

## Reviews

**THE OTHER FRIARS: THE CARMELITE, AUGUSTINIAN, SACK AND PIED FRIARS IN THE MIDDLE AGES** by Frances Andrews, *Boydell Press, Woodbridge*, 2006, Pp. 261, £25 hbk.

What the author calls, in odd phrasing, ‘the confessionally driven works on orders still existing in the contemporary world’ have tended to obscure the history of other orders of friars upon whom Gregory X passed sentence of extinction at the Council of Lyons in 1274. The Augustinians and the Carmelites are still very much with us, but the ‘Sack’ and the ‘Pied’ friars have largely disappeared from historical consciousness. Both the former orders have origins requiring the closer scrutiny which this erudite book provides. So little evidence survives to reconstruct the history of the ‘Pied’ friars that Frances Andrews can muster only six pages to tell us of them. The ‘Sack’ friars, a more successful order, are much better documented. Both these orders fell foul of the regulatory discipline of the Church and died out under ban of receiving further members – victims of success: there were simply too many mendicants.

The rise of mendicancy in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries is a complex phenomenon. The ideal of absolute poverty had inspired men, and women too, well before the time of Il Poverello. It seems unlikely that the early followers of Dominic decided to match the poverty of Cathar ‘parfaits’ for strategic reasons alone – like the followers of Francis, they too were attracted by the ideal of renunciation and holy poverty. Mendicancy gave friars mobility since they made no vows of stability. They were a flexible force in the Church militant. But there are other factors besides ideology and utility which help explain the phenomenon. Urbanisation was well under way in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and, although the friars often had difficulty negotiating the building of convents inside the walls, they moved steadily away from their rural and eremitical origins into the towns. No doubt the humble and holy ‘Pied’ friars would eventually have followed suit.

These ‘other friars’ were not popular either with the parochial clergy or with the better ‘established’ orders of friars. A forthright champion of the seculars, William of Saint-Amour, sounded the alarm, in a treatise of 1256 and in sermons criticising the Pope and Louis IX for patronising the friars, who he said were hypocrites and deceivers, seducing the people from their legitimate pastors. Humbert of Romans, resolute organiser and Master of Dominicans in 1254, was alarmed by the proliferation of new orders of friars. They posed a threat to the prestige and economic interests of the ‘established’ orders and, particularly, to pastoral authority of the secular clergy. They would need powerful friends and impressive founding narratives if they were to survive.

The ‘Sack’ friars (so-called probably from their cloak of sack-like cloth) and the ‘Pied’ friars (from their magpie habit) were sentenced to extinction because they lacked saintly founders of sufficient stature, had no mother-house and no prominent defender in the Curia. Deeply upset, the rector general of the ‘Sack’ friars acquiesces in the decision of 1274 and writes ‘...to all the desolate brothers ... a message of most bitter death, full of tears and grief.’ But both Augustinians and Carmelites might also have faced extinction had they not constructed impressive accounts of their origins or been fortunate in having powerful curial friends. Reproduced on the cover of this book is the detail of a fresco by Gozzoli (1464/5)

showing Augustine dressed as an Austin (Augustinian) friar. The Augustinians not only adopted the 'Rule of St Augustine' but anchored themselves to the prestige of the great Church Father. Yet their survival seems to have depended largely on the patronage of Cardinal Annibaldi (nephew of Pope Alexander IV). The Carmelites exploited their tenuous link with the Holy Land and enlisted Elijah and Elisha among their founders. They claimed that the Virgin had bestowed their scapular with a promise of salvation for those who died wearing it. Dominican scholars were predictably unimpressed and indignantly demonstrated the implausibility of these claims. Like other communities of religious, striving for legitimacy, the orders were 'creatively' constructing their title deeds.

The friars have in common a dependence upon the ever adaptable 'Rule of St Augustine' supplemented by their own regulations and constitutions. In this they closely followed the Dominican model as well as in emphasis on study. The importance of scholarship was quickly established among Austin friars, more tardily among Carmelites and 'Sack' friars. As Francis had foreseen, the acquisition of books and emphasis on learning would undermine holy poverty. The urban location of the friars, the vital importance of educated preachers, led to the establishment of *studia*. A scholarly elite were accorded privileges within the convents – individual rooms, exemptions from some community duties. The friars began to acquire property and accumulate wealth, moving steadily away from the contemplative solitude of their origins. By the 1240s, the Carmelites had descended from their 'observation post of contemplation' (Gregory IX). The 'Sack' friars of Barcelona were rich enough by 1264 to lend King Jaime of Aragon 5000 solidi in return for assistance with a diplomatic mission to Tunis.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, they were being mocked for compromising their ideals. Geoffrey Chaucer, just over a century after the Council of Lyons, portrays an unlikeable friar in *The Canterbury Tales*, an astute beggar, able to cajole a small coin from a barefooted widow. Chaucer's ideal of Christian dedication is the poor urban secular priest. And yet despite their critics, the friars were both influential and popular. They achieved remarkable success, extending their influence through lay confraternities. But in time reform became unavoidable and 'observant' houses attempted to return to the rigour of the original foundations. Teresa of Avila was a notable and formidable Carmelite reformer. Martin Luther was a friar of one of the Augustinian 'observant' houses – a reformer from a 'reformed' background.

This is an enlightening book, impressively researched and, despite density of detail, written with clarity and urbanity. If opacity remains over the origins of the orders, it is because, as Frances Andrews readily admits, records are often inadequate. More light will be shed as research continues. It is salutary to be reminded that those orders which survive to the present day were by no means the only friars in the 13<sup>th</sup> century dedicated to renunciation, seeking salvation and preparing for Judgement.

TONY CROSS

**LYING: AN AUGUSTINIAN THEOLOGY OF DUPLICITY** by Paul J Griffiths, *Brazos Press, Grand Rapids MI, 2004, pp. 254, £10.99 pbk.*

When the Nazi soldier knocks at the door and asks if there are Jews hiding in the house, and there are, is it wrong to reply, 'No'? It would be hard to find a philosopher or theologian, let alone a member of the general public, who would argue unequivocally that it is. Paul J. Griffiths, however, is bold enough to defend St Augustine's position that every lie is a sin and therefore all lies should be rejected. In order to explain this, he provides an imaginative reading of Augustine's