José García de Castro Valdés, SJ

Polanco: el humanismo de los jesuitas (1517–1576). Santander; Bilbao; Madrid: Mensajero; Sal Terrae; Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2012. Pp. 424. Pb, 30.00 Euros.

It is something of an irony that a man who worked so relentlessly for the preservation of the Society's historical memory would end up being virtually forgotten by historians. That, at least, is what one could be led to think in the face of the relative scarcity of monographs on Juan Alfonso de Polanco, as García de Castro points out at the opening of this richly documented study. Not that Polanco's importance was never properly acknowledged—it has been recognized by, among others, Dowling, Martini, Donnelly, Aldama, Ruiz Jurado, Coupeau, and O'Malley. However, and as García de Castro notes, such an acknowledgment has for the most part taken the form of passing remarks, made while discussing one of the three figures (Ignatius, Laínez, Borja) whom Polanco served as the head of the Society's secretariat in Rome. García de Castro summarizes the consequences of this neglect quite eloquently: "Le debemos mucho y le conocemos desproporcionadamente poco" [We owe him much and know him disproportionately little] (26).

García de Castro's formula serves not only as a description of the state of affairs surrounding the scholarship on Polanco, but also as a programmatic statement for his own book: if the latter seeks to fill a lacuna in our knowledge, it is because that is a way of paying the debt that Polanco is owed. One of the merits of García de Castro's book, however, consists in specifying what this debt is. For while it is true that Polanco's memory would end up being eclipsed by that of the seemingly more central protagonists of the epic of the Society's foundation—echoing Astraín, García de Castro refers to him as one of the "silent heroes" or *héroes callados* of the Society's early decades—it is equally true that his work (and hence the nature of the debt owed to him) has not been properly understood. It is in its efforts to understand this work that García de Castro's book ends up being more than a biography. His study, as he puts it, is not only an "ejercicio de memoria" [exercise in memory] but also an attempt to understand Polanco as the "arquitecto del carisma de la Compañía" [architect of the Society's charism] (26).

As is the case with the formula with which García de Castro summarizes the state of the scholarship, this one, too, is worth considering carefully. It posits a tension that readers of this book will understand to have been fundamental to Polanco's work: the tension between an evanescent spiritual grace that flows from God to humans and the fixity and permanence that characterize the structures that an "architect" is supposed to project. At stake here, to echo a basic

schema of sociological research, is nothing other than the fabled transition from a charismatic to a bureaucratic mode of organization. García de Castro depicts Polanco as someone who worked within the liminal zone that separates both, and his book makes a convincing case that what distinguishes this “architect” is the fact that he did not deaden the Society’s charism (a risk run by every effort to give enduring form to an exceptional grace) and that he instead “dynamized” it. In this depiction, García de Castro finds a way to dynamize Polanco’s own figure, liberating his memory from its imprisonment in the ultimately stereotypical role of the faithful secretary (29–40).

By his own admission, García de Castro follows a “classical” division. After an introduction that reviews the various treatments of Polanco’s figure, he proceeds to discuss Polanco’s life and work. Polanco’s native Burgos and family background are discussed in detail, as are his years in Paris and his arrival in Rome, where Polanco would quickly establish himself as a *scriptor* in the papal curia (43–108). A thorough selection of primary sources serves as the basis for García de Castro’s account of Polanco’s admission into the Society—of particular interest here is the testimony of his family’s fierce opposition to this path—and of his studies in Padua up until the year in which he was called back to Rome to assume control of the Society’s secretariat, an office that had been occupied on an *ad hoc* basis (109–16). We learn of Polanco’s organization of the archives, of his efforts to set up a system of communication for the entire Society, and of his role in the preparation of the Society’s *Constitutions*, and are then treated to a detailed account of his role in various critical junctures including the Portuguese crisis and, in the time following Ignatius’s death, the first three general congregations and the Colloquy of Poissy (147–83).

The discussion of Polanco’s work follows a threefold distinction between a juridical, a spiritual, and a historical oeuvre. It is in relation to the first group in particular—a set that includes not only the *Industrias* and the *Constitutions* but also various *Instrucciones*, the treatise *De officio de secretario*, and the vast number of letters which he wrote himself or *ex commissione*—that García de Castro refines his characterization of Polanco as the “architect of the Society’s charism.” In the book’s estimation, if Polanco is to be credited with having accomplished a successful transition into a bureaucratic mode of organization, it is largely due to his exceptional mobilization of the powers of the written word: under his command, writing became a means of continuously infusing new vitality into the special gift given at the origin of the Society (219–20). Polanco’s architectural task has, in García de Castro’s words, a “philological” basis—in the etymological sense of the term, where philology denotes a love of the word (23–24)—and its reach is nowhere more apparent, perhaps, than in the creation of what is arguably the most sophisticated “engine of communication” of its time. Polanco was a promoter, practitioner, and theoretician

of epistolary communication, and he is to be credited, García de Castro suggests, with an important innovation in this genre, one that is in line with the task entrusted to him. In essence, Polanco transforms the Humanist epistle into an apostolic tool, shifting the emphasis away from the “expresión” [expression] and “expansión” [expansion] of an “I” and towards the “gestión” [government] of institutional affairs and the “manejo de información” [management of information], all in a way that “favorece la conciencia de pertenencia a un ‘yo colectivo’” [favors the consciousness of belonging to a “collective I”] (231).

García de Castro’s study ends with a discussion of Polanco’s spiritual and historical works. The contents and the reception of the main works included in both categories—the *Directorio de confesores*, the *Directorio de ayudar a bien morir*, and the *Chronicon*—are each carefully documented. Throughout, García de Castro emphasizes Polanco’s preoccupation with the homologization of the Society’s ministerial praxis (particularly as regards confession and the ministry to the dead, in the case of his spiritual works) and with the preservation of the memory of the Society’s early years—and here, too, it is a question of praxis, since by Polanco’s own admission works like the *Chronicon* sought to outline a *modo de proceder* in which future generations of Jesuits could search for suitable models. A valuable appendix consisting mainly of letters that Polanco wrote to his family has been included at the end, along with a map detailing Polanco’s travels throughout Europe and a detailed chronology.

García de Castro’s book succeeds in presenting a picture of Polanco’s life and work that fills a lacuna in our knowledge and that, to echo his own formula, allows one to understand with greater precision than in previous attempts the true nature of the debt that the Society owes to him. One question that remains unanswered concerns the matter of “humanism” as it is mentioned in the book’s title. While Polanco’s relation to the Humanist culture is repeatedly emphasized, it is not thematized as a concern with the explicitness and the force that one expects given its appearance in the book’s title. The book’s center lies, instead, in Polanco’s work as the “architect of the Society’s charism” and in what this work entailed. On account of this concern, García de Castro’s book might be said to actually go beyond the figure of Polanco himself and to enter into a dialogue with the recent interest in the Society as a paradigm of the modern bureaucracy (evident, for example, in the excellent work of Markus Friedrich) and in the administrative questions comprised under that rubric.

Christopher van Ginhoven Rey

Trinity College

Christopher.vanGinhovenRey@trincoll.edu

DOI 10.1163/22141332-00201005-25