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## Review of Life of Bishop Machebeuf.

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*Life of Bishop Machebeuf.* By W. J. Howlett. Edited by Thomas J. Steele, S. J., and Ronald S. Brockway. Denver: Regis College, 1987. Reprint (1908). Notes, bibliography, index. 462 pp. \$24.95 cloth, \$11.95 paper.

Original editions of this obscure diocesan biography, the major source of Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, are all but inaccessible. The present reprint, an exact facsimile of the 1908 version, introduces to a wider audience the lively and memorable Joseph P. Machebeuf, first vicar apostolic of Colorado and Utah. To aid readers, the editors have included a bibliography, an index, and marginal asterisks pointing interested readers to a special notes section.

Divided into 26 chapters, this volume treats Machebeuf's life chronologically: his youth in France, his mission to the Great Lakes, his sojourn in the Southwest, his final years in Colorado. Written by a fellow priest and believer, this biography encompasses, as one might expect, a somewhat devotional view of the priest's life. Machebeuf's ecclesiastical calling, his reverence for the Virgin Mary, and his hairbreadth escapes from death are all explained through divine intervention. If at times we question Howlett's interpretation of events (who

knows?—he may be right), we never doubt his sincerity and good faith.

Howlett's narration would perhaps wear thin if it weren't for Machebeuf's letters and journal entries, which Howlett quotes extensively. In fact, these excerpts so inspired Cather that she based her novel on the friendship of Machebeuf and Father Lamy, his life-long friend. In Machebeuf's letters, we discover—in convincing detail—the challenges of living on the frontier and the rewards of administering sacraments to the superstitious, of bringing spiritual water to atrophied souls.

The newly added index is especially helpful. I find, for example, eight references to Mach-

ebeuf's sister, Philomene, and thirteen references to Machebeuf's money troubles in Colorado, topics that would be inconvenient to locate otherwise. The notes are equally valuable, clarifying difficult historical points and citing a plethora of additional sources, both published and unpublished. In short, this reprint will serve scholar, Cather enthusiast, religionist, and history buff equally well in discovering the wiry priest who helped civilize the Western wilds.

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## *Vision and Refuge*

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**A**

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