

Reviews

CHRIST AMONG THE MEDIEVAL DOMINICANS: REPRESENTATIONS OF CHRIST IN THE TEXTS AND IMAGES OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS edited by K. Emery & J. Wawrykow *University of Notre Dame Press, Southbend IN, 1998. Pp. xvi + 561, \$80.00 hbk.*

Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be for ever, declares the Letter to the Hebrews. Yet our perception of him varies and has given rise to numerous christologies over the centuries, beginning with the New Testament itself.

A conference was held in 1995 at the University of Notre Dame (USA) to take significant soundings as to how Christ was perceived in the writings and art of the medieval Dominicans. Most of its papers are now published in a large and generously illustrated volume. The variety of themes, perspectives and methodologies in the twenty-six chapters is in this case enriching as well as probably inevitable. With disarming modesty, the editors claim high quality for 'many' of the contributions.

The major subtext is how the medieval Dominicans compared and contrasted with the Franciscans, not least in how their respective founders were to be related to Christ and to their brethren. Correctly, however, the conference did not set out to establish any broad thesis about Christ among the Dominicans, to avoid the risk of replacing one set of overgeneralisations with another. Still, there are some striking features. With an eye on Franciscan theologians, Ulrich Horst reminds us that Aquinas never mentions the name of the founder of his Order, and indeed hardly mentions the Order. Simon Tugwell begins by reflecting on the fact that Gui in his section on St. Dominic in his *Speculum Sanctorale* eliminates almost all references to Christ as Dominic's model, and ends by giving an intriguing explanation as to why Christ as model was important in the earliest but not in later Dominican hagiography. The appeal to Christ as model was useful in meeting the challenge of the older monastic orders, less so when the more radical Franciscans were involved. Joanna Cannon's art-historical paper on Dominic as *alter Christus* shows her profound knowledge of Dominican medieval art, and she too identifies a certain reluctance to portray Dominic as another Christ. She reproduces a remarkable (unique?) manuscript illumination showing Dominic welcoming a group to a meal with Christ himself at the head of the table. This seems a crucially revealing iconography. It has to be admitted, and this may be significant in itself, that there is a dearth of pictorial evidence for Dominic as compared to Francis. Incidentally, Cannon could have strengthened her point about the relatively underdeveloped cult of Dominic among his brethren when referring to the 1254 and 1256 General Chapters urging the display of images of Dominic, by pointing out that both Chapters asked for images of Peter Martyr as well as of Dominic.

This volume deals in varying degrees with most of the themes, persons and genres that its title leads one to expect. The focus is far from being exclusively on the friars, but includes Dominican and other women. Alas, the book does not include a study of Fra Angelico's christological concerns nor of St. Catherine of Siena's, and it stops chronologically just as Savonarola is reached. These omissions leave big gaps in the overall project. As well as exploring the extent to which Dominic was seen in Christ-like terms, and indeed Christ could be considered as the first Dominican (R. Newhauser), much attention is given to how medieval Dominicans understood and preached Christ. Aquinas features prominently in more than one chapter, and he has pride of place in the exhibition of manuscripts, incunables and early printed books which accompanied the conference at Notre Dame and has now been turned into a lengthy chapter. (It includes a 1596 Dominican Missal in the possession of the London priory earlier this century.) Walter Senner's observation that Albert the Great's philosophy has been studied more than his theology could be extended to Aquinas. This is not a distorting mistake that Jean-Pierre Torrell would make, and those who have yet to read his two superb volumes on Aquinas can start with his chapter on Christ in the 'spirituality' of St. Thomas. We are in the hands of a master.

Important theological works need not have been widely read or influential in their time, and it is one of the merits of this collection that it gives ample and representative space to lesser-known figures and genres. Aquinas, Albert, Eckhart, Suso, Kilwardby, and Fishacre are notable theologians, and aspects of their christologies are studied in these essays. But a multitude of other Dominicans crowds these pages, in various settings. It is worth remembering that the most popular handbook of theology in the Middle Ages was not written by Aquinas or some other great theologian but could well be the *Compendium theologicæ veritatis* of Hugh Ripelin, an otherwise nearly unknown Dominican. The recurring attribution of his *Compendium* to St. Albert may have helped its standing, but (those Franciscans again) it is in fact heavily dependent on Bonaventure.

In the variety of these essays, we glimpse the presence of the one Christ, inexhaustible in meaning and power, distilled into countless thoughts and prayers and activities in a Dominican setting. Exposition of Christ's poverty and way of life was motivated by the need to validate and defend the evangelical legitimacy of the Dominican Order; further proof of the need to contextualise competing christologies. One of the most demanding chapters in a collection that often requires concentrated attention of the reader—and repays it!—is Jeffrey Hamburger's excellent study of Suso. Using a number of illustrations, possibly executed by himself, Suso asks his readers to live their lives according to his script, but beyond the text lies his experience and ultimately the prime Exemplar, Christ himself.

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