

ST DOMINIC IN EARLY TUSCAN PAINTINGS. By George Kaftal. (Blackfriars; 7s. 6d.)

This book should not be missed. Though small in size and modest in price, it has great interest both for the scholar and the art-lover. It is a study of St Dominic, through the medium of 13th, 14th and 15th century Tuscan paintings, of which forty-one are reproduced; but though the focus of the book is on the Saint one can learn much about Fra Angelico and Francesco Traini whose panels depicting scenes from his life are shown at the end. The Church's custom, in those days, of telling a story by means of painted pictures seems so infinitely superior to our present-day method of moving pictures. The painting of St Dominic's mother, conceiving a whelp, bearing in its jaws a burning torch with which to set the whole world afire, is a powerful piece of symbolism, and tells a story as vividly and completely as a long narrative film. There are pictures by Fra Angelico and Francesco Traini which show the book written by St Dominic leaping out of the flames, while that of the heretic was burnt; the scene is like a dream, speaking to the unconscious, revealing so poignantly the indestructibility of Truth.

One of the loveliest examples of Francesco Traini's painting is the figure of St Dominic (Fig. vii) beardless, with an open book and the lily. The serenity and poise of this composition give it its great beauty. It is interesting to compare this with Fra Angelico's conception of the Saint (Fig. xi) with a beard, an open book and a staff. One feels that Fra Angelico has not just painted a type but a particular individual and has truly been called an 'expressionist' painter. To lovers of Fra Angelico there is an opportunity of being able to see clearly the development of his style as shown in the Predella to the coronation altarpiece (Louvre, Paris) and the Predella to the altarpiece at Cortona (Cortona Museum). The Cortona paintings, influenced as the author says by the Louvre Predella, in each case are richer in design and the forms more carefully organised. Perhaps the most charming picture of all is that of the angels bringing bread to the friars when they had scarcely a morsel left.

The first complete life of St Dominic was written by Theodoric of Appodia in 1290, as the author explains in his preface, and for that reason he has used this manuscript in translation to accompany the illustrations; this makes very delightful reading. It is a most enjoyable book—the first of a series; it may be noted with pleasure that Dr Kaftal is preparing three more.

M. FREEMAN

POST-WAR CHURCH BUILDING. A Practical Handbook. Edited by Ernest Short. (Hollis and Carter; 30s.)

It is natural curiosity that leads one to look at the illustrations of an expensive and ambitiously-ordered book. The frontispiece, weakly-designed *mélange* of ecclesiastical commonplaces, described

all too truly as 'an example of modern stained glass', prepares one for worse to come. A 'suggested decoration for sanctuary' (p. 15) and a 'design for high altar and reserve altar' (p. 107) are about as hideous and liturgically meaningless as would be any sample taken casually from a church furnisher's catalogue. It is true that there are also many examples of good design (Joseph Cribb's font and Dunstan Pruden's chalice, as well as Geoffrey Webb's altars—though his name does not appear), but a first impression of this book is seriously prejudiced by the disorder of its illustrations. A detective eye might discern some significance in their numbering, or lack of it.

One admits the difficulty of providing a lowest common denominator, acceptable to all tastes (and to all religious allegiances), in a book of this sort. The problem that faces the architect in designing a Catholic Church is essentially different from that which confronts him in a 'broad church' suburban building, for instance. And all the ancillary arts will be modified accordingly. This is not denominational intransigence. A Catholic church grows from the altar: all else takes its meaning, and assuredly its plastic form, from that central determinant. Allegedly 'functional' churches, which might equally well be cinemas or community centres, have only the most superficial resemblances with the church 'which is built for the altar, without which the central act of the liturgy may not be celebrated', as Mr Geoffrey Webb properly emphasises in his magisterial article on 'Building and Furnishing an Altar according to the Roman Rite'.

*Post-War Church Building* is, then, seriously weakened at its central point by a confusion of purpose. But one must go on to admit that it contains a great deal that is incidentally useful. Knowledgeable papers on acoustics, heating and ventilation, lighting and wood-work should be of much value to architects and to those who engage them. And Mr Webb's contribution on the Roman altar is exact, practical and amply documented.

The introduction by the Director of the Tate Gallery argues to a precision of purpose that the book as a whole sadly lacks. 'Christianity', Dr Rothenstein writes, 'is not a distillation of man's creativity but the gratuitous gift of divine condescension, yet (or rather therefore) it solicits and inspires men's total response, and demands that the quality of this response be as perfect as possible; so that it should call out every "natural" perfection.' His severe castigation of the 'shoddy mass-produced objects of piety' which dishonour most Catholic churches is timely, and its ground is the valid one that relates means to ends (or, in this context, decoration to the thing adorned). And he vigorously attacks the specious defeatism which equates Christian art with a cultural milieu that has perished.

Yet it must be true that we get the churches (and the decoration) we deserve. Improvement can only come once, in Eric Gill's phrase, it is realised that 'it all goes together'; and the thing made reflects all too accurately the mind (or lack of it) in its maker. If Dr Rothenstein's admirable introduction (and the book is worth buying for

that alone) had determined what follows, *Post-War Church Building* might have done a great deal to establish principles (and the means for their implementation) which should guide the Christian artist in our time. As it is, disparate articles by specialists reveal all the specialist's proprietary concerns. A church is never the total of the things it contains, and the chaotic choice of illustrations reveals very plainly the dilemma which must arise from a failure to see a church as a whole thing—organic and serving a single end.

And yet the book can be recommended for its occasional excellences; it assuredly is representative, and it may, by the misgivings it rouses, help to clear the ground for the future.

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

THE CONDUCTOR RAISES HIS BATON. By William J. Finn. (Dennis Dobson; 12s. 6d.)

The author of this book is an American priest who—to quote the foreword by Leopold Stokowski—'has devoted a lifetime to music and conducting, particularly to the inspired *a cappella* music of the sixteenth century'. His purpose is to discuss, in the light of his long experience both as listener and conductor, certain aspects of interpretation rather than the mechanics of conducting; and, although he addresses himself primarily to the choral conductor, most of what he has to say is of equal value to the orchestral conductor also. In the earlier chapters especially there is much which will seem rather obvious to the experienced musician and which has clearly been included for the instruction of students. The subsequent chapters on Dynamics, however, are full of valuable suggestions from which even experts may derive considerable profit. Fr Finn does not expect universal agreement with his ideas, but rightly maintains that a consideration of them should benefit everyone who aspires to artistic distinction as a conductor.

The fundamental weakness of the book is revealed in its early chapter on Rhythm, in which the untenable thesis is propounded that the essential element of musical rhythm is periodic stress or accent. For Fr Finn the down-beat is a 'stress', the up-beat a 'slack' (inelegant word). This thesis is common enough in our text-books, but is nevertheless incompatible with artistic performance and therefore cannot be valid. Furthermore Fr Finn directs that a carefully graded hierarchy of 'stresses' and 'slacks' should be achieved within the measure. In 4/4 time, for instance, he insists on the following dynamic scale: the first beat is the loudest, the third beat somewhat less loud, the second beat softer, and the fourth beat softer still. Has it never occurred to him that this scheme would make it impossible to achieve a genuine *crescendo* throughout the bar? Such a *crescendo* makes the first beat the softest and the fourth beat the loudest!

No, the secret of the down-beat is a much subtler question than