The Three-Legged Stool

The Dorothy Sayers method of classical education does not guide us as to core subjects; she describes the method to use to learn any subject. The historic method of classical education likewise does not provide a curriculum comprehensive enough to meet the requirements of most state homeschooling laws. A truly optimum classical education, then, ought to be like a three-legged stool. One leg would be the mastery of language with a biblical foundation: English and Latin grammar, logic, and rhetoric. The second leg would be the mastery of mathematics with a biblical foundation: arithmetic, the grammar of mathematics; algebra and geometry, the logic of mathematics; and higher maths, the rhetoric of mathematics. Mathematics is also a language, and also teaches precise thinking and logic in another way. The third leg would be Christian and Western Civilization with a biblical foundation, so that the culture may be transferred from one generation to the next, allowing it to endure and progress. (If ever a generation failed to transfer Christian and Western culture to the next generation, that culture would cease to exist upon the parent generation’s death.) Western Civilization, which is based upon and is an outgrowth of Christianity, includes history, literature, art, music, science, philosophy, law, government, and other related topics, all on their biblical foundations.

Out of all the subjects which might be studied under the umbrella of Western Civilization, history and literature are the most important. History, because the plan of salvation and the work of God among men rests on a historical foundation; God has commanded parents to instruct children in what has happened before; and the study of history helps impart wisdom and judgment to those who engage in it -- foolish choices and their consequences are seen played out on the historical stage, so that foolishness need not be repeated. Literature, because, as C. S. Lewis wrote,

> Our whole destiny seems to lie in the opposite direction, in being as little as possible ourselves, in acquiring a fragrance that is not our own but borrowed, in becoming clean mirrors filled with the image of a face that is not ours ... [therefore] the author should never conceive himself as bringing into existence beauty or wisdom which did not exist before, but simply and solely as trying to embody in terms of his own art some reflection of eternal Beauty and Wisdom.

C. S. Lewis

“Christianity and Literature” in Christian Reflections

In other words, the truly good and great literature of Western Civilization reveals beauty and wisdom which are reflective of the Beauty and Wisdom inherent in God’s nature, each in its own way. And this does not take into account the purely pragmatic benefit that in order to develop proficiency in reading, one must, well, read, and do a lot of it.

To put it another way: in the grammar stage, the core of classical education would be: English grammar and writing; Latin or Greek grammar; Arithmetic; and Christian and Western Civilization and culture, especially as it is found in history and literature, all on a biblical foundation. In the dialectic stage, the core of classical education would be: formal logic and writing the argumentative essay; Latin or Greek grammar and reading in Latin and Greek; Algebra and Geometry; and Christian and Western
Civilization and culture, especially as it is found in history and literature, all on a biblical foundation. In the rhetoric stage, the core of classical education would be: formal **rhetoric** in both oratory and writing; Greek or Hebrew or modern languages such as French or German; higher mathematics; and Christian and Western civilization and culture, especially as it is found in history and literature, all on a biblical foundation.

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