Christopher van Ginhoven Rey

Instruments of the Divinity: Providence and Praxis in the Foundation of the Society of Jesus. Leiden: Brill, 2014. Pp. 244. Hb, \$141,00.

Instruments of the Divinity sketches the origins of the religious imaginary of the Jesuits through the lens of a metaphor: the metaphor of the instrument, traced by the author in two seminal texts of Ignatius, the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions*. The author believes that this textual key leads to new perspectives on the early history of the Society of Jesus: “The disclosure of this imaginary as a distinct reality opened up for me an area of Ignatius’ work that, to my knowledge, has not been explored in a systematic way” (16).

As early as 1941, van Ginhoven Rey writes, Father Pedro de Leturia had noticed that the Jesuits were the only order whose official foundation was preceded, and influenced, by the appearance of a common book of devotion, the *Exercises*. Since this book is a practical manual of asceticism, never simply meant to be read but rather to be performed, it followed that praxis and the relevant notion of instrumentality became part of the very essence of the religiosity of the Society of Jesus. The first occurrence of the metaphor of the instrument in the Ignatian discourse is detected by the author in a passage of the *Exercises*—and precisely in the *Contemplatio ad amorem* closing the fourth week—where God’s action on man is described as an action *ad modum laborantis*, “in the manner of a person at work.” Here, the exercitant is asked to “consider how God works and labors on my behalf in all created things on the face of earth, i.e., *habet se ad modum laborantis*.” This image of God as sustaining the whole of creation is diametrically opposed to the vision of hell in the first week, and asks the exercitant to consider himself transformed into an instrument of the divinity.

Van Ginhoven Rey retraces the presence of this metaphor throughout the *Constitutions* and how it shaped the self-image of the Society, i.e. its mission in the world. In particular, at the opening of the tenth part of the *Constitutions*, spiritual practices like virtue, prayer, and exercises of devotion are specified as “the means which unite the instrument [the Jesuit] with God, disposing it so that it may be wielded dexterously by His divine hand.” Hence, such a rhetoric of instrumentality can be understood as a basic element not only of Ignatian discourse, but of the identity of the Society of Jesus as a whole. According to the author, its influence is perceivable in two peculiar expressions of the Jesuits’ missionary program: the Society’s commitment to instruction (*instructio*, sharing the same verbal root as *instrumentum*), and its departure from the monastic ideal of contemplation and seclusion from the world.

Ignatius's critique of ascetic ideals is the major testing ground of van Ginhoven Rey's hypothesis. The author analyzes the expression of this critique in the well-known letter addressed by the general in 1547 to the scholastics of the college of Coimbra, who, under the Portuguese provincial Simão Rodrigues, one of the first companions of the founder, engaged in ascetic practices including fasts, vigils, and corporal penances. In opposition to this poetics of monasticism (as Rey terms the cultural background of those practices, borrowing the expression from M.B. Pranger) Loyola advocates a "poetics of the world," whereby contemplation and personal perfection are replaced by an itinerant lifestyle and ministry among the people. This worldly turn is attainable only by considering oneself as an instrument of God, not to be damaged by practices of mortification, so that, according to Ignatius, the correct exercise of devotion finds its very synthesis in the virtue of obedience, the quintessential instrumental virtue: "If you have a great desire for mortification, use it to break your wills and to submit your judgments under the yoke of obedience, rather than weakening yourselves and hurting your bodies without due moderation" (180).

This leads to what is probably the most fascinating hypothesis advanced in the book: "Linked to the possibility of damage, ascetic pursuits are fundamentally opposed to the instrument. For Ignatius, the way to avert this possibility is to place the ascetic drive under the authority of a superior endowed with the prerogative to discern whether and how the drive must find expression." The organizational development of the Society during the 1550s, witnessing the rising power of the general's representatives in the provinces, was a consequence of the transformation of the Ignatian metaphorical discourse into a program of government for the order. In other words, as the author puts it, the renowned hierarchical and authoritarian spirit of the Society of Jesus can also be interpreted—though not exclusively—as a reaction to the threat of anarchy ("the possibility of being gripped by the hand of God," 226) which might result from considering oneself as a divine instrument.

In this insightful and penetrating book Christopher van Ginhoven Rey displays a deep knowledge of Ignatius's texts, and a remarkable ability to track down conceptual genealogies and retrace the development of ideas and images. Yet, at this stage of research, it does not offer enough evidence to advance a compelling new argument about the foundation of the Society of Jesus. *Instruments of the Divinity* is not a study in the history of religious culture, since it does not show any interest in possible employments of the metaphor of the instrument beyond the Ignatian writings: still, it would be interesting to trace the impact of that metaphor in the progress of the missionary enterprise of the early Society (I think of the relic of the right arm of St. Francis Xavier in Il Gesù church in Rome, worshipped as the instrument for

the baptism of Asian infidels), or in the use of performative arts in the Jesuits' colleges as an educational tool.

On the other hand, the book is not really a study in the history of the Society of Jesus, given that the cultural, theological, and political environment from which it emerged are totally forgotten. Just to mention one case, I am far from sure that the ascetic practices of the students of Coimbra can be simply dismissed as a remnant of late mediaeval monasticism, as fasts and flagellations occupy center stage in the Baroque religiosity that the Jesuits promoted throughout their history. Furthermore, the figure of Simão Rodrigues tells us a lot about tensions and hostilities in the early Society that are not covered in this study, where Ignatius appears as the only active player in the foundational process of the order. Indeed, as Michela Catto reminds us (*La Compagnia divisa*, Brescia, 2009), Rodrigues was a leading exponent of the inner dissent that described an alternative history in which the collegial work of the first companions of Ignatius was just as important as his charismatic leadership.

Instrument of the Divinity is a study in literary analysis, a brilliant contribution to the knowledge of Ignatius's imaginary in its literary forms: though it leaves the reader with the impression that the intuitions and inferences that could have made for an excellent short contribution have been expanded into a book which appears to lack an overall consistency, especially because it has been published in a series of studies in intellectual history, a discipline where the historical context of ideas should never be neglected.

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