

## Interdisciplinary Measures: The Integration of Latin

by Ginny Kent

A print by Scott Mutter hangs in my classroom. Entitled “Gold Column,”<sup>1</sup> it depicts a Corinthian-headed column which supports a beautiful ancient frieze and roof. The column extends down the print and becomes a modern skyscraper, situated in a busy city. This print embodies the purpose of classical education. The influence of ancient history upon modern culture is hard to ignore, yet modern education seems to separate the disciplines, relegating them to isolated classrooms. Ancient history however, led by the Latin language, spawned the modern world, and therefore should be thoroughly integrated with the lessons of government, art, literature, math, science, and cultural studies. Covenant Classical Christian School in Columbia, South Carolina, strives to do this. Ancient meets modern in the classrooms of CCCS.

Covenant Classical Christian School, under headmaster Chris Crain and begun by Covenant Presbyterian Church, states as its mission, “Our desire is that students would grow in serving the Lord Jesus Christ as they discover more about His creation and work in history, and their gifts and calling. We want our graduates to succeed in life because they think and act biblically, building upon the foundational education they have received at Covenant Classical Christian School.”<sup>2</sup> The “Christian” part of CCCS’s mission is demonstrated by the school’s devotion to the Bible and Christian worldview; the “classical” aspect is demonstrated by distinctive subjects taught which hold to the

classical Trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric. But, to take these beliefs further, students at Covenant Christian School are taught on a daily basis that their Christian beliefs, Latin studies,

*Christiana*.<sup>3</sup> This curriculum builds an excellent foundation in grammar and vocabulary, but I often have to add teacher-created materials, games, worksheets and quizzes. Our seventh grade

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The Latin department of CCCS is composed of two teachers, Joeli Monteith and me, Ginny Kent. I teach Latin to grades five through seven; Joeli teaches high school Latin I, II, and III. We have developed our Latin department to reflect our love of the language, our belief that the language is a critical key to understanding English, and our conviction that the ancient language of the Church is still relevant to Christians today. It is vital to build these connections between Latin and other subjects. If at any time a student asks, “What is the point of studying Latin?”, I should be able to answer, “Look at what you have learned of your other subjects by studying Latin.” Those connections should prove the importance of studying Latin.

The market is laden with new up-and-coming Latin curricula, all of which promise the best approach to learning this “dead” language. For our fifth and sixth grade curriculum, we have chosen Memoria Press’s *Latina*

class begins Prentice Hall’s *Ecce Romani*.<sup>4</sup> This curriculum is translation-based, whereas *Latina Christiana* is vocabulary-based. This curriculum includes excellent translation exercises, but the grammar instruction often has to be amplified by the teacher. In our high school, Latin I and II finish *Ecce Romani I* and *II*, and our Latin III class expands their study with *Wheelock’s Latin*<sup>5</sup> supplemented with Memoria Press’s *Third Year Henle Latin*.<sup>6</sup>

For me, the joy of teaching Latin has less to do with a correct curriculum purchase and more to do with how the curricula is taught. When I enter the fifth grade classroom at CCCS, I am greeted by a classroom of heads cheering, “Salve, magistra!” To this I respond, “Salvete amici Latinae.”<sup>7</sup> (This greeting is regularly repeated over the whole campus from playground to cafeteria.) Mixed with their exuberant “yay-it-is-Latin-time” welcome, students run to retrieve their “drill sheet” with which they memorize and time their vocabulary. These drill sheets are continued through Latin III and give students the best opportunity to daily review

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## Interdisciplinary Measures...

their vocabulary and individually drill themselves. Following this, the whole class verbally chants all the noun and verb endings with me. For the younger grades I explain that they might never know what the more advanced endings mean! But the students are charmed by the wacky endings (*bor, beris, bitur, bimir, bimini, buntur*) and will someday thank me for impressing the endings on their young brains. There is a joy that pervades the fifth and sixth grades that stuns me. These students, on their own, bring in example after example of how Latin is reflected in their daily life. I have hardly to teach them of the interdisciplinary nature of Latin. A Playmobile® ship has SPQR (*Senatus Populusque Romanus*) inscribed on its sail, while a common Latin saying is found as the motto of our state, South Carolina.<sup>9</sup> One wonderful sixth grader actually took my advice and entered a General Nutrition Store (GNC) to inform the proprietor that her store's initials reminded him of gender, number, case (how adjectives and nouns agree) and asked for some distilled participles! At the end of each class, I might reward the students with a game of "Surgite, Sedete," a Latin-based musical chairs game.

In the advanced classes at CCCS, Joeli Monteith has integrated some incredible ways of bringing Latin to life. To quote her syllabus: "By working towards fluency in Latin, students gain a greater understanding of English grammar, uncover a wealth of rich classical literature, and attain a deeper insight into the historical and cultural context in which the early church emerged." Her classes have performed student-written skits of Roman funerals and weddings, complete with extensive

dialogue, all historically accurate, of course. This past year each Latin class was challenged to a Latin derivatives and sayings scavenger hunt, which took the classes to downtown Charleston, S.C., among graveyards and classically-built government buildings. These high school students add to their drill sheets the memorization of Latin sayings and are quizzed regularly. All too often, in a separate literature or history class, one student will say, "That comes from the Latin saying 'ad hominem,'" <sup>10</sup> or "The Latin root for that is 'sinistro' as in 'sinister.'" <sup>11</sup> These connections made on a daily basis prove that the acclaimed "dead" language is really living, well hidden in other subjects!

Translating in class is a challenge. It is a challenge to call each student to honest, original work, while engaging the entire class in an oral session. I remember from my Latin classes at the University of South Carolina the terror I felt when called on to translate out loud. Joeli and I have adapted comparable techniques in our classes. (I wonder why?) When reading and correcting an assigned translation in class, each student is to be ready to present and quick to review their work. Personally, I like calling my students to stand when they speak. They read the Latin, give their translation, and answer my pointed questions. As the correct translation is given, students either correct their own work or trade their work to mark their neighbor's sentences.

Both Joeli and I also teach literature classes in Covenant Classical Christian School's high school. It is a great privilege to be able to integrate our literary teaching with the students' Latin. With the study of Augustine's *Confessions*, students are required

to keep a vocabulary list and document any Latin root that might be represented on the list. Whether they know it or not, the students' vocabulary is dramatically strengthened. With our joined literature and history Omnibus classes, students reflect on the meaning of the word "omnibus" which means "all things." Frequently, when I am trying to restore the class discussion from a wayward rabbit trail, my students insist, "Teacher, this is O-m-n-i-b-u-s class! We can discuss ALL things!" Maybe Latin is teaching our students too much.

Latin is far from a lifeless language, dead to the modern world. Instead it is the basis for today's art, architecture, government, math, science, and language. Scott Mutter's "Gold Column" captures this image perfectly, intertwining Corinthian grandeur with modern strength. The influence of ancient history on modern has been lost in the education of the day. What a travesty! Latin is not lost, not obsolete, and not dead, at least not in the classrooms of Covenant Classical Christian School. The column and skyscraper are alive and well, creating an education of interdisciplinary studies, beginning with declensions and conjugations.

### NOTES

See page 15.

## Interdisciplinary Measures...

### NOTES

1. Scott Mutter, "Gold Column," <http://artwork.barewalls.com/artwork/GoldColumn.html?productid=275166&ns=normal>.
2. Covenant Classical Christian School, <http://www.covenantcs.org/>.
3. Memoria Press, *Latina Christiana I*, <http://www.memoriapress.com/descriptions/Latina1.html>.
4. Prentice Hall, *Ecce Romani*, [http://www.phschool.com/atschool/ecce\\_romani/program\\_page.html](http://www.phschool.com/atschool/ecce_romani/program_page.html).
5. Wheelock's Latin, <http://wheelockslatin.com/>.
6. Memoria Press, *Third Year Henle Latin*, [http://www.memoriapress.com/descriptions/index\\_latin.htm](http://www.memoriapress.com/descriptions/index_latin.htm).
7. "Hello teacher!" "Hello, friends of Latin!"
8. "The Senate and People of Rome" was the official inscription of the Roman government.
9. "Dum Spiro Spero" means "While I breathe, I hope."
10. "Ad hominem," meaning "to the man" is a logical fallacy attacking the speaker.
11. "Sinistro" is the root that means "left." Left-handed men were thought to be sinister, or cruel evildoers.

## How 'Bout Them Apples...

7. Hans H. Oerberg, *Lingua Latina Secundum Naturae Rationem Explicata* (Copenhagen: The Nature Method Institute, 1965).
8. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship Of The Ring*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982), 121.
9. Ibid.



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