

EXCELSIOR NEWSLETTER

Excelsior Classical Covenantal Community

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www.excelsiorclassical.org

“Why I Read the Pagans” by Steve Crampton

The question has arisen why we at Excelsior have chosen the classical Christian approach to education. After all, these godless pagan stories are filled with, well, pagans and all sorts of godless things. As the old saying goes, “What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?” Wouldn’t we be better off reading only the Bible and Christian books, and leaving these impure works behind?

*“The
devil
has no
stories.”*

*~ Peter
Leithart*

The question is a fair one, and one which parents, students and volunteers ought to seriously consider. Certainly the mere fact that classically educated students consistently score better on national achievement tests should not be our main reason for choosing this form of education. Nor should the simple addition of the word “Christian” satisfy us (there are plenty of schools with that moniker in the name that do not begin to offer a truly Christian education).

First, let us be clear about what classical Christian education is not. It is not something that should be undertaken lightly or without adequate precautions. The study of the classics is dangerous ground. It should not be attempted without a proper Christian foundation and careful preparation. Neither is a classical Christian education a substitute

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Medieval Faire

Saturday, November 15th

(please note date change)

Union County Fairground Arena

sign-up Oct 3rd & 10th

Due to a conflict with the Union County Fairground, we needed to change the date of our Medieval Festival.

Each family will be asked to bring a medieval dish - recipes to be provided by Jennifer Smith.

In addition, you will be asked to host a carnival-like booth for the event. Heather Duley is in charge of the booths. Here is a listing of the booths available.

fencing, chess, candle making, weaving, archery, jousting, catapult, music, juggling/jester, monks/monasteries, armor/sword, Viking invasion, broom making, pottery, soap making, leather curing/tooling, jewelry, book binding, printing press, blacksmith, making paper or scroll, writing ballads, medieval footwear

There will be a \$25 fee per family to cover the cost of renting the facilities and for decorations. Nichole Hardin is in charge of the decorations.

Be sure to wear your medieval costumes!



for the careful pursuit of Christ and the regular study of the scriptures; it is not the end-all, cure-all answer to society's ills.

There is much to be said about the matter, but I will try to keep this article short and to the point. In a simplistic answer to the question posed, it may be said that the classics pose the great questions of life; Christianity answers them. Questions such as who we are, where we came from, and where we are going are universal; pagans struggle with these issues as much as Christians do, and the ancients as much as the moderns. But Christianity alone offers real, workable answers, and points us

One Who is Truth, Jesus Christ.

In asking why we study the pagans, one may as well ask why we study history at all. History is the centerpiece of an Excelsior education. If, as the proponents of evolution contend, life itself is an accidental occurrence, a kind of cosmic coincidence without meaning or lasting significance, who cares what happened a thousand years ago, or who ruled what part of the world and when? Likewise, if history is cyclical, with no real purpose or goal, what difference does it make whether we know what happened at the turn of the 20th century? This is the view of the Eastern cultures, which treat history as unimportant. As G. K. Chesterton said, it is fitting that the Buddha be pictured with his eyes closed; there is nothing important to see.

Only in the Christian view of the world does history really matter. Christianity posits that history is in fact "His Story," and that God has a purpose for all that unfolds around us. Christianity says that history is not cyclical, but linear, pointing toward a particular end. It is progressive. This view of history is nothing short of revolutionary. It is a primary reason why the West has progressed to such an astonishing degree over the East.

It is no accident that the Bible alone among all the major religious texts (or history books, for that matter) sets forth in painstaking detail the chronology of events dating from the most ancient of times. No other book, religious or secular, dares even attempt such a feat. This curious focus begs the question, why? Why would God go to such lengths to explain the genealogies, the dates, times, and circumstances of the various events in the history of the Israelites? And why does He repeatedly instruct His people to remember? See, e.g., Gen. 9:15; Ex. 13:3; Deut. 5:15; Judges 8:34; 1 Chr. 16:12; Ps. 20:7; Ps. 78:42; Isa. 46:9; Ezek. 16:22; Mic. 6:5; Rev. 2:5. History is important to God.

We must know the past if we are to move forward in the future. As John Buchan observed, "every community, and every nation needs to be grounded in the good things, the great things, the true things, in

to the

Shakespeare Days

Our first Shakespeare Day
will take place
Tuesday, October 21.

Students who will be participating need to plan to come to Lit. class that day, 2-3pm. Then we'll all migrate to the Moeller's house and settle in for some fun, some food, and a movie. If you expect your student/s will participate, please reply to Rachel Green as soon as possible.

order to do the right things.” Understanding history, with all its warts and pagan influences, is a grounding in our origins, our theology, and our God. Just as the unfolding of the great story of the redemption of fallen man is set in the context of the circumstances detailed in scripture, so the apples of God’s gold are best understood in the settings of the silver of a Christian view of history.

Additionally, in offering a classical Christian education, we believe that the truths of scripture are capable of confronting and ultimately overcoming the wisdom of the world. Did not God Himself invite us to come and reason together? Isa. 1:18. Christ is the Word, the logos, the light and logical organizing force in life. We apply our reasoning, in the light of scripture, to the progression of Western Civilization at Excelsior. The Word instructs that we are not to hide our light under a bushel basket, but to let it shine before men.

There is another reason why I read the pagans. While we are born for an infinite eternity, we live in the finite here and now. We are both spirit and flesh, being in the world but not of it. Just as we should not be “post card Christians,” paying lip service to God but not walking in His ways, so we should not merely say that Christianity is superior to other religions and philosophies, but prove it to be true by engaging the culture on all fronts.

The cry of the Christian ought not to be “Retreat!” but “Charge!” We are commanded to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 1 Cor. 10:6. To abandon the intellectual field to the pagans is to relegate ourselves to the cultural ghetto, and to cede ground to the enemy.

Moreover, just as God causes the rain to fall on both the just and the unjust, so He has deigned that truth, too, be sprinkled on both the regenerate and the unregenerate. Classic literature is sometimes defined as those works which have stood the test of time; their excellence both in the writing style and the universal themes which they address continue to speak to us over the centuries.

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

John Keats, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. There is not one kind of beauty for pagans, and one for Christians; beauty is shared by all. So is truth. The stories of the classics tend to be God’s stories, albeit corrupted somewhat. As Dr. George Grant put it, “the devil has no stories.” Good literature tends to be variations on themes contained in the Bible, though to be sure from a different perspective.

The teacher in classical Christian education is to guide the students in discovering when the pagans got it right and when they got it wrong. When the pagans found a piece of the truth, they were simply echoing a theme from God’s Word; when they offered false responses to the universal challenges of life, they were pursuing a wrong and harmful path. That is, we teach students how to think about the world from a Christian perspective.

Dorothy Sayers, whose essay “Lost Tools of Learning” pioneered the recent return to classical education, observed, “although we often succeed in teaching our pupils 'subjects,' we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think.” Classical Christian education is intended to give students the tools to think for themselves. Is it perfect? Absolutely not. But it is arguably the best system of education yet devised by man, and, as the early Scottish missionaries recognized, “Christian education . . . has prepared a large body of the people for . . . a reception of Christ as the Saviour.” (Rev. Alexander Campbell, 1861.)

It is our hope and prayer that Excelsior will provide students with the tools that will allow them to continue to pursue truth, confront falsehood, and find Him from Whom all blessings flow.

Preparing for October...

October Clean-Up

October 3rd - Green family

October 10th - Hardin family

October 17th - Hill family

October 24th - Mathenia family

October 31st - McCallum family

October 3rd - **Taco Bell**

October 10th - **Chick-fil-a**

October 17th -

Backyard Burger

October 24th - **Pepper's**

October 31st - **Pizza**

Lunch:

