Jesuit Educational Quarterly, 2nd ser., 2, no. 1 (2026): 25–39

JEQ

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Groundwork for a New *Ratio Studiorum*

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ABSTRACT

It is time for a new plan for Jesuit education in North America, focusing on grades 9 through 14 (the "collegiate years"). Posit Jesus and the Gospel as foundational. Certain curricular contents follow: first, the Gospels; second, the Hebrew scriptures and Christian interpreters; third, some introduction to the relevant languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin); fourth, the classical cultures that conditioned Christian thought and expression; and fifth, rhetorical elements. This new configuration will provide at the collegiate level a synthesis of the traditional stages of Jesuit education (Letters, philosophy, theology) in a program of Christian humanism beneficial for all youth and for society's wellbeing.

Keywords:
Ratio Studiorum; curriculum, classics; humanism; formation

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DOI: 10.51238/jeq.xcyAz22
Received: 15 January 2026 | Accepted: 30 January 2026

Introduction

Facing today's educational challenges, inheritors of the Jesuit tradition in America should by now very clearly see the need for a new approach.[1] It is time to shake off the inertial power of the *status quo* and leverage the most promising features of the heritage. Fr. Joseph Hill, S.J., has made a strong argument that we need a new, focused plan for our schools to counter the tendency to replicate secular structures in a way that allows us to lose both Jesuit distinctiveness and the apostolic impact we most desire.[2] To make timely and effective progress, there must be an organized, stable, perduring locus for the necessary reflections, discussions, and actions. Perhaps this body could be called the "Ratio Studiorum Commission for North America." Competent, well-informed personnel must engage in the right kind of research and systemic thinking, with a view to eventually submitting proposals for provincial approval and promulgation. In the absence of any such assistancy-level structures or processes in the North American Society of Jesus at present, the following paper proposes a practical "starting rationale and consensus" that will help to focus this project and provide some details, should this kind of initiative ever be undertaken. An appendix will propose in summary form "First Principles and Foundations for Jesuit Education." Having at the outset a "union of minds and hearts" on some essentials will make for a far smoother and more productive process.

How, then, might we begin to construct a new, universal-yet-adaptable Jesuit plan of studies (*ratio studiorum*)? The standing prejudice sees such an effort as useless, perverse, retrograde, or intrinsically impossible.[3] The general tendency is to prefer the more progressive trends, but the Ignatian spirit leans rather decidedly the other way, suspicious of novelties and of all *recentiores*—that is, the more recent authors. The question should rather be "What has proven its solid worth over time?" Then we ask, "Can we do better?" Our creativity should be operating with some idea of the genius of the original *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599. To disregard that profoundly successful and foundational source is essentially to abandon the project of

1 See Claude N. Pavur, S.J., "A Response to Fr. Arthur Madigan's 'On the Roots of Boston College and Similar Institutions,'" *Jesuit Educational Quarterly*, 2nd ser. 1, no. 4 (2025): 647–52, https://doi.org/10.51238/Bh4iq9P.

2 Joseph Hill, S.J., "Why Jesuit Schools Need a New *Ratio Studiorum*," *Jesuit Educational Quarterly*, 2nd ser., 1, no. 3 (2025): 397–420, https://doi.org.10.51238/GellMvj.

3 See Claude N. Pavur, S.J., "Historiography of Jesuit Pedagogy," in *In the School of Ignatius: Studious Zeal and Devoted Learning* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2019), 62–65.

Jesuit education and to attempt to create something else. In effect, it would be to reject Vatican II's call to update the original charism of the order.[4]

The history of Jesuit education suggests adopting a special focus on the first stage, namely, the critically important pre-adult formational years of high school and just beyond—those years covered by the old Jesuit *collegia*.[5] The *collegia* generally managed six-year programs (with repeatable grades). However, the post-1900 American standardization of four-year high schools and four-year colleges broke up this old structure. Still, for planning purposes, it is still possible to think in terms of an integrated six-year program—let us call it "the collegiate years"—with the final two years being "detachable" should that be necessary to fit in with the current institutional scheme.[6]

First Move: Posit the Foundation

Where to begin? Presumably with the end, that is to say, with our ultimate goal, which is the primary motivation for the Society's involvement in education. As an apostolic work of the Church, the new Jesuit *Ratio* should in some way be based on Christ and the Gospels. Consider what Bishop Robert Barron has said about Catholic institutions of all types in answer to the question, "How do you define a Catholic school as Catholic?":

> All Catholic institutions, whether it's a hospital, it's a school, it's a university, it's a seminary, it's a parish, whatever it is, the primary purpose of it is to evangelize. What makes a Catholic institution Catholic is it's declaring the lordship of Jesus and inviting people to share his life in the church. So, if our hospitals, Catholic hospitals don't do that, they should close. If our Catholic schools don't do that, they should close. I mean, the church doesn't need to be sponsoring one more . . . STEM school, one more public school. The whole purpose, the primary purpose, I should say, not the whole purpose, but the primary purpose is to evangelize, declare the lordship of Jesus. And that should be not just a minor concern off on the side. That should be the dominant ethos of the institution that affects every aspect of the life of the place. So, I would say that that's the test.[7]

4 Pavur, *In the School of Ignatius*, 39.

5 Students in Jesuit schools most heavily populated the letters course (the "lower studies," *studia inferiora*), with philosophy and theology courses always drawing smaller enrollments. Higher studies carried more prestige, but the lower ones had a larger "societal footprint."

6 Nothing prohibits the re-establishment of integrated *collegia*-type institutions, particularly given the well-documented history of two-year colleges.

7 Matthew Petrusek, "How to Strengthen Catholic Identity in Catholic Schools," Interview by Bishop Robert Barron, *Word on Fire*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sTsF6Ikw5M, minute 5:48 to 5:60.

The original *Ratio Studiorum* described the Jesuit educational aim in a different but related way, similarly pointing to the ultimate religious realities. The first rule of the provincial reads this way:

> [7] The final goal of the Society's studies. 1. Since one of the leading ministries of our Society is teaching our neighbors all the disciplines in keeping with our Institute in such a way that they are thereby aroused to a knowledge and love of our Maker and Redeemer, the Provincial should consider himself obliged to do his utmost to ensure that our diverse and complex educational labor meets with the abundant results that the grace of our calling demands of us.
>
> [7] Finis studiorum Societatis. 1. Cum ex primariis Societatis nostrae ministeriis unum sit, omnes disciplinas instituto nostro congruentes ita proximis tradere, ut inde ad Conditoris ac Redemptoris nostri cognitionem atque amorem excitentur, omni studio curandum sibi putet praepositus provincialis, ut tam multiplici scholarum nostrarum labori fructus, quem gratia nostrae vocationis exigit, abunde respondeat.[8]

The Jesuit concept of teaching "in such a way" (*ita*) as to create in the students' hearts this positive spiritual change of knowledge and love of our Maker and Redeemer necessarily involves some kind of declaration of the lordship of Jesus; but the bare declaration always requires clarification. What is really *meant* by that lordship? How do we discover that?

The "separation of Church and State" (already far exaggerated beyond what the American founders intended) seems to have spawned a "separation of Church and Academy." Confessionally-based colleges now tend to be categorized as sectarian or proselytizing, and they stand sequestered from mainstream, nationally accredited universities. The government does not want to be in a position of funding religious education—even though neglecting religion altogether will be utterly disastrous for the nation, at least according to the likes of George Washington and John Adams. If, however, Jesuit schools surmount the widespread aversion to religious content in schools, and resist the general suppression of the religious dimension, with a resolve to become what they should be, then they will have a foundation on which to begin building a new *Ratio Studiorum*—an official plan of studies that effectively provides the institution with standards and character. That suggests an entire line of detailed programming for the Jesuit educational project.

We might prioritize a certain life-shaping question, one that can be evangelical but not proselytizing: "Who is Jesus Christ and what should he mean to me?" It is in a different register from, but still parallel to some-

8 *The Ratio Studiorum: The Official Plan for Jesuit Education*, trans. and ed. Claude Pavur, S.J. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005), Rules for the Provincial, no. 1 [7] 7.

thing like "What is the American Constitution and what should that mean to me?" In fact, *all* humanistic education, at best, should *always* be asking something like this of *all* its contents: "What meaning should this work, event, story, subject, personality, philosophy have for me? Why should I bother with it? How does it or might it affect me or my world?" Without some such existential "hook," humanistic studies can easily become, in the eyes of students and others, a detached or trivial manipulation of content without weighting, priority, or relevance.

The questions of greatest importance are to be chosen with regard for the character of the institution, its educational goals, and the context in which the questions are being asked. There is no equivalent obligation to make the same level of investment in asking such things about *every* proposed religious figure or political regime. Any attempt at "universal inclusion" in the curriculum will certainly lead to universal fragmentation and fecklessness, not to mention mixed signals that leave students overwhelmed by the plurality of options. Relativism, skepticism, and even cynicism—or just a loss of meaning—are the likely outcomes. The larger society will lose not only its youth, but also the distinctive goods offered by the principles and viewpoints of Christian humanism.

The Catholic institution always carries within itself its own most relevant "context," its own integration of faith and reason, its founding community's positions on what is fundamentally true and important, its own history and configuration of interpretation and authority. It has an obligation to declare in some way the importance of Christ. Otherwise, it ultimately loses or deflates its mission and identity. For Jesuit schooling, it is not enough to be "Ignatian," as the saint himself would enthusiastically agree. What is really "Ignatian" *necessarily* returns us to the Christ who was Ignatius's lasting inspiration, and to the Church to whose service he dedicated himself wholeheartedly. Not explicitly making that leap to what grounds us in the "whole truth about humanity"[9] obscures what should be, what *must* be, "a lamp unto our feet" (cf. Ps. 119:105).

The most important foundational commitment, vision, and beliefs are reasonably expected to appear in a substantial way in the programming of the Core. That is a mark of faithfulness to the truth as it is understood by the school's chartering community. It is part of the institution's

9 The original phrase "the whole truth about man and the world," is from John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, Encyclical Letter, The Holy See, 1979, §12, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html. It was used also in John Paul II, *The Whole Truth about Man: John Paul II to University Faculties and Students*, ed. and intro. James V. Schall, S.J. (St. Paul Editions, 1981).

expected service. For students who are nonbelievers, the special good to be received, the good that is available hardly anywhere else, is a deeper and more nuanced understanding of religion, of faith, of this particular faith tradition, and of its greatest source. They are introduced to a unique, worldwide, historically significant reality, and they are presented with a living option for their own life-choices. They are not pressured to convert, but they are expected to be well-informed. For students already professing a Christian faith, the good to be received is also a deeper and more nuanced understanding, but it is one that enhances their prior faith commitments. Believers and nonbelievers are well-served by such a program. Both should be able to say that their spiritual lives have been deepened and improved. The State itself profits immensely by having this major and foundational religious tradition better understood and appreciated by both groups. The good promised here is not well-provided by secular schooling, which can sometimes promote an overly simplistic notion of religious existence, just as it can, by omission or avoidance, deprecate religious elements and insinuate its own "comprehensive" but defective vision of reality.[10] Treating "the whole person" must always include careful attention to the religious dimension of existence. History itself cannot be well taught without a fair consideration of the substantial impact of religious dynamics or the positive contributions of religious traditions.

Second Move: Establish the Central Content of the Core

What ought to follow directly from the choice to posit Christ and the Gospels as the foundation? We might consider retreats or extracurriculars, special lecture series or events or workshops, service groups or liturgies. But if it is true that "the curriculum carries the mission,"[11] we should, above all, look to the studies that shape student experience more than any other single feature. The programming of the coursework should aim to ensure that students attend to the Gospels and to whatever especially illuminates

10 According to a secular humanist, "the American Humanist Association won an important motion in the case of *American Humanist Association v. United States* [before the US District Court for the District of Oregon]. . . . The court accepted our argument that humanism should be treated like [other] religions. 'The court finds that Secular Humanism is a religion for Establishment Clause purposes,' the decision read. It also ruled that humanism should be treated as 'religion' for purposes of the Equal Protection Clause, which prohibits religious discrimination." David Niose, "Humanism Is a Religion? Why Even 'Anti-Religion' Humanists Should Celebrate," *TheHumanist.com*, November 10, 2014, https://thehumanist.com/commentary/humanism-is-a-religion-why-even-anti-religion-humanists-should-celebrate/.

11 See Pavur, *In the School of Ignatius*, 33–44.

them, particularly from the larger body of Scriptures of which the Gospels are a part. "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."[12] The historical, spiritual, religious, and cultural impact of these texts is so deep and widespread that learning to read them properly and with a depth of understanding is essential. So generally significant are these texts that even purely secular humanistic programs are severely truncated without them. If a reform movement in Catholic education made no change other than to require from all students the right kind of diligent attention to these central texts of the Christian scriptures, the result would be radically transformative. Such a refocusing would provide significant resistance to the secularizing juggernaut. The Gospels have a certain power in themselves. No generation should ever be deprived of proper attention to them, certainly not in any Christian-sponsored educational programs.

The question about Jesus involves asking "What is his message and meaning?" How can we know what those are except from a study of the Gospel texts that constitute a privileged path to the best possible answers? Once you establish those texts as foundational in the curricular scheme, you need to ensure that they are taught appropriately. A postmodern, deconstructionist, politicized approach from a nonbelieving radical anarchist resentfully decrying patriarchy is simply not going to produce the right attitude toward the Gospels that ultimately leads to a greater "knowledge and love of our Maker and our Redeemer," as the original *Ratio* put it. So there has to be some administrative oversight of how the Gospels are being presented. The mere formal inclusion of a Gospel reading requirement is not at all adequate in itself.

Those concerned about the academic freedom of the professor should not fear: academic freedom properly understood is not in the least hindered if the terms of employment specify fulfilling in letter and spirit the particular mission as stated here. Skewing or derailing or even just somehow "neutralizing" the defined project, the desired task, the one for which the teaching position was established in the first place—that is not academic freedom but professional dereliction. What is important is the proper formation to which the students have a right, one that is in harmony with the character and stated purposes of the institution. Academic freedom of research is an entirely different matter.

Third Move: Select the Most Relevant Core Curricular Content

This beginning suggests certain curricular developments. To begin with, understanding Jesus through the Gospels necessarily implicates the

12 From the prologue to St. Jerome's *Commentary on Isaiah* (ca. 410).

Hebrew scriptures, their language and literary forms. Those ancient texts thoroughly imbued Jesus's cultural and educational context—his mind, his self-understanding, his idiomatic ways of communicating. Such aspects significantly determine what can stand as proper interpretations of his life, his message, his meaning, his impact. A knowledge of the older sources is also essential for reading well the other texts of the New Testament; they carry the earliest written interpretations of Jesus, from Pilate's *titulus* for the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" to those of Saint Paul (who also ought to be given a place on every humanistic reading list, secular or religious). Students should know that the tradition of interpreting Jesus and Scripture continues, through the patristic writings across the ages to meditations and studies of the present day.

This Gospel-centered project also heightens the relevance of learning about Mediterranean ways of thinking, speaking, writing, and acting. Students must know the literary forms used in the Bible. Furthermore, the early theological and philosophical developments in Christianity were heavily influenced by Greek and Roman traditions, even as they looked back to their Hebraic origins. It is significant that the favored scriptures of the early Christians were those of the Greek Septuagint, that the New Testament's language is Greek, and that from the late fifth century the Bible was most widely spread through Jerome's Latin Vulgate translation (originally produced in 405 CE).

Because it is impossible to enter deeply into a culture without knowing its language to some extent, Greek and Latin become highly relevant. They shaped, carried, and communicated Western/World Christianity through the ages. The classical heritage also includes many non-Christian works that were taken up by Christian thinkers and maintained in a generally Christian context. Pagans like Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Virgil were found worthy of study and attention and even emulation. They were put to good, edifying, Christian uses. They also helped to define or represent the "human condition" in pedagogically and ethically helpful ways that can be easily integrated with the Christian world view. Could Augustine have developed his understanding of history without the historical efforts of the Greeks and Romans? He certainly profited from the Platonists to refute materialism and appreciate the realm of the spirit.[13]

13 "But then, having read those books of the Platonists, after I had been advised to look for incorporeal truth, I saw that your invisible characteristics have been known through things that have happened [or that have been made]." *Sed tunc, lectis Platonicorum illis libris, postquam inde admonitus quaerere incorpoream veritatem, invisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspexi* (Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.20).

Granting that we have insufficient curricular time to give our students much fluency in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, we can nevertheless dedicate *some* introductory attention to these biblical and biblically-relevant languages—even if for only six or twelve or eighteen weeks of introduction. Latin, more expansively relevant to such a large swath of recorded history, could be given at least two required years, but preferably four. Having some competent introduction is significantly more valuable than having none at all. A door is opened, a framework of understanding initiated. Under the right teacher, a very little can go a very long way. An intellectual spark can lead to a penetrating illumination. For example, explaining the biblical use of a phrase like *hinneni* ("Here I am!") might deeply impact students deeply regardless of how limited their proficiency in Hebrew.[14] Merely to learn that the original texts have words with very different connotations is critically important. Compare, for example, the translation of the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," with the Hebrew "Thou shalt not do murder." The distinction is an important one to note.

Fourth Move: Revive the Rhetorical Backbone

The entire turn to language represents the pristine Jesuit educational insight into the importance of the study of language, literature, and communications. The seed was Ignatius's decision to study the Latin language in Barcelona in 1524, when he was 33 years old. This moment grew into a long tradition officially established 75 years later in the *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599 for the entire Society. The plan began with a five-year course of Letters heavily invested in learning words, grammar, translation, genres, imitation, composition, memory, delivery, declamation, relevant scholarly and cultural knowledge, and whatever was to be included in the study of rhetoric. Students learned to listen, to imitate, to speak well, and to participate appropriately in mature discourse on important topics. Studied attention to the particulars of a language necessarily focuses students on the elements of communication. It was just this focus that facilitated Jesuits' missionary achievements in the "ministry of the word" as well as in culture (e.g., creating a writing system for Vietnamese, compiling dictionaries of native peoples, translating sacred and other texts). Many have found in the phrase "*eloquentia perfecta*" (perfect or "finished" eloquence) a concise description of the essential character of Jesuit education.[15]

14 *The Word in Hebrew,* "Hebrew Word of the Day: Here I Am," YouTube, https://youtu.be/TjhVZv8SmPc?si=QGwv9ndmAgg-JQne.

15 See Claude Pavur, S.J., "The Meaning of Jesuit Rhetoric," in *Jesuit Rhetoric across Space and Time: Local and Global Perspectives*, ed. Sophie Conte, Cinthia Gan-

Studying the classical languages and cultivating the requisite "philological finesse" grounds and strengthens the entire Jesuit rhetorical axis of the project, even while it makes a fuller understanding of the Bible and other critically important texts possible. The present age largely eschews the study of sacred and classical languages. It was once an enterprise that kept verbal communication as well as cultural-historical foundations in the forefront of students' consciousness. Without the formerly strong curricular focus on those languages, new ways and new contents must be discovered and employed to get students to read many stylistically exemplary texts, to imitate them, and to engage in regular related exercises in memory, original composition, and oral delivery. This area is still largely underdeveloped. Two things are certainly required: constant reading of good prose and constant student activity in rhetorical practices. The larger aim goes beyond style to character: through the right kind of rhetorical practice, students will mature in mentality, confidence, psychological acuity, and spirituality.[16]

Fifth Move: Establish Some High-Quality Authorities as Standards

Jesuit education used a few widely recognized authorities as models to learn from and imitate. Cicero was the master of rhetoric; Aristotle, of philosophy; Aquinas, of theology. Scripture was given the highest place, at the summit of the entire educational plan. Other authors were read, certainly, but students had no option to ignore the most challenging, the most brilliant, the most approved and influential masters. The Society engaged in extended reflection on which textbooks to use. Attaining a very high status and wide popularity across institutions were Manuel Álvarez's (1526–82) Latin grammar[17] and Cipriano Soares's (1524–93) rhetoric.[18] The Jesuit system eventually gravitated toward the production of various classic textbooks so that each new teacher did not have to create them anew for each teaching assignment. Even into the last half of the 20th century, Loyola University Press in Chicago produced texts widely used in Jesuit schools: Henle's *Latin Grammar* and associated four-year Latin course (from 1945 on), Schoder and Horrigan's *A Reading Course in Homeric Greek* (1945–

nett, John Brereton, Manfred Krauss, Elizabethada Wright, and Bartosz Awianowicz (Brill, 2026), xi–xxi.

16 Pavur, "The Meaning of Jesuit Rhetoric," esp. xvii ff.

17 Manuel Álvares, *De institutione grammatica libri tres* [Three books on the teaching of grammar] (Lisbon, 1572).

18 Cipriano Soares, *De arte rhetorica libri tres ex Aristotele, Cicerone et Quintiliano* [Three books on rhetoric based on Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian] (Coimbra, 1562).

46), and Kammer and Mulligan's *Writing Handbook* (1953). Jesuit schools might consider attempting to revive this tradition of Jesuit textbooks to support a new Assistancy-wide curriculum.

Who might represent the major authorities for the three primary areas of Jesuit education? We now have a superabundance of possibilities and a complexity of traditions, so a selection of singular "high points" is much more difficult, perhaps impossible. The present proposal also calls for attention to the *accessibility* of the authorities chosen because the new Jesuit synthesis of Letters, philosophy, and theology is situated in what we are calling the collegiate years (grades 9 through 14). Thus, the giants like Karl Rahner or Hans Urs von Balthasar or Bernard Lonergan will be very difficult to use for such young students. In the old dispensation, such advanced thinkers would have found a place not in the collegiate years but in the years devoted to graduate-level study. Looking to the *de facto* tastes and praises of the public and to the actual achievements and relevance of individuals, one might consider C. S. Lewis for rhetorical diversity and elegance as well as for a blend of reflections that include philosophical, theological, social, cultural, spiritual, and literary topics. Students could certainly learn a huge amount even by using only a few essential introductory works or large overviews and syntheses such as Thomas Rausch's *Systematic Theology: A Roman Catholic Approach* (2016) and Tracey Rowland's *Catholic Theology* (2017).[19]

A New Integration

Moving from the Judeo-Christian core to the Greco-Roman spheres of meaning serves further purposes as well, particularly regarding the larger integration of Jesuit concerns in philosophy and theology, and also regarding the integration provided by the study of the classical tradition that conditioned and notably constituted Western/World civilization for ages. This classical material, added to the religious inheritance, grounds an expansive self-knowledge and a relevant cultural appropriation that is utterly impossible without them. This is true in both a primary sense and a secondary sense. Reading and learning about Homer, Plato, and Aristotle are perennial values in themselves, but they are also important for the role they have played in the intellectual lives of many leading cultural figures who came after them. Without the political-ethical discourse inherited from the classical tradition, would there have arisen the thinking that fueled the American Revolution? The very prevalence of classical architec-

19 Thomas Rausch, *Systematic Theology: A Roman Catholic Approach* (Liturgical Press, 2016); Tracey Rowland, *Catholic Theology* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

tural elements, as, for example, in the Supreme Court building, is witness to the self-conscious linkage of modern America with the ancients.

But the classical dimensions stretch far beyond the shores of North America, beyond the limits of "enlightened" modernity, and beyond the political realm. They help to serve as an integrative axis in the curriculum, since that ancestry underlies *many* influential moments and eras in cultural history (in medieval scholasticism, Renaissance humanism, and the Enlightenment). The Latin and Greek heritage has shaped the vocabulary and the idiom of wide swaths of our thinking, our genres, and our discourses. Not knowing that cultural background vitiates humanistic learning and dulls our awareness of the distinctive contribution of Christianity to Western/World modernity.

Importantly for the question at hand, these foundations also allow the integrated incorporation of philosophical and theological themes into the curriculum of the new *Ratio Studiorum*. Working out those details will be vital in the upbuilding of the whole program because, to be true to the genius of Jesuit education, we must include something substantial in philosophy and theology. It will not be hard to imagine how this can be done. To read carefully something like Augustine's *Confessions* is already to enter a profound contact with a long tradition in Letters, philosophy, and theology, now integrated with Christian spirituality. A work like Dante's *Divina Commedia* also incorporates a wide range of the intellectual-spiritual heritage in a large visionary synthesis. To find a guide, Dante turned to Virgil, who himself had earlier turned to Homer. This sequence symbolizes in brief how European consciousness grew by learning how to retrieve and build upon its inheritance. A continuous thread of literacy allowed for a development that would be quite impossible in oral cultures. Education today should leverage the power of this common literary good that has been bequeathed to us, this large stream of cultural achievements, as well as its practices of ongoing retrieval and assimilation and advancement. The most glaring alternative would have us fall back, first into tribal parochialisms and then into barbarism.

Social Impact

Today's cultural fragmentation and social confusions, our society's rootlessness, loneliness, desperation, and family-breakdown (fewer marriages, fewer children) are spiritual ills that cry out for our attention. The prevailing destructive forces seem very hard to remedy, even impossible to eliminate. Such troubles may have more than a little to do with the loss of a common sense of our shared cultural foundations and our (humanity's) larger "story." We live by meaning. Stories help provide it. Cultural history offers

a complex narrative and expansive communitarian framework for those worlds of meaning. That history, like good literature that is well digested, can help people find or understand their places in a larger scheme (one that is constructed, yes, but not utterly arbitrary). How can individuals perform their roles properly without knowing the play in which they are acting—and helping to write new scenes for? Besides aim and focus, we need a certain depth and breadth of vision and understanding. Some of that can come with learning the contents of our cultural-historical genealogy.

Furthermore, the chances of reconciliation between polarized adversaries will rise in proportion to the shared understanding of our common past and the greater overlap of perspectives on our heritage's strengths and weaknesses. Transcending our present squabbles, we will see with greater objectivity what we hold in common with the folly and the brilliance of other times. We can take a more philosophical, more insightful path that has a better chance of reconciling more parties on an existential level. *The very act of studying together the same important matters of perennial human concern is itself already the beginning of reconciliation*. We might more easily become an "us" rather than a gathering of mutually adversarial groups—"*us* versus *them*."

Humanistic studies can unify society and serve as a kind of effective, anti-narcissistic therapy, over and against the simplistic antagonistic cultural hermeneutic that divides social beings into the "oppressors" and the "oppressed." These studies, taught in the right way, provide a most valuable social and civic service. They make a unique contribution to the common good, providing deep roots for and influences on individual and collective consciousness. Our cultural-historical past embraces millions. It supports insight into our kinship and our shared humanity, with shared virtues and vices. When you know that your neighbors are in a real sense your relatives, you are more likely to do them justice. When you study the record, you are less likely to simplistically heap all the vices on one scapegoat—be it person or religion or culture or historical period. Long ago the Republic of Letters united the scholarly class across national boundaries, even in an age of growing nationalism. Christian humanism draws the circle of kinship ever larger and the bands of connection ever tighter.

Conclusion

A Christian education without the Gospel is a contradiction in terms. An education without attention to the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin heritages will always be a notably truncated effort. We might now be giving our youth a program of studies that is far more integrated, edifying, healing, purposeful, and inspiring than what they are typically receiving. All the specialized

disciplinary or technical training in the world can never compete with what such an education at its best can give. The content suggested here matters greatly, but it is ultimately not a matter of how much of it is covered but a matter of how and by what and to what the heart is moved. The teachers themselves must be not only competent but converted. Basing the core of the collegiate years' curriculum on Christ and the Gospel, and proceeding to the other relevant studies described here, we can lay a stable and lasting foundation for a new *Ratio Studiorum*, one that ultimately opens upon "all the disciplines in keeping with our Institute."

Appendix: First Principles and Foundations for Jesuit Education

The final goal of Jesuit education remains teaching "our neighbors all the disciplines in keeping with our Institute in such a way that they are thereby aroused to a knowledge and love of our Maker and Redeemer" (*Ratio Studiorum*, no. 7). The 1550 Formula of the Institute defines the context: the Society is "instituted especially to aim chiefly at the *defense of the faith and its propagation*, and at *the progress of souls in Christian life and learning*."

1. Jesuit education (hereafter, JE) aims to provide students with certain essential competencies, particularly verbal ones, but it looks especially to personal conversions (religious, moral, social, cultural, intellectual).
2. JE favors the use of high-quality, long-approved content in a Christian humanist mode, with emphasis on what is edifying and supportive of a mature Catholic worldview.
3. JE is guided by a stable, authoritative plan (*ratio*) that defines subsidiary goals, operations, procedures, academic events and structures, curricular content, textbooks, methods, operations, and procedures.
4. This plan is to be worked out by the Society on the basis of the idea, the scope, the spirit, and the history of JE; it is to be employed authoritatively but with reasonable variations for local needs and wants.
5. The Society's primary educational investment is in the collegiate years (Grades 9 through 14).
6. The foundational curricular areas are Letters, philosophy, and theology, with some introductory attention to other relevant disciplines (e.g., mathematics, physics, economics). The goal is not so much advanced or pre-professional knowledge (*eruditio*) as it is

formationally supportive content. Faculty provide valuable introductions, overviews, and any background necessary for responsible adulthood and citizenship (e.g., the main elements of the most relevant cultural history).

7. Theology courses emphasize Scriptural study. Courses guarantee students an opportunity to have a mature encounter with the Christ of the Gospels. They study the commandments, the creed, and the sacraments; the traditional virtues and vices; Church history; significant theological and spiritual writings; and major Church documents (e.g., encyclicals).
8. Jesuit formation is tasked with training, according to the Society of Jesus's own standards, a body of teachers and administrators who can competently maintain, promote, adapt, and deliver the plan; set the tone and direction of the work; and oversee hiring and operations.
9. Collaboration with allies is prized, but leadership ultimately rests with the Society. The Jesuit order is responsible for steadily investing in this work and evaluating its health on a regular basis. A standing local board of JE leaders oversees mission focus, strength, and quality; its decisions can be informed, conditioned, or overruled by a higher board or by the relevant Jesuit authorities (the provincial or the general). The local board makes yearly reports to the provincial and can receive directives from him.
10. Teachers are above all employed and advanced for their ability to integrate appropriately with the mission and to contribute to its realization. The faculty's mandate includes forming an effective moral and apostolic community of educators with a shared vision and an integrated approach. They are to maintain standards and work out local adaptations. Anyone in the institution can be disengaged for low competence or low compatibility. Teachers have creative latitude and flexibility, as teaching is an art and talents vary; but the plan and the principles remain the standard for the work as a whole.