

Giacomo da Milano, however, is examined more fully, and an edition from manuscripts of the *Responsio* attributed to him is among the book's useful appendices. It is a pity that Giacomo's refutation of error was mediocre and offensive.

Violante has succeeded in providing a unique compendium of pieces of information otherwise scattered in many publications. He should be read in conjunction with C. Delacroix-Beisner, *Les Dominicains et la Chrétienté Grecque aux XIVe et XVe Siècles* (Rome 1997) to correct a distorting neglect among medievalists of Dominican involvement in missions to the East. Longo's contribution to the history of Dominican missions is a meticulous and vivid reconstruction from archival material of one friar's extraordinary life. Longo too has to provide a good deal of background and related material to supplement the directly biographical, and even autobiographical, documentation available. The documentation is transcribed at length. With scholarly rigour, Bendici's colourful and troubled life is told in a gripping fashion devoid of hagiography.

In 1650, Bendici left his native Calabria in Southern Italy as a young Dominican to prepare for and eventually reach Armenia, zealous for the faith and eager for martyrdom. As with his brethren in Greece, his mission was to be to those in communion with his Church, separated Christians and Muslims. After some years back in Italy and elsewhere in Europe (it is unclear where and why), he was appointed rector of a college of studies in Isfahan (Iran) but probably never took up the post. In 1661 he was destined for North Africa, and did get there. But not where or as intended. Far from establishing a Dominican presence in Algiers, he was captured at sea and sold as a slave in Tunis. Rather than attempt to secure his own release, Bendici chose to become a kind of chaplain to some of the thousands of Christian slaves around him and he tried to convert Muslims. In 1662, probably for his part in an attempted uprising, he was executed.

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FESTIVAL ICONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN YEAR by John Baggley
Mowbray, London, 2000. Pp. xii + 180 + 24 colour plates, £16.99 pbk.

This elegantly produced book takes us through the major feasts of the liturgical year as the focal points of reflection on the Christian faith. The sequence of the feasts is re-arranged according to a chronological progression of the events of salvation (for example, the Annunciation—25th March—is inserted between the feast of the Birth of the Mother of God—8th September—and Christmas). The content of each feast is articulated through a brief sketch of the historical development of the celebration, a theological explanation of the liturgical texts used in the Byzantine rite and the description of a

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characteristic icon chosen from the Greco-Russian tradition. All icons commented upon are reproduced in good-quality colour plates. The meaning of Greek theological terminology and other unfamiliar terms is explained in a glossary.

The author defines his point of view as that of a 'Western Christian who has come to value the Orthodox tradition of iconography'. His personal appreciation of the powerful way in which icons (some in particular) express the Christian faith is clearly at the heart of the inspiration of this book. The readership is expected to be 'from a non-Orthodox background' or 'on the threshold of this tradition'. The aim of the book is that of helping the readers 'to see how icons are related to prayer, and how we can make use of icons in our own praying' (pp. 1 and 5).

Since icons are related to prayer in the liturgical context, the liturgical texts for the feasts are used to throw light on the subject represented in the icon. In the process of relating word and image, the author embarks on the arduous task of elucidating the peculiarities of the Byzantine calendar, providing the theological background against which to read the poetic language of the hymns and, in turn, explaining the doctrines of that theology. Thus, the book functions admirably as an introduction to Orthodoxy and achieves the laudable ecumenical intent of providing a sympathetic, favourable account of this tradition from the Catholic viewpoint.

Where the book may have been more effective is in suggesting that vital link between the doctrinal understanding and the activity of prayer that may be initiated through the icon at the personal level. Fr. Baggley observes that the direct prayer of Orthodox Christians who talk to icons and even remonstrate with them about their human vicissitudes has 'an unsophisticated immediacy which many Western people find hard to appreciate'. However, the pure contemplation of divine truths (of one or other denomination), accompanied by a questionable devotion to apocryphal accounts (such as that of Mary's spinning the Temple veil at the Annunciation) do not by themselves answer the special needs of a twentieth /twenty first-century Christian. It is a shame that only rarely has Fr. Baggley addressed the pastoral issue of relating those sacred events to present concerns.

But perhaps it is the very stuff of the book that does not lend itself easily to such an accomplishment. For the essence of the Orthodox tradition that Fr. Baggley expounds is a claim to atemporality, to an antihistorical continuity (admitting, of course, some superficial change) that takes man up to God's immutability rather than renew the Incarnation along the ages. Though we certainly can learn from the Orthodox approach, it requires Fr. Baggley's humility to pray according to that mode.

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