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Review of Christopher M. S. Johns, *The Visual Culture of Catholic Enlightenment* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015)

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CHRISTOPHER M.S. JOHNS. *The Visual Culture of Catholic Enlightenment*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015; pp. xxi + 413.

Christopher M.S. Johns' massive work *The Visual Culture of Catholic Enlightenment* retraces the impact of Catholic Enlightenment on eighteenth century visual culture, including art, architecture, and liturgical objects. In particular, it sheds light on the Church and papal Rome's commitment to promoting enlightened reforms in various fields, and the way such enlightened reforms were reflected in the art and architecture of the period.

Johns' book builds on scholarship on the relationship between the Catholic Church and secular Enlightenment in Italy. This remarkable volume enriches historiographical debate, which in the last decades has been enhanced by various approaches to the subject. The category of Catholic Enlightenment, especially for Italy, has been often replaced by the historiographical concept of Catholic "Aufklärung" (original meaning: "clarification"), which expresses a more neutral and nuanced idea than the ideological terms "Enlightenment" or "Lumières", and nonetheless refers to a wide range of enlightened reforms promoted by the Church in the Age of Enlightenment. Johns adopts the historiographical concept of Catholic Enlightenment, and sometimes also refers to "enlightened Catholicism". His accurate historical investigation, based on a rich corpus of archival sources (e.g. artists' and popes' correspondence), Italian Catholic scholars' works (e.g. by Ludovico Antonio Muratori and Celestino Galiani), and the exploration of a massive collection of art work, leads the reader to understand the success and limits of the eighteenth century papal reforms in Rome.

Catholic scholars, such as Muratori (1672–1750, a major promoter of the Italian enlightened Catholicism), are protagonists in Johns' narration. The book establishes important connections between the intellectual production of enlightened authors, the answer of the Church to these novel intellectual and religious contributions, and their reflection in papal administration and artistic creations.

Although the Church has often been considered in opposition to Enlightenment, the reality is much more complex, as Johns explains very well. The idea that studying the Church's enlightened reforms is essential for a better understanding of eighteenth century art emerges clearly from the book. The coeval Italian artistic production well expresses the Catholic Enlightenment ideas of social utility and Christian happiness, but also its opposition to superstition and to the devotional excesses that were quite diffused during the Baroque Age. Hence, for example, Johns points out how the new attention to girls' education by enlightened bishops, such as Giuseppe Pozzobonelli (1696–1783) in Milan, also resulted in the production of paintings concerning the Virgin Mary's education; the enlightened idea of social utility and Christian assistance resulted in artistic representation of saints caring for the sick and the poor (rather than mystics in ecstasy), and in the building of hospitals; and the promotion of the model of the good bishop (Johns highlights an important connection with the directives of the Council of Trent on this matter, 1545–1563) spurred bishops to take care of their dioceses more attentively, also providing their churches with liturgical objects. The latter were not only fundamental for religious and liturgical practice, but represent also remarkable examples of eighteenth century artistic production.

Johns reconstructs the origins of enlightened reforms in papal administration. Pope Benedict XIV (Prospero Lambertini, 1675–1758) is one of the protagonists of Catholic reforms, and Johns dedicates many pages to his pontificate, highlighting both his enlightened attitude and governance and, nonetheless, his deep link with ecclesiastical tradition. Exploring the history of liturgical objects, for example, Johns introduces Lambertini's encyclical *Annus qui* (1749), which also exhorts bishops

to decorate and take care of their churches; an invitation that resulted in a rich production of religious art pieces. Similarly, Benedict XIV's and Clement XIII's interest in antiquities, their preservation of art, and "salons" of conversation, resulted respectively in the expansion of the Capitoline Museum and the construction of the *Caffeaus* in the garden of the Quirinal Palace. The *Caffeaus* was designed as a place for relaxed gathering, free of the rigid protocols of papal palaces. As emerges from Johns' work, these places represented the "architecture" and spaces of enlightened papal Rome. They expressed the popes' consciousness of the importance of preserving antiquities (which is an important heritage of Catholic Enlightenment), and also hosted homosocial gatherings and cultural exchange that were typical of European secular Enlightenment.

Johns' work includes chapters concerning ecclesiastical reforms and actors of Italian eighteenth century Catholicism, such as Jansenists and enlightened authors; the re-organisation of causes for canonisation, considered through the lens of the enlightened principle of social utility of saints; the development of the Patrimony of St. Peter and Roman spaces of the Catholic Enlightenment by the popes in the central years of the eighteenth century; and the role of the episcopacy in preserving and decorating sacred sites.

In the epilogue, Johns develops an intriguing argument on the relationship between the Suppression of the Society of Jesus (1773) and the end of the Catholic Enlightenment. Although many progressives saw in the Suppression the Catholic Enlightenment's final achievement, as the Society of Jesus was born with a vow of obedience to the Pope and was considered *a quintessentially papal order* (p. 319), in reality, a withdrawal into tradition characterised the Church since late eighteenth century. Johns presents the Suppression of the Jesuits as the proof that the Church, at the end of the Catholic Enlightenment and when in conflict with European Catholic rulers, *was no longer in charge of its own destiny* (p. 323), but bowed to external influences, which, in this case, pushed for suppressing the Ignatian Order. The Suppression is an extremely complex event due to political, theological, and cultural causes that developed also (but not only) within Catholic Enlightenment circles, even in papal Rome. These circles usually opposed the Jesuit religious strategies and fostered Muratori's principle of *regolata divozione* (regulated devotion). Johns' considerations on the role of the Suppression at the end of the Age of the Catholic Enlightenment, and the consequent change in the Church's attitude, pave the way for further exploration of the subject in the nineteenth century, in connection to the Restoration of the Society (1814).

The rich iconographical apparatus, finally, allows the reader to dive into the reading while enjoying the numerous pieces of art explored by Johns who, in this groundbreaking work, remarkably retraces the role of visual culture in the complex eighteenth century Italian and Roman social, religious, institutional, and cultural contexts.

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