

Jesuit Biographies

Peter De Smet, S.J. (1801-1873)

Missionary, Diplomat, and Advocate for Native Americans

For more than 30 years Peter De Smet was perhaps the most influential man in the western wilderness. A Belgian novice who traveled from Maryland to Missouri in 1823, and then on to establish mission stations deep in the Oregon Territory, his is one of the most honorable names in America's tortured dealings with the American Indian.



Four U.S. Presidents—Pierce, Buchanan, Lincoln and Johnson—sought his services, asking him to perform feats they knew no other person could accomplish, or would attempt. These chief executives understood that if any man could bring peace to the West it was the man the Native Americans called Black Robe.

His writings, published in English, French, Dutch, German, Flemish, and Italian, brought him to the attention of an international audience. Henceforth, he was to aid Native Americans by pleading their cause before European nations and by becoming their intermediary in Washington. He crossed the Atlantic eighteen times on speaking tours to raise money for his American missions. At the University of Paris he appeared in full Indian regalia, with tomahawk, bow and arrows, and calumet among his props, and regaled his audience with tales of missionary life among the various Indian nations. In Rome, an audience had been arranged for him with the Pope and he was overwhelmed when Gregory XVI rose and embraced him.

The deep respect De Smet had for Native Americans and their way of life is perhaps best illustrated by a secret he kept for many years. On his first journey to the Flatheads in 1840, he passed a stream bed of gold sand and realized at once that the peaceful Flatheads would be brutalized and driven from their own lands, if the discovery was made public. According to legend, De Smet had discovered the Alder Gulch in Montana that 20 years later would become one of the richest placer mines in the world.

—John Upson Torrell, *Black Robe*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964.
—William V. Bagner, S.J., *Portrait of the Society of Jesus*, Institute of Jesuit Sources, Saint Louis, 1972.

Patrick F. Healy, S.J. (1834-1910)

Georgetown University's African American President (1873-1882)



The first black priests in the United States were brothers, three of the sons of Michael Morris Healy and Mary Eliza Clark. In 1816, Michael Healy immigrated to Georgia from Ireland and bought a 385-acre farm where he built a large family house and log cabins for his slaves. Mary Eliza Clark, one of his slaves, became his common-law wife (nineteenth-century miscegenation laws in Georgia forbade a legal marriage between whites and non-whites.) The Healys had ten children together; three of the five brothers became priests and three of the five sisters became nuns.

Patrick Healy graduated from the College of the Holy Cross in 1850. He taught there as a scholastic

—Robert Emmett Curran, S.J., *The Biographical History of Georgetown University*, Vol. 1, Georgetown University Press, 1993.
—James M. O'Grady, *Portrait of the White Race*, Religion, and the Healy Family, 1820-1920, Auburn University of Massachusetts Press, 2002.



Athanasius Kircher, S.J. (1602-80)

"The Man Who Knew Everything"

Caught in a stampede of horses, washed through the workings of a water-mill (twice), marooned on a wayward ice floe, captured by Protestant mercenaries, shipwrecked with alarming frequency, Athanasius Kircher lived up to a first name that meant, in Greek, "immortal."

For decades, Athanasius Kircher devoted himself to knowing everything, from the life of the tiniest worms to the outermost reaches of an infinite heaven. Mindful of human limitations, he succeeded as consistently as anyone in his own era in pushing back the boundaries of the senses, through new scientific instruments and new habits of thought.

Born in central Germany and educated at Würzburg, Kircher eventually moved to Rome, where he became the central intellectual figure in the Jesuits' Collegio Romano. There he read omnivorously, mingling in one turbid pool the multiple streams of information about the natural world and human history that flowed in from his brother Jesuits around the world. Among the 12 languages he claimed to command, he included—uniquely for his time—the ability to read ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. He was wrong about that but he believed that Coptic, the liturgical language of Egyptian Christians, held the key, and about that he was right. Although his instincts were correct, decipherment of hieroglyphs would also require the help of the Rosetta Stone, whose discovery lay more than a century into the future.

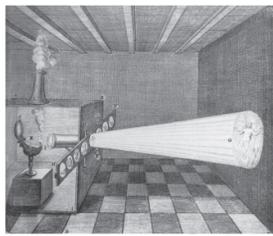
He also constructed mechanical devices of marvelous ingenuity, conducted scientific experiments, and seemed to know new and exciting information about virtually every subject under the sun, whose spots and freckles he had observed with glee through his own telescope. He was present at the violent eruption of Mount Etna in 1630, and afterward climbed right into the smoking crater

to record what he observed. His explanation of the fiery glow began the trail that led to our current understanding of bioluminescence, the emission of visible light by living creatures.

Kircher's celebrated museum at the Collegio Romano, filled with foreign rarities sent back to Rome by Jesuit missionaries, was one of the spectacles of baroque Rome. No random massing of curiosities, it operated as the empirical foundation of Kircher's scientific project, to develop a single moral, religious, and philosophical framework for a diverse globe. The gallery itself was dominated by a five-vaulted ceiling, each vault painted with scenes whose symbolic significance alluding to the unity and supremacy of knowledge. The most striking feature of the display was the series of five fascimile obelisks, placed like lightning conductors individually under each of the vaults. These implied a strong conceptual link between the cosmic program of the ceiling decoration and that of the collection itself and helps us understand the human and religious reality of baroque Rome, with its passion for Hermetic wisdom, obelisks, and antiquities.

The Kircher museum, though, was in no sense a dry and didactic place. The visitor was met with that his bottom and trunk—which mimicked an insulting gesture known to all Italians—pointed squarely at the Dominican residence in whose gardens the obelisk was found. With this material and easily readable act of defiance, the speculative Jesuit cocked a snook at his order's frequent nemesis, the censorious Dominicans.

Portrait of Athanasius Kircher, S.J. Special Collections, Aberdeen University Library.



By the flickering light of an oil lamp, Athanasius Kircher projected a series of images engraved on glass onto a wall. He could use his projector to illustrate lectures or simply to amuse his visitors.

By 1646, Kircher had become Rome's reigning expert on all matters Egyptian. A few years later, Pope Innocent X turned to Kircher for advice in re-erecting the obelisk from the Agonale Circus as a conversion ritual that would transform the pagan stadium into a sacred theatre. The Fountain of the Four Rivers in Rome's Piazza Navona was completed for the Holy Year of 1650.

In 1665, the discovery of the Minevran obelisk—a diminutive specimen inscribed for the Pharaoh Apries (589-570 BC)—in the gardens of the Dominican convent at Santa Maria sopra Minerva brought Kircher and Bernini together once again.

That collaboration produced the most engaging of all modern obelisk ensembles. The inscription on the base facing the church explains the sober moral of Bernini's wonderful, exuberant sculpture and the obelisk it raises to the sky:

"Let any beholder of the carved images of the wisdom of Egypt on the obelisk carried by the elephant, the strongest of beasts, realize that it takes a robust mind to carry solid wisdom."

With a wicked flourish, Kircher and Bernini placed the elephant so that his bottom and trunk—which mimicked an insulting gesture known to all Italians—pointed squarely at the Dominican residence in whose gardens the obelisk was found. With this material and easily readable act of defiance, the speculative Jesuit cocked a snook at his order's frequent nemesis, the censorious Dominicans.

—Blain A. Curran, Anthony Graham, Pamela O. Long, and Benjamin Weiss, *Obelisk: A History* (Harvard Library, Cambridge, Mass., 2009)
—Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (Villard A. Knopf, New York, 1995)

"We who have been in the motion picture industry for 40 to 50 years sometimes think of ourselves as pioneers, but the real pioneer of motion pictures was a Jesuit, Athanasius Kircher, who invented the magic lantern in the 17th century."

—Cecil B. De Mille at Loyola University, Los Angeles, 1956



Romano Collegii Societatis Iesu Museum Catechismorum (The Cathedral Museum of the Collegio Romano) Giorgio de Saphon, Amsterdam, 1678. Special Collections, Aberdeen University Library.

The vast range of Kircher's activities is conveyed in this engraved title page, showing him greeting visitors in the center of his museum at the Collegio Romano. The museum was founded in 1651 and thanks to Kircher's genius became the most famous in Rome and one of the best in Europe.



Elephant with Obelisk, 1665-67. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Piazza della Minerva, Rome.

Source: Arthur MacGregor, *Curiosity and Enlightenment: Culture and Collection from the 16th to the 19th Century*, Yale U. Press, 2007.
—David S. Cunningham, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Geography of the Gods in the Vatican Museums*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.
—Philip Hughes, *The Vatican Museums: A History*, University of Chicago Library, 2000.
—Philip Hughes, *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything*, Routledge, 2004.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. (1881-1955)

A Paleontologist's View of Christology

Teilhard was a French Jesuit who became one of the prominent paleontologists of the 20th century and one of the founders of human paleontology in China. He and fellow Jesuit, Emile Licent, were the first in China to explore the country's prehistory in a scientific way. Between 1926 and 1936, Teilhard worked with an international team that discovered the fossils of "Peking Man," the oldest human remains then discovered (450,000 B.C.) and *Homo sapiens* (18,000 B.C.) Teilhard was the first to confirm that these discoveries were the fossils, not of monkeys, but of human beings. But Teilhard was not concerned with understanding China's 5,000-year history; he was far more interested in the beginnings of human life as a way of understanding the evolutionary progress of humanity.



Throughout his life, Teilhard was forbidden by the Vatican to publish works outside of science, but immediately after his death his theological writings, entrusted to friends outside ecclesiastical institutions, were published to worldwide acclaim. His optimistic thought helped to set aside conflicts between religion and science and stimulated countless studies of the Christocentric sacramentality of the universe.

Teilhard's legacy is remarkable—broad enough to encompass science, theology, philosophy, art, and social thought. Published posthumously, his essays present a fascinating and integrated world view shaped by both the theory of evolution and the Christian message. The first of these thirteen volumes of essays was his major opus, *The Phenomenon of Man*, the one for which he is perhaps best known.



Teilhard's surreal landscape includes Barbelin and Bellarmine Hall at Saint Joseph's University in the background and depicts president John F. Kennedy (left), Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (bottom center), and Pope John XXIII (right) as heroes of the counterculture leading mankind to form a culture "in creation" that of the fabled world into which they had been born.

Source: Thomas Torrey, oil on masonite, St. Joseph's Univ. Collection, Gift of the class of 1964.

—Kathleen Chubb, S.S.I., ed., *Rediscovering Teilhard's Fire*, Saint Joseph's University Press, 2010.
—Thierry Bernard, S.J., *Following the Footsteps of the Lord in Beijing*, Institute of Jesus Studies, St. Louis, 2006.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J. (1844-89)

One of Victorian England's Finest Poets

Hopkins, unpublished until 1918 and undiscovered until the 1930s, is now recognized as a major poet. He wrote ageless poems, refreshed poetic language, brought Anglo-Saxon word-force back into English, experimented with rhythm and form, created word-music of distinctive richness, wrote "modern" poems in premodern days, and influenced W. H. Auden, Hart Crane, Dylan Thomas, Sylvia Plath, Denise Levertov, and the Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney. Major, indeed.



Yet Hopkins was a most improbable poet. Schoolboy or Oxford undergraduate, he couldn't decide whether to be a poet or a painter. After a religious crisis at Oxford, he left his Anglican heritage to become first a Roman Catholic then a Jesuit—both groups a bit suspect in Victorian England. Passionate about nature and God, he taught and ministered in smoky cities, often to exhaustion or depression. An ascetic by choice, he prized sense experience. Devoted to God, he sometimes lost contact with him. His poems ranged from elation to anguish, but often baffled poet-friends and fellow Jesuits. He both feared and esteemed fame, and amid all this, maintained a strong sense of self and immense self-confidence. Gerard Hopkins was a complex man and a complex poet.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins, "A Kingfisher Catch Fire."

—Joseph P. Feeney, S.J., *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2008

St. Francis Borja, S.J. (1510-72)

Third Superior General of the Society of Jesus (1565-72)

Francis Borja (also spelled Borgia) was born Francisco de Borja y Aragón at Gandia near Valencia in Spain. The son of Juan Borja, third Duke of Gandia, and Isana of Aragón, Borja was thus the great-grandson of Pope Alexander VI on his father's side and of King Ferdinand of Aragón on his mother's side.

At age nineteen, he married Eleanor de Castro, a Portuguese noblewoman who was lady-in-waiting to the Empress Isabel; Francis was himself appointed Lord of the Hunt and Constable to the Empress. The unexpected death of the Empress in 1539 deeply affected Borja and led to a spiritual conversion and close ties with the Jesuits in Spain.

Upon the death of his father in 1542, Borja succeeded to the Duchy of Gandia, became a patron of the Jesuits, and established a college for the training of young Jesuits on his estate in 1546. The following year, he used his influence in Rome, where two of his ancestors had been popes, to have his college elevated to the status of a university. Thus, although the real flagship Jesuit college was founded at Messina in 1548, Borja's school at Gandia, started two years earlier, was technically the first Jesuit college.

The death of Borja's wife, that same year, led him to take preliminary Jesuit vows and eventually to make a solemn profession in 1548. Ignatius Loyola wrote to Borja praising his decision but asking him to keep it secret until Borja could arrange for the marriages of his children and the settlement of his noble estate. By 1551, Borja had earned a doctorate at the institution he founded and had obtained permission from Charles V to abdicate his duchy. He was ordained that same year and said his first Mass at Loyola, Ignatius's birthplace.

Borja was elected the third general of the Society of Jesus on 2 July 1565 and spent the next seven years expanding the order, organizing its missions and educational activities, and serving as a papal emissary. It was he who suggested to Pius V that the missions

of the Church be placed under a central commission of cardinals, an idea which in 1622 blossomed into the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

It was under Borja's generalate that the Society sent missionaries to the New World—in 1566 to Florida, in 1568 to Peru, and in 1572 to Mexico. The dispatches that Borja sent to Jesuits overseas testify to the breadth of his apostolic vision. He emphasized the importance of getting to know the virtues and vices of the natives, to be active in solving problems but to preference gentleness to rigor in seeking remedies, and to omit nothing, good or bad, in correspondence with provincial superiors.

It is worth realizing that man gives service to God not only when he prays. . . . In fact, there are times when more service is given to God in ways other than prayer."

—St. Francisco de Borja

Planning began for the Gesù, the mother church of the Society of Jesus, in 1568. Cardinal Alessandro Farnese (1520-72), the principal donor, was Borja's difficult collaborator in the project in choice of the site, construction, and program of decoration. As demanding as the interaction was, it succeeded in producing one of the most exquisite architectural creations of sixteenth-century Italian and European culture, and perhaps is Borja's most memorable achievement.

Borja masterfully influenced the cult of sacred images with his endorsement of the icon of the miraculous Madonna supposedly painted by St. Luke in the church of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome. With the permission of Pius V in 1569, Borja had a copy of the image painted in a slightly updated style which was, itself, repeatedly copied and taken by the Jesuits to the four corners of the globe. By the end of the century, it was thought to be the most widely distributed image on earth.



St. Francis Borja, c. 1624. Polychromed wood and cloth. Juan Martínez Montañés (1568-1649) and Francisco Pacheco (1564-1644). Church of the Annunciation, Seville, Italy.

—William V. Bagner, S.J., *History of the Society of Jesus*, Institute of Jesuit Sources, Saint Louis, MO 1972.
—Marion R. Burke, *Jesus: Art and Iconography*, 1950-1980, St. Peter's College Art Gallery, Jersey City, NJ 1993.
—Philippe LeClerc, S.J. in *The Jesus and the Arts*, 1340-1775, Saint Joseph's University Press, 2009.
—John Patrick Donnelly, S.J. in *History Has Many Voices*, Whitman State University Press, Kalamazoo, MI 2003

John LaFarge, S.J. (1880-1963)

The Voice of Catholic Interracialism



John LaFarge, S.J. (1880-1963). Photo by Margaret Bouake-White/Titus/Pix

Fr. John LaFarge was the son and namesake of the celebrated American painter and stained-glass artist, John LaFarge (1838-1910). Born into the social register in Newport, Rhode Island, young John LaFarge was an aristocrat with a sense of noble obligation that facilitated his dealings with Church hierarchy but deprived him of the single-mindedness of purpose that often drives dynamic leaders.

Still, more than any other individual in the first half of the twentieth century, John LaFarge awakened the American Catholic church to the moral implications of the race problem. He labored for fifty years to make the crucial point that African Americans were God's creatures and should be fully accorded their God-given human rights in the Church and in American society. As the spiritual and intellectual leader of the Catholic interracial movement for thirty years, he made explicit what had only been vaguely implicit in American Catholic teaching: that racism was a sin and that Christian charity and justice required racial equality in the Catholic community. He was not the first Catholic to label racism and segregation a sin nor the first to start an interracial organization, but he spread the message better than any other Catholic before mid-century. Thus, he aimed to put the Church slightly out in front of the general society and to direct racial change in accordance with Catholic principles as he understood them. Cyprian Davis sums LaFarge's notable contribution in this way: "In a sense, LaFarge saved the honor of Roman Catholicism

in America by being the persistent voice of reason and justice in a time of apathy and racism."

In his prolific writings and speeches, LaFarge formulated a Catholic orthodoxy for those Catholic activists interested in black rights, most notably in his 1937 book, *Interracial Justice*. Long before the Brown case (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954), his interracial movement applied pressure on the Church in the North to integrate Catholic institutions.

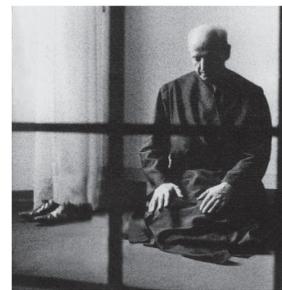
As editor-in-chief of *American* in the 1940s, he also served to make the influential Jesuit weekly a consistent voice of Catholic liberalism for the first time.

—David W. Southern, *John LaFarge and the Limits of Catholic Modernism*, 1971-1983 (Louisiana State University Press, 1986)
—John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2003)

Pedro Arrupe, S.J. (1907-1991)

"Have we Jesuits educated you for justice?"

—Pedro Arrupe, S.J., Valencia, 1973



Pedro Arrupe, S.J. (1907-1991). Superior General of the Society of Jesus (1965-1983)

Pedro Arrupe was born in the Basque region of Spain, as was Ignatius Loyola, founder of the religious order Arrupe entered at age twenty. His election as Superior General of the Society of Jesus in 1965 enabled him to participate in the fourth session of Vatican II, where Arrupe emphasized the need for the Church to formulate a response to atheism "from within the center of world affairs, not from some intellectual ghetto." He also spoke of the Church's need to become "at home in diverse cultures and to learn from them." Two concerns—inculturation and the integration of faith and justice—would become hallmarks of Arrupe's tenure as superior general. They would also become part of the legacy of Jesuit theological discourse.

Because Fr. Arrupe's last ministry was that of Jesuit superior general, it is easy to forget that over a third of his life, 27 years, was spent in Japan. The Jesuits had a parish church in the center of Hiroshima and a novitiate about four miles away. Arrupe had been made master of novices in 1942 and had been imprisoned and interrogated by the Japanese authorities for teachings that did not conform to the official militarism of the state. He was in his office when the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Arrupe and others at the novitiate were going about their work when they saw a blinding flash and heard a noise "similar to the blast of a hurricane and were thrown to the floor."

As the Jesuits tried to make their way into the city, they found "nothing but a sea of fire covering a city reduced to ashes" and people "unable to run owing to their horrible injuries." The Jesuits turned their house into a hospital, caring for as many of the wounded as they could. The next day they heard the words "atomic bomb" for the first time, as well as the warning not to enter the city "because there is a gas in the air." They went back anyway "to raise pyramids of dead bodies and pour fuel on them to set them afire."

On July 14, 1965, near the end of the first session of the Jesuits' 31st General Congregation, a songfest was held on the

flat-tiled roof of the headquarters of the Jesuit Roman Curia and the new superior general sang two tenor solos—one in Basque, the other in Japanese. The two formative experiences in Japan—his imprisonment and the bombing—do a lot to explain how a conservative religious Jesuit determined from the beginning of his generalate to transform a conservative organization into one radically dedicated to the service of the weak and the poor.

—Raymond A. Schoth, S.J., *The American Jesuit: A History*, New York University Press, 2007.
—Thomas Worcester, S.J., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*, Cambridge University Press, 2008.
—*Company Magazine*, Summer 1991