Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) obtained papal approval in 1540 for a new international religious order called the Society of Jesus. Until the mid-1700s the ‘Jesuits’ were active in many parts of Europe and far beyond. Gaining both friends and enemies in response to their work as teachers, scholars, writers, preachers, missionaries, and spiritual directors, the Jesuits were formally suppressed by Pope Clement XIV in 1773 and restored by Pope Pius VII in 1814. The Society of Jesus then grew until the 1960s; it has more recently experienced declining membership in Europe and North America, but expansion in other parts of the world.

This Companion examines the religious and cultural significance of the Jesuits. The first four parts treat the period prior to the Suppression, while part V examines the Suppression and some of the challenges and opportunities of the restored Society of Jesus up to the present.

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