

**New England Jesuit  
Oral History Program**



**Fr. John F. Broderick, S.J.  
Volume 2**

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ISBN 1-60067-016-4

**Distribution:**

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Interview with Fr. John F. Broderick, S. J.  
by Fr. Richard W. Rousseau, S. J.  
September 30, 2005

**RICHARD ROUSSEAU:** What we are going to do is to walk through your history to get a feel for the various events and accomplishments in your life. We do not need a lot of detail; we do not even have to touch on everything. So begin by going back to Lynn, Massachusetts to talk about what it was like growing up there.

**JOHN BRODERICK:** Well, I was born in Lynn, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1909, and not in a wealthy family, although we owned our own home. My parents were both immigrants from Ireland, and good Catholics. For eight years I went to St. Mary's, a Catholic parochial school, which is now closed. Then I went to Lynn Classical High School, a public high school, for four years. And after that, I went to Boston

University Business School for two years. I did not particularly go for the program there, so I switched to their School of Liberal Arts, and got an A.B. in 1931. I paid my own way entirely through college. I worked, although it was the Depression.

RR: What kind of work were you doing?

JB: Well, I worked as a clerk in a drugstore for a while, and then, while I was going to school, I took a civil service exam, and I got a job in the State Department of Public Works. I worked there while I was going to school, and after that, until I entered the Society.

RR: Now I notice that you graduated in 1927, but you did not enter the Jesuits then. We see a gap between the time you graduated from college and the time you entered the Society.

JB: Yes, well, as I say, after I graduated from college, I continued to work for the Department of Public Works full-time, until I entered the Society, because I was thinking about entering for some time before I entered. And then Fr. James Dolan, after I met him, suggested that I wait a year before actually entering. So that would account for the postponement of the entrance.

RR: Where did you come in contact with the Jesuits, given the fact that you went to Boston University?

JB: Well, more by reading about them.

RR: And that is when the interest in history began. So we all know that the Society has this long course of studies, and in many ways it is very similar for everyone. But was there anything during those years of study that you remember as especially interest-

ing?

JB: Well, I remember that the Society, as I entered it, was very different from the Society today. For instance, as novices we had to talk Latin. We were on silence most of the time. And things like public penances were common. And so, I think we followed a long tradition of the Society, so we were living pretty much the Society as it had been for a long time. And our Novice Master, Fr. John Smith, was a very strict and rigorous man.

RR: When you got into these studies you naturally entered what might be called a classical period that included, for example, Latin and a number of ancient authors, then philosophy followed by theology. Which one of those periods of studies did you find most interesting and worthwhile?

JB: I would say theology. You see, the course that we got was pretty much a repetition of what I had in college. So those two years I did not feel were particularly profitable. And then after four years at Shadowbrook, I came down here, and I had three years of philosophy, which was not to me as interesting as theology. I had the four years of theology here.

RR: I notice that your theological interests gradual focused on church history.

JB: Well, when I was in third year theology, I was asked if I would go to Rome after ordination, and study for a degree in church history. So that is what started my interest.

RR: And you found church history interesting?

JB: Oh, yes.

RR: Tell us a little bit about what happened in Rome while you were over there studying.

JB: Well, I went to Rome right after World War II, when life was kind of primitive. The conditions in Rome were poor, and the manner of life pretty simple. But at the same time, it was when the Communists were very powerful in Italy, and we faced an election, which, if it had gone to the Communists, would have turned the running of the country over to them.

RR: Oh.

JB: And we were not sure at all, at the time of that election, what was going to happen. And I well remember that big election there, when DeGaspari was elected, and we had the tanks going around the streets, to make sure that armed riots did not break out. So, it was not exactly a peaceful time.

RR: Was it a rather close election?

JB: No, well that was a national election. DeGaspari was a Christian Socialist, and he won the election. He was a Catholic, good Catholic.

RR: So that changed the course of post-war Italian history?

JB: Yes, indeed. But the Communist Party remained powerful all the time I was there.

RR: And what role did the Society of Jesus play in all this? Did they play any role in this critical moment in Italian history?

JB: Their main focus was on the papacy.

RR: Who was pope then?

JB: Pius XI.

RR: So, your studies in church history lasted about three

years?

JB: Yes. It was a good course. They had very good men there.

RR: Did you have some interesting professors that made an impact on you at the time?

JB: One of our professors was the close advisor of Pius XI, Fr. Leiber. He was over at the Vatican most of the time. And the pope relied on him a great deal for matters concerning Germany.

RR: Germany?

JB: He was supposed to have a very intimate knowledge of Germany. The pope, of course, had been the papal envoy to Germany before he was made pope. He contacted Leiber at that time, and he made sure that Leiber would remain close to him during his lifetime.

RR: Did Fr. Leiber have anything to do with one of those papal encyclicals at the time?

JB: Yes. Leiber was supposed to have written *Mit Brennender Sorge*, the famous encyclical of Pius XI.

RR: That was interesting. Did you have any contact with him at all?

JB: He was a teacher. He taught us one course.

RR: I see. So did you do your tertianship before this or after it?

JB: I was a tertian in Cleveland, after I finished fourth year here.

RR: Tell us a little more about Cleveland. You do not hear much about that anymore.

JB: Well, Cleveland was noted for being a very rigid tertianship, and very Germanic. You know, as I

say, the Irish took over the New York part of the country, and they let the Germans go up through Buffalo and Cleveland, places like that. We had three tertian masters: We had the tertian master assigned there, another who was just retiring but he lived there, and a third who was going to take over a new tertianship in the Midwest. So we had no lack of tertian masters.

RR: And they were all Germanic-oriented?

JB: I would say so, yes.

RR: That brings us to your final appointment after studies, which I believe was right here at Weston College, right?

JB: Well, when I finished the three-year course in Rome, they liked the doctorate that I had written, and they asked me to turn it into a book. So I spent the next year writing *The Holy See and the Irish Movement for the Repeal of the Union with England*.

RR: What did it deal with?

JB: It dealt with Daniel O'Connell, the leader in the Irish movement for freedom, and with the attitude not only of the British government, but also of Rome, towards that movement. At that time, Rome was not particularly favorable to movements like that of O'Connell. And I found a great deal of information both in England and in Ireland on it, and also at the Vatican archives.

RR: So you spent some time in Ireland in research?

JB: I spent a good deal of time in Ireland.

RR: So after that book came out the next step was an appointment to Weston?

JB: Then I came to Weston in 1951 to teach church his-

tory. And I stayed here. I would go out to local parishes on some weekends, but I was on the faculty here until 1961, when I was asked to go to Washington and be one of the editors of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.

RR: I would like to come back to that, but first let us talk a bit about teaching church history here at Weston. Did you enjoy that kind of work with fellow Jesuits, initiating them into church history?

JB: Well, I would say, getting up the lectures. But it also helped them in gaining the knowledge, and it also deepened my own knowledge. Because it was not particularly demanding on my time, I had a good deal of time to deepen my knowledge of church history.

RR: And were you able to pursue a little more research in church history at the same time?

JB: Yes, I did a fair amount of writing. I wrote one article which aroused a good deal of interest, about how many people were ever canonized. And actually, not a great many have been. And I published it in the *American Ecclesiastical Review*, a Catholic periodical that used to be put out at Catholic University, but which has ceased publication. And I wrote another one on the college of cardinals, where it came from, how it evolved through the centuries. And that was very interesting, because to my surprise some countries had most of the cardinals, and others never had any, century after century.

RR: I sounds like you wrote a lot.

JB: At one time, they had a meeting at Holy Cross, and I was asked to supply a list of all the writings I had

- made, and I did so. [His bibliography is appended.]
- RR: Besides your teaching here at Weston, were there other things that you did, say with the community or with the local churches?
- JB: Well, we used to go out a lot on weekends. During the summer, I went to various places. I was involved in a summer ministry in several parishes in Wyoming. It was helpful in many ways for them and satisfying for me. I also worked in Harlem for a couple of years.
- RR: Tell us about that. That is interesting.
- JB: Yes, that was an interesting place. It was like working in Africa. Because one of our professors here, John Walsh, had an uncle who worked there, he interested me in going down there for the summer. So I went down there for about three summers, until I went to Washington.
- RR: Which churches were you associated with in Harlem? What did you do there?
- JB: I lived in St. Aloysius parish on 132<sup>nd</sup> St., which is right in the middle of Harlem. And it was a good parish. They had their own school there, and they did a lot of convert work, too.
- RR: How about some of the local churches in Weston or around Boston?
- JB: The minister would ask you to go out to this parish or that. I do not remember their names.
- RR: A lot of them were local churches?
- JB: Oh, we would go out on a Saturday, hear confessions, and say Mass maybe Saturday evening and Sunday morning. And in those days you did not get a car, either. You walked down to the center of

Weston, and you took a bus there into Boston, and another bus out to a place like Greenwood, and then you would come back the same way. And if you came back in the evening, you would walk in the dark, pitch dark, from the center of Weston right up here. There was one car in the community, and we had a layman who used to drive it.

RR: At least that kept you in good physical shape.

JB: Yes, at least you learned how to walk.

RR: What about your connection with Boston University?

JB: I replaced one of their Religion Department professors for one semester. It was the first time a Jesuit had taught at BU. It turned out to be beneficial all around.

RR: Did you teach church history in other schools?

JB: I am glad you asked that. I also taught church history for the Daughters of Saint Paul. They were trying to start a theology program and at that time were assembling a faculty. I helped them as best I could, but the proposed theology program did not catch on.

RR: And what did you notice about the way, over the many years you were at Weston, that the Church changed, the teaching changed, and the students changed?

JB: This was, I thought, quite a conservative house. And I would say, until I went to Washington, I did not note any change in the scholastics. But when I came back after three years, I hardly recognized the place. It was in an uproar.

RR: What was the uproar about?

JB: Well, they wanted to move to Cambridge, for one thing, and they wanted to get rid of Latin. And well, when we first went to Cambridge, the course of studies itself did not change; it certainly has changed a good deal since then. But when we first went to Cambridge, it was only a move of the theologians from here at Weston to Cambridge. We did not take in members of other religious orders, or women, or lay people. Over time they broadened the makeup of the student body. I remember when the meetings took place in this house, the scholastics were demanding a change, so they asked the faculty for their decision. And when I got back from Washington, one of the first things they asked me was to head the committee on whether we should move to Cambridge or not. We were given a choice of whether we would move to Cambridge or not. And you know, we did not make the final decision, either. In fact, I am almost surprised that they took that route, and had the faculty make a decision on the matter, because I think that the higher-ups in the Society had pretty well made up their mind what they were going to do.

RR: Where did you live from then on?

JB: I lived right here at Campion.

RR: Oh, you went back and forth?

JB: Yes, I used to drive back and forth. Given the choice to live here or in Cambridge, because at that time they lived in apartment houses, I much preferred my room here to over there.

RR: As time went on, they did buy some houses and so

on, which made it a little easier. You probably do not remember, but in 1972, I was your dean at Weston in Cambridge.

JB: You were the dean?

RR: Yes, for five years.

JB: Yes, well I remember some of the meetings at which you were present.

RR: But after about four or five years they did open it up to other students.

JB: Yes, they kept opening, broadening the student body.

RR: And it has developed into an excellent school. And it seems to have worked out reasonably well over the long run.

JB: Now the move is toward Boston College. So whether they will take up the offer of Boston College I have no idea. But if they did, it would mean the end of our term over there in Cambridge.

RR: I did skip over the time that you spent in Washington as an editor of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. You were there as the editor of the church history division?

JB: I was given about a million words to edit. That is the way it worked. They gave each editor a certain number of words, and then he was supposed to figure out how he would distribute them, what the titles of the articles would be, and how long they would be, and then locate somebody to write them. And then when they wrote the articles and sent me a copy back, we would have to edit them, make sure that they were satisfactory, that they had all the

matter that was wanted in there, and that the articles were well written, and so forth. So it was a very, very hard job. It was a seven-day-a-week job, because we were under high pressure to finish in three years. You see, they were able to put out that work because McGraw Hill, the publisher, gave them \$4.5 million dollars because Catholic University did not have that kind of money. So with that money they could pay the editors and secretaries, because at one time we had a hundred people in our office. So it was quite an expensive project.

RR: Do you have a favorite article that you wrote?

JB: I wrote the article on the Jesuits. That was a long one.

RR: Who did you get to edit it for you?

JB: Well, I turned it over to one of the other men. I also got him to write the article on Pius XI.

RR: How was it published—in one volume or many?

JB: It was fourteen big volumes. Are you familiar with it?

RR: Yes. And over the years it has had quite an impact on the Church in America.

JB: I think it was an important job.

RR: And it has been revised once, I believe?

JB: Well, they put out several supplements, but no revision.

RR: Have you been involved in any of that since?

JB: The supplements, no. They got a different group of editors, living in Washington. When I went down there, I had to get enough money to support myself. And even the editor-in-chief was different, Matt

Maguire, who was a kind of a walking encyclopedia. They got together a good staff, I think. But I have only read a few parts of the encyclopedia, so I could not judge. But each of the editors had to go through that procedure. Very few people have had that experience.

RR: Yes, I can imagine. And so, what was your section?

JB: Church history, modern church history, along with some other things. They found late in the game that they needed somebody to edit the history of the Eastern church, and so they tossed that on me. And I got hold of somebody who was a good man on the Eastern churches. I got him to do most of the work on it.

RR: Now what would you do? Would you subcontract? Would you call somebody up and say, 'Could you do this section or that section of the encyclopedia?'

JB: No, the manager got to do the contracting. He would contact the men, and get them to sign a contract, as we all had to when we went to work there.

RR: And so you would get these texts in from the individuals whom they had contacted, and then you would edit them? Is that how it worked?

JB: Well, I had to edit all the material in my scope. We put a book out with the title of each article in the encyclopedia, its length, and its author. And I also wrote the article on the history of the modern papacy and some others. A number of articles would come in from other authors. Whenever they were not very well done, instead of starting from scratch and asking somebody else to write it, I would write

it myself, and put his name on it.

RR: You mentioned Fr. Phil Donnelly was also involved.

JB: Yes, Phil was down there with me for a couple of years.

RR: Did he like it as much as you did?

JB: No.

RR: So, you were there about three years?

JB: Yes. I waited there until all of the material was edited. Then they asked me if I would stay on another year and work on the index, but I turned down that offer.

RR: At that point you were able to come back to Weston take up teaching church history again?

JB: Yes.

RR: Did you notice that there had been a number of changes when you came back?

JB: Oh, there were a number of changes. For one thing, the faculty was much more involved in the running of the place. Because in my first years here, you never had a faculty meeting. The rector pretty much ran the place, and in Cambridge, as you know, they used to have regular faculty and departmental meetings. I used to be in the group that decided whether men should be promoted or not. I remember that one.

RR: So let us take a look at the Society you have been a part of for so many years. You have seen so much happen that there are many things you could tell us. First, though, to summarize, could you tell us how you feel about your life as a Jesuit, past, present and even future in whatever way you think best?

- JB:** Well, it has changed very much in the number of members that are in. We are losing members every year, and frankly few are entering. I would say that is the change that strikes me most. But I think that is a bigger move than one that just affects us Fathers. That is true all over the Church, or at least here and in Western Europe.
- RR:** Given your background over the years in church history and church life, is there anything you can tell us as to why this particular period of Western history has developed the way it has?
- JB:** Well, I think the world was changing. I would put a good deal of emphasis on the Vietnam War, when the young people were raising Cain in this country. And I think our young men were affected by that attitude of standing up for what they wanted, and demanding their rights. At least the change came rather suddenly. In my mind, that had a good deal to do with it. But it was a change not only here, but all over the country. It was true up in Canada; it was true in France and Germany, and so forth, and very much so in Spain. And then you had General Arrupe, who was of a different temperament and outlook than his predecessors.
- RR:** So from the point of view of Jesuit spirituality, the history of prayer in the Church, what changes have you seen there as well?
- JB:** Well, there have been changes in the mode of life, I would say. For instance, we lived here in a regime as a scholastic—a regime of sacred silence. And you know, you wore the habit all the time, and at table

you would have reading most of the time. You would not be allowed to speak at table. So there were a number of changes like that in our mode of life. But how much individuals changed, I would not be able to judge. Scholastics were given a great deal more liberty. After Vatican II it was a rather tumultuous time at Weston College among the Jesuit scholastics. It can be described as a revolution in expectations of what seminary life should be in the light of the Council. They felt strongly that a new model was needed, and there were several important meetings held on the question. One was held at the tertianship in Pomfret, CT, the second at Weston itself over three days, and the third at Boston College, which brought together most of the New England Province. The result of all this was the Province's and Fr. General's decision to move Weston College to Cambridge near Harvard. I continued to teach church history there for some years, though I lived out at old Weston.

RR: What about your further contributions to Weston College and to the Society?

JB: For some thirty years I was the librarian for Weston College including the time when Weston's academic program moved to Cambridge, and I worked closely with the Episcopal Divinity School. Weston always had an excellent philosophical and theological library.

RR: And speaking for yourself, have you felt that these years as a Jesuit have been good ones?

JB: Well, I have survived. No, I never thought of leav-

ing. And I cannot say that I suffer from depression or anything like that. Before entering the Society, I was used to taking care of myself, and so my way of life had been fairly well established by the time I entered the Society. And by the time that these great changes were taking place in the Society, I think I had been pretty well formed.

RR: Do you have any feelings or ideas as to how the Church is doing these days?

JB: Oh, I think it will be a very difficult period.

RR: How about our recent pope, Pope John Paul II? What do you think his special contributions were to the life of the Church?

JB: Oh, well I think he was a great pope. Yes, he was forward-looking at the same time he was conservative. And, of course, he was extremely popular.

RR: Now since you are a church historian, what do you think of the suggestion by some people that he might be called 'John Paul the Great?'

JB: Well, that I do not know. I would say he was one of the leading popes. But there have been some very great popes, you know, who have not only been popular but did a great deal to increase the position of the papacy and the Church. There were great popes in the fifteenth century.

RR: Do you find some parallels at least between those great popes and John Paul II?

JB: We do not know in detail about the lives of those popes. We know the power that they were able to exercise. But this man was a world traveler, and a lot of his experience came through that and from

his own personality.

RR: I have touched on a number of things. Is there something you are very interested in that I have missed, or anything else that you would like to add?

JB: A good deal of my activity was writing. I wrote a good many book reviews for *Theological Studies*, and then I put out a few scholarly articles as well.

RR: I think that about rounds out our interview.

JB: You did not mention the fact that I have come to be the oldest member of this Province.

RR: All right. How does it feel to be the oldest member of the Province?

JB: I feel in pretty good shape. I have a number of things wrong with me, including my eyes and my hearing. But on the whole, I am not suffering. And I am able to be up and around every day. And I went through this last year without so much as a cold, so I feel very fortunate in that respect. I am praying for my 96<sup>th</sup> birthday.

RR: Well you look fine. And you have been very generous and helpful.

JB: Good.

RR: We want to thank you for your help. And, do you want to say a little prayer to close?

JB: Yes, you go ahead and lead.

RR: All right. 'Lord, we want to thank you for the gifts that we have received from Fr. Broderick over the years, all the things that he has done for the Church. And in our gratitude we hope you will bless him for all that he has done. Please guard him, so that all of us may be enriched by what he can further teach us.

**Amen.'**  
**JB: Amen.**

**Rev. John F. Broderick, S.J.**

**Born:** September 17, 1909, Lynn, Massachusetts  
**Entered:** September 15, 1936, Shadowbrook, Lenox,  
Massachusetts  
**Ordained:** June 16, 1945, Weston College, Weston,  
Massachusetts  
**Final Vows:** February 2, 1954, Weston College,  
Weston, Massachusetts

1923 Lynn, Massachusetts: Classical High  
School - Student  
1927 Boston, Massachusetts: Boston University  
- Student  
1931 Massachusetts Department of Public  
Works - Clerk  
1936 Lenox, Massachusetts: Shadowbrook -  
Novitiate, Juniorate  
1939 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College -  
Studied philosophy  
1942 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College -  
Studied theology  
1946 Cleveland, Ohio: - Tertianship  
1947 Rome, Italy: Gregorian University -  
Studied church history  
1951-81 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College/

- Weston School of Theology - Taught church history, patrology, sacred archeology.
- 1963-65 Washington, D.C.: Catholic University - Editor, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Modern Church History
- 1969-70 Ipswich, Massachusetts: LaSalette - Teaching church history
- 1972-2004 Weston, Massachusetts: Campion Center - Librarian
- 1979-81 Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts: College of St. Paul - Teaching church history
- 1981-2004 Weston College/Weston School of Theology - Professor Emeritus, local apostolate
- 2004 Weston, Massachusetts: Campion Health Center - Praying for the Church and the Society

#### Degrees

- 1931 Bachelor of Arts, Boston University
- 1942 Master of Arts, Philosophy, Weston College-  
Boston College
- 1946 Licentiate in Sacred Theology, Weston College
- 1951 Doctor of Philosophy, Church History,  
Gregorian University

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