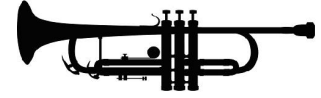


The Clarion



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Classical Education and Abraham Kuyper

Some thoughts on education from Tami Gamble, Fifth Grade Teacher at Providence Classical Christian School.

Abraham Kuyper was one of Adolf Hitler's worst enemies! Hitler was obsessed with Kuyper, a man who had been dead for twenty years when Hitler launched his attack on the Netherlands. Following five days of fierce fighting, the Nazis faced four years of sabotage and underground warfare with the Dutch resistance. This underground network which tormented the Third Reich was the fruit of Kuyper's labor to bring reformation to the Dutch culture. Because of Kuyper's success, Hitler ordered that every student and every leader influenced by him be hunted down and treated like a Jew. Hitler understood the threat of Abraham Kuyper's influence on a society, and he was determined to stamp out his influence in the Netherlands. What high praise for this man whose chief desire was to bring true praise and honor to the Lord Jesus.

Who was Abraham Kuyper? (1837-1920)

Coming out of a watered down and deflated university system due to the influence of Modernity, Abraham Kuyper entered his first pastorate in 1863. Here he met some remarkable people who believed the Bible and in whose lives he saw the "covenant" being lived out. This led him to a renewed study of the Word of God and a new understanding of God and how He works in the world. As he began to teach a comprehensive Godly worldview, he became known for his **worldviewishness**, the vision of Christ's lordship over everything. He taught that God was in music, art, literature, history, math, science—everything. "*Kuyper was loved out of his foolish arrogance and stubbornness, and he was loved into the Lordship of Christ,*" according to James E. McGoldrick. In 1870, he was an unflinching advocate of the teaching of Jesus Christ. Since he was expelled from the modern church, Kuyper was forced to re-build the church for the Dutch. It was then that he decided that if he were to have any influence for Christ upon the Dutch people, he would need to establish new schools, churches, newspapers, and politics. George Grant says, "*He published 90 books over a span of 30 years. It was during this time he undertook an 8 year long, 22 volume long, Heidelberg Catechism while publishing two books on theology a year*". Kuyper was not just influential, he reshaped, reformed, and renewed the Dutch nation, ultimately causing them to fiercely resist any evil, like that of Hitler's Third Reich.

Abraham Kuyper once said, "*God looks out across the whole of creation and says, there is not one thumb's breadth of it that is not Mine. The physical world; the spiritual world; history, science or spelling; literature, art, or math; governments, cultures, or societies. It is all his, and we must help our students internalize this enduring truth.*"

George Grant says of Kuyper, "*He lived this credo with no exceptions, and he hammered it out in extraordinary ways. It changed the shape of his nation. He goes on to say*

"The thing that set Kuyper apart from everyone else was the fact that he rolled up his sleeves and went to work. He worked without consideration of whether or not he would succeed. He didn't wait until he had enough money and resources, or the right size building to accomplish a job. He

lived by another simple thing: Go with what you've got because it's enough to get going."

The essential foundations of Kuyper

- A. **If you see something... you are probably called to it.** George Grant reminds us, "*Somewhere along the line you've read a book on Classical Education and said, "This is it!" You think everyone should have to read the book too. Some people read it and say, "That's interesting". Some who read the book nitpick, "This is a little harsh, don't you think?" But you are thinking, "This is it!" You were called to it, and they weren't.*" Kuyper believed this. He caught the vision of what could be, and he acted.
- B. **The irregardless principle:** It doesn't matter if you have the resources, or if you have the people behind you, or if you have encouragement along the way. If you are called to it, you are called to it.
- C. **Go with what you've got.** Kuyper was willing to go with what he had because it was enough to get going. Kuyper believed in providence, and he believed that God put him in this place in history for a purpose. He knew that he needed a new university, so he started one. He needed to have a newspaper and magazine, so he started those too.
- D. **Run toward the roar.** Kuyper had courage, boldness, and initiative. He taught his students that they must have it too if they were to change the culture for Christ. Kuyper said, "*When God calls you, and you hesitate, then you loose the day.*"

The people of Providence have not been called to tear down the institutions of the past, but we have been called to rebuild the good that has been lost. Classical Education was lost, and we have been called to bring it back for our posterity. Abraham Kuyper was called to reform a nation, and so are we. We are not here at Providence because of the "disease" of education, rather we are here for the "cure" God has given us for a true education. Let others yell and despair about the current state of education in America. Let us roll up our sleeves and get to work like Abraham Kuyper. We can change the culture one student at a time as we instill an understanding of Christ's Lordship over all things.

How do we accomplish this?

As Classical and Christian educators and parents we want our children to engage the culture, learn how to think, and change the world for Christ.

Here at Providence we use a three-step process that teaches students according to their frame to encourage an enjoyment of and love for learning. This process is known as the trivium. Students in grades K-6 learn facts in the Grammar, or first stage of the trivium. In the second, dialectic, stage the students in grades 7-9 analyze information. The third step of the trivium is taught at the 10th-12th grade level and is called rhetoric. This is the time for students to learn how to eloquently express opinions and persuade others according to the knowledge they have acquired.

The book, *Wisdom and Eloquence*, by Robert LittleJohn and Charles Evans, describes a thoroughly Christian education:

“Teaching and learning ‘Christianly’ requires much more than adding Bible and chapel to the daily regime. It requires a whole different way of thinking about education and about life in general. The successful fulfillment of the mission before us necessitates the pervasive influence of a thoroughly Christian world and life view as the foundation for our thinking, our doing, and our being. Such formation occurs when children learn (every day) how Christianity, the Bible, and God himself are integral to everything.”

What goes into preparing grammar students to become dialectic students who will become rhetoric students who will be eloquent communicators who will lead the world for Christ?

I. Grammar students in K-6th learn facts and content.

Susan Wise Bauer, author of *The Well-Trained Mind* says, “Grammar students are described as sponges because they soak up knowledge. But squeeze a dry sponge and nothing comes out, so first we have to fill the sponge in the grammar grades. Their minds need to be filled with pictures, stories, and as many facts as can be put into them. The goal is to supply mental pegs on which later information can be hung.”

At the grammar level, students memorize, chant, and sing facts to increase the memory muscle. All of this work yields incredible results, and a well trained mind. The teachers at Providence seek to seize the grammar student’s early excitement of learning by spreading knowledge out before them as a feast. When someone walks down the Grammar hall at Providence, they will hear chanting, singing, and reciting, the business of the grammar years.

II. Dialectic Stage

The Dialectic stage begins somewhere in the latter part of the grammar years. This is the time when the student who once enjoyed chanting and singing now notices all the awkward exceptions to rules, and he begins to question the facts he has been memorizing. The dialectic begins to generalize, analyze, question, and develop a mind for abstract thought.

They enjoy as Dorothy Sayers says, “arguing and correcting the mistakes of their parents and teachers.” She goes on to say “this age is characterized by contradicting, and answering back,” and “students must be equipped to detect fallacy, redundancy, slip shod reasoning, ambiguity, relevance, and to pounce on them like rats.”

God built the dialectic student to argue, so the dialectic teacher works at training them to do so logically and respectfully. Their classroom instruction will emphasize analyzing, applying, comparing, contrasting, evaluating, discussing, and debating information. In the dialectic stage, those memorized facts from the grammar years are re-introduced with a new perspective. This new perspective is “why?”—the question that is now at the center of all learning. Because students in grades 7-9 also enjoy proving what they know to be true or what they know to be false, formal Logic is introduced in the 8th grade, and applied in all subjects. Logic provides the student with a set of rules to help him decide whether or not he can trust the information that has been given to him. Along with the facts mastered in the early years, the dialectic student will gain the tools to sharpen his mind in light of God’s Word.

III. Now that the students have grammar and logic under their belts, they are ready to fuse the two into Rhetoric which is the third step of the Trivium.

A good definition of the rhetoric student is found in Susan Wise Bauer’s, *The Well-Educated Mind*:

“In the final stage of secondary education, the rhetoric stage, students learn to express their own opinions about the facts they have accumulated and evaluated. So the final years of education focus on elegant, articulate expression of opinion in speech and writing – this is the study of rhetoric.”

Rhetoric students in the 12th grade at Providence spend the entire year accumulating data and arguments for a thesis paper. This project is a practical way to apply the three phases of the trivium. Each student learns to express, articulate, and defend their opinions before a panel of judges whose questions force them to prove their position.

Rhetoric students take a trip to Rome and Greece called the “Grand Tour” and are required to keep a journal of their experiences. I had a chance to read some of these journals when my oldest daughter returned from her trip in 2005. I read in one journal about a discussion some of the students had with a Muslim man. The discussion was about the American presidents, and what makes a strong leader. Sometimes it amazes me that this type of education can equip 17 year olds to go into the world to talk naturally and casually about politics with a Muslim man. What would the discussion have been like without the facts of history, presidents, politics, and world religions from the years in grammar school; the ability to evaluate, compare, contrast, and debate learned during the dialect years; and the training in elegant and articulate expression of their opinions learned in the rhetoric years? The training begun in grammar and carried through the rhetoric years provides our students with the tools to continue learning throughout their lives and gives them confidence to approach life boldly.

The classical and Christian education here at Providence teaches to a child’s frame. It trains the character and disciplines the soul of students from grammar through the rhetoric years. It equips our graduates to meet the world, engage the culture, and impact it for Christ.

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