


WHAT *is a* CLASSICAL EDUCATION?

The recent explosion of Christian schools across our country has been a self-conscious Christian response to the national public education system that has legislated God and Christianity out of the instruction and training of our children. In taking on the challenge of establishing a sound educational system that is truly Christian, many have realized that more is involved than having Bible readings and lessons, offering prayers, and maintaining a disciplined moral environment.

The Christian school must first TEACH “Christianly”—that is, its curriculum must reflect faithfully the Divine perspective in each subject as it is rooted in the truth of Holy Scripture. Indeed, there are *no* neutral subject areas. Secondly, the Christian school must teach its pupils to THINK “Christianly.” Those seeking more faithfully to fulfill this requirement have fueled a renewed interest in the “classical” education method.

Several classical and Christian school associations have formed, as well as annual conferences and seminars advancing a classical education. ACCS (Association of Classical and Christian Schools) is one such organization, which also provides extensive literature on the subject and has a very helpful website (accsedu.org).

At ACCS, a classical education is summed up in this way: In the western world, our way of life, our theological and intellectual history, our laws and social customs, have all been handed down to us. In other words, our culture has grown from the heritage of the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans.

How would it be possible to acknowledge such a vast heritage by merely adding a Latin class? As the Gospel spread throughout the ancient classical world, the early Christians developed a teaching method which revolved around what were called the Seven Liberal Arts. This method grew and developed down into the Middle Ages and had remarkable success.

The first three of these Seven Liberal Arts were called the Trivium and comprised the means by which students were given the tools of learning. Our adoption of the Trivium as a method of instruction was essential in the formation of our school upon a classical model. The Trivium has three parts. The first, *grammar*, concerns the particulars of any given subject. *Logic* is the second, and deals with the reasoning which ties all the various particulars together. *Rhetoric* is then used to teach the students how to express what they have learned in a polished and effective way.

At Good Shepherd, we apply these three categories in every discipline, and every discipline can be divided into these categories. But subjects are only half of the classical approach to teaching. Each child also has an innate affinity for the stages of learning, which corresponds to this division of the Trivium.

Consequently, we ensure that students of different ages learn according to those innate abilities. From the chanting of math and grammar of the elementary students, to the logic class with debate and discussion in junior high, to the inventive rhetoric and study of literature at the senior high school level, the various stages of the Trivium are thoughtfully lined up with the abilities and desires of the students.

And yes, we also teach Latin.

