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Book Reviews: Catholic Higher Education in Protestant America: The Jesuits and Harvard in the Age of the University, Kathleen A. Mahoney, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003

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Kathleen A. Mahoney, Catholic Higher Education in Protestant America: The Jesuits and Harvard in the Age of the University.


By Kevin P. Quinn, S.J.

The process of “negotiating identity”—Alice Galin’s trenchant phrase—for American Catholic higher education is not new. It did not suddenly begin in response to the 1990 apostolic constitution Ex Corde Ecclesiae or earlier with the 1967 Land O’Lakes statement on the nature of the contemporary Catholic university. In Catholic Higher Education in Protestant America, Kathleen Mahoney explains how a single event in 1893—the refusal of Harvard Law School to recognize the degrees of Jesuit colleges—was a defining moment in the history of American Jesuit (and by extension, more of Catholic’s higher education, illuminating “on whose terms and on what bases Catholics and Catholic colleges would participate in American higher education in the age of the university.” The controversy between Harvard and the Jesuits is both the focus of this book and a lens through which Mahoney, the president of the New York City-based Manhattan Foundation, enters “the turbulent century of Jesuit higher education and the social, cultural, religious, and theological factors that shaped the Jesuits’ responses to the rise of a new academic order.” Those leaders of American Catholic intellectual life who struggle to discern a Catholic identity in higher education appropriate today should remember the common sense of naturalist George Santayana—“Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it”—and read this book.

How the Jesuits—primarily those from the Maryland-New York Province—weathered the academic revolution in the late-nineteenth century, wherein the age of the denominational college gave way to the age of the non-sectarian research university, is a fascinating story. Two interrelated crises in the late 1890s forced the Jesuits and other Catholic educators to reckon with the rise of this new academic order: the aforementioned Law School controversy and the decision by too many Catholic colleagues to patronize non-Catholic institutions. (By 1893, Harvard enrolled more Catholic undergraduates (300+) than any Catholic college.)

Mahoney traces the Jesuits’ conundrum in America to an unresolved tension between two Jesuit resources: the Ratio Studiorum and the Constitutions of the Society. The Ratio of 1599 which remains the classic text was a well-developed pedagogical guide that “mixed elements of Renaissance humanism with aspects of medieval scholasticism; put another way, it mixed the science of man with the science of God.” It came to define Jesuit education. Yet Ignatius of Loyola also wrote that Jesuit educators should always take “into account circumstances of times, places, persons, and other such factors, as seems expedient in Our Lord” (Constitutions IV, 351). To adopt the new academic order with the world-affirming spirit of Ignatius or to maintain a world-suspicious attitude that condemned Protestant-inspired liberalism and modernism was the dilemma for American Jesuit educators as the age of the university opened.

Mahoney’s genius is to organize her account of reluctant adaptation around three of Ignatius’ words in the Constitutions—times, places, and persons—in order to argue for three broader challenges facing Catholic higher education at the turn of the century. The Jesuits’ problem of time was in the form of the “modern imperative” and its increasingly powerful sway in America that helped propel the university movement. Likewise, the problem of place was Protestant America...


By Patrick Howell, S.J.

This engaging study, which examines the influence of Renaissance humanism on Ignatian spirituality, begins with a summary of the well-known features of the life of Ignatius, explores the dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises, and then creates five vivid portraits of Jesuits who profoundly exemplified Ignatian humanism.

Modras, a professor of theology at St. Louis University, skillfully summarizes familiar material. For instance, he deftly unfolds the daily examination of conscience, which lies at the heart of Ignatian spirituality; 1) a prayer for light to the Holy Spirit, for insight into the mystery of God; 2) an attitude of gratitude; 3) a review of the gifts we have committed; 4) attending to the welter of feelings arising through key events; and 5) then a look to the future for guidance from God.

Similarly Modras summarizes six distinctive features of Ignatian Spirituality: 1) Centeredness on a Christ with a Mission; 2) a panoramic Trinitarian view of salvation; 3) the liberality of Grace; 4) Faith as Trust; 5) Service in the world, which is closely interwoven with 6) Discerning God's Will. Modras makes clear that God's will and our deepest desires are

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