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**In This Sign Conquer**  
***A History of the Society of the Holy Cross 1855-2005***  
ISBN 0-8264-9186-3.  
*Continuum, 2006. £12.99.*

The photographs on the cover of this book were taken at the celebrations for 150 years of the Society of the Holy Cross in April 2005, when 5,500 people filled the Albert Hall to give thanks for the work and witness of the Society in times alike of prosperity and adversity.

The book is a collection of essays by eight authors, forming a concise history of the Society, which is usually known by the initials SSC, from the original Latin title *Societas Sanctae Crucis*. The book is well planned, so that the different authors hardly ever overlap with one another, which makes for good reading.

Charles Lowder, who founded the SSC, inspired by the example of S. Vincent de Paul, set out to bring together a group of priests who would pledge themselves to follow a common rule of life and to pursue the way of holiness, lived out according to Anglo-Catholic principles.

This book tells the story. Some readers will probably find themselves skipping over the chapter on the Rules of SSC, though they will recognize that the research that lies behind it will be useful for the historian. The greater part of the book is fascinating and illuminating. Readers will soon discover that many of the ecclesiastical battles of former days, concerning doctrine and ceremonial, were won because of the determination and perseverance of SSC priests.

The Society played a large part in the nineteenth century revival of the use of sacramental confession, and particularly in the training of priests for this ministry. Here the members met with powerful opposition, especially from the bishops of the time, but they stood their ground, and the Church of England as a whole has been able to reap the benefits of their struggle.

Nevertheless, as the authors point out, SSC did not come into being as a pressure group to fight for a particular cause. Its founder's priority was to deepen the spiritual life of those called to the priesthood, equipping them for pastoral work, for the preaching of the Gospel and the teaching of the Catholic faith. Many of its priests have worked, and are working now, in urban areas of deprivation, both in London and elsewhere. As Bishop Geoffrey Rowell said, in the first chapter, "the founding members of SSC were undoubted believers in a mission-shaped Church".

*In This Sign Conquer* gives us a valuable summary of the first 150 years of SSC's history, furnishing us also with a good deal of background information, so that its work can be seen in context. Whether you share the theological position of SSC or not, you will profit greatly by reading this book.

***Martin SSF***