



EDITORIAL

Special Section: *Renovatio Mundi: The Jesuits as Educators in History*

Renovatio Mundi: Forming Youth and Renewing the World

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“Puerilis institutio mundi renovatio est” (the formation of youth is the renewal of the world), expresses the transformative aspirations of Jesuit education. The sixteenth-century Jesuit Juan de Bonifacio records the sentence in *De recta institutione* (On Proper Education), an epistolary treatise appended to the 1606 edition of his *De sapiente fructuoso: Epistolares libri quinque*.¹ Addressing an unnamed distinguished teacher, Bonifacio recalls the words his correspondent has spoken in praise of the educational vocation. The phrase carries an argument for the religious, moral, intellectual, and civic benefits of educating the young, presenting their formation as a means of renewing both church and society. It quickly became a hallmark of the Jesuit vision of spirituality and its involvement in education, its pedagogy.

The ideal expressed in the maxim recorded by Bonifacio also provides a lens through which to read later representations of the Society’s educational mission.² In 1640, *Imago primi saeculi*, a volume commemorating the Society’s first century through texts and emblems, gave the formation

1 Juan de Bonifacio, “De recta institutione,” in *De sapiente fructuoso: Epistolares libri quinque* (Ingolstadt, 1606), 635.

2 See Ladislaus Lukács, ed., *Monumenta paedagogica Societatis Iesu*, vol. 3, 1557–1572 (Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1972), 402n15; Carlos Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*, nouvelle éd., vol. 1 (Brussels, 1890), cols. 1722–23; and Pedro Juan Perpiña, Juan de Bonifacio, and Antonio Possevino,

of youth a place in this celebration with the emblem *Institutio iuventutis* ("The Education of Youth").³ Read alongside Bonifacio's maxim, the emblem underscores the importance of education in the Society's understanding of its apostolic purpose.

While formal education was not included explicitly in the Formula Instituti, the founding charter of the Society of Jesus as a religious order, the progressive involvement of the Jesuits with teaching and running schools was profoundly based on the magnifying, exponential effect that forming new generations had in fostering the progress of souls, communities, and society at large.

A celebrated document drafted by Juan Alfonso de Polanco listed several benefits that involvement in education would bring for the Jesuits themselves, their students, and the students' families and communities. Among the most important was the prospect that these young people would become leaders in their communities. By educating and forming a single student, the Society of Jesus could therefore influence many others through the alumnus's subsequent activities, leadership, and example.⁴

If this was the case, a direct connection emerges between the philosophy of Jesuit pedagogy and the pursuit of the greater good, a central tenet of Ignatius of Loyola's spirituality. This notion has both personal and collective dimensions. At the personal level, it informs discernment by guiding the choice of the path most conducive to drawing closer to God and the means most likely to help a person attain that ultimate end. Yet the pursuit of the greater good also extends beyond the individual. *Non nobis solum nati sumus* (not for us alone are we born), the Jesuits repeated with Cicero and Aristotle. The journey toward God could therefore not be understood as an exclusively individual undertaking, detached from relationships and responsibilities to others. Rather, it entailed helping others advance toward the same end. In this collective sense, pursuing the greater good meant choosing means whose benefits would reach more people. Forming future leaders offered one such means, since their responsibilities, conduct, and example could extend the effects of their education throughout their communities. The rationale for the Jesuits' educational commitment was thus rooted in Ignatius's spirituality. From the global perspective required by a

Der Jesuiten Perpiña, Bonifacius und Possevin ausgewählte pädagogische Schriften, trans. Josef Stier, Heinrich Scheid, and Georg Fell (Herder, 1901), 243n2.

3 *Imago primi saeculi Societatis Iesu a provincia Flandro-Belgica eiusdem Societatis repraesentata* (Antwerp, 1640), 468.

4 Ignatius of Loyola and Juan Alfonso de Polanco, "The Society's Involvement in Studies (1551)," in *Jesuit Pedagogy, 1540–1616: A Reader*, ed. Cristiano Casalini and Claude Pavur, S.J. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2016), 59.

history of the Society of Jesus, however, the diversity of societies also meant that this commitment could take markedly different educational forms.

The relationship between these aspirations and their practical realization raises an important historical question. A shared educational purpose did not necessarily produce identical institutions, methods, or experiences. Understanding that purpose requires attention not only to statements of principle, but also to the choices through which educators translated them into practice. It also invites consideration of how students, families, and collaborators received, interpreted, and helped shape those efforts. The history of Jesuit education can thus be approached as a history of the interaction between apostolic ideals and the circumstances of everyday life, with neither understood adequately in isolation.

In 2024, the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies hosted at Boston College the annual International Symposium on Jesuit Studies, with the intent of exploring the historical development of the Society of Jesus's global educational apostolate from its origins through the end of Pedro Arrupe's generalate (1965–83). The symposium took as its starting point the early Jesuit conviction that education was central to the Society's mission. This conviction found expression in the famous assertion recorded by Juan de Bonifacio that "the formation of youth is the renewal of the world" and Diego Laínez's insistence that every Jesuit share in the burden of the schools. The scholars gathered at the symposium traced continuities and changes in this commitment across periods and regions, before and after the Suppression.

Their papers examined schools, colleges, universities, and other educational initiatives within their political, economic, and social contexts. Topics included pedagogical methods, textbooks and teaching materials, the backgrounds and mobility of teachers and students, and the daily life of educational institutions. Particular attention was given to the work of Jesuit educators and their collaborators, their relationships with local communities, and understudied dimensions of the apostolate. Studies of mission territories considered how encounters with local cultures shaped curricula and instruction, while others explored the place of faith formation, music, art, and sport beyond the classroom. Together, these contributions highlighted the interplay between a shared apostolic purpose and the varied circumstances in which it was pursued, revealing how Jesuit education developed through engagement with the societies it sought to serve.

Returning to Bonifacio's words, the renewal of the world emerges not simply as an assertion of education's transformative power, but as an invitation to investigate how that power was understood and exercised. What kinds of renewal did educators envision, whom did they seek to form, and how did their efforts affect the communities around them?

Such questions connect the history of institutions and teaching practices with the wider history of religious and social life. They also keep the aspirations of Jesuit education in view without assuming that its outcomes always corresponded to its intentions.

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