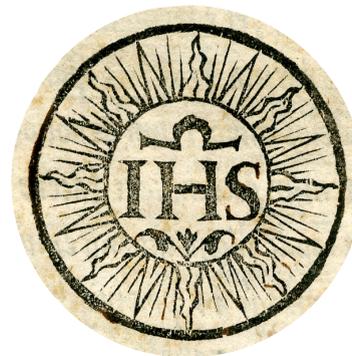


The Beginnings of a Jesuit Iconography

The iconography of the Society of Jesus does not begin with a picture but with three letters, the monogram IHS, which is an abbreviation of the name of Jesus in Greek: IHCOUC. The Greek letter sigma, C, was replaced by the Latin S. The name Jesus was shortened to IHS in many Latin manuscripts of the gospels beginning in the fourth century. The monogram was often employed when a person or group wanted to give expression to special devotion to the person and name of Jesus, as did Saint Bernardino of Siena in central Italy in the fifteenth century. It was the Jesuits, however, who most effectively claimed the monogram and gave it international diffusion. In so doing they made the symbol a clear statement to themselves and others of where their hearts were—or at least of where they wanted them to be.

The title page of the first printed edition of the *Spiritual Exercises*, 1548, contains the first, very simple expression in artistic form of devotion to the name of Jesus to appear in the history of the Society. The monogram appears there as a vignette enclosed in two concentric circles. Above the three letters IHS stands a printed form of the stroke that in manuscripts tied the three letters together. Under the letters is a three-petal lily, which probably symbolizes Mary, who literally stood under the cross. The three petals were soon replaced by three nails, which are usually interpreted as symbolizing the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The inner circle of the vignette is surrounded by rays, which are presented dynamically as alternating between wedge-shaped and wavy forms (Figure 1).

The official seal of the Society of Jesus was created during Ignatius's lifetime and surely under his supervision. It differs from the title page in several regards. The H is extended upward to form a cross, the rays are missing, and a half-moon surrounded by stars, probably another reference to Mary, has replaced the three-petal lily (Figure 2). The original seal is still the one in use today.



—Heinrich Pfeiffer, S.J., in *The Jesuit and the Arts 1540-1773* (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2005)

▲ Figure 1
The first seal of the Society of Jesus reproduced from the title page of the first printed edition of Saint Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, 1548. Rome, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu.

◀ Figure 2
The official seal of the Society of Jesus created during Saint Ignatius's lifetime and under his supervision. Engraved brass with wood handle, c. 1550. Rome, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu.

Jesuit Formation

There are definite steps in a Jesuit's training, or formation, but they are anything but lock step. A short glossary of the process follows.

CANDIDACY:

One who is seriously considering becoming a Jesuit contacts a province vocation director to enter the candidacy program. Candidacy is not strictly part of the formation process, but it does allow a candidate to get a better idea of Jesuit life. A candidate might attend retreats or get-togethers with other candidates or take part in "Six Weeks a Jesuit" programs, living and working with Jesuits to experience community life and different Jesuit ministries.

NOVICESHIP:

A novice lives for two years with fellow novices and staff, studying Jesuit history and spirituality and making the Spiritual Exercises. He also works, perhaps in a hospital, a retirement home, or a grade school, for short and long stints, called "experiments." These are apostolic experiences designed to aid the discernment process. At the end of two years, novices take First Vows—poverty, chastity, and obedience—and go on to First Studies.

FIRST STUDIES:

This is usually a three-year period when a Jesuit works on an MA in philosophy, but exceptions abound. Someone who enters with such a degree might pursue a degree in another field; someone without a bachelor's degree would work on that as well as study philosophy. During First Studies, Jesuits also work part-time in ministries, perhaps in campus ministry or a homeless shelter.

REGENCY:

A two- or three-year period after First Studies when a Jesuit lives in community while working in a ministry. Traditionally, regents are assigned to teach in Jesuit high schools, but one with a Ph.D. in botany, for instance, might teach that subject at a Jesuit university, while another might be assigned to a parish or retreat house. Remember the "exception" rule; the desires of the regent and the needs of the province both come into play.

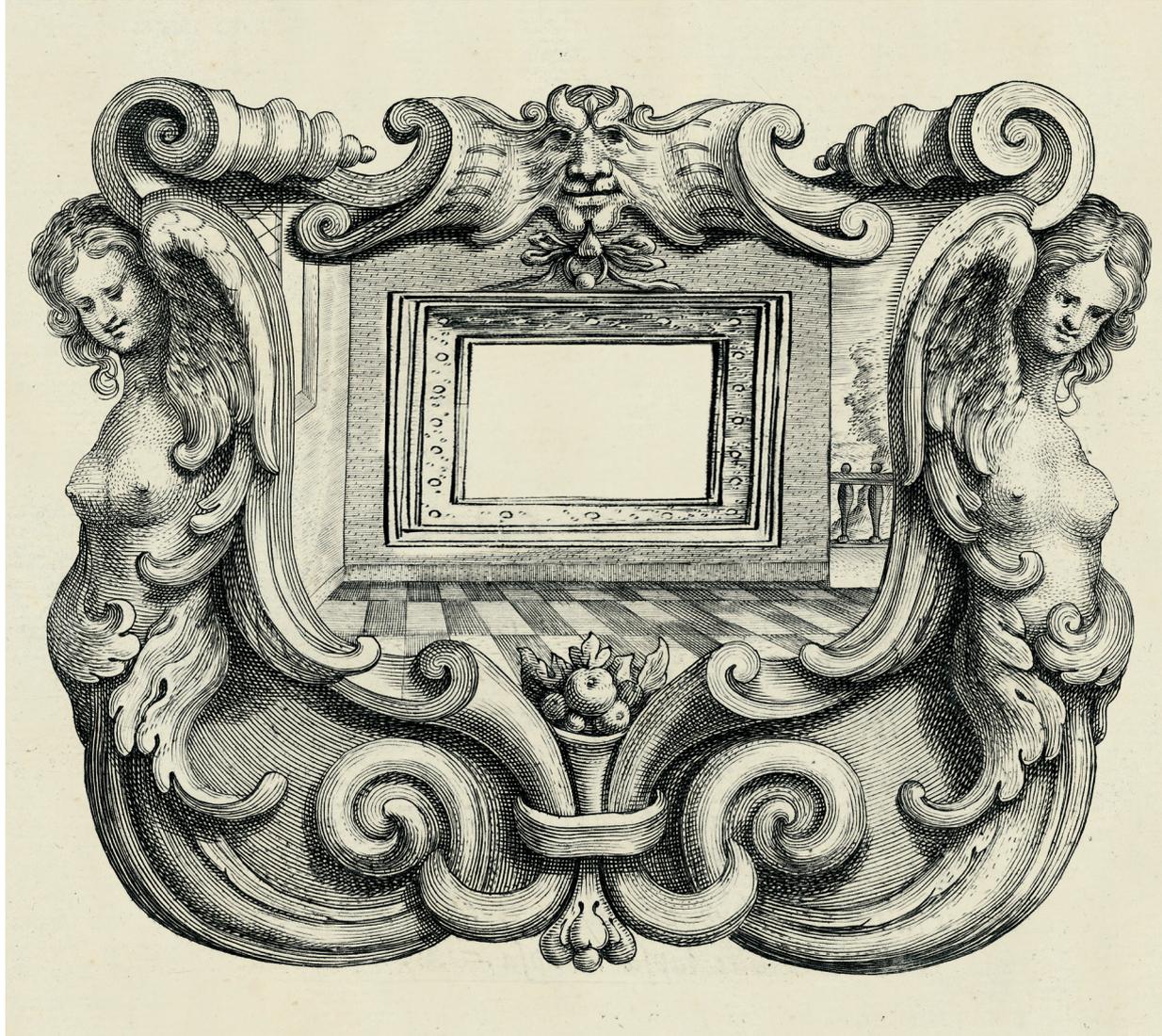
THEOLOGY STUDIES:

A time when a Jesuit pursues a master's in theology, usually at the Jesuit theologates in Berkeley, California, or Boston College. Some theologians study in Italy, Germany, or Canada, just as Jesuits from outside the United States study here.

TERTIANSHIP:

About three or so years after a priest is ordained or a brother has completed studies, he will spend nine months to a year in a tertianship program.

The idea is for a Jesuit to spend time, often with a spiritual director, reflecting on his vocation as a Jesuit. He'll think about not only the last decade-plus of formation but also discern what's in store for the rest of his career in the Society of Jesus. It's a cross between a retreat and a working sabbatical that leads to Final Vows, the "official" end of formation.



Motto:

Societatis operarij {Labors of the Society}

Omnibus omnia {All for all}

*That love might render everyone similar to himself,
he himself, we may be sure,
is time after time rendered unlike himself.*

When St. Ignatius Loyola, following St. Paul, advised his own followers to be “all things to all people,” *omnibus omnia*, he was recommending a policy of cultural translation of the Christian message, an imperative for accommodation that coincided with the Jesuits’ way of proceeding on a profound and pervasive level.

The Society’s investment in the overseas missions led its members into long-term engagements with cultures radically different from their own. However much the long period of spiritual and intellectual formation may have forged a common Jesuit worldview, and whatever unifying force there may have been in the customs, values, and goals of the Society, the encounter with the non-Christian, non-European “Other” posed a challenge to Jesuit identity. Just as Jesuits sought to transform the identity of others through their missionary work, Jesuit identities were themselves deeply affected by those encounters.

The verbal trick of the motto indicates that the emblematic mirror gives back slightly altered, even inexact, reflections: omnia is reflected in omnibus. The motto also shows that this mirrored analogy has a spectator as its focus, and is meaningless without that point of reference. 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. In this case, two truths are encoded in emblem, motto, and subscriptio: one relative to the viewer; the other to the work of the Society of Jesus.

Figure 1.
Emblem 452. *Societatis operarij*.
Image print made by Societatis Iesu
(Antwerp: Plantin Press, 1640)
Special Collections, Saint Joseph’s University

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