

Memoirs of Someone who is 'Addicted' to Jesuit History

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The following contribution is the very elaborated text of a short talk delivered on 11 June 2019 at Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, USA, on the occasion of the International Symposium on Jesuit Studies, the fifth annual gathering of scholars organized by the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies (11–13 June 2019). The theme of the conference was, “Engaging Sources: The Tradition and Future of Collecting History in the Society of Jesus”.

At the end of the Second World War, in the middle of the *hongerwinter* (winter of starvation), I was born in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, on December 1, 1944, feast day of Edmund Campion SJ (1540–1581). I was the second of nine children. The oldest son, Arthur, became a Jesuit, a year ahead of me, left for Japan, but returned to the Netherlands in 1970, and died of cancer in the same year. My parents had met each other while studying in Amsterdam, my father studied law, my mother medicine and psychology. After the war, they returned together with my older brother and me to the southern part of the country, and from there to Nijmegen, where my father got a job at the Catholic university, until he decided in later life to become an art dealer in prints.

After primary school, I went to the Jesuit boarding school *Katwijk de Breul* at Zeist, where I spent almost seven years, and had to learn six languages. I worked for the school paper, acted in plays, sang in two choirs, and was a member of the Marian Sodality. After my finals in the summer of 1963, my paternal grandmother gave me a ticket for a trip to Rome, where I arrived the day after the funeral of Pope John XXIII. I stayed for the Mass of the Holy Spirit, and witnessed the election of Pope Paul VI. I also had the occasion to meet Father General John Janssens (1889–1964) and other Jesuits at the General Curia. Altogether a real baptism in Church history.

I joined the Dutch Jesuits at the village of Grave on September 7, 1963, together with ten other men, who all left eventually, except for one who was forced to move to Mexico. It was a world apart, almost a monastery. One day, I asked Father Minister Hubert Jacobs: “Is this what Ignatius had in mind? How were those first novitiate years in the sixteenth century? Will it be possible to reconstruct the novitiate

of the first Dutch Jesuits?" We discovered that Peter Canisius (1521–97) was the very first, followed by fellow-Dutchman Claes Floris from Gouda, in Latin, Nicolaus Goudanus (1517–65). Father Jacobs promised to help me to do historical research, and so he smuggled many volumes of the *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu* from the house library and brought them one by one to my desk. I copied all the data I could find regarding Goudanus, and thus could mark the contours of this interesting person. After studies at the University of Leuven, he became parish priest in Bergen op Zoom, in the Netherlands, and entered the Society of Jesus a few years later, to the great dissatisfaction of Marchioness Jacqueline de Croy, who lodged a complaint with Ignatius of Loyola himself. Goudanus accompanied Canisius to Bavaria, assisted him in composing a catechism, suffered under his lack of the gift of tears, became papal ambassador to Mary Queen of Scots, and had a varied pastoral life, like many Jesuits of the earliest generations.

In the second year of my novitiate, Father Jacobs left for Rome to become the editor of the *Monumenta Malucensia*, the documents on the Jesuit mission in the Moluccas. After my first vows, I moved to nearby Nijmegen in September 1965 to begin my studies of philosophy in the Collegium Berchmanianum (the Jesuit college and residence connected to the Catholic University of Nijmegen), a two year period of other-worldly and (for me) superfluous and isolated education. In the meantime, all institutions for philosophy and theology in the Netherlands, of both secular and regular clergy, were desperately looking for internal mergers, although not with great success. Happily enough, there were other activities to keep us busy, like the mimeographed in-house magazine *Groei* (Growth), in which scholastics published their essays on philosophy, theology, spirituality, Church history and literature.

Together with two scholastics and one priest, who had made his tertianship in Spain, we decided to start the translation of the Jesuit *Constitutions* into Dutch. Highly motivated, we met four times a week. In 1967, the job was finished. It was one of the earliest translations in a modern language; the French one appeared when we were half way with our work; the German, English and Italian translations came much later. It was an excellent method to discover this source of Ignatian spirituality.

My research on the early years of the Society of Jesus was stimulated by an invitation of Father Hubert Jacobs to come to Rome and see with my own eyes the Historical Institute of the Society of Jesus and its collaborators. It was clear that he wanted me to become

a *Monumentista* like himself. On the Via dei Penitenzieri 20, not only historians lived, but also Jesuits who worked for Radio Vaticana, who teasingly called each other *hysterici* and *radiotici*. When I arrived and had my first meal, the Canadian John Swain (1908–1987), Assistant of General Pedro Arrupe (1907–1991), joined us for coffee, saw me sitting at the table, and exclaimed: ‘Ecco, il bambino!’ The most famous among these senior figures was 84 years old German Georg Schurhammer (1882–1971), who, as a young Jesuit had made a vow to write a biography of Saint Francis Xavier. On his deathbed, he dictated the last chapter of his very detailed book to his Swiss confrère Josef Wicki (1904–1983), editor of the *Monumenta Indica*. There also lived three Hungarian Jesuits with the first name László. The first, László Lukács (1910–1998), was specialized in the history of Jesuit education. The second, László Polgár (1920–2001), was until his death responsible for the annual bibliography. The third, László Szilas (1927–2012), did research on the Jesuits in Austria-Hungary. Then there was the Spaniard Ignacio Iparraguirre (1911–1973), who was a specialist on the history of the Spiritual Exercises, who died tragically young, and the roaring Sicilian lion Mario Scaduto (1907–1995), who made the life and generalate of Diego Laínez his *magnum opus*.

Working at the Institute was intense, sometimes fraught over historical and methodological questions, and not without its battles, in spite of the mediation of Father Jacobs. For several weeks, I stayed in Rome, and almost every day I did my research in the general archives of the Society (ARSI), then in the Curia. The helpful, stooped Walloon Jesuit Edmond Lamalle (1900–1989) brought me the requested documents regarding Goudanus and the earliest Jesuits in the Netherlands. Like a hamster, I hoarded my discoveries by making transcriptions of these pieces and using them in later publications. I hardly took time to visit the city.



In the summer of 1967, I received my first Jesuit 'mission': back in the Netherlands, I was appointed *surveillant* (housemaster) in the Jesuit boarding school at Zeist, which had been my own high school. With four Jesuits, we were responsible for the education of about 110 boys. It was an around-the-clock task, with one day off per week. Most of the time on that day, I took a bus or a train and spent the whole day in a university library or different archives somewhere in the country in order to do research on early Jesuit life. I also wrote reviews and articles for Jesuit journals, although I never had received any historical training. I truly was an autodidact.

In 1970, I moved to Amsterdam for my study of theology, which took place in a rather chaotic context. I put a lot of energy into my Master's thesis, entitled *A theological evaluation of national and international views of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands, 1963–1972*, based upon the analysis of three Jesuit journals, *Civiltà Cattolica*, *The Month* and *Orientierung*. The three eventful years in Amsterdam nevertheless gave me an opportunity to publish many articles. The most important ones were about Peter Canisius and his family, among them his step-aunt, who was the author of the very popular mystical treatise, *The Gospel Pearl*.

In the summer of 1973, I was sent again to the Jesuit boarding school in Zeist, this time as pastor of the boarders, now 150 boys. On May 25, 1974, I was ordained a priest in Amsterdam. I had considerably less time than in previous years to publish about Jesuit history, which generally covered topics along the same lines as in bygone days. In 1975, the city museum in Nijmegen was able to buy a triptych depicting the family of Peter Canisius, painted about 1526. My genealogical research regarding the family Kanis (latinized as Canisius) helped to identify the persons on the painting, and was published at the time of an exhibition in the local museum. In 1974, I also started the bibliography of Jesuit history, which appeared in the Dutch Province monthly newsletter for many years.

In 1978, I left for the United States to begin my tertianship under the inspiring leadership of the American Jesuit, Edward J. Malatesta (1932–1998), who, the previous year had been asked by General Arrupe to try out a new format. The tertianship took place in California, first in Santa Barbara and then in Berkeley. It was a total revelation, an American Gloria, as I wrote in my diary. I recharged my spiritual batteries, and combined it with enjoying culture in the broadest sense of the word: Martha Graham, Twyla Tharp, Maurice Béjart, Marcel Marceau, San Francisco Ballet, King Tut, Daniel Berrigan SJ (1921–2016), Gerard Manley Hopkins SJ (1844–1889),

Samuel Barber, Michael Tang SJ, William Hart McNichols SJ (1949–) and Joan Baez. At the same time, I visited prisoners in San Quentin, and lived together with marginal people in the San Francisco Tenderloin. In the morning of November 27, 1978, while working in ‘Saint Anthony’s Dining Room’ in San Francisco, I received the message that the mayor of San Francisco, George Moscone, together with Harvey Milk, the first gay supervisor, was shot by another supervisor. It was in many ways a shocking experience, which marked me for the rest of my life. At the end of that year, I felt that I was not ready to return to my home country, and asked my Provincial if I could stay on in Berkeley for a second year, for special studies. During my tertianship, I composed a bibliography on the Spiritual Exercises, which was published in 1981 in the series of *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, with a reprint in 1991.

During tertianship, I was invited to join a group of six Dutch Jesuits back in the Netherlands, who would found a new centre for spirituality in Deventer. I went there in the summer of 1981. In the same year, General Pedro Arrupe visited us, together with his American Vicar General Vincent O’Keefe (1920–2012). My Provincial also asked me to join the editorial staff of *De Heraut*, a journal for spirituality, for which I wrote many articles and poems for eighteen years. In the same year, I became the co-founder and co-editor for ten years, of *Cardoner*, a journal of Ignatian spirituality. I also became editor of the journal, *Numaga*, on the history of Nijmegen, a role I had for thirty-one years. In 1982, I was invited by the Jesuit Historical Institute in Rome to become editor-in-chief of the Dutch section in the new encyclopedia on Jesuit history, which was to be published simultaneously in English and Spanish. This encyclopedia, planned for 1985, nearly shipwrecked several times: after many different kinds of challenges, the work came out with a delay of fifteen years, although only in Spanish – the *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús* (2001). As to my contribution, in order to be able to write the recent history of the Dutch Province, I asked many Jesuits to send me their opinions and experiences, which I included in my contribution.

In 1986, I moved to a Jesuit community in Nijmegen. I was invited to become one of the authors of a book in a series of monographies of Dutch orders and congregations. The subtitle of this book on Dutch Jesuits, with essays, interviews and drawn portraits was: *Choosing for faith and justice*. It was a model for reflection on our spiritual roots. Another model was an exhibition on *Jesuits in the Netherlands*, in the jubilee year 1990–1991, held in the museum for

the history of Christianity, Catharijneconvent, in Utrecht. Curating an exhibition is a fascinating way of discovering and presenting history. This exhibition was opened by the Catholic prime minister of the country, Ruud Lubbers, former student of the Canisius College in Nijmegen. In the same year, I curated an exhibition on the Jesuits in Nijmegen. A catalogue accompanied both exhibitions.

Study in the spirituality and history of the Society of Jesus received a strong new impetus thanks to a series of colloquies held every three years, beginning in 1986, in Chantilly, near Paris. From 1989, I was part of the organizing board, with gratitude and great pleasure. About one hundred Jesuits participated each time.

In Amsterdam, the Jesuits had started a new centre for spirituality, *Ignatiushuis*, which initially concentrated on supporting parishes, but later developed in a different direction: support for individual people and groups who were interested in spirituality. That is where I was sent in 1992, and where, after six months, I became a staff member. Regarding research and publications, I decided to concentrate on Jesuit history and themes, such as the relationship of the Jesuits and the Leiden publishing house Elzevier, as well as the Amsterdam mapmakers Blaeu, and the distribution of works of the German Jesuit Jeremias Drexel in the Netherlands. When the Jesuit journal for spirituality *De Heraut* celebrated its 125th anniversary in 1994, I published its interesting history and organized an exhibition in the Catholic University of Nijmegen. The 400th anniversary of the death of the first Dutch Jesuit saint Peter Canisius was celebrated in 1997 with an exhibition in Nijmegen, a selection of texts by Canisius, a stamp in Austria, a conference in Frankfurt with president Roman Herzog and General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach (1928–2016), a new stained-glass window in Nijmegen, with the motto, *To measure with the measure of mildness*.

In the summer of 1998, I asked my Provincial for a sabbatical in Australia, a vitalizing Province, where, at the request of a publishing house, I wrote my autobiography in the first half of 1999, under the title, *But who am I? Metamorphosis of a Vocation*. I also visited the Province Archives in Sydney, where I found a file on the Dutch Jesuit Walter Steins (1810–1881), who, after having served the Church in India and New Zealand, died in Sydney. He was one of the bishops who participated in Vatican I.

On 25th May 2000, the Hungarian Jesuit László Polgár died in Rome at the age of 80, having been responsible for the annual bibliography in *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* since 1952, with only 560 entries; his last had 2594 entries; truly, he was a great help

for researchers. In his final years, he had the valuable and valued assistance of librarian Nicoletta Basilotta. Polgár was a friendly, even shy man, who kept his titles written on cards in shoe boxes, pigeon holes, like his predecessor Carlos Sommervogel (1834–1902). When I heard about Polgár's death, I wrote immediately to the Historical Institute in Rome that it was very important to continue the annual bibliography. In subsequent years, I returned to the subject several times in my correspondence until, as the result of a meeting on the subject—held in Rome in November 2005, where I offered to restart the bibliography myself—the Bibliography was resumed and published in *AHSI* in 2006. As author of the "Bibliography on the History of the Society of Jesus", I followed the format of Polgár, but used English instead of French. I concentrated more on titles regarding history and less on spirituality, and I would include only titles published after 2000. In my first issue, I was able to mention 1458 new titles. What struck me was that the number of non-Jesuit authors grew rapidly. The number of younger Jesuits interested in their own history is decreasing remarkably. Over the years, I was able to build up a group of correspondents, who regularly sent me new titles. I concluded my work on this annual bibliography after twelve years, in 2019.

The first two decades of the twenty-first century were strikingly rich in my publications and activities in the area of Jesuit history. I will only mention the most important ones. When I moved to the Jesuit community in Amsterdam, I made a spectacular discovery. One of the old members of the community, before leaving for the retirement home, handed over to me a cardboard box with 75 original copper plates with religious imagery from the turn of the sixteenth century, made by order of the Antwerp Jesuits. The artists were the Wierix brothers and others. I asked the *Rembrandthuis* museum in Amsterdam to exhibit this collection, which happened in 2001. This exhibition was later shown in the *Museum for Religious Art* in Uden (The Netherlands), and in several museums in the United States.

In the same year, 2000, I started the Canisius Project, together with Patrizio Foresta and Robert Maryks. The objective of this project was and is the edition of letters and documents regarding Peter Canisius, that Otto Braunsberger SJ (1850–1926) did not include in his eight volumes of the *Epistulae et Acta Beati Petri Canisii* (1896–1923). I hope to publish two volumes in the near future: *Peter Canisius. Documents, Genealogy and Bibliography*, and *Peter Canisius. Correspondence*, in collaboration with Vincent Hunink and others.

Apart from my work on the *Diccionario histórico*, I contributed articles on individual Jesuits and Jesuit topics to other encyclopedias as well, like the Dutch encyclopedia of mysticism (2003), Biographies of Nijmegen men and women (2004, 2006, 2013), the Dutch Christian Encyclopedia (2005), and the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Jesuits* (2017).

I continued my many publications on Jesuit book history, which after twenty years resulted in one of my most important publications, *Jesuit Books in the Dutch Republic and its Generality Lands 1567–1773: A Bibliography* (2014). Another publication that came out after many years of preparation was *A Guide to the History of the Jesuits in the Netherlands 1540–2000*, 2 volumes (2002, 2006).

From my art-historical publications, those on the painter Johannes Vermeer and the Jesuits in Delft (2008; 2016, together with Dries van Akker SJ) are the most important ones, followed by those on the Dutch artist Jan Toorop (2003, 2009). In this context, it is relevant to mention the articles that I wrote on works of art that I acquired or discovered: two alabaster portraits of Ignatius and Xavier (2005), an illustrated life of Ignatius by Petrus Firens, about 1609 (2006), a painting of Francis Xavier baptizing the people of India by Cornelis Schut (2006), a Chinese-Ignatian porcelain tea service (2007), and an unknown medallion for the beatification of Ignatius in 1609 (2010).

My first and last official appointment regarding Jesuit history came at the request of my Provincial to become the archivist of the Dutch Province. “Please, think about it as long as you wish”, he said. I responded: “I don’t have to think about it, I will do it immediately”. That was in 2006. I took my time to go through the shelves of the archives, the cupboards, drawers and boxes, and noticed how interesting this historical collection was, but also that the inventory needed much attention. It took me three years to finish *The inventory of the archives of the Jesuits in The Netherlands 1540–1773* (2009), followed by the inventory over the years 1773–1849 (2011). I gave the Dutch Jesuit archives a new name, *Archivum Neerlandicum Societatis Iesu (ANSI)* after the example of the British Archives (ABSI) and the General Archives in Rome (ARSI). Working in ANSI was a great joy, serving the visitors, answering the many letters, making discoveries, and publishing. A great support was Joep van Gennip, not a Jesuit himself, but at least a Jesuit *honoris causa*. In 2016, the new Provincial decided to move ANSI to Belgium, where it would be combined with the archives of the Flemish and Walloon Jesuits. Sadly, my own role—which I had loved—ended with these changes.

Finally, in terms of my writings, two biographies may be mentioned, both of Dutch Jesuits: Jan van Kilsdonk (1917–2008), famous university chaplain in Amsterdam (2008, 2009), and Frans van der Lugt (1938–2014), martyred in Syria (2015).

Seth Meehan of Boston College, one of the organisers of a three-day conference on Jesuit sources in 2019, invited me to come over and participate. It was a useful and joyful meeting, with eighty participants from all over the world, the majority being young and non-Jesuit. It gave and gives hope for the future. At the request of Seth and, of Camilla Russell in Rome, I have written these memoirs of someone who is 'addicted' to Jesuit history.

