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Van Noort, Margaret. *Spiritual Writings of Sister Margaret of the Mother of God (1635–1643)*. Ed. Cordula van Wyhe. Trans. Susan M. Smith

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**Van Noort, Margaret.**

***Spiritual Writings of Sister Margaret of the Mother of God (1635–1643).* Ed. Cordula van Wyhe. Trans. Susan M. Smith.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 39 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 480. Toronto: Iter Academic Press/Tempe AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2015. Pp. xvi, 314 + 3 ill. ISBN 978-0-86698-535-2 (paperback) US\$39.95.

This is an excellent edition and fine translation of diaries kept by an extraordinary nun in Brussels between 1635 and 1637. The translations are clear and fully annotated, and the introduction offers a thorough review of the works plus past and present research. At the end of the book there is a glossary of terms that help to explain the complicated issues of faith and the situation of a Netherlands' commoner in a convent filled with privileged women who were Spanish or identified with Spanish Catholicism. The diaries were suggested by her confessor and are very personal, covering her youth and then her spiritual life in the convent; they record an intense, isolated routine of body-focused spirituality. They were published posthumously and the appendices include documents that discuss their impact.

This is really the autobiography of a lower-class spiritual woman in an upper-class confined environment. She was never allowed to join the ranks of the aristocratic nuns in liturgical and ceremonial life, and her duties were essentially those of a servant to the others in work and worship assignments. She was constantly ill and under the care of the Brussels court doctor, which raised questions in her own mind about her female sanctity and added to her worries that her body was equally open to God, Satan, and disease.

The sketch of her early life is an overview of the Netherlands' revolt against Spain and the long years of war. Her father was in the Spanish army, and her comments are a fine source on a life of want and threat as a girl. Entering a convent was an opportunity to escape harsh poverty, and the Spanish Carmelites included her because she could cook, was strong, and would work hard. Yet her writings depict a girl who was clearly miserable and who thought that only the Devil was speaking to her; her life was filled with horrid visions and injuries, most of which were self-inflicted. She took solace in cooking and wrote of the connection she saw between spirituality and food preparation. Otherwise, her life was filled with self-deprecation and weeping,

followed by moments of dazzling visions offering brief relief. In the diaries, she was fulfilling a confessional obligation; she wondered about how accurate she should be in documenting spiritual experiences, since she favoured seeing herself naked in visions and felt affirmation only through self-mortification and the physical and mental trauma that followed. Clearly, however, these were not outside the monastic experiences of the day, and Margaret became well known as she dreamed of martyrdom by means of grotesque lethal torment. Pain aroused devotional happiness, and she found that illness was an excellent way to be in communion with the teachings of the church, thus securing salvation. The diaries demonstrate her awareness that the only way for a woman to gain approval and sainthood was through suffering. She also showed considerable knowledge about the church and her function in it. However, the confessors who dictated the terms of her writing may have influenced her understanding.

The first part of the translated text is an autobiography written in 1635. It is a clear and personal account of a childhood defined by war and servitude. It also reveals her religious feelings and her desire to enter a convent, even one that honoured class distinctions before faith. Margaret was in a nasty but safe environment and took pleasure in the confinement and the work. She was already tormented by demons who took the form of pigs, and recounting these episodes increased the discrimination she suffered. This in turn multiplied her visions, torments, and woeful afflictions as she led a life of self-induced frantic episodes in which the other nuns chat while she has rapturous or horrific visions.

The second part is a diary, written in the same year. It was a particularly hard and lonely time for Margaret, and she was convinced that she received messages from God. She had visions both saintly and demonic in character, causing her some moments of panic and others of ecstasy. The stress of war accentuated her distress, and she had a long series of visions wherein God forced her to put down her thoughts and the devil attacked her. All of it was very personal. She did not shrink from claiming interaction with the entire company of heaven in a tortured but always rewarding manner.

The third part is her diary of 1637, in which she relates feelings of inadequacy and imagines herself as a filthy old rag. She also describes following a program of contemplation that brought her back to union with God, who then forced her to relate the miracles she had experienced which required a recitation of conflicting moments of joy and misery alleviated only by visions

of the sacred dead and a growing attachment to the rituals that affirmed saintliness. The passages emphasize the confined nature of her existence and how little change there was in her inner spiritual experiences or sense of her faith. The diary ends with Margaret's claim that God placed everything in her memory and allowed her to put it down in Spanish despite it not being her native tongue.

The book concludes with a letter to her confessor and an account of her devotions. An appendix contains a note on her death, testimonials on her virtues, documents relating signs from her after death, and letters attesting to how her writings were regarded. There is an excellent bibliography with a relation of all manuscript sources, followed by a carefully arranged section listing primary and secondary courses.

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**von Friedeburg, Robert.**

*Luther's Legacy: The Thirty Years War and the Modern Notion of "State" in the Empire, 1530s to 1790s.*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. vi, 441. ISBN 9-78-1-1071-1187-5 (hardcover) US\$154.95.

Martin Luther's legacy in Germany is multifaceted and complex. His life was intricately bound to the society that formed him, and he in turn left indelible marks on the religious, political, and social orders. Though these aspects of society are distinct, they function interdependently, in a continuing co-relationship of formation and re-formation, with Luther's voice remaining a sometimes subtle, sometimes not-so-subtle, influence on the generations after his death. Robert von Friedeburg, in his most recent volume, takes on an aspect of Luther's influence in his detailed decoding of the rise of the modern state in Germany. He uncovers the interrelationships of German life and thought in the emergence of the state, with particular reference to Luther's role in the story. With acute sensitivity to the subject matter and with exceptional erudition, von Friedeburg presents a compelling case for the unique nature of the German state and the reasons for its birth, and does so with force and precision.