

JESUIT EDUCATION

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Perhaps Jesuits impart the best-known education in India. They conduct not less than 31 university colleges, 5 Institutes of Business Administration and 155 high schools spread throughout the country, almost all of them among its most reputed (for example: St. Xavier's, Calcutta, Mumbai, Ranchi; Loyola, Chennai, Vijayawada; St. Joseph's, Bangalore, Trichy; XLRI, Jamshedpur). In them, more than 250,000 students belonging to every religious, linguistic and socio-economic group, receive their education.

The number of Jesuit colleges and universities in the world has now reached 114, including 28 in the United States. Many of these universities have traditions dating back many years. In Europe, the Gregorian University (Rome, Italy; founded 1551) is the most famous Jesuit University

Ignatius of Loyola, with firm determination to serve God and His people, founded the Jesuit Order, called the "Society of Jesus". Pope Paul III approved it as a Religious Order in 1540. Ignatius was an outstanding character of the 16th century. One of his first companions was the then professor of the Paris University, Francis Xavier, who came to India in 1542. The Society of Jesus is the largest religious order in the Catholic Church with 20,563 Jesuits spread all over the world. It has taken up every conceivable form of work, which may, lead to people's total welfare. The Jesuits, according to Ignatius, should be ready to undertake in any part of the world, work which will be for the "Greater Glory of God" (the Jesuit motto: Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam). The Order remembers on July 31, its Founding Father who died 445 years ago.

Though nowhere in the Order's Constitution is it stated that education is to be given special importance, the Jesuits have come to be particularly known in the public mind for their educational work and have acquired the reputation of being among the world's best educators; in every country a Jesuit school or college is synonymous with quality secular education given in an atmosphere conducive to character formation with emphasis laid on spiritual and moral values and the development of an integrated human personality.

India and the United States rank among the most important countries in regard to the size of the Jesuit educational undertakings. In the USA there are no fewer than 45 Jesuit Universities, and 75 high schools. In other Asian countries such as Japan, Nepal, Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam, the Jesuits conduct reputed schools and university establishments, which make a notable contribution to the education of their youth. The situation is the same wherever the Society of Jesus has established itself.

St. Francis Xavier opened the first Jesuit school in Goa in 1542. It was named St. Paul's College. Nothing exists of this institution today except its memory, but it was the predecessor of hundreds of other schools and colleges. The first Jesuit school to be opened in Europe was in Spain during the lifetime of the Order's founder. As he explained to one of his close friends, Ignatius saw in the school an opportunity to do good by initiating the young into secular and human knowledge and simultaneously into spiritual and moral values -- the love of God and human person. The success experienced here encouraged the Order to go in for more and more schools and college of every kind, so that soon education came to be considered the primary work of the Society of Jesus. Hence, the Jesuit dictum "Give us a boy and we will return you a man, a citizen of his country and a child of God."

Any worthwhile book on the history of education will mention the contribution made to European educational thinking and development in the 16th and 17th centuries. It was at this

time that Jesuit schools were opened all over Europe and in them the newly discovered classics of Greece and Rome were successfully used in the formation of the young. The “Ratio Studiorum” or “Guide to Education” produced by the Jesuits at the end of the 16th century remains an educational classic down to our day.

Jesuit educational methods derive directly from the Order’s own spirit. There is first a willingness to use any branch of human knowledge, modern languages, philosophy, theology, medicine, law, media and every branch of science and technology – nothing is taboo in Jesuit education. Secondly, there is the stress on character formation and discipline combined with the development of freedom. Next is the continual drive towards self-improvement, by stretching talents and abilities in every field as far as they can go. Ambition and individual emulation are stimulated by prizes and awards; simultaneously, teamwork is encouraged through the “house system” in schools – a Jesuit innovation.

No Jesuit education is complete without attention to the development of the moral and intellectual qualities of leadership: love for the country, integrity, human relations, understanding, hard work, organizational ability, cooperation and teamwork, and the power of expression in speech and writing. A Jesuit school or college aims to form “men and women for others” who will be agents of needed social change in their country. Jesuits view their work as “the service of faith in God and the promotion of Justice in the world”. Special and preferential treatment is given to economically poor students in terms of financial and academic support.

To quote from Paul Johnson's History of Christianity, What in fact they did was to provide an educational service on demand. If a Catholic prince or prince-bishop wanted an orthodox school, college or university established and conducted efficiently, he applied to the Jesuits; he supplied the funds and buildings, they trained personnel and techniques. They

were, in effect, rather like a modern multi-national company selling expert services. And they brought to the business of international schooling uniformity, discipline, and organization that was quite new.

Jesuit educational methods have been criticized by some as being too rigid, too stereotyped, and geared chiefly to the elite, intelligent and the determined, owing to the excessive stimulation of ambition. Modern Jesuits are probably more aware of their educational approaches in the context of the national and local socio-economic realities, and as a result there is a very different atmosphere prevailing in today's Jesuit institutions, an atmosphere at once more relaxed, less formal, more pluralistic and more tolerant of individual idiosyncrasies.

One may wonder what keeps these Jesuits united or keeps them going. The answer lies in their basic characteristics, which are, first of all the Order's "humanism" – its refusal to condemn anything that is human – and its willingness to use all human knowledge and achievements in the service of God and people. Another Jesuit characteristic is obedience or flexibility, willingness to adjust and to compromise. The only thing a Jesuit is taught to be rigid and uncompromising about is moral evil or sin. Another mark of the Jesuit is the way of combining stern inner discipline with maximum freedom for each individual member in external life and in the choice of methods. Finally there is a certain typical thoroughness in all that is undertaken. This is expressed by the frequent use of the word "magis", "greater", "higher" in relation to the goals the Jesuits, as individuals and as a community, strive for. Their age-old maxim is to aim at the greater good for the greater number of people.

On the dust jacket of his book, *The Jesuits*, Malachi Martin wrote: ". . . In that world where faith and power clash, the Society of Jesus has been the most fabled and fabulous, the most admired and reviled, in the practice of both. From its first beginnings during a

revolutionary time almost exactly like our own, and down the four and a half centuries of the Society's tumultuous existence, Jesuits have been both a puzzle and a model for the rest of the world. Friends and enemies, Catholics and non-Catholics, have all tried to unravel "the power and the secret" of these religiously trained and devoted men who stand as giants in every secular pursuit of mankind as well. In science and art, writing and exploration and teaching -- and not least in world politics -- Jesuits always aimed to be the best. And they were. They had a part to play in every major political alliance in Europe and America, in Asia and Africa. They became shapers not only of religious history, but of world history. Their power came to rival that of world leaders and the Roman pontiff. Even Nazi generals dreamed of such a cadre of men; and even Lenin envied them."

"Though few in number, the basic principles that Inigo Loyola had set forth for his Company were powerful catalysts. Once his men harnessed their energies within his organization to the worldwide work of the Roman Church, they produced a unique phenomenon of human history. That is why the eighteenth-century German theorist, Novalis wrote, "Never, never before in the course of the world's history had such a Society appeared. The old Roman Senate itself did not lay schemes for world domination with greater certainty of success. Never had the carrying out of a greater idea been considered with greater understanding. For all time, this Society will be an example to every society which feels an organic longing for infinite extension and eternal duration . . ." (Malachi Martin, *The Jesuits* p. 27).