The Traitor and the Jew: Anti-Semitism and the Delirium of Extremist Right-Wing Nationalism in French Canada from 1929-1939

Oscar Cole-Arnal
The Traitor and the Jew: Anti-Semitism and the delirium of extremist right-wing nationalism in French Canada from 1929–1939
Ester Delisle
215 pp.

The Traitor and the Jew and the story behind the book have elicited much controversy in the land. The book itself is a revision of author Delisle’s doctoral dissertation at the Université Laval, a dissertation which was the subject of strong polarization within the departmental faculty there. Some felt her work was deserving of a doctorate; others did not. The debate became public through a number of prominent figures, not least of which was Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Quickly the academic controversy became political, since the subject matter of her dissertation and the above book touch the very heart of Quebec nationalism and its past. Tragically opinion on the book has divided, for the most part, along such political lines with neo-separatists disparaging the work and pro-federalists lauding it. In spite of the publicity, and to some extent because of it, there is an imperative to evaluate the book on its own merits. Although such a task is difficult, I will make the attempt in the following paragraphs.

Initially I had high hopes for the book. In my own research in Quebec over the last seven years I was saddened to witness much uncritical patriotism surrounding Quebec’s nationalists in the early half of this century. Of course, this was not universal, yet I was uncomfortable with the fact that many Quebec progressives were engaging in selective memory when it came to such figures as Lionel Groulx. Father Groulx was being lauded for his patriotism, and his reactionary corporatism, laced with xenophobia and anti-Semitism, was either ignored or softened considerably. This struck me as strikingly similar to our own Lutheran tendency to ignore Luther’s anti-Semitism and his brutal treatment of the peasant rebels (1525). My hope was that Delisle’s book would challenge such avoidance of the dark side of early Québécois nationalism.

Dr. Delisle accomplished this very well with respect to Abbé Groulx, but it seemed as if she were far away from indicting the wide range of clerico-nationalists in the 1930s and 1940s, which very thing she had promised to deliver. However, as the book progressed, her evidence for the latter got stronger and stronger. Indeed, she was able to demonstrate that anti-Semitism and xenophobia were part-and-parcel of Jeune-Canada and the neo-nationalists of L’Action nationale and Le Devoir. What was most appalling was how extensive the data was, to the point of advertising blurbs and small news items. Even the admired progressive André Laurendeau was not untainted, though it is worth noting that he has since apologized for his earlier forays in bigotry.

The Traitor and the Jew has its own outrageous and debatable characteristics. For example, one might challenge Delisle’s views regarding the
nihilism of the figures she portrays, and it is not certain that these clerico-nationalists are the full-blown “Nazis” that she seems to suggest. More likely they are replicas of the Pétainiste collaborators of continental France. It is to be regretted that the flames of public controversy have enveloped the book. Mordecai Richler, with his own gratuitous snipes at Québécois patriotism, has made honest debate on the book increasingly difficult by his endorsement of Delisle’s work. Nonetheless, The Traitor and the Jew has brought to the light of day much of the ugly side of the right-wing nationalism that dominated part of Quebec’s past. Dr. John Hellman of McGill University is currently in the process of unearthing data that shows that sectors of Quebec’s clerical and political elites played a major role in helping pro-Pétain miliciens escape justice after World War II. As painful as this past is, it must be owned by all of us, anglophones and francophones. Such openness will do its part to free progressive Québécois nationalists from any identification with a past which is the very antithesis of the patriotism they have embraced since the Quiet Revolution. The Traitor and the Jew can be of great service to that challenge.

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The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period
Yizhak Hirschfeld
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302 pp.

At first glance this particular volume would appear to be on the arcane end of books anyone might want to spend their time reading. However, once enveloped by Hirschfeld’s own thorough and compelling research, the need to consume the entire contents is significantly increased. The history of Judean Monasteries provides a foundation on which one can begin to build an understanding of ancient Christianity in Palestine. The connection between the monks themselves, the hermits around them and the wealthy Europeans who were their benefactors are all discussed.

Nine years of research is covered by the author, from early excavations beginning in 1981 and concluding during 1990. Therefore the information presented in this book is both current and relevant. Prior to 1981 there were fifty monasteries known to exist in both ruins and still in operation. Hirschfeld and his team discovered twelve more during their work. Hirschfeld does not limit himself to only archaeological discussions. Throughout the book there are many references to and a thorough analysis of the sociological aspects of the desert monk’s daily life; these are