William P. O'Brien, S.J.

Claude La Colombière: Sermons. Volume 1: Christian Conduct. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University. Pp. 240. \$35.

William P. O'Brien's excellent, well-structured book aims at, and succeeds in, 1). introducing Claude La Colombière (canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1992) and his work to readers otherwise unfamiliar with them; 2). presenting annotated English translations of twelve of La Colombière's sermons, representative of the central points of his theological and spiritual thought; and 3). offering in the critical apparatus a novel interpretation of both the author and his beliefs using modern conceptual categories (primarily, classical American pragmatism), and suggesting that a similar approach might prove generally useful in other studies of spirituality. Briefly, the author argues that the classical notion of "eloquence" transposes, in sacred rhetoric, to "holiness," which, understood as a "habit" in the sense of the American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, governs the feelings, actions, and thoughts of both preacher and audience(s).

O'Brien makes superb use of the French critical edition of the texts, as well as the primary and secondary sources requisite for such a translation. He stays close to the French for the English translation, but uses sound judgment suiting the text to the contemporary English reader. Thus, his translation is smooth, lucid, and reads like intelligent English, not French transposed into English. The sermons (all of approximately the same length) accomplish the purpose for which O'Brien chose them: namely, to provide an overview of La Colombière's spirituality, with holiness and "habitation" at the center of his preaching.

The footnotes offer ample evidence of O'Brien's erudition. They clarify La Colombière's historical context and explain why O'Brien selects—in some cases—one critical text over another. His list of abbreviations and pellucid introduction also indicate uncommon scholarship. O'Brien also refers to the biblical texts and the theology behind La Colombière's remarks. On occasion, he contrasts La Colombière's dated theological perspective with that of contemporary theologians. (Gérard Ferreyrolles, professor of seventeenth-century French literature at Université Paris Sorbonne-Paris IV, establishes a good overall tone for this work through his preface.) To the best of my knowledge, this is the first English translation of these sermons, as delivered (save perhaps a few fragments), making O'Brien the foremost expert on La Colombière as orator.

Given the contemporary interest in spirituality and La Colombière's connection with St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–1690) and the Sacred Heart devotion, these sermons should find a home in many libraries. Although some of the material has long since seen its day, there is much that is timely and

appealing to a general Catholic Christian readership. I suspect many Catholic college and university libraries will want a copy, as will Catholic retreat centers and religious communities. Furthermore, the historical, rhetorical, and literary merit of the study recommends the volume to university libraries in general.

Harvey D. Egan, S.J.

Boston College

egan@bc.edu

DOI 10.1163/22141332-00202007-21