Wickedness is itself the cause of wickedness, it does not 'come from' any other source; since it is aimed at no human good a full explanation of it, a rational account, is not possible. It is simply inexplicable.

Now, this may make a certain sense of Augustine but only at a certain cost. For it is surely not the case that evil acts are aimed at no good but rather at one or more goods in inappropriate ways. Someone who kills, tortures, cheats, deceives etc. does not aim at nothing but aims at some good (money, play, reputation, survival, aesthetic satisfaction...) and does so in morally impermissible and unreasonable ways. Unless they are pathological, wicked acts are not unintelligible, not pieces of sub-rational behaviour—this is why we consider wicked agents morally responsible. Chappell thinks either we hold wicked acts are unintelligible or embrace the Manichaean doctrine of positive evils, but this is not so. We can accept something like the position of Aquinas: though from the point of view of ultimate happiness, Perfect Beatitude, sins may be non-acts, they are still chosen for the sake of some (impoverished, imperfect conception of) human good; they are still expressions of rationality for which agents may be held morally responsible, even if they are (all things considered) unreasonable.

I have not discussed any number of topics about which Chappell's book is useful and clear-sighted; nor have I explored distinctions with which he might attempt to answer queries. This book is clearly worth reading for anyone interested in theories of practical reason or in understanding Aristotle and Augustine. In bringing Aristotle's and Augustine's ethics closer together and doing so within the confines of analytic philosophy Chappell has achieved a great deal.

HAYDEN RAMSAY

SPITTING AT DRAGONS: TOWARDS A FEMINIST THEOLOGY OF SAINTHOOD by Elizabeth Stuart, *Cassell*, London, 1996.

Spitting at Dragons is that most impressive mix, a popular work distilled by a scholarly understanding, which remains loyal to a demanding and dogmatic denominational tradition (that of Christian feminism), and yet breaks new ground valuable for other traditions also. Its question is an important one: how is an ordinary, rational, intelligent Christian to view the community of saints? In particular, how is an ordinary, rational, intelligent Christian *woman* to view the community of saints?

The first chapter, making use of writers such as Mary Daly, Sara Maitland and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, sums up the case for the prosecution. Today's enlightened women should have nothing to do with saints. Lives of women saints in all ages stress submissiveness, sexual purity (or endless penance for the lack of it), a sense of unworthiness and an eagerness for suffering, sometimes self-inflicted. They can often be little short of pornographic. These claims, while they certainly beg some questions, are convincingly illustrated from patristic, medieval and modern hagiography. Furthermore, it is claimed, the

canonisation process is controlled by the male hierarchy, which self-confessedly uses it for political ends (statistical breakdowns of canonisations by gender and state of life are adduced), and three essential ingredients in sanctity are unfeminist: heroism (the emphasis on an individual at the expense of her community, often over against it), death (the dead are safe from offering unexpected challenges to those in power) and miracles (which demonstrate a hatred of nature and the desire to supersede it).

Elizabeth Stuart notes a few obvious replies to these objections (canonisation is traditionally a popular movement, not a hierarchy-led one; "heroes" can be redefined as "helpers", the dead can be a "dangerous memory" to the living), and proceeds to offer two ways forward, one historical/literary and one affective.

The first of these is the familiar process of historical and sociological detective work involved in giving hagiography and other historical material dealing with women saints, including their own writings, a "feminist reading". The author gives a quick spin to Brigit of Kildare, Hilda of Whitby, Catherine of Siena, Thérèse of Lisieux, Teresa of Avila, Elizabeth Seton, Joan of Arc and Thecla, pointing out how clearly their strength and authority can be seen through writings by or about them which seem at first sight to place them in the submissive, purity-fixated roles earlier objected to. (The inclusion of Thecla, disciple of the apostle Paul in the late second-century *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, illustrates a potential problem: the author is not prepared to differentiate between saints who actually lived and those who probably did not. Her excuse is that "the male presentation of Christian history" is not itself necessarily factual, which hardly acquits her of the duty of proposing some properly researched alternative if she believes in history at all.)

This solution, examined in the second chapter, is worked out in the fourth as the first of two "theologies of sainthood": the "minimalist approach". Oppressed communities can learn from and take heart from the histories and writings of saints to remind them that they are not alone; that others have fought against similar troubles in the past in very different ways, and sometimes successfully. These saints remind the oppressed and others who care about them that hunger for justice is a mark of orthodoxy, and that, in sharing their struggle, they share in their holiness. The approach is well-established, but the author brings a deep understanding of the process to her exposition of it: the saints will be strange as well as familiar, they will trouble as well as support those who seek inspiration from their stories; in particular, the more distasteful aspects of their culture will challenge modern Christians to realise that our standards are less objective than we implicitly believe them to be, and that ideas whose truth we today take for granted will seem equally distasteful to future generations. She is alive to the difficulties of seeing self-starvation, flagellation and the rest as anything other than repulsive and sick, and yet without making sense of them

insists that there must be some sense to be made.

But the book's real originality is in the second, "radical" solution to the question of how modern Christian women could view the saints. This is adumbrated in the third chapter, which discusses the friendship of women saints with earlier women saints, paying particular attention to the friendship of Joan of Arc with Katherine of Alexandria and Margaret of Antioch, as described in the record of her trial for witchcraft. The author (successfully, I think) argues that these were clearly recognisable figures to Joan, with their own identity separate from hers, in some sense embodied, and capable of supporting or disagreeing with her. Other cases she adduces are less convincing: Christine de Pisan's relationship with her namesake St Christine seems to be no more than one of historical inspiration. But experienced friendship with Jesus, Mary and the saints was indeed commonly reported of many women saints of the Middle Ages and after. The second "theology of sainthood", then, is the suggestion that modern women could likewise experience such friendships themselves.

What leads the author to make (very tentatively) this suggestion is her conviction that friendship is essential to human flourishing, and hence to holiness. This is a view of holiness that surely cannot be expounded often enough. The author identifies it as the child of feminism: followers of Thomas Aquinas will recognise it from his account in the *Summa*, based on Aristotle's discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (see e.g. Fergus Kerr's article "Charity as Friendship" in Davies, ed. *Language, Meaning and God*). But the author improves on Aristotle's picture: far from being only really possible between free citizens, friendship is essential above all to slaves, those who can nowhere else find the safety to be vulnerable. Friendship with the saints would be one possibility of friendship for the oppressed.

But what level of reality would this friendship have? Here the author acknowledges that she has a major problem, because she (following what she takes to be feminist orthodoxy) does not actually believe in individual life after death, deeming it "a male concern" and a "dualism we have to ditch", opposed to the environmentally-sound recycling of both body and soul back into the energy of the cosmos. Yet one of the prerequisites of friendship is that the two friends be distinct, able to interact and challenge one another. Such a view would seem to turn friendship with the saints into friendship with an indistinguishable piece of "cosmic soup".

Her answer is to make use of the realm of the imagination (oddly enough also a classic "orthodox" explanation of such friendships, made use of for example by the Inquisitors who exonerated Rose of Lima). "The divine may...choose to incarnate herself in the lives of some in the re-embodiment of a particular person who has long since been absorbed back into her being." The author's views on incarnation may not recommend themselves to someone who believes that Jesus is

uniquely God made human (call me old-fashioned), but her picture works as well if we assume that saints can inhabit our imaginations, without being the product of them, by the gift of God. She calls for a recognition of the goodness of the imagination, which can harbour much that has no other place on earth, pointing out that the potential dangers of this can be avoided by testing it against criteria for knowing the voice of God in general: is it a voice that calls to compassion? To community? and so on. Above all, she claims, "such experiences may not be consciously sought, they are inevitably deeply mysterious".

This is a work of enormous integrity, full of hard thinking matched by strong feeling. It is aimed at a Christian feminist readership, and takes some time to gently challenge some of Christian feminism's dearly-held assumptions (though very little to write off some of Christianity's even more dearly-held ones, unfortunately), but its voice deserves to be generally attended to. Whether or not the reader can stomach the idea of meeting someone else in the imagination, this counts as a persuasive picture of what medieval saints with their mystical friendships were doing, and an impressive drawing-out in general of the spirituality of the communion of saints.

SARA DUDLEY EDWARDS OP

ATHANASIUS AND THE POLITICS OF ASCETICISM by David Brakke, *Clarendon Press*, Oxford, 1995 (Oxford Early Christian Studies series), pp. xvii + 356, £40.

The emergence of the Christian ascetic movement in Egypt, Palestine and Syria has long been a subject of particular interest and importance in the history of Late Antiquity. Its genesis and the respective claims made for rival founders, such as the Egyptian hermit Anthony or the Palestinian Paul, became matters of debate as early as the second half of the fourth century. Its influence on the leading Greek Christian intellectuals of that period, notably the three 'Cappadocian Fathers', Basil of Caesarea and the two Gregorys - of Nyssa and of Nazianzus - is undoubted, as is the role of Basil in particular as the systematiser and populariser of ascetic practices for the upper classes of Constantinople and the provinces of Asia Minor. From this there were but few steps to the popularity of modified ascetic lifestyles and the creation of the aristocratic house monasteries and communities in Rome that provided the context for such popular spiritual teachers as Jerome and Pelagius. In the course of the fourth century a highly diverse, spontaneous, non- or even anti-intellectual movement that had developed in provincial backwaters in the east had been controlled, systematised, regulated and made chic.

In that the founding fathers of the movement, such as Anthony, Pachomius and later the early Stylites, such as Simeon, have left little or no literary traces of themselves, it is to a second or later generation of more sophisticated and literate interpreters that recourse has to be