

participate in the venture of the New World. In this sense a chapter on the Churches in the U.S.A., and a formal description of the U.S. presence and influence in the area was conspicuous by its absence, for there alone can changes of popular opinion lead to political pressure which might indeed be a source of hope for those south of the River Bravo (for instance, the visit of some U.S. bishops to Central America and the widely publicized controversy which ensued). Without a wider focus, the book, an excellent read, and the most readily accessible source of information on the subject, remains a survey of a situation rather than a Vision of Hope.

A final word (of congratulation) to Fount, who have produced this book very finely—attractive cover, well-spaced lines, readable print, well priced. They have even, though not always accurately, accentuated the Spanish and Portuguese words which appear in the text, a quality leap which I hope other publishers will follow.

JAMES ALISON OP

OWNERSHIP: EARLY CHRISTIAN TEACHING by Charles Avila. *Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York and Sheed and Ward, London, 1983*

Charles Avila's book is a mixture of modern political tract and learned patristic treatise. The political tract element arises from the author's anger at the injustice he sees in the theory and practice of the ownership of private property in land which prevailed in the Philippines during his time as a seminarian in the 1960s and still prevails. He argues (page 153) that the teaching of the Fathers of the Church on property was socialistic or communistic but that when Christianity 'decided to accept an alliance of power with the Roman Empire' the essentially socialistic perspective of the teaching of the Fathers was ignored and forgotten. He goes on to suggest that peasants in the Third World and industrial workers in the developed countries alike now see that the obsolete concept of the absolute right of private property which the West inherited from Roman Law must be rejected and *autarkeia* (self-sufficiency) to foster *koinonia* (or fellowship), the ideal of the Fathers is to replace it. Unfortunately he does not develop the idea of self-sufficiency in modern terms but leaves the strong impression that community enforced egalitarianism is to be the order of the day in achieving it.

Such a sweeping thesis raises many questions not least in that it involves what might be called a slapstick theory of history—witness the quotation given about the Church's acceptance by Constantine, witness too the lumping together of the Roman concept of the absolute rights of property with the predicament of the modern industrial worker which is, of course, due to the errors of economic liberalism. A casual way with history implies a more fundamental defect—the failure to appreciate the idea of the development of doctrine. Only a very superficial understanding of the manner in which the Church's teaching is evolved, especially on moral, and especially on social moral issues, would enable the author to assert that the teachings of the Fathers on this matter became one of institutional Christianity's best kept secrets. Likewise only a lopsided scholarship enables the suggestion to creep in that there is an essential discontinuity between the mainstream Catholic thinking and theology of the patristic age with that of its scriptural forebears while there is more than lopsidedness in his accusations concerning later institutional Christianity. The biblical and the Catholic understanding of the right to own and use private property in productive goods is that the right exists and it means that some can be wealthier than others but it is subject to social provisions so that the purposes of the initial gift of the earth to all men in common should be achieved. This is an argument for social responsibility and to call it socialism in any sense is extremely misleading, both in itself and in the context of the controversies in the modern world. It is a teaching which is perfectly compatible with the Fathers here quoted, Clement of Alexandria, Basil the Great, Ambrose, John Chrysostom and Augustine as it is compatible with Aquinas and the modern social Encyclicals. The only differences are in emphasis and in the coherence of the modern

teaching.

The very documents to which Avila appeals and which he quotes reveal the continuity despite his loaded commentaries. Thus (page 43) Clement of Alexandria is quoted as saying: 'You can use wealth rightly'. It is not possessions in themselves that are evil but the temptation to use them wrongly, the temptation that Christians must resist. Basil the Great's condemnation of the evils of private property are precisely concerned with the situation in which few own much while the many go in dire need (page 52). Basil's condemnation is of forms of private ownership which are in clear contradiction of biblical teaching and the same condemnation would spire directly out of the modern social teaching of the Church. He is in other words not pre-empting the more general question of the circumstances in which wealth in the form of ownership of productive goods can be reconciled in theory and in practice with the law of God. St. Ambrose (page 76) does consider the more general case and concludes 'The distribution of property is a human fabrication. It may be just or it may be unjust and if it is unjust it should be changed'. The author's quotation from John Chrysostom most comprehensively destroys his general thesis 'It is not wealth that is evil, but the evil use of wealth' (page 87). In brief economic justice in the Catholic tradition does not, in the Fathers or anywhere else, demand egalitarianism. It demands that inequalities in wealth where they exist should not mean injustice or denial of a decent life to anyone.

The book therefore is useful for those who know how to use it properly. Unfortunately the rather loose rhetoric that overlays its scholarly presentation of the text will mislead many.

RODGER CHARLES SJ

SANTO DOMINGO DE GUZMAN, by José M. Macias. *BAC popular*, Madrid. 1979. pp. 274.

DOMINIQUE OU LA GRACE DE LA PAROLE, by Guy Bedouelle. *Fayard-Mame*. 1982. pp. 277.

DOMINIKUS, by Vladimir J. Koudelka. *Walter-Verlag, Olten & Freiburg im Breisgau*. 1983. pp. 203.

SAN DOMENICO E I SUOI FRATI, by V. Ferrua & H. Vicaire. *Gribaudo*, Turin. 1984. pp. 118.

Thanks to the monumental work of Vicaire, the biography of St. Dominic is, as Ferrua says, "substantially complete". But the four books under review show that there is still room for considerable disagreement in the interpretation of that biography. In particular, there is a significant divergence between those (like Vicaire) who situate Dominic in what is taken to be a reasonably coherent, continual spiritual and religious tradition, and those who (like Chenu) are more impressed by the controversies and discontinuities. Bedouelle (Vicaire's successor at Fribourg) follows in his predecessor's footsteps. His genial "spiritual portrait" of St. Dominic is a serious and competent piece of historiography. Even if it adds little to our knowledge of Dominic's life, it enlarges the historical context in several interesting ways. In particular it attempts to relate Dominic to *la tradition de l'église, une et sainte*, with special reference to Cassian, Augustine, the Grandimontenses and the Cistercians.

Ferrua is more aware of the ways in which the monks and canons do *not* explain Dominic; for him, Dominic represents essentially a return to the gospel, overcoming in the process the tension between the active and contemplative lives. In a fine phrase, he describes Dominic's preaching as *una contemplazione ad alta voce*.

Vicaire's contribution to Ferrua's book attempts the impossible, a history of the Order in fifty pages. It succeeds with surprising credibility, but it cannot really compete with slightly larger potted histories, such as those by Redigonda in Italian and Hinnebusch in English. Inevitably some of the details are wrong, and the value of some of the dates is questionable—for instance, there is no particular reason to date the