

REVIEW ARTICLE:

St. Ignatius on Education

by John A. Oesterle

ON JULY 31, 1556, there died a man who left a deep and lasting impression on the life and growth of the Catholic Church. His name was Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus. . . ."

These words appear on the front of the little pamphlet put out by the Jesuits to commemorate the Ignatian Year. The Ignatian Year, observing the 400th anniversary of the death of St. Ignatius, was instituted by the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, beginning July 31, 1935, and extending to July 31, 1956. Among the many achievements of the Jesuits, their work in education is perhaps best known. In the New World, they established a college in Mexico City in 1573, over half a century before the founding of Harvard. In the United States at the present time, apart from their many high schools, the Jesuits are conducting twenty-eight colleges and universities, with an enrollment of nearly a hundred thousand students, close to half the total enrollment of all Catholic Schools.

It is not only fitting but just that *THE NEW SCHOLASTICISM*, the official journal of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, should join in the acknowledgment of the Ignatian Year. The contribution of Jesuit universities and colleges to the promotion of philosophical study and research is amply indicated in the issues of this magazine and in the meetings of the Association from the very beginnings of both. There is no need to dwell on the indebtedness owed to the many outstanding priests and lay teachers in the Jesuit institutions of this country. The Jesuits have been particularly active in the encouragement of laymen in the study and teaching of philosophy. It is perhaps not inappropriate to mention my indebtedness to a Jesuit institution and in particular to Fr. R. J. Belleperche, S. J., for being introduced to philosophy and encouraged to go on to graduate work in it. Such results are certainly in the spirit of St. Ignatius, for "he seems to have been the first founder of a religious order to make the education of lay youths in both secular and sacred subjects one of the major works prescribed by the constitutions of his order."

The concluding part of the previous sentence is quoted from *Saint*

*Ignatius' Idea of a University.*¹ Although apparently not conceived as a project in connection with the Ignatian Year (the Author's Preface is dated July 31, 1954), the book serves admirably as an occasion to make better known the contribution of St. Ignatius himself to Catholic education during the observance of the Ignatian Year. It is my impression, upon reading the book, that the extent of St. Ignatius' contribution to education is not sufficiently known and appreciated or, better perhaps, not precisely evaluated and estimated. Fr. Ganss himself acknowledges in the Preface, in the light of reading St. Ignatius' own writings, that he has had to abandon educational theses he thought were part and parcel of Jesuit educational theory—theses which stemmed, not from St. Ignatius, but often no further back than the time of John Locke. If someone so close to the Jesuit tradition as Fr. Ganss makes this discovery, presumably all of us will gain immeasurably from an examination of Jesuit educational theory as it is found primarily in St. Ignatius himself.

My object in presenting a necessarily brief discussion of the book will be twofold. I shall seek to summarize, through Fr. Ganss, the thought of St. Ignatius on education and to note the development of Jesuit educational institutions during the lifetime of St. Ignatius; this early development of Jesuit education is, I think, not generally known. Secondly, I shall seek to reproduce and comment on that part of St. Ignatius' plan of education which pertains to theology and philosophy, and to add a note or two concerning philosophy of education in general.

The heart of St. Ignatius' thought about education can be reduced to two main points. Fr. Ganss summarizes them in the following way (p. 18). St. Ignatius "accepted education, especially that of lay students, among the ministries of the Society of Jesus as a means of promoting the salvation and perfection of the students, in the hope that they might vigorously and intelligently leaven their social environment with the doctrine and spirit of the Kingdom of Christ. . . ." Secondly, "since solid and strong intellectual formation was necessary to achieve this, he appropriated the best elements he could find in the educational system of his day, Catholicized them, and organized them into an instrument truly fit to achieve his purposes in his era—that is, the period of the advanced Renaissance as distinguished from late scholasticism." It seems to have been especially the merit of St. Ignatius, in outlining his

¹ By George E. Ganss. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1954), p. 107.

educational aims, to preserve the best in the education of the past while being fully alert to the interest and needs of his day.

Before examining how St. Ignatius planned the accomplishment of his educational ideals, let us sketch the rapid growth of educational institutions under the Jesuits, much of it while St. Ignatius was still living. This widespread early development is, as I have suggested, not generally known.

St. Ignatius personally approved the opening of *thirty-nine* colleges or universities, all within the last ten years of his life. All but six were in operation before his death. By colleges, St. Ignatius meant dwellings for young Jesuits and others whose chief occupation was study. Fr. Ganss lists the following types of colleges existent in the Society by the time of St. Ignatius' death: 1) those in which only young Jesuit students lived and attended lectures at public universities (Paris and Bologna); 2) those in which Jesuit professors taught young Jesuits (Gandia); 3) those in which Jesuit professors taught both young Jesuits and extern students (later at Gandia); 4) those intended chiefly for extern students, but with some young Jesuit students (Messina); 5) those which were boarding colleges for aspirants to the priesthood who went elsewhere for most of their classes (the German College in Rome).

By a university, St. Ignatius meant a college in which the lower faculty of languages and letters was augmented by the higher faculties of philosophy and theology. The Roman College is a concrete example of what St. Ignatius had in mind as a university. It was opened in 1551 with a staff of fourteen Jesuits, who taught letters. (It might be noted that this lower faculty of letters is what we would now consider as secondary education). Two years later, the faculties of philosophy and theology were added, and thus it became a university in the sense of having all the elements present which St. Ignatius considered necessary for a university. (It became known as the Gregorian University in 1584 when Pope Gregory XIII gave the Jesuits a new building). It was with this institution especially in mind that St. Ignatius wrote and revised his *Constitutions* on education; he lived near it and it afforded him firsthand experience. Other Jesuit colleges which were also universities (in fact if not in name) during the lifetime of St. Ignatius were those of Gandia, Messina, Coimbra, Vienna, Prague, and Billom.

The plan of St. Ignatius for his colleges and universities is given in Part IV of *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, which Fr. Ganss translates from the Spanish text of St. Ignatius. It appears as

the last part of the book, pages 271-335. He comments on it at various places in the book, e. g., in Chapter 5, "Observations About the Organization," Chapter 8, "Ignatius' Appropriations and Adaptations," and particularly in Part III, "The Spirit of Ignatius' Constitutions on Education," Chapters 9 and 10.

In the latter section, Fr. Ganss discusses the relation of this fourth part of the *Constitution* to the *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599, which is the following: the *Constitutions* gives the sources and basic principles, while the *Ratio Studiorum* is in the nature of a bulletin or catalog, presupposing and applying the former document to a given situation of time and circumstance. Since the *Ratio Studiorum* has received much more consideration in treatises on education, Fr. Ganss is justifiably concerned to warn against reading the *Ratio Studiorum* without the spirit of the *Constitutions*, "for the identical group of Catholic educational principles which make up the spirit of Ignatius in Part IV of the *Constitutions* is also the spirit of the *Ratio Studiorum*. This is the important fact which has been overlooked by those who see in the *Ratio Studiorum* . . . only a collection of administrative decrees or of practical procedures. This oversight leads them to grasp the letter but miss the spirit" (p. 206). It is well to bear in mind, then, that the *theory* of Jesuit education is not in the *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599 or in any other later official pronouncements; they are either interpretations, applications, or adaptations of Ignatius' principles to various times and occasions. The primary merit of Fr. Ganss' book is that it appears to be the only one which has as its principal theme the educational theory of St. Ignatius himself.

My concern is to present only those aspects of St. Ignatius' theory of education that are of special interest to philosophers and theologians. St. Ignatius is, first of all, clear and forceful on the point that theology is the most important subject in the curriculum. In Chapter 12, n. 1, of Part IV of the *Constitutions*, he says:

Since the end of the Society and of its studies is to aid our fellow men to the knowledge and have love of God and to the salvation of their souls; and since the branch of theology is the means most suitable to this end, in the universities of the Society the principal emphasis ought to be put upon it. Diligent treatment by highly capable professors should be given to what pertains to scholastic doctrine and Sacred Scripture, and to that part of positive theology which is conducive to the aforementioned end.

As Fr. Ganss says, in commenting on this passage (p. 54):

Ignatius was well aware how incongruous it would be for a student to

develop his knowledge of literature or physics or mathematics or law or medicine to the well-reasoned knowledge which is characteristic of one who has the degree of a bachelor, master, or doctor in the subject, and simultaneously to let his knowledge of theology . . . remain that characteristic of a child. . . .

In Chapter 14, n. 1, St. Ignatius further says: "In theology there should be lectures on the Old and New Testament, and on the scholastic doctrine of St. Thomas. . . ." "What he prescribed," Fr. Ganss remarks, "is a sequence of theology courses lasting throughout four years, with St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* as the chief textbook" (p. 54).

The concern of St. Ignatius for an orderly and organic presentation of theology, following St. Thomas, undoubtedly sprang from his fruitful association and study with the Dominican Fathers of the Convent in Rue Saint-Jacques in Paris in 1534. St. Ignatius wished his students to know thoroughly all the great topics in theology, such as God, the Trinity, the Incarnation, and to grasp the relation of each topic to all others. He stresses this not just for young men intending to be priests, but for lay students as well, since for centuries lay students had been attending university lectures on theology. Fr. Ganss notes that "the instruction in theology was to be open to externs as well as to Jesuits," (p. 55), and refers to Chapter 7 of Part IV of the *Constitutions*, which explicitly refers to externs.

From St. Ignatius' period of study in Rome, particularly his pursuit of the master's degree at the University of Paris, he acquired knowledge of and much esteem for Aristotle. In this connection, Fr. Ganss writes, "this was to lead him, as we shall see, to inaugurate later in Rome itself a measure of great importance in the eventual restoration of a sound philosophy—that of making Aristotelian philosophy the main constituent of the entire program of arts in the universities he was to found" (p. 15). To appreciate the significance of this contribution of St. Ignatius, it must be borne in mind that, by and large, philosophy in the sixteenth century was not in nearly so flowering a condition as it had been in the thirteenth century, chiefly owing to the decline and misrepresentation of Aristotle, current at the time. In Chapter 14, n. 3 of Part IV of the *Constitutions*, St. Ignatius states: "In logic, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, and metaphysics, the doctrine of Aristotle should be followed."

The insistence of St. Ignatius on the primacy of theology, of the necessity of following the systematic and orderly presentation indi-

cated by St. Thomas in the *Summa Theologiae*, and of the similar need of orderly development in philosophy through the instrumentality of Aristotle is as relevant at the present time as it was for the sixteenth century. It is not a question here of *names* primarily, that is, "thomistic" and "aristotelian," but rather of the orderly development of doctrine, particularly in fundamental courses, through the unparalleled medium of St. Thomas and Aristotle, whose importance is in proportion to their value as instruments for teaching truth.

Here we may legitimately wonder to what extent the contemporary Jesuit university and equally the contemporary non-Jesuit Catholic university follows the mature counsel and prescription of St. Ignatius, and others, with respect to the teaching of basic courses in philosophy. There is a current tendency to depart from the order of learning manifested (and in no sense "made up") by Aristotle, of proceeding from what is more known to us to what is less known, and of proceeding from logic through natural philosophy to moral philosophy and metaphysics, an order sanctioned by St. Thomas as well. There is also a curious tendency in vogue to "inflate" St. Thomas at the corresponding expense of Aristotle, which is not the same thing as to point out differences between the two. It is reasonable to assume that St. Thomas would have found such a tendency startling. St. Ignatius, who is probably not to be regarded as a philosopher or a theologian in the professional sense of the terms, nevertheless grasped the underlying union of doctrine in the Philosopher and the Theologian at a particularly difficult time, the sixteenth century.

The primacy of theology in the curriculum is not a feature peculiar to St. Ignatius, but the intent and seriousness with which he expected it to be carried out is certainly noteworthy. His language indicated that he expected theology to be taught as a science and a wisdom. Here again, to some extent at least, the contemporary Catholic college—Jesuit and non-Jesuit—appears to be paying lip service to the principle rather than giving it mature assent.

By and large, Catholic institutions in this country are weakest in theology departments; the weakness is chiefly in the content, to use a maligned word. By and large, Catholic institutions spend less money, care, and preparation on the theological education of their students than on any other part of education. There is a persistent tendency to regard theology as a subject which anyone can teach in virtue of being ordained, and hence relatively little concern is given to the professional preparation of teachers in theology. Such an approach to the most

important branch of the college curriculum is quite alien to the mind of St. Ignatius who, in Chapter 12 of Part IV of the *Constitutions*, stresses "diligent treatment by highly capable professors," the assumption clearly being that the teachers are thoroughly formed in the subject they are to teach.

A statement from Fr. Ganss has already been quoted to show how much St. Ignatius was aware of the incongruity that would exist if a student should develop his knowledge of literature or physics or law while at the same time not be able to reason deeply about the fundamental matters of theology. No doubt, some difficulty may arise today because of the general quality of education students have prior to entering college, yet Fr. Ganss has the following to say in this connection:

"In Ignatius' day, the opportunity of teaching scientific theology to lay students probably was not as great as that which is opening up before the American Jesuits today. The era of widespread literacy had not yet begun, and the number of lay students desiring training in theology was no doubt far less than that of the young Americans requesting it in Jesuit and other Catholic American universities today" (p. 56). All the evidence suggests that St. Ignatius would have been quick to respond to the need and desire of young Americans for a "scientific training in theology as a means to equip themselves with a scientifically reasoned Christian outlook by which they could take an effective part in life . . ." as Fr. Ganss suggests (pp. 56-57).

In an appendix to the book, Fr. Ganss discusses "*Paideia*, Liberal Education, and General Education." He is prompted to do so presumably on two scores, the contemporary interest in genuinely liberal education, and the concern of St. Ignatius himself for a complete code of liberal education. In the appendix, Fr. Ganss discusses the meaning of the above three terms, particularly as they are used by current writers, Catholic and non-Catholic. It seems to me inaccurate to equate "general education" and "liberal education," as Fr. Ganss and most contemporary writers tend to do. No doubt, general education in the best sense of the term (the cultivation of the intellectual virtues with the stress on speculative knowledge) is the heart of liberal education. There are, however, other parts to liberal education: the liberal arts, as the means of acquiring liberal knowledge, and the specialized education following upon general education, for example, concentration in different areas of liberal knowledge. Liberal education would thus seem opposed primarily to vocational or professional training. Viewed

in this way, it is evident that all college students should have a minimum of liberal education even, and perhaps especially, if they are going on into this or that form of professional education.

In any case, it is abundantly clear that St. Ignatius' educational scheme is basically a plan for liberal education. He required, first, a formation in what we would call the liberal arts but which, in the late Renaissance period of the sixteenth century, was disguised a bit under the confusing name of "humanities," and tended to emphasize unduly rhetoric and the niceties of polished expression. Secondly, he insisted upon knowledge of the most fundamental liberal sciences, philosophy, mathematics, and the natural sciences. Finally, and most importantly, he required the student "to know scientific theology, the true keystone of a Catholic liberal education . . . Theology is the true crown of the liberal education which his *Constitutions* provide . . ." (p. 192).

The foregoing summarizes the heart of an educational plan that is truly liberal and truly Catholic—a Christian *Paideia*. The fundamental principles underlying it are as relevant to Catholic education now as they were in the time of St. Ignatius. "If Ignatius were living in the United States today . . . he would without doubt carefully observe the objectives and procedures of those who are striving to adapt the *paideia* or liberal education of Western Culture to modern circumstances. . . . He would want to have a Christian *paideia* fully abreast of the times, in which Christian Culture would be an object of study, and in which philosophy and theology would in practice be the most important branches in forming the outlook on life" (p. 270).

*University of Notre Dame,
Notre Dame, Indiana*