

The Bible and the Crisis of Modernism: Catholic Criticism in the Twentieth Century. By Tomáš Petráček. Translated by David Livingstone and Addison Hart. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022. vii + 421 pp. \$125 hardcover.

Tomáš Petráček has produced a wonderful contribution to the study of Catholic biblical criticism as it has evolved over the very tumultuous past century. This is not a merely academic historical survey, but a vital resource for understanding the key personalities, magisterial documents, and political and philosophical forces that have shaped a struggle for authentic biblical interpretation that continues to this day.

Petráček examines the development of what he calls “progressive Catholic exegesis” as it began to emerge during the pontificate of Leo XIII, especially with the foundation of the Dominican Bible School in Jerusalem (1890) and the publication of *Providentissimus Deus* (1893). He traces its trajectory through the Modernist crisis of the early twentieth century, with its conservative clamp down on progressive scholarship, up until the final vindication of the Catholic use of historical-critical methods with the publication of Pius XII’s *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943) and *Dei verbum* of the Second Vatican Council (1965).

This historical survey has a strong biographical component to it, tracing the careers and contributions of pioneering scholars such as Hummelauer, Loisy, and Lagrange. It also highlights the contributions of several Czech biblical scholars, namely Zapletal, Musil, Hejčl, and Šanda, who are likely to be less well known to a western audience. Petráček offers a rich and nuanced portrait of these leading figures, including their professional and personal disputes, as well as the development of their positions and careers through the crucible of the early twentieth century.

In addition to his treatment of the proponents of progressive exegesis, Petráček analyzes the methods and motives of their main opponents both within the Roman Curia (for example, Cardinal Billot and Monsignor Benigni) and from the ranks of conservative exegetes (such as Delattre and Fonck). His analysis here is remarkably fair and judicious. He lays out with clarity the very real theological concerns these parties had for correctly understanding and safeguarding the inspiration and truth of scripture. He is careful not to portray the opponents of progressive exegesis as mere ideologues or intellectual hacks. He writes, for example, of Billot: “He was unquestionably a brilliant theologian . . . [who] was able to comprehend the theological aspects of exegetical issues . . .” (147). At the same time, Petráček is able to provide an insightful critique of the shortcomings of Billot’s dogmatic approach to inspiration.

Petráček has a clear understanding and command of the relevant primary texts, including the works of the exegetes under consideration and the documents of the church’s magisterium and its advisory dicasteries. He also has a keen awareness of the important issues at stake and the human drama of this battle for the Bible that continues into our own time. In his penultimate chapter, where he quotes from a 1970 textbook by Jaromír Tobola, Petráček writes: “It is not unlikely that ‘some wave of anti-scholarly reaction’ will again roll over us in coming years” (296). This reviewer wonders how aware the author might be of what I see unfolding at the present moment in my own country, local church, and classroom.

In addition to its well-balanced and thorough treatment of the interrelated spheres of ecclesial and social history, theology, and exegesis over the span of many decades,

Petráček's book spins an engaging narrative. At times I found myself reading a novel that I could not put down, even though I was already well informed of the basic story. Petráček does not write as a dispassionate neutral observer, but as a Czech and a Catholic with a horse in this race. Far from detracting from his work, this insider perspective adds a depth of understanding that would be difficult for someone standing at a further distance to obtain.

As the title suggests, this work focuses on “the crisis of modernism” and the “twentieth century.” To be more precise, its arc runs from *Providentissimus Deus* in 1893 to *Dei verbum* in 1965, with special emphasis on the early decades of the twentieth century. It does an exemplary job of illuminating these very formative years in the development of Catholic biblical criticism. While later developments are briefly noted in the last chapter and a half, my only complaint (which is not a criticism) is that I want to read the next volume in the series. There is much that could be said, for example, about the reception of *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993) and a certain neo-integralist backlash against progressive Catholic exegesis in more recent years. In his final reflections, Petráček writes: “Though the Catholic Church has finally succeeded . . . in objectively and impartially evaluating modern biblical scholarship and integrating it in a positive manner—the struggle is not definitively over” (301). I could not agree more.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640723003347

***An Odd Cross to Bear: A Biography of Ruth Bell Graham.* By Anne Blue Wills. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2022.**

Ruth Bell, the child of missionaries and an aspiring missionary herself, accepted Billy Graham's proposal of marriage in June of 1941. Her commitment to the burgeoning evangelist was unwavering, yet she knew the marriage meant a new direction for her life, one where she understood she would “slip into the background . . . be a lost life. Lost in Bill's” (70). Seven decades later, a wry epitaph on her grave testified to her humble spirit and grounding wit. It read: “End of Construction—Thank you for your patience” (228). Anne Blue Wills presents these two episodes deftly—among many others—to represent Ruth Bell Graham's sense of personal sacrifice in service to a larger evangelical project and her strength of character and agency within that same evangelical world. In other words, Ruth's “slip into the background” stands for Wills as a critical foreground for understanding mid-century evangelical marriage and motherhood while also gaining appreciation for a formidable person who occupied a rarefied cultural position as the wife Billy Graham.

Before she met Graham, Ruth was born and lived the majority of her life in China. Wills captures these formative years in detail, demonstrating how the experience engrained an obedience to what Ruth understood to be God's calling for service as a missionary. The call to service remained, but her field of service shifted to hearth and husband. That makes for a challenging biographical subject. She insisted on