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**Editorial:  
John O'Malley and "How We Got to Be Who We Are"**

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Initially conceived as a celebration of John O'Malley's many contributions to the world of Jesuit higher education, this collection has taken on a new poignancy in the wake of his recent death. John knew this collection was in progress and expressed his characteristic delight and humility in the face of such appreciation of his work. Completing this volume during his brief illness and after his passing has helped its editors and contributors channel our grief into this labor of love.

The contributors to this volume include Jesuits and laypeople, graduate students and a university president, Endowed Chairs and Assistant Professors. We are scholars of history, theology, ethics, philosophy, English, rhetoric, and music. Our varying ages, areas of study, and positions in the world of higher education indicate how sweeping John O'Malley's influence has been on generations of scholars in a wide variety of fields.

I welcomed the opportunity to guest-edit this collection, as my own experience of Jesuit higher education was indelibly shaped by John O'Malley. I first met John when I took his course on Vatican II at Georgetown, where I was an undergraduate theology minor with a bee in my bonnet about the Catholic Church's treatment of women. I remember telling John that I was considering graduate studies in theology because I wanted to make the church a more just institution. With a twinkle in his eye, he responded, "If you want to change the church, don't study theology. Study history. Then you can tell your detractors what already happened, and they can't argue with you."

This comment has remained with me for over a decade, not only because it's classic O'Malley—pithy, insightful, and a little irreverent—but also because it captures so perfectly his approach to

historical scholarship. In his 2021 memoir, he makes the same point with a bit more nuance: "...the only way to get rid of the past was to remember it. Once we did that, we began to understand how we got to be where we are and how we got to be who we are. Once we are in that position, we are free to embrace from the past what now helps us and free to leave the rest behind. The past no longer controls us."<sup>1</sup>

Similar to the *ressourcement* thinkers of the twentieth century, to whom John had introduced me in his Vatican II course, he insisted that the contemporary church had much to learn from its past. O'Malley's approach to the history of the Jesuits echoes a similar refrain: the contemporary Society and its many institutions of higher education benefit from the knowledge of "how we got to be who we are."

O'Malley's work was the history of institutions, but it was always in service of a living tradition. He never confused the institution for the tradition, nor did he capitulate to nostalgia. Rather, he gave those of us existing within these institutions—Jesuit universities, the Society of Jesus, or the Church more broadly—a context for understanding "how we got to be where we are," and "how we got to be who we are." What we do with that knowledge is now up to us, but we are simultaneously more rooted in that tradition and freer to carry it forward because of O'Malley's contributions.

He taught me that the history of institutions is always more complex than it first appears, demonstrating in his pedagogy and his scholarship both respect for tradition and an acute awareness of the human foibles of all institutions—his books on Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II brim with humorous examples. Many of the articles in this

collection emphasize his “style,” which I’m sure would delight the scholar who insisted that style *is* content. John treated the past with clarity and levity, a style that seemed to say, “we need to know this, and we may choose to draw lessons from it, but we don’t need to repeat it.”

This collection brings together articles whose different styles offer, when taken together, a vibrant picture of how O’Malley’s work has impacted Jesuit higher education.

John DeGioia reflects on the extraordinary historical resources his dear friend John O’Malley unearthed for contemporary Jesuit universities, particularly regarding the spirituality and mission of the Society. With an eye toward O’Malley’s pedagogical and scholarly influence, Anthony DelDonna recounts a paradigmatic moment of O’Malley’s holistic engagement with art, history, and culture: a performance at Georgetown of an 18<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit-composed oratorio on which the two collaborated. Brenna Moore captures the warmth and insight of O’Malley as a mentor, focusing on his “honest, relaxed, straightforward” style of writing and teaching that empowered students to find their own voices. Nelson Minnich commemorates O’Malley’s career as a scholar who “brought Jesuits outside the walls of Jesuit higher education,” garnering respect for the study of Roman Catholicism in secular institutions.

Stephen Schloesser, S.J. takes up O’Malley’s insight that early Jesuit education embraced the secular—even pagan!—world, uncovering examples of this legacy in the more recent history of Jesuit education. Cristiano Casalini and Alessandro Corsi trace the impact of O’Malley’s work on the history of Jesuit education, fleshing out the historiographical and pedagogical implications of his scholarship. Paul Grendler explicates O’Malley’s major contributions toward defining the early principles of Jesuit education, and picks up where O’Malley left off to analyze the different kinds of Jesuit universities prior to 1773. Massimo Faggioli highlights O’Malley’s contributions to the reception of Vatican II as a model for the work that remains to be done in Catholic higher education today. James Keenan, S.J. identifies O’Malley’s work on “style” as an expression of deepest-held values, applying this approach to O’Malley’s own style, and playing

with the very styles this journal typically uses, weaving together scholarly analysis with illustrative anecdotes.

Allen Brizee, Cinthia Gannett, and John Brereton conducted an interview with O’Malley in May 2022 for this collection; the result includes two articles that, as a pair, reflect the theory and praxis of O’Malley’s work in rhetoric. Gannett and Brereton trace O’Malley’s evolving relationship with the emergent field of rhetoric studies, highlighting his profound influence on this field in the US and abroad. The article by Allen Brizee, Stephanie Hurter Brizee, Colten Biro, and Meha Gupta looks to O’Malley’s work in rhetoric studies as a guide for the Jesuit hallmarks of *eloquentia perfecta* and *vita activa*, featuring two digital public humanities projects that embody these pedagogical values.


Moshe Gold invites readers into an O’Malley-inspired intertextual, interdisciplinary, and interreligious thought experiment he uses in the classroom, offering a richly layered analysis of the story of St. Ignatius’s encounter with the Moor. And finally, Elisa Frei highlights an ongoing public history project, the *Digital Indipetae Database*, that empowers students to preserve and interpret early modern primary sources in the history of the Society of Jesus, carrying on the legacy of O’Malley’s work.

This robust and eclectic collection of articles reflects the robust and eclectic career of John O’Malley. As each draft and revision crossed my inbox, some before, some during, and some after John’s illness, I found myself sometimes laughing, sometimes crying, and often nodding along in awe at how well the contributors had captured different facets of his work and life. I owe much gratitude to every author, section editor, and especially Kari Kloos, our general editor, each of whom agreed to an accelerated publication trajectory in light of John’s illness and turned around drafts more quickly than imaginable. It has been an honor to work with each of them on this volume celebrating my mentor, my professor, and my friend John O’Malley.

This project began as a celebration of a vivacious, productive scholar who had just published his memoir last year (2021) at the age of 94. Now that

it is being released as a posthumous commemoration, we maintain that celebratory tone in gratitude for all that John O'Malley did to enrich our ongoing work in Jesuit higher education. I hope this collection of articles inspires our readers to carry out John's legacy, to

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know "how we got to be where we are," and to embrace from the past whatever is helpful to further the mission of Jesuit higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. 

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>John O'Malley, *The Education of a Historian: A Strange and Wonderful Story* (Philadelphia: St. Joseph's University Press, 2021), 174