Robert Blair Kaiser

Inside the Jesuits: How Pope Francis Is Changing the Church and the World. Lanham, MD and London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. Pp. xiii, +224. Hb, \$35.00.

The late Robert Blair Kaiser has written one of the first treatments of Pope Francis, and has done so in a journalistic style which integrates memoir with some new insights. At length, Kaiser's quest is to explain to the reader what made the Jesuit Jorge Cardinal Bergoglio such a historic and "surprising" choice as pope. In language more suitable to undergraduates, Kaiser explains that this pope is different from others due to an "inner compulsion to do more" (xii), Kaiser's definition of the *magis*. On the one hand, making spiritual language accessible is perhaps where Kaiser is most helpful. On the other, for readers of this journal, the author's continued attempts to explain Francis through memoir and colloquial comparison may prove frustrating. For example, the Jesuit integration of prayer and decision-making seems in many ways too complicated for Kaiser to spell out in a sophisticated way. Consequently, the heart of Jesuit interior movement toward external activity is a concept he simply calls "the Jesuit DNA" (14). The *Spiritual Exercises* are a part of this "DNA," but not central to it, since Jesuit training, culture, and experience all play a role. In reading Kaiser's book, one could get the impression that the *Spiritual Exercises* are just another instrument in the toolkit Jesuits use to calibrate their "inner compulsion" to work the world.

Even though this book is entitled *Inside the Jesuits*, readers should know that the view provided is hardly global or transnational, but rather rooted mainly in North America and deeply influenced by the post-Vatican II emergent Catholic left perspective. The Jesuits brought to light in this monograph, and consequently those who are deemed quintessential Jesuits, are the rebellious theologians, the maverick social justice entrepreneurs, and the many ex-Jesuits who have felt compelled to leave the order. Jesuits are at their best when they "stand up to their bishops" (29). (This seems in contradistinction to St. Ignatius and his fourth vow of evangelical allegiance to the bishop of Rome.) In essence, Kaiser's "Jesuit DNA" is most determinative when it produces what looks like a modern, liberal (as the term is used in the United States), center-left Jesuit lax on moral matters (birth control is a "phantom" evil (11)). Perhaps this was the world Kaiser encountered during his own formation (or rather the one he anticipated), but unfortunately it has produced a one-dimensional rendering of a global enterprise.

In many respects, this particular subjective view ends up poisoning the narrative. A leitmotif of the work is the juxtaposition of Francis's new style with the leadership styles of his immediate predecessors. What surfaces is the writing of a hagiography of one pope at the expense of maligning previous pontiffs. For example, the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI are acknowl-

edged as simply “thirty-five years of terrorism” (10), presumably against the U.S. Catholic left. Such wild analysis cheapens the narrative and adds nothing to the assessment of Francis.

Kaiser declares that one of the main differences between Francis and his predecessors is that Francis views the Church “too self-referential” (4). The irony deepens, however, when Kaiser’s portrait of Francis merges into an expansive portrait of his own experience as Jesuit. The reader, then, comes away with a largely self-referential portrait of a Jesuit regent in California who ultimately departs the order due to a run-in with an irritating superior. This, I think, is one of the major drawbacks of this book for readers of this journal. Kaiser enthusiastically shows how episodes from his own Jesuit formation either foreshadow or confirm his trust in Francis’s “Jesuit DNA.” The portrayal of Francis becomes obscured through the lens of personal memoir. Consequently, we learn more about the formation of a California Province scholastic during the 1960’s than we do of the current incumbent of the seat of Peter.

Kaiser’s chapter on Liberation Theology presents no obstacles to this narrative. Sympathetic to the Marxist critique, Kaiser delicately dances around Jorge Bergoglio’s tussles with Liberationists during his time as provincial in Argentina in the 1970’s. The tone of Kaiser’s argument is that Bergoglio can be absolved of his public defiance of the Marxist Liberationists because in the end tacit toleration prevailed. The implication is that Bergoglio may harbor some attraction and sympathy for Liberation Theology. This analysis stretches the public record and obscures the possibility that Francis’s concern for the poor may be more akin to that of his fellow Latin American Jesuit Alberto Hurtado. Hurtado successfully skirted the Marxist synthesis by refusing to adulterate Catholicism and relying on the central tenets of charity and Catholic Social Teaching—a trend Francis continues.

Kaiser’s book does help highlight some aspects of the North American Jesuit experience that historians no doubt will find of great interest in years to come. This book can be used as a resource for piecing together America’s modern Jesuit history. For example, future historians will find value in the published discussions between Kaiser and the embattled ex-Jesuit peace activist John Dear. Kaiser also wistfully, yet with great detail, recalls the engagement of Alinskyite Jesuits in California and their founding of PICO, the Pacific Institute for Community, which lobbied leftward for housing and labor goals during the 1970s.

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