

**MEMOIRS by Louis Bouyer, translated by Anne Englund Nash, *Ignatius Press*, San Francisco, 2015, pp. 297, \$18.95, pbk**

Louis Bouyer, a French Oratorian who died in 2004, was one of the less sung theologians of *ressourcement*, at least in the English-speaking world, where his two trilogies of dogmatic theology were surprisingly slow to find publishers or readers. At least in England, he is chiefly known for his contributions to historical knowledge, whether monastic, liturgical, spiritual, or ecumenical.

Under *noms de plume* Père Bouyer published several novels in contemporary settings as well as a study of the legends of the Holy Grail. Both the novelist and the (serious-minded) theological fantasist are detectable in the making of this autobiography. The novelist is more clearly apparent in the opening two chapters on the author's childhood as the son of cultured Protestant members of the commercial bourgeoisie in Paris at the end of the *belle époque*. The highlighting of objects that speak of a milieu, the character-sketches of relatives and acquaintances, and the evocation of landscapes, all suggest this sort of literary gift which we know from other sources Bouyer possessed in abundance. The tendency of his family – and he himself, in young adulthood – to slide between Reformed and Lutheran allegiances would seem odd in Scandinavia or the United States, but is more intelligible in what was effectively (and especially after he moved to Strasbourg/Strassburg) a Franco-German milieu. The Prussian monarchy had long since invented the combined Lutheran-Evangelical church-model common in the German *Länder*.

The three chapters that follow chronicle Bouyer's decision to opt for the Protestant ministry; his studies, teaching, and pastoral work in that context; and, at their close, his request for reception into the Catholic Church. How much interest Anglophone readers will find in the detailed catalogue of French Protestant pastors may be a moot point. The value of these chapters for exploration of Bouyer the theologian lies in their evidence of his desire to locate a High Church Protestantism which will present, respectively, the Gospel as the content, and ecclesial Catholicity as the form, of the Christian religion. (The author rightly draws a comparison with A. M. Ramsey's 1936 classic, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*. Newman's writing was a major inspiration for both men.) Of more interest to this reviewer are his contacts with the Paris-based Russian theologians Sergei Bulgakov and Vladimir Lossky, as well as the 'Western-rite Orthodoxy' of Evgrafy Kovalevsky. Bouyer's bizarre portrait of another Orthodox figure, Léon/Lev Gillet (who wrote as 'A Monk of the Eastern Church') should be read in tandem with Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's biography of the latter.

Bouyer's conversion to Catholicism was followed by his entry into the *Oratoire de France* the members of which expressed a certain anxiety that their personalities might be harvested for his next novel. These memoirs in their own way bear out that fear – one reason, no doubt,

why Bouyer wished them to be posthumous. By way of counter-balance he also admits his debt to the Oratorians, not least in the extraordinary liberty they gave him in terms of his later career (houses in delectable spots in the French countryside, the second with its own separate chapel complete with personally commissioned neo-Byzantine *Deesis*).

Globe-trotting as a lecturer dominate the next two chapters which take the reader to the eve of the Second Vatican Council. A large element of name-dropping from among the Great and the Good of immediately pre-Conciliar Catholicism and Anglicanism indicates the persistent networker as well as the lover of holy Church. Yet Bouyer's hard work as a writer and professor and his well-conceived contribution to the Ecumenical and Liturgical Movements quite justified his appointment to various pre-Conciliar, Conciliar, and post-Conciliar commissions. Paul VI intended to make him a cardinal, he tells us, but the appointment was blocked by the opposition of a progressive-leaning French episcopate.

The information fits with other indiscreet references, in the closing three chapters, to the work of the commissions and the author's critical animadversions on both the Council itself and the subsequent papal revision of the Roman Liturgy. Those references explain the eager awaiting of an English translation of this book in the Catholic blogosphere – and perhaps the publisher's own interest therein. The American translator, it may be added, has not only produced a readable text. She has also annotated it with notes many of which are essential to its understanding, at any rate by a reader from outside both the popular and the high culture of modern France.

Some light is thrown on Bouyer's own theology in these pages, notably in the combined inspiration from mathematics and the English Romantics in his cosmology. But what Ignatius Press must now do, if they have not already done so, is to commission a companion translation, this time of *Le Métier du théologien* (1979, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2005) from which much can be learned and not only about the subject of the present review.

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**THE SLAIN GOD: ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH** by Timothy Larsen, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, pp. 256, £22.50, hbk*

Unremarked in the mass media, both anthropology and sociology have taken introspective turns where the genesis of both disciplines is being subject to archival and biographical exploration. The outcome of these exercises is to deepen the roots of identity of both disciplines but also to reveal unexpected influences which do much to explain the contours and presuppositions of their classical works. For instance, in the case of Weber, far from being indifferent to religion, a recent and enormously