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Dec. 21, St. Peter Canisius, Patron of the Catholic Press

Gerelyn Hollingsworth | Dec. 21, 2009 NCR Today

O Radiant Dawn, *splendor of eternal light, and sun of justice: Come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.*

--Antiphon for Vespers, Dec. 21 [1]

Today is the feast of St. Peter Canisius, [2] the first Dutchman to enter the Society of Jesus and its first best-selling author.

Unlike the Protestants who began producing catechisms and bibles in the vernacular soon after the invention of the printing press, Catholics were slow to take advantage of the new technology. But with Canisius's catechism, the light began to dawn.

"In April 1555, Dutch Jesuit Peter Canisius's famous catechism was published in Vienna at the request of King Ferdinand of Austria. The book became one of the most successful religious bestsellers in Church history, and it was the most frequently issued publication by a Dutch author ever: 1,075 different editions in 26 different languages."

-- Scroll down half way to see pages of the catechism. [3]

In addition to writing, Canisius "saw the uniqueness in the process of 'conversation,' dialogue and interaction with others directed totally toward their edification and salvation, and in the many forms of preaching and teaching".

--Fr. Jos Vercruysse, S.J. [4]

A search of John W. O'Malley's "masterly account" of *The First Jesuits,* [5] published by Harvard University Press in 1995, brings up 70 results for "Canisius", including his opinion of the Index of Forbidden Books: "intolerable" and a "scandal".

Fr. O'Malley [6] describes the first Jesuits' "missions to the countryside", "the most distinctive pastoral strategies devised in Catholicism in the early modern period".

They visited villages to preach, to march with the children "singing catechism", to hear confessions, to found or reactivate confraternities, and to choose a man who could read. They "gave him the catechism book, and then instructed him on how to teach it". Then they moved on to the next village. Spain first, then Italy. In Bavaria, at the request of the duke, Peter Canisius sent preachers to counter the Lutherans and strengthen the Catholics.

Fr. John A. Hardon, in his list of features of St. Peter Canisius's spiritual life, [7] emphasizes the incessant hard work. "He wrote many books, a manual for Catholics, a martyrology, a breviary. The last eight years, his hands

were paralyzed, but not his mouth; for the last eight years he kept dictating until a few weeks before he died, he lost his voice. He stopped writing when he couldn't speak any more." Peter Canisius, who lived from 1521 until 1597, is "the longest lived Jesuit ever who became a saint".

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Links:
[1] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAUzuw1l-7U
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[4] http://www.companysj.com/v152/canisius.html
[5] http://www.amazon.com/First-Jesuits-John-W-OMalley/dp/067430313X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1261177785&sr=1-1
[6] http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog/OMAFIR.html
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