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O'Malley's "The Jesuits: A History from Ignatius to the Present" (Book Review)

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All of the authors have served overseas as missionaries and are current or former faculty members at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Their treatment of the subject reflects their North American evangelical perspective, as well as their practical experience. Readers looking for a more international approach to the subject will be disappointed in the limited discussion of world religions, the very brief mention of the work of non-Western missionaries, and the exclusion of non-Western missions scholars, both from the text and the bibliographies. However, the book's strong biblical and theological foundation and the practical insights drawn from the authors' experience make this an excellent introduction to missions for evangelical students, and especially for prospective missionaries. It would be a welcome addition to the library of any church, seminary, or Christian college or university.

The Jesuits: A History from Ignatius to the Present,

Reviewed by Terry L. Christian, Assistant Archivist, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX

When Pope Francis was elected in 2013, the world witnessed an event of considerable importance for the Roman Catholic Church. Jorge Mario Bergoglio, a Jesuit, will forever be known as “the first Jesuit pope in history!” (p. 112). Who better to tell their story, expelling the stigma of a tainted reputation, than a fellow Jesuit priest, John W. O’Malley? Currently a professor of theology at Georgetown University specializing in European church history, he has written several books with his The First Jesuits winning the Philip Schaff Prize for church history.

Written for a popular audience, The Jesuits dispels the mystique and enlightens readers concerning the Society of Jesus. O’Malley clearly states his objectives as first providing “in almost skeletal form the basic narrative of the origin, development, triumphs, and tribulations of the Society of Jesus up to the present,” and second, presenting “almost arbitrary choice descriptions in detail of a few undertakings,” keeping the book concise (p. x). The book is divided into four main chapters covering the society’s foundation, and the following chapters are roughly divided by centuries.
Whereas the author does “little more than glide over the surface of a long and complex history” (p. 113), he expects the reader to have some knowledge of certain complex concepts, such as understanding Marian theology and who the Jansenists were. Even though the book is clearly a synopsis of the order’s history, O’Malley provides a valuable section following the epilogue for further reading targeting those who wish to study the subject more closely and in depth. This book would be a good choice for readers seeking to gain a cursory understanding of the Jesuits.


Reviewed by Brian W. Holda, Web Development & Instructional Librarian, Cornerstone University, Grand Rapids, MI

Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective explores the triune nature of God, with emphasis on the person and work of Christ. It does this through a detailed study of Scripture, history, and philosophy, ambitiously accomplishing its goals in only 225 pages of text.

Though the arguments are thorough, erudite, and, I believe, very compelling, the dense writing (not to mention subject matter) will prove a barrier for some who desire to explore the topics while lacking the background, terminology, or patience to read through this work (labeled by its cover as, “An Intermediate Christology”). However, there are helps provided to make it more understandable, including: chapter summaries, “big ideas” to glean (called “Axioms for Christological Study”), and a list of key terms at the beginning of each chapter.

Notwithstanding the caveats mentioned above, I would highly recommend this work as a handy reference for understanding what Scripture teaches – and how philosophy and church history support the Scriptures – regarding the Triune God, especially as He relates to the incarnation and the atonement. Throughout the work, the Scriptures are treated as inerrant and authoritative, and the contributors are clearly competent in their disciplines, well aware of the issues and contrary viewpoints. As such, I have difficulty imagining a reader walking away unconvinced (or at least unchallenged) by the main tenets argued, and I believe that the church has received a gift in these studies – albeit one requiring patience and determination to truly appreciate.