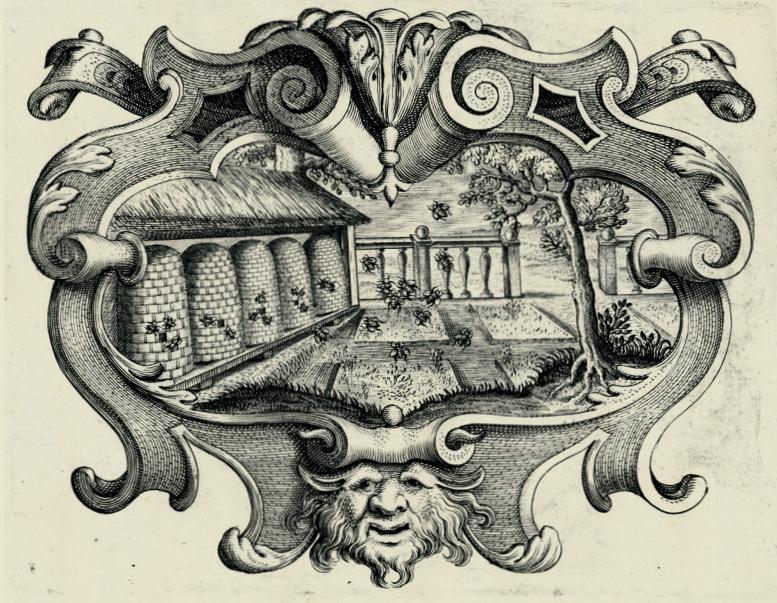


Humanities and Rhetoric



Motto:
Schools of Humane Letters

Subscriptio:
*But why do I myself pay homage to the sweet arts that you are learning?
Because through these arts you are allowed to possess something greater.*

The ideal scholar exhibited eloquentia perfecta, or articulate wisdom. This meant not only the ability to speak, to write, and to express ideas with ease and elegance, but also “the capacity to reason, to feel, to express oneself and to act, harmonizing virtue with learning.” In short, the goal was “the integral formation and style of life along the lines of what today we would call ‘human excellence.’”

—Gerald McKeivitt, S.J., *Brokers of Culture: Italian Jesuits in the American West, 1848-1919* (Stanford University Press, 2007)

Since the guiding goal of the founding members of the Jesuits was to save their own souls and those of others, when they entered into the work of formal education they wanted to equip students, whether novices or lay, to carry out that mission. The educated public of the time, having enjoyed the polished discourse of the Renaissance humanists, expected their priests to deliver homilies in a similar style: if the inroads of Protestants were to be countered, it would be accomplished by apologists skilled in the rhetorical art of persuasion. It was no longer sufficient for a student to obtain a rudimentary knowledge of Latin and then go on to study the scholastic theologians and philosophers. The Jesuits were certainly not opposed to scholasticism, indeed both the *Ratio* and the *Constitutions* granted Saint Thomas Aquinas an honored place in the Jesuit curriculum; but even the most learned scholar was considered at a disadvantage if he could not eloquently plead his cause.

According to the plan of the *Ratio* the average student was expected to spend his first three years gaining a basic mastery of Latin grammar, following upon that with a course called Humanities during which he

began working more on style. The crowning course, Rhetoric, had the ambitious aim of “*ad perfectam eloquentiam informare*.” Each one of the three levels of Grammar was carefully planned with the next stage in view. This was true also of the plan of study for humanities and rhetoric. Grammar progressed from the rudiments to exposure to all of the rules. Students were not to be promoted until they had reached the level of proficiency required of their class. Daily exercises included repetition, recitation, and composition so that students were actively involved in achieving mastery. By the end of their Rhetoric class students were expected to be able to compose a complete oration in the manner of Cicero.

The flowering of Jesuit humanists had ended by the middle of the seventeenth century. However, Jesuit schools continued to provide their students with a thorough grounding in Latin until the suppression of the order in 1773. Provinces in various countries adapted their own variations, but the basic *curriculum* set up by the *Ratio* assured a certain uniformity and quality of education. Eloquence and erudition remained the *foci* of Jesuit education.

—John Ateberry, *Humanities and Rhetoric in Ratio Studiorum: Jesuit Education, 1540-1773*
(John J. Burns Library, Boston College, 1999)

The beehive, the bee, and honey are apt emblems of Humanities and Rhetoric for, in the sacred texts of East and West, bees symbolize knowledge, and especially rhetorical eloquence.

Figure 1.
Emblem 471
Imago printi sacrali: Societatis Iesu
(Antwerp: Plantin Press, 1640)
Special Collections,
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