



Digging Deep: A Primer on Classical Christian Education

By L. Jerry Nelson

Introduction

Once we understand the necessary framework for cultivating a biblical worldview, the Christian must then begin the process of determining what type of education best compliments this framework. In other words, what is the most effective scope and sequence, within the framework, that cultivates the mind to develop those habits suitable for thinking biblically about all things? How do we arrive at those habits of minds? Just any education will not due. Only the education that trains students to think critically, cultivates their natural ability, and instills those necessary skills essential for great thinking. If the goal is Christian thinking and communicating, then the education that best facilitates this end must be used.

Before the Christian teacher can develop Christian thinkers and communicators, they must first become Christian thinkers and communicators themselves, and begin to think Christianly about all areas of life, including pedagogy. The cultural-synthesis of Americanism and Christianity has yielded at least two generations of Christians with a utilitarian view of education. Economics has been the primary goal of many of Americans' push for educational reforms. Not to say that this is not a legitimate goal, but it is not the end of pedagogical practices for the Christian. Although many individuals place money as the chief end, this is not the chief end of man?it is to glorify God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. How shall we glorify God if we serve two masters? Although this idea is perpetuated in culture, Christians must make it their goal to place God at the center of their educational reality. Notwithstanding, education practices will always mirror the goals of the nation. Since Christians are properly citizens of another kingdom, they operate with respect to its directives. The Christian?s educational aims are wholly fixed on Jesus, which has been commissioned by him and for him. Again, how does the Christian fulfill this commission? Through the best means possible ? the cultivation of necessary habits of mind properly trained to rightly divide the word of truth and the preparation of disciples ready to give a reason for the hope that drives them to do the things that they do.

The Classical Education is the best education available to develop those habits of mind necessary for the evangelical to think biblically about the world and produce biblically authentic responses for all those who inquire. The Classical Education is centered on the study of Latin; although it is a dead language, it provides the best training for developing proper habits of mind. The apology for Classical Education is made from its historically documented effects on civilizations past. The Founders and Framers of the United States of America were classically trained. Many of the artisans and great writers were classically trained, producing a rich anthology of literature and works of art that are authentically American. This same Classical Education has been the foundation of all great nations. If Great Nations need great leaders, then great leaders need to undergo rigorous training and intellectual development.

The Classical Education prepares its submissives to think critically and respond within the cultural context reasonably. For the Christian it gives a deeper understanding of the word of God, beyond its culturally affected language. It also gives the Christian the ability to articulate those meanings in his or her own vernacular, and possibly in other modern languages. Classical Education, in essence, equips students with the tools to explore the world, to spend a lifetime dialoguing with the great minds of the past, and with a biblical worldview, to respond authentically and reasonably within a given cultural context. Classical Education serves as a means by which the believer develops the essential skills, not only to present the gospel intelligibly, but to create a culture that is authentically Christian by teaching its constituents to think biblically about their environment, ultimately shaping a biblical worldview that predicates their actions. Classical Education standards are very much the same as many others, yet it presents the material as a unified whole. The standards consists of the following: the classical languages of Latin and Greek, arithmetic and mathematics (including pre-calculus), English, Classical, Christian and Modern Studies, Science and Logic, the Modern Languages, and the Arts. Below is a brief explanation of each standard:

The Classical Languages

The study of Latin and Greek are the foundations of the Classical Education. Latin and Greek combined comprise seventy percent of the English language. Many of the multi-syllable words students encounter are Latin and Greek in nature. Students who learn Latin and Greek at an early age continuing through college preparation will develop the habits of mind and the vocabulary necessary to study the modern languages of French, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, and Italian. It also lays a foundation for studying other languages such as German and Russian. Students of Latin will have a much easier transition into various discipline requiring the knowledge of Latin and Greek (i.e. Law and Medicine). Those aspiring to be evangelists or pastors will have the skills necessary to probe the depths of God's word. Over and above students will be given

the key to reading and understanding the great works of the past?in their original languages.

Arithmetic and Mathematics

Historically, Classical Education has been divided into the *Trivium* and the *Quadrivium*. The *Trivium* comprised grammar, rhetoric, and dialect. The *Quadrivium* comprised arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. Where Latin symbolized the whole of the *Trivium*, Mathematics symbolized the whole of the *Quadrivium*. The goal is to lead students through a slow and steady mastery of arithmetic facts, leading to a formal study of algebra and geometry. The studies include the historical and biographical context that link the subjects to the broader scope of history.

English Studies

English Studies correspond to the ancient grammar and rhetoric strains of the *Trivium*. It encompasses a wide range of areas: reading Instruction, penmanship/copywork (and recitation mainly emphasized in the primary grades) literature, composition, rhetoric, and essays. English studies seek to expose the students to Classical English literature and history while teaching the necessary skills of critical reading, orthography, composition, and rhetoric.

Classical Studies

Classical Studies seeks to understand the culture from which the classical languages emerged. It is important to note that culture has an effect on the language and the language itself has an effect on the culture. Any student attempting to learn the classical languages without a historical backdrop will find their learning incomplete to say the least. Much of what we understand to be American has Greco-Roman roots. The ultimate goal is an in-depth study of key examples of classical drama, poetics, and philosophy.

Christian Studies

Christian studies introduce the Bible and Christian theology. Again in keeping with the educational principle of *multum non multa*, the students are introduced to key bible stories in the primary years progressing to a study of key New Testament books. Christian studies naturally integrate the study of Latin and Greek as students will have to translate verses of Scripture from the Vulgate and Greek New Testament.

Modern Studies

Where Christian Studies focus on the history and literature of Christianity and Biblical Theology, the modern studies provides the larger picture of history surrounding Christianity. The goal is to introduce students to national history and basic geographical concepts, leading to a detailed study of American History.

Science

Andrew Campbell, in *The Latin-Centered Curriculum* notes, "In the ancient world, the natural sciences were a branch of philosophy. Unfortunately, today science is often set

in opposition to the humanities, "hard facts" against fuzzy, non-quantifiable ideals. Such a view divorces the sciences from the intellectual matrix that ultimately gives them meaning. He goes on to describe science within its historical context, noting that it is "the least "traditional" of all the subjects discussed so far." Furthermore, science should be treated as an ever-changing discipline with new discoveries that reshape an individual's worldview. The goal of science in the Classical Education is to achieve scientific literacy with the "ability to make informed judgments about scientific matters." In the primary grades, students explore the natural world at their leisure, moving to a survey of the various scientific disciplines, leading to scientific literacy and the ability to view science in relationship to the humanities.

Logic

Classical Education should, if properly administered, result in many common questions that all the ancients have asked, but at the same time give the students the facility to effectively answer those questions. The study of logic not only enhances a student's ability to ask sound questions, but it also enhances their ability to formulate reasonable and thorough responses. The study of formal logic would begin in the late grammar school years with a mastery of the basics of traditional logic to a mastery in material logic and logical fallacies, resulting in the ability to apply logical principles to philosophy and theology.

Modern Languages

Since Latin and Greek are the best training for studying the modern languages, they should be left to secondary years. Students who have mastered Latin will not have much difficulty learning the Romantic languages (Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, and French). Students' transition to other languages, such as German and Russian, and also modern Greek, will be much smoother.

The Arts

The Arts include music, dance, drama, drawing, and photography. Holding true to classical roots, the arts are vital to education because they encompass all other disciplines, bringing them to life within the arts. Therefore, the study of the great masterpieces is emphasized in the classical education. The idea is that the more students are exposed to great works of arts (music, photography, painting, dance, and drama), the more likely they will produce great works of their own.

The Focus of the Classical Education

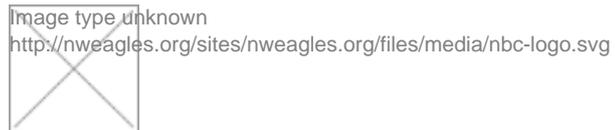
The Classical Education is unapologetically pared-down from the modern curriculum. It focuses in on the habits of mind that are essential to produce great thinkers, communicators, and leaders. With an acute focus on skill development and acquisition of learning tools, Classical Education seems to serve the Great Commission best, in that it best equips each student to love God with all of his or her heart, mind, soul, and strength.

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Our Mission

Northwest Christian Academy exists for the purpose of assisting the local church in fulfilling Christ's command: "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." This institution is built upon the framework of Reformed theology and seeks to provide a biblical worldview to equip students to advance the kingdom of God.



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