

**New England Jesuit
Oral History Program**



**Fr. Leo F. Quinlan , S.J.
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Interview with Fr. Leo F. Quinlan, S.J.
by Fr. Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.
November 16, 2005

THOMAS SHEEHAN: Good morning.

LEO QUINLAN: Good morning.

RR: Let us begin with your growing up. Tell us where you were born, about your family, and all that kind of thing.

LQ: Born in Somerville, Mass., but we moved out of there quickly. We ended up in Dorchester at St. Margaret Parish all my early life. Wonderful parish.

RR: Was the parish an influence on you, as far as eventually entering the Society goes? Was the pastor there a man that was helpful?

LQ: There were many vocations from the parish, many who went to become sisters and priests, and many Jesuits, too.

RR: What would you attribute that to? Was it the priests who were there at the time?

LQ: Oh, the priests were very good. A lot of the old priests particularly. Monsignor Ryan, who was very kind, never asked for money, naturally, and gave us apples at Christmas. It was all sisters in my grammar school,

Sisters of 'True' Charity of Halifax.

RR: So the priests and the sisters had an influence on you.

LQ: Yes. I was the first graduate from St. Regis Grammar School. St. Regis had started my second year, and we broke off from St. Margaret's, just down the road a bit. The sisters were very devoted to us. I lived on St. Margaret's Street.

RR: Were you an altar boy at the time?

LQ: Of course. Very good, too. I would be called out of class to go serve a funeral for fifty cents or a dollar.

RR: Then where did you go to from grammar school?

LQ: To B.C. High in 1929.

RR: Tell us more about B.C. High and your experience there.

LQ: I believe I got my vocation there, as they say. I saw what the Jesuits were doing. I said, "Maybe I can do that." So it was not a case of either/or, but I just liked what I saw them do.

RR: Did you have any support, directly, from Jesuits there, about becoming a Jesuit?

LQ: Not really. I only had two Jesuits in four years, for a few classes: [Mr. Frederick] Owens and the history teacher [Fr. Eugene] Cummings.

RR: What kind of education do you think you got there at B.C. High?

LQ: Pure literature. No science. I recall the extra hours which you had to put in reading more books, such as Shakespeare. I had Latin and Greek.

RR: Did you enjoy those classes?

LQ: Not particularly.

RR: I see that when you graduated from B.C. High you went to Shadowbrook in 1933.

LQ: Shadowbrook, correct.

RR: How did your family feel about that at the time?

LQ: My father was not fully for it, but my mother was all for it. I was afraid, but I was also stubborn, as I still

- am. Even if they had said no, I would have entered anyway.
- RR: What was your experience at Shadowbrook as a novice? Tell us a bit about something outstanding that happened during that period.
- LQ: I recall that Fr. Jack Smith, our novice master, was very old-fashioned and strict. That is where I made some new friendships and deepened some old ones. Pat Sullivan has been my good friend since B.C. High. There are just a few of us living still.
- RR: After novitiate you entered the juniorate; did you like it?
- LQ: I did. The teachers were very kind, quiet—no trouble.
- RR: Do you think those years at Shadowbrook shaped, to a certain extent, the things that you would do later on? Or was it not until you came to Weston that you were clearer about the things you thought you wanted to do?
- LQ: No, I took it in stride. Whatever would be, would be. No trouble.
- RR: Then you came to Weston for your philosophy from 1937 to 1940. That was quite different, in many ways, from what you had been doing before. So how did you feel about that?
- LQ: I think it was pretty dull and heavy; the games saved the life for me. We played games.
- RR: Sports?
- LQ: Basketball, baseball, and other games. The studies I have no clear recollection of, apart from notions of ens [being], and things like that. No particular preparation for teaching. That came later.
- RR: How?
- LQ: With John [Louis] Bonn. Remember that scholastics spent their vacation at Holy Cross. Luckily, I met John Bonn. I had been assigned to teach poetry, although I was not expecting that. Like the rest of the B.C. High

School grads, I expected to be sent to B.C. High for regency. Instead I was sent to Boston College to teach poetry, English, and Latin. If I had not had John Bonn at Holy Cross during those summers to help out, I would not have done well. But luckily, he gave me a lot of hints.

RR: Did you enjoy that part of regency, despite the fact that it was new to you?

LQ: The students were no trouble. The next time I saw them a few years later, they had come back from war, so they were veterans. The veterans allowed no trouble in class; they took care of the class. I must admit that the first time I had my first class, I followed John Bonn, about 2:30 PM, teaching Latin composition. I was wavering right then and there: would I just take my beretta off and walk away? Especially teaching class right after John Bonn's class, because he ran a circus.

RR: How so?

LQ: Everything was wild—he revved the boys up, chairs all mixed up. So that gave me some courage to go in and teach, especially since the boys were very friendly. A number of those were thinking of being Jesuits and priests, so they behaved all right.

RR: Did that actually happen, that a number of them later became priests or Jesuits?

LQ: Yes, about three or four. The biggest surprise was the one boy in the class that I did not recommend for the priesthood. He turned out to be a very good Jesuit!

RR: After regency, you came back to Weston in 1942 for your theology.

LQ: That year Holy Cross beat B.C. 55-12. They were not supposed to. That year the Coconut Grove nightclub downtown burned up with B.C. boys not there, because they had lost badly to Holy Cross that afternoon. It was an act of God, of course.

RR: What other memorable things happened during your

years of theology here at Weston? Anything special that comes to mind?

LQ: Memorable things were the fusions, when theologians and philosophers could talk with each other. [Philosophers and theologians were not allowed to 'break grades' by talking with each other except at fusions.] I made a couple of good friends—Joe Fennell and I repeated the course material to prepare for exams. After ordination we parted our separate ways. I went back to B.C. for a year 1946-47, teaching the same poetry.

RR: That you taught during your regency there?

LQ: Yes.

RR: You were able to build on that experience?

LQ: Yes.

RR: Was John Bonn there then?

LQ: Yes, he was still teaching. He was sort of a wild man, but wonderful! Wonderful teacher, a wonderful preacher of retreats and other things.

RR: It sounds like he had quite an influence on you.

LQ: Interesting person, yes.

RR: Good. When were you ordained?

LQ: 1945.

RR: It was a rather large class, I assume?

LQ: Must have been several dozen, including Joe Fennell, Pat Sullivan, Bill Raftery, plus about fifteen people from New York.

RR: Is there anything else you want to say about that period in your life, the training period, anything I have missed?

LQ: Very good, very regular. Though I cannot say that it helped me very much for the future. At least I do not remember much of theology and a lot of things like that.

RR: Right. Then in 1948 you started teaching at Fairfield after tertianship in Auriesville?

LQ: For one year. The usual thing was for people to come

and go between Fairfield and Jamaica.

RR: Fairfield must have been barely started at that time.

LQ: It had started in 1942.

RR: Were you teaching in the prep or in the college?

LQ: In the college. I think I may have been the first one to teach Greek. The students were very bright. It was a small college.

RR: So you were there really as a pioneer?

LQ: As a pioneer, though never mentioned in any history. Not only that, but Fr. Victor Leeber, now living here, was there at the time—yet we have no recollection of each other. It was interesting, teaching Greek for the first time in so many years, it was modern Greek.

RR: What did you think of the students there?

LQ: Very nice. The small class I had was very good. The Glee Club was very good. Basketball was just starting. They were all very good.

RR: Where did you live while you were there?

LQ: In one of the new houses, Berchman's, I think. There was just one building at the time. With John Parker Murphy and Don Grady.

RR: About then you began your long experience in Jamaica?

LQ: Well, not quite.

RR: Not quite?

LQ: There is a bit of a story to it.

RR: OK.

LQ: I was very happy teaching there at Fairfield. Then I saw a notice on the board from the provincial, Fr. McEleney: "We need one more volunteer for Jamaica." I wrote a letter to him with a dozen provisos: "If you think I'm ready, if you think I can do it, and so forth." I put my name in. I had no answer for three or four months, so I said, "Well, that's that. I don't go." I guessed I would go back to teaching. But on the last day of my retreat at Shadowbrook, the retreat director said, "Congratulations." I said, "What for?" "It's

on the board.” I said, “Could it be?” On the board: Jamaica. First I heard about it—no letter back from the provincial.

RR: Your offer was accepted.

LQ: OK. So we go. Our joke is that Fr. McEleney, who was to become bishop in Jamaica, had hand-picked his men. I was one of them, along with Charlie MacMullan, Jack Dorsey, and Jim Barry. We were sent down there. So that was a claim to the hall of fame.

RR: What became of these three men?

LQ: Charlie MacMullan was headmaster at St. George’s for nine years and then the first rector of the new Campion College for six years.

RR: And Jack Dorsey?

LQ: He worked at St. George’s College a teacher, then night school dean, and rector. He was headmaster at Campion, but had a stroke his first year. He taught Scripture classes for several years, and came here to Campion in 1976. He must have been one of the first to come.

RR: And Jim Barry?

LQ: He was Archbishop McEleney’s secretary for many years, major superior of the island, and a very successful pastor at SS. Peter and Paul and at St. Ann’s Bay. So, as I said, McEleney picked his men, and then became bishop there. He knew what he was doing.

RR: What was your first assignment in Jamaica in 1949?

LQ: Holy Rosary Church. It is in the city, and was the liveliest of the parishes. The liveliest of the priests there, Phil Branon, was pastor. He was a TB sufferer, and used to do his convalescence somewhere else. Nobody in the world up here knows him, but he was a real fireball.

RR: Did you enjoy doing your work those first years?

LQ: Yes. I was assistant pastor. Strangely, just the other day the Richards family celebrated my 90th birthday.

They live in Randolph now, but they lived in Holy Rosary parish. They were the backbone of the church. They were involved in everything. They had a children's choir and an adult choir. All the organists came from that family. One of the boys was in the seminary for a while, George. They were known as supporters of the church.

RR: That was a nice way to begin your years of work in Jamaica, with contact with a sympathetic family group.

LQ: Yes. The next year I also worked at Holy Cross Mission at Half Way Tree.

RR: Tell us about that.

LQ: It was the second biggest parish in Kingston, and the best.

RR: I see you had many responsibilities in the parish.

LQ: The year went fast.

RR: Then we have your almost thirty years at St. George's.

LQ: Yes, actually twenty-nine years. And what happened? I became headmaster.

RR: Well, first you started teaching?

LQ: Yes.

RR: How did you find the experience of teaching in a unknown educational system?

LQ: Wonderful. Just as good as up here. As Fr. [Joseph] Maurice Feres used to say, "The boys are just the same." Did you know Fr. Feres at all?

RR: Yes.

LQ: He also taught up at Cheverus. Teaching was very good. I liked the boys, and the boys liked me. So that is half the battle. I also played handball with them after class. Gave them an exam during the morning, and handball after school. No trouble.

RR: By and large, did you find them well-motivated?

LQ: Oh, yes. At that time it was also called a Chinese school, because the Chinese knew that the place for education was at St. George's, so that is where they went. My

first class, out of thirty boys, twenty-eight were Chinese. So no trouble, and they studied hard.

RR: That is very interesting. Did that ratio continue?

LQ: No.

RR: Was that just a temporary phenomenon?

LQ: Just for three, four, five years, that was all. The school population changed. It is fully black right now, fifty years later. They were an interesting group. Those friendships I have kept up all the time. I write letters—sixteen hundred just since I came here to Campion.

RR: Since you were in Jamaica so many years, try to give us a kind of picture of the importance of St. George's in the life of the church and society of Jamaica. Why has it been such a crucial place?

LQ: First of all, academically, it was the number one school. The Jamaica scholarship, for five or six years in a row, was won by a George's boy. That is an external scholarship from England, so it had a reputation. It was also good at football [soccer]. The boys were well-mannered and mostly Catholic with a number of converts. One Jesuit converted a boy of eleven and his buddy.

RR: What happened after that?

LQ: All the other boys wanted to be Catholics. The reputation of George's grew. Every school is number one for a certain number of years, and then comes a change. So we were number one at that time.

RR: Number one among all the other schools on the island.

LQ: The interesting thing was the beginning of Campion College. The one objection to the second school's starting came from Fr. Charlie MacMullan: "No, no, no!" He repeated everything ten times. "No, no, no. You must not try this yet. We haven't got the teachers. Where are the students coming from? We can't start a second school!" So what did we do with those objec-

tors? We made them headmasters. Charlie MacMullan, even before Campion was built, was made rector of Campion. So no more objections.

RR: What happened then at St. George's

LQ: They needed a headmaster, so they brought in Ed Donahue, who used to be the prefect of discipline. He got sprue, so he could not eat any wheat. It was difficult to say Mass, of course. It was a bad case; in three years or so he died. So they looked around for a headmaster, and they picked me. Jim Barry said, "We have no one else ready to take the job, So, you're in."

RR: That is how it happened.

LQ: I had to go in from scratch, and take over. Since I knew most of the boys, I was OK, and got on well enough. The old boys [alums] still tell stories about me, most of which are not quite true, and some which are exaggerated. I got along very well with them.

RR: That always helps. How was the ending of your time as headmaster?

LQ: When the time came for me to step down and while Larry Burke was superior of the Jamaica mission, Maurice Feres was appointed headmaster. Something happened which startled the lay teachers: I became assistant headmaster. Maurice had been my assistant. We just swapped jobs. I was at George's for twenty-nine years; it was wonderful.

RR: While you were headmaster, were you still able to do some teaching?

LQ: A little bit, mine being the Scripture. Surprisingly, the boys liked Scripture. They had exams in it from Cambridge University, even though there was no exam about doctrine as such. The exams were all about facts. For some years they had wonderful marks in Scripture.

RR: From the point of view of the relationship between American education and British education, George's

was largely influenced by the British system, was it not, as far as the number of years and the subjects went?

LQ: Initially they had a syllabus based on British education. But then they ran into difficulties, when a new headmaster tried to change it to the American system. It was a time of considerable tension, unfortunately.

RR: Did that become permanent, the American system?

LQ: It was permanent. Problems arose with an American system headed by a school president in a British context where the headmaster had been in charge. So from that friction everything else began to decline. When the Jesuits began to drop out, the school dropped back from being number one. So thirteen years later, it is number twenty-seven or twenty-eight.

RR: They went from one to twenty-seven?

LQ: Yes.

RR: What explains that, exactly?

LQ: Just the type of students, for one thing. Campion is getting all the better students, even though they are assigned by the government. In addition most people put in for Campion. They had to give you a choice if they could, so Campion was their number one choice.

RR: As of today, is Campion still one of the top schools?

LQ: Oh, yes.

RR: Is Campion now a bigger school than St. George's, as far as the number of people and professors goes?

LQ: About the same—fifteen hundred. But Michael Davidson, a young Jesuit scholastic, is doing very well at St. George's. He has helped the discipline in every way. He is marvelous with the kids as dean of discipline. He was in Zambia for philosophy, and liked it very much. So George's is coming up.

RR: What shape, really, is the Jesuit presence in education in Jamaica?

LQ: At the school, fairly high. St. George's was once what

Larry O'Toole called the best campus in the Province. He was thrilled by the whole thing, because the boys loved him right away. He liked the boys, and did very well. During a spell of illness, four or five old boys—a couple still in the college—took over his classes in chemistry. It was a difficult job, and they did very well.

RR: Are there other factors in its ending up with such a low ranking?

LQ: Well, first of all, the teachers are not Jesuits, so they approach teaching differently. The type of boy also began to change, so discipline became more of an issue.

RR: Looking at the overall picture, the whole Jesuit educational contribution to the life of the Jamaican church and to Jamaica as a whole has been a rather important one, would you say?

LQ: It has been.

RR: It has had an impact, perhaps, on a number of people, including some of the community leaders?

LQ: Well, I would say so, particularly starting with the leadership of Archbishop McEleney. He was ahead of everybody else in ecumenism and liturgical reform. We were far ahead of people up here in this area. In ecumenism, we had ministers' fraternals long before anything got going up here. When someone came down from here to give us a lecture, he said the people up here had not yet started having parish councils, when we already had them for some time.

RR: Archbishop McEleney was a pioneer, it seems.

LQ: The people liked McEleney; he was very powerful, outspoken, and strong. He also got along with the other bishops, and did well with the priests, especially some of the older priests.

RR: He was popular all around.

LQ: When we had our novenas, novenas to St. Theresa and all those other saints you have never heard of, the non-

Catholics liked to come, too.

RR: What was the impact of Vatican II, generally, on the Jamaican church, since you say a lot of these changes had already begun? Did Vatican II increase and develop them?

LQ: Yes.

RR: Many of those reforms were welcome in Jamaica?

LQ: Yes. The services were altogether different. I was so used to holding hands during the “Our Father”—a very different culture, that is all—and at the end, shouting out, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power!” I liked their music very much and miss it very much.

RR: After St George’s, you had a rather varied pastoral experience in many parishes—St. Ignatius in Brown’s Town, Our Lady of Perpetual Help in St. Ann’s Bay, and so on. Could you describe these churches and say what happened to you in them?

LQ: It all started when I began to give weekend retreats to boys in the school during the years after being headmaster. Those retreats influenced many boys, and no doubt they still talk about them. When I stopped giving them, other Jesuits continued them.

RR: Where were the retreats done?

LQ: Campion had a boarding school then, so we used it when it was not in session. I charged a pound for three days for food and lodging. Joe Krim was very kind to us with the arrangements. So I was used to pastoral ministry. I also went out on Sunday calls. Practically everybody at St. George’s went on calls to the various parishes; they were very good experiences.

RR: To get a feel for the actual situation in those parishes, let me just run through some of them, to see if something comes to mind. For example, St. Ignatius in Brown’s Town was the first one you went to in 1980. What was that parish like?

LQ: It is a beautiful country parish. The people in the coun-

try are different from the city slickers. You can sense it as you go through the country. They were very, very friendly and rather simple. The Mass was in English by then. Good singing. The parishioners were wonderful; they helped you all you wanted.

RR: Then you went to St. Ann's Bay near Ocho Rios, right?

LQ: Yes. But St. Ann's Bay include taking care of Our Lady of Fatima Church in Ocho Rios. It was a popular place for the rich vacationers and for foreigners to get married. Most people wanting to be married mistakenly thought think there was nothing to it, and that there were only hicks down there. But when they found out that the "hicks" had the same training in marriage preparation as priests everywhere else, many of them were surprised. It was a rich parish, with the money to support it, so there was no trouble with it.

RR: I know Ocho Rios is a tourist center. Would many Catholics on vacation also come to St. Ann's for Sunday Mass?

LQ: To Ocho Rios, not so much to St. Ann's Bay.

RR: Because there was a church in Ocho Rios?

LQ: Oh, yes, a big church, which Jim Barry built.

RR: So St. Ann's—

LQ: The same person took them both.

RR: What is the name of the church at Ocho Rios?

LQ: Our Lady of Fatima. It was a big church, and its biggest crowd—six hundred—came at Easter.

RR: Did you enjoy that kind of a busy place?

LQ: Yes. But some of the marriages I was not happy about, because they were just for convenience. They got married because they fulfilled all the rules, and married because of the country they were in. Some marriages have broken up already.

RR: So you were there about two years, and then you went to St. James Parish in Point Richey in Florida?

LQ: Yes. That was because at the time I was so tired that I

said, "I can't carry this out." Brown's Town was a half hour up the hill. The other parishes were on the coast, but they were a distance from each other. I thought I would have to retire. As I was figuring what to do, the provincial, Fr. Manning, was visiting. He said, "Don't make any plans. Call up Bill Devine."

RR: Bill Devine in the province offices?

LQ: Well, but I called him up. Bill said, "My cousin, a priest in Florida, is looking for help." The provincial said, "Call. Go there." I had expected to retire, but now I could go on. So I got there, and I did very well. Two years in a very nice parish. When the bishop assigned another priest there, I returned to Jamaica.

RR: To St. Mary Parish in Above Rocks.

LQ: There was a school up there and pastoral work. I went up there with Lou Grenier. Lou had been there about twenty years by then. Lou was in town every day at meetings by the millions.

RR: You helped out?

LQ: Yes. I also filled in for a few months at the villa at Mamee Bay, then back to St. Ann's Bay. After that I went to Patrick House in Kingston, where I did pastoral ministry for three years. Then came here to Campion Center in 1998 after about fifty years in Jamaica.

RR: As we conclude our time together today, let me just ask you a general question. As you look back over your whole life, do you see providential support and guidance from God, helping you to live the kind of a life that you did, and guiding you to help all the people that you helped so much over the years?

LQ: Yes.

RR: Just tell us a little bit about how you feel about that.

LQ: Well, the fact that they liked me. I must admit that, in all my pride. If they liked you, it made a tremendous difference. It is true at any parish. The way I got the jobs was providential, especially the future bishop pick-

ing me out for Jamaica. And my initial letter, and getting no answer for four or five months, as if it was all over. Yet I fitted right in; I had no difficulty fitting in.

RR: For you, Jamaica was a true religious validation and experience?

LQ: True.

RR: You met so many people, and did so many good things for so many people?

LQ: Yes, I would say yes.

RR: You mentioned you have kept up a wide correspondence over the years.

LQ: Yes. Since I came here, I have written about 1600 letters.

RR: Who gets them?

LQ: Old boys from George's, former parishioners.

RR: That must keep you busy.

LQ: They write a lot and I reply.

RR: I want to thank you for giving us all this insight into Jamaica and your years of work there.

LQ: I am glad if you can make use of any of it.

Rev. Leo F. Quinlan, S.J.

- Born:** November 2, 1915, Somerville,
Massachusetts
- Entered:** July 30, 1933, Lenox, Massachusetts
Shadowbrook
- Ordained:** June 16, 1945, Weston, Massachusetts,
Weston College
- Final Vows:** June 21, 1977, Kingston, Jamaica,
St. George's College
-
- 1929 Boston, MassachusettsRR: Boston College High
School - Student
- 1933 Lenox, MassachusettsRR: Shadowbrook - Novitiate,
Juniorate
- 1937 Weston, MassachusettsRR: Weston College - Stud-
ied philosophy
- 1940 Chestnut Hill, MassachusettsRR: Boston College -
Taught Latin, English; assistant moderator of The
Heights
- 1942 Weston, MassachusettsRR: Weston College - Stud-
ied theology; assistant editor of the Jesuit Seminary
News
- 1946 Chestnut Hill, MassachusettsRR: Boston College -
Taught English in Intown College; assistant direc-
tor of Alumni Sodality
- 1947 Auriesville, New York: Our Lady of the Martyrs -
Tertianship
- 1948 Fairfield, Connecticut: Fairfield University -
Taught Latin, Greek
- 1949 Kingston, Jamaica: Holy Rosary Mission - Parish
ministry [moderator of St. John Berchmans Society
(altar servers), moderator of the parish school,
supervisor of school and mission at Harbour Head]
- 1950 Half Way Tree, Jamaica: Holy Cross Mission -
Parish ministry [buyer, moderator of St. John

- Berchmans Society, moderator of Girls Sodality; assistant director of Apostleship of Prayer; supervised school at Nun's Pen; taught catechism]
- 1951 Saint George College, Jamaica: Taught 4th year (1956-62), student counselor (1960-62), taught 5th year (1962-70), principal (1962-70), taught religion (1970-78), prefect of discipline (1970-80), assistant principal
- 1980 Brown's Town, Jamaica: Saint Ignatius - Pastor, including missions at Runaway Bay and Discovery Bay
- 1989 Saint Ann's Bay, Jamaica: Our Lady of Perpetual Help - President of mission, minister, treasurer; also at Our Lady of Fatima in Ocho Rios
- 1991 Point Richey, Florida: St. James the Apostle Parish - Assistant pastor
- 1993 Above Rocks, Jamaica: St. Mary Parish - Pastoral ministry
- 1994 Saint Ann's Bay, Jamaica: Our Lady of Perpetual Help - Pastor, also at Our Lady of Fatima in Ocho Rios
- 1995 Kingston, Jamaica: Patrick House - Pastoral ministry
- 1998 Weston, MassachusetRR: Campion Health Center - Praying for the Church and the Society

Degrees

- 1937 Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy, Weston College-Boston College
- 1945 Licentiate in Sacred Theology, Weston College