to the see of Milan in 374. It would be hard to do justice here to the wealth of cogent argument and new ideas that emerge from these three chapters. There are excellent sections on Filastrius of Brescia, Eusebius of Vercelli and Zeno of Verona, as well as

an important consideration of the role of Hilary of Poitiers, including powerful arguments about the place and date of composition of his second letter to Constantius II. What emerges is further confirmation of the regional strengths of the Homoians and above all of the central importance of imperial attitudes.

This latter impression is amply reinforced in the section of the book devoted primarily to Ambrose. What is at issue is not just imperial partiality for one or another theological party, but the effects of the studied neutrality practised by the dynasty of Valentinian, at least up until 381. In a carefully argued section on the change of attitude on the part of Gratian, the emperor becomes as much liberated as Ambrose from the intellectually stultifying effects of older views that saw him as little more than a puppet of the bishop of Milan. Both the famous Altar of Victory controversy, here treated briefly, and the conflict over the restitution of a basilica to the Milanese Homoians are made infinitely more comprehensible by the wider political contexts into which they are placed. In particular, a well argued re-dating of a letter from Magnus Maximus to Valentinian II shows that fear of military intervention in Italy by the Gallic usurper played as least as much of a part as Ambrose's convenient discovery of the relics of Milan's only indigenous martyrs in causing the court to back down over the matter of the basilica.

These major episodes are far from being the only parts of Ambrose's career to benefit from Professor Williams' inspection. Many other aspects, such as the reasons for his election are fruitfully re-examined. Many new insights and arguments, for example his probable baptism at the hands of his eventual successor Simplicianus, are offered, and few of them are likely to be resisted. The only criticism that can be made, and it itself is testimony to the author's achievement, is that we are not given more. The task that Professor Williams sets himself, of explaining the real defeat of western Homoianism, is achieved through his account of the events of the years 387 and 338. He thus has no cause to proceed into the final decade of Ambrose's episcopate, and the confrontations with Theodosius I. These need as much freeing from the dead hands of Homes-Dudden and Palanque and behind them of Paulinus of Milan, as did the Arian conflicts. But, while this is by far the best study of Ambrose to be written for a very long time, it was never intended as a comprehensive biographical treatment. Perhaps our author will oblige?

ROGER COLLINS

RENEWING PHILOSOPHY by Hilary Putnam, *Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA. and London, 1992. pp xii + 234p.*

Hilary Putnam's Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of St. Andrews in 1990 are the basis for this wide-ranging, extremely readable book (now out in paperback). Putnam is one of the main players in Anglo-American philosophy and the book provides a useful introduction for theologians and others, both to Putnam's own work and to recent