"Kino: A Legacy: His Life, His Work, His Missions, His Monuments" 1998
Charles W. Polzer, S.J.

The Early Years In Europe
1645 - 1664

The saga of Padre Kino begins in Segno, a tiny mountain town in the Italian Tyrol, not far from historic Trent. There on August 10, 1645, Eusebio was born in a typical stone and timber house similar to those that stud the slopes of the Dolomite Alps along the Val di Non. He was the only son of Franceso Chini and Margherita Lucchi and the brother of three sisters, Margherita, Catarina, and Ana María. His boyhood in Segno shaped the powerful frame that would one day explore the mountains and deserts of a land a hemisphere away. He learned the essentials of life on the family farm at Moncou which was later sold after his father’s death in 1660; the sale included the home, buildings, vineyards, and livestock. So Eusebio was not unfamiliar with agriculture from the earliest days of his childhood.

Young Eusebio must have shown some degree of brilliance because his parents provided him with a private tutor, Giorgio Coradinus Mollari, and then sent him off to the newly founded Jesuit "gymnasio" at Trent where he was introduced to the world of science and letters. Three years after his father’s death, the family holdings at Moncou were sold to liquidate some debts and finance Eusebio’s education at the college of Hall near Innsbruck in Austria. He registered in the program of rhetoric and logic, moving on to Freiburg in 1664. While studying at Hall, Kino contracted an unidentified illness that brought him close to death. These were obviously very emotional times for the young man from Segno who found his future confronted by serious choices. Was he destined to return to the Val di Non? His father had died when Eusebio was only fifteen; and the properties were sold to pay for his education. Or was he meant to be a missionary? Always in the back of Eusebio’s mind lingered the memory of the visit of his cousin, Father Martino Martini, an accomplished China missionary; his brief visit had sparked an abiding interest in science and mathematics, almost prerequisites to be a missionary to the mysterious Orient. The sickness drew from Kino one of his deep-down dreams – for he vowed that if his patron, St. Francis Xavier, would intercede for his recovery, he would enter the Society of Jesus. His health returned and for the rest of his life Eusebio Kino valued his healing as a gift from God through the intercession of Xavier. Whatever may be said of Kino’s recovery, his life was certainly to be a welcome gift for the “abandoned souls” of Baja California and the Pimería Alta.

Kino Enters The Society Of Jesus
1667 - 1677

Now twenty years old, Kino set foot on the long trail of Jesuit training typical of the men of the “Company of Jesus.” Entering the novitiate at Landsberg, he pronounced his first vows in 1667 when he renounced any inheritance from his family. Kino now entered on the Society’s intensive course of studies at Ingolstadt, beginning with philosophy which he finished at the newly opened University of Innsbruck. Minor orders were conferred in April, 1669, and he was now ready for his first apostolic assignment, teaching basic grammar at Hall.

Five years had passed since his entry into the Society, but he had not forgotten his promise to volunteer for the missions; he filed his first formal petition to go to the Americas, to China, or any other difficult foreign assignment. Father General Oliva honored the offer with silence. Two of his Swiss professors, Amhryn in philosophy and Aigenler in mathematics, were named for the China missions, and this prompted Kino to appeal a second time for a similar assignment in 1672; he was being patient but insistent. After three years of “regency,” the period Jesuits spend prior to theological studies, Kino again renewed his appeal to be sent to the missions. The only response from the General was a recognition of his constancy in discerning his vocation. Two more years elapsed while Kino devoted himself intensely to the study of theology and mathematics; again, he petitioned Rome. Ordination was not far off, and where would he be destined afterwards? Yet another appeal rumbled down to Father General only a year later. Eusebio was showing strong determination. He was ordained a priest in the Society on June 12, 1677, at Eistady, Austria, with the other members of his class. But still, no word from Rome.

The Ingolstadt years were intense ones. Not only had Kino dedicated himself to the demands of theological studies, he delved into mathematics, geography, and cartography under a faculty of distinguished professors. The Jesuits were not isolated from other students at the relatively young university, and Kino moderated a mathematics club that concentrated in the emerging field of astronomy. In fact, he converted one of the classic towers of the university building into a mini-observatory! Although the facts are scanty, one can feel the energy and enthusiasm of this determined young man from the Tyrol; the whole world and the heavens were fair game for all his talents.

The Duke of Bavaria, whose son Kino was teaching, was so impressed with his accomplishments, he invited the young priest to stay on to teach science and mathematics. Kino, as appreciative as he must have been, however, continued to press Rome for an assignment to the missions. Finishing the “tertianship,” at Oettingen (or final probationary period in the Society’s long training), he knew men were being chosen for the Americas. For the sixth time, he offered himself if Father General felt that this was truly God’s will for him in life and in the Society.

America Or The Orient?
1678

In late March, 1678, Kino’s provincial superior arrived at the tertianship with the General’s decision; he was to be assigned to the missions of the Spanish empire! Would that mean the Americas or the Orient? Neither of the two classmates now destined for the missions lost any time. On March 30, Kino and Anthony Kerschpamer left for Munich to spend a week in making preparations for the long journey. Always resourceful, special permission was granted Kino to offset travel expenses with money he had earned from the sale of scientific instruments he had been making.

Winter was wearing away as Kino and Kerschpamer rode off to Hall where the dreams of distant worlds once dominated their lives. This time, however, the dreams had become awesome realities as they bade farewell to old companions and loyal students. Threading the Brenner Pass, the two America bound Jesuits rode through Trentino valleys and Tyrolean hills seeking family, friends, and old professors. Spring was in the air. The sun of the southern Alpine slopes beckoned new leaves and melted the edges of snow banks into rivulets of crystal water. There was life and freshness everywhere. There was hope and adventure in his voice as Kino said goodbye to childhood haunts. The Val di Non, Mezzacorona, Moncou; his sisters, uncles, and scores of relatives in the Alto Adige were swallowed up in a wake of twisting canyons and sprawling vineyards. The Tyrol now would be only a cherished memory.

Nineteen Jesuit companions converged on Genoa to begin their missionary careers. Germans, Austrians, Bohemians, Italians, and Tyrolese made up the contingent that would eventually disperse across America, the Pacific, and Asia. Who could really describe their sentiments as they set sail for Cádiz. Excitement, a raging summer thunder storm, and choppy seas worked their unwelcome magic on Kino’s first time aboard an ocean-going vessel; but he was fine after a day. The Capitana and the San Nicolás under command of Francesco Colón of Genoa, tacked on toward the Spanish peninsula. Eight days out of Genoa, as Minorca slid past the horizon, huge sails were bearing down on the course of the two Italian ships. General quarters were sounded to prepare the one armed ship to give battle to Turkish pirates. But as the men-of-war approached, a saludatory salvo rang out; they were, for now, a friendly English squadron! The breast-works made from mattresses and boxes were stored again and the ships steered for Alicante. Nonetheless, sails continued to jab up from the horizon and battle stations were resumed off and on for the next five days until more English ships brought news that the Turks had been driven to Argel.

What a curious way the missioners must have thought to begin a life of service to the non-believer! Landing at Alicante, the Jesuits were hosted by the college because there was some thought of continuing the journey overland. Word arrived, however, that the armada was delayed at Cádiz and would not embark until around the 12th of July. The decision was taken to continue on by sea. From the 26th of June to the 14th of July the small squadron plied the stormy waters of the western Mediterranean. Phantom ships loomed up from the African coast; dense fogs confused the pilots who promptly steered the crafts into Ceuta instead of Cádiz. Then, at the crack of dawn huge sails bore down on them from the east; rushing to battle stations, again, the small Italian vessels slowly tacked away until the threatening ship vanished from sight.

By noon of the 14th they sighted the Straits of Gibraltar, falling on their knees in gratitude for having reached the classic portal to the Atlantic. The ships triumphantly scudded along the desolate coast of Trafalgar. Hope was high until sunset. Then, the brilliant sun outlined the imperial Spanish armada, standing out to sea en route to America. Kino’s heart, everyone’s heart sank with that setting sun. Contrary winds were keeping them from their rendezvous. Beautiful and dramatic, the sight of forty-four galleons just miles away dashed the expectations of everyone aboard! Winds, tempestuous seas, pirates and fog had interrupted their fateful journey.

The Wait In Spain
1678 - 1681

Missing the fleet was not quite like missing a scheduled transatlantic steamer. As Padre Kino and companions feared, they would have to wait nearly two years to book new passage! Few other places in 17th century Europe could offer the advantages of Andalusia which was the virtual throat of western expansion. Ships and passengers from all over the world converged on Cádiz and Sevilla with news and cargoes. So, Kino’s keen interest in the Orient was honed even more sharply with news of Macao and the Marianas, and a newly struck friendship with Father Teófilo de Angelis, the appointed superior of the Pacific missions, enkindled in Eusebio a desire to join in the expedition to the Carolines. It never happened because De Angelis embarked before a change of assignment could be received from Rome. But the interlude occasioned Kino’s acquaintance by correspondence with the Duchess of Aveiro, a staunch patron of Jesuit mission activity in the Orient. Not even her powerful intercession, however, was able to divert Kino from his destiny with New Spain. While he waited for word from Rome or for permission to board an America bound armada, he spent his time mastering Spanish, some Portuguese, teaching mathematics at the Jesuit colleges in Seville and Puerto Santa María, and making scientific instruments for use in the missions.

Just over a year had elapsed when the Jesuits got their chance to sail; but learning that the destination of the small fleet was first the coast of Angola to take on slaves for the Americas. The Jesuits refused to be associated with the business. More time passed in Sevilla until the Father Procurator booked passage for them on the flota which would accompany the new Viceroy to New Spain. Rushing to board the Nazareno in the port of Cádiz, the expectant missionaries were thrilled to be under sail – but a large ship threatened to collide with the galleon that slammed into a shallow sandbar, still known today as El Diamante. Winds and waves crashed over the stricken ship, and the passengers barely escaped with their lives. Viceroy Paredes’ fleet left port with a few lucky missionaries destined for the Orient and South America. Kino recovered some of his baggage and once again sailed upriver to Sevilla for another winter of waiting.

Finally, letters arrived from Rome in mid-November that tried to calm Kino’s anxieties. If the opportunity arose, he could, indeed, join his German province companions to go to Nueva Granada (Colombia) or even the reducciones of Paraguay. It seemed to Kino that his life’s destiny was still unclear. Just what was the will of God saying? Since leaving the mountain fastness of Austria, Kino had lost out on his preference for the Orient. His companion through years of preparation, Anthony Kerschpamer, had won the draw of destinations; Kino’s slip of paper read “Mexico”; Kerschpamer’s, “Oriente.” Like a gamy trout, he had tried to escape the hook of destiny. And now in the chill of the Andalusian winter, he hoped for other climes.

Crisp and dry, the skies of southern Spain were ideal for astronomical observations. As Kino’s third winter in Sevilla debuted, a brilliant comet stretched across the Andalusian skies. Using instruments of their own manufacture, the Jesuits speculated on the nature and meaning of the heavenly spectacle. For Kino it was a unique event that offered an explanation for the raging pestilence in the city. He had hardly concluded his observations when word came for the lingering Jesuits to leave for Cádiz because an armada was forming to bring the Viceroy of Peru to his post. Kino would be aboard a smaller packet or mail ship that would break off at Havana for the port of Veracruz, where he arrived May 1st or 2nd after ninety-six days at sea. America at last!

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