Thomas F. Mayer (ed.)


This volume contains revised papers from participants invited to a conference held at Augustana College in 2010, and is both edited and introduced by the organizer of that meeting. It considers some of the ways in which the Protestant Reformation, and more especially the Catholic Reformation, as historiographical concepts and as complex processes stretching across at least three centuries, can best be elucidated by an interdisciplinary approach that includes theology, history, literature, art history, and more. The geographical focus of the essays is on Italy, England, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire. A specialist on English Cardinal Reginald Pole (1500-58), and on others from England who were transformed by long stays in Italy, Thomas Mayer includes no article on France in this collection. It is an odd omission, as France provided the only credible Catholic alternative to Habsburg hegemony on the continent, and by the mid-seventeenth century had succeeded in eclipsing both the Austrian and Spanish Habsburgs in power and influence.

Though no article in this collection is focused principally on the Jesuits, they make more than a few appearances in several articles. In an essay on the centrality of conversation and personal interaction in Spanish Catholicism, Lu Ann Homza cites letters of Ignatius of Loyola to demonstrate her point. Jodi Bilinkoff, in examining John of the Cross as a reformer, contrasts him with Loyola in various ways, including a comparison between the autobiography, abundant extant letters, and the “style of muscular clerical activism” (104) of the founder of the Jesuits, and the absence of such things from the discalced Carmelite. Anne Overell argues that the Jesuits “played a large part” (131) in making the Imitation of Christ a bestseller, and that the Jesuit emphasis on helping souls drew on the theme of consolation in the Imitation. John Frymire’s essay on reconfiguring Catholicism in the Holy Roman Empire includes a review of an older historiography that emphasized the importance of Jesuit militant zeal. But Frymire stresses that the Jesuits could do nothing in German lands without the support of Catholic princes and governments, and that reform of any kind depended upon state backing and financing. Frymire also shows that in reformation of Catholic preaching in Germany the Jesuits actually played a smaller role than historians such as Hubert Jedin led us to believe.

Marcia Hall, in a well-illustrated essay on painting after the Council of Trent, points out that construction of the church of the Gesù, mother church of the Jesuits in Rome, was begun in 1568, during the pontificate of Pius V (1566-1572). In general his austere reign saw a dearth of major artistic projects; but this
church, under the patronage of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, was a major exception. Farnese was the grandson of Pope Paul III, who had approved the foundation of the Jesuits in 1540. Hall discusses at some length several important late-sixteenth-century paintings, a 1593 lamentation by Scipione Pulzone among them; but she fails to point out that this superb painting, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, was commissioned for the Gesù in Rome. There is occasionally a self-congratulatory stance to this volume (see Mayer, on an article of his own, p. 6). The fact that the book’s editor is also the editor of the series in which the book is published adds to the in-house tone of the work. So too do flattering comments on the editor by some of the contributors (see 142 and 199); comments that make the work almost a Festschrift. The editor mentions a frontispiece (13), but there is none; what is meant seems to be an intriguing cover illustration, though its connection, if any, to the book’s themes is unclear. Such quibbles aside, this volume is well worth the attention of a broad range of scholars, including those whose main focus is the Society of Jesus and the challenges it faced in its first centuries.

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