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*Columba Marmion: Correspondance 1881-1923* (review)

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*Columba Marmion: Correspondance 1881-1923*. Edited by Mark Tierney, R.-Ferdinand Poswick, and Nicolas Dayez. (Paris: François-Xavier de Guibert. 2008. Pp. 1361. €55,00 paperback. ISBN 978-2-755-40318-3.)

Blessed Columba Marmion, O.S.B., was born in Dublin in 1858. During his studies at the Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, and at the Roman College of the Propaganda Fide, he was deeply formed by the neo-Scholastic theology of his teachers. After his ordination as a priest in 1881, Edward McCabe, the archbishop of Dublin, sent him as a curate into a parish for one year. After that, Marmion taught as a professor of philosophy and languages at Clonliffe. In 1886, the twenty-seven-year-old priest entered the Benedictine Abbey of Maredsous in Belgium, which had been founded by the Benedictine Congregation of Beuron in 1872. From 1899 to 1909, Marmion was sent as prior to the Abbey of Keizersberg at Leuven. During this time, he became acquainted with many members of the Catholic University of Leuven, among them the later archbishop of Malines, Désiré-Joseph Mercier. In 1909, Marmion was elected abbot of Maredsous.

During this year, nearly 130 monks from Belgium, France, Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany belonged to the large community of Maredsous. Some of the monks were already or were to become famous scholars, such as the theologian Laurent Janssens and the historians Ursmer Berlière, Germain Morin, and Philibert Schmitz. While theological discussion suffered from the papal measures against modernism, the Liturgical Movement was born. Meanwhile in Europe, World War I provoked a wave of nationalism, which infected important Catholic leaders as well. Following the German occupation of Belgium, the German monks had to leave Maredsous. Some of the Belgian monks became soldiers or prisoners of war. Marmion, trying to find a refuge for at least part of his community, spent two years (1914–16) in Great Britain and Ireland. After his return to Maredsous, he started to prepare for the separation of this monastery from the German Congregation of Beuron and the foundation of the Belgian Benedictine Congregation of the Annunciation in 1920. In 1919, he sent four of his monks to the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem to replace the German monks. But the Holy See did not support his plans to make the Dormition a Belgian monastery. Thus, in 1920, the German monks returned to Jerusalem.

With the publication of his spiritual conferences in three volumes—*Christ the Life of the Soul* (London, 1917), *Christ in His Mysteries* (Namur, Belgium, 1919), and *Christ the Ideal of the Monk* (Lille, 1922)—Marmion became famous. Generations of priests between World War I and the Second Vatican Council have read this trilogy. Marmion died in 1923 and was beatified in 2000. The most important facts of his life are to be found in the biographies by his assistant Raymond Thibaut, O.S.B. (1929), and, more recently, by Mark Tierney, O.S.B. (1994). Both of these biographies are somewhat apologetic.

Now, the monumental edition of almost all known letters written by Marmion is opening a new chapter in the scholarly approach to this impor-

tant ecclesiastical and spiritual leader. The editors have published 1867 letters in chronological order. Letters written in English are translated into French, and brief commentaries are provided. At the end of the volume, an alphabetical index helps one to find the correspondents and contains further information about these individuals and institutions. The book ends with a chronology of the letters and the life of Columba Marmion. An index of all individuals named in the letters would have been useful. The information, most important for a full understanding, that Marmion's correspondence with Dame Cécile de Hemptinne, the abbess of Maredret, was censored by his superior, Robert de Kerchove, the abbot of Leuven, from the end of March to July 1902 is hidden in a note on page 134.

Despite some errors in the commentary on these letters, this *Correspondance* is a welcome and useful edition. For the first time, the reader comes into close contact with the Irish humor of Marmion and learns a lot about the difficulties of a European Benedictine abbot at the beginning of the twentieth century.

*Benediktinerabtei Gerleve  
Billerbeck, Germany*

MARCEL ALBERT, O.S.B.

*The Wine of Certitude: A Literary Biography of Ronald Knox.* By David M. Rooney. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2009. Pp. 427. \$17.95 paperback. ISBN 978-1-586-17232-9.)

David M. Rooney's new study of one of the great twentieth-century apologists is as welcome as it is needed. Monsignor Ronald Knox (1888–1957)—brother of *Punch* editor E. V. Knox and uncle of novelist Penelope Fitzgerald—was one of the premier figures of the Catholic literary revival, deserving a place among the revival's *illustrissimi*, such as Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton, Graham Greene, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Cardinal Henry Edward Manning, Cardinal John Henry Newman, J. R. R. Tolkien, Evelyn Waugh, and others. Yet he has been sadly and unjustly neglected in the half-century since his death. His translation of the Bible into what he hoped would be “timeless English” is overlooked in favor of other, often worse, translations, and his other works, ranging across the spectrum of genres, are similarly unread and largely forgotten. It is, therefore, encouraging that we are seeing something of a Knox revival, a timely resurrection, in the wake of a revival of interest in the whole Catholic literary revival in which he was such a key player.

Baronius Press has recently secured the rights for the Knox translation of the Bible from the Archdiocese of Westminster and is in the process of producing a new complete edition, thereby bringing this literary gem back into print after several decades in the biblio-wilderness. A major work on Knox's Apologetics, Father Milton Walsh's *Ronald Knox as Apologist: Wit, Laughter and the Popish Creed* (San Francisco, 2007), has been published, as well as Walsh's comparative study of Knox and Lewis, *Second Friends: C. S. Lewis*