CHAPTER 7

The Writings of Ignatius of Loyola as Seminal Text

Pierre-Antoine Fabre

Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, is the author of an immense body of written work... that he did not write, and for which he was the authority or the spirit. If one excludes the pages from his *Journal* (1544–1545), we have no signed manuscript of the founding documents, the *Constitutions* or the *Spiritual Exercises*, and even fewer from the *Autobiography* that he “dictated” at the end of his life (1553–1555). As for his prodigious *Letters*, written between 1524 and 1556, only a very small portion was written by his own hand. Nevertheless, the same thread connects all of these written texts and constitutes what one would call a *seminal text* of the Society of Jesus. This thread connects a monologue (*Journal, Autobiography*) to a dialogue (*Exercises*, a portion of his letters) and to the many writings, whether their recipients are multiple (in the *Instructions*, for example) or the authors are themselves multiple (in the *Constitutions*). In other words, the seminal text constitutes a community, which I will attempt to demonstrate herein.

Three comments must be made concerning my methodology before examining this collection of texts. First of all, this collection of texts eludes any and all internal hierarchy, contrary to what has sometimes been suggested, treating the *Journal* as an attempt to implement the *Exercises* and upon which it would therefore be dependent or by finding in the *Letters* the prolongation of a spiritual direction, or by making of the *Autobiography* a sort of primary text, indistinguishable from the very life of the founder.2 These organizational approaches are generally the symptom of a difficulty in understanding Ignatius of Loyola as a mystical prophet and spiritual figure, as well as a member of a governing body.

---

1 Translated by Andréa Javel (Boston College).
2 For the first time in the history of Ignatian editions, Maurice Giuliani, in the *Writings*, published in France in 1991, places the *Autobiography* at the end of the volume, and not at its beginning, as was the case, for example in the Spanish *Obras* (Ignacio Iparraguirre) or in the Italian *Scritti* (Maurizio Costa). In doing so, the testamentary purpose of the *Autobiography* was suggested. Many of the elements of what is to follow are a result of the work that Maurice Giuliani asked of me for his volume. I am forever grateful to the confidence he showed me and of which I wanted to bear witness in my edition of the *Journal des motions intérieures* (Bruxelles: 2007). Unfortunately, it was only published after his death in 2003.
Thus, seeing in the *Journal* a scansion of the *Exercises* solves the riveting problem of the origin of these *Exercises*, something that Ignatius, by definition, could not have done, as if he had received them from another, who he himself must have received them from another, etc. Yet how can one both make the *Exercises* the fundamental center of spiritual life of the Society of Jesus and exclude the founder himself? In my opinion, this can be done. It contributes to the complex relationship between the founder and the institution he founded, an institution that he eludes and which eluded him, as the end of the *Autobiography* demonstrates quite nicely: the latter, dictated between 1553–1555, was suspended in 1540, on the threshold of pontifical approval of the institute, in an extraordinary gesture of restitution of the moment of foundation (1540) at the moment of institution (1553–1555); a restitution which demonstrates the *heteronomy* of these two eras and the continuing strength of the foundation in the established institution. As one can see, removing Ignatius from the exercise (as an exercitant) of his own *Spiritual Exercises*, is not without consequence, and is probably one of the reasons that the reconstruction of the *Journal* was seen as a form of the *Exercises* in certain editions of the last century. It is not the only reason, and other aspects of the *Journal* will indicate other directions below.

One could also ponder the motives for dividing up Ignatius's *Letters*, when doing so separates and isolates from the “spiritual letters,” resolving another difficulty, however copiously explained in the preparatory works of the *Directory of the Exercises*, published in 1599: that of dialogue as the irreducible location of the *Exercises*. There is a strong relationship between the exercise of the imagination and that of the spoken word, both being different from “images” on the one hand and writing on the other (writing and reading). This relationship marks the first century of the Society of Jesus with Loyola’s spiritual imprint—very precisely in the first illustrated editions of the *Spiritual Exercises* around 1640. The transformation of the dialogue into correspondence through the homology of the *Exercises* and through certain series of letters appears to be a retrospective reading of this first moment. The stakes are not less important than in the preceding case, since it is this suggestion regarding the function of images in Christian life and the reaffirmation of the meaning of the word in leading a spiritual life that are involved

---