

ST IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA'S "VISION AT LA STORTA" AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

Alison C. Fleming*

The foundation and naming of the Society of Jesus in 1540 is explicitly linked to the "Vision at La Storta", a central event in the life of the Society's founder, St Ignatius of Loyola. This life-changing vision is reconstructed visually by the Jesuits between the 1590s and the 1690s, culminating in the sculptural representation on the Altar of St Ignatius in the Church of Il Gesù. In a century of prints and altarpieces, sculptures and frescoes, these images portray the miraculous event in diverse fashions and for various purposes, all of which allow the viewer to comprehend – and even experience – the event that serves as an emblem of the foundation and naming of the Jesuit order. This engaged participation builds on established Jesuit ideals, practices and works of art, including the envisioning essential to the Spiritual Exercises, and the participatory commentaries on the Gospels by Jerome Nadal. This essay examines the relationship between the vision, the denomination of the Society of Jesus, and the artistic representations that allow the viewer to appreciate them fully by experiencing them in the most prominent Jesuit churches.

In the fall of 1537, Ignatius of Loyola approached the city of Rome. He had started out from Paris three years earlier, with his companions, having taken a collective vow to travel to the Holy Land. When this proved impossible they determined to go to Rome and put themselves

* I would like to thank the editors of this volume for their thoughtful questions and suggestions throughout the writing of this article. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the staffs at Burns Library of Boston College, the Archives of the Society of Jesus in Rome, the Interlibrary Loan department at Winston-Salem State University, the Print Study Room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Public Library, the Butler Library Rare Books Room and Avery Art & Architecture Library at Columbia University. All of these institutions provided assistance with my examination of documents and printed books and helped with photographs. Finally, thanks to the Jesuit Institute at Boston College and the Professional Development Committee at Winston-Salem State University for travel grants that facilitated my research, and to Stephanie Leone of Boston College, for her hospitality in Rome and Boston and her careful reading of a draft of this essay.

in the hands of the Pope. Now, just miles outside the city where he would spend the rest of his life, Ignatius paused to pray [Fig. 1].¹ The miraculous event that followed was described in rather meager detail by Ignatius himself years later, in his *Spiritual Diary*, and in his dictated autobiography.² His first biographer, Pedro Ribadeneira, however, recorded a fuller account:

The B. Father took his way towards Rome, on foot, with F. Faber, and F. Laínez in his company [...] one day drawing nigh to the city of Rome, leaving the two Fathers in the field, he went into a deserted and solitary church some mile from the city to pray. There amidst the greatest fervor of his prayers, he felt his heart changed, and God the Father appeared to him, together with his most Blessed Son, who carried the Cross upon his shoulders and with the eyes of his soul, illustrated with that resplendent light, he saw that the Eternal Father, turning to his only begotten Son, commended Ignatius, and those in his company unto him, with exceeding great love, putting them into his hands. And our most benign Jesus having received them under his patronage and protection, as he stood in that manner, with his Cross, turned to Ignatius and with a loving and mild countenance said unto him: 'Ego vobis Romae propitius ero' ('I will be favorable to you at Rome'). With this divine revelation, our Father remained very much comforted, and strengthened, and he related it afterwards to those in his company, to animate them the more, and to prepare them for the troubles which they were to endure. And, with this vision, together with many other excellent illustrations which he had, the most sacred name of JESUS, was so imprinted in his soul, with an earnest desire to take our Savior for his Captain, carrying his Cross after him, that was the cause, that at his, and the other first Fathers humble request, the Apostolic See, at the Confirmation of our religion, called it and named it THE SOCIETY OF JESUS.³

¹ The chapel where Ignatius prayed, located on the Via Cassia, was already dilapidated at this time. It was renovated by the Jesuits for the Jubilee of 1700, but further damaged and subsequently rebuilt in modern times. For a view of the chapel at present see Fig. 1.

² For the account of Ignatius in his *Spiritual Diary*, written 23 February 1544 (translated into English), see Nicolas A. de, *Powers of Imagining, Ignatius de Loyola: A Philosophical Hermeneutic of Imagining Through the Collected Works of Ignatius de Loyola with a translation of these works* (Albany: 1986) 189–238. For the description in the autobiography dictated to Luis Goncalves da Camara in 1553–1555, see *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*, ed. J. Tylenda (San Francisco: 2001) 112–113. In addition to the brief accounts of the event by Ignatius himself, and that of Ribadeneira, Laínez, as a witness, wrote an account, and descriptions were compiled by Jerome Nadal, Peter Canisius, and Juan Alfonso de Polanco.

³ Pedro Ribadeneira, *Vita Ignatii Loyolae*, chapter 9. This English translation comes from Ribadeneira Pedro de, *The Life of B. Father Ignatius of Loyola, 1616* (York: 1976) 94–98. The Latin and Spanish versions have been published in *Monumenta Historica*



Fig. 1. Chapel at La Storta, rebuilt twentieth century, Rome (photo: author).

The episode at La Storta is significant not only because it is a miracle, but also because of how it connects, directly and emphatically, to the establishment and naming of the Society of Jesus. The relationship between Ignatius's "Vision at La Storta" and the foundation of the Jesuit order in 1540 – and how and why this association is visually manifest in works of art commissioned by the Jesuits between ca 1590 and 1700 – will be examined in this essay.

The Foundation of the Society of Jesus

The prominent Jesuit scholar John W. O'Malley tells us that 'The story of the first Jesuits does not begin, properly speaking, until the Society of Jesus officially came into existence with the papal bull of 27 September 1540'.⁴ But, he rightly notes that a full understanding of this story begins much earlier.⁵ The founding members of the Jesuits, including Ignatius, Francis Xavier, Pierre Favre (also called Peter Faber), Diego Laínez, Alfonso Salmerón, Nicolás de Bobadilla, and Simão Rodrigues, met while students in Paris in the 1530s. Their common interests bound them together, and on the Feast of the Assumption, 15 August 1534, they made a vow to become priests, embrace celibacy and poverty, make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and to tender their ministerial services to the Pope. In hindsight, we view these preparations as an important step en route to establishing a new religious order; yet all later denied this intention. Juan Alfonso de Polanco states this unequivocally.⁶ The companions, or 'friends in the Lord,' as they were

Societatis Iesu 93 (Rome: 1965). One further point should be mentioned: while Ribadeneira states the words spoken to Ignatius by Christ as 'Ego vobis Romae propiti-
 eris', Peter Canisius later observed that the phrase should instead be given as 'Io sarò con voi' ('I will be with you'). See Rahner H., *The Vision of St Ignatius in the
 Chapel of La Storta* (Rome: 1975) 12. The first phrase is commonly associated with
 the event, however, the latter phrase is in fact inscribed on the altar wall inside the
 present chapel.

⁴ O'Malley J., *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: 1993) 23.

⁵ O'Malley examines the early life of Ignatius in chapter 1 of *The First Jesuits*. Readers unfamiliar with the events of his young adulthood that led to his convalescence, religious conversion, pilgrimage to Jerusalem and study in Paris may be referred to O'Malley's overview.

⁶ *Fontes Narrativi de S. Ignatio de Loyola et de Societatis Iesu initiis*, ed. C. de Dalmases (Rome: 1943–1965) vol. I, 204. An English translation of Polanco's statement, 'They had no plan to form a congregation, nor any other form of religious order, but they wanted to dedicate themselves to the service of God and that of the Apostolic

known, met up in Venice in 1537 to depart for the Holy Land. Their voyage was blessed by the Pope, but the political situation at the time did not allow for them to travel to advance their vow. They continued the charitable work they had begun in Italy, and were ordained priests. Then, in the fall of 1537 Ignatius, Laínez, and Favre set out for Rome.⁷ They were almost at their destination when Ignatius miraculously encountered Christ and God the Father in the small, run-down chapel at La Storta.

The miraculous vision that Ignatius experienced in that chapel had a dramatic and specific impact of his life, and the lives of his companions. The historian Michael Foss has described the assured attitude of the post-La Storta Ignatius in this way: 'Through the trials of 1539 and 1540 Ignatius acted as if confident of the final result [...] as if opposition would collapse before him, and it always did'.⁸

Would Ignatius have pursued and persevered in the same manner had he not been promised favor in Rome by Christ himself? It is difficult to imagine, knowing what the historical record tells us about the saint, that he would have been deterred. In speaking of the episode, Foss states that 'as usual when he (Ignatius) had made an interior decision, he found it confirmed by vision'.⁹ Ignatius himself, referring to the miracle over six years later, tells us, 'I recalled the day when the Father placed me with His Son [...] (I only had) this in mind: to carry deeply the name of Jesus [...] seemingly confirmed for the future'.¹⁰

The notion that Ignatius took from this experience a renewed sense of confidence and optimism regarding his plans, and in fact viewed the episode as *confirmation* that he would succeed, is one way in which we are able to connect the "Vision at La Storta" and the subsequent foundation of the order. The particular naming of his group the 'Society of Jesus' is another thread which weaves together these events.

See, from the moment they discovered that they could not go to Jerusalem' appears in Ravier A., *Ignatius of Loyola and the Founding of the Society of Jesus* (San Francisco: 1987) 95. See also O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* 32 for more discussion on this matter.

⁷ We do not know the exact date of the miracle. Accounts of their journey to Rome vary with regard to whether the event occurred in October or November. Today the anniversary of the event is celebrated on the Feast of the Presentation in the Temple (21 November).

⁸ Foss M., *The Founding of the Jesuits, 1540* (London: 1969) 122.

⁹ Foss, *The Founding of the Jesuits* 118.

¹⁰ Entry in the *Spiritual Diary* of Ignatius from 23 February 1544. For the English translation see Nicolas, *Powers of Imagining* 201–202.

The papal bull *Regimini militantis ecclesiae* (issued by Paul III in September 1540) names the new order in latin, Societas Iesu, which may be easily translated into english as the Society of Jesus. The italian equivalent is Compagnia di Gesù, which many people have mistakenly connected with a military implication, although the term ‘compagnia’ has traditionally been used in Italy for religious confraternities or associations. But, the name was not debated or determined for this official occasion; the name was the one that they had already been using. Ignatius and his companions decided, before they parted ways in Vicenza (at the moment when Ignatius, Favre and Lainez left for Rome) that ‘to anyone asking them who they were they would reply that they were of the “Company of Jesus” since they had no other superior but him.’¹¹ Juan de Polanco, Ignatius’s secretary, clearly writes:

As far as the name of the Society is concerned, the following is certain: Ignatius and his first companions had already given themselves the name ‘Society of Jesus’ before they came to Rome. For as they discussed among themselves how they should answer the question as to the form they should give their new community, they began to pray and consider what name would fit them best. They considered that they really had no other head but Jesus Christ, whom alone they longed to serve. And so it seemed most appropriate to give themselves his name [...] Thus their community must be called the ‘Society of Jesus’.¹²

The *Formula of the Institute*, a document first written in Rome in 1539 (revised in 1550), and the basis for the foundation bull issued the following year, begins with these lines:

Whoever desires to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus, and to serve the Lord alone [...].¹³

Ignatius himself, in the same passage from his *Spiritual Diary* noted previously, notes that, ‘While preparing the altar, the thought of Jesus came to me. I felt a movement to follow Him [...] since He was the

¹¹ O’Malley, *The First Jesuits* 33–34. The original source is *Fontes Narrativi* I 204.

¹² Polanco J.A., *Vita Ignatii Loiolae et rerum Societatis Iesu historica [Chronicon]* I (Madrid: 1894–1898) 72. I have used the English translation in Rahner, *The Vision of St Ignatius* 41.

¹³ Aladama A. de, *The Formula of the Institute: Notes for a Commentary* (Rome – St Louis: 1990) 3–4.

head of the Society'.¹⁴ A modern commentary on the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus examines the issue of its name, clarifying that the first Jesuits had starting calling themselves by this term in Vicenza in 1537, with Ignatius receiving 'divine confirmation of that name in the celebrated vision at La Storta'.¹⁵ Candido de Dalmases, in his biography of Ignatius, eloquently states that:

The mystical phenomenon experienced by Ignatius had [...] a clear repercussion upon the foundation of the Society of Jesus [...] Ignatius perceived himself as one intimately united with Christ; and he also desired that the society which was soon to be founded should be totally dedicated to Him and bear His name. It was a name which was a whole program: to be companions of Jesus.¹⁶

Thus, we may see that for Ignatius, the vision of Christ at La Storta confirmed that serving Jesus – and telling all who cared to ask that he was of the 'Company of Jesus' – had set him on the correct path. This affirmation led directly to Rome, to the Pope, and to the foundation of the Society of Jesus (with the confidence noted earlier).

Early Images of the "Vision at La Storta"

The earliest images commissioned by the Jesuits were largely martyrdom cycles that decorated their churches, in typical Counter-Reformation style.¹⁷ It is not until the very end of the sixteenth century, approaching the beatification of Ignatius, that the events of his life are depicted visually. Ribadeneira's narrative, first published in 1572 and reprinted in a variety of languages over the following century, provides the details for visual depictions of the "Vision at La Storta", which flourish in the period ca 1600. The earliest painted cycle may be the set of fifteen oil

¹⁴ Entry in the *Spiritual Diary* of Ignatius from 23 February 1544. The English translation comes from Nicolas, *Powers of Imagining* 201.

¹⁵ Aladama A. de, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus: An Introductory Commentary on the Constitutions* (Rome – St Louis: 1989) 24–25.

¹⁶ Dalmases C. de, *Ignatius of Loyola, Founder of the Jesuits: His Life and Work* (St Louis: 1985) 153.

¹⁷ For more on the earliest Jesuit art, see Bailey G.A., *Between Renaissance and Baroque: Jesuit Art in Rome, 1565–1610* (Toronto: 2003); Herz A., "Imitators of Christ: The Martyr-cycles of Late Sixteenth Century Rome Seen in Context", *Storia dell'Arte* 62 (1988) 53–70, and Noreen K., "Ecclesiae militantis triumph: Jesuit Iconography and the Counter-Reformation", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29 (1998) 689–715.

paintings produced by Juan de Mesa for the Jesuit Novitiate in Madrid in 1604. This cycle was created under the authority of Ribadeneira, and closely follows his account.¹⁸ The “Vision at La Storta” scene appears first in prints in the 1590s. These illustrations were initially incorporated into the background of profile portraits of Father Ignatius.¹⁹ The inclusion of the event as a vision – the one single vision connected to Ignatius – that the viewer is privileged to see through the window, reveals the experience as the central event in his life. It will also come to be seen as the fundamental, representative example of the Society of Jesus. Soon, attention to the biography of Ignatius increases, and the “Vision at La Storta” will be frequently depicted as a component of Ignatian life cycles. By 1600 numerous prints appear, in the format of small medallions depicting events of the life of Ignatius, surrounding his portrait.²⁰ These types are rapidly expanded into extensive visual biographies that appear as efforts to beatify Ignatius increase in the years leading up to 1609, and even more emphatically in the years approaching his canonization in 1622. The most celebrated example dating to that time is the *Vita Beati P. Ignatii Loiolae* (published in Rome, 1609), a pictorial biography engraved by Jean-Baptiste Barbe, possibly based on drawings by Peter Paul Rubens [Fig. 2].²¹ A second book, *S. Ignatii Loyolae Soc: Iesv fyndatoris: qvaedā miracvla*, also published in Rome in the early seventeenth century includes engravings by Valérien Regnard [Fig. 3]. The “Vision at la Storta” is consistently included as a key event in these (and similar) pictorial biographies of Ignatius.

The “Vision at La Storta” scene engraved by Barbe shows Ignatius, kneeling at prayer, inside the chapel, his staff and pilgrim’s hat on the ground. His two companions are visible through the open, arched doorway on the left; the ruined state of the structure is obvious. Ignatius looks upward, at the glorious sight of Christ bearing the Cross

¹⁸ The entire cycle does not survive, but the extant paintings are today in Manresa. See Pfeiffer H., “The Iconography of the Society of Jesus”, in O’Malley J. – Bailey G.A. (eds.), *The Jesuits and the Arts, 1540–1773* (Philadelphia: 2005) 217.

¹⁹ Examples of these printed portraits are illustrated in König-Nordhoff U., *Ignatius von Loyola: Studien zur Entwicklung einer neuen Heiligen-Ikonographie im Rahmen einer Kanonisationskampagne um 1600* (Berlin: 1982) figures 130, 131, 135, 136, 138, and 139.

²⁰ Again, see König-Nordhoff, *Ignatius von Loyola* figures 83, 269, 270, 283, 284, 289.

²¹ For more on the Barbe engravings and connection to drawings prepared by Rubens see Held J., “Rubens and the *Vita Beati P. Ignatii Loiolae* of 1609”, in Martin J.R. (ed.), *Rubens Before 1620* (Princeton: 1972) 93–134.



Fig. 2. Jean-Baptiste Barbe, "Vision of St Ignatius at La Storta", from *Vita Beati P. Ignatii Loiolae, Societatis Iesu fundatoris* (Rome: 1609) (photo: author; published with permission of John J. Burns Library, Boston College).



Fig. 3. Valérien Regnard, "Vision of St. Ignatius at La Storta", from *S. Ignatii Loyolae Societatis Iesu fundatoris: quaedam miracula*, Rome, ca 1600–1630 (photo: author; published with permission of John J. Burns Library, Boston College).

and God the Father, floating above the altar on a cloud of angels. The accompanying inscription describes the episode and includes the phrase 'Ego Vobis Romae Propitius Ero'. The scene as engraved by Regnard is similar: Ignatius kneels inside the chapel, gazing at the figures of Christ and God the Father, who appear in a radiant ring of angels. But, Regnard's chapel is less ruined and less detailed, and the companions appear much larger and closer. The inscription differs, and does not include the important phrase, but both engravings serve a similar purpose. They were produced in order to explain the life of Ignatius, a candidate for beatification, to the public. Their function – and hence their appearance – differs considerably from the other, later, images of the scene that will be considered in this essay.

After the canonization of St Ignatius – and throughout the seventeenth century – the "Vision at La Storta" appears in altarpieces, large-scale frescoes and more prints. The composition, and other elements of the narrative, and the text of accompanying inscriptions differ widely, depending on the function of these images. The representations reproduced in biographies of the saint in preparation for his beatification and canonization may be considered promotional, as well as didactic and descriptive, while others are variously documentary, meditative, directive, or commemorative.²² But, it is at the end of the century, in the works of the Jesuit artist, Fra Andrea Pozzo, that we see the "Vision at La Storta" incorporated into larger artistic projects, emphasizing the significance of the miraculous vision to the Society of Jesus in general, and its foundation in particular.

The Ceiling Fresco in Sant'Ignazio

The magnificent, illusionistic ceiling fresco in the Church of Sant'Ignazio in Rome, painted by Pozzo between 1688 and 1694, is traditionally interpreted as a depiction of the *Allegory of the Jesuit Missions* [Fig. 4].²³ While there are multiple ways of viewing the fresco,

²² For a more detailed examination of the extraordinary and purposeful diversity in the "Vision at La Storta" (printed) images produced between 1590 and 1750 see Fleming A., "The 'Roles' of Illustrations of the Life of St Ignatius of Loyola", in Ardisino E. – Selmi E. (eds.), *Il Libro Sacro Figurato in Italia tra Cinque e Seicento* (Rome, forthcoming).

²³ For more on Pozzo's fresco see Kerber B., *Andrea Pozzo* (Berlin: 1971); de Feo V. – Martinelli V., *Andrea Pozzo* (Milan: 1996); and Battisti A. (ed.), *Andrea Pozzo* (Milan: 1996).



Fig. 4. Andrea Pozzo, *Allegory of the Jesuit Missions*, 1688–1694, fresco. Rome, Church of S. Ignazio (photo: author).

they are not mutually exclusive. The conventional reading, stemming from Pozzo's own description, examines the fundamental missionary work carried out by the Jesuits across the four corners of the globe, which are explicitly labeled and detailed.²⁴ A more recent analysis, taking into account the fresco's emphasis on light and fire, situates the focus on Ignatius as a miraculous healer.²⁵ I suggest that the placement of Ignatius near the center of the fresco, his arms outstretched and eyes fixed on the figures of Christ, bearing the cross, and God the Father at the center of the composition repeats the arrangement of their interaction at La Storta [Fig. 5]. Yet, this miraculous event is situated within other figures and concepts significant to the Jesuits. This unusual conglomeration allows the important vision to be physically intertwined with Jesuit ideals, and as this occurs within a visually engaging *trompe l'oeil* painting, the spectator is able to place himself within that relationship. The powers of imagining that are inherent in Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* are activated here. We may classify this scene as experiential.

The notion that Jesuit art should engage and involve the spectator dates back to Ignatius himself. His formulation of the *Spiritual Exercises* established the importance of meditation on an image formed in the mind. The Jesuits quickly became accustomed to developing a visual of a physical place, populated by figures and objects that compose the narrative. The idea of employing all of the senses to 'place oneself' in the scene in order to best meditate, contemplate and pray became an essential component of Jesuit practice. Therefore, it is easily understood that the first work of art commissioned by Ignatius himself – the *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia* written by Jerome Nadal with images created by Bernardino Passeri and engraved by the Wierix workshop (eventually published in Antwerp in 1595) – uses a combination of text and image to lead the viewer through images of Christ's infancy, Passion, and Resurrection.²⁶ Recently, scholars, notably Walter Melion, Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Ralph Dekoninck, have focused attention on the interactive qualities of Jesuit art.²⁷ While these studies

²⁴ Pozzo A., *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* (Rome: 1717) vol. I.

²⁵ Levy E., *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* (Berkeley: 2004) 150–155.

²⁶ Nadal J., *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels*, trsl. F. Homann, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: 2003–2007).

²⁷ See for example Melion W., *The Meditative Art: Studies in the Northern Devotional Print, 1550–1625* (Philadelphia: 2009), and Melion's introductory essays to each volume of Nadal, *Annotations and Meditations*; Dekoninck R., "Imagines



Fig. 5. Andrea Pozzo, *Allegory of the Jesuit Missions* (detail).

predominantly consider prints (by Nadal among others) they firmly establish the experiential aspects of meditation and engagement with works of art. The viewer meditating upon a print engages with the image in a personal and intimate fashion. Standing in a church focusing upon a ceiling fresco or sculptural group is both a more physical and a more public experience. Instead of the image being supported by accompanying text, it is supplemented by the architecture of the building, other works of art, the sounds of music and/or the mass, even physical interaction with other people. This 'communal contemplation' creates a different type of experiential viewing. The two works conceived by Pozzo align the viewer and the painted/sculpted figures so that they interact in the space of the church (in a three-dimensional manner via sculptures in the round or illusionistic frescoes), allowing the spectator to truly 'place himself' completely into the scene, so that he sees what Ignatius saw in this spectacular vision.²⁸ This, in turn, reinforces the circumstances of the foundation of the order, and the Jesuit ideal to follow Christ.

The Altar of St Ignatius in the Gesù

Fra Andrea Pozzo's project for the founding saint's tomb in the principal Jesuit church in Rome, Il Gesù, even more strongly incorporates the "Vision at La Storta" into a space dedicated to Jesuit ideals [Fig. 6]. The church holds many works of art illustrating the life of Ignatius. On the surface, many simply appear to be narratives or iconic representations that visually document the import of the saint in this environment. However, recent scholarship has made it clear that this decoration goes far beyond associating the nave chapel paintings with

peregrinantes: The International Genesis and Fate of Two Biblical Picture Books (Barrefelt and Nadal) Conceived in Antwerp at the End of the Sixteenth Century", in Gelderblom A. – de Jong J. – van Vaecck M. (eds.), *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs* (Leiden: 2004) and Dekoninck R., *Ad imaginem: Statuts, fonctions et usages de l'image dans la littérature spirituelle jésuite du XVII^e siècle* (Geneva: 2005); and Fabre P.-A., *Ignace de Loyola: Le lieu de l'image. Le problème de la composition de lieu dans les pratiques spirituelles et artistiques jésuites de la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle* (Paris: 1992).

²⁸ Regarding representations of the visions of Ignatius, see Fabre P.-A., "Les Visions d'Ignace de Loyola dans la diffusion de l'art jésuite", *Modern Language Notes* 114 (1999) 816–847.



Fig. 6. Andrea Pozzo, Altar of St Ignatius, 1695–1699. Rome, Church of Il Gesù (photo: author).

the meditations of the *Spiritual Exercises*.²⁹ I contend that many of these works were intended to recreate the life of St Ignatius for later Jesuits who sought to imitate him, as well as to connect the events of his life – especially his “Vision at La Storta” – with the foundation of the Society of Jesus and the Church of Il Gesù. The miraculous vision of Ignatius is inextricably linked to the establishment of both the community and the physical building by the images that interpret and commemorate the Jesuit mission. The way in which the scene above his tomb is represented – again an experiential, not descriptive, documentary or didactic, representation – allows visitors to ‘place themselves’ into the work, facilitating a better understanding of this essential relationship. This concept reinforces the central ideas of Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*.

The Altar of St Ignatius project was initiated in 1694. The dedications of both of the transept chapels were reconfigured in the late seventeenth century, after the 1622 canonizations of the first two Jesuit saints, Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier. The left transept chapel is dedicated to St Ignatius. The chapel dedicated to St Francis Xavier, which contains a relic of his arm, is located opposite, in the right transept chapel. The Jesuit artist Andrea Pozzo, and at least two other architects (namely Giovanni Battista Orrigone and Sebastiano Cipriani), submitted competing proposals in 1696.³⁰

The final conception of Pozzo centers on a dynamic, over life size, silver statue of Ignatius executed by Pierre Legros (1697–1699, remodeled by Luigi Acquisti, 1803–1804), who stands with arms outstretched and gazing upwards [Fig. 7]. The saint stands in a lavishly adorned niche, with two angels above him flanking an escutcheon with the ‘IHS’ monogram, presented as if one angel is actually writing the name of the order. Seated atop the cornice of the niche are God the Father and Christ bearing the Cross. They are appearing to Ignatius – as in the “Vision at La Storta” – and he gazes upon them joyously.

There are two marble relief panels flanking the central sculptural group: on the left is Angelo de Rossi’s *Pope Paul III Confirming the Order* (1695–1699) [Fig. 8]; on the right is Bernardino Cametti’s

²⁹ For the connection of the nave chapel frescoes to the *Spiritual Exercises*, see Hibbard H., “*Ut picturae sermones*: The First Painted Decorations of the Gesù”, in Wittkower R. – Jaffe I. (eds.), *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution* (New York: 1972). For more recent discussions of the interior decoration of the Gesù see Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque*, and Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque*.

³⁰ Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* 84–106 thoroughly describes the planning stage.

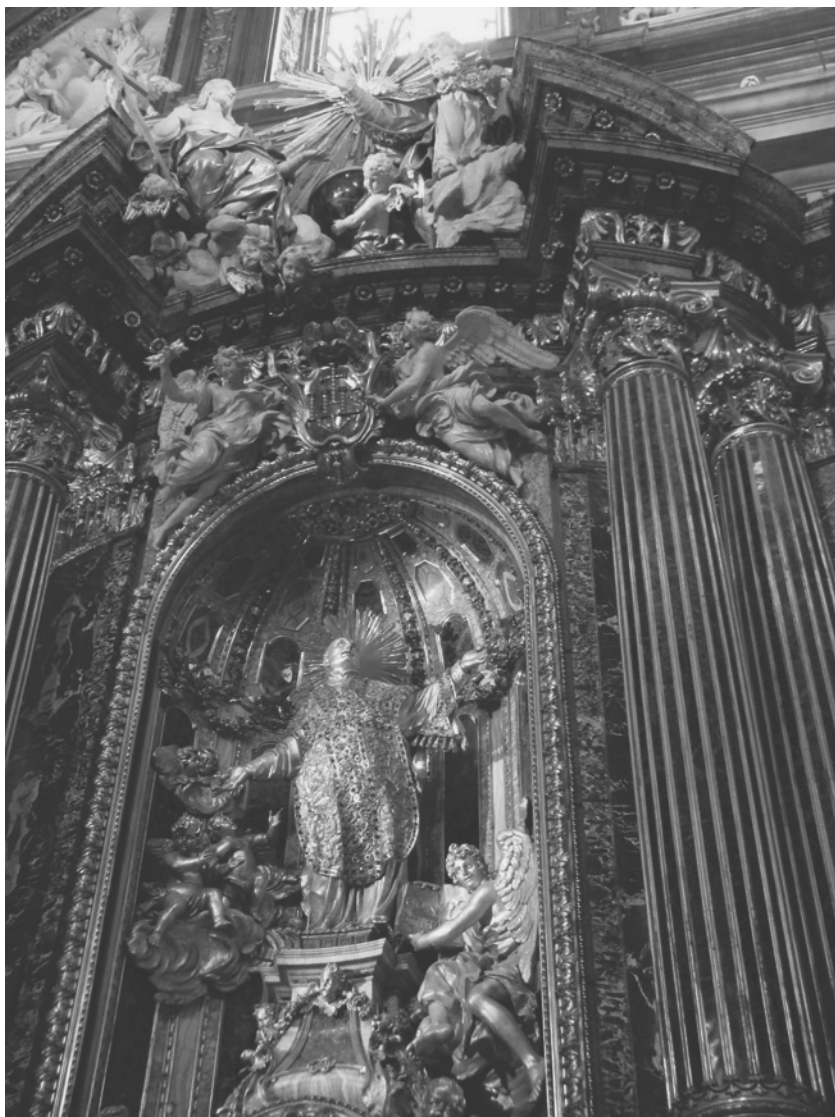


Fig. 7. Pierre Legros, *St. Ignatius*, 1697–1699; Pierre Stephan Monnot: *Angel Composing the Name of the Society*, 1696–1697; Lorenzo Ottone and Bernardo Ludovisi: *Trinity*, 1726; Altar of St Ignatius, Church of Il Gesù, Rome (photo: author).



Fig. 8. Angelo De Rossi, *Pope Paul III Confirms the Society of Jesus in 1540*, 1695–1699. Altar of St Ignatius, Church of Il Gesù, Rome (photo: author).

Canonization of St Ignatius (1695–1698). Levy speaks of these panels as representing ‘two instaurational moments for the providential goal of the Society: its founding and Ignatius’s canonization’.³¹ The design earlier proposed by Cipriani had included two relief panels, illustrating the “Vision at La Storta” and “The Confirmation of the Rule” flanking a concave relief of St Ignatius with the Trinity. Cipriani’s plan rendered the historical events connected to the foundation of the Society of Jesus in an explicit fashion, but would not have allowed them to engage the visitor in the interactive manner that Pozzo’s design ultimately does. Instead, Pozzo’s concept, the placement of the figures eternally reenacting the visionary experience, facilitates the participation of future spectators. The *Confirmation* reinforces the relationship between the historical event and the vision that preceded it. The *Canonization* relief was designed to hold a real candle, so that the scene could be ritually reenacted.³² These seemingly small elements further my suggestion that the sculptures in the transept chapel containing Ignatius’s tomb work together to assist the spectator in placing himself into the miraculous life of the saint. The representation here, as in the Sant’Ignazio ceiling fresco, is experiential. Spectators – from the eighteenth century forward – visiting the tomb chapel could view the scene as the companions of Ignatius originally did at La Storta. The unusual composition assists their ability to ‘place themselves’ in that moment. The circumstances of the foundation become not a distant historical fact, but an event into which pilgrims can encounter and participate in the vision that led to the establishment and naming of the Society of Jesus.

The Naming of Christ

The meaning of the “Vision at La Storta” scene – and the reminder of its significant connection to the establishment and naming of the Society – is enhanced by the placement of the Jesuit monogram ‘IHS’ on the escutcheon between Ignatius and the Trinity, accompanied by

³¹ Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* 161.

³² This is discussed by Levy, who also notes that the inscription on the relief does not include a date, further supporting the notion that the scene could be re-experienced. See Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* 163–164. An excellent detail of the candle is in her figure 59.

two angels who have just 'written' the name. Further reference to the naming theme is seen on the ceiling of the church's nave, in Giovanni Battista Gaulli's fresco of the *Adoration of the Name of Jesus* (1672–1675), which again illuminates and glorifies the 'IHS' monogram.³³ While this Jesuit monogram is displayed in most buildings connected to the order, it is showcased here (not only inside the church but even more prominently on the façade) on the site where a chapel dedicated to the Holy Name was established by St Bernardino of Siena in the fifteenth century.³⁴ St Bernardino first developed the 'IHS' monogram adapted by St Ignatius a century later, just after the order was established and named.³⁵

The biblical celebration in which the infant Christ was named is the Circumcision, and the titular feast remains of central importance to the Jesuit order. A clear indication of this is the prominence of the 'IHS' monogram in the engraving of the Circumcision published in the *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia* by Jerome Nadal in 1595.³⁶ Paintings of this subject also adorn the high altars in many Jesuit churches.³⁷ This was true at the Gesù, where Girolamo Muziano's altarpiece of the *Circumcision* (1587–1598) was originally placed at the high altar.³⁸ The altarpiece was replaced in 1843.³⁹ Taken as a whole, the pilgrim visiting the Gesù is continuously reminded of the significance of the name of Christ and the name of the order, and this reminder would have been significantly stronger in the seventeenth

³³ See Enggass R., *The Painting of Baciccio* (University Park: 1974) for more on Baciccio's paintings in Il Gesù.

³⁴ Herz, "Imitators of Christ" 66. For more on St Bernardino, his monogram, and preaching in Rome, see Mormando F., *The Preacher's Dream: S. Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: 1999).

³⁵ Herz, "Imitators of Christ" 66–67, discusses also the name taken by Ignatius as connected to the Holy Name of Jesus and the monogram. See also Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque* 196–197.

³⁶ Nadal, *Annotations and Meditations*, vol 1: *The Infancy Narratives*.

³⁷ Examples include Cornelis Schut's *Circumcision* in the Church of St Charles Borromeo in Antwerp, and a painting of the same subject by Peter Paul Rubens in Sant'Ambrogio in Genoa.

³⁸ Evonne Levy has published two images that provide an idea of what Muziano's altarpiece looked like in situ at the high altar: an engraving by Valerian Regnard, and a detail from the background of an anonymous painting depicting Cardinals Odoardo and Alessandro Farnese in the Gesù. See Levy E., "The Institutional Memory of the Roman Gesù. Plans for the Renovation of the 1670s by Carlo Fontana, Pietro da Cortona and Luca Berettini", *Römisches Jahrbuch der Biblioteca Hertziana* 33 (1999–2000) 376–377.

³⁹ Herz, "Imitators of Christ" 66.

century. The original plan for the fresco in the semi-dome was to have represented *Joshua stopping the sun*.⁴⁰ As Joshua is the Old Testament name for Jesus, the repeated emphasis on his name would have been undeniable. The episode that connects these names, that is, how the name of Jesus Christ came to be the name of the order, is centered in the miracle that occurred in the chapel at La Storta. Thus, the re-enactment of this episode is created in gleaming silver and marble sculptures, in the premier church of the Society of Jesus (a church specifically named Il Gesù), to be experienced by future pilgrims.

Other Depictions of St Ignatius

While the figure of St Ignatius (paired with the Trinity) in both of Pozzo's projects – the Sant'Ignazio ceiling fresco and the Altar of St Ignatius in Il Gesù – is not so specific that it must be exclusively interpreted as a variation on the "Vision at La Storta" episode, Ignatius is in fact presented differently than typical iconic representations. Traditional portraits of St Ignatius, such as another image painted by Pozzo at the end of the corridor of the Casa Professa at Il Gesù (1682–1686), generally show him holding a book inscribed with the motto 'Ad Maiorum Dei Gloriam.' The two projects of Pozzo examined in this essay portray the founder in a rather different manner, without the conventional attributes, and in a fashion comparable to his rendering in traditional "Vision at La Storta" scenes.

Conclusion

This essay has elucidated the connection between the representation of the "Vision at La Storta" and the foundation and naming of the Society of Jesus, as seen through visual representations of the event produced between the 1590s and the 1690s, and culminating in the sculptural representation on the Altar of St Ignatius. In the century leading up to the tomb project, the Jesuits repeatedly depict Ignatius's vision in prints and paintings. These images portray the miraculous

⁴⁰ Levy, "The Institutional Memory" 406. The semi-dome was later painted by Baciccio; the subject is *The Adoration of the Lamb*.

event in various ways, for a plethora of functions. While some incorporate the scene into the larger context of Ignatius's life, others single out this event, and employ it as an emblem of the order. I contend that the sculpture group depicting the "Vision at La Storta" on the Altar of St Ignatius combines some of these purposes, in that it allows the spectators to physically interact with and participate in a ritual repetition of the sacred event that solidified the foundation and naming of the Jesuit order. This engaged participation – reminding them of the origins of the order and the church, and central to the concept of the Spiritual Exercises – is stressed over and over in the imagery produced by the Jesuits over the course of the century leading up to the execution of the tomb project. While I am not the first scholar to suggest that the silver statue of St Ignatius, placed above his tomb, re-envisions the "Vision at La Storta" by incorporating Christ bearing the Cross and God the Father in the framework above the figure of the saint, previous studies have not examined the project with the focus on how the Jesuits employed this specific imagery throughout the period 1537–1700.⁴¹ Nor have previous writers focused on how the event unambiguously ties into the establishment and naming of the Society of Jesus, or why this is significant. Some Jesuits and Jesuit historians have sought to increase the visibility of the "Vision at La Storta" with regard to its role as a fundamental component of the Jesuit foundation.⁴² This study aims to promote a better understanding of the foundation of the Society of Jesus by investigating the significant connection to this vision. The ruined chapel in the hamlet of La Storta, just outside the city of Rome, was where Ignatius witnessed the vision of Jesus Christ, and was assured of his favor in Rome. As a result, the companions who arrived in Rome and petitioned the Pope to establish a new religious order (in 1540) called themselves the Society of Jesus, and embarked on a specific devotion to his name, and imitation of his acts. The Church of Il Gesù, and the tomb of the Jesuit founder in the left transept, physically manifests and ritually reenacts the connection between the "Vision at La Storta" and the ideals of the Jesuit order.

⁴¹ This idea is also considered by Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* 171–172.

⁴² See, for example, Ravier, *Ignatius of Loyola and the Founding of the Society of Jesus*, and Kolvenbach P.-H., *The Road from La Storta* (St Louis: 2000) 1–4. Kolvenbach, in a homily on the anniversary of the vision (in 1987) stated that "The Vision at La Storta has not been given to us so that we might stop to gaze at it. No, it is the light in which the Jesuit regards the whole world'.

Selective Bibliography

- A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*, ed. J. Tylenda (San Francisco: 2001).
- ACKERMAN J., "The Gesù in the Light of Contemporary Church Design", in Wittkower R. – Jaffe I. (eds.), *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution* (New York: 1972).
- ALADAMA A. DE, *The Constitution of the Society of Jesus: An Introductory Commentary on the Constitutions* (Rome – St Louis: 1989).
- , *The Formula of the Institute: Notes for a Commentary* (Rome – St Louis: 1990).
- BAILEY G.A., "The Jesuits and Painting in Italy, 1550–1690: The Art of Catholic Reform", in Mormando F. (ed.), *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image* (Chicago: 1999) 151–178.
- , *Between Renaissance and Baroque: Jesuit Art in Rome, 1565–1610* (Toronto: 2003).
- CONWELL J., *Impelling Spirit: Revisiting a Founding Experience, 1539, Ignatius of Loyola and His Companions: An Exploration into the Spirit and Aims of the Society of Jesus as Revealed in the Founders' Proposed Papal letter Approving the Society* (Chicago: 1997).
- DALMASES C. DE, *Ignatius of Loyola, Founder of the Jesuits: His Life and Work* (St Louis: 1985).
- DEKONINCK R., "Imagines peregrinantes. The International Genesis and Fate of Two Biblical Picture Books (Barrefelt and Nadal) Conceived in Antwerp at the End of the Sixteenth Century", in Gelderblom A. – de Jong J. – van Vaecck M. (eds.), *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs* (Leiden: 2004) 49–64.
- , *Ad imaginem: Statuts, fonctions et usages de l'image dans la littérature spirituelle jésuite du XVII^e siècle* (Geneva: 2005).
- DONNELLY J.P., *Ignatius of Loyola: Founder of the Jesuits* (New York: 2004).
- ENGGASS R., *Early Eighteenth-Century Sculpture in Rome* (University Park: 1976).
- FABRE P.-A., "Les Visions d'Ignace de Loyola dans la diffusion de l'art jésuite", *Modern Language Notes* 114 (1999) 816–847.
- , *Ignace de Loyola: Le lieu de l'image. Le problème de la composition de lieu dans les pratiques spirituelles et artistiques jésuites de la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle* (Paris: 1992).
- Fontes Narrativi de S. Ignatio de Loyola et de Societatis Iesu initiis*, ed. C. de Dalmases, 4 vols. (Rome: 1943–1965).
- FOSS M., *The Founding of the Jesuits, 1540* (London: 1969).
- HELD J., "Rubens and the Vita Beati P. Ignatii Loiolae of 1609", in Martin P. (ed.), *Rubens Before 1620* (Princeton: 1972).
- HERZ A., "Imitators of Christ: The Martyr-cycles of Late Sixteenth-Century Rome Seen in Context", *Storia dell'Arte* 62 (1988) 53–70.
- HIBBARD H., "Ut picturae sermones: The First Painted Decorations of the Gesù", in Wittkower R. – Jaffe I. (eds.), *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution* (New York: 1972).
- JAFFÉ M., *Rubens and Italy* (Ithaca: 1977).
- KERBER B., "Designs for Sculpture by Andrea Pozzo", *Art Bulletin* 47 (1965) 499–502.
- KOLVENBACH P.-H., *The Road from La Storta* (St Louis: 2000).
- KÖNIG-NORDHOFF U., "Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Vita Beati P. Ignatii Loiolae Societatis Iesu Fvndatoria Romae 1609 und 1622", *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 45 (1976) 307–317.
- , *Ignatius von Loyola: Studien zur Entwicklung einer neuen Heiligen-Ikonographie im Rahmen einer Kanonisationskampagne um 1600* (Berlin: 1982).
- LARSEN E. – HYDE MINOR V., "Peter Paul Rubens and the Society of Jesus", *Konsthistorisk tidskrift* 46 (1977) 48–54.

- LEVY E., "The Institutional Memory of the Roman Gesù. Plans for the Renovation of the 1670s by Carlo Fontana, Pietro da Cortona and Luca Berettini", *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 33 (1999–2000) 373–426.
- , *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* (Berkeley: 2004).
- LUCAS T. (ed.), *Saint, Site and Sacred Strategy: Ignatius, Rome, and Jesuit Urbanism* (Vatican City: 1990).
- MATT L. VON – RAHNER H., *St Ignatius of Loyola: A Pictorial Biography* (Chicago: 1956).
- MELION W., *The Meditative Art: Studies in the Northern Devotional Print, 1550–1625* (Philadelphia: 2009).
- NADAL JEROME, *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels*, trsl. F. Homann, with an introductory essay by W. Melion, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: 2003–2007).
- NICOLAS A. DE, *Powers of Imagining. Ignatius de Loyola: A Philosophical Hermeneutic of Imagining through the Collected Works of Ignatius de Loyola with a translation of these works* (Albany: 1986).
- NOREEN K., "Ecclesiae militantis triumph: Jesuit Iconography and the Counter-Reformation", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29 (1998) 689–715.
- O'MALLEY J., *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: 1993).
- O'MALLEY J. – BAILEY G.A. – HARRIS S. – KENNEDY T. (eds.), *The Jesuits: Culture, Sciences and the Arts, 1540–1773* (Toronto: 1999).
- , *The Jesuits II: Culture, Sciences and the Arts, 1540–1773* (Toronto: 2006).
- O'MALLEY J. – BAILEY G.A. (eds.), *The Jesuits and the Arts, 1540–1773* (Philadelphia: 2005).
- O'REILLY T., "Ignatius of Loyola and the Counter-Reformation: The Hagiographic Tradition", *The Heythrop Journal* 31 (1990) 439–470.
- PECCHAI P., *Il Gesù di Roma* (Rome: 1952).
- PFEIFFER H., "The Iconography of the Society of Jesus", in O'Malley J. – Bailey G.A. (eds.), *The Jesuits and the Arts, 1540–1773* (Philadelphia: 2005) 200–228.
- PIRRI P., "La Topografia del Gesù di Roma e le Vertenze tra Muzio Muti e S. Ignazio Secondo Nuovi Documenti", *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 10 (1941) 177–183.
- PIRRI P. – ROSA P. DI, "Il P. Giovanni de Rossis (1538–1610) e lo sviluppo dell'edilizia gesuitica", *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 44 (1975) 65–79.
- POLANCO J.-A., *Vita Ignatii Loiolae et rerum Societatis Jesu historia [Chronicon]*, 6 vols. (Madrid: 1894–98).
- RAHNER H., *The Vision of St Ignatius in the Chapel at La Storta* (Rome: 1975).
- , *The Vision at La Storta: History and Spirituality* (Rome: 1988).
- RAVIER A., *Ignatius of Loyola and the Founding of the Society of Jesus* (San Francisco: 1987).
- RIBADENEIRA PEDRO DE, *The Life of B. Father Ignatius of Loyola, 1616* (York: 1976).
- Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings; Reminiscences, Spiritual Diary, Select Letters Including the Text of the Spiritual Exercises*, trsl. J. Munitiz – P. Endean (London: 1996).
- TACCHI VENTURI P., *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù in Italia* (Rome: 1950).
- Vita Beati P. Ignatii Loiolae, Societatis Iesu fndatoris* (Rome: 1609).