

his rejection of the Catholic faith when set against his repeated denials of heresy and his remaining a member of the clergy until his excommunication in 1930. Talar then turns to Marcel Hébert who embraced Kantian and evolutionist philosophy and reinterpreted everything in the Christian lexicon in a symbolist fashion. The success of this chapter, as indeed of Talar's other chapters, is to show us what differentiates Hébert from other modernists: in this case the fact that, unlike Turmel, he left the Church when he found he could no longer reconcile his thinking with the Magisterium. If Talar's final chapter concerning Pierre Battifol is sympathetic, it is surely because Battifol was a learned theologian attempting to remain faithful to the Magisterium while taking account of the insights of critical history and biblical studies; he was, nevertheless, dismissed from his post at the Institut catholique de Toulouse. While Talar underlines the suspicions of Loisy concerning Battifol's orthodoxy, this reader frankly finds Loisy's remarks about Battifol less an example of trenchancy and more an example of *schadenfreude*.

After Talar, Harvey Hill takes up the story to address the modernists of the centre, namely Alfred Loisy and (to some extent)

Henri Brémond. Yet if the interest of this volume is to be found in its use of contemporary sources, it is somewhat surprising to find Hill gnawing at the credibility of Albert Houtin's analysis of Loisy. Hill underlines the minor fact that Houtin, a former priest, was hurt at being used by Loisy, and tiptoes quietly past the much more important fact that Loisy self-censured his own memoirs heavily, and, to Houtin's knowledge, had remained a priest for twenty years after ceasing to believe in the Catholic faith. Hill likewise seems too ready to embrace Henri Brémond's notion of Loisy's "mystical faith," an expression which, when it was finally clarified after twenty-five frustrating pages, seemed to mean little more than Loisy's fuzzy feelings about religion. Louis-Pierre Sardella's final chapter of *By Those Who Knew Them* addresses the interesting figure of Eudoxe Mignot, Archbishop of Albi and a startlingly public supporter of Loisy. Sardella puts forward a mostly convincing analysis which corroborates J.M. Mayeur's description of Mignot as the Erasmus of Modernism: irenic, suspicious of wilful revolt and anti-scholastic.

While one could make reservations about the taxonomy of left-right-centre when applied to

Modernism, it is as useful as other schemas and allows the nuances between the various modernists to be clearly delineated. Yet if this volume undertakes a useful and informative excursion into the primary sources, it nevertheless leaves this reader perplexed by its reiterating the nostrums of modernist historiography with little care for what these nostrums overlook. The first is that Pius X was temperamentally unsuited to judge Modernism correctly. I have yet to see the evidence that Pius X's anti-modernist objections were indeed temperamental. The second is that *Pascendi* was utterly wrong to imply there was a modernist conspiracy; and yet there is ample evidence in this book alone of priests whose modernism was covert and concealed by dishonesty, even in the opinion of modernists like Houtin. If "conspiracy" is a step too far, it is somewhat more convincing than Hill's breathtaking defence of Loisy's pre-excommunication double life. The third is that the modernists' positions seemingly need not be aired, explained and contrasted with the criticisms of their contemporaries — an exercise that might yet show that an early twentieth-century Catholic could be both intelligent and anti-modernist.

What if Pius X was not the "stubborn and duplicitous pontiff"

of Brémond's description, cited by Sardella in the final paragraph to this book? What if, rather, he was simply hard-headed enough to know faith from fuzz?

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One Hundred Great Catholic Books from the Early Centuries to the Present
by Don Brophy
BlueRidge: New York, 2007
ISBN: 978-1-933346-08-3.

Don Brophy, a former editor for Paulist Press, has written another in the long series of "hundred best" or "hundred greatest" that publishers apparently like to issue. The origin of this practice may have been the erroneous idea that the great books curriculum at St. John's College in Annapolis was restricted to 100 great books, a notion that caught the fancy of journalists when that curriculum was instituted in 1937 and which one still occasionally encounters. But however that may be, the project of setting forth the best Catholic books, whether limited to 100 or not, clearly has value, since many Catholics have little

idea of the landmark books and authors of our tradition, and thus a guide for those who don't know where to begin could be very useful. And of course, Brophy is well aware that any selection of 100 books is both arbitrary and limiting. He appends an "Afterward: And Fifty More" (201-5). He also notes some of his exclusions and gives his reasons. Chiefly it is certain important theologians whose lengthy works Brophy judges "too technical for the average reader" (202). Of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* he asks, "who is going to pick it up and read it from beginning to end?" (xv). And although his title is *One Hundred Great Catholic Books*, in many cases he really means, one hundred great Catholic writers, for he often discusses more than the one work that he's chosen to highlight.

Brody's collection then consists of two-page accounts of each author and book. It's a collection, however, with some serious difficulties. But first its merits.

His introduction nicely sets the stage for a discussion of the best Catholic books by pointing out that "Books in the sense that we know them today are creatures of European-Christian culture." That is the codex, a book whose pages are bound together between two

covers rather than rolled up into a scroll, is especially associated with the nascent Church. Although the codex was known to the pagan Romans, Reynolds and Wilson, in their, *Scribes and Scholars: a Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature* (Oxford, 1974) state that the "impulse to change the format of the book must have come from the early Christians; for while the pagan codex was a rarity in the second century, the codex form was already universal for biblical texts." Brophy is right that even the "physical presence" of our books "speaks of past delights and lessons learned. They are doors opening on familiar rooms, voices calling from other places" (xiii). But if our favourite books are a kind of backdrop for our individual lives, how of the books that form a backdrop for the life of the Church? Here it is not a question of one man's memory, but of the memory of many millions who have been part of the Mystical Body, the extension in time and space of our Incarnate Lord. Here we have the "books that have nourished Catholic Christians and many other seekers over the centuries" (xiv). And Brophy ranges wide over the Catholic world in his choice.

Recognising rightly that Sacred Scripture "is so obviously the

book of the Christian faith that it would be presumptuous to include it in this collection" (9), he begins in the patristic age with the writings of the Desert Fathers. His selections from this period include Athanasius, Augustine, John Cassian, and at the end of the patristic era, St. Benedict. Among his medieval authors he numbers Anselm, Hildegard of Bingen, surprisingly but fittingly, Wolfram von Eshenbach's *Parzival*, Dante, Chaucer, Julian of Norwich and Thomas à Kempis. For the Renaissance and Baroque eras Brophy gives us a long series of saints, Thomas More, Ignatius Loyola, Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales and John of the Cross, as well as those not canonized, Pascal, Brother Lawrence and Caussade with his *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are sparse and include little more than Newman, Leo XIII and St. Thérèse. But the twentieth century is very well represented indeed, for of the two hundred pages which are devoted to his list the twentieth century begins on page 62.

Brophy's choices for that century, especially its first half, do include many of the truly greats, Chesterton, Sigrid Undset, Gilson, Mauriac, Bernanos, Caryl Houselander, Waugh, Grahme

Greene, Christopher Dawson, Ronald Knox, Tolkien, Flannery O'Connor, as well as other outstanding Catholic writers from an era of outstanding Catholic writing. But beyond that we begin to encounter some of our difficulties, or in truth, those of Brophy.

To put it bluntly, Brophy writes from a neo-modernist theological stance, what is usually and inexactly called liberal. For example, what is probably his most egregious instance of theological error are his comments on John Meier's *A Marginal Jew*. "The desire to know more about the Jesus of history has engaged scholars for the past two hundred years. Prior to that it was simply assumed that the Jesus of the Gospels was the Jesus of history" (171). One can only think of C. S. Lewis' comment on this intellectual enterprise in *The Screwtape Letters* (Letter XXIII), that

"each 'historical Jesus' is unhistorical. The documents say what they say and cannot be added to; each new 'historical Jesus' therefore has to be got out of them by suppression at one point and exaggeration at another, and by that sort of guessing (*brilliant* is the adjective we teach humans to apply to it) on which no one would risk ten

shillings in ordinary life ...”

So I am afraid that Brophy's claim that “recent advances in archaeology, sociology, and allied sciences have given scholars new tools for reaching at least tentative historical conclusions” (171) must be regarded as simply one of the latest in the series of *brilliant* guesses inspired by one of Screwtape's confreres. But unfortunately it gets worse. On the next page Brophy guides us with apparent approval through one of Meier's specific conclusions, a conclusion that Jesus had brothers and sisters, thus denying the perpetual virginity of our Lady, which is a *de fide* teaching of the Church.

One can judge the tone of much of the book from this. But to give the reader a few more samples, before the Second Vatican Council we had, we are told, “Latin rites with pointless multiplication of signs that mystified and marginalized the faithful” and a “Roman structure groaning under the weight of Europeans, the legalistic mind-sets, the rote conformity of parishes and religious communities” (123). To be sure, Brophy does include some fine post-Conciliar authors, for example, Pope John Paul II and Alasdair MacIntyre. But the majority of those he takes from after the Council generally stand in

some dubious relationship with orthodoxy.

Clearly one cannot recommend this book, and clearly Brophy is not a safe guide to Catholic writing. Although he obviously loves much of the Church's history and appreciates the wisdom of many of her saints, novelists, poets and theologians, he also evinces scorn for essential parts of Catholic teaching and tradition. The book could be harmful for those for whom it was intended, and those who would not be harmed by it have little or no need of it. But in its own way it witnesses to the depth and richness of Catholic teaching and tradition, a depth and richness that clearly can fascinate even those who do not accept essential parts of that teaching and tradition.

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