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EDITORIAL

Laying Foundations to Endure: Ignatius's *Institutio* and the Archival Soul of Jesuit Education

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The Society of Jesus was born from a companionship among university students. After facing inquisitorial scrutiny in Alcalá and Salamanca, Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) chose to continue his studies in Paris, then one of the most prestigious centers of higher learning in Europe. Initially enrolled at the Collège de Montaigu—whose halls had recently hosted John Calvin (1509–64)—he eventually settled at the Collège Sainte-Barbe, sharing a room with Francis Xavier (1506–52) and Peter Faber (1506–46). The rest of the story is well known.

What deserves further attention, however, is a biographical detail that reveals an overlooked facet of Ignatius's character and institutional vision. Upon being cleared of the charges brought against him in Spain, Ignatius secured formal documentation of his clearance and carried it with him for the rest of his life. More than a mere token, it became a reference point and protective instrument. This very seminal act of recordkeeping served as a touchstone and precedent for future institutional challenges—a model he followed for both personal and institutional purposes.

Though anecdotal, this detail is anything but trivial. It suggests a link between Ignatius's personal documentary habits and the emerging Jesuit culture of governance. From early on, Ignatius, as a superior general of the newly established order, and his successors exhibited an enduring emphasis on documentation, reflection, and archival preservation. While direct

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causality is difficult to establish, it is plausible to argue that the convergence of Ignatius's courtly training, administrative experience, and reflective habits gave rise to a distinctive documentary sensibility—one that shaped Jesuit institutional life from its inception.

During his formative years at the court of Juan Velázquez de Cuéllar in Arévalo (1506–17, historians agree that Ignatius was involved with bureaucratic and administrative procedures while he was receiving chivalric, court-life training. This early exposure informed his later methodical approach to both spiritual discernment and institutional governance: recording insights, preserving notes, producing templates and striving for clarity in communication.

This ethos materialized in key moments of Jesuit institutional development.[1] After the companions' failed pilgrimage to the Holy Land, they spent time together between Venice and Vicenza to discern their next steps—and recorded their deliberations in a document still preserved in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu. The drafting of the Constitutions, carried out with Juan Alfonso de Polanco, involved extensive resourcing, note-taking, referencing, and synthesis.

Such practices coalesced into enduring administrative instruments: the *Formula scribendi,* which governed internal correspondence; the annual and triennial catalogs, which tracked personnel and institutional health; and, most notably, the *Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Iesu*. Often abbreviated to *Ratio Studiorum*—thereby minimizing the central term "institutio"—this foundational document epitomizes the Jesuit attitude toward documenting processes. Its drafting proved to be a prolonged, collective endeavor characterized by a sophisticated system of checks and balances. The process involved committee-based revisions, provincial feedback, repeated trials and experiments, and extensive deliberation—not only within the central governance of the Society, but also at local levels. The *Ratio* emerged from a dynamic interplay of top-down directives and bottom-up contributions, all of which generated a vast corpus of documents: drafts, reports, minutes, memoranda. These were not discarded once their immediate function was fulfilled; rather, they were preserved as

1 Markus Friedrich wrote: "The Jesuits mirror the administrative culture of their times not just in their continuous production of administrative records (the modern historians' "sources"); they also shared what was by then a well-established culture of archiving." Friedrich, "A Jesuit Culture of Records?: The Society of Jesus, the Life Cycle of Administrative Documents, and the Late Medieval and Early Modern History of Bureaucratic Information," *International Symposia on Jesuit Studies* (2019): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.51238/ISJS.2019.06.

valuable records, contributing to the institutional memory and reflective capacity of the Society of Jesus.

From these practices emerged a broader archival disposition—one that not only preserved memory but enabled historiographical construction. Historiography and archive are mutually constitutive. The establishment of official narratives inevitably shapes the selection of sources and the processes by which memory is curated and preserved. It is therefore no surprise that the Society of Jesus turned early on to the task of producing its own history—an endeavor certainly not without apologetical aims yet grounded in the rigorous use of archival materials meticulously preserved within the order. As early as the sixteenth century, official historians internal to the Society were appointed—a role that, though evolving from personal designation to institutional function, remained vital to the Society's identity and mission well into recent times.

This historiographical enterprise unfolded alongside a vigorous editorial activity rooted in the Society's archival holdings. As John O'Malley and Timothy O'Brien have recently observed, the publication of the monumental *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu* not only provided critical editions of foundational documents but also laid the groundwork for interpretive constructs—such as the very notion of "Ignatian spirituality."[2] That such a construct emerged and gained traction in the twentieth century, is itself a testament to the interdependence of historiography, archival preservation, and editorial labor—an interdependence not always immediately apparent in the context of current practices in Ignatian spirituality.

The emergence of Jesuit studies as a distinct and respected academic field—capable of shedding light on both global developments and local contexts—has been made possible precisely by the Society of Jesus's enduring commitment to documentation and preservation. Such an emergence has been accompanied not only by individual work of scholars who have approached Jesuit material stored in the archives, or by extraordinary moments of sharing among them (such as particular conferences, publications on historical special occasions, etc.). Rather, institutes dedicated to the study of Jesuit history, heritage, and culture have been founded to work alongside the major archives of the Society, complementing their work of preservation with research, interpretation, and the dissemination of sources.

Ignatius's vision—spiritual, communal, pedagogical—cannot be separated from his commitment to laying enduring foundations. By "institutionalization," we mean it in its etymological sense: the act of giving form

2 John O'Malley, S.J., and Timothy O'Brien, S.J., "The Twentieth-century Construction of Ignatian Spirituality: A Sketch," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 52, no. 3 (2020): 1–44.

by laying foundations for what is intended to last.[3] In Jesuit education, this took the shape of rules, routines, and documents—but also of institutions capable of transmitting a living heritage across time. Documentation, preservation, and reflection were not accidental features of Jesuit governance; they were its architecture.

In this light, recent efforts to recover Jesuit identity through source-based approaches gain renewed significance. Across the Jesuit educational network, particularly in the Anglophone world, there is a growing movement to revitalize archives, foster historical research, and integrate these materials into curricula. These efforts move beyond branding exercises or abstract values statements. They return to sources not out of nostalgia, but to cultivate a living tradition capable of engaging contemporary challenges.

This renewal has already had the positive outcome of challenging prevailing assumptions. The Society of Jesus has often been described as possessing a centralized mentality that left little space for local memory. But recent scholarship and archival projects in Jesuit schools and universities have complicated that view. Local repositories are now more clearly understood to have been vital centers of memory, contributing meaningfully to the Society's collective historiography.

This decentralization reveals the archival culture of the Society to be multifaceted and layered. Universities have often led the way, but secondary schools are increasingly investing in this work—establishing archives, training professionals, and building digital platforms for shared memory. These efforts reaffirm that the Jesuit tradition is not a static inheritance but a dynamic process of re-appropriation, grounded in documents and driven by reflection.

In reclaiming these sources, we do not merely recover the past. We renew the institutional imagination that made such a past possible. Through archives, we remember; through historiography, we interpret; through education, we form. In all three, the enduring imprints of Ignatius and the early Jesuits remain visible—not only in what they did or wrote, but in how they preserved and gave instructions on preserving what was worth remembering.

If we accept that Ignatius's documentary habits shaped the governance structures of the Society, then the present-day reclamation of Jesuit identity

3 From the Latin verb *instituo*, deriving from *in* + *stituere* (a variant of *statuere*), means "to establish," "to set up," or "to cause to stand." The Latin root conveys the idea of something made to stand firmly—something grounded or founded. From this original sense of giving firm foundation, the terms *institute, institutional* and *institution* later developed, encompassing both the act of establishing, the public officiality of an act, and the process of educating, forming a person.

through archival work takes on more than historical interest—it becomes an act of living *ressourcement*. The founding impulse of the Society is not frozen in time but alive in every community that documents, reflects, and discerns. In this sense, the contemporary work of archivists, educators, and historians is not ancillary to Jesuit education; it is essential to it.

This realization should guide institutional investment. The resources required to support local archives, train professionals, digitize holdings, and network repositories are not luxuries—they are foundational. To rearticulate the mission of Jesuit education for the twenty-first century, institutions must deepen their engagement with the material legacy of their past.

Doing so has both internal and external benefits. Internally, it fosters a deeper understanding of institutional identity among faculty, students, and staff. Externally, it enables collaboration across Jesuit institutions globally, linking local narratives to broader histories. In both cases, the result is a thicker, more resilient tradition—one capable of adaptation without dilution.

As we look to the future of Jesuit education, we must therefore look also to its archives and institutes—not merely as repositories of memory, but as engines of renewal. They are the soil in which our institutions grow, the record of our discernment, and the map by which we navigate changing contexts.

This is why journals dedicated to Jesuit education must continue to foreground historiography and archival work—not as marginal pursuits, but as central to the mission. The Society of Jesus was born not only in companionship and zeal but in the quiet power of the organized written memory. To honor that birth is to commit ourselves, again and again, to the labor of documentation and interpretation—of building foundations that endure.

In the end, what is at stake is not simply the preservation of documents but the future of Jesuit education itself. As new generations of students, teachers, and administrators enter into this tradition, they must be offered not only values and slogans, but the deeper context in which these took root. It is only by cultivating this shared historical awareness—this literacy of origins—that Jesuit institutions can remain faithful to their foundational mission while continuing to adapt and flourish.

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