

This book is an impressive achievement in the sweeping range and sophistication of its scholarship, communicated in flourishing style. Every one of the many thinkers whom Prevot introduces is the author of a considerable literary corpus, and Prevot demonstrates a mastery of each. The work is original in the interpretation of its principles, in its narrative of modernity, and in its making prayer the focus of that narrative. Readers who take Prevot's tour of modernity will be grateful for the journey and eager for future opportunities for travel with this author as their guide.

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From Mother to Son: The Selected Letters of Marie de l'Incarnation to Claude Martin, AAR Religions in Translation, translated by Mary Dunn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 256 + xii, £51.00.

Mary Dunn's edition of letters from mystic-missionary Marie de l'Incarnation to her son is a gift to historians of early modern Europe and Christian spirituality. This intriguing volume not only offers an intimate view into the evolving relationship between mother and son, and their understanding of the depths of a life united to Christ; it also provides a window to lesser known aspects of seventeenth-century New France. It is meticulously researched and elegantly translated, with careful annotations that are themselves a valuable scholarly resource.

The reader cannot help but feel a measure of irony while poring over this private exchange. Marie repeatedly protests sending details of her inner spiritual life, even giving painstaking instructions to her Benedictine son to burn the letters upon her death. At times, she seems to regret having revealed these interior mysteries, even to the son she loved 'more than anything else on earth' (p. 154).

Scholars often attribute this reticence to the rhetoric of feminine humility, a strategy used subversively to authorise the female voice. In Marie's case, however, her reservations seem to come from genuine reluctance. As Dunn notes, Marie resisted disclosing her spiritual journey, despite her son's persistent inquiries, until their relationship deepened over the years. Their exchanges were further complicated by the guilt Marie felt for 'abandoning' him at a tender age, when she became an Ursuline and joined the mission in New France. She mentions this rupture in eight of the eighty-one extant letters.

This pain would heal over time, through her belief in God's promised provision for her son and the deepening of their spiritual companionship. Towards the end of her life, their mutual trust and affection are evident. She writes, 'If I could wish for one thing in this world, it would be to be close enough to you to pour my heart into yours, but our good God has appointed us each to our own station, to which we must hold' (p. 155). Despite the physical distance between them, the two seem to experience an enduring oneness, grounded in their shared union with Christ. Thus Marie writes to Claude, 'I visit you many times a day and I speak about you ceaselessly to Jesus' (p. 48).

And so Marie eventually responds to her son's determined queries, and offers glimpses into her life in Christ. She describes for Claude three states of mystical prayer, her visions of the Trinity and her experience of 'breath prayer' – a prayer so simple that it becomes her very breath, transcending external forms of prayer. She writes of her intense spiritual yearnings and reports her actual prayers to God. She also encourages her son, who preferred a quiet life of prayer, to embrace the contemplative-active life. Marie viewed her vocation in New France as apostolic marriage to Christ, in which union with her beloved remains unbroken while in vigorous service of others: 'I was flying when the work was the hardest, helped by the grace that possessed me' (p. 107).

Some elements in the letters may disturb modern readers and require critical engagement, some of which Dunn leaves to the reader. For instance, Marie has imbibed her surrounding culture's view of the campaign against the Iroquois nation (who 'persecuted' the missionaries) as 'holy war'. Her understanding of the colonised peoples wavers between seeing them as noble and ignoble 'savages'. In addition, Marie's thirst for martyrdom and her valorisation of suffering invite further engagement with secondary literature that might contextualise her attitudes. Lastly, I would have been eager to see some of the original French, especially for key English terms such as 'abandoned' or 'lost'. These words carry multivalent meanings, negative and positive, depending on their usage. But these questions simply indicate the level of interest and engagement that this volume evokes. *From Mother to Son* is a delightful read from beginning to end and a valuable resource for anyone interested in the early modern period, missions history or Christian spirituality.

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