

Ralph Dekoninck. *Ad Imaginem: Statuts, fonctions et usages de l'image dans la littérature spirituelle jésuite du XVII^e siècle.*

Travaux du Grand Siècle 26. Geneva: Librairie Droz S. A., 2005. 424 pp. + 53 b/w pls. index. illus. bibl. CHF120. ISBN: 2-600-01048-3.

In the past decade, studies of Jesuit *emblematica* and print culture have blossomed into a substratum of the field of Jesuit imagery, rightly acknowledging Antwerp as the second city of Jesuit art after Rome. Authors such as Pierre-Antoine Fabre, Richard Dimler, Karl J. Höltgen, Volker Remmert, Serge Gruzinski, and Jeffrey Chipps Smith have profoundly enhanced our understanding of this fascinating and undeservedly overlooked field of early modern visual culture. One of the reasons Jesuit print culture is so important is that, unlike the paintings and frescoes that adorned the Jesuits' churches and colleges, engraved images traveled with ease, spreading their influence to the four corners of the earth. It is thanks largely to print culture that Flemish art — much of it Jesuit in origin — was one of the most important influences on the arts of Colonial Latin America and Asia between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries.

Ralph Dekoninck is a new star in the constellation of image theorists concerned with sacred emblematics. Professor of art history at the Catholic University of Louvain, he is author of the acclaimed *L'idole dans l'imaginaire occidental* (with Myriam Watthee-Delmotte in 2005), *Fou comme une image: puissance et impuissance de nos idoles* (2006), the catalogue *Emblemata Sacra: Emblem Books from the Maurits Sabbe Library, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven* (2006), and numerous articles in scholarly books and journals. In these works Dekoninck has ably combined studies of imagery in the early modern Catholic world with explorations of idolatry in contemporary times.

Ad Imaginem may be the most thorough survey of seventeenth-century Jesuit print culture in existence, and it opens up a wondrous and often bizarre world of illustrated gospels, meditative images, emblem books, spiritual exercises, and virtual pilgrimages by creative masters such as Johannes David, Antoine Sucquet, Philips Fruytiers, and the prolific and absurdly erudite Louis Richeôme, one of the

most obsessive iconophiles of the Baroque era. It says something about Dekoninck's own erudition that he can tackle such a daunting subject so capably, and his efforts are long overdue. His monograph will help counterbalance the decades-old and increasingly abundant literature on Jesuit painting and architecture. Jesuit printed image books can tell us more about the complicated mechanics of their spiritual and meditative processes than those higher art forms: this modern medium was meant to be used in a practical and intensely personal way and was an especially efficient means of proselytism for an Order that was becoming ever more deeply-engaged in the double worlds of education and missionary work. Despite Dekoninck's focus on the Catholic Low Countries, the implications of his study are global in scope.

Ad Imaginem is divided into two sections of roughly equal length: one focusing on theory and the other on practice. In the first section, Dekoninck summarizes the traditional Catholic defense of imagery — the theology of the visible — from the Church Fathers through Scholasticism, and then concentrating mainly on Jesuit writers such as Richeôme and on the Ciceronian concept of imagery as rhetoric. The main argument for the Jesuits' use of imagery was the incarnation of the Word — the principle of *logos* made image. In a theme played throughout this volume, Dekoninck matches the three potencies of the soul as understood at the time — memory, intelligence, and free will — with categories of Jesuit imagery: narrative images, symbols, and allegories. Dekoninck explores the Jesuit idea that the world is a book composed of living characters — rooted in the Ignatian aim of finding God in all things — and the metaphor of the world as a mirror, with its good side (for example, a symbol for meditation) and bad side (for example, vanity). He finishes this section with the Jesuit conceit — so beloved of art historians — of the world as a work of art or theater with God as the artist-choreographer, looking at the edifying virtual picture-tours inspired by the Greek sophist Philostratus (by far the most extravagant were by Richeôme) and the didactic uses of theater and ballet as promoted by Claude Ménestrier. The remainder of this section reflects on the functions and spiritual uses of the image, including one of the most thorough explanations of the *Exercises'* use of imagery in print.

In the second section Dekoninck demonstrates how images in Antwerp between 1585 and 1640 were used to inspire and guide meditation. He leads us through a truly spectacular world of iconography, beginning with scriptural narrative imagery and symbolic picture books with a more directly didactic purpose — here we meet some of the most outlandish imagery of the early modern era, such as Sucquet's ingenious yet methodical virtual pilgrimages. The book ends with a chapter on images meant to engrave themselves upon the heart: a motley group of picture books about love, encompassing spiritual weddings, the famed *Pia Desideria*, with its female soul's quest for a male divine love, and seventeenth-century attempts to illustrate the *Exercises*.

Dekoninck's impressive volume will be a necessary starting point for any future studies of Jesuit image theory and print culture. More than a mere art

history book, *Ad Imaginem* rallies together the forces of theology, anthropology, and image theory and combines them with a profound understanding of the origins of the genre and historical context.

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