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Le Cardinal Liénart: Évêque de Lille 1928-1968

Catherine Masson

Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001

769 pages, \$60.28 Hardcover

Once again an historian of Catholic France has written a biography of a significant church figure in the grand style of a *magnum opus*. In this instance the choice fell upon one of the two most significant transitional cardinals of the twentieth-century French church, Achille Liénart.

The other acknowledged leader, of course, is Emmanuel Suhard, the cardinal archbishop of Paris whose brief tenure at his see (1940-1949) witnessed an explosion of Catholic creativity – clandestine chaplains, missionary parishes, a pluralistic press, a revived specialized Catholic Action, the *Mission de France* seminary and the worker-priest movement. Suhard's noted career emerges in yet another *magnum opus*, that of Father Jean Vinatier who himself was active in these vital French Catholic renovations. Indeed, Vinatier had written an earlier book on Cardinal Liénart, *Le Cardinal Liénart et la Mission de France*, but as the title indicates it focuses on the bishop of Lille's specific relationship with the troubled *Mission de France* and its seminary.

Hence the vast biography of Cardinal Liénart by his niece Catherine Masson proves to be a most welcome addition to our knowledge of the twentieth-century French Catholic church as well as providing us with the definitive biography of this great prelate.

Although one might sustain a degree of scepticism with respect to a biography written by a beloved family member, Catherine Masson presents a most convincing and balanced account. To be sure, she writes from a Christian perspective and does not hide her admiration for the cardinal, but this exhaustive work is no hagiography. Cardinal Liénart's contradictions and blinders appear in this biography. They are explained, but they are not explained away. That she displays her own analysis is to be expected, and even where one might challenge her conclusions she makes a convincing case.

In his attitude toward the Communists Liénart carried his suspicions, perhaps, without sufficient nuances. At the same time, as Masson points out, he was no simplistic foe of the local Marxists and their organizations. He remained in dialogue with them and sustained

the loyalty of every one of his worker-priests even when they were disappointed in him. His embarrassing silence with respect to treatment of the Jews during the German occupation receives sufficient attention, but the full depths of anti-Judaism within the church await more analysis which likely will cast more shame on the cardinal. His behaviour, in spite of political limitations, appeared tawdry in light of such figures as Cardinals Saliège and Gerlier.

Nonetheless, the heroic figure who strides across major changes in France and within its church emerges as most convincing in Dr. Masson's work. Her portrayal of a pious, conservative figure compelled by his faith to be a pastor in a changing world rings true. His courage in the trenches, the loyalty he inspired, his commitment to working-class justice and specialized Catholic Action, his relationship with clerical and lay leaders, his capacity for dialogue and his openness to Vatican II combine to make him a compelling figure. Catherine Masson has achieved her goal admirably in her presentation of a French Catholic leader of faith and integrity who straddled a radically changing church with creativity and vision in his four-decade episcopate.

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Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel

Jacob A. O. Preus

St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000

235 pages, \$18.05 Softcover

At first glance Jacob A. O. Preus' work *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* may appear to be yet another heavy-handed attempt to define the nature and limits of that most fundamental of Christian doctrines, the gospel. Preus would certainly not be the first to negotiate this theological minefield in order to categorize the same gospel that audaciously defies such categorization. To ask and the answer the question "What is the