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The Texts and Contexts of Ignatius Loyola's "Autobiography." New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. Pp xv + 230. Hb, \$85, Pb, \$28.

The "Autobiography" of Ignatius of Loyola is as confusing to use as it is to name. Neither autobiography nor biography, this account of Ignatius's life spanning the years 1521–1537 was fitfully dictated nearly twenty years later in Rome between 1553 and 1555, and then written down with the help of an amanuenses by Gonçalves da Câmara in Spanish and Italian in 1555 and 1556. As a result, historians of the Society of Jesus have always had to treat it with suspicion, even while drawing on it extensively. Teachers routinely employ it in college classrooms to explore Ignatius's early life while discreetly failing to deal with its problems.

For devotional purposes, the autobiography is also problematic. In *The Text and Contexts of Ignatius Loyola's "Autobiography,"* McManamon refers to the *Acta* (as numerous others have decided to call the "Autobiography") not as a literal or historical window into Ignatius's thought, but as a mirror reflecting key elements of Ignatian spirituality. The author's decision to use "Acta" instead of "Autobiography" as a working title indicates his decision to interpret the text as a reflection on the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. The author's treatment provides a fresh way of looking at this problematic source, and he is to be congratulated for the effort. Yet, because of the incompleteness and thinness of its historical research, and the inadequacy of the author's treatment of Renaissance reading, the book must ultimately be judged a useful and constructive misreading that confuses as much as it clarifies.

The book's five chapters begin with a concise history of the *Acta* from their original production (though the author is frustratingly vague about the crucial transfer from dictation to written product—not an insignificant detail), to their deliberate withdrawal from circulation during the Counter-Reformation, to their reappearance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the next four chapters, McManamon presents the *Acta* as three different "Mirrors" reflecting what he understands to be important themes and texts in Ignatian and Jesuit spirituality and apostolate: vainglory, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Gospel of Luke. The author is at his best when hewing most closely to the facts. Thus his introduction does a fine job of tracing the polemics among Jesuit leaders, including Pedro de Ribadeneyra, that led to the removal of the *Acta* from circulation after 1567. Only in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did the text reappear as a source for historians, and only after World War I was it widely available for devotion and pedagogy. McManamon rightly denotes it a "privileged and new source" (1).

The second chapter presents the *Acta* as a “mirror of vainglory,” the most convincing of McManamon’s arguments, in large part because it derives very much from Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle’s indispensable account, *Loyola’s Acts: The Rhetoric of the Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Rather than treat the text as a straightforward biographical narrative, the author reads against the grain to understand the lessons Ignatius must learn through tales of his physical and spiritual pride being humbled through God’s grace. This is a useful approach, for anyone using the *Acta* in teaching must quickly learn to spy the self-irony that lifts this tale from merely a rather banal account of the everyday to a text that can teach and inspire. Even here, though, the overreach that mars the book is on display. In the now famous story of the pilgrim, a Moor, a mule, and the Virgin Mary, McManamon writes astutely, “By letting the mule decide, Ignatius abandons a strict *hidalgo* code of honor” (23). But then the episode becomes a “mirror of improper ministry to marginal groups. Faith is a gift one cannot compel another to believe by threatening to take the person’s life” (24). Perhaps, but the tale gives no hint of this. Another way of reading, equally against the grain and equally focused on the Pilgrim’s “vainglory,” is to see it as Ignatius’s own example of his spiritual naiveté and presumption, in assuming that God would make decisions for him in this fashion.

The early chapters are rewarding, not as history but—precisely as McManamon intends them—as a reflection on the Ignatian pilgrim’s way. Chapter three nicely parallels the individual episodes of Ignatius’s life with the larger historical developments of the early Society of Jesus. The reader can trace not only the flash point of Ignatius’s own journey to 1537, but also the tensions and conflicts facing the Jesuits in the mid-1550s.

By chapter four, though, “The *Acta* as a Mirror of Luke,” the author’s increasing divergence from the text itself produces a mirror of over-determination. The problems begin with the specific decision to focus on Luke’s Gospel. McManamon never demonstrates any special significance of Luke for Ignatius. Yes, during his convalescence in 1521 Ignatius became more familiar with the Gospel, but by his own account it was through reading Ludolph of Saxony. Yes, Ignatius had to study scripture at Paris. Yes, Ignatius ended his contemplation on the life of Jesus with the Ascension, “a uniquely Lucan account” (100). Nowhere in any of this is there evidence of a specific and special Ignatian use of Luke, as opposed to the other Gospels. McManamon notes the “15 specific references” (100) to Luke in the *Spiritual Exercises*, but he would make a better case by contrasting this statistic with the number of references to other Gospels and scriptural texts. This is a crucial detail missing from his argument.

Perhaps more significantly, McManamon ignores the potential influence of Ludolph of Saxony in shaping Ignatius’s understanding. Whether or not

Ignatius in the 1520s read the Gospels as individual accounts, the one thing that is absolutely certain is that he devoured the *Vita Christi*. Surely, this should count for something. Ludolph (like other spiritual “biographers” of Christ) organized all the individual Gospels into a single chronological narrative. As a result, it is no accident that the Ascension appears at the end. The critical question is not whether Ignatius read the Gospel stories or the individual Gospels, or even which ones he read, but *how* he read them as an early sixteenth-century Spanish Christian.

Strikingly, though, after making the tenuous connection with Luke, the author never mentions Ignatius again until the concluding paragraph of this chapter. There is no sense of how Ignatius actually read Luke’s Gospel, only the way in which McManamon *wishes* Ignatius had read it. By this point, then, the *Acta* and Ignatius are less a mirror than a pretext for an independent spiritual exegesis of the Gospel of Luke, even focusing on the meaning of terms in the Greek, a language Ignatius never mastered, as far as we can tell.

McManamon’s book has many refreshing insights to offer, but one must use it with extreme caution, especially when pondering the historical Ignatius. The author succeeds in framing the *Acta* as a critical text in understanding the Society and its mission, but its problematic nature remains an unsolved puzzle. Ignatius’s own journey, redacted by Câmara and reflected in *his* spiritual account, now has another reflection in McManamon. Historically, at least, it is not necessarily clearer. The author’s “mirrors” become more distant with each chapter, and ultimately the reader can only view Ignatius through a glass, darkly.

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