



Teófanos Egido López, Javier Burrieza Sánchez, Manuel Revuelta González. *Los jesuitas en España y en el mundo hispánico.* Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2004. 511 pp. EUR 24 (paper), ISBN 978-84-95379-79-5.



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Ordering the Jesuits

The history of the Spanish world, and the Spanish Atlantic, in particular, cannot be properly understood without reference to the history of the Society of Jesus. Since its foundation in 1540, the society quickly achieved a position of power and preeminence not only in the Iberian Peninsula but in the Americas as well, despite the fact that the Jesuits arrived in the New World several decades after the most important religious orders. Perhaps this speed contributed to raising animosities and the many controversies surrounding the society, especially in the early modern period. This controversial image contributed to development of a series of myths about the order's power and influence, which caused its eighteenth-century dismantlement, when it was expelled not only from Spain and its dominions, but from other Catholic countries as well, finally being suppressed by the pope. The society, nevertheless, recovered after its restoration at the beginning of the nineteenth century, reaching great prosperity by the end of this century and the beginning of the next. However, the history of the society in Spain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was even more turbulent than in early modern times, with the order being suppressed and restored sev-

eral more times in the course of these two centuries.

The work reviewed here attempts to tell the complete history of the Spanish branch of the Society of Jesus from its inception until the beginning of our century. Although the book suffers from some limitations, which will be examined below, it nonetheless offers a complete synthesis of the society's ups and downs since its beginnings. Three Spanish historians, one for each of the three great periods in which the history of the order has been divided, wrote the book. Javier Burrieza Sánchez takes charge of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; Teófanos Egido concentrates on the eighteenth century, until the suppression of the society in 1773; and Manuel Revuelta González tells the society's history from the early nineteenth century to the present.

Burrieza's study, while dense and erudite, is excessively descriptive. A more critical account would have made the reading of these chapters livelier and more compelling. The chapter dedicated to Jesuit activity in the Americas and the Philippines is the weakest, as there is much factual description and little analysis. This weakness may be due to the fact that the author's expertise lies

in Spanish history. This is a problem found throughout the book, because, despite its title, the text is basically a study of the Jesuits in Spain, with only cursory references to the “Hispanic world.”

Burrieza focuses much attention on the society’s controversial nature, a long-standing status that belies the conventional image of an order closely allied with the Crown and ruling elites. This aspect, perhaps, most sets the Jesuits apart from the rest of the religious orders. To a certain extent, the controversy emerged from the society presenting itself, since its inception, as a new religious order intent on breaking the conventions on which traditional monastic or mendicant orders had been established. Unsurprisingly, as early as the sixteenth century, the society ran into trouble with the Inquisition because of the apparent lack of orthodoxy of some works written by its members, including a work as fundamental in the Jesuit spiritual life as the *Spiritual Exercises* (written between 1522-24 by Ignatius Loyola, the order’s founder, although the first printed edition in Latin did not appear until 1548). Burrieza traces how this same suspicious attitude was adopted toward such illustrious members of the society as Francisco de Borja, Roberto Bellarmino, Juan de Mariana, Francisco Suárez, and Luis de Molina. The order’s controversial aspect was also greatly increased by its theological disputes with the Dominicans, who saw any discrepancy with Thomas Aquinas’s doctrines as erroneous and a sign of heterodoxy. Also, their quarrels with the Jansenists, who accused the Jesuits of having a lax and excessively pragmatic morality, did not help either. All of this would contribute to forming a collective image of the Jesuits as being excessively accommodating and lax, given over to a sterile probabilism and casuistry.

Two important aspects of Jesuit history that Burrieza examines in detail are its well-known educational mission and the role the Jesuits played as royal confessors. As he describes, the Jesuits soon realized that education was a privileged instrument in the defense and propagation of the faith, the two main reasons that led to the creation of the society. Furthermore, Loyola identified virtue with study, explaining the fundamental role the Jesuits came to play in educational institutions. The other important aspect that helped to consolidate the social and political influence of the society’s members was the role they played as royal confessors. After the Council of Trent reasserted the transcendence of the sacrament of confession, the royal confessor became an indispensable figure at the Spanish court. Under the Bourbon dynasty, the Jesuits came to almost monopolize the post of royal confessor (the Habsburgs had tended to favor the

Dominicans as confessors). Although Burrieza does not elaborate on this, there is some irony in the fact that it was under the Bourbon kings that the society was expelled from the Spanish kingdoms, despite the influence they were supposed to have on the royal conscience as confessors. This is an aspect of early modern Spanish history to which historians have not paid much attention, but it is clear that a more detailed knowledge of this figure would allow us to better understand the extent to which religion shaped many of the political decisions made by Spanish rulers.

Another aspect duly examined by Burrieza is the strong evangelizing impulse that the Jesuits possessed since its origins. This impulse clearly benefited from the fact that the order’s rule (its “Constitutions”) did not hinder missionary activity, as was the case with the more traditional orders. Thus, on the other side of the Atlantic, the Jesuits’ educational and evangelizing activity became as crucial and significant as in Spain, or even more so. But they would not escape controversy in the New World either. Burrieza describes how Jesuits often clashed with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, as in an especially virulent mid-seventeenth-century confrontation with Bishop Juan de Palafox in New Spain. The indigenous communities, known as *reducciones* that they created among the Guarani of Paraguay were also highly controversial. The Guarani *reducciones* captivated European imagination for more than one century and were used both to commend and denigrate the Jesuits.

These *reducciones* were utilized by the Spanish Crown in the eighteenth century to justify the expulsion of the Jesuits from its realm by presenting them as a “Jesuit kingdom” independent from royal authority, which constituted a threat to the monarchy’s security. All these tensions notwithstanding, the eighteenth century, the century of the society’s fall, had also been, in the words of Egidio, “that of its glory, that of the apex of its power” (p. 225). Egidio’s study is probably the best of the three that comprise this book. In a nimble and readable style, and always giving the amount of information appropriate for a work of synthesis, the author explains in a clear and compelling way the factors that led, in the second half of the eighteenth century, first, to the order’s expulsion and, a few years later, to its suppression by the church. In the author’s view, it was the society itself that had created the “solitude” in which it found itself on the eve of the expulsion (p. 251). This solitude stemmed, above all, from the animosity that the rest of the religious orders felt toward the Jesuits, an antagonism that had its roots partly in the struggles for privilege and preeminence among the

different orders. But, in Egido's view, this ill feeling was caused, above all, by very pronounced "theological hatreds," at a time when theological differences were taken extremely seriously (p. 251). At stake was the monopoly of the philosophical, theological, moral, and even historical truth. To the attacks against the order, the Jesuits responded as they always had: accusing their enemies of being Jansenist heretics, while using a frightful weapon, the satire, which they employed in masterful ways. Nevertheless, Egido contends that the Jesuits' expulsion did not have any religious connotations and it should by no means be seen as an instance of ecclesiastical persecution; it was merely a political act originating from the Crown's extreme regalism.

The final section of the book, dedicated to the modern period, is also excessively prolix and detailed. It offers an insider's view of the history of the society by Jesuit author Revuelta, who is well informed about the debates and changes experienced by the order in the last forty years. For the author, the society's history in modern Spain, including four suppressions and five restorations over two centuries, is inextricably linked to the country's political history. Suppressed by radical liberal and democratic regimes characterized by their laicism and anticlericalism, the society was restored during periods of absolutism, which were then accepted or tolerated by moderate liberals (especially in the half century from 1875 to 1931). In the twentieth century, suppression by the Second Republic in 1931 was followed by full restoration by the Franco regime in 1938. Revuelta has divided the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spanish Jesuits into two great periods: the "restored society" (1814-1965) and the "renovated society" (since 1965).

For Revuelta, one of the great ironies of the society's history in this period was its restoration in 1815 by Fernando VII, the quintessential absolutist monarch, even though one of the main arguments against the Jesuits before their expulsion in 1767 had been its opposition to absolute monarchs and its defense of the popular origins of power. As a result, in this era, the society was characterized by both intellectual and political conservatism, reasserting fidelity to Thomist and scholastic ideas and condemnation of the liberal "pest," although there were some continuities with the Jesuit past as well (p. 318). For example, the nineteenth century was also a missionary century, during which the Hispanic world reached a special significance, since liberal government officials, who did not want monks and friars in Europe, were delighted to send them around the world as agents of colonization. Thus, to a large extent, the restoration of the Jesuits in

Spanish America was undertaken from Spain.

An important moment highlighted by Revuelta is 1965, when the society began to experience an identity crisis brought on by great changes from Vatican II. Under the leadership of General Superior Pedro Arrupe, elected in 1965, the society, not without resistance, adopted a progressive line of identification with the underprivileged. This new attitude led many Jesuits to confront power both in Spain, where they were very active in the struggle against the Francisco Franco regime, and in Latin America, where many, drawing closer to Marxist and socialist ideas, adopted the precepts of liberation theology and its "preferential option for the poor." This change in outlook had tragic consequences in Latin America, where many Jesuits paid with their lives for their new convictions. The most notorious case was, no doubt, the murder in 1989 of six Jesuit professors of El Salvador's Universidad Centroamericana, along with two female employees.

Despite the order's return to its proselytizing roots, Revuelta chronicles how the society's recent history in Spain has been marked by a calamitous decrease in vocations (beginning in the 1960s) and an increase in the number of Jesuits leaving the order. The society (like the rest of the once dominant Catholic Church) finds it increasingly difficult to maintain a significant presence in a Spanish society immersed in rapid secularization since 1975 and in which religion, despite superficial appearances, plays an ever smaller role in people's lives. While the society retains a strong presence in the field of education and most active Jesuits are dedicated to teaching, this presence hides, as Revuelta is quick to observe, a different reality: 93 percent of teachers working in Jesuit schools are laypeople, as are 67 percent of their headmasters. The other aspect that has defined the Society of Jesus in Spain in its most recent history, once the political situation reached stability with the democratic regime inaugurated in 1977, is an emphasis on "the promotion of justice" and development of aid organizations geared toward the third world (p. 431). Revuelta ends his study (and the book) with this fact. One could argue that, given the almost total lack of appeal of the traditional Jesuit ideals among the younger generation of Spaniards, it should not seem unreasonable to think that the order could eventually disappear from Spain (something that, of course, Revuelta does not dare to think). But, perhaps, this latest Jesuit emphasis on social justice and international solidarity and cooperation could be an indication that the only option for the survival of such a distinguished institution would be to become a religious

NGO of sorts.

Although scholars of the Jesuit order will not find much in this account to surprise them, the detailed description of the ups and downs of the society that the reader can find in this book will serve as a good introduction to students and scholars interested in learning about the history of the Spanish Jesuits. Unfortunately, and despite its title, there is no real attempt by the authors to incorporate both sides of the Atlantic in their historical

explanations, or to try to understand the extent to which the order was shaped or changed by their transatlantic experiences. Perhaps the main virtue of this comprehensive overview of the society's history is that it allows the reader to realize how radically the image and perception of the society has changed in the course of the centuries. In that sense, it could be argued that there is not one Society of Jesus but many and that easy reductionisms should be avoided when approaching its study.

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