

## Preface

The dusty clutter of an old attic sparked my first thoughts about this book. As a seminary student in the 1960s, I lived in an antiquated Victorian building perched on a leafy hillside above Los Gatos, a small town on the edge of California's Santa Clara Valley. The seminary, an elaborate wooden pile replete with false quoins and mansard roof, had been erected in 1888 amid vineyards and olive groves by Jesuit émigrés driven from Italy during national unification. My curiosity was piqued by those atypical refugees and by the gingerbread edifice they left behind. When not occupied with Latin study, meditation, and handball, I explored their ancient structure— from its dark, labyrinthine basement to its lofty turret, below which spread, in spring-time, a pink-and-white quilt of blossoming orchards. Already in the sixties, that landscape was changing as plum and apricot groves gave way to high rise technology centers and the Santa Clara Valley metamorphosed into Silicon Valley. The old seminary alone seemed constant.

It was not the view from the tower that most fascinated this twenty-four-year-old, however, but rather the building's fourth-floor attic. A vast chamber crouched under the roof, it had served as *dormitorium* or common sleeping room for novices of the nineteenth century. By the 1960s, the iron bedsteads had long since disappeared. In their place, the debris of a discarded past littered the plank floor: cracking portraits of no-longer-fashionable saints; scrapped Victorian furniture; religious canvases consigned to oblivion by a shifting aesthetic; and steamer trunks inscribed with the names of long-departed Jesuits. Who had once slumbered in that odd space? I mused. What had prompted the immigrant Jesuits' flight from Italy to Gold Rush California? What sort of life had they transplanted to the Los Gatos hillside?

The questions remained largely unresolved when I moved on a few years later, but they resurfaced in 1975. After completing doctoral studies in the history of the American West at UCLA, I began teaching at Santa Clara University. Founded in 1851, that institution, too, had been brought into

existence by displaced Italians. In the process of researching the school's history for a book subsequently published by Stanford University Press, I learned that the Jesuit immigrants had not confined their work to California. Itinerant missionaries circulated among Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest, erecting sturdy missions that still serve as functioning churches and historical monuments. In the Southwest, adobe school houses, churches, and a printing press testified to widespread community-building by Neapolitan missionaries. From Montana to Texas, from the Pacific Coast to the high plains of Wyoming—the émigrés left footprints. In light of my research in educational history, the queries once prompted by the ghosts of the seminary attic evolved. What mark did these Italian clerics make on the cultural and religious life of the West? What were the distinctive qualities that typified their status as immigrants? And how did their national genesis mold their encounter with a multifaceted and ethnically diverse frontier Catholicism? Thus, a new research project was born, resulting in this book about Jesuits that is also a book about America.

That these clerical refugees warranted study seemed evident from the works of other scholars who either ignored the Italians or made only passing mention of them. Most intriguing was a reference by the historian Howard R. Lamar in his presidential address to the Western Historical Association in 1986. Listing topics that awaited scholarly scrutiny, Lamar challenged researchers to give more attention to both the religious and the intellectual history of the West. “The frontier and the West . . . had their full share of ideologues and theorists,” he argued. But “I believe we have omitted covering several crucial groups of westerners who not only played a role in resolving . . . seemingly incompatible versions of the western mind, but who, in the process, created ideas, concepts, institutions, and even lifestyles that we call genuinely western.” In his tally of overlooked westerners, Lamar cited the Jesuits who are the subject of this volume. “European-born Jesuit fathers dreamed of a new civilized Catholic Indian substate” in the Pacific Northwest, and “in a quiet, almost invisible way, determined teacher-priests established the tradition of Catholic higher learning at Santa Clara College in gold rush California.”<sup>1</sup>

Stirred by Lamar's appraisals, which situated the Jesuits in broad context, I was further drawn to the Italians because their multiple projects embodied many of the major themes of western development—education, immigration, gender, religion, and minority relations. Additionally, their story braided together two linked phenomena, religion and immigration, that historians tend to treat separately. Although studies of globalization and transnational migration have multiplied in recent decades, for example, the role of religion in that process has received scant scholarly notice. In the case of the Jesuits, the correlation between religion and migration was essential,

not only in understanding their own experience but also in explaining how they affected others. One of the reasons why the Italian missionaries were accepted by Native Americans, for instance, was their nationality. Because they were not regarded by the tribes as Americans, they were not held accountable for repressive United States policy.

And what about the connection between religion and multiculturalism? Despite our contemporary passion for ethnicity, historians have yet to fully explore how specific European newcomers to the United States interacted with older, established ethnic communities, particularly Hispanics and Native Americans, two groups with whom the Italian missionaries were closely tied for decades.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the case of the expatriate Italians provided a novel entrée into the topic of immigration. Although an enduring theme of American historiography, migration has never ceased to offer new questions for scholarly analysis. Historians have for generations fruitfully studied the ways in which America refashioned new arrivals, but in an era of globalization, counter agency has become equally significant: How have outsiders molded and propelled American society in new directions? As the writer Jeremy Eichler has said, nineteenth-century America was “a country reaching both inward and outward in its quest to forge a national cultural identity, yearning to be free of Europe’s shadow but seeking its counsel in finding that freedom.”<sup>3</sup>

The relationship between European Jesuits and American Catholics revealed a similar exchange. When the Italian clergy introduced old world religious notions to congregations in the United States, for instance, they usually met acceptance rather than rejection. Why were alien ways readily embraced? One reason was that heterogeneous American congregations interpreted the supranational and centralized practices offered by the European priests as a means of transcending the restrictive confines of ethnicity.<sup>4</sup> Of a German Jesuit who toiled among fractured immigrant populations in the nineteenth-century Midwest, a historian wrote: “He gave them a Catholic sense and determination where before they were separate and dissonant.”<sup>5</sup> Much the same could be said of Italian Jesuits in the Far West.

If Italy brought novelty to America, the reverse was also true. Research on the Jesuits underscores another issue central to immigration studies: the impact of receiving countries upon sending nations. As students of contemporary migration have demonstrated, once neophytes become adjusted to a new environment, they channel money, ideas, and other cultural innovations to their former homeland. Jesuit exiles of the nineteenth century did the same thing. While importing the traditions of Italy into the United States, they transmitted new world concepts and practices back to the old world. They exemplified the transnational character of American Catholicism, which the historian John T. McGreevy has aptly described as “an international set of

ideas, people, and institutions circling back and forth across the Atlantic, the Pacific . . . and up and down the American continent.”<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the study of the Jesuit saga offers an opportunity to restore some equilibrium to the history of the American frontier. The frequent lament of students of church history has been that the story of the churches in the trans-Mississippi West remains a lonely *terra incognita*. “All that most of us know and learn about American religion keeps us firmly moored in an east-to-west framework,” the historian Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp argues. “The farther west we go, the less important the religious events seem to become, in part because the vast majority of us know much less about them.”<sup>7</sup>

Patricia Nelson Limerick and other proponents of the “New Western history” have advanced the study of previously ignored subjects and populations, including religious figures and their institutions. Nonetheless, much is yet to be learned. For instance, although Christian missionization of Native Americans has been a consistently productive research topic, both Indian adaptation and resistance to proselytization — issues explored in this book — have left many questions hanging. In their ideological encounter with native peoples, how did missionaries attempt to effect conversions? What practical strategies and methodologies were employed in soul-saving, where did they come from, and why did they succeed or capsize?

A final consideration that propelled the project is a desire to bring some balance to the writing of history about the Jesuits. In recent decades, researchers have gravitated to the earlier period of the order’s sixteenth-century origins. While this emphasis has resulted in many ground-breaking studies, it has also created the impression that this era stood as an archetype for all subsequent Jesuit history. But as John W. O’Malley, author of the exemplary *The First Jesuits*, has cautioned, the Society of Jesus is best understood by looking beyond its founding moment and early documents. We cannot presume that “the ship sails through the sea of history without being touched by it.” Instead, scholars must grasp how the organization existed and changed in different historical epochs. “If we want to understand such a body,” he has advised, “we must at some point descend to the lived and continuing experience and then try to discover and weigh its impact.”<sup>8</sup>

For the nineteenth century, the lacuna is especially stark. Although some deeply informative monographs on European Jesuit history have appeared in recent years, what has been written about the society’s early activity in the United States has often been disappointing or incomplete.<sup>9</sup> Impediments to research on Jesuit topics that scholars once lamented — the order’s secrecy about its internal affairs, its defensiveness, and the inaccessibility of its archives — no longer exist. The mystique that surrounded the group from its founding era, however, dies hard, and we are left with an impression of lifeless, impersonal characters who occupied a parallel universe separate from

the rest of the human race. In the words of Frances Trollope, author of the Victorian novel *Father Eustace: A Tale of the Jesuits*, human nature was “not quite the same . . . for Jesuits as for other people.” A century later, the writer Luigi Barzini used a mechanical metaphor to stereotype them: “All Jesuits were interchangeable cogwheels in a vast machine; they spoke all languages and could fit in anywhere.” The historian David J. O’Brien put it more deftly: “The works of the Jesuits are all around us, yet they themselves remain elusive.” The task of the contemporary church historian, therefore, is to explore both the public and the private lives of the Jesuits as well as to situate their story in its larger social and cultural context. This book attempts to do both.<sup>10</sup>

Writing about the uprooted Italian clergy of the nineteenth-century is sparse. In 1968, Andrew F. Rolle drew upon the careers of the Jesuit refugees to effectively make his interpretive point about the unique features of Italian immigration in the West in *The Immigrant Upraised: Italian Adventurers and Colonists in an Expanding America*. Full-length biographies of a few individuals have been published, although they often are uncritical and aimed at a popular readership. And cursory analyses of the most influential among the expatriates have appeared in standard biographical dictionaries. Those who have drawn the most scholarly notice, as several masters’ theses and doctoral dissertations attest, were the ones who undertook missionary careers among western Indians.<sup>11</sup> Editions of the letters of several Italian missionaries have found their way into print because of the rich ethnographic data they contain.<sup>12</sup> Until the present volume, however, there has been no comprehensive study of the entire group and no analysis of the implications that national difference had for missionary work.

It has taken forty years to answer the questions I originally posed in the attic. In the interval, I have accumulated many debts in research trips in the United States and Europe. Although I cannot list all of my benefactors, I wish especially to acknowledge the guidance provided by the staff of Rome’s Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, the chief depository of documentation on Jesuit history. For the hospitality and assistance of Filippo Iappelli during an intense month of research in Naples in the Archivio della Provincia Neapolitana della Compagnia del Gesù, I remain deeply grateful. Similar kindnesses were extended by the staff of the Archivio della Provincia Torinese della Compagnia del Gesù, then housed at Villa San Maurizio near Turin. Michele Casassa of Turin’s Istituto Sociale aided my investigation by supplying the California Jesuit Province with photocopies of hundreds of useful documents under his care. Closer to home, Thomas A. Marshall, Daniel J. Peterson, and Silvano P. Votto of the Archives of the California Jesuit Province graciously responded to my every request for assistance during

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