

Latin: Training Skillful Communicators

by Patch Blakey

This article of *Classis* contains a number of excellent articles on Latin from instructors and administrators at ACCS schools. Each author presents some stimulating thoughts, some addressing the “why” of Latin and others the “how.” Tom Spencer has even included a portion on Latin from Dorothy Sayers’ 1947 essay, “The Lost Tools of Learning,” to remind those involved in this resurgence of classical Christian education to return *ad fontes*.

I would like to briefly emphasize an aspect of teaching Latin from a perspective that is addressed in these articles to some degree, but which I think worthy of some well-deserved redundancy. Bear in mind that the Apostle Paul was supportive of some level of redundancy when he wrote to the church in Philippi, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe” (Phil. 3:1).

One of the primary objectives of ACCS is to help teach students to communicate well, both in speaking and writing. Augustine wisely advocated the godly use of rhetoric in his work, *On Christian Doctrine*. He wrote, “Now, the art of rhetoric being available for the enforcing either of truth or falsehood, who will dare to say that truth in the person of its defenders is to take its stand unarmed against falsehood? For example, that those who are trying to persuade men of what is false are to know how to introduce their subject, so as to put the hearer into a friendly, or attentive, or teachable frame of mind, while the defenders of the

truth shall be ignorant of that art? That the former are to tell their falsehoods briefly, clearly, and plausibly, while the latter shall tell the truth in such a way that it is tedious to listen to, hard to understand, and . . . not easy to believe it? . . . That the former, while imbuing the minds of their hearers with erroneous opinions, are by their power of speech to awe, to melt, to enliven, and to rouse them, while the latter shall in defense of the truth be sluggish, and frigid . . . ? Who is such a fool as to think this wisdom?”

Augustine doesn’t mention instruction in Latin in this passage, even though the original text came to us in that language. However, the language of the original text is not my point. The point that I want to stress, and which Augustine makes so forcefully above, is that learning to communicate well is an advantage to Christians in that it only enhances the speaker’s ability to effectively convey or present the truth. Paul, I believe, encouraged this when he wrote, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Col. 4:6).

Now here’s the nub. Instruction in Latin contributes to a student’s ability in rhetoric, just as do grammar and logic. Clarity of thought, accuracy in speech, attention to detail, and a broader, more effective vocabulary are all benefits of studying Latin. The study of Latin, an essential part of the study of the Trivium, helps develop students who are skillful in the use of speech and writing. This not only glorifies God, but enhances their ability to engage

the world on behalf of Jesus Christ in a more eloquent and persuasive manner. They may not become as proficient in Latin as the famous Roman orator and statesman, Cicero; but then again, that is not the objective. But, they will certainly be better equipped in the use of English to act as an ambassador for Jesus Christ.

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