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# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

# IES

A Life at the Edge of the World

Francis X. Hezel, S.J.

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**A LIFE AT THE EDGE  
OF THE WORLD**

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**Francis X. Hezel, S.J.**

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**STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS**

**41/4 • WINTER 2009**

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*the first word . . .*

“April is the cruelest month.” My great Aunt Tillie’s lumbago! What kind of nonsense is that? What funny stuff was T. S. Eliot smoking when he came up with such idiocy? January is the cruelest month, with February running a very close second. One might also add in the nasty bits of December and March to round out the package of winter misery. Are my carefully nuanced feelings about this matter detectable under the surface? Yes, it’s true. Despite living my entire life in northern climes, I still hate winter. It’s bad enough that an old codger like me looks like the Pillsbury dough boy when he wrestles his post-Adonis body into parka and scarf, boots and gloves, and one of his collection of ridiculous hats, but even the comeliest of youth trundle around a college campus like self-propelled throw pillows. Winter is dehumanizing. If Santa had any sense, once he makes his annual break from the North Pole, he’d keep going. To be humane he could give those odious little elves an extra suit of thermal green tights, with those tiny pointed shoes attached, and then leave them alone to run the toy factory while he winters in Cancun. Despite Al Gore, some of us must own up to ambivalent feelings about global warming. In mid-January, it has much to commend it.

My rage at the thought of winter surely has its roots in the Society. As a boy growing up in Brooklyn—no tropical paradise that—seasons were irrelevant. We rode sleds and built snow forts, like kids everywhere north of Paducah, and paid little attention to chapped faces, runny noses, and the gradual numbing of extremities. During my high-school years, it seemed that weather was something that happened between the front door and the subway station. Overcrowded and overheated trains provided an intervenient thaw, or roast, before another interval of slipping and slopping from subway to school. One could turn up a topcoat collar as a concession to the elements—that was cool—but one could never, ever wear a hat, even if one’s *really* cool pompadour drooped in the sleet. (If these fashion statements puzzle you, get someone over sixty to explain.)

The novitiate changed my relationship to winter forever. Imagine the open-mouthed stupefaction of a city boy when he is told that spending forty minutes shivering on a platform overlooking the frozen Hudson River in mid-winter is actually evening recreation. Recreation! As the Twentieth Century Limited sped up-river on its way to Chicago, we assured one another that those people sitting on comfortable chairs, sipping cocktails in a well-heated club car were not really happy. Could have fooled me. For some strange reason, lost in

the lore of the long black line, putting one's hands in one's pockets was somehow a violation of the rules of modesty, and the standard-issue gloves were those striped cotton work gloves with leather palms. Think of it: Hudson Valley, January at night, cotton gloves. As a special treat, on Thursdays, we could picnic amid the drifts and glaciers for a quiet hour between outdoor work details in the morning and an afternoon's stroll through the forest primeval. Since basketball and touch football were billed as violations of the rule of touch, the options for afternoon "games" were somewhat limited. My sole consolation arose from the thought that I could have been sent to Plattsburg on the shores of Lake Champlain, a few hours by dogsled from the Canadian border.

Sports were limited but not altogether absent. In those years the novitiate had a goodly proportion of tundra natives. In addition to the usual contingent from Buffalo and Rochester, St. Andrew hosted a rather large group of New Englanders, who were exiled to foreign territories after fire destroyed Shadowbrook. This combination formed a lethal critical mass that actually liked playing hockey outdoors on a frozen pond. (A truly bizarre custom: everyone knows hockey should be played on rollerskates on a smooth asphalt side street with a role of friction tape as the puck, curbstones as boards, and manhole covers as goals.) On special afternoons, the Aleuts, Inuits, and Bostonians would skate up and down the ice, while the rest of us stood around in wet socks shouting clever cheers like "Nice shot, brother." What we said to one another in lowered voices was substantially different.

Not that I didn't try to join in the alleged fun, but I had several handicaps to overcome. First of all, I'd never skated on ice. Not to worry; I was up for acquiring new skills. Hadn't I just learned how to tie a cincture and crack eggs with one hand. The problem had an added complication in my case. I never thought to add ice skates to my novitiate trousseau. No problem. Brother Sub could supply common-stock skates for my winter blunderland. But he ran into one other problem. He could not find a matching pair approximating my size, even with toes stuffed with paper. Time to improvise. He fixed me up with one figure skate and one hard-toed hockey skate, whose blades are a full inch further from the sole of the shoe than those of figure skates. Thus whenever I shambled out onto the ice, I had a distinct list to starboard. Aren't we having fun, brother? That may be the last time I leaned to the right in any circumstance.

Some of us deluded New York City boys held the naive presumption that skating ice merely happened. Not so. Once a pond freezes over, it snows—and snows and snows in upstate New York. If the snow gets an extra coating of rain or sleet and refreezes, it ruins the surface of the ice for skating. The only remedy involves shoveling off portions of the pond as soon as possible after a snowstorm. "Save the lake!" held the same terror as "Your money or your life." After the ordeal of shoveling off ice, the novices had "extended recreation" during which they could spend even more time fending off frostbite. Gamely tilted to the right, I took to the ice with meager satisfaction in knowing that because



of me Poughkeepsie had a leaning monument to rival Pisa's. Bears have the right idea about winter. They wriggle into a hole and sleep until it goes away.

Regency in Manhattan and theology in subtropical Woodstock outside Baltimore had softened me up more than I realized. Chicago brought me back to reality in a hurry. Armed against the elements with only my Patapsco parka, I was no match for the sadistic breezes that rose in anger from the ice floes of Lake Michigan and wandered the streets of Evanston looking for something to devour. Jack Frost nipping at my nose bore a strange resemblance to T-Rex, tearing huge chunks of flesh out of my body with fangs the size of hockey sticks. After the first serious cold snap, I remember staying on the El after class and riding down to the Loop where I bought the biggest woolliest parka I could find, confident that the province prefect of studies would cover the bill, with or without a tsk-tsk note. (He did. Without a single tsk.)

Then, after years of relative bliss in weatherless Manhattan and sultry Washington, the novitiate in Syracuse skied its way into my life. Those who have served in the novitiate in Minnesota have the right to dismiss me as a whiner and softy. They're right, of course, but comparatively moderate temperatures in New York have to be balanced against the snowfall. The natives claim that it's not really snow but lake-effect. (Don't the Arabs have forty words for sand?) Nonetheless over a hundred inches of the white stuff, whatever the name, falls every year. I learned to operate and repair a snow blower, much to the amusement of the novices. For weeks on end, one travels around the Le-Moyne campus through a series of slit trenches. I've heard that SUNY-Geneseo, a few miles down the pike, has ropes connecting the buildings to keep students from getting lost as they grope their way through the white-out to the next class. Perhaps it's an urban myth, but it's feasible. During the long, white months on the shores of Lake Onondaga, the sun seems to be wintering elsewhere, since the sky always had the color of overcooked corned beef.

Speaking of winter sun; I'm now in Boston. The temperatures don't vary much from New York, but Boston College does not provide a subway to commute between residence, office, and library. My Syracuse sun-suit, a hooded down parka, knit cap and Timberland boots make my travels around Chestnut Hill endurable. The darkness, however, came as a bit of a surprise. Boston rests at the eastern rim of the time zone that extends over to Detroit. As the winter solstice chips away at the remains of my fragile psyche, the sun slips beneath the horizon at four o'clock. It's worse than Dublin. While we're stumbling around in the dark back East, colleagues at Detroit Mercy are still applying sunscreen. Human beings, at least some of us, are not intended to survive on nine hours of sunlight a day.

Well, you might justifiably reason, if you can't stand the cold, get out of the refrigerator. Actually, dreams of leisure on some quiet tropical island do invade my fantasy life every once in a while. Palm trees swaying to the gentle music of the trade winds, pristine beaches opening onto lagoons, where the water doesn't provoke cardiac arrest and hypothermia, the strains of a distant ukulele—ah, perfect bliss! Several years ago a New York provincial thanked

me for doing a project for him. By way of compensation, I suggested that he arrange for me to become Assistancy coordinator of villas. The job would involve staying at all the villa houses in the country during vacation periods and then, as fall tightened its icy fingers around my throat, withdrawing to an office on Aruba to write a ten-page report of my findings for the Jesuit Conference. He reminded me that he had no jurisdiction in Aruba, but he could work something out for me in Abuja, Nigeria. Lesson learned: never engage in banter about assignments with a provincial. You may have the jokes, but he's got the punch lines.

The trouble with my fantasy of life in the tropics is just that: a fantasy. I've never lived there or even visited. My ancestors lived in caves on an island where the sun never shines, leaving me with the blue eyes and chalky skin that does really strange things when exposed to sunlight. We of the Celtic tribe have dedicated our Jesuit Health Trust to the task sending the children of dermatologists through the Ivy League. And I don't swim, so there go the fantasies about scuba diving in crystal-clear waters around breath-taking coral reefs. I've never tasted coconut milk and would be hard-pressed to figure out how to get it out of its armored shell. In fact the only coconut I've ever tasted is the sticky stuff that they sprinkle on pastry and stuff into candy bars, where the flavor is surely overpowered by sugar. And if I couldn't spend all day, every day, rocking in my hammock, what would I actually do? Are there libraries, DVDs, electricity, restaurants, theaters? Do you need air conditioning? What is life in a tropical paradise really like? Really?

If you're curious, read on. The author of this issue has been in the Caroline Islands for over forty years. As you can see from his author identification, he's done it all: pastoral work, education, Society administration, and scientific research. He is a prolific writer, whose works have gained enormous respect in the region. It's time to share the word with mainland Jesuits, and the Seminar is grateful that he chose *STUDIES* as the means to present his story. He tells us what life on a series of small tropical islands is really like, both for the resident peoples and for the American Jesuits who serve their needs. Intertwined with the anecdotal material one can detect an undercurrent of profound theological and spiritual reflection. What would ever motivate someone to do what Fran has done? We believe that our readers will be as grateful to read his story as we were.

This issue has provoked some wider reflections about Jesuit life. Last summer, several of us from the New York and Maryland Provinces got together at Fordham to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of our ordination. Many of us hadn't seen one another in decades, and as is the way with reunions, we talked well into the night, both recalling shared memories and catching up on our lives after Woodstock. We'd certainly traveled divergent paths, all intriguing, all mysterious in their own way, and all embodying a desire to follow the Standard of the Christ through our lives in the Society. We'd heard about assignments and reassignments, for the most part, but notices in the *Status* and *Catalogus* tell only a minimal part of the story.



As the evening wore on, it struck me how little we Jesuits really know about one another and ministries of our companions. It's amazing how isolated we can become in our own worlds and immediate concerns. Does a university professor really know very much about the daily challenges of life in a high school or parish? Or does a retreat director understand on a gut level the tedium of reading theses, attending faculty meetings, and trying to do research under pressure to produce? Can men living in small communities move beyond recollections of the old huge scholasticates and imagine what life in a large university community is like today? And do Jesuits in institutional communities appreciate the consolations and trials of small-group living? How do we cope with loneliness and the need for private space in any community setting? Do we understand the emotional costs of retirement, of searching for a job, of being denied tenure, or vows, or ordination? What are other Jesuits going through in their lives? What keeps them going? What pushes them to the edge of giving it all up? What can we learn from one another?

We sat and talked, men with much in common, yet each living in a cocoon of mystery, each of us, if not entering the twilight of our careers, at least well into the mid-afternoon. What have we learned, what do we know? As Fran reminded us in his homily, some forty years ago we each charged off like Don Quixote ready to tilt at our own particular windmills. Over the years, we learned that sometimes the windmills win. There's a wealth of wisdom to be mined from those experiences.

Fran Hezel's life at "the edge of the world," may be the most exotic story told that evening. Now it is a delight to be able to share it with our readership.

*Richard A. Blake, S.J.*

Editor



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*Francis X. Hezel, S.J., first went to Micronesia in 1963. In the years that followed, he served as principal and director of Xavier High School in Chuuk, known then as Truk. He was regional superior of the Jesuits in Micronesia and then local superior of the Jesuits on Pohnpei. As director of the Micronesian Seminar he researched and wrote fourteen books, five published by the University of Hawaii Press, and dozens of articles and monographs on issues facing local people, such as alcohol abuse, suicide, development, and family life. Through the Seminar he established a major research library of books, photos, and DVDs, produced radio and video programs on the history of the islands, and conducts workshops for catechists and educators. He has received honorary doctorates from the University of Guam and Fordham University.*



# A Life at the Edge of the World

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*In the last half-century the role of the foreign missionary and the concept of mission in the work of the Society have changed markedly. The experience of one Jesuit shows how the legacy of the past can be incorporated into the present and help set directions for the future.*

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## I. The Journey to the Missions

**E**ntrance into the Society of Jesus was an adventure for all of us back in the 1950s, when streams of teenagers, most of them graduates of Jesuit high schools, headed for novitiates every year. The sense of adventure was heightened for some who entered with the stipulation that they would be sent to the foreign missions if they were judged suitable. After all, we were the product of a generation that had faithfully donated pennies and nickels during our early Catholic-school years to “rescue pagan babies” from the fate that awaited the unbaptized.

But that was far from my thoughts when I entered the Society in 1956 after graduating from Canisius High School in Buffalo. I was captivated by other aspects of Jesuit life: high-school teaching, like the Jesuit scholastics I admired at Canisius, and the breadth of interest in the Society that translated into just about everything that could fascinate a teenager with a dawning sense of the world. There were Jesuit astronomers, paleontologists, vulcanologists, glacier priests, zoologists, botanists—and even puppeteers and mimes, as I was to find out later. Jesuits were clearly men who embraced the world, whose interests were as boundless as the

planet and beyond. It wasn't much of a stretch, years later when I was introduced to the books of Mary Doria Russell, to imagine Jesuits on a spacecraft speeding toward the planet of "the singers" in another constellation.<sup>1</sup>

As a high-school student, I had read *Saint among the Hurons* and been captivated by the heroism of Jean de Brébeuf, the sturdy Norman who had endured excruciating torture at the hands of the Iroquois, and done it so bravely that at his death his captors paid him the compliment of ripping out his heart and devouring it in the hope that they might ingest some of his courage.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps even more touching was the story of Noel Chabanel, the cultured and sensitive Jesuit who found himself hopelessly out of place in New France, a man who easily read Greek and Latin but could never master any of the Native American languages, a person who found life in the wilderness repugnant but who nonetheless took a vow to remain until death in the land of the people he had always hoped to serve.<sup>3</sup>

In the novitiate I was selected to do a presentation on the Caroline-Marshall Islands as part of a series that we second-year novices did on mission areas, but the topic aroused little real interest in me at the time. It was an assignment, and so I did it. The bibliographic tools were very basic: an oversize spiral-bound volume of maps of the islands showing the location of mission facilities, listing mission personnel, and offering a thumbnail history, and also a couple of books penned by missionaries themselves.<sup>4</sup> I learned that the Caroline and Marshall

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow* (New York, Villard, 1996), and her sequel *Children of God* (New York: Villard, 1998).

<sup>2</sup>Francis X. Talbot, S.J., *Saint among the Hurons* (New York: Mass Market Paperbacks, 1956).

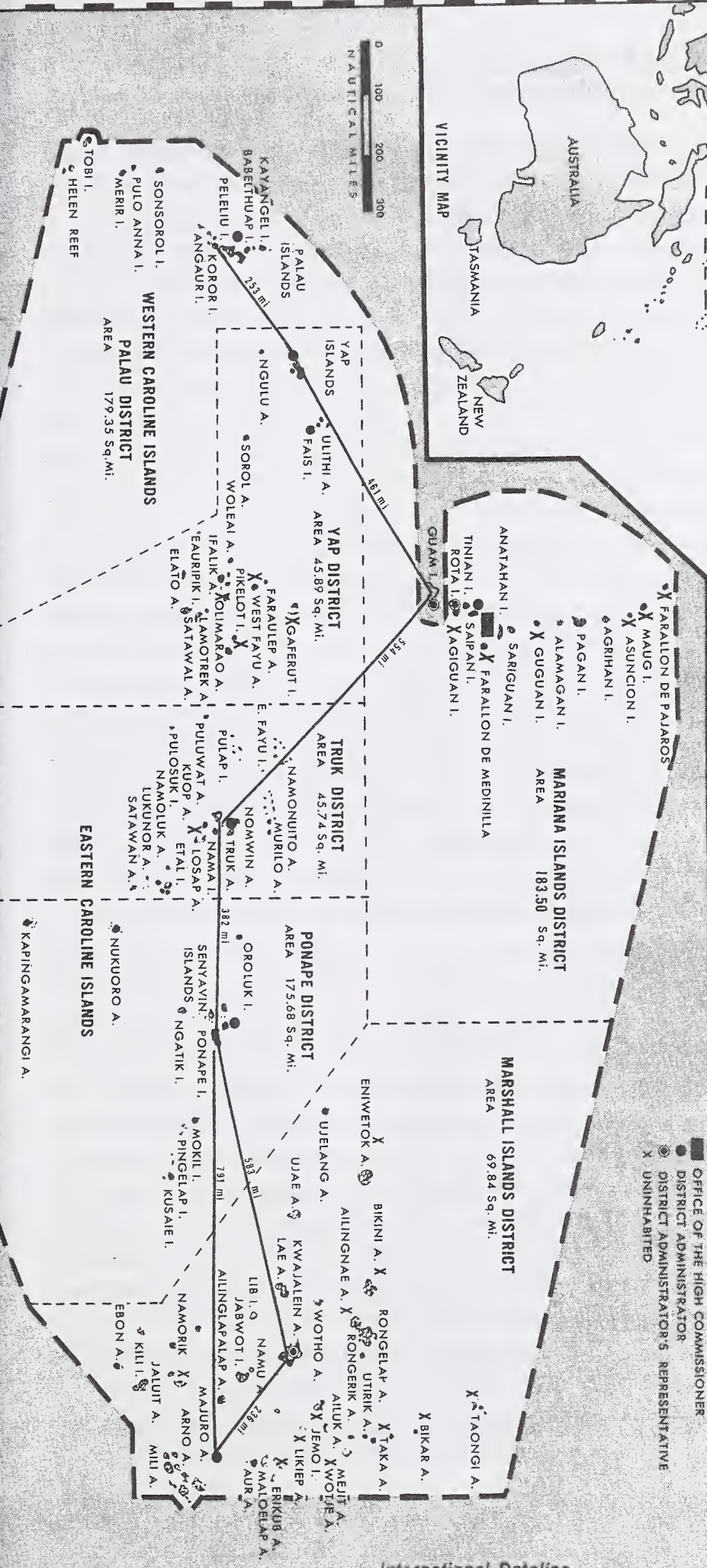
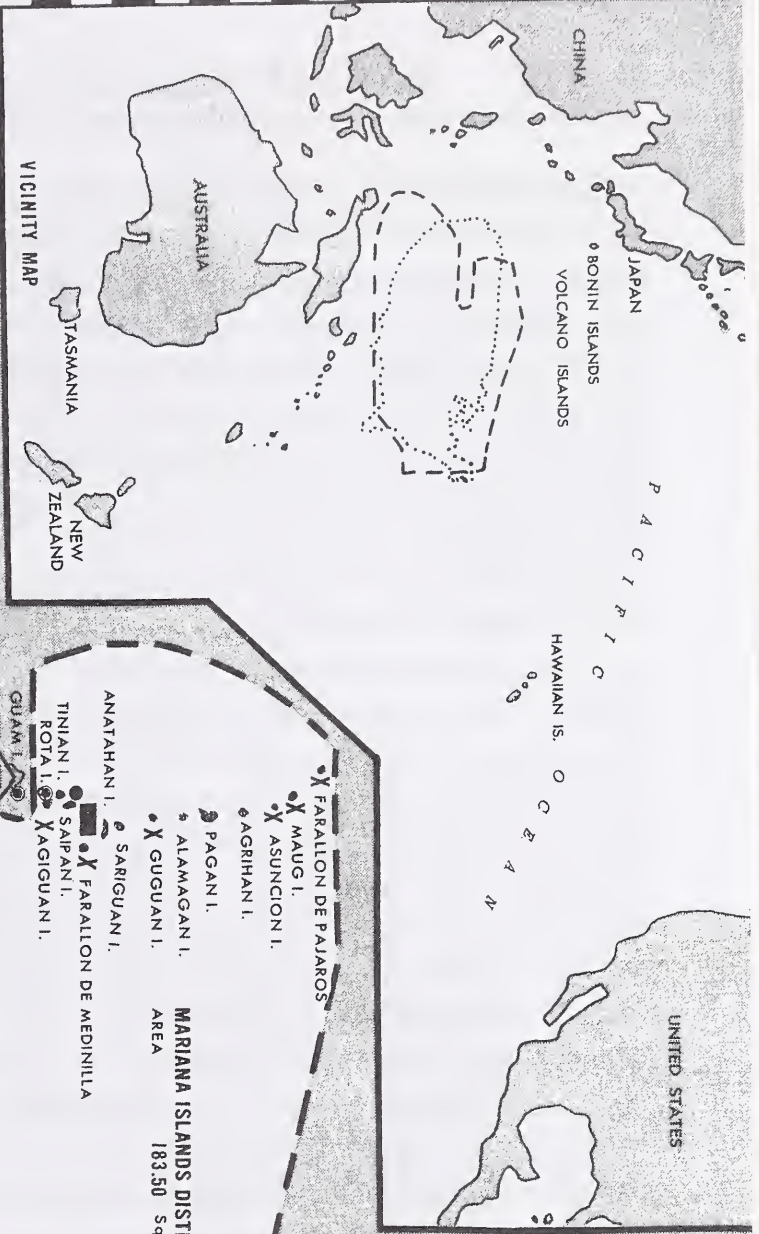
<sup>3</sup>Story of Noel Chabanel, recounted in an English-literature textbook.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas J. Feeney, S.J., *A Prospectus of the Physical Status of the Caroline and Marshall Islands* (New York: Society of Jesus, 1955). Feeney, who in 1952 was appointed the first American vicar apostolic of the Caroline and Marshall Islands, issued this short publication to encourage burses and legacies that would benefit the mission. Feeney, who spent five years in the Marshall Islands before being named a bishop, was also the author of *Letters from Likiep* (New York: Pandick, 1952), a compilation of essays on life in the Marshall Islands. Bill Rively, who served the remote atolls in Chuuk, describes being lost at sea in an outrigger canoe for four days after he and his companions barely survived a typhoon. When finally rescued, he determined to find the money to purchase a second-hand brigantine, which he renamed "Star of the Sea." See William E. Rively, S.J., *The Story of the Romance* (New York: Rhinehart & Co, 1953).



# TRUST TERRITORY of the PACIFIC ISLANDS NORTHERN MARIANA, CAROLINE, AND MARSHALL ISLANDS

- OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
- DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR
- DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR'S REPRESENTATIVE
- X UNINHABITED





Islands contained about one hundred inhabited islands in all that could be broken down into six major island groups, each group with a population of a few thousand (5,000–25,000). Although the counts varied, it was generally agreed that there were at least eight different languages in the area, some with as few as a couple of hundred speakers. As far as I could determine, a mysterious food known as breadfruit, together with more familiar foodstuffs like taro and tapioca, figured prominently in the diet. Housing was generally simple and was built of local wood, scraps of imported lumber and tin, and whatever else people could gather. But the most striking characteristic of the place was that nearly everywhere transportation was by boat. The image of the single outrigger canoe repeatedly showed up on the pages of the works I consulted, as if it were the symbol of the archipelago. The Trust Territory Government, managed by the U.S. Department of Interior, maintained a small fleet of old steamers that provided ship service between islands and contracted with PanAm to keep a couple of small planes flying to provide minimal air service with the outside world. But transportation was bound to be a challenge since the ratio of water to land area was nearly 10,000:1. These were islands, after all, and very small islands at that. All this seemed challenging for those Jesuits destined to spend the rest of their lives in such a doubly isolated place. Not only was it half a world away from the towns and cities they grew up in and called their home, but the Jesuits there seemed equally isolated from one another and even from many of those they were supposed to be serving.

The decision to apply for the missions came suddenly, one late-summer day in 1962 as I was reading *Beyond All Horizons: Jesuits and the Missions*, a beautifully edited compendium on the subject by Thomas Burke. I was sitting alongside the pool at the philosophate in Westchester County, just north of New York City, as we were preparing to begin the final year of our philosophical studies.<sup>5</sup> The newly formed Buffalo Province, of which I was a member, inherited from its parent New York Province the mission of the Caroline-Marshall Islands. I remember the thrill of reading the chapter on the greats who had served overseas: Alessandro Valignano in Japan, Matteo Ricci in China, Robert De Nobili in India, José de Anchieta in Brazil, and Eusebio Kino in North America. Burke's volume went on to describe contemporary mission work in several countries, including the Philippines and the Caroline-Marshall Is-

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas J. Burke, S.J., *Beyond All Horizons: Jesuits and the Missions* (New York: Hanover House, 1957).



lands. In recounting the glories of the Jesuit missions, past and present, the book stirred my imagination in a way that I had not expected.

Yet, the little I knew of the Caroline-Marshall Islands was enough to deflate the romanticism of the “missions” and make me wonder whether I really ought to be thinking of this field at all. From what I had read, Jesuits assigned there had to be ready for the inglorious work of fixing their own outboard engines, laying foundations for churches and schools, and moving constantly from one village to the next on what appeared to be an endless round of Masses. On top of all this, the missionary was expected to learn the local language—surely nothing as difficult as Mandarin or Japanese or Vietnamese, but of a different order altogether from the Indo-European languages to which we all had been exposed during our studies. Although I had not yet read Somerset Maugham, James Michener, Nordhoff and Hall, and Louis Becke (that would come later), we all had an appreciation of the mystique that the South Pacific had in the eyes of Westerners. Still, Micronesia was by definition a small place, a backwater in the sea of missions that Jesuits had staffed over the centuries; it was of a very different order from the kingdoms and the centers of power that Jesuits once assaulted. We needed a Jesuit to teach at our high school simply because this was the mission assigned to the province, and regents assigned to Xavier High School, the mission school in Chuuk, were expected to return after their ordination to add to the supply of Jesuit priests. In the afterglow of Burke’s volume, impulsively and discounting whatever second thoughts I may have had, I wrote to the provincial to volunteer for the Caroline-Marshalls Mission.

## **Micronesian Mission: A History**

The Caroline and Marshall Islands, scattered throughout the western Pacific, had for centuries been little more than way stations or stepping-stones for Westerners to more alluring destinations—Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, and the shores of the Asian continent. Back in the sixteenth century, the golden age of Spanish exploration, the islands had first made their way onto Western maps. Some of them served as watering and reprovisioning stops for the caravels that sought the spices of the East Indies or the galleons that traded in the Philippines. Three centuries later the same islands became convenient stopovers for American merchants engaged in the lucrative China trade. Then, toward the end of the nineteenth century, the islands were annexed by Spain, only to be sold to Germany at the end of the Spanish-American War, and fi-

nally seized by Japan at the outbreak of World War I. During the Second World War, the islands had acquired an importance for the Japanese as staging areas and military bases for its push eastward and southward. Then, a few years later, these outposts were either neutralized or taken by assault during the Allied drive toward Japan headed by Admiral Chester Nimitz. The names of some of the islands—Peleliu, Angaur, Truk (now known as Chuuk), and Saipan—were once instantly recognized by Americans and were immortalized in military history, before these names, like the islands themselves, receded back into obscurity. Through it all, the value of these islands remained that of stepping-stones to somewhere else.

Jesuits have long been able to claim a spiritual paternity over the region, for it was Jesuits who first brought the faith to Micronesia in the late-seventeenth century. Blessed Luis de San Vitores and five Jesuit companions, accompanied by several catechists and a small force of Filipino troops, reached Guam in 1668. Their mission to Guam and the Marianas, the archipelago extending north-south just above the Carolines, had the distinction of being the first Christian missionary venture of any sort into Oceania. Conversion of these islands was not easily accomplished, even though the troops, whose responsibility was to protect the missionaries, enjoyed the advantage of muskets. In the course of the guerrilla warfare that followed the establishment of this Spanish colony, a dozen Jesuits lost their lives; and three more were killed a few years later in the failed attempts to extend the mission southward into the Caroline Islands. Consequently, the Marianas Mission acquired the same cachet as the much more publicized North American Mission and for the same reasons. Blood shed in the name of the faith had an irresistible appeal in those days, and so Jesuits from every part of Europe—Bohemia, Italy, Austria—soon volunteered to join Spanish missionaries in the field.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Mention of the hostilities between the Spanish and local islanders is bound to trigger memories of colonization in New Spain and evoke comparisons with the pillage, cultural depredation, and depopulation that occurred there. There were similarities, to be sure, but it was cultural misunderstandings, personal offenses, and perhaps quarrels over women, not the desire for gold or spices, that incited conflict in the Marianas. Jesuits were not entirely blameless throughout the twenty years of guerrilla warfare, but they played a much less invidious role than was attributed to them by some early authors. It should also be noted that the rapid depopulation of the island group—a decline of from forty-thousand to four thousand in forty years' time—can be blamed largely on the diseases that the foreigners brought rather than the carnage wrought in war. For a history of this period and assessment of the causes of hostilities and their cultural cost,



It was two centuries later, in the late-nineteenth century, that Catholic missionaries finally made their way south into the Caroline and Marshall Islands. Spanish Capuchins began work in 1886, soon after Spain was awarded possession of the Carolines. When the islands became a colony of Germany shortly after the Spanish-American War, German Capuchins relieved the Spanish friars even as German-speaking Missionaries of the Sacred Heart opened their own field in the Marshall Islands. The German missionaries had barely begun their work when the islands once again changed hands, this time passing over to Japan at the onset of World War I. Since the German missionaries were regarded as emissaries of a hostile power (Germany and Japan were on opposing sides in the war), all religious were expelled between 1914 and 1919.

When Admiral Shijiro Yamamoto<sup>7</sup> appeared at the Vatican in 1920 to request Catholic missionaries from a neutral country, Pope Benedict XV reportedly attempted to

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*With the mission largely in ruins, the foremost task of the first generation of American Jesuits was one of rebuilding churches and schools, reestablishing the ordinary parish life that had been seriously disrupted during the war years, and expanding the Catholic-school system in the mission.*

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persuade four different religious orders to take on the mission, but they all pleaded lack of manpower to staff the new mission field. The Pope finally turned to the Jesuits and requested that the Society, by virtue of its vow to accept special missions from the pontiff, assume responsibility for the mission. What could Fr. Wladimir Ledóchowski—or any general for that matter—say to such a request? The mission was turned over to the Spanish Assistancy, and within a year twenty-two Jesuits set sail for the island mission that the other major religious congregations had turned down.

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see "From Conversion to Conquest: The Early Spanish Mission in the Marianas," by Francis X. Hezel, *Journal of Pacific History* 17 (1982): 3–4; 115–37; and id., "From Conquest to Colonization: Spain in the Marianas, 1690–1740," *Journal of Pacific History* 23 (1988): 137–55. A fuller version of this second article was published as a monograph in the Micronesian Archaeological Survey Report Series: Francis X. Hezel, *From Conquest to Colonization* (Saipan: Division of Historic Preservation, 1989).

<sup>7</sup>Shijiro Yamamoto, not to be confused with Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto of World War II fame, came from a longtime Catholic family and was a legate to the Vatican in 1920.

Building on the work done by the Capuchins before them, Spanish Jesuits founded new parishes, opened elementary schools, and inaugurated many parish organizations that continued to operate until well after the Second World War. These parish organizations, sex- and age-graded like most traditional island groups, were the source of life for the parishes: there were the Luistas (named for Aloysius Gonzaga) and the Estanislaoistas (in honor of Stanislaus Kostka), any number of women's groups (usually given some title of our Lady), and men's organizations (often named after St. Ignatius). Conditions in the mission were admittedly rough at times, especially in the first few years of their work. When Br. Aniceto Arizaleta was digging the foundations of a new church in the Mortlocks, he was forced to use a frying pan for lack of any other tools. He also wrote of having nothing more than a bit of pumpkin and a single egg to share with his priest-companion, Fr. Martin Espinal, for dinner one evening when breadfruit was out of season and nothing else to eat was to be found. Under the leadership of Msgr. Jaime DeRego, the vicar apostolic of the mission, the Jesuits fluttered about in their white cassocks from village to village and from island to island performing the unglamorous work that had to be done to build up the Christian communities throughout the islands. By the late 1930s, as war drew near, Japanese authorities curtailed the work of the missionaries, later confining them to their own rectories and moving them even from these as suited the Japanese military. Finally, in late 1944, as the Allies were sweeping into the islands during the final year of the war, the Japanese executed six Jesuits who had served in Yap and Palau. They were either beheaded or shot, depending on which account one credits, and buried in a mass pit that has never been located.<sup>8</sup>

Following the war, it was Americans' turn to try their hand at the mission. Indeed, the Department of the Navy, which insisted that all new mission personnel be Americans, would have repatriated the remaining Spanish Jesuits if Cardinal Francis Spellman, the military ordinary at that time, had not petitioned the U.S. Navy to allow them to continue their work, if only to permit an easier transition. The mission was open to the entire U.S. Assistency for a year until, in 1947, it was turned

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<sup>8</sup>Fr. Luis Blanco Suarez, Fr. Bernardo de la Espriella, and Br. Francisco Hernandez were ordered out of Yap and relocated by the Japanese military on Palau early in the war. There they joined Fr. Marino de La Hoz, Fr. Elias Fernandez, and Br. Emilio del Villar in a remote area where they were placed under house arrest. In September 1944, at the time of the U.S. invasion of the southern islands of Palau, the six Jesuits were executed along with the family of a Guamanian weatherman who had been working on Yap.



over to the New York Province to staff, along with the Philippines and later Puerto Rico and Nigeria.

With the mission largely in ruins, the foremost task of the first generation of American Jesuits was one of rebuilding churches and schools, reestablishing the ordinary parish life that had been seriously disrupted during the war years, and expanding the Catholic-school system in the mission. The early American missionaries, many of whom would acquire reputations as big builders, were equal to the task. They included Len Hacker in the Marshalls, Hugh Costigan in Pohnpei, Jake Walter in the outer islands of Yap, John Hoek and Br. John Walter in Chuuk. But these giants did not work alone. The same islanders who had nourished their piety through the long war years by gathering for daily rosary worked at the side of these men as they laid the concrete blocks in their parish buildings and as they slowly reconstituted parish life. Religious women, Mercedarians and Maryknoll Sisters, were brought in to teach at the schools. A Catholic high school, Xavier in Chuuk, was opened in 1952, and a second one, Pohnpei Agriculture and Trade School (or PATS, as it was commonly known), would begin operations in 1965. By the early 1960s the Caroline and Marshall Mission had recovered from the war, and then some. The future was bright with promise in this small part of the world.

## II. Fitting In

Such was the picture of the mission in 1963 when I was assigned to Micronesia to do regency at Xavier High School in Chuuk.<sup>9</sup> My letter to Fr. James Shanahan, provincial of the Buffalo Province, volunteering for the missions was duly received, and I was asked to undergo a thorough physical exam. But in his reply to me, the provincial noted that there was only a single slot for a regent that year and a

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<sup>9</sup>Xavier High School was originally opened as a minor seminary in 1952. A year later, when it was clear that the seminary project was overly ambitious, Xavier was converted into a boys boarding school, which immediately attracted the brightest young men from the entire mission. It still does, even though an opportunity for a good high-school education is far more common today. The entire school then was housed in a poured-concrete building constructed by the Japanese as a naval communications center on mission land the Japanese military had confiscated at the beginning of the war. With three-foot-thick cement walls and steel-shuttered windows, the building was designed more with an eye to protection against bombs and shells than for comfort, as we quickly discovered.

Micronesian Jesuit was due to finish his philosophy studies in the Philippines within a few months. It was clear that I was to be the back-up. When, not long afterwards, the other scholastic asked to leave the Society, I received a letter instructing me that I would be assigned to Xavier for regency after all.

The trans-Pacific flight to Guam in July 1963 was an adventure, but nothing compared to what happened when Fr. John Nash, my traveling companion, and I arrived and took up temporary residence in the



Capuchin friary to await the weekly flight to Chuuk. Two weeks in a row, the two of us presented ourselves at the airport for check-in on the amphibious sixteen-seat plane that served the islands, only to be told that the flight was full and we would have to wait another week to get out. Then one day, just as we were beginning to despair of ever getting passage to Chuuk, we were informed that a military transport plane would bring us to Palau, a thousand miles west of our destination. There we could catch a ship bringing students east to Chuuk. We



reached Palau without incident and were being transported from the landing strip on Angaur to Koror, the port town some fifty miles distant, when our boat went aground on the reef. We waited for hours, sharing sandwiches and cookies and passing around a bottle or two of scotch, before we were rescued by another vessel. In the middle of the night, we were transferred to a vintage military landing craft that had been pressed into service as an occasional passenger ship, and so we finally made our way into Koror a few hours before sunrise. Once there, we caught some sleep and prepared to board the ship that was to bring us to Chuuk, only to learn that it had been delayed for a week. Welcome to Micronesia, where nothing happens as planned!

Three weeks or so after our departure from Guam, following another long delay on Yap, John Nash and I arrived in Chuuk at last. We were treated to the wonders of the Pacific: banana trees, with the fruit growing upside down; foliage everywhere of the deepest green I had ever seen; and, of course, the heat and humidity of an endless summer. All of it was new and exciting. We met the ninety high-school students, the intellectual cream of every island group in the mission. Their faces had softened from their images in the yearbook that I had seen less than a year before. They joked, they teased, there were miles of smiles. Since I had replaced my cousin, Ken Hezel, who had returned to the United States to begin his theology, they lost no time in reminding me that I was the "artificial Hezel" (he, of course, being the real item). The students were easy-going and easy to like. I could see that teaching would not be the contest for control that I had been led to believe occurred in the usual Jesuit high-school classroom, so I decided to jettison the old counsel provided to scholastics of that time: Never smile until Christmas. How could one help but smile, in class and out, with young men this engaging? Before long, I simply did what a generation of scholastics before me had already done: I fell in love with the school and the students and the regency assignment and the mission.

This is not to say that there were no challenges during regency. But many of them were the stuff of regency anywhere in the world, compounded a bit perhaps by the small (and entirely Jesuit) staff at the school. The school needed a choir and band director. Fine, I'd be willing to try my hand at these activities, even though I couldn't read music and had never played an instrument of any kind (I would have been challenged playing the kazoo). They needed a basketball and baseball coach? You can count on me, even if my enthusiasm far outweighed my ability in either sport. Then followed the camera club and the ham-radio class, but I



was sure that I could handle the basics of the darkroom and learn Morse Code. When Fr. Jerry Cuddy, the blustery ex-military chaplain who was then teaching physics, became discouraged with his class, he handed them off to me, convinced as he was by this time that I was ready for any challenge. So I struggled through the course, a few pages ahead of the class in the sophisticated new post-Sputnik textbook we were using, imposing even greater struggles on the students who attempted to understand what we were doing in class.

Thus was instilled a willingness to try just about anything, and so also was born the conviction that anyone who wanted to work in this field could not afford the luxury of mastering a trade before beginning to practice it. “Jack of all trades and master of none” was never more applicable than in the islands, and it has served me well over the years. My only truly marketable skills, it seems to me, were in the Latin and Greek classics, but I never had the opportunity to put them to use in the islands. I see now that it would have been a terrible mistake to put life on hold until I had the chance to exercise them. Choir and band, baseball and basketball, camera club and ham radio—better a half-baked job than nothing at all. But then again, that may be the great lesson of regency no matter where it’s made. Even so, Micronesians with their finely tuned sensitivity and unfailing politeness made it so much easier, for we would never have been greeted by hooting, smirks, or rolling eyes as we stumbled through our duties.

This recognition certainly allayed my initial fears that I had volunteered for and been assigned to a mission where I wouldn’t fit in. Boat repairs and construction? Running a credit union or a co-op? Learning an island language? Spending my days visiting the sick, offering marriage preparation, and presiding at local liturgies? If a man like me could teach physics or direct the choir, why couldn’t he try his hand at these as well? Fear of failure is a powerful inhibition for all of us, sometimes a crippling one. But I was learning the limits of professionalism and of the careerism that sometimes accompanies it, not because I wanted to, but because the lesson was forced upon me during regency and reinforced in the years since.

## Reentry Shock

What the Peace Corps terms “reentry shock”—the flip side of the culture shock volunteers feel when they first experience life abroad—hit me hard when I returned to the United States after my three years of regency. In a strange reversal, life in the islands, which at first seemed so

odd, had by this time become the norm, while life in my own country now felt unfamiliar to me. Like so many others who have returned from an overseas mission, I desperately longed for a conversational partner, someone with whom I could share my experiences in the islands—what I had found fascinating and what remained puzzling and, above all, what I had learned about myself during those three formative years. Yet somehow, whenever I cautiously tried out these topics, I would see eyes glaze over and conversation drift off to Super Bowl contenders, or national politics, or how difficult it's become to find parking in the city. Doesn't anyone care about the islands? I inwardly screamed. The loneliness was relieved only when chatting with one of the other Jesuits who had been assigned to the mission or upon one of the rare visits from persons living in the islands.

I could better appreciate why those missionaries of old used to haul around a carousel of slides that they would show to anyone who expressed half an interest in their work. They

were as hungry as I was for someone with whom they could share their experiences. We who had served in Micronesia during regency clung to one another for this purpose, organizing monthly meetings for a group that we called the Micronesian Seminar. We collected books about the islands, stoked our energy for what we regarded as our inevitable return to the mission, talked about the fields of specialization that we would enter, and dreamed about how our collective efforts would elevate the islanders and their church. To a man, we were focused on our future ministry in a mission that had wormed its way into our whole being.

Theology at Woodstock College in the mid-1960s brought its own challenges. One of the greatest was catching up with the changes of Vatican II, from which I had been shielded in the islands. Each year during regency one of the four scholastics was chosen to serve as subdeacon in the solemn high Mass we celebrated for the students at Easter and Christmas. I had never even become used to Mass facing the people, but now we were all adapting to the idiosyncracies of the small-chapel liturgies that were offered to us daily. I still remember how awkward I felt when I was invited to sit in a chair to confess rather than kneel in front

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*There were other explanations, more compatible with Vatican II's emphasis on the Church as a sign of salvation. The establishment of the Church in all parts of the world, even if it would never encompass entire populations, still stood as a sign of the universal salvific will of God.*

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of a screen, as I had always done. On the other hand, the changes in the theology program itself were welcome for anyone earnest about studies, especially in view of the all-star faculty that Woodstock could boast of in those days. The problem for people like me, on the other hand, was the new emphasis placed on service projects just as I was trying desperately to regain a handhold on the cliffs of academia.

## In Search of a Theology of Mission

Woodstock offered singular opportunities for people like me to update our mission theology. Avery Dulles offered a seminar on missiology that opened to us new currents of thought, while Jesuit Missions sponsored an international conference on missions, held at Woodstock, that drew some of the big names from throughout the world. This offered us an opportunity to reflect on just what the theological basis for mission is. Jesus' injunction at the end of Matthew's Gospel, and found in slightly altered form in the two other Synoptics, was clear: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."<sup>10</sup> But why? Church thinking on the matter of salvation had come a long way since the days when we saved our pennies to "ransom Chinese babies." Surely there were other ways in which those who had never heard of Christ could be saved. For a generation that was raised on Rahner's theology of Anonymous Christianity, the voice of God that summons from within and that can be assented to in a "yes" that need not take the form of Church involvement, what does the explicit missionary activity of the Church add?<sup>11</sup> This question was debated passionately in the popular theology digests of the day. Men who had spent their whole adult lives overseas seemed to find the theological rationale of their apostolate undermined and their life's work questioned. They reacted strongly to the suggestion that post-conciliar theology rendered the foreign missionary an anachronism.

Yet, there were other explanations, more compatible with Vatican II's emphasis on the Church as a sign of salvation. The establishment of

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<sup>10</sup>Matt. 28:19. The command appears in slightly different forms in Mark 16:15 and in Luke 24:47.

<sup>11</sup>Karl Rahner first presented his position in the article "Anonymous Christians," *Theological Investigations* 6 (1969): 394ff. (Baltimore: Helicon Press). Rahner's position was soon incorporated into missiological works of the day, such as *The Church as Mission*, by Eugene Hillman (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965) and *Toward a Theology of Religions*, by Heinz Robert Schlette (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966).



the Church in all parts of the world, even if it would never encompass entire populations, still stood as a sign of the universal salvific will of God. The Church, faithful to the injunction of Christ and the dynamism of its own nature, would stand as a beacon to the world rather than an exclusive society of the saved.<sup>12</sup> It was a sacrament of Christ's saving work in the world, even when that work was carried out in other mysterious ways far from the pulpit and altar. The Church's thrust to all parts of the world might be seen as a testimony to the concern of the Lord for all peoples, not just those with modern communications and transportation systems. Here was something that I could resonate with.

There were difficult questions urged on us by other voices, of course, as shouts of "Yankee, go home" echoed throughout the world. What about the effects of missionary movements in the past? Have missionaries been unwitting collaborators with colonial powers, softening up local people for Western business or military interests? Have missionaries unintentionally promoted the cultural values that are more intrinsically linked to their home countries than to the Gospel itself? Given the excesses of some of the earlier mission attempts, might not we do better to let people work out their salvation on their own rather than run the risk of infecting them with cultural imperialism? Ivan Illich, the self-anointed prophet of Latin America during this era, clearly thought so. Convinced that missionaries were contaminated by their own cultural values and so were carriers of a potentially deadly virus, Illich was urging future foreign missionaries to help out by staying home.<sup>13</sup> This is, in fact, what many of those who had been destined for the Philippines did. Confronted by the early stirrings of nationalistic resentment toward foreign missionaries, several friends of mine decided not to return to the mission or left it not long after their return.

Once, I remember, in our last year of theology we theologians were asked to prepare a statement on the international apostolate. As one of those asked to prepare a draft, I thought long and hard about what justi-

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<sup>12</sup>*Lumen gentium*, 5 and 9.

<sup>13</sup>Nowhere was this message made more clearly—and stridently—than in Illich's address to the Conference on Inter-American Student Projects (CIASP) in Cuernavaca, Mexico, on April 20, 1968. Illich began his speech thus: "For the past six years I have become known for my increasing opposition to the presence of any and all North American "do-gooders" in Latin America. I am sure you know of my present efforts to obtain the voluntary withdrawal of all North American volunteer armies from Latin America—missionaries, Peace Corps members, and groups like yours, a "division" organized for the benevolent invasion of Mexico."

fication could be made for our overseas work. We in Micronesia did not have the teeming millions that Latin America or Africa could boast of, nor did we suffer from the acute poverty, widespread unemployment, and the glaring injustice of those parts of the world. We were not, by any stretch of the imagination, one of the hinges on which the world swung. We had few people, with little formal education and almost no understanding of how modern society worked. Yet, these people, marginal as they were, could claim to be children of the Lord and so no less worthy of the Church's attention than larger and more publicized peoples.

By the time I left theology, the claim of the marginal on the Church had become a key component in my personal theology of mission. Even so, the nagging question persisted: Is working among a forgotten population at what appeared to many to be at the edge of the planet the "greater good" that Ignatius had in mind when formulating the criteria for Jesuit ministries? Perhaps the staunch advocates for serving the masses, as in the poor favelas of Latin America, had a point after all. The misery there has always been far worse than in the fertile islands of the Pacific, the numbers are much greater, and there was always the bonus of possibly making a splash in the press, enticing other magnanimous souls to dedicate themselves to these places and peoples. Publicity was certainly not the end goal of Ignatian discernment, but it could be an apostolic means of enhancing the value of ministry. And it was a sure bet that Micronesia wouldn't be making headlines anytime soon.

### III. Reentry into the Field

**A**fter my ordination in 1969, I returned to Micronesia as expected, although more by default than as a matter of conviction. The late 1960s had been a tumultuous period in the United States, with its anti-Vietnam War protests, the rise of Haight-Ashbury, and the alternative lifestyles embraced there, the flowering of the youth revolution, the assassinations of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and riots in several of the country's major cities. It was the season of communes, long-haired hippies, the Weathermen—that is to say, rebellion against the conventional in all its forms, founded on the belief that all human institutions were infinitely plastic and malleable enough to be reshaped if only the will and the numbers were there. Whether one bought into this view or not, it was clear that certain elemental forces were at work challenging virtually everything that we had taken for granted, including the faith we were raised in. New frontiers were be-



ing flashed on our TV screens nightly: one of the last I witnessed in July 1969 was Neil Armstrong's first steps on the surface of the moon. There seemed to be no end to the ways in which we were called to reshape our own culture, and now we were being confronted with challenges beyond our own planet.

To pack up and leave for the remote Pacific at a time like this seemed folly, so I hedged my bets and asked superiors if I might consider a doctoral degree in anthropology or history or Pacific studies—anything that might offer an escape route from a mission field that looked as though it might be a dead end. I returned to teach for a time in the same high school where I had done regency, but with the understanding that I would be enrolling in a graduate program after a year or two.

The return to Chuuk proved to be a harsh transition. Six years earlier, when I had first landed in Micronesia, it was easy to find wonder in everything I experienced, pleasant or unpleasant, if only because it was novel. Now the geckos that ran up the walls and made strange chirping sounds had lost their charm and were nothing better than an annoyance, one more trial added to the ubiquitous cockroaches and flies and mosquitoes and rats. The heat and humidity that I had accepted as a matter of course a few years earlier now seemed almost diabolical in the way they cloyed the mind and sapped what little energy I possessed. Even the students had lost the charm they once had for me. I was becoming immune to their smiles, cynical about their irrepressible good humor. Now I was beginning to find off-putting the long pauses before they answered, with eyes lowered, and the evasiveness of their replies.

Yet, somehow, by the end of the year I had ripped up the application form for the Australian National University that I had been keeping on my desk. I'm not sure why, other than the realization that if I ever left for studies I would probably never return to the islands. I could imagine teaching in a nearby college, the University of Guam perhaps or the University of Hawaii, and living on the fringe of the islands but not in them. Despite the initial revulsion at my return to island life, I knew that here was where I was meant to be. All I needed now was the rationale for my decision to stay, legitimation for the personal sense of mission I was beginning to feel.

## **Ministry in the Islands**

As I continued teaching at Xavier High School, I was given an opportunity to do social studies curriculum work, with emphasis on the



islands, their history and culture, while introducing basic social-science concepts in the context of the social environment of the islands themselves. This work issued in two high-school textbooks that were used for a time by island schools, private and public. My curriculum work led to a personal thirst for a deeper understanding of the history of the islands. So we purchased second-hand books: accounts of early French naval expeditions, memoirs of trading captains and beachcombers, seventeenth-century mission documents to add to our growing library on Micronesia. There were other opportunities to add to this storehouse: anthropological conferences, consultations with visiting Pacific historians, and one memorable summer of travel through New England whaling museums to consult and copy from whaleship logs from the mid-1800s, the height of American whaling activities in the Pacific.

It's one thing to know about culture, however, and quite another to understand it experientially. A half year of language study in a Chuukese village offered me that opportunity, even as it presented cultural conundrums every day. Never did I feel so alone, so incompetent than at the beginning of this experience. I'll never forget the first day in the village, after I was dropped off by Andrew Connolly, the pastor of the island cluster at the extreme western end of Chuuk. There was no one in the village to greet me, so I waited with a throbbing headache, wondering what I was doing here. I remember finding a place to lie down in a small hut, sleeping for a while, and waking to find a gaggle of young boys staring at me. My language learning immediately began as I walked through the village pointing to objects—trees, boats, turtles, firewood, anything at all—and asking the boys to give me the Chuukese word for the object. Language study was guaranteed to shrink a person's ego to manageable size, but other opportunities for self-deflation also abounded.

There were more than enough awkward moments, like trying to take a shower in a tin bathhouse in which the water spigot was barely half a foot off the ground and learning that the idea was to fill a pail with water and splash it over your body as needed; figuring out how to balance on a single tottering two-by-four that served as the wobbly walkway to an over-the-lagoon latrine; discovering that there were no secrets in a small village when people asked me how I felt the morning after I had made a hasty trip to the woods to vomit up my dinner in what I presumed was secrecy. If there were no secrets in an island village, there was no sense of privacy either. Children lined the house to watch with amusement as I did my daily exercises in the plywood

house that served as my temporary home. My box of personal possessions, toothbrush and cigars included, were fair game for my hosts, as I came to understand when I examined the contents upon my return after a weekend away.

After six months I acquired a rudimentary knowledge of the language—enough to get by on but not much more—along with a head full



of cultural conundrums and enough stories to last a lifetime. Language learning was a lesson in humility, as it was for Noel Chabanel, I suppose. But it was also the reaffirmation of a truth that I was slowly and reluctantly coming to accept: that all of us in the mission were doomed to doing things half-well. A life of professionalism was out of the question in a place such as this. I had once been led to believe that overseas work would demand certain obvious sacrifices: theater, art galleries, televised sports, and the easy familiarity of home, with all that meant.



But I gradually came to understand that it was far easier to surrender these than the satisfaction that comes from a job competently done. Years later, as I was thumbing through a copy of the Indian Assistancy publication *JIVAN*, I found an article by an Indian Jesuit working among tribal peoples in his own country, who portrayed himself as a man who had learned several "half languages." By this time I had tried my hand at another island language, Pohnpeian, and I instantly understood just what he meant.

Barely was I back from the village when I was told that I was to be the principal of Xavier High School, replacing Fr. Jack Curran, who had been reassigned to pastoral work on the neighboring island of Pohnpei. Superiors assured me that it was to be a temporary assignment, since just a year earlier, at our mission-planning meeting, I had been chosen to direct the newly conceived research-pastoral institute, a new program that was christened with an old name, Micronesian Seminar. As it turned out, however, I was to spend two years as principal and another seven as director of the high school.

## Companions in Mission

By the mid-1970s the age of the "giants of the mission" was already in deep decline. William "Jake" Walter, the ex-military chaplain during World War II who had tirelessly established missions on the atolls of the central Pacific, building churches everywhere, catechizing people who had only the vaguest knowledge of Christianity, even importing thread that the women of his parishes could use on traditional looms to weave their distinctive lavalavas, had died of throat cancer. Ed McManus, who had arrived a year after the end of the war and had gone on to become the father figure of the Palau Islands, a man whose long shadow could be ascribed to his linguistic and cultural understanding of the area rather than his feats of construction, had passed away in 1969. Father Berganza, a saintly Spanish priest who seemed to be without a first name as far as we could tell, died in 1973 on Pohnpei, the island on which he had lived and worked for nearly half a century. Br. Bill Condon, who had supervised the construction of half the post-war church buildings on Pohnpei during his twenty years of service in the mission, had returned to the United States in 1972 because of failing health. Vincent Kennally, formerly assigned to the Philippines where he, together with Bill Rively and John Nicholson, had endured Japanese internment in Santo Tomas during the war, was named the superior of the mission months after the war ended. After another brief stint in the Philippines, he returned to



serve as bishop of the Caroline and Marshall Islands for two critical decades. Exhausted and in poor health, Kennally left the mission in 1974 and died three years later in the Philippines.

Others would remain in the mission a while longer. Bill Rively, who had spent nearly his whole adult life in the Mortlock Islands where he was practically worshiped by his people, would continue to serve in the mission for another fifteen years before retirement. John Nicholson, also a survivor of the concentration camp and another of those men who seemed to be able to build veritable cathedrals anywhere they went, would retire within a year or two of his close friend, Bill Rively. Hugh Costigan, one of the first American Jesuits assigned to the mission after the war and founder of Pohnpei Agriculture and Trade School (PATS), was still active at this time, although he would succumb to cancer in 1987. Then there was Len Hacker, the indefatigable pastor of Majuro, the center of the Marshall Islands, a firmly Protestant stronghold. When he wasn't visiting the sick, instructing altar boys, or picking up his sparse Catholic flock on an ancient bus that he was hard pressed to keep running, he was building something—a school, a convent, it didn't much matter what. On the side, he organized a boys band that became a legend in the islands even though he never learned to read music. Outlasting all of his contemporaries, Hacker continued working in the Marshalls until 2001.

These were the founders of the post-war mission, the early arrivals, those whose task was to build (or rebuild) the church in the islands and to provide instruction and the sacraments, as well as to put up the buildings in which such activities were carried out. Those of us who followed couldn't imagine ourselves the equals of these men. The deprivations that we who arrived later experienced were modest by comparison with what they had endured. We knew them well enough to be able to describe in rich detail their quirks: most were loners (an occupational hazard for missionaries); some of them were infamous for the torrent of words that flowed from their mouths, usually about their own projects, but we couldn't imagine achieving what they had. Let me add that neither could I imagine any of them submitting to the second-guessing that I was inflicting on myself as I deliberated whether to stay in the mission and why. They were old-time missionaries, these men who had won our respect.

Our latter-day companions were men like Bill Suchan, Andrew Connolly, and John Condon. Too late to be considered pioneers, these

mere mortals came to the mission to contribute what they could. Although they were not all gifted linguists or great planners, they preached and taught and did all they could to meet the spiritual and other needs of their people. Not everything they touched took on a gilded glitter, let it be noted. Their initial credit unions ended when loans were not repaid and cash ran out, while Jack Fogelsanger's cement-boat-building project, a feature of popular mission magazines of the day, fizzled as funding sources dried up and neglect of maintenance took its inevitable toll on the boats completed. It was easy for a newcomer like me to find comfort in their friendship, for they too must have wondered whether they really belonged. As Dick Hoar, another of the second generation and himself a remarkable builder, often remarked, "We have here no lasting city." As warm and receptive as island people were, none of us was prepared to believe that we truly belonged to the societies in which we ministered. The cultural values we embraced and the "half languages" we spoke marked us as different, however much we may have wanted to believe otherwise. We were men with one foot in island society but with the other firmly planted in our own culture, men straddling societies separated by more than just a huge body of water.

#### IV. Redefinition of Our Mission

If building up the church was the goal of our work, the first generation of American Jesuits had done an admirable job of it. Cadging military surplus (unused quonset huts, rebars, cement, and whatever else they could find), they had constructed churches and rectories and convents and schools by the dozens under the most difficult of conditions. They opened so many new schools that by the mid-1960s nearly one out of every five children were enrolled in a Catholic school. In just twenty years, the early American Jesuits had not only restored what the war had destroyed, but had created a church network that surpassed anything before it.

But other forces were at work in the islands as in other parts of the world, urging the church to take several steps beyond all this. A mission-planning council, the first of its kind in Micronesia, was held in the early 1970s to determine future mission directions.<sup>14</sup> The council, echoing concerns voiced at Vatican II, recommended increased collaboration

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<sup>14</sup>The Vicariate Pastoral Planning Council was summoned by Bishop Kennally in 1971 and finished its work the following year.



among pastors and between pastors and laity to address major problem areas in the islands. Jesuits and their colleagues in Micronesia, as elsewhere around the globe, were beginning to ask what they could do to contribute to the full human development of the islands they served. After all, the Church everywhere was beginning to recognize that community development in its various dimensions was the underpinning for genuine religious growth. Everywhere in those heady days the words of Irenaeus were plastered on walls and quoted at seminars: "The glory of God is man fully alive."<sup>15</sup>

Islanders were confronting the modern world to an extent hitherto inconceivable. Thousands of additional Micronesians were now earning salaries, thanks to the increase in government jobs that resulted from the greatly increased U.S. yearly subsidies to its Trust Territory. The new wealth translated into increased mobility for islanders, an influx into the towns, loss of traditional sanctions, and a host of social problems that ranged from suicide to youth gangs to family violence.<sup>16</sup> On top of this were other issues that would have to be addressed in the near future: a choice of future political status (since the current U.N. trusteeship would not last forever and talks between island representatives and the U.S. Government were already underway to determine the political future of the islands), not to mention the concomitant need to take the first serious steps toward economic development if the islands were ever to be self-reliant.

Conscientization was the byword of the day, and Paolo Freire became required reading.<sup>17</sup> If we were to help people satisfy their needs, even as they grew in dignity and self-respect, we would have to step back and assist them to understand and engage their own problems. This demanded more of the church than directly providing what people needed in life; it meant a commitment to helping people peer deeply into the realities of their society so they could address their own needs. In an earlier day it might have been enough for the pastor to run the parish and school, but so much more seemed to be demanded of church

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<sup>15</sup>St. Irenaeus, *Adversus hæreses* 4.20.7.

<sup>16</sup>See, for instance, Mac Marshall, *Weekend Warriors: Alcohol in a Micronesian Culture* (Palo Alto, Cal.: Mayfield, 1979); Francis X. Hezel, "Suicide and the Micronesian Family," *Contemporary Pacific* 1, no. 1 (1989): 43–74; Michael Kenney, *Youth in Micronesia in the 1970s: The Impact of Changing Family, Employment, and Justice Systems* (Saipan: Trust Territory Government, 1976).

<sup>17</sup>Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).



leaders in this age. If the church had always provided education for school children, perhaps it was time to expand this education to the community at large and to extend it beyond the three Rs to the host of issues that people faced as they engaged in the struggle with modernization.

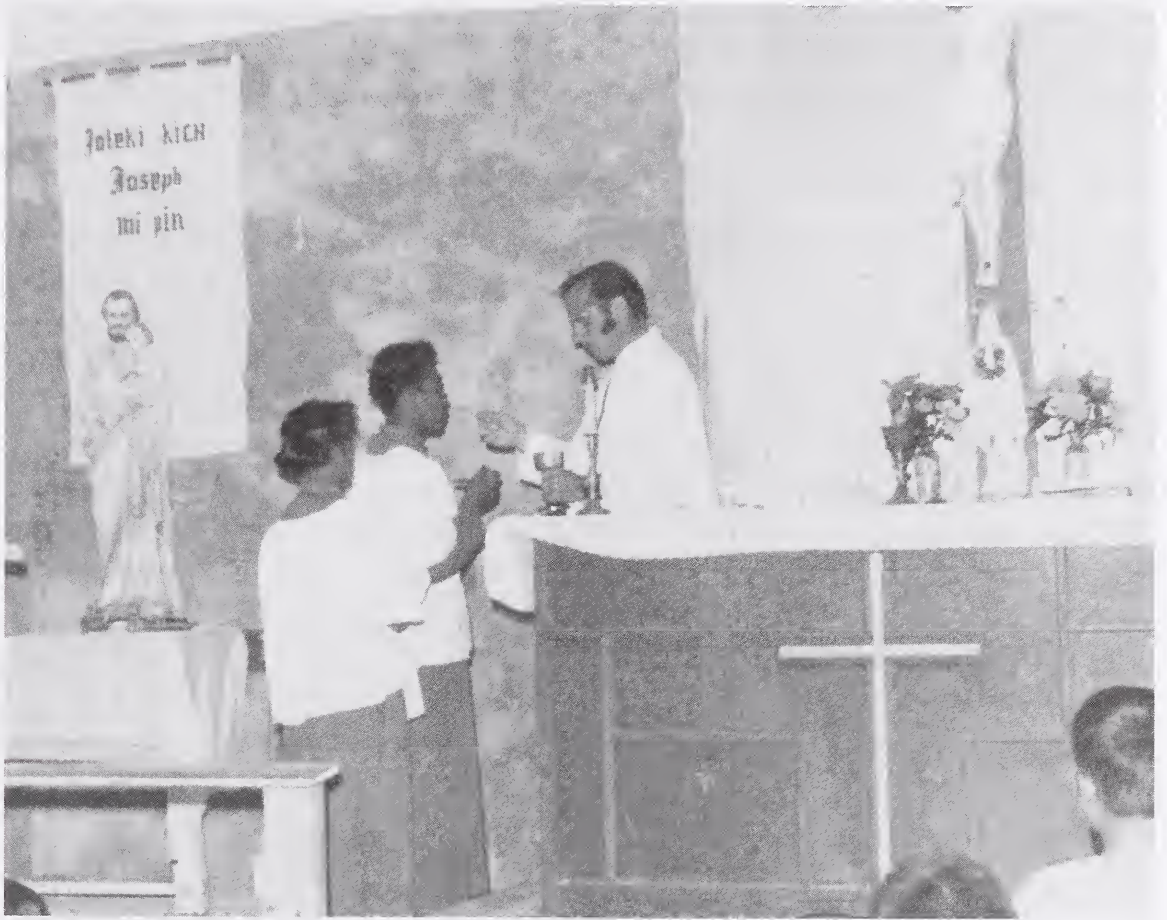
From all this sprang a whole range of community-education programs: workshops for church lay leaders, mobile teams that moved from village to village for a few days at a time to draw local people into a discussion of these problems, and production of radio dramas that could offer listeners the chance to confront the issues of the day in all their flesh-and-blood concreteness. Of course, this effort demanded a degree of collaboration that was hitherto unimaginable in this far-flung mission, in which each pastor had always been truly lord of his domain. Thus, new missionwide offices were created—for media, for the social apostolate, and for catechetics—and pastors were encouraged to join forces in order to think and plan beyond their parish boundaries.

### **Micronesian Seminar**

The Micronesian Seminar (popularly known as MicSem) that I was to direct issued from the same planning council of the early 1970s. The program was initially envisioned as an instrument for providing renewal for mission personnel, especially through the two-week summer workshops that were held every other year. Some of the more forward-thinking Jesuits in the mission recognized that we all had some catching up to do, on theology, to be sure, as well as on the issues that islanders were facing as they modernized. If we were to help our people integrate faith and life, we all needed a deeper understanding of the issues our people were confronting. So, the Micronesian Seminar was to help equip pastors and their associates to engage in grass-roots community education.

Directing such a program would have been a dream assignment for a polymath, a latter-day Renaissance Man, and I fully appreciated the possibilities that the position offered. But the job description meant bouncing from one issue to another: political status this year, youth problems the next, and economic development issues the year after that. For a person who wondered whether he could master the art of small-boat repair and mixing concrete, the stakes were now upped: I was asked to trip lightly from sociology to economics, to anthropology, to political science. Here we were again, trying to do everything: “Jack of all trades; master of none.”

Our work began modestly: running each year a week-long conference attended by people from all parts of Micronesia, and organizing biennial workshops that would update our mission personnel in theology and some of the development issues that were surfacing. Within a few years the mission workshops were discontinued, and MicSem began speaking more directly to island people themselves. Through the 1980s the focus of MicSem broadened and its output increased. We were producing papers addressing such diverse issues as the ethical questions involved in political status, the constraints of economic development,



and the overall impact upon island society of expanded college education for young Micronesians. In time, the range of topics expanded even further to include health issues, domestic violence, and drug use, and others besides. Meanwhile, we graduated from presentations and publications to video programs that were broadcast on the local TV channels that had become part of island life since the late 1980s. In time, we



created a website ([www.micsem.org](http://www.micsem.org)) that offered Micronesians, including the thousands who by then had moved to the United States, access to our publications, educational videos, historical photo albums, and even a discussion forum.

My own interest in island history and culture, along with the absence of any real social life, it should be added, led to the publication of a number of works on the islands: a few general histories of the islands, a history of the Catholic Church in the area, and a volume on social change in the islands since World War II, among others, but these were a personal diversion.<sup>18</sup> In other ways, MicSem worked to engage island people as a conversation partner. Paolo Freire would have been proud of us. We were trying to conscientize: to deepen people's understanding of their own problems in full confidence that once they understood them they could somehow resolve them. This was the public education thrust of MicSem that we have tried to maintain ever since.

## Building a Local Church

From the outset we Jesuits have understood that the ultimate goal of our work overseas was to work ourselves out of a job. The earliest mission encyclicals stressed the importance of establishing a local church—local clergy and local support.<sup>19</sup> In the years following Vatican II, of course, the understanding of a local church was broadened even further; it was to be a church rooted in the culture, one that took on some of the distinctive characteristics of the soil in which it grew.

The Spanish Jesuits who cared for the mission before the war were well aware of the need to provide local clergy. During the 1920s and 1930s, they sent off a dozen young island men to seminaries in Manila and Tokyo. As it happened, only one of them was ordained: Paulino Cantero, a Jesuit who served in Spain during the war years and returned to Micronesia soon afterwards to work on his home island of Pohnpei for nearly forty years. Then came Felix Yaoch, who entered the Society from Palau in the mid-1950s, was ordained in Buffalo in 1967, and became a beloved figure in Palau during his thirty-five years of service before his death in 2002. There were others as the years went by: Br. Cypriano Moses and Fr. Apollo Thall, who have passed away, as well as

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<sup>18</sup>For those who may be interested, the titles of these books, along with a brief description of each, may be found on our website, [www.micsem.org](http://www.micsem.org)

<sup>19</sup>Benedict XV mentions this in *Maximum Illud* (1919), and the point is reasserted by Pius XII in his two mission encyclicals, *Evangelii præcones* and *Fidei donum*.



those who continue their work up to the present: Br. Juan Ngiraibuuch and Fr. Wayne Tkel from Palau, and Frs. John Hagileiram and Ken Uru-molug from Yap. Indeed, our present regional superior, John Hagileiram, is a Micronesian, the second local Jesuit to be named to this position.

There were also diocesan priests being ordained, beginning in 1977. Today there are about a dozen engaged in active ministry in the islands, one of whom, Amando Samo, was appointed bishop of the Caroline Islands in 1995. With the growth of the local clergy in the past two decades, Micronesian priests are able to provide for the full pastoral care of the vicariates of Palau, Yap, and Chuuk. Only the vicariate of Pohnpei remains dependent on foreign priests today, and even there deacon pastors have assumed full administrative responsibility for the parishes.

Women's vocations to the religious life also flourished. The Mercedarian Missionaries of Berriz, a Spanish missionary order that did pioneering work in the schools throughout the islands, have received about a hundred young Micronesian women into their congregation over the years. Still other have joined the Sisters of Marie Auxiliatrice, who entered the field in 1980, and a few have entered religious congregations on Guam and in the United States.

Micronesianization, as we like to call it, has gone beyond replacing white-skinned pastors and religious with those of a darker skin color. There is a sensitivity to inculturation felt everywhere in the islands today. Many local features have been incorporated into the liturgical life of the church, from the traditional Yapese dances on Good Friday that replace the Reproaches during the veneration of the cross to the communal reconciliation services on Pohnpei that make use of the offering of kava, a drink made from an indigenous plant. Songs and worship styles have been altered, and so have administrative procedures. Adaptation of church practice to reflect cultural life and values has clearly begun and will undoubtedly continue.

The logic of indigenization is obvious and the goal is admirable, but the process is not always a painless one, as many of those Jesuits who served in the Philippines in the early 1970s can testify. Foreign missionaries are likely to ask whether they have overstayed their welcome. Or, even worse, not to ask that question at all. With the build-up of local clergy, we enter the second stage of mission work. In the first, we have had to put aside whatever reservations we may have had about

our competence and leap into whatever job needed to be done. Now we sense that we are second-raters, even in our own small pasture. Our task now is to move gracefully to the sidelines, perhaps offstage altogether as roles are reversed. "We have no lasting home here," as my friend Dick Hoar used to say.

Father Kolvenbach, at a meeting of provincials in the Assistency of East Asia and Oceania, once cited a French saying, "The missionary has two gifts to offer his people: his *envoi* and his *renvoi*—his arrival and his return home." The irony is that it takes half our lives to become comfortable in our new cultural surroundings, only to find out that we are called to surrender them—or at least to move aside to the margins. This, of course, demands a double renunciation: any mission requires at least as much effort to give up as it does to assume.

## The Balance Sheet

If the goal of the missionary effort is to establish a self-sustaining church, then the islands may be considered a success. Just two years ago, the Marshall Islands were entrusted to the care of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, the religious order that initiated the first mission there over a century ago. Hence, the Society's efforts have become concentrated on the Caroline Islands. With fourteen local diocesan priests now in active ministry and another four young seminarians currently in preparation for ordination, not to mention the dozens of ordained deacons, the local leadership of the church seems to be guaranteed.

The handful of Micronesian Jesuits along with the dozen American Jesuits that constitutes the remnant of the New York Province mission provide additional support for the local church. Xavier High School, the Jesuit flagship educational institution in the islands, has consistently maintained its standard of academic excellence even as it approaches its sixtieth anniversary. It still draws many of the most talented young men and women from throughout the islands just as it always has. PATS, the Jesuit-run vocational high school on Pohnpei, was closed in 2005, but the Society had already started a regional education program, headed by Jim Croghan, to support the private schools from one end of the diocese to the other. Even more recently, the Society created a leadership-training program under the direction of Greg Muckenhaupt. Micronesian Seminar, too, remains a major focal point of the Society's effort at community education.



This success was not purchased cheaply. The Society of Jesus has tended this mission for just short of ninety years, prodigally assigning manpower to staff these islands. Fifty-six Spanish Jesuits worked here, and another 92 American Jesuits were assigned to the mission for varying lengths of time. An additional 30 Asian Jesuits spent time in the islands, most of them at Xavier High School during their regency. In all, 178 foreign Jesuits labored in the mission, and doesn't include the 71 Capuchins and 25 Missionaries of the Sacred Heart who served the area even earlier. Together Jesuits have dedicated over two thousand man-years of service, two millennia of work, to establishing the church in an area that numbers fewer than 180,000 people. Was it worth it? Was the Society, and the church it serves, justified in lavishing resources of this magnitude on a territory that many would consider a backwater?

### **The Value of a "Backwater"**

In Part VII of the *Constitutions*, Ignatius lays down norms for the choice of ministries that are entirely reasonable: works in which "greater fruit is likely to be reaped," for instance, or service of those "persons and places, which once benefitted, are a cause of extending the good to many others," in other words, ministries that promise a multiplier effect.<sup>20</sup> Throughout this section, Ignatius insists on the importance of the more universal: large nations, important cities, numerous persons. Yet, he also recommends that we "select that part of the vineyard where there is greater need . . . because of lack of other workers." This last norm is precisely what brought the Society of Jesus to Micronesia in 1920—that and the important fact that the Pope urged this mission on the Society. It is also the reason we've continued this apostolate since then, almost contrary to the norms most commonly employed for choice of ministry. Yet, in my opinion, a theological case can also be made for Jesuit involvement in such a "backwater."

For the Church to be credible and to be faithful to the original summons of Christ, it must reach out to all peoples everywhere in the world. There can be no limits placed on the evangelization of the Church, just as there are no limits to the love of the Lord. Most of us today can easily imagine that isolated people, those who live and die outside of the Church, can be saved without explicit knowledge of the Gospel. But personal salvation is not the issue here. It is a matter of what the Church

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<sup>20</sup>*The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*, ed. John W. Padberg, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Studies, 1996), Part VII, [622] (p. 284).



must do to be true to its call if it is to truly stand as a sign of Christ's saving summons to the world. The Church must continue to cross borders, cultural and national, if only to testify to the universal saving mission of the Lord. There can be no people so marginalized, so remote as to be forgotten or written off by the Lord, or those who carry on his mission. Even backwaters have a claim on the Good News.

The word that we must speak with our lives is a word of love, something that is to be proclaimed in more than narrowly religious terms, in deed as well as in word. Our hope is that somehow this is communicated to the people to whom we minister through the service we offer, even those who will never attend a Church liturgy. The obligation of Jesuits to embody this message of love in works of service is a theme as old as the Society itself. From the earliest days of the Society, Ignatius and his men busied themselves founding houses for "fallen" women, caring for orphans, and tending to plague victims. Likewise today, schools, social involvement, healing of different sorts can speak of the love of the Christ who healed bodies as well as souls. So can economic-development workshops and educational TV programs in a society that badly needs an understanding of its place in the modern world. The form of the service may change from place to place or from one age to another, but the underlying message is timeless.

Our hope is that what we do at the edge of the world is seen as a pale reflection of the love of Christ for all, not just those who happen to be conveniently located in this world of ours. Our mission overseas can also serve as a reminder to fellow Jesuits in the United States, as well as to others who share our faith, that borders are meant to be crossed if the Gospel is to be proclaimed in its fullness. The Church has been doing this since the days of Paul. Jesuits, too, have a long and proud history of crossing national boundaries and cultural barriers in proclaiming the gospel.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it has been the Society's badge of distinction to minister to the leftovers of the world.

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<sup>21</sup>Numbered among these Jesuit border crossers are two men, Eusebio Kino and Jacques Marquette, who have been acclaimed for the contributions they have made to our own country and whose images are to be found in the Rotunda of the Capitol in Washington.

## V. Other Forms of Border Crossing

Such a rationale, of course, can be used to explain our presence in so many other areas of ministry today—from soup kitchens to work on behalf of political refugees and illegal immigrants. Not long ago Fr. Kenneth Gavin, the director of Jesuit Refugee Service, and I enjoyed a dinner conversation in which we discussed our common concerns and hopes for the Society today. For anyone eavesdropping on the conversation, it would have been difficult to tell which of us was involved in refugee work and which was the foreign missionary.

Today as never before, the outside world has been coming to us in the person of immigrants, political refugees, the needy of our nation. There is no need to travel very far to find those who speak other languages or practice different cultural ways. We who have spent our lives abroad have every reason to be proud of the creative Jesuit response to the marginalized in this country. Nativity-type middle schools and Cristo Rey high schools have, in effect, been eloquent testimony to our readiness to cross such boundaries even within our own country. Moreover, these schools have offered models of education, just as the early Jesuit schools in Europe once did, for others to utilize and even improve upon.

Even so, the Society is still sending personnel abroad, although for limited periods of time and in response to particular needs in certain parts of the world. If traditional Jesuit missionary activity around the globe has declined, short-term, carefully targeted missions abound today. The clearest example of this may be the work that Jesuit Refugee Service has been engaged in for over thirty years on behalf of the millions who have been dislocated, often forcibly, from their own homelands. In the United States alone, JRS has played a major role in the relocation of three million refugees over the past quarter century. As crises arise in different parts of the world, JRS targets the areas that need assistance and, together with other relief agencies, dispatches men and supplies to the people in need. Hundreds of Jesuits throughout the world have served for at least a year or two with JRS to testify to the Church's concern for the forgotten of the world.

We who are assigned to the overseas apostolate may be declining in numbers, but we have countless kindred spirits working today among those living at the fringes of society, both in this country and abroad. We join forces in proclaiming, each in his own way, that it is



not power, fame, and wealth that bestow the blessings of the Kingdom, but it is the lowly whom the Lord will search out and offer his love. For me, these "lowly" have been the people of the Caroline-Marshalls; for others they are the prisoners on Ryker's Island or the street kids in the South Bronx.

## The Passing of the Foreign Missions

The foreign missionary, long the pride of the province, is close to becoming an anachronism these days. A few years ago, on a furlough to the province, I was invited to look through piles of photos and documents on the Micronesian mission and to take what I needed, since the venerable Jesuit Seminary and Mission Bureau was closing down. We were losing our home in New York, the place in which all overseas missionaries felt most comfortable, just a few years after the annual Jesuit Mission Dinner was discontinued. It was like returning to our birthplace to find that the house in which we were raised, the family homestead, had been torn down. The staff that had once sent out our Christmas letters, posted our supplies, and welcomed us on our return to New York was busy with other duties now. This gave rise to a nagging feeling in us old mission hands that we had become marginalized, just like the people we served.

In the past, the Jesuits who worked among the "savages" in New France, or among the Chamorros in the Mariana Islands, or among the Guaraní in South America might have been the models of men ready to go to the extreme in their service of the Lord. Ignatius, after all, repeatedly uses the expression "even to the Indies" in describing how vast the range of our ministries should be. Today there are men serving in places like East Los Angeles or downtown Newark, places that are at least as challenging and probably more culturally diverse than many of the overseas apostolates we staff.

It is understandable, then, that overseas work has lost much of its exoticism today. We can't expect Jesuit houses to roll out the carpet for us missionaries, nor do we expect the New York Province to restore the home away from home that we once found in the Mission Bureau offices on Eighty-third Street. The overseas apostolates can be folded into something broader, something that represents the wider spectrum of missions that Jesuits undertake today. In the past, the term "missionaries" was reserved for those who went overseas to work in foreign fields, presumably for the duration of their lives. Today, we have reclaimed the word "mission" for all Jesuits who are sent away to carry out an apos-

tolate, no matter whether it is abroad or at home. Hence, we are all, in a genuine sense, missionaries today.

Still, there may remain a touch of the extreme in missions to the overseas apostolate. It may be that we haven't completely shaken off the exhilaration of that phrase "even to the Indies," the sense that, short of stowing away on a moon shot, we couldn't do anything more extreme than going on mission overseas. Indeed, an assignment to an overseas apostolate may remain the clearest and most radical expression of what it means to be a Jesuit on mission: one prepared to travel to the ends of the earth and remain there as long as he was needed. In their ignorance of what they will face, Jesuits have not always packed very well for their overseas assignments, nor have they always brought the skills that would have proved most useful, but they are forced to trust that they can pick up along the way what they will need. Disponability and confidence in the face of risks are features required in any Jesuit dispatched on a mission, even those sent to the parish or school down the street, but their importance is heightened for Jesuits sent to a place in the other hemisphere.

## **Think Big Even When Living Small**

The symbols of the idealism that once moved people of my generation—the quests of knights setting forth on heroic missions, the worlds to be won for Christ—may have faded, the victim of an increasingly complex world and a more sophisticated understanding of the limitations of what a single person can do. Certainly what prompted me to sign up for the missions by the poolside during philosophy in 1962 is no longer the compelling motive it once was. If doing great deeds for the Lord was refined into something truer and more spiritual in the life of Ignatius, why shouldn't the same happen to his followers? Our hearts soften as we pray and age, and our thoughts linger less on what we can accomplish than on the fond hopes we have for the people we serve.

The mythology we draw upon to support what we do may change, but let's hope the grand idealism remains. It probably does, if the vocation-promotion literature that is passed on to us by the province is any indication. "Do you want to make a difference?" it asks prospective candidates for the Society. Many years ago when I was in Rome attending the workshop that all new provincials and regional superiors are required to attend, I felt a thrill whenever I passed the statue of Ignatius in the Jesuit Curia with the challenging words inscribed on its base: "It



incendite inflammate omnia." The old symbolism may have changed, but the challenge to attempt the impossible remains.

A half-century ago, a Jesuit scholastic in our year scribbled in Greek on our classroom chalkboard the famous quote from Archimedes: "Give me somewhere to stand and I will move the earth." That scholastic may have just been trying out his Greek, but he was also expressing something more, something that resonated with most of us at the time. Move the earth, set fire to the world, but it has to begin somewhere. We need a perch, a place to plant our feet.

Despite my early doubts, Micronesia has proved to me to be as good a place to stand as anywhere else. I think I can say with confidence that my Jesuit companions in the mission field, past and present, have shared my feelings. Whatever else Micronesia has done for us, such as educate us to how people of another culture view the world and temper the convictions that owe as much to our ethnicity as to timeless principle, it has also given us a pulpit from which to speak of the importance of caring for the forgotten people of the world. The edge of the world may not be a bad perch after all from which to try to move the globe.

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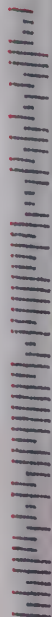
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