Christopher M.S. Johns

The Visual Culture of Catholic Enlightenment. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014. Pp. ix + 413. Hb, \$89.95.

Christopher Johns has provided a fascinating and valuable text that explores how the eighteenth-century Catholic Church engaged with the philosophy of the European Enlightenment through visual culture. Although the idea of a Catholic Enlightenment has often been seen as incongruous, Johns demonstrates how the church saw the benefit of adopting and adapting certain trends of European Enlightenment thought. In many instances, this improved the image of the church and asserted its relevance in the modern world. Johns looks at the church's reforms and the role that the arts, in their many different expressions, played in shaping these changes, while maintaining elements of tradition. Focusing on papal Rome from 1725 to 1775, the author has chosen a variety of compelling examples of works of art and scholarship, giving the reader a great deal of insight into the social context, visual culture, and position of the Catholic Church in eighteenth-century Rome.

A significant change in the attitude towards saints is one important aspect of how supporters of Catholic Enlightenment used visual culture to promote their reformist ideas. Prominent, progressive authors argued that visionary and mystical experience was a product of superstition. It was this attitude that also informed critics of the Society of Jesus, who were considered to be promoting this kind of outdated, superstitious, and Baroque theology. Pope Benedict XIV's book *De servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione* (1734–1738) outlines the reformed procedures of canonization and beatification, and reflects his engagement with certain aspects of contemporary theology and science, especially advancements in the field of medicine. For example, he argued that the advice of doctors was needed to firmly establish the veracity of healing miracles. Although Benedict XIV and others did not deny the possibility of miraculous experience as evidence of holiness, this period of Catholic Enlightenment emphasized social melioration. Individuals who demonstrated considerable social utility—including those engaged in pastoral work, nursing the sick, and helping the poor—were preferred candidates for canonization and beatification. This shift is apparent in the visual arts that celebrate newly-canonized saints, where a greater sense of naturalism and scenes of good Christian charity proliferated. One example Johns provides is that of Camillo de Lellis, canonized in 1745, who represented the qualities of sainthood promoted by Benedict XIV. In Pierre Subleyras's *Saint Camillo de Lellis Rescuing the Sick in the Hospital of Santo Spirito in Sassia from an Inundation of the Tiber in 1598* (1746) Baroque theatricality and mysticism has been replaced with a

greater sense of naturalism. In this painting, de Lellis's strength and virtue is demonstrated not through supernatural intervention or visionary experience, but rather by his selfless action of carrying a grown man on his shoulders through the flooded hospital.

The interest in and application of Enlightenment ideas and values to church practices suggests a desire to balance innovation and tradition, a theme that ties together the examples Johns presents in this book. He describes how the Enlightenment papacy's adoption of contemporary coffee culture also reflected this goal. The coffee house setting as a space for the informal exchange of ideas was a key aspect of the secular Enlightenment, which Benedict XIV promoted at his "Caffeaus" in the Quirinal Gardens. Built by Ferdinando Fuga between 1741 and 1743, this was a space where the pope could host gatherings for the exchange of intellectual conversation over a cup of chocolate or coffee. The modern and informal character of this space contributed to a positive opinion of the papacy. The decoration and furnishings of the Caffeaus also reflected the progressive, enlightened attitude the pope wanted to promote. For example, Giovanni Paolo Panini's two large *veduta* paintings in the west pavilion allude to some of the fundamental values of Catholic Enlightenment thought: the construction of public buildings and the preservation of antique monuments. Johns argues that the placement of these paintings among those with more traditional iconography elevating Christian charity (e.g. Agostino Masucci's *Pasce oves meas*, 1741–1742) in the building represents the church's attempt to balance tradition and modernity. In another way, the space also reflects the church's engagement with modern medicine, as drinking coffee was promoted as essential to good health and governance, encouraging digestion and sobriety.

Johns concludes that, for the most part, the reforms inspired by the Catholic Enlightenment were successful and the legacy of some, such as the changes to canonization procedures and the church's support for the protection of cultural patrimony, continued to be influential. Throughout this book, Johns provides an informative and very clear analysis of the social, political, and religious context of eighteenth-century Rome and has chosen compelling examples of how these reforms were expressed in the visual arts. This is a regrettably understudied subject, but one that is essential for establishing a more complete understanding of the Enlightenment period. The church navigated a complex middle ground between the traditional institution and the modern world and Johns astutely demonstrates that the two were indeed not in conflict. One of the many excellent qualities of this book is that Johns includes discussion of a diverse range of media. He includes examples of painting, sculpture, architecture, and ephemera with consideration of the social and ecclesiastical context

in which they functioned. This study will also be of interest for scholars of Jesuit history, as Johns explores how the order's philosophy conflicted with that of the reform movement and how the suppression of the order in 1773 is related to the culmination of the period of Catholic Enlightenment. This is a thoroughly engaging and fascinating book that will be an invaluable reference in eighteenth-century studies.

Jillian Lanthier

Queen's University, Kingston

ojltog@queensu.ca

DOI 10.1163/22141332-00204008-07