

† THE FIRST † JESUITS



JOHN W. O'MALLEY

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Fratribus carissimis in Societate Jesu

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LIKE SO MANY projects, this book seemed relatively easy to write and quick to complete when I first conceived it. The process proved long and arduous and made me contract debts of gratitude that I can never adequately repay. I must at least list the debts, not as if they were weights upon my conscience but to acknowledge what I really take them to be—signs of friendship and of commitment to our common enterprise of trying to understand the past.

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As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

Gerard Manley Hopkins

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The Jesuit astronomer Johann Adam von Bell. From Alfred Hamy, *Galerie illustrée de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Paris, 1893), vol. 7. Photo courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard University. 343

Introduction

“SEVEN SPANISH DEVILS” entered Italy after the year 1530. Thus wrote the English historian and litterateur John Addington Symonds in *The Catholic Reaction*, published a little over a century ago. Among Symonds’s devils was “Jesuitry, with its sham learning, shameless lying, and casuistical economy of sins.”¹ That particular devil in fact arrived in Italy at Venice in 1535 in the person of Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatius was soon joined by nine other men, not all of them Spaniards, who had known each other at the University of Paris and banded together to become the nucleus of the future Society of Jesus.

In 1622, less than a century after the arrival of the group in Italy, Pope Gregory XV canonized two of them—Ignatius and Francis Xavier—and thereby held them up for emulation as models of piety and probity. By simple association the remaining eight somewhat shared the same glory, and one of them, Pierre Favre, was in fact declared a “blessed” by Pope Pius IX in 1872. Also canonized as saints from the first generation of Jesuits were Francisco de Borja (or Borgia, 1671) and Peter Canisius (1925).

Reviled as devils, revered as saints—the Jesuits have evoked these extremes of characterization throughout the 450 years the Society of Jesus has existed. In the course of the centuries more balanced appreciations of the Society have sometimes appeared, but always conditioned by the national, cultural, and religious assumptions of those evaluating it. The story of the Jesuits is, of course, inseparable from the so-called Counter Reformation, and the Jesuits have often been regarded as emblematic of all that was bad or all that was good in that phenomenon.

The past several decades have seen a renewed interest in sixteenth-century Catholicism, inspired in part by the massive scholarship of Hubert Jedin and

his disciples on all aspects of the Council of Trent and in part by the quite different approach of practitioners from the *Annales* school of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. Grounded in better methods of research and less animated by unexamined prejudices than previous scholars, these and other historians are gradually helping us see with new eyes the complexity of the Catholic situation in that religiously troubled era. Accompanying the mass of new information presented in these studies have been reinterpretations of old information and even complete turnarounds in evaluating it.² Our understanding of the Reformation has likewise changed, as scholarship has moved from major figures such as Luther and Calvin to the impact they and their movements had as they were interpreted and put into action at the grass roots.³

Where do the Jesuits fit into this new configuration? We still await an adequate answer. Most popular writing on the Society of Jesus, whether favorable or unfavorable, has been woefully inadequate. Scholarly articles and monographs of reliable quality appear each year, although perhaps not in the quantity one might expect.⁴ Until relatively recently practically all the scholarship came from Jesuits. Generally characterized by technical accuracy, it tended to take up familiar and even familial issues and was relatively unaffected by the new historiography. Even today this scholarship is not always free of hagiographical vestiges, especially when dealing with Ignatius, for whom we still await a biography that satisfies sophisticated canons of scholarship.⁵

There are many exceptions to these generalizations, as for instance Mario Scaduto's two-volume study of the Jesuits in Italy during the generalate of Diego Laínez, early companion of Ignatius and his successor as head of the Society.⁶ The standards of scholarship in the *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu*, the journal of the Jesuits' Historical Institute in Rome, are high, as are those of the monographs published by the same Institute. No book exists in any language, however, that treats the ministries and culture of the first Jesuits in the comprehensive way that I attempt here.

The difficulties of such an undertaking daunt all but the most foolhardy. The amount of documentation is overwhelming. By 1565 the Society numbered about thirty-five hundred members, who were exhorted or obliged to maintain regular correspondence with each other and especially with the Jesuit leadership in Rome. A large number of these letters have survived and been edited in the more than 125 volumes of the *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu* and elsewhere. The letters of Saint Ignatius alone fill 12 volumes in the *Monumenta*, constituting the largest correspondence extant of any six-

teenth-century figure, none excepted.⁷ To all this correspondence must be added the numerous other documents, official and unofficial, that the early Jesuits produced to use as instruments of ministry, to guide them in their way, and to explain to friends and enemies what they were about. The responses of both friends and enemies are many, scattered in various sources.

A second difficulty comes from the great range of activities in which the early Jesuits engaged. They dealt with kings and paupers, with the devout and with public sinners, with popes and prelates, with lowly pastors and with convents of nuns. They excluded no category of the laity from their ministry. By 1565 they were active in many countries of Western Europe, but also in Brazil, India, Japan, and elsewhere. They preached, taught catechism, proposed new sacramental practices, and sought to help orphans, prostitutes, and prisoners in jail. They developed patterns of piety that were peculiarly their own, no matter how traditional the elements upon which they drew. They appropriated both scholastic and humanistic learning and tried to relate these two cultures to one another. They wrote plays and were present at the Council of Trent. They engaged in polemics with Protestants and, to their dismay, found themselves caught in controversies among Catholics. They supported various Inquisitions, yet sometimes found themselves the object of inquisitorial scrutiny and censures. They taught in universities. Within seven or eight years of their papal approval, they founded and operated schools.

Every one of the areas of activity treated in this book has led me into technical and often controversial areas of scholarship. Moreover, the way the Jesuits engaged in even the same activities differed from place to place—Brazil was not Germany, Italy was not France. In such a predicament both author and reader must be guided by clear aims and have secure points of reference.

My first aim in this book is to understand the early Jesuits as they understood themselves. This is pursued by studying what they said about themselves to each other and to outsiders and especially by looking at how they translated that understanding into action in their many ministries and in the style of life they adopted. Exposition of the consistencies and inconsistencies in that translation fall under the same aim.

I also try to discover the origins of the Jesuits' self-understanding and to take account of the contexts into which they inserted themselves that furthered their process of self-definition. That is my second aim. The Jesuits did not think, feel, or act in a vacuum or in the timeless arena of eternal

verities. In a panoramic study like this one, it is impossible to develop these points with the amplitude they deserve. Once a reliable overview is achieved, however, such development can be left to other scholars.

By taking account of so many contexts, the book accomplishes a task that falls outside my formally stated aims. It acts as a series of windows through which we catch glimpses of almost every conceivable aspect of Roman Catholicism in the mid-sixteenth century. These glances are perforce fleeting and originate from a special perspective, but they are richly instructive.

This book spans the first quarter century of the existence of the Society of Jesus, officially founded in 1540 with Pope Paul III's bull *Regimini militantis ecclesiae*. The terminal date of 1565 is somewhat arbitrary. It carries us to the death of Diego Laínez, the second superior general and the only one of Ignatius's companions from the early days to hold that office. It also takes us beyond the end of the Council of Trent in 1563, as well as beyond the death of Calvin in 1564. Concluding with the death of Ignatius in 1556 would have been easier, but the longer viewpoint makes clearer the directions the Society was taking. Although the Society would face many challenges after 1565 and undergo further changes, some of them significant, its design had by that time been set and the most fundamental elements of its "way of proceeding" established.

Among the basic points of reference to hold us on course are, as might be expected, five documents that came exclusively or in large measure from Ignatius. The importance traditionally ascribed to the *Spiritual Exercises*, which he began to compose at Manresa shortly after his conversion in 1521 and which were published in their practically final form in Rome in 1548, emerges from the following pages fully vindicated. The *Exercises* will be discussed at some length under two different aspects in chapters 1 and 3.

That document encapsulated the essence of Ignatius's own spiritual turnaround and presented it in a form meant to guide others to analogous changes of vision and motivation. Ignatius used the *Exercises* as the primary means of motivating his first disciples and prescribed it as an experience for all who later entered the Society. Although at no point intended exclusively for Jesuits, the *Exercises* remained the document that told Jesuits on the most profound level what they were and what they were supposed to be. Furthermore, the *Exercises* set the pattern and goals of all the ministries in which the Society engaged, even though it was not always explicitly recognized as doing so. There is no understanding the Jesuits without reference to that book.

The second document is much less well known and, hence, requires more

description. It is generally referred to as the *Formula of the Institute* and was the result of deliberations in Rome in 1539 by the original companions and a few others. The object of the deliberations was to construct for papal approval the basic elements of the new association they by then hoped to found. At this stage the *Formula* consisted of “Five Chapters” (*Quinque Capitula*), each of which was not much more than a paragraph long. After some changes, the chapters were incorporated into *Regimini militantis ecclesiae* of the next year. They were meant to be and have remained the fundamental charter of the order, of which all subsequent official documents were elaborations and to which they had to conform. The *Formula* is to the Jesuits what the Rule is to other religious orders.⁸ It was composed by a committee, but Ignatius’s role in its articulation was of course pivotal.

In the light of experience, the *Formula* was somewhat revised in 1550 and incorporated into a second bull, *Exposcit debitum*, which was issued by Pope Julius III and served to confirm the Society. Further changes were considered after the death of Ignatius, but none were ever made.⁹ Most variations in the second version were clarifications or specifications of the earlier one, or they took account of changes in actual practice introduced since 1540. For instance, the *Formula* of 1540 indicated the purpose of the Society as “the propagation of the faith and the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine.” In the version of 1550, the first phrase was significantly expanded to read “the defense and propagation of the faith.”

With some discrepancy in wording, both versions listed the ministries by which this purpose was to be accomplished. The latter version was more complete:

public preaching, lectures, and any other ministrations whatsoever of the Word of God, and further by means of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ’s faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments. Moreover, the Society should show itself no less useful in reconciling the estranged, in holily assisting and serving those who are found in prisons and hospitals, and indeed in performing any other works of charity, according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good.¹⁰

Unexceptional though this list might seem upon first reading, it gave the first generation of Jesuits a sense that in their ministries they were different from diocesan priests and from members of religious orders already in existence. They often referred to this list—to these “customary ministries” (*con-*