

sense of encapsulating the main strands of his thought. But it is a pity that of Greer's selection only the homily on Numbers is not already available in a good, annotated English translation.

More serious, perhaps, is the fact that the selection is rather bland, a blandness intensified by Greer's very unsatisfactory handling of the text of *De Principiis*. Koetschau's edition, from which Greer translates, prints Rufinus' bowdlerized Latin version, together with fragments or supposed fragments drawn from hostile sources like Justinian and Jerome. With one curious exception, to which I shall return in a moment, what Greer gives is a translation of Rufinus, with all mention of the hostile fragments banished to footnotes. These notes sometimes contain a brief summary of the fragment, but they frequently give no more than a bare reference; one wonders, for example, how many of the readers Greer seems to envisage will be edified by a note like 'Cf. Jerome's Letter to Avitus 12' (p 202, n. 85; this reference happens to be to a very interesting discussion of the 'eternal gospel').

To make matters worse, Greer gives no warning that there is even a problem here. Apart from a remark in the introduction to the effect that 'a central difficulty in interpreting Origen is that we must approach his writings through the controversies about them' (p 30), there is not even a hint that the text he gives the reader might not be what Origen actually wrote.

The curious exception I mentioned occurs at the end of IV.3.10, where Greer prints in his text a translation of an extract from Jerome's *Ep. ad Avitum* 11, and, for good measure, he here includes as

a part of his text a sentence which Jerome surely intends as a summary of Origen's position, rather than as a direct quotation, and which not even Koetschau regards as a part of the original text ('The firmament ... is to others heaven': p 198 = Koetschau, p 339, note to line 17).

Origen, of course, continues to be a divisive figure, and I must confess that my prejudices are not Greer's. His introduction is written from a 'confessedly sympathetic point of view' (p 6) and often reads like a statement of the case for the defence. He argues that in evaluating the 'theological story' that Origen tells 'we must not be deceived by the philosophical and cosmological elaborations. Beneath them and expressed through them is the authentic vision of the early Church' (p 17).

This means that the more idiosyncratic features of Origen's system tend to be minimized or explained away. For example, Greer states emphatically that at the final restoration 'the souls have resurrection bodies' and their final state is 'stable', so that the 'rational natures can never fall' again (p 16). Now these are notoriously thorny questions, and the systematic distortions of both Rufinus and the hostile sources make it virtually impossible to recover the nuances of Origen's position. But it is difficult to see what purpose is served by such bald statements, unsupported by any reference to the texts.

Through his handling of both text and introduction, Greer produces an emasculated Origen, one whose excitement and incisiveness do not really come through. But if Eusebius' story about Origen's youth is actually true, that is, I suppose, a not inapposite fate.

PAUL PARVIS O P

**DOMINICAINS: L'ORDRE DES PRÊCHEURS PRÉSENTÉ PAR QUELQUES-UNS D'ENTRE EUX. *Du Cerf*. 1980. pp 264.**

Some fifteen years after Père Walgrave's *Essai d'Autocritique* we now have from du Cerf what might be described as an *essai d'autocélébration*. The contributors, both men and women belonging to the Dominican family in France, declare

from various points of view, their enthusiasm for the original ideal of St Dominic and their confidence in its vitality today. The contents range from a very sympathetic "Portrait of St Dominic" by the present Provincial of France to brief

accounts of some of the ventures in which French-speaking Dominicans are currently involved, such as the enormously successful *Pèlerinage du Rosaire*, the experimental Centre de la Sainte Baume, the renowned École Biblique and the great publishing house, du Cerf itself. A substantial part of the book consists of a series of comments on the Fundamental Constitution of the Order, including an account of the significance of the different parts of the Dominican family (nuns, congregations of sisters, Dominican laity and the Secular Institute as well as the brethren). There are also a few brief articles on famous Dominicans of the past (St Thomas, St Catherine of Siena, the Rhineland mystics, Las Casas, Lacordaire and Père Lataste).

The prevailing tone of the book is certainly enthusiasm. Controversy whether ancient or modern has been almost entirely banished, to such an extent that in the article on Lacordaire there is not a single mention of Jandel. But this does not mean that the contributors entirely avoid problematic issues. Fr Boespflug's article on Dominican religious life, for instance, makes some very sensible comments on some of the difficulties faced by Dominican communities. He also, usefully, indicates the rather negative lessons to be learned from the French experience of small communities which, as he says, have tended rather too easily to become "foyers of intolerance".

The French language lends itself admirably to the kind of ebullient eagerness which the authors of this book wish to convey. Many of the contributions are written in spurts of unashamed rhetoric, which few Englishmen would dare to imitate. But the result is a delightful and refreshing book, which communicates vividly the spirit of the Order. Vicairé's words about the beginnings of the Order might be applied to the book itself: "Une jeunesse pure rayonne sur le front des frères ... tous les lieux où passe le petit troupeau du Messie, il se fait comme une fête de nouveauté".

The major constant ingredients in Dominican life are all well represented in this collection. The life of study features

in several articles, but Père Nicholas' outstandingly good sketch of the character of St Thomas' sanctity deserves a special mention, with its reminder that the Dominicans are typically concerned with the "sanctification of the intellect". (It is only fair to point out, though, that the articles on some of the more modern Dominican enterprises reported in the final section of the book show a slightly disturbing tendency to succumb to the prevailing anti-intellectualism of the present day). Père Duval displays expertly the peculiar way in which Dominican law seeks to foster and enshrine a spirit of freedom. The Master of the Order makes the interesting observation that Dominican government cannot simply be regarded as "democratic", because it seeks not just majority decisions, but, as far as possible, a genuine unanimity in which minority views are allowed to make their full contribution to the eventual synthesis. Throughout the book it is accepted without hesitation that the nub of the whole Order's life is its apostolate; in the article specifically devoted to this topic, Père Ranquet remarks that preaching can never be regarded simply as "one aspect" of our lives. The diversity of different particular vocations contained within the Order is well reflected in the different contributions, and the complexity and subtlety of Dominican community life is well discussed by Père Boespflug in the article already referred to.

As an introduction to Dominican life, for those who are not familiar with the past or the present of the Order, *Dominicains* will be an admirable book to recommend, though obviously it is addressed primarily to the situation in France. And those who have long been familiar with the Order will find *Dominicains* an encouraging sign that its vitality has by no means been quenched by all the struggles and difficulties of recent years. And if the rhetoric is sometimes nearer to the clouds than to the earth, a little fantasy is often the best way to get ourselves moving again in our attempts to cope with the tedious problems of everyday life.

SIMON TUGWELL O P