Comment: *Saints*

The fifth edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, by David Hugh Farmer (Oxford University Press, £8.99 paperback), is compulsive reading.

Since the fourth edition (1997) Pope John Paul II has canonized many more saints. The new edition of the *Roman Martyrology* (2001), as well as the updated *Index ac Status Causarum* (1999) provide new information, w the latter also enabling one to trace how the 'causes' are progressing. Interest in the cult of the saints is also a major growth area in scholarship, outside the Church. Farmer, deadpan as ever, notes the 'paradox', that 'scholars are exploring the historical importance of relics at the very same time that some of the Churches seem keen to abandon them'.

New entries include the Martyrs of Vietnam (1745-1862), Korea (1839-67), Mexico (1915-37) and the Spanish Civil War (1934-9) , as well as Edith Stein, Pius of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio), and Josémaria Escriva de Balaguer. As regards Spain, the full extent of the slaughter, Farmer observes, has seldom been realized in Britain: no fewer than 6,832 priests and religious were put to death, for no other reason than professing the Catholic faith. Only nine have so far been canonized, in 1999.

As regards Saint Dominic, founder of the Order of Preachers, 'recent research, mainly by Czech and English Dominicans, has considerably modified traditional accounts'. Since the second edition (1987), the entry has been radically revised. Dominic, still the son of the — now 'devout' — warden of the town of Caleruega [*sic*], in Castile, no longer bears the surname Guzman. He got his name from Saint Dominic of Silos (an excellent new entry), who re-established the monastery at Silos, near Burgos, in the eleventh century, which, revived again by Solesmes monks in the 19th century, is now (so Farmer tells us) among the most flourishing in Spain ('recordings of Gregorian Chant are specially notable'). The connection is that our Dominic's mother Jane of Aza made a 'fruitful pilgrimage' to Silos some months before his birth.

The revised entry includes a relatively lengthy account of the Cathars, the 'perfect' (Greek *katharoi* = 'pure'), whose practices and beliefs were such a threat to society that they had to be exterminated, in the brutal Albigensian Crusade, led by Simon de Montfort — though Dominic himself 'took no part in the violence of the crusaders nor in the later Inquisition', the entry assures us, in another new remark.

Dominic — 'unlike Francis [of Assisi]' — is no longer 'an excellent organizer', 'a pioneer in representative government': all three phrases are expunged. In the judgement of a 'recent writer' Dominic was less the

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founder than the 'midwife' of the Order, 'so important were the contributions of the other friars, the bishops of Osma and Toulouse, and above all of the papacy'.

Somewhat strengthening the previous entry, we learn that, for the Order, 'an important feature was the democratic rule with short-term superiors and the Constitution agreed by the general chapter'. Whether this feature should be credited to Dominic himself is not made clear.. In conclusion, the Order — 'renewed in recent years' — 'contributes powerfully to teaching, preaching and missionary work'. (Nothing so positive is said at the end of the entry on Saint Francis.)

Who the 'recent writer' is, is not hard to guess. Farmer provides good bibliographies. The authorities newly cited are S. Tugwell (1995) and V. Koudelka (1997), English and Czech, respectively. The references, to spell them out, are to Simon Tugwell's essay, 'Notes on the life of St Dominic', in *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 65 (1995): pp. 5-169; and to Vladimir J Koudelka's book, *Dominic* (Darton Longman & Todd 1997), an anthology of extracts from texts and documents giving contemporary insight into Dominic's life, work, character and prayer.

Unsurprisingly, many entries are unchanged. Saint Fergus, for example, we are relieved to see, is still 'the early 8th century apostle of substantial areas of Scotland', as place-names and church dedications confirm. He 'may be identical' still with the *Fergustus episcopus Scotiae Pictus* who attended a synod in Rome in 721 which condemned 'irregular marriages of various kinds, sorcerers, and clerics who grew their hair long'. In this case, as in many of the other early saints, no new research prompts changes. Indeed, research on Fergus has never gone much further than repeating the account in the Calendar of Saints in the Aberdeen Breviary (printed in 1510).

Given the precedent of Farmer's occasional allusions to present-day connections with this or that saint's afterlife, one might add that St Fergus, the small town in Buchan, is now famous as the site of the vast terminal for bringing ashore natural gas from the North Sea. Of greater interest to church historians, the kirkyard at St Fergus is one of several in the region with a little watch-tower: the growth of medical education at the end of the 18th century created a demand for fresh corpses for anatomy lessons, which in turn meant policing cemeteries against body snatchers or 'resurrectionists'.

'Even those who do not believe in saints', the reviewer in *The Economist* of the previous edition is quoted as saying, 'will be able to enjoy and to profit from this splendid book'. 'Profit' perhaps, 'enjoy' certainly — and much else besides.

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