

April 2007

Book Reviews: The Jesuits and The Arts, 1540-1773, John O'Malley, S.J., and Gauvin Alexander Bailey, St. Joseph's University Press, 2005

Tom Lucas, S.J.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

Recommended Citation

Lucas, S.J., Tom (2007) "Book Reviews: The Jesuits and The Arts, 1540-1773, John O'Malley, S.J., and Gauvin Alexander Bailey, St. Joseph's University Press, 2005," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 31, Article 20.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol31/iss1/20>

The Jesuits and The Arts, 1540-1773

Edited by John O'Malley, S.J., and Gauvin Alexander Bailey

Saint Joseph's University Press, 2005, 475 pp., \$70.00

By Tom Lucas, S.J.

The *Jesuits and the Arts* is a big, beautiful and useful book. In 475 lushly illustrated pages, its eleven contributors chronicle and analyze the role of image and imagination in Jesuit preaching, teaching, and missionary activities before the Society's suppression in 1773. From the Society's humble foundation in late Renaissance Rome to its worldwide extension to the courts of Beijing and the Mughal empire and the extraordinary experiment of South America's reductions, the essays frame Jesuit art under John O'Malley's useful rubric of "pastoral pragmatism" — never art for art's sake, but art for the sake of the mission. And what art they produced, commissioned, and enjoyed!

Schooled by the pedagogy of the Spiritual Exercises to trust and rely upon the imagination, the early Jesuits were resolutely unafraid of art. They used painting, architecture, music, theater, dance, and spectacle as well as theology, philosophy, and classical literature to preach their message and make their points. Ruthlessly practical and pedagogically sophisticated, they taught sing-song catechism to street urchins and commissioned some of the best artists of the period to build, decorate, and make music in their churches and colleges. Centuries before the creation of Industrial Light and Magic, spectacles produced by the thousands at Jesuit colleges and the fine art those

colleges and churches contained were pyrotechnic vehicles intended to inspire, move, and change the hearts of their viewers.

While the volume's essays definitively nail closed the coffin containing the late 19th-early 20th century theory that the Jesuits somehow created the Baroque sensibility, they explore in detail how Jesuit builders, schoolmasters, and missionaries used, adapted, and often transformed local styles and vernacular arts and architecture with brilliant results. John O'Malley's magisterial essay on Ignatius and the cultural mission of the Society introduces and contextualizes the argument for pastoral pragmatism. Giovanni Sale's essays on early Jesuit architecture in Rome and Richard Bösel's comprehensive analysis of Jesuit architecture in Europe make the case for Jesuit adaptation of contemporary styles rather than outright invention. Marcello Fagiolo and T. Frank Kennedy provide valuable insights into the use of theatrical spectacle and music in both European and mission contexts.

Gauvin Alexander Bailey's contribution on art and architecture in Asia, and Ramón Gutiérrez and Graciella Viñuales's treatment of the Jesuit legacy in Spanish America are welcome contributions to the expanding literature on Jesuit mission art and architecture. Philippe Lécrivain's "Jesuit Culture and Missions... at the crossroads of History and Theology" uses the Reductions and the Chinese missions as paradigms for understanding Jesuit practice in intercultural communication. Bailey's accessible contribution on the complicated interaction between Jesuits and late-Renaissance and Baroque painters covers vast ground with great agility, and his essay on early Jesuit arts in North America is a fascinating read. The only lacuna is the want of a separate chapter on illustrated books and Jesuit presses.

The book itself is a technicolor spectacle. Originally published in Europe in 2003, O'Malley and Bailey re-edited and updated it, commissioned new essays, and found many new, splendid illustrations. Underwritten by Jesuit provincials, the Boston College Jesuit Institute, and the Jesuits of Saint Joseph's University, Carmen Croce and the staff at St. Joseph's University Press are to be commended for designing an elegant and sumptuous volume worthy of the tradition it celebrates. ■

Thomas M. Lucas, S.J., is a professor of visual and performing arts at the University of San Francisco.