

# Jesuit Emblems

An emblem—an image accompanied by a motto and either verses or a short prose passage—is both art and literature. It seeks to convey an abstract idea through the combination of a visual image and a brief text. The interplay of the two is what unlocks the meaning, as the two elements together impress in a way that neither could alone.

The Jesuits more than anyone else integrated the emblem in education, and used it as a pedagogical crowning-piece to recommend their education system to the outside world... In the hands of the Jesuits the emblem was both an artistic-ingenious and a persuasive means of communication. The emblem was part of the high technology of . . . Jesuit eloquentia. It influences the public in a very powerful way and it also demonstrates the ingenuity of its designers. So the emblem just had to play a part in the education in the Jesuit colleges, an education that was completely directed to the acquisition of this eloquentia.

—Karel Porteman



◀ Figure 1.

The earliest and most visible of Jesuit emblem books was Jerome Nadal's *Evangelicae historiae imagines* and *Adnotationes et meditationes*, published in 1593. Although not emblematic in the proper sense (it is what we might term "proto-emblematic"), this important work sets out the visual steps in Ignatian meditation and is the first emblematic creation by a Jesuit. Nadal's method of assigning letters (A, B, C, etc.) to each constitutive element of the Gospel scene that was keyed to captions identifying the places, persons, and actions depicted was subsequently adopted by many religious illustrated and emblem books.

Emblems were distinctly preferred by the Jesuits, who produced more emblem books (in all the major European vernacular languages, as well as in Latin) than did any other identifiable group of writers, employing them in their ministries of education and preaching, and to disseminate Ignatian spirituality.

Ignatian spirituality insists that the ordinary fabric of everyday life always has a deeper hidden meaning, for the finite and the quotidian are the privileged place of encounter with God. This conviction is summed up in the leitmotif of the Ignatian tradition, "finding God in all things." In other words, just as in emblems, where meaning is hidden or concealed and needs to be deciphered through attentive "reading," in Ignatian spirituality reality must be decoded and transformed into a

"spiritual painting" that points to the true reality. The design, composition, and submission for general criticism of emblems was also an integral part of the educational curriculum of Jesuit colleges, specifically in the area of rhetoric (the emblem was considered an *imago figurata*, and thus part of the rhetorical doctrine of tropes).

The privileged place of emblematics in Jesuit pedagogy was rooted in the time-honored belief that in the learning process the eye was the most important sense organ, and hence that visual images, such as emblems, have a deeper and longer-lasting effect on the memory than words: "By encoding the subject matter in emblem books, it becomes easier to grasp and to commit to memory; by decoding the matter as a reader-viewer, it can be assimilated more easily and lastingly."

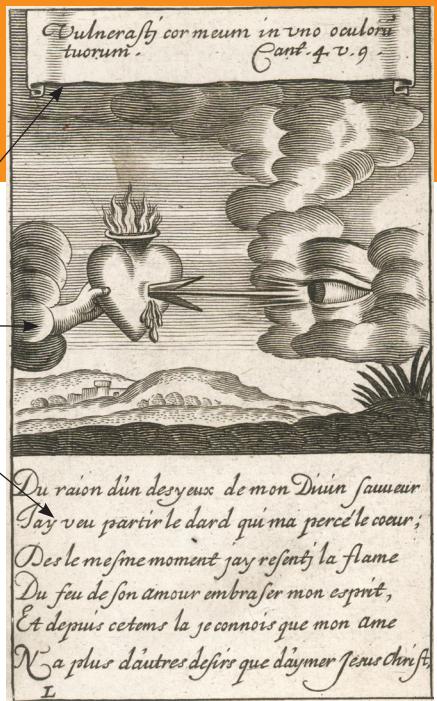
Thus, the emblem was intrinsically related to the art of memory, whose primary aim was not simply retention, but creative composition, which put the mind "in play," provoked new thought, and resulted in "making" new things. This process entailed crafting memorable images, namely, emotionally heightened images (bloody, violent, monstrous, titillating, awe-inspiring, pathetic), or everyday images put into unexpected contexts.

How do emblematics work in practice? The task of "emblemizing" a subject, or representing or expressing it in emblematic form, involved not decoding, but encoding it. An emblem combined three elements: (1) an illustration (*pictura*), (2) a title or motto, and (3) a poem, with or without commentary (*subscriptio*) (see Figure 2). For the viewer, the emblem presents an enigmatic image

that can be deciphered only by discovering the link between it and the apparently unrelated motto. The emblematic contribution is the use of old materials to make something new: the variation, adaptation, and personalization of already existent materials (derived from a wide variety of sources, such as iconologies, bestiaries, natural history, astrology, commonplace proverbial wisdom, earlier emblem books, etc.) to meet new needs, situations, and attitudes.

The emblematic compositional or encoding process involved "reassembling" these older materials in a way that the tension between the expectations produced by the earlier use of the materials and their new adaptation generates the surprise that forms much of the emblem's appeal.

—Joseph P. Chappuis, O.S.A., *Emblematica Sacra: Emblem Books from the Middle Ages to the 18th Century* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006)



motto

pictura

subscriptio

This emblem, which has a surrealist quality, illustrates Song of Songs 4:9: "Thou hast wounded my heart with one of thy eyes." Berthod explains: "This eye from which comes an arrow that pierces a heart represents the eye of Jesus Christ, who beholds a Soul that He loves, and simultaneously wounds and enflames it with His love."

▲ Figure 2.  
François Berthod,  
*Sacred Emblems Taken from Sacred Scripture and the Fathers of the Church*,  
Paris, 1665.

## Emblematics and Modern Tattoos



Figure 3. ▲ Some modern tattoos derive directly from emblematic devotional images. The tattoo above incorporates two popular images from 17th-century emblems: the heart which conveys love and the eye set in the hand which usually conveys a warning to be careful and not to trust too easily.



Figure 4. ▲ Emblem 88, Julius Wilhelm Zingereff, *Emblematica Ethico-Politicorum centuria* (1635)  
Motto: Trust guarded with the eyes.

The tattoo shown in Figure 3 derives from emblematic images like the one shown in Figures 4 and 5. The hand reaching out means trust. A handshake signifies friendship and trust, while the open eye indicates the precaution and circumspection that a wise person exercises in offering friendship.



Figure 5. ▲ Emblem XXII, George Withler, *A Collection of Emblems: Ancient and Moderne* (1635)  
Motto: Give Credit, but, first, well beware. Before thou trust them, who they are.

A variation that occurs frequently in tattoo imagery is a picture of a handshake, sometimes combined with the image of the heart, to symbolize friendship, love, and matrimony.



Figure 6. ▲ Image from a 20th-century tattoo pattern book.

Some motifs in tattoo art reveal how patterns and images familiar from the emblem tradition have survived in popular imagery. The tendency to adorn tattooed images with inscriptions and maxims is also remarkable.

At first sight one might assume that tattoos and emblematics have little in common, but a closer look is revealing. At a Tattoo Convention I looked at artists' pattern books which are intended to attract new customers. One of the photographs showed a hand with an open eye tattooed in the middle of the palm.

We encounter the same motif of the eye set in the hand in emblem books, where it usually conveys a warning to be careful and not to trust too easily, as in Zingereff's emblem *Oculata fides* [Trust guarded with the eyes] and in George Withler's 'Give credit, but, first, well beware.' The hand reaching out usually means trust and fidelity, while the open eye indicates precaution or circumspection. The specific combinations of the two motifs forms a unique moral, and it is not likely that the tattoo artist who 'invented' or rather re-invented the image had the same idea or intention in mind. However one might claim that the process of 'finding' the image is not far removed from the emblematic mode of combining isolated items of symbolic value to form a new, original and surprising *pictura*.

### Emblematic Motifs in Pattern Books for Tattoos

From an examination of tattooists' pattern books, a specific typology of images can be established that bears resemblance to motif categories in emblem compilations. Although these images are shorn of their original contexts, and in spite of the trivialization they underwent in the following centuries, some motifs have survived that were also very popular in 16th- and 17th-century emblem books. For example, the anchor as a sign of Christian hope became a symbol of seafaring and navigation in many sailors' tattoos.

Many examples in modern pattern books demonstrate that one is tempted to assume that they derive directly from emblem books, or at least from emblematic devotional pictures. Among those tattoos one discovers all sorts of

combinations of a snake with a sword or dagger, which sometimes bear inscriptions such as 'True till death.' Other variations that occur frequently in tattoo imagery are pictures of handshakes, sometimes combined with the image of the heart, to depict the confirmation of friendship, love, and matrimony. The heart is certainly one of the most popular images in emblems and in applied emblematics.

Another important parallel can be found in the way some tattoos function almost like impress or mottoes. Here the tattoo fulfills a similar function to the *impresa* in the renaissance and baroque eras, that is, to convey a self-understanding and present the individual's general opinions and attitudes.

### The Authority of Images

The striking similarities between tattoos and emblems are by no means accidental. Such images fulfill two purposes at the same time. On the one hand, the old values are evoked and remembered, but on the other hand, the new meaning is connected to the authority of the older image and is strengthened by being contrasted with it.

Whether or not images found in modern tattoos derive directly from the emblems to which they often bear such an obvious and strange resemblance, it is obvious that many of the images, especially the heart emblems in combination with other attributes, are popular for exactly the same reasons that they appealed to readers of 17th-century emblem compilations.

—Sabine Melchior-Boppo, *Emblems from All-time to the Future*, *Image Figure Studies*, Vol. 21 (Tübingen: Boppo, 2001)



Figure 7. ▲ Emblem XI, Daniel Cramer, *Emblemata Sacra* (1635)  
Motto: The end of the body is not the end. To live fully is to gain Christ by dying.

This religious emblem depicts a winged human heart [the soul] ascending toward the monogram [Christ (IHS)] from a skull. A snake winding through the eye sockets of a skull was a popular memento mori [remember you are mortal] in the 17th century.



Figure 8.

This contemporary tattoo pattern derives from 17th-century emblematic literature and functions now, as it did then, as a memento mori [remember you are mortal]. The snake signifies immortality and knowledge that persists beyond death.

# Jesuit Student Note-Taking Techniques

## How did early Jesuits take notes?

Like other aspects of Jesuit pedagogy, the use of notebooks would become normalized in the 1550s-60s through written guidelines for the colleges and circular memoranda. These sources reveal a culture of note-taking indebted to scholastic learning methods which aimed at the rapid comprehension of texts through summary and drill, and which valued the cognitive appropriation of course material over verbatim mastery.

### Teaching Methods and Student Learning Techniques

Dictation and student copying were still used as a means of providing students with texts throughout the sixteenth century. Prior to the widespread availability of cheap paper in the late middle ages, most students used reusable media such as wax tablets.

### Commonplacing

Commonplacing, the practice of copying excerpts into a thematically or logically organized notebook under designated heading or *loci*, became widespread over the course of the sixteenth century.

Of more direct relevance is the relatively well-documented practice of recording lecture notes in the margins of printed books. This is likely a modified form of late medieval pedagogical practice carried over from the manuscript age.

### Modus parisiensis

The essential elements of Jesuit techniques were no doubt acquired by Ignatius, Lainez, Polanco and others as part of the *modus parisiensis*, the teaching methods of the Parisian colleges which so strongly influenced the first generation of Jesuits. Students were expected to invest a considerable amount of time outside class in maintaining their notebooks and adding supplementary material.

### Note Taking and Mission

It is no surprise that Polanco, mastermind of the Jesuit paper labyrinth in Rome, was also one of the principle forces behind the implementation of standardized note-taking techniques in the colleges. These techniques would also later serve

Jesuits in the field in fulfilling the spiritual mission of the Society in preaching, delivering informal lectures on spiritual themes, letter writing and a host of other activities in which techniques of observation and description, redaction and recall might be called upon.

### "Furnishing" the Student Notebooks

At the Collegio Romano, humanities and rhetoric students spent time outside class hunting for furnishings to use in their rhetorical compositions. They were encouraged to copy into their notebooks examples, comparisons, testimonies, sentences, proverbs and other things "of manifold erudition which might enrich and embellish orations."

The student notebook consequently assumed the form of a collection of notes or glosses on a course text. Lectures furnished one source of information, but consultation of additional materials was clearly normal practice in stocking the notebook.

### Notebooks for a Lifetime

The other significant feature of the summary is its anticipated use outside the immediate didactic context. While the colleges eventually taught both Jesuit and non-Jesuit students, it is worthwhile recalling that the colleges originated in the Society's need to train Jesuits for ministry. Basic techniques of reading, note-taking, and summarizing thus aimed to provide individual Jesuits with the tools which would enable them to fulfill the spiritual mission of the Society. Above all, preaching and public lectures are singled out in the Constitutions.

In this regard the summary had little to do with mastery of an academic subject. At stake, instead, was the long-term service such collections of notes could provide in a lifetime of preaching and lecturing.

### A System Without Parallel

The discussion of note-taking techniques which occurred within the early Society is without parallel in the history of education. There is no similar body of evidence for medieval universities and colleges or other early modern institutions.

—Paul Noller, "Note-taking Techniques and the Role of Student Notebooks in the Early Jesuit Colleges," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 74 (2007)

Mission and mobility were the twin defining characteristics of the early Society. The desire to create a corporate culture within a rapidly expanding organization whose members were frequently separated by great geographical distance meant that even the most routine aspects of Jesuit daily life required articulation and elucidation. The wealth of documentation bearing on the Jesuit educational experiment is rooted in this feature of the early Society.

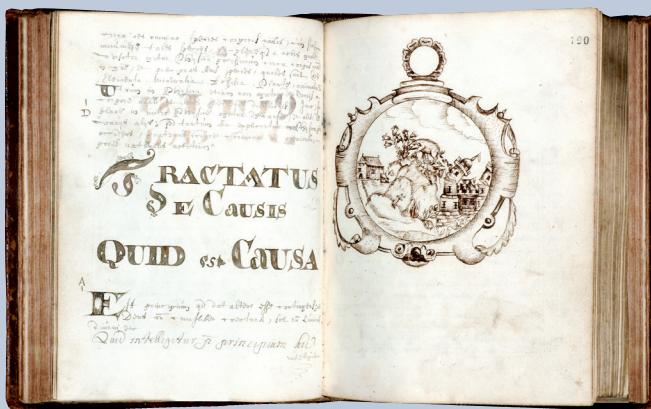


▲ Figure 1. *De vacuo*, dictation notebook written down by Johannes an Cantelbeek in 1670. (K.U.Leuven, BTAB, Leuven University college dictata, list C, vol. VII.)

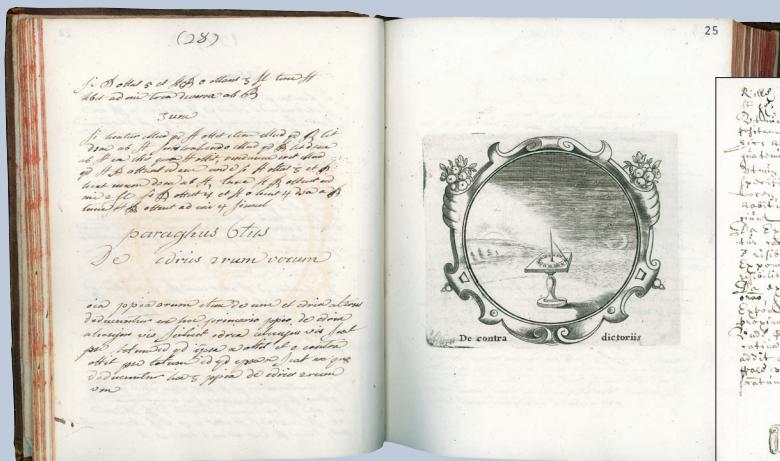
## 17th-Century Jesuit Student Notebooks

Students themselves inventively created similar emblematic structures. An interesting example in this respect is the set of seven dictation notebooks by Van Cantelbeek (1669-70). Van Cantelbeek bought five emblematic dictation prints from Hayé and others by the famous French engraver Jacques Callot (1592-1635). The Callot prints are often inserted in the *dictata* in a humorous way. The chapter "De vacuo" [On vacuum] in the *Physica* dictation notes by Van Cantelbeek is illustrated by a *gobbo* (hunchback) lifting a drinking cup (Figure 1). In one of Van Cantelbeek's *dictata*, an engraving from the Hayé Engelgrave series (Figure 3) served as a model for Van Cantelbeek's own drawing, namely, for the representation of a solar table, now provided with the text "effluit hora diesque" (hours and days pass by) (Figure 4).

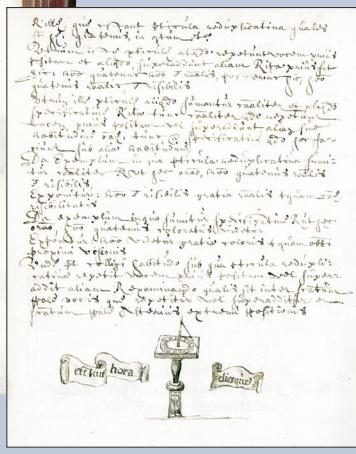
The success of Hayé's series of emblematic engravings and the way in which university students made use of them in an inventive way may be illustrated by the college dictation noted in 1676 by Michiel van den Biessema, a student in the college "Het varken" (The Pig), during the lectures of Professor Johannes Stevenot (c. 1640-1718). Van den Biessema made a drawing demonstrating the superiority of his college (The Pig) over the three others (The Lily, The Castle, and The Falcon). The *pictura* of this *impresa*-like representation shows a pig opening its bowels on a collapsing castle. At the same time, it treads on the falcon and devours the lilies on the hill (Figure 2).



▲ Figure 2. *Physica et Metaphysica*, dictation notebook written by Michiel van den Biessema, 1676. (K.U.Leuven, BTAB, Leuven University college dictata, list C, vol. 23.)



▲ Figure 3. *Quaestio vigesima quarta quid sit enunciatio*, reduplicatio et quomodo exponatur, dictation notebook written by Johannes van Cantelbeek in 1670. (K.U.Leuven, BTAB, Leuven University college dictata, list C, vol. VI.)



► Figure 4. *Dialectica*, dictation notebook written by L.J. Bevanus in 1763. (K.U.Leuven, BTAB, Leuven University college dictata, list C, vol. XXXVI.)

—Joseph F. Cherrington, O.S.A., *Enchiridion Sacrae Theologiae* (1964), pp. 40-41. Reprinted with permission from the Society of Jesus (©2014 Joseph F. Cherrington, O.S.A.)