

The Bugnini commission can be accused of antiquarianism and immobilism in thinking that the Latin rite could be returned to some imagined primitive form, but may not traditionalists also be criticized for the same things in proposing that the Latin rite somehow reached a final ‘perfection’ four centuries ago and in trying now (once again with a certain artificiality and contrivance) to ‘restore’ that rite?

The arguments will clearly continue. Hull’s book is an important, well-documented, argumentative, contribution to a question increasingly urgent for the Church. For him it is *the* question, and in that one can only agree. At stake is, not the preservation of a cultural museum piece, but the faith of the Church, the meaning of adoration, and the knowledge of Christ that comes through worship.

VIVIAN BOLAND OP

MARTHE ROBIN AND THE FOYERS OF CHARITY by Martin Blake, *Theotokos Books*, Nottingham 2010, pp. 161, £7.95

This work has an importance that belies its shortness and unassuming style, being the first book written originally in English about the 20th Century French mystic, Marthe Robin, foundress of the ‘Foyers of Charity’. While the name of Marthe Robin is known in this country, she has received far less attention here than in her native France, where Jean Guilton called her ‘the greatest genius I have ever met’ (p. 135), and Jean Daniélou spoke of her as ‘the most extraordinary person of the century’ (p. 56). Others who have testified to her great influence upon them include the philosopher Marcel Clément, and Fr Marie-Dominique Philippe, founder of the Community of St John. Her cause for beatification has been opened.

The present book aims to be no more than an introduction to Marthe Robin and the ‘Foyers’ which she inspired. We read first of her early life: her birth, in 1902, as the sixth child of parents who were small farmers south of Lyon, ‘Catholic, if not particularly religious’ (p. 18); her early piety, and the decline of her health from the age of 16 onwards, leading to blindness and paralysis. The author describes, without excessively dwelling on, the extraordinary phenomena said to have accompanied her illness, for example, her reception of the stigmata and continuous shedding of blood, her weekly ‘re-living’ of the Passion, and her passing of fifty three years, until her death in 1981, without food, drink or sleep. The major theme of the book, however, is the spiritual influence which Marthe Robin exercised on the many thousands who came into contact with her, and the importance of the ‘Foyers of Charity’ which from the 1930s, she predicted would be part of ‘a new Pentecost of love’ within the Church (p. 15).

After Marthe Robin herself, the principal actor in these events was a French priest of the diocese of Lyon, George Finet. He met Marthe in 1936, and at her request, preached the first ‘Foyer’ retreat in her village of Chateauneuf later that year. It was a 5 day, silent retreat, which has remained the pattern for the Foyers ever since. Under the guidance of Marthe, and with the permission of his bishop, the Abbé Finet founded a community in the village whose principal work would be to receive those who would attend such retreats. This is known today as the ‘Central Foyer’ and more than 70 others are spread across several continents, although, as the author remarks, there is still none in the Anglophone world. Their Statutes received the final approval from the Pontifical Council for the Laity in 1999.

It is a remarkable fact that Marthe Robin never visited the Foyer she had inspired in her own village. Bedridden, she was not able even to assist at Mass for more than half a century, though she received Holy Communion weekly. But

in her darkened room, she received a constant stream of visitors seeking prayers and counsel. More than 100,000 names appear in the visitors' book and this figure does not take into account those who visited more than once (p. 55). The author writes: 'Her aim seems to have been to lead her visitors to work out a solution to their problems with the help of the Holy Spirit. She did not regard herself, and disliked being regarded, as a kind of oracle' (p. 56). Nevertheless, it is clear that many people considered that they had received extraordinary graces by means of their brief interviews with Marthe and the author includes a few well-chosen examples.

The Foyers themselves are also described by some personal testimonies, including the author's own. He explains that Marthe Robin believed that she had been instructed directly from heaven that they were to be centres of 'light, charity and love', 'charity' referring here especially to fraternity among Christians, and 'love' to the love of God exercised in prayer (p. 114). The members do not take vows, though most are celibates, and may include both men and women. Each Foyer has a priest-member as its spiritual father, though he is not in charge of temporalities. Some run schools, which the author notes have been a striking source of vocations to the priesthood in France (p. 128).

This relatively brief study raises some questions which it would be interesting to see discussed more fully. For example, the author speaks of Marthe as 'still the subject of controversy' (p. 12), but it is not clear what the controversy is about. Elsewhere he mentions a crisis that the movement passed through in the 1970s, but gives very few details (p. 81).

Some of the most interesting testimonies in the book are those of the philosopher and 'academician', Jean Guilton. He emphasises Marthe Robin's naturalness, and her capacity to adapt her conversation to those to whom she spoke. He remarks on the paradox that it was while living for years in complete darkness that she spoke of 'Foyers of light'. We also learn that Guilton was urged by Marthe (p. 75) to encourage his friend Pope Paul VI to remain firm and not to abdicate (it would be interesting to know if she ever spoke of that pontiff's confrontation with Archbishop Lefebvre, another of Guilton's friends.).

This book is written in a personal, even 'homely' style. It contains a number of repetitions and, no doubt to keep down costs, no photographs. A useful bibliography of recent books about Marthe Robin, almost all in French, is included. As the author says (p.149), the private writings which Marthe produced between 1929 and 1932, as well as the many letters that she dictated, will no doubt be the subject of much theological study in future years.

THOMAS CREAN OP

A SOUL-CENTRED LIFE: EXPLORING AN ANIMATED SPIRITUALITY by Michael Demkovich OP, *The Liturgical Press*, Collegeville 2010, pp.144, £13.50 pbk

Few serious books on spirituality are predicated upon a pun, but Michael Demkovich's *A Soul-Centered Life: Exploring an Animated Spirituality* is certainly not like most of these books. Both a thoroughgoing critique of the current state of spirituality, as well as a creative contribution to the field itself, Demkovich's latest showing is ultimately a plea to re-appropriate the Thomistic teaching on the soul and so literally to reanimate both the Church and the academy in light of the classical teaching.

The author takes on two distinct yet related problems: the first concerning those who self-identify as 'spiritual, but not religious', and the second concerning the state of spirituality in the contemporary academy. While he stops short of