CHAPTER 25

Jesuit Restoration in Mexico

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Mexican Historiography on the Jesuits

The literature on the restoration of the Society of Jesus is still very limited, particularly in the case of Mexico. There are some references to the Jesuits in nineteenth-century general histories of Mexico, two of which are mentioned below, but no historical accounts of the local restoration process appeared until the early twentieth century, and most of these were written by members of the order who took a distinctively apologetical approach. This can clearly be seen in the Historia de la Iglesia en México [History of the Church in Mexico] written by Father Mariano Cuevas:

The order had been so good to our country in previous centuries, and the memories it created were so pleasant, that despite all of the venom directed against it by the European and Mexican press, the country always retained a traditional affection for them and expressed a desire to have them back.1

This kind of approach can also be seen in the Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en la República Mexicana durante el siglo XIX [History of the Society of Jesus in Mexico during the nineteenth century], written by Father Gerard Decorme and published in 1921. Decorme (1874–1965) wrote his study as a member of a Mexican province that had achieved some stability during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Decorme relied on the work of José Mariano Dávila but sought to distance himself from the latter’s interpretation of the Jesuits’ return to New Spain.2 This can be perceived in the book’s epigraph,3 where

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1 Mariano Cuevas s.j., Historia de la Iglesia en México (Editorial Revista Católica: Texas, 1928), 5277.
2 José Mariano Dávila y Arrillaga, Continuación de la Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en Nueva España (Imprenta del Colegio Pío de Artes y Oficios: Puebla, 1889), vol. 2.
Decorome associates the Jesuits with the cause of the insurgents during the fight for Mexican independence. Dávila makes no reference to this and simply links the second suppression of the Society in 1820 to the resentment the people of New Spain harbored against the Spanish monarchy; a feeling that, according to him, favored the independence movement led by Iturbide. On the other hand, Decorme enriched his archival research by studying new and extensive documents, though he did not refrain from attacking the opponents of the campaign.

Guillermo Zermeño comments that Decorme’s work suffered some darkening due to a new diaspora and the dispersion of the Jesuits caused by the 1910 revolution, the consequences of which would not be noticeable until the religious and political military conflict of 1926–1929. This new historical threshold—articulated around the conflict between church and state that started in 1821—was surpassed by a new generation of postcristero Jesuit historians, representatives of a “new Society” stabilized and resurrected after 1930. In this regard, the work of Father José Gutiérrez Casillas stands out, and it still carries the imprint of Decorme.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the histories written by Jesuits about the restoration of the order exhibited a rather commemorative tone. A notable example is the work of Gutiérrez Casillas. In the prologue of his book Jesuitas en México durante el siglo XIX [Jesuits in Mexico during the Nineteenth Century] he states the following:

September of the current year [1972] will mark the 400th anniversary of the coming of these men to Mexico. The celebration will be a quiet one; it will consist of the renovation of the primitive supernatural spirit. However, it might be convenient that some historical works on the subject remain as monuments.

Finally, both Gerard Decorme and José Gutiérrez Casillas analyzed the political aspects of the return of the Jesuits, and commented only marginally on what happened within the schools and missions. What proliferated at the time were pamphlets and articles either in favor of or opposed to the return of the Society of Jesus. To give one laudatory example, here is an account originally published in Madrid in 1845 and reprinted in Mexico in 1873:

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4 Arrillaga, Continuación, 239–240.
5 Zermeño, “Retorno, extinción e independencia,” 3.
7 Gutiérrez, Jesuitas, 11.