Volume XXXI
Issue 1
Fall
2023

CLASSIS

Sine Doctrina Vita est Quasi Mortis Imago

FEATURING

"Sayers Through the Looking Glass: *Reexamining the Lost Tools of Learning*"

AMERICA'S CHRISTIAN
CREDIT UNION

Does your bank love the Good, the True, and the Beautiful?

Join **America's Christian Credit Union**, the financial partner that shares your values and supports your mission.

AmericasChristianCU.com/Schools

Personal Banking • School Banking

2100 E. Route 66 | Glendora, CA 91740 | Toll-Free: 800.343.6328

Volume XXXI | Fall
Issue 1 | 2023

CLASSIS

A JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

CLASSIS is a journal promoting a new "old way" and is designed to edify, support, and encourage educators around the world who seek to recover classical Christian education in the twilight of the West.

Publisher: Association of Classical Christian Schools (ACCS)

Editor-in-Chief: Devin O'Donnell

Designer and Editor: Susan Williams

Advertisement: Rachel Ortego

Association of Classical Christian Schools
317 West 6th, Suite 211, Moscow, ID 83843

Phone: (208) 882-6101

Editorial: dodonnell@accsedu.org

Advertisement: rortego@accsedu.org

Web: www.classicalchristian.org

Cover Art: *Laöcoon and His Sons*, Vatican Museums

Hard copies of Classis are available to ACCS members and by subscription. If interested, please contact Olivia Unger for more information about subscriptions at ounger@accsedu.org.

HERZOG FOUNDATION INSTITUTE

The Herzog Foundation Institute provides training retreats and workshops to address relevant topics within the Christian education sphere. These events are led by experts in subjects such as marketing, donor development, and culture building. Offered each month in Kansas City, Missouri and other locations throughout the U.S., Institute events are plentiful and fully funded by the Herzog Foundation for Christian educators and administrators of all denominations.

To learn more or register for an event » scan the QR code.

The Herzog Foundation Institute is focused on developing Christian education leaders, organizations and teachers.

Leadership Development Series:

- Donor Development Training Retreat
- Marketing & Enrollment Training Retreat
- Strategic Planning Training Retreat
- Boarding Leadership Training Retreat
- Culture Building & People Management Training Retreat

Organizational Development Series:

- Legal Workshop
- Crisis Management Workshop
- Financial Management Workshop
- Campus Safety Workshop

Teacher Development Series:

- Science Teacher Training Retreat
- Civics Teacher Workshop
- Bible Teacher Training Retreat
- Cultural Conversations Training Retreat

Training Retreat = Multi-Day Event **Workshop = One-Day Event**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I

Headline Articles

SECTION II

Old Voices

Friends, Colleagues, and Fellow Classical Christian Educators,

As ACCS approaches thirty years of operating as an organization, it's fitting to return to the document that animated the latest historical renaissance of classical learning within the Christian tradition. Given as a talk at Oxford in 1947 and then published as a journal article in 1948, "The Lost Tools of Learning" was only a footnote in the literary corpus of Dorothy Sayers' works. Doubtless, she could not have guessed that so much discussion and consequence would have issued from one of the smallest and, up until thirty years ago, lesser known works. She was, after all, a first-rate Oxford scholar, a crime novelist, an accomplished poet, and a translator of medieval literature. (She considered her *terza rima* rendering of Dante to be her finest work, a magnum opus popular among Dante scholars and which is still in publication today.) But for many, our introduction to Dorothy Sayers begins with her novel thoughts on education, which we are pleased to make available here once again.

This brings us to the special theme of this fall issue of *Classis*. Her contributions to English literature notwithstanding, Sayers' "Lost Tools" imagines how modern man might return to an older educational vision, to which the history of Western Culture owed its life. We do well to remember that Sayers was herself a classical Christian scholar. If she saw then how the classical tradition was in the process of being slowly dismantled and quietly discarded in her own day, then it's possible that the originality of her "insight" was her greatest gift, a kind of prophetic talisman she thought to pass to those living in a world that would later need it. The analogy here seems consistent with her own metaphor, as if she recommends we find a way to reuse the forgotten "tools" of learning, just as Bilbo and company made good use of the preternatural swords that they found rotting in the empty troll dens. Perhaps in some mystically prophetic gesture, Sayers knew that future generations would need an educational compass to navigate the complicated wasteland of the modern world. And we are grateful for this. Those searching for the "ancient paths" (Jer. 6:16) would find direction and wise counsel in her words. Those parents who were asking "where the good way is" for the education of their children would uncover the cultural trail that once lay hidden in leaves and undergrowth. Douglas Wilson—who might arguably be the person most responsible for Sayers' popularity amongst evangelical Christians in the latter twentieth century—was one of those parents. Later in this issue, we are glad to have him recount his own version of stumbling upon Sayers so many years ago as he was thumbing through the pages of *National Review*.

But what was Dorothy Sayers great "insight"? There were several, but what might be regarded as her greatest observation was the natural correlation between the arts of the Trivium and the stages of child development. Particular reflection has centered on Sayers and the application of her ideas and on understanding what "classical" really means. This revaluation may have started long ago as a small conversation among scholars, but it has since grown to the pitch and clamor of a large family reunion, with the noise of excited voices arguing about sports or politics. Was Dorothy Sayers right? Was she aware of the novelty in her approach? Is what she advocates in need of any correction? How much authority should we place upon her?

As a lady of Oxford, she would have perhaps welcomed these questions, inviting a critical yet gracious discussion of her thesis, provided the judgments included sharp distinctions, careful inferences, and solid evidence. The following disputation presented in these humble pages proceeds in that spirit. This is why I am so grateful for the scholarly contributions of Christopher Schlect (PhD), Andrew Selby (PhD), and David Diener (PhD). Under the guidance of Dr. Schlect, a scholarly exchange and critique of Sayers' educational insights was delivered at the Repairing the Ruins Conference 2023. The historical depth of their observations is balanced with a charitable tone and magnanimity toward their subject. We are pleased to publish their papers here, as well as their critical responses to each other.

If doubt surrounding the classical integrity of Dorothy Sayers has risen, then let us hear the voices of both the scholar and the schoolmaster. Let us consider hard questions. We do Sayers a disservice if we read her essay without raising hard questions. It may be possible for Sayers to be right and for our own understanding of her to be refined. Two things can be true at once.

Non Nobis,

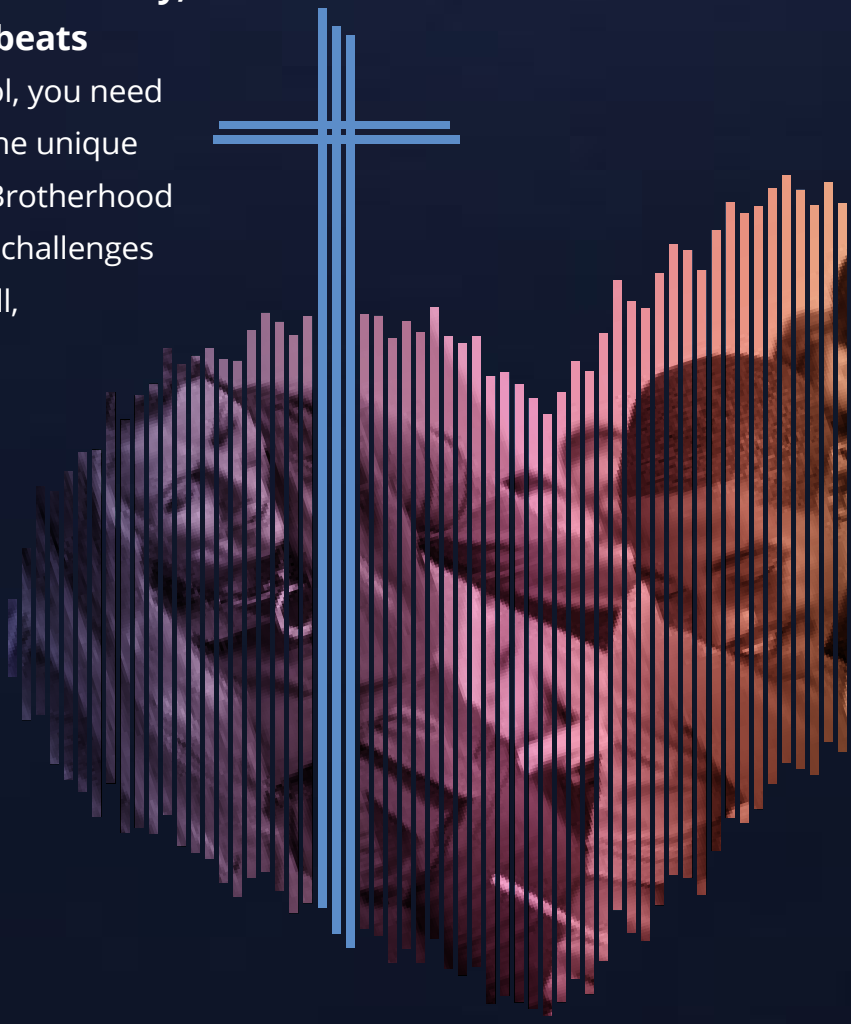
Devin O'Donnell, Editor-in-Chief

ACCS exists to promote, establish, and equip member schools that are committed to a classical approach in the light of a Christian worldview.

There's an eternal difference between school and Christian school.

Your school is unique in its curriculum, community, and pursuit of excellence—but its heart beats because of your faith. To protect your school, you need an insurance team member who understands the unique risks of education in a Christian school setting. Brotherhood Mutual embraces your mission—including your challenges and vision for the future—and helps protect it all, from the inside out.

- Property insurance
- Liability insurance
- Workers' comp
- Commercial auto
- Accident insurance
- Risk management
- Mission travel
- Payroll
- Health benefits
- and more



BROTHERHOOD MUTUAL®

brotherhoodmutual.com | 888-674-4060

ACCS REGIONAL ADMINISTRATORS SUMMIT

SHARING WISDOM GROWING FRIENDSHIPS

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, Join us for a 2023 Fall Regional Administrators Summit!

THE ACCS LEADS THE WAY in training and development for classical Christian educators. Now with multiple locations across the country, this year's Summits provide more opportunities for us to build relationships with fellow administrators and discuss the real-world issues we face within our school communities.

- **Connect** with nearby colleagues
- **Discuss** important issues
- **Pray** for one another
- **Bear** one another's burdens
- **Equip** yourself to fight for the souls of your students and the security of your school

2023 DATES

SEPTEMBER 25–26
NC: Cary Christian
TN: Highland Rim Academy

SEPTEMBER 28–29
FL: Geneva Classical Academy
AL: Trinity Christian School

OCTOBER 5–6
MI: Bloomfield Christian School
PA: Philadelphia Classical School

OCTOBER 12–13
TX: Regents School of Austin
MN: Schaeffer Academy

OCTOBER 16–17
CO: Arma Dei Academy
KS: Classical School of Wichita

OCTOBER 23–24
CA: Trinity Classical Academy

NOVEMBER 9–10
WA: The Oaks

Visit **classicalchristian.org/regional-administrative-summits**

Contact Devin O'Donnell at **dodonnell@accsedu.org**

HORD
ARCHITECTS

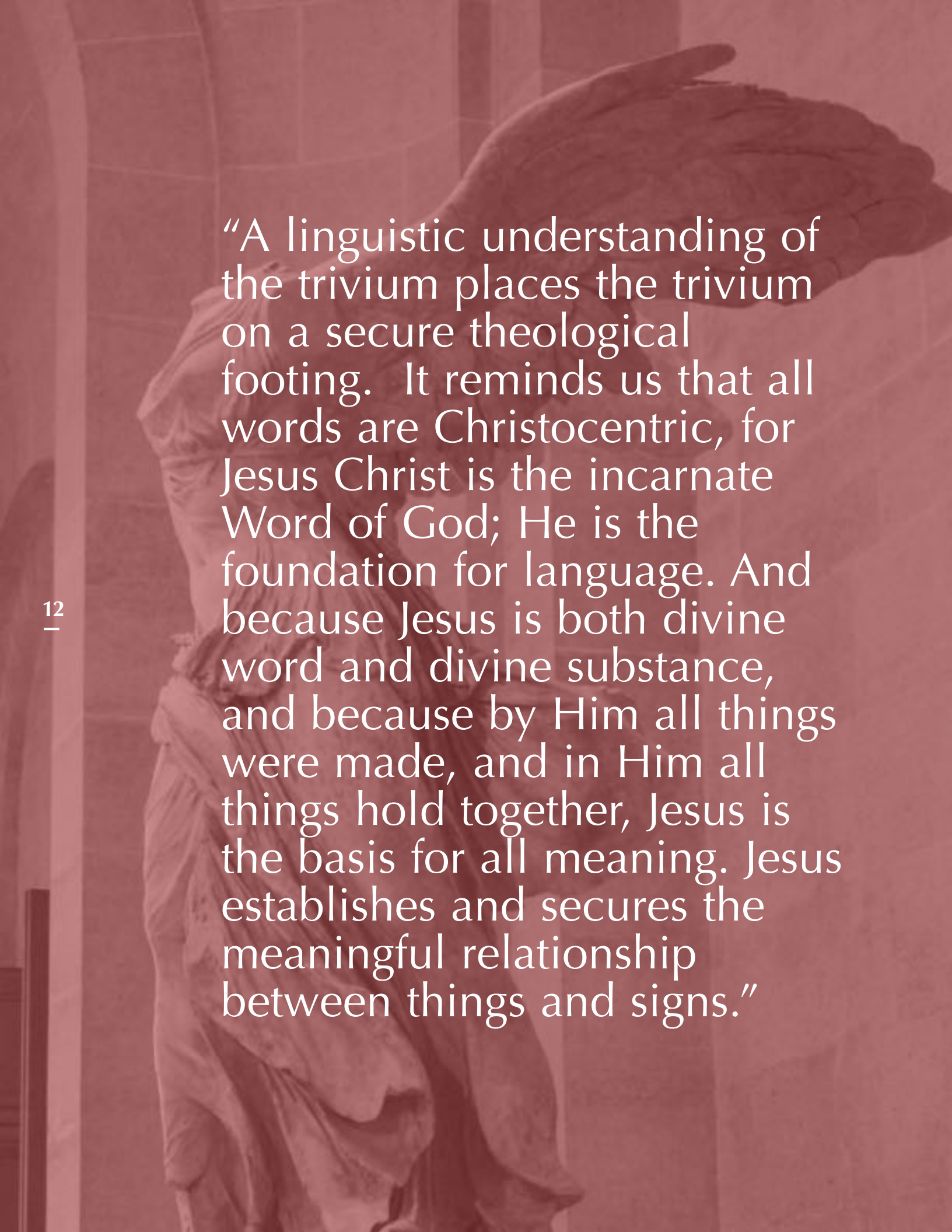
www.hordarchitects.com
901-527-9085

SERVICE THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

"WE SHAPE OUR BUILDINGS AND AFTERWARDS OUR BUILDINGS SHAPE US."

—WINSTON CHURCHILL

ARTICLES



“A linguistic understanding of the trivium places the trivium on a secure theological footing. It reminds us that all words are Christocentric, for Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word of God; He is the foundation for language. And because Jesus is both divine word and divine substance, and because by Him all things were made, and in Him all things hold together, Jesus is the basis for all meaning. Jesus establishes and secures the meaningful relationship between things and signs.”

The Grammar of My Morning Coffee

Dr. Christopher Schlect, *New St. Andrews College*

If you have spent any time in classical education circles over the past few decades, you will have encountered Dorothy Sayers. Her essay, "The Lost Tools of Learning," holds a canonical position in renewal of classical Christian education. Sayers directed us to look back in time, back to the medieval trivium, as a model of sorts to emulate. Her essay is an exposition of the historical trivium together with her imaginative proposal for aligning the trivium to the stages of a students' maturity.

The trivium that Sayers puts forward is, she claims, the trivium we find in history – the trivium that prevailed in "the medieval scheme of education – the syllabus of the schools."[1] To be sure, there is more to Sayers' essay than her historical claims (most notably, her common-sense insights about the phases of childhood development). Yet her historical claims do figure prominently in her program. Thus she invites a question: *Is the trivium that Sayers describes the trivium we find in history?* To answer this question, we need to lay Sayers' formulation of the trivium alongside witnesses from the past. As we will see, such a comparison exposes an important confusion in the way Sayers construes the trivium. My aim in this paper is to meet her confusion with clarity.

Here is where Sayers' confusion lies. Historically, the arts of the trivium were construed to be linguistic in nature. The liberal arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric concerned language and how language works. But Sayers' presentation obscures the trivium's orientation around language.

In order to see Sayers' confusion, we need to review a distinction that was important to ancient and medieval educators. This is the distinction between things and signs, between matter on the one hand and words on the other – more technically, between *res* and *verba*.[2]

To illustrate: the item on the left is a sign, whereas the item on the right is a thing.

dog 

The word "dog," on the left – the sign – is a linguistic object, whereas the actual dog on the right is a material object. (Suppose for our purposes that what you see on the right is an actual dog rather than a picture.) The object on the right – the *thing* – is the material object that the sign on the left signifies. We humans fashion signs in order to describe reality, and our ideas about reality, as we communicate with one another about *things*. *Things*, then, are the reality itself (or our ideas about

1. Dorothy Sayers, "The Lost Tools of Learning," in Douglas Wilson, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning*, Turning Point Christian Worldview Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 149.

2. The distinction emerges as an important concept in Cicero's writings, and Quintilian gave it classic expression: "Every utterance, at any rate every one by which meaning is expressed, must have both content and words [*rem et verba*]," and again, "Every speech consists either of what is signified or of what signifies, that is to say, of content or of words [*rebus et verbis*], Quintilian, *The Orator's Education: Books 3-5*, trans. Donald A. Russell, vol. 2, 5 vols., Loeb Classical Library 125 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), III.3.1 and III.5.1.

reality); whereas *signs*, or languages, arise from our effort to describe that reality.

This distinction between things and signs may seem esoteric, but ancient and medieval teachers thought it was important. Augustine is a case in point: he organized his seminal work on education, *On Christian Teaching*, around the distinction between things and signs.[3]

The arts of the trivium – grammar, logic, and rhetoric – are linguistic arts. They deal with *signs*, and not so much with *things*.[4] It is the peculiar business of these three arts to consider words in all their proper arrangements and meanings. It is because these three arts share a linguistic orientation that we group them together into a trivium.

So if we want to recover the medieval trivium, and we should want to, then we need to reckon the arts of the trivium as linguistic arts.

Sayers, to her credit, captures this thrust in the early paragraphs of her essay. She rightly associates the art of grammar with language, and she highlights the Latin language.[5] But later in her essay she muddles the distinction between things and signs, and begins treating grammar as though grammar pertains to things. When Sayers mentions "the grammar of history," she is not pointing to the linguistic aspects of history, not to the interpretation of historical texts; she points instead to the *things* of history – to battles, dates, people, events, and the like.[6] Such items comprise the facts of history, or the constituent elements of history, but they are not the grammar of history – at least, not according to the historical sense of grammar.

Similarly, when Sayers refers to "the grammar of mathematics," she has in view the *things* of mathematics – numbers, quantities, sums, and multiples. She is not treating mathematics linguistically, as grammar would. Sayers might have considered symbolic languages of Arabic and Roman numerals, of leibnizian and newtonian notation, or other signs that refer to mathematical ideas. Instead, she refers to actual mathematical things.[7]

When Sayers presents the trivium, she vacillates between, on the one hand, the study of language and meaning, and on the other, the study of facts and things. This confusion has led many of Sayers' readers to disassociate the arts of the trivium from language study. This marks a departure from the historical trivium, though it arises from a natural reading of Sayers.

Douglas Wilson is an example. Wilson is one of Dorothy Sayers' most important interpreters, and today's resurgence of classical education owes a great debt to him.[8] Note that Wilson follows Sayers when he treats grammar as substantive rather than linguistic. "First we have grammar – the accumulation of factoids," he writes. "Then comes dialectic – the sorting out of facts into truth and goodness. Then rhetoric is the presentation of that truth and goodness in a lovely form."[9] For Wilson, grammar is not about language and its meaning, at least not primarily; rather, it is "the accumulation of factoids." It could be factoids about anything. When Sayers refers to the grammar of all subjects, she might just as well point to the grammar of auto mechanics, the grammar of offensive schemes in football, or the grammar of my morning coffee.

3. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green, Oxford World's Classics (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), see especially book I.

4. Because signs, by their very nature, refer to things, the art of grammar does entail some consideration of things. But when grammar considers things, it treats of things not in themselves--contra Sayers—but of things insofar as they are objects to which signs refer.

5. Sayers, "The Lost Tools of Learning," 150, 154ff.

6. Sayers, 156.

7. Sayers, 156.

8. The contemporary resurgence of classical and Christian education—including the important adjective "classical" in the name for this program of education—was built upon the foundation laid by Douglas Wilson, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning: An Approach to Distinctively Christian Education*, Turning Point Christian Worldview Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991); Susan Wise Bauer and Jessie Wise, *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home*, Fourth edition (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016). Bauer and Wise have revised their work to a fourth edition (2016), and Wilson released his more mature formulation in *The Case for Classical Christian Education* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003). Both Wilson and Bauer-Wise grounded their vision for the trivium in Dorothy Sayers' "Lost Tools of Learning." Were it not for the foundation first laid by Wilson, and extended by Bauer-Wise, we would not even be having this conversation in the first place. Apart from their pioneering work, and with due credit to Sayers, neither the journal *Classis* nor the association that publishes it, ACCS, would exist today. To the degree that I quibble with Wilson in the present essay, it is a quibble that stands upon his shoulders, for I am entering a conversation that he began. My readers should regard my interaction with Wilson here in the appreciative spirit of a *festschrift*.

9. Wilson, *The Case for Classical Christian Education*, 133.

When Wilson turns his attention to logic, because logic deals with the arrangement of facts, he removes language syntax from the domain of grammar, where authorities in earlier eras had placed it, and relocates it to the domain of logic.[10]

To show how this formulation departs from the historic trivium, we need to call upon some historical witnesses. Due to limited space, I will focus our attention on the art grammar, just as Sayers does, though a similar historical survey could just as well be mustered around the other arts of the trivium, logic and rhetoric.

We open our historical survey with Quintilian, the greatest of the Roman educators. Speaking of grammar, he writes, "This subject comprises two parts – the study of correct speech and the interpretation of the poets."[11] For Quintilian, grammar concerns language. Studying grammar nurtures a student's facility with language – whether he builds with language or interprets language – and thus grammar involves both verbal and written composition, together with the interpretation of texts.

Another witness is Cassiodorus. It was Cassiodorus who helped settle the roster of liberal arts into the familiar seven we now know.[12] We can also credit him with transforming early monasteries into institutions for learning and preserving texts. Here is Cassiodorus' formulation of grammar: "Grammar is the skill of speaking stylishly gathered from famous poets and writers; its function is to compose prose and verse without fault; its purpose is to please by the impeccable skill of polished speech and writing."[13] For Cassiodorus, as it had been for Quintilian, grammar is concerned with language, and it involves composing language well and interpreting language well. Cassiodorus emphasizes the fact that grammar deals with the interpretation of texts, for, he says, it treats language that is "gathered from famous poets and writers." We find similar formulations of grammar in other early educators, including Boethius, Alcuin, and Isidore of Seville.

First, when we restore a linguistic understanding of the trivium, especially grammar, we more securely connect early instruction to stories – stories about people and about the world. This is because grammar teaches students to see meaning. This is how grammar, linguistically understood, shapes their intuitions and affections.

The same notion of grammar carried forward into the scholastic period, the heyday of Europe's great cathedral schools. Here too we see that grammar deals with words and how words connect to one another in order to carry meaning. Hugh of St. Victor is a representative voice of the scholastics. "Grammar, simply taken," Hugh writes, "treats of words, with their origin, formation, combination,

10. Wilson writes, "To see that a horse is not a duck belongs to the grammar stage. To see that a horse is a suitable animal to use in battle, and that a duck is not, belongs to the dialectic stage," Wilson, 135. Elsewhere he says, "And then each subject has a dialectical aspect, a certain logic to it. For example, in English this second stage is where you would learn how to diagram sentences." Douglas Wilson, "The Sayers Insight," Substack newsletter, *Educator in Residence* (blog), March 31, 2023, https://dougwils.substack.com/p/the-sayers-insight.

11. Quintilian, *The Orator's Education, Books 1-2*, trans. Donald A. Russell, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), I.4.2.

12. Cassiodorus was not the first to identify and delimit the roster of seven liberal arts; for this development we credit Martianus Capella. But Martianus's formulation gained lasting traction from the fact that Cassiodorus adopted it.

13. Institutions II.1.1. Cassiodorus, *"Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning"* and *"On the Soul,"* trans. James W. Halporn (Liverpool University Press, 2004), 175.

inflection, and all things else pertaining directly to utterance alone."[14] Again, the primary concern of grammar is less with facts and information; like the other arts in the trivium, grammar is concerned primarily with language.

For the sake of historical completeness, we can extend our cloud of witnesses to the educators of the early modern era. This brings us to the humanities curriculum promoted by leading educators in the Renaissance. Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini is a prominent representative. He writes, "*Grammatica*, as Quintilian says, means "literature" when translated into Latin, and has three parts: the science of correct speech, the explanation of the poets and other authors, and composition."[15] I could just as well cite other luminaries from the same era, including Vergerio, Bruni, and Guarino, as well as notable educators of the reformation era, including Philip Melanchthon, Johann Sturm, and Jon Amos Comenius. I could also extend the survey up through the Puritan William Ames. My central point is this: the prevailing witness of great educators in the western tradition, dating back to the classical era and extending well into the Christian era, is that the study of grammar is fundamentally about language. Grammar has less to do with facts and more to do with meanings and linguistic associations. Returning to Augustine's educational categories, grammar is less about *things* and more about *signs*.

Does this have any bearing on the way we teach? – or on what we teach? To illustrate how it does, I will highlight one medieval text on grammar, a text by Alcuin, an educational leader who flourished at the turn of the 9th century. Alcuin held an influential position in Charlemagne's court, where he developed an educational program that became a model throughout Europe (or more precisely, across the civilization that was beginning to take shape as Europe). A key source for Alcuin's program is a work known as the *Disputatio Pippini*. Alcuin composed this text in dialogue form; it is an instructional conversation between Alcuin himself, in the role of teacher, and his young pupil, Pippin, who was Charlemagne's son. Alcuin prepared this text and circulated it as a model to show what teaching grammar actually looks like. Here is how the dialogue opens:[16]

Pippin: "What is a letter?"

Alcuin: "The guardian of history."

Pippin: "What is a word?"

Alcuin: "The revealer of the mind."[17]

Pippin: "What forms a word?"

Alcuin: "The tongue."

Pippin: "What is a tongue?"

Alcuin: "A whip of breath."

The opening lines indicate that the dialogue offers instruction in grammar, for it begins with grammar's most basic building blocks, letters and words. From the outset, the dialogue addresses language and meaning. Let's keep reading:

Pippin: "What is a day?"

Alcuin: "The impetus to labor."

Pippin: "What is the sun?"

Alcuin: "The splendor of the world, the beauty of the sky, the grace of nature, the dignity of day, the giver of hours."

Pippin: "What is the moon?"

Alcuin: "Eye of the night, generous with dew, the seer of storms."

Pippin: "What are the stars?"

Alcuin: "A painting of the heavens, the steersmen of sailors, the elegance of night."

14. Hugh of St. Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor, Records of Western Civilization (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1991), II.28.

15. Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, trans. Craig W. Kallendorf, vol. 5, The I Tatti Renaissance Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), sec. 41.

16. The version of the *Disputatio Pippini* quoted throughout this essay is this: Alcuin, *Disputatio regilis nobilissimi iuvenis Pippini cum Albino scholastico,* translated by a team led by Anneliese Mattern, including Carter Ehnis, Emily Kapuscak, and Anneliese Mattern; with editorial assistance from Caleb Harris, Joseph Roberts, and Christopher Schlect. This translation is based on the Latin text edited by W. Williams, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum 14* (1869): 530-555.

17. The word used here is *animi*, which could also be translated as "soul." We employ this translation of *animi* elsewhere in the work, as in the definition of friendship "an affinity of *souls*," based on the context of the word.

Notice that grammar deals with more than just the parts of speech (although grammar includes parts of speech); grammar also considers associations and meanings. Here we see how the study of grammar, as Alcuin conceived it, cultivates a student's intuitions about language – that is, about proper and improper associations, about meanings, about sense and nonsense. Put another way, the art of grammar is about storytelling in the broadest sense; it teaches students to tell a true, good, and beautiful story about the world. See again how this orientation continues to play out in the dialogue.

Pippin: What is rain?

Alcuin: The conception of the earth, the mother of crops.

Pippin: What is fog?

Alcuin: Night during the day, the eyes' toil.

Pippin: What is the wind?

Alcuin: A disordering of air, flowing of waters, drought of the earth.

Here the student receives instruction in categories, associations, and meanings. These meanings are remarkably thick and rich, the stuff of beautiful instruction. It even gets better.

Pippin: What is life?

Alcuin: The joy of the fortunate, the despair of the downtrodden, the expectation of death.

Pippin: What is death?

Alcuin: An inevitable event, an uncertain journey, the tears of the living, the crux of covenant, the thief of man.

Pippin: What is a man?

Alcuin: A slave of death, a passing wanderer, a guest in this realm.

In these passages we witness a striking contrast to Sayers' notion of grammar, a notion that reduces grammar to things or factoids considered in themselves. In Alcuin's vision, grammar deals primarily with signs, with language, and with the way language carries meaning. (I recognize that things are not altogether out of the picture in grammatical study. For signs invariably relate to things, as it is the nature of a sign to gesture to a thing. So signs and things are always connected. Though they are connected, we should nonetheless distinguish them from one another.)

This linguistic orientation of grammar helps us see why early educators insisted that grammar is elementary instruction suited to poets, storytellers, and philosophers. This notion of grammar, unlike what Sayers presents, secures grammar as one of the liberal arts. As an art, grammar is a type of productive reasoning, and what a grammatical artist produces is verbal meaning. Because grammar builds up a student's facility with meanings and associations, educators of the past saw grammatical study as a pathway to wisdom. This is why Alcuin's dialogue, elementary as it is, looks a whole lot like wisdom literature.[18]

John of Salisbury, the great 12th-century scholastic, echoes this philosophical vision for grammar in his introduction to the topic. "Grammar is the cradle of all philosophy," he says,

> and in a manner of speaking, [grammar is] the first nurse of the whole study of letters. It takes all of us as tender babes, newly born from nature's bosom. It nurses us in our infancy, and guides our every forward step in philosophy… [Grammar] is the first of the arts to assist those who aspire to increase in wisdom. For it introduces wisdom both through ears and eyes by its facilitation of verbal intercourse. Words admitted into our ears knock on and arouse our

18. Quintilian, *The Orator's Education, Volume II, III.3.1 and III.5.1.*

> understanding….This art [i.e., grammar] accordingly imparts the fundamental elements of language, and also trains our faculties of sight and hearing. One who is ignorant of it cannot philosophize any easier than one who lacks sight and hearing from birth can become an eminent philosopher.[19]

For John of Salisbury, grammatical study places students on the road to philosophy.

John's sentiment brings us back to Alcuin's *Disputatio Pippini*. As we approach the end of the dialogue, we see the student, Pippin, growing mature. Now that Pippin is trained in grammar, he grasps how language works, how language carries meaning. The student is well on his way to wisdom. Alcuin sets up the final exchange by reflecting on names and naming.

Alcuin: How can something exist and not exist?

Pippin: It exists in name and not in actuality.

The difference between names and actuality, which is underscored here, echoes the distinction between things and signs. Notice also that the student is now the one who is answering the questions. Pippin, is maturing as a student; he is becoming like his teacher. He is coming to understand signs.

Alcuin: "What is the silent messenger?"

Pippin: "It is what I hold in my hand."

Alcuin: "What do you hold in your hand?"

Pippin: "Your letter, teacher."

Alcuin: "Read joyfully, son!"

This is how the dialogue finishes. Recall that the dialogue had opened with questions about the building blocks of language, "What is a letter?" and "What is a word." Now it concludes by pointing to what those building blocks form into: a complete text. In this case, the text takes the form of a letter, an epistle written by the teacher and given to his student. The letter is now in Pippin's hand; a complete text is now in the student's possession. Thus our student has received a gift, the gift of understanding of texts, together with a capacity to search out their meaning.

This linguistic orientation presents a much richer vision for grammar than Sayers' material notion of "the grammar of all subjects." The preceding survey of grammar, though brief, offers enough historical testimony to lay alongside Sayers so that we see the contrast. Sayers has exchanged a linguistic understanding of grammar with a rather novel construction of grammar as the study of things – the study of basic facts, or the study of rudimentary information. A similar confusion extends to other two arts of the trivium, logic and rhetoric, which I will leave for another day.

Why should we care about this? Does it matter that we understand grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric to be linguistic arts? I offer four reasons why it matters, though there are probably more.

First, when we restore a linguistic understanding of the trivium, especially grammar, we more securely connect early instruction to stories – stories about people and about the world. This is because grammar teaches students to see meaning. This is how grammar, linguistically understood, shapes their intuitions and affections.

Second, because the trivium deals with meanings and linguistic connections, it is organically tied to the classical idea of memory. To form one's memory is to form connections and associations. When we remember something, what happens is this: a certain image, or a sign, calls up another idea to our mind. Those of you who are familiar with memory palaces are acquainted with the classical practice of storing images against backgrounds in your mind. Memory is essentially a manipulation of signs, and grammar teaches students how memory works.[20] Sayers was right to associate memory with grammar. Had she

19. John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium*, trans. Daniel McGarry (Philadelphia, PA: Paul Dry Books, 2009), I.13.

20. The foremost ancient instruction on memory is found in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. See Harry Caplan, trans., Rhetorica Ad Herennium, Loeb Classical Library 403 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), III.xvi-xxiv. For a helpful scholarly overview, see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

construed grammar as a linguistic art, she might have brought out this association more richly.

In the third place, when we restore a linguistic understanding of the trivium, we place language and texts at the center of instruction. If you ask most premodern Christian educators, "What is the preeminent function of grammar?" They would answer that grammar serves the proper interpretation of scripture. The study of grammar addresses questions such as, How can Jesus be a lamb? And if Jesus is a lamb, how can he also be a good shepherd? And if he is a good shepherd, how can he also be a bridegroom? Such questions point to ideas that are deeply true, yet they are true not in a literal or factual sense; rather, they are true grammatically, for grammar deals with meanings and proper associations.

We classical educators cherish texts in our instruction, and we cherish the scriptures above all other texts. Just as it was for our medieval predecessors, so our own commitment to texts should lead us to embrace a linguistic understanding of the trivium. Such a historically-informed understanding of the trivium will help us tighten the relationship between scripture and our everyday instruction. Augustine, Cassiodorus, and Hugh of St. Victor would certainly approve.

Fourth, a linguistic understanding of the trivium places the trivium on a secure theological footing. It reminds us that all words are Christocentric, for Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word of God; He is the foundation for language. And because Jesus is both divine word and divine substance, and because by Him all things were made, and in Him all things hold together, Jesus is the basis for all meaning. Jesus establishes and secures the meaningful relationship between things and signs (cf. Colossians 1:15-20).

As we turn from Christology to anthropology, we also recognize that a language-oriented trivium underscores the role of language as a key tool in human hands for taking dominion. Man is God's image-bearer who gave names to the animals. From this foundation we can establish a biblical basis for culture. To build culture is to produce works of human artistry that are imbued with meaning—faithful meaning, which is faithful naming.

I am grateful to Dorothy Sayers for directing us back to the historical trivium. In conversations about educational philosophy, I position myself as an ally of Sayers, and in important ways I am a living product of her insights. One thing I appreciate about Sayers's essay is how deeply she cares about categories and definitions. I think she would welcome my call for clarity in how we understand the trivium, and how we talk about it, and especially when that clarity arises from historical witnesses. The result is not a wholesale departure from Sayers' understanding of the trivium, but an important clarification that corrects against her tendency, and that of her followers, to disassociate the trivium from language study.

Christopher Schlect, Ph.D., has worked in classical and Christian education for over thirty years. He is Senior Fellow of History at New Saint Andrews College, where he also serves as Head of Humanities and Director of the college's graduate program in classical and Christian studies. At NSA he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in history and historiography, education, and classical rhetoric, among other subjects. Schlect has also taught history at Washington State University and presently serves on the faculty of Gordon College's Classical Graduate Leadership program. In addition to his work at the collegiate level, Schlect has decades of experience as a high school teacher and Mock Trial coach. He serves classical and Christian schools around the country through his consulting and teacher training activities. He and his wife, Brenda, have five grown children — all products of a classical and Christian education, as are their children's spouses — and the number of their grandchildren continues to grow.

When thinking is outlawed, only the outlaws will think.

Big Ed is America's bloated education system built on government money. Don't opt-in. The key is to see through the facade of "free stuff" that Big Ed offers. Big Ed fundamentally undermines Biblical truth and grooms the rising generation in doubt and unbelief. Wear the mask, get the shot, don't think for yourself, do what we tell you — or else.

At New Saint Andrews College we offer an education that frees people. We offer logic and language, hard work and joyful courage, old books and godly professors —time-tested resources that equip you for any vocation.

Apply Today

Selby Response to Schlect

I would like to respond to the part of Dr. Schlect's presentation, in which he stated that "Sayers vacillates between seeing the trivium as the study of language and meaning, and a trivium as the study of facts and things. This confusion has led many of Sayers' readers to decouple the trivium from language study. This understanding departs from the historical trivium, but it follows a natural reading of Sayers." The examples also show that in the historical trivium, "…grammar is less about things and more about signs."

Now, some might wonder whether it matters very much for, say, a third-grade classroom that the medieval trivium is about facts or arts, about content or about gaining skill in language study. Schlect gave four helpful implications of why an approach that is more faithful to a historical understanding of the trivium is better than the part of Sayers' essay in which she emphasizes the inculcation of facts. And indeed, I believe that if one chooses the medieval trivium over Sayers' "Grammar-of, Logic-of, Rhetoric-of" model, one's classroom, K-12 will look quite different, especially over time as these presuppositions are worked out to their logical implications. In addition to the four implications that Schlect offered, I'd like to add one more: I have found that grammar school teachers who practice in the framework of the grammar as a linguistic art direct more peaceful and manageable classrooms on average than those practicing the grammar-as-rudimentary-information model.

Let me begin with the problems that can sometimes arise in the "grammar-as-fact" approach, thinking particularly about grammar school teachers, especially in younger grades. The teacher in this approach is perhaps given 7-8 subjects and told to teach her students a certain amount of knowledge in all these subjects. How does she know which ones to choose? If a day's instruction time is shortened because of, say, a chapel or the need to reward students with extra recess time, then should she choose history or geography? Spelling or phonics? Science or Bible? Many of us end up making this decision on our own personal preferences or the preferences of the students. But it's hard to give a principled rationale for these choices at the end of the day. Many teachers feel harried by the need to get to so much content every day. Teaching 1,000 years of medieval history to fourth graders can feel like an insurmountable challenge! That is especially true when teaching in a way that they can truly understand and therefore retain.

In addition to this problem of prioritization of the "grammar" of one subject over another, another problem that arises is the unease of the cram-pass-forget cycle. What I mean by "cram-pass-forget cycle" is when students memorize certain amounts of information for a test, take the test, and then promptly forget what they've learned since the facts are not reused often or integrated into a larger whole. Students cram, pass, and forget for one unit, and then they move on to the next and do the same thing. In summary, if a particular school teaches a wide variety of subjects, especially at the Grammar School level and that school's teachers struggle to *cover* everything, odds are that this school has imbibed Sayers' "Grammar of" idea rather than the idea of the art of grammar as linguistic study.

One of the practical benefits of turning to the classical ideal of the art of grammar is its *simplicity*. The students must study *language* to study the trivium: no more, no less. Returning to a fully classical idea of the trivium frees teachers up to concentrate on one main thing: language, and the skills of decoding language in reading and encoding language in writing. Having this singular focus grants teachers better parameters for making decisions about what to teach every day. Now we have a principled reason to make curricular

decisions on a shortened day: If it builds the students' linguistic skills, it is worthy and the better it builds those skills, the more time and attention it should get. Having those principles creates less stress and more peace.

The focus on Grammar as an *Art* as opposed to grammar as facts-and-things or content, does not mean that *content* is unimportant. Content is crucial to forming linguistic skill. So even if we are persuaded that Sayers has misguided us on the nature of the Trivium, let's not ditch the reading and memorization of beautiful poetry, excellent stories, and deep Bible study. These are essential to building a *copia* or abundance of knowledge in students so that they can comprehend more and more wonderful and complex texts, so that they can understand their world.

One can really perceive this fact in the dialogue of Alcuin. He answers "grammatical" questions with appeals to "fact," not in the sense of scientific fact—though he covers a few of those—but the "facts" of the connotations of various terms. It's a fact that it can properly be said that "the moon is generous with dew" because the nighttime, which is ruled by the moon, is when dew descends on the earth. But that "fact" is ordered toward understanding the world of words, and through the understanding of words students are brought to understand the world.

Diener Response to Schlect

Thank you, Dr. Schlect, for this thoughtful analysis of what the Trivium is throughout the tradition and how that compares with Sayers's presentation of the trivium. I would like to offer a couple of thoughts to build on what Dr. Schlect has said, but first I want to offer one picky clarification. Dr. Schlect discussed the difference between *signs* and things, noting that "signs are conventional in nature. . . . *Things* are the reality itself. . . . *Signs*, or languages, are the product of human reflection upon that reality." I just want to clarify that while it is true that language is one kind of conventional sign, there are other kinds of non-linguistic and even non-conventional signs as well. In addition to words, there are non-verbal conventional signs, such as a red octagonal sign with a white boarder which means to stop, or your clapping at the end of my talk to communicate what a great job I have done. In addition, there are both natural and formal signs that are not conventional. Smoke, for example, is a purely natural sign that something is burning, and a mental image is a formal sign of the reality it represents. Within the context of discussing the trivium, the verbal arts, clearly words are the most relevant type of sign. I just want to be clear that within the study of signs, semiotics, there are other types of signs as well.

Dr. Schlect has argued that Sayers's basic confusion is that she seemingly conflates (or at least muddles) the distinction between signs and things, between the arts of the trivium as the study of language/meaning and as the study of facts/reality. This is a helpful analysis, and it is one way of explaining how Sayers's presentation of the trivium is a distortion of the historical tradition. I would like to build on Dr. Schlect's analysis by explaining this problem in slightly different terms. Another way to explain the distortion is to say that Sayers does not

properly recognize the arts of the trivium as just that – as arts. What is an art? Within the tradition, a common definition is that an art is rational knowledge ordered toward production. Thus grammar, like logic and rhetoric (and many other arts) is a body of rational knowledge that is ordered toward the production of something. Rhetoric is a body of rational knowledge that produces persuasive discourse; logic is a body of rational knowledge that produces rational thought; medicine is a body of rational knowledge that produces physical health; etc. This is a common way of discussing what an art is throughout the tradition. In the *Gorgias*, for example, the critique of rhetoric as an art is made (in part) on the basis of the claim that rhetoric is not the *knowledge* of anything in particular and that it does not *produce* anything unique to it.

The problem here is that Sayers's discussion of grammar as, in Wilson's terms, "the accumulation of factoids," distorts this view of grammar as an art. The art of grammar involves a certain sphere of knowledge about language, and thus to talk about the "grammar of history" or the "grammar of mathematics" is out of step with the tradition's understanding of grammar as an *art*. To put it another way, grammar as an art has a limited domain of study and is not merely one aspect of any discipline whatsoever. History, just like Dr. Schlect's morning coffee, does not have a "grammar." Relative to the tradition, that is simply a misuse of the term.

To close, I'd like to add a fifth reason to Dr. Schlect's four for why these distinctions and definitions matter. Understanding grammar, logic, and rhetoric as the verbal arts that they are is important because verbal communication is constitutive of who we are as human beings. Consider the following passage from Quintilian's *The Orator's Education*, for example, in which Quintilian discusses the power of speech as fundamental to our nature as human beings:

> "God, the father of all things and the maker of the universe, distinguished man from other living creatures that are subject to death by nothing so much as the faculty of speech. . . . Making soft beds, weaving nests, rearing and hatching the young, even storing up food against the winter, and other works which we cannot imitate (like making honey and wax) – all these are perhaps signs of a certain degree of Reason; but since the creatures which do these things lack speech, they are said to be dumb and irrational."[1]

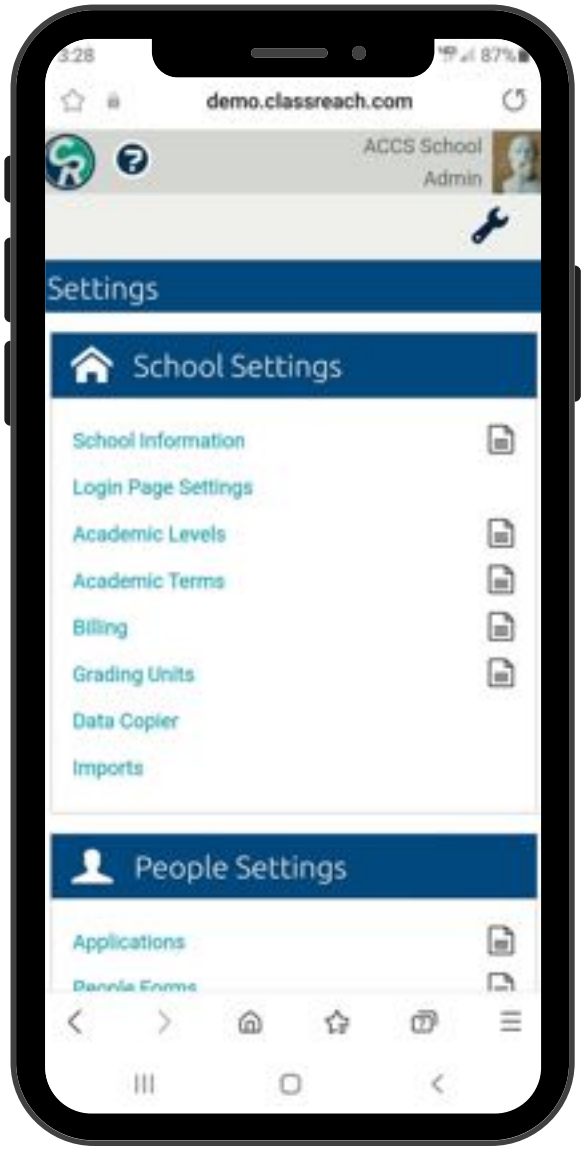
The verbal arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric are important within the classical tradition because they help us to become more fully human through the proper use of language. Treating grammar as the mere collection of factoids thus not only is a misrepresentation of the tradition but also tarnishes the full value of this art and the rationale within the tradition of classical education for why it should be studied.

1. Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell, vol. 1, *Books 1-2*, Loeb Classical Library 124 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2.16.

CLASSREACH

FROM APPLICATION TO GRADUATION

DO MORE WITH A FLEXIBLE SYSTEM



Communicate

- Announcements
- Messages

Share Curriculum

- Student Agendas
- Assignments

Invoice Tuition

- Payment Plans
- Agreements

Ad Hoc Reports

- Transcripts
- Enrollment

CLASSREACH.COM

- Powerful
- Intuitive
- Mobile

Learn and teach America's Bible-inspired founding principles.

Studies show that Americans today are largely uninformed about the principles that shaped our nation. AHEF provides FREE award-winning, patriotic, supplemental resources for K-College teachers, families, and students.

America's Heritage
An Adventure in Liberty

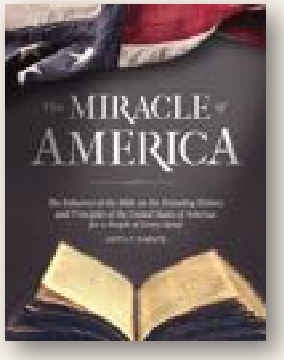
K-12 award-winning Lesson Plans focused on American Freedom, Unity, Progress, & Responsibility (FUPR™).

FREE ONLINE

America's Heritage
An Experiment in Self-Government

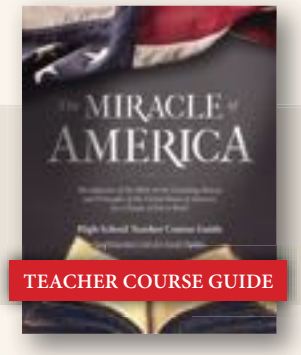
The latest and best MS and HS Lesson Plans focused on America's founding documents & principles.

FREE ONLINE



The Miracle of America
The Influence of the Bible on the Founding History and Principles of the United States of America for a People of Every Belief

The critically-acclaimed, most informative sourcebook on the Bible's connection to the American idea. A "must have" text.



ALSO AVAILABLE

The Miracle of America HS Teacher Course Guide

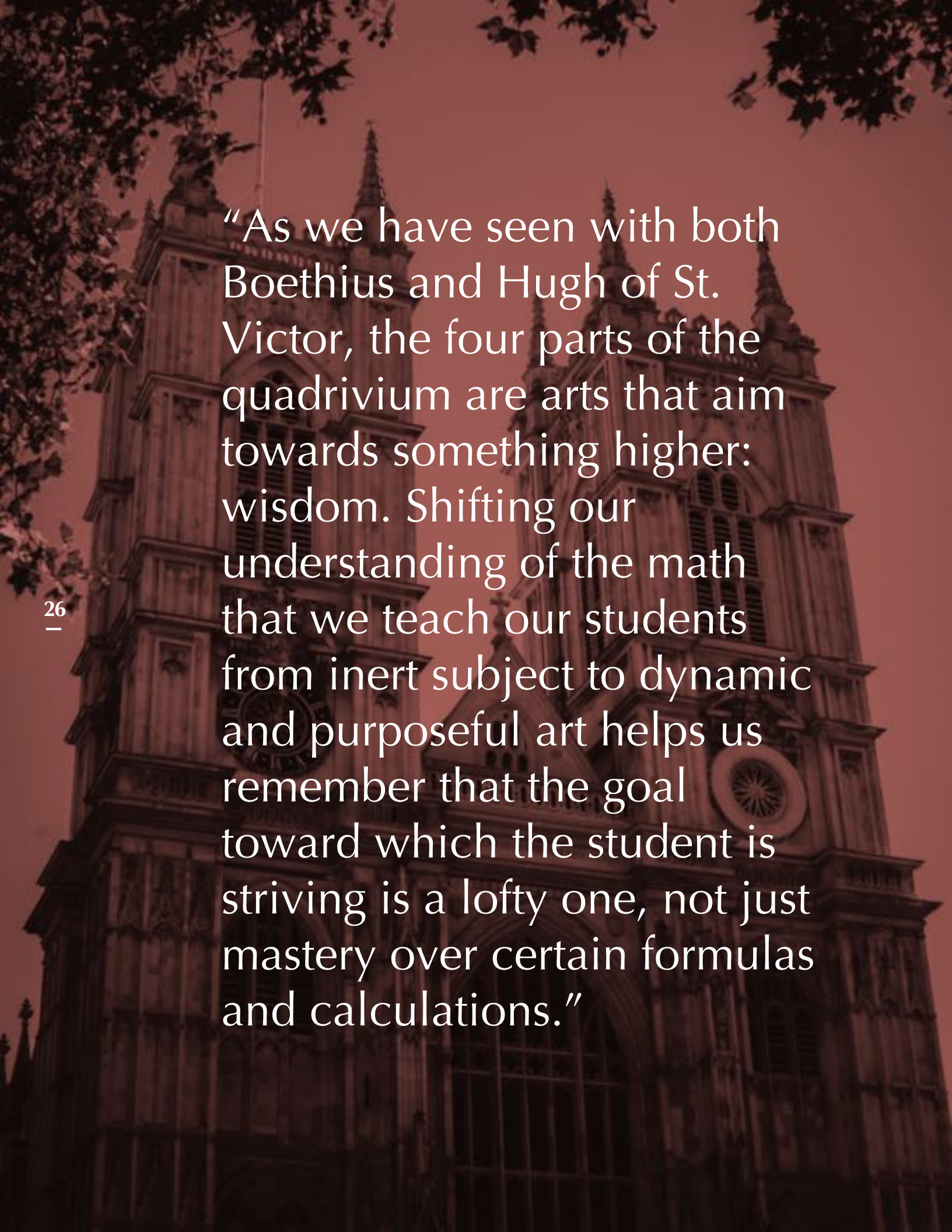
An in-depth study on America's founding philosophy, with ideas and activities for teaching *The Miracle of America* book topics as a course or units.

FREE ONLINE

AMERICAN HERITAGE EDUCATION FOUNDATION, INC.

A non-profit organization dedicated to the understanding and teaching of America's philosophical heritage—including the Bible-based principles that shaped America's foundations. A trusted non-profit educational foundation for over 25 years!

WWW.AMERICANHERITAGE.ORG



“As we have seen with both Boethius and Hugh of St. Victor, the four parts of the quadrivium are arts that aim towards something higher: wisdom. Shifting our understanding of the math that we teach our students from inert subject to dynamic and purposeful art helps us remember that the goal toward which the student is striving is a lofty one, not just mastery over certain formulas and calculations.”

Figuring Out the Quadrivium:
Math and Science Education in Sayers and the Classical Tradition

Dr. Andrew Selby, *Trinity Classical Academy*

Math and science: unpleasant hoops through which we must jump or a ticket to the upper middle class? Contemporary American education presupposes mathematics and science have as their purpose utility. They can get you through school and maybe even make you comfortably wealthy. However, math and science once occupied a different place in educational theory. The greatest proponents of math education emphasized its benefit for the soul. I myself somewhat owe the heritage of my faith to the intellectual rigor and beauty of math. Circa 1970, in his late teens, my father thought that Christianity was passé and that he could obtain truth through reading mystical texts of eastern traditions such as the Vedas of Hinduism. Simultaneously and providentially, a classically-trained high school teacher of his recommended Euclid's *Elements*, which he was working through in the old school style with a straight-edge, compass, pencil, and piece of paper. As my father read the Vedas, he experienced dissatisfaction with the lack of proof and clarity that he encountered therein, proof and clarity which were so evident in Euclid. That led to his rejection of eastern religion and his subsequent re-embrace of traditional Christianity. He attributed his re-conversion to the Holy Spirit's providential work through an ancient Greek mathematician. The intellectual precision of mathematics partially caused his return to the church. Our students benefit similarly when they experience the self-evident truth and beauty, and even the rigor, of mathematics. Learning the quadrivium puts us in touch with bracing reality. That is a point which Dorothy Sayers, a medievalist and lover of truth, would likely affirm. However, Sayers' presentation of mathematics in her essay "The Lost Tools of Learning" might harm those newly coming to classical education by reinforcing our culture's utilitarian approach to mathematics and obstructing the transcendental characteristics of the quadrivium. Specifically, Sayers potentially misleads readers in three areas: first, she mis-categorizes the quadrivium as subjects rather than arts; second, she subordinates the quadrivium to the trivium, and third, she emphasizes the pragmatic purpose of the mathematical arts over their ability to form students' minds and lead them to beauty.

Quadrivium as Arts Rather Than Subjects

Sayers mentions the quadrivium first when she presents the reader with the medieval scheme of education. She characterizes the quadrivium as "subjects" put in quotation marks.[1] Unfortunately, she does not unpack that idea any more than to state that the quadrivium ought to be studied by students at the end of their pre-university-level education[2] and that subjects proliferated beginning in the modern period.[3] From these remarks, it is not clear that Sayers understood the quadrivium to be associated with mathematics and science, but as a medieval scholar, she surely knew they were.

In fact, the term quadrivium entered into western parlance in Boethius' *On Arithmetic*. Boethius, a Christian philosopher, served as a statesman in the shambles of the Roman empire in the early sixth century. At the beginning of his seminal text on the preliminary mathematical art, he writes:

1. Dorothy Sayers, "The Lost Tools of Learning," reprinted in Douglas Wilson, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* (Crossway, 1991), 149.

2. Sayers, "Lost Tools," in Wilson, Recovering, 162.

3. Sayers, "Lost Tools," in Wilson, Recovering, 151.

> Among all the men of ancient authority who, following the lead of Pythagoras, have flourished in the purer reasoning of the mind, it is clearly obvious that hardly anyone has been able to reach the highest perfection of the disciplines of philosophy unless the nobility of such wisdom was investigated by him in a certain four-part study, the *quadrivium*, which will hardly be hidden from those properly respectful of expertness. For this is the wisdom of [the] things which [truly exist]… .[4]

Boethius refers to the quadrivium as a four-part study that leads to unchanging truth. These four parts were well known as arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. Boethius clarifies the mathematical character of these four disciplines when he explains that all physical reality can be divided into multitudes – which are groups of individual things such as flocks or a crowd of people or pebbles – and magnitudes – which are continuous entities not separated into various parts such as a mountain or a tree.[5] Think of multitudes as points that are indivisible and magnitudes as lines that can be cut into smaller parts.[6] Arithmetic deals with multitudes considered in themselves. Music is defined as the study of multitudes in relation to one another, especially proportionality. Geometry consists of magnitudes at rest, while Astronomy concerns magnitudes in motion. By investigating each of these modes of reality, the mind is prepared to find the truth.[7]

Definitions of each of these liberal arts, synthesized from a number of medieval and modern sources can be found in [Table 1.1].

It is significant that Boethius coined the term *quadrivium* to name these four studies. Significantly, they are not ends in themselves. They are studied in order to get to something higher. The Latin etymology reveals as much: *quad* is related to four, and *vium* is related to the word for "road" or "path," *via*. The quadrivium are thus studies that lead the student on a path. In speaking of the seven liberal arts, Hugh of St. Victor, a great 12th century expositor of education, declared that by these arts, "as by certain ways [*viae*], a quick mind enters into the secret places of wisdom."[8] The academic word that pairs with "ways" is "arts" and not "subjects." Subjects imply a body of knowledge. It is true that the disciplines of the quadrivium concern certain content areas having to do with number in its various forms. So each of the quadrivium could be considered a body of knowledge in that sense. But

Table 1.1: The Seven Liberal Arts

Trivium: The three ways of encountering reality through ***language***	**Grammar**: correct speech and writing and reading skills
	Logic: correct argumentation and disputation
	Rhetoric: timely use of persuasion in words
Quadrivium: The four ways of encountering reality through ***mathematics***	**Arithmetic:** art of recognizing the modes of unity expressed in discrete number
	Geometry: art of number is expressed in continuous space (deductive reasoning)
	Music: art of recognizing the real relationships among the modes of unity (study of mathematics in time)
	Astronomy: art of expressing arrays of number in systematic relationships or doing mathematics in time and space (inductive reasoning)

the same is the case for the trivium. Grammar, logic, and rhetoric each had their own famous books that teach the skills to be gained from those arts. We can conclude, then, that the seven liberal arts are bodies of knowledge put into action systematically in a way that prepares one to learn other bodies of knowledge and experience the true and the beautiful.

Therefore, Sayers may mislead when she characterizes the quadrivium as subjects, if we take

4. Boethius, *De arithmetica,* I.proemium, translated by Michael Masi in *Boethian Number Theory: A Translation of the* De Institutione Arithmetica *with Introduction and Notes* (Rodopi/Brill, 1983), 71.

5. Boethius, *De arith*, I.proem (72).

6. Cf. Euclid, *Elements*.

7. Boethius, *De arith*, I.proem (73).

8. Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. Jerome Taylor (Columbia University Press, 1961), III.3 (87).

her to mean that the specific areas of study in mathematics are bodies of knowledge that are ends in themselves and not preparatory for other kinds of learning. As we have seen with both Boethius and Hugh of St. Victor, the four parts of the quadrivium are arts that aim towards something higher: wisdom. Shifting our understanding of the math that we teach our students from inert subject to dynamic and purposeful art helps us remember that the goal toward which the student is striving is a lofty one, not just mastery over certain formulas and calculations. As Hugh writes, only those who could "claim knowledge of these seven" liberal arts "were thought worthy of the name of master" because "by their own inquiry and effort, rather than by need of a teacher" they could go on to learn other bodies of knowledge.[9] Our students gain humility and our teachers are oriented to how their teaching fits into the big picture when we understand how the quadrivium leads us onward and upward when we venture out onto its ways.

Subordination of Quadrivium to Trivium

Now that we have identified the disparity between how the liberal arts tradition understood the quadrivium and how Sayers characterizes it, we should consider Sayers's portrayal of the relationship between the trivium and quadrivium. Sayers diverges from the liberal arts tradition, when she subordinates the quadrivium to the trivium in younger education. She asserts that studies in the quadrivium were secondary to the trivium in medieval education and in her ideal education, quadrivium studies are only for "scholars," and therefore not an essential part of a classical education. Sayers's "tools of learning" are identical to the trivium, not the quadrivium, as she writes: "The interesting thing for us is the composition of the Trivium, which preceded the Quadrivium and was the preliminary discipline for it."[10]

On the one hand, Sayers makes a fair point. Students must have the ability to read to advance to word problems in mathematics or to read any mathematical text with ease and profit. Facility in logic enhances students' skill in solving the problems that are the substance of mathematics curriculum. But on the other hand, it is hard to imagine not teaching students arithmetic until they are ready for the university! What parents would send their children to a school in which the rudiments of arithmetic were purposely avoided until junior year of high school? Even the great 5th century B.C. philosopher Plato advocated for the study of calculation "at the same time as [students] learn how to read and write." The Protestant reformer Philip Melanchthon attests to similar timing in the learning of math as Plato almost two millennia later in his introduction to arithmetic of 1536.[12] In fact, to my knowledge, no thinker in the liberal arts tradition banished the quadrivium to the time after the trivium was mastered.[13]

In fact, Sayers seems to recognize this problem and course correct as the essay proceeds. When she explains the trivium not in terms of *tools* but in terms of *stages*, she mentions mathematical work both in the Grammar Stage and in the Logic Stage.[14] She even implies that in her revival of medieval curriculum, the older students in the Rhetoric Stage who lean towards the humanities should be required to take some math and science courses as well.[15]

9. *Didascalicon*, III.3 (87).

10. Sayers, "Lost Tools," in Wilson, *Recovering*, 149.

11. Plato, *Laws* 819b in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (Hackett, 1997), 1489.

12. Philip Melanchthon, "On Arithmetic," in *Orations on Philosophy and Education*, trans. Christine F. Salazar (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 96. See also Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. Donald A. Russell (Harvard University Press, 2002), I.12.1-8.

13. Quintilian does seem to be arguing against those who would push off mathematical study so that students could focus on rhetoric in I.12.

14. Sayers, "Lost Tools," in Wilson, *Recovering*, 156 and 158.

15. Sayers, "Lost Tools," in Wilson, Recovering, 161.

This leaves us wishing that Sayers had simply allowed the quadrivium to sit alongside the trivium in K-12 education. I would wager all the schools represented in this room adhere to this view. We probably agree that students should be taught as much arithmetic as early as possible, provided that the teachers are equipped to do so and good learning in the language arts is preserved. Despite her suggestions of mathematical work in the three stages, Sayers nevertheless exhibits a bias for the trivium over and against the quadrivium. This bias becomes more apparent when we consider what she thought the quadrivium was *for*, which moves us to the third point: the purpose of the quadrivium.

The Purpose of the Quadrivium

Sayers gives us scarce testimony about the quadrivium's purpose in the "Lost Tools of Learning" essay. In the Poll-Parrot period, Sayers says that learning science will "give a pleasant sense of superiority," and multiplication tables will "be learnt with pleasure." Her remarks on math in the Pert stage emphasize their connection with logic, which she hopes will allow students to see how mathematics have intrinsic connections to other disciplines. Lastly, Sayers states that the quadrivium is properly studied by those on the "scholar" track in the university.

From this evidence, we can conclude that Sayers believed math and science would give the student illumination and pleasure and that it would be useful. Indeed, Sayers's essay strongly emphasizes the pragmatic benefit or expedience of mathematics. Sayers emphasizes the utility of mathematics in two ways. The first is by the overall pragmatic tone of the essay. Sayers establishes this tone in the introduction, in which she appeals to the reader's despair over the illogical, incompetent state of social discourse. While Sayers identifies the inculcation of the trivium as the main practice that will improve argumentation and dialogue, her idea that the quadrivium-ish activities follow from and bolster the trivium suggest that math and science, too, contribute to a better society. The overall metaphor of education as recovering *tools* of learning also gestures toward expedience. Tools are useful. They help accomplish practical ends for Sayers such as not falling prey to advertising and propaganda, causing committees to run efficiently, writing with logical clarity, etc. Scientific and mathematical skills belong in the toolbox.

Instead of the quadrivium being subordinate to the trivium, the liberal arts tradition generally endorses teaching the mathematical arts at the same time as the verbal arts and rates education in the quadrivium as highly as that of the trivium. Instead of thinking of the quadrivium as primarily useful, the liberal arts tradition thinks of study of the mathematical arts as excellent mental training and even as a road to experience Beauty and God Himself.

The second way Sayers stresses the usefulness of mathematics is in her presupposition that university students can learn mathematical bodies of knowledge, presumably in ways related to their careers. Perhaps Sayers' notion of studies in higher education was more freed from concern about specific vocations in the late 1940s England than we contemporary Americans have. But even in her wonderful Lord Peter Wimsey mystery novels, such as *Murder Must Advertise* or *Gaudy Night*, Sayers portrays her non-aristocratic characters advancing in their careers on the strength of their university degrees.[16]

16. In *Murder Must Advertise* (HarperCollins, 2020), many of the employees at the advertising firm which Lord Peter investigates rise to the top because of their Oxbridge degrees, which becomes a source of spite in the office. In *Gaudy Night* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), the protagonist Harriet Vane's fictional Oxford college graduates young women who go on to successful careers.

When Sayers lays emphasis on the usefulness of mathematical studies, she is in fact consistent with many voices in the liberal arts tradition. For instance, when writing to his young students about to study arithmetic, Melanchthon appeals to "economy." He urges the boys in his school in Wittenberg to study mathematics diligently so that they do not become like the ignorant Thracians whom Aristotle claimed could not count beyond four. Melanchthon points out how important it is to be able to do calculations for running one's own private estate or conducting the business of the public.[17] Plato himself, that philosopher famous for his obsession with the heavenly realm of the forms, enumerates the mathematical arts pragmatic uses for both the individual and the city in *Republic* and *Laws*.[18]

However, Sayers puts us on dangerous ground when she stresses the expedient features of the quadrivium. The modern secular world is characterized by its wild hope that in getting systems and techniques right we can set our problems to rights. Or at least by mastering aspects of math and science we can earn a lot of money and secure a comfortable existence for ourselves. The great thinkers in the liberal arts tradition offer an antidote to the malaise of materialism surrounding us. Nearly all these thinkers orient the study of mathematics beyond mere pragmatism to include the two transcendent aims of the formation of the mind and beauty.

First, thinkers in the classical education tradition revere math for its ability to create mental discipline. The etymology of mathematics suggests as much. The Greek word μαθηματική (*mathēmatikē*), from which the English word "mathematics" is derived, simply means "studies."[19] Perhaps the first century rhetoric teacher Quintilian spoke most clearly for the tradition when he wrote of math that "it exercises [the] minds [of children], sharpens their wits, and generates quickness of perception."[20] Quintilian recognizes that mathematics has a special ability to provide mental gymnastics that seem to prepare the mind for all sorts of other mental work. Melanchthon sums it up: "And those who are even moderately trained in arithmetic will easily understand many things."[21]

Second, the quadrivium was thought by many to point to beauty and the source of all beauty: God. Boethius observed, "From the beginning, all things whatever which have been created may be seen by the nature of things to be formed by reason of numbers. Number was the principal exemplar in the mind of the creator."[22] Boethius here claims that God somehow combined number with matter to give the world the shape and order that it enjoys. While Christian philosophers still debate over the ontological status of numbers, the idea that number has its source in God and that, therefore, contemplating number can draw one's mind upward to God permeates the thinking of Christians in the classical Christian tradition. That the creation reflects God's own thoughts finds expression in various Scriptures, but perhaps none so vividly as Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God, / and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."

This is why Christians like Boethius and Hugh of St. Victor were so drawn to some of Plato's ideas about number. Plato's characters in the *Republic*,

17. Philip Melanchthon, "On Arithmetic," 92..

18. Plato, *Republic* 525b–c in *Plato: Complete Works,* trans. G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve (1142); *Laws* 819b–d.

19. Cf. Ravi Jain and Kevin Clark, *The Liberal Arts Tradition*, 3rd ed. (Classical Academic Press, 2019), 66.

20. Quintilian, *Institutio*, I.10.34.

21. "On Arithmetic," 94. Other thinkers such as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas shared a similar opinion of mathematics benefits.

22. Boethius, *De arith.* I.2 (75–76). Likely Boethius is relying on Nicomachus of Gerasa, a 2nd century A.D. Greek mathematician, whose work on arithmetic provides the basis for Boethius'. Nicomachus wrote, "All that has by nature with systematic method been arranged in the universe seems both in part and as a whole to have been determined and ordered in accordance with number, by the forethought and the mind of him that created all things; for the pattern was fixed, like a preliminary sketch, by the domination of number preexistent in the mind of the world-creating God, number conceptual only and immaterial in every way, but at the same time the true and the eternal essence, so that with reference to it, as to an artistic plan, should be created all these things, time, motion, the heavens, the stars, all sorts of revolutions" (*Introduction to Arithmetic*, I.6, trans. Martin Luther D'Ooge (Macmillan, 1926), 189.

Glaucon and Socrates, agree that studying mathematics purifies the eye of the soul and thereby draws us upward out of the cave of images and unrealities and toward reality itself.[23] The way that mathematics causes us to move from the tangible, invisible, changeable realities around us to intangible, invisible, unchanging ones prepares the mind for the deep, sometimes abstract contemplation of Beauty and even of God Himself. To echo Hugh of St. Victor, the quadrivium indeed prepares the mind for the apprehension of wisdom. Our youngest students work with manipulatives to learn addition, then the more abstract concept of place value. Eventually, they build the skills necessary to do geometry, advanced algebra, and even calculus. They start with what is visible and tangible. Then they move to a grasp of Truth and Beauty.

Conclusion

Dorothy Sayers in her famous "Lost Tools of Learning" essay says only a little about the quadrivium. What she does say might misdirect those new to classical Christian education. Instead of the quadrivium being subjects, the broad and deep classical education tradition thinks of them as ways or arts by which knowledge and wisdom are attained. Instead of the quadrivium being subordinated to the trivium, the liberal arts tradition generally endorses teaching the mathematical arts at the same time as the verbal arts and rates education in the quadrivium as highly as that of the trivium. Instead of thinking of the quadrivium as primarily useful, the liberal arts tradition thinks of study of the mathematical arts as excellent mental training and even as a road to experience Beauty and God Himself. Sayers wrote a short essay and did not have time to elaborate on these ideas, many of which I suspect that she would agree with. Whatever the depth and accuracy of Sayers' thought, those of us who are responsible for our students and who want their good, must be cautious about making curricular and pedagogical choices based on half-worked-out ideas on the quadrivium. If we harness the insights of the liberal arts tradition, our students might have their minds formed in the rigor and excellence and beauty of number, and perhaps experience God more richly and deeply than they had before. Perhaps it will even save someone's faith as it did for my father. May the God who is three-in-one bless us in that noble endeavor.

Andrew Selby has been a leader in classical education for over a decade. He has a B.A. from Biola University where he studied Great Books at the Torrey Honors College, an M.A. in Historical Theology from the University of Toronto, and a Ph.D. in Religion from Baylor University. In 2020, he published his dissertation with Gorgias Press: *Ambrose of Milan's On the Holy Spirit: Rhetoric, Theology, and Sources*. He also regularly writes and speaks on topics related to classical education and theology among other subjects. He has taught students from fifth grade through post-graduate in subjects such as Latin, rhetoric, composition, logic, history, literature, philosophy, Bible and theology. Andrew is passionate about classical Christian education but even more so about his wife, Malea, and his five children. He loves reading novels, signing hymns and Psalms in four-part Harmony with his church family, teaching adult Sunday School, hiking the hills of Santa Clarita, finishing a good workout, fishing, eating and drinking well, and discussing Great Books and the Bible.

23. See *Republic* VII, 514a–b and 527c. On this point also see the exposition of Jeffrey S. Lehman, "The Cave and the Quadrivium: Mathematics in Classical Education," *Principia* I.1 (2022): 63–74.

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

Schlect Response To Selby

Thank you for the paper, Andrew. I join you in wanting to rehabilitate the quadrivium. Because I largely agree with your paper, my reaction, more than anything, is an attempt to carry the conversation forward. I will touch on two matters: the first is about the quadrivium itself, and the second addresses its relationship to the trivium.

I will turn first to the nature of the quadrivium. As you and Boethius have both pointed out, the quadrivium is a legacy of the Pythagoreans that carried down to us through Plato. It seems to me that, if the mathematical arts of the quadrivium carry genius at all, their genius lies in the fact that these arts traffic in immaterial abstractions. They deal in an arena of multitudes and magnitudes that are universal and unchanging. This is certainly how these arts were construed by the likes of Pythagoras, Plato, Euclid, and Archimedes.

We can illustrate their outlook by looking at geometry. Geometry addresses points that have neither length, breadth, nor depth; lines that do have length, but no breadth or depth; planes that have length and breadth but no depth; and so on. Contrast these geometrical abstractions to the physical reality that, say, a draftsman inhabits. A draftsman draws circles on an actual paper, in physical space, using a pencil and a compass. He draws triangles with a ruler – again, with actual dimensions in physical space. The draftsman's shapes do not possess quite the same attributes as the pure circles and the abstract triangles described by Greek geometry. Once we revert to the physical world, a world of instruments and measurements – that is, once we revert to application, we leave the domain of geometry that we encounter in the quadrivium. We are no longer contemplating the pure abstractions of Euclid. Aren't we becoming – and dare I say the word – *engineers*?

Remember that Martianus Capella denied that architecture is a liberal art because, in his words, architecture is "concerned with mortal subjects" and an architect's skill "lies in mundane matters."[1] Martianus was the one who settled the roster of liberal arts to the seven we know, and he excluded architecture because it produces physical drawings, measurements and all, which describe actual buildings, all within this messy and imperfect physical world. Because architecture deals not with pure abstractions, but with material stuff that extends into space, then on Martianus's reckoning, architecture is not among the liberal arts.

These reflections bring me to a dilemma that I would like to present to Andrew. If we lean into the quadrivium, as he proposes, then doesn't consistency demand that we adopt a set of Pythagorean assumptions about the universe? – assumptions that draw us away from the physical world and not to it? On the other hand, when we turn to study the physical world, then whatever it is we may be doing, haven't we left the quadrivium we find in the history of education? Don't we open the floodgates to practical arts like engineering, architecture, ballistics, surveying, and mechanics, and a host of others? Don't these other arts hold just as valuable a place in our educational program as arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music (the four arts that comprise the quadrivium)? I'll lay out this dilemma more succinctly: if we adopt the old quadrivium, then we cannot apply it to the real world; and if we apply it to the real world, then

1. Martianus Capella, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts, Volume II: The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, trans. William Harris Stahl, Richard Johnson, and E. L. Burge, vol. 2, Records of Western Civilization (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1992), section 891.

whatever it is we are applying is no longer the old quadrivium. I would love to hear Andrew, or anyone else, speak to this dilemma.[2]

My second reaction connects more directly to Dorothy Sayers. Sayers makes three claims about the medieval quadrivium that I cannot reconcile with one another. She says, in the first place, that the quadrivium is comprised of "subjects," and in the second place, in the sequence of study, she says that the quadrivium follows after the trivium, for Sayers describes the trivium as "preliminary" to the quadrivium.[3] Now we come to a third claim that Sayers makes: when she discusses the early "poll-parrot" stage of instruction, she gives the quadrivium more than a cameo appearance. Here is where she mentions "the grammar of mathematics."[4] Herein lies the problem. Sayers has students in her early poll-parrot stage engaged in the study of mathematics, and yet she also says that the quadrivium follows after they have mastered the trivium.

I do not know how to harmonize Sayers's claims. Her presentation of the quadrivium seems incoherent.

That said, we ought to hold ourselves up to the same standard to which we hold Sayers. It's one thing for you and I to call out Sayers for muddling the relationship between the trivium and the quadrivium. We must not be muddled either. So how do we see the relationship between trivium and quadrivium?

In my own paper, I highlighted the trivium as a body of linguistic arts. Now you have done your part, Andrew, by describing the quadrivium as a body of mathematical arts. So what *IS* the proper relationship between the trivium and the quadrivium – the linguistic arts and the mathematical arts? What do all seven share that makes them, and uniquely them, liberal arts?

These are questions for further reflection. I thank you, Andrew, for provoking such questions, and for advancing such a fruitful conversation.

Diener Response To Selby

Thank you, Dr. Selby, for this thoughtful analysis of what the quadrivium is throughout the tradition and how that compares with Sayer's presentation of the quadrivium. I concur that Sayers fails to properly recognize the arts of the quadrivium as just that—as arts. I already have explained, in my response to Dr. Schlect's paper, what an art is and why the study of the arts of the trivium is so important. It seems to me that it is Sayers's failure to discuss the trivium and quadrivium as arts that leads to her improper subordination of the quadrivium to the trivium. She thus writes that the quadrivium "consisted of 'subjects,' and need not for the moment concern us. The interesting thing for us is the composition of the Trivium, which preceded the Quadrivium and was the preliminary discipline for it. . . . The whole of the Trivium was, in fact, intended to teach the pupil the proper use of the tools of learning, before he began to apply them to 'subjects' at all."[5]

2. I thank my colleague at New Saint Andrews College, Mitch Stokes, for helping me recognize this dilemma
3. Dorothy Sayers, "The Lost Tools of Learning," in Douglas Wilson, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning*, Turning Point Christian Worldview Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 149.
4. Sayers, 156.
5. Sayers, 149-150.

Historically, however, this kind of subordination simply does not exist within the tradition of classical education. Consider, for example, Hugh of St. Victor's description of the seven liberal arts in the *Didascalicon*: "It is in the seven liberal arts, however, that the foundation of all learning is to be found. Before all others these ought to be had at hand, because without them the philosophical discipline does not and cannot explain and define anything."[6] Hugh here is clear that all seven arts serve as the foundation of learning, not that the trivium is the foundation which serves as the "preliminary discipline" (as Sayers writes) for the quadrivium. The distinction between the arts of the trivium and those of the quadrivium is simply that the trivium consists of verbal arts while the quadrivium consists of mathematical arts. All seven are equally arts, however, and throughout the tradition it is not the case that the study of the trivium necessarily preceded the study of the quadrivium. In Plato, for example, the early education of children includes the study of the quadrivial arts, and students don't get to the study of logic (dialectic) until they are 30 years old.[7] (As an aside, maybe we thus should reserve the term "Logic School" for PhD programs, not for middle schools.) At the very least logic comes, in thinkers like Cassiodorus, after grammar *and* rhetoric.[8] Sayers's subordination of the quadrivium to the trivium is thus both out of step with the tradition of classical education and, as Dr. Selby has pointed out, leads to some goofy counterintuitive conclusions such as children shouldn't start studying arithmetic from the earliest stage of their education.

Finally, I want to emphasize that while many thinkers in the tradition recognize the practical usefulness of the quadrivial arts, their usefulness is *never* the ultimate *telos* for which they should be studied. In his rationale for studying the Pythagorean quadrivium in the *Republic*, for example, Plato is explicit that the true purpose of education in arithmetic is not, "like tradesmen and retailers, for the sake of buying and selling, but . . . for ease in turning the soul around, away from becoming and towards truth and being."[9] Elsewhere he puts it even more simply, claiming that the study of arithmetic is necessary in order "to be properly human."[10] Cassiodorus argues for the study of arithmetic based on the nature of God's creation: "The study of arithmetic is endowed with much praise, since the Lord, maker of things, arranged the universe by number, weight, and measure. . . . Since we believe that God created everything, we may to a certain extent learn how things are made."[11] Thus the study of the quadrivium is worthwhile not because it helps us to build bridges or rocket ships but because it helps us to become more fully human, with our souls and loves oriented properly toward the world and ultimately toward God.

6. Hugh of Saint Victor, *Didascalicon*, in *The "Didascalicon" of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 3.4.

7. See Book 7 of Plato's *Republic*.

8. See Book 2 of Cassiodorus's *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning*.

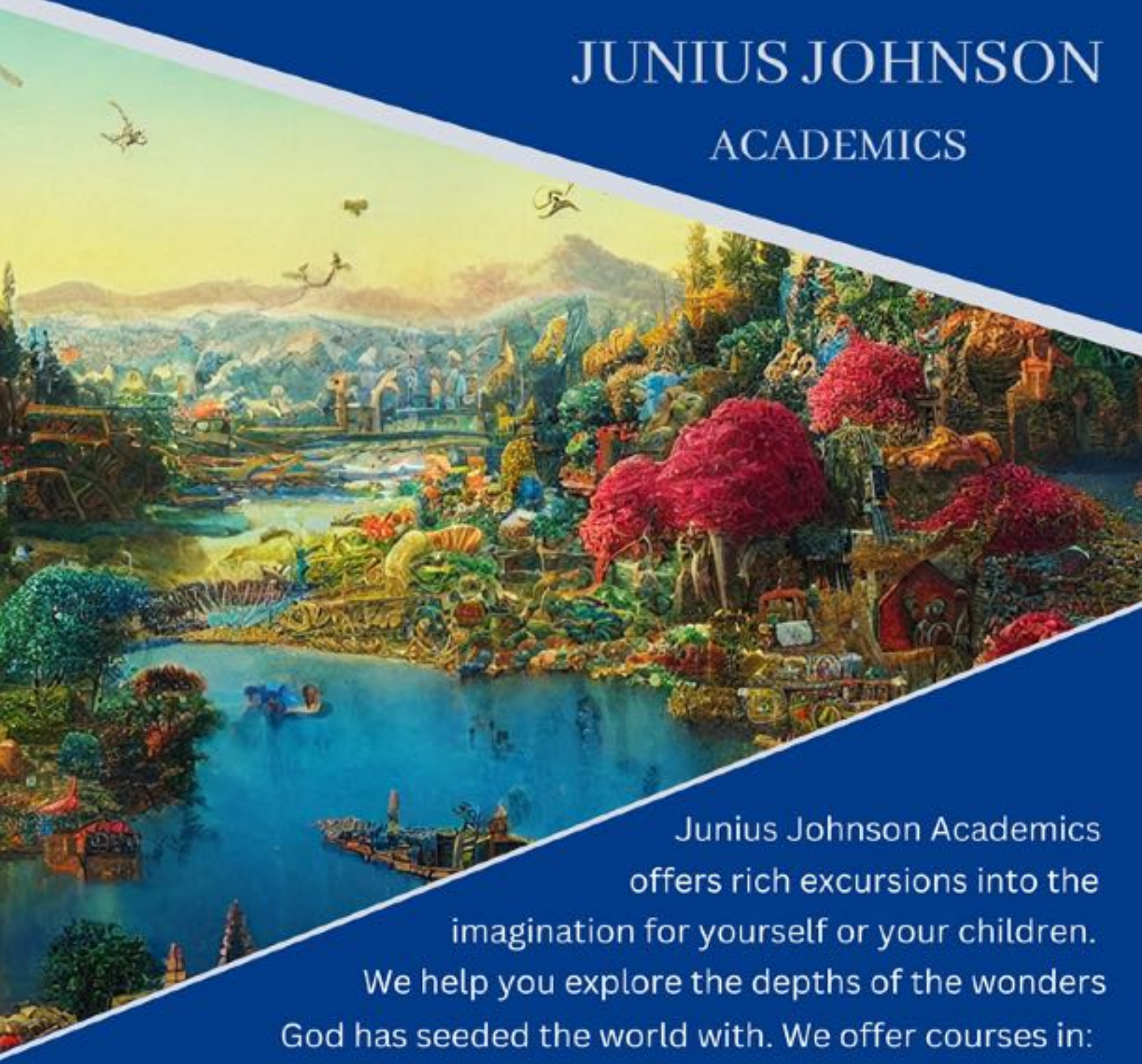
9. Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1992), 525c2-4.

10. Ibid. 522e4.

11. Cassiodorus, *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning*, in *"Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning" and "On the Soul,"* trans. James W. Halporn, Translated Texts for Historians 42 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 2. pref. 3.

JUNIUS JOHNSON

ACADEMICS



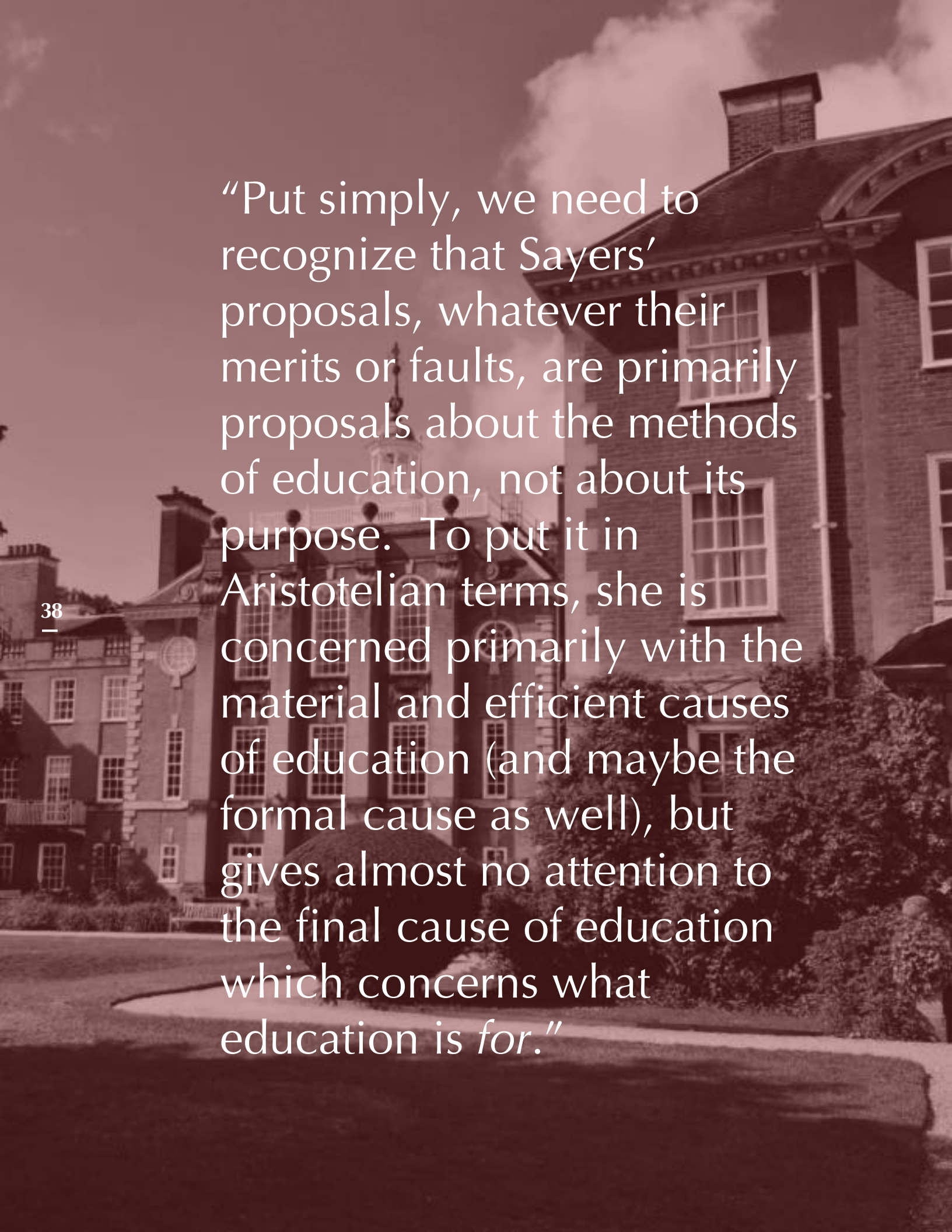
Junius Johnson Academics offers rich excursions into the imagination for yourself or your children. We help you explore the depths of the wonders God has seeded the world with. We offer courses in:

Literary Studies
Visit extraordinary worlds and journey alongside great heroes in epic stories that aim to teach us how to live well.

Theological Studies
Explore the riches of the Christian faith and uncover the theological dimensions of imagination and beauty.

Latin Studies
Explore the way Latin works and improve your skill at one of the foundational languages of Western culture.

academics.juniusjohnson.com



"Put simply, we need to recognize that Sayers' proposals, whatever their merits or faults, are primarily proposals about the methods of education, not about its purpose. To put it in Aristotelian terms, she is concerned primarily with the material and efficient causes of education (and maybe the formal cause as well), but gives almost no attention to the final cause of education which concerns what education is *for*."

Dorothy Sayers and the Reduction of Classical Education to Method

Dr. David Diener, *Hillsdale College*

Dr. Schlect and Dr. Selby have offered insightful analyses regarding various aspects of Sayers's educational proposals. I am going to offer something a little bit different to the conversation by zooming out and discussing Sayers's essay within the broader context of the tradition of classical education. In particular, I am going to address the centrality of teleology throughout the tradition of classical education and contrast it with Sayers's overwhelming emphasis on method. I will do this in three parts: First, I will offer a brief survey of the role that teleology has played throughout the tradition of classical education; second, I will address the educational proposals that Sayers makes in "The Lost Tools of Learning" relative to that tradition; and third, I will explain why this distinction between methodological means and teleological ends is important as well as how we can best think about and utilize the educational insights Sayers offers to us.

Teleology in the Tradition of Classical Education

Throughout the tradition of classical education, the definitional distinction between a classical liberal arts education and other paradigms has not been primarily one of method but rather one of purpose. The most fundamental question to ask of education is not "How should we do it?" but rather "What is it for?" It is from the answer one gives to this teleological question that methods flow. Educational methodology, in other words, is always downstream of educational teleology. You have to know where you are going before you can figure out how to get there. Thus the 20th century philosopher Bertrand Russell writes in his book *On Education* that, "We must have some concept of the kind of person we wish to produce, before we can have any definite opinion as to the education which we consider best."[1]

A survey of key classical educators across the centuries makes manifest that they start with questions of education's purpose and, grounded on their answers to those teleological questions, then develop ideas about the methods that most effectively will achieve the desired ends. For example, in Book 7 of the *Republic* Plato defines education as a process of conversion in which students turn their souls from the shadows of this world to the form of the good.

As he explains, "The instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body. This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into being without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good."[2] Given this view of education as conversion, the role of the teacher is to help bring such a conversion about.

According to Plato the teacher's craft, the craft of education, is "the craft concerned with

1. Bertrand Russell, *On Education, Especially in Early Childhood* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1926), 38.

2. Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1992), 518c4-d1.

doing this very thing, this turning around, and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it."[3] The goal of education, in other words, is to redirect students' souls so that their souls are oriented toward the proper things. It is *after* thus explaining education's teleology that Plato then turns to the curriculum that should be used to educate toward that goal. He is explicit that the subjects he thinks should be studied are selected not on the basis of their content *per se* but rather because of their ability to turn the soul away from darkness and toward goodness and truth.[4] It is on the basis of this goal that Plato argues students should study gymnastics, music, the Pythagorean quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and harmonics), and dialectic. Plato thus clearly recognizes that the curricular subjects are not ends in and of themselves but are educationally valuable only insofar as they promote the realization of education's ultimate goals.

Similarly, in Book 8, Chapter 2 of the *Politics*, Aristotle addresses the *telos* of education and notes that there are disagreements about what its purpose should be. He distinguishes between liberal and illiberal education in these terms, noting that "What one acts or learns *for* also makes a big difference" and that liberal education is "what one does for one's own sake, for the sake of friends, or on account of virtue."[5] Following this discussion, in Chapter 3 of Book 8 Aristotle *then* turns to an examination of what curricular subjects should be studied, and as with Plato this examination of curricular content is grounded on his understanding of the final goals of education.

In his 6th century *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning*, Cassiodorus offers a detailed analysis of the progression of liberal arts. At the end of the book he concludes by making explicit the teleological nature of these arts: "Let us consider why this arrangement of the disciplines led up to the stars [i.e., astronomy as the last of the quadrivial arts]. The obvious purpose was to direct our mind, which has been dedicated to secular wisdom and cleansed by the exercise of the disciplines, from earthly things and to place it in a praiseworthy fashion in the divine structure."[6] The ordering of the liberal arts, in other words, is based on the purpose for which they are studied.

Hugh of St. Victor, in his 12th-century *Didiscalicon*, grounds his understanding of education on our primary task, i.e. purpose, as human beings: "This is our entire task – the restoration of our nature and the removal of our deficiency. The integrity of human nature, however, is attained in two things – in knowledge and in virtue, and in these lies our sole likeness to the supernal and divine substances."[7] He goes on to explain how our purpose of being restored in the divine image comes about: "Now there are two things which restore the divine likeness in man, namely the contemplation of truth and the practice of virtue."[8] It is within this teleological context that Hugh develops his proposals on education. In advocating for the study of the liberal arts, he explains that the ancients settled on the seven liberal arts of the trivium and quadrivium because they were believed to be "the best instruments, the best rudiments, by which the way is prepared for the mind's complete knowledge of philosophic truth."[9] The curriculum was selected, in other words, on the basis of its efficacy in achieving education's goals.

3. Ibid. 518d3-5.

4. See ibid. 521c4-d1.

5. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 1337b17-18.

6. Cassiodorus, *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning*, in "I*nstitutions of Divine and Secular Learning*" and "*On the Soul*," trans. James W. Halporn, Translated Texts for Historians 42 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 2.conc.1.

7. Hugh of Saint Victor, *Didascalicon*, in The "*Didascalicon" of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1.5.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid. 3.3.

In his 12th century *Metalogicon*, John of Salisbury defends the liberal arts by trying to demonstrate the relationship between them (especially the verbal arts of the trivium) and the study of philosophy (i.e. the pursuit of wisdom). In Book 1, Chapter 12 he explains that the arts of the trivium and quadrivium are called "liberal" because "their object [i.e., their goal or purpose] is to effect man's liberation, so that, freed from cares, he may devote himself to wisdom."[10] In addition to their practical usefulness, the liberal arts are valuable for John because of how they guide us to virtue, wisdom, and happiness. Thus the liberal arts play a fundamental role in human existence because of their relation to our nature and purpose.

These are but a few examples, and many more could be given. Across the centuries we see, over and over again, that the key educational distinctions between classical liberal arts education and other approaches are distinctions of purpose, not method. As Neil Postman accurately quips in his book *The End of Education*, "There was a time when educators became famous for providing reasons for learning; now they become famous for inventing a method."[11] In contrast to millennia of educational tradition, contemporary educators too often focus on the methods of education, on the technical engineering aspects of education, instead of on the metaphysical question of what education is for. According to Postman, however, the most fundamental educational problem "is metaphysical in nature, not technical. . . . The truth is that school cannot exist without some reason for its being."[12] Thus Postman makes the title of his book a double entendre, a play on words, for "There is no surer way to bring an end to schooling than for it to have no end."[13]

Throughout the tradition, proponents of the classical approach to education have understood that the heart of their educational paradigm is teleological in nature. Certainly these thinkers did advocate for specific educational methods (curricular scope and sequences, pedagogical practices, etc.), but these methodological considerations were downstream from the fundamental question "What is education for?"

> *"This is our entire task – the restoration of our nature and the removal of our deficiency. The integrity of human nature, however, is attained in two things – in knowledge and in virtue, and in these lies our sole likeness to the supernal and divine substances."*
>
> Hugh of St. Victor

It is only on the basis of this teleological question that one has sufficient grounds for developing a given set of educational practices. Thus the key difference between the "old education" in 5th-century BC Athens for which Plato advocated and the new education peddled by the Sophists was one of *telos*. The key difference between John Henry Newman's defense of classical liberal

10. John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, in *The "Metalogicon": A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium*, trans. Daniel D. McGarry (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2009), 1.12.

11. Neil Postman, *The End of Education* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 26.

12. Ibid., 27 (emphasis in the original).

13. Ibid., 4.

arts education in the middle of the 19th century and the movements of secularization and utility to which he was responding was one of *telos*. The curricular movements of the late 19th century and early 20th century away from the traditional classical curriculum and toward electives, specialization, and pragmatic job training were all based on a more fundamental shift in the understanding of education's *telos*. The progressivism of thinkers like John Dewey was a fundamental divergence from the classical understanding of education not because progressives advocated for methodological changes but because they embraced a radically different understanding of education's *telos*. The key difference, finally, between classical Christian schools today and other approaches to both public and private education is one of *telos*.

Teleology and Method in "The Lost Tools of Learning"

What does this have to do with Dorothy Sayers's essay "The Lost Tools of Learning?" Put simply, we need to recognize that Sayers's proposals, whatever their merits or faults, are primarily proposals about the methods of education, not about its purpose. To put it in Aristotelian terms, she is concerned primarily with the material and efficient causes of education (and maybe the formal cause as well), but gives almost no attention to the final cause of education which concerns what education is *for*. I want to be unambiguously clear that the fact that Sayers focuses on the methods of education and not on its ends is not a critique of her essay *per se*. Insofar as her (admittedly "amateur") insights are valuable they should be implemented. However, methodological considerations are not what thinkers within the tradition of classical education typically have used to differentiate this education from other educational paradigms.

In the last sentence of the essay Sayers does make a teleological claim, stating that, "The sole true end of education is simply this: to teach men how to learn for themselves."[14] We can debate later whether or not that is a good definition of the purpose of education or one that aligns with the long-standing tradition of classical education. For the present, I'll simply note that throughout her essay Sayers's educational proposals are overwhelmingly methodological, not teleological, in nature, and that within the renewal movement of classical Christian education it is Sayers's methodological insights, not this teleological claim, that are most frequently used to explain classical education. As just one example, in *The Case for Classical Christian Education* Douglas Wilson is explicit about how he defines classical education: "Classical education, as *I* am using the phrase, refers to a particular pedagogical approach together with an emphasis on passing on the heritage of the West. The pedagogy refers to our commitment to Dorothy Sayer's basic insight – that children grow naturally through stages that correspond nicely with the three elements of the Trivium. We teach the grammar of all subjects to the younger children; we teach dialectic to the children of junior-high age; and we teach the rhetorical disciplines to the high school students."[15] This definition, drawn explicitly from Sayers, is methodological, not teleological in nature.

14. Dorothy Sayers, "The Lost Tools of Learning," in Douglas Wilson, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning: An Approach to Distinctively Christian Education* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 164.

15. Douglas Wilson, *The Case for Classical Christian Education* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003), 84 (emphasis in the original). Cf. Douglas Wilson, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning: An Approach to Distinctively Christian Education* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 99: "As used here the word classical refers to the structure and form of the education we provide. It also refers to the content of the studies." In terms of the millennia-old tradition of classical education, this is simply not a very good definition. Across the centuries there have been varying structures and forms of classical education. Across the centuries there have been varying sets of content that are studied. What has united these disparate practices under the name of "classical education" is that they share a common understanding of education's teleology.

The Importance of Distinguishing between Methodological Means and Teleological Ends

To conclude then, why is this distinction between methodological means and teleological ends so important? What is at stake here for classical Christian educators? How can we best think about and utilize the educational insights Sayers offers to us? Clarity on the methods/purpose distinction is important because one of the greatest educational dangers of our day is the confusion of means with ends. As Jacques Maritain writes in *Education at the Crossroads*, "If means are liked and cultivated for the sake of their own perfection, and not as a means alone, to that very extent they cease to lead to the end. . . . This supremacy of means over end and the consequent collapse of all sure purpose and real efficiency seem to be the main reproach to contemporary education. The means are not bad. On the contrary, they are generally much better than those of the old pedagogy. The misfortune is precisely that they are so good that we lose sight of the end."[16] Consider also a metaphor used by David Hicks in his book *Norms & Nobility*: "Both policy maker as strategist and school administrator as educator resemble the farmer who tries to plow a field with his eyes on the plow rather than on that imaginary point on the horizon on which he must fix his gaze if he expects to leave a straight furrow."[17] In other words, to be successful as educators we must keep our eyes fixed on the goal of education and not be distracted by the means we are using to achieve that end. As Postman succinctly puts it, the problem with a focus on technical educational methods is that "it diverts attention from important matters"[18] – namely the metaphysical matter of education's end.

Let me again be clear that there is nothing wrong with Sayers, or any thinker, proposing an educational method. "Method" is not a dirty educational word; in fact sound educational methods are of utmost importance for any educational endeavor. The problem is not that Sayers calls for a new (or renewed) approach to educational methodology. The problem comes when that methodology is used by others (like us) *to define* what distinguishes classical education from other educational paradigms. Let me put it in even stronger terms: The danger of Sayers's "The Lost Tools of Learning" is not principally that it advocates for problematic methods (though today we have heard some ways in which the methods she espouses can be problematized). There is, to be sure, much value in some of the educational ideas Sayers puts forward, and we have seen decades of high-quality classical Christian education that in many ways has been the product of some of her ideas. The more fundamental danger, however, lies with us, not with Sayers. That is to say, the danger is that we interpret her essay and ideas in a way that actually undermines our continuity with the historical tradition of classical education and that belies the contemporary confusion between educational means and the ends that those means should serve. Classical education throughout history has not been understood primarily as a method, and we should not do so today. Insofar as we define what distinguishes classical education from other paradigms of education in terms of methodological differences, we are both out of step with the very tradition we say we are renewing and also are tacitly accepting a set of assumptions about the primacy of educational method over educational purpose that are contemporary, progressive, and in many ways

16. Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 3. Cf. ibid., 18 where he defines the final end of education as "the fulfillment of man as a human person."

17. David Hicks, *Norms & Nobility: A Treatise on Education* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1999), 12.

18. Postman, *The End of Education*, 26.

actually antithetical to the very nature of classical education itself.

Consider this thought experiment: If all public schools today suddenly started teaching the "grammar," "logic," and "rhetoric" of subjects like socialism and critical race theory, would that make them classical Christian schools? If they recognized Sayers's three stages of child development and called their middle schools "Logic Schools" and their high schools "Rhetoric Schools," would that make them classical Christian schools? If they started teaching logic classes and even required a senior thesis project, would that make them classical Christian schools? The answer, I hope you immediately give, is a resounding "No." The reason these public schools would not be classical Christian schools even if they were to adopt these methodological recommendations from Sayers is that their fundamental purpose and understanding of the final goals of education still would be incommensurate with the teleology of education that has been widely accepted throughout the tradition of classical education.

As our movement grows, it is important that we offer nuanced, historically and philosophically informed answers to questions like "What is classical education?" "What is classical Christian education?" "What is public charter classical education?" Dorothy Sayers has played an important role in the 20th and 21st century renewal of classical Christian education, and for that we should be incredibly grateful. It would be imprudent and irresponsible, however, to ask her essay to bear a weight that it cannot bear by taking the *methodological* recommendations she makes as constituting a *definition* of classical education. Sayers awakened educators to some of the richness of the medieval approach to education. That is laudable. Let us remember, however, the words of C. S. Lewis in *The Last Battle*: "Don't stop! Further up and further in. . . . Further up and further in. . . . Further up and further in."[19] As we study and work to continue the rich tradition of classical Christian education, let us learn from Sayers but not stop with Sayers. Let us be willing to go further up and further in to the tradition so that we might articulate and implement an ever-improving vision of what classical Christian education truly is all about.

Dr. David Diener works at Hillsdale College where he is an Assistant Professor of Education. Previous experience includes fifteen years in K-12 private education, eleven of those in administration and eight as headmaster of classical Christian schools. He is the author of *Plato: The Great Philosopher-Educator* and has published articles on Plato, Kierkegaard, and various topics in philosophy of education. He holds a B.A. in Philosophy and Ancient Languages from Wheaton College, as well as an M.A. in Philosophy, an M.S. in History and Philosophy of Education, and a dual Ph.D. in Philosophy and Philosophy of Education from Indiana University.

19. C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, The Chronicles of Narnia 7 (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 172 ff.

At The Champion Group we provide

holistic, self-funded solutions

to address the root causes of your financial challenges
so that you can focus on what matters most,

DISCIPLESHIP
INFUSED EDUCATION.

WWW.THECHAMPIONGROUP.COM

CHAMPION

Schlect Response to Diener

I join you, David, in commending some of Sayers' insights about pedagogy. You highlight the ends of education, not the means.

I want to offer a word in Sayers' defense. I think she does attend to the ends of instruction, though ends are not the focus of her attention. Early in "The Lost Tools of Learning," Sayers says this: "if we are to produce a society of educated people, fitted to preserve their intellectual freedom amid the complex pressures of our modern society,"[1] and so on. Her aspiration for "A people fitted to preserve their intellectual freedom" may not be an ultimate end, but it is an end nonetheless, and a worthwhile end at that. Moreover, this end is a pretty fair expression of what a number of voices in the tradition identify as the peculiar end of liberal arts instruction. Of course we recognize that this end, intellectual freedom, is a proximate end that serves further ends – like the ends of loving God and neighbor – and the final and ultimate end of glorifying God and enjoying him forever.

We find Sayers offering another ends statement elsewhere in her essay, where she speaks of those who are "fit to assume responsibility for the conduct of their own affairs."[2] This is certainly an end statement, and it carries an echo of what Hugh of St. Victor says about the Liberal Arts.

Beyond Sayers' explicit statements about the ends of education, she also drops a number of inferences about ends. We see this throughout her long train of denunciations against poor education. For example, Sayers denounces an inability to make a mental connection between different spheres of knowledge. From this we should infer a contrary virtue – an end – which is an ability to make a mental connection between different spheres of knowledge. Again, Sayers denounces students who forget what they have learned, and who cannot tackle a new subject for themselves. In this denunciation we recognize a contrary virtue in students who remember what they have learned, and who are indeed able to tackle a new subject for themselves.

And finally, and this one is especially ironic in view of David's paper, Sayers denounces those who have no ability to distinguish between a material and a final cause. Here the implied end or *telos* would be the virtue of making these distinctions.[3]

My first point has been a simple note of clarification. I want to be fair to Sayers, taking care to recognize that she is not silent on the ends of education.

Turning now to my second point, I want to be fair to David. I take David's observation to be less about Sayers and more about the contemporary movement of classical and Christian education. David bewails the fact that we are tempted to elevate the means to the neglect of ends. He is on to something, and we would do well to heed his point. We have no warrant for criticizing Sayers on the grounds that, in her essay about educational method, she devotes most of her attention to educational method. It was not Sayers' purpose to outline all that classical and Christian education represents. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the adjective "classical" appears nowhere in Sayers' essay. To deem Sayers "classical" is our coinage, not hers. So David's critique is directed less to Sayers and more to us who make up the CCE movement. It seems to me that David's helpful observations correct against our tendency to let our means get out ahead of our ends. It's as if we are trying to slalom

1. Dorothy Sayers, "The Lost Tools of Learning," in Douglas Wilson, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning*, Turning Point Christian Worldview Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 146.

2. Sayers, 146.

3. Sayers, 147–48.

that giant downhill run of classical and Christian education while leaning the weight of method way out over our skis.

To pick up on another theme in David's paper, Sayers *does* introduce some insights about pedagogy that we both think are truly helpful. David didn't identify what those insights are (that was beside his main point), but I'll take David's nod to Sayers' pedagogy as an invitation to identify what her pedagogical insights are.

Sayers highlights two ingredients that play into any worthwhile reflection on pedagogy. She reminds us that a sound pedagogy must harmonize two ingredients: (1) the nature of the material together with (2) the nature and capacity of the students. Sayers calls upon us to "teach with the grain," and she recognizes that there is a natural grain in both ingredients. In the first place, the material we teach has a natural grain. For example, teaching addition is prerequisite to teaching multiplication, and this is true regardless of how old the learner may be. Thus a good educator will tailor instruction to the nature of the material she teaches. Sayers is mindful of this ingredient – the nature of the material – when she sequences grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric. Though she misconstrues what these arts actually are – see my paper for elaboration – she is nonetheless right to consider the nature of the material as a key factor in judgments about pedagogy.

In the second place, Sayers recognizes that students possess a natural grain of sorts. A bright nine-year-old may be able to follow along with the plot and dialogue in *Pride and Prejudice*, but most nine-year-olds lack the maturity and life experience to appreciate the social politics that permeate the novel. Jane Austen's genius would be wasted on little kids. Not so, however, for teenagers who are coming into adulthood. These older students have a capacity to truly appreciate what Austin is writing about. On the other hand, when it comes to memorizing information, younger students will take delight in mnemonic strategies that would strike older students as tedious. These illustrations display why it is that a good educator should tailor instruction to the maturity and capacity of his students. Sayers' approach to pedagogy also takes this second factor into account.

David introduces a third factor that is latent in Sayers, and overlooked by many of her readers among us. He highlights the end of education, the *telos*, and he is right to underscore it. When we put all the pieces together, the result is a fruitful outline that should guide our reflections on pedagogy. Sound instruction should harmonize three ingredients:

the nature of the material;

the nature of the student; and

we must tailor (1) and (2) to virtuous ends.

David, you have done us all an important service when you highlight the ends of education. Count me in.

Selby Response to Diener

I am grateful to Dr. Diener for his insightful paper on the *telos* of education, and how crucial it is that we as classical Christian educators put purpose ahead of method. It is so true of human life that we jump to busywork instead of stopping and reflecting which way we're going.

However, an objection could be made to Diener's tactic of pointing us back to the classical tradition to determine what the *telos* of classical education should be. The objection first notes that the authorities cited differ somewhat between each other in their articulation of *telos*.

First, to prove that there are differences in the telos that Diener's cited authors provide, please consult Table 1.2:

Table 1.2: Classical Education Authorities and the Telos of Education

Author	Telos of Education
Plato	Soul's apprehension of Goodness and Truth
Aristotle	Creating virtue
Seneca	Cultivation of virtue
Cassiodorus	Elevation of the mind to perceive the divine purpose
Hugh of St. Victor	Attaining knowledge and virtue to make up for our deficiency and to be more like the divine image
John of Salisbury	Liberating men so that they can become wise (also mentions virtue and happiness)

It seems that Plato, Cassiodorus, and Hugh of St. Victor emphasize the ideal of education as attaining the divine and being made fit for the apprehension of God. On the other hand, Aristotle, Seneca, and John of Salisbury believe education is *for* the cultivation of wisdom and virtue, becoming the kind of people who attain certain excellences. It seems that Hugh of St. Victor brings these two together, positing wisdom and virtue as a means to attain the divine. But broadly speaking, one camp promotes the creation of virtue in students, and the other is interested in encountering divine realities.

So the objection could run like this: If I am persuaded that Sayers in the "Lost Tools of Learning" essay focuses overmuch on method at the expense of purpose, and if I want to become more classical by concentrating on the purpose of education first and foremost, *and* if I believe that decision should be informed by the greatest thinkers who formed western education, then I will be left with multiple choices. I would at least have to choose between educating for virtue or educating for students to apprehend the divine. Wouldn't following the path toward educational purpose that Diener recommends lead me down a confusing maze of possibilities for the purpose of education? And might not this path lead to despair, even as deadlines for ordering curriculum draw near?

Rather than merely raise this objection, I will try to meet it as well by attempting a synthesis of the two different camps that Diener elaborated in his essay. To do this, I will enlist yet another authority, John Milton, from his work *Of Education*. In this text, written in 1644, Milton gives the famous quotation about education, from which the ACCS *Repairing the Ruins* conference takes its name: "The end of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by

regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection."[1]

In this quotation, which begins the body of his account of the best possible education, Milton starts with education's purpose, "the *end* of learning." That end or *telos*, he tells us, is to attain divine knowledge.

Milton situates this purpose clearly within the Christian narrative of fall and redemption. Adam and Eve, by their sin, broke us, the edifice whom God constructed. We no longer could know him with ease, as our first parents were able to before the fall. Milton, with his Puritan theology, was acutely aware of the debilitating effects of sin. He knew that knowledge of God is difficult for sin-bent persons.

But Milton also believes that it is possible to attain virtue. Becoming virtuous, that is, developing the excellences that God bestowed on us, especially cultivating the various capacities of our minds, allows us to start knowing God again. There is a virtuous cycle here as well: Milton says that knowing God causes us to love and imitate him, and this loving and imitation results in the formation of virtue.

Note, too, that Milton gives an important place the "the heavenly grace of faith." That gift of God is the only thing which enables our students to get to the highest perfection, the proper growth of human character.[2]

Thus in Milton, we have reconciliation of the virtue camp with the attainment to the divine camp: virtue facilitates knowledge of God, while knowledge of God inspires virtue. In short, both are apt expressions of the end of education. They are mutually reinforcing.

I hope this objection and response models in some measure how we can approach the broader classical tradition, which does not always speak with one voice. Though it requires work and acquaintance with somewhat forgotten and difficult-to-read authors, it is possible to find a core. We must negotiate the differences in the authorities of the classical Christian tradition and be sharpened as we "converse" with them.

A fuller account should still be given, however, for the divergence of responses on the question of *telos* or other differences in aspects of classical education. How could a leader in a school's academic program go about finding a practical way of crafting their understanding of a workable *telos* for the education that they offer? Answering this question is of crucial importance as we rebuild the ruins of education in our day.

1. John Milton, "Of Education," in *The Works of John Milton*, vol. 4, ed. Frank Allen Patterson (Columbia University Press, 1931), 277, quoted in Grant Horner, *John Milton: Classical Learning and the Progress of Virtue* (Classical Academic Press, 2015), 24.

2. Compare to Horner's exposition of this text in *John Milton*, 24–28.

"For we let our young men and women go out unarmed, in a day when armour was never so necessary. By teaching them all to read, we have left them at the mercy of the printed word. By the invention of the film and the radio, we have made certain that no aversion to reading shall secure them from the incessant battery of words, words, words. They do not know what the words mean; they do not know how to ward them off or blunt their edge or fling them back; they are a prey to words in their emotions instead of being the masters of them in their intellects."

Dorothy Sayers, 1947

Dorothy Sayers, Now More Than Ever

Douglas Wilson, *Greyfriars Hall*

Introduction

I appreciated the interaction with Dorothy Sayers in this edition of *Classis* (Vol. XXXI, Issue 1), and I thank Drs. Schlect, Selby, and Diener for their contributions. As I read through their pieces, I picked up on their clear appreciation for the contribution that Dorothy Sayers made to our movement, and for my indirect role in putting what I call the Sayers Insight back into pedagogical play. I am grateful for their comments.

At the same time, there were also some critical interactions with Sayers, and so I would like to respond to just a few of those. While I believe that criticisms and disagreements will remain after we are done interacting, I had the sense that there were larger agreements underneath those apparent disagreements, and that perhaps fifteen minutes of interaction might clear those up. That's the hope at any rate.

But in the meantime, I still want to count myself soundly in Sayers' corner . . . but only after these criticisms are answered or contextualized. When it comes to the way in which the schools of ACCS have applied the Sayers Insight, and with great profit, I confess that I am cheerfully unrepentant. But there are some legitimate questions nevertheless.

Reprise

I certainly don't mind telling the story again, and for those who might mind hearing it again, there is always the option of skipping over this section. And I really wouldn't blame those who avail themselves of that well-telegraphed opportunity because I am getting on in years, and I like stories that have well-worn grooves.

I first read Dorothy Sayers' essay *The Lost Tools of Learning* when it appeared in the pages of *National Review*. This was sometime in the early Seventies. They reprinted an address that she had given some thirty years before, back in the Forties. I was in the Navy at the time, unmarried and with no children, and so the article, while interesting, was largely an academic question for me. But soon it was to become a very different kind of academic question.

Just a few years later I was out of the Navy, married, and with a couple of little ones. The issues were no longer academic in the formal sense at all. And so it was that a day eventually came when my wife asked what we were going to do about education. Nancy said that she couldn't see handing our oldest daughter Bekah over to someone we didn't know in order to ask that stranger to teach her about, you know, *everything*.

I knew next to nothing about Christian education, but I said, somewhat rashly, that she need not worry because we would have a Christian school started by the time Bekah reached kindergarten.

Our small steering committee knew what we did not want to do, but we did not have an articulated vision of what we did want to do. We had no *positive* vision. We knew that we didn't want to be an expensive prep school that was just as unbelieving as the government schools, only more expensive. That was one thing. We also didn't want to build a fundamentalist reactionary academy, one that was conservative enough, but for various reasons didn't

conserve nearly enough. We didn't want a conservative but truncated education. I am not quite sure why or when we did this, but somewhere in there we came up with the motto "a classical and Christ-centered education." The *classical* meant not truncated and the *Christ-centered* meant not a secular school in the private sector.

Around the same time, I recalled the Sayers article, went up to the UI library and tracked it down. I circulated it to the other members of our committee, and we all thought, "sure, why not?" We had nothing better to do. Now very early in her address, Sayers said that she knew that nobody would ever be crazy enough to try to implement her suggestions, but in saying this she wasn't counting on a small group of Idahoans, who had no real idea of what she was talking about, and with no good way of checking, but who were up against a wall, and who needed to do something. It sounded good anyhow.

But once the school started, the very next thing we became aware of was the fact that the approach she had proposed — I speak here as an American heavily influenced by pragmatism of my people — really *worked*. I hate to resort to homely metaphors, but we found ourselves cooking with propane. Put another way, whether or not it was classical in all the ways, it was truly fantastic.

Now as the years went by, we naturally learned more and more about the nature of the classical education we were engaged in recovering. As we learned more, we began to develop settled convictions about our rightful place in the tradition we had become part of.

In addition to that, a movement had sprung from this, now numbering hundreds of schools, and others within the movement began offering various criticisms of Sayers' approach. I would divide these criticisms into two broad categories. There are the denominational differences of emphasis, as represented by our discussion here, and then there are voices suggesting that we adopt another religion entirely — e.g. anything that rhymes with *woke*.

To a few of those denominational differences we now turn. And after we have considered them, perhaps we may come to the realization that the differences are not that great after all.

Teleological Education

On the matter of *telos*, I was grateful that Andrew Selby pointed out that the name of the ACCS relates to the teleological focus that we have sought to maintain from the beginning (p. 48). Our goal in education has been to "repair the ruins" of the Fall by "regaining to know God aright." This was self-consciously taken from Milton's essay on education.

In short, while there may be some differences in our stipulated definitions of some words, I don't believe that a classical teleology is missing at all from the approach taken by the disciples of Sayers.

Now Dr. Diener quoted from *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* in a footnote, where I said, "As used here the word classical refers to the structure and form of the education we provide. It also refers to the content of the studies." Dr. Diener says that as a definition of classical education, it is "simply not a very good definition" because it neglects the teleology of the whole enterprise. But this citation comes immediately after my detailed discussion over the previous two pages of the need for this education to be Christ-centered. This emphasis on a Christocentric education was intended to be profoundly teleological in nature. Moreover, it lines up with the broad teleology that has characterized Christian education for centuries.

And when it comes to whether Sayers would agree with this, it is evident that she did. "This reminds me of the grammar of Theology. I shall add it to the curriculum, because theology is the mistress-science without which the whole educational structure will necessarily lack its final synthesis" (p. 62).

In short, while there may be some differences in our stipulated definitions of some words, I don't believe that a classical teleology is missing at all from the approach taken by the disciples of Sayers.

We will attempt to sketch out a syllabus — a modern Trivium 'with modifications' and we will see where we got to.

Signs and Things Signified

Dr. Schlect argued that Sayers' approach encouraged us to drift away from the linguistic aspect of grammar. And so she did, by means of metaphor, but only after she established the foundation of that metaphor in her rigorous application of it to the study of language — which was for her, most preferably Latin. In that treatment, she was addressing what the study of language should be like, and in what she says there, I don't see a lot of daylight between her and Dr. Schlect.

The problem (or apparent problem) arises when she contributes what I call the Sayers Insight. This part really is her innovation, but I think that it is pretty clear that she knew that it was an innovation. She said:

> "Thus prepared, we will attempt to sketch out a syllabus — a modern Trivium 'with modifications' and we will see where we get to" (p. 60).

A *modern* Trivium. With *modifications* no less.

When she says that math has a "grammar" (*e.g.* multiplication tables), and that geography does (*e.g.* mountains, rivers, lakes), and that history also does (*e.g.* kings, battles, eras), I can go with Dr. Schlect as far as to put scare quotes around "grammar." It is an extension, a metaphor. But going back to my earlier point, as a metaphor it works gloriously.

As for Dr. Schlect's point about this approach breaking down the relation between sign and thing signified, I am not at all persuaded. The spelling words that the students learn all have a referent out in the world, and that is a linguistic event — grammar proper. But a study sheet full of king lists and battles is also a list of signs, with the actual kings and actual battles being the things signified. When a student learns that Actium was fought before Gettysburg, he is learning the order on the study sheet as well as the same order that happened out there in history. I do grant that this is a metaphorical application that Sayers makes, but I also contend that it is a really good one.

Comenius and Sayers

I believe that the most serious challenge to Sayers' approach was the one mounted by Dr. Selby. His concern (I believe) went to the root of Sayers' whole proposal, and to accept his approach would be tantamount to rejecting Sayers. But I also think that there is a misunderstanding beneath the challenge, which I hope to bring out, trusting that we can still get to agreement.

In the medieval tradition, in medieval times, a small minority of the children received a classical education. The school doors were largely closed to children of peasants and to girls. The rich and powerful could see to it that their children were educated, including their girls, but the ideal of universal education was nowhere close to being realized. Moreover, it was not even an ideal. That had to wait for the Reformation. Because Protestants were all about everybody needing to read

the Scriptures, the need for schools to teach literacy obviously became a much higher priority.

Now educating everybody is quite a different proposition than educating the children of an aristocracy. If you are educating an elite, it can work to throw them all off the Trivial High Dive into the Quadrivial Deep End. But this approach *cannot work* if you have undertaken to educate everyone.

What Sayers did, by structuring a curriculum inspired by the Trivium, was to make classical education accessible for everyone. She brought prerequisites into the Trivium.

Into this moment came a Reformed bishop from Moravia, a man named John Amos Comenius. He developed something that had in those circumstances become absolutely necessary, and that was the idea of prerequisites. Before you can learn *this*, you will need to learn *that*. The educated elites can sort this kind of thing out for themselves, but Comenius was throwing the average kid, the average student, a life-saving rope.

Now whether Dorothy Sayers was self-consciously making her proposal with the contribution of Comenius in mind, I cannot say. But she was certainly writing in a world that Comenius made, a world where education was for all, and where prerequisites were now taken as the norm. What Sayers did, by structuring a curriculum inspired by the Trivium, was to make classical education accessible for everyone. She brought prerequisites into the Trivium.

For these reasons, and a number of others I didn't have room to get to, I believe that classical Christian educators would do well to stick to the basics. "Always dance with the one what brung ya." We are not seeking to duplicate the schools of the fourteenth century. We have open enrollment in our schools, we have internalized the insights of Comenius, and we have accepted the proposal of Dorothy Sayers that allows us to have our curriculum be shaped by the Trivium, "with modifications."

Again, many thanks to Drs. Schlect, Selby, and Diener for an engaging discussion.

Douglas Wilson is the minister of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. He is a founding board member of both Logos School and New Saint Andrews College, and serves as an instructor at Greyfriars Hall, a ministerial training program at Christ Church. He is the author of numerous books on classical Christian education, the family, and the Reformed faith.

OLD VOICES

The Lost Tools of Learning[1]

Dorothy Sayers

That I, whose experience of teaching is extremely limited, should presume to discuss education is a matter, surely, that calls for no apology. It is a kind of behavior to which the present climate of opinion is wholly favorable. Bishops air their opinions about economics; biologists, about metaphysics; inorganic chemists, about theology; the most irrelevant people are appointed to highly technical ministries; and plain, blunt men write to the papers to say that Epstein and Picasso do not know how to draw. Up to a certain point, and provided the the criticisms are made with a reasonable modesty, these activities are commendable. Too much specialization is not a good thing. There is also one excellent reason why the various amateur may feel entitled to have an opinion about education. For if we are not all professional teachers, we have all, at some time or another, been taught. Even if we learnt nothing – perhaps in particular if we learnt nothing – our contribution to the discussion may have a potential value.

However, it is in the highest degree improbable that the reforms I propose will ever be carried into effect. Neither the parents, nor the training colleges, nor the examination boards, nor the boards of governors, nor the ministries of education, would countenance them for a moment. For they amount to this: that if we are to produce a society of educated people, fitted to preserve their intellectual freedom amid the complex pressures of our modern society, we must turn back the wheel of progress some four or five hundred years, to the point at which education began to lose sight of its true object, towards the end of the Middle Ages.

Before you dismiss me with the appropriate phrase – reactionary, romantic, mediaevalist, *laudator temporis acti* (praiser of times past), or whatever tag comes first to hand – I will ask you to consider one or two miscellaneous questions that hang about at the back, perhaps, of all our minds, and occasionally pop out to worry us.

When we think about the remarkably early age at which the young men went up to university in, let us say, Tudor times, and thereafter were held fit to assume responsibility for the conduct of their own affairs, are we altogether comfortable about that artificial prolongation of intellectual childhood and adolescence into the years of physical maturity which is so marked in our own day? To postpone the acceptance of responsibility to a late date brings with it a number of psychological complications which, while they may interest the psychiatrist, are scarcely beneficial either to the individual or to society. The stock argument in favor of postponing the school-leaving age and prolonging the period of education generally is there there is now so much more to learn than there was in the Middle Ages. This is partly true, but not wholly. The modern boy and girl are certainly taught more subjects--but does that always mean that they actually know more?

Has it ever struck you as odd, or unfortunate, that today, when the proportion of literacy throughout Western Europe is higher than it has ever been,

1. "The Lost Tools of Learning" was presented by Dorothy L. Sayers at Oxford in 1947. Reproduced with permission from the Association of Classical Christian Schools website: https://classicalchristian.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Dorothy_Sayers_The_Lost_Tools_of_Learning.pdf

people should have become susceptible to the influence of advertisement and mass propaganda to an extent hitherto unheard of and unimagined? Do you put this down to the mere mechanical fact that the press and the radio and so on have made propaganda much easier to distribute over a wide area? Or do you sometimes have an uneasy suspicion that the product of modern educational methods is less good than he or she might be at disentangling fact from opinion and the proven from the plausible?

Have you ever, in listening to a debate among adult and presumably responsible people, been fretted by the extraordinary inability of the average debater to speak to the question, or to meet and refute the arguments of speakers on the other side? Or have you ever pondered upon the extremely high incidence of irrelevant matter which crops up at committee meetings, and upon the very great rarity of persons capable of acting as chairmen of committees? And when you think of this, and think that most of our public affairs are settled by debates and committees, have you ever felt a certain sinking of the heart?

Have you ever followed a discussion in the newspapers or elsewhere and noticed how frequently writers fail to define the terms they use? Or how often, if one man does define his terms, another will assume in his reply that he was using the terms in precisely the opposite sense to that in which he has already defined them? Have you ever been faintly troubled by the amount of slipshod syntax going about? And, if so, are you troubled because it is inelegant or because it may lead to dangerous misunderstanding?

Do you ever find that young people, when they have left school, not only forget most of what they have learnt (that is only to be expected), but forget also, or betray that they have never really known, how to tackle a new subject for themselves? Are you often bothered by coming across grown-up men and women who seem unable to distinguish between a book that is sound, scholarly, and properly documented, and one that is, to any trained eye, very conspicuously none of these things? Or who cannot handle a library catalogue? Or who, when faced with a book of reference, betray a curious inability to extract from it the passages relevant to the particular question which interests them?

Do you often come across people for whom, all their lives, a "subject" remains a "subject," divided by watertight bulkheads from all other "subjects," so that they experience very great difficulty in making an immediate mental connection between let us say, algebra and detective fiction, sewage disposal and the price of salmon – or, more generally, between such spheres of knowledge as philosophy and economics, or chemistry and art?

Are you occasionally perturbed by the things written by adult men and women for adult men and women to read? We find a well-known biologist writing in a weekly paper to the effect that: "It is an argument against the existence of a Creator" (I think he put it more strongly; but since I have, most unfortunately, mislaid the reference, I will put his claim at its lowest)--"an argument against the existence of a Creator that the same kind of variations which are produced by natural selection can be produced at will by stock breeders." One might feel tempted to say that it is rather an argument for the existence of a Creator. Actually, of course, it is neither; all it proves is that the same material causes (recombination of the chromosomes, by crossbreeding, and so forth) are sufficient to account for all observed variations--just as the various combinations of the same dozen tones are materially sufficient to account for Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata and the noise the cat makes by walking on the keys. But the cat's performance neither proves nor disproves the existence of Beethoven; and all that is proved by the biologist's argument is that he was unable to distinguish between a material and a final cause.

Here is a sentence from no less academic a source than a front-page article in the Times Literary Supplement: "The Frenchman, Alfred Epinas, pointed out that certain species (e.g., ants and wasps) can only face the horrors of life and death in association." I do not know what the Frenchman actually did say; what the Englishman says he said is patently meaningless. We cannot know whether life holds any horror for the ant, nor in what sense the isolated wasp which you kill

upon the window-pane can be said to "face" or not to "face" the horrors of death. The subject of the article is mass behavior in man; and the human motives have been unobtrusively transferred from the main proposition to the supporting instance. Thus the argument, in effect, assumes what it set out to prove – a fact which would become immediately apparent if it were presented in a formal syllogism. This is only a small and haphazard example of a vice which pervades whole books – particularly books written by men of science on metaphysical subjects.

Another quotation from the same issue of the TLS comes in fittingly here to wind up this random collection of disquieting thoughts – this time from a review of Sir Richard Livingstone's "Some Tasks for Education": "More than once the reader is reminded of the value of an intensive study of at least one subject, so as to learn the meaning of knowledge' and what precision and persistence is needed to attain it. Yet there is elsewhere full recognition of the distressing fact that a man may be master in one field and show no better judgment than his neighbor anywhere else; he remembers what he has learnt, but forgets altogether how he learned it."

I would draw your attention particularly to that last sentence, which offers an explanation of what the writer rightly calls the "distressing fact" that the intellectual skills bestowed upon us by our education are not readily transferable to subjects other than those in which we acquired them: "he remembers what he has learnt, but forgets altogether how he learned it."

Is not the great defect of our education today – a defect traceable through all the disquieting symptoms of trouble that I have mentioned – that although we often succeed in teaching our pupils "subjects," we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think: they learn everything, except the art of learning. It is as though we had taught a child, mechanically and by rule of thumb, to play "The Harmonious Blacksmith" upon the piano, but had never taught him the scale or how to read music; so that, having memorized "The Harmonious Blacksmith," he still had not the faintest notion how to proceed from that to tackle "The Last Rose of Summer." Why do I say, "as though"? In certain of the arts and crafts, we sometimes do precisely this – requiring a child to "express himself" in paint before we teach him how to handle the colors and the brush. There is a school of thought which believes this to be the right way to set about the job. But observe: it is not the way in which a trained craftsman will go about to teach himself a new medium. He, having learned by experience the best way to economize labor and take the thing by the right end, will start off by doodling about on an odd piece of material, in order to "give himself the feel of the tool."

The Medieval Scheme of Education

Let us now look at the mediaeval scheme of education--the syllabus of the Schools. It does not matter, for the moment, whether it was devised for small children or for older students, or how long people were supposed to take over it. What matters is the light it throws upon what the men of the Middle Ages supposed to be the object and the right order of the educative process.

The syllabus was divided into two parts: the Trivium and Quadrivium. The second part – the Quadrivium – consisted of "subjects," and need not for the moment concern us. The interesting thing for us is the composition of the Trivium, which preceded the Quadrivium and was the preliminary discipline for it. It consisted of three parts: Grammar, Dialectic, and Rhetoric, in that order.

Now the first thing we notice is that two at any rate of these "subjects" are not what we should call "subjects" at all: they are only methods of dealing with subjects. Grammar, indeed, is a "subject" in the sense that it does mean definitely learning a language – at that period it meant learning Latin. But language itself is simply the medium in which thought is expressed. The whole of the Trivium was, in fact, intended to teach the pupil the proper use of the tools of learning, before he began to apply them to "subjects" at all. First, he learned a language; not just how to order a meal in a foreign language, but the structure of a language, and hence of language itself – what it was, how it was put together, and how it worked. Secondly, he learned how to use language; how to define his terms and make accurate statements; how to construct

an argument and how to detect fallacies in argument. Dialectic, that is to say, embraced Logic and Disputation. Thirdly, he learned to express himself in language – how to say what he had to say elegantly and persuasively.

At the end of his course, he was required to compose a thesis upon some theme set by his masters or chosen by himself, and afterwards to defend his thesis against the criticism of the faculty. By this time, he would have learned – or woe betide him – not merely to write an essay on paper, but to speak audibly and intelligibly from a platform, and to use his wits quickly when heckled. There would also be questions, cogent and shrewd, from those who had already run the gauntlet of debate.

Is not the great defect of our education today – a defect traceable through all the disquieting symptoms of trouble that I have mentioned – that although we often succeed in teaching our pupils "subjects," we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think: they learn everything, except the art of learning.

It is, of course, quite true that bits and pieces of the mediaeval tradition still linger, or have been revived, in the ordinary school syllabus of today. Some knowledge of grammar is still required when learning a foreign language – perhaps I should say, "is again required," for during my own lifetime, we passed through a phase when the teaching of declensions and conjugations was considered rather reprehensible, and it was considered better to pick these things up as we went along. School debating societies flourish; essays are written; the necessity for "self- expression" is stressed, and perhaps even over-stressed. But these activities are cultivated more or less in detachment, as belonging to the special subjects in which they are pigeon-holed rather than as forming one coherent scheme of mental training to which all "subjects" stand in a subordinate relation. "Grammar" belongs especially to the "subject" of foreign languages, and essay-writing to the "subject" called "English"; while Dialectic has become almost entirely divorced from the rest of the curriculum, and is frequently practiced unsystematically and out of school hours as a separate exercise, only very loosely related to the main business of learning. Taken by and large, the great difference of emphasis between the two conceptions holds good: modern education concentrates on "teaching subjects," leaving the method of thinking, arguing, and expressing one's conclusions to be picked up by the scholar as he goes along' mediaeval education concentrated on first forging and learning to handle the tools of learning, using whatever subject came handy as a piece of material on which to doodle until the use of the tool became second nature.

"Subjects" of some kind there must be, of course. One cannot learn the theory of grammar without learning an actual language, or learn to argue and orate without speaking about something in particular. The debating subjects of the Middle Ages were drawn largely from theology, or from the ethics and history of antiquity. Often, indeed, they became stereotyped, especially towards the end of the period, and the far-fetched and wire-drawn absurdities of Scholastic argument fretted Milton and provide food for merriment even to this day. Whether they were in themselves any more hackneyed and trivial then the usual subjects set nowadays for "essay writing" I should not like to say: we may ourselves grow a little weary of "A Day in My Holidays" and all the rest of it. But most of the merriment is misplaced, because the aim and object of the debating thesis has by now been lost sight of.

A glib speaker in the Brains Trust once entertained his audience (and reduced the late Charles Williams to helpless rage by asserting that in the Middle Ages it was a matter of faith to know how many archangels could dance on the point of a needle. I need not say, I hope, that it never was a "matter of faith"; it was

simply a debating exercise, whose set subject was the nature of angelic substance: were angels material, and if so, did they occupy space? The answer usually adjudged correct is, I believe, that angels are pure intelligences; not material, but limited, so that they may have location in space but not extension. An analogy might be drawn from human thought, which is similarly non-material and similarly limited. Thus, if your thought is concentrated upon one thing – say, the point of a needle – it is located there in the sense that it is not elsewhere; but although it is "there," it occupies no space there, and there is nothing to prevent an infinite number of different people's thoughts being concentrated upon the same needle-point at the same time. The proper subject of the argument is thus seen to be the distinction between location and extension in space; the matter on which the argument is exercised happens to be the nature of angels (although, as we have seen, it might equally well have been something else; the practical lesson to be drawn from the argument is not to use words like "there" in a loose and unscientific way, without specifying whether you mean "located there" or "occupying space there."

Scorn in plenty has been poured out upon the mediaeval passion for hair-splitting; but when we look at the shameless abuse made, in print and on the platform, of controversial expressions with shifting and ambiguous connotations, we may feel it in our hearts to wish that every reader and hearer had been so defensively armored by his education as to be able to cry: "*Distinguo*."

For we let our young men and women go out unarmed, in a day when armor was never so necessary. By teaching them all to read, we have left them at the mercy of the printed word. By the invention of the film and the radio, we have made certain that no aversion to reading shall secure them from the incessant battery of words, words, words. They do not know what the words mean; they do not know how to ward them off or blunt their edge or fling them back; they are a prey to words in their emotions instead of being the masters of them in their intellects. We who were scandalized in 1940 when men were sent to fight armored tanks with rifles, are not scandalized when young men and women are sent into the world to fight massed propaganda with a smattering of "subjects"; and when whole classes and whole nations become hypnotized by the arts of the spell binder, we have the impudence to be astonished. We dole out lip-service to the importance of education – lip- service and, just occasionally, a little grant of money; we postpone the school-leaving age, and plan to build bigger and better schools; the teachers slave conscientiously in and out of school hours; and yet, as I believe, all this devoted effort is largely frustrated, because we have lost the tools of learning, and in their absence can only make a botched and piecemeal job of it.

What then?

What, then, are we to do? We cannot go back to the Middle Ages. That is a cry to which we have become accustomed. We cannot go back – or can we? *Distinguo*. I should like every term in that proposition defined. Does "go back" mean a retrogression in time, or the revision of an error? The first is clearly impossible per se; the second is a thing which wise men do every day. "Cannot" – does this mean that our behavior is determined irreversibly, or merely that such an action would be very difficult in view of the opposition it would provoke? Obviously the twentieth century is not and cannot be the fourteenth; but if "the Middle Ages" is, in this context, simply a picturesque phrase denoting a particular educational theory, there seems to be no a priori reason why we should not "go back" to it – with modifications – as we have already "gone back" with modifications, to, let us say, the idea of playing Shakespeare's plays as he wrote them, and not in the "modernized" versions of Cibber and Garrick, which once seemed to be the latest thing in theatrical progress.

Let us amuse ourselves by imagining that such progressive retrogression is possible. Let us make a clean sweep of all educational authorities, and furnish ourselves with a nice little school of boys and girls whom we may experimentally equip for the intellectual conflict along lines chosen by ourselves. We will endow them with exceptionally docile parents; we will staff our school with teachers who are themselves perfectly familiar with the aims and methods of the Trivium; we will have our building and staff large enough to allow our classes to be small enough for adequate handling; and we will postulate a Board of Examiners willing

and qualified to test the products we turn out. Thus prepared, we will attempt to sketch out a syllabus – a modern Trivium "with modifications" and we will see where we get to.

But first: what age shall the children be? Well, if one is to educate them on novel lines, it will be better that they should have nothing to unlearn; besides, one cannot begin a good thing too early, and the Trivium is by its nature not learning, but a preparation for learning. We will, therefore, "catch 'em young," requiring of our pupils only that they shall be able to read, write, and cipher.

My views about child psychology are, I admit, neither orthodox nor enlightened. Looking back upon myself (since I am the child I know best and the only child I can pretend to know from inside) I recognize three states of development. These, in a rough-and-ready fashion, I will call the Poll-Parrot, the Pert, and the Poet – the latter coinciding, approximately, with the onset of puberty. The Poll-Parrot stage is the one in which learning by heart is easy and, on the whole, pleasurable; whereas reasoning is difficult and, on the whole, little relished. At this age, one readily memorizes the shapes and appearances of things; one likes to recite the number-plates of cars; one rejoices in the chanting of rhymes and the rumble and thunder of unintelligible polysyllables; one enjoys the mere accumulation of things. The Pert age, which follows upon this (and, naturally, overlaps it to some extent), is characterized by contradicting, answering back, liking to "catch people out" (especially one's elders); and by the propounding of conundrums. Its nuisance-value is extremely high. It usually sets in about the Fourth Form. The Poetic age is popularly known as the "difficult" age. It is self-centered; it yearns to express itself; it rather specializes in being misunderstood; it is restless and tries to achieve independence; and, with good luck and good guidance, it should show the beginnings of creativeness; a reaching out towards a synthesis of what it already knows, and a deliberate eagerness to know and do some one thing in preference to all others. Now it seems to me that the layout of the Trivium adapts itself with a singular appropriateness to these three ages: Grammar to the Poll-Parrot, Dialectic to the Pert, and Rhetoric to the Poetic age.

The Grammar Stage

Let us begin, then, with Grammar. This, in practice, means the grammar of some language in particular; and it must be an inflected language. The grammatical structure of an uninflected language is far too analytical to be tackled by any one without previous practice in Dialectic. Moreover, the inflected languages interpret the uninflected, whereas the uninflected are of little use in interpreting the inflected. I will say at once, quite firmly, that the best grounding for education is the Latin grammar. I say this, not because Latin is traditional and mediaeval, but simply because even a rudimentary knowledge of Latin cuts down the labor and pains of learning almost any other subject by at least fifty percent. It is the key to the vocabulary and structure of all the Teutonic languages, as well as to the technical vocabulary of all the sciences and to the literature of the entire Mediterranean civilization, together with all its historical documents.

Those whose pedantic preference for a living language persuades them to deprive their pupils of all these advantages might substitute Russian, whose grammar is still more primitive. Russian is, of course, helpful with the other Slav dialects. There is something also to be said for Classical Greek. But my own choice is Latin. Having thus pleased the Classicists among you, I will proceed to horrify them by adding that I do not think it either wise or necessary to cramp the ordinary pupil upon the Procrustean bed of the Augustan Age, with its highly elaborate and artificial verse forms and oratory. Post-classical and mediaeval Latin, which was a living language right down to the end of the Renaissance, is easier and in some ways livelier; a study of it helps to dispel the widespread notion that learning and literature came to a full stop when Christ was born and only woke up again at the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

Latin should be begun as early as possible – at a time when inflected speech seems no more astonishing than any other phenomenon in an astonishing world; and when the chanting of "*Amo, amas, amat*" is as ritually agreeable to the feelings as the chanting of "eeny, meeny, miney, moe."

During this age we must, of course, exercise the mind on other things besides Latin grammar.

Observation and memory are the faculties most lively at this period; and if we are to learn a contemporary foreign language we should begin now, before the facial and mental muscles become rebellious to strange intonations. Spoken French or German can be practiced alongside the grammatical discipline of the Latin.

In English, meanwhile, verse and prose can be learned by heart, and the pupil's memory should be stored with stories of every kind--classical myth, European legend, and so forth. I do not think that the classical stories and masterpieces of ancient literature should be made the vile bodies on which to practice the techniques of Grammar – that was a fault of mediaeval education which we need not perpetuate. The stories can be enjoyed and remembered in English, and related to their origin at a subsequent stage. Recitation aloud should be practiced, individually or in chorus; for we must not forget that we are laying the groundwork for Disputation and Rhetoric.

The grammar of History should consist, I think, of dates, events, anecdotes, and personalities. A set of dates to which one can peg all later historical knowledge is of enormous help later on in establishing the perspective of history. It does not greatly matter which dates: those of the Kings of England will do very nicely, provided that they are accompanied by pictures of costumes, architecture, and other everyday things, so that the mere mention of a date calls up a very strong visual presentment of the whole period.

Geography will similarly be presented in its factual aspect, with maps, natural features, and visual presentment of customs, costumes, flora, fauna, and so on; and I believe myself that the discredited and old-fashioned memorizing of a few capitol cities, rivers, mountain ranges, etc., does no harm. Stamp collecting may be encouraged.

Science, in the Poll-Parrot period, arranges itself naturally and easily around collections – the identifying and naming of specimens and, in general, the kind of thing that used to be called "natural philosophy." To know the name and properties of things is, at this age, a satisfaction in itself; to recognize a devil's coach-horse at sight, and assure one's foolish elders, that, in spite of its appearance, it does not sting; to be able to pick out Cassiopeia and the Pleiades, and perhaps even to know who Cassiopeia and the Pleiades were; to be aware that a whale is not a fish, and a bat not a bird – all these things give a pleasant sensation of superiority; while to know a ring snake from an adder or a poisonous from an edible toadstool is a kind of knowledge that also has practical value.

The grammar of Mathematics begins, of course, with the multiplication table, which, if not learnt now, will never be learnt with pleasure; and with the recognition of geometrical shapes and the grouping of numbers. These exercises lead naturally to the doing of simple sums in arithmetic. More complicated mathematical processes may, and perhaps should, be postponed, for the reasons which will presently appear.

So far (except, of course, for the Latin), our curriculum contains nothing that departs very far from common practice. The difference will be felt rather in the attitude of the teachers, who must look upon all these activities less as "subjects" in themselves than as a gathering-together of material for use in the next part of the Trivium. What that material is, is only of secondary importance; but it is as well that anything and everything which can be usefully committed to memory should be memorized at this period, whether it is immediately intelligible or not. The modern tendency is to try and force rational explanations on a child's mind at too early an age. Intelligent questions, spontaneously asked, should, of course, receive an immediate and rational answer; but it is a great mistake to suppose that a child cannot readily enjoy and remember things that are beyond his power to analyze – particularly if those things have a strong imaginative appeal (as, for example, "Kubla Kahn"), an attractive jingle (like some of the memory-rhymes for Latin genders), or an abundance of rich, resounding polysyllables (like the *Quicunque vult*).

This reminds me of the grammar of Theology. I shall add it to the curriculum, because theology is the mistress-science without which the whole educational structure will necessarily lack its final synthesis. Those who disagree about this will remain content to leave their pupil's education still full of loose ends. This will matter rather less than it might, since by the time that the tools of learning have been forged the student will

be able to tackle theology for himself, and will probably insist upon doing so and making sense of it. Still, it is as well to have this matter also handy and ready for the reason to work upon. At the grammatical age, therefore, we should become acquainted with the story of God and Man in outline – i.e., the Old and New Testaments presented as parts of a single narrative of Creation, Rebellion, and Redemption--and also with the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. At this early stage, it does not matter nearly so much that these things should be fully understood as that they should be known and remembered.

The Logic Stage

It is difficult to say at what age, precisely, we should pass from the first to the second part of the Trivium. Generally speaking, the answer is: so soon as the pupil shows himself disposed to pertness and interminable argument. For as, in the first part, the master faculties are Observation and Memory, so, in the second, the master faculty is the Discursive Reason. In the first, the exercise to which the rest of the material was, as it were, keyed, was the Latin grammar; in the second, the key- exercise will be Formal Logic. It is here that our curriculum shows its first sharp divergence from modern standards. The disrepute into which Formal Logic has fallen is entirely unjustified; and its neglect is the root cause of nearly all those disquieting symptoms which we have noted in the modern intellectual constitution. Logic has been discredited, partly because we have come to suppose that we are conditioned almost entirely by the intuitive and the unconscious. There is no time to argue whether this is true; I will simply observe that to neglect the proper training of the reason is the best possible way to make it true. Another cause for the disfavor into which Logic has fallen is the belief that it is entirely based upon universal assumptions that are either unprovable or tautological. This is not true. Not all universal propositions are of this kind. But even if they were, it would make no difference, since every syllogism whose major premise is in the form "All A is B" can be recast in hypothetical form. Logic is the art of arguing correctly: "If A, then B." The method is not invalidated by the hypothetical nature of A. Indeed, the practical utility of Formal Logic today lies not so much in the establishment of positive conclusions as in the prompt detection and exposure of invalid inference.

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) and the history of language (i.e., how we came to arrange our speech as we do in order to convey our thoughts).

Our Reading will proceed from narrative and lyric to essays, argument and criticism, and the pupil will learn to try his own hand at writing this kind of thing. Many lessons – on whatever subject – will take the form of debates; and the place of individual or choral recitation will be taken by dramatic performances, with special attention to plays in which an argument is stated in dramatic form.

Mathematics – algebra, geometry, and the more advanced kinds of arithmetic – will now enter into the syllabus and take its place as what it really is: not a separate "subject" but a sub- department of Logic. It is neither more nor less than the rule of the syllogism in its particular application to number and measurement, and should be taught as such, instead of being, for some, a dark mystery, and, for others, a special revelation, neither illuminating nor illuminated by any other part of knowledge.

History, aided by a simple system of ethics derived from the grammar of theology, will provide much suitable material for discussion: Was the behavior of this statesman justified? What was the effect of such an enactment? What are the arguments for and against this or that form of government? We shall thus get an introduction to constitutional history – a subject meaningless to the young child, but of absorbing interest to those who are prepared to argue and debate. Theology itself will furnish material for argument about conduct and morals; and should have its scope extended by a simplified course of dogmatic theology (i.e., the rational structure of Christian thought), clarifying the relations between the dogma and the ethics, and lending itself to that application of ethical

principles in particular instances which is properly called casuistry. Geography and the Sciences will likewise provide material for Dialectic.

But above all, we must not neglect the material which is so abundant in the pupils' own daily life.

There is a delightful passage in Leslie Paul's "The Living Hedge" which tells how a number of small boys enjoyed themselves for days arguing about an extraordinary shower of rain which had fallen in their town--a shower so localized that it left one half of the main street wet and the other dry. Could one, they argued, properly say that it had rained that day on or over the town or only in the town? How many drops of water were required to constitute rain? And so on. Argument about this led on to a host of similar problems about rest and motion, sleep and waking, *est* and *non est*, and the infinitesimal division of time. The whole passage is an admirable example of the spontaneous development of the ratiocinative faculty and the natural and proper thirst of the awakening reason for the definition of terms and exactness of statement. All events are food for such an appetite.

An umpire's decision; the degree to which one may transgress the spirit of a regulation without being trapped by the letter: on such questions as these, children are born casuists, and their natural propensity only needs to be developed and trained – and especially, brought into an intelligible relationship with the events in the grown-up world. The newspapers are full of good material for such exercises: legal decisions, on the one hand, in cases where the cause at issue is not too abstruse; on the other, fallacious reasoning and muddleheaded arguments, with which the correspondence columns of certain papers one could name are abundantly stocked.

Wherever the matter for Dialectic is found, it is, of course, highly important that attention should be focused upon the beauty and economy of a fine demonstration or a well-turned argument, lest veneration should wholly die. Criticism must not be merely destructive; though at the same time both teacher and pupils must be ready to detect fallacy, slipshod reasoning, ambiguity, irrelevance, and redundancy, and to pounce upon them like rats. This is the moment when precise-writing may be usefully undertaken; together with such exercises as the writing of an essay, and the reduction of it, when written, by 25 or 50 percent.

It will, doubtless, be objected that to encourage young persons at the Pert age to browbeat, correct, and argue with their elders will render them perfectly intolerable. My answer is that children of that age are intolerable anyhow; and that their natural argumentativeness may just as well be canalized to good purpose as allowed to run away into the sands. It may, indeed, be rather less obtrusive at home if it is disciplined in school; and anyhow, elders who have abandoned the wholesome principle that children should be seen and not heard have no one to blame but themselves.

Once again, the contents of the syllabus at this stage may be anything you like. The "subjects" supply material; but they are all to be regarded as mere grist for the mental mill to work upon. The pupils should be encouraged to go and forage for their own information, and so guided towards the proper use of libraries and books for reference, and shown how to tell which sources are authoritative and which are not.

The Rhetoric Stage

Towards the close of this stage, the pupils will probably be beginning to discover for themselves that their knowledge and experience are insufficient, and that their trained intelligences need a great deal more material to chew upon. The imagination – usually dormant during the Pert age – will reawaken, and prompt them to suspect the limitations of logic and reason. This means that they are passing into the Poetic age and are ready to embark on the study of Rhetoric. The doors of the storehouse of knowledge should now be thrown open for them to browse about as they will. The things once learned by rote will be seen in new contexts; the things once coldly analyzed can now be brought together to form a new synthesis; here and there a sudden insight will bring about that most exciting of all discoveries: the realization that truism is true.

It is difficult to map out any general syllabus for the study of Rhetoric: a certain freedom is demanded. In literature, appreciation should be again allowed to take

the lead over destructive criticism; and self-expression in writing can go forward, with its tools now sharpened to cut clean and observe proportion. Any child who already shows a disposition to specialize should be given his head: for, when the use of the tools has been well and truly learned, it is available for any study whatever. It would be well, I think, that each pupil should learn to do one, or two, subjects really well, while taking a few classes in subsidiary subjects so as to keep his mind open to the inter-relations of all knowledge. Indeed, at this stage, our difficulty will be to keep "subjects" apart; for Dialectic will have shown all branches of learning to be inter-related, so Rhetoric will tend to show that all knowledge is one. To show this, and show why it is so, is pre-eminently the task of the mistress science. But whether theology is studied or not, we should at least insist that children who seem inclined to specialize on the mathematical and scientific side should be obliged to attend some lessons in the humanities and vice versa. At this stage, also, the Latin grammar, having done its work, may be dropped for those who prefer to carry on their language studies on the modern side; while those who are likely never to have any great use or aptitude for mathematics might also be allowed to rest, more or less, upon their oars. Generally speaking, whatsoever is mere apparatus may now be allowed to fall into the background, while the trained mind is gradually prepared for specialization in the "subjects" which, when the Trivium is completed, it should be perfectly will equipped to tackle on its own. The final synthesis of the Trivium--the presentation and public defense of the thesis--should be restored in some form; perhaps as a kind of "leaving examination" during the last term at school.

The scope of Rhetoric depends also on whether the pupil is to be turned out into the world at the age of 16 or whether he is to proceed to the university. Since, really, Rhetoric should be taken at about 14, the first category of pupil should study Grammar from about 9 to 11, and Dialectic from 12 to 14; his last two school years would then be devoted to Rhetoric, which, in this case, would be of a fairly specialized and vocational kind, suiting him to enter immediately upon some practical career. A pupil of the second category would finish his Dialectical course in his preparatory school, and take Rhetoric during his first two years at his public school. At 16, he would be ready to start upon those "subjects" which are proposed for his later study at the university: and this part of his education will correspond to the mediaeval Quadrivium. What this amounts to is that the ordinary pupil, whose formal education ends at 16, will take the Trivium only; whereas scholars will take both the Trivium and the Quadrivium.

The Trivium Defended

Is the Trivium, then, a sufficient education for life? Properly taught, I believe that it should be. At the end of the Dialectic, the children will probably seem to be far behind their coevals brought up on old-fashioned "modern" methods, so far as detailed knowledge of specific subjects is concerned. But after the age of 14 they should be able to overhaul the others hand over fist. Indeed, I am not at all sure that a pupil thoroughly proficient in the Trivium would not be fit to proceed immediately to the university at the age of 16, thus proving himself the equal of his mediaeval counterpart, whose precocity astonished us at the beginning of this discussion. This, to be sure, would make hay of the English public-school system, and disconcert the universities very much. It would, for example, make quite a different thing of the Oxford and Cambridge boat race.

But I am not here to consider the feelings of academic bodies: I am concerned only with the proper training of the mind to encounter and deal with the formidable mass of undigested problems presented to it by the modern world. For the tools of learning are the same, in any and every subject; and the person who knows how to use them will, at any age, get the mastery of a new subject in half the time and with a quarter of the effort expended by the person who has not the tools at his command. To learn six subjects without remembering how they were learnt does nothing to ease the approach to a seventh; to have learnt and remembered the art of learning makes the approach to every subject an open door.

Before concluding these necessarily very sketchy suggestions, I ought to say why I think it necessary, in these days, to go back to a discipline which we had discarded. The truth is that for the last three hundred

years or so we have been living upon our educational capital. The post-Renaissance world, bewildered and excited by the profusion of new "subjects" offered to it, broke away from the old discipline (which had, indeed, become sadly dull and stereotyped in its practical application) and imagined that henceforward it could, as it were, disport itself happily in its new and extended Quadrivium without passing through the Trivium. But the Scholastic tradition, though broken and maimed, still lingered in the public schools and universities: Milton, however much he protested against it, was formed by it – the debate of the Fallen Angels and the disputation of Abdiel with Satan have the tool-marks of the Schools upon them, and might, incidentally, profitably figure as set passages for our Dialectical studies. Right down to the nineteenth century, our public affairs were mostly managed, and our books and journals were for the most part written, by people brought up in homes, and trained in places, where that tradition was still alive in the memory and almost in the blood. Just so, many people today who are atheist or agnostic in religion, are governed in their conduct by a code of Christian ethics which is so rooted that it never occurs to them to question it.

But one cannot live on capital forever. However firmly a tradition is rooted, if it is never watered, though it dies hard, yet in the end it dies. And today a great number – perhaps the majority – of the men and women who handle our affairs, write our books and our newspapers, carry out our research, present our plays and our films, speak from our platforms and pulpits – yes, and who educate our young people – have never, even in a lingering traditional memory, undergone the Scholastic discipline. Less and less do the children who come to be educated bring any of that tradition with them. We have lost the tools of learning – the axe and the wedge, the hammer and the saw, the chisel and the plane – that were so adaptable to all tasks. Instead of them, we have merely a set of complicated jigs, each of which will do but one task and no more, and in using which eye and hand receive no training, so that no man ever sees the work as a whole or "looks to the end of the work."

What use is it to pile task on task and prolong the days of labor, if at the close the chief object is left unattained? It is not the fault of the teachers – they work only too hard already. The combined folly of a civilization that has forgotten its own roots is forcing them to shore up the tottering weight of an educational structure that is built upon sand. They are doing for their pupils the work which the pupils themselves ought to do. For the sole true end of education is simply this: to teach men how to learn for themselves; and whatever instruction fails to do this is effort spent in vain.

Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957) attended Somerville College, Oxford, graduating in 1915 with first class honors in modern languages. She held a variety of jobs in publishing, advertising, and teaching. She began writing detective fiction, and in 1923 her first of fourteen Lord Peter Wimsey novels, Whose Body, was published. Sayers married Arthur Fleming, a journalist 12 years her senior, in 1926. Sayers turned to play writing in the mid-1930s, a medium which highlighted her poetic skill and dramatic abilities with Christian themes. Sayers' most well-known play, The Man Born to be King, broadcast on the BBC in 1941, was very popular but caused a stir for its Christ who spoke modern English. In the 1950s, she began translating Dante's The Divine Comedy, an interest of hers for some years as a result of reading Charles Williams' The Figure of Beatrice. Her translations of Dante were to be her greatest accomplishment, though she died in 1957 at age 64 before completing the last of its three volumes. She was a contemporary and acquaintance of C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Owen Barfield, to name a few. Dorothy Sayers delivered her talk on “The Lost Tools of Learning” at Oxford University in 1947, where it was later published.

slater strategies
school success makers

We help you grow your school's enrollment.

Start now at SlaterStrategies.com

Download our free enrollment growth e-book

Signup for our email newsletter. News, tips, and free giveaways.

Join our school community on Facebook

SlaterStrategies.com

(772) 222-3661

Association of Classical Christian Schools
317 West 6th, Suit 211,
Moscow, ID 83843

PRESORT STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 455
MOSCOW, ID
83843

ASSOCIATION OF CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

CLASSIS

CLASSIS is a journal promoting a new "old way" and is designed to edify, support, and encourage educators around the world who seek to recover classical Christian education in the twilight of the West.

Association of Classical Christian Schools
Phone: (208) 882-6101

Editorial: dodonnell@accsedu.org
Advertisement: rortego@accsedu.org
Web: www.classicalchristian.org