

ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA
(1491 - 1556)
and ST. FRANCIS XAVIER
(1506 - 1552)

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power
and love and discipline.

—2 Timothy 1:7

The Counter-Reformation. The 16th century Roman Catholic Church seemed in danger of being crushed under the combined weight of its own corruption¹ and the new Protestant Reformation. Many of the Church's leaders—the products of blatant and persistent simony²—were incompetent or irreligious, or both. Protestant reformers like Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), and John Knox (ca. 1505-1572) criticized the greed of the Church and the morals of her leaders. The Protestant message proved to be immensely popular, and the Protestant movement grew rapidly. Even in Italy, whose economy was dependent upon the Church revenues which flowed into Rome from all over Europe, Protestantism developed a large and vibrant following. The writings of the Protestants, aided by Gutenberg's printing press,³ circulated throughout Europe and could no longer be suppressed.

The Roman Catholic Church probably owes her survival—and certainly her renewal and growth—to reformers within the Catholic Church who forced change upon her. These leaders of the “Counter-Reformation” included: Count Gaetano da Thiene (1480-1547), who led a group of prominent men dedicated to poverty, care of the sick, and a moral life; Bishop Gianmatteo Giberti (1495-1543), who built orphanages, helped the poor, forced his priests to live moral lives, and jailed those clergymen who resisted; St. Philip Neri (1515-1595), who founded the Fathers of the Oratory, a group which devoted their Sundays to religious music and discussion; St. Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), who reformed the clergy and people of Milan, and was almost shot because of it; and Giovanni Pietro Caraffa, who, as Pope Paul IV,⁴ enacted many of the reforms Church leaders had scorned for so long. Paul IV took steps to eliminate simony, pluralism, and absenteeism,⁵ and insisted upon morality in both his clergy and his monks. Additional reforms were also enacted by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and later Popes, such as Pius V, Gregory XIII, and Sixtus V.⁶ Yet no one deserves more credit for the success of the Catholic Counter-Reformation than St. Ignatius Loyola.

ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA

A Soldier for Christ. He was born in 1491, in northern Spain.⁷ His full name was Don Iñigo de Oñez y Loyola. Iñigo was one of 13 children (8 boys, 5 girls) born to a Spanish nobleman, Don Beltrán de Oñez y Loyola.⁸ Iñigo learned the skills of warfare, and acquired both the courage and the lax morals of a soldier. But in 1521, his leg was broken by a cannon ball while fighting the invading French army in Pamplona, near the Spanish-French border.⁹ He suffered excruciating pain, a long rehabilitation, and a permanent limp, largely because doctors set the bone wrong—twice.

During his lengthy convalescence, Iñigo had access to only two books: one about the life of Christ, and the other about the lives of the saints. Iñigo began to envision himself as a soldier for Christ. He dreamed of going to Jerusalem to free the Holy Land from its Muslim captors; this dream soon evolved into a resolution to convert the Muslims to Christianity. During this same time, a vision of the Virgin Mary and the Christ-child seem to have solidified the Church's hold upon him.

When he was well enough, Iñigo traveled to a Benedictine monastery at Montserrat, near Barcelona, in northeast Spain. Here he gave away all of his possessions, took vows of poverty and chastity, and prayed all night in a chapel of the Virgin Mary. Then he went to the nearby town of Manresa, where he lived in a cave for about ten months. During this time, he tended the sick, lived on whatever food he could obtain, and adopted a severe regimen of fasting, prayer, service, and devotions that several times almost cost him his life. He struggled with what he felt were temptations of the Devil. Several times he considered suicide. But he also had numerous visions and ecstasies, and ultimately found the spiritual tranquility he had longed for.

Here in Manresa, Iñigo first developed his “spiritual exercises”—a severe, ascetic regimen designed to master the weaknesses of the flesh and the pride of the spirit. The goal was to grow into unquestioning, obedient servants to both God and Pope. The exercises included meditation upon one's own sins, the punishment those sins deserve, the sufferings endured by Christ to provide redemption, and Christ's triumphant resurrection.

Taking ship in Barcelona, Iñigo reached Palestine in 1523. But Muslim law prohibited attempts to convert Muslims to Christianity, and the local Franciscan monks insisted on compliance with this law. Whether or not Iñigo fully obeyed is uncertain. Either way, he was not free to pursue his missionary dream and left the Holy Land in March, 1524. But before he left, he had a vision of Christ near the Mount of Olives.

Teacher and Student. Returning to Barcelona, Iñigo pursued a basic education, studying Latin with schoolboys. Here in Barcelona he acquired the name, Ignacio—or in its Latin version, Ignatius. Before long, he was preaching and teaching about Christianity. He advocated Christian morality, including sexual purity; the boyfriends of his female students did not appreciate his efforts to spoil their fun. To emphasize their point, they beat him severely.

Ignatius moved on to Alcalá,¹⁰ where he studied at the University of Alcalá. He also taught and preached Christianity—in homes, in hospitals, and on the streets. But this time his teaching attracted unwanted interest from the Inquisition,¹¹ which jailed him and eventually commanded him not to teach or hold meetings for three years. Ignatius moved again, this time to Salamanca¹² and its university. Within only two months, the Inquisition arrested him again. He was subsequently released, but with the command that he study for four years before teaching again. So he went to Paris.

In Paris, Ignatius lived as a beggar, but studied as a scholar—at the Collège de Montaigu and later at the Collège de Ste.-Barbe, both part of the famous University of Paris. He stayed at the University for seven years, from 1528 to 1535, studying theology and obtaining a Master of Arts decree in March 1535.

The Society of Jesus. Loyola soon won over his two roommates at the University, Peter Faber and Francis Xavier, and together they practiced Loyola's spiritual exercises. Before long, Loyola, Faber, and Xavier attracted other students of like spirit: Diego (James) Laynez, Alonso Salmerón, Nicolás Bobadilla, Simón Rodríguez, Claude Le Jay, Jean Codure, and Paschase Broët. On August 15, 1534, these 10 took lifelong vows of chastity and poverty, and agreed to live in Palestine after two more years of study. Because of his health, Loyola left at the end of the first year, and spent a few months in Spain. Then he went on to Venice, where the others joined him in late 1536. But a war between Venice and the Turks made the voyage to Palestine impossible, frustrating their dream of traveling to the Holy Land. Instead, they all became priests and pledged themselves to the service of the Pope. They called themselves the *Compañía de Jesús*—the Company of Jesus.¹³ The Pope, in 1540, renamed them the “Society of Jesus.” They would later become known as the “Jesuits.”¹⁴

In 1537, Loyola, Faber, and Laynez walked to Rome to seek the Pope's approval for their planned journey to Palestine. They had to wait until early 1538 to have their request considered, so they passed the time by serving in a hospital and a school. When the Pope approved the trip, the group returned to Venice to await a ship to Palestine. However, another year passed and the voyage was still not feasible. The *Compañía de Jesús* returned to Rome, this time seeking the Pope's recognition of their group as a new and separate religious order. The Pope gave verbal approval in

1539, followed by formal written authorization in 1540. He also approved rules for the new order in 1540.

Meanwhile, Loyola devoted himself to converting the prostitutes of the city, and founded a home (the “House of Martha”) to care for them after their conversion. While Loyola worked, the Society steadily grew. Its members pledged themselves to obey the Pope in whatever he commanded, and wherever he might send them, for the good of the faith. They also pledged themselves to obey the group’s head, or General. Naturally, Ignatius Loyola was elected as the first General in 1541.

Impact of the Jesuits. Ignatius drafted a Constitution for the Society¹⁵ and directed most of its activities during his remaining 15 years. His background as a soldier was evident in the military-like organization of the Jesuits and their insistence upon absolute obedience. Indeed, Loyola was strict even with those closest to him, from whom he would not accept the slightest disobedience. But he was harder on himself: living mostly on nuts, bread, and water; seldom sleeping more than four hours a day; and working ceaselessly. Under his dedicated leadership, the Society established two colleges¹⁶ and several charitable foundations, sent missionaries all over Europe, and grew to about 1,000 members.

The scholarly background of Loyola and his early followers was reflected in the Society’s emphasis on education. The Society required extensive schooling for their priests, and undertook as its special mission the Christian instruction of young people and unbelievers. The Jesuits—well educated themselves—became the greatest educators of their time by establishing schools throughout Europe and providing high-quality education free-of-charge. Of course, this instruction was not limited to secular subjects; it included religious training and moral development, and emphasized devotion to the orthodox Roman Catholic faith. The Jesuits also preached the Gospel and tended the sick, including victims of the Plague.

In addition to running the Jesuits, Loyola wrote his *Spiritual Exercises* during this time in his life,¹⁷ reducing to written form the religious meditations which he had developed in his days at Manresa. These *Spiritual Exercises* were formally approved by the Pope in 1548, and are commonly used today by Roman Catholics during retreats and other contemplative times.

Meanwhile, most of the Society’s original members traveled on missions in Europe. Faber, Le Jay, and Bobadilla went to Germany; Salmerón and Broët traveled to Ireland and Scotland; and Rodríguez journeyed to Portugal. As we shall see, Xavier surpassed all of them in both distance and scope, traveling to India and beyond. In addition, Laynez and Salmerón served as papal theologians for the Council of Trent.

Ignatius Loyola died in Rome on July 31, 1556. Sixty-six years later, in 1622, the Roman Catholic Church canonized him as a saint.

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

We now turn to St. Francis Xavier, one of the Jesuits' greatest missionaries. Francisco de Jassu y Javier was born on April 7, 1506, at Xavier Castle, near the town of Sanguesa,¹⁸ in far north Spain (near the French border). He was born into a wealthy family that lost most of its wealth by supporting the French invaders in the battle of Pamplona (the same battle in which Loyola had been injured). Francis decided to become a priest and went to the University of Paris in 1525 to study theology. There he became the college roommate and close friend of Peter Faber. As we have seen, Ignatius Loyola arrived a few years later, and the three of them formed the foundation of the Society of Jesus. Xavier remained in Paris as a teacher until November 1536, when he and the other members of the Society journeyed to Venice to rejoin Loyola. Xavier spent the next several years assisting Loyola in his various ministries in Venice and Rome.

In early 1540, Loyola received a request from John III, the King of Portugal, for Jesuit missionaries for Portugal's colonies in the East Indies. Loyola could spare only two, one of whom was Francis Xavier.¹⁹ And when his companion was detained in Portugal for other work, Xavier went alone. He sailed in 1541, and reached Goa, midway up the west coast of India, in May 1542. While en route he tended the sick and ministered to the other passengers. When Xavier arrived in Goa, he found a wide disparity between Portuguese opulence and the Indians' suffering. He labored faithfully to relieve the natives' misery, while reminding their masters of their duty to God and their fellow men. Not surprisingly, Xavier aroused a lot of resentment (and made many enemies) among the Portuguese. However, he also helped convert thousands of Muslims and Hindus, ministered to the Portuguese, and founded a multi-cultural college—the College of St. Paul—to train priests and missionaries from among the native peoples.²⁰

From Goa, Xavier moved to southeast India, where he taught, served, and converted the Paravas, a people numbering about 20,000. Xavier learned their language and taught Christianity to the children, who then taught the adults. These same children grew up into faithful Christians. So successful was Xavier that the Paravas people remain predominantly Christian to this day.

Xavier continued to labor in India, Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon), Malaysia, and the Molucca Islands²¹ until 1549, when he sailed for Japan. He was accompanied by a Japanese convert to Christianity and two other Jesuit companions. He learned Japanese during the voyage, landed at Kagoshima (at the southern tip of Japan) in August 1549, and preached the Christian message in Japan for two years.

In 1551, events in Goa required Xavier to return there for a short time. Antonio Gomez, who was placed in charge of the College of St. Paul shortly before Xavier's departure, did not approve of the College's concessions to native customs or its exclusion of Portuguese students. Consequently, in Xavier's absence, Gomez reversed both of these policies. By the time Xavier returned from Japan, the College had become exclusively a university for the Portuguese. However, in the meantime Ignatius Loyola, with keen understanding of Xavier's difficulties, removed India and the East Indies from the control of the Jesuit provincial leader in Portugal and placed both under Francis' control. With this new authority, Xavier relieved Gomez of his duties and sent him back to Portugal.

Xavier next sailed for China in April 1552. He hoped to become the first Christian missionary to China, which at that time excluded all foreigners. Sadly, he became ill and died on December 2, 1552, before he could really begin. Like Loyola, Xavier was canonized as a saint in 1622.

The Jesuits After Loyola and Xavier. The Jesuits did not end with the deaths of Xavier and Loyola. By 1565 they had grown to about 3,500 members, and were sending missionaries to Africa, India, China, Japan, North and South America, and many parts of Europe. Jesuits such as Peter Canisius (1521-1597), Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), Aloysius Gonzaga (1568-1591), and Francis Borgia (1510-1572) contributed mightily to the growth of the Jesuits and the revival of the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, the Jesuits helped the Catholic Church reclaim Poland, most of Hungary and Bohemia, and parts of Germany from Protestantism, while predominantly Catholic countries such as Spain, France, Ireland, and Italy were strengthened in the Catholic faith. Many of the successes of the Catholic Counter-Reformation can be attributed to the efforts of the Jesuits.

- Sources:
- (1) *The Story of Civilization: Volume VI, The Reformation*, by Will Durant (1957).
 - (2) *A History of Christianity, Volume II (Reformation to the Present, A.D. 1500 - A.D. 1975)*, by Kenneth Scott Latourette (1953, 1975).
 - (3) *Saints for Sinners*, by Alban Goodier, S.J. (1930, 1993).
 - (4) *Lives of the Saints You Should Know, Volume 2*, by Margaret & Matthew Bunson (1996).
 - (5) *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia* (1998 Edition).
 - (6) The following articles in the Catholic Encyclopedia:
 - “The Counter-Reformation” –
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04437a.htm>
 - “Pope St. Pius V” –
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12130a.htm>
 - “Pope Gregory XIII” –
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07001b.htm>
 - “Pope Sixtus V” –
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14033a.htm>
 - “Council of Trent” –
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15030c.htm>
 - “St. Ignatius Loyola” –
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07639c.htm>
 - “St. Francis Xavier” –
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06233b.htm>
 - (7) In addition, the following web sites were useful regarding the geography of some of the locations mentioned in this article:
 - Spain and Portugal for Visitors* –
<http://spainforvisitors.com/index.php>
 - Drive Alive!* - <http://www.drive-alive.co.uk/>
 - Sacred Destinations* (“Shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat”)–
<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/spain/montserrat-shrine.htm>
 - Malaka.Net* - http://www.melaka.net/malaysia_map.htm
 - msn encarta World Atlas* –
<http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/features/mapcenter/map.aspx>

Endnotes for “St. Ignatius Loyola and St. Francis Xavier”:

¹ For a more detailed discussion of the abuses that provoked the Protestant Reformation (and the Catholic Counter-Reformation), see the article, “Predecessors of the Reformation,” on this web site.

² Simony is the buying and selling of Church offices. In other words, instead of appointing a person as a Bishop or Cardinal based upon merit or piety, the position would be given to whoever could pay for it, thus generating additional revenues for the Church. Such positions were often viewed as investments, since the office holder received a portion of the tithes from his region (and in those days, tithes were generally mandatory, like taxes). A wealthy father might purchase a church office for his son to provide him with financial security. There were even cases in which the Papacy itself was sold.

³ The Gutenberg Bible was first printed in about 1456-1457.

⁴ Pope from 1555 to 1559

⁵ Pluralism refers to holding more than one Church office (e.g., two bishoprics), which allows the office holder to receive the revenues from each. Absenteeism is the practice of living at a remote location from the region for which the Church official is responsible—in effect, receiving the revenues of the office without fulfilling its duties.

⁶ St. Pius V was Pope 1566-1572; Gregory XIII was Pope 1572 - 1585; Sixtus V was Pope 1585-1590.

⁷ St. Ignatius was born in the Loyola family castle, near the town of Azpeitia, in the region of Guipuscoa (or Guipuzcoa). Azpeitia is about 26 miles (42 km) southwest of San Sebastian.

⁸ St. Ignatius’ mother was Marina Saenz de Lieona y Balda.

⁹ Pamplona is located about 51 miles (82 km) south of San Sebastian.

¹⁰ Alcalá, also known as Alcalá de Henares, is about 22 miles (35 km) east of Madrid.

¹¹ For more on the Inquisition, see the article, “Predecessors of the Reformation,” on this web site.

¹² Salamanca is about 134 miles (215 km) west of Madrid.

¹³ *Compañía* is a military term, like our Army “company,” which is a subdivision of a regiment or battalion. Loyola, perhaps because of his military background, viewed his followers as “soldiers” for Christ.

¹⁴ In the 15th century, the term “Jesuit” derisively referred to someone who used the name “Jesus”

too frequently in his speaking. The term was first applied to Loyola's followers in about 1544 in the writings of the Society's critics. The name caught on and was eventually adopted by the members of the Society sometime after Ignatius' death.

¹⁵ The Society's Constitution was first written between 1547 and 1550, and was approved by the Pope in 1550, but it was continuously revised until Loyola's death in 1556. It established several levels of membership. The lowest level consisted of candidates for admission, who had to undergo a novitiate of two years. At the end of this two-year trial period, they would take revocable vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and become members of the "second class." The third class consisted of those who had received further education and been trained as teachers, professors, or priests. The fourth class, called the "professed," were priests who pledged to undertake any task assigned them by the Pope. Ultimate authority in the Society was vested in these "professed" members. However, they were pledged to obey the head of the Society, unless he were removed for cause or overridden by the Pope. The Jesuit leader became known as the "Black Pope" because of the authority he wielded and the black cassock he wore.

Jesuits practiced moderation in eating and drinking, but did not require fasting or asceticism. Members were allowed to retain their property upon entry, but all income from the property belonged to the Society. Customarily, such property was given to the Society upon the member's death, but this was not required either.

The Jesuits consistently supported the Pope and Catholic orthodoxy, including—unfortunately—the Inquisition. However, they did not actively participate in the Inquisition (unlike, for example, the Dominicans and the Franciscans).

¹⁶ The Roman College was founded in 1551, and the German College in 1552.

¹⁷ The earliest copy of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* dates from 1541.

¹⁸ Sanguesa is located about 80 miles (131 km) southeast of San Sebastian, and about 29 miles (47 km) southeast of Pamplona.

¹⁹ Loyola initially designated two other Jesuits, but one of these became ill. Loyola replaced the sick Jesuit with Francis Xavier, almost at the last minute. Xavier had only a single day's notice before leaving for Portugal.

²⁰ Today, this seminary is located at nearby Rachol, a few miles inland.

²¹ The Molucca (or Maluku) Islands were once known as the Spice Islands. They are located west of the island of New Guinea.