Looking at the year 1521, one's eyes might pop out at the outrageous coincidences which, because of their very improbability, must surely be related. In 1521, Magellan's fleet (sans Magellan) completed its circumnavigation of the globe and limped into home port. In 1521, Conquistador Cortés toppled Tenochtitlan. To add to these world historic events, in Rome Pope Leo X made good on his threat to excommunicate an annoying north German monk, Martin Luther, for heresy. And, finally in a battle at Pamplona pitting the great dynastic rivals of the age—Habsburg and Valois—a Basque nobleman fell, then rose to lead a spiritual revival that exploited Magellan's travels and Cortés's conquests to confront Luther's newly-shaped Protestantism.

As irresistible as the temptation to relate these scattered events of 1521 has been, to indulge it is historically misleading. Ignatius and Luther never met, and though Ignatius knew something of “Lutheranism,” Luther never heard of the Jesuits' founder or of the Society of Jesus itself. Nor is it at all clear that Ignatius intended his Society to be a bulwark against the Protestant flood or that he was even a church reformer in the first place. The historical literature comparing the two men involves anachronism and stereotype rather than the details of their lives. Historians who talk of Ignatius and Luther have really been referring to Jesuits and Lutherans, as these groups crystallized in the half century following the deaths of their founders (Luther in 1546 and Ignatius in 1556). Yet viewing Luther and Ignatius together is also revealing, both about the men themselves and the age in which they worked. This article, therefore, begins with an attempt to clarify the historical record and ends with what the author hopes will be a constructive misreading.

Historians of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations have often placed Ignatius and Luther in opposition because one of the grand narratives of the early modern period involves a militant Society of Jesus pushing back the Protestant Reformation's ever-expanding frontiers. These arguments were a commonplace of German historical writing in the nineteenth century (as will be seen below), but still in the mid-twentieth century, a historian as distinguished as Hubert Jedin would point to Ignatius's military language and Jesuits'

Still, the tendency to see Ignatius in the light of the Lutheran Reformation (or vice versa) is not just a product of modern historiographical taste. Just after Ignatius’s death in 1556, Jerónimo Nadal, authoritative interpreter of Loyola’s goals and plans, explicitly linked the rise of the Society with the appearance of Lutheranism. And in a striking statement from 1562, Nadal wrote, “God called our Father Ignatius in about the same year that Luther left his convent and contracted his scandalous marriage. [...] From this fact we understand in a special way how the Society was raised up to help the Church in Germany, in India or wherever.”\footnote{Jeronimo Nadal, 1562, quoted in Philip Endean, “Ignatius in Lutheran Light,” \textit{The Month} 24 (1991): 271.} Juan Alfonso de Polanco, Loyola’s long-term secretary, in 1564, also claimed, “[...] when God, because of our sins, permitted Martin Luther in Germany to declare war on the apostolic Holy See and the Catholic religion [...] at the very same time, his divine Providence began to prepare an antidote, so to speak, to counter this poison, in the striking conversion of Fr Ignatius Loyola.”\footnote{Juan Alfonso de Polanco, \textit{Fontes Narrativi de S. Ignatio de Loyola et de Societatis Iesu initiis}, vol. 1, ed. Fernández Zapico and Cándido de Dalmases (Rome: 1943). The quotation is translated by Terence O’Reilly, “Ignatius Loyola and the Counter-Reformation: The Hagiographic Tradition,” \textit{Heythrop Journal} 31 (1990): 465.}

Clearly these early Jesuits saw something more in the events around 1521 than mere coincidence. As O’Malley himself notes, “The now familiar diptych, so beloved of historians, of Luther on one side and Ignatius on the other, was first painted by the early Jesuits themselves.”\footnote{O’Malley, “Attitudes of the Early Jesuits toward Misbelievers,” \textit{The Way} 68 (1990): 64.} Further, Nadal in this period had begun to reinterpret some Jesuit practices in order to fit them for the battle with heresy.\footnote{O’Malley, “Attitudes of the Early Jesuits toward Misbelievers,” 64.} Ignatius agreed by 1554 that the Society was at least in part mandated to combat Protestantism.