

(and sharing)

FINDING [^] GOD IN ALL THINGS

THE WORK OF THE SOCIETY OF
JESUS IN PUBLISHING AND WRITING

interview by George Kearney

Q How does publishing, and for that matter writing, fit into the contemporary mission of the Society of Jesus?

A Ignatius Loyola was born just 25 years after Johannes Gutenberg died in 1468. By the time Ignatius founded the Society of Jesus, Gutenberg's invention of "movable type" was as much a revolution in "information technology" as the computer, the web, and the internet are in our own day. At the time of his death, Ignatius was negotiating the purchase of a printing press for the Roman College (and the Curia). Jesuits were quick to adopt this new technology *ad majorem Dei gloriam* ("for the greater glory of God"). Peter Canisius' catechisms went through hundreds of editions; Robert Bellarmine's *Controversies* answered "reformers" throughout Europe; Clavius, Grimaldi, and Kircher at the Roman College were publishing groundbreaking work in mathematics and astronomy that Matteo Ricci took to the Imperial Court of China and John de Britto made use of in India. Jesuits published in drama, languages, art, science, philosophy, and, of course, theology. Finally, most importantly, and most widespread through the centuries, were *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola himself.

Jesuits still do that today. The "apostolate of writing" flourishes not only in our universities but also in the published works of a Karl Rahner, Teilhard de Chardin, or John Courtney Murray, to pick but a few names everyone recognizes. Jesuits publish magazines like *America*, *Etudes* in France, *Stimmen der Zeit* in Germany, and *Civiltà Cattolica* in Italy. There are Jesuit poets such as Dan Berrigan, Jesuit scientists like George Coyne and others at the Vatican Observatory, social scientists like Peter Henriot of the Center for Theological Reflection in Zambia, and "spiritual writers" too numerous to mention. The Irish Jesuits publish a website, "Sacred Space," that's an oasis of peace and prayer in the frenetic world of the internet.

In short, "publishing and for that matter writing," fit



Q & A

Fr. Daniel L. Flaherty, SJ, treasurer of the Chicago Province, entered the Society in 1947 after graduating from St. Ignatius High School in Chicago. In his career as a Jesuit, he's served as executive editor of *America* magazine for ten years, director of Loyola Press for another ten, as the first publisher of *National Jesuit News*, and as provincial of the Chicago Province from 1973–1979. He is presently the publisher of *Company* magazine and a board member of Loyola Press, *America* magazine, Loyola Productions, and Loyola University/Loyola Medical Center. Fr. Flaherty also co-authored *With God in Russia* and *He Leadeth Me* with Fr. Walter J. Ciszek, SJ, who served 15 years in prisons and slave labor camps during 23 years of ministry in the Soviet Union.

into the contemporary mission of the Society of Jesus in exactly the same way as they have since the death of St. Ignatius over 450 years ago. The Constitutions he wrote for his order urge Jesuits to go wherever the need is greatest. Their mission: to serve souls. That's what Jesuit publishing today is still all about: serving souls with all our combined talents and professional skills—at Loyola Press in the Chicago Province, Ignatius Press in San Francisco, the Institute for Jesuit Sources in St. Louis; at Fordham or Georgetown or other university presses; at the Gregorian and Biblical Institute Presses in Rome, at La Prensa in Mexico, or Gujarat Sahitya Prakash in India.

Q Historically, how has the Society used the written word as a tool for evangelization?

A Well, in all the above ways I've mentioned. And more. Everyone's heard the famous Ignatian dictum about "finding God in all things." Historian George Bancroft once wrote of the era of exploration "not a cape was turned, not a river entered, but a Jesuit led the way." He was speaking of the Jesuit missionaries in the North America; but we could analogously say the same, I think, of Jesuits from Ignatius' day to our own. No branch of knowledge, whether religious or secular, scientific or literary, is alien to God's creation—and God can be found in all of them. But though "finding God" in His creation may not be difficult, leading others to find Him there is not always easy. That, fundamentally, is the work of evangelization—or perhaps more correctly "pre-evangelization." The written word has been the principal means for Jesuits, outside the classroom and pulpit at least, to share the "traces of God" they've found in all the places they've studied—whether the place has been another part of the physical world or a new world of science, literature, language, or learning.

Q How do you see the Church and the Society of Jesus responding in the future to a generation of people more comfortable opening a web browser than a book or magazine?

A I've already mentioned "Sacred Space" (www.sacredspace.ie), the website of the Irish Jesuits that offers prayer and spiritual reflection to literally millions. You can "make a visit" to this virtual chapel from your office, school, or home computer any time of day or night, and, if so inclined, go on to guided meditations, or even make the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. Versions of "Sacred Space" in languages other than English are now springing up around the globe, and similar websites, such as Creighton University's (www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html) or Loyola Press' (www.findingGod.org), are offering edu-

cation and information in addition to prayer and reflection. Nearly every Jesuit educational institution now has a webpage, as do most Provinces; the Jesuit Conference has one; so does the European Conference of Jesuits and our General's Curia in Rome. I don't say they're all "on the cutting edge" or we've yet learned how best to use them, but I know there's a whole new crop of young Jesuits coming along who know what their generation is "seeking"—and how better to provide it.

Q As a board member at Loyola Press, you've seen the Finding God Series evolve? What are its strengths? What do you think it brings to the contemporary faith community?

A Loyola's Finding God program is not just another textbook series. It involves a whole new approach to both "evangelization" and "catechesis." It evolved from the fundamental premise, enunciated in the Liturgy of Baptism, that parents are the first (and "primary") teachers of their children in the Faith. That can be a scary thought, however, if you're a post-Vatican II Catholic who may vaguely remember the old Baltimore Catechism questions and answers but aren't quite sure just *what* the Church teaches these days. So the development team at Loyola Press set out to create a program to involve (and assist) parents in teaching children their Faith with the help of the Christian community. Its overarching vision is to see parishes become vibrant adult faith communities where the Faith is not only taught but lived (on a daily basis!) and shared.

To accomplish that, the Finding God program starts by providing parents with just what it is "the Church teaches these days," based on the post-Vatican II *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (in place of the old Baltimore Catechism), so they can be confident in teaching their children. It also provides them with an every-other-month newsletter written by Thomas McGrath, author of *Raising Faith-filled Kids*, to help translate the "dry words" of the *Catechism's* theology into everyday language and activities of daily life not just for the kids but the whole family. Learning to pray, individually and as a family, is also an integral part of the program. Built into it, too, at the parish level, are "Gathering Sessions" for parents and other adults to share each other's faith understandings and experiences.

Finding God, in short, is not just about "teaching religion" in school or CCD. It's about creating faith-filled communities where faith is shared and neighbor helps neighbor. It's about not only "finding God in all things" but also about our response to God's gifts of life and love, of family and friends. It's a vision, a vision of Christian community, and like all things human will surely be imperfectly realized. It's not the Parousia, but it is about "getting there." ■