

THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

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In the year 1534 Henry VIII proclaimed his Act of Supremacy, declaring himself sole head of the Church in England, and thereby laid the cornerstone of the schism that was to develop into a heresy and separate England from the Church of Christ. The same year John Calvin began his career as a heretic and started the movement that worked such havoc in France, in England, and in Scotland. Seventeen years earlier, Luther had hurled defiance at the Pope and begun the breaking up of Christian unity. While all of these agents were working to destroy Christ's work and to dismember His kingdom, Divine Providence was preparing a band of workers to undo the evil that had been done, to strengthen the fortresses of the Old World, and to establish outposts in pagan lands where vast numbers of new members of the great Christian family should replace those who had fallen away or who had been separated from the Church by the disrupting forces of the Reformation.

Ignatius Loyola and his little band of religious pronounced their first vows on the Feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady, August 15th, 1534. This group of zealous men of God did not have any intention, at the outset, of being special counter-reformers, but it was God's will that they should be one of the most powerful factors in undoing the work of Luther and his followers on the continent of Europe, and in swelling the ranks of Christ's army with fresh recruits from the four corners of the earth.

It is not my intention to enter into the story of the foundation of the Society of Jesus. I shall likewise leave aside all the difficulties that accompanied their establishment in the various countries into which they penetrated, to deal exclusively with the work they accomplished, and their rapid development during the first century of their existence. Even such a limited field is too vast to permit of any adequate development within the limits of a half-hour paper. However, I shall endeavour to cover the ground rapidly and I hope to be able to give a brief sketch of the first century of this remarkable Society.

I am assured that this history is known to many of you. I shall, therefore, like Pope St. Gregory in explaining the Gospel, endeavour to treat the subject in such a way as to interest those to whom it is new, without being tiresome to those to whom it is familiar. I cannot hope for St. Gregory's success, but I can at least expect credit for the attempt.

Now, be it known that I am dealing with the Society of Jesus, exclusively. There were other workers at this time. They have been dealt with elsewhere. It is not my purpose to establish comparisons, but to outline the

achievements of one of the groups of workmen who laboured to buttress the Church of God and to extend it.

During the lifetime of St. Ignatius, the Society had members working in Italy, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, and in the pagan lands of Asia, Africa, and South America.

IN ITALY

In 1539, Fathers Broet and Simon Rodriguez were sent to Sienna, LeJay to Bognerea, and Brescia, LeFevre and Lainez to Parma, and Bobadilla to Naples. A letter written by the founder tells us that in 1545 the Jesuit house in Rome had 30 to 40 members (professed).

These missionaries spent their time preaching and catechising, explaining the Scriptures and lecturing on theological questions, as well as looking after the sick in hospitals and visiting prisoners – in short, they were actively engaged in spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

In a short time a great change came over the districts where these holy men worked and prayed. The sacraments were received, fraternal charity was better practised, peace reigned and the spirit of Christ was again apparent in these parts of His mystical Body. The clergy, impressed by the example of these new apostles, began to understand their duties better, monasteries were reformed and brought back to their pristine fervour.

Such unexpected success may be accounted for in various ways. One of the chief reasons for it was the appropriate character of the new preaching. The Jesuits preached fundamental doctrines, the great truths that are necessary to salvation. They preached with great clearness, like men who had meditated these eternal truths, and they expounded the traditional doctrines with the skill of learned theologians; they combined intellectual knowledge of truth with a great love of God which lent unction and persuasiveness to their words. Above all, they knew how to adapt their preaching to the intellectual calibre of their hearers, the learned and the illiterate. They even had special courses of instruction for priests.

They spent long hours in the confessional where they could be found at all hours of the day and night absolving sinners and giving to each individual those special instructions which fit his particular needs.

Of course, they did not neglect to give the Spiritual Exercises to all who wished to take them, and undoubtedly did more in this way than in all their other activities, because they were thus enabled to form an *élite* who by their example would continue the preaching of the Fathers when they should have passed on to other parts.

GERMANY

Father LeFevre, about the year 1540, received orders from the Pope to accompany Ortiz, chargé d'Affaires of Charles V, to the colloquy of Worms. He was the first Jesuit that the reformers met. He did not deal directly with them, but during his first sojourn in the country he performed a very fruitful ministry among the prelates and gentlemen of the Emperor's court, by his conversations, by giving the Spiritual Exercises, and by his efficacious work in the confessional. During his second visit to the Empire he entered into open conflict with the Archbishop of Cologne, Hermann de Weid, who was supporting the reformers, and ably upheld the clergy against him.

LeJay and Bobadilla came later, and, although they did not succeed in learning German, they did much preaching in Latin, Italian, and Spanish. Their work was confined to the clergy and the gentlemen of the court. Bobadilla took the initiative in founding the first German Seminary for the education of candidates for the priesthood. This was in 1552. In twenty years the college gave Germany one hundred and sixty pious, zealous, learned priests, well equipped to guide their people out of the wilderness into which they had been led by the reformers.

IRELAND

The mission to Ireland was less successful at first than the missions in other countries. Paul III sent Broet and Salmeron to Ireland in 1541 with full powers of Papal Nuncios. The Archbishop of Armagh was in Rome, where he had been compelled to take refuge. Being blind, he was considered incapable of doing any effective work in his native land, although it would appear that he later returned to Ireland and lived many years there governing the Church, and succeeding in spite of his blindness. (Historians do not agree on this point.) The two priests remained in the country only 34 days. Their work was not as successful as they would have wished it to be, but Almighty God reserved a fruitful ministry for them in Ireland for some years later.

PORTUGAL

The mission in Portugal began almost by accident. Simon Rodriguez and Francis Xavier arrived in that country in 1540 on their way to the Indies. Like St. Paul, they preached on their way, and were so popular that the king wanted to keep them in the country. St. Ignatius effected a compromise with the king, advising Rodriguez to stay in Portugal, and sending Francis Xavier on to the Indies. Rodriguez was given several helpers, and in 1542 he was able to establish a Jesuit college at Coimbra, which was later given the Faculty of Arts of the University.

The Society had ninety-two scholastics and twenty-three priests in Portugal in 1547.

SPAIN

Although half of the first companions of St. Ignatius were Spaniards, most of them were dwelling outside of Spain, and no establishment was made in that country until 1544. The first Jesuit to come there was Araoz, who, though not yet ordained, preached with great success at Barcelona and elsewhere. After his ordination he continued his work and in 1547 there were seven Jesuit establishments in the country, united into a province, with Araoz as provincial. The number of members of the Society was forty-one (41).

LeFevre also visited Spain, but he spent only a short time there (1541-2 and 1545-6). He gave the Spiritual Exercises to many gentlemen of the king's court, and was successful in gaining powerful protectors for the Society. He also has the distinction of receiving the first two Spanish novices, in 1541.

One of the greatest glories of the Jesuits in Spain is Francis Borgia, Viceroy of Catalonia, who entered the Society, and later became Superior-General. His chief work in Spain was the establishment of a University College, the first example of a Jesuit College open to students from outside the order. (This was while he was still Duke of Gandia.)

CORSICA

About 1552, the Pope sent Fathers Landini and Emmanuel de Montemayor to Corsica.

AT THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

By far the greatest act of the counter-reformation was the Council of Trent (1545-1563). As the Jesuits were such active counter-reformers, it is but fitting that a word be said about their part in the Council.

In 1546 St. Ignatius, at the Pope's request for three theologians, sent LeFevre, Lainez, and Salmeron to Trent. LeFevre died on the way but his two companions arrived and found LeJay there ahead of them, representing the Cardinal Archbishop of Augsburg who could not be present in person. LeJay thus had a consulting voice in the Council, and was admitted to the general congregations otherwise limited to prelates. The records of the Council show that he expressed his views, during the latter part of the fourth session, on the decree concerning Holy Scripture and Tradition. He took an active part in the subsequent sessions of the Council until its first interruption in 1547, and almost all his views are incorporated in the final canons.

Lainez and Salmeron were no less prominent. The papal legates were so impressed with their knowledge of theology that they determined that one of them should speak among the first in all committees, in order to state the questions clearly, and that the other should always speak near the last to correct any errors that might have crept in during the discussion.

AMONG THE INFIDELS DURING THE GENERALSHIP OF IGNATIUS

Francis Xavier: Francis Xavier, the greatest missionary of modern times, set out for the Indies in 1540 with all the powers of an Apostolic Delegate. He set sail from Lisbon in 1541, skirted the coast of Africa, preached the Gospel in Mozambique, made many conversions on the island of Sokotra, and finally arrived at Goa, the capital of Portuguese India, in 1542. There was a bishop at Goa, which was considered a Christian city, but the people were living like pagans and Francis Xavier began his work among them. Not until he had converted large numbers of them to a more Christian way of life did he turn his attention to the natives along the coast and on the islands. He preached in Ceylon, Sumatra, and many more islands in the vicinity.

In 1549 he left his newly-formed Christian settlements in India and the College of Goa to Jesuit companions who had come to him from Europe, and set out for Japan. He was successful in that country despite the opposition of the Buddhist priests, making three thousand converts at Amanguchi alone.

His attention was now turned to China. He set out for that country, but Almighty God called him to his eternal reward before he could land there, Nov. 27, 1552.

In 1555 John Nunez Barreto became Patriarch of Ethiopia with two coadjutor Bishops (Jesuits). Ignatius, who was opposed to accepting honours for the members of the Society, finally consented to this because he felt that these missionaries were really accepting a most difficult task, and that, although they were to be invested with the fulness of the priesthood, and all the dignity connected therewith, they would still, on account of the state of the country in which they were to labour, be doing the work of the humblest missionaries.

As early as 1549, Monald de Nobrega inaugurated a mission in Brazil. Four years later a province was erected there with four houses, of which two were colleges. The number of members there in 1555 was thirty.

At the death of Ignatius there were one thousand members in the Society, spread out over the face of the earth in one hundred posts. The little flock of religious had grown to a large band of soldiers of Christ, whose fame had gone out to the whole world.

Not only were the Jesuits numerous at this period of their existence, but they were well organized. There were twelve provinces – in the Society – in Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the Indies, Brazil, West Africa, Ethiopia. Rome had three colleges under the direct government of the General.

In Rome the Society had established special works among which I should like to mention the Catechumenate. St. Ignatius himself converted forty Jews in one year. There was also the St. Martha House for penitents, and the St. Catherine House of Shelter for poor girls who were living in dangerous situations.

UNDER LAINEZ (1556-1565)

Under the second General the membership of the Society was doubled, so that at his death there were 2,000 in 130 houses. Six new provinces were constituted. The number of colleges in Italy was increased from thirteen to twenty-eight.

Spain made great strides at this time, and in 1565 there were four provinces and twenty-seven colleges in that country. Sardinia got two colleges. Germany and Hungary saw the rise of five colleges. Austria became a province. Two new provinces were constituted in Germany, Belgium and the Rhine. In France, where there had been Jesuits from the very beginning, the Society succeeded in being registered, and henceforth spread rapidly. Canisius opened up a field of action in Poland by establishing a college there in 1558. In Asia and Africa the number of converts increased.

One of the most important and prominent undertakings of the Society at this time was the assuming the direction of the Roman Seminary (1564). This was the first seminary to be established in conformity with the decrees of the Council of Trent. A commission was appointed to look into the matter of organizing the new institution, and it was of the opinion that it should be given to the Jesuits.

UNDER FRANCIS BORGIA (1565-1572)

The seventeen years of Borgia's generalship were very fruitful years. The Society increased in numbers to 3,906, of whom 1,172 were priests. The saintly General was able to constitute a new province in Rome, one in Peru, and one in Mexico. France was endowed with six new colleges, and Poland with three. In 1566 the first Jesuits arrived in North America: Father Martinez was martyred in Florida. In 1572 Father Pedro Sanchez established the province of Mexico.

UNDER MERCURIAN (1573-1580)

Father Mercurian was very fortunate in recruiting work and at his death there were five thousand members in the Society. It was during his generalship that Fathers Persons and Campion began the English missions. Infidel countries were especially attended to by the appointment of Visitors who were sent out with full authority to do what they judged best for the correction of any abuses that existed and the inauguration of new activities among the missionaries they visited.

In Rome, Father Leunis began his famous Congregations of the B.V.M. for college students. They were so popular and produced such happy results that soon all classes of society had their congregations, and many were the works of zeal and charity inspired by these pious associations.

Another work undertaken under Mercurian was the establishment of Pontifical Seminaries, or boarding houses connected with the Jesuit Colleges where young men were prepared for the priesthood at the Pope's expense. These seminaries were for those who did not have sufficient means to pay their way through college. They attended the lectures, in the Jesuit Colleges, and were generally looked after by the Fathers.

The first of these seminaries was established in Vienna, in 1574. They became very numerous in the German countries in a few years. Others were opened among the Slavs, the Poles, the Tcheks, the Illyrians. There was also one at Vilna in Lithuania for Catholics of the Ruthenian rite.

It was also during this period that the Society directed six English colleges in various countries of Europe for the benefit of the students from the British Isles who could not get a Catholic education in their own land. They also had a college for Greeks and Maronites in Rome.

By this time France had fourteen Jesuit colleges, and it is estimated that the average number of students in each was one thousand. The Society also engaged quite actively in preaching, in teaching catechism, and in hospital work. Their part in the latter work was especially notable during the plague in Paris (1577-1586).

UNDER CLAUDIUS AQUAVIVA (1581-1615)

Under Claudius Aquaviva the Society increased in numbers to 8,519, distributed throughout thirty-two provinces. A fact worthy of mention is that at Aquaviva's death the Society conducted two hundred and forty-five colleges.

Many of the saints of the Society were active members at this time. In Japan there were the first martyrs of that country, Paul Miki, John de Goto, James Kisai, all Japanese. These three Jesuits, with six Franciscans, were the first missionaries to die for the faith in Japan. Other illustrious names are: Aloysius de Gonzaga, Alphonsus Rodriguez, Edmund Campion, and Peter Canisius.

It was in 1586, during the generalship of Aquaviva, that the Jesuits inaugurated their work in Paraguay, erecting colleges and other houses for white settlers, and organizing the far-famed Reductions for the Indian tribes. These were colonies where the Indians were gathered together and kept by themselves. No white man except government officials was allowed to enter these regions. The first Reduction was begun in 1609 and was at Guayara, the second in 1610 at Reo Paronaponemo. By 1630 there were fourteen Reductions in Paraguay, with a population of ten thousand Indians.

It is interesting to note, in connection with this work, that on Septuagesima Sunday, Jan. 24, 1934, three of the earliest workers among the Indians of Paraguay, who suffered martyrdom, were declared *Blessed*. These were Roque Gonzalez de Santa Cruz, Alfonso Rodriguez, and Juan de

Castillo. The first mentioned was a native of Paraguay who entered the Society of Jesus in 1609. The earliest existant geographical and physical description of that country was written by him. These three Jesuits were not only preachers of the Gospel. They were also explorers, pathfinders, educators, and instruments of civilization and culture in South America.

In 1598, two Jesuits, Mediano and Figuero, founded a college in Bagota.

Peter Claver, the greatest missionary of the South American continent, arrived at Cartagena in 1610. There he took care of the unfortunate negroes who were being brought into the country in tens of thousands to be sold into slavery. They were filthy and diseased, and in general very loathsome. Peter Claver fed, nursed, and buried them.

In Mexico the earliest efforts were directed towards educational institutions. Schools, colleges, and a Seminary were founded, and the great Colegio Maximo of St. Peter and St. Paul, which received its Papal charter sixty years before Harvard University was opened. The first mission to the Indians was at Luis de la Paz, and the missions were steadily extended towards the northwest of New Spain. By 1624 the number of their converts on the western coast was estimated at 100,000.

The Philippines offered a field of labour for the zealous sons of Ignatius. As early as 1591 they established a house at Manila. In 1595 they opened a college and seminary at San José. It is still in existence, the oldest college of the Archipelago.

The glorious history of the Canadian Missions, begun under Aquaviva, needs no telling here.

The first Jesuits to come to Canada were Fathers Biard and Massé, who arrived in Acadia in 1611. They were joined by Gilbert du Thet and Fr. Quentin in 1613. In this same year they moved to Mt. Desert Island, from which they were driven away by Argall, a Virginian privateer. In the attack on Mt. Desert Father Du Thet was killed. He was the first Jesuit, among those who worked in Canada, to lose his life in the new world.

The first Jesuits to arrive at Quebec landed on June 15, 1625. They were Charles Lalement, Massé, Brébeuf, and two lay-brothers. In July of the same year they were at Three Rivers, from which they immediately set out for the Georgian Bay region by way of the Ottawa River, the Mattawa, Lake Nipissing and the French River. They began their missionary work at Penetanguishene Bay and in the territory now known as Simcoe county. They returned to France after the capture of Quebec by Kirke, but came again to Canada shortly after the treaty of St-Germain-en-Laye. In 1634 Brébeuf, Daniel and Davost were back in the Huron country to resume their labours.

THE RATIO STUDIORUM

Francis Borgia, while still Duke of Gandia, founded a University College — a mixed college where Jesuit scholastics and lay students lived and studied

together. This was the first example of such an institution within the ranks of the Society. To Claudius Aquaviva belong the honours of having promulgated the "Ratio Studiorum" or plan of studies, which is still in use.

I shall not enter into a discussion of the merits of this constitution of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. Suffice it to say that it was the first plan or complete programme of studies from the elementary Latin class to the end of the Theology course which offered a system of education that would suit both aspirants to the priesthood and the students whose lot was to be cast in secular callings. Moral and religious training was stressed as of first importance. The sons of St. Ignatius aimed at forming Christian scholars and in that work their success through the ages can be measured by the number of colleges and universities they conduct, the high quality of their graduates, and the reputation they enjoy as educators.

UNDER VITELLESCHI (1615-1644)

The last thirty years of the first century were guided by Vitelleschi. At his death the Society had reached the number of fifteen thousand five hundred and forty-four (15,544) members. Among those who have since been raised to the altars are St. Francis Regis, St. Peter Claver, St. John Berchmans, St. Stanislaus Kostka, and St. Robert Bellarmine. More than two hundred Jesuits in pagan lands died as martyrs of duty during these last thirty years, and more than seven hundred died as a result of their heroism and devotedness in the service of the sick.

March 25, 1634, Fathers White and Althous landed in Maryland, the first Jesuits to labour in that portion of North America.

CONCLUSION

Pope Sixtus V, who, among others, was somewhat astounded at the name chosen by the disciples of Ignatius, the "Society of Jesus," is reported to have asked, during a discussion: "Who are these Fathers that we cannot even name without uncovering our heads?" History bears testimony to their work, and it is now evident that we can all, with very good grace, "take off our hats to them," if one may use such an expression without detracting from the dignity of the subject. During the first century of its existence the Society brought into the Church as many converts as the Reformers had led away. In Europe they infused new life into the clergy, stimulated the fervour of the laity, and struck terror into the hearts of the heretics. Their seminaries gave the Church a zealous, learned, pious clergy. Their colleges prepared new generations of enlightened Catholic laymen. Their Spiritual Exercises established a Catholic *élite* wherever they were given. In foreign lands new Catholic communities grew up and flourished. Truly may it be said of them:

"Their sound hath gone out into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world."

They were the avowed enemies of those very movements that led to the Reformation. Nationalism, that had weakened the influence of the Church in Germany, France, and England, caused them a great deal of trouble and was one of the causes that led to their suppression. The Jesuits were symbols of Rome. They upheld the traditional doctrine of the supremacy of the Pope and the supra-national character of the Church. When the College of Coimbra was opened, the Portuguese resented the Spanish Fathers there, much to the dismay of Ignatius, who regarded his subjects as members of the Society, not as representatives of any particular country. The matter was settled after a short time, but it was only one of the many instances of this most disastrous and disrupting state of mind that the holy Founder had to deal with. Gallicanism retarded the establishment of the Society in France. English nationalism caused the Jesuits and the Seminary priests to be particularly distasteful to the enemies of the Church in England. Spanish nationalism caused great trouble within the ranks of the Society during the generalship of Aquaviva. In all parts of the world where the state has attempted to control the Church, the Jesuits have been the first victims to be sacrificed, because they stand for the Catholicity of the Church, and although, like Our Lord Himself and His Vicar on earth, they wish to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, they are careful above all to render unto God the things that are God's. They remind the state that there are things that are not Caesar's.

In these times, when nationalism is running amok and threatening to destroy our civilization, there is only one anchor of hope, and that is that the world will hearken to the voice of His Holiness the Pope, Christ's Vicar on earth. The Church, at all times, has struggled and fought to maintain the Kingdom of Christ, "a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace." Every disrupting influence, every movement or condition that has torn the seamless robe of Christ, has begun by disobeying His teachings and the commands of the Pope. All improvement will come from obedience to him who heads the Church whose mission is to teach, rule, and sanctify the world.

It is very fitting, therefore, that the Canadian Catholic Historical Association, on the fourth centenary of the founding of the Society of Jesus, should render due meed of praise to that army of Christian soldiers who have so nobly fought the battles of their King, whose kingdom is not of this world. Long may they prosper, and may the God of armies who has decorated so many of these valiant men for services rendered on the battle-field, raise up many more like them, imbued with the spirit of St. Ignatius – a spirit of devotion to Christ's cause, and of obedience to the slightest wish of His Vicar upon earth.

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