Jesuit History in Brief: A Personal View

Jesuit history falls into two parts separated by the period of suppression (1773-1814):
(1) the "Old Society," 1540-1773, and (2) the "New Society," 1814-present.

PROLOGUE: RELIGIOUS LIFE BEFORE THE 16TH CENTURY

Christian religious life first appeared in the second half of the first century in the person of "virgins" (mostly women but also some men) who lived at home and, by refusing to marry and produce offspring (they claimed to be "spouses of Christ"), countered the absolutist claims of the state (Rome) and hence many of them became martyrs. Once the Roman Emperor Constantine became a Christian (313) and Christianity the state religion, martyrdom ceased being the realistic ideal of heroic Christians. Instead, a significant minority fled the worldliness of the cities and of the church itself for the desert where, unencumbered, they could fight the great battle against evil. Many, both women and men, sought solitude as hermits; others lived a communal way of life. Part of the strict asceticism they all practiced was abstention from sexual relations (celibacy), and therefore men and women lived in separate communities ("Religious Order/Religious Life" in "Jesuit A-Z").

As this professedly religious life moved gradually from the deserts of Egypt, the Middle East and Eastern Europe to the West, it became tamer and more balanced, especially with the monastic way of Benedict of Nursia in Italy (c 480-c 547) and his "Little Rule for Beginners." The Benedictine life was a balance of manual labor and study, communal prayer sung in choir (psalms and other scripture readings made up the "divine office") and meditation or private prayer. Monasteries were self-sufficient and acted as a stable force for order and peace in a crumbling Roman Empire that experienced repeated invasions of peoples from the East.

By the high Middle Ages, Europe saw the development of cities, the rise of a new class of merchants and of artisans united by guild and the birth of the university with its new (Arab/Greek) learning. In response to these social, economic and intellectual changes came the mendicant (literally "begging") orders like the Franciscans (Francis of Assisi [1181 or 82-1226]) with their stress on poverty and simplicity of life and the Dominicans (Dominic [c 1170-1221]) with their scholarship, preaching and teaching. In continuity with religious life in the past, the friars retained the recitation of the "divine office" in common, but these regular times of prayer through the whole course of each day did not really fit with an increasing call to ministry outside the priory walls.

THE JESUIT WAY AND ITS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH HISTORY

In the 16th century once again, a new form of religious life appeared—the "clerks regular"—meaning clerics or priests who were also members of a religious order. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) and his University of Paris companions who formed the Jesuits were not the only such order that arose. But they were perhaps the clearest conceived and the best organized. Ignatius was adamant about serving God, not principally in solitude or with communal prayer, but in "helping souls," in meeting the human

and spiritual needs of people. And in this age of the dawn of printing, the Jesuits had a book of their own, the *Spiritual Exercises,* a rich and highly adaptable resource for a broad range of ministries. (Go to **"Ignatius of Loyola"** for a brief biography of him.)

Cross-cultural Missions

From its earliest days, the Society of Jesus was marked by men going out to non-European cultures to bring the "good news." Francis Xavier (1506-1552), Paris companion and missioner to India and the Far East, was the first and probably the most famous of these. But a little later others like Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in China and Roberto di Nobili (1577-1656) in south India pioneered a new way of evangelization that we now call "inculturation"—a presentation of the gospel in a de-Europeanized way, in terms of the language and culture being approached. Of course, not all Jesuit missioners were able to learn a new language well or live a foreign lifestyle. But the ideal of inculturation was established, and it has survived opposition and prohibition over the centuries and is alive in all sorts of ways today.

Some contemporary historians claim that these principles of inculturation were compromised by the way Jesuit missionaries cared for the Guarani people of South America (17th and 18th centuries). These were a nomadic people and as such vulnerable to be captured by white men (Spanish and Portuguese raiders) and sold into slavery. To protect them, the Jesuits gathered them into community compounds ("Reductions"), taught them useful arts (agriculture) and fine arts (music and painting/ sculpture) and through these Christian religion. Although two or three Jesuits in each community had the final word, "the immediate authority for governance belonged to a council of the natives that possessed legislative, executive , and judicial power over perhaps as many as ten thousand inhabitants of a given reduction" (O'Malley, *The Jesuits*). It was a work of genius—recognized even by European intellectuals of the day otherwise hostile. Still, it did away with the natives' original culture, and, ultimately, it couldn't save them. The Jesuits went so far as to arm the natives for self-defense—until with the re-drawing of Spanish and Portuguese colonial boundaries and the expulsion of the Jesuits first from Portuguese territories (1759) and then from Spanish ones (1768), the Reductions, one after another, were destroyed.

Schools

The other major ministry of the Society was not foreseen by Ignatius and his early companions; they fell into it. As younger recruits joined the order, their Jesuit mentors set up houses of study near universities. But they often found the quality of instruction mediocre, and so they undertook the teaching themselves, and the houses of study became colleges for young Jesuits. The final stage in the process came with a request from the city of Messina in Sicily to open a "college" for lay students. Even with this first venture in the education of laity, Ignatius must have sensed great apostolic possibilities; he sent some of his very best men to start the school (1548). At the time of his death eight years later, there were 35 of these colleges (comprising today's secondary school and the first year or two of our college) all over Europe and beyond.

By the time the order was suppressed in 1773, the number had grown to more than 800—all part of a system of integrated humanistic education that was international and brought together in common enterprise men from various languages and cultures. Among these Jesuits were some of the most distinguished mathematicians, astronomers, and physicists; linguists and dramatists; painters and architects; philosophers and theologians; even what today would be called cultural anthropologists ("Education, Jesuit" in "Jesuit A-Z"). The Jesuit college and its Jesuit community became a center of many other apostolic activities as well. The most significant effect of this investment of manpower in schools was not just the education of the whole person that the students received, but the profound impact such work had on the Jesuits themselves. Very many became good and learned priests at a time when the clergy were not known for either trait.

THE SUPPRESSION AND ITS EFFECTS

The suppression of the Jesuit order by the pope in 1773 and the imprisonment (for life) of superior general Lorenzo Ricci (1703-1775) were indeed tragic events. They were the culmination of the earlier piecemeal suppression of the order, first in Portugal, next in Spain, and then in France—all nations ruled by Bourbon monarchs who each had their own particular political reasons for wanting the order abolished ("Suppression" in "Jesuit A-Z").

The suppression meant the loss of all the schools and the other ministries connected with them. It also meant the loss of mission endeavors like the "Reductions" in South America, where European powers held sway. There it was especially hard for the people who had been served for well more than a century and now were left to the predation of Spanish and Portuguese marauders.

Perhaps the greatest loss in the long run was the Jesuits' own loss of continuity with their roots. When the order was restored in 1814, many who had been Jesuits had died, and those still living were aged and often infirm. The living tradition of Ignatian/Jesuit spirituality had been sorely interrupted. The new Jesuit leaders (Jan Roothaan [superior general 1829-1853] and others) were good men and took clear steps to connect with the earlier tradition as they understood it, but "[t]he result was an often wooden, moralistic, and legalistic interpretation of the normative texts" (O'Malley, *The Jesuits*). The venturesome spirit of the "Old Society" (1540-1773) was gone. After all, the order had been suppressed—better be careful. "Jesuit schools and scholars in Europe never regained the prominence they previously had. Besides, they were largely involved in the resistance to modern thought and culture that characterized Catholic intellectual life through the 19th century and beyond" ("Education, Jesuit" in "Jesuit A-Z").

The Nineteenth-Century

In the century after the French Revolution (1787-1799), Europe and Latin America swung back and forth between monarchy and anticlerical republicanism. The restored Society of Jesus sided instinctively with monarchy and when kings lost out the Jesuits were expelled—three times from France, for instance, and five times from Mexico. The British Isles and the U.S. offered a more hospitable climate (though, of course, the U.S. suffered the Civil War (1861-1865). So we turn there and look at two remarkable

Jesuits and their very different ministries: Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-11889) and Peter De Smet (1801-1873).

G. M. Hopkins was a convert from the Anglican Church to Roman Catholicism under John Henry Newman at Oxford. Like many a Jesuit before him and after, he taught classical language and literature (especially Greek) in Jesuit schools. He worked hard at his teaching and gained little satisfaction from it. He also spent a good number of years in parish ministry with similar results. All his life long he suffered from depression, at times severe depression. Indeed, in the last years of his life, in Dublin, he wrote the "Terrible Sonnets" about his sense of futility in his life and work, turning his frustration into high verbal art. For these and for his earlier poems (in particular, *The Wreck of the Deutschland,* a semi-autobiographical great ode about the death by drowning at sea of five exiled German nuns), he must be considered "one of the great lyric poets of the English language" ("Hopkins" in "Jesuit A-Z"). In his journals and letters as well as his poetry, he showed himself a theologian as well as an artist; "he reached and expressed a unique, Catholic, overwhelming vision of God" (*ibid*.). His judgment about the Society—"brilliancy does not suit us"—shows typical ignorance about the "Old Society" and belies his own stature, only recognized with the publication of his poetry 30 years after his death.

Peter De Smet , Belgian born, came to the U.S. as a young man and entered the Society of Jesus here. He was in St. Louis when Flathead Indians from beyond the Rockies came looking for Blackrobes to instruct them in Christianity. Two Iroquois living among them had been instructed by former Jesuits during the suppression, and their testimony had aroused the interest of the Flatheads. De Smet responded; he journeyed to the tribe and then proceeded to establish mission stations not only for them, but for many of the tribes in the vast Oregon Territory.

Meanwhile Jesuit confreres of De Smet established colleges all over the U.S. Twenty-one of today's 28 Jesuit colleges and universities were founded in the 19th century. All of these schools experienced a new and demanding challenge; none of them were endowed. They had to charge tuition, and their leaders were forever struggling to raise the needed funds that tuition didn't cover.

De Smet himself led a "double life"—in the U.S. establishing missions all over the Northwest and sixteen times crossing the Atlantic to raise the money to support them. But perhaps his supreme achievement was the relationship of trust he built with the Native Americans. Here is a picture:

> the redoubtable Belgian . . . riding alone--save for a small escort of friendly Sioux and his interpreter—along the Yellowstone River into the camp of 5,000 Sioux intent on war against the white man, and by power of his persuasion and the integrity of his character inducing Sitting Bull to order his braves to bury their hatchets (Bangert, *History of the Society of Jesus*).

De Smet was one of the few lights shining in the darkness of the white man's dealings with the American natives.

VATICAN II AND 20TH-CENTURY JESUITS

Although the climate in the Church and the Society of Jesus in the early 20th century did not generally favor innovation—the *Syllabus of Errors* published by Pius IX (pope 1846-1878) made it uncomfortable to explore or adopt anything "modern"—the beginning of a new era was in the making with fundamental scholarship —French and German and some American—in areas like scripture study, liturgy, church history, theology of the church and of religious life and of the laity. The study was being undertaken by a good number of Dominicans and Jesuits as well as some Benedictines and lay people. It was first of all a "return to the sources" (scripture and other early Christian writings ["church fathers"]) and later a more creative engagement of systematic theology with contemporary philosophy and culture which led to certain theologians being silenced—forbidden to publish or teach. As a result, when Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council in 1959, the Church was ripe for something beyond the standard seminary manuals of theology from the past several centuries. Most Catholics in North America, however, had no inkling of what was about to happen.

John's purpose in calling the Council was to bring the Catholic Church "up to date." And, in effect, "this 21st Ecumenical (that is, worldwide) Council (1962-1965) signaled the Catholic Church's growth from a church of cultural confinement (largely European) to a genuine world church. The Council set its seal on the work of 20th-century theologians that earlier had often been officially considered dangerous or erroneous. Thus the biblical movement, the liturgical renewal and the lay movement were incorporated into official Catholic doctrine and practice.

Here are several significant new perspectives coming from the Council: celebration of liturgy (worship) in various vernacular languages rather than Latin, to facilitate understanding and lay participation; viewing the Church as 'the whole people of God' rather than just as clergy and hierarchy and viewing other Christian bodies (Protestant and Orthodox) as belonging to it; recognizing non-Christian religions as containing truth; honoring freedom of conscience as a basic human right; and finally including in its mission a reaching out to people in all their human hopes, needs, sufferings as an essential part of preaching the gospel.

Of equal importance with these new perspectives is the style or genre in which they were delivered. The documents of earlier councils always had a negative tone; they listed errors to be corrected and condemned anyone who held them. The documents of Vatican II, in contrast, were written in a positive tone, in keeping with the "pastoral" approach that Pope John had called for in his initial remarks to the gathered bishops. These documents addressed not just Catholics, but all people; and they urged ideals that many could embrace.

There were at times heated interventions from the floor and a good deal of maneuvering behind the scene. Yet in the end a huge majority of the bishops voted to approve each of the documents in turn. The conviction and determination of those in the tiny minority, however, did not go away with the closing of the Council" ("Vatican Council II" in "Jesuit A-Z"). Indeed, because they and their successors controlled Vatican offices and the appointment of bishops, they have been able to promote a return to some earlier, pre-Vatican II ways, in particular, a centralization of church governance at the top and censorship of supposed "liberal" theologians.

One of the Jesuits who inspired many just before the Council was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), distinguished French paleontologist, philosopher, poet, mystic, and precursor of today's ecologists in their respect and love for the Earth. He was exiled to China for decades to keep him from expounding his positive view of evolution, but China was exactly where he needed to be in order to participate in the discovery of Peking Man, another link in the evolutionary chain. He was also forbidden to publish his writings. But when he died, his non-Jesuit literary executor could not be prevented from having his works published.

Another 20th-century Jesuit, Karl Rahner (1904-1984) from southwest Germany, was also censored for a time, but later he was brought to the Council as an "expert" by the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna, and he taught behind the scenes there. His thought is again and again recognizable in the Council's documents. When Rahner was asked about the greatest influence on his life and writings, he answered, "The Ignatian Exercises." He did have a sense of closeness to Ignatius, and in the middle of his life he put words into Ignatius' mouth in an essay titled "Ignatius of Loyola Speaks to a Jesuit of Today." Here is one of the crucial points he has his Ignatius make:

> I have encountered God directly and, as well as I could, I wanted to communicate such experiences to others. . . . I have experienced God, the nameless and unfathomable One, silent and yet near to me in Triune self-giving. . . . I have experienced not human words about God, but God's very self. . . . This experience is indeed grace, and there is really no one to whom it is denied. Of this I was quite sure (trans. Modras in *Ignatian Humanism*).

Rahner (Ignatius) is convinced that God communicates with—gives God's self to—every human being— Christian or not, theist or agnostic. This is indeed a gracious God, who while remaining Absolute Mystery, yet comes near to us in grace and love.

A third 20th century Jesuit, Pedro Arrupe (1907-1991), was superior general of the Society of Jesus for nearly 20 years. Elected in 1965 and able therefore to participate in the fourth and last session of the Council, he was the central figure in the renewal of the Society after the Council, paying attention both to the spirit of Ignatius the founder and to the signs of our times. From the Basque country of northern Spain, he left medical school to join the Jesuits, was expelled from Spain in 1932 with all the other Jesuits, studied theology in Holland, and received further training in spirituality and psychology in the U.S. Arrupe then spent 27 years in Japan (where among many other things he cared for victims of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima) until his election in 1965. He is considered the founder of the modern, post-Vatican II Society of Jesus ("Arrupe" in "Jesuit A-Z")

In 1975, Arrupe called the 32nd General Congregation, which proved to be his crowning achievement. Following the lead of a recent international assembly ("synod") of Catholic bishops, the Jesuit delegates came to see that the hallmark of any ministry deserving of the name Jesuit would be its "service of faith" of which the "promotion of justice" is an absolute requirement. For instance, Jesuit education should be noteworthy for the way it helps students—and for that matter, faculty, staff, and administrators—to move, in freedom, toward a mature and intellectually adult faith. This includes enabling them to develop a disciplined sensitivity toward the suffering of our world and a will to act for

the transformation of unjust social structures that cause that suffering" ("The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice" in "Jesuit A-Z"). Arrupe warned his brothers, if they adopted this stance, where it would likely lead. And indeed it did—to martyrdom for all too many Jesuits.

As he grew older and infirm, Arrupe went to see the pope (John Paul II) to indicate his intention to call a general congregation and resign. But the pope was unwilling to let Arrupe proceed. Arrupe spent months trying to see him again. Officials high in the Vatican had evidently told the pope the Jesuits couldn't be trusted, and John Paul did not want to chance an election for a new superior general. The attempt on the pope's life prolonged his unavailability. And then Arrupe, on returning from a long trip abroad, suffered a terrible stroke, losing his gift of many languages and being reduced to virtual silence. He appointed as vicar general Vincent O'Keefe, an American Jesuit and former president of Fordham University as well as his closest adviser through all his generalate. Not very long afterward, the pope sent a message telling him that he and O'Keefe were being replaced by two other Jesuits of the pope's own choosing. It was a blow to Arrupe and to most Jesuits. But then, a year and a half later, saying that he had been "misinformed," John Paul allowed the Society to return to its own governance (*Pedro Arrupe: His Life and Legacy* [Georgetown University DVD, 2007]).

So General Congregation 33 took place (1983) and elected Peter-Hans Kolvenbach (1928-) superior general. It fell to him to build a new bridge of trust between the Society and the Vatican. Among other things that he did well, he seems to have succeeded here. Kolvenbach was from the Netherlands, but had spent most of his Jesuit life in the Middle East (Lebanon) as a graduate student and then teacher of linguistics and a major Jesuit superior. By his own admission, he was relatively "ignorant of matters pertaining to justice and injustice," when he went from Beirut to Rome for Jesuit General Congregation 32 and witnessed the faith-justice emphasis emerge from the Congregation under the leadership of Pedro Arrupe. Still, as superior general, he worked tirelessly in collaboration with his advisors to implement and extend the direction in which his predecessor had been leading the Society ("Kolvenbach" in "Jesuit A-Z"). His major address at Santa Clara in 2000 has become a blueprint for U.S. Jesuit higher education in this century ("Whole Persons of Solidarity for the Real World" in "Jesuit A-Z").

When he was nearly 80 years old, Kolvenbach called the 35th General Congregation (2008) in order to resign and allow the Society to elect a new leader. Perhaps that Congregation's most important accomplishment was the election of Adolfo Nicolas (1936-), a native of Spain who had spent most of his Jesuit life in the Far East. The delegates were evidently thinking of the *global* reality of our broken, lovable 21st century world, and in electing Nicolas they were choosing indeed a great-hearted man with extensive cross-cultural experience and a global worldview ("Nicolas" in "Jesuit A-Z").

EPILOGUE: THE *CRISTO REY* SCHOOL

As a conclusion to this story, we turn to a Jesuit venture that brought together mission, the international character of the Society, the poor, and education. In the early 1990s, then Chicago Jesuit Provincial Bradley Schaeffer and the team around him were looking for something new to serve the poor and disadvantaged in keeping with the call of the church and of Jesuit General Congregation 32.

Schaeffer felt a strong impulse toward serving the struggling Mexican-American community in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. He set up a team to investigate needs and possibilities. And he arranged to bring Chicago Province Jesuit John P. Foley back from Peru where he had spent most of his Jesuit life.

The choice seemed to emerge: a school—a secondary, college-preparatory school—to serve the people of Pilsen. Foley would be president and he was joined by Judy Murphy, a Benedictine sister, as principal. The school would be coeducational and bi-lingual—Spanish and English. Now all they had to do was figure out how to pay for the students' education. Not knowing what to do, they hired a consultant, Rick Murray, a lay person. He came up with the solution: the students would all work an entry-level job at a cooperating company one day a week and go to school four days. Five students would hold down one job. The school would be paid for their work. Preston Kendall, formerly vice president of Washington National Insurance, was hired to direct the work/study component, an essential member of the leadership team. The work-study idea worked. They called the school *Cristo Rey* ("Christ the King"); it began in 1996. The rest is history. Not only was the school a great success, but the Chicago *Cristo Rey* became a model that spread to city after city, sometimes with Jesuit sponsorship, sometimes with that of other religious communities. The "*Cristo Rey* Network" (motto: "Schools that Work") was born and in fifteen short years has grown to 24 schools around the country [fall 2011]. By 2020 the Network Board hopes to have 25,000 students in 50 schools.