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# The Fathers Who Founded Us: Reflections on the Jesuits Reborn

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# To See the Love, to Share the Joy

## *World Youth Day*

By Erin Verdi

**A**s a young Catholic living in a markedly secularized and materialistic society, it is sometimes a struggle to express or even to remember my spiritual identity. “Catholic” means universal, and yet even at a Jesuit institution I could feel isolated from my faith and by my faith. My decision to go to Brazil stemmed not only from a desire for culture and an altered perspective but also from an unspoken need to reaffirm my membership in the global Catholic community. So often my Catholicism is repressed as a secondary aspect of my person simply because it is easier to do so, and I felt something vital was missing from my life. Though it took me a few days to adjust to the lack of warm water and warm beds, my Brazilian experience was ultimately invaluable. It let me view my faith and my religious community from a different angle, to see the love there, to share the joy.

One scene in particular stands out in my memory – the day Pope Francis was rumored to drive by the high school the MAGIS participants were calling home for the duration of World Youth Day. Everyone was rigid with excitement and made hasty plans to line the streets until they glimpsed the Holy Father. No one could cite the source of the rumor or tell if the rumor was anything more than a popular wish, but everyone filed outside early that morning anyway, just in case. As young Catholics, none of us could pass up the chance to see the pope, who represented not only the tradition of the Church but change within the Church as well. We were willing to brave the elements, to risk wasting our time and our hopes.

The weather in Rio, being unpredictable, was often inconvenient. Winter rain poured down on our heads, which were shielded with everything from plastic ponchos to backpacks to a neighbor’s

outstretched arm. It seemed like there were hundreds of us out there, enthusiastically anticipating the arrival of Pope Francis even though we were cold, and wet, and suddenly deprived of every semblance of personal space. We clustered around each other like family, anxiously asking when the pope was allegedly driving by.

At this point, I took a mental step back and observed my peers. All of them looked like they should have been miserable, but they weren’t. They were infectiously enthusiastic. And after three hours, when Pope Francis sped by in his gray sedan and waved, the entire crowd erupted in joyful shrieks and applause as if there had been no wait, no uncertainty. All of us had traveled to Brazil and then to the streets not only to express our faith in God but also to express our faith in the Church and its ability to overcome recent challenges through Pope Francis. We were all hopeful for the future of the Church, just as the Church is hopeful for our futures.

My experience in Brazil was like a shot of adrenaline. It reawakened my passion for Christ and reaffirmed that I was not alone in my faith. There are many in my faith community, all of them willing to share their love with me. ■

*Erin Verdi, from Las Vegas, is a senior at Seattle University with a double major in psychology and creative writing.*

# The Fathers Who Founded Us:

## *Reflections on the Jesuits Reborn*

By Nicholas Sawicki

**I**f you take a short walk just beyond the University Church at Fordham’s Rose Hill Campus, you will find a cemetery in which 124 sons of St. Ignatius are interred. Amongst the tombstones, all of which list the place of birth and death of the individual they mark, one finds an astounding array of ethnicities and cul-

tures represented. There are, for example, 6 Canadians, 7 Germans, 5 Italians, 4 Belgians, 24 Frenchmen, 46 Irishmen, 27 Americans, and one Czechoslovakian, an Austrian, a Swiss, a Scotsman, and an Englishman. Upon closer inspection, you find that many of the men from Europe entered the Society prior to 1850, and almost no Americans are found as mem-

bers of the Society in the cemetery before that point. It is fascinating that, in what was still generally a parochial time for most people, this bustling international community of Jesuits made it to Fordham, and one cannot help but wonder how this came to be.

Let us rewind to the significant year of 1814. It was a world which witnessed

the first abdication of Napoleon after his defeat at Toulouse, one in which Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron were the envy of the literary world throughout Europe. With the skillful diplomatic machinations of Prince Metternich influencing the Congress of Vienna, the Holy Roman Empire was dissolved, and the Treaty of Ghent was signed ending the War of 1812 between Britain and the United States. It was also the year in which Pope Pius VII escaped France and reclaimed the See of St. Peter in Rome. It was upon this explosive scene that the Society of Jesus was restored.

Many consider the suppression the darkest days of the Society, and rightfully so. For all canonical and legal purposes, the Society did not exist. Its schools, missions, apostolates, and institutions had all been dispersed. The internal structures necessary to train new Jesuits – novitiates, scholasticates, theologates – had been dealt a similar blow. However, the most spectacular sunrises occur only after the darkest of nights.

So, what does suppression and restoration have to do with a vibrant, international community of Jesuits forming 2,000 miles away from Europe? The answer: everything. For one, the existence of the Society of Jesus is inherently necessary for it to have existing members. Second, the time in which the Society was restored and the approach that the surviving fathers chose to take were both pivotal in creating the Society we see today.

The post-Suppression Society of Jesus is a stronger, globally focused one, but it would not be the same if it had been restored earlier or later. The benefit is clear in terms of timing for the restoration: Europe and the world were changing. With the soon-to-be-developed concepts of communism, nationalism, socialism, with the expansion of imperialism, and with the emergence of labor unions and social welfare just around the corner,



Cemetery at Fordham University, Rose Hill.

the Church would need a way to respond. The Society was restored early enough so as to be significantly influential and was able to adapt sufficiently to the oncoming social struggles of the 19th century, yet late enough not to be considered directly part of the older order of Europe, which had cast them out. This allowed the Society to develop and emerge to meet the world as it was changing, mimicking its creation during the Reformation in the 16th century. It was because of this timing that Jesuits for the past 199 years have been identified not only with their trademark pursuits in academia and missionary work but also as social reformers and labor negotiators, significantly expanding the Society's work to meet the times in which it continues to survive.

The second benefit to the Society was how the surviving fathers structured the training for the new members who

flocked to the novitiates. There was a greater focus on integrating Jesuits from across Europe into international communities. For example, there are records of Jesuit novices being sent from Ireland to France and from Germany to England and Italy, and vice versa, to complete their training. This was for various reasons. First, it allowed the Society to focus its limited resources in the earliest days to provide the best training they could. Second, it ensured that the education was streamlined and that new members received the same education with the same mission in mind. Third, it allowed the men in formation to receive a broader knowledge of the world, i.e., a familiarity with foreign cultures, languages, etc. Fourth, with the limited number of men generally having a familiarity with one another and having experience in each other's languages, it made international apostolates easier. The Jesuits may have been more comfortable moving as there was a good chance they knew some-

one in the new country because of the international communities that were formed in training.

It was because of the formation of international communities, the timing of the restoration, and the streamlining of Jesuit education that the Society was able to become the globalized network that it is today on a grander scale than ever before conceived. The 124 markers in the Fordham cemetery and the markers in the many Jesuit cemeteries throughout the United States are reminders of the work the early fathers of the restoration accomplished and how the modern Society of today began to take shape. ■

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