
John W. Padberg, S.J.
The Men and Movements Who Made the Modern Society of Jesus

Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., The American Jesuits: A History


By John W. Padberg, S.J.

The first Jesuit to set foot on the territory of what came to be the United States was a thirty-five-year old Spaniard, Pedro Martinez, in 1566. This engagingly written, direct and honest story of the American Jesuits starts there and ends as the Society is preparing for its thirty-fifth General Congregation in 2008. The book’s four sections follow a generally chronological sequence, In the Beginning, Suppression and Return, Engaging the World and The Modern Society Emerges. Not meant to be a primary-source, scholarly-researched endeavor, it nonetheless does draw on excellent sources as the notes and bibliography attest. Neither is it a traditional institutional narrative nor an analytic history. Rather, the author, an accomplished writer, most often attaches the story to particular Jesuits, representative or iconic figures, who embody or illustrate or provide a launching point for a period, a movement, a problem, an accomplishment, an attitude, a success, a mistake. The best way here to illustrate that characteristic is to note within the book’s headings the names of some, only some, of the men through whose exploits the story progresses.

‘In the Beginning’ moves through a brief account of the life of Ignatius Loyola, the Spiritual Exercises, and the founding of the Society of Jesus. The world scene of the early Society involved the intertwining of church and state and the problems and opportunities of adaptation to new cultures (Ricci and De Nobili) for instance. Then come the Maryland beginnings (Andrew White) and pioneers such as martyrs and missionaries East, Southwest and Mid-continent.
Eva Nagy against the world meant also engaging World War II in which about 250 Jesuits served as chaplains. That world brought to the fore social questions and responses such as the Institute of Social Order, Labor Schools ("Pete Corridan" the "waterfront priest"), racial integration (Louis Fitzer, Joseph Fichot). The golden age, especially of Jesuit recruitment and of college and university expansion, lasted through the 50s and on into the 60s (Paul Rohmer, Michael Walsh) even if it had earlier taken a long struggle especially in finding resources (Santa Clara, Loyola Marymount, Gonzaga as successful examples). But how was one to adapt the schools to the structures of American education, to face facts and to raise standards? An internal 1930s assessment (the McElvane Report) had noted so devastatingly the shortcomings of Jesuit higher education that it was initially suppressed. It took several decades to put its recommen-
dations fully into effect.

The Modern Society Emerges with Vatican II and General Congregations 13-14. It was made possible, the author says, by several interlocking "seeds toward freedom," such as the ability for positive self-criticism the church's growing con-
mittance to a "worldly" problem, poor people, the influence of Fr. Giuntini of Chaluit and the theolo-
y of Karl Rahner. Those and other influences were not always easily assimilated but they were helped by such things as the liturgical move-
ment (Gerard Ellery) the burgeoning of scripture studies (the Catholic Biblical Association) the increasing call for high intellectual standards (John Tracy Ellis, himself not a Jesuit). The Council and the congru-
egations (Pédro Armpot) with their reformulations of old truths and pas-
sionate agreement or opposition thereon are vividly portrayed, as are personal and institutional crises, col-
lege and university upheavals, sociol-
ary mores, Vatican censorship, and in most recent years such striking and successful innovations as Navinity and Cristo Rey schools, and the mul-
tiple ways in which Jesuit institutions as a whole are changing.

To be honest, the publisher has not well served the author in its copy edits and proofreaders. There are too many unfortunate editorial over-
sights and errors. But the merits of the book surely outweigh them. It will be of great interest and value to all United States Jesuits and their friends and colleagues. I surely hope that directors of Jesuit works put it into the hands of their coworkers, their faculty members and adminis-
trators and their boards of trustees.

What will the future hold? The book ends by quoting Karl Rahner: "One thing remains certain. It is possi-
ble for men to know God." The Jesuits' role is to help people find God "in everything." "Will there be enough Jesus to do this? How many they are numerically and in proportion to mankind as a whole is ultimately of no importance, if the church alone as the sacrament of salvation of the whole world remains present in it."