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Taproots

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Service of the "common good" appears as one of the goals of the Society of Jesus in the very first document that the first ten Jesuits drew up to express its purposes and ways of proceeding. How that service has been carried out through the four and one-half centuries since the mid 1500's ranges from prison ministry to scholarly writings on political theory, from public preaching to public health programs, from geographical exploration to education on every level.

Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Society, made clear in a letter of 1551, when Jesuit schools were just beginning, that they included among their goals the political good of the community in which those schools operated: "From among those who are now students, in time some will depart to play diverse roles — one to preach and carry on the care of souls, another to government of the land and the administration of justice, and others to other occupations. Finally, since students become grownups, their good education in life and learning will be beneficial to many others, with the results expanding more widely every day." Some decades later, when there were already Jesuit schools in Europe, Asia, and Latin America, Diego Ledesma (1519-1575), one of the important early expositors of that Jesuit education, noted that among the reasons for which the Society of Jesus ran schools was that "they contribute to the right government of public affairs and to the proper making of laws."

In addition to classroom education that contributed to the common good, Jesuits early participated in developing political theory on the nature, purpose and scope of government in a community. Among such theorists perhaps the most famous was Francisco Suarez (1548-1617), the Spanish philosopher and theologian. Along with the Dominican, Francisco de Vitoria, he was one of the first modern writers on international law, on the community of nations and on their interrelationships for the common good. He helped to confront the speculative and practical questions that arose among nations out of the growing consciousness of their own particular characteristics and out of their widespread overseas colonization. In addition, Suarez's theory of popular sovereignty and civil authority maintained that a government may indeed receive its authority from God but only indirectly and through the mediation of the people and for their good and not through some kind of direct divine right. Another Spanish Jesuit, Juan de Mariana (1536-1624), hardly commended himself to absolute rulers when he maintained that since kings held power for the common good by conferral and sanction of the people, in the last analysis the people had the right to tyrannicide in extreme circumstances. Nor on behalf of the commonwealth did his blunt accusations of monetary debasement and fiscal fraud among government officials win him any popularity.

Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), too, along with Suarez, is counted as a proponent of the immediate origin and authority of civil society in the free consent of the members of that society. Such views brought on a public and spectacular clash with James I of England on the question of the 1606 Oath of Allegiance, the divine right of kings, papal power in temporal affairs, and the relationship of church and state. Bellarmine's championship of papal power that was only indirect in secular affairs did not please the then-reigning pope and almost got his writings put on the Index of Forbidden Books. But his position later became common church teaching.

Then that view itself was challenged in the twentieth century by John Courtney Murray (1904-1967), another Jesuit, writing on the relations of church and state. Ironically, Murray was for a time silenced as he questioned Bellarmine's views on the subject. He was, however, fully vindicated at Vatican II when the council promulgated the declaration on religious liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, on the right of the person and communities to social and civil liberty in religious matters. Murray, through his writings over a decade on the connection between a constitutional government and religious freedom, was one of the main architects of the document which reversed centuries of Catholic teaching on that aspect of the common good. And with Murray and his insistence on the "moral substance of public affairs," this brief account links some of the taproots of Jesuit concern for the common good with that subject as the focus of this issue of *Conversations*.

TAPROOTS

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