


BOOK REVIEW

Friedrich, Markus. *The Jesuits: A History*

Translated by John Noël Dillon. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022.
Pp. 872.

Bronwen McShea 

Augustine Institute
Email: bronwenmcshea@gmail.com

Markus Friedrich has produced the best one-volume, comprehensive history to date of the Society of Jesus, the Catholic Church's most storied and controversial religious order. *The Jesuits: A History*—an elegant translation by John Noël Dillon of Friedrich's German work of 2016—examines the order from many angles. Arranged thematically rather than strictly chronologically, *The Jesuits* draws widely and deeply from developed bodies of specialized literature on five overarching themes: the inner life and structure of the order, including developments in Jesuit spirituality and the formation of young recruits (Chapter 1); the Jesuits' impact on the Catholic faithful at large in diverse localities, especially through educational ministries (Chapter 2); the order's complex role in European political and military affairs and other secular spheres, with attention to some Jesuits' nationalistic tendencies (Chapter 3); the global expansion and evangelistic activities of the Society (Chapter 4); and the lead-up, details, and aftermath of both Pope Clement XIV's suppression of the order in 1773 and Pope Pius VII's restoration of the Society in 1814 (Chapter 5).

Although the book spans the period of the Jesuits' founding by Saint Ignatius Loyola in 1540 to the present-day pontificate of Francis, the first Jesuit elected as Pope, it is devoted much more to the earlier centuries of the order than to the modern era. Nineteenth-, twentieth-, and early twenty-first-century developments are confined to brief summaries. In a provocative epilogue on the modern Society, Friedrich articulates his general take on the Jesuits' history: well into the nineteenth century, the Jesuits, although they "adopted some modern innovations," were characterized by "a conservative insistence on continuity and tradition" (621). Then, during the era of World War II and the Second Vatican Council (1963–65), the order "acquired a new role and position within the church," to the point that Friedrich sees it—with its radical versus moderate, liberal posture—as a very distinct from both the pre-Suppression Society and the Society of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (622).

Friedrich's book holds a great deal for scholars in many fields. Given the fact that the Jesuits' Austrian province, established in 1562, over time was "the largest in Europe, since it included Hungary" (33), specialists in the history of Austria and other lands formerly part of the Habsburg Empire will find much of interest in all the book's chapters. Friedrich's treatment of the Jesuits of early modern Vienna, with their special devotion to social ministries, such as the care of orphans and prisoners, is illuminating (185, 199). Friedrich covers, too, the shifting fortunes of the Society during the Thirty Years' War, the War of the Austrian Succession, the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, and other conflicts, covering matters such as the wars' impact on Jesuit educational institutions and recruitment and the political influence of Jesuits serving as royal confessors.

Stemming from his own earlier, specialized work, Friedrich is at his best when describing interconnections—political, intellectual, spiritual—among Jesuits working within different European contexts and those in colonial and other mission territories across the globe, as well as friendly and tense relationships alike between Jesuits working in diverse locales and ministries and a range of others, including members of different religious orders, papal nuncios, and local bishops. Likewise, Friedrich accounts for ways that members of the Catholic laity, including women, collaborated with

Jesuits in various projects and were sometimes crucial in establishing them. For example, he acknowledges the central role that the daughters of Emperor Charles V—Joanna who was regent of Spain for a time, and Maria who became Holy Roman empress—played in the establishment and development of the Society in these lands (29, 263). Friedrich gives a prominent place, too, to Empress Maria Theresa's complex and shifting relationship with the Jesuits prior to and during the era of the royal and papal suppressions of the order. This includes the empress's surprising hospitality toward ex-Jesuits in the period of the suppression of 1773 (604).

A few important women in the Jesuits' history are missing from the book: mention might have been made, for example, of Ignatius's friend and patroness Isabella Roser, the Spanish noblewoman who temporarily was permitted by Pope Paul III to form a women's congregation affiliated with the Jesuits. With respect to Friedrich's coverage of the global Society over time, some readers might be disappointed by Friedrich's relatively cursory treatment of Jesuit slaveholding and additional forms of mistreatment of Black people and other oppressed racial and ethnic groups. In Friedrich's defense, however, some of the best-specialized scholarship on such matters—and on the Jesuits' global activities broadly—has been published only since the time he was completing the original German volume, and discourses on race, class, and gender have also evolved considerably even since Princeton University Press began preparing this English version for publication. Should Friedrich ever wish to revise and expand *The Jesuits*, many would welcome his updated thoughts on these and other themes in Jesuit Studies as they continue to develop. In the meantime, there is no denying that this book is a masterful synthesis of both traditional and recent scholarship. It covers numerous national and cultural contexts with great sensitivity to changing political, economic, and social conditions, and it avoids both hagiographic and iconoclastic modes in its careful, critical discussion of well-known, admirable Jesuits as well as numerous non-canonized—and sometimes scandalous or otherwise disappointing—lesser-known Jesuits of historical import. Friedrich's will be a go-to book on the Jesuits for specialists, students, and general readers alike for decades to come.