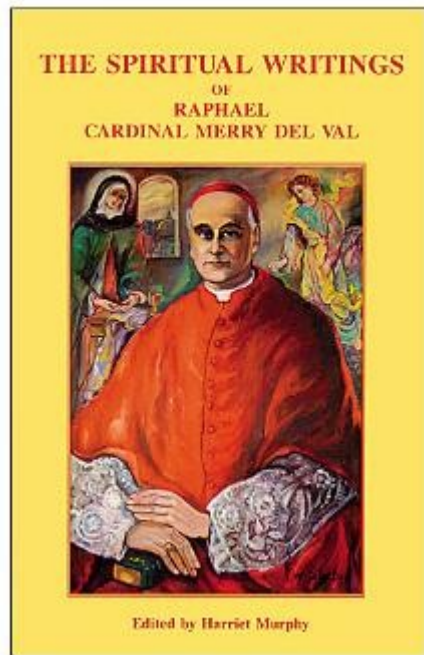

Book Review

THE SPIRITUAL WRITINGS OF RAPHAEL, CARDINAL MERRY DEL VAL (1865-1930)

edited with an introduction by Harriet Murphy

Raphael, Cardinal Merry del Val, Secretary of State to Pope St. Pius X from 1903 to 1914, was born in the Spanish Embassy in London in 1865, the son of a distinguished Spanish diplomat of Irish origin (successively Spanish Ambassador to the Court of St. James, to Austro-Hungary, to Brussels and to the Holy See) and an English mother, he was educated by the Jesuits and was to become a priest after a brilliant period of study, first at the once great Seminary at Ushaw, Durham, England then in Rome. Jealously, it was long supposed that he owed the prodigious rise of his career to a privilege of birth and personal ambition, but the truth is very different; far from seeking honours, he only ever wished to be an ordinary priest. His aristocratic origins did play a part in his career, but it was also his intelligence and extraordinary talent for languages, together with his quiet understated virtue, that made him an unwilling public figure in the history of the Church. He was eventually appointed the Secretary of State to Pope St. Pius X whom he served as a devoted servant and kindred spirit until the latter's death in 1914. He died in Rome in 1930 and is buried in St. Peter's Basilica.

The Cardinal retained a great love of England—his adopted country—whilst working against his will in the Vatican; indeed, one of his early letters to Pope Leo XIII shows that he was repelled by the idea of service in Rome, preferring to



labour as a hidden priest working for the conversion of England. Many members of the Merry del Val and de Zulueta families (his mother was a de Zulueta) were and still are public servants.

This collection of the great man's writings has been out of print in English since 1986 and has been published to advance the cause in Rome of a much maligned figure. It will come as no surprise that the cause for Cardinal Merry del Val's canonisation has lain dormant since the 1950s (when it was launched directly after the canonization of Pope St. Pius X). Perhaps one should not really expect support for the cause of a Cardinal who was a fierce anti-Modernist and an embodiment of the Church Militant.

To this day the 'liberal mafia' has not forgiven him for his valiant role in the defence of the faith, and his likely part in the writing of 'Pascendi' (1907) which denounced Modernism as the "synthesis of all heresies". Similarly the Freemasons never forgave him for denouncing the separation of Church and State in France in 1905.

The fight for Catholic tradition was never very pretty. In the conclave which elected Pope Pius XI in 1922 Cardinal Gasparri actually had Cardinal Merry del Val excommunicated for allegedly trying to rig the vote! As readers will discover, however, Cardinal Merry del Val allowed himself to head the group of anti-Liberals as a potential candidate for pope, not for reasons of self-advancement and ambition, but to save Holy Mother Church from the infiltrators....Cardinal Merry del Val had first hand experience of Cardinal Gasparri's Liberal inclinations from the days of the 1896 condemnation of Anglican Orders as absolutely null and void. Cardinal Gasparri held them to be valid.

The twenty page introduction of the new edition provides us with a complete biographical background, distilling much that was already known through the biographies by Pio Cenci (1933) and Mother Forbes, Fr. Dal Gal and Cecilia Buehrle (all of which appeared in the 1950s). A fire in Cardinal Merry del Val's

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study after his death burned many papers that might have been revealing; it is said that the Cardinal had prepared a fierce condemnation of Communism which would be very pertinent to our support of Our Lady of Fatima; it will disappoint some readers that a new biography was not possible.

So why bother to publish a new book, if there is nothing really new? Because the prayers and letters of spiritual direction are an antidote to the pride which is at the heart of the modernism he fought so valiantly against. They do not just reveal how important it is for the lay Catholic to live a daily war against all the vices, especially the sin of human respect; the litany of humility alone, which has found its way into many a canonical anthology, can drive out and extinguish the sins of the intellect which have fabricated a new kind of deviant Catholicism. We might leave it to truly Catholic theologians and controversialists to search for the rather elusive hermeneutics of continuity in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, but we cannot abandon our duty of self-perfection whilst that war – one which few of us are in a position to materially influence – continues.

The edition is also a compelling on account of the new translations of prayers and letters of spiritual direction previously only available in Italian. One of the many apostolates which the Cardinal supported after the death of Pope St. Pius X in 1914 was the cause of traditional femininity and womanhood. Three major addresses in Rome, published here for the first time, are prophetic and apocalyptic by turns. Lambasting the degeneration of



Monseigneur Merry del Val as the very young Apostolic Delegate to Canada in 1897.

morality, the rise of frivolity and the transformation of woman into a plaything, the Cardinal exhorts the resistance movement of traditional womanhood to remain true to the Church's teachings on the sacrament of marriage. What would



Cardinal Merry del Val assisted by Eugenio Pacelli signing the Concordat with Serbia on 24th June 1914.

he have said now, given that the clear demarcation lines between the sacred and the profane are being eroded so viciously? As a Third Order Servite, the Cardinal's devotion to Our Lady's Sorrows also shines through, as does the spartan spirituality of a man who was devoted to St. Francis of Assisi.

This edition will attract a traditional readership for the edifying meditations on some of the principle feast days of the year, for a whole host of prayers which have received scant publicity (even though they are in the 'Raccolta' and are indulged by Holy Mother Church), and for topics for retreats for religious and clergy, ...and much more. The volume is handsomely produced with an oil portrait of the Cardinal on the cover. Cheaply priced, it deserves greater publicity, not least because of information on how to report favours received to the priest at Spanish College, Rome, who is responsible for monitoring the progress of the cause. Oremus.

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