

2016-9

A HISTORY OF THE BROTHERS AND PRIESTS OF HOLY CROSS

Introduction to a discussion of the outline of the proposed book.

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May 26, 2016, San Antonio, Texas

Once there was a priest on his way to a wake for a man whom everyone knew to have been a scoundrel. The deceased had abused his children, beaten his wife, cheated his business partners and customers, and was the scourge of his neighborhood. The priest was trying to think of something positive to say about the man but could not. When it came time for him to speak, the priest said, “There’s an old Latin adage, *De mortuis nihil nisi bonum – Say only good things of the dead.* We all knew old Bill here, so let’s share the good things we remember about him, just the good things.” With that, the priest sat down. There was a long, long silence. Finally, an old man in the back of the room stood up and said, “His father was worse than he was.”

I would like to be able to say of this work that previous attempts at a history of the Congregation of Holy Cross are worse than mine, but, to the best of my knowledge, there are no previous general histories of the Congregation. More than eleven biographies of Fr. Moreau have been published as well as biographies of Fr. Dujarié, Sr. Mary of the Seven Dolors, Bro. André, and various other Holy Cross personalities, not to mention the histories of various Holy Cross institutions. But to the best of my knowledge, there is no general history of the Congregation.

Fr. Thomas Barrosse, the superior general at the time, commissioned me in 1982 to research and write a “popular” history of Holy Cross. He thought it could be easily done by synthesizing the various publications that already existed. Once I began to examine the documentary evidence, I realized that it would not be so easily done. My great mistake at the beginning was not to have asked for a sabbatical of two or three years in which to do the work.

My goal has been to produce a readable, one-volume account of about 300 pages and to do this, I had to make choices as to which events, ministries and personalities to treat. One of the first and most significant choices that I had to make was to restrict my account from 1857 onward to the Congregation of Holy Cross as it was approved by Rome: the priests and brothers as the congregation and the Marianite Sisters of Holy Cross as a separate congregation. As the sisters divided into three autonomous congregations, to include all four communities in my account would have been all the more difficult, if not impossible.

My focus has been on the ministry of the Congregation rather than on its ministers, although some of these are mentioned in passing. Since the history of the Congregation and the institutions and ministries with which it has been affiliated are intricately linked, the rise, the fall and the character of these are often noted. I realize that not everyone will agree with my choices, but I have noted the sources on which I have relied in hopes that my choices and my interpretations will be seen as reasonable.

I like to think of my attempt at a popular history as comparable to the Gospel According to Mark. It was the first of the canonical gospels written and it served as an outline of the life and ministry of Jesus. However, it said little or nothing about many aspects of the story and the later evangelists filled in missing parts, e.g. the infancy narratives, details of the crucifixion and the resurrection appearances, all without seriously contradicting Mark's basic outline. I am attempting to trace the outline of the story, touching lightly on many things and treating no subject in the depth that it may deserve. The notes to my sources will serve the person who wants to offer a more detailed account, which I hope will not be seriously contradictory to mine.

To those who might object to the production of a history rather than serious studies of the spirituality of our founder and foundresses as we seek to chart our future, I offer the admonition

of another historian, St. Bede the Venerable. He believed that it was not only in Scripture but in the history of his own people and the stories of holy lives that the handwriting of God could be discerned. (cf. *History of the English Church and People*)