

Juan Luis Vives as the “Second Quintilian”: Transforming Liberal Arts Learning into Christian Piety

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For centuries, Christian teachers have looked to the ancient Roman rhetorician Quintilian (35–96 CE) for instructional guidance concerning the liberal arts, reading his *Institutio Oratoria* for its recognized wisdom. Given its all-embracing system of formative instruction, emphasizing the creation of the “*vir bonus dicendi peritus*,”¹ Quintilian’s opus attracted the interest of Christians committed to virtue, regardless of the incongruities between pagan and religious ideals; and from the fifth century until the Renaissance, the educational views and methods of the *Institutio* greatly influenced Western thinking.² As W. Martin Bloomer perceptively declares, “The treatise has an unrivaled importance for the legacy of educational thinking.”³ One of the most notable Renaissance scholars to be inspired by this ancient proponent of liberal learning and pedagogy was Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540), who became one of the leading humanists of Northern Europe. Quintilian’s sway upon Vives’s own thinking and writing proved to be so prominent and consequential that his contemporaries described him as “the second Quintilian.”⁴ Vives adapted many of the educational concepts and practices of his Roman guide for a distinctly Christian purpose, namely the cultivation of piety; and his innovative didactic appropriations, largely overlooked, warrant further consideration.

Quintilian’s Influence on Christian Educators Before Vives

Before examining Vives’s work, a brief survey of Quintilian’s influence on other Christian teachers prior to the sixteenth century is in order, cataloging some of the most notable figures shaped by him.⁵ The first Christian scholar to follow clearly in the steps of Quintilian, as evidenced by his writing, was Saint Jerome (347–420), who in his letter of catechetical instruction to Laeta reveals the unmistakable methods of the Roman rhetorician, converted for Christian purposes.⁶ Similarly impressed was the Bishop of Hippo, Saint Augustine (354–430), who “was himself a

teacher of rhetoric in a school following Quintilian's program."⁷ Professor James J. O'Donnell, corroborating the scholarship of Harald Hagendahl, affirms that Augustine read many Latin authors from antiquity, including Quintilian.⁸ Additionally, in the early Middle Ages, the works of Isidore of Seville (570–636), Cassiodorus (480–575), and Alcuin (732–804) all exhibit indebtedness to Quintilian. However, by the late Middle Ages, when the only known text of the *Institutio Oratoria* had become mutilated, few scholars made reference to the work. One such scholar was John of Salisbury (1115–1180), who modeled his educational curriculum in the *Metalogicon* according to the one described in the *Institutio*.⁹

A little more than a century later, in the early Renaissance, we find Petrarch (1304–74) paying Quintilian a great compliment in a letter, extolling the teacher of rhetoric with these words: “Thou hast performed the office of the whetstone rather than that of the knife, and thou hast had greater success in building up the orator than in causing him to excel in the courts; thou wert a great man, I grant, but thy greatest merit lay in the ability to ground and to mold great men.”¹⁰ Undoubtedly, many Renaissance thinkers believed in the importance of Quintilian's educational aim—to equip citizens to actualize good (virtuous) lives via the *artes liberales*, especially through serious training directed by the *trivium*.

Indeed, Quintilian's ideas became born anew when, in 1416, a papal secretary named Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) and two others investigated a dank tower of the abbey church in St. Gall, Switzerland. “It was not the architectural features of the great medieval abbey that drew the visitors,” writes Stephen Greenblatt in *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*. “It was the library of which Poggio and his friends had heard extravagant rumors. They were not disappointed [...] he had located an astonishing cache of ancient books.”¹¹ To his great surprise and delight, he made a rare find, as he recounts in his correspondence to two friends, Leonardo Bruni and Niccolò Niccoli: “In the middle of a well-stocked library, too large to catalogue at present, we discovered Quintilian, safe as yet and sound, though covered with dust and filthy with neglect and age.”¹² After painstakingly copying the entire twelve-volume manuscript of the *Institutio Oratoria*, a feat that took fifty-four days to complete,¹³ Poggio then reproduced and distributed the work, to the great satisfaction of countless readers.¹⁴

The almost immediate result, especially with the eventual aid of the printing press, was that Quintilian became celebrated for his educational insights and methods once again. Vittorino da Feltre (1378–1446) revered Quintilian so much that he earned the nickname “Quintilianus

redivivus,” or “Quintilian living again.”¹⁵ Likewise, Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457) became such a strong advocate for Quintilian that his first work, *De comparatione Ciceronis Quintilianique*, written by the time he was only twenty-three, asserted the importance of Quintilian’s approach to the training of an orator over Cicero’s.¹⁶ A mounting fervor for the *Institutio* during the middle of the fifteenth century explains why it was one of the first rhetorical texts to be printed.¹⁷ Thus, it is understandable that from the time Erasmus was born (fifty years after Poggio’s celebrated discovery) until the time of his death in 1536, nearly one hundred editions of the *Institutio Oratoria* were published.¹⁸ The significance of the complete version of the *Institutio Oratoria*, and the impact of Quintilian on thinkers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, cannot be overstated, as George A. Kennedy affirms: “His educational theories profoundly affected schools of the liberal arts, such as that of Vittorino da Feltre in Mantua (founded in 1423), and his rhetorical theory is reflected in such otherwise diverse writers as Lorenzo Valla, Rudolph Agricola, Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives, Peter Ramus, and Francisco Patrizi.”¹⁹

Considering the First Quintilian Relative to the Second

Born at the approximate time when Christopher Columbus landed in the “New World,” Vives, a native of Valencia, came from the same region of Spain as Quintilian.²⁰ Nonetheless, several noteworthy yet overlooked comparisons between the two men go beyond their common place of origin. Both obtained a solid primary education; this included the rigors of grammar instruction in the classical languages, of which they became experts.²¹ Both left their home in their late teens to acquire advanced training in the liberal arts; Quintilian went to Rome, and Vives went to Paris. Both were shaped by several years of mentoring from prominent scholars of their day; Domitius Afer became Quintilian’s guide, and Desiderius Erasmus became Vives’s. Both taught rhetoric; Quintilian at a publicly funded school in Rome, and Vives at Louvain and Oxford. Both faced opposition from ideological foes; Quintilian fought the *delatores*, and Vives attacked the *pseudodialecticos*. Both received patronage from powerful, albeit ruthless, leaders; Domitian charged Quintilian with the job of tutoring his two nephews, who were heirs to the throne, and Henry VIII (to whom Vives dedicated his translation of Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, at the behest of Catherine of Aragon) commissioned Vives to direct the instruction of his daughter, Princess Mary. Both teachers authored landmark educational tomes, which promoted a distinctly moral

approach to the goal of a student's formation as a human being, employing writing as a central method of instruction; Quintilian wrote the *Institutio Oratoria*, and Vives the *De Disciplinis*. And finally, both thinkers, although their work has had a definite and lasting influence upon Western educational thought and practice, have been largely overlooked or forgotten.

Despite the similarities between the two men, Vives's ideas should not be perceived as a simple repetition of Quintilian's, just as it would be erroneous to consider Quintilian's views to be a mere rehashing of Cicero's. Translator Foster Watson warns against this reading of Vives for several reasons:

If the term "second Quintilian" were to be taken in the sense of reproducing the views of Quintilian or of authors of antiquity solely, a sense in which it was certainly not meant by the sixteenth century, it would be an inadequate description of Vives, and we should lose part of its complimentary import. For Vives was to the Europe of his time what Quintilian had been in the first century A.D. to Rome. He was the modern Quintilian, prepared to incorporate what was best and permanent in humanity from the ancients, but to use the ancient writers as a starting place, and not as a goal, in education and in all other "arts" and branches of knowledge. He had passed over the bridge separating the mediaeval and modern ages, and had entered on the "way-making" side of the modern world. He was the Quintilian of the Renaissance, in looking forward towards the conceptions of the golden age placed in the future, not in the past.²²

Sensitive to many of Quintilian's basic concerns about education, including questions regarding the ultimate aim of learning and considerations about the best methods to achieve that end, Vives sought his own solutions, which in some cases extended or modified Quintilian's ideas and methods for the distinctly religious purpose of the formation of character: "a profound accord between pagan culture and Christian piety."²³

Like his ideational forebear Quintilian, Vives became renowned for his intellectual prowess as an explorer of diverse and expansive realms of knowledge, although with some controversy. After studying Latin grammar and Greek classics in his native Valencia, he traveled to the University of Paris in 1509, at that time considered "the academic center of the Christian world."²⁴ Once there,

he threw himself into the study of scholastic philosophy at the Collège de Lisieux.²⁵ Yet, to his dismay, the confining nature of deductive logic, the common staple of university learning at the time, became increasingly frustrating to study and to practice. As Vives biting explains in one of his earliest books, *Contra pseudodialecticos* (1519), “Who is not familiar with the current saying that in Paris our youth are taught nothing save to rant and rave in displays of endless verbosity? Other institutions have their useless and futile branches of learning [...] only in Paris does one encounter the most idiotic and frivolous froth to the exclusion of all else.”²⁶ Vives had little patience for the dialecticians’ limiting course of study.²⁷ In *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation*, Erika Rummel explains how Vives became firmly convinced that serious harm was done to the soul by a theological curriculum that contaminated religion with sophistry.²⁸ Ultimately, Vives was faced with a choice between medieval scholasticism, with its emphasis on a narrow definition of dialectic, or Renaissance humanism, with its affirmation of grammar and rhetoric. As Carlos G. Noreña comments, “Vives repudiated terministic logic because it represented a wasteful and misdirected form of human energy and encouraged the wrong emotional dispositions such as contentiousness, vanity, and lack of concern and interest for the challenges faced by individuals in their private and social life.”²⁹

Once Vives rejected the life of a scholastic in favor of the life of a humanist, he became an important representative of the Northern Renaissance as a teacher and writer, winning the esteem and favor of several contemporaries, including Sir Thomas More and Erasmus. Corresponding with Erasmus in 1519, More asks, after reading Vives’s scathing diatribe against the dialecticians in *Contra pseudodialecticos*, “Who surpasses Vives in number and quality of his studies? [...] And who instructs with more clearness, with more pleasure, or with more success than Vives?”³⁰ To this, Erasmus responds, “As to the ability of Ludovicus Vives, I rejoice that my estimate of him agrees with yours. He is one of the number of those who will overshadow the name of Erasmus. There is no one to whom I am better inclined.”³¹

Regarding this exuberant epistolary interaction, Lisa Jardine convincingly argues in *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print* that there is a significant backstory not to be overlooked: “Vives (like Erasmus himself) had taken no formal university degree, and held no university post, so such an introduction is designed to promote Vives’s reputation by accumulating printed testimonials from the best print authorities. In other words, it is calculated so as to build a pedigree in print citations as a substitute for diplomas and degrees.”³² This practice of promoting

a scholarly reputation, along with a particular line of humanist thinking, proved to be a skill at which Erasmus had become quite adept, as Jardine reveals, especially regarding his own life and accomplishments. She views the letter exchange between More and Erasmus (soon thereafter published in 1520 as part of a widely circulated schoolbook, under Erasmus's direction), as a means to claim Vives as a part of a select group of humanist scholars.³³ Consequently, Vives clearly had much to gain from this association, especially insofar as concerned the promotion of his own writing: "Specialist texts produced within that circle, associated with debates (like that surrounding humanist dialectic) with intellectual (and particularly pedagogic) repercussions throughout the educated world, can then be claimed as belonging to a 'school' with a (vague and distant) geographical, rather than institutional, affiliation, and a reality only in print—'Erasmian school at Louvain.'"³⁴ Obviously, Vives never supplanted Erasmus as a thinker or writer, prolific as Erasmus ultimately became within intellectual history³⁵; yet he did surpass him as a teacher who possessed a keen awareness of the educational exigencies of his era, comparable in this regard to Quintilian in his own epoch.

The Innovative Pedagogic Aim of the *De Disciplinis*

Vives demonstrates his own innovative instructional approaches most adeptly in the *De Disciplinis*. Describing it as Vives's fullest expression of his "revolutionary ideas on education," Charles Fantazzi underscores the fact that the work is dedicated to King John III of Portugal, with the intent of "purging the arts of impious doubts and infusing pagan darkness with the light of the Christian religion."³⁶ Commonly considered to be the most systematic and authoritative text on education written in the sixteenth century, just as Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* is the most methodical and comprehensive educational work of the first century, the *De Disciplinis* actually represents two treatises that were printed together under one title.³⁷ The first, called the *De Causis Corruptarum Artium*, consists of seven books that examine various factors contributing to the degradation of the arts of knowledge in Vives's day. The second, entitled the *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, contains five books that attempt to remedy the problems pertaining to the transmission of knowledge, as presented in the first part.

In the preface to the *De Disciplinis*, Vives expresses a purpose that is, in some ways, similar to Quintilian's intentions for the *Institutio Oratoria*. He begins,

When I reflected that there is nothing in life more beautiful or more excellent than the cultivation of the mind through what we call the branches of learning (*disciplinae*), by means of which we separate ourselves from the way of life and customs of animals and are restored to humanity, and raised towards God Himself, I determined to write on the subject, as far as my powers let me, and to do so, if I am not mistaken, in a manner different from what most of our predecessors have done.³⁸

Locating himself in the Isocratic tradition,³⁹ Vives also affirms the central role that the disciplines or arts of knowledge play in distinguishing ourselves from the animals. Likewise, Quintilian states, “In truth, the sovereign deity, the parent of all things, the architect of the world, has distinguished man from other beings, such at least as were to be mortal, by nothing more than by the faculty of speech.”⁴⁰ As a Christian theorist of liberal arts education and knowledge, however, Vives distinguishes himself from Quintilian; he links the arts—constructions of language—with humanity *and* its Creator, whom he believes to be the God of Israel, who ultimately fulfills his purposes through his son Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Vives recognizes that the arts can be vehicles of grace to move humans nearer to God and his ways. As Valerio Del Nero declares regarding Vives’s convictions, relative to a validation of the ancient formulation of knowledge, “Pagan culture can certainly be purified and made part of Christian culture itself.”⁴¹ Thus, Vives gives a distinctly Christian conceptualization for his exploration of, and reflection upon, the academic disciplines, serving as a justification to build on the notions of Isocrates and Quintilian while pointing to the revelation of God, as it is found in the Bible. In his extensive bibliographic review of scholarship on Vives, Carlos G. Noreña observes, “Vives’s sincere Christian fervor has been minimized or denied by those who emphasized his commitment to education and to social justice.”⁴² Vives’s deep Christian convictions merit serious consideration in relation to his educational praxis.

In the *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, Vives claims that study, the exertion of discipline to apprehend and employ the arts of knowledge, should ultimately provoke an important question: “For what is the good of fatiguing oneself with this effort, if nothing is gained by desires except fresh desires; if the end of one longing is the beginning of another; if we work continually, and there is no end or rest?”⁴³ The question he raises is an old one. It echoes a query found in Ecclesiastes, one

expressed candidly by the text's skeptical speaker, who says, "For though someone toils with wisdom, knowledge, and skill he must leave it all to one who has spent no labor on it. This too is futility and a great wrong. What reward does anyone have for all his labor, his planning, and his toil here under the sun?"⁴⁴ Vives acknowledges that his question, like the question of Ecclesiastes, has perturbed thinkers in the past: "[It] has exercised the greatest minds more than it has instructed them; in truth, because the human mind, provided with its small lamp, is not able to attain to the conception of the ultimate end, unless it has been enlightened by the end itself."⁴⁵

And here a paradox presents itself: the beginning of real knowledge encompasses a consideration of the end of knowledge. Recognizably, this is not an idea that is original to Vives. For Quintilian cites it as the common understanding of his day, that "all arts have a certain definite end to which they are directed,"⁴⁶ what he earlier describes by the Greek term *telos*, or "highest and ultimate end."⁴⁷ For him the *telos* of the art of oratory, which enlists the other arts to promote its great purpose,⁴⁸ is the formation of "the good man." For Vives, the *telos* is not found in human goodness alone, but in the source of all goodness. The beginning and the end of knowledge are found in God, whom Vives describes as "the source from which we came, and towards which we are going."⁴⁹ Elaborating further upon this concept, Vives states what he considers to be the greatest possible purpose for knowledge, and the means to attain it:

For who is there who has considered the power and loftiness of the mind, its understanding of the most remarkable things, and, through understanding, love, and from love the desire to unite himself with the things of knowledge, who does not perceive clearly that man was created, not for food, clothing and habitation, not for difficult, hidden and troublesome knowledge, but for the desire to know God more truly, for a participation in eternity, and in His divine nature? Wherefore, since that is the perfection of man's nature, and the consummation of all its parts; and since piety is the only way of perfecting man, and accomplishing the end for which he was formed, therefore piety is of all things the one thing necessary.⁵⁰

As this passage illustrates, Vives modifies Quintilian's teleological equation, exchanging the virtue of "goodness" with the distinctly Christian life habit that promotes an ever-increasing, intimate knowledge of God—"piety."

Piety, Love, and Liberal Learning

Undoubtedly, the formation of Vives’s “pious” student draws upon Quintilian’s concept of shaping the “good” student; nevertheless, the motivation for becoming pious is distinct, and it deserves further consideration. In the fourth chapter of the first book of the *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, entitled “Our Highest Good,” Vives asks, “What can we fix as the end of man, except God Himself? Or where can man more blessedly repose, than when he is, as it were, absorbed in God and changed into His nature? We must return to Him by the same way we came forth from Him.”⁵¹ The means by which we “return” to God, as Vives immediately explains, involves the acceptance of God’s love for us—a love demonstrated by the very fact of our existence; and the release of our love back to our Creator is therefore the proper response. This interpersonal exchange of love provides joy, purpose, and meaning. “By that love we have been recalled and raised up, that is to say, by the love of Christ,” expounds Vives, “By love, i.e. by our love to God, we are to return to our source, which is also our end.”⁵²

Our motivation of love for God should rouse us, directing our studies, but only to the degree that we respond to the weighty knowledge of God’s love for us, understood through living a pious life. As Vives stresses, “knowledge must precede love.”⁵³ This is a central tenet to Vives’s pedagogy for liberal arts in the cultivation of Christian piety. This principle exists because our Creator predicates His love upon knowledge. “God loved us before we were born,” insists Vives.⁵⁴ Why? He offers a simple but profound reason: “He *knew* [emphasis added] that we had already proceeded from Him.”⁵⁵ Similarly, we must possess knowledge before we can truly love. “We exercise love,” reminds Vives, “after we are born and have obtained the power and habit of knowing.”⁵⁶ The Bible and the Holy Spirit serve as our primary sources of knowledge; as we exercise our faith, they help us to determine those things that are worthy of our time, energy, and love.⁵⁷ “Faith will show what things ought to be loved,” declares Vives, “since the first and simplest elements of piety have been handed down to each person from God the Father of all and His Son Jesus Christ.”⁵⁸ The practice of piety depends upon vibrant faith that is regularly put into action, which yields knowledge of the divine life.

The knowledge of the divine life, which comes to us through intentional pious practices, creates the standard by which all other knowledge is interpreted and judged. Vives expounds on how this occurs in this lengthy but important passage:

This [knowledge of the divine life] ought to be the standard of other principles, just as God is of spirits and man of living creatures; so that every kind of learning may be valued to the extent that by its matter, its end taken as our end, its teachers, its method and its results, it agrees or does not agree with this standard. No subject-matter, no knowledge is, of itself, contrary to piety. I call that contrary which is at variance with faith and love, that namely which takes these virtues utterly away, or certainly lessens them by bringing into the mind wickedness and sin. For materials of study are taken from things which the good God has made, and therefore they are good. Neither is piety adverse to anything good, since it becomes itself the crown of everything good and nothing in us can be good without it, nor can anything be inimical to it, since its author is He whose worship and religion piety professes, and for which it prepares man's will. Indeed, all things, the more exactly they are known, the more do they open the doors of entrance to the knowledge of the Deity, i.e. the supreme Cause, through His works; and this is the most fitting way for our minds to reach to the knowledge of God.⁵⁹

The branches of knowledge, then, correlate to aspects of the world that God created, and therefore they prove complementary to the pious life as long as they are studied with the proper end of loving God. So, with a similar sort of fervor possessed by Quintilian, who affirms that all disciplines are beneficial in the education of the good orator,⁶⁰ Vives proclaims that all realms of knowledge are efficacious for the pious learner.

It must be noted, still, that Vives does concede there are ways in which knowledge can be harmful, especially if the ends for which that knowledge is attained are incongruous with the standard that comes from the knowledge of the divine life through piety. He cautions, "There are some things which almost always increase vice, and detract from virtues, e.g. disputations, quarrelsome, contentious books, in which the intellect arms itself against truth, and by an impious affectation of commendation of the truth prefers to hide the truth, rather than to yield to it."⁶¹ One wonders if Vives, when writing the foregoing description, was thinking about the dialecticians he encountered while at the University of Paris. No doubt his first-hand experience with them left a lasting impression of learning-gone-wrong that only served to deepen his own educational vision for Christian liberal learning.

After briefly cataloging the divisions of knowledge at the end of Book I, and carefully elucidating the vital importance of good books, good schools, good teachers, and good pupils in Book II—all in a manner resplendent with the aura of Quintilian⁶²—Vives continues the *De Tradendis Disciplinis* with a full examination of “Language Teaching,” the focus of Book III.

The Essential Importance of Language Study

The preeminence Vives gives to language, in the context of the many disciplines of knowledge, is shown not only by his devoting a whole book to it in the *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, but also by the first chapter’s beginning sentence: “The first thing man has to learn is speech. It flows from the rational soul as water from a fountain.”⁶³ Vives immediately provides three reasons why spoken language carries such primary import as a discipline of knowledge: first, it distinguishes us from the beasts; second, it is the “instrument of human society” that allows people to communicate and commune with each other; and third, it is a “gift of God.”⁶⁴ Consequently, language must be taught both at home, by parents, and at school, by teachers, where students should be afforded proper models to imitate “chaste words,” free from “faults of pronunciation.”⁶⁵ Of course, Vives draws his sound advice from the very beginning of Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*, right down to his admonition that both parents and caregivers become learned in the art of speech for the wellbeing of the child.⁶⁶

Vives encourages students to become multilingual, but at the same time he affirms the supremacy of Latin. “Language is the shrine of erudition, and as it were a storeroom for what should be concealed, and what should be made public. Since it is the treasury of culture and the instrument of human society, it would therefore be to the benefit the human race that there should be a single language.”⁶⁷ The advantage to this, especially for Christians, would be a shared language by which people could worship God, improve world commerce, and increase basic knowledge.⁶⁸ Martin Elsky notes the significance of Latin to Vives’s overall educational plan, putting the emphasis back on grammar and rhetoric within the *trivium* of the liberal arts: “He urges that humanist Latin and all it implies replace scholastic Aristotelianism as the universal linguistic and intellectual framework of Christian unity within a Christian empire.”⁶⁹ Reflecting upon the fall of the human race and the proliferation of languages due to sin,⁷⁰ Vives conjectures that Adam probably spoke Latin—the most perfect of languages—before he ate the forbidden apple; in Latin

he may have named the animals in the Garden of Eden.⁷¹ “It [Latin] is rich in words on account of its cultivation by so many men of intellect in their writings,” writes Vives, “for they have increased its vocabulary. It is of sweet sound and is weighty in utterance, neither rough nor crude, as is the case of some other languages.”⁷² Just as Quintilian asserted the priority of Greek study before Latin,⁷³ which was the vernacular in his day, Vives argues that Latin should take precedence as a study over the vernacular languages of his own day.⁷⁴ Vives assures his reader, “If anyone should consider the matter with close attention, he will see that my view of teaching and that of Quintilian are alike.”⁷⁵

Culling additional wisdom from the *Institutio*, Vives offers the language teacher sage advice. “Let him accustom himself to sociability and friendliness,” writes Vives, making sure to remain “affable to his pupils, as a father.”⁷⁶ Clearly, Vives and Quintilian both believe that teachers should promote trust and goodwill in their classrooms so that their students will be free to take risks and to learn without undue fear of failure. Furthermore, Vives proposes that in addition to knowing the vernacular completely, “The teacher should have an ample and copious equipment of Latin words so that his boys may be truly able to draw from him as from a fountain.”⁷⁷ And lastly, citing his ancient Roman compatriot, Vives writes these words of admonition:

Let the teacher remember that very apt image by which Quintilian describes the boy’s mind, viz. that it is like a vessel with a narrow neck, which spits out again the too large a supply of liquid which the teacher attempts to pour in. Let instruction therefore be poured in gradually, drop by drop. Similarly let the teacher offer his pupils in the beginning few and easy matters of instruction; then the boy may become accustomed so as to understand further, greater, and more solid topics. In the first beginnings let the teacher often ask questions, and let him often supply the reasons for what he has got in answer.⁷⁸

The graduated method of instruction, described above, reflects Quintilian’s adherence to the *progymnasmata*, with its series of carefully coordinated exercises that build, one on another. Vives, too, is convinced that this accretive approach establishes the greatest guarantee of the student’s facility with words.

Listening, reading, writing and speaking, as in Quintilian’s classroom, operate in conjunction with one another in Vives’s classroom. “The boy should listen intently to the teacher,” he explains, “and fix his look on him except when he has to look at his book, or when he has to write.”⁷⁹ Since hearing represents the dominant “medium” of learning, students who fail to listen carefully, will fail to learn well.⁸⁰ Consequently, students should consider the teacher as a “pure oracle,” poetically speaking, offering an unusual display of words in the classroom; and as students observe the proper use and function of words, they will imitate their master and attain his “virtues,” and even, he warns, his “faults.”⁸¹

As for instruction in writing, Vives adheres to several of the principles found in Book X of the *Institutio*, although he adds his own innovations here and there. “Let the pupil learn to write correctly and quickly,”⁸² he asserts; and here he affirms Quintilian’s belief that “by writing well [Vives phrases it as “correctly”] we are brought to write quickly.”⁸³ Agility becomes secondary to accuracy; it only merits appreciation when the other results simultaneously. And how does the student writer achieve accuracy? Vives answers: “The foundations of writing ought to be laid while pupils are being taught to read; they must know what letters, what syllables, what sounds ought to be separated or combined, and keep them ready for use.”⁸⁴ On this point Vives assumes that his reader will make a connection with Chapter VI of Book I, where he argues for selective reading of the “heathens”: “Here avail the instruments of truth, of discovery, of judgment, which help us towards practical wisdom. [...] The heathen [...] possess every ornament, grace, elegance, and splendor of discourse.”⁸⁵ Notwithstanding the benefits of reading such writers, Vives forewarns the Christian reader that at times “the sweetest wine is mixed with poison”; and yet, sometimes “skilled physicians use poisons against poisons.”⁸⁶ It all depends upon the subject-matter, the reader, and the reader’s disposition. Therefore, Vives advises the use of discretion.

The Primacy of Writing and Using a Notebook

Agreeing with the ancient Roman writing teacher Quintilian, Vives asserts the primacy of writing in the work of learning across the disciplines, but more emphatically so. Whereas Quintilian writes that “writing itself is the principal thing in our studies, and that by which alone sure proficiency, resting on the deepest roots, is secured,”⁸⁷ Vives writes, “Let them [students] be convinced that nothing conduces more truly to wide learning than to write much and often, and to use up a great

deal of paper and ink.”⁸⁸ It is not sufficient to simply believe in the centrality of writing as a teacher of the liberal arts, according to Vives; the students in the class must be “convinced” of this as well. Part of the task of the teacher, then, is to persuade students that writing not only matters, but that it proves to be the most effective, and therefore most important, skill that a student can employ in the learning process. Vives reinforces this conviction through the instructional expectation of regular composing exercises in a notebook.

The idea of a notebook as a useful tool for recording one’s reflections predates Vives. As Richard Yeo states, “Of course, glossing texts and making summaries of them in notes had long been crucial in the manuscript culture of the West.”⁸⁹ For example, Pliny the Elder, one of Quintilian’s Roman contemporaries, became renowned for his comprehensive reading appetite, as well as his penchant for simultaneous commentary about the texts he consumed. In his Letter XXVII to Baebius Macer, Pliny the Younger describes the daily literacy habits of his famous uncle:

As soon as he returned home [after business with the emperor each morning], he gave what time was left to study. After a short and light refreshment at noon (agreeably to the good old custom of our ancestors) he would frequently in the summer, if he was disengaged from business, lie down and bask in the sun; during which time some author was read to him, while he took notes and made extracts, for every book he read he made extracts out of, indeed it was a maxim of his that “no book was so bad but some good might be got out of it.” When this was over, he generally took a cold bath, then some light refreshment and a little nap. After this, as if it had been a new day, he studied till supper-time, when a book was again read to him, which he would take down running notes upon.⁹⁰

Pliny the Younger goes on to describe for his friend how his uncle bequeathed to him one hundred and sixty volumes of notebooks, containing pages written on both sides in very small handwriting. Considering Pliny the Elder’s feat, John Henderson remarks, “Reading-and-writing are (as they say) less polarity than mutually constitutive dyad, for to read studiously is to ‘write’ a ‘study’ of the book.”⁹¹

In a similar manner, Vives affirmed the importance of reading books studiously, with a notebook and pen nearby.⁹² In fact, the production and distribution of paper and ink in the fifteenth

century made it possible for Vives to promote “using up a great deal” of the two. In *The History and Power of Writing*, Henri-Jean Martin explains that the explosion of words and images from the fifteenth century through the eighteenth century resulted from advanced methods of paper production: “The history of the paper industry shows that paper mills constantly increased in number throughout Europe. Gradually, every region attempted to produce enough paper to meet the demands of local consumption.”⁹³ Vives himself writes about paper and ink in his *Dialogues*. Regarding paper, he states, “Get for your own use the best paper from Italy, very thin and firm, or even that common sort brought over from France.”⁹⁴ Without paper and ink, the notebook, a teaching tool that resides at the center of Vives’s pedagogy, would not have been possible.

To support his theoretical convictions about liberal arts education, Vives offers a pedagogical approach that provides students with the opportunity for regular, meaningful learning-through-writing in the classroom: composing in a notebook. The idea, standard fare in today’s college classroom, was innovative at the time Vives promoted it.⁹⁵ Keep in mind that the purpose of this teaching tool, as Vives intends it, is first to allow students to write regularly and much, and second to persuade students of the efficacy of writing as an interdisciplinary skill—making integrative insights regarding various subjects. “Therefore,” suggests Vives, “let each boy have an empty paper book divided into several parts to receive all that fall from his teacher’s lips, since this is not less valuable to him than precious stones.”⁹⁶ The notebook, in addition to encouraging the practice and valuing of writing, also functions as a repository for rare or costly things. In the modern sense, it serves as a sort of safe in which to house “precious stones” received from the teacher, which the student can secure and, on occasion, retrieve for examination, pondering their worth.

Vives recommends that the student divide the notebook into sections that correspond to the different aspects of learning in the liberal arts disciplines. For example, he writes,

In one division let him put down separate and single words. In another proper ways of speaking and turns of speech, which are in daily use; and again, rare expressions, or such as are not generally known and explained. In a separate division, let him make history notes; in another, notes of anecdotes; in another, clever expressions and weighty judgments; in another, witty and acute sayings; in another, proverbs; in other divisions, names of well-known men of high birth, famous towns, animals,

plants and strange stones. In another part, explanations of difficult passages in the author. In another, doubtful passages which are still unsolved.⁹⁷

The kinds of writing activities specified here are far from mere busywork—they bring unity to *res* and *verba*, providing the means of contemplating the fundamentals of knowledge, the very elements of rhetorical invention. For Vives, the notebook should function as a heuristic device, a tool to draw upon, especially for the invention of ideas and arguments, allowing the student to organize *topoi* creatively, with authentic intention. Recognizing the import of these categories of thought, Peter Mack explains, “When Vives discusses the practicalities of mediating between arguments for different kinds of good and between the good and the useful, he notes that Quintilian said that the art of writing deliberative orations depended on comparisons between things themselves and then on comparisons in relation to person, place and time.”⁹⁸

Vives is so convinced of the value of his notebook approach to writing and learning that he endorses not one, but two notebooks for each student: “a larger book in which he can put all the notes expounded and developed at length by the teacher [... and one for] what he reads for himself in the best writers, or the sayings which he observes used by others.”⁹⁹ As Vives describes it, the notebook clearly encourages the student *to observe* and *to judge*. These are the two functions of the mind that, Vives argues, are fundamental to liberal learning.¹⁰⁰

Keeping a notebook—and writing, in general—not only helps a student to organize information creatively and to sharpen the powers of observation and judgment, it also enables the student to recollect what has already been learned, as Vives explains: “It is a very useful practice to write down what we want to remember, for it is not less impressed on the mind than on the paper by the pen, and indeed the attention is kept fixed longer by the fact that we are writing it down.”¹⁰¹ Once again, the powers of observation and judgment are heightened by the act of composing, forcing the student—in the span of a moment—to process sensory data and cognitive deliberation, resulting in a meaningful and more memorable expression on a page. On the subject of writing and memory, Noreña makes an insightful connection between Vives and Quintilian:

Vives often recommends the use of notebooks, a significant departure from the medieval stress on oral learning. Vives joins Quintilian in rejecting Plato’s claim that the use of written characters is a hindrance to memory, and he is convinced that the very effort to put

into orderly writing the material to be remembered is a powerful way of engraving it more deeply on our memory.¹⁰²

The advocacy of notebook writing among students was vital to Vives’s process of liberal learning. To this day, the notebook—in paper and computer media—continues to serve as a locus for the retention of important written material, both to enhance reflection and to improve memory.

On a related point, in his introduction to the *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, Foster Watson laments the fact that Vives’s original thinking on the improvement of student writing through use of paper notebooks has largely been overlooked. Considering the “conservative methods” of the Middle Ages, which involved “the learning by heart of intricate grammars,” Watson emphasizes the “startling” nature of the notebook in the first half of the sixteenth century, insisting that such “written methods were revolutionary.”¹⁰³ Continuing on, Watson observes that long before Vives wrote the *De Tradendis Disciplinis* (1531) the paper notebook idea was in his head. The evidence Watson refers to comes from *De Ratione Studii Puerilis* (1523), wherein Vives provides detailed instructions for a pupil to make a notebook and complete various writing exercises. At the end of the passage, which Watson translates from the Latin, Vives states, “Then will thy book alone know what must be read by thee, to be read, committed and fixed to the memory, so that thou mayest bear in thy breast the names thus handed down, which are in thy book and refer to them as often as is necessary.”¹⁰⁴ For Watson, this passage substantiates the high degree of instructional intention that Vives possessed in conceiving the aims of the notebook, and considering its beneficial enhancement of memory.

The End Becomes the Beginning

Unfortunately, Juan Luis Vives has faded from the collective memory of most educators, even within the liberal arts tradition. As Enrique González González laments, “Even today, many specialists in the Renaissance and humanism continue to have a very vague idea of what his name and writings signified for a long period of time.”¹⁰⁵ However, if Vives has not received proper recognition for his contributions to liberal learning and instruction, then it must be stated that Quintilian, also, has been slighted. For it was Quintilian who prompted Vives to consider the foundational principles of a comprehensive liberal arts education; and then Vives took many of

Quintilian's ideas and methods, only to convert them for Christian purposes. Self-effacing and altruistic, they both taught and wrote for ends greater than themselves. For Quintilian it was the formation of the "good man," and for Vives, the shaping of the "pious student." In the words of Quintilian, "Indeed the whole conduct of life is based on the desire of doing ourselves that which we approve in others."¹⁰⁶ Ruminating on this educational principle from the *Institutio*, Vives transformed it, pursuing a different sort of "approval" as a motive for liberal learning—one grounded in pietistic devotion to God. Near the very end of the *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, Vives ponders his principle as one of the most crucial to a proper "conduct of life":

Certainly there can be nothing more pleasant to Him, than that we offer our erudition and whatsoever of His gifts we possess to the use of our fellow men, i.e., of His children, for whom God has imparted those great goods that to whomsoever they are allotted, they should be of use to the community at large. God wishes us to give freely of that which we have freely received.¹⁰⁷

These words describe the pious life, fulfilling the initial promise of the *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, as expressed in its incipit: "the delivery of instruction on Christian principles" for liberal arts learning. Furthermore, the pietistic transformation of the *enkyklios paideia* comes full circle by the end of the work: "the delivery of instruction on Christian teaching."¹⁰⁸ Thus, the end becomes the beginning, thanks in part to the pagan Quintilian, to whom Vives remains indebted.

Notes

1. The "good man speaking well."
2. Golden et al. 2003, 60.
3. Bloomer 2011, 109.
4. Vigliano 2013, xxxvi–xxxvii.
5. Several good analyses of Quintilian's influence exist, including those by James J. Murphy (1987, xxxvii–xlv), *Quintilian: On the Teaching of Speaking and Writing*, Charles Edgar

Little (1951, 19–25), *Quintilian the Schoolmaster, Volume Two*, and F. H. Colson (1924, xliii–lxxxix), *M. Fabii Quintiliani Institutionis Oratoriae, Liber I*.

6. See Davis 2000 for Jerome’s particular appropriations of Quintilian.
7. Murphy 1987, xxxix.
8. O’Donnell 1980, 224–25.
9. Honeycutt 2007: “John of Salisbury describes in some detail his own education at Chartres under the tutelage of Bernard, Thierry, and William of Conches, who patterned their instruction after the program laid out by Quintilian.”
10. Quoted in Little 1951, 21.
11. Greenblatt 2011, 177.
12. Quoted in Bowen 1975, 219.
13. Greenblatt 2011, 179.
14. Concerning the discovery, Thomas M. Conley (1990, 112) writes, “The new version contained the parts of the work that had been missing in the manuscripts previously available—important parts, including the preface and opening chapter of Book One, the entire section on figures of thought in Book Nine, and the last half of Book Twelve. Scholars were now able to appreciate and contemplate the most comprehensive treatment of rhetoric ever composed. Quintilian’s reputation was considerably enhanced, and such key notions as that of the core relation between *virtus* and eloquence and that of the universal range of rhetoric took on a new significance. Together with the new picture of rhetoric as actually practiced, which the Renaissance humanists were able to get from the newly discovered speeches of Cicero, the *Institutes* provided them with new inspiration and increased motivation for total devotion to the study of Roman rhetoric.”
15. Murphy 1987, xli. See also Gerald L. Gutek (1987, 106) who explains, “Following Quintilian’s admonitions, Vittorino’s methodology emphasized the recognition of individual differences among the students. A child was not to be forced into a line of rigidly prescribed study but was to be encouraged to develop according to his capacity and interests. As soon as he noticed a particular interest in a student, Vittorino adjusted the method of his teaching. The school at Mantua became a model for other humanist educators who sought to emulate the success of Vittorino.”
16. Panizza 1978, 79.

17. Murphy 1987, xlii.
18. This calculation is based upon Murphy's printing history facts: Murphy 1987, xlii.
19. Kennedy 1980, 198.
20. Corbett 1990, 551. Note: The distance between Calagurris (present-day Calahorra), the ancient birthplace of Quintilian, and Valencia, Vives's birthplace situated on the Mediterranean coast, is fewer than 300 miles.
21. Edward V. George (1989, xxix) reports that Vives studied grammar with two teachers, Daniel Siso and Jeronimo Amigueta, at the Estudio General in Valencia.
22. Watson 1971, ci-cii.
23. Del Nero 2008, 202.
24. George 1989, xxix.
25. Enrique González González (2008a, 33) corrects the commonly mistaken view that Vives attended the Collège de Montaigu: "All evidence points to the fact that Vives stayed at the Collège de Lisieux."
26. Quoted in Rummel 1995, 184.
27. Vives (1908, x) continued to voice his concern for young boys debased by a steady diet of dialectic: "Even the youngest scholars (*tyrones*) are accustomed never to keep silence; they are always asserting vigorously whatever comes uppermost in their minds, lest they should seem to be giving up the dispute. Nor does one disputation or even two each day prove sufficient, as for instance at dinner. They wrangle at breakfast; they wrangle after breakfast; before supper they wrangle, and they wrangle after supper [...]. At home they dispute, out of doors they dispute. They wrangle over their food, in the bath, in the sweating-room, in the church, in the town, in the country, in public, in private; at all times they are wrangling."
28. Rummel 1995, 185.
29. Noreña 1990a, ii.
30. Quoted in Watson 1971, xxiii.
31. Ibid.
32. Jardine 2015, 18.
33. Jozef Ijsewijn (1992) recognizes Vives as a central character within the established Erasmusian circle of friends who often met in the home of Franciscus Cranevelt, a jurist who

studied law at Louvain and served on the Supreme Court of the Netherlands; Cranevelt collected many of the letters exchanged by this group: “The *Litterae ad Craneveldium*.”

34. Jardine 2015, 20.

35. Enrique González González (2008a, 43) describes a fluctuating degree of friendship, interest and support of Vives by Erasmus, suggesting that he actually prevented Vives’s work from being published in Basel.

36. Fantazzi 2008b, 4.

37. William Harrison Woodward (1906, 184) rightly observes, “This comprehensive work, by far the most systematic of those produced by the Revival, is not only compiled (as is inevitable) upon the basis of Aristotle, Plutarch, and Quintilian, but also draws from the masters and writers of the fifteenth century, notably from Erasmus. But, notwithstanding this dependence, the breadth and the methodical presentation of the *De Tradendis Disciplinis* [the second of the two books that make up the *De Disciplinis*] rendered it the standing authority to which authors and workers in the fields of education uniformly turned for a century or more.”

38. Vives 1971, 8.

39. In fourth-century Athens, the great rhetorician Isocrates (1929, 327) wrote in the *Antidosis*, “Because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other, and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities, and made laws, and invented arts.”

40. Quintilian 2011, 2:16.12.

41. Del Nero 2008, 186. Del Nero clarifies an important distinction between “art” and “discipline” in the *De Disciplinis*: “According to the Valencian humanist, ‘ars’ and ‘disciplina’ have culture as their object [...]. Sometimes these two terms are used synonymously, but much more frequently Vives differentiates them with a certain precision. In fact, while ‘ars’ is connected with the moment of development and then of the learning (theoretical and physical) of a precise ability or technique, ‘disciplina’ is related to a semantic field where the aspects of learning, teaching, transmission and communication of a determined content are prevalent” (2008, 183). Furthermore, art and discipline move us from the level of animals to that of human beings, the very process of “*humanitas*.”

42. Noreña 1990b, ii.
43. Vives 1971, 17.
44. Ecclesiastes. 2:21–22 (*Oxford Study Bible*).
45. Vives 1971, 17–18.
46. Quintilian 2011, 2:17.22.
47. *Ibid.*, 2:15.38.
48. Quintilian recognizes three different kinds of art: theoretical, practical and productive—rhetoric draws upon all three, but especially the last (2011, 2:18.1–2).
49. Vives 1971, 18.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*, 28.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*, 28–29.
56. *Ibid.*, 29.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*, 29–30.
60. See Quintilian 2011, 1. Preface.4–5.
61. Vives 1971, 33.
62. Allusions to Quintilian abound, with more references to him than any other writer cited.
63. Vives 1971, 90. Note: The second part of this quotation comes from Aristotle, *Politics* 1:1.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*, 90–91.
66. See Quintilian 2011, 1:1.4–11.
67. Vives 1971, 91.
68. In this regard, some linguists believe that English may fulfill the role that Latin once did.
69. Elsky 1999, 404.
70. See Genesis 11: 1–9 (*Oxford Study Bible*).
71. Vives 1971, 92.

72. Ibid.

73. See Quintilian 2011, 1.1.12.

74. Vives 1971, 98.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., 101; see Quintilian 2011, 2:2.4–5.

77. Ibid., 103; see Quintilian 2011, 2:2.5–8, who describes the teacher as a source of nutrition.

It is likely that Vives’s suggestion, here, comes as a result of his study with Erasmus, whose *De Copia* Vives surely read.

78. Ibid., 106; see Quintilian 2011, 1:2.28.

79. Ibid., 107.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid. See Quintilian 2011, 1.3.1 and 2.4.8–9.

82. Ibid., 108.

83. See Quintilian 2011, 10:3.10.

84. Vives 1971, 108.

85. Ibid., 49. See Quintilian 2011, 10.1 for similar views on appropriate authors to read.

86. Ibid., 49, 51.

87. See Quintilian 2011, 1:1.28. Note: Similarly, Quintilian writes later in the *Institutio* (10.3.1) that “practice in writing, which is attended with the most labor, is attended also with the greatest advantage.”

88. Vives 1971, 108.

89. Yeo 2008, 119.

90. Pliny the Younger 2001.

91. Henderson 2002, 268.

92. Stansbury 1999, 53: “By the third century, such devices [notebooks] were also in use in Christian circles in the form of *Testimonia*, books of collected biblical citations.”

93. Martin 1994, 283.

94. Vives 1908, 73.

95. Noreña 1989, 100.

96. Vives 1971, 108.

97. Ibid.

98. Mack 2008, 247.
99. Vives 1971, 108.
100. Ibid., 37.
101. Ibid., 109–110.
102. Noreña 1989, 100.
103. Watson 1971, xxxvii.
104. Quoted in Watson 1971, xxxix.
105. González González 2008b, 359.
106. Quintilian 2011, 10.2.2.
107. Vives 1971, 283.
108. González González et al. 1992, 182. The heading of the *De Tradendis* reads “*Ioannis Lodovici Vivis Valentini De tradendis disciplinis seu de institutione Christiana liber primus*” (“Ioannis Lodovici Vivis Valentini on the delivery of instruction on Christian principles”); and the ending states “*Librorum de tradendis disciplinis sive de doctrina Christiana finis*” (“This is the end of the books on the delivery of instruction on Christian teaching.”)

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