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## Antonio Possevino, S.J. as a Counter-Reformation Critic of the Arts

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The Protestant Reformation called into question many traditions and practices of the Church, including the traditional relation of art to religion. Many Protestant theologians, for instance Calvin and especially Zwingli, condemned religious statues and art as idolatrous or superstitious, partly on the basis of Old Testament prohibitions. Luther and Lutherans approved of religious paintings but rejected the cult of the saints that had figured so largely in medieval and Renaissance religious art. In the Lutheran tradition religious art was more closely tied to the Bible, another manifestation of the *sola scriptura* principle.<sup>1</sup> In Catholic circles as well there arose lively discussions which culminated in a hurried declaration during the closing days of the Council of Trent. The Council defended the use of religious art from the charge of idolatry—images are not to be revered for themselves but only because of the holy subjects that they represent. Images are useful because they imprint in the faithful the teaching of the faith and the miracles our God has worked through his saints. Hence religious images raise hearts to God and put vividly before the faithful models of holy living. Finally the Council warned against abuses of religious art: the faithful must be taught to avoid idolatrous or superstitious use of art; art must not give rise to either doctrinal error or indecent thoughts, hence it is to be supervised by the bishops who are to see to it that no indecent or unusual images nor new miracles are included in religious art. Implicit in the Council's statement was greater ecclesiastical control over religious art.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Carl C. Christensen, *Art and the Reformation in Germany*, (Detroit/Athens: Wayne State University Press/Ohio University Press, 1979); Margarete Stirm, *Die Bilderfrage in der Reformation*, (Gütersloh: Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1977); Charles Garside, *Zwingli and the Arts*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 76–183.

<sup>2</sup>Hubert Jedin, *Kirche des Glaubens, Kirche der Geschichte*, (Freiburg: Herder, 1966), II, pp. 460–498, "Entstehung und Tragweite des Trienter Dekrets über die Bilderverehrung"; Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450–1600*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 102–136; Émile Mâle, *L'art religieux de la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle et du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Étude sur l'iconographie après le Concile de Trente*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1951), pp. 1–107; E. Kirschbaum, "L'influsso del Concilio di Trento nell' arte," *Gregorianum*, 26 (1945), pp. 100–116.

During the sixteenth century, Italy, the home of the greatest and most innovative artists, was also extremely rich in theoretical discussions of art. In the wake of the Council of Trent a number of churchmen began to write treatises that filled out the short, generic prescriptions of the Council. Among them were the two saintly cardinals of Milan, Carlo and Federigo Borromeo.<sup>3</sup> More influential and fully worked out than the Borromeos' writings was the long treatise of Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti of Bologna. Recent studies by Paolo Prodi have made his treatise well known.<sup>4</sup> This study examines the treatise on art written by the influential Jesuit diplomat and writer Antonio Possevino. There is considerable literature on Possevino, but it concentrates on his diplomatic activity while rather neglecting his writings, particularly on art.<sup>5</sup>

Possevino's treatment of art first appeared in his *Bibliotheca Selecta* of 1593, an enormous work of some 1200 folio pages covering almost every aspect of Renaissance learning.<sup>6</sup> Romeo de Maio calls it "the bibliographic catechism of the Counter-Reformation;"<sup>7</sup> Pietro Pirri sees it as an updating of Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Majus*<sup>8</sup> and terms it the "Encyclopedia of the Counter-Reformation."<sup>9</sup> The *Bibliotheca Selecta* was first printed on the Vatican Press in 1593; there were subsequent editions at Venice (1603) and Cologne (1607). It came armed with an unusual distinction: a warm prefatory letter by Clement VIII. Its treatise on poetry and painting was reprinted separately in Lyons in 1594 and 1595. Parts of the treatise on painting have been reprinted recently.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Carlo Borromeo, *Instructionum fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae libri II . . .*, (Milan, 1577); reprinted in Paola Barocchi, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento, fra manierismo e controriforma*, (Bari: Laterza, 1960-1962), III, 1-113; Federigo Borromeo, *De Pictura sacra* (1964), edited by C. Castiglioni, (Sora, 1932).

<sup>4</sup>Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane, diviso in cinque libri*, (Bologna: A. Benacci, 1582), reprinted by Barocchi, *Trattati*, II, pp. 117-509. Paolo Prodi, *Il Cardinale Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597)*, (Rome: Edizione di storia e letteratura, 1967), II, 526-562; "Ricerche sulla teorica delle arti figurative nella riforma cattolica," *Archivio italiano per la storia de la piet *, 4, 1965, pp. 121-212. Prodi's article gives a good review of recent scholarship on the relationship of the Counter-Reformation to art, pp. 123-140.

<sup>5</sup>There are scattered comments on Possevino's art criticism in Blunt, pp. 112, 114, 118, 127, 136.

<sup>6</sup>Antonio Possevino, *Bibliotheca selecta de ratione studiorum, ad disciplinas, et ad salutem omnium gentium procurandam . . .*, (Venice: Apud Altobellum Salicatum, 1603). References are to this edition, henceforward abbreviated as *B.S.*, unless otherwise noted. The *Bibliotheca Selecta* also contains a theological justification of religious images, Book 8, chapters 16 and 17.

<sup>7</sup>Romeo de Maio, *Michelangelo e la controriforma*, (Bari: Laterza, 1978), p. 257.

<sup>8</sup>Pietro Pirri, S.J., *Giuseppe Valeriano, S.I., architetto e pittore, 1542-1596*, (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1970), p. 214.

<sup>9</sup>Pietro Pirri, S.J., "L'architetto Bartolomeo Ammannati e i Gesuiti," *Archivium Historicum Societatis Iesu*, 12, (1943) p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>Paola Borocchi, *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento*, (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1971-1977), I, pp. 42-53, 454-459. De Maio, p. 215, refers to two German editions but I think they are ghost editions.

Possevino begins his treatment of painting by quoting the famous comment of Horace *ut pictura poesis*, a poem is like a picture.<sup>11</sup> This analogy between art and literature, plus many other lines illustrating the analogy, tie Possevino's treatment of painting with the preceding thirty-two chapters on poetry in Book XVII of the *Bibliotheca Selecta*. The analogy is continually reinforced by references to the *Ars Poetica* of Horace. Indeed, one page quotes Horace four times for a total of eighteen lines.<sup>12</sup> The use of the *Ars Poetica* and its analogy between art and literature put Possevino squarely within a tradition of art criticism that began with Leon Battista Alberti and flourished down into the eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Following Horace, Possevino saw the purpose of poetry and art as identical and twofold: *utilitas et iucunditas*.<sup>14</sup> This combination was also a commonplace of Renaissance criticism.<sup>15</sup>

After his introductory remarks Possevino discussed the areas of knowledge that the painter, like the poet, must master. The painter will need encyclopedic knowledge because he must not only recreate the real historical world in its complexity, but he is also called to paint fanciful and fabulous scenes. Relying on classical authors, particularly Pliny the Elder, and dressing out his prescriptions with classical examples, Possevino argued that the painter must know arithmetic, geometry and optics for the proper construction and proportion of his paintings. Since he must depict the human soul and all its emotions, he must study philosophy, particularly moral philosophy which treats the passions. To understand anatomy and how the limbs function painters should study Galen. This demand for vast erudition on the part of painters may strike us as naive, but Horace had recommended it for poets, and Alberti together with many other authors had transferred the requirement to painters.<sup>16</sup>

In keeping with the purpose of the *Bibliotheca Selecta* as an encyclopedic guide to previous literature, Possevino next devotes a chapter to discussing ancient and modern authors who had written on painting. After brief bows to Aristotle and Vitruvius, Possevino summarizes Book XXXV of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, the *locus classicus* for the history and

<sup>11</sup>B.S., p. 539. The analogy between poetry and painting is developed by Horace in the *Ars poetica*, 361-365. For a study of the analogy in Horace, see the articles by Wayne Trimpf, "The Meaning of Horace's *Ut Pictura Poesis*," *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, 38, 1973, pp. 1-34; "Horace's '*Ut Pictura Poesis*': The Argument for Stylistic Decorum," *Traditio*, 34, (1978) pp. 29-73.

<sup>12</sup>B.S., II, p. 543.

<sup>13</sup>Rensselaer W. Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanist Theory of Painting," *Art Bulletin*, 22, (1940) pp. 197-269. Lee does not refer to Possevino, whose tract would have confirmed many of his arguments.

<sup>14</sup>B.S., II, p. 539.

<sup>15</sup>Lee, pp. 226-228. According to Paleotti "uffizio del pittore sara . . . dare diletto, ad insegnare e muovere l'affetto. . . ." Barocchi, *Scritti*, I, p. 334.

<sup>16</sup>B.S., II, pp. 539-540; Lee, pp. 212, 235-242; Blunt, p. 148.

theory of ancient art.<sup>17</sup> Like much in the *Bibliotheca Selecta*, these passages are derivative. More interesting is his discussion of sixteenth century authors. He recommends Albrecht Dürer's book on proportion and Pomponio Gaurico on sculpture. The best book on the nature and use of color is that by Julius Caesar Scaliger.<sup>18</sup> Good general treatments of painting are to be found in the books of Pierre Gregoire, Gregorio Comanini, and Giovanni Battista Armenini.<sup>19</sup> He then gives a long summary of the contents of Armenini's *De veri precetti della pittura*, which we may pass over except to note that Armenini and Possevino consider that the seven greatest painters of their century were Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian, Correggio, Sebastiano del Piombo, Giulio Romano, and Andrea del Sarto.<sup>20</sup> Possevino's recommendation of Comanini and Armenini has in part a religious basis. Comanini, an Augustinian canon, laced his work with pious moralizing. Armenini started his career as a painter, spent his middle years touring Italy and studying works of contemporary art, and ended by becoming a priest and writing his book.<sup>21</sup> Possevino also recommends Cardinal Palleotti's *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane*.<sup>22</sup>

Possevino devotes a separate chapter to the works of Bartolomeo Ammannati and Giovanni Andrea Gilio (Lilius). Here again religious reasons control his discussion. Ammannati, a personal friend of Possevino, was one of the leading sculptors and architects of the mannerist movement. Late in life he underwent a religious conversion, willed his wealth for the refurbishing of the Jesuit church and college in Florence, and wrote a famous letter to the artists of Florence denouncing his early sculpture as lascivious.<sup>23</sup> His late works were chiefly religious. Gilio is best known for his *Dialogi* which severely criticized Michelangelo's paintings for their nudity. Possevino follows Gilio in demanding that artists must be as historically precise as possible, relying on the best historical evidence and not their creative imagination when they paint sacred scenes. Thus St. Joseph at the manger and St. Peter in scenes from the gospels should not be painted as decrepit old men. St. Jerome should not be pictured with a red cardinal's hat since such hats were introduced by Innocent IV in the thirteenth century. The thieves crucified with Jesus should be shown as

<sup>17</sup>B.S. II, pp. 540-541. E. Sellers, commentator; K. Jex-Blake, translator, *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art*, (Chicago: Argonaut Publishers, 1968).

<sup>18</sup>B.S., II, pp. 541-542. Scaliger, *De subtilitate ad Hieronymum Cardanum*, (Frankfurt, 1576.)

<sup>19</sup>Pierre Gregoire, *Syntaxes artis mirabilis, in libros septem digestae . . .*, (Lyons, 1583), probable identification; Comanini, *Il Figino overo del fine della pittura . . .*, (Mantua, 1561); Armenini, *De veri precetti della pittura libri III ne' qual con bell' ordine . . . si dimostrano i modi principali del disegnare . . .*, (Ravenna, 1586), II, p. 542.

<sup>20</sup>B.S., II, p. 542.

<sup>21</sup>Barocchi, *Scritti*, I, p. 1060; B.S., p. 542.

<sup>22</sup>B.S., II, p. 542.

<sup>23</sup>B.S., II, p. 543; Pirri, "Ammannati," passim. Ammannati's letter is reprinted by Barocchi, *Trattati*, III, pp. 115-123.

nails, not roped, to their crosses since the three crosses discovered by St. Helena were physically similar and had nails marks.<sup>24</sup> Possevino warns artists against painting the false miracle stories found in the apocryphal gospels. Before they take up their brush, painters should consult with a theologian who is learned in sacred history. Such consultation became common in seventeenth century practice.<sup>25</sup> Rather surprisingly, Possevino shows no interest in iconography and does not discuss the use of symbolism in religious paintings. Possevino's passion for historical accuracy was shared by both humanist scholars and Counter-Reformation churchmen who wanted uniformity and distrusted popular religious and artistic traditions which delighted in stories from the apocryphal gospels and medieval legends of the saints. The desire for accuracy was not a conservative impulse but rather a reflection of scholarly reformism directed against long standing traditions. Possevino wrote most of the *Bibliotheca Selecta* at Padua, not far from Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel which were largely based on the apocryphal gospels. The traditional images of St. Joseph and St. Jerome were deeply rooted in artistic tradition and easily survived the attacks of Possevino and other reformers.

Possevino is particularly critical of painters who picture Christ during his passion as handsome and unharmed. He singles out the flagellation scene in Rome by Sebastiano del Piombo which suggest Christ was being scourged with strands of woolen yarn rather than harsh thongs. The gospels present Christ at many different ages, as both suffering and triumphant, thereby affording artists a variety of subject matter, but within each gospel scene artists should picture Christ as he was. As a model for the depiction of agony Possevino recommends the famous classical statue of Laocoon. Giving precise examples he demands that martyrdoms should be vivid and bloody. To the objection that art consists in the display of skill in rendering the human anatomy he retorts, "I firmly assert that the highest art, which imitates reality itself, both expresses martyrdom in the martyrs, tears in the weeping, sorrow in the suffering, glory and joy in the risen, and fixes them in our hearts. This is indeed the substance of art."<sup>26</sup> In rejecting art for art's sake and insisting on historical accuracy and maximum religious impact, Possevino was very much within the main current of Counter-Reformation art criticism.<sup>27</sup> Later he returns to this topic and devotes a whole chapter to urging that in depicting martyrdoms and especially the passion of Christ painters must enter psychologically

<sup>24</sup>B.S., II, p. 544. Possevino borrows examples from Gilio's *Due dialogi*, (Camerino, 1564), pp. 83, 84. On Gilio, see Barocchi, *Scritti*, I, 1095-1097. A similar demand for historical accuracy is made by Comanini, Raffaello Borghini, and both Borromeos: Prodi, "Teorica", p. 132; Blunt, pp. 110-112.

<sup>25</sup>B.S., II, p. 545. Mâle, pp. 16, 17.

<sup>26</sup>B.S., II, p. 545.

<sup>27</sup>Blunt, pp. 126-127.

into the mind of Christ and the martyrs in their sufferings so that they can convey this sense to viewers. Of course he cites Horace's injunction, "If you want me to weep, you must first weep yourself." To help painters enter the mind of the suffering Christ, he recommends that they use the meditations of Louis de Granada and other authors who have written on the passion.<sup>28</sup> One suspects that Possevino would have approved the dramatic realism of Caravaggio who was working at Rome while Possevino was writing the *Bibliotheca Selecta*.

Possevino touches only lightly on another common theme of Renaissance art criticism, decorum, when he states that art works must be adapted to their subject matter, their probable audience, and the place where they are to be displayed. He develops this theme mainly through a series of quotations from the poets Horace, Prudentius, and Claudian. He associates himself in passing with Gilio's criticism of nudity in Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, referring to the painter only as "a man otherwise outstanding."<sup>29</sup> His criticism is gentle and certainly sincere, more than can be said for the savage and hypocritical criticism that Pietro Aretino and Ludovico Dolce leveled at Michelangelo's use of nudity.<sup>30</sup>

Possevino devotes a whole chapter to attacking nudity in both painting and sculpture which decorate "the facades and turrets of buildings, the villas of the nobility, and the interiors of homes."<sup>31</sup> Mostly such pictures celebrate scenes from pagan mythology, but in fact they are the hook by which Satan drags men down into hell. This sort of art gives a handle to the Protestant iconoclasts, but its chief evil is that it fills minds and hearts, which should belong entirely to God, with lustful thoughts. Possevino laments that, now when the spread of the Gospel in the Indies is driving the statues of the demons from their temples, in Europe itself the demons are destroying Christian worship by evil books, false philosophy, and pictures of nudes and statues of satyrs which destroy piety and foster adultery. Religious subjects are so handled that they arouse lust rather than devotion and are so mixed with pagan subjects that religious feeling gradually dissipates. In earlier days popes such as Gregory the Great directed the removal of pagan statues from Rome, and recently Pius V and Sixtus V have ordered the removal of similar statues from the Vatican and Capitoline. Possevino tactfully says nothing about the role of Renaissance popes and churchmen in commissioning and erecting such images. Plato, Aristotle and the other pagan philosophers forbade pictures of nude women since these gave rise to evil desires—what then should the Christian magistrate whom God has enlightened do? The painting of such pictures threatens the conscience of the artists too, for who can paint these subjects without being filled with lustful thoughts? Who are we to dispute with

<sup>28</sup>B.S., II, pp. 546-547.

<sup>29</sup>B.S., II, pp. 543-545; on decorum, see Lee, pp. 228-235; Blunt, pp. 122-124.

<sup>30</sup>Blunt, pp. 123-124; Lee, 232. Not all Jesuits shared Possevino's harsh judgement on Michelangelo's use of the nude; de Maio, p. 265.

<sup>31</sup>B.S., II, p. 547.

God, who provided our first parents with garments to cover their nakedness after the Fall? These passages are the most personal and passionate in Possevino's treatise.<sup>32</sup>

Certainly there was a puritanical current in Possevino, as in most Counter-Reformation clerics who wrote on art.<sup>33</sup> The austere and puritanical stance of the Counter-Reformation Church in the decades following the Council of Trent has often been pointed out, but during this same period secular mannerism in Catholic Europe was giving a new emphasis to the nude, especially the female nude, that is not found in the early Renaissance. Often the treatment was sensuous and provocative, sometimes downright pornographic. Possevino had intimate contact with this sort of art. Several times his diplomatic missions brought him to the court of Emperor Rudolf II at Prague where the loves of pagan gods and goddesses were a chief subject of art. But more important for his violent reaction was probably the erotic mannerist cycle of the loves of the gods by Giulio Romano in the Palazzo del Tè at Mantua. The Palazzo was a private villa for the ducal Gonzaga family, but as a young man Possevino served as tutor and chaperone for two Gonzaga princelings, both of whom became cardinals. Later in life he had many dealings with the Gonzagas and was chosen to preach the funeral sermons for a Gonzaga duke and duchess. Possevino, therefore, was probably familiar with Giulio Romano's frescoes at the Palazzo, some of which John Shearman has recently described as lascivious.<sup>34</sup> In his youth Possevino edited a collection of obscene and anti-clerical poems by his friend and patron Lelio Capilupi, which was later put on the Index.<sup>35</sup> He mentions this in the *Bibliotheca Selecta* and then prints long selections of religious verse by other members of the Capilupi family, perhaps as a way of reparation.<sup>36</sup> The zeal of the convert also surfaces in interesting ways during his diplomatic career. While conducting a Russian ambassador to Rome, he wrote ahead that nude statues at the Ambassador's lodging should be draped since they would compromise the spiritual standing of the papacy in the eyes of those brought up

<sup>32</sup>B.S., II, pp. 547-549.

<sup>33</sup>Possevino even writes, "cum si quis honesti aliquid in corde retineat, vix seipsum concipere audeat nudum." B.S., II, p. 548.

<sup>34</sup>John Shearman, *Mannerism*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 145.

<sup>35</sup>Lelius Capilupi, *Centones ex Virgilio*, (No place, publisher, or date). Capilupi's second poem, for example, applies to the offspring of the furtive union of monks and nuns a line usually applied to Christ in Virgil's "messianic" eclogue (IV, 7): "Iam progenies caelo dimittitur alto." pp. 21-22. I have used the Vatican Library's copy of this very rare work.

<sup>36</sup>B.S., II, pp. 283 ff. (1593 edition). Here is not the place to explore Possevino's literary criticism, but it displays a moralism parallel to his art criticism. Possevino wrote two treatises on poetry. The first, *Tractatio de perfectae poëseos ratione*, was published in 1576 under the name of Lorenzo Gambara, a well-known poet, who was Possevino's friend and penitent. Possevino's manuscript autobiography describes the circumstances of its composition: *Opp. NN.*, 336, f. 92rv. The *Tractatio* is a violent attack on obscene mythological poems and describes the principles that should govern the Christian poet. Possevino's second treatise on poetry, that in the *Bibliotheca Selecta*, is not quite so extreme in its condemnation of pagan poetry.



in the Russian-Byzantine tradition.<sup>37</sup> Possevino was, incidentally, one of the few westerners in the sixteenth century to express an appreciation for Russian art.<sup>38</sup> Possevino also wrote the Cardinal Secretary that several artistic Agnus Deis being prepared for the Orthodox princes of Wallachia and Moldavia should be "without nude pictures."<sup>39</sup> Several years later he wrote from Padua to Baccio Valori, Commissario of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, that several nude pictures in the grand chapel of the Church of San Lorenzo should be veiled since "such an ugly spectacle" gives great offense to strangers of other nations. The pictures that he objected to were certainly the Pontormo frescoes in S. Lorenzo. Other reformers also objected. The frescoes were destroyed in 1738.<sup>40</sup> Several times in his life Possevino served as an agent for securing religious art for important persons such as the duke of Bavaria<sup>41</sup> and the duke of Mantua.<sup>42</sup>

Let us return to the *Bibliotheca Selecta*. The book on poetry and painting concludes with a long chapter on that new art form of the sixteenth century, emblems, which was added to the 1603 Venice edition.<sup>43</sup> Emblems, as is well known, soon attained enormous popularity throughout Western and Central Europe, not least among Jesuit writers.<sup>44</sup> Possevino begins by praising the usefulness of emblems and emblem books, particu-

<sup>37</sup>P. Pierling, editor, *Bathory et Possevino: Documents inédits sur les rapports du Saint-Siège avec les Slaves*, (Paris: Leroux, 1887), p. 217: Possevino to the Cardinal of Como, 6/9/1582: "Per amore di Nostro Signore vostra signoria illustrissima si degni ordinare che si avisi chi avesse cura di porre o panni di razza o altro in Belvedere (se ivi alloggia l'ambasciator) che non ci si pongano panni nei quali sieno imagini o ignude o etniche; et che quella Cleopatra di Belvedere et simili altre cose poco decenti non sia in alcuno modo veduta, percioche ne restano, come scrissi, scandalizatissimi et si confermano nei loro errori." The best study of Possevino's Russian mission is Stanislas Polçin, *Une tentative d'union au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: la mission religieuse de Père Antoine Possevino S.I. en Moscovie (1581-1582)*, (Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1957).

<sup>38</sup>Hugh Graham, editor and translator, *The Moscovia of Antonio Possevino, S.J.*, (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Center for International Studies, 1977), pp. xvi, 39, 53, 54.

<sup>39</sup>Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Borghese III*, 14, B. I, f. 248v, letter of Possevino to the Cardinal of Como, 13/6/1583.

<sup>40</sup>Firenze Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, *Ms. Rinuccini*, 27 (M-S), unpaginated, 20/2/1589. On the objection of others, see Blunt, p. 122. Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, (New York: Dutton, 1927), III, pp. 253-54, describes the frescoes that Possevino objected to.

<sup>41</sup>Firenze BNC, *Ms. Rinuccini* 27 (M-S) unpaginated, 20/2/1589.

<sup>42</sup>Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Opp. NN.* 332, ff. 177, 220. Pirri, *Valeriano*, p. 225.

<sup>43</sup>*B.S.*, II, pp. 550-52. The section contains a reference to a book published in 1593 and appeared in the 1595 Lyons edition of Possevino's treatise on poetry and art, so it must have been written between 1593 and 1595.

<sup>44</sup>A monumental introduction to emblem literature is Arthur Henkel and Albrecht Schone, *Emblemata, Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts*, (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1967). More convenient and recent are Peter Daly's books, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979) and *The European Emblem: Toward an Index Emblematicus*, (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980). Richard Dimler has published an on-going series of articles on Jesuit emblem writers in the *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu*, 1976—.

larly books of emblems based on the Old and New Testaments. He is distinctly less favorable to attempts to convert pagan mythological stories to Christian use by typological or moralizing allegories, a theme that was common in emblem books. He mentions several authors, notably Marsilio Ficino, who have used pagan myths this way but feels that pagan myths should be employed with utmost caution.<sup>45</sup> Only after these preliminary remarks does Possevino turn to the difficult problem of defining emblems, a problem that continues to vex scholars even today.<sup>46</sup> Following the commentary that Claudius Minones added to his edition (Antwerp, 1574) of Andrea Alciati's pioneer emblem book, Possevino points out that almost any decorative device, even those on walls, vases, and clothes, can be called an emblem in the broad sense. In the specific sense at issue the emblem contains three elements: a short inscription (usually an aphorism or adage), a picture, and a poem which helps explain the inscription and the picture. Usually the meaning of the emblem should not be immediately obvious but should require learning and reflection to discover the link between the inscription and the picture. He then distinguishes the emblem from proverbs, parables, and puzzles. Like most Renaissance writers, Possevino does not, however, distinguish the complete emblem from the *impresa* as sharply as would many modern scholars.<sup>47</sup> He recommends nineteen authors of emblem books and recapitulates the rules of emblems with stress on religious and ethical content.<sup>48</sup>

The concluding sections of Possevino's treatment of emblems deal with the images on coins, military standards and flags, topics that at first seem somewhat unrelated, but in fact the devices and images on coins and flags were closely related to emblems. Like the *impresa* coins, medals and flags often had two of the three elements of the emblem, the motto or maxim (*inscriptio*) and the figure (*pictura*) but obviously lacked the poem (*subscriptio*). Coins, medals, and Egyptian hieroglyphics (to which Possevino adverts briefly) provided inspiration for many emblem writers. Possevino displays his erudition by describing fifty-three different figures that are found on Roman coins. He then compares these figures unfavorably to Christian symbols such as *vitis vera*, *bonus pastor ovium*, *sol justitiae*, and *via, veritas et vita*, but he fails to note that many of his Christian symbols are literary and can be expressed as figures only with difficulty, for instance *via, veritas et vita*. After a short discussion of the symbols used on the standards of the Roman legions Possevino argues that Christian flags and standards should contain either a cross or other specifically Christian image. He concludes by remarking that family heraldic devices should em-

<sup>45</sup>The Renaissance use of ancient mythology and its justification, see Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), translated by Barbara F. Sessions.

<sup>46</sup>Daly, *Literature*, pp. 3-36.

<sup>47</sup>Compare *B.S.*, II, p. 551, with Daly, *Literature*, pp. 21-25.

<sup>48</sup>*B.S.*, II, p. 551.

ploy scriptural mottos and avoid anything likely to foster old family antagonisms.<sup>49</sup>

Possevino's treatise on architecture, which has been described as "short but dense,"<sup>50</sup> includes three chapters (16 to 18) at the end of Book XV, "De Mathematicis," of the *Bibliotheca*.<sup>51</sup> The first two chapters will puzzle modern readers. They ask whether the principles of architecture should be drawn from Vitruvius, the Roman architectural writer, or from the scriptural description of Solomon's temple, which is the most perfect of all buildings. Possevino begins by pointing out that there were divinely inspired tabernacles before Solomon's temple and that the description of the temple in Ezechiel is mysterious. Moreover, much has been invented over the centuries that was unknown to the ancients, for instance cannons and gunpowder. Human reason develops ideas from sense data, from experience, and the cultivation of scholarship. Architecture should not be a blind following of Vitruvius or of some attempt to reconstruct Solomon's temple.<sup>52</sup>

Possevino's concern on this matter derives from the circumstances in which he wrote this part of the *Bibliotheca*, but to which he gives no direct hint. While he was in Rome late in 1591 and during 1592 to see his book through the press, two Spanish Jesuits at the Roman College were also preparing a work on architecture. Jeronimo Prado and Juan Bautista Villalpando were continuing their massive commentary on Ezechiel by including in great detail an attempt at reconstructing Solomon's temple, complete with many lavish drawings. Most of this was the work of Villalpando, who was a fervent proponent of Vitruvius and a former student of Juan de Herrera, the chief architect of Philip II. Villalpando's Vitruvian reconstruction of Solomon's temple was, of course, put forth as the divinely inspired model for Christian church architecture. Possevino's treatise on architecture is then a quiet polemic against the "divinely inspired" *a priori* architecture of Villalpando, although the Spaniard's name is never mentioned.<sup>53</sup> Possevino, the amateur, buttressed his position by pointing out that his treatise is based on frequent conversations about architecture that he had with Bartolomeo Ammannati and with the Jesuit priest-architect Giuseppe Valeriano, a disciple of Michelangelo who had many years of experience in designing Jesuit colleges and churches. He cites Valeriano's claim that architecture cannot be simply copied out of Vi-

<sup>49</sup>B.S., II, pp. 552-53. Interestingly, Daly's modern treatment, *Literature*, pp. 25-32, also related emblems to medals and heraldry.

<sup>50</sup>Pirri, *Valeriano*, p. 215.

<sup>51</sup>B.S., II, pp. 285-291. Most of the treatise on architecture is reprinted in Pirri, *Valeriano*, pp. 379-387.

<sup>52</sup>B.S., II, pp. 285, 286.

<sup>53</sup>B.S., II, pp. 285-287; Pirri, *Valeriano*, pp. 28, 29, 214-216. The publication of Prado and Villalpando's *In Ezechielem. Explanationes et apparatus Urbis et Templi Hierosolymitani commentariis et imaginibus illustratus*, (Rome, 1604), Vol. II/1, was much delayed.

truvius but depends on careful thought and observation. Great as Vitruvius was, much that he taught is second-hand, obscure and misleading. Writers on architecture such as Alberti and Daniele Barbaro have criticized Vitruvius. Those who try to apply the rules of Vitruvius without a careful study of design end up with buildings that either collapse or have a mutilated appearance with parts that seem plastered together. The essence of architecture consists not in knowing the five Vitruvian orders but in mastery of the five sources of good architecture: invention, learning, rules, observation, and use. Neither should architects look to Solomon's temple for inspiration. God gave an understanding of architecture to the gentiles as well as to the Jews. His providence allowed the temple to be destroyed, and all attempts to rebuild it have failed. Moreover, the temple was designed for Jewish worship, which had requirements and ceremonies very different than Christian worship. Just as the passing away of the Jewish temple and its worship was providential, so too was the preservation of the Pantheon and other Roman temples and their conversion and use as Christian churches.<sup>54</sup>

Having disposed of Villalpando and his pretensions, Possevino turned to a hard-headed discussion of the considerations that have to be taken into account by architects and those who hire them, especially churchmen. Buildings, he argued, should have three major qualities: *firmitas*, *utilitas*, and *venustas*. His discussion puts less stress on *venustas*, beauty, which consists in symmetry and proportion, than on more practical considerations. Special subsections take up the choice of proper environment (*locus*), soil, location, and building materials. Possevino, who earlier in life had played a major role in the foundation of many Jesuit colleges and seminaries, had little to say about the esthetics of architecture, but he made shrewd comments on what part of a city is best for building a church so that it will attract worshipers, especially among the nobility, on what type of soil is best, and on how wind, weather, and water affect buildings. It would not be out of place to recall that the very last sentence of St. Ignatius Loyola's Jesuit *Constitutions* requires that colleges should have healthy locations with pure air. Possevino dwelt on what type of stone should be used, but unlike S. Carlo Borromeo he showed no interest in whether cruciform churches are more appropriate than circular ones. His references to the Pantheon and his esteem for Palladio, who in contrast to Borromeo praised circular ground plans, suggests that Possevino had no objection to central churches.<sup>55</sup>

In the course of his discussion Possevino included many precise references to architectural writers. While he recommended passages from Vitruvius and Daniele Barbaro, his favorites were Alberti and Andrea

<sup>54</sup>B.S., II, pp. 286-288.

<sup>55</sup>B.S., II, pp. 288-291.

Palladio. His taste inclined to the classical rather than the mannerist or proto-baroque strains in the architecture of his day.<sup>56</sup>

The *Bibliotheca Selecta* reveals that Possevino was not merely a man of action but also one of the most versatile and erudite scholars of his age. Many of its parts are original contributions, for instance the treatises on education, geography, history, and its plan for world evangelization. The treatises on art and architecture are less original, and Possevino's stress on the moral and religious impact of art crowds out much concern for esthetic goals or practical techniques; still he voices concisely attitudes which were common among churchmen during the Italian Counter-Reformation and thereby deepens our understanding of a complex age that was crucial in the development of the Church.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.* Pirri, *Valeriano*, p. 216. It seems to me that Pirri, *Valeriano*, pp. 215–217 is a bit too eager to attribute almost all of the tract on architecture in Possevino to Valeriano and slight the contributions of Ammannati, Possevino himself, and other sources.