

# Reviews

**ALBERT AND THOMAS: SELECTED WRITINGS.** Translated, edited and introduced by Simon Tugwell OP. Preface by Leonard E. Boyle OP. *Classics of Western Spirituality.* Paulist Press, 1988. Pp. xvi + 650. \$17.95 (Pb).

After Simon Tugwell's earlier volume in the *Classics of Western Spirituality* on *Early Dominicans*, readers will approach this further volume with high expectations. They will not be disappointed. What we are given here are substantial chunks from the writings of the greatest Dominican theologians of the High Middle Ages, St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas, on the subject of spirituality. For Albert, this means a translation (the first into English) of his commentary on the *Mystical Theology* of Denys (Dionysius) the Areopagite; for Aquinas, the text of his Inaugural lecture as Master of theology in Paris in 1256, a series of texts on prayer tracing the development of his understanding of prayer from his early commentary on the Sentences to the *Summa Theologiae* and the slightly later commentary on Romans, texts on the contemplative life, and texts on the religious life, ending with the article from *Secunda Secundae* on which religious order is the best (no prizes for guessing!). In addition to all this, riches enough one might think, there are very substantial introductions to each theologian. As one would expect from Fr Tugwell, all this is based on original sources, all presented very clearly, and enlivened by explanation of points of scholastic theology in terms of everyday (if sometimes endearingly dotty) examples.

The introductions give clear impressions of two very different men: Albert unflinchingly interested in everything (for Albert, Tugwell suggests, beatitude would include enlightenment as to why flies lay their eggs on white walls), Aquinas interested in books and ideas. But two parts of the introductions deserve to be singled out for special comment. The second part of the introduction to Albert consists of a long survey (almost 100 pages) of the tradition of interpretation of the writings of the Areopagite in the West. It is quite brilliantly done and constitutes a very substantial essay on a subject more often referred to than written about. If there is a criticism to be made of it, it is that it keeps strictly to its title—'Albert and the Dionysian Tradition'—but may be taken to be more ambitious. For by the time of Albert, Western interest in the Dionysian writings was concentrating more and more on the *Mystical Theology* and *Divine Names*, and Tugwell looks back from that vantage point. Earlier interest in Denys in the West had been, it would seem, in his writings on the hierarchies, especially the *Celestial Hierarchy*, commentaries on which had been written by Eriugena in the 9th and by Hugh of St-Victor in the 12th centuries, to mention but two. Denys' notion of hierarchy was seized upon as a very general interpretative tool and was still attracting considerable interest in the 13th century (Bonaventure, for example). We hear little of all this from Tugwell (Bonaventure, of course, was a Franciscan). Nevertheless, Tugwell traces a

strand of Dionysian influence and shows how it bore on Albert. The other part of the introductory material that begs for comment is his life of St Thomas (again a substantial essay—65 pages this time). Here Tugwell sifts the evidence for various periods of Thomas's life and shows that much that is commonly taken for granted rests on very shaky foundations. His interpretation of Thomas's final silence, relating it to his love for the Mass, is particularly well argued.

The texts are, as we would expect, finely translated and very clearly annotated. The selection of texts on prayer and on contemplation are especially interesting, enabling one to trace the development of the Angelic Doctor's thought on prayer from a stage when he at least entertained the notion that it is an affective activity to his settled thought which sees prayer as essentially petition, an activity of the intellect, interpreting desire. Tugwell presents this as the recovery of a primitive, authentically Christian understanding of prayer from the confusions being introduced in the Middle Ages. In the texts on contemplation, we see various very different traditions jostling with one another, and never properly sorted out in Aquinas' thought. His basic conviction, that contemplative and active are traits of character, is caught up in other contrasts—intellectual v. practical, eschatological v. this-worldly, love of God v. love of neighbour—and never thoroughly worked through.

This is a very long book, but it is a continual delight to read, a delight enhanced by the sharp humour and clear-headed erudition of Tugwell's annotations, as when he remarks at the end of a footnote on the notion of God's changelessness in relation to prayer that 'if we find an insult in the very fact of being created, of being caused, we might as well pack our bags and set off to sample the joys of reigning in hell' (p. 430, n. 10)!

ANDREW LOUTH

**QUAND ROME CONDAMNE. DOMINICAINS ET PRÊTRES OUVRIERS** by François Leprieur. *Terre Humaine/Plon/Cerf* 1989. Pp. 785. 190 francs.

From now on, no one will be able to write about the church in the 1950s and the pontificate of Pope Pius XII without referring to this splendid and magisterial work. Access to unpublished documents in the Dominican archives has enabled François Leprieur O.P. to reconstitute the inner history of the priest-worker crisis which broke in the spring of 1954. It was of such gravity that even the moderate Yves Congar was led to lament 'the abyss that yawns between Christian people and the hierarchy, especially the Roman hierarchy.' 'Rome,' he said, 'is completely foreign to the Gospel insights that are the concern of our laypeople, and completely insensitive to their protests.'

Marie-Dominique Chenu tries to explain to a fellow Dominican how he managed to obey. A learned Jesuit had written an article in *Études* claiming that there was a virtue in obedience itself, a sort of mysticism of obedience by which faith was purified. Chenu counters that the foundation of obedience is not the will of the superior, but the common good which the superior also must serve. It is not a good thing because it is ordered; it is ordered because it is good.

But far from being consoling, that line merely accentuated the

200