

Exercices spirituels: Propres pour passer une âme par voie d'abnégation et d'amour de Dieu, jusques au sommet de la perfection chrétienne et religieuse (1622). Séverin Rubéric.
Ed. Bernard Forthomme. *Mystica* 4. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2015. 332 pp. €60.

Bernard Forthomme has produced a modern critical edition of the spiritual exercises of Séverin Rubéric of the Récollets (*Ordo fratrum minorum recollectorum*, or Order of Friars Minor Recollect, now Franciscan), published at Bordeaux in 1622 and based on the

editio princeps conserved in Lyon's Bibliothèque Municipale. Forthomme's critical apparatus includes an extensive introduction, notes with sources and references, a restricted bibliography, an *index nominum*, a reproduction of the detailed *Table des matières* from the 1622 edition, and customary approbation. Spelling and punctuation have been modernized and usage standardized for ease of reading, whereas syntax has been preserved. Rubéric's *Exercices spirituels* are distinct from his *Exercices sacrés* (1623), a substantially revised version of the former work; Forthomme convinces when favoring the 1622 version. The book's title evokes the influential work by the founder of the Society of Jesus, the *Spiritual Exercises* (*Exercitia Spiritualia*) of Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), composed a century prior to Rubéric's work, and printed in Latin in 1548. While the bibliography on Rubéric is quite thin, the present edition is offered as a remedy, in the wake of the monumental work of Henri Bremond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France* (1916).

Forthomme's introduction sets Rubéric's work in the context of Franciscan inspiration and the Catholic Reformation; pertinent contemporaries include François de Sales (1567–1622), Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629), and Louis Lallemand (1588–1635). An extended spiritual lineage includes Paul, Origen, Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, and *Devotio moderna*. In his survey of Rubéric's spiritual ancestors, Forthomme declines to consider the relevance of *De Imitatione Christi* or the Spanish mystic García de Cisneros (1455–1510), whose compilation, the *Ejercitatorio de la vida espiritual* (1500), offers a system for spiritual exercises prior to Ignatius. Instead, Forthomme asserts the primacy of Italians in building a tradition of spiritual exercises, emphasizing Francis of Assisi and Bonaventure. Rubéric's text has three main parts: purgative, illuminative, and unitive, corresponding to the triple way of Christian spiritual advancement, with each part subdivided into four *méditations*. The twelve *méditations* resemble orations or elaborate prayers and exhortations for the reader's edification, rather than a program of exercises per se. The work contains little practical guidance for the exercitant. Like Ignatius, Rubéric affirms the necessity of a director's spiritual counsel, as opposed to individuals forging independent paths. Forthomme emphasizes that Rubéric's text is not merely a set of *méditations* nor a spiritual experience, but a life choice. Rubéric does not subvert established ecclesiastical hierarchies, doctrines, or institutions, but validates and reinforces them. Discussions of the will, obedience, charity, poverty, and other topics do not disturb orthodoxy. Forthomme contends that the experience and language of substantive mysticism are not completely consistent with Christianity. While this is a perfectly plausible statement, it is vague — which Christianity? When, where? — and does not enlighten the reader concerning Rubéric's text, which is hardly radical in doctrinal substance.

Forthomme's introduction, while erudite and enthusiastic, lacks orderly sequence despite the apparent structure with subheadings. The thread of his ponderous discussion wanders from one topic to another. Forthomme presumes the reader's intimate knowledge of the history of Catholic spirituality and theological debates. He admits

the failure of the Wars of Religion and of the Liges to induce a true obedience to the Church, as if that were the universal endpoint. He alludes to the laws of the sacred and the cosmos, presuming consensus. His presentation of Rubéric's work will be embraced by devout Catholics, but others might find his approach rather problematic (e.g., his discussion of chastity and *érotisme*). In contributing to the history of Christian spirituality, one might address a broad potential audience with a scholarly perspective of reasoned impartiality.

The figure of Mary Magdalene is central to Rubéric's vision, and she is included in a majority of the twelve *méditations*. Forthomme's analysis might have taken the opportunity to advance our understanding in light of intriguing scholarly perspectives: here, Magdalene symbolizes desire to imitate Francis of Assisi. Forthomme draws analogies between Mary Magdalene, the triple way, and conversion; predication of the resurrection; and joyous divine union, all in anticipation of Francis. It remains for other scholars to continue to interpret the significance of Mary Magdalene, including the mystical language, for Rubéric's Christian exercitant.

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