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Why Publish a Journal on Classical Christian Education in Canada?

The Reformers knew how essential Christian education is for children. They also knew the importance of turning to the authority of Scripture and the wisdom of the past *(ad fontes)* to secure the truths necessary for a child's heart and mind to flourish.

The battle over the future of our families, our churches, and even our country will be won or lost in the education of our children. I am certain of this. And if we are to educate our children properly in these times, we need resources to encourage and unify us, texts we can share and use in our homes, churches, and schools. This journal is an attempt to be one of those resources.

I hope you find encouragement in its pages and are inspired to join us in advancing classical Christian education in Canada.

Soli Deo gloria,

Brenden Bott
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, THE WESTMINSTER CLASSICAL JOURNAL
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Manners:
An Indispensable Ingredient of a Good Education

Written by Brenden Bott

"Nothing in the world will be a surer help to you than proper manners."[1]
Daniel of Beccles, *The Book of the Civilised Man* (13th century)

"Manners maketh the man."[2]
Motto of William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester (14th century)

The word "manners" can elicit various images, and not all of these images are good. To some, the word may evoke a picture of a self-righteous curmudgeon who snarls as he shouts, "Mind your manners." To others, the word may call to mind a meticulous relative, one notorious for her absence of grace and proper proportion. However, still for others, the word elicits someone sweet and is accompanied by feelings of something lost in our society. But whatever picture you may have in your mind, I want to suggest that manners are indispensable, especially in the education of children, and that the absence of manners in education does harm to those we profess to teach.

Now this essay is not an attempt to discourage you. Like most of us, you have probably sensed the importance of manners in a child's education but have neglected to encourage them as they ought to be. Take courage. This is a new day, and we must not live in the past but press on, by the grace of God, toward a better future. A grace of life is this: As long as we live, there are opportunities for improvement.

Before we begin, however, we should answer the following question: What are manners? Now to avoid the details of a full investigation, we will use a definition used since the fourteenth century: Manners are "a person's social behaviour or habits, judged according to the degree of politeness

1. Daniel of Beccles, "The Book of the Civilised Man: An English Translation of the Urbanus Magnus of Daniel of Beccles," quoted in *Chivalry and Courtesy: Medieval Manners for a Modern World*, Danièle Cybulskie (New York: Abbeville Press, 2023), 10.

2. William of Wykeham, "Manners," in *Little Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 4th ed., ed. Susan Ratcliffe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 246.

or the degree of conformity to accepted standards of behaviour or propriety."[3] In what follows, the focus will be on manners as a person's conformity to, or lack thereof, accepted standards of polite social behaviour.[4]

As with all things, we should look first to the Scriptures to guide us. Are there any insights into manners from the Bible? In the Old Testament, there are clear examples of standards of what appropriate social conduct is, practices we would call manners. In Leviticus, God gives a direct command for the treatment of the elderly: "You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man" (Lev 19:32a), and in Proverbs, we are encouraged to be careful not to overstay our welcome when we visit our neighbour (Prov 25:17). In the New Testament, we are told to be careful with the words we use (Eph 4:29). These, and various other directives, should inform our conduct and help shape our behaviour toward others. But there is something even more fundamental than these specific examples in the Scriptures.

Simply put, how we love God is put on display by how we love our neighbour, the person we see in front of us who is made in the image of God.

The two greatest commandments, Christ tells us, are to love God with our entire being and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matt 22:36–40), and the former commandment is the greatest. Now it is disingenuous to claim to love God with our whole heart if we do not regularly spend time with Him in prayer or read His Word and obey His commands (John 15:10); however, what it means to love our neighbour is often debated (for example, Luke 10:29). Paul's Epistle to the Galatians helps give us a greater appreciation for and clarity about the significance of loving our neighbour as ourselves, and it does so in a way that should shape our regular routines and conduct with one another. In Galatians 5:14, there is an apparent tension with the passage from Matthew 22. Paul writes, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" But wait, what about loving God? The first and preeminent of the greatest commandments is, on first reading, peculiar in its absence.

There is, however, no tension or contradiction. The paradox, as is often the case, reveals reality in a way that we may not have otherwise seen. Simply put, how we love God is put on display by how we love our neighbour, the person we see in front of us who is made in the image of God. The two greatest commandments are one—though distinctions must be made at times—and they are both found together in the neighbour before us.

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3. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Manner," accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/manner_n?tab=meaning_and_use#37939372.

4. It may be noted that "etiquette" and "civility" are often used interchangeably with "manners," but it is not my purpose here to detail the similarities or distinctions.

Do you want to grow spiritually? Yes, spend time with God, and read His Word; but also, in all of this, do not neglect to love the person in front of you because how you treat this person is evidence of how much you love God.

We can spend time in prayer and God's Word and yet remain detached from God, as many of the religious leaders did in Jesus' time, but we need the grace of God Almighty and the love of Christ in our hearts to direct us aright to our neighbour. We can have dreams of loving humanity but in reality despise those around us, as Dostoevsky suggests through one of his characters in *The Brothers Karamazov*:

> "I love humanity," he said … "In my dreams, … I have often come to making enthusiastic schemes for the service of humanity; … and yet I am incapable of living in the same room with anyone for two days together, as I know by experience. … In twenty-four hours I begin to hate the best of men."[5]

Now it is true that we can have good manners and hard hearts, but it is difficult to see how we can genuinely and regularly show care for others while ignoring manners.

It takes more than dreams of sacrifice about abstract people; real love is active in its response to the person in front of us. It is in our neighbour that our love for God is proved and fulfilled and our heart is given the opportunity to grow.

But what does all this have to do with manners? Manners are the outward forms of an inward care for others. They are ways—though varied in different times, locations, and cultures—that we can display love for others.

Now it is true that we can have good manners and hard hearts, but it is difficult to see how we can genuinely and regularly show care for others while ignoring manners. It is difficult to understand how we can be attentive in our love for others and not say "Please" when we ask for something and "Thank you" when we receive help or a gift. It is also difficult to see how we can care for others if we never bother even to look at them when they speak to us; to ask them, with interest, how they are; and to speak kindly to them. It is in these ways that we help fulfill the calling that God places upon us and our children to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Children do not learn manners naturally. I promise you this. If you hold a door open for a line of elementary school students, those who have not been regularly encouraged to say "Thank you" will by nature ignore you. Our culture makes these common expressions of gratitude more difficult to learn since it focuses so much of its attention on teaching our children to elevate the self and its desires as the highest good, instead of, as the Scriptures teach us, to esteem others better than ourselves (Phil 2:3) and to care for others in practical ways.

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5. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Random House, 1996), 59.

As we are to train children up in the way that they should go (Prov 22:6; Eph 6:4b), and as loving others and looking for ways to bless them is God's calling on all of our lives, manners are one of the indispensable ways that we can help children orient themselves to the life God calls them and us to.

Now all of this does not mean that we bristle when our five-year-old forgets to say "Thank you." It does, however, mean that we gently remind him or her that these moments to display gratitude are opportunities to show our care for others and to give to others the thanks that is due. We should also not give in to rude demands from our children, but rather always require them to ask for things politely. When our little balls of energy are polite and respectful to others, we need to occasionally make note of it to them in order to encourage them that they are on the right path.

Only the gospel can set us free to truly serve others as we ought.

But is this all not legalism? Will this not lead to a works-based salvation? It is possible that manners, like many other good things, can, without a proper understanding of the gospel, lead a child astray. However, if our children do not have a clear understanding of what God expects of us, namely that we are to love others in concrete ways, it is unlikely that our children will understand how deep human sin resides in their own hearts—that we are curved in on ourselves (*incurvatus in se*) and prefer to please ourselves rather than care for our neighbours—and only the gospel can set us free to truly serve others as we ought.

Any child's education must be handled with care, and there are errors on every side. Can manners ever be a problem? Yes. Whenever we look down upon others because we do something that they do not do, we are no better than Pharisees and have twisted the intent of manners into something perverse and vain. (May God help us and forgive us for when we have failed.)

But there is another concern that I should mention here: We must encourage basic manners, such as saying "Please" and "Thank you," not being rude when speaking to someone, and not interrupting when someone is speaking; however, all manners are not created equal. There are other manners, things that are viewed as polite forms of behaviour in our current culture, that we must resist as Christians.

It is now considered good manners in our culture to support people in sin or, at the very least, to not say anything that may unsettle a person's expression of himself or herself, however destructive these expressions may be. Though we want to be polite and always filled with grace when we speak, Christian manners must not require silence when there are serious temporal and eternal consequences at stake in a person's life due to his or her behaviour.

Something else worth mentioning is that though many of what used to be considered basic manners are fading in our culture, even a recovery of these forms of healthy conduct is insufficient. Christian manners go further. Christian manners mean going the extra mile (Matt 5:41), to do

good to those who persecute us and to love our enemies (Matt 5:44). We should be more thankful, hospitable, charitable, generous, and more kind than anyone else. While basic manners are important, and children need to be taught them, what God calls His people to is so much higher.

Manners, at their best, are the cultural forms that we use to show to others our love and care for them. Though there are times when manners may be distorted and some of their cultural expressions found wanting, this does not mean that all manners should be abandoned. In the end, as our children learn what it means to be polite and treat others as they should be treated, something that the Scriptures command us to do, we may also find that they will be more welcomed by others and have more opportunities to share the gospel.

About the Author

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Brenden Bott is the Head of School at Westminster Classical Christian Academy. He has a doctorate in theology from the University of Toronto, Wycliffe College, specializing in medieval and Reformation thought and theodicy.

"Find My Eyes": The Significance of Eye Contact in the Grammar Years

Written by Elisha Galotti

During my first year teaching kindergarten, a parent expressed concern over our school's practice of prompting children to make eye contact during lessons and interactions. She expressed her concern this way: "Children should never be told to look at someone. Instead of requiring their eyes, why don't you instead ask them to give you their heart? Wouldn't that be better than prompting them to physically look into someone's eyes? Shouldn't we give children the freedom to look wherever they wish to look?"

A day in a kindergarten classroom is full of joyful learning, reading, reciting, painting, playing, and so much more. Mingled through it all, we are training and guiding little lives in the way that they should go. With so much to complete each day, with all of our curriculum goals, and with so many important habits to instill, was this parent right? Was eye contact really a habit worthy of our time? Moreover, were we requiring too much of our students or even wrongly burdening them?

I was thankful for that parent's question, for it prompted deeper reflection and ongoing study. Now, years later, I remain convinced that if there was ever a time to offer children the lifelong gift of the habit of focus, it is now.

Charlotte Mason, the British educator and philosopher from the turn of the twentieth century, known for her enduring work on education and the formation of habits, writes this:

> It is impossible to overstate the importance of this habit of attention. It is, to quote words of weight, "within the reach of everyone, and should be made the primary object of all mental discipline"; for whatever the natural gifts of the child, it is only so far as the habit of attention is cultivated in him that he is able to make use of them.[1]

Over a century later, her words ring truer than ever. In our present age of distraction and disconnection, we honour our students when we teach them how to focus their minds, whether that be on a lesson or, more importantly, on a person. And while Mason's habit of attention is broad

1. Charlotte Mason, *Home Education* (Lawrenceville, GA: Simply Charlotte Mason, 2017), 146.

and instilled over a lifetime, this essay will specifically consider how eye contact in the early years helps children focus on learning and connect in relationships.

What does this training practically look like in the classroom? Ranging from children who naturally and regularly look into the eyes of another to children who struggle to make eye contact at all, there is an organic and fluid quality to training this habit of eye contact in the early years. In the kindergarten classroom, this training looks less like a formula and more like an impulse toward connection and focus.

For a student who struggles to still his or her body long enough to look into the teacher's eyes, the earliest form of training can be simple and lighthearted. During a time of free play, the teacher, bending on a knee, might take the hands of her student and help the child to still his roving eyes by asking, "What colour are my eyes?" No 4-year-old can resist demonstrating his or her knowledge of colours. And this could be followed by a silly eye-to-eye conversation about looking for alligators in the teacher's "murky, swamp green" eyes, leading to connection and warmth between the teacher and student, upon which the teacher builds another layer: "Do you see how you're looking right into my eyes as we're talking right now? This is how we're going to try to look at each other every time we have a conversation." In other words, through many ordinary moments, the initial work of training does not feel like training at all—for the child, the experience is calming, sweet, and fun.

Through many ordinary moments, the initial work of training does not feel like training at all—for the child, the experience is calming, sweet, and fun.

Indeed, far from being rigid or austere, the teacher trains the eyes of her students through warmth and an ever-ready smile. "We're not going to begin our math lesson until each student is looking at me," the teacher explains, quietly waiting for eyes to lift from the allure of a thousand visible and invisible distractions. But then the moment the student looks up and makes eye contact, the child is met with the warm, smile-crinkled eyes of her teacher, and the unspoken assurance that looking to her teacher will be good for her heart.

One of the joys of teaching kindergarten is observing, over the unfolding months, the progression and ability of students to refocus their gaze on their teacher when asked. "Find my eyes," are three simple words the teacher says with warmth and, sometimes, seemingly on repeat. It is less of a command and more of an invitation. But over the course of days turned to months turned to years, students learn the importance and even the joy of finding the eyes of the one to whom they must look. "Find my eyes" transitions from the oft-spoken reminder to the unspoken habit of the heart.

The above examples are but a few of many practical tools. Children are unique, and so training them may look different from child to child. Over the years of training children in this habit, I have watched the restless child become more still and connected, the timid child grow in self-assurance and confidence, the distracted child begin to focus and learn, and the disconnected child begin to participate and flourish.

Training in eye contact blesses our students because it lays the foundation for the broader mental discipline of the habit of attention. But for a Christian teacher, there is a deeper reason at the heart of this training. It is not just for mental discipline that we are teaching children to slow down and put aside their momentary instinct in order to look into the eyes of another human being. We are teaching them to look into the very reflection of God's own image as found in the eyes of other image bearers. We are teaching them that another person is worthy of their eyes, their focus, their heart. Showing Christian love and giving someone our heart is about much more than simply giving them our eyes, but giving them our attention is surely where giving them our love begins.

In classical education, we often reflect on the portrait of a graduate. When a boy grows into a young man, what do we hope that he looks like? It is a sorrowful but helpful contrast to also consider what we hope that he does not look like. But it is with the end in mind, with the portrait of an ideal graduate in mind, that we then work backwards and train our youngest students. For indeed, by God's grace, the 4-year-old boy who learns to focus his eyes on his teacher becomes the 13-year-old adolescent who respectfully looks his father in the eye when receiving instruction, who becomes the 18-year-old young man who walks into a Sunday morning gathering with his church family and uses his eyes to see—to really see!—the people around him. For his eyes have been trained, and the training of his eyes has also influenced his heart. This young man, our graduate, looks to serve rather than to be served, and his eyes scan the room to find the eyes of someone who needs his attention, his focus, his heart.

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Elisha Galotti teaches Junior Kindergarten at Westminster Classical Christian Academy. Elisha received her Bachelor of Arts from Ryerson University and then continued her education with the Royal Academy of Dance, completing an intensive three-year Teaching Certificate Program. She started teaching at WCCA in 2015.

The Power of Paternal Presence

Written by Ryan Eras

In her book *The Mind of the Maker,* Dorothy Sayers draws attention to an important detail about the nature of man as the image-bearer of God. Considering Genesis 1, when God says, "Let us make man in our image," Sayers observes that at this point in history, we do not know a lot about what God is like; he has not shown us yet. Sayers writes, "When we turn back to see what [the author of Genesis] says about the original upon which the 'image' of God was modelled, we find only the single assertion, 'God created.' The characteristic common to God and man is apparently that: the desire and the ability to make things."[1]

The insightfulness of Sayers' observation is reinforced just a couple of verses later in Genesis, where we see that the Lord's first command to His newly created man and woman is a command to make: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). The work of filling and subduing is what theologians sometimes call the cultural mandate: the commission to build, to take the raw materials of the earth and turn a profit on them to the glory of God. This reality has powerful implications for how we approach the work of education.

In what follows, I would like to consider some principles that I believe that Scripture gives us for understanding the responsibility of fathers in the education of their children and offer a few practical suggestions for how to apply them. It is my hope that this will not only prompt fathers to think about the important role that they play in helping their children thrive in school but also encourage families to partner with their schools to raise godly students and help build strong, faithful institutions.

One thing to notice about the cultural mandate is that it is inescapable. This is the way that God created us, so we cannot help but build. As fathers, we set the tone, the pace, and the priorities for our homes. Whether we do it consciously or not, we are all building our homes; the only question is whether we are building in a God-honouring direction or in a direction that goes against God's calling. As fathers, we have the privilege and responsibility of raising children who, by God's grace, will carry the truth and hope of the gospel into the next generation. This is a noble calling, and one day we will stand before God and give an account of how faithfully we did it.

One principle that can help us keep a proper perspective in this regard is to remember what it is that we are building. Another way to say this is that we need to begin with the end in mind. Our job is not to take a 5-year-old and turn him into a somewhat better-informed and better-behaved 6-year-old, repeat ten times, and then see what we get when we are done. The Psalmist speaks of

1. Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (London: Mowbray, 1994), 17.

the unique nature of man as lord of all creation, in submission to God the creator: "You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet" (Ps 8:6). This is the work that God has entrusted to us—and our children after us—as His image-bearers. We should desire to see our children grow up into thoughtful, godly, and capable adults, living images of biblical virtue, ruling with wisdom and righteousness over their areas of responsibility. This necessarily happens by faint degrees, but each of those degrees is meant to be a link in the chain, reinforcing and reinforced by each of the other links, not a bucketful of discrete, disconnected facts and accomplishments.

God has designed men, and fathers in particular, to take responsibility, and abdication of responsibility is the archetypal masculine sin, beginning with Adam and continuing down throughout biblical history.

This leads to an important related principle: make a habit of cultivating your own virtue. The Lord taught His people through Moses that we are to keep our souls diligently, to remember what God has done for us, and to make His acts "known to [our] children and [our] children's children" (Deut 4:9). Many fathers like the idea of a classical Christian education for their children, but because they did not receive such an education themselves, they can be tempted to disengage from this aspect of their children's lives—is that not what the school is for? But this is a pernicious temptation. God has designed men, and fathers in particular, to take responsibility, and abdication of responsibility is the archetypal masculine sin, beginning with Adam and continuing down throughout biblical history. If we want our children to be wise, disciplined, and godly, if we want them to think clearly and speak compellingly, then we must provide them with a living example of those virtues that they can imitate.

Again, this is a high calling, and we should not be surprised if the work stretches us in places that we have not stretched for a long time. With that in mind, I want to list a few practical ways to apply this principle.

Before and after all of the Socratic dialogues and Latin declensions, classical Christian education emphasizes forming the soul to fit the pattern exemplified by Christ—a humble, godly, teachable spirit, pursuing its God-given work (Isa 50:5; Heb 10:7). We do not need to become experts in every area of our children's studies, but being attentive to what they are learning helps us to cultivate our own virtue in imitation of Christ. For example, you could ask your children to recite memory work, narrate the plot of a story, or tell you about

a historical figure that they have been studying. This will better familiarize you with the school and curriculum, but more importantly, it will demonstrate to your children the importance of a teachable spirit.

In addition to their schoolwork, read to your children every day, especially if they are not old enough to read to themselves. It is worth reviewing and restructuring your family schedule to create space for this activity. In our house, we give the last half hour before bed to a family read-aloud. Because we have boys and girls in our family, we pick books that can be enjoyed by both boys and girls at a range of ages, such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*. If you are stuck for ideas, your children's teachers can offer some good book recommendations. Give young children quiet activities, such as play dough or colouring, while you read to them. Don't worry if they do not get every detail; they will retain more than you might think.

Take the initiative to memorize a Psalm or poem. Read it out loud once every day, and invite your family to join in. Take turns reciting to each other. Master it and repeat with a different Psalm or poem, increasing the length and difficulty as you improve. You will expand your repertoire and fill your soul with good, time-tested works that will stay with you forever. More to the point, you will show your kids that their education and training is something that you take seriously and want to share with them.

Finally, remember that schools are servants. It is common for classical Christian schools to use the phrase *in loco parentis* (in the place of parents) to describe their understanding of the school's own role in training children. As fathers, when we send our children to school, we are delegating a level of our God-given authority to the teacher, implicitly telling our children to become like that teacher. It is important that the values and priorities of the school align with the goals you have for your children, and you will not know whether this is so if you are not paying attention. Make an effort to attend school events. Of course, you should go to after-hours events such as concerts and plays, but try to be a more regular presence than that. Most schools will have a weekly chapel session, a monthly book club, and other regular events to which parents are invited. Take the time to get to know the staff and other parents. Offer to share an interesting skill or hobby with students or fellow parents; many years later I still remember the time the grandfather of my daughter's classmate gave an evening seminar on calligraphy. In short, take responsibility for your children's education by making sure that you understand and support the way that your children are being taught. One of the surest ways of doing this is by being involved in the life of the school.

Fathers are ultimately accountable for their families, including the significant task of their children's education. Whether you are homeschooling or enrolling your children in a day school, the

buck stops with you, and even if you did not receive the kind of education that your children are receiving, there are steps that you can take and principles that you can apply to help your children's learning, develop your own character, and strengthen the school that you have entrusted to help you in this task.

About the Author
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Ryan Eras serves as Headmaster of Niagara Classical Academy (NCA), a classical Christian elementary school in the Niagara region, where he also teaches math and physical education. Ryan earned a BA in History and MI in Library and Information Science. He and his wife Rachel live happily in the farming countryside of Niagara. They classically homeschooled their five children until starting NCA in 2024.

Niagara Classical Academy

Omnis Vitae Coram Deo

Niagara Classical Academy is a new classical Christian school in the Niagara Region of Ontario.

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Training in Habits

Written by Tina Bergs

The habits we acquire when we are young, whether good or bad, often endure for life. Our habits make it easier or harder for other people to live with us. Our habits help or hinder our learning. Our habits can either assist us in our walk of faith under the rule of God or enslave us to self-centredness.

When parents and teachers engage in habit training, we set before children a divine moral standard. We orient them toward a disposition that demonstrates consideration for God and others. In the end, the best course of action is to replace bad habits with good ones.

A habit is a pattern of behaviour that is repetitive and comes to us easily and quickly. A bad habit is one which impedes a person's growth "in wisdom … and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). Some bad habits cause friction in a person's relationships with others. For example, a child frequently does not come to the table right away when called for a meal, leaving the rest of the family waiting while dinner gets cold. Other bad habits primarily interfere with a child's learning. For example, a son habitually tunes out his father's voice when his father reads to him, or a student continually forgets to raise his or her hand before speaking in the classroom. Unchecked, such habits ultimately hinder the growth of these children, so their parents and teachers need to take action to guide them back on the right track.

When we seek to break a bad habit in a child, sometimes our most instinctive route is to impose consequences that will make the habit undesirable. We must seek the Lord's wisdom in finding a fitting consequence that will prove undesirable enough that the child will mend his or her ways. An overly harsh or illogical consequence might simply lead to confusion or further rebellion. An even tone of voice, rather than one of anger or bitterness, is also important in communicating consequences. Habit training done in a spirit of love is ultimately the most effective.

In the case of the child who dawdles after being called for dinner, her parents could explain to her that she must learn to consider how her actions affect other people in her family. They could set the expectation that she must come immediately to the table when called. A consequence for her disobedience could be that she must stay after dinner and do additional clean-up duties while the other children are permitted to be excused from the table to go and play. Since she delayed coming when called, the consequence is that her play time will be delayed. The sound of her siblings playing happily while she has to spend extra time cleaning up the dishes might discourage her from repeating this behaviour the next time.

Another strategy in habit training is to create circumstances in which good habits are easy and desirable to carry out. In the case of the child who habitually tunes out his father's reading, the

father might look for ways to make the habits of listening and attending easier and more desirable. He can consider the environment. For example, if the room chosen for their reading is cold, uninviting, has poor lighting, or is too noisy, then he could instead choose a quiet, cozy corner in the house that has comfortable seating and ambient lighting. Perhaps the book he is reading is so far beyond the child's comprehension that his son simply tunes out in frustration. In that case, the father could select books that are more nourishing, engaging, and appropriately challenging for his son. If the father's reading style is monotonous, he could work on varying his pitch and tone to make it more interesting. He could also ask his son to listen for particular things while they are reading or ask him questions about what they just read. When his son does attend, listen, engage, and respond to what is being read, the father could then express his pleasure at his son's good listening. In doing these things, the father encourages his son to choose to listen rather than to tune him out.

The inculcation of good habits and the elimination of bad habits are intimately connected.

For the student who habitually calls out in class without waiting to be given permission to speak, the teacher can help him by refusing to allow him the floor unless he first raises his hand. Consistency is key here because if the student is permitted to interrupt, he will continue to do so. A firm but friendly "Remember to raise your hand" from the teacher is usually effective. Then when the student does raise his hand, the teacher can say, "Thank you for your hand. Yes?" and allow him to speak. The teacher is training him in the habit of listening to others and waiting for his turn to talk, which helps him with his learning. She is also protecting the considerate atmosphere of her classroom, which helps all the students learn.

Sometimes a child may exhibit a change of habit without a change of heart (i.e., mere compliance to avoid discipline). In that case, we must pray that the inward heart will come into line with the outward behaviour. A transformed heart typically results in transformed behaviour. We must exercise patience in this whole process, since rarely is this an overnight transformation.

It should be noted that while the level of detail of explanation may vary, our training need not be devoid of explanation. However, at times the child's understanding will follow obedience, rather than precede it. For example, a small child need not understand all the reasons for placing her shoes in a basket when she comes in the front door. It is enough to say to your toddler something like, "Put your shoes in the basket, dear." A child who is consistently trained to do this from the time she begins to wear shoes will form this considerate habit and rarely leave her shoes out where others will trip over them. Attentiveness on the part of the parent to correct her and remind her to practise the good habit will help keep the bad habit from forming.

The inculcation of good habits and the elimination of bad habits are intimately connected. As Thomas à Kempis asserted, "Habit is overcome by habit."[1] We must not merely think of what we do not want the child to do, but also what we want the child to do instead and train him or her in that good habit.

Obeying God's command to love Him and love others necessitates treating others with consideration, and we do that daily by practising considerate habits. By these actions we demonstrate that we esteem others more highly than ourselves (Phil 2:3). Ultimately, habit training in our children ought to have the goal of teaching them to put Christ first in their affections. Jesus Christ has the power to break every sinful habit that we bring to Him when we surrender our lives completely to His control. We should not despair if, as parents and teachers, we are convicted that we have not done our duty in training the children in our care in virtuous habits. Rather, we should ask for the Lord's help to begin again and pray that He will do the ultimate transforming work in their hearts (and ours) that we cannot do ourselves.

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Tina Bergs serves as the Assistant Head of School and Director of Curriculum and Teacher Development at Westminster Classical Christian Academy (WCCA). She completed a Bachelor of Education at the University of Victoria and a post-degree diploma in Special Education Teaching at Vancouver Island University. Tina worked as both a classroom teacher and a special education teacher in public schools in British Columbia before becoming one of the first teachers to join the WCCA faculty when the school opened its doors in 2014.

1. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ,* trans. Aloysius Croft and Harold Bolton (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1940), 30.

Beauty in Theatre

Written by Ann Garau

"Beauty is vanishing from our world because we live as though it did not matter," says Roger Scruton.[1] If we look around us, it is hard to disagree with him. Classical schools attempt to swim against this cultural tide by teaching truth, goodness, and beauty. However, while truth and goodness are certainly woven into our lessons and our curricula, how much do we include beauty among our priorities? If we do not, it is not hard to understand why.

As a relatively recent movement, classical education has had to feel its way forward in the dark. It is blessed by clarity of vision, but also frequently plagued by uncertainty about how to reach that vision. We know that we should be seeking beauty, for example, but we are not sure how, and often enough we are not even really sure what beauty is. Part of our problem, of course, is that beauty is famously difficult to define. We tend to avoid the issue by treating it as a matter of personal taste, as if we agree that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." But this subjective approach sounds suspiciously like the "my truth" of the modern intersectional West. Yet there is no "my truth" and "your truth"—there is one truth, and we can seek it. Similarly, there is no "my beauty" and "your beauty." Beauty can be objectively defined, and we can seek it too. Indeed, not only can we seek it, we must.

As Dr. Denis McNamara puts it, "Beauty is to truth as deliciousness is to food."[2] We can easily prefer junk food to nourishing food, but if the nourishing food is also delicious, then we choose it because it is appealing. Likewise, we can easily prefer comfortable falsehoods to truth, but when truth is presented in a beautiful way, truth becomes appealing. When goodness is made beautiful, we not only know what it is, but also come to desire it.

Making truth and goodness beautiful in the classroom can be more or less difficult depending on the subject matter that we are teaching. In literature class, we have recourse to a huge body of beautiful literary works, and it would not be hard to steer classroom conversations or assignments toward beauty. In mathematics, numbers and the relations between them are inherently ordered and beautiful, awaiting only the math teacher to bring this beauty out. Science, of course, has the privilege of studying the overwhelming beauty of the natural world.

Drama, it might be thought, would enjoy the same privilege that literature has, but in reality, we cannot simply take refuge in the great works of the past as we do in literature class. This is

1. Roger Scruton, *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 161.
2. Robert Mixa, "Beauty Will Save the World—But How? Part 1: Elements," Word on Fire, May 18, 2021, https://www.wordonfire.org/articles/fellows/beauty-will-save-the-world-but-how-part-i-elements/.

because, let's face it, almost all classic works of theatre are intended to be performed by adults, whether because of mature subject matter or because they require skills beyond those of a child. "What about Shakespeare adaptations?" would be the obvious objection, and there are certainly some wonderful versions of Shakespeare's plays for children. But just as we do not limit our literature studies to only one great author, nor should we limit our theatrical productions to only one playwright, no matter how great. Part of the mission of literature classes is to pursue our goals of truth and goodness by exposing our students to the many ways that different authors can use a variety of beautiful styles and narrative structures. Drama should be no different. But this is precisely where drama programs suffer a serious handicap: when trying to stage a child-friendly version of one of these great works of literature, we are limited to whatever children's scripts are available for purchase. These adaptations, by and large, were not written by people motivated by classical principles. They were often written by people who think that if a script is to be accessible to children, its complexity and quality need to be lowered. These scripts focus on being funny, or engaging, or simple, or catchy—all good things—but were they designed to be beautiful? Were they written with the idea that children can delight in difficult, complex productions because they are of good quality? Generally speaking, no.

Yet if we in classical education believe that embodying a truth is the ultimate way to learn it, then drama, in which we literally embody narratives of truth and goodness, is enormously important.

Perhaps this handicap has not been addressed so far because drama is so often undervalued as a school subject. It is not considered as important as mathematics, grammar, Latin, and science. Yet if we in classical education believe that embodying a truth is the ultimate way to learn it, then drama, in which we literally embody narratives of truth and goodness, is enormously important.

In this article, I am proposing a reorientation of our drama programs to aim not only at truth and goodness, but also at beauty. We need to make a variety of great works of literature available to children in scripts that value, and seek to transmit, the beauty of the original text. This will require us to write our own scripts, in many cases, but within our movement we have people of great and varied talent. We can do it. In short, what we need to produce is musical theatre—and I will be insistent on the musical part—that is designed to be acted, sung, and danced by children—I will be insistent about the dance part too. We need compelling narratives that express truths about human nature, about the nature of good and evil, and about our relationship with God, and that, as a whole, create beauty.

Now, declaring this is the easy part. It is the sort of conveniently clear vision that is typical of classical education. The real question is: how do we do this? To answer this, I will be depending on two key concepts: the idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the concept of objective beauty.

Gesamtkunstwerk is one of those deliciously long German words that contain a whole concept within themselves. A literal translation would be "total work of art," but "total" in the sense of all-inclusive. When referring to theatre, it means a union of all the arts—music, language, visual art, and dance—to serve a single narrative. *Gesamtkunstwerk* comes out of the nineteenth-century Aesthetic Movement in Germany, which proposed aesthetics and good taste as a metric by which to measure artistic value and even morality. This is emphatically not the context in which I wish to use the word; rather, I want to repurpose it slightly. Instead of all the arts being brought together to serve a single narrative, I propose that we bring them together to seek and portray the *logos* within the narrative—the central truth or truths that every great work of literature contains. We should use every kind of beautiful art that we have access to in order to portray the truth and goodness within the story. And, crucially, through beauty we can make that truth and goodness desirable.

We should use every kind of beautiful art that we have access to in order to portray the truth and goodness within the story.

This brings me to my second key concept: objective beauty. It is all very well and good to say that we should use beautiful arts, but first we have to know what beauty is. Once again, McNamara puts it clearly: a thing is beautiful if it reveals its deepest reality to our senses—its essential nature as known to the mind of God.[3] To explain this more specifically, we need to turn to Thomas Aquinas, a great thinker of the medieval Church. Beauty, says Aquinas, can be identified by three characteristics: *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas*. *Integritas* means wholeness or perfection, in the sense that a thing has all the parts that it should have. *Consonantia* means having all those parts in correct proportion to each other and in proportion to the thing's God-given purpose. Achieving *consonantia* will bring us some way toward the last element of beauty, *claritas*, which means something like transparency or clarity. A beautiful thing reveals its true nature to us, in the sense that its outward appearance matches its inner essence.[4]

Now that we have defined our terms, how do they relate to drama programs in the classical school movement?

Integritas, or wholeness, I would suggest, would be achieved by carefully structuring a script to include all—and only—the key parts of the narrative, in other words the parts that best reveal

3. Mixa, "Beauty Will Save The World – But How?"

4. Christopher Scott Sevier, "Thomas Aquinas on the Nature and Experience of Beauty" (PhD diss., University of California, Riverside, June 2012).

the narrative's deepest truth. A good example of where this is often not done is in adaptations of C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.* Far too many student productions of this play use scripts that incomprehensibly sideline the death and resurrection of Aslan, which is the very heart of the story. Either it is played out offstage or else passed over quickly and incompletely onstage. These same productions, however, make sure to include the inconsequential pre-Narnia scenes in Professor Kirke's house.

Scripts also lack *integritas* when the key events of the story are kept but reinterpreted to make the play serve some other agenda. For example, *Prince Caspian*, another C. S. Lewis classic, is a story about faith in an age of atheism, but a recent Canadian stage production turned it into a call for environmental activism instead. One senior figure from the production declared, "The ultimate good in these stories is the natural world,"[5] while another publication explained that *Prince Caspian* "is a story about the incredible magic and power that trees have and why it is our duty to protect them."[6] This version of the story no longer knew what it was really about—it had lost its *logos*. Yes, it had kept the main parts of the narrative but twisted them into something that they were not meant to be. Because these productions have failed to achieve *integritas*, they lack the beauty of the original story. They fail to express its truth.

A beautiful theatrical production that has attained *integritas*, therefore, would combine all proper elements of logic, sight, and sound to reveal the narrative's *logos*.

However, not only in narrative structure can *integritas* be achieved, but also by bringing all the arts together in the production. Here is where the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* is useful because once you have your whole—perfect and logically complete narrative—the *Gesamtkunstwerk* then creates an artistically complete representation of that narrative. A beautiful theatrical production that has attained *integritas*, therefore, would combine all proper elements of logic, sight, and sound to reveal the narrative's *logos*.

Consonantia, or correct proportion, would mean that not only are all parts present but that each part is given its correct weight and importance. For example, the sacrifice of Aslan in a production of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* should properly be the focus of the entire work. This has implications for the length and staging of that scene in order to have the correct proportion in relation to the other scenes. Similarly, no one artistic component should take absolute precedence over the others, but rather, all the different artistic parts of the play should respect each

5. Marilyn Baillie, "A Swashbuckling Tale," program notes for Prince Caspian, Shaw Festival, May 2023.

6. "The Shaw Festival Presents Prince Caspian," student learning resource, Shaw Festival, April 2023, https://www.shawfest.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/caspain-learning-resource.pdf.

other and work together to serve truth and reveal goodness. One could almost call *consonantia* the Romans 12 aspect of beauty (see Rom 12:3–6).

Finally, *claritas*, or intelligibility, is almost self-explanatory. Not only must the language be clear (neither overly fussy, nor so preoccupied with entertaining that it forgets to serve the clarity of narrative), and not only must the scene progression be clear and easy to follow, but the students' voices must be intelligible too. Many of us have probably sat through children's plays in which we wondered what it was all about because we could not hear the actors. A play cannot be beautiful if we cannot hear the beauty. Insisting on basic skills like clear diction and powerful projection, therefore, is also a way to create beauty.

It is finally time to get down to the nitty-gritty. How does all this work out in detail when creating theatrical works worthy of the classical education movement?

Language might be a good place to start. The language used in scripts needs to be proportionate to the *telos*—the intrinsic purpose—of the piece as a whole. The words spoken also need to be proportionate to the truth within each fictional character who speaks those words. I have seen a musical of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in which the White Witch sings how sorry she is that Edmund is outside "without a cozy coat." It fits the rhyme scheme of the song, certainly, but the word "cozy" does not fit her haughty, formal personality at all. It is jarring enough to destroy the perfection—indeed, the beauty—of that scene. In contrast, Gabriel Dean's version of *Beowulf* uses language that serves the narrative well. It is plain enough to be understood and performed by twelve- and thirteen-year-olds, allowing it to provide *claritas*, but strongly evokes the original poem's Old English alliterative style, maintaining *consonantia* with the world of the narrative.

I could, theoretically, finish the article here. Most plays, after all, are only spoken. The problem is that we humans are not only (and perhaps not even principally) speaking beings. From the dawn of humanity, we have been making music—the bone flutes of pre-historic man make this clear. Furthermore, since at least the time of ancient Greece, people have known that music has an unusually strong effect on people's thoughts and emotions.[7] Plato said that "more than anything else, rhythm and harmony find their way to the inmost soul and take strongest hold upon it."[8]

Unfortunately, in children's theatre, there are few really good musicals. For one thing, most composers seem simply uninterested in writing for children. It's not hard to imagine why: most children's singing abilities are naturally very limited, and the commercial potential of a children's mu-

7. The examples of emotive music in theatre are too numerous to name, but one might think of Verdi's "Va pensiero" from his 1842 opera *Nabucco*. This chorus so powerfully expresses longing for a homeland that it became a sort of anthem of the emerging Italian state in the 1860s. More recently, the chorus "Do You Hear the People Sing?" from the hit musical *Les Miserables* has been taken up by protesters against authoritarian governments as recently as 2019 in Hong Kong. Neither the nineteenth-century Italians nor the twenty-first century Hong Kongers were reciting spoken poetry to express themselves, they were singing it. The music made all the difference to the power that those lyrics could have.

8. Plato, *The Republic* 3.401d, trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930).

sical is small. This is not a criticism. Composers need to earn a living, and it must be frustrating to be constrained by the limited vocal range and singing abilities of ordinary, untrained children. However, it does mean that for drama teachers, the pickings are slim.

As for the children's musicals that do exist, they almost exclusively use a pop style both in their musical structure and in their singing lines. Indeed, the tendency is to assume that children need the simplicity of pop music because sophisticated music is beyond them. But that is not a position that should ever be taken by classical schools because we know better. We know that children can love difficult and beautiful things. We also know that when given a high standard to achieve, children will, by and large, rise to the occasion. Why should it be any different in musical theatre? If we are going to give them pop-style musicals, we might as well give them comic books in literature class. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with pop music, just as there is nothing intrinsically wrong with comic books, but part of our mission is to train students' tastes to what is beautiful, not to what is easy. If we are to train their tastes to what is beautiful and good, we need to feed them with those things.

We know that children can love difficult and beautiful things. We also know that when given a high standard to achieve, children will, by and large, rise to the occasion.

So, instead of pop musicals, let us give them complex vocal lines that reveal with *claritas* the complicated emotional and spiritual development of the characters. And not just a few main characters, either; let the musical be structured so that a wide variety of characters have a chance to sing on their own, even if just a verse here or there. This not only takes the vocal burden off the main characters (which can often be too heavy a load for many children) but also communicates to children that even as part of the chorus, they are an important part of the production. Children often do not have strong voices, so we should include duets or trios as well, so that the young actors can help each other.

Let the music express the atmosphere of each scene, which will, in turn, serve the *logos* of that scene. To respect *consonantia*, the music should not go on too long, or simply serve the composer's personal taste. It must not obscure the words, but partner with them so that they can be understood by the audience. Let the music deepen the impact of the words, strengthening their ability to draw us into the narrative and meet the *logos* within it.

Language and music provide the sound of a play, but audiences come to see a play, not just hear it. One main thing that audiences see is the actors as they move. I will begin, therefore, with choreography. Where and when do the actors walk, stop, bend, turn, raise their arms, or fall to the ground? This is a crucial part of the storytelling, and it must complement the words being spoken, the emotions inherent in those words, and the personality of each character. It must also

complement the overall style of scenery. Is the scenery stark and stripped-down or lush and opulent? Is it naturalistic or stylized? The actors' bodies, in short, should move in a manner that is in *consonantia* with the style of the setting.

If the play contains music, their bodies should also move in *consonantia* with the music. Here, choreography can move into dance. Just as music expands the communicative power of language, so dance expands the communicative power of music. Skeptics need only consider the entire genre of ballet to see what I mean. Likewise, in musicals, it is said that when emotions become too strong for spoken words, the characters break into song; and when their emotions become too strong for song, they shift into dance. Classical dance, in all its different forms, uses the human body to further serve the narrative. It could well be argued that it empowers the body to speak out truth and goodness through beauty and, as such, enables the body to glorify God.

Once again, however, there are examples of what to avoid. Dances that mimic the aesthetic of show business are the choreographical version of pop music; they are easy and fun, but they are not appropriate to deep, rich narratives that seek to express great truths. Let our children instead learn how to use movement in modest but expressive ways to serve the narrative and express emotion, such that the choreography is proportional both to the language and to the music of the play. If designed to respect *consonantia*, choreography will both increase *claritas* and help achieve *integritas*.

I have left the most obvious source of visual beauty until the end: the costumes. We have probably all seen some play advertised as "visually stunning" or a "visual masterpiece." When I see that, I suspect that the play has not achieved *consonantia*. I think that the Hollywood-style visual effects of some modern musicals overwhelm the narrative as a whole. The resulting lack of *consonantia* distracts the audience from the *logos*; thus, neither truth nor beauty is attained. Rather, we should design our costumes and scenery to be graceful and not overdone. The scenery, furniture, and props need to be in harmony with the costumes, lighting, and any other audio/visual effects.

To achieve *claritas*, the costumes must reveal important aspects of the characters. Returning again to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* we can see the importance of costume in the different ways in which Aslan is depicted on stage. One production that I have seen used a child's commercial lion costume (the zip-up kind that children might use for Halloween). This turned Aslan into the living version of a plush toy, devoid of all kingliness, dignity, and authority. He was horrendously cute. Conversely, I have seen Aslan dressed as a tawny-coloured, vaguely Renaissance-style prince. This was more successful in capturing his royalty, but it also reduced him to a mere man, on the same visual level as the Pevensie children. Once the Pevensie children became crowned, the costumes silently proclaimed that they were the equals of Aslan. The most successful costume that I have seen is the one created for the 2022 London West End production: the actor's opulent but rough fur robes captured both his majesty and his wildness, his beard and long hair further emphasized his untamed nature, the simplicity and humanity of his costume preserved his dignity, and the massive articulated lion puppet that shadowed his every move

not only expressed Aslan's great size, but pointed to Christ's double nature as both God and man. This, indeed, was a beautiful costume. It possessed *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas* and revealed the spiritual truth of the character.

Naturally, no school will be able to provide giant articulated puppets. However, when designing costumes for a school production, we must consider whether the costumes are intelligible, and if so, whether they reveal the true nature of the characters. We must ensure that the costumes are appropriate (proportional) to the fictional world of the story and proportional to the other arts by not taking over or distracting the audience's attention from the narrative.

To sum up the preceding pages, I am calling on anyone who loves the classical movement to re-think how we approach drama. Do we take seriously our dedication to truth, goodness, and beauty? Do we truly believe in the primacy of narrative to lead us to truth? If so, do we hold that embodying and mimicking good lessons or truths is the best way to make them part of us? Do we honestly see all school subjects as interlinked and merely different expressions of God's creation? If so, how can we do any less than strive to put on stage stories that lead us to goodness and truth, and to do so in a beautiful way? Let us create plays that present great works of literature, great stories whose compelling narratives express deep truths about ourselves and our souls. And, crucially, let us do so in such a way that the work as a whole creates beauty—beauty that is designed to be spoken, sung, danced, and acted by ordinary children. It might sound like a hard thing to propose. But, as a friend of mine is fond of saying, hard does not equal bad.

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Ann Garau is the Director of Curriculum and Teacher Development for the Upper Grades at Westminster Classical Christian Academy (WCCA). She previously taught Latin and drama at WCCA, and two of her children attended WCCA for several years. Ann holds a B.A. in English and Medieval History from St. Andrews University in Scotland, an M.A. in Medieval and Renaissance Studies from Glasgow University, an M.A. in Creative Writing from the University of London, and a Ph.D. from the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto. Ann and her husband, Salvatore Garau, created an original stage play with original music for C. S. Lewis' The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. *They are currently writing a new children's musical for Lewis'* Prince Caspian.

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When we were looking for a school for our son, a friend invited us to Westminster Classical Christian Academy. We fell in love with their focus on Christ-centered education, small class sizes, and sense of community in a private school at a time when Ontario's educational system lacked what we wanted for our children. Financially, we wouldn't have even entertained the idea of private education but with WCCA's bursary program, we were able to give our children the best foundation to be successful learners and followers of Christ. It's now our ninth year at Westminster, and we are happy to have both our children enrolled and thriving in their education and this school's community.

- Ronnie and Jody Jawdi

WCCA has been a rich blessing to our children and our family. Our kids are, and feel, truly loved by their teachers. Teachers are quick to see the strengths and skills of our children, and patiently work to cultivate godliness and virtue in them. In many ways the teachers are an encouragement to us as parents as we seek to raise children who know and serve the Lord.

The bursaries offered for WCCA students and families are truly a gift from God. Without generous donors providing these gifts, we simply wouldn't be able to send our kids to WCCA. With these gifts, our four kids will grow up in Toronto with the foundation of a strong Christian education. The impact of these gifts on the lives of our kids and our family is hard to overstate.

- Joshua and Tricia Martin

My dream was always to have my daughter attend a private Christian school. Finding WCCA was such a blessing; not only did it have everything I was looking for, but I knew the values that I was teaching my daughter at home in regards to our faith would also be continued at school. I was sold on WCCA from the moment I stepped through the doors for a tour. However, since it is just my daughter and myself, I worried about how I would be able to make this dream a reality. Thankfully with the help of bursaries, I have been able to have my daughter enrolled for the last three years. I have seen her growth not just academically but in her faith as well. I have seen her be supported in ways I know she would not be in a regular school setting, and, for that, I could not be more grateful.

- Grace Synch

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