



The Catholic Tradition of Classical Education

with Dr. Andrew Seeley

Lesson 4: Hugh of St. Victor

Outline:

Catholic Classical Education purpose

- To examine church experience and teaching on education and how it's prompting modern day renewal.
- St Augustine explains how the liberal arts hones our ability to have interior self-vision and a vision of the spiritual realities that are home. But the liberal arts are also important in serving the intense, deeply meaningful reading of scripture.

Hugh of St Victor and learning to read

- Well known in education for writing *The Didascalicon*, where he ruminates on treatment of the seven liberal arts and how they impact the life of learning.
- “How do the seven liberal arts work within a whole life of learning?” - excerpt from *The Didascalicon*, in *Renewing the Mind*.
- The *Didascalicon* is a not a book about the liberal arts but rather reading it as a text that generates wisdom, virtue, and initiation into the life of philosophy.
- One of Hugh's main lessons focuses on teaching young how to read worthwhile books fully and completely in an impactful way that we may or not understand.
- **Example:** Dr. Andrew Seeley used to be quite the avid reader. He read rigorously and enthusiastically throughout his childhood. But when he attained an education, he realized that he was devouring not reading, not taking the time to study and digest the words of the authors, not allowing them to influence his imagination. So he was not able to understand them on a level as detailedly as they merit.
- If you can produce students who can read best traditional authors with thoughtfulness and delicacy, then you have maximized their interior powers, and prepared them to mature further later. And if they don't learn that, it is a great pain.

Key natural endowments

- Hugh of St Victor is presenting his whole treatment of liberal arts and a life of learning and how to read scripture as a book about reading. “We have key natural endowments and these are developed by practice in a life of discipline.”



- These natural endowments are: I) the aptitude we have for learning and understanding and receiving and noticing. II) the memory, the power of fruitfully retaining what we've learnt and encountered.

The Aptitude

- The aptitude is trained through practice, which involves reading and meditation. A careful reading follows a methodical order. The order seems to be a system that teachers should guide their students through, though it's also the kind of habit that students should also cultivate in their own preparation.
- When going through a text, these are some important questions.
 - **Are we understanding certain words?**
 - **Are we missing any vocabulary?**
 - **Do we see the detail, and not just the general picture?**
 - **What are the main points the author seems to be trying to communicate?**
- Text example 1: The Beatitudes:
 - **He said:**
 - 3
**“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**
 - 4
**Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.**
 - 5
**Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.**
 - 6
**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.**
 - 7
**Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.**
 - 8
**Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.**
 - 9
**Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.**
 - 10
**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**
 - Go over words like 'Meekness', what does this mean? Understanding vocabulary can make a lot of difference in understanding the text.



- Reflect on the larger message content. What is the Lord trying to convey or instruct us to do? One example is that we are not meant to act in vengeance or arrogance or defense of honor.
- Gives way to discussions on the Lord's nature and our environment, for example, poverty. One conclusion could be that we must have the humility to turn to God and others for help.
- Look at the context too. The Lord is presenting the Beatitudes before the people on a mountain, which is reminiscent of Moses and the elders going onto a mountain too. This image is of Christ being a new Moses, acknowledging the Law and representing himself as a model for us.
- Text example 2: Cave allegory in Plato's Republic
 - Seeley usually asks students to picture a cave. Who and what occupies the cave? You have to pay intricate detail to the dimensions, such as the walls of the cave.
 - Once you have the settings of the cave secured, you start questioning them. What does the fire in the cave mean? What do the images on the wall mean? These questions are what lead us to a richer meaning that the author has.
 - Then it's important that you come to the stage of meditation. It will bring you past a surface level appreciation, and bring you closer to the aptitude of learning.
 - Often the case that reading an intro can be a hindrance because you will have pre-formed ideas before you confront the text. Your limited understanding will keep you from seeing significant details and questions of the text directly.

The Memory

- Memory has a tremendous importance in classical education. Developing memory, for that Hugh recommends gathering and retaining through reduction to a brief orderly outline, what you've learned. Take what you've read, whatever discipline it is, and organize it into a segmented outline.
- Developing aptitude through careful reading, developing memory through reducing to a short outline, these are the two main things that Hugh focuses on in teaching and learning.
 - All of this are fruit within a life of discipline. It begins with a humble mind. (For instance, the karate kid realized that his teacher has taught him a set of moves through the frustratingly repetitive chore 'Wax on, wax off', which humbles him and opens him up to learning more)
 - Eagerness to inquire.
 - A quiet life. Free yourself from distraction, giving yourself time to meditate on stimuli, not just during engagement of lesson, but afterwards, in one's individual time.