

JESUIT RHETORICAL ARTS: *ELOQUENTIA PERFECTA*

Emerging out of European Renaissance humanism, Jesuit rhetoric, also known as *Eloquentia Perfecta*, aimed to produce a Christian version of the Classical ideal orator, a good person writing and speaking well for the common good. Over the next three and a half centuries this goal remained central to Jesuit education. During the last several years, American Jesuit universities and colleges have attempted to revitalize this rhetorical tradition, especially in relation to core curriculum revision.¹ LMU has embraced this revitalization in its own core curriculum revisions, with particular emphasis on this important Jesuit cornerstone in our newly imagined Rhetorical Arts course. The principles of Jesuit rhetoric, discussed below, provide the foundation for both the content and pedagogy of this integrated oral and written communication course.

What are the characteristics of Jesuit rhetoric in the 21st century?

(1) In its teaching, *Eloquentia Perfecta* combines oral and written rhetoric, speech/listening with writing/reading. Informed by the tradition, these language arts are now being developed in light of recent composition scholarship and communication theory.

(2) Jesuit rhetoric today includes engagement with other forms of literacy as well. A Jesuit rhetoric of the 21st century engages the digital revolution, including new media technologies that are visual, aural, and kinesthetic as well as verbal. Contemporary Jesuit rhetorical instruction acknowledges the media is the message.

(3) But not only is the media the message, so too is the Mediator the message. Jesuit *Eloquentia Perfecta* is a form of Christian rhetoric based on an Ignatian pedagogy aimed at educating the whole person and producing men and women for others.ⁱⁱ Jesuit rhetoric incorporates these pedagogical goals by integrating eloquence and critical thinking with moral discernment, thus continuing the humanist tradition of conceiving the ideal rhetor as the good person speaking and writing well for the public good.

(4) To achieve this ideal in a globalized, multicultural society, it is important to update another defining characteristic of Jesuit rhetoric: the famous pedagogical adaptability of the Jesuits. Today this flexibility is best understood through two aspects of rhetorical instruction--multicultural education and student-centered teaching. The pervasiveness of this Jesuit rhetorical flexibility suggests a final point.

(5) *Eloquentia Perfecta* taught and practiced today should be modeled on the institutional embeddedness of the first Jesuit ministries of the Word. That is, rhetoric relates to all aspects of Jesuit identity and mission, especially in light of the post-Vatican II emphasis on dialogue and conversation. That means Jesuit rhetoric should strive to encompass what makes Jesuit Catholic education distinctive, and Jesuit Catholic education should aim to incorporate the Jesuit rhetorical tradition in all its historically rich aspects.

ⁱ See Kevin Clarke, "How to Build a Better Student" and John W. O'Malley, "Eloquentia: A Short History," *America* 16 May 2011: 13-18 <<http://americamagazine.org/toc-past/2011-05-16>>; *Conversations* Spring 2013 <<http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>>.

ⁱⁱ See "Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach," in *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th Anniversary Perspectives*, ed. Vincent J. Duminuco, S.J. (New York: Fordham UP, 200): 231-93.