



The Catholic Tradition of Classical Education with Dr. Andrew Seeley

Lesson 6: The Ratio Studiorum of the Jesuits

Outline:

Brief introduction

- Ratio Studiorum is the Jesuits' great educational document. Xavier and Ignatius founded the Jesuits in the middle of the sixteenth century.
- The Jesuits realized in order to be strong preachers, their members had to have excellent education. They had to be deeply informed in the liberal arts, before advancing to philosophy and then theology.
- The Jesuits began educating students (mostly middle school) with 3 years of grammar, transition to 1 year of humanities (wider reading of traditional authors), and then end with rhetoric.
- Ratio Studiorum was a common document that contained the combined experience of different schools to improve existing schools and produce new ones.

Purpose of Ratio Studiorum

- Ratio Studiorum begins with the aim of education, which is to lead men to the knowledge of God.
- According to Ratio Studiorum, in order to promote the love and service of God, the students must improve in character, literary skills and learning in general. They are supposed to develop virtue, learn how to read deeply and maximize traditional learning as possible.
- **“In order to form a Christian, they [Jesuits] must first form a man.”** - Seeley

Jesuit teachers and students

- Jesuit's students were leaders of societies, one of the most effective teachers and missionaries of the church.
- Teacher should be a capable person, devoted to God, passionate for the subject, caring and prayerful for his students. Purpose is to train his students in the service of God and all the virtues required for the service. Should provide direction for their students but also allow space for the students' self-exploration.
- Students would teach for a few years in between the theology and philosophy phases of their training, because teaching helps facilitate their own intellectual and moral development. They also need to learn to make teaching a part of their spiritual lives.



- Teachers like Seeley are able to:
 - Recognize the significance in insightful things that students say
 - Connect those things even if the students themselves cannot
 - Learn from those experiences.

Jesuit Curriculum - Latin, Drama and Prelection

- Latin is strongly taught within the Jesuit curriculum. Students expected to take Latin after a year.
- Latin is learnt by invitation with a few words and lines, progressing in the next year to dialogues and answering questions
- Another part of the Jesuit curriculum is drama, performed in Latin:
 - Comedy
 - Tragedy
- If students can deliver powerful or comical performances in Latin, and the audience can respond emotionally, then they have really mastered the language. This also develops confidence, memory capacity, a presenter's persona before an audience.
- **Prelection:** Teacher would read a small chunk of a Latin text and then explain the assignment (which is slow and distinct reading) relate it to previous class, then comment on vocab, syntax, figures of speech. Students were not to take any notes, just listen.
 - Point was not to teach them everything but to give them enough that their self-study had good supplements.
- Teacher would also share some of his own learnings about the text
- Once students are capable of performance, the teacher begins prompting them to exhibit that with only minor tips. Only towards the end of the class, would the teacher provide an idea and capacity of the work he had in mind, so the students can compare it to what their own intuition has produced.

Managing class size through disputation

- The Jesuits also knew how to manage class size. There'll usually be around 80 to a 100 students. First, they'll listen to the prelection. And then they'll work on another exercise (imitate poetry of a great author) while the teacher graded written work. They would have to prepare oratory presentations for the whole school and engage in disputation.
- **Disputation** truly tests a student's understanding in a different way from private reflection. **“What seems crystal clear in the seclusion of one's own room often becomes worthless in the give and take of disputation.”** - Seeley