

in their secondary schools, as well as in the few universities they ran, they in the main conformed to the consensus of their age about what constituted a good education. This is a fact often overlooked when people today ask what a "Jesuit education" is. But there were some features that were special, if not quite unique, to them that began to give a special character to what they did, so that we no longer speak of them as following the Parisian style in the education but as developing their own Jesuit style.

I will describe only one of those features. Unlike some of their contemporaries, they did not oppose humanistic education to scholastic (university or professional) education, as if these were two incompatible systems of cultures. They saw them, rather, as complementary. They esteemed the intellectual rigor of the scholastic system and the power of the detached analysis it provided, and they believed in its goal of training highly skilled graduates in the sciences and in the professions of law, medicine, and theology. They saw this graduate training as especially appropriate in theology for their own members and even for a few select students for the diocesan clergy. In this instance they saw it as a help to a more "professionally" reliable ministry, for they shared the goal of both Protestant and Catholic leaders to produce a literate, more learned clergy.

They at the same time esteemed in the humanist system (primary and secondary education) the potential of poetry, oratory, and drama to elicit and foster noble sentiments and ideals, especially in younger boys; they believed in its potential to foster *pietas*--that is, good character. Moreover, this system taught eloquence, for rhetoric was at the center of the curriculum; that is, it taught oratory, the power to move others to action--action in a *good* cause.

Furthermore, from both these systems of education they appropriated the conviction that human culture and religion were not competing but complementary values, each enriching and challenging the other. Both systems taught in fact that philosophical, ethical, and to some extent even religious truths were available outside Christianity, and that these truths had to be respected. They were both thus reconciliatory in their ultimate dynamism. In the philosopher Aristotle the scholastic Aquinas found truths about the universe and human

morality. In Virgil and Cicero the humanists found truths about human nature and its destiny. I do not know of any Jesuit going so far as the humanist Erasmus did in his famous prayer, "O, St. Socrates, pray for us," but some of them came close.

I am not the only scholar to suggest that the benign attitude Jesuit missionaries like Matteo Ricci took toward Confucianism in China and Roberto De Nobili toward Hinduism in India related in some way especially to the humanist education that the Jesuits cultivated for their own members to a degree no other Order ever did--they had to, for practically every Jesuit was called upon at some point to teach "the humanities," that is, the Latin and Greek literary classics.

My impression is that the Jesuits, for all that, saw the boundaries between these two educational philosophies, unlike the blur that occurs in North America today where the undergraduate college both is the direct heir of the humanistic system and at the same time, by being part of the university, partakes of the technical or even vocational training reserved to "professionals." What is education for? It is for many things, according to one's philosophy, but it is difficult to be successful in it if it is seen to be for many things competing at the same time for the same person.

The Jesuits, I believe, wanted to preserve the best of two great educational ideals, the intellectual rigor and professionalism of the scholastic system and the more personalist, societal, and even practical goals of the humanists. I am not trying to say they were successful--or unsuccessful--in doing so. Indeed, I wonder if a final resolution of such disparate goals is possible within any educational vision and, unless we clearly opt for one of the two alternatives, if we are not perpetually condemned to some compromise rather than synthesis. Already in the sixteenth century, a certain ambivalence about the purpose even of university education was introduced by the Jesuits and others, and that ambivalence persists even today, though the terms in which it manifests itself are of course quite different.

By 1599, in any case, the Jesuits had had enough experience in education to try to codify their methods and ideals, and they did so by producing the famous *Ratio Studiorum*, or plan of studies, whose anniversary is the occasion for this conference. They had tried to produce it



earlier but were not able to bring it about. The *Ratio* would serve them as a guide throughout the world, really down to the nineteenth century. Basically a codification of curricular, administrative, and pedagogical principles, it had all the advantages and the many disadvantages of any such codification. It provided a firm structure and assured a certain level of quality control. It ran the danger of dampening initiative and inhibiting needed changes as the decades and then the centuries rolled on. At a certain point it desperately needed revision, but revision was resisted. Perhaps most important, it failed to highlight the larger vision and deeper assumptions that had originally animated the Jesuit educational undertaking--partly because it took them for granted, partly because they were half-forgotten. Much scholarly commentary on Jesuit education has taken the *Ratio* as almost the only document studied, with the result that what I consider most important in Jesuit education has been slighted or even altogether missed.

There are two further aspects of the Jesuit enterprise that the *Ratio* and most scholarship has missed and that I think are crucially important. I have become increasingly aware of these in recent years, and especially during the international conference that I helped organize two years ago at Boston College, entitled "The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773." Most of the papers from the conference--some thirty-five of them--have just been published in a volume from the University of Toronto Press.¹²

The first aspect of which the conference made me increasingly aware is the attention the Jesuits gave to the arts. Official Jesuit legislation and directives in this regard are generally quite deceptive, for they are few, and those few tend to be cautious and restrictive. The importance of Jesuit theater has long been recognized, but it has been little recognized in the American scholarship and generally treated as a subject in itself, not integrated into the educational enterprise as such.

In any case, the more I study the history of Jesuit education, the more integral to the program of the schools the arts seem to be, many of them consequences of the early Jesuit commitment to theater -- which of course was itself part of the Parisian style, which the Jesuits interpreted to mean that the plays of Terence should not simply be read but be



performed. The plays, besides inevitably entailing music and dance, sometimes required elaborate sets and other paraphernalia of dramatic productions. The arts took the form of what we would today call extracurriculars, but they were done in many of the schools in a way that fitted them into a clear program--and often carried out with great expense. The great collegiate churches attached to Jesuit schools often employed architects, painters, and sculptors of the highest local standing for their construction and decoration--but not only of local standing, for the Jesuits employed in the early seventeenth century the most celebrated artist of the day, Rubens, and after Rubens's death, the subsequently most celebrated Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Thus, education took place outside the often narrow confines of the classroom.

Louise Rice wrote in the Toronto volume on the celebrations that took place at the Roman College in the seventeenth century on the occasion of academic disputations or degree defenses of the lay students.¹³ These were great public affairs, with distinguished guests, who were entertained with instrumental and vocal music at various moments in the program, with the hall sometimes elaborately decorated according to the design of a local artist. An unexamined field in the history of architecture, it seems to me, is the development of formal school buildings as almost a new genre. The Jesuits sparked this development. At least in Italy before the Jesuits opened their schools, no such buildings existed for primary or secondary education, for "schools" were such informal institutions, usually meeting in the house of the schoolmaster. One of the great changes that the Jesuits helped promote was the development of teams of teachers--a real faculty--for such schools, which might range from five or six teachers up to thirty or forty. A faculty of such size required many classrooms, and hence required a building specially constructed for that scope.

A second aspect called to my attention by the Boston conference is the working of the very network itself, that is, the working of the communication of Jesuit schools with one another; or, even more impressive, communication with Jesuits working "in the field" in newly discovered lands. Steve Harris has published, again in the Toronto volume, an article on this subject, which he calls the Jesuit "geography of knowledge." Harris is a historian of



science, and his specialty is Jesuit science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a subject now experiencing an upgraded evaluation among many such historians. Jesuits were committed to the university program in place at Paris and elsewhere, whose lower college was that of the arts, that is, of philosophy, that is, as I said, of natural philosophy or science. It is this curricular fact that accounts for the many Jesuit astronomical observatories and laboratories in their larger schools and for a certain Jesuit preeminence in this domain.

But one advantage the Jesuits had over others was the reports from the overseas fields of their brethren, who also had had good training "in philosophy" as astronomers, geographers, and naturalists. These reports often took the form of the "edifying letters" the Jesuits sent to broad audiences to will support for their work abroad. In Harris's opinion, it was not only the quantity and frequency of this correspondence that gave some Jesuit centers a privileged access to new information about the natural world. It was also the quality of the observation and the dependability of remote agents in executing requests from the Jesuit scientists back home for measurements, descriptions, and the sending back to Europe of natural objects, which could be examined and then put on display. The Jesuits shared this information with colleagues who did not share their own confessional allegiance. As Harris says, at least within the history of science, Jesuit letters can be found in the correspondence of every major figure from Tycho Brahe in the sixteenth century to Kepler, Galileo, Descartes, Newton, and Leibniz in the seventeenth, and to similarly distinguished figures in the eighteenth.

When the Jesuits opened their first school in Messina, Europe was not only in the throes of the great religious turmoil in the wake of the Reformation but also at one of the great turning points in the history of formal schooling. The fifteenth-century humanists in Italy had set in motion a movement that bit by bit was creating a brand-new institution--the primary/secondary school pretty much as we know it today. This new institution was of course derived from principles enunciated in ancient Greece and Rome, but it was being put into a systematic form that Cicero and Quintilian did not know. The Jesuits arrived on the scene at just the right moment to capitalize on what was happening, and they play an important role in the development of the new system. They were far from being alone in



such development, but because of the way they were organized, because of the special backgrounds they came from and then devised for themselves, their role was special. I have tried to indicate a few ways in which this was true.

These schools must of course be placed in the context of what we can call the confessionalization of Europe, for they became confessional schools, intent on establishing for their students clear Roman Catholic identity. But they had other aspects to them that were broader in their scope, as I hope I have suggested, that helped lift them out of the special context of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Jesuits also appropriated the older institution of learning--the university. This too gave them a special role in European culture, of which science was a particularly important and perhaps somewhat surprising manifestation. By the seventeenth century, the universities began to undergo important changes, as science moved away from the text of Aristotle to more experimental modes, in which individual Jesuits took part even as the Jesuit educational institutions tended to remain fixed in the more text-bound mode.

I exaggerate when I say that the Jesuits got into formal schooling almost by a series of historical accidents, but there is at least a grain of truth in it. I find that they were not always clear in explaining to themselves or others why they remained in it or what they hoped to accomplish--sometimes repeating what sound suspiciously like bromides. But let me put words in their mouths.

First, they were convinced that formal schooling was a good thing for society at large. They were content through their schools to contribute to the common good. Second, they believed that ethical and religious formation should not be confined to the pulpit, for it was a concern much too broad for such a boundary. Third, they were not fundamentalists, for, though not uncritical, they saw culture and education not as enemies but as friends. They derived this last conviction from the basically reconciliatory dynamics of the Thomistic system of scholasticism and from the reconciliatory dynamics of the humanists' attitude toward good literature. They derived it as well from the founder of their Order who, a few



years after his conversion, decided that he needed a university education in order, as he said, "better to help souls."

Notes

- 1.[\[back\]](#) For general background, see Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). For specific background, see John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), esp. 200-42.
- 2.[\[back\]](#) Elizabeth Rapley, *The Devotees: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).
- 3.[\[back\]](#) See John W. O'Malley, "The Historiography of the Society of Jesus: Where Does It Stand Today?" in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, eds. John W. O'Malley et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 3-37.
- 4.[\[back\]](#) Besides Grendler's *Schooling*, mentioned above, the best entrance into this world is still William Harrison Woodward, *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators* (1897; reprint, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963) .
- 5.[\[back\]](#) See the insightful article by Craig R. Thompson, "Better Teachers than Scotus or Aquinas," in *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. John L. Lievsay (Durham: Duke University Press, 1968), 114-45.
- 6.[\[back\]](#) For a description of *Christianitas* and its importance in the Middle Ages, see the brilliant article by John Van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," *The American Historical Review*, 91 (1996): 519-52.
- 7.[\[back\]](#) See John W. O'Malley, "Early Jesuit Spirituality: Spain and Italy," in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, eds. Louis Dupre and Don E. Saliers, vol. 18 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 3-27.
- 8.[\[back\]](#) See O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, 200



9.[\[back\]](#) Ibid., 209.

10.[\[back\]](#) Ibid., 212-13.

11.[\[back\]](#) Ibid., 211.

12.[\[back\]](#) O'Malley, *The Jesuits* (see note 3 above). See also Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin American, 1542-1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

13.[\[back\]](#) Louise Rice, "Jesuit Thesis Prints and the Festive Academic Defence at the Collegio Romano," in *The Jesuits*, ed. O'Malley et al., 148-69.

