

It is accurate of Aspden to hold that the English bishops in the period 1903–1963 produced no bishop of the national standing enjoyed by Manning in the 19th century. Yet I hold that the contribution made by the bishops to the formation of laity was prophetically, even if unconsciously, anticipatory of the teaching contained in *Gaudium et Spes* par.76 concerning the relations between the Church and the political community. Aspden's title, *Fortress Church*, does not represent the state of affairs in the English Church that I remember as a layman. I regarded the Catholic Church as called to a mission to the whole population of the land and not as an embattled stronghold. I did not need defending by my bishop, but I did expect him to represent the teaching of the Catholic Church. I believe that I carried these sentiments with me when I became a Conventual Franciscan and later a priest.

Despite these strictures, I recommend Aspden's work as essential reading for those who are interested in the English Catholic Church in the period 1903–1963. His industry in collating his findings from many primary sources and his comments will be invaluable for those who wish to study the developments in the Catholic Church in England and Wales subsequent to the Second Vatican Council that terminated in 1965.

+ JOHN JUKES OFM Conv.

THE GLENSTAL BOOK OF ICONS: PRAYING WITH THE GLENSTAL ICONS by Gregory Collins OSB, *The Columba Press, Glenstal Abbey, 2002, Pp. 138, £9.99 hbk.*

It is unusual to read a prayer book with the task of reviewing it at hand. And this *is* a prayer book, offering a collection of icons from the Benedictine abbey of Glenstal in Ireland as a starting point for contemplative meditation, cast in a small, very personal format to be carried about and opened at a silent opportunity. Yet it is much else besides, seeking as it does in its brief explanations after each picture to inform, instruct and broaden one's perspective of faith. The tension between alert appraisal and abandoned receiving that I experienced from my particular viewpoint is in fact at the heart of the book itself. The question is whether this tension is fruitful.

Fr Gregory's perspective in approaching this subject is intellectually stimulating. It proceeds from a genuine interest in the riches of a different tradition, that of Eastern Orthodoxy, while perceiving both its common, Byzantine roots in the undivided Church and the continuous interrelationship of Catholic and Orthodox theologies well into the modern era, for example, with Nikodemos the Hagiorite in the second half of the 18th century, and in the influence of Western

painting on icon painting, which he points out in some 19th-century Russian examples. While the theme of East-West dialogue runs throughout the book, it peaks in the commentary on the icon of St Athanasius: 'His icon is a sign of unity in diversity, not only of a mixed iconographic tradition, but more importantly of the very essence of catholicity. Christianity cannot be monopolised by any national group. It is not only Latin and Greek – or even Coptic – but universal. Athanasius, spanning East and West in defence of Jesus Christ, the one Redeemer of the world, is a striking witness to this fact' (p. 101).

This meeting of traditions, or ultimate understanding of the one God, is not only visually mediated by the recognition of familiar saints (such as St Nicholas) or motifs (the feasts of the liturgical calendar) in their Eastern form, but is carefully prepared and presented through a theological understanding of each theme or mystery. The contribution of the East is highlighted, for example, in the emphasis it has given to the episode of Christ's baptism as theophany as against the Western tradition of Epiphany, and this fact of liturgical historical development is used to highlight what the faithful can gain in their meditation on the image of Christ and John the Baptist. Points of debate are not muted, though, as Fr Gregory's kind ear to the Eastern viewpoint on the Trinity is balanced by a fair account of the Western struggle to comprehend such mystery. Happily, he has before him both an icon of the Eastern Trinity (the hospitality of Abraham) and one of the Western Trinity (with Father, Son and Dove) to hook his historico-critical notes on the theological debate, and to look at the 'deeper truth' in which the two approaches can be complementary (p. 127).

Thus, in reading and meditating on the Glenstal icons, that span a good variety of iconography from the Eastern tradition, we are actually enacting this complementarity – Collins assumes his readership is predominantly Western, though not exclusively Catholic. In fact, we are experiencing the challenge, set out in the scholarly introduction to the book, of practising *lectio divina* not from the written text of Scripture, but from the visual text of these inspired images. Yet the reader is not left alone with such visual texts, but is guided by Fr Gregory's short commentaries that follow each picture, interwoven, as all good spiritual preaching, with Scriptural quotations that bring us back to the traditional source of the *lectio*. Each section is concluded with a short selection of prayers, often drawn from disparate liturgical sources. It is a matter of choice for the reader, based on his or her particular inclinations or momentary requirements, which aspect to privilege among these three constitutive elements. This is indeed a rich prayer book, and one in which East and West meet in hope.

BARBARA CROSTINI LAPPIN