Introduction to The Trivium Handbooks (*The Tutor Handbook, The Student Handbook, and the Curriculum Handbook*)

Trivium School is the result of an idea that John and Louise Schmitt formed over many years. It began when they first met, and it was developed by a number of experiences. This introduction is an attempt to articulate their vision. The focus is on forming excellence in students. This is not simply an affirmation of the value of the students or the nobility of their final end, but an articulation of the foundational principles upon which the School was founded. A School, grounded in these principles, truly educates.

1. Education for Reality

Education is for reality; it is an introduction to what is real. The goal is to know what is really there, the truth, goodness and beauty of everything. The presupposition is that we can know and that relativism is a petty capitulation. Every person naturally desires to know and this means understanding the causes. The older opposition between the free man and the slave reemerges as the distinction between the citizen and the relativist. Here is the crossroad that divides "classical" education from progressive "education."

2. The Tools of Learning

Dorothy Sayers' essay "The Lost Tools of Learning," first published in 1947 and then republished in 1979 in *National Review*, marks the beginning of the Classical School movement. In her essay, Sayers revives the ancient *organan* by focusing on grammar, logic, and rhetoric as tools that are needed to learn any material. These correspond to the three modes of teaching: lecturing, coaching, and seminars. Sayers separated the skills from the content and emphasized these skills. The Ancients actually taught these skills when they taught Latin. Ordering the material in this way, corresponds to Aristotle's theoretical intellectual virtues to be developed in the student: knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.

3. The Whole Person

A school is concerned not only with the virtues of the mind, but also the heart and soul of the students. Aristotle's intellectual virtues include doing and making, and so an education that involves the whole child, especially his imagination, and must include activities and arts. It will have small classes where the students can interact and participate and the tutor can help to guide and form the student. The model here is Socrates. Including the whole person means opening the soul not only to abstract truth, but also to the concrete persons around us. Many aspects of school life are included here (e.g., teamwork, class unity, dances). It is also the reason we defer to the parents and are co-educational.

4. The Paradox of Man's *telos*

The education in the virtues can be seen abstractly as man's nature ordered for the transcendent, for the absolute that he can never obtain without grace. This is paradoxical because nature cannot reach its own final end – and the Promethean attempts to do so are marked by sin. The whole Ancient world of the West knew this paradox, and the Old Testament is a slow pedagogy towards an understanding of it. Greek Tragedy captures man's dilemma, as does a more careful reading of *The*

Aeneid. This ordering (and not Rousseau's denial of original sin and his critique of society corrupting man) is the cause of man's difficulties. The paradox is exemplified by man's ability to reason – and how often he uses this badly. Examples of this, especially in modern times, are part of the curriculum too. This paradox, and not technical mastery, is the key to understanding the culture of the West.

5. Adopted Sons and Daughters of God

Christ calls us to participate by grace in his Trinitarian life. We become adopted sons and daughters of God through Baptism, whereby we die to ourselves and order our lives in the Holy Spirit, with Christ, in obedience to God the Father. The Christian life in the sacraments is a participation in divine trinitarian life. It is not enough to hold that we are in God's image and likeness, that we are created in a way that mirrors God, unless we also see the specifically Christian; namely that we are called to the fullness of divine life and love. Education cannot stop at a natural end, but should prepare us for a life in God. This begins already in the current life and is realized in a community. A virtuous person is the best citizen, one who orders his life in this world to ultimate things. This is the task that Christians have in whatever state and whatever role they have in the world.

The Characteristics that Form the School

After setting forth the main contours of an anthropology that is foundational for education, it is important to specify more concretely how this manifests itself. What follows is a list of important characteristics of Trivium School. The reality of a school is analogous to a living person, and so it is more than these characteristics. In fact, not all of them are absolutely essential, but together they form a whole.

General Characteristics

- Roman Catholic, faithful to Scripture and Tradition
- Coeducational with familial relations between the two sexes
- Small classes that allow interaction between students and tutors with Socratic discussion
- Beautiful surroundings that express noble forms and transcendence and not simply technical virtuosity
- Limited use of technology in the classroom so that students can actively develop their imaginations
- Consistent focus in prayer on asking for assistance that our actions are ordered to God's glory
- An administration that serves and leads the faculty and students according to the mission of the School – and not simply financial success

Curriculum

- Curriculum that analogously applies the Trivium of Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric to all subjects
- Rhetoric as the crown of the Trivium that orders Logic and understanding to interpersonal persuasion
- A common curriculum that changes little over the years that unites current students with alumni
- Public defense of a senior thesis as a graduation requirement that focuses on grammar, logic, and rhetoric
- Theology program that is faithful to the magisterium of the Catholic Church
- Latin as the one foreign language requirement
- Euclid class that gives the students an experience and understanding of logic.
- Science program that emphasizes observation and does not exclude design and purpose
- History program that passes on the inheritance of Western Civilization
- English and Composition program that enlivens the imagination with the good and great works of Western literature
- Co-curriculum program that is a requirement for all and is not an elective
- Arts program that focuses on studios and making instead of theoretical understanding.
- Athletic program that strongly encourages participation and teamwork

Faculty

- Headmaster who is also a tutor
- Understanding of the role of a teacher to guide the student as a tutor instead of being an expert in a specialized field
- Tutors that lead a wide variety of subjects – so that they can be models of a well educated person who is not a specialist -- as the students are expected to be.
- Understanding and appreciation of the three modes of teaching that correspond to the Trivium (lecturing, coaching, discussion)

Students

- Students that are highly motivated and respectful of the School and its life
- Good communication with parents about expectations and progress of their children that gives students an opportunity to grow in personal responsibility
- Robust inclusion of students in the daily life of the school, especially in events.
- Student groups or clubs that are inclusive and open to all students
- Patience and flexibility of rules that admits exceptions
- Prudent discipline of students that recognizes their dignity
- Dress code that promotes human dignity

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