CHAPTER 5

Ignatius of Loyola and His First Companions

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Íñigo of Loyola, a Man of Relationships

Íñigo was the youngest of eleven brothers. His childhood and adolescence were full of many diverse relationships. Surely the tower house of Loyola was frequently inhabited by more than a few members of the family, neighbors, relatives, or servants. Upon leaving for Arévalo to enter the service of Velázquez de Cuéllar (1506), Íñigo was forced to restructure his relationships from those typical of a closed, local family setting to a quite different one—that of an open, cultural, politico-administrative one, which courtly circles provided.

The life change brought about in great part by his time of solitude and illness in the tower house of Loyola, in addition to reading the Vita Christi and the Flos Sanctorum, provoked in him a strong reaction in the other direction. If his “mundane” past had been full of social relationships, his “divine” present would have to be inhabited by solitude and a lack of friendships. From the time of his childhood, Íñigo knew he was a person with social influence, known in powerful circles and contexts, even far from his own land. As he points out in his so-called Autobiography, “To avoid recognition he left the town at daybreak. He did not go by the direct route that leads to Barcelona, as he might have met those who knew him and would honor him, but he took a byway that led him to a town called Manresa.” His new life with God (or so he thought in the first days of his conversion) would be the opposite in every way from his past life of sin. Where and how would human relationships fit in now?

In the beginning Ignatius lived with the internal tension between seeking silence and radical solitude, which even led him to consider Cartuja as a new home, and the inclination to create relationships and human groups through which he could share with others his incipient religious experience and his first project of living and dying in Jerusalem. This inclination, an inalienable...
part of his personality, led him to create “social nets” in diverse stages of his life. First there were the female followers at Manresa, known as the Íñigas; later the first group of companions during the Alcalá/Salamanca period (1522–1523) formed principally of Calixto de Sa, Lope de Cáceres, Juan de Arteaga, and Juan de Reynalde;5 and once in Paris, a small group of brilliant students who were fascinated by the Spiritual Exercises.6 These were preliminary attempts at forming a definitive group of companions. Ignatius tried “to preserve and increase” these first groups of friends that he was able to bring together, but something was missing. In the words of his secretary Juan Alfonso de Polanco, “This second creation, too [in Paris], like the first [in Alcalá], lasted only a little while, all three later withdrawing from the path they began, though still living virtuously.”7

The Consolidation of a Desire: A Group

Ignatius’s third attempt at forming a group was the definitive one. In Paris, the first and smallest societas was established (Fig. 5.1). How did Ignatius arrange the internal structure of the group so that it would finally result in such a committed common project? Various factors contributed to this. Firstly, Paris was where Ignatius spent the most time—seven years (1528–1534)—following his conversion; the time factor offered stability and continuity to the relationships. Secondly, the university context to which they all belonged favored an environment propitious for encounters, conversation, and shared spiritual life. Having the same studies and same professors encouraged theological affinity and similar ways of thinking. Polanco recounts that “although they lived in different places, during the year they were now in one person’s house, now in another’s, eating together in kindness and looking after one another; whence was born much love for one another and mutual help and affection.”8 Pierre Favre comments that “living in the same dwelling, we shared the same table and the same purse,” and Laínez remembers “having a special love for one another and helping each other out in worldly things as much as we could” until “we finally ended up having the same desires and the same wishes.”9

6 Ignatius of Loyola, Autobiography, 77–78.
7 Font. narr. I, 179.
8 Font. narr. I, 182 (55).
9 Favre, 493 and Font. narr. I, 104.