

Living Latin In Rome

by James McGlone

I have considered myself a Latin enthusiast since the seventh grade, when I first began learning the language, for a host of reasons, from the sheer beauty of Latin to its special role in the cultural and intellectual tradition of western civilization. Perhaps the biggest reasons I am so drawn to Latin, though, come from my Catholic background. The Church was where Latin first truly came alive for me, as I learned to go to Mass and pray in Latin. As a Catholic, I embrace Latin in a particular way as part of my heritage, as the language of countless saints, and as a bond joining me to the continuous tradition of the faith through the centuries.

The Paideia Institute's Living Latin in Rome program, in which I participated this past summer, was an exceptional opportunity across the board. With its outstanding faculty, enthusiastic and engaging students, and thrilling programming all around Rome and its environs, I am sure that St. Anselm, were he alive today, would say that LLiR is a Latin program *quo maius cogitari nequit!* Furthermore, I found that the program had a special impact on its Catholic students, despite have no religious affiliation itself.

Unfortunately, it all too common to find in the classics world a certain prejudice against Christian Latinity as somehow second-rate compared to a narrowly defined, pre-Christian "golden age." No such bias is to be found at the Paideia Institute, however, where Christian and pre-Christian literature are studied side-by-side with equal avidity. For example, the program's site visits took the class not only to great classical sites like the Roman Forum and Horace's Villa, but also to the magnificent Basilica di San Clemente and the monastery of Monte Cassino. I will always treasure the memories of reading with my classmates about Aquinas' final hours in the very room in which he died, about Peter's "Quo Vadis?" vision of Christ on the Via Appia, and about St. Monica's last days as described in the *Confessions* just a few feet from where she died in Ostia Antica. Other optional events made possible by Paideia, such as Mass celebrated in St. Peter's by one of our teachers, Fr. Dan Gallagher, further enriched what the program offered to its Catholic students.

Outside of Paideia's own programming, the chance to visit Rome for the first time made a huge impact on me as a Catholic. The other Catholics in the class and I often used the class's site visits around Rome to explore new churches, and much of our free time each week was likewise spent seeking out the incredible Catholic treasures of the city. A day off spent exploring Assisi with a few classmates and near-daily trips left at least as much of an impression on me as any of my coursework this summer. To the Catholic student, Living Latin in Rome is truly not only a Latin experience but also an extended pilgrimage.

It is also a program that, in its own way, offers a very favorable impression of the faith to non-Catholic participants. Even though Paideia is not a religious group, the nature of the program is such that it cannot help but impart a respect for the history of Christendom by engaging firsthand with some of its great achievements in art and literature. At one site visit, for example, the whole class worked together to read, translate,

and chant the Tantum Ergo, all interspersed with an explanation of the Eucharist. Throughout that episode, there was no sense of proselytizing under the guise of Latin instruction. Rather, it was all a very natural part of Paideia's effort to make Latin come alive, for how else can one come appreciate of Aquinas and his great hymn, if not with this sort of activity?

I could praise Living Latin in Rome program to no end for its impact on me as both a Latinist and a Catholic. I only hope that it continues to have this same impact on many successive generations of summer students. In fact, since returning home I have told many of my Catholic friends that they should start learning Latin, if only so that they can apply to this program! Having been a part of it myself, I firmly believe that Paideia's project will bear much fruit, and indeed is already doing so.