

# Writing the History of the German Jesuits in the New Society

Delimitation of the subject:

In space: "Little German" solution (without Austria) - but including Switzerland until 1947 - in short: a History of the German province(s), with the missions.

In time: from 1814 until 1965 with full access to archival material, until 1983 using the accessible sources.

Using and evaluating the sources: The problem is not the scarcity, but rather the abundance of sources. A choice is inevitable. It would be impossible to consult all the personal papers of Jesuits.

- 1) The best basic information is given by the **Roman Archive** of the Society (ARSI), especially:
  - Correspondence between the General and the Provincials. - The General receives the information of background and special conditions which are of value also for the future historian; and the respective correspondence offers an insight into the internal decisions, their conditions and underlying options, also into alternative possibilities.
  - Letters "ex officio"
  - Letters of the consultors. - The latter often represent different voices and opinions, also of minorities, and so they offer a colourful and plastic image of the province.
  - Limits of the historical value of these sources: over-representation of problems and defects.
- 2) The **Historiae domus**. Their historical value depends on the persons who wrote them. Generally "engaged" house histories, although often partial, present better insight into the problems.
- 3) **Printed papers of the province(s)**:
  - "Mitteilungen aus der(n) Deutschen Provinz(en)" (1897-1967).
    - Actual information about Jesuit activities, especially in the Missions.
    - Historical articles based on Jesuit documents or on memories of persons.
    - "Nachrufe" (obituaries): They present a vivid image of the persons with their limits and originalities of character. Often they offer historical information also about conditions of formation, Superiors, novice masters, communities and general situations. The limit is, that, based on memories and talkings, they are in many cases not precise in the details of the events.
  - Information of the singular provinces, containing generally short notices, but also obituaries.
- 4) The **Province Archive**, actually united at Munich. Especially:
  - 1) The protocols of the consultations of the province.
  - 2) The correspondences between the Provincials and also between the Provincials and the Superiors of the Missions.
  - 3) The materials regarding certain categories of labours (popular missions, retreats, youth associations etc.) or also certain problems or controversies.
  - 4) Written memories of certain Jesuits (precious, but rare).
  - 5) Files regarding the single houses, generally containing the correspondence between the Provincial and the Superior and the other Jesuits of the house. They give very detailed information about the history of the single houses, but they are conserved only after the Second World War.
- 5) The **Swiss Provincial Archive** at Zürich. Especially the "Historia missionis Helveticae", important because in the time of the "Jesuit article" (51 BV) the catalogues don't give information about the address and activities of the single Jesuits.
- 6) Generally the **House archives** are less important.

7) Archives of **Dioceses** where Jesuit houses did exist: material for the founding of the houses, especially for the wishes of the bishops and for the persons in the diocese who wished an establishment of the Jesuits.

8) **Statal Archives:**

- Prussian archives for the time after the Kulturkampf.
- In the Federal Archive of Berlin, the files concerning the Jesuits in the Third Reich.
- Swiss archives (Federal Archive in Bern and Cantonal Archives of Basel and Zürich): about the application (or non-application) of the Jesuit article and the changing attitude of the Swiss authorities in the Jesuit question.

Regarding the history of the German Jesuits in the Third Reich: The more known Jesuits engaged in the "resistance" (Rupert Mayer, Delp, Grimm, Rösch, König, Muckermann etc.) have already been explored exhaustively, especially by Roman Bleistein. Less known is the attitude of normal Jesuits. A special problem is, that we have candid reports to Rome only until 1938 or 1939. But despite these limitations I could make some interesting discoveries, also regarding personalities like Friedrich Muckermann or the case of Josef Spieker, the first Jesuit taken to a concentration camp and then liberated and exiled by a convention between the Gestapo, General Ledochowski and the Provincial Klein. Also to the survival of the Canisianum of Innsbruck in Sitten in Switzerland, the fictitious "secularization" of some (not all) of the teaching Jesuits and the respective attitude of the Swiss Jesuits and Federal authorities I could dedicate a chapter.

The value of "oral history": Typical distortions:

1) Periods are remembered as uniform and homogeneous unities. - or from a diversity of expectations, hopes and fears in the person remembers only those realized or accepted personally at the end, forgetting the "experiments" of thinking.

2) Considerations or decisions which occupy a longer time are concentrated in a typical scene. Generally the "oral history" is more reliable for the "Wirkungsgeschichte" (the impressions produced on a larger scale and more permanently by persons or events) than for the "Ereignisgeschichte" (the history of the events and their immediate consequences and mutual concatenation).

Unfortunately I must destroy some appreciated or amusing legends ("Suntne angeli?" after forgetting of the toilets in the plans of construction).

The limitation in the choice of the sources involves a certain limitation in the object: however embracing the whole field of Jesuit activities and also of internal life, the emphasis of the work will be on the internal strategies, considerations, options, including alternative solutions and propositions.

Plan of the work: 4 volumes of text:

- 1) Swiss and the First German period (1814-1872)
- 2) period of exile (1872-1917)
- 3) 1917-1945
- 4) the two periods of Post-War (1945-1965) and of Post-Council (1965-1983). In the interior of these periods the division will be categorial.
- 5) Annexes, the most extensive of them will be a short biography of all Jesuits mentioned in the text (indication of dates of life and all stations and occupations in the Society). Last date of publication: 2014.