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From the Editor: What 50 Years may Mean

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From the Editor

What 50 Years May Mean

When we entered the Society of Jesus at Saint Andrew on Hudson in 1957, the church was, as far as we knew, set on its course. I had come out of Fordham University and the U. S. Army Artillery, as a First Lieutenant accustomed to taking orders from higher officers and was warned that, as a Jesuit, I might receive more orders I might not agree with. But that's how armies work.

One "order" emphasized that the young religious be formed sealed off from outside world "distractions." No newspapers, magazines or radio and only rare visitors. So when my father, a newspaper man, sent me clippings of James Reston columns from the *New York Times*, sometimes my mail was opened and the clippings removed. One evening I saw a mysterious streak of light sail across the horizon sky. I found out later it was Sputnik, a Cold War reminder.

In 1958 the novice master announced that Pope Pius XII had died and John XXIII had been elected and, soon after, called for Vatican Council II. But we were kept in pious ignorance while Pope John threw open the windows and let the 19th and 20th century intellectual world — personified in Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud — come flying in. A lot has happened since then.

By 1960 the American Assistancy reached its peak of 8,338 men, and the New York Province had two novitiates. The summer I joined 43 entered at St. Andrew and 33 at Bellarmine College on Lake Champlain. Today, from St. Andrew six remain, from Bellarmine, seven. The national headcount is 2574. In June three priests were ordained from the combined provinces of New England, New York, and Maryland, and three novices entered. And 300 Jesuits and lay colleagues from the three met for three days at Fordham, celebrated their new relationship as one unified province, confident that our future is bright.

This issue of *Conversations* examines what has happened in Jesuit higher education over those years and spells out the basis of that confidence. The church is still dealing with the council's changes. Some have resisted and want to turn back the clock. Others fear that certain theologians and members of women's religious orders have, in their interpretation of Vatican II, exceeded the limits of orthodoxy. On some campuses this is a critical time during which freedom of expression may be in jeopardy. Meanwhile, the church is shrinking. For various reasons —

the alienation of women, the sex abuse crisis, the apparent isolation of church authorities — too many people have stopped calling themselves Catholics.

Those who were on Jesuit campuses in the 1960s and early '70s recall the student strikes, building occupations, marches and candle-light vigils for civil rights and in opposition to the Vietnam War. Jesuits at the old Woodstock Maryland seminary seized the opportunity to experiment with the liturgy: they wrote their own liturgical prayers, tried them out in small group daily Masses where each person improvised opening and closing prayers, and shared in the free-wheeling homily. One music group, the Woodstock Jesuit Singers, made it to the Ed Sullivan Show. The spirit of experiment carried over onto the campus liturgies, some in the campus chapel, weekdays at midnight, sitting in a circle, informally dressed, or in the resident Jesuit's dorm room. There was a strong feeling that the Spirit really was at work.

Meanwhile, in a dramatic response to the demand for change, the Society closed its isolated country seminaries and moved to the big university campuses where, with their lay peers, Jesuits mingled with male and female students and faculty of every age, shape, color, social class, religion, sexual orientation, belief and unbelief. Jesuits and lay colleagues took risks and threw themselves into the world they were committed to serve. Some Jesuits left; others, under stress, grew stronger.

In this issue of *Conversations* we open with essays on the tensions within the council itself, ecumenical dialogue, challenges to Jesuit identity, the struggle of philosophy and theology, once the spiritual and intellectual core of the curriculum, to adapt. Next a campus tour introduces new institutions set up to integrate Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists into the campus culture. Then reports on Ignatian spirituality programs and social projects, which sometimes restore the religious faith of the alienated, plus student essays and book reviews. Finally, to knit the issue together we present the AJCU-developed seven key characteristics of Jesuit university education.

What do we conclude from our review of the last 50 years? We have much to be proud of. We have much more work to do. ■

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