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### Book Review: Mission, Identity, Local Relationships How Schools Have Survived: Sacrifice and Survival: Identity, Mission, and Jesuit Higher Education in the American South, by R. Eric Platt

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## Mission, Identity, Local Relationships How Schools Have Survived

### *Sacrifice and Survival: Identity, Mission, and Jesuit Higher Education in the American South, by R. Eric Platt*

Tuscaloosa, AL: University Press of Alabama, 2014. 240 pages

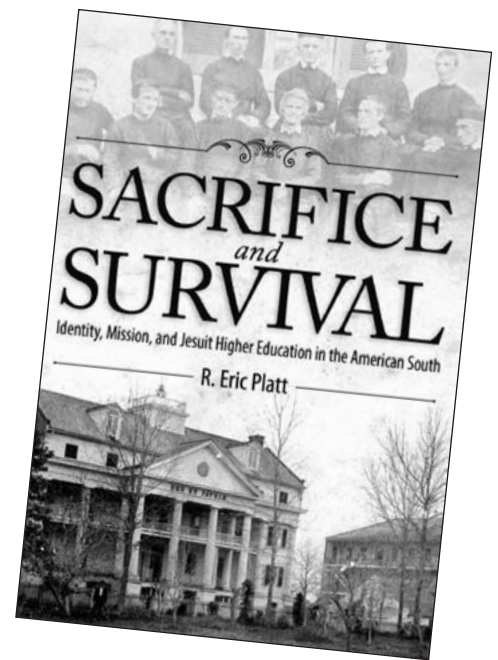
Reviewed by Jeff Dorr, S.J.

The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) consists of 28 member schools today. What would the difference be if the AJCU had 33 member institutions instead? From the perspective of the Jesuits' former New Orleans Province, the difference might simply have been the inclusion of St. Charles College of Grand Coteau, La., the College of the Immaculate Conception of New Orleans, St. Mary's University of Galveston, Tex., the College of the Sacred Heart of Augusta, Ga., and Loyola College of New Orleans. All of these schools had been part of the educational landscape in the American South but closed their doors between 1912 and 1922. After 1922, the Jesuits of the South operated only Loyola University of New Orleans and Spring Hill College of Mobile, Ala. What had occurred that five of seven Jesuit colleges would close their doors during a single decade? What distinguished Loyola and Spring Hill from the other five schools? These questions and many more are the focus of R. Eric Platt's new book *Sacrifice and Survival: Identity, Mission, and Jesuit Higher Education in the American South*.

*Identity, Mission, and Jesuit Higher Education in the American South.*

R. Eric Platt, a professor of higher education at University of Southern Mississippi, by not being affiliated with a Jesuit institution, brings a new perspective to the study of Jesuit education. Platt's emphasis on institutional survivability and willingness to consider all colleges of a given province, even those which have been closed, make his book a markedly new contribution. Furthermore, Jesuit schools currently place tremendous emphasis on mission and identity, but Platt's guiding question – how do mission, identity, and local relationships, which he refers to as “town and gown,” help explain whether a school remained open or closed its door? – is a new one.

Despite not being connected to a Jesuit institution, Platt's research both in secondary sources concerning the Jesuits, Jesuit education and the American South and, more importantly, in numerous archival collections of the New Orleans Province gives him a strong basis from which to work. This research allows him to narrate the ardu-



ous roads each of these seven Jesuit colleges had to navigate trying to make it in the American South. One of the schools, St. Charles College, faced fires, a flood, yellow fever, isolation, and changing curricular expectations. Though this college in Grand Coteau, La., may have faced the most extreme challenges (a claim those who lived through the hurricane of 1900 at St. Mary's College in

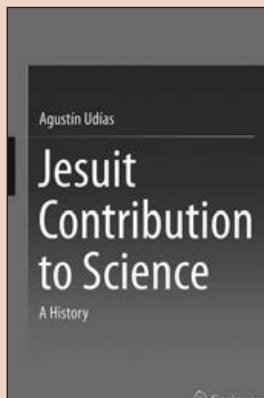
*Jeff Dorr, S.J., received his undergraduate degree from Xavier University and a master's from Creighton; he is now pursuing graduate studies in history at St. Louis University.*

## Book Review

### Other Book News

Fr Agustin Udías (see story, page 5) has just published an English translation of his book about the contributions of the Jesuits to science, *Jesuit Contribution to Science: A History*. In this new English edition, he has limited the mention of Spanish authors of lesser importance and has

added more about what motivated the dedication of Jesuits to science. In the epilogue he relates dedication to science with Ignatian spirituality. This book is the first to join the earlier Jesuit scientists with the modern ones, highlighting the continuity between the two periods and the difference between them.



### A Jesuit's Reading List

Ray Schroth, S.J., literary editor at *America* magazine and former editor of *Conversations*, recently published the America Reading List online, which includes book lists he put together at four different Jesuit universities over two decades resulting in 150 short essays with 270 book suggestions. Fr. Schroth came up with

the idea for these essays while teaching at Fordham University in the 1970s. "I've always felt the main role of the teacher is to introduce the student to other people, and by other people I mean people throughout world history – the great artists and the great writers. I made a big point of assigning a lot of books."

(<http://americamagazine.org/america-reading-list>)



Galveston, Tex., would surely have disputed) each and every school had to deal with an environment that in one way or another was hostile.

The book's five chapters provide space for Platt to acknowledge contextual and unifying dynamics and to give specific attention to each of the colleges. The first two chapters, which study the Society of Jesus, the Jesuit tradition of education, and the 19th-century context of the American South, are well suited for readers generally unfamiliar with the Jesuits. The remaining three chapters group the seven colleges and tell their stories. The third chapter, titled "Failure to Survive," examines the stories of St. Charles College (1837-1922), St. Mary's University (1854-1922), and the College of the Sacred Heart (1900-1917). The fourth chapter, "Closure and Amalgamation," looks at the two New Orleans colleges, Loyola (1904-1912) and Immaculate Conception (1849-1912), which blended into Loyola University. Finally, chapter five, "Institutional Survival," looks at the only two which continued in operation, Loyola University (1912-present) and Spring Hill (1837-present).

The greatest contribution of *Sacrifice and Survival* is found in the carefully constructed accounts of each of the seven New Orleans Province colleges. Platt's careful archival work allows him to draw out the Jesuits, local community members, and students as they responded to the trials of establishing, maintaining, and attend-

ing Catholic colleges in the 19th- and early 20th-century American South. This book provides a more unified and significant treatment of these colleges than is perhaps available in any other single source.

Though the research and narration of the book come through extremely strong, the conclusions Platt seeks to draw are weaker. His assumption that identity, mission, and local relationships influenced a school's ability to stay open is undoubtedly true. However, the contention could have been strengthened by a more thorough and explicit comparative analysis of how those three factors differed from college to college and, perhaps even more importantly, how these compared to other significant factors. Furthermore, while survival of colleges is emphasized over measurements of their success, the use of the term *failure*, particularly in reference to St. Charles College and St. Mary's University, seems misleading. Might it be more precise to say that the Jesuits sacrificed those two colleges for the sake of Loyola University?

The value of *Sacrifice and Survival* is immediately seen in its presentation of the generally forgotten stories of five late 19th- and early 20th-century Jesuit colleges. However, the book's even greater enduring impact might come from the way it inherently challenges those involved in Jesuit colleges and universities in the present to consider how institutions relate to one another and how concepts of sacrifice and survival might still be important today. ■