



Rev. John W. O'Malley, SJ

June 11, 1927 - September 11, 2022

Remembering Jesuit Father John O'Malley

Rev. John W. O'Malley, SJ, was the only child of Charles and Elizabeth Gallagher O'Malley. He was born on June 11, 1927, and grew up in the small town of Tiltonsville, Ohio. He attended the public high school and graduated in 1945. He felt a call to the priesthood but not as a parish priest. Learning of the Jesuits and their work as educators and missionaries, he completed a semester of Latin at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio, and was accepted into the Chicago Province, entering the novitiate at Milford on February 10, 1946.

After his juniorate at Milford, Fr. O'Malley did three years of philosophy at West Baden College, West Baden Springs, Indiana. He was then assigned to teach history at Saint Ignatius High School in Chicago (now Saint Ignatius College Prep). In 1956, he returned to West Baden for theology, and was ordained a priest there on June 14, 1959.

Fr. O'Malley's interest in Jesuit history had grown strong, and he was now focused on the German Counter Reformation and the role played in it by the Society of Jesus. He left West Baden in 1960 to begin his tertianship in Austria, where he perfected his German and prepared for a future in German history. Upon leaving Austria, he spent a week sight-seeing in Italy that

changed his life. He was stunned by the natural and artistic beauty of the country and by its gastronomic delights. On the spot, he gave up German history in favor of Italian, a decision he never regretted. That fall, he entered the doctoral program in history at Harvard University, where he pursued his passion for Italy under the mentorship of Professor Myron P. Gilmore, one of the leading lights in the history of the Italian Renaissance.

After two years on the Harvard campus, Fr. O'Malley finished his course work and was fortunate to have won a two-year fellowship at the American Academy in Rome to work on his dissertation. Just before leaving for the Academy, he pronounced his final vows on August 15, 1963, in the small chapel at Saint Andrew Bobola House in Boston.

Life at the Academy was a transforming experience. Especially over meals, Fr. O'Malley engaged in conversation with scholars in every branch of the Humanities, particularly art historians. The experience helped his scholarship have an interdisciplinary reach. Another experience while in Rome had a deep effect on him. Vatican Council II was in session, and he was able to slip into the council's afternoon press briefings, which gave him an insider's grasp of the council. Within a few years, he was writing almost as much on the council as on the Italian Renaissance.

In 1965, Fr. O'Malley finished his dissertation on an important but forgotten figure of the Renaissance in Rome—Giles of Viterbo (Egidio da Viterbo), which was soon published as his first book. Meanwhile, he was assigned to teach history at the University of Detroit (now the University of Detroit-Mercy). He served first in the History Department and then in the Religious Studies Department, where he acted as chair from 1976 to 1979.

After 14 good years at Detroit, Fr. O'Malley departed to teach at the Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts (later the Weston Jesuit

School of Theology). While there, he served as acting dean for a year and then acting president for seven months. Fr. O'Malley loved his time at Weston. He had superb colleagues on the faculty and good students, both Jesuit and non-Jesuit. The Jesuit student-body began to become ever more international. Toward the end of his time there, Fr. O'Malley was the only American in the small Jesuit community of nine members, which he enjoyed immensely.

While at Weston, he was elected by his province as a member of General Congregations Thirty-two (1974-75) and Thirty-three (1983). These experiences reawakened his interest in Jesuit history and led to his book, *The First Jesuits*, published in 1993. It won two best-book prizes and is now in twelve languages. After 27 years at Weston, he joined the Theology Department of Georgetown University in 2006 as a professor of church history. While there, he published four books on ecumenical councils, one of course on Vatican II, *What Happened at Vatican II*.

During his publishing career, Fr. O'Malley received many academic honors from both Catholic and secular institutions. Among them were three life-time achievement awards from the Society for Italian Historical Study, the Renaissance Society of America, and the American Catholic Historical Association. While at Georgetown, he also received the prestigious Centennial Medal, bestowed in June 2016 by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University.

Fr. O'Malley remained at Georgetown until June of 2020, when he moved to the Saint Claude de la Colombière Jesuit community in Baltimore, Maryland. He died peacefully on September 11, 2022, at the age of 95.