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Three College Roommates Dream to Change the World

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EARLY 16TH CENTURY PARIS WAS A TIME OF MAJOR CHANGES. INFLUENCED BY THE DISCOVERY OF THE AMERICAS AND AN ONGOING EUROPEAN RENAISSANCE, THE CULTURE BEGAN EMBODYING THE NEW VALUES OF A MODERN WORLD. ECONOMIES WERE SHIFTING AND A TIME OF SCIENTIFIC INNOVATION WAS DAWNING. STIRRED BY THE ADVENT OF THE PRINTING PRESS, INFORMATION SPREAD WITH HITHERTO UNMATCHED EASE. SIMILAR TO HOW THE INTERNET IS INFLUENCING OUR TIMES, MASS-PRODUCED PRINTED MATERIALS FUELED A NEW LEVEL OF LITERACY AS PUBLICATIONS OF THE BIBLE, THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS, AND PHILOSOPHICAL MUSINGS BLEW A SPIRIT OF INQUIRY THROUGH THE CHURCH. LONG BEFORE ELECTRICITY HAD BEEN DISCOVERED AND HARNESSSED, THE URBAN LANDSCAPE OF WHAT WOULD ONE DAY BE CALLED THE CITY OF LIGHTS TOOK ON A NEW ENERGY. THIS WAS THE CITY INTO WHICH IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA TREKKED ON FIRE WITH A DESIRE TO ATTEND THE UNIVERSITY OF PARIS AND EXPAND HIS OWN INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL HORIZONS. HE WAS YOUNGER MEN – PETER FABER AND THESE THREE COLLEGE ROOMMATES TIMES IN WHICH THEY LIVED AND

ASSIGNED TO ROOM WITH TWO FRANCIS XAVIER. THE FRIENDSHIP OF WOULD PROFOUNDLY AFFECT THE ALL THE CENTURIES SINCE.

Change The World

BY FR. JOHN PATRICK DONNELLY, SJ

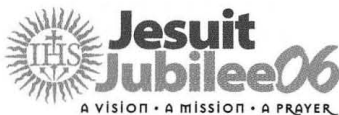
Historians usually search for deep causes of developments that reshape the world, but sometimes luck or chance play the major role. Such was the case in 1525 when fate, fortune, or maybe the mysterious working of divine providence assigned Peter Faber and Francis Xavier to the same room at the University of Paris, which they shared until 1536. A third roommate, Ignatius of Loyola, joined them for six years (1529-35) until returning to Spain.

From their relationship the Society of Jesus arose. The blessings that have flowed from this event reach down to our day and affect more than half the nations of our world. St. Francis Xavier and Blessed Peter Faber were both born in 1506, so this is the 500th anniversary of their births. Saint Ignatius of Loyola died 450 years ago, in 1556. We celebrate all three of these anniversaries in 2006.

Of peasant origins, Faber worked as a

shepherd in the hill country of Savoy in his youth and was fortunate to receive an excellent education in the cities of Thônes and La Roche, both near his home village of Villaret. His training included Latin, Greek, philosophy, and some theology – a fine combination for success at Europe's finest university. A degree from Paris would open many doors for a peasant lad. An accomplished student, and almost certainly more learned than his more famous roommates, he helped Loyola grapple with the Greek text of Aristotle. Loyola more than returned the favor.

Faber was a devout student but tortured by scruples till Loyola opened his eyes to see and rejoice in the God of mercy and forgiveness. After returning to Paris from a seven-month visit to Villaret, Faber spent 30 days in 1534 on retreat making the Spiritual Exercises under the direction of Loyola, their originator. Faber was ordained a priest in May of the same year and became a superb director of retreats. St. Peter Canisius made the Exercises under Faber's direction in 1541 and wrote, "Never have I seen nor heard such a learned or profound theologian, nor a man of such shining and exalted virtue.... I can hardly describe how the Spiritual



BL. PETER FABER, SJ
ST. FRANCIS XAVIER, SJ
ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, SJ
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN BROWN, SJ

Exercises transformed my soul and senses.... I feel changed into a new man.”

Xavier and Faber made an odd pair. Faber was a peasant, pious and studious; Xavier was a Basque nobleman – dark haired, tall, a fine athlete, outgoing. Noblemen of that era seldom took university degrees, but Xavier had few career opportunities in Spain since his family had fought against Charles V during the same French invasion in which Loyola was wounded. This undoubtedly influenced Xavier’s decision to seek an academic career in Paris. While Faber was pious, Xavier was worldly, so Loyola, who wanted to recruit others to serve God, needed a different strategy to win over Xavier. Loyola attended some classes in philosophy taught by Xavier at the College of Saint Bauvais and helped pay some of his debts. Several accounts relate that he kept asking Xavier the question of Jesus: “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?”

Gradually Loyola won Faber and Xavier over to his own plan to spend their lives in Jerusalem working for souls. Once won over, Xavier, with his usual enthusiasm, wanted to cancel his three year commitment to teach at Paris. Loyola and Faber dissuaded him, but as a result he could not devote 30 days to making the Spiritual Exercises until late 1534.

Meanwhile Loyola was winning other gifted students to his Jerusalem plan. On the feast of the Assumption 1534 the three roommates plus four new companions (Diego Laínez, Alfonso Salmerón, Simon Rodrigues, and Nicolás Bobadilla) climbed up to a chapel atop Montmartre in central Paris. Faber, the only priest among them, celebrated a Mass at which all seven took a vow to work for souls in Jerusalem. From these seven companions sprang the Society of Jesus, the religious order of priests and Brothers commonly called the Jesuits. Loyola always regarded the original seven as the Society’s co-founders.

Loyola returned to Spain while the others completed their academic degrees and recruited three more students for the Jerusalem project. They gathered at Venice in 1537, where all but the previously ordained Faber and Salmerón became priests.

Again chance and luck intervened. Bad luck: war between Venice and the Ottoman Empire (which controlled Palestine) broke out. There would be no ship to Palestine. Good luck: the

Turks would never have allowed 10 companions to proselytize in Jerusalem. They would have been executed or made into galley slaves, never to be heard from again.

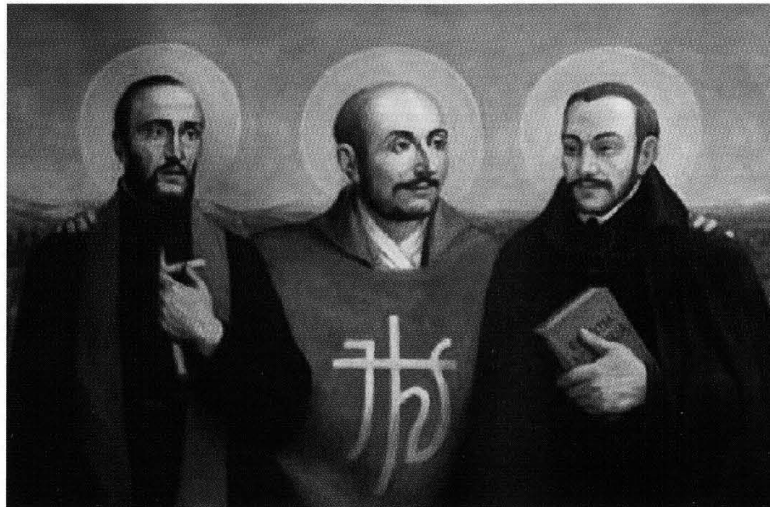
Fortunately, the Montmartre vow had a backup clause: if the companions could not go to Jerusalem, they would put themselves at the Pope’s disposal to work for souls. They waited several months, preaching and helping the needy, before they went to Rome and undertook work suggested by Pope Paul III. Faber lectured on scripture at the University of Rome. Loyola directed people through the Spiritual Exercises. Later the pope assigned others of the companions to preaching in various Italian towns. While this arrangement offered opportunities to serve God, it placed their companionship at risk, prompting them to form a religious order whose rules and goals would bind them together, however dispersed their work.

In 1540 they requested and received papal approval for the Society of Jesus. Loyola remained in Rome as superior general of the Jesuits until his death in 1556. The others brought the good news of Christ to the far corners of the world.

Faber helped reform the diocese of Parma in north-central Italy before being sent to the famous Colloquy of Regensburg in Germany, which tried and failed to work out a doctrinal agreement between

Lutherans and Catholics. There Faber gave the Spiritual Exercises to bishops and priests. His next stops were his native Savoy, then on to Madrid where he spent three months preaching, hearing confessions, and explaining that new order – the Jesuits. He also lectured on the psalms at the University of Cologne where he gave the Exercises to Peter Canisius, who then entered the Jesuits. Faber’s next assignment was Portugal. Paul III also appointed him a papal theologian at the Council of Trent. He went to Rome where he conversed with Loyola for the first time in seven years. But his health was broken, and he died at age 40 on Aug. 1, 1546 with his old roommate, Loyola, at his bedside.

Xavier’s travels dwarfed those of Faber. King John III of Portugal asked for two Jesuits to serve as missionaries in India. Loyola appointed Rodrigues and Bobadilla, but Bobadilla fell ill. Loyola then asked Xavier, who had been serving in Rome as his secretary, if he would take Bobadilla’s place. Xavier volunteered enthusiastically, left Rome on March 15, 1540, and never saw Loyola or Faber again.



ST. FRANCIS XAVIER, SJ, ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, SJ, AND BL. PETER FABER, SJ.

COURTESY OF JESUIT CURIA – ROME

'Three Companions' parallels 15th-century icon

Three Companions of Jesus, from the hand of Fr. George Drance, SJ, was created at the request of the Wisconsin Province of the Society of Jesus in celebration of the 2006 Jubilee Year honoring St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Francis Xavier, and Bl. Peter Faber.

Icons are said to be "from the hand" of the artist or "written" (rather than drawn) because creating an icon is a spiritual process in which the hand is guided by the Holy Spirit.

The images in the icon on page 8 reflect a pose struck in an icon from the hand of Andrew Rublev in 1425 titled *The Holy Trinity*. In the original icon the grouping of figures included the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Fr. Drance placed Ignatius (considered by some the father of the Society of Jesus) to the left of his "son" Francis Xavier in the middle, and Bl. Peter Faber on the right. Faber is holding a copy of *The Spiritual Exercises* because, of all the early Jesuits, it has been said that Faber understood the Exercises best and was an expert at giving them to others. One could say that the *Spiritual Exercises* are the spirit of the Jesuits.

Ignatius is wearing the traditional black cassock of the Jesuits. Xavier is dressed with a surplice and stole and holding a cross. He preached the Gospel in India and the Far East and

baptized many people, hence the cross and the stole. Faber is dressed in full chasuble because he was the first priest ordained in the Society. The three figures are pointing to a globe of the world and Francis has his finger near Japan. In the original the figures point to a chalice.

On the left behind the figure of Ignatius is a building which is a composite of the Roman College (which Ignatius started in 1555) and of the Gregorian University, which the Roman College has become. Behind Faber is the facade of the Gesu Church in Rome. Behind the figures is an Oriental wave that shows up in various Japanese art prints. This again is more of the emphasis on Francis and his mission to the East.

Fr. Drance received his B.A. in theater from Marquette University, and a master's of fine arts in acting from Columbia University. He has performed and directed in more than 15 countries on five continents.

Fr. Drance has been a guest artist and lecturer at Columbia University, Cornell University, and Boston College, and has been on the faculties of the Marist International Center in Nairobi, Kenya, and the Red Cloud Indian School on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. He is presently artist-in-residence and teacher of acting and senior values at Fordham University.

— Fr. Jim Kubicki, SJ



Fr. George Drance, SJ

Xavier sailed from Lisbon on a 13-month journey, six of them working in Mozambique, before arriving at Goa, the main Portuguese base in India. At Goa he preached to the Portuguese and tried, not very successfully, to learn the Tamil language. Therefore he required translators during two years of work along the south coast of India where it is believed he baptized more than 10,000 converts. In September 1545 he sailed to Malaysia and spent the next year working in Indonesia. In 1549 he and several other Jesuits sailed to Japan where they converted some 700 Japanese, a people who impressed him as extremely intelligent. He returned to Malaysia and then India in 1551, almost perishing in a typhoon.


Back in India, he reorganized Jesuit work there, then departed for China at a time when foreigners were forbidden to enter. He tried persuading Chinese smugglers to take him ashore, but they considered it too risky. He died on the little island of Sancian near Hong Kong on Dec. 3, 1552 at age 46.

Xavier pioneered and organized Jesuit missionary work in Asia and the Pacific islands. The publication of his letters in Europe attracted many young men to missionary work. Xavier is considered the greatest missionary since Saint Paul.

But what of Ignatius of Loyola? He lived a far longer life than his widely traveled roommates. Except for a trip south

to Monte Cassino to give the *Spiritual Exercises* to a Jesuit benefactor, he spent his last 16 years in Rome. He set up confraternities to help ex-prostitutes find better lives and another confraternity to prevent poor young women from falling into prostitution. He spent most of his days dictating letters of spiritual advice and directives for Jesuit superiors. (We still have 6,590 items of his correspondence from his final 10 years.) He oversaw the translation into Latin and publication of his *Spiritual Exercises* in 1548; since then it has appeared in some 5,000 editions and has been translated into all the major languages of the world.

Loyola's companions commissioned him to write the rules, regulations and guidelines for Jesuit life and works known as the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*. A draft was circulated in 1552, and input from Jesuits around Europe was incorporated in the final document, which was officially ratified in 1558. He also dictated a short but fascinating autobiography which covers only the years before the founding of the Jesuits.

Loyola and Xavier were canonized March 12, 1622. Their college roommate, Peter Faber, was beatified Sept. 5, 1872. 

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at Marquette University.**