Jesuit Missionary Outreach during the 19th and 20th Centuries

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Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, July 2022

Abstract

This article focuses on the international outreach of the Jesuits during the 19th and 20th centuries. The impressive breadth of Jesuit missionary work is discussed. Some about the origin and early years of the Jesuits during the 16th century is included. The Jesuits started as a missionary order and that thrust has carried through today. The article gives a brief look at 21st century developments and proposes applications to Protestant mission work.

Key Words: Jesuits, Roman Catholic missions, missions history, mission societies, Catholic geographical expansion.

Introduction

One day during my seminary years I overheard a conversation between the missions professor and another student as I walked by a classroom. The professor asserted that the early Protestant Reformers were not much involved in fulfilling the Great Commission. Rather it was the Roman Catholics who were sending missionaries to the far reaches of the world. Those statements surprised me. Interestingly, Philip Jenkins says about the same thing, noting that Protestants did not do widespread missionary outreach until the end of the 18th century. Up to that time Roman Catholics were the ones spreading their faith worldwide. In fact, Catholic apologists asked how the Protestants could be true Christians if they ignored the Great Commission? (Jenkins 2002, 33). That state of affairs sparked my interest in Roman Catholic missions.

While a number of Catholic orders have sent missionaries over the centuries, the focus here will be on the international outreach of the Jesuits during the 19th and 20th centuries. Some information about the origin and early years of the Jesuits is included to lay a foundation for what occurred later. There is a brief look at twenty-first century developments, followed by some suggested practical applications.

The Beginning and Early Years of the Jesuits

The outstanding leader who sparked the formation of the Jesuits was Ignatius Loyola. He was born around 1491 and lived to 1556. Ignatius was Basque and Spain was the land of his birth. As a young man he was a soldier and experienced a spiritual conversion while recovering from injuries sustained during a battle with the French. Later he enrolled in the University of Paris. Ignatius recruited six of his classmates to form what at that time was an informal group. One of the original six was Francisco Xavier, who became an outstanding missionary to the Far East (Foss 1969, 66-69; Geisler and McKenzie 1995, 444). They added three more to their number before leaving Paris (O'Malley 2014, 2).

The original ten met in Rome for three months in 1539. Early in the deliberations they decided to form a new order. They put together the *Formula vivendi,* which contained the basic guidelines for the proposed society, and submitted it to the Holy See. Pope Paul III formally recognized the new order establishing the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits as they are popularly known, on September 27, 1540. The *Formula* clearly described the order as an organization for missionaries.

Its purpose was to propagate the faith (Foss 1969, 122; Geisler and McKenzie 1995, 444; Livingstone 2006, 308-309; Neil 1986, 127; O'Malley 2014, 2-3, 17). From their inception Jesuits committed themselves to serving anywhere at any time under the direction of the Pope. They were always a missionary order (Geisler and McKenzie 1995, 445; Livingstone 2006, 309; O'Malley 2014, 4).

The Jesuits did not take long to make good on their missionary commitment. Ignatius chose Jerónimo Nadal to be his traveling representative. Nadal moved across Europe exhorting the Jesuits to be journeying evangelists who sought to impact the world at large (O'Malley 2014, 22). Soon after their founding in 1540 members traveled to Lima, Havana, and Manila, making Roman Catholicism the first global religious faith (McGreevy 2016, 4). By the time of Ignatius' death in 1556 the Jesuits had moved into Brazil, India, and Japan. Furthermore, they were established in the Congo and moving toward a presence in Ethiopia (Foss 1969, 133; Livingstone 2006, 309; O'Malley 2014, 43). Also, by 1556 the original ten Jesuits had grown to 1,000 (Foss 1969, 133; O'Malley 2014, 3). Fifty-five of them were in Goa, India. Twenty-five were in Brazil, which they entered in 1547. Francisco Xavier arrived in Japan in 1549. By 1549 the Jesuits were stationed in 22 cities (O'Malley 2014, 3,19).

Brazil was the most successful mission field during the early years. Manuel da Nobrega, who was of the Portuguese nobility, arrived in 1549. Catechism classes for the children of colonists and of indigenous people were established soon after he arrived. José de Anchieta, a crippled Basque young man 19 years of age, arrived in 1553. Anchieta was a gifted linguist who soon wrote a grammar of the Tupi language. He also composed many songs that taught Catholic beliefs in that language. The Tupi were characterized by giftedness in music and this ministry proved very effective (O'Malley 2014, 22-23).

One ministry, though not included in the *Formula* that established the Society of Jesus as a missionary order, early on became characteristic of the Jesuits. That ministry was schools, which began in 1548 (Livingstone 2006, 309). When Ignatius passed away there were 30 schools, most of them in Italy. The schools for young laymen became a source of new recruits for the order. Jesuit schools were also a point of contact with unbelievers, like the students' parents (O'Malley 2014, 12).

The 19th Century

An event in 1773 set the tone for the Jesuits' ministry during the 19th century. That event has been variously described as the "suppression" (Livingstone 2006, 309; McGreevy 2016, 1; O'Malley 2014, 27), "liquidation" (Neill 1986, 335), and "dissolution" (Neill 1986, 336; Latourette 1945, 444) of the Society of Jesus. This action was decreed by Pope Clement XIV and had far reaching effects (Livingstone 2006, 309; McGreevy 2016, 1; O'Malley 2014, 27). Twenty-three thousand were forced to leave the Society. Ministries, such as churches and schools, all over the world were abandoned. The Jesuit organization in many places was almost instantly put out of existence (McGreevy 2016, 12).

The question naturally arises as to why the Pope would issue such a decree. John T. McGreevy believes that the suppression of 1773 was the result of differences between Jesuits and their theological opponents earlier in the century. But there were other explanations put forth by the Jesuits themselves (McGreevy 2016, 9-10). As McGreevy points out, "Nineteenth century Jesuits

came to blame the suppression on an alliance of corrupt monarchs and anti-Catholic Enlightenment intellectuals, who together forced the hand of a reluctant Pope Clement" (McGreevy 2016, 12).

The Jesuits continued to face opposition even after they were restored in 1814 by Pope Pius VII (Livingstone 2006, 309; McGreevy 2016, 1, 12; O'Malley 2014, 88). They were expelled from a number of places during the 1840s. McGreevy believes the expulsions of Jesuits during the 19th century were fomented by the order running afoul of the nationalist spirit of the age. There was fear that the Society of Jesus was not conducive to nation states because Jesuits were loyal to an international fellowship rather than a particular country (McGreevy 2016, 10-11). John W. O'Malley holds that the Jesuits, along with Roman Catholic leadership, identified with older power structures, like monarchies, during the rise of nationalism in the 19th century. He believes, similar to McGreevy, that this led to their expulsions (O'Malley 2014, 88, 92).

The expulsions continued after the 1840s and thus freed Jesuits to serve in other places (O'Malley 2014, 92-93). For example, in 1868 they were driven from Spain and relocated in Colombia and the Philippine Islands. Jesuits were kicked out of Germany in 1871 and went to Ecuador and Great Britain (McGreevy 2016, 184).

The number of Society members in the Philippines thus rose markedly after the 1868 Spanish expulsion. Jesuits had first arrived in the Philippines in 1581. In Spain the Society was suppressed in 1767, but Spanish Jesuits were back in the Philippines in 1859. Spanish Jesuit missionaries had been very successful winning Filipinos to the faith. In 1898 they sent still more missionaries to Mindanao and other places in the Philippines (McGreevy 2016, 184, 197).

The restoration of 1814 spurred a great increase in missionary activity and the Jesuits made great progress toward the global extension of Roman Catholicism (McGreevy 2016, 223). New Jesuit missions were established in Syria (1831), Calcutta (1834), Argentina (1836), Madurai (1837), Nanking (1841), Canada (1842), Madagascar (1844), Algeria (1848), and Australia (1848) (McGreevy 2016, 4). It was the French Jesuits that went to Madagascar and in 1893 the Belgians entered the Congo (O'Malley 2014, 94). Often half the German Jesuits were serving beyond German borders and one-third of the French were stationed outside of France. Other Catholic clergy contributed to the increased missionary outreach of the nineteenth century, but the breadth of Jesuit international endeavor was unmatched by anyone else (McGreevy 2016, 2, 4). Certainly it was expulsions that ironically facilitated the geographical extension of the Jesuits and multitudes left Europe as missionaries. At the same time, the desire to spread the faith also contributed to this mobilization (O'Malley 2014, 92-93). Father General Jan Roothan, who led the Society 1829-1853, put a strong emphasis on sending Jesuit missionaries to the ends of the earth (McGreevy 2016, 14-15; O'Malley 2014, 91).

Cultural issues, both good and bad, were part of the missionary landscape during the 19th century. Jesuits worked tirelessly to become fluent in indigenous languages (McGreevy 2016, 33). However, they tended to see themselves as promoting the culture of their home countries, as well as the gospel (O'Malley 2014, 94-95). Paternalism was a great problem for Protestant and Roman Catholic missionary work during the 19th century. The goal was an indigenous church that could function without missionary help, but that was considered a distant goal, so not much was done to bring it about (Neill 1986, 362).

While there were many places to which the Jesuits were sent, the greatest geographical movement of Society members was to the United States. The expulsions of 1840 and afterwards

markedly increased their number in the U.S.A. Jesuits did dedicated work with Native Americans from the North Atlantic coast to the Pacific Northwest. The percentage of American Jesuits involved in foreign missions had always been quite small in comparison with their counterparts from Spain, Italy, and Germany. However, the Spanish American War in 1898 was a wake up call for the North Americans because of the expanding U.S.A. empire (McGreevy 2016, 4, 30-32, 186).

The 20th Century

Though missions sending did not take off immediately, the North American Jesuits gradually increased their involvement in foreign missions. Early in the twentieth century two percent of the members in the Maryland-New York Province (a province is a regional administrative unit) were foreign missionaries, while nearly 40 percent from the Aragón Provence in Spain served overseas. However, World War I brought significant changes. After the war the overall number of Jesuit missionaries was half of what it had been before the war. At the same time, the number of American missionaries increased. Jesuits stationed in the United States sent missionaries to places such as China, Jamaica, Chile, and India in the early part of the 20th century. Not surprisingly, given the U.S. involvement in the Philippines following the Spanish-American War, their largest contingent of overseas workers was in the Philippines (McGreevy 2016, 179, 217-218, 285 n. 36).

The Society of Jesus continued to progress during the 20th century. In 1900 there were about 1,500 Jesuits serving in Latin America. A good percentage of them were Europeans (O'Malley 2014, 94). By 1902 a little over a quarter of the members worldwide served outside their country of origin (McGreevy 2016, 5). O'Malley reports, "In 1914 … there were 217 in Armenia and Syria, 22 in Egypt, 78 in Indonesia, 102 in Australia, and 42 in Albania" (O'Malley 2014, 95). During the early years of the 20th century 75 percent of new Jesuit recruits came from missionary receiving countries (O'Malley 2014, 112). In 1930 the Jesuits had more missionaries than any other Catholic order (Latourette 1945, 40). Jesuit intellectual and writer John Courtney Murray said in 1946 that the burden of the order is to reach all people (McGreevy 2016, 210-211). Between 1945 and 2000 Jesuits from all economically advantaged counties served as foreign missionaries in many places across the globe. Society of Jesus missionaries from the U.S.A. arrived in Korea in 1960. By 2014 nearly all of the approximately 200 members were Koreans. The peak year for membership was 1965 when the Society numbered about 36,000. Half of the members in Indonesia and the Philippines were native born, which reflected a growing trend in missionary receiving lands (O'Malley 2014, 110, 111, 98).

The Jesuits sent many new missionaries to India during the twentieth century. As O'Malley states,

> The Belgians went to Bengal and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the French to Malabar and Madurai, the Germans to Bombay (Mumbai), the Italians to Mangalore. The Americans and Canadians arrived much later in Darjeeling, Jamshedpur, and Patna. As before, the Jesuits established schools, seminaries, printing presses, and churches wherever they went. These institutions soon flourished and continue to do so today in a country that now boasts eighteen Jesuit provinces, the largest number in a single country in the whole history of the Society (O'Malley 2014, 93).

In the decades following 1914 Catholic schools in the south of India had a student population that was two-thirds non-Christians. Also during those years a training center was established near Darjeeling that gave a thorough and prolonged orientation to new members. Both Christian and

Indian areas of study were included, as well as active service in a mission station (Latourette 1945, 284-285). By 1960 the Jesuits in India had developed to the point that they sent missionaries to Tanzania and not much later to Sudan (O'Malley 2014, 111) . At mid- century the United States was the country of origin for the largest group of Jesuits. By the 1980s, however, the largest group was from South Asia (Jenkins 2002, 196; McGreevy 2016, 221).

Probably the most spectacular results of Roman Catholic mission work have been realized in Africa. In that continent baptized Roman Catholics went from 7 million in 1914 to 14 million in 1938 (Jenkins 2002, 37). Orders established in the 19th century made a great impact on the extension of Catholicism in Africa. Especially notable were the White Fathers, founded in 1868. By 1967 they numbered 3,621 in the continent (Neill 1986, 357-358, 420). Jesuits also made a significant contribution to the extension of the faith. As O'Malley reports, "In 1946 . . . French Jesuits arrived in Chad and Cameroon, the seed from which the Province of West Africa was formed in 1983. The province today has about 255 members. The first Jesuits arrived in 1947 for the beginning of what developed into the Province of East Africa, which now numbers about 190 members" (O'Malley 2014, 110-111).

Father General Pedro Arrupe, who was elected in 1964, urged more local control over ministries so that African nationals would make more of the important decisions. That was a significant advance for Jesuit work in the continent. The order came to be located located in 36 African countries (Mkenda 2016, 17-18). In 1955 the number of Catholics in Africa was calculated at 16 million. The increased availability of air transportation enabled missionaries to arrive at difficult to reach places and by 2002 the number was 120 million. Former French colonies, like Chad and Cameroon, were partly responsible for this monumental increase and French Jesuits served in those countries (Jenkins 2002, 58).

The African country with the most pronounced Jesuit growth has been the Congo. The story really begins during the 1800s. After the 1814 restoration Belgian Jesuits went to serve overseas in great numbers and many went to the Congo (McGreevy 2016, 67). In the Congo during the 19th century Jesuit Father Van Hencxthoven, who was Flemish, decided on the strategy of sending believers, under the supervision of a catechist, from a mission station to live near a non-Christian village. Among other activities the settlers would care for abandoned children. By 1902 there were 250 such settlements with 5,000 children in their care. The Belgian Jesuits took responsibility of the Kwango area in the Congo in 1891 and have remained there ever since. The greatest growth in numbers occurred after the First World War. This resulted in perhaps one-fourth of the population becoming Catholic (Neill 1986, 362). As the 20th century progressed the number of Jesuit missionaries in the Congo increased markedly, probably more than in any other African country. They were active in evangelism and that helps explain how Catholicism continued to expand in that country (Mkenda 2016, 18). Jenkins notes that former Belgian colonies registered great growth, and many Belgian Jesuits were sent to the Congo (Jenkins 2002, 58).

Sensitivity to local cultures developed into a characteristic of Jesuit missionary work, especially after World War 2 (O'Malley 2014, 94-95). More missionaries studying cultural anthropology may have fomented this change. A greater desire to understand and interact with the culture, history, and religion of people groups in different settings became a concern of the Society. The goal changed to winning people to Christianity rather than to Western culture. The Second Vatican Council, held 1962-1965, determined that the liturgy would be translated into indigenous languages worldwide (McGreevy 2016, 218, 219, 221; O'Malley 2014, 99). Father General Arrupe

was stationed near Hiroshima when the atomic bomb fell and did much to aid victims of the blast. Arrupe visited the Philippines in the 1970s and exhorted the Jesuit missionaries to express theology in a way that that was Filipino rather than Western/European (McGreevy 2016, 220-221; O'Malley 2014, 100).

Entering the 21st Century

In 2013 an Argentinian Jesuit was elected pope. Pope Francis is the first member of the Society of Jesus to be named to that position (O'Malley 2014, 112). He shares the concern to understand the cultures where missionaries serve and encouraged research in that area many years prior to assuming the pontificate. At the bicentennial celebration of the Jesuits in 2014 Pope Francis charged the members to continue with a missionary outreach orientation (McGreevy 2016, 222-223).

The 21st Century, however, has brought new challenges. Adolfo Nicolás was elected Father General in 2008 and, like Pope Francis, has charged the Jesuits to continue with a missionary passion (McGreevy 2016, 222; O'Malley 2014, 108). Yet the number of members in 2010 was half that of 1965, when the order had its highest membership in history. But new recruits are increasing in Africa and Asia, especially India. In the 21st century the majority of the 1,600 Jesuits serving in Africa are Africans (Mkenda 2016, 18). Perhaps the biggest challenge is the diminished prospect of winning converts in secular Europe, as well as North and South America. Catholic leaders are hoping to penetrate Africa, India, and China more effectively (O'Malley 2014, 111).

Application

As a lifelong Protestant, and a longtime missionary, I stand in awe of the mission work of the Society of Jesus. The rapid pace at which they have been able to expand their outreach worldwide is most impressive. The Jesuits illustrate the advantages of a mission society, with its own structure and leadership, dedicated to world evangelization. Though other structural arrangements have worked well through the centuries (Smither 2017, 25, 42-44), Ralph Winter argues that Catholic orders and Protestant mission societies have been very effective in extending the Christian Faith. An organization of trained specialists is very useful when the goal is to penetrate another culture with the gospel (Winter 1999, 4, 7, 8).

The Jesuits also demonstrate that oppression/persecution is inevitable. The suppression and the expulsions of the 19th century are evidence of that. No one should be surprised by opposition (Lk. 10:3; Ac. 9:15-16; 2 Co. 11:23-26; 2 Ti. 3:12). I never heard much about that during my missionary career. Giving a warning about potential suffering may dissuade some potential recruits from considering mission work. Other sturdy souls, however, may be motivated to take up the challenge and persist when the going gets tough.

Composing this article will have been worth the effort if it stimulates respect for mission societies and attracts courageous recruits for missionary service.

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