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DISCIPULI ITERUM FIAMUS. (LET US BECOME PUPILS AGAIN).

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ALTHOUGH THE TRADITIONAL OBJECTIVES OF HISTORICAL-CULTURAL APPLICATION AND ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE CONTINUE TO BE EMPHASIZED WIDELY IN LATIN CLASSES, THE TIMES DEMAND THE ADOPTION OF THE MORE VITAL MODERN METHODS CURRENTLY PRACTICED IN MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING. OF COURSE, THE ORAL COMMAND OF LATIN CAN NEVER BE FUNCTIONAL, BUT IT CAN PERMIT A TYPE OF INTRA-TEMPORAL COMMUNICATION. FURTHERMORE, BY STRESSING ALL FOUR BASIC LANGUAGE SKILLS, THE TEACHER CAN HELP THE STUDENT ACHIEVE THE LANGUAGE CONTROL NEEDED TO READ MORE ADVANTAGEOUSLY "REAL" LATIN AUTHORS AND CONSEQUENTLY, TO HAVE A GREATER CAPACITY TO APPRECIATE THE ROMANS, THEIR CIVILIZATION, AND THEIR CULTURAL IMPACT. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "THE DFL BULLETIN," VOLUME 6, NUMBER 3, MARCH 1967, PAGES 4-6. (AB)

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A rationale for the teaching of Latin in the latter half of the twentieth century

DISCIPULI ITERUM FIAMUS!

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Latin is a language as dead as dead can be;
First it killed the Romans and now it's killing me.

This couplet, amazingly new and meaningful to each incoming crop of Latin students, has been appearing in fewer and fewer texts of late. The Latin language as a mental discipline, as a subject for analysis, as a code to be solved, as a key to history, or as a means of mastering English, simply is not attracting the twentieth century student: *something is killing Latin!* Trite though the couplet has become in over three hundred years of appearances in textbooks in America, it contains one essential truth that Latin teachers have all too often forgotten — *Latin is a language!*

If the majority of Latin teachers today were to be questioned about the objectives of the courses they are now teaching, most of the responses would be some of the objectives of The Classical Investigation Report of 1924. There would be historical-cultural, application, and disciplinary objectives, although they might not bear these titles.

It is impossible in the education of the sixties, in which the various English-study projects, the very exciting approaches to English teaching and learning which have left Latinate grammars far behind, to say that the kind of traditional drills which are done in Latin will benefit the pupil's comprehension of his own language. Latin will aid his understanding of English in the same way in which the study of German, French, Russian, or Spanish does — via the contrast with it. There are no places in twentieth century curricula for courses of Latin operating in the province of remedial English: English teachers can do the job better and more economically. Classicists are on dangerous ground when they claim therapeutic benefits for Latin study in the realms of vocabulary building also. A very large part of that English vocabulary which is derived from Latin is scientific and abstract and cannot be activated in any real sense without more time being devoted to that purpose than the Latin teacher has to give.

The historical-cultural objectives and the references to the continuum of man are also tremulous claims. In the "typical" sequence of Latin studies the first and the only Latin author studied is Caesar and Caesar does not appear until the second semester of the second year. In the third year the student "reads" Cicero, sometimes Cicero and Ovid; the fourth year is almost always devoted to Vergil. All four of these men fall in the very late Republic or the very early Empire; the pupil is then studying two generations of Romans, the time from the advent of Julius Caesar though the reign of Augustus, Julius Caesar's successor. This is less than an inch on a mile-long graph of the continuum of man. Medieval Latin is seldom mentioned, much less studied, so that the mass of Latin students consider but a minute segment of the continuum "frozen" for them; since that mass is engaged in only a two year sequence, the solitary author read is Julius Caesar and the possibilities for either some real understanding of the continuum or an appreciation of Roman authors or the civilization from which they sprang via the Latin course is all the more reduced.

The other of the most frequently advanced "selling points" is that Latin prepares the student for his study of the other foreign languages. In an era in which all languages were taught by a grammar-translation or a reading approach, this might have been true, in that the student would be conditioned to certain necessary study habits. There is nothing in the traditionally taught Latin course, however, which would prepare a student for the audio-lingual approach which his modern language teacher will be taking.

There is nothing in the traditional course to prepare him for the mimicry, the dialogues, the pattern drills, the directed dialogues — the use of the target language to the point of mastery before formal analysis is undertaken. In truth, were the student to take Latin first, he might suffer some real inhibition and interference from the kind of study habits and teaching he has come to accept as constituents of foreign language learning.

What then is a rationale for the teaching of Latin in the twentieth century? Before we can establish the rationale, we must yet do away with all the "Classical" resentment of the National Defense Education Act and the impetus it gave to modern foreign languages and adopt some new attitudes toward the Latin language itself. We cannot make any real progress until we dispense with the rationalization of the reasons for our present predicament and consider the predicament with an eye toward improving our status. We are, in the process, going to have to face the fact that the greatest boon NDEA presented to modern language teachers was increased knowledge of what foreign language learning actually entails and improvement of their methods of teaching. We Latin teachers have been so busy worrying about our exclusion from NDEA funds that we neglected to capitalize on those areas which were open to us; there has never been a time when we could not adapt the methods and techniques the modern foreign language teachers are now using. One of our extreme difficulties has been in admitting that *we are all, Classicists and modern foreign language teachers alike, teachers of foreign language!* There will be some difference in goals, some variance in objectives, but the principles involved in the teaching of a second language are the same, regardless of the language. *Modern language teachers are getting the publicity and the students because they are giving the students a skill they can readily recognize for themselves!* Two major steps must precede the acceptance of the rationale to be proposed here: Classicists must approach their teaching with a strong conviction that Latin is, first and foremost, a language and they must set out deliberately and conscientiously to learn techniques and methods from their modern language colleagues. *The pupil, when he enrolls for our Latin courses, contracts to study an ancient language: there is never any contract that this language must be taught by ancient or medieval methods!* We must learn from our modern language colleagues what they have been able to learn from the fields of linguistics, physics, psychology, psycho-linguistics, anthropology — from all the sources they have tapped — so that we, too, can teach the language and not just some interesting facts about it.

What then is the rationale for the teaching of Latin in the second half of the twentieth century? We teach the Latin language for the same reasons for which any of the modern foreign languages are taught. We teach Latin to give our students a control of the basic structures and the basic patterns of the Latin language, to give our students a control of the sound system of that language, and to give our students an appreciation of the culture of the people who originated the Latin language and in turn had their thinking shaped by the Latin language. We teach Latin to teach our students four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. We teach them to develop their listening and speaking skills so that they will have the kind of control of the Latin language which will enable them to read it. Certainly, we should benefit from the experiences of those teachers attempting to teach disadvantaged children how to read, that these children cannot read language they do not control and have never had modeled for them. Our objectives and deliberate efforts must be directed toward teaching our students an acquisition of the habits of the Latin language first by oral techniques and finally by reading the Latin language as a language. We shall have to do away with our long, long tracts of English during the Latin class and thrust our people into the culture by using the language as much as possible — in pattern drills, in question-answer drills, in Latin-to-Latin manipulative exercises.

If we aim at teaching the Latin language and a mastery and control of it, we shall have a better opportunity to teach our students an appreciation of the people who originated this language and their impact on the history of mankind via a greater use of "real" Latin authors from the outset of the course. Martial and Catullus and medieval Latin can be begun with our students at very early stages; other authors can be found once attention is focused in this direction. Of course, a different type of teaching materials will be necessary for this kind of approach to Latin teaching, but we shall not be facing any challenge which our colleagues in the modern languages have not already encountered. We must stop directing all our attention toward the *process* of extracting the message from Latin and rendering it into English: we must insert *direct communication in Latin into the Latin course.*

I am free to admit that I use my Latin for no utilitarian purpose. I speak to no one in Latin, I write letters to no one in Latin, I order no dinners in Latin, and yet I believe wholeheartedly that Latin is a language experience equivalent to any experience possible in Spanish, French, German, or Russian. When the modern language student has mastered his target language, he can look forward to the possibility of face-to-face communication with the native speakers of that language. We cannot offer our students this functional application of their foreign language. We cannot lean across a fence, across a boundary line, or a table to converse with a Roman. We can, however, offer our Latin students a comparable if not the same language experience. Our language will enable us to experience an intra-temporal communication which is comparable in scope to the astronauts' reaching into space.

We in Latin education can perform one task for our students that no other group can do in quite the same way. The twentieth century student tends to be a hopeless being. What does a Julius Caesar, intervening in the Haeduans' war with the Helvetians, have to say to a student whose brother or father or uncle is fighting in Vietnam? What do Cicero's orations against Catiline have to say to the pupil who experiences the protest march or the demonstration, at least vicariously, almost every day? What can Cincinnatus, Horatius, Mucius Scaevola and Coriolanus say to the youth of today? What values are there for the student whose native land is building the "Great Society" in studying Augustus' threefold building program — the monuments dwarfing man physically, the bureaucracy dwarfing him in relationship to the state, and the erection of a history which dwarfed him in comparison with his antecedents? *Nothing* — if that student is forced forever to parse and analyze and search for the correct English equivalent! The message of Latin has been losing *much* in translation!

We owe our students the security of the realization that each generation has had essentially the same perils, essentially the same terrors, essen-

LATIN (Cont.)

tially the same conflicts to resolve and that no generation was ever really paralyzed by them. We owe our students the opportunity to realize that these perils and terrors and conflicts are part and parcel of that gift which every child receives with the first spank that draws breath into his lungs. We can show him that man has always had the same basic trials — we have accelerated them, we have cloaked them in different terms, we can now analyze them on computers — but the basic problems are still the same. None of these realizations are possible, however, so long as we must draw them out of the student in his own native tongue and force him always back into his own frame of reference. Until he can encounter some statement, some thought, some pithy saying of the Romans and be struck by it *directly* before the discussion, before the analysis, before the teacher's interpretation, the student will never have a complete Latin language experience.

One of the questions we should be asking ourselves more often is, "Why did Rome's power last so long?" The answer some of us would give is that Rome had the ability to alter with the changing situation so that when the monarchy became untenable, the Romans evolved a republic, but when the republic was too difficult a means of administering the lands they had conquered, the empire was born. Certainly Latin teachers should be able to emulate the Romans in their adjustment to changing situations!

In the U.S. Office of Education Bulletin 1963, Number 26, *A Handbook for Guiding Students in Modern Foreign Languages* by Ilo Remer, the following passage occurs under the heading, "Why Study a Foreign Language":

> The individual student should consider the study of a modern foreign language for its potential contribution to liberal education as well as for its practical use. The student who acquires a second language acquires a new channel of communication and, in the process, discovers new avenues of thinking and develops an insight into the thoughts and feelings of people of non-English speech. From the very beginning stages of foreign language study, the pupil discovers that other people express themselves differently, and that other languages are not just like English except for the words. Because language not only conveys thought but also helps shape it, speakers of different languages view relationships and interpret experience in very different ways. Learning to react in a foreign language and thus actually to participate in a different culture through the language is a broadening educational experience. As the pupil's abilities to understand and read the new language develop, a gradually deepening knowledge of the people who use it, of their customs and institutions, and of the significant features of their country (such as its geography, economics, politics, history, literature, music, and art) can lead to a lifelong enjoyment and, in addition, give a better perspective on American culture.
>
> Is there any requirement here that Latin cannot fill?

In his book *Teach the Latin, I Pray You** Paul Distler, S.J. details the classroom techniques necessary to fit the kind of rationale for the teaching of Latin outlined here. Like the Romans, when they conquered the Greeks and were confronted with a superior approach to the ask at hand — life, at that stage — we must be prepared to take over from our colleagues that which is better than what we have. The operative word in the couplet quoted at the outset is "is": Latin *is* a language! If we do not begin to teach Latin as a language, we may find that the couplet has to become:

> Latin *was* a language as dead as dead can be;
> It did survive the Romans but then died needlessly.

**Teach the Latin, I Pray You,* Paul F. Distler, S.J., Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1969.