

The Jesuits – Missions, Myths and Histories by Jonathan Wright.  
Harper Collins 2004.

The Jesuits have an awesome reputation, both positive and negative, and having read Jonathan Wright's excellent history of the Society of Jesus it is easier to see why.

In eight engaging chapters, Wright traces the five centuries of Jesuit history, carefully separating myth from reality, sparing nothing yet at the same time impressing the reader with the genuine power and commitment shown by such a diverse range of individuals to the goals and ambitions of the movement's founders.

The two principal areas of interest to me were those of missionary activity, in which endeavour individual Jesuits happily gave their all for the cause, and the struggle with the Reformation in general and the threat posed to Catholicism by Protestantism in particular.

Wright details the sometimes stormy relationship between the Society and successive popes, and also, least controversially, the contribution of individual Jesuits, ordained and lay, to many fields of human endeavour, including the arts, architecture, and politics.

The Jesuits is informative and enlightening and perfectly pitched for as wide a readership as possible.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh