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## Another Ignatian History: Including Women in the Story of Jesuit Mission

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### Abstract

Orientation programs at Jesuit universities often include a review of the life of Ignatius. What is missing from the official history of Ignatius are the stories of the women with whom he lived and worked, who contributed financially, politically, and emotionally to Ignatius' formation and that of the early Jesuits. What is also missing is a critical feminist analysis of the historical context out of which Ignatius, the Spiritual Exercises, and the Society of Jesus were born. In this article, I argue that women provided essential scaffolding to bolster Ignatius' identity and vocation, and likewise contributed to the early establishment and pastoral work of the Society, and that the Spiritual Exercises were a means through which this collaboration happened. I look at three moments in the life of the Society that illustrate the relationship between women and Jesuits that could be shared at Jesuit educational institutions as part of mission formation programs that seek to move Jesuit universities to a deeper engagement with social justice, diversity, and inclusion.

### Introduction

Orientation programs at Jesuit universities often include the biography of Ignatius. Faculty, staff, and students learn about the Basque nobleman born in 1491, raised to serve as a royal knight, who suffered a near-fatal injury at the battle of Pamplona against the French, resulting in a lengthy recovery during which he had a conversion experience. We hear about his intense spiritual struggles, culminating in his decision to devote his life to serving God, his run-ins with the judges of the Inquisition who questioned his authority, his development of the Spiritual Exercises, and his recruitment of nine fellow students at the University of Paris with whom he eventually formed the Society of Jesus. We learn that Ignatius and his male companions in 1540 founded a new apostolic order of Catholic clergy whose purpose was to serve the people of God most in need, and to "help souls," a mission which eventually became focused on education.

What is missing from the official history of Ignatius are the stories of the women with whom he lived and worked, who contributed financially, politically, and emotionally to Ignatius' formation and that of the early Jesuits. What is also missing is a critical feminist analysis of the historical context out of which Ignatius, the Exercises, and

the Society of Jesus were born. Margo Heydt and Sarah Melcher make this point in their article, "Reflections from an Ignatian Pilgrimage," which they wrote following a trip for faculty at Xavier University to visit the historical landmarks of Ignatius' life.<sup>1</sup> They discovered during the experience how significant Mary was to Ignatius and the early Jesuits, far more so than had been portrayed in the books they had read in preparation for the journey. Heydt and Melcher reflected on the gap between the importance of Mary to Ignatius historically and how little her influence is reflected in official biographies. They extend their curiosity regarding Mary's exclusion to the other women in the life of Ignatius whose stories are also missing.

Heydt and Melcher suggest that the stories of the women who influenced and helped establish the Society of Jesus must be reclaimed and retold in the official discourse on the history and development of Jesuit education. They turn to Decree 14 from the Jesuits' 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregation, "Jesuits and the Situation of Women in the Church and Civil Society," as further reason for Jesuits to take seriously the contributions of women in the historical development of the Society of Jesus, that indeed, the inclusion of women's stories and acknowledgement of their involvement is critical

to making the contemporary context of Jesuit education more inclusive.

Looking to the past is complex. There is a danger in applying modern viewpoints to the effort to make sense of a completely different culture and context that can blur the truth. For example, one might assume that Ignatius shared the modern understanding of gender equity as a commonly accepted social value, as most do in the contemporary US educational context. To do so would be anachronistic and misleading, as gender equity was not a commonly accepted social value during his time; instead the opposite was true. Yet several scholars have attempted to pull together a version of Ignatius' life that highlights the role of women in his early life, his formation, and in the early days of the Society, and that is meanwhile mindful of avoiding anachronistic assumptions. Their historical analysis enables us to recognize that relations between genders have always been complex, that they change over time, and that the stories of women and men are connected.<sup>2</sup>

Viewing the life story of Ignatius through a feminist lens influences our consideration of male and female roles in church and society today. In their groundbreaking work, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women*, authors Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin, and Elizabeth Liebert suggest that it is critical to recover the stories and influence of these women in order to form right relationships for mission today,<sup>3</sup> particularly if Jesuit universities seek to build communities of equity and inclusion. When women's stories are excluded from official institutional history, women themselves are rendered invisible and irrelevant, an illusion that perpetuates the myth of male power, independence, and superiority. Other minority and marginalized persons are likewise outcast and overlooked, their marginalization justified by the myth of one dominant social group operating successfully and independently throughout history.

Rather, the inclusion of women in the official narrative of Jesuit history allows contemporary listeners to hear the history of the Society not as a tale about male self-determination, but as an example of what can happen when a complex community of actors consciously and actively seek

to align themselves with God's call to improve their world. It becomes a tale of flourishing in community, rather than flourishing apart. It challenges conventional notions of male clerical superiority and independence. Women partner with Jesuits and Jesuit institutions today by contributing their money, scholarship, labor, connections, companionship, and children to the work of the Society. Women's involvement and resources are vital to the maintenance and continuation of the Jesuit order and its institutions—indeed, its very mission. Reclaiming women's place in the history of Jesuit education is a vital step toward establishing diverse communities of inclusion and justice at Jesuit educational institutions today.

Historian Gemma Simmonds writes that “while the Jesuits were not exempt from the social prejudices and misogynistic assumptions of their time, Ignatius himself had a wide spiritual correspondence with prominent women and never hesitated to enlist their support in promoting the welfare and apostolic ministries of his nascent order.”<sup>4</sup> Although several women were early and substantial benefactors of Ignatius and the early Society (in particular, Inés Pasqual and Isabel Roser), Ignatius' partnership with women went beyond the strictly financial. Elizabeth Dreyer writes, “it is safe to say that among Ignatius' earliest experiences of pastoral work, his encounters with women are prominent. He conversed with women about the things of God, directed women in the Spiritual Exercises, helped reform female convents, and engaged women of means in ministries.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Simmonds affirms that “the early generation of Jesuits offered the Spiritual Exercises to women and trained them in turn to be spiritual guides to other women, and there are many instances of fruitful apostolic collaboration between Jesuits and female friends and companions.”<sup>6</sup> Hugo Rahner, whose volume on the letters between Ignatius and women, first published in German in 1956, prompted much contemporary scholarship on the topic, argues that “there is now no doubt—even though earlier lives of the saint from Ribadeneira's on have been largely silent on the subject—that Ignatius of Loyola had his first, still uncrystallized experience of pastoral work in connection with women,” and that “[women] were the first to whom Ignatius made known the ideas from which sprang the

*Spiritual Exercises*.<sup>77</sup> Given the social and ecclesial restraints of sixteenth century Europe, including strict social norms regarding appropriate interaction between men and women as well as official church teaching directing women religious to remain cloistered, Ignatius' spiritual and pastoral collaboration with women begs our attention.

### **Historical Context of Ignatius and Early Society of Jesus**

First, let us look at the historical and religious context in which Ignatius was living and working in sixteenth century Europe. Ignatius lived from 1491 to 1556, a period of profound social transformation. Jill Raitt writes, "the story of European Christian spirituality from 1450 to 1700 begins within a larger cultural history of urban development, the spreading Italian Renaissance, the European invention of the printing press, the growth of national consciousness, the stabilization of national languages, and the development of navigational tools that would send Europeans around the world."<sup>78</sup> Thomas Worcester describes, "[Ignatius] grew up at a time when Spain was rapidly becoming the dominant power of Europe and indeed of the world."<sup>79</sup> This complex historical context must be taken into consideration with any analysis of the history of the Society of Jesus, the life of Ignatius, and contemporary adaptations of Ignatian spirituality.

Ignatius was born in 1491, the year Christopher Columbus gained permission and financial backing from the king and queen of Spain to sail the Atlantic in search of the West Indies.<sup>10</sup> Ignatius' family of origin held significant economic, political, and religious power in northern Spain. The family Loyola had controlled the province of Guipúzcoa in the Kingdom of Navarre in the Basque region since 1387. Historian Lu Ann Homza explains that not only was the Loyola family responsible for the military defense, economic productivity, and governance of the province under the Spanish monarch, but they also held responsibility for running the churches, abbeys, and chapels of the area. This responsibility included providing for the sacramental and pastoral needs of the faithful and carrying out religious reforms initiated by the Church. For these contributions, the family

received a portion of all tithes to the churches as well as rental income. Therefore, argues Homza, "Ignatius ... was certainly exposed to one of the ironies of Catholicism in early modern Europe: that church offices were as valuable for their income and privileges as for any spiritual vocation."<sup>11</sup> Ignatius was born and raised in a family that had elite access to power within the Church and the kingdom of Spain. He was groomed to share in these responsibilities and reap the benefits as an adult.<sup>12</sup> Ignatius likely developed a sense of himself as a religious and civic leader who had a special responsibility to serve society as an adult. His approach to forming and leading the Society of Jesus was likely influenced by his upbringing as a member of the noble class with all of the rights, privileges, and responsibilities that entailed.

Culturally speaking, Europe was on the cusp of the Renaissance. The printing press had just been invented, which got books and religious texts including scripture into the hands of the laity. Scientists were starting to suggest that the earth might be round, not flat. In concert with the social, scientific, and geo-political developments of the time, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw significant religious tension and change. Spanish monarchs, politically aligned with the Church in Rome, expelled Muslims and Jews from the country; meanwhile the Church sought to enforce, with the help of Spanish civil authorities, centralization and uniformity in Catholic belief and practice.<sup>13</sup> Laity had started to speak out against abuses of clerical power, demanding reforms within the priesthood and beginning to take matters spiritual and religious into their own hands.<sup>14</sup> There was a growing split between spirituality (prayer and piety) and theology (doctrine and magisterial teaching) as lay men and women sought ways to live out their religious beliefs without joining religious orders under church authority and control.<sup>15</sup> Lay spirituality and reform movements in the form of sodalities and confraternities took shape.<sup>16</sup> Popular religious devotions, particularly devotion to Marian shrines, grew; religious writing and guidelines on personal piety proliferated.<sup>17</sup>

Two major ecclesial events were underway during Ignatius' lifetime that had an impact on his religious worldview and activities: the Spanish

Inquisition and the Protestant Reformation. The Spanish Inquisition began in 1478 “to prosecute Judaizing *conversos*, namely individuals of Jewish ancestry who were baptized as Christians but who continued to practice aspects of Mosaic Law.”<sup>18</sup> The Church and the state conspired to prosecute and execute those believed to be holding onto their Jewish faith traditions even though claiming to be baptized Christians. Meanwhile, Church reform movements culminated in the Protestant Reformation when Martin Luther publicly challenged the Roman Catholic Church in 1517 on ninety-five points, including the practice of collecting money for sacramental purposes (known as indulgences). The target of the Inquisition then extended to anyone suspected of supporting Luther’s claims or of challenging official church teaching. Targets included *alambrados*, those considered “illuminated ones,” who spoke publicly about spiritual matters without official Church sanction.<sup>19</sup> Counter-Reformation efforts to contain and suppress any initiative by Protestants—or anyone—who challenged Rome’s central authority very much defined the Church at the time when Ignatius was developing the Exercises and founding the Society of Jesus.

The Crusades were ongoing during this time: a series of wars initiated and sustained by civil and church authorities since the eleventh century to defend and expand Western Christendom. Biographer Hans Wolter suggests that Ignatius internalized a “crusade spirituality” characterized by the notion of the church militant: going to battle under the banner of Christ, spreading the Christian faith, and fueled by the popular folk piety of relics, devotions, and pilgrimages. Wolter points out several aspects of crusade spirituality evident in Ignatius: his understanding of receiving a “call” of God, likening Christ to a temporal King and leader of the crusade or battle, the militant language, the willingness to risk death for Christ, obedience to the Pope akin to a soldier’s obedience to the king, and the desire for inner conversion to model his life on Christ’s.<sup>20</sup> The folk religion in which Ignatius was raised prior to his formal education, along with the militant language and symbolism of the crusades in which military conquest was fused with propagation of the Christian faith, came together for Ignatius and is evident throughout the Spiritual Exercises. The

Exercises contain multiple references to the symbols and language popular in the era of the Crusades such as military banners to describe the way of Christ, receiving a call from Christ as one would a temporal authority, and battling evil spirits the way one would enter into warfare. The movements of the Exercises are informed by crusade spirituality, which must be explained and put in context in order for the Exercises to be relevant for a contemporary audience.

Women’s place in the Church and society during the life of Ignatius was complex and involved “tensions [between] authority and humility, public/social and private/domestic roles, control and obedience, enclosed convents and public ministry, and fear of women’s power versus need for their contributions,” as described by Elizabeth Dreyer.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, Dreyer explains that although the period of the Reformation saw an increased commitment by religious orders to serve the poor and engage in charitable acts, as well as an increased access to religious literature, these opportunities were not available to women in equal measure. She writes, “the trend was toward limiting women to the private sphere,” and the “centralization of ecclesial power was mirrored by a strengthening of patriarchal power in emerging nation-states and within the nuclear family.”<sup>22</sup> Women’s roles were limited to maintaining the nuclear family, which supported and allowed for the independence of men in the civic, ecclesial, and public spheres. Dreyer makes the point that relegating women to work exclusively within the home coincided with, and was required for, the centralization of ecclesial power and the development of the nation-state model for establishing a global empire. Limiting women to the home was required for the Church and state to consolidate its power and wealth. For women, the choice became marriage, prostitution,<sup>23</sup> or the convent.

Regarding the latter, there was no model for women’s active religious orders; in fact, it was not allowed under canon law. Lisa Fullam explains, “women religious of this time, even members of female branches of active male orders like the Dominicans, were cloistered, a situation that was to be set in canonical stone with the Tridentine decree in 1563 that all women under a religious rule must be enclosed.”<sup>24</sup> Fullam describes that

“ministry as such was not the problem: ministerial opportunities for women, especially those wishing to work with children or other women, were readily available . . . Rather, the issue was the juxtaposition of the somewhat daring, even scandalous, activities of women doing charitable work with the decorum expected of women with vows acknowledged by the Church.”<sup>25</sup> The pastoral ministry of the Church was divided between men’s work and women’s work, a set of distinctions that supported and perpetuated the myth of male superiority that required female submission. Such was the context within which the Society of Jesus took shape.

Ruth Liebowitz’s influential paper, “Virgins in the Service of Christ,” points out that the efforts by women in the Counter-Reformation period to form apostolic communities had been ongoing since the Middle Ages with groups such as the Beguines; by the sixteenth century, however, they were forced to be enclosed. She emphasizes that the impulse to serve the poor and help society in response to a spiritual calling was not unique to female religious groups at the time, citing the Jesuits as an example of a male order doing the same. The difference was that the male orders were “conceived of in terms of specifically *priestly* pastoral work—above all preaching and administering the sacraments. Their associations . . . thus inevitably were all male, because of the traditional exclusion of women from the priesthood.”<sup>26</sup> Liebowitz argues that “the pastoral emphasis of the Counter-Reformation tended to accentuate differences in sex roles within Roman Catholicism. This emphasis also tended to accentuate the inequality between these sex roles.”<sup>27</sup> Church authority segregated the pastoral work of the Church according to gender; there was women’s work and there was men’s work according to social and cultural customs of the time.

To illustrate the impact of gender differentiation in the pastoral functions of the Church, we can look at Ignatius and the early Jesuits. Ignatius initially did not plan to become a priest. John O’Malley comments several times in *The First Jesuits* that “they had no intention of founding a new religious order.”<sup>28</sup> Ignatius sought the freedom to “help souls” wherever he was needed. It became clear to him, however, that anyone

seeking to do apostolic work under a religious framework was required to abide by canon law—and one option available to Ignatius that was not available to his female counterparts was priestly ordination. The option of priestly ordination gave Ignatius and his early companions social credibility and standing within the Church from which they could innovate and expand. They chose the priesthood for practical reasons; their female counterparts could not do the same.

### **Female Sexuality Purity and Misogyny in Early Christianity**

The backdrop of these limitations on women was, in Dreyer’s words, “a preoccupation—some would say obsession—with sexual purity . . . which rested in large part on female sexual purity.”<sup>29</sup> Embedded in the obsession with female sexuality was a misogyny with deep roots in Christian theology and philosophy. Misogynistic philosophy and theology gave rise to the popular characteristic of women as witches easily coopted to serve as agents of evil. Rosemary Radford Ruether, in a discussion on Renaissance feminism in her book, *Women and Redemption*, describes “a misogynistic tradition long rooted in late medieval sermons and popular stories and songs denouncing women’s slippery and manipulative natures” used to justify the Church’s subjugation of women.<sup>30</sup> *Malleus Malificarum*, a handbook on witch-hunting, was published by two Dominican monks in 1486. The widely distributed handbook put into popular and religious consciousness the suggestion that women are inherently defective, prone to demonic influence, and therefore should be feared, controlled, and in certain cases, jailed and executed.<sup>31</sup> Misogynist portrayals of women as prone to witchcraft and Satanic activity originated in patristic and medieval writings that painted women as incomplete, defective, and inferior to men.<sup>32</sup> These ideas were used to influence and justify the Church’s official ban on female apostolic orders and ecclesial leadership. A related set of ideas are captured by the strict church teaching regulating human sexuality with a focus on sexual morality in women in particular.

### Three Moments in the History of Women and the Society of Jesus

Ignatius was born and lived in a complex period of growth, tension, and change within the Church, during which spirituality and faith were coming out of the cloister into the world. Religious movements were proliferating under the anxious scrutiny of the Roman Church, which itself was compelled by a quest for global expansion and empire. Jill Raitt summarizes the period as the time when “religious leaders understood that the increasingly literate populace needed not only instruction but also intentional spiritual methods that they could incorporate into their lives as lay people. From the beguines to St. Ignatius to St. Vincent de Paul, retreats, spiritual direction, and books helped Catholic laity to follow spiritual paths.”<sup>33</sup>

Threads of all of these historical factors can be recognized in the biography of Ignatius and, specifically, in the development of the Spiritual Exercises. An analysis of his relationships with women reveals evidence of the gender and sex stereotyping of the time, as well as Ignatius’ impulse toward reform and innovation. We are looking at a both/and situation here. Ignatius was a product of his time and generation, as well as a synthesizer and innovator, who pulled together from the sources available to him and his personal experience—a process in his work that remains relevant today for its adaptability and flexibility. To portray him as one or the other, as either a radical reformist or a loyal servant of the Pope, is mistaken. He was both, and as is the case with many charismatic leaders, it was his agility with nuance and ambiguity that makes him, and the educational institutions he founded, relevant today.

To illustrate my point, I will look at three moments in the life of the Society that shed light on the both/and nature of the tension and struggle between women and Jesuits, and the ways in which both groups have handled the limitations of social and ecclesial norms. I argue that the Spiritual Exercises, as well as reflection on the Exercises, freed individuals, including Ignatius, to think beyond social and ecclesial constraints based on gender and to adopt a posture of adaptability, flexibility, and openness to the Holy Spirit.

Specifically, I will discuss the experience of Isabel Roser (1523–1554), Mary Ward’s Institute of English Ladies, (1609–1631), and the development of the decree, “Jesuits and the Situation of Women in the Church and Civil Society,” during the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (1995). I chose these three moments because they each illuminate particular tensions and complexities that still exist for women and Jesuits. The three examples illustrate what happens when women are included, what happens when they are not, and why this issue remains unresolved and still calls for our attention.

#### Isabel Roser (1523–1554)

Isabel Roser is one of four women who became a Jesuit during the life of Ignatius. She was a spiritual companion and follower of Ignatius and one of his original patrons. Isabel Roser was a Spanish noblewoman whom Ignatius met when he was staying in Barcelona from February through March 1523 and waiting for passage to Rome, then to the Holy Land. The wife of a wealthy merchant, Isabel Roser had important political and ecclesiastical ties, and hers was “among the most influential families of the capital.”<sup>34</sup> Isabel met Ignatius when he was sitting on the altar steps of her church. In her words, “it seemed to me that there was a radiance about his face, and I heard in my heart a voice which said: ‘Call him, call him!’”<sup>35</sup> She invited him to her home for a meal after which he gave a spiritual talk by which she was deeply moved. As their relationship developed, Isabel became an important patron of Ignatius. She personally funded his studies and solicited donations from other noblewomen of Barcelona to do the same. In 1532, Ignatius wrote Isabel a letter of gratitude stating, “for to you I owe more than to anyone I know in this life.”<sup>36</sup> Several letters exist in which Ignatius provides spiritual counsel to Isabel, and Isabel shares information about her personal and prayer life with Ignatius.<sup>37</sup> Hugo Rahner writes, “Loyola would not have been the great spiritual director who in many of his ideas was in advance of his age, if he had not also known how to deal with all the questions, requests and projects which came to him...from women both lay and religious.”<sup>38</sup> Isabel Roser was one of these women.<sup>39</sup>

In a letter dated November 10, 1532, Ignatius writes to Isabel from Paris, thanking her for her financial support of his studies. He also comforts Isabel, who had written him about facing ridicule and false accusations for her support of Ignatius. He writes:

for from the moment when you give yourself to God our Lord, desiring and striving for his glory, honour and service, you are already embarked on warfare against the world, are setting up your standards against it, and disposing yourself to struggle against what is exalted by embracing what is lowly, resolved to accept indifferently things both high and low—honour and dishonor, riches or poverty, to be loved or hated, welcomed or rejected, in short the world’s glory or its abuse.<sup>40</sup>

The use of “crusade spirituality” language is clear, as Ignatius presents the life of faith as one of facing struggle and doing battle. One might surmise that these words had a different meaning for Isabel as a woman than they would have for Ignatius as a man. Given the restricted role of women in church and civil society, women were already compelled to accept what was lowly; for women, it was not a choice. Unlike many women, though, Isabel had significant economic status due to her wealth in Barcelona. What is noteworthy here is that Ignatius uses the same language he uses later with his male counterparts in offering solace and encouragement to Isabel. His advice to her is not gender-specific.

In the same letter to Isabel, Ignatius shares a story about a young woman who disguised herself as a man in order to become a Franciscan friar. Hugo Rahner refers to this story as the legend, commonly known from the Middle Ages, of St. Marina.<sup>41</sup> In the story, a young woman goes to a Franciscan monastery dressed as a boy to ask to join as a friar. Ignatius writes, “*he* spoke so persuasively that they gave him the habit forthwith” [italics mine].<sup>42</sup> One night while traveling, a young girl falls in love with the disguised friar, attempts to seduce him, and when rebuffed, accuses the friar of sexually attacking and impregnating her. The friar is publicly shamed and punished, but ultimately allowed to rejoin the

monastery without ever revealing his true biological gender. It wasn’t until the friar died that it was discovered he was a woman.<sup>43</sup>

Rahner suggests that Ignatius tells this story to Isabel as a way of illustrating the need for patience and constancy amid life’s struggles. The story begs the question of Ignatius’ suspicious view of gender limitations on religious vocations, however. In telling this story, Ignatius hints that, for him, women are as capable as men of the spiritual and religious life. He praises the ingenuity and faithfulness of this young woman who tricked religious authorities into allowing her to do what she felt compelled to do despite her gender.<sup>44</sup>

Letter writing was an important means by which the Jesuits developed their spirituality as well as a sense of common mission and purpose. It is clear through Ignatius’ letters to women that he also included women in this effort. In a recent article, José García de Castro argues that letter writing for the early Jesuits was a key way in which they maintained their bonds with one another, and through which they developed the Constitutions. De Castro argues that because the members of the Society were dispersed throughout the world, “letters were the principal manifestation of the ‘love of God’ operating as ‘the chief bond for the union of the members between themselves and their head’ (Constitutions VIII 1.8 [671]). For those on mission, it was letters that stirred up their memories, kept alive their mutual affection and deepened friendships.”<sup>45</sup> Through letters, they reminded each other of their common experience of knowing God through prayer, and also of their shared call to serve others. Through letters, they reflected on their spiritual experiences and callings, forging a common sense of identity and purpose. Ignatius included women in this activity as well as men.

To be clear, in 1532 the Society of Jesus had not yet formed. Ignatius was then a student studying in Paris and was just beginning to share the Exercises with others. Isabel Roser was an early and frequent correspondent with Ignatius beginning at this time until her death in 1554. They were lifelong friends. Their relationship, including her financial support of his education and that of his companions, is a cornerstone in the foundation of the Society. The language and ideas



Ignatius expressed to Isabel mirrored those shared with his male companions. Through letters, Ignatius included women in the early formation of the mission of the Society of Jesus. Dreyer discusses this mutually beneficial arrangement as such: “Letters helped Ignatius engage women in the mission of the Society, provide them support and pastoral care, and contribute to their spiritual growth. We can also surmise that he was instructed and affected in diverse ways by the relationships behind this correspondence.”<sup>46</sup> Ignatius’ correspondence with Isabel is evidence that Ignatius shared a common language and identity around the mission and purpose of the Society with women as well as with his male counterparts.

After her husband died, Isabel petitioned Ignatius to allow her to live and work in Rome under his obedience. Lisa Fullam describes Isabel expressing to Ignatius her “desire to forget altogether my possessions, and I have no feeling of attachment to these things”<sup>47</sup>—language reflecting Ignatius’ own, and language that reflects movements of the Exercises, including detachment from worldly possessions and willingness to assume poverty.<sup>48</sup> In 1543, she traveled to Rome along with two female companions, her servants, and her belongings, to ask Ignatius to join in his ministry. Ignatius, hesitant at first, eventually assigned Isabel the job of directing the house of St. Martha, a property adjacent to the Jesuit community that housed women leaving prostitution. In this act, Ignatius assigns a woman to be a director of a Jesuit work.<sup>49</sup> In 1545 Roser petitioned Paul III to be “admitted to the least Society of Jesus,” promising to take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to Ignatius: essentially asking to become a Jesuit. Her request was granted, and on December 25, 1545, she, along with her two friends, Lucrezia di Bradine and Francisca Curyllas, took a vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience to Ignatius.<sup>50</sup>

Fullam, Rahner, and others generally agree that the experiment of Roser, di Bradine, and Curyllas joining the Society was a failure from the start. Fullam cites the reasons for the difficulties as “personal more than institutional: the same organizational energy, effusive enthusiasm, and profound devotion to Ignatius that made Roser such an efficient fund-raiser and all-around

advocate for the Society among the Barcelona upper class became a problem when exercised at close range.”<sup>51</sup> Other Jesuits in Rome are reported to have complained to Ignatius about the difficulties of working alongside the three women. Jerónimo Nadal is said to have been “scandalized by the fact that Sister Isabel got her food daily from the Fathers’ kitchen.”<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, four months after taking their vows, Ignatius petitioned the Pope to release the three women from obedience to him, thus reversing his initial decision. On October 1, 1546, Ignatius sent a letter of renunciation of vows to Isabel, in which he asked that “I should withdraw and separate myself from this care of having you as a spiritual daughter under obedience, having you rather as a good and pious mother, as you have been to me for several years now.”<sup>53</sup> Isabel left Rome and eventually entered a Franciscan convent, where she died in 1554. She and Ignatius remained friends and continued to correspond in letters until her death.<sup>54</sup>

Other women in Isabel’s and Ignatius’ time—like Spanish noblewoman Juana de Cardona—had similar experiences of conversion and desire for becoming closer to Christ after being introduced to the Exercises. De Cardona wrote to Ignatius, “I beseech and ask you to receive me into this holy Society . . . for I was prevented from entering the Lord’s service to the full extent of my capacity. . . . Let not Your Reverence fear my woman’s weakness, because, when the Lord sets his hand, he makes the weak strong.”<sup>55</sup> Other letters exist from women speaking of profound experiences of conversion in going through the Exercises with the early Jesuits including Ignatius, Araoz, Mirón, and Faber. There is a common theme of women longing to do more, and an initial impulse on the part of Ignatius and the early Jesuits to accommodate them. As further evidence of this adaptive stance, in 1556 the Jesuits were publically accused by the Duke and Duchess of Alba for “being *too* familiar with women”<sup>56</sup> [emphasis mine], a comment that points to the strict cultural mores directing male and female relationships, as well as the Jesuits’ willingness to push the boundaries of those restrictions.

Ruth Liebowitz points out that women seeking membership in active apostolic orders like the Jesuits “were highly innovative in terms of

defining new spiritual vocations and institutional structures . . . yet it is striking how none of them questioned basic medieval assumptions about the religious life.”<sup>57</sup> One can see women falling back on medieval stereotypes about “women’s weakness” and lowly status in the letters excerpted above. Isabel did see herself as worthy of membership in the Society, however, and Ignatius did as well for a brief time. A church law against women’s apostolic availability based on the misogynistic theology of the time gave him reason to end the experiment; meanwhile, his initial response could be understood as “why not?”

The letter from Ignatius to Paul III asking that the Society forever “be freed from the responsibility of women” is often referred to as a once-and-for-all decision regarding the Jesuits and women: Ignatius specifically chose not to establish a female branch, as other orders had, and therefore the case is closed. Fullam points out that for Ignatius, however, the decision to exclude women was not about women in general; instead he made it about mobility, citing the order’s need to be available for mission, which women were not allowed to do at the time.<sup>58</sup> Women were confined to the home or the convent, and Ignatius wanted his companions to be ready at a moment’s notice to go serve wherever they were needed. Given that the issue Ignatius cited was mobility for mission, Fullam suggests that the question of women’s admission to the Society be reconsidered today because opportunities available to women socially and professionally have expanded significantly since the sixteenth century, albeit less so in the Roman Church. Fullam’s analysis that the problem was about mobility rather than women per se (i.e., their intrinsic qualities) points to the reasons the experiment failed as being cultural and ecclesial rather than gender-based. Ignatius demonstrated that he recognized this circumstance in his context, and that he was willing to explore a new type of male-female partnership in his early mission.

Ignatius’ initial acceptance of three women, and later Infanta Juana of Spain, into the Society signal to me an adaptability, openness, and flexibility on the part of Ignatius to respond to the activity of the Holy Spirit despite the significant ecclesial restrictions at the time.<sup>59</sup> Fullam suggests that at the very least, their admission into the Society

suggests that “being a woman was not an absolute bar to membership in the Society.” For Isabel, the ways in which Ignatius advised her spiritually brought forth in her a strong desire to serve God more generously and fully, “to serve God our Lord better and without hindrance.”<sup>60</sup> Through her relationship with Ignatius, new spiritual experiences changed her perception of herself and her perception of how God was calling her to obey and serve. Her experiences with Ignatius’ nascent Spiritual Exercises compelled her to desire more than what she was allowed to do in her community at the time, and she begged for an opportunity to respond to that desire. Likewise, Ignatius’ relationship with her influenced his view of women’s spiritual and ministerial capacities, prompting him to expand the bounds of their partnership beyond what was typical at the time.

### **Mary Ward’s Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Congregation of Jesus (1609–1631)**

Born in England in 1585, Mary Ward was a woman who pushed strongly against church limitations on women and nuns in her era. This spirit of resistance was inspired by the spirituality she developed through Jesuit education and with her Jesuit confessor and trusted advisor, Richard Lee.<sup>61</sup> Itinerant Jesuits brought the Spiritual Exercises to Catholic families in Elizabethan England who were prevented legally from practicing their faith.<sup>62</sup> Mary Ward, as a member of the Poor Clares, experienced in prayer a call to establish a religious order for women modeled after the Jesuits. She writes of hearing a call from God “to take the name of the Society [of Jesus]”—so understood as that we were to take the same both in matter and manner, that only excepted which God, by diversity of sex, hath prohibited.”<sup>63</sup> She describes her evolving sense of an apostolic vocation in the following way:

It seemed to me most perfect to take the most austere Order, that a soul might give herself to God not in part but altogether, since I saw not how a religious woman could do good to more than herself alone. To teach children seemed then too much distraction . . . nor was of that perfection and importance as therefore to hinder that quiet and continual communication

with God which strict enclosure afforded.<sup>64</sup>

She sought to develop an institute based on the Society of Jesus, in which women would wear the clothing of noblewomen and be engaged in a variety of ministries “such as caring for the sick and the poor and teaching in private homes.”<sup>65</sup> Fullam states that “Ward’s aim was to establish a group parallel to the Society of Jesus in organizational structure, range of ministries, and commitment to mobility. Her order, for instance, was to be governed by a mother general who was directly subject to the pope.”<sup>66</sup> She sought, in similar language to that of Ignatius, a society whose aim was to promote the salvation of souls through education of girls—and in any way that promoted the greater glory of God and the further propagation of the Catholic Church.

Pamela Ellis suggests that “this was an extraordinarily radical ambition—no less than the taking on of the public apostolate of male religious—and went far beyond the educational aims of earlier active women’s orders. Mary described this revelation as having given her ‘so great measure of light . . . so much comfort and strength,’ but in fact the path it set her on was all but impossible.”<sup>67</sup> Lisa McClain describes Mary Ward as having been a fixture in the “vibrant current of experimentation in women’s spirituality and modifications to compulsory women’s enclosure in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe.”<sup>68</sup> Mary Ward fought her entire life for legitimacy of her Institute, and the right to be called the Congregation of Jesus (which they were not granted until 1909). Her desire to live out her vocation, a calling clearly arrived at through prayer and, in her experience divinely sanctioned, clashed bitterly with social and ecclesial restrictions based on her gender.

Gemma Simmonds reports that “the Jesuits showed a marked ambivalence towards Mary Ward’s ‘English Ladies,’ referred to by many as ‘Jesuitesses.’ They received support from the likes of Roger Lee and from John Gerard, who had experiences of women’s apostolic potential from the English mission. From others there was implacable opposition.”<sup>69</sup> Matters were made more challenging by the fact that the Jesuits at the time were already under heightened scrutiny by

the secular clergy who had an “instinctive mistrust of Jesuit innovations . . . only exacerbated by the unprecedented freedoms claimed by these ‘Galloping Girls,’ whom some did not hesitate to accuse of immorality, financial irregularity, and usurping priestly functions.”<sup>70</sup>

After years of conflict between church authorities and Mary Ward’s English Ladies, Pope Urban VIII issued a papal bull of suppression against them in 1631. In it he stated that the “poisonous growths in the church of God’ had to be torn up by the roots . . . lest they spread themselves further.”<sup>71</sup> Ellis argues that “the violence of expression is perhaps a measure of the threat that these independent women were felt to pose to the Church; certainly they were seen as challenging the rightful order of things.”<sup>72</sup> Mary Ward never survived to see her institute established as she had envisioned it. She died in squalor, a victim of extreme social, economic, and ecclesial exclusion. Hers is a case of wanting to do simply what the male orders were permitted to do and of dying for her cause, as summarized by Christine Burke in her telling of Ward’s life story:

Throughout her life, Mary Ward was drawn into an ever-deepening friendship with God and, as Jesus had warned, living out the implication of such a friendship led her to the cross. Central to the oppression she endured was her belief that women as well as men were called to bring God’s love to an estranged people. She died a laywoman because the church authorities had disbanded the religious institute she founded.<sup>73</sup>

Despite their suppression and the vitriolic language of the papal bull, Mary Ward’s Institute did survive and spread. Almost four hundred years later, in 2003, the Institute for the Blessed Virgin Mary officially adopted the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and took the name Congregation of Jesus, “in conformity with the directive Ward received in her 1611 vision to ‘take the name of the Society.’”<sup>74</sup> It had taken four centuries, but Mary Ward’s Institute survived and her prayer came to fruition.

Scholars now recognize that the English Ladies were able to support the English Catholic mission

more successfully than priests in some cases because they were not in identifiable Catholic garb. “Benefiting from gendered attitudes and stereotypes, Ward’s English Ladies were less likely than priests to be suspected, identified, and arrested for their work on the English Mission,”<sup>75</sup> as noted by McClain:

The decades-long contribution of Ward and her companions to the English Mission remain to be written into scholarship on the Mission. The English Ladies participated in the Mission in different ways than the male missionaries did, using different tactics, reaching a different demographic, and increasing the effectiveness of other groups—such as priests and recusant laywomen—whose work on the Mission is already well recognized . . . For more than twenty years, the English Ladies worked alongside well-known Jesuits, such as Roger Lee and John Gerard, and in so doing changed the experience, character, and effectiveness of the English Mission.<sup>76</sup>

Recent scholarship is reclaiming the vision and ministry of Mary Ward as essential to the survival of the Roman Catholic Church in England.

In the case of Mary Ward, we see what happened when a woman completed the Exercises and attempted to live out her experience of election. The Exercises are meant to inspire an internal and external response during a process of “election” during the Second Week. Dyckman, Garvin and Liebert explain, “the methods for election and the entire dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises allow seekers to enact the belief that their deepest desire and ultimate good, and that of other persons as well, are the same. God’s preferential love grounds all finite expressions of love, making them possible and completing them. In this sense, love wants commitment because it wants to express itself as fully as it can to assure its completion.”<sup>77</sup> Much theological and pastoral scholarship is dedicated to the notion that mission and vocation are central to one’s ability to understand oneself; to answer the existential question, “Who am I?”; and to overcome egocentric impulses.<sup>78</sup> What happens when an individual is prevented from

living out his or her vocation? What does it say about human freedom, human choice? Can anyone’s vocation be authentically lived out if it isn’t freely chosen, if it is instead Plan B because options are restricted? Is it possible to fully surrender to God if one is not permitted to externally express and live out that full obedience to that divine summons? How does one reconcile internal impulses with external expression or movement toward one’s ultimate horizon of meaning if one is not allowed to go there? And how is the glory of God served in these instances—or not?

The Spiritual Exercises presuppose that God is good. God is immanent, active, transcendent, and accessible—but, above all, good. If God is good, and humans are made in the image of God, then all humans are good. These realizations of the fundamental worth of women in the image and likeness of God are fundamental to the Spiritual Exercises, and they challenge the ecclesial and social limitations on women, which assume women’s un-worthiness.

In the cases of Isabel Roser and Mary Ward, we see examples of what happens when social and ecclesial restrictions prohibit the full expression of one’s deepest desires as discovered through the Exercises. Burke puts it in the following way:

Changing mindsets has never been easy. Mary Ward challenged the Church to change, to recognize the potential of women to be an apostolic force. She did not allow the resistance she met to damage her relationship with God or her commitment to following God’s call. Her story shows that God can bring about what is needed if we continue to work for what we know to be right, even in the face of opposition. The challenge is to do this with love and respect, committed to new possibilities yet remaining within the community of faith.<sup>79</sup>

With Isabel Roser and Mary Ward, we see gestures, albeit modest ones, toward mutual partnership between Jesuits and women, as well as an effort to work around existing church structures to accommodate and give space for the vocational and apostolic work of women in

response to their call from the Exercises. Likewise, new histories are reclaiming the vision and ministry of Mary Ward as essential to the survival of the Roman Catholic Church in England. Both women are historical examples of the complex and interwoven role between Jesuits and women during the foundation and early expansion of the Society of Jesus. Both are also examples of the transformative power of the Exercises to inspire change.

### **Decree 14, General Congregation 34 (1995)**

Fast forward to the more recent context of women and the Society of Jesus. In 1995 the Society of Jesus published a decree at its 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregation with radical possibilities for the church and civil society entitled, “Jesuits and the Situation of Women in the Church and Civil Society.” The genesis of the document, and the fact that it was put on the congregation’s agenda at all, is a testament to the long history of engagement and shared spiritual reflection between Jesuits and women since the days of Ignatius. Gerry O’Hanlon, S.J.,<sup>80</sup> a Jesuit from the Irish Province, suggested that the topic be discussed at the general assembly after having worked on two books about solidarity with women in his home province. In a telephone interview O’Hanlon recalled how the discussion went:

We had an initial three days of prayer [at the General Congregation]. People were divided into groups. There was a provision at an early stage for new topics to be mentioned by individuals and groups. I sought speaking time and I spoke at that time about my conviction that this topic merited inclusion, and that this wasn’t a women’s problem, this was a men’s problem. They listened to what I said and put it on the agenda. Pat Howell and Bill Urin got in touch with me and said that they would be willing to help. There was a lot of resistance to men talking about women. Some feared, ‘this will make us a laughing stock.’ There was a fair amount of incredulity and nervousness around the whole topic. A French Jesuit used to look at me and say, teasingly, ‘*Ab, les femmes, les femmes.*’ And I

would say, “No, it’s *les hommes, les hommes.*” We tried to put this back on us—of course it affected women but it was largely the male part of the church that was continuing to reinforce and failed to challenge this issue.<sup>81</sup>

O’Hanlon’s response indicates an awareness on the part of some Jesuits to recognize that the division of church roles by gender is not the women’s fault; it is on the men who set up and maintain patriarchal structures.

The powerfully worded decree addresses the situation of poverty, discrimination, and violence against women, and it accepts responsibility and the need for action that is tied to the Jesuit commitment to a faith that does justice. The Society states its appreciation of women as partners in ministry and makes a clear call for Jesuits to listen to women’s experiences as a first step toward solidarity. The document includes the following call to conversion:

In response, we Jesuits first ask God for the grace of conversion. We have been part of a civil and ecclesial tradition that has offended against women. And like many men, we have a tendency to convince ourselves that there is no problem. However unwittingly, we have often contributed to a form of clericalism which has reinforced male domination with an ostensibly divine sanction. By making this declaration we wish to react personally and collectively, and do what we can to change this regrettable situation.<sup>82</sup>

In 1995, the Jesuits made a statement toward forging new pathways of partnership with women, based on Jesuits’ experiences of prayer, listening to women, and working alongside women. Civil society had also changed dramatically since the days of Isabel Roser and Mary Ward. Still, more than twenty years later, women remain limited in their vocational choices and still disproportionately hampered by social, theological, economic, and ecclesial discrimination.

Since 1995, the Jesuits have held two general congregations, neither of which has said anything more about the situation of women. In 2019, however, the current Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Arturo Sosa, gave an address on International Women's Day, in which he discusses and praises women's resilience and calls for men and women to work together to bring peace to regions affected by violence and civil disturbance. Sosa does not go as far as Decree 14 in acknowledging Jesuit complicity in the diminished status of women worldwide. He does nonetheless call for a new "theology and an ecclesiology of women" that can "change the image, the concept and the structures of the Church." He notes that "women's creativity can open new ways of being a Christian community of disciples, men and women together, witnesses and preachers of the Good News . . . The opposite of clericalism is collaboration, working together as baptized daughters and sons of God."<sup>83</sup> He concludes by saying the effort to include women in the core of the Church might be impossible, but that we must start. Sosa's address is very Ignatian in that he starts with reflection on the situation in the world and then goes to theology. His is a hopeful document in that it points to a continuation of Jesuit leadership's desire for equality for women in church and civil society.

An analysis of the historical context of Ignatius, the early Society, and the development of the Spiritual Exercises reveals points of tension and opportunity. Historically, the Spiritual Exercises specifically were an instrument for male/female relationship and cooperation for Ignatius and Jesuits after him. We know that Ignatius was supported by and influenced by women in his ministry. The Spiritual Exercises were a process and a means by which that collaboration happened and by which it still continues. Through the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius became free to form relationships with women that were beyond the norm of his time. It was in part through the Exercises that women responded with passionate energy and resolve to serve the Church and society. The Spiritual Exercises had an effect on women and men that stirred them to challenge the gender-based social and ecclesial constraints of their era. The Exercises set a course for a radical reimagining of the spiritual and apostolic work of men and women together, fueling their attempts

at collaboration. The social and ecclesial restraints against women's full and equal participation in the Church and in religious orders, including the Society of Jesus, were formidable and remain so, but the Exercises provide a pathway forward that was relevant then and remains so today.

### **Applications for Jesuit Education: Recovering Herstory**

Leaders at Jesuit universities have an opportunity to reinsert female figures and feminist critique into the official history of Jesuit education during professional development and formation programs. There are many resources available to do so. A central aspect of the story is the role the Spiritual Exercises played in facilitating the collaboration between Ignatius, the later Jesuits, and women. Ignatius' shared reflection on the Exercises and other spiritual matters with women catalyzed a degree of collaboration that challenged the cultural stereotypes and gender-based limitations of sixteenth century Europe. Reflection on the Exercises, and how the Exercises prompt men and women to act in certain ways, can provide clues to moving toward greater equity and inclusion in our current educational contexts.

Heydt and Melcher suggest that "Jesuits and feminists can work together toward greater inclusion of women at every level, including in relating the 'history' of the Society of Jesus,"<sup>84</sup> a process referred to as recovering "herstory." Our history of Jesuit education must consider the historical factors that limited and suppressed women's full equality as persons in the Church and civil society systematically over the past several centuries. Be these restrictions economic, political, religious, or otherwise—they have come in many forms—state- and church-sponsored treatises, laws, teachings, and papal bulls officially codified and lent legitimacy to the unequal treatment of women and relegated women to supporting roles in the patriarchal and clerical hierarchy. Recovering herstory requires us to name and recognize the systemic decisions that awarded economic, political, and other advantages to men, meanwhile denying women the same. This recovery also requires us to admit that these misogynist symbols and images remain embedded in the Exercises themselves. Doing so enables us to reflect critically on the vestiges of those

systematic decisions that continue to oppress women and other marginalized groups.

Not only does the history of Jesuit education need to be contextualized with a feminist lens, the Spiritual Exercises must also be presented to university faculty and staff with explicit reference to this context. If presented without any nuance or explanation of the historical and theological context in which they were developed, and without a critical analysis of why theology and ideologies of the medieval and Reformation eras deserve to be challenged, given what we know today, we risk perpetuating the same subjugation and oppression of women and marginalized groups we seek to end. Earlier I discussed the both/and approach of Ignatius that a careful reading of his life reveals. I suggest that we apply a both/and approach to discussing the history, current reality, and use of the Exercises in Jesuit education today. Rather than presenting Jesuit education and the Exercises in hagiographic or otherwise glorified terms, we should recognize the inherent flaws and injustices built into the system itself. Jesuit education and the Exercises are neither all good nor all bad. They are neither the answer to social justice nor its enemy. They are somewhere in between, and by exploring the areas of tension—particularly the tensions between Jesuit education, the Exercises, and feminism—we can engage in the work of justice more creatively and effectively.

### **Anticipating Resistance**

There are significant challenges to reclaiming herstory in the official history of Jesuit education. There are reasons it is not being done. Heydt and Melcher warn, “our research indicate . . . that when individual Jesuits take that brave step to truly align with women in solidarity, trouble tends to brew for them and the women themselves or the history of their roles is again omitted.”<sup>85</sup> Given the substantial amount of information about the female actors in Ignatius’ life and the early Society, it is worthwhile to ask why women are still excluded from the official narrative. One response might be that even though the relationship of the early male Jesuits and their female colleagues was symbiotic in certain ways, the benefits were distributed disproportionately. Whereas some women in partnership with Ignatius had the

opportunity to engage in work and ministry that they were otherwise denied, women were not permitted to join the Society as equal members, to share ownership of the Jesuit properties and institutions in which they had invested, nor to establish religious orders for themselves that granted them the same apostolic freedoms as for the male religious. In that way they were not equal beneficiaries of the fruits of their labor. A disproportionate amount of credit goes to the Jesuits for work that was shared. The privileges and opportunities assigned to one gender or class of persons necessarily has an impact on another. Through erasure from official history, women are denied an equal share of the credit for their investment in early Jesuit works. To correct the history would require a reallocation of the credit and benefits, which would prompt disruptive questions about women’s equal access to positions of influence in church and society today. Certain groups benefit from holding a hallowed place in history. To question their autonomy and their exclusivist claims to success has the potential to unsettle their current standing in church, society, and the academy today, questions that raise fear and anxiety for those benefiting from the current system.

Additionally, as Dreyer notes, “we know that cultural and ecclesial misogyny are not only perpetrated from outside but also interiorized by women.”<sup>86</sup> Women are socialized to keep silent and protect the systems that oppress them. Misogynistic myths, symbols, and stories are cemented into the foundation of the Church and remain fixed in our lexicon and theological imaginations. Women are taught to question themselves from birth and rewarded as they age for their successful acquiescence to the status quo. Recognizing women’s own internalized justifications for their oppression, and recognizing when these biases are blocking free choice and movement, are necessary first steps in the process of recovering herstory.

One way to move through some of these obstacles could be a return to the tools provided by the Exercises. The Spiritual Exercises specifically were an instrument for male/female relationship and cooperation for Ignatius and Jesuits after him. The Spiritual Exercises historically had an effect on women and men that

stirred them to challenge the gender-based social and ecclesial constraints of their era. The Exercises set a course for a radical reimagining of the spiritual and apostolic work of men and women together, further fueling their attempts at collaboration. The social and ecclesial restraints against women's full and equal participation in the Church and in religious orders including the Society of Jesus remain formidable, but the Exercises provide a pathway forward that was relevant then and remains so today.

We know that Ignatius was supported by and influenced by women in his ministry. The Spiritual Exercises were a process and a means through which that collaboration happened and continues. Through the Spiritual Exercises Ignatius became free to form relationships with women that were beyond the norm of his time. It was in part through the Exercises that women responded with passionate energy and resolve to serve the Church and society. For some women, the Exercises are an experience of remembering the ways God has spoken to them through their lives as beloved and good—before the Church and society taught them otherwise. The Exercises can be a process of remembering one's worth, dignity, confidence, power, and passion, and knowing again that one is beloved of God regardless of social and ecclesial messages to the contrary.

## Conclusion


Recovering and restoring the names and stories of the women in the life and work of Ignatius

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Margo J. Heydt and Sarah J. Melcher, "Reflections from an Ignatian Pilgrimage," in *Jesuit and Feminist Education*, eds. Jocelyn M. Boryczka and Elizabeth A. Petrino (New York: Fordham, 2012), 37–55.

<sup>2</sup> Excellent resources include Gemma Simmonds, "Women Jesuits?" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*, edited by Thomas Worcester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Elizabeth Dreyer, "Do as I Do, Not as I Say: The Pedagogy of Action," in *Jesuit and Feminist Education*, edited by Jocelyn M. Boryczka and Elizabeth A. Petrino (New York: Fordham, 2012), and Margo J. Heydt and Sarah J. Melcher, "Reflections from an Ignatian Pilgrimage" in the same volume; Catherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin and Elizabeth Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2001), 25–47; Lisa Fullam, "Juana, S.J.: The Past (and Future?)

changes our perception of the Society of Jesus as a whole. Inserting female figures and images into the traditional montage of all-male bodies opens up a new understanding of the complex and intertwined relationships out of which Ignatius and the early Society grew and developed. Like any person, Ignatius was a product of the love and support of many people. Like any institution, the Society of Jesus was formed within and through an organized network of political, economic, social, and religious factors in which women played a role. The benefits were mutual. Writes Elizabeth Dreyer, "women benefited from their Jesuit connections ministerially and spiritually as well as personally. Ignatius and the Jesuits benefited through conversation, friendship, and donations of money, property, and influence necessary to create the Jesuit educational empire."<sup>87</sup> Acknowledging the interconnectivity of all of the actors in the early life of Ignatius and the Society moves us beyond simplistic images of Ignatius the solitary hero to a more complex and historically accurate portrayal of a human being who worked in relationship with a community of people that included women.

Those who have a podium from which to tell the story of the foundations of the Society have an obligation to remember, reclaim, and amplify the stories of the women who were there. Doing so is a subversive act, but one that is required if we are to be honest about our commitment to the stated mission of providing just, equitable, and inclusive education. 

Status of Women in the Society of Jesus," in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 31, no. 5 (November 1999); and Amalee Meehan, "Partners in Ministry: The Role of Women in Jesuit Education," in *America*, May 12, 2008, 22–24.

<sup>3</sup> Dyckman, Garvin and Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 46.

<sup>4</sup> Simmonds, "Women Jesuits?," 120.

<sup>5</sup> Dreyer, "Do as I Do, Not as I Say," 28.

<sup>6</sup> Simmonds, "Women Jesuits?," 120.

<sup>7</sup> Hugo Rahner, S.J., *St. Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women* (New York: Crossroad, 2013), 9–10.

<sup>8</sup> Jill Raitt, "European Reformations of Christian Spirituality (1450–1700)," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian*



*Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell: 2011), 122.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Worcester, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*, ed. Thomas Worcester (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>10</sup> I mention the biographical overlap between Ignatius and Columbus to point out how Ignatius' life coincided with European and Christian expansion to the New World and the dawn of the colonial period.

<sup>11</sup> Lu Ann Homza, "The Religious Milieu of the Young Ignatius," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*, ed. Thomas Worcester (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 14.

<sup>12</sup> For more commentary on the early life of Ignatius, see Jean Lacouture, *Jesuits: A Multibiography*, trans. Jeremy Leggatt (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1995), 3–34; John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 23–36; George Ganss, "General Introduction," in *Ignatius of Loyola*, ed. George Ganss, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1991), 9–63; and Ron Hansen, "The Pilgrim: Saint Ignatius of Loyola," in *The Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, ed. George Traub, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 24–44.

<sup>13</sup> Worcester, "Introduction," 1.

<sup>14</sup> Homza, "The Religious Milieu of the Young Ignatius," 13.

<sup>15</sup> Raitt, "European Reformations of Christian Spirituality (1450–1700)," 123.

<sup>16</sup> One example of these religious movements is the Beguines, groups of women who formed during the thirteenth century in Northern Europe, shared assets, met for prayer, and committed themselves to serving the poor; however, they did not establish monasteries or religious orders under church control. Raitt explains that "because they were not cloistered nor easily brought under close ecclesiastical supervision, they were increasingly suspected of heretical ideas and practices and in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were severely repressed. By 1500 they were practically destroyed." See Raitt, "European Reformations of Christian Spirituality (1450–1700)," 123. I mention the Beguines as an example of lay spiritual movements preceding the Jesuits which sought to take "spirituality out of the cloister" (Raitt, 136) and into the world, which is what Ignatius aimed to continue with his early Companions.

<sup>17</sup> Lu Ann Homza explains that "biblical excerpts, saints' lives, and meditational texts in the vernacular" were published and distributed by the influential Cardinal Francisco Jimenez de Cisneros (1436–1517). Two titles particularly popular at the time were *Vita Christi* by Ludolph of Saxony and *Imitatio Christi* by Thomas à Kempis, both of which were significantly influential to Ignatius. One can see his use of both devotional texts in his development of the Exercises. George Ganss argues that the four-week structure of the Exercises is based on the chapter structure in Ludolph's *Vita*, and that the *Vita* "formed his mental habits of reading and praying, his way of looking at things, his mind-set." See Homza, "The Religious

Milieu of the Young Ignatius," 18–21, and Ganss, *Ignatius of Loyola*, 15–26.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> For more on this, and how Ignatius was accused of heresy as an *alumbrado*, see Raitt, "European Reformations of Christian Spirituality (1450–1700)," 24, and Jean Lacouture, *Jesuits: A Multibiography*. John O'Malley argues that Ignatius was "not an *alumbrado*" but had "friendly relationships with persons associated with the movement and in a few important respects his teaching resembled theirs" (O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 27–28).

<sup>20</sup> See Hans Wolter, "Elements of Crusade Spirituality in St. Ignatius," in *St. Ignatius of Loyola His Personality and Spiritual Heritage 1556–1956*, ed. Friedrich Wulf (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977), 97–134.

<sup>21</sup> Dreyer, "Do as I Do, Not as I Say," 22.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>23</sup> Dreyer notes that prostitution was "tolerated and even supported by civil and ecclesial authority as a way to keep order by channeling male libido and preserving the honor of legitimately married women," 26.

<sup>24</sup> Lisa Fullam, "Juana, SJ: The Past (and Future?) Status of Women in the Society of Jesus," 16. See also Gemma Simmonds, "Women Jesuits?," 120–135.

<sup>25</sup> Fullam, "Juana, SJ: The Past (and Future?) Status of Women in the Society of Jesus," 6.

<sup>26</sup> Ruth Liebowitz, "Virgins in the Service of Christ," in *Women of Spirit*, eds. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 138. Church authorities had actively restricted women from preaching or publicly discussing religious matters since the Middle Ages. See also Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 79–111.

<sup>27</sup> Liebowitz, "Virgins in the Service of Christ," 138.

<sup>28</sup> O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 27–28, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Dreyer, "Do as I Do, Not as I Say," 26.

<sup>30</sup> Ruether, *Women and Redemption*, 127. Ignatius uses female imagery to describe evil in Rules for the Discernment of Spirits: "the enemy conducts himself like a woman... [confronted by weakness...her] anger, vindictiveness, and ferocity swell almost without limit." *Ignatius of Loyola*, ed. Ganss, 9–63, sec 325.

<sup>31</sup> Ruether, *Women and Redemption*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 92–97.

<sup>33</sup> Raitt, "European Reformations of Christian Spirituality (1450–1700)," 136.

<sup>34</sup> Rahner, *St. Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women*, 262–263.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 265–267.

<sup>37</sup> Lu Ann Homza and Elizabeth Dreyer discuss the common practice of letter-writing between confessors and women in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and argue that Ignatius saw letter-writing as an important way of life, as did literate women of the time. See Dreyer, “Do as I Do, Not as I Say,” 26–28 and Homza, “The Religious Milieu of the Young Ignatius,” n. 19, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Rahner, *St. Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women*, 251.

<sup>39</sup> Correspondences between confessor and penitent in the sixteenth century show that the role of confessor expanded to that of a spiritual director and became more personal and significant and had an element of submission of the penitent to the spiritual director. Liebowitz gives examples in “Virgins in the Service of Christ,” 138–139.

<sup>40</sup> Rahner, *St. Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women*, 266.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 266–267.

<sup>44</sup> Gender non-conformity in medieval and renaissance spirituality and practice as a response to women’s subordination has been discussed by Rosemary Radford Ruether. Ruether suggests this corresponded to a shift in gender symbolism for God and Christ during the medieval era to include femaleness, including in descriptions of Jesus. For example, portrayals emerged in text and art of Jesus on the cross as a nursing mother with breasts. See Ruether *Women and Redemption*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> José García de Castro, “Juan Alfonso de Polanco: Memory, Identity and Mission,” trans. Philip Endean, *The Way* 56, no. 3 (July 2017), 48.

<sup>46</sup> Dreyer, “Do as I Do, Not as I Say,” 27.

<sup>47</sup> Fullam, “Juana, SJ: The Past (and Future?) Status of Women in the Society of Jesus,” 16.

<sup>48</sup> It was not uncommon at the time for women to take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to the founder of a religious order as opposed to entering a convent. They became members of “third orders” of male monastic orders such as the Dominicans or Franciscans. See Homza, “The Religious Milieu of the Young Ignatius,” 19.

<sup>49</sup> I am using contemporary language of a “Jesuit work” to describe what was likely a confraternity at the time, a faith-based charitable work led by men and women in cooperation with the Society of Jesus. Despite the anachronism, I am attempting to highlight Isabel’s important role in the early Society through a specific position directing and managing a Jesuit ministry. The title “director of a work” continues to hold sway in the Society and is given to women infrequently.

<sup>50</sup> Rahner, *St. Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women*, 286–287.

<sup>51</sup> Fullam, “Juana, SJ: The Past (and Future?) Status of Women in the Society of Jesus,” 18.

<sup>52</sup> Rahner, *St. Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women*, 287.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>54</sup> Following Ignatius’ decision, Isabel and her nephews fought the Society in court for repayment of donated gifts and property. She lost and eventually signed a letter testifying the donations were freely given. See Fullam, 18–19, Rahner, 288–291 and Dyckman, 37–38.

<sup>55</sup> Rahner, *St. Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women*, 304–305.

<sup>56</sup> O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 293–294.

<sup>57</sup> Liebowitz, “Virgins in the Service of Christ,” 133.

<sup>58</sup> See Fullam, “Juana, SJ: The Past (and Future?) Status of Women in the Society of Jesus,” 18–19.

<sup>59</sup> In 1554 Ignatius accepted the vows of Juana, Princess of Portugal into the Society of Jesus under a male pseudonym, Mateo Sanchez. Mateo Sanchez joined the Society of Jesus as a scholastic. She survived Ignatius and died in 1573 as a Jesuit. See Rahner, 56–67 and Fullam, 23–31.

<sup>60</sup> Rahner, *St. Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women*, 276.

<sup>61</sup> Fullam, “Juana, SJ: The Past (and Future?) Status of Women in the Society of Jesus,” 10.

<sup>62</sup> Simmonds, “Women Jesuits?,” 123.

<sup>63</sup> Fullam, “Juana, SJ: The Past (and Future?) Status of Women in the Society of Jesus,” 11.

<sup>64</sup> Simmonds, “Women Jesuits?,” 123–124.

<sup>65</sup> Fullam, “Juana, SJ: The Past (and Future?) Status of Women in the Society of Jesus,” 11.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Pamela Ellis, “They Are But Women: Mary Ward, 1585–1645,” in *Women, Gender and Radical Religion in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sylvia Brown (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 251.

<sup>68</sup> Lisa McClain, “On a Mission: Priests, Jesuits, Jesuitresses, and Catholic Missionary Efforts in Tudor-Stuart England,” in *The Catholic Historical Review* 101, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 438.

<sup>69</sup> Simmonds, “Women Jesuits?,” 125.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>72</sup> Ellis, 259.

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<sup>73</sup> Christine Burke, “Mary Ward: To Be or Not to Be...a Saint,” *The Way* 56, no. 3 (July 2017): 57.

<sup>74</sup> Lisa McClain, “On a Mission,” 461–462.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 437–462.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 462.

<sup>77</sup> Dyckman, Galvin and Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 295.

<sup>78</sup> See Meredith Secomb, “Responding to the Call of God: How Mission Makes the Person for Hans urs von Balthasar,” *The Way* 54, no. 3 (July 2015): 91–92. Also Paul Crowley, “Mystagogy and Mission: The Challenge of Nonbelief and the Task of Theology,” in *Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2015): 7–28, in which Crowley asserts faith is mystagogy and mission; A.J. Conyers, *The Listening Heart: Vocation and the Crisis of Modern Culture* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009); and Susan M. Mountin, “Tilling the Soil: Preparing Women for the Vocation of Ministry—A Challenge and Call,” in *Jesuit and Feminist Education: Intersections in Teaching and Learning for the Twenty-first Century*, eds. Jocelyn M. Boryczka and Elizabeth A. Petrino (New York: Fordham, 2012), 234–241.

<sup>79</sup> Burke, “Mary Ward: To Be or Not to Be...a Saint,” 57.

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Ireland. The other two authors of Decree 14 are Bill Urin, S.J., Rector of Newman College at the University of Melbourne, and the late Pat Howell, S.J., former Vice President for Mission at Seattle University. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Pat for his support and collegiality over many years.

<sup>81</sup> Gerry O’Hanlon, S.J., December 12, 2015. Telephone interview with author.

<sup>82</sup> *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees of the 31<sup>st</sup>–35<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009), 617.

<sup>83</sup> Arturo Sosa, S.J., “Stirring the Waters—Making the Impossible Possible,” accessed December 1, 2017, [http://www.sjweb.info/documents/assj/2017.03.08\\_Voices\\_of\\_Faith\\_2017\\_Fr\\_General%27s\\_speech.pdf](http://www.sjweb.info/documents/assj/2017.03.08_Voices_of_Faith_2017_Fr_General%27s_speech.pdf).

<sup>84</sup> Heydt and Melcher, “Reflections from an Ignatian Pilgrimage,” 5.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>87</sup> Dreyer, “Do as I Do, Not as I Say,” 35.