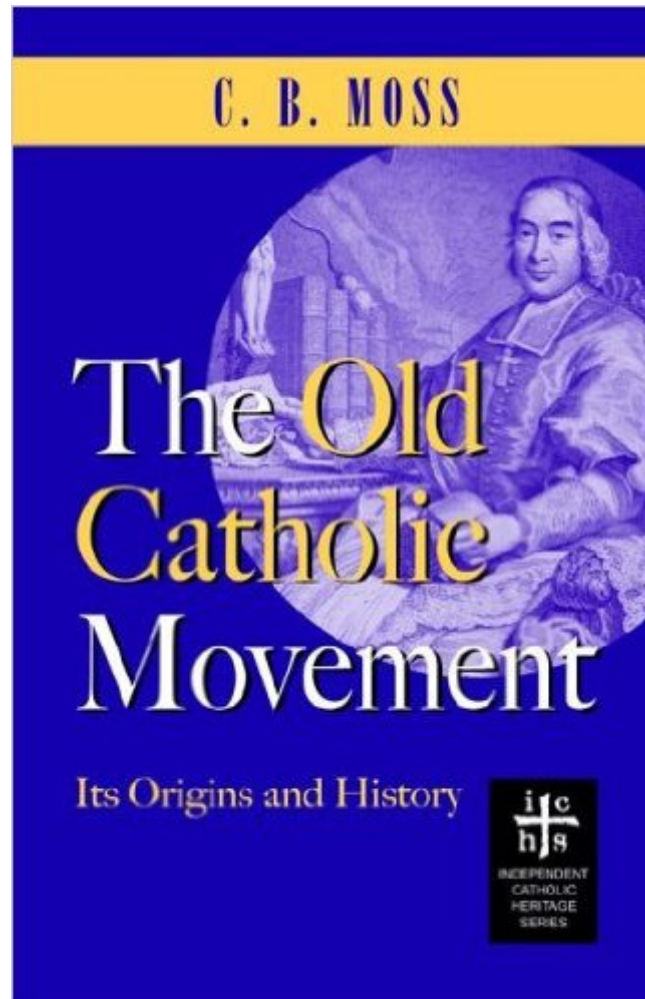


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The Old Catholic Movement: Its Origins And History



Synopsis

The Old Catholic movement is the best kept secret in Christendom. The fact that there is a valid (if "illicit") form of catholicism that is independent of Rome and which values local control seems scandalous to some and a cause for delight or even relief in others. The Old Catholic churches have branches-both official and unofficial-all over the world. They constitute one of the most interesting and diverse movements in Christian history, a movement worthy of greater visibility and academic attention. Here is the story of this unlikely legacy, from its beginnings in the fourteenth century through 1977-now back in print after twenty-eight years from Apocryphile Press.

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Customer Reviews

This book, recently reissued by Apocryphile Press, is one of the more heavily sought-after volumes on Old Catholicism on various online venues, used bookstores, and other avenues. Part of the reason for this is simple - Old Catholicism as a denomination and phenomenon in the Christian tradition is relatively little studied, and much of the material is done in German and other continental European languages. There are no major established seminaries, no strong denominational resources, and, particularly in the English-speaking world, a lot of competing sources of material that rarely approaches the quality of being good scholarship. C.B. Moss has produced a reasonably sound, reasonably broad account of European Old Catholicism in historical, ecclesial, and to lesser extent theological, terms. Moss' first inspiration to study the phenomenon of Old Catholicism came from a foundational book of my own in this regard, the text 'History of the So-Called Jansenist

Church of Holland'. This book, published in the 1850s, describes some of the earliest issues that led to a separate but Catholic church in Holland; this group later formed relationships with other continental Europeans, primarily but not exclusively in the German lands, after Vatican I. Moss' survey of church history from the Conciliar Movement (circa fourteenth century) to the first Vatican Council takes up more than half the book; this history is interesting and worthwhile, and serves as a good guide to process for Anglican thinking of the time as well as Old Catholic. It is after this point in the text that the work of history of Old Catholicism proper really takes place. Moss looks at the various national/cultural situations in turn - German, Swiss, Latin, etc. He spends a good amount of time on the Reunion conferences at Bonn and the Declaration of Utrecht, and various conferences that have taken place since Vatican I in which the administrative side of Old Catholicism has been formed. Moss also devotes a chapter to Old Catholic liturgy, as well as one to ecumenical relationships with other Christians - both of these could be better if more fully developed. Moss concentrates the native language liturgies and is generally dismissive of the English versions of Old Catholic liturgical resources. Of course, C.B. Moss was a cleric of the Church of England. While making a claim to present an unbiased and objective review of the material, he nonetheless betrays himself at the outset by labeling the foundational figures of North American Old Catholic jurisdictions with the chapter title, 'False Starts', with the fully intended double entendre that that terminology implies. Even as Moss speaks in glowing words about the unity of intercommunion and understanding given by the Bonn Agreement and the way in which this models a better means of cooperation among Christian bodies, he is careful to exclude those he doesn't seem to think pass muster. The bias is subtle but very present, even in the less critical parts of the narrative. (Moss in other writing confesses his personal bias against the North American and British expressions of Old Catholicism.) The version of this text reissued and revised in 1977 devotes a special addendum to the Old Catholic body since Vatican II. Moss highlights certain restricted communion-agreement sharings that are significant; he also highlights other communion issues with Lutherans, Orthodox, and other churches, including the Anglican communion since the advent of women's ordination. This has continued to be a problem area for the Old Catholics. This is a flawed text in many ways, but still remains a touchstone for Old Catholic history if for no other reason it is one of the few with a scholarly authority. It is a must for any in Old Catholic and Independent Anglican churches, to help them better understand their own history.

Admittedly, Moss is an Anglican, and he has an ax to grind. No, not the axe that cut off the head of St. John Fisher. Rather, Moss wishes to drive a wedge through Roman Catholicism by means of the

Old Catholic Church of Utrecht. He fails at this, but in the process unfolds an arresting tale of the abuse of power in the Catholic Church. I was long told that "the Old Catholics are the guys who rejected Vatican I." That's only partially true. They are also victims of Jesuit power-snarfs and a Counter-Reformation run amuck. The notion that there can be an authentic and faithful Catholicism that dares differ with Rome is taking slow but steady root today, especially in the independent sacramental movement. Moss' book is a very valuable historical account of how and why this particular ball got rolling.

I give this product a 5 star rating because of its content and topic on the various faces of Catholicism.

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