



The Book Reviewer

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Matteo Ricci by Michaela Fontana (People of the Church)

Matteo Ricci was a brilliant student, whose ambitious father sent him to Rome to study law. Instead, Matteo joined the Jesuits and was determined to become a missionary in China. China in the 16th century was a mystery to the western world, although Marco Polo had gone there in the 13th century by an overland route, seeking silk and spices. At the end of the Ming dynasty, when Matteo was there, China was a very sophisticated and rigidly controlled society. The Portuguese explorers, with their soldiers and missionaries, had gone as far as Macao. They made numerous converts, mainly through economic duress, offering employment and food.

Matteo Ricci was nearly thirty years old when he was finally able to enter China, with a novel approach to the teaching of

Christianity. He totally immersed himself in learning the language and culture, and soon became fluent in reading and writing. China was a very complex society, with the "literati" at the top of a rigid bureaucracy; they were scholars, who had to study for years to pass a series of exams in order to reach their exalted positions in society and government.

Matteo became one of the literati, and fascinated the upper classes—and even more the Emperor, whom he never actually met—by his amazing feats of memory and information, as well as his gifts of exotic clocks, maps of the known world, and his knowledge of mathematics and Euclid's geometry. Astronomically, the Chinese were perhaps more advanced than the western scientists, and Ricci had not yet learned of Galileo's discoveries.

Only a few hundred of the literati became Christians, finding some agreement between the teachings of Confucius and Christ. The lower classes were more inclined toward superstition, astrology, and a simplified interpretation of Buddhism.

One of Matteo's successes in China was in being able to publish several books, since the Chinese were in advance of the West in printing, using carved wooden blocks. His books were very popular: *Treatise on Friendship*; *Euclid's Geometry*; *Christian Doctrine*; and *Twenty-five Discourses*, which adapted Greek stoic philosophy to Confucian and Christian ethics.

The Jesuits who followed Fr. Ricci in China were more successful than he was in making a large number of converts.

Reviewed by Clare Dinno

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Franny and Zooey by J. D. Salinger (Fiction)

Franny and Zooey are the two youngest children of the large and precocious Glass family. Franny has returned from college in a very disturbed state of mind. She is wondering, as all thoughtful young people must, about the banality and meaninglessness of seemingly everyone and everything in our ego-driven society. She has discovered an old book about a Russian pilgrim, who goes about continually reciting the Jesus prayer: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner" and she is caught up in this same reci-

tation. The practice of the prayer, instead of soothing her, has completely disoriented her.

Her parents, a former vaudeville team, are quite unable to understand what has happened to their once brilliant child. At one point, the father says, "Perhaps a tangerine would help." Her slightly older brother, Zooey, comes to the rescue.

Zooey discovers that the book belonged to their older brother, Seymour, now dead, but still very influential in their lives. Telephoning from Sey-

mour's room in their same apartment, he manages to soothe Franny's anxieties, by reminding her of something which Seymour had said to both of them when they were very young, whenever they thought that anything was too difficult or unbearable. He would say to them, "Do it for the fat lady." He would leave it to them to think about the fat lady, and both had imagined an enormous fat lady dying of cancer. Now Zooey says, "Don't you see; Jesus is the fat lady," and somehow, quantity becomes quality in Franny's prayer.

Reviewed by Clare Dinno

The Accidental Pope by Ray Flynn and Robin Moore (Fiction)

If you want to get a look at the machinations that go on in electing a new pope, pick up this novel, written by a former United States Ambassador to the Vatican. The story reveals the procedures used in the Sistine Chapel when the election of a new pope becomes necessary. It gives you a look at the way the Curia and the Vatican Secretary of State work behind the

scenes to influence the Pope and his decisions. It goes into the Swiss Guards and their function in protecting the Pope. The tale revolves around the nomination of an unusual and unexpected candidate and how he is treated by the College of Cardinals who want an insider to be chosen. When the new Pope wants to present some new and updated policies to the

Church, he is opposed at every opportunity, but the story makes it clear that even those who are against any change really do have the good of the whole Church at heart. This work of fiction is an entertaining book with a different perspective, worth reading to get an insider's view of the way those at the head of our church think and work.

Reviewed by Pat Milstead