

## “Classical Education” – What is it?

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This past April the Board of Christian Education at Hope elected to move Hope Lutheran School to the time-tested model of “Classical Education.” At first that term might sound scary. We might even be tempted to throw up our hands and ask, “What was wrong with the way we were doing things?” Let me just say, a term is only scary as long as we don’t know what it means. When we learn its proper meaning, we tame the word as well as the flood of emotions inside us. As for what was wrong with the way we were doing things, I say, “Absolutely nothing.” The move toward Classical Education is built on the good and healthy desire to always improve, always do better, and always grow. And in the school setting, that desire to always grow and improve means that we want to keep “raising the bar” in what we teach and how we teach it.

One book that first opened my eyes to the great benefits of Classical Education is titled *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning: An Approach to Distinctively Christian Education*, by Douglas Wilson. Years ago Mr. Wilson was so taken by Classical Education and its proven, time-tested methods of teaching students to be life-long learners that he began a classical school, “Logos School,” in Moscow, Idaho. Wilson’s book teaches us on what Classical Education is and how his school implemented it. Here are some juicy quotes that help us understand “Classical Education.”

Under the heading “I’D LIKE AN EDUCATION – TO GO” Wilson says:

*In modern America, the fast-food mentality has penetrated the realm of the mind. The modern student has a mind full of McThoughts. Information comes to him processed and prepackaged, and he does his duty as a consumer. This does not mean that intellectual activity has disappeared, but having your mind full of mental “stuff” is not the same thing as thinking. This problem did not just*

*arrive a few years ago; insightful people have seen it coming for some time now. In 1947, Dorothy Sayers, a clear-thinking classicist, lamented lack of true thought: “...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?”*

*She goes on: “...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” (p. 91).*

Wilson introduces the *Trivium* [literally, “three ways”] of learning, and then says:

*Sayers matches the three stages of the Trivium to three stages of child development. Grammar, which involves memorizing basic facts, goes nicely with what she calls the “Poll-parrot period.” Younger children love to chant, recite, and memorize. Dialectic, the study of formal logic and argumentation, fits well with what she calls the “Pert” stage. Because children are argumentative at the junior high and early high school level anyway, they might as well be taught to argue properly. The third level, rhetoric, should accompany the child’s “Poetic” phase.*

*When grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric are taught at these ages, the teacher is teaching “with the grain.” Two things are accomplished. The children enjoy what they do, and what they do equips them with the tools of learning (p. 91).*

With so much more to learn about “Classical Education,” feel free to buy and read Wilson’s book for yourself. It’s a great read, well worth buying it, and you can find it easily at Amazon.com.

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