



St Ignatius of Loyola – Early Life Part 2
A NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT FOUNDS A TOTALLY NON-TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

Although Iñigo was unable to preach and serve God in the Holy Land as he had hoped, he was still determined to meet his goal in some fashion. He decided that he needed to get an education by which to "help souls." He returned to Barcelona and attended a free public grammar school to prepare himself for entrance into a university. This meant that beginning at the age of 33 and for two years, he was studying Latin grammar and other language basics with classmates ages 8 to 14 years old. He may have felt some discomfort at the age difference, but it was at this time that he had the "most beloved" teacher in his entire academic career—Master Jeronimo Ardevol. From his source he gained an avid love of learning and its value in life.

After this initial successful schooling in Barcelona, Iñigo moved to Spanish university towns—first Alcala, near Madrid, and then Salamanca in the north. In both places, he spent nearly as much time engaging people in conversation about spiritual matters as he did his studies and attending lectures. Such conversations got him repeatedly into trouble with the Spanish Churches' *Inquisition* and he was put in prison three different times for interrogation. The charge was always the same: that he dared to speak of theological matters when he did not have a theology degree. Further, he was not ordained. In the end, he was always exonerated, but he decided to avoid further harassment by the Inquisition. He left his homeland and headed north to the premier university of sixteenth-century Europe - Paris.

So, it was at the age of 38, the Pilgrim attended the *College Ste. Barbe* of the University of Paris, considered the heart of the French Renaissance. He knew minuscule French, and he was not very fluent or correct in Latin. Still, he made progress, little by little. In those days, students rose at 4:00 a.m.; classes—lectures—with teachers began at 5:00 am. There were also classes for several hours in the later afternoon. The university curriculum—in the Parisian style—was much more rigorous and orderly than he was used to in Spain. There was progression along with expected prerequisites to be successfully completed. As a result, he started all over again with grammar, languages, and the humanities, and only then moved on to the sciences, philosophy, and theology. The present-day notion of progressive levels or classes—freshman, sophomore, junior, senior—is a Jesuit legacy to education based on the "rugged" experience with this Parisian style of learning.

Eventually, he earned what today equals a master's degree. The name on his diploma was not Iñigo, but "Ignatius," which he adopted in Paris and used for the rest of his life. (It is speculated that he named himself after a saint he admired - Ignatius of Antioch.) When he applied for doctoral studies, he was turned down as too old; he was 44, and too ill, from stomach ailments that he attributed to the extreme penances he practiced during his time in Manresa.

THE FIRST COMPANIONS

While at the University of Paris, Ignatius roomed with Peter Faber, a young man from Savoy in the south of France, and Francis Xavier, a nobleman from the eastern end of the Basque country. They gradually engaged a whole circle of "Friends in the Lord," as they called themselves, formed around Ignatius. What bonded them closely together was the fact that one after another they were led through the Spiritual Exercises, most guided by Ignatius himself. In a deep sense, they all became "companions of Jesus" and companions of one another in this period of learning in the Lord.

Ignatius shared with them his dream of going on mission to the Holy Land; yet this time he had grown a bit wiser and more practical. If the Holy Land dream fell through, their alternative was **Rome** where they dreamed to put themselves

at the disposal of the pope. The pope, as universal pastor, would know where the greatest needs were that they might serve.

They waited a whole year in Venice for a ship to take them to the Holy Land. As Providence had it, just for that one year, because of war between Venice and the Turks, no ship sailed. So they went to Rome, and there entered an extended period of communal discernment. Their designs were to be sent all over Europe and all over the world. Their challenge was that spread out like that, how would they secure the bond among them? Their decision was to form themselves into a religious order. They called it the *Company* (meaning the companionship) or *Society of Jesus*. Outsiders disparagingly nicknamed them the "Jesuits" and that name caught-on and eventually was used by all the members.

The Society of Jesus was approved by Pope Paul III in 1540 and so became an official Catholic religious order. In the first election Ignatius was chosen as their first leader. He declined after the first vote, feeling unworthy for the position because of the vanity and licentiousness of his earlier life and because he felt that others were more theologically knowledgeable. After much discernment and pressure from the members, he ultimately accepted the position and served until his death sixteen years later.

As the Superior General, he sent his new companions all over Europe and around the world. He called them to "hurry to any part of the world where...the needs of the neighbor should summon them." And he counseled them to serve "without hard words or contempt for people's errors." In addition to writing the Constitutions of the fledgling order he wrote nearly 7,000 letters. He wrote to high and low in church and state and to women as well as men. But most of these letters were to his Jesuit companions, thus forming a vast communication network of friendship, love, and care among the now bustling community.

At the time of his death, there were 1,000 Jesuits, a good number of them involved in the 35 schools that the group had founded. Twenty-five years later the number of schools rose to 144, and another 35 years after that, it approached 400. In contrast to the ambitions of his early days, the fundamental philosophy of the mature Ignatius was to desire and choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we are created - to praise, reverence, and serve God through serving other human beings.

He prayed: *Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give, and not to count the cost, to fight, and not to heed the wounds, to toil, and not to seek for rest, to labor, and not to ask for reward, except that of knowing that we are doing your will.*

The great 20th-century British historian Dom David Knowles summed up his sense of the early Jesuits and their founder in these defining words and recognized universal mission: ***"That mighty impulse from Manresa which spread over Europe and to the ends of the earth - perhaps the greatest single religious impulse [in Christianity] since the preaching of the apostles."***

Not far from the core!