The Distinctiveness of the Society of Jesus

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Abstract

The Society of Jesus has a number of features making it distinctive among the religious orders of the Catholic Church. The ten founders all held university degrees, which meant that they established a tradition of a high regard for learning and of articulated procedures, as exemplified in the *Formula instituti* (the rule of the order) and in the *Constitutions*. The high degree of authority enjoyed by the superior general was not only itself distinctive, but it led to a distinctly international character to the Jesuit missions. Once the Society undertook the staffing and management of schools, its distinctiveness only increased and led to its having, besides its religious mission, also a cultural and a civic mission.

Keywords

adaptation – articulation – civic mission – common good – *Constitutions* – cultural mission – *Formula* – Ignatius of Loyola – *Imago primi saeculi* – magnanimity – missions (overseas) – Juan Alfonso de Polanco – schools – *Spiritual Exercises*

From the moment of its founding in 1540, the Society of Jesus projected a profile different from that of other religious orders. The difference seemed to be not simply of degree but almost of kind, a feature that won the Jesuits warm friends and admirers but also sparked envy and resentment. No better indication of how fearfully the Society was received in some of the highest levels of sixteenth-century society than its condemnation in 1554 by the theological faculty of the University of Paris, which was still the most respected theological

* This article is based on a keynote address I had delivered at the First International Symposium on Jesuit Studies held at the Institute for Advances Jesuit Studies (Boston College) in June 2015.

body in the world. The condemnation was a serious blow against the barely-nascent order, which the Society's enemies through the centuries never let it forget. The words of the condemnation are well known: "This Society appears to be a danger to the Faith, a disturber of the peace of the Church, destructive of monastic life, and destined to cause havoc rather than edification."¹

At the time the most distinctive and disturbing features of the Jesuits appeared to be that they did not wear a distinctive habit, did not recite or chant the liturgical hours in choir, retained their family names, lived not in monasteries or convents, but simply in houses or colleges, and were governed not by provincial and general chapters, but by a superior general with expansive authority. On the part of the first Jesuits, these features of the Society were probably in part a reaction to the satire and criticism directed against the mendicant orders, especially by humanists like Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), but more certainly and more largely indicative of the distinctive way of life and way of proceeding they committed themselves to.

With a short period of time, the Jesuit profile became even more distinctive. Nonetheless, we must not let Jesuit distinctiveness seduce us into forgetting that the Jesuits were most fundamentally a religious order within the Catholic Church. To that extent they were a species within a genre, albeit a quite a special species. The questions to which I will try to sketch an answer are why and how that species was constituted, and what the consequences were that followed thereupon.

We must begin at the beginning. In 1539, the ten future founders of the Society deliberated for several months in drawing up a statement detailing the features of the order for which they hoped to receive papal approval. They called the resulting document their *Formula vivendi*, their "Plan of Life," which later came to be known as the *Formula of the Institute*.² After some minor revisions by papal officials, the document was incorporated verbatim into the bull *Regimini militantis ecclesiae* (1540), constituting the substance thereof. The Jesuit *Formula* is the equivalent of the rule in the older orders.

The *Formula*, which remains today the fundamental charter of the Society that allows it to function in the Catholic Church, already implicitly or explicitly sets down or otherwise reveals some of the distinctive traits of the Society. Crucial in the document is the list of ministries to which members would devote their time, talent, and energies. The list betrays that the ministries of

1 As quoted in John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 289.

2 See Antonio M. de Aldama, *The Formula of the Institute: Notes for a Commentary*, trans. Ignacio Echániz (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1990), especially 2–23.

the mendicant orders of the thirteenth century, especially those of the Dominicans and Franciscans, were the founders' implicit model. The list is short, but in first place is ministry of the word of God—that is, preaching—followed by hearing confessions. These are precisely the two ministries that the mendicants cultivated.

Despite this striking correlation, the Jesuit list is different. It is different in large part because the Society was founded in the sixteenth century, not the thirteenth. Besides listing preaching and confessions, the future Jesuits included “by the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity,” that is, by teaching catechism. One of the most distinctive traits of the religious enthusiasm of the sixteenth century was its campaign “against ignorance and superstition” that was waged vigorously by both Catholics and Protestants. Enthusiasm for catechetical instruction, which appeared in Italy and Spain long before Luther's famous catechisms of 1529, was a constitutive part of that campaign. It was a sixteenth-century phenomenon, not a thirteenth.

But aside from specifics like catechism, the *Formula* is distinctive in a more profound sense, simply by the fact of its very existence. Although the authors considered it only a basic sketch of what they had in mind, it is a reasoned, thought-out plan, the result of months of deliberation. It is the kind of document that university graduates would compose. By the sixteenth century, the universities had become *de rigueur* for the clerical elite, which was not true for the founders of the mendicant orders in the thirteenth century. Those orders do not have a document that in any way resembles the *Formula*, as a comparison of it with the rules drawn up by Saint Francis of Assisi (d.1226) for his order immediately reveals.

This fact is of capital importance in grounding the Jesuit penchant for an articulated approach to virtually every phenomenon. The ten founders had been trained to spell out what they were doing and why they were doing it. A good instance in the *Formula* is the famous fourth vow. Scholars now concede that that vow is not, as is so often said, a vow of loyalty to the pope, but a vow to be missionaries. This is an understanding of the vow confirmed by where Saint Ignatius later placed it in the Jesuit *Constitutions*, where it opens Part Seven, the part entitled “The Distribution of Members in the Vineyard of the Lord.”³

Long before the founding of the Society, the Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians, and other orders had been sending members hither and yon, and by the early sixteenth century sending them to “the Indies,” that is, to the

3 See John W. O'Malley, “The Fourth Vow in Its Ignatian Context: A Historical Study,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 15, no. 1 (1983).

Americas and Asia. The Jesuits were late-comers as missionaries and were therefore hardly distinctive simply by being such. They were, however, distinctive in articulating that was what they were about, and firmly incorporating it into the ritual of the order.

This feature of the Society manifests itself in numerous ways, but perhaps most notably in the insistence of Ignatius and his successors as superiors general on frequent and detailed correspondence between center and periphery, as well as among the members themselves.⁴ The implicit command: "Articulate for us what you are about, why you are doing it, and what the results are." The single most specific monument illustrating this feature is the *Constitutions*, in which at length and with almost obsessive detail the guidelines of the *Formula* are elaborated upon and given institutional form.

The fundamental point I am trying to make is the fact that the founders of the Society were not simply devout and intelligent Christians of their time, but were men formally educated at one of the most prestigious academic institutions of the day contributed in multiple and fundamental, even if sometimes subtle, ways to the distinctiveness of the order from its first days.

In that regard, I will point to the *Formula* as revised in somewhat amplified form in 1550 and incorporated into the new papal bull, *Exposcit debitum* (1550). In that document, the list of ministries is slightly expanded, including a further articulation of "the works of charity" listed in the earlier version. This time the list concludes by saying that the Jesuits were called "to perform any other works of charity, according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good."

The expression "common good" almost jumps off the page. Up to that point the vocabulary of this section of the *Formula* has been directly or indirectly derived from the Bible or from traditional Christian usage. "Common good" derives not from those sources but from philosophy. It is an expression that would come naturally to the lips of university graduates with Master of Arts degrees, and not so readily to the lips of devout Christians not thus trained.

The expression is important for other reasons as well. It suggests a concern for this world and its betterment, and it indicates a shift away from exclusively evangelical goals. The older orders doubtless had concern for this world and expressed it in various ways, as their histories make clear, but the upfront commitment to

4 See Markus Friedrich, "Ignatius's Governing and Administrating the Society of Jesus," in Robert A. Maryks, ed., *A Companion to Ignatius of Loyola: Life, Writings, Spirituality, Influence* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 123–40 (doi: 10.1163/9789004280601_009) and Paul Nelles, "Cosas y cartas: Scribal Production and Material Pathways in Jesuit Global Communication (1547–1573)," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2, no. 3 (2015): 421–50 (doi: 10.1163/22141332-00203003).

it in the *Formula* highlights it and give it notable force. This commitment to the betterment of this world would take its most impressive form in the Jesuits' commitment to formal schooling, which in 1550 was just getting under way. In Jesuit correspondence concerning the schools, the expression "common good" recurs again and again in justification of the enterprise.

The almost all-inclusive character of the common good suggests, moreover, the malleability and adaptability that is generally recognized as a special Jesuit trait. The qualifiers in this section of the *Formula* provide another instance of the trait. The Society, it tell us, is founded "*chiefly*" for such and such a purpose, its members should strive "*especially*" this and that, and they should act "according to what might seem *expedient*."

As has often been pointed out, this quality is characteristic of the *Constitutions*. Although the *Constitutions* lay down not only firm goals but also important directives for achieving them, they consistently qualify the directives with escape clauses, such as "according to times, places, and circumstances." Ignatius's correspondence with members of the Society is laced with such expressions. As the British historian John Bossy (1933–2015) said decades ago: "Few religious superiors can have told members of their order so firmly to forget the rules and do what they thought best."⁵

We are certainly not surprised that the list of ministries in both versions of the *Formula* includes the *Spiritual Exercises*. By the time of the second version, Ignatius had put the finishing touches on the *Exercises* and they had appeared in print (1548). No religious order had a document that could in any way compare with the *Exercises*, for no comparable document existed in the Christian corpus. For all its scissors-and-paste appearance, the *Exercises* are a strikingly original work, the first time in Christian history that a document laid out a clear yet flexible program of exercises designed to help individuals become more deeply in touch with themselves and with God.

The flexibility of the *Exercises* is one of its most striking features. It proposes programs from little more than catechetical instruction to a full thirty days in seclusion. The Jesuit penchant for adaptation and accommodation has roots in this document, with its fundamental principle as stated in Annotation 18, "The *Spiritual Exercises* must be adapted to the condition of the persons engaging in them, that is, to their age, education, and talent."

The *Exercises* are a spiritual classic because they fulfill in splendid fashion the four criteria for a classic: first, a work that creates a new genre or moves a traditional genre to a significantly new level; second, a work deeply expressive

5 John Bossy, "Editor's Postscript," in H. Outram Evennett, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation*, ed. John Bossy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 126–45, here 130.

of the culture of the age in which it was produced; third, a work that nonetheless somehow transcends that culture to be meaningful in others; and, fourth, a work that is therefore susceptible to a certain range of interpretations.

On a practical level, the *Exercises* gave the Society a brand-new ministry, the retreat, another mark of Jesuit distinctiveness. No other religious group had in hand such a structured yet flexible program and marketed it to the public at large. When in the *Constitutions* Ignatius later prescribed that every novice to the order was to make the full, thirty-day program of the *Exercises*, he again broke new ground. The full program is geared to help individuals place their lives in God's hands and commit themselves fully and completely to the following of Christ. Of course, the *Exercises* did not achieve its exalted goals with every novice in the Society that undertook them—far from it—but the experience of the *Exercises* in large part explains the determined, persevering, and sometimes heroic behavior of Jesuits in extremely difficult circumstances. There is no understanding the Jesuits or the Society of Jesus without taking the *Exercises* into account. No other order had such a program for its novices.

To speak of the *Exercises* is almost automatically to speak of their author, Saint Ignatius, a most unusual man who reinvented himself many times. He was in succession a page in a court of the Spanish kingdom's treasurer, then a courtier there, a soldier for a few years, and then a recluse. A year later, he became a pilgrim to a distant land and then a student of rudimentary Latin with boys twenty or more years his junior. Thence he became a university student at three different, highly regarded institutions.⁶

At the last of these, the University of Paris, he became the organizer of a group of fellow students that became the nucleus of the Society of Jesus. With them, he traveled to Italy, where he was ordained a priest and engaged in street preaching and catechizing. He spent the last fifteen years of his life as essentially the CEO of a sprawling, rapidly expanding, and multinational organization with over a thousand members located in virtually every country of Western Europe, as well as in Brazil, India, Japan, and elsewhere. In his lifetime, he traveled from Spain to Italy to Palestine, back to Italy and to Spain, then to France, and finally, once again, to Italy. He was a man, therefore, of extraordinarily broad experience.

He contributed to the distinctiveness of the Society in innumerable ways, most especially as the author of the *Exercises* and as the principal author of the *Constitutions*, then in his role as the first superior general, guiding the order and giving flesh, blood, and life-spirit to the bare bones of the *Formula*. He was

6 For an analysis of different stages of Ignatius's life, see Maryks, *A Companion to Ignatius of Loyola*.

a most unlikely candidate to be so successful in his role as superior general. Despite his broad experience, his past history in no way seemed to move in that direction or to have provided him with the skills he needed to pull off the job. He did not have an MBA in Business Administration.

What were the qualities that made him successful? For one thing, he seemed to have an innate sense of when to be firm and when to be flexible. He seemed to have an instinct especially for encouraging initiative and letting talented individuals spread their wings and fly. Although there is evidence that especially around the house in which he lived he could devolve into a petty micro-manager, he does not show that tendency in his general governance of the Society.⁷

He had perhaps the most important gift a leader needs: the gift for choosing the very best persons to serve as his assistants and collaborators, persons with gifts that complemented his own. In that regard, Jerónimo Nadal (1507–1580), his brilliant agent in the field, and Juan Alfonso de Polanco (1517–1576), his brilliant aide and secretary, are outstanding. It was the appointment of these two men that firmed up the young order, marshaled its forces, and told its members what it meant to be a Jesuit.

It was only with the appointment of Polanco in 1547 that Ignatius was able to complete the *Constitutions*, a project he had been dabbling with for the previous six years. The two men set to work in earnest in 1548, and two years later, they, despite being busy with other tasks, had the job substantially completed. The document was ready to be reviewed by those of the original band of ten who were still alive. It survived their scrutiny substantially intact.

Though cluttered with too much detail, the *Constitutions* are a remarkable document, another classic. They broke new ground for the genre in the rationalized structure of their organization, in the psychological undergirding of their development from part to part, in their attention to motivations and general principles, in their insistence in particular and in general on the flexible implementation of their prescriptions, in having an implicit but detectable theological foundation, and in conveying a sense of overall direction. Thus, unlike the correlative documents of other orders, the *Constitutions* were not a collection of rules and of specific dos and don'ts. They were not scatter-shot. They had a beginning, a middle, and an end. The *Constitutions* are the product of well educated men, influenced by both the Scholastic and the humanistic traditions.

7 See Luís Gonçalves da Câmara, *Remembering Inigo: Glimpses of the Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, The Memoriale of Luís Gançaves da Câmara*, trans. Alexander Eaglestone and Joseph A. Munitiz (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004).

Besides their overall significance, I will call attention to two of their specific provisions. They both occur in Part Nine, the part that deals with the superior general and his governance of the Society. Chapter Two of Part Nine lists the qualities the general should possess. It is in essence a portrait of the ideal general and is consequently a portrait of the ideal Jesuit. The person, for instance, should be united with God in prayer, a person of sterling virtue, a person who knows "how to combine rectitude and, when necessary, severity with kindness and gentleness."⁸

Qualities like these are of course necessary and basic but certainly not surprising. They are no more than what we would expect. But the text goes on, in an unexpected way, to describe another quality, unique, as far as I have been able to determine, in the annals of any religious order. That quality is magnanimity.

Magnanimity and fortitude of soul are likewise highly necessary for him to bear the weaknesses of many, to initiate great undertakings in the service of God our Lord, and to persevere in them with constancy when it is called for, without losing courage in the face of contradictions, even from persons of high rank and power, and without allowing himself to be moved by their entreaties or threats from what reason and the divine service require. He should be superior to all eventualities, without letting himself be exalted by those that succeed or depressed by those that go poorly, being altogether ready to receive death, if necessary, for the good of the Society in the service of Jesus Christ, our God and Lord.⁹

In that quotation it is easy to hear an echo of the meditations on the kingdom of Christ and the two standards in the *Exercises*.¹⁰ Surely, that is what it meant to Ignatius and to Polanco. Nonetheless, its wording is a paraphrase and adaptation of a passage from Cicero's popular work, the *De officiis* (1.20.66), a text much more likely provided by Polanco than Ignatius. I know of no other order where such a secular source holds such a place in a foundational document.¹¹

8 Ignatius of Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. George E. Ganss (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), 310.

9 Ibid.

10 See Adriano Prosperi, "The Two Standards: The Origins and Development of a Celebrated Ignatian Meditation," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 3, no. 3 (2015): 361–86 (doi: 10.1163/22141332-00203001).

11 See Kevin Spinale, "The Intellectual Pedigree of the Virtue of Magnanimity in the Jesuit Constitutions," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 3, no. 3 (2015): 451–69 (doi: 10.1163/22141332-00203004).

Even at this early date, therefore, Jesuit leadership implicitly made a correlation of the sacred and profane—a dangerous game—that was on its way to becoming distinctive of the Jesuits.¹² It was a trait that later the Jansenists and other enemies of the Society particularly pounced upon with unconcealed glee, as symptomatic of the easy and despicable worldliness of the Jesuits.¹³

The second provision of this Part Nine to which I will call attention is the high degree of authority enjoyed by the superior general, much more than that of the superiors general of the older orders and of the new orders contemporary with the Society, such as Oratorians, Somascans, or Theatines. Even within the Society, this provision was from time to time heavily criticized, beginning with Nicolás Bobadilla's (1511–1590) scathing criticisms of Ignatius, “the tyrant.”¹⁴ One of the most serious attempts to attenuate it created a severe crisis during the generalate of Claudio Acquaviva (1581–1615). The provision managed to survive the crisis and the criticisms essentially unscathed, and I think that Jesuits today are grateful that it did.¹⁵

In both the so-called Old and New Societies, this provision benefited the Jesuit missions. During the time of the Old Society, for instance, in the great missionary orders, such as the Dominicans and Franciscans, the prerogative of sending missionaries rested essentially with the local chapters. This worked reasonably well for the Spanish and Portuguese provinces because of the support of their respective monarchies, but it was difficult for the chapters of provinces outside Spain and Portugal to follow suit.

The Jesuit general, however, had the authority to send men from every province wherever he thought best, which meant that he could just as easily send men from Italy and Germany, for instance, territories that had no empire, as he could from Spain and Portugal. The result was often a mix of nationalities in a given mission, another distinctive trait. The examples are legion, as, for instance, the Italian Jesuits Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) in India and Japan, and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) in China, part of the Portuguese domain. By the eighteenth century, German, Bohemian, and Swiss Jesuits were a powerful force in Spanish America. In the same century, the French were the single most influential group in Beijing. In this regard, therefore, the Jesuits were international in a way the other orders were not—or at least not to such a degree.

12 See, for example, Alma Montero Alarcón, *Jesuitas: su expresión mística y profana en la Nueva España* (Toluca de Lerdo, Estado de México: Gobierno del Estado de México, 2011).

13 See, for example, Dale K. van Kley, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France, 1757–1765* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

14 See O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, 273, 334.

15 See Flavio Rurale and Pierre-Antoine Fabre, eds., *The Acquaviva Project* (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources, forthcoming in 2016).

Ignatius showed his leadership gifts in yet another crucial way. He was able to see how at a given juncture change is more consistent with one's scope than staying the course. It consists as well in the courage and self-possession required to make the actual decision to change, and to convince others of the validity and viability of the new direction. Such was Ignatius's vision and courage when he made schools the primary ministry of the Society, a venture that was not only not foreseen at the beginning but that seemed to be precluded by the vow of mobility, the "fourth vow" concerning missions.

By undertaking the staffing and management of schools for lay students, the Jesuits not only created a new—and at the time distinctive—ministry for themselves, a ministry no previous order had ever undertaken in a systemic way, but they created a new ministry in the Catholic Church. They paved the way for others, men and women, to follow suit. Such schools became a hallmark of Catholicism from at least the seventeenth century to the present.¹⁶

As we know, the repercussions of this decision on the Society of Jesus itself were incalculable and, as much as anything in the *Formula* and the *Constitutions*, lent distinctiveness to the Jesuit profile. Although some of the Jesuit schools would teach the traditionally-clerical subjects of philosophy and theology, they all taught the very unclerical *studia humanitatis*, that is, the works of poetry, history, drama, oratory, and similar subjects by pagan authors such as Homer, Sophocles, Virgil, Ovid, and Livy—works that some of the older orders forbade their members to read without special permission.

I repeat what I wrote earlier: the Jesuits were founded in the sixteenth century, not the thirteenth. In the first place, this meant that the program of education that the Jesuits themselves underwent began with the *studia humanitatis*, an important innovation in the clerical curriculum. In their own educational venture, moreover, they simply took over the curriculum and goals prescribed for that style of education by theorists in antiquity, such as Cicero and Quintilian, but also by Renaissance theorists and practitioners, such as Pier Paolo Vergerio the Elder (1370–1444) and especially Erasmus.

As teachers of the humanistic subjects the Jesuits had to become specialists in them and, indeed, write books concerning them—after all, we are in the sixteenth century, after the invention of movable type and the proliferation of printed books. It was thus that the Jesuits became poets, historians, biographers, musicians, painters, dance theorists, and theatrical entrepreneurs.

I call your attention to a recent book that illustrates this point in massive detail. *Art, Controversy, and the Jesuits* is a big study of one of the most important

16 See John W. O'Malley, "How the First Jesuits Became Involved in Education," in O'Malley, *Saints or Devils Incarnate? Studies in Jesuit History* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 199–215 (doi: 10.1163/9789004257375_013).

and intriguing books the Jesuits ever published, the *Imago primi saeculi*.¹⁷ The *Imago* was written and published in 1640 by the Flemish Jesuits, as part of the Society's worldwide celebration of its centenary. It is a magnificent volume of 952 folio-sized pages of poetry, prose, and 127 exquisite copper-plate engravings published by the prestigious Plantin-Moretus Press of Antwerp in a Latin edition, followed later that year by a Dutch adaptation.

The *Imago*, badly understudied until now, is an important book for any number of reasons, including its splendid physical qualities. The ink was hardly dry on its pages, however, before it became an object of controversy that reached even to the court of Pope Urban VIII (r.1623–1644). It was immediately attacked by the Jansenists in what became the first volley in the bitter Jesuit-Jansenist culture war that divided French society for a century and contributed to the suppression of the Society of Jesus.

The Jansenists had good fun with the *Imago*, which they interpreted as a monument of Jesuit self-congratulation and an especially egregious example of the Society's pride, arrogance, ambition, and self-satisfaction. They saw the very size and impressive physical qualities of the book as typical of the Jesuits' worldliness. They assessed the book's spiritual teaching as typical of Jesuit accommodation to the world—a spirituality sweet and civilized, which made people devout in a fashionably acceptable mode.

Whatever the merits or demerits of the Jansenists' criticism, one thing is clear to me: no other religious order, and perhaps no other organization, could have produced the *Imago*. The authors are anonymous members of the Flemish province. It is not the product of a single author but a corporate venture, accomplished from beginning to end within a year's time. What is impressive about it, therefore, is not only that a broad and deep learning pervades it, but that that learning is corporate, a learning that marks all the anonymous authors who contributed to the book. Moreover, that learning is markedly *literary*, a trait especially notable in some hundred and fifty elegant neo-Latin poems spread throughout the volume.

The *Imago* is generally described as an emblem book—indeed as the culmination of the genre. Emblems were one of the most important, popular, and characteristic genres of Baroque literary and artistic culture, both secular and religious. Nonetheless, they have not yet made their way into mainline scholarship.¹⁸

17 John W. O'Malley, ed., *Art, Controversy, and the Jesuits: The Imago primi saeculi, 1640* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2015).

18 See, for example, Peter M. Daly, *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe: Contributions to the Theory of the Emblem* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), Monica Calabritto and Peter Daly, eds., *Emblems of Death in the Early Modern Period* (Geneva: Droz, 2014), and Walter S. Melion, James Clifton, and Michel Weemans, eds., *Imago exegetica: Visual Images as Exegetical Instruments, 1400–1700* (Leiden: Brill: 2014).

An emblem is, on one level, an intellectual puzzle and thus a form of play. An emblem consists of three elements—a picture, a maxim or motto, and a poem. The fun consists in discovering the connection among these three elements—in uncovering the clues, unraveling the puzzle, and seeing the many ramifications of the solution. Religious emblems, such as those in the *Imago*, conveyed spiritual or ethical truths and made them stick in the memory by means of picture, maxim, and poems. For that very reason, you can see how they would be consonant with the traditions of the Society of Jesus.¹⁹

Among Catholics, Jesuits took such a lead in producing emblem books that the genre almost became identified with them. They published more emblem books in Latin and in all major European languages than any other identifiable group. During the first half of the seventeenth century, they produced some 1,700, of which 500 were first editions. The German Jesuit Jeremias Drexel, for instance, wrote twelve emblem books. Between 1618 and 1642, 170,000 of them were sold by his three publishers in Munich alone, a city that at the time had only 22,000 inhabitants.²⁰

We have just begun to discover that emblems played an important role in Jesuit pedagogy and were one of the distinguishing marks of the program for students in pursuit of the *studia humanitatis*. It was scornfully said of the Jesuits that they trained students by having them look at picture books. The jibe hits the mark in that it points to the importance to Jesuit pedagogy of having students construct emblems, but it betrays ignorance of the sophisticated learning process that encoding and decoding emblems entailed.

The *Imago* can stand therefore as symbol, embodiment, and revelation of the distinctively humanistic trait of the culture of the Society of Jesus.²¹ But besides strictly literary learning and skills, the humanist program also admitted a modest measure of mathematics and philosophy, especially natural philosophy, the seedbed of modern science. But Jesuits went on to do a full course in philosophy, where those last-named subjects were professionally pursued. Thus the Jesuits became astronomers, physicists, architects, and hydraulic engineers.²²

19 See Walter S. Melion, review of *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe: Contributions to the Theory of the Emblem*, by Peter M. Daly, *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 3, no. 3 (2015): 471–80 (doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/22141332-00203005>).

20 See, for example, Nicholas J. Crowe, *Jeremias Drexel's 'Christian Zodiac': Seventeenth-Century Publishing Sensation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

21 See John W. O'Malley, "Renaissance Humanism and the Religious Culture of the First Jesuits," in O'Malley, *Saints or Devils Incarnate*, 181–98 (doi: 10.1163/9789004257375_012).

22 See, for example, Antonella Romano, *La Contre-Réforme mathématique: Constitution et diffusion d'une culture mathématique jésuite à la Renaissance* (Rome: École française de

These skills allowed some Jesuits to become expert cartographers, a skill marvelously on display in the early eighteenth century, when the French Jesuits in China mapped for Emperor Kanxi (r.1661–1722) his entire empire, the largest cartographic accomplishment carried out with exact measurements in the history of the world up to that point. I call your attention to another recent book that describes this project in detail and prints the maps in full color.²³

The educational enterprise had a major impact on the very physical structure of the Society's establishments, which made them distinctive for a religious order. With their vigorous communication network, the Jesuits were able not only to learn from their missionaries about the climate, topography, flora, and fauna of distant lands, but also to establish museums to display specimens and to plant gardens to display exotic plant life. With access to natural remedies from far-off locales, they were able to establish pharmacies in many cities. As is often pointed out, they introduced quinine into Europe, which became known as "Jesuit bark."²⁴

Most basic of all were the school buildings themselves. Jesuit pedagogy entailed moving from the basic skills of a subject to more advanced elements. This meant that even schools that taught little more than the *studia humanitatis* demanded multiple classrooms. They also required theaters and other kinds of assembly rooms. A church was invariably part of Jesuit educational complex. The educational enterprise led to the establishment of extensive libraries, with books on the widest range of subjects. These were often the largest and best kept libraries in the cities and towns where the Jesuits were located.²⁵

Because of the schools, the Society acquired a relationship to learning and culture that was new and distinctive for a religious order. By the sixteenth century, a learned clergy was the goal avidly pursued by both Catholics and

Rome, 1999); Mordechai Feingold, ed., *Jesuit Science and the Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); and Marcus Hellyer, *Catholic Physics: Jesuit Natural Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005). For a recent overview of the historiography on Jesuit science, see Sheila Rabin, "Early Modern Jesuit Science. A Historiographical Essay," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): 88–104 (doi: 10.1163/22141332-00101006).

23 Roberto M. Ribeiro with John W. O'Malley, eds., *Jesuit Mapmaking in China: D'Anville's Nouvelle [sic] Atlas de la Chine (1737)* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2014).

24 See, for example, David A. Bender, "Jesuit's bark," in *A Dictionary of Food and Nutrition*, ed. David A. Bender (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014 (<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191752391.001.0001/acref-9780191752391-e-2910>)).

25 See the special issue of the *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2, no. 2 (2015), "Jesuits and Their Books," guest-edited by Kathleen Comerford (<http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/22141332/2/2>).

Protestants as part of the “war on ignorance and superstition” I mentioned earlier. The other religious orders, old and new, pursued this ideal, as did the Jesuits. But because of the schools the Jesuits were learned in a distinctive way. Besides the standard clerical subjects of philosophy and theology, they dedicated themselves to worldly subjects, such as literature, theater, and astronomy. Their dedication to those subjects was systemic, not occasional.

Teachers require textbooks. It comes as no surprise to learn that, principally because of the schools, the Jesuits not only produced a prodigious number of books but did so on a range of subjects virtually untouched by members of other orders. Ignatius himself saw to the establishment of a printing press in the Roman College, one of whose first products was an edition of a pagan classic, Martial's *Epigrams*. Of the ten books produced in France on the history and theory of dance between the middle of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, five were by Jesuits.²⁶

The schools thus broadened the very mission of the Society, redefined it, and made it distinctive. The Society was not just an organization that happened to have members active in areas of general culture, that is, beyond philosophy and theology. It was now an organization whose mission had been expanded by these activities and by the very nature of the schools. It had become an institution with a cultural mission as well as a directly religious one, even though the Jesuits themselves, then and now, might be reluctant to admit that distinction.

I would go even further, to say that the schools gave the Society a civic mission. The schools were, after all, basically civic institutions—usually requested by the city, in some form or other paid for by the city, and established to serve the families of the city. Coordinated with this reality was the educational theory of the *studia humanitatis*: that education was ultimately dedicated to the public weal. Remarkable in the correspondence of Ignatius himself, for instance, is how often the schools were described as being founded *ad civitatis utilitatem*—for the good of the city.

The Jesuits thus had a relationship to the cities and their citizens that was new and distinctive for a religious order. They had a new relationship to the families of each city. Parents might be indifferent to church liturgies, but they were passionately concerned about their sons' education, and therefore about the teachers and the institution that provided it.

It is my opinion that, had it not been for the schools, the Society of Jesus would, within one or two generations, have become barely distinguishable

26 See Judith Rock, *Terpsichore at Louis-le-Grand: Baroque Dance on the Jesuit Stage in Paris* (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), especially 17–18.

from other religious orders, such as the Dominicans. I say that despite the distinctive elements that I earlier described. With the schools those elements somehow blended into an institutional system that stabilized, strengthened, and gave them room to operate effectively.

I have for the most part been describing the Society of Jesus in its origins, and as it developed in the so-called Old Society, that is before its suppression in 1773 and its restoration in 1814. The New Society, that is, post-1814, differed from the Old in manifold ways, in large measure because of the political, cultural, and ideological impact of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and because of the trauma the Jesuits had suffered with their suppression. The Jesuits reacted negatively to the new political, cultural, and ideological order, which sometimes resulted in multiple expulsions from countries in Europe and Latin America. The nineteenth century was a great golden age of anti-Jesuitism.

The Society was also different now because the Jesuits had become the victim of their own success. By this time, other orders of men and women had in large part taken up formal schooling as their ministry, and their schools often seemed indistinguishable from the Jesuits'. These orders offered retreats, which were sometimes based, closely or remotely, on the *Exercises*. By this time, the study of something like the old *studia humanitatis* had been incorporated into the training of their members, just as the usefulness of those *studia* was increasingly questioned. Research in the physical sciences now demanded financial resources beyond what the Society of Jesus could muster. And so it went.

Nonetheless, the Society still retained a distinctive profile, even if not as sharply distinct as in the previous era. This retention was due in large part to the stabilizing power of the Society's two great books, the *Exercises* and the *Constitutions*, but also to the recovery of the great wealth of other documentation from the foundational years, a corpus unmatched by any other order in its quantity, organization, and the wide range of subjects dealt with. The Society continued to attract to its ranks young men of talent, who, as in the past, were encouraged to develop their talents, whatever they might be, and put them at the service of the Society and the human family.

Only in the past several years, however, have we scholars turned in a serious numbers to the study of the restored Society. It is therefore not only too early to pronounce on the degree of distinctiveness that the Society retained, but the very criteria for making such a pronouncement are also far from clear. At least for the moment, we must be content with flabby generalizations—such as the ones I just made.²⁷

27 See Robert A. Maryks and Jonathan Wright, eds., *Jesuit Survival and Restoration: A Global History, 1773–1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

In this article, I have moved at breakneck speed over a large and complex topic, which deserves a more considered treatment. I hope, however, that for both the Old and the New Society I have been able to provide a few indications of how and why the Society of Jesus enjoys a high degree of distinctiveness among the religious orders of the Catholic Church and, in my opinion, among other multinational institutions of the modern world.