Joseph A. Munitiz, S.J., ed. and trans.

The First Biographies of St. Ignatius Loyola: Diego Laínez and Juan Polanco.

Campion Hall, Oxford: Way Books, 2019. Pp. xxi + 158. Pb, €24.00.

The so-called “Autobiography” of St. Ignatius Loyola that the saint recounted sporadically to Luís Gonçalves da Câmara between 1552 and 1554 is the most well-known primary source on the life of the founder of the Society of Jesus. For centuries it collected dust in the Society’s archives, all but forgotten except to professional historians; but in the 1970s, Jesuit scholars published it in various languages as part of a larger effort, following the Second Vatican Council, to encourage studies in the Society’s history and spirituality.

Less well-known, even among scholars, are two early Lives that predate the “Autobiography.” In 1547, Diego Laínez, a co-founder of the Society, sent a lengthy letter to Juan Alfonso de Polanco, Ignatius’s new secretary, in which he recounted what he knew of Ignatius’s life and the origins of the Society. Polanco then used it as the nucleus of his own longer account, in which he copied much of Laínez’s text verbatim. Polanco also incorporated data from other early Jesuits and from a brief text in which Ignatius recounted his own election as first superior general of the order. Seven years later, Gonçalves consulted Laínez’s and Polanco’s Lives when composing the final form of the “Autobiography.”

Munitiz’s translation of both Lives—and of the aforementioned account of Ignatius’s election that Munitiz provides in an appendix—could not be timelier. For decades, writers have regarded the “Autobiography” as a straightforward historical account from a privileged source, when in fact the text was highly redacted—presumably by Gonçalves possibly with input from Ignatius—to resonate with motifs and spiritual wisdom found in such classics as the *Life of St. Antony*, *The Imitation of Christ*, Cassian’s *Institutes*, and Ignatius’s own *Spiritual Exercises*. More recently, some scholars like Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle have over-corrected by suggesting that the text is little more than pious fiction (*Loyola’s Acts: The Rhetoric of the Self* [Berkeley: University of California, 1991]).

The Lives of Laínez and Polanco mitigate both extremes. Clear similarities in content, form, and vocabulary between the three texts reveal the existence of an oral tradition, based on Ignatius’s frequent retellings of his own stories, that assures a basic historicity. At the same time, subtle but significant differences provide ample fodder for form-critical studies that would identify the priorities of each writer. For example, Gonçalves depicts Ignatius’s conversion as dramatically unexpected: a sinful man had his eyes opened by pious books that he was obliged to read. The Lives, however, suggest that enforced silence and solitude during his convalescence were sufficient to prompt his conversion,

and that he chose to read the books only later, specifically to reinforce that conversion (2–3, 42). The second version suggests that dissatisfaction with his old life—and perhaps even a religious vocation—had been rumbling inside him long before his injuries.

Munitiz generally foregoes idiomatic English for a close translation of the Spanish, which at times arguably obscures the meaning. When the bad spirit tempts Ignatius with thoughts of quitting, he responds, “Give me a certificate [*cédula*] that I am going to live one day more, and I’ll change my way of life!” (5, 45); in which case, “written assurance” would be clearer. Or again, the elliptical Spanish often requires additional qualifiers for clarification. After Ignatius gives his *hidalgo* vestments to a beggar, he feels a twinge of sadness, thinking, “If only you had your [original] clothes, would it not be better to dress yourself [once again in them]?” (5, Láinez), or, “Would it not be better if I [still] had his clothes [that I have just given to him]?” (45, Polanco).

Greater attention to motifs of medieval literature would illuminate various passages. Láinez and Polanco repeatedly draw attention to Ignatius’s nobility, which Munitiz correctly surmises: “had perhaps a special significance in Spain at this time” (38n4). In fact, the conversion of nobles and the wealthy to Christianity or to a more intense practice of it (e.g., Perpetua, Antony, Francis) had long exercised fascination on the faithful. It is a trope in *The Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine, and it explains why news of Ignatius’s conversion spread so rapidly and far, a fact to which Gonçalves alludes repeatedly.

Or again, Láinez and Polanco referred to a private vow of chastity that Ignatius had made *non secundam scientiam*—a classic medieval expression, derived from the Vulgate of Romans 10:2—meaning that a Christian had acted piously but without sufficient reflection and prudence. The implicit context was the popularity of private vows in the sixteenth century, and Ignatius’s ambivalence as superior general about Jesuits making them, insofar as they could provoke scruples or hinder availability for mission. Munitiz initially speculated that the Latin expression meant that Ignatius had not followed ecclesiastical protocol for making a vow (4n11, 43), but then later deduced its correct meaning (69n55).

A great benefit of the *Lives* is that they draw attention to inconsistencies and ambiguities found frequently in the writings of early Jesuits that seem to result from glossing over delicate points of history. For example, Polanco gives the impression that the companions unanimously agreed upon the controversial name *Compañía de Jesús*, but shortly afterward, he drops clear hints that Ignatius had received concerted pushback from the others (91–92). Or again, Láinez and Polanco meticulously avoid mention of followers of Ignatius who had defected, created scandal, and jeopardized papal approbation of

the Society. Consequently, in some stories, the identities of the protagonists appear to be unclear (e.g., 21n55), or the details seemingly inconsistent (e.g., 79n70).

Notwithstanding an excellent English translation of Ribadeneyra's *Life of Ignatius of Loyola* by Claude Pavur (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2014), the "Autobiography" remains for many Jesuits and laity the privileged source for teaching the connections between Ignatius's experiences and his doctrine, so that the lessons often return to the same unexamined chestnuts. In that sense, Munitiz's translation might contribute to a second watershed moment in English-language studies of Ignatius's life. That, at least, is my own hope for his work.

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Michael Questier

Dynastic Politics and the British Reformations, 1558–1630. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. 528. Hb, \$45.00.

In *Casablanca*, a film with many eminently quotable lines, Rick explains the predicament to Ilse: "But it doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world." Without too much exaggeration, this sentiment also summarized traditional, textbook, Whig historiography's approach to early modern English Catholicism. Catholics, of every hue, were irritants easily dismissed in a paragraph or a page so that the author could concentrate on the glorious, ineluctable rise of Protestantism. Questier, either alone or with backup, has repeatedly challenged the establishment over its myopia: "History, it is often said, is written by the victors and, at one remove, by those who, down the centuries and in our own time, have desperately wanted to identify with those whom they take to have been the victors" (3). Thirty years ago, Christopher Haigh wrote *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) to demonstrate how the then *au courant* aggressively revisionist approach effected the traditional historical narrative of the era. Questier undertakes a similar task: "The contention of this volume, however, is that there are reasonable grounds for reintroducing and reintegrating into the 'mainstream' what one might confidently call Catholic voices