

A BRIEF HISTORY OF JESUIT EDUCATION

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Even though St. Ignatius Loyola and his first companions were graduates of the University of Paris, the original works of the Society of Jesus did not include educational institutions. The goal of the Society was to be highly mobile, ready to move where the need was greatest. Permanent institutions, other than places for the education of Jesuits themselves, were not envisioned.

In 1545, five years after the establishment of the order, a college was founded in Gand a, Spain, for the education of those preparing to join the Society. Its founder was Duke *Francisco de Borja* who later gave up his title and became a Jesuit and, eventually, Superior General of the order. At the insistence of parents, the college began, in 1546, to admit other boys of the city. The first Jesuit school in the sense of an institution intended primarily for young lay students was founded in Messina, Sicily, two years later.

When it became apparent that education was not only an apt means for human and spiritual development but also an effective instrument for reforming the Church, the number of Jesuit schools began to increase rapidly.

The Roman College was founded in 1551 with monies from Francis Borgia. It opened as a college of humane letters and later added faculties in philosophy and theology.

In those days, the Jesuits and Ignatius had the good fortune to attract one of the most accomplished scholars and charming characters it has ever known, the Spaniard, Diego Ledesma. Described as "always smiling and always joyful," he was a doctor three times over, of Alcal , of Paris, and of Louvain.

At Ignatius' request, Ledesma organized the studies at the new Roman College. In doing so, he mapped out the future of Jesuit education and provided it with a rationale.

John Padberg, director of the Institute of Jesuit Sources, paraphrases Ledesma's rather ornate language: Jesuits have schools because, first, they help to educate a person for a productive career; second, they provide education for social and political responsibility; third, they develop the totally human person in the humanities and sciences; and, fourth, they give an education for a particular perspective, which is Christian and Catholic, on the ultimate nature and destiny of the human person.

It is not surprising, then, that the motto of the Roman College of Diego Ledesma became "religioni et bonis artibus" -- for religion and the good arts -- the motto which appears on Main Hall at Regis and on the seals of many Jesuit institutions of learning.

In the *Constitutions*, Ignatius mandated that Jesuit education should follow the *modus Parisiensis*, the method of the University of Paris, rather than the rather loose Spanish or Italian models. This meant, first, a stress on the humanities; second, an orderly system to be observed in pursuing successive branches of knowledge; third, repetition of material; and, fourth, the active involvement of the students in their own education through argumentation, discussion and competition. This last led to *eloquentia perfecta*: an ability to express oneself well in writing and speech.

Ignatius asserted that he could not set very detailed guidelines for the schools until there was more concrete experience available. Before he could do that, he died (July 31, 1556).

The Roman College became known as the Gregorian University in 1558, after Pope Gregory XIII built a structure to house it. Founded by two Jesuit saints, Ignatius Loyola and Francis Borgia, it remains, today, in the same building and is the flagship Jesuit university.

In the years following the death of Ignatius not all Jesuits agreed that involvement in education was a proper activity for the Society of Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesuit involvement in education continued to grow at a rapid rate. Of the 40 schools that Ignatius had personally approved, at least 35 were in operation when he died, even though the total membership of the order had not reached 1,000. Within 40 years, the number of Jesuit schools would reach 245. The promised development of a document describing common principles for all these schools became a practical necessity.

The first drafts of a common document were based on the "Rules of the Roman College." An international committee of six Jesuits was appointed by Superior General Claudio Acquaviva. In 1586 and again in 1591, this group published drafts which were widely distributed for comments. Finally, the definitive *Ratio Studiorum* ("Plan of Studies") was published on January 8, 1599.

The *Ratio* is a handbook. It consists of a series of rules regarding the government of the school, the formation of teachers, the curriculum and methods of teaching. It is not so much an original work as it is a collection of the most effective educational methods of the time.

There is little explicit reference to underlying principles in the *Ratio*. Such principles were stated in earlier versions and were presupposed in the edition of 1599. The relationship between teacher and student, for example, is to be modeled on the relationship between the director of the *Spiritual Exercises* and the person making them.

The process leading to the publication of the *Ratio* produced a "system" of schools whose strength and influence lay in a common Ignatian vision that evolved into common pedagogical principles. It was the first educational system that the world had ever seen.

The system was, at the beginning, highly flexible, adapting itself to the needs of time and place. It stressed the humanities, the fine arts, and theater. It was world-wide. It was inclusive as well, ranging from elementary school levels through universities.

The system of Jesuit schools developed and expanded for more than two hundred years and then came to a tragic end. The eighteenth century was not kind to the Church, the Jesuits, or Jesuit education. The Bourbon monarchies of Catholic France, Spain and Portugal sought to limit the power of the Church and take control of the schools in their territories. The Jesuits

became targets. Fierce political pressure was placed on the Papacy to suppress the order. The campaign was a success. First in the colonies and then in Europe, thousands of Jesuits were rounded up and shipped to Italy.

When the Society of Jesus was finally disbanded by a reluctant Pope Clement XIV in 1773, a world-wide network of 875 educational institutions was largely destroyed. Only a few Jesuit schools remained in Russian territories (actually, "occupied Poland"), where the suppression never took effect. In addition, Jesuits disappeared from faculties at state sponsored universities such as those at Vienna, Prague, and Cologne.

When Pope Pius VII was about to bring the Society of Jesus back into existence in 1814, after the fall of Napoleon, one reason he gave for his action was "that the Catholic Church could have, once again, the benefit of their educational experience." Educational work did begin again almost immediately. However, the turmoil of nineteenth century Europe, marked by revolutions and frequent expulsions of Jesuits from various countries prevented any genuine renewal of Jesuit education. Often enough, the Jesuits were also divided and educational institutions were enlisted in the ideological support of one or other side of warring factions. However, Jesuit schools flourished in the developing areas of India, East Asia, Latin America and, in particular, the United States.

The first Jesuits in the present United States had been Spaniards who came to Florida in 1566. In the seventeenth century Jesuits had worked in the vast territories of New France. These included such men as St. Isaac Jogues and the explorer, Jacques Marquette. They were contemporaries of another French Jesuit, Jean-François Régis, who had volunteered for the mission but who remained in France. In 1634, Andrew White and John Altham arrived in Maryland with Lord Calvert of Baltimore. Other Jesuits, notably Eusibio Kino, later came up from Mexico into what is now Arizona.

Jesuits were not always welcome, however. Massachusetts Bay Colony had a law which condemned to hanging any Jesuit caught twice in its territory. Even after the American Revolution, Jefferson and Adams considered a prohibition of the Jesuits in the Constitution.

The first Jesuit college in the United States, George Town College, was founded in 1789 by John Carroll, the first bishop of the very small Catholic community in the new country (about one percent of the population). Carroll had been a Jesuit before the 1773 suppression of the order. He gathered a small group of other English ex-Jesuits who, incorporated as the "Catholic Gentlemen of Maryland," founded the school in what would become Washington, D.C. The college was "given to the Jesuits" after the restoration of the order.

Twenty-one Jesuit colleges or universities were founded in the United States in the nineteenth century. Their original purpose was to assimilate the large groups of Catholic immigrants pouring into an American society which was often anti-Catholic. Accordingly, there was often an emphasis on the professions -- medicine, law and, later, business. Today, there are 28 Jesuit colleges and universities and two graduate schools of theology in the United States. There are also 46 high schools.

The twentieth century, especially the years after World War II, brought a dramatic increase in the size and number of Jesuit schools around the world. Jesuit educational work now extends to more than 2,000 institutions of a bewildering variety of types and levels, including 183 on the post secondary level and 356 high schools. Ten thousand Jesuits and

nearly 100,000 lay people in 56 countries provide education for more than 1.8 million students (Jesuits work in 113 countries).

Jesuit education today does not and cannot form the unified system of the seventeenth century. Distinct needs of different cultures and places prevail, and rightly so.

In fact, no longer is Jesuit education the exclusive property of Jesuits. Rather, Jesuit education is the property of all the men and women who work in educational institutions which claim the Ignatian heritage.

It was the spirit of Ignatius that enabled the early Jesuit schools of the sixteenth century to evolve. This same Ignatian vision, much broader than the Jesuit order, is characteristic of the Jesuit schools of today and can remain so as they become the Ignatian schools of tomorrow.



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