



Effective Upper School Teaching & Leadership with Dr. Christopher Schlect

Lesson 10: A Brief History of Classical Education

Outline:

Brief History of Classical and Christian Education

Highlighting Quintilian, Augustine, Cassiodorus, Martianus Capella, Boethius, Monastic schools, cathedral schools, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugh of St. Victor

What is this tradition and where does it come from?

- In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, Christians started movements behind family values, undermining mainstream US culture. They were split between two parties:
 - An attempt to reform culture through legal channel
 - An attempt to create a counter culture institution
- These approaches **revolve around education**. **Cultural reformation** took place in public schools, where curriculum, vouchers and charter schools were reevaluated. **Counter cultures** began homeschooling tradition and opened new Christian schools.
- Wanting to avoid mainstream schools problems, Christian parents and educators searched for inspiration and models.

Dorothy Sayers' address

- During this rediscovery period, founders of a small North Central Idaho Christian school read Dorothy Sayers' 1947 address: 'The Lost Tools of Learning'. They decided to structure their school around Sayers' program.
- **Sayers' essay** suggested an **unorthodox method, recover the medieval trivium**:
 - Grammar
 - Dialectic
 - Rhetoric
- Sayers used these three as a general overview to cover a combination of curriculum and pedagogy within education history. She also modified the trivium from its historical context.
- 1994 North Central Idaho school founder Douglas Wilson wrote a book on converting Sayers' ideas to practice. *Recovering The Lost Tools Of Learning* is popular among American Christian parents. It was the first of many literary



- works that demonstrated that parents' dissatisfaction with how Christian circles handle education.
- Their **ideal educational module** would be:
 - Historically rooted
 - Distinctively Christian
 - Intellectually rigorous.
 - **Usage of the term 'classical'**
 - Sayers' address became a movement trend; carried the hallmark adjective 'classical' in marketing catalogs and websites. 'Classical' brand can be found in educational wares, pedagogy and curriculum. Web search can reveal classical writing program, classical work sheets, classical flash cards.
 - Ironically, Sayers never used the word 'classical' to describe her educational program. The education system in her essay is more medieval than classical.

What does classical education mean and how did medieval vocabulary include the adjective 'classical'?

- Sayers advises that we go back to the sources.
- When classical Rome changed into a medieval Christian civilization, this was the period when seven liberal arts were codified.
- **Seven liberal arts:**
 - **Three linguistic arts of the trivium**
 - Grammar
 - Dialectic
 - Rhetoric
 - **Four mathematical arts of the quadrivium**
 - Arithmetic
 - Geometry
 - Astronomy
 - Music
- This was a transitional time when the ancient's legacy was being identified, reinforced, customized for Christians, who would spread it to the West. The arts were recognized among classical education folk as more medieval than classical.
- Organizing the curriculum into seven arts preserves an otherwise dying educational culture, and construct a new one in the future. **Schlect recommends reading:**
 - Augustine
 - Cassiodorus
 - Martianus Capella
 - Boethius
- The above figures adopted classical ingredients from pagan Romans and Greeks. The Pythagorean school prior to Plato developed four mathematical arts.



- Aristotle systemized the study of logic and associated logic to rhetoric. Later, the Romans modeled their rhetorical transition after his own, as well as grammatical study.

Augustine

- Augustine expresses what attitude Christians should have towards pagan classical learning, in *De Doctrinal Christiana* (Christian doctrine).
- He encourages a range of studies:
 - Study of languages (especially Greek and Hebrew, because then you can read Scripture)
 - Study of nature
 - Study of numbers
 - Study of music
 - Study of astronomy
 - Study of history
 - Study of state laws
 - Study of craft skills
 - Study of logic and eloquence.
- He commends these to Christian students with the warning to avoid pitfalls that would deviate them from the glory of God. Some studies are considered to be off-limits because they practice superstition, i.e. astrology.
- However, Augustine concludes by applying Exodus narrative: “Just as the Israelites took gold from the Egyptians at God’s command and appropriated it for godly use, so Christians can appropriate certain aspects of pagan learning to serve the truth.”

Cassiodorus Senator

- This advice segues into Cassiodorus Senator’s work *Institutiones Divinarum et Saecularium Litterarum*. He lived in the era known as antiquity to historians. His life and career argue for why the older way of distinguishing between the ancient and medieval world is “misleading”. He is both ancient and medieval.
- Cassiodorus commission Christians to preserve knowledge. While Augustine assumed his audience could access secular sources of information anytime, Cassiodorus understood that these institutions were not going to last. He instructed Christians to continue the process of learning, not only by transferring important texts into libraries, but by choosing the ones of high priority and value.
- Cassiodorus’ work is a learning compilation as well as an acquisition guide for librarians. He delegated learning towards several general subject disciplines for learning, including outlining the trivium into grammar, rhetoric and dialectic. His work institutes divine and human learning that marks out Book I and Book II, respectively containing each learning.
- **Divine Learning** included scripture and scripture commentary, listing canon scripture and a lot of theologians and church fathers who commented on it.



- He also suggested study of history which provides context, or study of practical arts, like growing herbs, which helps sustain monastery.
- In **Human Learning**, Cassiodorus codifies the trivium and quadrivium. This was the early introduction of the term trivium into the vocabulary and history of education.
- Laying Sayers' essay next to Cassiodorus would amplify their differences. We would see her educational terminology that Cassiodorus would not understand.
 - Sayers says, "The grammar of History should consist, I think, of dates, events, anecdotes, and personalities," and, "The grammar of Mathematics begins, of course, with the multiplication table..." Don't these quotes indicate a departure from Cassiodorus as to what "grammar" even means? After all, Cass. locates history within "divine letters," and he explicitly places multiplication within the quadrivium's art of arithmetic.
 - Sayers says, "This reminds me of the grammar of Theology....At the grammatical age, therefore, we should become acquainted with the story of God and Man in outline..." Here I renew my query as to whether Sayers is radically redefining grammar, while noting that theology falls on the "divine readings" side of Cassiodorus's curriculum. So in addition to grammar, is Sayers also reconceptualizing the place of theology in the curriculum?
 - Sayers says, "Let us now quickly review our material and see how it is to be related to Dialectic. On the Language side, we shall now have our vocabulary and morphology at our fingertips; henceforward we can concentrate on syntax and analysis (i.e., the logical construction of speech)..." For Cassiodorus, syntax plainly falls within the purview of grammar; it is not the stuff of dialectic. Again, isn't Sayers playing fast-and-loose with the trivium as it was historically conceived?

Martianus Capella

- His purpose was less effectively Christian.
- He produced a fantasy allegorical text that grew popular during the Middle Ages, *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (Marriage of Philology and Mercury). It depicted a wedding banquet that illustrated the seven liberal arts as beautiful bridesmaids. Each one explains why they are essential to education and life.
- C.S.Lewis is a familiar reader of allegories but Capella's allegory was bizarre even for him.
- Lewis' comment on MC: "This universe which has produced the bee, orchid and the giraffe, has produced nothing stranger than Capella. He is a fanciful compiler of ancient learning and has preserved it in the form of the seven liberal arts."
- Comments that MC is the kind of scholar who tends to collect useless information. His allegory is a weird collection of learning that unsystematized, like a collection in an attic



- Lewis continues his reflection on Capella's *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, saying, "I have heard the scholar defined as one who has a propensity to collect useless information, and in this sense Martianus is the very type of the scholar. The philosophies of others, the religions of others—back even to the twilight of pre-republican Rome—have all gone into the curiosity shop of his mind. It is not his business to believe or disbelieve them; the wicked old pendant knows a trick worth two of that. He piles them up all round him till there is hardly room for him to sit among them in the middle darkness of the shop; and there he gloats and catalogues, but never dusts them, for even their dust is precious in his eyes." (98-99).
- Despite this critique, Capella's dense text is one of the most popular Western writings on Education for a thousand years.

Thomas Becket

- In 1155, Plantagenet King Henry II appointed Thomas Becket Chancellor of England, which places him in charge of his writing office. Six years later, he became the archbishop of Canterbury. These two roles made him gain the responsibility of chief educator in the realm.
- **How was this school organized?**
 - He would instill liberal learning and court etiquette into sons of nobility. His educational style is drastically different from modern methods, i.e. no standardized tests or formal class timetables. He was always accompanied by his students, learning directly from him. His banquet table served as his most precious assembly for education. The king's knights were separated from Becket's disciples because the latter discuss theology and literature, which the former wouldn't understand. However, Becket compensates for the exclusion by serving the knights high quality cuisine. This setting doesn't match our ideas of school, but it was one of the twelfth century's greatest classrooms.
- **What did Becket teach?**
 - Conversations were in Latin, around literature, theology and philosophy. Becket was named magister (teacher).
 - Boys were discipuli (disciples), or condiscipuli (fellow-pupils or classmates).
 - Becket nurtures students to perform servitude at the table. The junior scholars who have less understanding in scholarly topics were positioned further from important seats, but were also given better portions. Becket was teaching his older students humility and encouraging the younger ones not to be disheartened by their experience. If one of the students spoke exceptionally, Becket honored them with his own cup and dishes.
- **Becket and his students**
- Becket doesn't have favorites among his disciples, and recognized student excellence. His direct behavior and speech influenced his students indefinitely for the better, without relying on curriculum or source material.



- “Thomas Becket the teacher was a force of nature, somewhere between the kind of force that drives a mother to feed her child, and the force of a storm front coming up the seacoast. Becket was as gentle as he was irresistible. His character shaped the culture that surrounded him, the culture that his students inhabited. And the students were shaped after the pattern of their great teacher.” - Schlect
- “Let us turn back the pages of our new exemplar and continue to read in it. For **acts of virtue** are certainly **read more fruitfully in men than in books**, just as **deeds speak more effectively than words**.” - one of Becket’s students.

John of Salisbury and Hugh of St. Victor

- John of Salisbury and Hugh of St. Victor were strong characters whom, during the “twelfth century renaissance”, pushed forth a liberal arts movement for education, through philosophy and theology. This period was where intelligence became increasingly rampant. Their writings could be compared to Martianus Capella and Cassiodorus.
- “These authors are near-contemporaries of one another. Both represent important intellectual changes in the west. John of Salisbury’s *Metalogicon* encourages renaissance of attention to Aristotle’s works, which inspires scholasticism. Hugh of St. Victor’s *Didascalicon* helps construct scholasticism, a shift in the nature of reading—from approaching a text as a proxy for its author, to approaching a text as a compilation of thoughts or ideas.” - Schlect