

St Mary's, Inverness
The RC Diocese of Aberdeen: SC005122]
The Year of St Ignatius
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THIRTY-SIXTH REFLECTION

THE MISSION TO SOUTH AMERICA : BRASIL, ARGENTINA, THE GUARANI & PARAGUAY

Context : The first Europeans to discover what is now Argentina. Were the sailors who accompanied the Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci in 1502.



Brazil is clearly the largest country in the South American land mass, the next largest being the country now called 'Argentina'.



The name 'Argentina' is derived from the Latin word for silver the

precious metal. The extraction of silver from mines was a source of great wealth to the Spanish economy. A Portuguese explorer, Lopo Homem, was one of the first to associate this territory with silver, marking it on a map in 1554 as "Terra Argentea" – Land of Silver.



Ignatius, the General, directing the Universal Mission, from his room at the Jesuit Curia in Rome

Missions : After the Holy Father Pope Paul III had approved the 'Society of Jesus' and Ignatius had been elected and ratified as the First General, he began to plan and organise the universal Mission. The first missionary priorities were initiated by requests from the Portuguese King, John III, to send missionaries to the Portuguese Empire. Francis Xavier, the first to be sent overseas by Ignatius travelled east to India, Malacca, Japan and China.

In the west the recently discovered Americas were the next overseas priority.

Fr Manuel Nobrega arrived with five other missionaries in 1549 and settled at The Bay [Bahia] where the city of Salvador was being built. His first task was the protection and conversion of the native peoples. From Salvador the Jesuit missionaries moved into the interior, establishing a

school in 1553 on the site that later became the city of Sao Paulo [San Paulo]. The Mission to Brazil had begun.



Fr Joao Azpilcueta was an outstanding linguist, consolidating the native language, Tupi, and providing sung catechisms to assist in evangelising.

The Jesuits who travelled to what is now called 'Argentina' also valued linguistic skills and the importance of education. 'Argentina' was a Spanish colony which the first 'conquistadores' [conquerors] had established. In 1516 the first explorer, Juan Diaz de Solis was killed by the indigenous tribes. In 1536 the Spanish aristocrat and conquistador Pedro de Mendoza arrived in the area of the Plata river.

He was the first civil and military governor of the Rio de la Plata area. In 1573 Jeronimo Luis de Cabrera established and founded the city of Cordoba which became the centre of the Jesuit Mission to the Rio de la Plata.

The first Jesuits when they arrived initially erected a number of 'estancias' [Blocks of houses and small estates] in and around the city of Cordoba.



Cordoba Cathedral

The city of Cordoba's main plaza is overlooked by a picturesque colonial cathedral. Nearby is the Jesuit Block and Estancias, which is well preserved, and now contains the University of Cordoba, one of the oldest colleges in South America.

From the beginning the priests of the Society of Jesus were devoted to apostolic activity, notably through missions, and education. The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola fostered and developed a missionary priesthood which was rooted and grounded in Christ. The inner conviction and the personal integrity of these Jesuits, all well-educated men, enabled them to promote new forms of preaching and teaching. They were in great demand in Europe in the reform of the Church. They were decisive participants in the Catholic Counter-Reformation fostered by the Council of Trent (1545–1563).



The South American Mission

The growth and expansion of the order in Latin America was rapid and continuous. The first Jesuits arrived in Brazil in 1549, in Peru in 1568, and in Mexico in 1572, and they soon became involved in the main religious, social, economic, and political activities of each region. They founded numerous colleges and residences in the most important cities and dozens of missions, or *reducciones*, villages among the indigenous populations living on the borderlands of the colonial territories of Spain and Portugal. The Jesuit missions in Latin America were organized territorially into provinces. Ignatius' encouragement of correspondence meant that there was constant and fluid communication with the headquarters of the order in Rome, where the Superior General lived. Several local governments requested missions and, as a consequence, new Jesuit provinces were established in the Seventeenth century. The Jesuit Province of Paraguay became one of the most famous in Latin America.

In the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, Jesuits missions, or 'reductions' began to be concentrated in the area around the Parana river on the border of Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil. This was a Mission towards the conversion of the native Guarani population

to Christianity. The strategy of the Jesuit missionaries in northern Argentina was peaceful and harmonious. They did not set out to intimidate or coerce the Guarani population, but rather to integrate them into their missions so that they might become active participants in these new communities. The Guarani were impressed with the tools, medical and agricultural knowledge of the Jesuits, and decided to follow them although it took some time for the initial break-through. The Jesuits established 'the reductions', which were often a collection of buildings that housed a church, schools, administrative buildings, and housing for the Guarani, organised around a central plaza. These communities of 'common-wealth' operated collectively, with the inhabitants working for both their family and the community. Education was a high priority and as in Brazil so also in the 'reductions' throughout their mission territory good communications were essential. While Spanish and Latin were taught, it was the Jesuits who consolidated, promoted and established the indigenous Guarani as a language. Eventually it became the official language of Paraguay.

The Jesuit missions have been variously called a 'Holy Experiment', a 'Lost Paradise' or a 'Music State'. They were actually small, self-determined republics inside the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, where the indigenous were protected from exploitation (often for the slave trade).

The treatment of, and relationships with, the Guarani people were unique. The missionaries, priests and lay brothers of the Society of Jesus, worked with them to create communities in which ideas and skills were shared. Education occurred in both Spanish and Guarani language, and in both directions. The people were taught trades and skills that related

to their culture. The shared enjoyment of music was a pleasure, a means of worship and a tool of evangelisation. When the Jesuits were accepted the Guarani flocked to live and work in these communities free from all exploitation.



Jesuit Missions of the Guaranis: San Ignacio Mini, Santa Ana, Nuestra Señora de Loreto and Santa Maria Mayor (Argentina).

Sao Miguel – ruins.
 “The ruins of São Miguel das Missões in Brazil, and those of San Ignacio Miní, Santa Ana, Nuestra Señora de Loreto and Santa María la Mayor in



Argentina, lie at the heart of a tropical forest. They are the impressive remains of five Jesuit missions, built in the land of the Guaranis during the 17th and 18th centuries. Each is characterized by a specific layout and a different state of conservation.” from UNESCO WEBSITE



San Ignacio in Argentina -ruins

Jesuit Missions of La Santísima Trinidad de Paraná and Jesús de Tavarangue in Paraguay “The archaeological ruins of these urban complexes represent a fusion of cultures in which the process of Christianisation permitted the indigenous population to retain elements of their traditional culture.” from UNESCO WEBSITE

These Jesuit Missions in Latin America were rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ, preaching the Gospel, and in fellowships of prayer and praise using sacred music. Holy Mass was central to community life. Within these communities the indigenous people were educated and cared for both spiritually and materially. Cattle ranches and plantations for growing sugar and cotton were developed and managed commercially.

Mission layout

The ruins of several of the missions still remain. They were laid out in a uniform plan. The buildings were grouped around a central square, the church and store-houses at one end, and the dwellings of the natives, in long barracks, forming the other three sides. Each family had its own separate apartment, but one veranda and one roof served for perhaps a hundred families. The churches were of stone or fine wood, with lofty towers, elaborate sculptures and richly adorned altars, with statuary imported from [Italy](#) and Spain. The priests' quarters, the commissary, the stables, the armoury, the workshop, and the hospital, also usually of stone, formed an inner square adjoining the church. The Plaza, the Square itself, was of grass which was neatly cropped by sheep. The houses of the natives, the Guarani, were sometimes of stone but more often of [clay](#) or cane, with home-made furniture and religious pictures often made by the Guarani themselves.

Life at the missions

Smaller missions had two priests, whereas larger missions had more. Populations varied from 2,000 to 7,000. In the morning, children's hymns were followed by Mass and breakfast, after which the workers went to their daily routine.

The Jesuits gathered the new converts to the sound of music, and in procession to the fields, with the statue of a saint held high, the community each day at sunrise made its way to work. Along the way there were shrines of saints where those in the processions prayed, and as they continued on their way, they sang hymns between the shrines. As the procession advanced it became gradually smaller as groups of Indians dropped off to work at the various fields and occupations. Finally, the priest and acolyte with the musicians returned to the base by themselves.

At noon each group assembled for the prayers of the Angelus, then came dinner and a siesta. Work began again after the break until dusk. After supper the Rosary was said before evening rest and sleep. On rainy days they worked indoors. There was much gaiety and laughter in the Missions as there were frequent festivals with mock battles, fireworks, concerts, and dances.

Aside from the main Mission farm, each man typically had his own garden area, land on which he could grow crops or raise animals and the cultivation of maté [a caffeine rich variety of tea, drunk traditionally from a gourd:



The Jesuits introduced many European trades and arts to their communities : Cotton weaving, tanning-hides, leather-working, wood-working, tailoring, hat-making, making barrels [coopers], and boat-building.

The fine arts were also encouraged particularly as silversmiths, painters, musical instrument makers, musicians instruments, and artists. The Jesuits instructed the Guarani in the art and craft of printing, and in addition some manuscripts were produced by calligraphy.

The goods and crops that were produced at the missions, including cattle, were sold in the cities and other markets under the supervision of the priests. The proceeds were divided among a common fund, the workers, and dependents.

The profitable and commercial success of the 'reductions', which the Jesuits used for the welfare of the native communities, caused resentment among local landowners and the colonial officials. The relationships between the colonists and the Jesuit missionaries were not always easy, indeed at times far from peaceful.

The colonial planters resented the marketing success. The principles of freedom, and the idea of a 'common-wealth' to be used for the benefit of everyone, were anathema to settlers from Europe who wanted to get rich from the resources of the colonies and were prepared to exploit and even enslave the native populations to achieve this.

A combination of factors worked against the Jesuit missions in South America. Spanish and Portuguese rivalry as well as a shared interest in diminishing the mercantile and commercial success of the 'reductions' shaped their common opposition. Suspicion and fear of the threat to the social order if Jesuit principles of freedom and equality were to become widespread struck terror in the hearts of the colonisers, particularly as the Jesuits had engaged with some hostility the slaving policies of the Portuguese. The Jesuits had encouraged the Guarani to take up arms against the slave traders. Difficulties within Europe as different monarchies became suspicious and resentful of the influence of the Jesuits within their own courts added to the grievances against them.

The film, "The Mission", attempted with some success to portray the essentials of the 'reductions' and their destruction. Spanish civil servants after 1700 resented the concessions enjoyed in the Jesuit missions. In the 1760s tired of Jesuit privileges, inflamed by Guarani military resistance to the Treaty of Madrid of 1750, which would have transferred seven missions on the Uruguay River to Portuguese control. The Portuguese were more exploitative colonisers than the Spanish, and were accustomed to the enslavement of the native peoples. Some administrators also envied the wealth that the Society of Jesus accumulated in and for its missions. In early 1767, the Spanish king, Charles III, ordered that the Jesuits should be expelled from his dominions. Officials in the Río de la Plata executed the order in 1767 and 1768. The Portuguese undertook a similar expulsion, but with greater violence.

After the expulsion, imperial bureaucrats and land-hungry colonists conspired to grab the mission lands. The Guarani missions gradually declined. Many Guarani took advantage of more relaxed controls to leave the missions and join Spanish speaking communities of the upper Río de la Plata where they applied their skills and education.

The Society of Jesus returned to South America many years later, but again that is another story for yet another day.

The Reductions, The Mission in South America was a noble exercise in Christian living, sharing resources and education for the Common Good while giving greater Glory to God. An experiment that in a way was a paradigm of Christian living which was ahead of its time.

Thoughts to Consider:

- A Common Life in the Body of Christ : the first Christians practised an early form of 'communalism', sharing their resources according to need, meeting regularly for prayer and sharing in the Thanksgiving. The Reductions were an attempt to live 'Biblical Christianity'. Is this a possible ideal?
- Worship of God at Mass involves a concern that 'our daily bread' also involves the physical and spiritual welfare of all humankind. Is Mass integrated into our family, personal and daily routines?
- Jealousy and acquisitive greed were primary motives in opposing the Reductions. Are we aware of such impulses in our world today?
- Skills enable people to be more self-sufficient. Are we in a position to enable others to become better educated, or have greater development of their abilities through the assistance of SCIAF, or Mary's Meals.

Suscipe

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.

THE EXAMINATION OF OUR LIVES [THE EXAMEN]

Daily Examen :

Looking with quiet sincerity and simplicity of heart at the day

Five Daily R's (a daily examen)

- R Relish the moments that went well and all of the gifts you have today.
- R Request the Holy Spirit lead you through your review of the day.
- R Review your day.
- R Repent of any mistakes or failures.
- R Resolve, in concrete ways, to live tomorrow well.

Source:

Reimagining the Ignatian Examen: Fresh Ways to Pray From Your Day
by Fr. Mark Thibodeaux, SJ



Preparation for Scriptural Reflection :

- *Short acts of devotion : placing ourselves in the presence of God.*
- *Opening up conversation with God by expressing our sorrow for sin and our gratitude for our blessings*
- *Asking God to receive our lives, our hopes and prayers*
- *Reading the Passage of Scripture slowly saying the words silently*
- *We place ourselves into the scene of the Scripture : what we see, what we hear, what it feels like, what we smell, what we might taste.*

Passage for Spiritual Reflection : St Luke 5.1-9

1. Now it happened that Jesus was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing round him listening to the word of God, 2. when he caught sight of two boats at the water's edge. The fishermen had got out of them and were washing their nets. 3. He got into one of the boats -- it was Simon's -- and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4. When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch.' 5. Simon replied, 'Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.' 6. And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, 7. so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when these came, they filled both boats to sinking point. 8. When Simon Peter saw this he

fell at the knees of Jesus saying, 'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man.' 9. For he and all his companions were completely awestruck at the catch they had made; 10. so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. But Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on it is people you will be catching.' 11. Then, bringing their boats back to land they left everything and followed him.

Points for Consideration :

- Jesus is with Simon and the other fishermen. He is interested in their work. He is able to teach others while with them. How close to Jesus are we when we are at work? Do we call to mind his teaching? We can commune with Jesus by reflection on his teaching, his life and his continuing Presence.
- Jesus asks Simon to 'put out into deeper water' – it's not always easy to accept a challenge from the Gospels- are we challenged to go further, and put ourselves out so that we may discover what God wants of us?
- The resulting success, a huge catch of fish, is a demonstration that the creator God is the source of all good things, the food we eat, the work that we have and the means of grace which brings us the hope of glory. 'God gives the increase', bread and wine, become the Life of God Himself. The Sacrament enables us to share in the Life Divine, Love beyond all telling.

ICTHUS > Fish: Jesus, Christ,
God's Son, Saviour



- **A Period of Silence** in which we pray with St Ignatius, talking conversationally to God as Father: seeking understanding and insight, ever searching, ever finding, always willing, and Loving.

"For those who love, nothing is too difficult, especially when it is done for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ignatius Loyola

The Lord's Prayer



Jesus Mercy, Mary Pray

Praise God Always