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SOURCES

Cover Letter for the Ratio Studiorum of 1832

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[Editorial Note: Father Jan Philip Roothaan, S.J. (1785–1853), Servant of God, the second general of the restored Society of Jesus, played a critically important spiritual and administrative role in reconstituting and reinvigorating the religious body that had been so diminished by its suppression (1773–1814). As general, he contributed significantly to two great pillars of the Society's existence: He promoted his new Latin translation of Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, made directly from the Spanish autograph (an early scripted version that has some notes in Ignatius's hand), published with annotations;[1] and secondly, he issued an updated version of the *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599.[2] This latter work was distributed for use and evaluation with an eye to later improvement, not yet promulgated as part of the Society's law. The earlier, still authoritative *Ratio* had been to a certain extent adaptable from the beginning (and we know that variations existed in abundance), but this newly proposed document opened up the curriculum to necessary modernizations, especially to the inclusion of more mathematics, to natural sciences, and to the study of vernacular languages and literature. Presented here is the cover letter that Roothaan sent with this document. It explains both the importance of updating of Jesuit education in these ways and the need to preserve scrupulously all that had proven its worth in the previous centuries, especially its classical core, which was not to be displaced at all by the inclusion of modern vernacular content. The letter links the pre- and post-Suppression forms of the Society. It is an important witness both to the continuing high importance of the Society's

1 Ignatius of Loyola, *Exercitia spiritualia S. P. Ignatii Loyolae cum versione litterali ex autographo Hispanico* (Typis Salviucci, 1835).

2 *Ratio atque Institutio studiorum Societatis Iesu* (Collegio Urbano, 1832).

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educational project and to the Society's desire to be well-grounded in its venerable sources without being so slavishly attached to them that further developments had to be disallowed. The good of the Church, the common good of society, and the care for the lives of individual students are all deep concerns, especially in the face of perniciously skeptical, revolutionary, and even nihilistic modern movements. Roothaan highlights a profound, ever-present issue when he writes that the Society's education primarily intends not just a literary course but above all the Christian education of the youth: "Without that education, to be sure, the unhappy experience of too many years has proven that an abundance of scholarship and learning, however great, brings into society more loss than gain."

Roothaan was a very learned, highly skillful linguist and rhetorician. The translation here does not attempt to parallel exactly the complex and elegant Ciceronian periods of the original.]

Source: G. M. Pachtler, S.J., *Ratio Studiorum et Institutiones Scholasticae Societatis Jesu per Germaniam olim vigentes collectae concinnatae dilucidatae*, ed. Karl Kehrbach, Tomus II: Ratio studiorum ann. 1586, 1599, 1832, Monumenta Germaniae paedagogica 5 (A. Hofmann & Comp., 1887), 228–33. Translated from the Latin by Claude N. Pavur, S.J. in June 2014 with the generous assistance of Dr. Clarence Miller and Fr. John Padberg, S.J. Thoroughly revised and annotated by Pavur in 2025 for the present edition.

To Provincial Superiors, Rectors of Colleges, Prefects of Studies, and Teachers

In the first general congregation after the restoration of the Society,[3] the provinces petitioned to have the plan of our studies updated for our times. Subsequent experience has all the more demonstrated the great necessity of the same. This project, superintended on the authority of the most recent congregation and finally finished, I now present to you, such as it is, Reverend Fathers.[4] It is to be put into use in such a way that if any disadvantages are discovered in its employment, we can subsequently apply a remedy; and if anything seems preferable to include as an improvement, it can be added in its proper time.

3 Pope Pius VII (1742–1823, r. 1800–1823) restored the Society of Jesus with the bull *Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum* (August 7, 1814), ending a 41-year period of suppression that had been declared by Pope Clement XIV (1705–74, r. 1769–74) in a *breve* (brief) of 1773 entitled *Dominus ac Redemptor*. The first general congregation after the restoration was the 20th general congregation in the Society's history. It took place in 1820 and elected Luigi Fortis (1748–1829, in office 1820–29) as the superior general.

4 The most recent general congregation at the time was the 21st in 1829. It had elected Jan Roothaan (1785–1853, in office 1829–53) to be the superior general.

I called to Rome, as you know, several Fathers chosen from different provinces. They had brought along with them comments and notes on the *Ratio studiorum*. After devoting long effort and careful attention to the comparison of these items with one another, they finally submitted a proposal that the Fathers Assistant and I have examined and carefully analyzed. At last I offer this to you to be tested by experience and practice, so that then, corrected anew where there is need, or expanded, it might obtain the force and sanction of universal law. Whatever else it was, it was certainly a weighty undertaking. We had to do nothing casually or speedily. But neither was it a matter of fashioning a new order of studies, as I pointed out in the letter to the provinces calling for fathers to be deputed to prepare what was necessary for this work. Rather, it was a matter of adjusting the very same venerable text to our times in such a way that people might realize with what great reverence this undertaking had to be handled, and how nothing was to be changed offhandedly or rashly. The original, after all, had been composed by the very best men after a long process of gathering a great body of advice. It had been well confirmed by the successful experience of almost two centuries, and it had often received laudatory recommendations even from the very enemies of the Society.

What, then? Of all the many innovations introduced into the education of the young over the last fifty years and more, could they all possibly be approved and adopted in our schools? Novel methods, novel forms devised day after day, novel arrangements of content and scheduling in treating the disciplines, often in fact even conflicting with and contradicting one another—how could these become a norm for our studies? Rather what right-thinking person would not deplore so many innovations that have produced such bitter fruits for the Church and for society (*rei publicae*)?[5]

5 Roothaan several times invokes the concept of *res publica*, translated here as "society." The Latin phrase connotes shared ownership, investment, and interests (*res*) that are public and communal (*publica* = "relating to the people"). It evokes ideas of the common good, the commonwealth, the State, the government, civil society, and a whole way of life reflecting a more or less unified population's values and laws. In our days, the word "republic" evokes political dimensions, whereas "society," though it loses the governmental and legal aspects, more adequately suggests "what a community significantly shares," its common concerns, and perhaps even a certain cultural-historical identity. Roothaan's mention of "bitter fruits for the Church and for society" likely points to social, political, and intellectual revolutions that followed upon the more radical Enlightenment thinking, secularization, and the wider rejection of traditional religion. A striking example of the new situation is the exile of Pope Pius VII from 1809 to 1814 by Napoleon, who had already precipitated the end of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806.

All good people everywhere groan over the current situation: that in the higher academic classes or in the treatment of the more serious studies there is actually nothing solid despite their specious appeal; that there is a disordered abundance of exuberant erudition and too little precise reasoning; that the disciplines (apart from natural science and mathematics) have not made genuine progress but hover in almost complete confusion so that often you can hardly tell where the truth stands. With the abandonment and near scorn of the study of rigorous logic and dialectic, errors are being planted in the minds of even quite educated people. By some unfathomable fate or happenstance, people are celebrating certain ideas as if they were unquestionably true, praising them to the skies, the ideas that nothing can be precisely and accurately said, and that no account should be taken of definition or distinction. And so, after the philosophical disciplines have been lightly sampled, young people go forth furnished with no weapons against the the innovators' sophistries. They do not even know how to distinguish them from solid arguments. Hence their minds are caught and ensnared by all manner of utterly absurd errors. If it were not a matter of the most serious issues, such things would deserve laughter rather than refutation—but there would be no way to unmask those errors and demonstrate their falsity.

About the lower academic classes what should I say? Every effort has been made to have the boys learn as much as possible—but to have them learn it in as short a time as possible and with as little effort as possible. How nice! But if the boys barely taste so many different subjects without truly imbibing them, that variety *of course* makes them think that they know a great deal; and they go on to swell the mob of the half-educated who are most destructive of both the sciences and society (*rei publicae*) alike, and whatever else—but indeed they know nothing truly and solidly. *A bit of everything; nothing in its entirety.* Covering the humanities in a short time at a very impressionable age, even with their intellectual powers still untrained, just in order that they may go on to the most serious studies of philosophy and the higher disciplines (from which they would usually take no real profit), they, captivated by their enjoyment of greater freedom, are then swept headlong into vice. They are soon to be teachers, certainly, but (to put it quite mildly) not really mature ones.

The devising of ever easier methods, however, if it appears to have any advantage, certainly has that considerable disadvantage that what first is attained without effort also adheres most tenuously to their minds. What is acquired in a brief time is lost entirely in a brief period of oblivion. Then, there is a far more serious loss, although perhaps many do not give it much thought: the important capacity gained in the education of children that

has them becoming accustomed from their early years to serious mental application and to bearing that labor, not without some pressure being put on them. How valuable this habit is in every subsequent stage of life for mastering wicked emotional impulses and for exercising self-control—all wise persons throughout history have realized this, and the Holy Spirit teaches it, saying: "It is good for a person to bear the yoke from the time of his own youth."[6]

Therefore these many things, as harmful as they are new—and all too destructive, as much to the Church as to society (*rei publicae*)—are such that they can in no way be adopted by us unless we would like to straight out veer away from the end for the sake of which those educational labors have been undertaken by the Society. That end is not at all located in literary training alone, but it most especially intends the Christian education of the youth. Without that education, to be sure, the unhappy experience of too many years has proven that an abundance of scholarship and learning, however great, brings into society (*in rempublicam*) more loss than gain.

But even if it is not fitting that we should permit those new methods, nor right in those things that run counter to the Society's authentic Institute and aim; and even if for us it could not even be done for the lovers of novelties (despite its possibly being quite permissible and serviceable) since many are demanding things as inconsistent and contradictory with one another as with what is traditional—even so, nevertheless, in some things that do not touch on the substance of a solid education, the necessity of the times compels us to diverge from the practice of our Fathers. In this case, serving that necessity is not only not wrong but even completely compatible with the design of our Institute for the greater glory of God.

And indeed in treating the higher studies, how many points that once were not even controversial but that are now being bitterly attacked in the unreasonableness of the times need to be established with secure arguments so that the very foundations of truth are not overturned! And again, how many things that once were also elaborated at great length more to exercise intellectual talent than to establish the truth should now more profitably be omitted, to make time available for more necessary matters, in order to confirm those teachings, I say, on which the most essential realities (*summa rerum*) depend, and to analyze and refute in the light of truth what idlers or miscreants have thought up in order to arouse doubt concerning even things that are most certain and most obvious!

Clearly it might have been fine for a better age to indulge its talent; and even now it is permissible to dwell at length on harmless but nevertheless

6 Lamentations 3:27.

less useful questions; but indeed at this point we certainly have a greater obligation to attend to what is critically important. All the more is this so because the course of studies is circumscribed just about everywhere within narrower limits. For that disadvantage we can indeed hope that we can come up with a remedy, but we can hardly dare to expect it—and maybe not even hardly!

The same crisis now demands that more time than before be given to natural science and to mathematics. The Society has never thought either that these studies are foreign to our Institute, nor that it is now permissible for us to neglect the things that have become so extremely important in our times, and without which the Society's schools could in no way defend their own honor nor answer the public's expectations. Even if many have abused these disciplines to the detriment of [our] most holy religion, that is no reason at all for us to abandon them; in fact, that is the very reason why it is urgent for Ours to devote themselves more zealously *especially* under this title [of religion] so as to be able to snatch from our enemies the weapons that they abuse to impugn the truth and so as to be able to use those weapons rightly for the defense of the truth. For truth is everywhere self-consistent; in all the disciplines it always stands out as one and the same. It cannot happen that what is true in natural science or in mathematics ever contradicts the truth of a higher order, provided that fictions capriciously and rashly affirmed are not thrust in to take the place of what is true and undoubted. Exposing and shattering this very artifice of the wicked is a pursuit most worthy for a Christian and religious person attending to natural science and mathematics.[7]

Finally, in the plan for the lower academic classes, we had to provide both that some time be scheduled for learning well certain accessory subjects and that more diligent attention be given especially to the national language and literature. Yet this is to be done in such a way that the study of Greek and Latin languages and literatures may always remain safe and foremost. These are, even now as they once were, the leading sources of solid learning and edifying literature (*bonae litteraturae*) and the most finished examples of beauty. If they were better kept before our eyes and in our hearts, there would not emerge day after day, from so many talented people, compositions that are quite bizarre (*nova plane ac singularia*) not less in form and style of expression than in ideas and opinions.[8] These are indeed popular objects of amazement and stupor; nevertheless, all those

7 Here, "religious person" means a person formally professing a religious way of life in an order or congregation.

8 These traits may be associated with the Romantic movement that was at its peak in 1832.

who are wise and passionate for true beauty painfully deplore those compositions as glaring indications of an eloquence that has been twisted by our times and by our manners as well.

All this effort to adapt the plan of studies has therefore been poured into serving the urgent need of our times in such a way that there might be as little departure as possible from the solid and correct training of the young.

Now it remains, Reverend Fathers, that you enthusiastically and diligently put into practice what we have prepared and present to you here. Although some of these provisions are for now, certainly, no more than temporary until, under the guidance of actual employment and experience, we see what might perhaps be changed, what added, what removed, if nevertheless we put these things into play only half-heartedly because they are not yet thoroughly defined and established, a reliable judgment could never be rendered about their result. So I strongly recommend

- that superiors urge the execution of the plan;
- that in every college, some persons should be assigned to observe the actual result of this plan;
- that these persons make notes on any difficulty that may perhaps arise somewhere or on any possible improvement that may be introduced;
- that the provincial superiors should submit to us what these persons have noted, after considering and weighing them with their own consultors.

Since the new opinions springing up day after day, especially in the philosophical disciplines, rightly ought to sharpen our vigilance, I judge that we must press for what the first congregation of the restored Society instructed should be done; namely, that the provincials should present for my approval a list of opinions that it would not be helpful for Ours to teach.[9]

9 The outlining of which ideas should be taught and which not was a long-standing project in the Society's educational history. It was especially favored by the general who issued the *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599, Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615, in office 1581–1615). That document included a catalog of specific questions from Aquinas's *Summa*, with directives for their employment or omission. See also Claudio Acquaviva, "Uniformity of Doctrine," in *Jesuit Pedagogy, 1540–1616: A Reader*, ed. Cristiano Casalini and Claude Pavur, S.J. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2016), 233–38. The Society's own *Constitutions* (1558) spoke of "which books should be presented […] and which cannot be" (Latin version, no. 359, Part 4, chapter 5, E).

So let us devote ourselves to the great service of educating the younger generation in studies, energetically and each according to his own grade and office. For since it is one of the chief ministries of our Society, for the sake of which (among other things) Pius VII of blessed memory wanted the Society restored, and since rulers and populations have been especially looking for this same thing, let us consider, I ask you, how much we should take to heart the issue of how we might answer the expectation that the Church and society have of us, and how we might show the worth of our effort to God Almighty, which is the most important thing. Certainly, I have not stopped begging him for the successful outcome of so great a work as this, offering many thousands of Masses drawn from the treasury of the Society. Furthermore, I will not stop begging him for this. In this I am eager to have you with me as my fellow suppliants before the Lord.

Jan Roothaan,
Superior General of the Society of Jesus

Rome, July 25, 1832