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Book Reviews: Thomas Worcester, S.J., editor, *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*, Cambridge University Press, 2008

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The Cambridge Companion to The Jesuits, Edited by Thomas Worcester, S.J.

Cambridge University Press, 2008. 361 pp. \$29 paper.

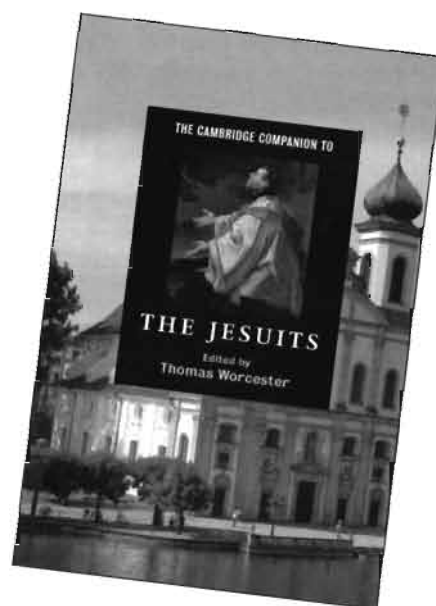
By William Neenan, S.J.

When asked by a colleague, friend or graduate of a Jesuit school “Will you recommend a good book that will tell me about these Jesuits?” often I have been at a loss. Of course I can recommend the masterful *The First Jesuits* by John W. O’Malley, S.J. which recounts the early years of the Jesuits in the 16th century. But what about Jesuit history after those foundational years? Francis Xavier and Japan and Mateo Ricci and the Chinese Rites controversy? The North American Martyrs, Pere Marquette and New France? The Reductions in South America? Were there ever any women Jesuits? And why no Jesuit religious sisters similar to the Benedictine, Franciscan and Dominican congregations? What was the Jesuit involvement in the great scientific developments of the 16th and 17th centuries? Why were the Jesuits suppressed by a Pope? Haven’t the Jesuits been known in history as strong supporters of the Papacy? Why were the Jesuits restored by another Pope in the aftermath of the Napoleonic era? How has this restored Society differed from the pre-Suppression Society? And how did the Jesuit educational tradition blossom in the

United States to such an extent that David Riesman asserted there are two great brands in American higher education, the Ivy League and Jesuit education? And what has been the Jesuit contribution to theological thinking in the Vatican II era?

There is now a book that addresses these and similar questions in a compact format. *The Jesuits* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) edited by Thomas Worcester, S.J., an Associate Professor of history at the College of the Holy Cross, includes eighteen essays that serve not only as an introduction to Jesuit life and lore of nearly five centuries but will be informative for many who know the Jesuits quite well including Jesuits themselves. The overall quality of the essays is quite good but as might be expected some are more arresting than others. I found three to be most enlightening. “The Jesuit Enterprise in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century Japan” by M. Antoni J. Ucerler, S.J. is the remarkable account of Christianity in Japan in the wake of Francis Xavier’s arrival in 1549. Over the next century, the Christian population reached nearly ten percent before persecution and expulsion obliterated nearly all traces of Christianity. Shusako Endo’s powerful novel *Silence* might well serve as a companion piece to this essay.

Although Jesuits are involved in



a variety of apostolates, they are often identified in the popular mind as educators. Gerald McKeivitt, S.J.’s “Jesuit Schools in the USA, 1814-c. 1970” recounts the remarkable development of Jesuit educational institutions in the United States that were in large part established by foreigners—Belgians, French expatriates, Neapolitans and German exiles of Bismarck’s Kulturkampf. Although this account does not break new ground, it usefully describes the century and a half evolution in Jesuit education—from the classical academies of the nineteenth century to the Jesuit colleges and universities of today. This evolution often proceeded in response

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to external challenges. A principal challenge to Jesuit education today is internal—how in the face of the decline in the number of Jesuit educators to maintain the vitality and Jesuit character of this remarkable apostolate that has had such a positive impact on the life of the Catholic Church.

Jesuit education in the United States dates its origin to the restoration of the Society of Jesus in 1814, some forty-one years after its suppression by Pope Clement XIV. The suppression of the Society of Jesus was “one of the most mysterious matters in the history of the Church” according to John Henry Newman as quoted in Jonathan Wright’s essay “The Suppression and Restoration” (p.263). According to Wright, it is not possible to identify one or two over-arching explanations for the Society’s destruction. An earthquake in Lisbon, theological disputes with Jansenists in France, Spanish legislation forbidding the wearing broad-band hats all played a role as did a

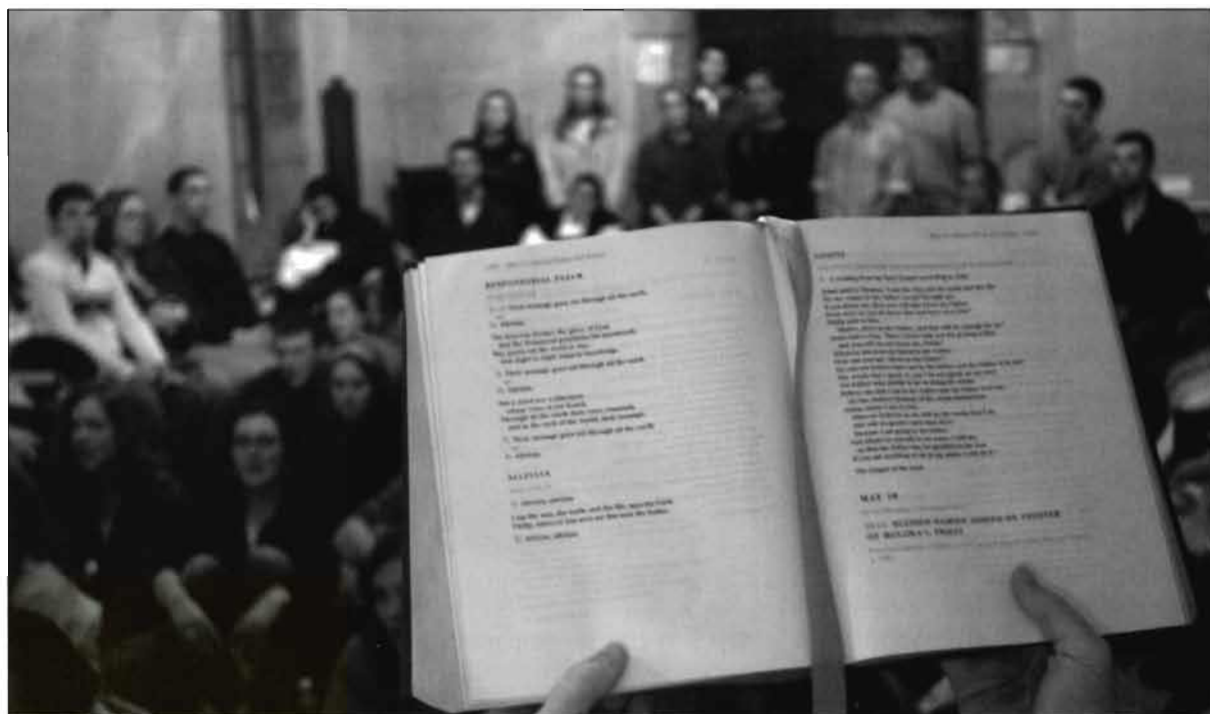
Jesuit’s financial machinations involving trade between Martinique and France. These and numerous other grievances, real and contrived, created a climate in which the Pope with some reluctance issued his brief of suppression in 1773.

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hundreds of Jesuits were shipped to the Papal States and unceremoniously dumped on shore with no means of support. Most egregious was the treatment of Father Lorenzo Ricci,

the Superior General of the Jesuits. For the final two years of his life, this seventy-year old man was imprisoned in Castel Sant’Angelo, a stone’s throw from St. Peter’s Basilica in a cell with boarded windows. In an earlier century, Galileo Galilei also ran afoul of the Church. In contrast to Ricci, however, Galileo ended his days in the comfort of a Tuscan villa overlooking Florence meeting regularly with his beloved daughter, a nun in a nearby convent. The Church has apologized for its treatment of Galileo. Perhaps in this confessional age the Church might consider apologizing to the Society of Jesus for its suppression, the mistreatment of thousands of its members and the imprisonment of its Superior General. ■

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