Editors’ Preface

Current Trends in Jesuit Historiography

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Paul Grendler recently wrote:

When I look at all the new articles and books that the Jesuitica Project [of the Catholic University at Leuven] lists every week, I suspect that there is enough scholarship and interest in the history of the Society of Jesus and individual Jesuits to fill a new journal. I am particularly impressed with the amount of new scholarship appearing in English. There is a climate of interest and acceptance for scholarship on the Jesuits in the English-speaking world that did not exist thirty to fifty years ago. When I obtained my Ph.D. in 1964 studying the Jesuits, or the Catholic Church generally, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not the path to rising in the historical profession in the USA and Canada.

Likewise, John W. O’Malley, S.J. wrote in a front-page article of America entitled “Jesuit History: A New Hot Topic”:

Historians are a cautious lot and do not use the word revolution lightly. But that is the right word to describe what has been happening in the study of the history of the Society of Jesus. The scene is so different now from what it was as recently as a dozen years ago that it is hardly recognizable. All at once the Jesuits have become a hot topic—indeed, one of the hottest—in the field of early modern history. [...] Now the most prestigious university presses—Princeton, Harvard, Stanford and Toronto, for example—also publish on Jesuit history, a venture almost unheard of before. [...] The Jesuits are in vogue.

Indeed, Jesuit history is a wonderful prism through which to look at many interdisciplinary aspects of modern global history, whether through explicitly comparative studies, or by the grouping of studies around a given topical, chronological, or geographic focus. One of the very best things about Jesuit history is that it intersects with so many other important
topics: from the Renaissance and Reformations to the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment(s), from colonialism and imperialism to slavery, anti-modernism, and twentieth-century totalitarianisms. Jesuit history is a window through which these and many other aspects of modern history can be observed, and it should not be ignored for ideological or other reasons. It also engages with a staggering array of disciplines: art history, theology, literary studies, the history of science, international law, military history, performing arts, archaeology, and many others.

Because scholarship on Jesuit history has recently become so abundant, the Journal of Jesuit Studies aims at helping scholars to find their bearings in this rapidly growing field of studies. This is why each issue of the journal will contain a substantial book review section (for more details please see the introduction to the book review section in this issue) and every fourth issue will include the most recent bibliography. Additionally, subscribers will be able to access online a more comprehensive bibliographical database. At the same time, the JJS targets those areas of scholarship on Jesuit history in its broader context that have lamentably been neglected. This mission of the JJS is enhanced by the foundation of the first monograph series of a major academic publisher specifically dedicated to the history of the Society of Jesus—Brill’s Series of Jesuit Studies. Both are officially launched in 2014, the bicentennial of the Jesuits’ world-wide restoration.

In order to fulfill our mission we begin with an issue dedicated to a review of recent historiography on the Jesuits. Our goal is to assess where Jesuit scholarship stands at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Obviously, this review cannot be fully comprehensive because of the overwhelming number of Jesuit-related publications which now amount to at least 800 titles a year. Yet, the following six essays explore recent scholarly trends in the history of the pre-suppression Society of Jesus across the fields of schooling, literature and later, foreign missions, visual culture, science, and philosophy.

We learn from these essays that in spite of the numerous studies published in the two decades following the publication of O’Malley’s The First Jesuits (1993), there are still many lacunae to be filled. Paul Grendler, for example, points out that much has been written on the teaching of mathematics in the international web of Jesuit secondary schools and universities but too little on that of philosophy, and almost nothing on teaching catechesis, although some important works analyzing Jesuit printed catechisms have recently been published. Both Grendler and Ronnie Po-chia Hsia indicate that finances remain a neglected field in studying both schools and missions.

Additionally, there are also some chronological gaps. Not only is it clear that an overwhelming majority of studies have been dedicated to the