away in favor of vocational training and social engineering, as promoted by progressive educationists like John Dewey.

Thus we enter the era of what Russell Kirk witheringly called "Behemoth University," the university as vocational training center. With its elective-based, cafeteria-style curriculum, the university could no longer claim to inculcate the philosophical habit of mind lauded by John Henry Newman a century before. While classical education retained some of its former glamor—Wheelock's popular college Latin text was written for returning soldiers—by the time the Baby Boomers reached high school in the 1960s, Latin had all but disappeared from the curriculum, shouldered aside by an ever-changing array of 'socially relevant' electives and 'life skills' courses.

The Sayers Trivium and the Reinvention of Classical Education

By the 1970s, the United States was caught in a downward educational spiral. With test scores falling and indicators of social unrest rising, bemoaning the state of education became a national pastime. A chorus of complaints arose from both Right and Left, but few lasting solutions were forthcoming.[49]

In January, 1979, *National Review*, a conservative news magazine, published an article that caught the imagination of a rising generation of Christian educators. The piece was by Dorothy Sayers, a British novelist and playwright best known for her literary mysteries. Sayers was a devout Anglican and sometime writer on theological and devotional themes; one of the first women to take a degree from Oxford University, she was an acquaintance of J. R. R. Tolkien's and C. S. Lewis's. She was

49 For an enlightening study of the history of progressive educational reform in the United States, see Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). For the devastating effects of those reforms on the public schools and universities, see Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education* (New York: Free Press, 1993). Although Sowell's book is now fifteen years old, the situation he described has only worsened since its publication.

also an accomplished translator, having published a masterful English edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. When her article appeared in *National Review*, Sayers had been dead for more than twenty years. The piece itself, a lecture originally delivered at Oxford, had lain largely unnoticed since 1947. One can hardly imagine a less auspicious beginning for what would become a veritable educational revolution. Yet less than two years after the publication of "The Lost Tools of Learning", a Christian school had been founded based on the educational principles Sayers outlined.[50] What were her ideas, and how do they relate to the history of classical education that we've been reviewing here?

Sayers' article is well worth reading in its entirety.[51] In it, she outlines an educational program based on the medieval Trivium subjects: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. In a bold move, Sayers treats these disciplines not only as subjects in themselves, but as stages of learning:

> 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.

In Sayers' view, then, the Trivium is to be understood, not as the content of specific subjects, but as descriptive of stages of intellectual development. In a much-quoted passage, she went on to describe how these stages apply to modern children:

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50 The Logos School, Moscow, Idaho, opened in September, 1981. See logosschool.com and especially the articles "What Do We Mean by Classical?" (logosschool.com/classical.asp) and "The Lost Tools Chart" (logosschool.com/files/LostToolsChart.asp).

51 The full text of Sayers' essay appears in Gamble, pp. 602-615. It can also be found at several sites on the Internet.

> 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.

Sayers further observed that each subject has its own internal grammar, logic, and rhetoric. The grammar of a subject consists of essential facts and rules: "The grammar of History should consist, I think, of dates, events, anecdotes, and personalities." The logic of a subject encompasses the relationships between the facts and rules, which can be determined analytically. The rhetoric of a subject, then, culminates in the clear expression and creative application of the material grasped and analyzed in the previous two stages. Facts, analysis, synthesis: the Trivium becomes a methodology for approaching any subject. Sayers writes, "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."

Two questions arise at this point: Is Sayers correct in her assessment of the stages of learning? And how does her method relate to classical education?

To the first question, we can give an affirmative answer, albeit with some qualifications. Classroom teachers and parents alike acknowledge that Sayers showed insight into child development; six-year-olds do have a high tolerance for repetition, and eleven-year-olds do tend to be cheeky. It is also undeniably true that students need to learn certain basic skills before they can master a subject.

But is it equally true that what we learn matters less than how we learn? Is the material really just "grist for the mental mill"? Here Sayers is on shakier ground. Few parents would agree that learning about the history of the comic book is the equivalent of learning about the history of the novel. We rightly object to such pedagogical monkey business as 'dumbing down'. No amount of memorization or analysis of famous comic books will make the subject matter any more than trivial. What we learn does matter.

What's more, every subject requires the use of all three modalities —memorization, analysis, synthesis—for mastery. These modalities do not necessarily occur sequentially, but more often simultaneously and from the very earliest stages of learning. A beginning Latin student will certainly memorize grammar paradigms—a typical 'Poll-Parrot' task—but she will also, in short order, be asked to apply these paradigms to real Latin sentences. Being able to chant amo, amas, amat means nothing if you cannot use those forms in meaningful sentences, a process that requires analysis. The same beginning student will soon learn that *Rhenus non est fluvius parvus* does not mean quite the same thing as *Rhenus fluvius parvus non est*.[52] In short, she will have to come to terms with meaningful expression—the beginnings of rhetoric—and that within

52 The former sentence is more emphatic, and can imply a thought to follow, such as …*sed fluvius magnus*.

the first few hours of exposure to Latin.[53]

So it seems that the Sayers model does not in fact reflect pedagogical reality on all counts. What about the claim that her proposal is classical? After all, the schools and books that rest on the Sayers Trivium all feature the term 'classical' prominently. Are they justified in this?

First, Sayers makes specific reference to the medieval scholastic curriculum, but not to classical education. What's more, her description is idealized: as we've noted, medieval scholasticism included heavy doses of Aristotelian logic, but scant study of literature or rhetoric. Appealing as Sayers' scheme is, it reflects an ideal not fully realized in any historical period.

Tellingly, Sayers herself never refers to her "Lost Tools" as 'classical'. As a product of a classical education herself—she began the study of Latin at age six—Sayers would have been well aware of the accepted definition of the term: a literary course of study based on the classical languages. As far as I have been able to determine, the first person to call the Sayers Trivium 'classical' was Douglas Wilson, one of the founders of the Logos School and author of a number of books on the Sayers method.[54] Some writers, such as Susan Wise Bauer, have suggested the term 'neoclassical' as a more accurate way to describe methodologies inspired by the Sayers Trivium.

In addition, we should note that Sayers gives Latin pride of place in her proposal. While neoclassical educators certainly promote the study of Latin, it is usually not for the purpose of reading Latin literature, which some reject on religious grounds and others dismiss as 'derivative' and 'second-rate'.[55] Rather, they suggest Latin study for more utilitar-

53 This particular example is drawn from the first chapter of *Lingua Latina: Familia Romana*, and would typically be encountered in the first or second class session.

54 *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* (1991) and *The Case for Classical Christian Education* (2002).

55 On religious grounds: Harvey and Laurie Bluedorn explicitly reject Ovid and other classical Roman writers as inappropriate for Christian students. See their *Teaching the Trivium: Christian Homeschooling in a Classical Style*. 'Derivative' and 'second-rate': Susan Wise Bauer's characterization of Latin literature: susanwisebauer.com/blog/?p=103 .

ian reasons: Latin increases students' understanding of English grammar and vocabulary. While these are certainly important benefits of Latin study, they are not the ones that traditional classical educators—ancient, medieval, or modern—would consider the most important. For them, the purpose of learning Latin was to read Latin literature, to encounter the greatest minds of the past on their own turf, so to speak, and to be molded by their language and their ideas.

When the broader history of classical education is taken into account, then, it becomes clear that the equation of the Sayers Trivium with classical education represents a fundamental redefinition of the term. We must therefore recognize the Sayers Trivium as a new method, in use for only a short time—a single generation—and developed largely within a narrow social and religious milieu.[56] In contrast, the traditional classical curriculum has spanned thousands of years, has been pursued across the globe, and has been accepted by Christians of all the major communions as well as by members of other faiths. In short, the traditional curriculum enjoys a universality unrivaled by any more recent educational method.

And what is that traditional curriculum? The one described in the previous pages: a curriculum that treats the classical languages—Latin and Greek—as the organizing principles of education; one that relies on a relatively small number of accepted literary masterworks to teach excellence in speaking, writing, and acting; one that educates the whole person: spirit, emotion, and will as well as mind.

> Once classical education pointed to an elite course of instruction based upon Greek and Latin, the two great languages of the classical world. But it also delved into the history, philosophy, literature, and art of the Greek and Roman worlds, affording over time to the more perspicacious devotees a remarkably high degree of cultural understanding, an understanding that endured and marked

56 Virtually all of the well-known proponents of the Sayers Trivium are American and come from a Reformed (Calvinist) background. The major exception is Laura Berquist, author of *Designing Your Own Classical Curriculum*, who is Catholic.

the learner for life. *Classical education was classical immersion*.[57]

Tracy Lee Simmons challenges us to define our terms accurately:

> Today we use the term licentiously. We apply 'classic' or 'classical' to anything we believe to be excellent and universal. […] Thus nowadays may classical education refer to something not linked to the classical world at all—never mind the languages—and get equated with what might once have been called simply traditional or orthodox education. […] And now legions of well-intending home schoolers rush to put dibs on the term and bask in the light of the glory they believe it to exude. […] I will only say to all these good people that extending 'classical' to mark an approach or course of study without reference to Greek and Latin seems an unnecessarily promiscuous usage.[58]

What can we glean from this last phase in the development of classical education?

1. Classical education recognizes that memory, analysis, and expression are important facets of learning at all levels. It therefore treats the medieval Trivium subjects—Latin grammar, logic, and rhetoric—as disciplines in their own right. It suggests that to place undo emphasis on 'ages and stages' can lead to rigidity in the curriculum and an unnatural emphasis on technique in teaching.
2. Classical education treats classical languages as the organizing principles of education.[59] These subjects can only be mastered by orderly, systematic study over a period of many years.[60] They provide the best training for 'learning how to learn' and the most solid foundation for further study in literature, history, and science.

57 Simmons, p. 13.

58 Simmons, pp. 14-15.

59 See Martin Cothran, "Latin as an Ordering Principle" at www.memoriapress.com/articles/latinorder.html .

60 See Cheryl Lowe, "An Apology for Latin and Math" at www.memoriapress.com/articles/apology-latin-math.html .

What is Latin-Centered Classical Education

Latin-centered classical education as described in this book follows traditions that stretch back to ancient Greece and Rome and that dominated education in the West until a century ago. It consists of a rich and varied curriculum, "grounded upon—if not strictly limited to—Greek, Latin, and the study of the civilization from which they arose."[61] An emphatically literary education, it stresses the art of verbal expression, both spoken and written. It looks to the ancient teachers of rhetoric, especially Cicero and Quintilian, and to their Christian interpreters, particularly the authors of the Ignatian *Ratio*, for inspiration.

Yet this type of classical education does not limit itself to exercising the intellect. Its goals are not met by creating mere sophists. We seek not only the True, but also the Good and the Beautiful in their many expressions, acknowledging that all three find their ultimate source in God. Latin-centered education affirms a holistic humanism. It asserts that the development of the mind, the training of the will, the refining of the emotions, and the cultivation of the aesthetic sense are appropriate activities for creatures that bear the image of God. Education should not only train the mind, but ennoble the spirit. To borrow a felicitous Ignatian phrase, education is a matter of formation, not information.

Finally, Latin-centered educators accept as axiomatic the ancient view that the purpose of education is first and foremost moral, not utilitarian. We affirm that one who wishes to live the Good Life must rise above the bread and circuses of mass culture. We do not educate to create more efficient workers or more satisfied consumers, but better—and freer—persons.

This is the classical vision of what it means to be an educated human being, one shared by the greatest educators of the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds: a free person both virtuous and eloquent.

61 Simmons, p. 15.