

12-2020

Review: In the School of Ignatius: Studious Zeal and Devoted Learning by Claude Pavur

Timothy Rothhaar

Marquette University, timothy.rothhaar@marquette.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe>

Recommended Citation

Rothhaar, Timothy. "Review: In the School of Ignatius: Studious Zeal and Devoted Learning by Claude Pavur." *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 9, 2 (2020). <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol9/iss2/14>

This Resources is brought to you for free and open access by ePublications at Regis University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal by an authorized administrator of ePublications at Regis University. For more information, please contact epublications@regis.edu.

**Review: *In the School of Ignatius: Studious Zeal and Devoted Learning*
by Claude Pavur**

Reviewed by Timothy W. Rothhaar
Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Philosophy
Marquette University
Timothy.rothhaar@marquette.edu

Claude Pavur. *In the School of Ignatius: Studious Zeal and Devoted Learning*. Chestnut Hill, MA: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2019. 174 pages. \$19.96 (paperback).

Fr. Claude Pavur's book argues that for Jesuit education, at all levels, to return to its authenticity and glory it must retrieve the first Jesuits' vision of education in the *Ratio Studiorum* (RS), a flexible educational plan and manual for running Jesuit schools. Pavur does not argue the RS ought to be reinstated. Rather, he insists we must draw on its sources—and in this way he imitates the *ressourcement* movement—to reinvigorate Jesuit education in serving God and serving students. His effort is an enormous step in the right direction to this end. Given the controversy surrounding Jesuit higher education (e.g., what is it?), it would behoove all parties with a vested interest in Jesuit education to take seriously Pavur's remarks.

The book is recommended for all those with a deep interest in Catholic higher education, specifically Jesuit education, as it exists today and is moving ahead. I do not recommend it for students or those with a light heart for history or curriculum argumentation. It's best in the hands of serious scholars/teachers who take Jesuit education seriously and administrators at Catholic universities looking to lead their schools to retrieve and deepen authentic features of the Jesuit tradition while using the RS as a model for their own missions. The appendix alone is worth the cost, detailing every major and minor event on the Jesuit educational timeline.

To clarify the contents of the book, I offer this brief summary of each chapter.

Chapter one is an overview of Jesuit education, laying out in broad terms the relationship of the RS to contemporary questions facing Jesuit education today including justice, leadership, spiritual direction, and ethics. Pavur begins with

an overview of the *Ratio*, describing several features that permeate its content. First, "the content of the RS is structured by the office and their responsibilities" (2). Everyone knows what to do and works in unison to accomplish the given goals. Second, there is a sense in which authority, rightly exercised, is ordered toward realizing those goals. At the earlier levels, when students are adolescents, students are encouraged to practice a sort of respect for proper authority. Third, there are three stages: Letters (grammar, humanities, rhetoric), philosophy, and theology at the top, symbolic of where all fields lead. Fourth, oversight plays a crucial role in keeping students on track. Provincials, etc., make their own rules to obtain the results necessary for a place of knowledge, "the quality of education" (3). Fifth, the goal of teaching is to point the student towards the love of God, morality, and good citizenship. Sixth, brevity is preferred to wordiness. The RS does not mince words, nor does it encourage sloppiness in its work. Last, because of its vision, the RS took "generations to emerge" (4) because of the amount of input from all teachers involved. Jesuit education is the result of many conversations, all exchanged for the benefit of the student.

Chapter two traces a brief history of the Jesuits' relationship with academic education. Contrary to traditional accounts about the University of Messina, a viceroy of Sicily, Juan de Vega wanted his citizens' "hearts filled with virtue and devotion" along with spreading God's name (18). He was enthralled with St. Ignatius and his order, so the Jesuits appropriately founded a school for him. Ignatius himself was led into studies when he discovered he needed formal credibility for teaching "to keep himself free from suspicion" (21). His main goal was to help souls attain

heaven, so Letters could aid him in obtaining greater efficacy as a preacher. The goal is a “*docta pietas*,” or “learned devoted goodness,” the coupling of faith and studies (23). There are spiritual benefits to learned devotion, namely, love of one’s Maker. The RS was shaped by this understanding, including the notion students in themselves benefitted from studies. There is something about Letters that is good for the soul, and “any valid understanding of Jesuit education must build on this foundation” (29).

Chapter three argues “the RS . . . represents something that is quite integral to the charism of the Jesuit order,” notably, it is rooted in the life of Ignatius (33). He believed God spoke to him as an educator to a student, and the increasing belief for his needing credentials to be trusted in spiritual questions only furthered his resolve. The RS’s spirit reflects this belief. Pavur then draws an analogy between the RS and the *Spiritual Exercises*, the most important connection being they are both pedagogical texts because they use exercises for spiritual improvement and require students to take up learning as their own. Since the *Exercises* are part and parcel of being a Jesuit, so too, must the RS. In this way, the RS founds the mission of Jesuit education—educating for the faith and “living academic culture” (40). Fr. Pavur ends the chapter saying the RS is the basis of the school curriculum, which may take many years to develop and needs many faculty contributing the best of their fields.

Chapter four is mostly a literature review of the historical and recent attempts to define Jesuit education in terms of the RS. There are too many texts here to list; suffice it to say there was a significant following of the RS through the early- and mid-twentieth century, notably Fr. Robert Schwickerath, who argues “the vision of the RS and many of its methods” were already present in then contemporary educational methods (54). Pavur also notes the events of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the Land O’Lakes Statement (1967) as significant contributions to the Jesuits own rejection of their pedagogical heritage. Losing their junioriate (a two-year study program after a two-year novitiate) did not help either, as it undid the “letters—philosophy— theology” model St. Ignatius himself founded (64).

Chapter five is the heart and soul of the book, containing Fr. Pavur’s main argument. It returns to the RS for foundational sources in building up Ignatian education, asserting the RS is necessary to combat fragmented postmodern education. He offers seven specific arguments to this end. Pavur’s main contention is “the self-concept of the [Jesuits] is truncated and distorted if [the RS] and *all that it represents* are either omitted or minimized” (93, original emphasis). The central concept of Jesuit education, and thereby the charism of the order, is *docta pietas*, learned devotion, centered around joining learning and love of God—the goal of Jesuit education—such that students “are thereby aroused to a knowledge and love of our Maker and Redeemer” (3, RS no. 7). St. Ignatius desired to help people deeply with their spiritual troubles, but could not gain the requisite credentials “to win acceptance as a trustworthy guide in important spiritual questions” without a proper academic education (35). So, the RS is built on St. Ignatius’s convictions, experiences, and those of his fellow Jesuits, that education and salvation are not at odds and actually are paired like a fine wine and steak.

To that end, chapter six puts flesh on a new curriculum rooted in the RS. Any new curriculum must build itself off of the RS, else it is not truly Jesuit, which means the curriculum is inherently rooted in the liberal arts. In the last section, Fr. Pavur offers a sketch of this curriculum (123). His instructive history proves the Jesuits took education seriously enough to warrant a large, detailed manual they fully intended to be revised over the years. Except Pavur’s point is it hasn’t, at least not in America since the 1960s with the overhaul of higher education.

Chapter seven offers seven definitions of Jesuit education, the shortest being “Jesuit education is the *Ratio studiorum*, rightly adapted” (128). The afterword discusses *docta pietas* and the Society today.

I read this book as one Jesuit recovering his order’s heritage. The RS shaped Jesuits for centuries; during the 20th century, monumental events (such as Vatican II, Land O’Lakes, and the changing scenery of American education) led to a situation in which the RS was mostly dropped or forgotten, and replaced with a scattered and

beleaguered pedagogy. Pavur himself admits “essays and documents [on Jesuit education] keep being produced” precisely because “Jesuit education must look for new modes of thought” (67). In other words, Pavur’s argument is that if you destroy the *Ratio*, you destroy Jesuit identity; for Pavur, an institution cannot rightly be called Jesuit when the RS and its importance for Jesuit formation are ignored or forgotten. Education is too close to the heart of Jesuitism to be ignored, so why ignore the RS, the Jesuit education document? That is precisely Pavur’s point. The Jesuits have a rich intellectual foundation which ought not be disrupted or discarded for passing educational trends; the market fades, but faith is forever.

Fr. Pavur’s book offers a bracing argument, and one might raise concerns about implementation. The early Jesuits were not trying to do anything innovative—it was not their goal to reinvent education. Instead, Jesuit pedagogy was simply combining the best available educational theory and methods to accomplish their specific goal. One wonders whether implementing Jesuit education today could be an exercise in determining the best educational practices with *docta pietas*. Pavur’s text is a welcome addition to the literature on Jesuit education, and his argumentation, rooted in historical documentation and contemporary experience, is most refreshing. We should all be grateful. HJE