

## **Metropolitan Moses' Second Blog Post**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In my former blog post I discussed the spiritual aspects of Christian learning and wisdom. I mentioned how, in our life as Christians, we begin our quest for the knowledge of the truth with the hearing of the word of truth. We then pass through the stages of godly fear and strive to live a life of repentance and we have as our goal to attain to a purified love of God and all men.

I also emphasized that our children need the tools of a liberal arts education to combat the confusion and deceit of our day. Our children need to be able to confront the world with confidence; classical education coupled with an Orthodox Christian world-view as its foundation will enable them to do this.

I wish to share with you the Oxford Dictionary definition of "liberal arts":

liberal                      arts | lib(ə)rəl  
ärts | plural noun --*chiefly North  
American* academic              subjects  
such as literature, philosophy,  
mathematics,              and              social  
and physical sciences as distinct  
from professional and technical  
subjects. • --*historical* the  
medieval              trivium              and  
quadrivium.

ORIGIN from                      the  
Latin *liberalis*,              from *liber* 'free  
(man)'.

*liberal*,                      as                      distinct  
from *servile* or *mechanical* (i.e.  
involving manual labor) and  
originally referring to arts and  
sciences considered 'worthy of a  
free man'; later the word related  
to              general              intellectual  
development rather than  
vocational training.

The historical approach of education is not in conflict with the industrial arts, technology and sciences. With this, a historical note is in order; originally the term “liberal arts” was used by the Romans to refer to the education of a free citizen. In this way, it was being used as a socio-political term. With the evangelization of the Roman Empire from Saint Constantine forward, we can see a spiritual transformation of the liberal arts. The Church teaches that we are rational sheep, that God gave us the gift of freedom. Free will is a fearful gift. We are called to choose good over evil in thought, word and deed. To do this effectively we have to have clear thoughts, clear beliefs, and this is assisted greatly by a classical education.

Our aim in using the classical approach is for the student to achieve more in their life. Classical education is made up of three stages (the Trivium): grammar, logic and rhetoric. Through their study of grammar, the students will be able to understand what they read more effectively, whether that reading is about academic subjects or theological matters. Through their study of logic the students will be able to find natural

truth through sound reasoning. Through their study of rhetoric the students will be better able to understand and defend Christian revelation.

In order to show the power of educating your child using classical education, I wish to share one family's story that I found through my ongoing interest in education. Some years ago I read an extraordinary book on classical education titled, *Simply Classical: A Beautiful Education for Any Child*, written by an extraordinary woman by the name of Cheryl Swope.

It is a powerful story of her efforts to educate her two adopted special-needs twins, a boy and a girl. I think that the story of their real limitations and the subsequent level of intellectual and moral development that they achieved beyond all expectation, through classical education, are of use to all parents.

It must be pointed out that Cheryl Swope has a master's degree in special education for learning disability children and a bachelor's degree in special education for behavioral disorder

children.

It also must be pointed out that in the book she refers to the many specialists who she consulted during the first years of the children's education and it is quite obvious that she showed the children unflinching love and patience in their schooling. She stated that the pace of the course work went slower than it would have for an average student and that they had to do a lot more review than what is normally called for.

Having given you this background, let me quote from her book, *"Simply Classical, A Beautiful Education For Any Child"*

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## INTRODUCTION

*If you have met my daughter, then you already know why I am so passionate about classical education for any child.*

*My daughter Michelle faces many challenges. She falls in the "borderline mentally handicapped" range with a full-scale IQ of 75, although her low score is*

*due in part to organic brain dysfunction. Diagnosed on the autism spectrum at age two, Michelle began her life with an odd "semantic pragmatic language disorder." She later evidenced severe and specific learning disabilities. As a young woman today, she battles neurological disorders such as debilitating migraines, chorea (involuntary movements), and dystonia (involuntary cramping of her hands and feet). She fatigues more easily than her peers. She is distracted and impulsive, and she requires continual supervision and care. Michelle has severe organizational difficulties and mood instability. She also suffers all of the profoundly dark and disturbing effects of her hardest challenge: schizophrenia. This began with a frightening hallucination at age four and will persist throughout her life. She combats the daily side effects of necessary medications. But because of classical education, this is not the end of her story.*

*Michelle loves words. She writes simple poetry. She reads her favorite Latin books in her free time. She performs poised solos in Latin, French, and German with a community singing group. Michelle has studied the ancient civilizations, including famous men of Greece and Rome, even attempting some*

*Plutarch and Cicero. She writes plays and stories for personal enjoyment, and she shares her poems as gifts. She loves L. M. Montgomery, Louisa May Alcott, and Jane Austen. When tired or unsettled, she listens gratefully as her father reads comforting poems by Eugene Field or captivating plays by William Shakespeare. Because she has studied Greek and Roman mythology, the writers' classical references are not unfamiliar to her. Michelle has also been engaged from her earliest years in the mathematical arts, and she plays piano pieces that reflect her study of music theory. She loves the opera and has begun creating new works, perhaps for a small opera theater to perform. In many ways, Michelle's leisure time reflects the impact of the liberal arts.*

*Michelle also treasures her Christian faith. She has read the entire Old and New Testaments. She sings with clarity the hymns and liturgy of the church, often seated with her favorite older church members. She says quietly, "Oh, I am not offended," when someone new believes her to be a young child, not a young woman. Michelle prays for people, and she notices need. In a group, Michelle is usually the first to bring a cup of water to someone who coughs, or a tissue to someone who cries. She cheers her father*

*after he has had a hard day at work. Michelle forgives when someone wrongs her, and she asks forgiveness when she has wronged someone else. She has begun to reflect a great purpose of classical education: a thoughtful life, lived in love and service to others.*

*Because of classical education, Michelle achieves academically in some surprising ways. For example, in her earliest years before formal Latin instruction, Michelle tested very low in the area of "receptive vocabulary," which is a term for the words a child understands. ("Expressive vocabulary" indicates the words a child speaks.) In fact, she tested in the lowest 6th percentile of children her age.*

*Many years later --years filled with Latin grammar, Latin and Greek roots, English grammar, and literature-- Michelle was retested. She received a score of 130 (100 = average). This time, when compared to children her age, she tested in the gifted range in vocabulary! She continues her studies today, just as she will throughout her adulthood, in part because the liberal arts strengthen her mind and increase her facility with language.*

*Classical education has helped to unlock Michelle's*

*mind, and classical education has broadened her world. One day in a stuffy, cramped doctor's office, Michelle engaged herself with a book, as she often does during the too-familiar appointments. She curled her little body over the large, dog-eared copy of Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy and immersed herself in the brilliant language. We heard her giggle. Her doctor paused. The doctor told me candidly that with other educational approaches, Michelle would still be trying to read "house" and "mouse." Instead, she appreciates good literature!*

*Recently, Michelle played the part of Portia in our dining-room version of The Merchant of Venice. She laughed out loud in the early scene when Portia laments the sorry state of her suitors. At age 17, Michelle can commiserate. She finds great solace in the insights of Shakespeare's characters. In addition to literature, she continues her studies in Latin. The language seems to lift Michelle beyond her struggles. She especially loves learning new Latin words. She sings hymns in Latin, and they lighten her heart. When we listen, her music lightens our hearts too. Though full of struggles even in many academic areas, Michelle's life has become an illustration of the rich and delightful benefits of classical education for any*

*child. This book is my response to Michelle's simple request: "I want my story to help other children."*

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I have included this lengthy passage because it paints a marvelous picture. A young girl who, in her early years, was assessed to have an IQ of 75 and a score in the bottom 6th percentile in receptive vocabulary was transformed by the application of the classical method of education and is now in the gifted range in receptive vocabulary.

This is extraordinary! Michelle was not an average child. She was not even a slightly below average child. She was mentally handicapped. Yet, she was able to expand her mind and enrich her life far beyond what any of her doctors and the experts in the child development field could have predicted. This is one of the most moving and persuasive examples for the merits of the classical method of education.

One might ask, why is this important?

The answer is that we are in a struggle to preserve the minds and hearts of our children from the confusion of this age. Our culture is hostile to Christianity. We need to look back to the older way of life and the older way of education, used by the Holy Fathers of the Church themselves, that laid the groundwork for a person to expand their mind and heart.

The classical educational method provides a systematic multi-faceted approach that seeks to cultivate the child's mind and character, seeking to impart wisdom, virtue and eloquence. Today's methods of education are a hybrid of pragmatism (which seeks to train the child to perform labor or work in technical or scientific fields) and progressivism (which seeks to condition the mind of the child in a new way, thus turning out new citizens who will change society in the direction the education oligarchs desire.)

The radical changes in our society that have occurred over the last seventy years are not the result of the voting consent of the majority. Rather, they occurred through policies first

implemented at the teacher's colleges by education oligarchs and filtered down throughout all levels of education. The values taught to children in government schools have, in many cases, come into conflict with the values of their parents.

We seek to provide something akin to an inoculation from the disease of radical progressivism. I have offered the example of Michelle to demonstrate to you that the classical method of education is not only for the elites and not only for gifted children.

I am not sure whom I should marvel at more, Michelle who made such progress, or her mother, who showed such dedication to provide the classical method of education to a handicapped child. When she first started out she sought out a school to put Michelle in, but no classical school would accept her, as the schools did not have the resources to spend so much time with one student. Cheryl then did the research and contacted everyone she could to learn how to teach this program on her own in a homeschool environment. I also respect

Cheryl's husband who supported her work and provided the means for her to teach her children at home.

It must be clarified that Cheryl Swope was not originally classically educated. *She was educated to be a teacher of handicapped students using today's standard methods and she found them to be dehumanizing and ineffectual.* She then withdrew from teaching, became a real estate agent, and then rediscovered her Christian roots, inspiring her to turn away from the Progressive ideology in which she was trained. It was then that she discovered classical education and she found it to be effective where her former methods were not.

Both Michelle and her mother Cheryl are sources of inspiration and they can help us to see how families can rethink their choices regarding not only education, but also how they spend their time.

With the tools given to them through classical education, our children can learn to be in the

world, but not of the world. They can be *aware* of the things of this age and yet fulfill the words of the Holy Apostle Paul: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” (1Thess 5:21)

By means of a classical education steeped in the tradition of the Church Fathers, our children can acquire an Orthodox Christian worldview and have their hearts and minds on the things of God and the heritage of our Orthodox Christian culture.

May it be so. Amen.

[Those who are interested can find a 2014 interview with Cheryl Swopes at:  
<https://www.circeinstitute.org/blog/words-wisdom-cheryl-swope-teaching-special-needs-students-classically> ]