

'NOT RECOMMENDED FOR CATHOLIC LIBRARIES': MARIE VON
EBNER-ESCHENBACH AND THE TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY
CATHOLIC REVIVAL MOVEMENT¹

DORIS M. KLOSTERMAIER

ABSTRACT

Although celebrated during her lifetime as Austria's greatest woman writer, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach endured much harsh criticism from representatives of the Catholic Church. She and her husband were critical of the Church as an institution, especially of the abuse of priestly authority. They were attracted to a secular doctrine of ethics. Meanwhile the Papacy was determined to preserve traditional belief against the influence of liberalism. In this climate, the criticisms of the Church found in Ebner-Eschenbach's fiction attracted censure from defenders of a narrowly orthodox Catholic literature, who also opposed the efforts of Karl Muth to promote a modern Catholic literature which dealt with contemporary issues. Caught between these two parties, Ebner-Eschenbach avoided public controversy but continued to express her beliefs and defend the religiosity of her writings.

Ebner-Eschenbach scholarship has long assumed that by 1900 the professional reputation of this prominent and widely-read writer was inviolable, and that her name was associated with nothing but admiration and praise.² After publishing *Das Gemeindekind* in 1887, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach was considered the matriarch of Austrian literature. Reviewers complimented her on her observational and narrative skills, her gift for characterisation, her empathy and psychological penetration. In 1898 she received the Austrian 'Ehrenzeichen für Kunst und Wissenschaft'. In 1900, on the occasion of her seventieth birthday, ten thousand Viennese women thanked her for her work. Shortly afterwards, in an opinion poll, she was listed as one of the five most eminent women of her time.³ The public venerated her as a model of noble-mindedness, generosity of spirit and ethical conviction. As Rainer Baasner observes: 'Es bestand eine Art Konsens, den Ruf der berühmten Frau niemals anzugreifen, die Kritik, je berühmter die Dichterin wurde, immer gemäßiger anzumelden.'⁴ Yet, as the present paper attempts to show, beside the mainstream reception of Ebner-Eschenbach's work some criticism existed that radically diverged from the positive estimation by the writer's basically liberal reviewers.

¹ Research for this paper was carried out in Vienna with the support of the Austrian Cultural Institute, New York, which is gratefully acknowledged. I would also like to thank Moritz Csáky and Walter Obermaier, Vienna, and Linwood De Long, Winnipeg, for their help and advice.

² See Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Das Gemeindekind*, ed. Rainer Baasner, Bonn 1983, p.223 (= vol. 3 of *Kritische Texte und Deutungen*, ed. Karl Konrad Polheim).

³ Karlheinz Rossbacher, *Literatur und Liberalismus. Zur Kultur der Ringstraßenzeit in Wien*, Vienna 1992, p. 366.

⁴ Baasner, *Gemeindekind*, p. 222.

Ultramontane pastoral analysts, bound by rigid ecclesiasticism, considered her writing heretical and a threat to the Catholic Church.

A close look at the ecclesio-historical context in which these negative commentaries, published between 1903 and 1911, were written, reveals that their reasons are extremely complex. They have to be seen in connection with the writer's personal reservations regarding the Church and with the crisis of Roman Catholicism at the turn of the century. The official Church's paranoid obsession with what was known as Modernism, the disputes in Germany and Austria concerning Catholic inferiority in theology, the sciences and the arts, and ultimately the 'katholischer Literaturstreit', all had an impact on the verdict of Ebner-Eschenbach's clerical reviewers.

EBNER-ESCHENBACH AND THE CHURCH

Although born and brought up a Catholic, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, until her final years, took a rather critical stance toward the ecclesiastical institution. The Church of her day was uncongenial to her deepest aspirations, since it never satisfied her demands for higher standards of righteousness and her profound need for a spirituality that could fulfil her longing for the transcendent. Her boredom during catechism classes in her childhood and her frustration with her all too lenient parish priest who could not resolve the conflict between her religious devotion and her rational curiosity, doubtless contributed to her gradual alienation from official Catholicism (III 853–61).⁵ However, the main reason was the influence of her cousin and later husband. Moritz von Ebner-Eschenbach, a soldier, scientist, and from 1863 onwards a corresponding member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, adhered to the tenets of Austro-liberalism with its belief in the progress of civilisation and its commitment to the freedom and autonomy of the individual.⁶ Extremely honest, at times too outspoken and blunt, he aroused his superiors' animosity by his aversion to doctrinaire attitudes and his belief in the urgent necessity for reforming the state, the army and the Church. He became Marie's mentor in her formative and most impressionable years.

Although sincerely convinced of the greatness of Christ and his teaching, Moritz had so strong a resentment against the Roman Catholic Church that he devoted an extensive discussion to it in his memoirs.⁷ As a student at the Theresianum in Vienna he had received too great a dose

⁵ References by volume and page number only are to the three-volume edition of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's works by Johannes Klein, Munich 1978: I = *Das Gemeindegeld, Novellen, Aphorismen*; II = *Kleine Romane*; III = *Erzählungen, Autobiographische Schriften*.

⁶ See Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Tagebücher I* [1862–1869], ed. Karl Konrad Polheim and Rainer Baasner, Tübingen 1989, p. 9; henceforth cited as T I.

⁷ See Bettina Mitterhofer, 'Moritz von Ebner-Eschenbach – Erfinder und Litterateur. Ein Mann im Schatten seiner Frau', thesis, University of Vienna 1986, pp. 90–174. All the following information regarding his attitude to the Church comes from this source.

of religious exercises which, instead of fostering devotion, had caused in him aversion to all ecclesiastical matters. Catholic dogma and doctrine were to him 'der reine Aberwitz', while clerical teachers represented an obstacle to enlightenment, spreading senseless superstition instead of strengthening Christian morality. As a great admirer of German culture and proud of his German origins, he rejected ultramontanism as a persuasion of southern and, in his view, inferior races. However, his main objection to the Church seems to have been its alleged greed for wealth and power and its inability to adjust to intellectual progress. According to him, only science and not religion could lead humankind to intellectual, material and moral betterment.

While basically in accord with her husband's views – she defended his memoirs against 'astonished relatives'⁸ – Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach was more conciliatory. As a woman and a writer she felt she had to exercise more restraint (T IV 205, 316). Eager to guard her privacy and to live up to the public's notion of her benevolence, she destroyed many autobiographical materials and asked her friends to burn her correspondence.⁹ There exist therefore very few personal documents – unedited diary and notebook entries and some letters – that reveal her anti-clericalism and her aversion to ultramontane and extremely orthodox Catholics. It was only in her fiction, the most important vehicle for venting her frustration, that she dared to voice her misgivings about Catholicism more openly.

Like her husband, Ebner-Eschenbach objected both to the Church's resistance to modern thought and to its aspirations to worldly power and material gain. In 'Komtesse Paula' she describes the eponymous heroine as being astonished at her pastor's elitist thinking and his deficiency in general education: 'Er hatte in wissenschaftlichen Dingen Ansichten, die niemand mit ihm teilte, außer höchstens Madame Duphot und ich, und selbst wir nur eine Zeitlang' (III 324). 'Mašlans Frau' deals with the concepts of hell and eternity as two constructs that have for centuries served the Church as a means to preserve its power over the faithful. Stories like 'Ob spät, ob früh', 'Das tägliche Leben' and 'Unverbesserlich' focus on the cruelty of an institution that exacts of its followers blind submission and close observance of doctrine, without concern for their humanity. The narrator of 'Der gute Mond' speaks of the Church's attempt to enrich herself at the expense of a young, innocent girl whose aunt, likewise under clerical control, has promised the most valuable part of her estate to the ecclesiastical institution, instead of leaving it to her.

Ebner-Eschenbach further resented the legalism of the Catholic Church and the inability of some priests to deal with their parishioners as fellow human beings. In 'Die Resel' she portrays a dean who considers ecclesiasti-

⁸ See Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Tagebücher IV*, ed. Karl Konrad Polheim, Norbert Gabriel and Markus Jagsch, Tübingen 1995, p. 318; henceforth cited as T IV.

⁹ See Doris Klostermaier, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: The Victory of a Tenacious Will*, Riverside, CA 1997, p. VIII.

cal doctrine more important than a dying person. Father Leo Klinger of 'Glaubenslos?' considers leaving the priesthood because, unlike his colleague who only deals with his parishioners on an official level, he longs to establish personal contact with them (II 286). The priest in 'Mašlans Frau' is unable to effect the reconciliation of a stubborn, long-estranged couple. His hackneyed phrases about the bliss of eternal life are a 'Heilmittel . . . , gegen das der Organismus des Kranken längst abgestumpft ist' (I 483). Overall, instead of empathising with his parishioners, he deliberately keeps them at a distance (I 472). Maria Dornach of 'Unsühnbar' faces a confessor who is too unworldly and naïve in his faith to realise that he has failed to alleviate her anguish (II 473).

Ebner-Eschenbach also regarded religion as a means to keep women under a 'sacred yoke' and to make them endure husbands who treated them as chattels. Works like 'Komtesse Paula', 'Mašlans Frau' and especially 'Der gute Mond' deal with this concern. In the latter story the narrator, aware of the double standards in society and Church, illustrates how a young girl is denied her own judgement and, at the instigation of the clergy, given in marriage to a man she has never met (I 262).

Contemporaries, aware of Ebner-Eschenbach's liberal, socio-humanitarian and undogmatic views, considered her to be Josephinist, a free-thinker and a metaphysical sceptic, claiming that she basically distanced herself from Catholicism.¹⁰ Indeed, she never moved in Catholic circles and likewise avoided clerical organisations. Her diaries demonstrate that she mainly attended mass during holidays and at her relatives' country estates – perhaps to keep up appearances – whereas in Vienna she seldom went to church. She shared liberal reservations about confessional schools on account of their allegedly low educational standards and was therefore shocked when she learned of her brother Victor's decision to send his eight-year-old daughter to a Catholic boarding school.¹¹ Regular visits to her niece did not improve Ebner's view of the institution. Overall her opinion of the Church was low, as she remarked in an undated notebook, echoing her husband's views: 'Keine Kirche steht mit den Lehren ihres Stifters in solchem Widerspruch wie die katholische'.¹² In the same notebook she repeatedly remarked on the hard-heartedness of people considering themselves pious Catholics. Their Christian mercy, in her view, lasted only up to the steps of the church. 'Die Frommen haben einen Berührungspunkt mit Nietzsche', she wrote, 'Sie sind nicht mitleidig.' The sight of misery did not much affect them, and they wore armour-plating to protect them from earthly things.

Similar thoughts are expressed in *Das Gemeindegeld*, in which a teacher,

¹⁰ See Johannes Mumbauer, 'Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach', *Hochland*, 14 (1916–17), 189–217 (here p. 207).

¹¹ Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Tagebücher III*, ed. Karl Konrad Polheim et al., Tübingen 1994, p. 240; henceforth cited as T III.

¹² Konvolut Ja 81213, Wiener Stadt- und Landesbibliothek, Rathaus, Vienna.

not the Church, helps the protagonist to reintegrate into the village community. The heartless priest feels nothing but disgust for Pavel, the neglected orphan boy, and finds it difficult to muster even the required pastoral sympathy (I 110). When Pavel's imprisoned mother tries to contact her daughter at the convent, the nuns let her know that it would be best if the girl never heard from her. And Pavel, pleading with the superior of the same institution to help him find a place to live and work, meets with nothing but 'sanfter Unerbittlichkeit' (I 67).

Although disappointed and frustrated by her denomination's growing political involvement in the 1890s, Ebner-Eschenbach was never hostile and never officially left the Church. She had, however, a great aversion to Karl Lueger, a prominent Catholic and from 1897 to 1910 the mayor of Vienna, who instrumentalised religion in order to gain political power.¹³ In 1890 he united the anti-liberal Christian Social movement which, counting among its members many priests and theologians, propagated an aggressive Catholicity. In their endeavour to emphasise the religious element in public life, the Christian Socials furthered clericalism, encouraging priests to engage in political and anti-Semitic diatribes, rather than dealing with spiritual concerns. As a friend of the Jews the writer strongly resented this movement. In a letter to Natalie von Milde, a friend to whom she was very open regarding religious matters, she expressed her anger about the growth of clericalism and Jew-hatred, calling Vienna 'eine verpaffte, antisemitische Kaiserstadt'.¹⁴

In the mid-1880s Ebner-Eschenbach found a substitute for the Christian faith in William Mackintyre Salter's religion of morals.¹⁵ His teaching on ethics and morality, intended to attract 'earnest and brave-hearted liberals',¹⁶ largely coincided with her own tenets. Since she read Salter's work *Die Religion der Moral* at a time of growing anti-Semitism among Catholics, his statement that existing religions had stopped advocating ideal convictions must have struck a responsive chord in her.¹⁷ Salter's demands for higher standards of morality, for social equality and peace, and for a religion of love, instantly appealed to her, so that she soon called him a prophet and herself his 'demütigste Schülerin'.¹⁸ She also became a member of the Gesellschaft für Ethische Kultur in Vienna which, according to its constitution, aimed at creating a just and peaceful society.¹⁹

After her husband's death, Ebner-Eschenbach's relationship with the Church improved. Lonely and in need of comfort, she may have reassessed

¹³ See Klostermaier, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach*, p. 254.

¹⁴ Handschriftensammlung, Wiener Stadt- und Landesbibliothek, Rathaus, Vienna, I.N. 129.434.

¹⁵ See Klostermaier, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach*, p. 189.

¹⁶ William M. Salter, *The Basis of the Ethical Movement*, Chicago 1883, p. 19.

¹⁷ Salter, *Die Religion der Moral*, tr. Georg von Gyzicki, Leipzig 1885, p. 267.

¹⁸ Quoted in Anton Bettelheim (ed.), *Louise von François und Conrad Ferdinand Meyer*, Berlin 1920, p. 199.

¹⁹ See Hedwig Dransfeld, 'Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach', *Borromäus-Blätter*, 5 (1905), 89–91 (here p. 89).

her own spiritual history. In Rome she met Father Heinrich Denifle, a Dominican scholar, in contact with like-minded, reform-oriented Catholics.²⁰ He probably presented the Church to her in its affirmative and positive aspects and helped her to find her way back to her Catholic faith. After years of aloofness she was now ready to become a practising member again.²¹

Yet despite her new commitment, she never professed Ultramontanism but remained true to her liberal creed. Nor did she join the Katholischer Schriftstellerverband, perhaps because it was supported by the Christian Socials and propagated political Catholicism.²² She likewise avoided publishing in Catholic journals in which writers were subjected to the norms of pedagogical and moral censorship, and never studied neo-scholastic, apologetic-theological literature, as was recommended for Catholic writers at the time.²³

By 1901 Ebner-Eschenbach was no longer listed as a member of the Gesellschaft für Ethische Kultur, probably because in 1896 the society adopted a rather hostile attitude toward the Church.²⁴ Yet popular Catholicism with its pilgrimages, veneration of saints and mass festivals never appealed to her. She continued attending mass and confession but adhered to her own beliefs. The Church, far from opening up to modern life, still seemed immured in an enclave. In 1907 Pope Pius X started a veritable witch-hunt to cleanse Catholicism of progressive ideas.²⁵ In this restrictive atmosphere Ebner-Eschenbach nostalgically thought of the Austrian revolution when writing to a friend in 1908: 'Sie sind blutjung. Gottlob. Im dem Jahre geboren, 1848, in dem ich voll Begeisterung das Anbrechen einer neuen herrlichen Zeit begrüßte. Was ist aus diesen Träumen geworden? Basta!'²⁶ Like many at that time, she may have hoped not only for freedom in a constitutional state but also in a democratic and modernised Church.

ATTEMPTS TO RECONCILE THE CHURCH AND THE MODERN WORLD

The revolution of 1848 had aroused great expectations in Austria. Metternich's repressive, authoritarian regime came to an end; the first Constitution granted the people full freedom of faith and expression. Eager to liberate the Church, Austrian clergymen demanded greater freedom of

²⁰ Otto Weiss, *Der Modernismus in Deutschland*, Regensburg 1995, pp. 160, 442.

²¹ See Klostermaier, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach*, p. 249.

²² See Albert Fuchs, *Geistige Strömungen in Österreich 1867–1918*, Vienna 1978, p. 139.

²³ Manfred Weitlauff, 'Modernismus litterarius', *Beiträge zur altbayerischen Kirchengeschichte*, 37 (1988), 97–175, n.224.

²⁴ See *Mitteilungen der Ethischen Gesellschaft*, 2 (Dec. 1901); Mechthild Alkemade, *Die Lebens- und Weltanschauung der Freifrau Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach*, Graz 1935, p. 233.

²⁵ Weiss, *Modernismus*, p. 52.

²⁶ Quoted in Anton Bettelheim, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbachs Wirken und Vermächtnis*, Leipzig 1920, p. 91.

thought, better scientific education for priests, and regular clerical assemblies. After the Emperor, at the request of the Catholic masses, had dismissed the Redemptorists and Jesuits from the country, the *Wiener Zeitung* observed: 'Das Volk verlangt jetzt Religion, nicht Aberglauben, Kirche, nicht Pfaffenthum, Sittigung, nicht Verfinsterung'.²⁷

Shortly afterwards Father Johann Emanuel Veith founded the Wiener Katholikenverein as part of an extensive emancipation movement in the Church. In a speech in August 1848 he asked for the liberation of the faithful, for a constitutional government in state and Church and for more lay participation in ecclesiastical affairs. Yet the Church officials looked on constitutionalism as the forerunner of heresy and went out of their way to preserve the traditional, authoritarian structures of the institution. The Katholikenverein, led by lay people under the motto of tolerance and freedom of expression, soon turned into a pious prayer and welfare association. Veith's writings came close to being placed on the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, and in 1849 he left, disappointed and frustrated, for Prague. The doctrinaire direction in Roman Catholicism had gained the upper hand.²⁸

At that time the Church under Pius IX began to reject any liberating initiatives. In his *Syllabus Errorum* of 1864 the Pope categorically condemned liberalism, giving dogmatic definition to his own authority. He rejected the sovereignty of the people, the freedom of the press, of faith and worship, and any type of philosophy deviating from scholasticism. His successor, Leo XIII, continued to endorse the condemnations of modern life, summarised by the *Syllabus*. In his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* he declared neo-scholasticism the only acceptable official theology of the Church. In reflecting on revealed truths, theologians were not supposed to use historical skills but had to rely solely on dogma and the interpretations provided by a divinely decreed *magisterium*. Yet by the late 1890s progressive clergymen in the United States, in France as well as in England and Italy were calling for renewal in the Church and for an alignment of Catholicism with modern thought. The Pope, however, trying to consolidate his spiritual power, anxiously watched over the unity, orthodoxy and stability of the Church and never allowed an open debate.²⁹

In Germany, after the First Vatican Council, Catholic theologians hardly dared to speak out any more, yet there, too, reform-oriented members of the Church began to break loose from their neo-scholastic strait-jacket and to demand a dialogue between Catholicism and modern society.³⁰

²⁷ Quoted in Otto Weiss, 'Katholiken in der Auseinandersetzung mit der kirchlichen Autorität', *Rottenburger Jahrbuch für Kirchengeschichte*, 10 (1991), 23–54 (here p. 35).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54. Ebner-Eschenbach visited Father Veith in 1867 and was much impressed by 'this great good man' (TI 195).

²⁹ On the efforts of reform-oriented theologians in the United States and Europe see Weiss, *Moder-nismus*, pp. 71–107.

³⁰ See Gabriel Daly, OSA, *Transcendence and Immanence: A Study in Catholic Modernism and Integralism*, Oxford 1980, p. 19.

One of the most renowned reformers was Hermann Schell, a professor of apologetics at the University of Würzburg and an advocate of tolerance and democratisation in the Church. Inspired especially by his American colleagues, he rejected blind submission to Rome and asked that the faithful be given personal responsibility to take initiative in Church and state. Investigating the religious reasons for the Church's alleged backwardness in scholarship, Schell came to the conclusion that the structure, law and offices of the ecclesiastical institution needed as much reform as did the training of priests. Yet his efforts to pave the way for Catholicism into modern life were not appreciated by Rome. The authorities quickly acted to silence the 'Americanist'. He was denounced as a heretic who endangered Catholic unity, and his writings were placed on the Index.³¹

The inferiority debate soon moved into the field of Catholic literature. During the *Kulturkampf* in Germany, Catholic artistic production had atrophied. Engaged in building solidarity in the face of a hostile German government and in countering anti-clerical propaganda, the Church had focussed mainly on politics and social work instead of furthering the arts. Through a system of associations and institutions a Catholic subculture was created, limiting the interaction between Catholics and non-Catholics and ensuring the survival of the Church by insisting on the most pronounced articulation of distinctive Catholic doctrines. Literature had first and foremost to serve propaganda purposes.³² The standard fare for Catholic readers included works like Friedrich Wilhelm Weber's *Dreizehnlinden*, defined by some as 'eine stupend oberflächlich-ungenießbare Reimerei'.³³

Although the novel was the favourite literary genre at the time, its focus on sexuality aroused great concern among pastoral, morality-oriented literary critics. Pastoral reviewers not only moralised and dogmatised but often showed a decided partiality for explicitly orthodox Catholic writers. Works like Ferdinande von Brackel's *Daniella* and Itha von Goldegg's *Das Märchen vom Glück* were praised as the embodiment of Catholic belletristic ideals.³⁴ Authors who, unwilling to submit to this ecclesiastical dictatorship, dared to criticise the Church, were not recognised as Catholics, even if their works had a Catholic background.³⁵ Aesthetic standards were of secondary importance.

In 1898 Karl Muth, the editor of the Catholic journal *Alte und Neue Welt*, entered the discussion. He was inspired by Hermann Schell's reform ideas and by Martin Deutinger's aesthetics which focussed on artistic freedom from Church censorship. Like Eichendorff before him, Deutinger had

³¹ See Weiss, *Modernismus*, pp. 110, 136, 146.

³² See Josef Nadler, 'Hochlandkämpfe von gestern und morgen', in Nadler (ed.), *Wiederbegegnung von Kirche und Kultur in Deutschland. Eine Gabe für Karl Muth*, Munich 1927, pp. 59–70 (here p. 63).

³³ Heinz Deschner, *Ein Jahrhundert Heilsgeschichte*, Cologne 1982, p. 58.

³⁴ Karl Muth (Veremundus), *Steht die katholische Belletristik auf der Höhe der Zeit? Eine literarische Gewissensfrage*, Mainz 1898, pp. 32–40.

³⁵ See Weitlauff, 'Modernismus litterarius', p. 124.

condemned the rigorism of ecclesiastical pettiness and had warned of the dangerous consequences of a separation of Church and national culture.³⁶

Under the pseudonym Veremundus, Muth published a brochure, *Steht die katholische Belletristik auf der Höhe der Zeit?*, investigating the reasons for Catholic backwardness in literature. Although conceding that some Catholic writers had talent, he nevertheless claimed that their work suffered from a deplorable tendentiousness. Writers' and critics' extreme conservatism, their isolation from German culture, their narrow-mindedness and their lack of appropriate education, all had contributed to this state of affairs. As a remedy he demanded emancipation from oppressive ecclesiastical leadership, greater involvement of lay people in the literary field, and a dialogue between Church and culture, to create a Catholic literature that would be acceptable to the whole nation. Muth's suggestions were greeted with fierce opposition from the clergy. They accused him of being hostile to the Church, questioned his knowledge of Catholic literature, and stubbornly defended the *status quo*.³⁷

Yet Paul Wilhelm von Keppler, the Bishop of Rottenburg, though likewise offended by Muth's 'hypercritical' stance, agreed with the latter's urgent demand for a literary review journal for educated Catholics.³⁸ Accordingly, in 1900, upon Keppler's request, the *Literarische Warte*, a Catholic monthly, was founded in order to overcome literary inferiority by adopting the aesthetic standards of the rest of the nation.³⁹ It seemed as if Muth's critique and suggestions, born out of his desire to move beyond Catholic institutional self-centredness, had fallen on fertile ground.

MARIE VON EBNER-ESCHENBACH AS THE TARGET OF THE INTRANSIGENT CHURCH

In 1902 the editors of the *Literarische Warte* initiated a catalogue, the *Literarischer Ratgeber*, with suggestions about which books Catholics might purchase for Christmas. Among many other works by Catholic and non-Catholic authors Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's total *oeuvre* was listed and highly recommended. This angered Heinrich Falkenberg, a priest from the Rhineland who, in the following year, published his work *Katholische Selbstvergiftung* and thus started the 'Literaturstreit'. He reproached the editors of the *Warte* for praising writers like Peter Rosegger, Gustav Frenssen, C. F. Meyer, and Ebner-Eschenbach who, in his view, had demonstrated blatant anti-clericalism. He further claimed that the journal, by favouring opponents of Catholicism, hurt the Church and the authors

³⁶ See Max Ettlinger, 'Schlegel, Deutinger und Muth als K nder des religi sen Urgrundes aller Poesie', in Nadler, *Wiederbegegnung*, pp. 71–6 (esp. p. 74).

³⁷ See Weitlauff, 'Modernismus litterarius', p. 132.

³⁸ See Karl Muth, *Die litterarischen Aufgaben der deutschen Katholiken*, Mainz 1899, p. 71.

³⁹ Oskar Katann, 'Die Katholische Literaturbewegung von Muth bis Muckermann', in *Die Zeit im Buch*, ed. by the Seelsorgeinstitut Wien, Vienna 1950, pp. 1–4 (here p. 2).

who were loyal to it, at a time when it was difficult to sustain a market for Catholic literature. From Falkenberg's standpoint, Ebner-Eschenbach's *oeuvre* should never have been recommended. He made special reference to her parable 'Der Gottesleugner' in which she had described an atheist being accepted into the Kingdom of God.⁴⁰ He demanded a Catholic literary journal which, catering especially for young people and focussing on their eternal salvation, should suggest literature that furthered the Catholic cause. He thus opposed Muth's efforts to establish objective, aesthetic criticism according to the standards of contemporary German literature, and instead asked that authors create Catholic propaganda material.

That same year, in 1903, the *Borromäus-Blätter* appeared, a journal of the Borromäus-Verein which had been founded in 1844 in Germany for the protection of Catholics from liberalism and from allegedly revolutionary activities. Strictly ultramontane and in some respects rather sectarian, the association laid great stress on upholding Catholic values.⁴¹ The new journal – its authors were priests, with some lay people – was intended to combat the dissemination of immoral writings, to promote works by orthodox Catholics, and to provide guidelines for Catholic libraries.⁴² Critics were asked to point out for which age, professional group and educational level the books under discussion were suitable. Thus the *Borromäus-Blätter* – from 1906 onwards called *Die Bücherwelt* – by trying to prevent libraries from purchasing anti-Catholic works, became an influential institution in Catholic cultural politics. The journal's criteria were moral and eternity-oriented, as Falkenberg, closely connected with the Borromäus-Verein, had demanded.

It was probably due to Falkenberg's influence that Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach came under investigation by the reviewers of the *Borromäus-Blätter*. In 1905 Hedwig Dransfeld wrote a detailed commentary on the writer's 'Weltanschauung' and work. Conceding that Ebner-Eschenbach never denied God or ridiculed religion, Dransfeld still declared her far removed from positive Christianity, owing to her membership of the Gesellschaft für Ethische Kultur. Therefore, supposedly hostile to Catholic dogma and unconcerned about morality, the writer misled her audience, drawing it into the 'kühle Atmosphäre der "ethischen Kultur"' and estranging it from 'dem ewigen persönlichen Gott mit seinen klaren Gesetzen'.⁴³ According to Dransfeld, the writer also lacked respect for the mass and the sacraments. She was a free-thinker on the way toward the 'counterpole to Christianity'.

While admitting that Ebner-Eschenbach was a great artist, Dransfeld cautioned Catholic libraries against acquiring her complete works,

⁴⁰ Heinrich Falkenberg, *Katholische Selbstvergiftung*, Kevelaer 1903, p. 20.

⁴¹ See Alexander Schnütgen, *Der Verein vom Hl. Karl Borromäus geschichtlich gewürdigt*, Leipzig 1924, p. 8.

⁴² See *Borromäus-Blätter*, 1 (October 1903), 1.

⁴³ Dransfeld, 'Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach', *Borromäus-Blätter*, 5 (1905), 89.

because, in her view, many of them contradicted Christian ethics and episcopal decrees. She then wrote another review, dealing chronologically with Ebner's fiction. Here she rejected the stories as too complicated for the average reader, discarded the aphorisms as too secular and passed over the parables as lacking in edifying thought. Interestingly enough, the only work she enthusiastically recommended was the story 'Ein Verbot' from the collection *Alte Schule*. So much did Dransfeld like its plot, structure and message, that she suggested its distribution for the masses in penny brochures.⁴⁴ On the other hand, she considered *Bozena*, *Neue Dorf- und Schloßgeschichten*, 'Lotti, die Uhrmacherin', and 'Bertram Vogelweid' suitable only for urban, not for rural readers. She rejected most of the other works as either too far removed from popular interest or as exhibiting hostility toward the Church. *Das Gemeindegeld*, commonly celebrated as Ebner-Eschenbach's greatest accomplishment, displeased her by its alleged anti-clericalism, and 'Unsühnbar' struck her as dangerously pantheistic. The slightest allusion to a flaw in the Church deeply offended Dransfeld's sensibilities, causing her to observe that the writer had lost her Catholic feeling. Heartless nuns (*Das Gemeindegeld*), desperate priests ('Glaubenslos?'), Church authorities refusing burial to a person who committed suicide ('Die Resel'), simply did not exist as far as she was concerned. According to her, sexuality, eroticism, adultery and divorce had no room in literature fit for Catholic readers. If Ebner-Eschenbach dealt with less than perfect aspects of life, she only revealed her un-Catholic imagination. Yet, strangely enough, Dransfeld stated at the outset of her analysis that Ebner-Eschenbach's fiction was 'ein getreuer Spiegel ihrer Zeit'.⁴⁵

Apart from contradicting herself, Dransfeld sounded like the hypersensitive readers whom Karl Muth had dismissed as 'prudish fault-finders and old-maidish governess souls' who assume the right of censorship.⁴⁶ Conditioned by her own restricted Catholic background and obviously envisaging an extremely unsophisticated readership, Dransfeld was unable or unwilling to perceive the message of Ebner-Eschenbach's works and instead reduced them to her own level of understanding. Yet Dransfeld's judgement was not strict enough for Hermann Herz, the editor of the *Borromäus-Blätter*. As a priest he applied even more rigorous moral and dogmatic criteria, repeatedly inserting his own comments into her text. In a footnote he even went so far as to compare Ebner-Eschenbach to Graf Paul von Hoensbroech, a former Jesuit priest who, having converted to Protestantism, in his writings fiercely attacked the Catholic Church.⁴⁷ Soon afterwards, in 1907, Herz brought out an article by B. Stein examining the portrayal of priests in contemporary literature and concluding that

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 (1905), 123–7 (here p. 126).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 5 (1905), 88.

⁴⁶ Muth, *Belletristik*, p. 56.

⁴⁷ Dransfeld, 'Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach', *Borromäus-Blätter*, 6 (1905), 101–8 (here p. 104).

most authors presented them in a way that was 'ungerecht und unwürdig'.⁴⁸ Among other writers who allegedly caricatured priests in their work, Stein also listed Ebner-Eschenbach as a culprit. She supposedly described either hard and cruel clergymen, as in *Das Gemeindekind*, or narrow-minded and intellectually inferior ones, as in 'Die erste Beichte'. According to Stein only works that glorified the priesthood were acceptable. Yet neither Ebner-Eschenbach nor any other German writer had fulfilled these expectations.

In 1908 Stein resumed his polemics by preparing a new edition of Heinrich Keiter's *Konfessionelle Brunnenvergiftung*. This work, according to Muth, had originally been intended to reconcile Catholics and Protestants after the *Kulturkampf*, and Stein might have made it into an even finer 'Friedensinstrument'.⁴⁹ Instead, Stein took the opportunity to attack writers deemed hostile to the Church, including Ebner-Eschenbach who had not been mentioned in the first edition. Inspired by Dransfeld's essay in the *Borromäus-Blätter*, he literally copied from it whole paragraphs without acknowledging his source. Plagiarising Dransfeld's thoughts and words, the editor simply adopted her moral and dogmatic stance and categorically declared Ebner-Eschenbach an enemy of the Church.⁵⁰

Meanwhile the second attack on Karl Muth's literary renewal programme had occurred. Members of the Austrian Leo-Gesellschaft, a society founded by Catholic priests and scholars for the promotion of the sciences and arts, filed an official complaint at the 1905 Vienna Katholikentag about Muth's and his collaborators' underestimation of commendable Catholic writers. Shortly afterwards the poet and critic Richard von Kralik and a group of like-minded colleagues established the Gralbund, an organisation for the creation of a great national culture. A year later they founded the *Gral*, a monthly devoted to the improvement of literary standards and the propagation of Catholic doctrine. The journal was further meant as a counterpart to Muth's progressive *Hochland* which, as Kralik saw it, presented a danger for the Church.⁵¹ In contrast to Muth who had the German literary scene in mind, Kralik considered his own country's Catholic literature, including his own dramatic art, superior to non-Catholic achievements. He claimed that contemporary literature, being too modern and liberal, needed renewal in the spirit of the Middle Ages. With his concept of a Catholic *ars perennis* he hoped to bring about the regeneration of Church and nation.⁵²

Initially in accord with Muth's literary reform, Kralik, offended by the

⁴⁸ B. Stein, 'Katholische Priestergestalten in der neueren Literatur', *Die Bücherwelt*, 4 (1907), 248–52 (here p. 248).

⁴⁹ See Muth, *Die Wiedergeburt der Dichtung aus dem religiösen Erlebnis*, Kempten/ Munich 1909, p. 125.

⁵⁰ Compare Heinrich Keiter, *Konfessionelle Brunnenvergiftung*, 2nd edn, Essen 1908, pp. 26–7, with Dransfeld, 'Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach', pp. 88–90 and pp. 190–1.

⁵¹ Richard von Kralik, *Die katholische Literaturbewegung der Gegenwart*, Regensburg 1909, p. 41.

⁵² Kralik, 'Die moderne Kunst- und Literaturbewegung', *Literarische Warte*, 3 (1902), 385–94 (here p. 393).

latter's refusal to offer him a position on the editorial staff of *Hochland*, started to polemicise fiercely against him, against his journal, and against the writers he supported.⁵³ Thus the Catholic literary debate moved into its second stage, comprising the Kralik-Muth controversy and the clergy's polemics defending either *Gral* or *Hochland*. Kralik's followers accused Muth's ecumenically-oriented programme of endangering Catholic art. They denounced him as siding with supposedly antagonistic liberal Catholics and tried to eliminate his journal.⁵⁴ Kralik, in turn, was described as a 'Dilettant und ein mittelmäßiger Epigone', possessed of a 'pathologischen Schaffensdrang'.⁵⁵ The *Gral* programme was charged with exacerbating the rift between the German nation and ghettoised Catholicism.⁵⁶

The 'Literaturstreit' soon moved into the theological sphere and was linked to the Catholic reform movement. Pius X, elected Pope in 1903, was, like his predecessor, a staunch adherent of political and religious conservatism. He not only reinforced obedience to Papal authority, but mounted a campaign against theological liberalism, now decried as 'Modernism', with the aid of denunciation and spying.⁵⁷ In 1909 Caspar Decurtins, a close collaborator of Rome, claimed that Modernism had infiltrated not only theology, politics and sciences, but even the field of literature. To prove his point he cited the Austrian writer Enrica von Handel-Mazzetti's novel *Jesse und Maria* as an example of perilous religious subjectivism. The editors of the *Gral* followed suit and accused Muth of likewise propagating modernist thought.⁵⁸ Yet the latter and his collaborators held fast to their goals, even though *Hochland* barely escaped being placed on the Index, and continued sponsoring authors they regarded as true artists.

In 1910, at the height of the 'Literaturstreit', on the occasion of Ebner-Eschenbach's eightieth birthday, Muth wrote a tribute in *Hochland*, highlighting her artistry and pointing out that her liberal religious views had brought her the open hostility of pastoral criticism.⁵⁹ This statement irked Hermann Herz, the militantly conservative editor of the journal now called *Die Bücherwelt*. He therefore decided to rebut Muth's contentions by once more scrutinising Ebner's work. He was at odds with Muth, who had previously accused him of misjudging outstanding literature on account of his narrow, doctrinaire perspective.⁶⁰ Convinced of the correctness of his approach, Herz again took the strictest orthodoxy as his guideline.

After confirming Dransfeld's evaluation, Herz focussed mainly on

⁵³ See Weitlauff, 'Modernismus litterarius', p. 141.

⁵⁴ Josef Pfeneberger, 'Kralik oder Muth?', *Frankfurter zeitgemässe Broschüren*, 29 (1910), 153–87 (here p. 157).

⁵⁵ Falkenberg, *Katholische Selbstvergiftung*, p. 29.

⁵⁶ Johannes Mumbauer, 'Ein literarisches Ghetto für deutsche Katholiken', quoted in Pfeneberger, 'Kralik oder Muth?', p. 161.

⁵⁷ See Weiss, *Modernismus*, p. 52.

⁵⁸ Weitlauff, 'Modernismus litterarius', pp. 150–1.

⁵⁹ Muth, 'Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach', *Hochland*, 8 (1910–11), 116.

⁶⁰ Muth, *Wiedergeburt*, pp. 118–27.

Ebner-Eschenbach's most recent publications. He rejected *Altweibersommer*, arguing that the parables 'Vertrauen' and 'Der Gottesleugner' revealed the writer's disregard for Catholic doctrine. *Genrebilder* he totally discarded, simply because of the story 'Das tägliche Leben', in which a woman's suicide is condoned. He then dealt with *Die unbesiegbare Macht*, consisting of 'Der Erstgeborene' and 'Ihr Beruf', and once again applied his moral exhortation. While the first novella found favour in his eyes because he could not detect any undogmatic or immoral statements, the second fared badly on account of its supposedly anti-clerical tendencies. Herz particularly objected to the fact that the writer had endowed an atheist with positive characteristics. The whole volume was therefore, according to his view, suitable neither for young people nor for a wider readership.⁶¹

Finally Herz examined *Meine Kinderjahre*, finding it valuable for literary historians but rejecting it for Catholic readers because, according to his reading, the autobiography ended with the writer's unresolved crisis of faith. Focussing once again on Ebner's earlier membership of the Gesellschaft für Ethische Kultur, he came to the conclusion that, though mellowed in old age, she had not found her way back to the Church. He denied Muth's claim that her liberal Catholicity was the cause for the clerical reviewers' opposition. Instead, he maintained, she was in her thinking and feeling an opponent of Catholic dogma and discipline. He then decreed that the majority of Ebner's works had to be rejected, not only out of pastoral concern, but for reasons of dogma and morality.⁶²

Due to his prejudice against the Gesellschaft für Ethische Kultur, Herz never tried to understand Ebner-Eschenbach's message and intent. Rejecting her world-view and her vision, he displayed a total disregard for her work's essential value and artistic merit. Instead of focussing on aesthetic aspects, he applied casuistic criticism and a method thinly disguised as confessional polemics. Because she had read Schiller voraciously, anathema to integralist Catholics, Herz insinuated that her religious education had suffered. He also chose to ignore the fact that Ebner-Eschenbach, at the end of her autobiography, professes her faith in the Christian God (III 885). Nor did he trouble to find out whether she still participated in the Gesellschaft für Ethische Kultur at the time of his writing. He only investigated the religious-ideological aspect of each text. In Friedrich Schlegel's words, he exhibited the 'unerleuchteten Zelotengeist' which disdains intellectual accomplishments.⁶³ He further proved that Muth was right in attributing Catholic inferiority to the repressive measures of the Church.

There may have been many reasons for Herz's investigation into Ebner-Eschenbach's works. Here only the most important stimuli will be adduced. In 1909 Kralik urgently appealed to all literary critics, editors

⁶¹ Hermann Herz, 'Maria von Ebner-Eschenbach', *Die Bücherwelt*, 8 (1911), 147–51 (here p. 149).

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁶³ Quoted in Ettlinger, 'Schlegel, Deutinger und Muth', *Wiederbegegnung*, p. 72.

and publishers loyal to the Church to collaborate with him, the Catholic people and the Papacy, 'die große katholische Literaturbewegung zum heilvollsten Ziele zu führen'.⁶⁴ Herz may have been responding to this call. In 1910 Pius X issued his *Motu proprio* 'Sacrorum antistitum', admonishing the bishops to prevent their flock from reading modernist literature and to establish a censorship for booksellers and editors. Even Catholic newspapers and journals were scrutinised. Thus a strict surveillance was in force throughout the Church, and Herz had to prove absolute loyalty to save himself and *Die Bücherwelt* from suspicion. To be called a 'Literaturspitzel' by the Protestant press was less dangerous than being excommunicated by the Papal authorities.⁶⁵ Finally, he may have been inspired by the papal *Breve* of 1910 to the 'loyal son and valiant fighter' Caspar Decurtins, thanking him for uncovering Modernism in literature and calling on all Catholics to reject the so-called modernists' 'aus dem Hinterhalt kommende Anschläge'.⁶⁶

By applying the anti-modernist principles of the 1907 encyclical *Pascendi* to Ebner-Eschenbach's work and by pointing out rationalist and subjectivist tendencies, Herz was implicitly accusing her of Modernism.⁶⁷ At the same time he was implicating Muth, already suspected of siding with the modernists, as a defender of the writer's heretical work. Indirectly Herz also censured Keiter's literary calendar, a listing of orthodox Catholic writers, for having mentioned Ebner as a Catholic author, and in addition he upbraided all those Catholic well-wishers for paying tribute to her on her eightieth birthday.⁶⁸ If Decurtins had earned a *Breve* for denouncing a relative novice on the literary scene as a modernist, how much more credit must Herz have expected for unmasking Austria's greatest woman writer as a dangerous apostate.

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach was thus caught in the crossfire between the progressive and ultra-conservative forces in Catholicism. But she never publicly took a stand. Since the publication in 1893 of 'Glaubenslos?' she knew she had seriously antagonised the clergy. In a letter to Natalie von Milde she mentioned that a journal editor had refused to publish a review of the story because the Church disapproved of it. Yet she declared: 'Wenn sie das schon nicht ertragen, noch dickere Sammethandschuhe kann ich nicht anziehen'.⁶⁹ Early in April 1896 she heard rumours that her work had been placed on the Index of Forbidden Books (T IV 205). Shortly afterwards, in an article in the Catholic-conservative *Vaterland*, she found herself denounced as alienated from God, and her work described as

⁶⁴ Kralik, *Literaturbewegung*, p. 133.

⁶⁵ Herz, 'Maria von Ebner-Eschenbach', p. 151.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Weiss, *Modernismus*, p. 457.

⁶⁷ Herz, 'Maria von Ebner-Eschenbach', pp. 149, 151.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁶⁹ Handschriftensammlung, Wiener Stadt- und Landesbibliothek, Rathaus, Vienna, I.N.129.437.

unworthy of being read by Catholics.⁷⁰ While disconcerted and hurt by these accusations, she later confidently declared that no one should defend her against the allegations of the *Vaterland*, adding: 'Wer meine Schriften für irreligiös halten kann, ist einer Widerlegung unzugänglich und auch unwürdig.'⁷¹

Ebner-Eschenbach never succumbed to the dictatorship of Rome, as did her friend Enrica von Handel-Mazzetti who, once accused of propagating modernist thought, submitted unconditionally to Papal control.⁷² Charged, like her, with ignoring Catholic dogma and endangering the faith, Ebner-Eschenbach nevertheless did not recant. Even after her return to Catholicism she kept voicing her concern about the flaws of the ecclesiastical institution and insisted that the Church should not be afraid of people's honesty.⁷³ She also still dared to express notions contrary to Catholic teaching by having the protagonist of her 1915 story 'Der Herr Hofrat' declare that going to church is unnecessary (III 423).

By then the First World War had put an end to the Catholic inferiority debate and the persecution of 'modernists'. Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach had weathered the repressive measures of a Church that had tried to dominate not only the theological but also the cultural sphere. For a while Vienna had become a stronghold of integralism with Austrian bishops submissively executing generally unpopular papal decrees.⁷⁴ Institutions like the Gralbund had set narrow standards for literary aesthetics, and only outstanding writers were able to remain independent. Yet Ebner-Eschenbach courageously distanced herself from any party or clique, steadfastly following her own inner voice and continuing to write in her individual manner ('Ebner-Eschenbachisch').⁷⁵ Until the end she claimed the freedom to be herself, searching for truth and not for orthodoxy.

⁷⁰ Anon., 'Nochmals Lectüre und Gewissen', *Das Vaterland*, 103 (14 April 1896), Morgenblatt, 1–3 (here p. 2).

⁷¹ Quoted in Jiri Veselý, 'Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach und Hieronymus Lorm', in Karl Konrad Polheim (ed.), *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach. Ein Bonner Symposium zu ihrem 75. Todesjahr*, Frankfurt a.M. 1994, pp. 81–96 (here p. 92).

⁷² See Bernhard Doppler, *Katholische Literatur und Literaturkritik. Enrica von Handel-Mazzetti: Eine Fallstudie*, Königstein 1980, p. 33.

⁷³ Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Tagebücher V*, ed. Karl Konrad Polheim and Norbert Gabriel, Tübingen 1996, p. 98.

⁷⁴ Moritz Csáky, 'Österreich und der Modernismus', in *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs*, Vienna 1965, pp. 322–36 (here p. 336).

⁷⁵ Mumbauer, 'Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach', p. 207.