

Cultivating Talents and Social Responsibility Aims and Means of Early Jesuit Education

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Individual and Community

The Prefect of the Inferior Classes "should by all means support the Rector in guiding and organizing our schools, so that all students make progress no less in the Liberal Arts than in their conduct of life."¹ The Inferior Classes at Jesuit colleges, for which these rules of the *Ratio studiorum* were crafted in 1599, comprised what elsewhere was termed *studia humanitatis*, that is, Latin Grammar, Greek, poetry, and rhetoric. Thus, they were the introductory studies before students could move over to philosophy and eventually theology. This first rule, expressly designated as the 'aim' of the Prefect, creates an unmistakable link between moral conduct and academic learning.

So, moral conduct is an aim of education that goes on par with scholarly learning. But one might think that this simply refers to the individual moral perfection of the student. And, indeed, the rules for students seemingly confirm this individualistic view: "Our students should, in the first place, care for the purity of their souls and for the right attitude towards studies; nothing else should they seek therein but God's glory and the fruit for the souls."²

Still, one should remember that the spirit of Saint Ignatius was always two-fold: He was a convert soldier and his initial idea was to foster individual spirituality, as is best expressed in his *Exercises*. On the other hand, he endeavored to save the souls of the Roman Christians by preaching, but soon it dawned on him and his fellows that their mission should extend to recover the newly apostate protestant populations. It was this expansion that would shape the image of Ignatius and his Society of Jesus.³ Soon the Society engaged in founding colleges and universities, thus becoming a "teaching Order".⁴

The aim which the Society of Jesus directly seeks is to aid its own members and their neighbors to attain the ultimate end for which they were created. ... Therefore ... it will be necessary to provide for the edifice of [the Jesuits'] learning and the manner of employing it, that these may be aids towards better knowledge and [better] service of God, our Creator and Lord. Toward achieving this purpose the Society takes charge of the colleges and also of some universities, that in them those who prove themselves worthy in these houses but have entered the Society unequipped with the necessary learning may receive instruction in it and the other means of helping souls.⁵

¹ *Ratio Studiorum*, 1599, *Regulae Praefecti Studiorum Inferiorum*, n. 1: "ut omni ope atque opera adiuvet in scholis nostris ita regendis ac moderandis, ut, qui eas frequentant, non minus quam in bonis artibus, in vitae probitate proficiant." Unless otherwise cited, all translations are mine.

² *Ratio Studiorum*, 1599, *Regulae Scholasticorum Nostrae Societatis*, n. 1.

³ Miguel Batllori, "El mito contrarreformista de San Ignacio anti-Lutero", in Julio Caro Baroja (ed.), *Ignacio de Loyola, Magister Artium en París, 1528-1535*, San Sebastian: Kutxa, 1991, pp. 87-93.

⁴ Cf. "Introductio generalis" in Ladislaus Lukács (ed.), *Monumenta Paedagogica Societatis Iesu*, vol. 2, Rome: IHSI, 1974, pp. 6*-19*. John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, chapter 6.

⁵ *Constitutions*, part 4, Preamble, n. 1, in Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss, New York: Paulist Press, 1991, p. 293. Never trust a translation! For reasons of smooth style the translator omitted the second "magis"="better" (*ad magis cognoscendum, magisque serviendum Deo*), which in Latin, too, is not necessary, hence emphatic.

This purposeful declaration should be surprising to all who have learned in their philosophy core course, that the Liberal Arts are 'liberal' because they pursue knowledge for knowledge's sake. In Catholic Reformation, studies aim at some employment: in the knowledge of God and in 'helping souls'. The individual perfection and the care for the souls of others seem intimately conjoined and depend on one another. And they are so to say stimulated by the emphatic repetition of *magis*/"more". Everything else follows from these premises. The spirit of outreach, of improvement, of teleology, of perfection in the sense not of perfected achievement but of permanent task is clearly present in the very justification of drafting a *Constitution*: Even though it lies in Divine providence to "preserve, direct, and carry forward" the Society of Jesus, on its part and as its way of cooperating with providence, it needs some constitution "to aid us to proceed better ... along the path of divine service on which we have entered."⁶ We are used to associate the idea of progress with the Baconian project, and with Enlightenment; and this is correct if we think of it in merely secular terms. For it was secularization that allowed humans to strive for improvement of wisdom by way of accumulation of knowledge and that could pretend to improve individual and social welfare by securing abundant means of survival. However, Ignatius and the early Jesuits appropriated the old metaphor of the Christian as *viator*, as being on the way, but they gave it a two-fold meaning, an individual and a societal one. As I said before, the perfection of the individual soul is at stake, but the *Constitutions*, and even more the *Ratio studiorum* declared that this goal can only be achieved by extending our operation to the world within which we live. The educational program of the early Jesuits clearly shows that scholarly achievements, personal salvation, and engagement for the other are not mutually exclusive; rather, care for the soul always includes caring for the souls of all. The comparative mode in the formula AMDG ("To the *greater* glory of God") extended over all activities. After all, if God is great, what can multiply His glory? What increases is the devotion in the believers, and the number of believers, too.

Now if we look for further indications regarding social engagement in early Jesuit education, there is not much, at least on the surface. However it should be noted that already in the *Constitutions* there is an "Instruction of the Scholastics (i.e., students) in the means of helping their neighbor," which draws upon the above mentioned ends of the Society of Jesus for which the students should "accustom themselves to the spiritual arms which they must employ in aiding their neighbor."⁷ Even more importantly than that, poor students were admitted from the very beginning. The rules for the Prefect of Studies state: "He may not exclude an applicant, because he is not of noble origin or he his poor."⁸ This is an enforcement of the ruling of the *Constitutions* that had suggested the acceptance of some poor students, even without their intention to enter the Order. They were to be admitted in case there was a shortage of other applicants no less than applicants of noble birth and well-off background who could sustain themselves.⁹ This led eventually to a number of 'houses for poor students' (*domus pauperum studiosorum*) in many places. In Paris, for instance, a special ruling was necessary, given the sociological phenomenon of impoverished nobility: It was decided that in

⁶ *Constitutions* (as above), p. 288.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 296.

⁸ *Ratio Studiorum*, 1599, *Regulae Praefecti Studiorum Inferiorum*, n. 9.

⁹ *Constitutiones*, IV 3, declaratio B.

such colleges young noblemen, even though they were relatively poor, were not to be preferred over those who "are really poor, provided they are equal in intelligence, habit etc."¹⁰

All this looks quite encouraging. But for the sake of raising awareness of the specific method of education in the Ignatian spirit, let us think of alternatives. Not long after the Jesuit Order had been founded and the education had been systematized, Tommaso Campanella and Francis Bacon drafted their views of science, education, and society. Bacon was already mentioned. In the "House of Salomon" of his *New Atlantis* (1626) plenty of research is going on, but clearly on a quantitative and expansive, rather than intensive, scale. Even though there is a dab of natural theology like whipped cream on top of all the *New Atlantis*, and morally good behavior is strongly recommended, there is no word about the education of the individual, for – it seems – Bacon believed that the improvement of the person comes automatically with technological advancement. His scientological approach, as we may term it, has no real place for the education of humans as such. The Dominican friar Campanella had well thought about individuals and their education in his *City of the Sun* (1600). But as is well known, his solution has an air of communism in that personhood finds its perfection in annihilation in a happy society of brothers. Much more than in Bacon, the "City of the Sun" depends on God's presence. Even more, it is ultimately a system of worship, though again at the cost of individual development. In Campanella, education is part of his social engineering: expose people to truth, keep them from private interest, and they will be good. That's what was on the market at the time when Jesuit schools flourished. If there was any serious alternative around 1600, it was the "Pious Schools" of the Piarists, originated in 1597, by Joseph of Calasanz, and directly aimed at poor children in Rome. Eventually, in the late 18th century, the Piarist Order would replace the educational monopoly the Jesuits had, especially in the Habsburg Empire – but this is another story.¹¹

As is well known, the proletariat as such was not the key target of the Jesuits, but rather Christianity on a whole, yet its apostolate was nonetheless meant politically. The role of the confessors at several European courts from the mid 16th century on had been criticized and eventually endangered the existence of the Order. As Robert Bireley, S.J., has pointed out, key to the engagement at the courts was an instruction by Saint Ignatius to the effect that there is nothing wrong with pastoral care of the higher classes, including nobility, especially if they act as generous promoters of the Catholic cause. Moreover, spiritual guidance to a prince benefits all subjects in the same way as all members of a body share the well being of the head.¹² Now there was and would be plenty of room for historical and critical remarks on the political involvement of some fathers, starting from within the Order moving over to its critics. But this is not at stake here. Ignatius's attitude repeats the pattern that I have tried to highlight in all the previous references and which I want to repeat now:

- The Glory of God and its increase
- The salvation of the individual
- The responsibility for the community

¹⁰ Ladislaus Lukács (ed.): *Monumenta Paedagogica Societatis Iesu*, vol. 4, Rome: IHSI, 1981, mon. 50, X, p. 437.

¹¹ On religious orders with school ministry see Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism 1450-1700*, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1999, pp. 34-35 and 130-132.

¹² Robert Bireley, "Hofbeichtväter und Politik im 17. Jahrhundert, in Michael Sievernich, Günter Switek (ed.), *Ignatianisch. Eigenart und Methode der Gesellschaft Jesu*, Freiburg: Herder, 1990, pp. 386-403; 387.

All three are marked by transcending each other mutually, which becomes quite clear as soon as one translates them into more familiar words: Worship is open to improvement; it is done both for God and for the care for the soul; and this can only be achieved by transcending the individual concern towards the community in which the individual factually lives. So, in search for social responsibility we are seemingly diverted to another focus of attention: the individual. For all references adduced so far evolve around the individual student, the personal target of ministry, even though everything seems to aim at the community. Paradoxically, Jesuit mission begins with the individual; mission being understood in the broadest sense of the word, and individual in an anthropological sense.

Possevino's Cultivation of Talents

In order to prove my point I should like to draw upon one key text of early Jesuit education, namely Antonio Possevino's *Cultura ingeniorum* – which should translate as "Cultivation of Talents", but in a more loose sense could be rendered as "Culture of the individual". Possevino (+1611) was one of the great missionaries of his Order. He organized schools in the Baltics and in Transylvania, he negotiated with princes all over Europe, and he also wrote two important books that, on the surface, are something like commented bibliographies. But in many parts, the books expand to well pondered studies on the meaning of scholarship in general and an assessment of special areas. The book covering theology had the title *Apparatus sacer* – "Sacred warehouse" and came out in 1603-08, the book covering humanities came out first in 1593 and was called *Bibliotheca selecta* – "Selected library" with the subtitle: "On the *ratio studiorum* [or rather, "on how to study"] for the sake of disciplines and salvation for all peoples."¹³ Again, we see the view widen from what is at hand to universal salvation.

The book initiates with a chapter, which from the second edition on had the headline just mentioned. On a whole, it is a treatise on education, or more specifically on the initiation to the liberal arts. Not surprisingly, the treatise states the humanist view of human dignity, i.e., the human as the median creature between angels and beasts: God has given to humans the upright stature so that the spiritual eye may look to where the face is directed, he says. But for the rest, humans are dependent on the earth which they may scrutinize and where they may gain virtue in order to proceed on the way to God. Note the circular movement of the images.

On his way to learn about the world and his own destiny, the human being has been bestowed with senses, teachers, and the tradition. The senses not only simply help to experience reality, but they are the condition for humans to read the book of wisdom, namely the world which has been created for their instruction. And I may note that Possevino is echoing here a tenet of natural theology.¹⁴ Now in order to understand this book there are the angels, who according to traditional cosmology keep the outer universe revolving and thus transmit God's gifts to nature. Moreover, there are also human teachers and educators, as we might expect to see in a pedagogical treatise. However, in addition to these there are the sages of the Old Testament, as well as the pagan Greeks and Romans, who all – in their ways – witness the power and wisdom of God. Again, we observe a standard humanist motive. But it is employed for the purpose of stating that all and any wisdom is a gift from God.

The latter thought is expanded by reference to the tradition of tradition, as I would call it, namely a brief history of academic teaching from the Ancients, through the Apostles up to

¹³ 1593: ...*Qua agitur de ratione studiorum in historia, in disciplinis, in salute omnium procuranda*, 1603: ... *de ratione studiorum, ad disciplinas, et ad salutem omnium gentium procurandam*. The following paraphrase will be based on the second edition.

¹⁴ I am referring to Raymundus Sabundus, *Theologia naturalis, sive liber creaturarum*, 1434.

the academic teaching of the present time. So, as one can see, I am doing in my way what Possevino had done 400 years ago: I am making a point by recapitulating the history of my topic.

Possevino then addresses the question of human error and identifies three reasons for it: Sin, imprudence, and method. As for sin, a favorite issue in protestant epistemology, Possevino condenses his point to the observation that wisdom and religion must be equally nursed in order to direct one's life in all its activities towards the highest good. Spoken to the heretics of his time, Possevino's statement means that beatitude can, and can only, be achieved by a pious and wise approach to real life. For Catholic teachers and students, this statement exhorts them to have confidence in learning and piety towards it and not to lose salvation from sight.

The second reason for the failure of human wisdom was imprudence in the sense of not considering the true capabilities of the human mind. Evidently here Possevino comes to the core of his message: There is no point in teaching young people without examining the actual talent they have. Talent [*ingenium*] is simply defined as the ability to learn with more or less effort the doctrines and arts.¹⁵ With the help of Aristotle, Plato, medical tradition, and the Church Fathers, Possevino insists that human individuals are diverse.

The author then explains the origin and extent of diversity in talent among students. The thrust of his argument is that such talent is not identical with nature, and not unchangeably determined by nature: otherwise learning and education would be futile. And even if we assume that some people are less gifted than others, this is not to be mistaken for legal disenfranchisement. Commenting upon Aristotle's famous distinction concerning 'natural slaves' (*Pol.* I 4, 1254a 13) he clearly argues that any servant – whether enslaved through warfare and trade or by charitable choice – is not per se excluded from culture.¹⁶ As to the natural gifts, the rule applies that every person has to till his own soil. All this is based on one elementary assumption, as mentioned above, namely that intellectual aptitudes are of spiritual nature and as such they are God's endowment. Consequently, Possevino rejects any naturalist approach, such as assigning the difference of intelligence to physical and medical conditions, as Girolamo Cardano had tried.¹⁷ Rather, personal development depends on the openness of the pupil to the teaching, and this is ultimately an act of freedom:

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.¹⁸

Possevino equally rejects Juan Huarte's (+1588) notion of *ingenium* (from whose *Examen de los ingenios* he had borrowed the title of his treatise) because in a similar naturalist approach he had endeavored to locate the variety of disciplines in the various faculties of the intellect.¹⁹ The divine origin of human faculties entitles the individual to seek for improvement; and this is best done, first, by inquiring into personal propensities and strengths and, second, by employing all faculties of the mind towards an education in the full sense. It is the responsibility of the educators to discover the foremost natural gifts of a student, but also to

¹⁵ Chapt. 9.

¹⁶ Chapt. 10.

¹⁷ Chapt. 10, conclusion.

¹⁸ Chapt. 11; James 1.23-25 (King James version).

¹⁹ Chapters 12-17.

refine or even to suspend their judgment about them, since "it is amazing with how many personal properties one individual differs from the other".²⁰ After that it lies in the responsibility of the youth to overcome difficulties of learning by care for body and soul through keeping order in his studies. By 'order' Possevino meant to engage all spiritual powers towards the study and not to fragment one's mind by engaging in too many disciplines. So his remedy of imprudence is to assess the very personal talent of each individual and, at the same time, to foster all talents of an individual for the sake of learning. Both are necessary conditions to educate a person as a whole. In view of the three basic faculties of the intellect, reason, memory, and will, Possevino maintains that those waste their efforts who train only reason, or fill their memory, or – unconcerned of both reason and memory – approach scholarship only with apparently pious intentions.²¹ Piety alone makes no one wise or prudent. Needless to say, all these recommendations apply for teachers as well.²²

Possevino, the protagonist of Re-Catholicization, had the salvation of endangered and lost souls in mind, when he wrote about education. Therefore he repeats the circular structure of Ignatian spirituality: The struggle for the greater glory of God depends on well trained individuals who will take over the apostolate for the greater glory of God. He underscores in his treatise what the *Constitutions* already had stated, namely, that education bestows the students with the arms needed for the struggle in this life. In this sense, all sciences are practical.²³ College education serves two aims, which obviously converge: God's glory and the salvation of souls. Possevino employs a simile to illustrate his point:

The honorable lady Judith – before her attempt at capturing Holophernes – not only prayed and fasted but also dressed up with earrings, sandals, rings, and any female embellishment, to which God added graciousness and splendor. In the same way religious people call eloquence and all disciplines as servants into their fortress, where they serve as shields to fend off the enemies of the Church.

²⁰ Chapt. 18.

²¹ Chapt. 20.

²² Chapt. 22.

²³ Chapt. 32.