OMNIBUS IV

The Ancient World

Edited by Gene Edward Veith,
Douglas Wilson & G. Tyler Fischer

Omnibus IV

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Veritas Press, Lancaster, Pennsylvania
©2009, 2015 by Veritas Press
800-922-5082
www.VeritasPress.com
ISBN 978-1-936648-42-9
Second edition 2015

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Printed in the United States of America.

To my children, now all grown up, Paul, Mary, and Joanna (who is now an Omnibus teacher herself).

—Gene Edward Veith

For Cinco and Pinto, with great affection.

—Douglas Wilson

To my parents and to Emily's as well—George and Ann, and Glenn and Lucille. Thank you for your encouragement, kindness, patience, and love.

—G. Tyler Fischer

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Foreword

One of the most obvious questions that Christians might ask about a curriculum like this one is, "Why study this stuff?" The question can be asked for different reasons. Perhaps a concerned parent is attracted to the rigor of a "classical and Christian approach," and yet has thumbed through a couple of the texts and is taken aback by some of the material. "It was this kind of gunk," he thinks, "that chased us out of the government school." Or perhaps the question is asked by the student himself when he "hits the wall." The rigor that is built into this course of study is significant, and about a third of the way through the year, a student might be asking all sorts of pointed questions. "Why are you making me do this?" is likely to be one of them. The student may be asking because of his workload, but if he points to the nature of the material, the question still needs a good answer. It is a good question, and everyone who is involved in teaching this course needs to have the answer mastered.

G.K. Chesterton said somewhere that if a book does not have a wicked character in it, then it is a wicked book. One of the most pernicious errors that has gotten abroad in the Christian community is the error of *sentimentalism*—the view that evil is to be evaded, rather than the more robust Christian view that evil is to be conquered. The Christian believes that evil is there to be fought, the dragon is there to be slain. The sentimentalist believes that evil is to be resented.

My wife and I did not enroll our children in a classical Christian school so that they would never come into contact with sin. Rather, we wanted them there because we wanted to unite with like-minded Christian parents who had covenanted together to deal with the (inevitable) sin in a consistent, biblical manner. We fully expected our children to encounter sin in the classroom, on the playground and in the curriculum. We also expected that when they encountered it, they would see it dealt with in the way the Bible says sin should be dealt with.

A classical Christian school or a home school following the classical Christian curriculum must never be thought of as an asylum. Rather, this is a time of basic training; it is boot camp. Students are being taught to handle their weapons, and they are being taught this under godly, patient supervision. But in order to learn this sort of response, it is important that students learn it well. That is, setting up a "straw man" paganism that is easily demolished equips no one. All that would do is impart a false sense of security to the students—until they get to a secular college campus to encounter the real thing. Or, worse yet, if they continue the path into a soft, asylum-style Christian college and then find themselves addressing the marketplace completely unprepared.

If this basic training is our goal, and it is, then we should make clear what one potential abuse of the Omnibus curriculum might be. This curriculum was written and edited with the assumption that godly oversight and protection would accompany the student through his course of work. It was written with the conviction that children need teachers, flesh and blood teachers, who will work together with them. It was also written with the assumption that many of these teachers need the help and the resources that a program like this can supply. But we also believe that, if a seventh-grader is simply given this material and told to work through it himself, the chances are good that the student will miss the benefit that is available for those who are taught.

The Scriptures do not allow us to believe that a record of sinful behavior, or of sinful corruption, is inherently corrupting. If it were, then there are many stories and accounts in the Bible itself that would have to be excluded. But if we ever begin to think our children need to be protected "from the Bible," this should bring us up short. Perhaps we have picked up false notions of holiness somewhere. In short, there is no subject that this curriculum will raise in the minds of seventh-grade students that would not *also* be raised when that student reads through his Bible, cover to cover. It is true that this curriculum has accounts of various murders, or examples of prostitution, or of tyranny from powerful and cruel kings. But we can find all the same things in the book of Judges.

So the issue is not the *presence* of sin, but of the *re-*

sponse to that sin. What we have sought to do throughout—in the introductory worldview essays, the questions and exercises, and in the teachers' materials—is provide a guideline for responding to all the various worldviews that men outside of Christ come up with. This program, we believe, will equip the student to see through pretences and lies that other Christian children, who have perhaps been too sheltered, are not able to deal with.

Of course, there is a limit to this, as we have sought to recognize. There *are* certain forms of worldliness and corruption that would overwhelm a student's ability to handle it, no matter how carefully a parent or teacher was instructing them. And while children differ in what they can handle, in our experience with many students of this age, we believe that the content of this curriculum is well within the capacity of Christian children of this age group. But again, this assumes godly oversight and instruction. The challenge here is two-fold. The rigor of the curriculum can seem daunting, but we have sought to provide direction and balance with regard to the demands of the material. The second concern is the question of false worldviews, paganism and just plain old-fashioned sin, which we have addressed above.

As our students work their way through this material, and in the years of the Omnibus program that will follow, we want them to walk away with a profound sense of the *antithesis.* What we mean by this is that right after Adam and Eve fell in the Garden, God gave His first messianic promise (Gen. 3:15). But along with this promise, He also said that there would be constant antipathy between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. This is what we mean by the antithesis, and we want our students to come to share in that godly antipathy. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil (Ps. 97:10; Prov. 8:13). In every generation, in all movements (whether of armies or philosophies), in all schools of literature, the men and women involved are either obeying God or disobeying Him. They are either trusting Him or they are not trusting Him. All students are learning to love God, or they are not learning to love God.

But when they love and trust Him, they must do so in the face of conflict. Jesus was the ultimate Seed of the woman, and yet when He came down and lived among us, He faced constant opposition from "broods of vipers." It is not possible to live in this world faithfully without coming into conflict with those who have no desire to live faithfully. The task of every Christian parent bringing children up to maturity in such a world is to do it in *a way that equips.* False protection, precisely because it does not equip, leaves a child defenseless when the inevitable day comes when that artificial shelter is removed. True protection equips. We do not want to build a fortress for our students to hide in; we want to give them a shield to carry—along with a sword.

Students who have faithfully worked through this course of study will not be suckers for a romanticized view of ancient paganism offered up by Hollywood. They have read Suetonius, and they have worked through a Christian response to true paganism. They are grateful that Christ came into this dark world, and they know *why* they are grateful.

—Douglas Wilson

Preface

As you are preparing to begin your work in Omnibus IV, it is at least likely that you are one of those students who began to work with us in Omnibus I. We know that we have picked up some students in the middle of this journey, but we have lined up these books in the consecutive way that we have for a reason.

Omnibus I covers the ancient world, while the second text covers the medieval period, and the third deals with the Reformation period down to the present. With Omnibus IV, we start the process over again—going back to the ancient world. Why do we do this?

There are several reasons that can be given. The first that comes to mind is related to C.S. Lewis's argument in his *Experiment in Criticism* where he maintained that the mark of a good book is that it is the kind of book you return to, in order to read through again. Classics don't wear out the way blue jeans do. In a similar way, you could argue that a period worth studying is a period worth studying *again*. We make no pretense of having covered everything that could be covered in our first pass through these eras, and we know for a fact that a return trip will be well-rewarded.

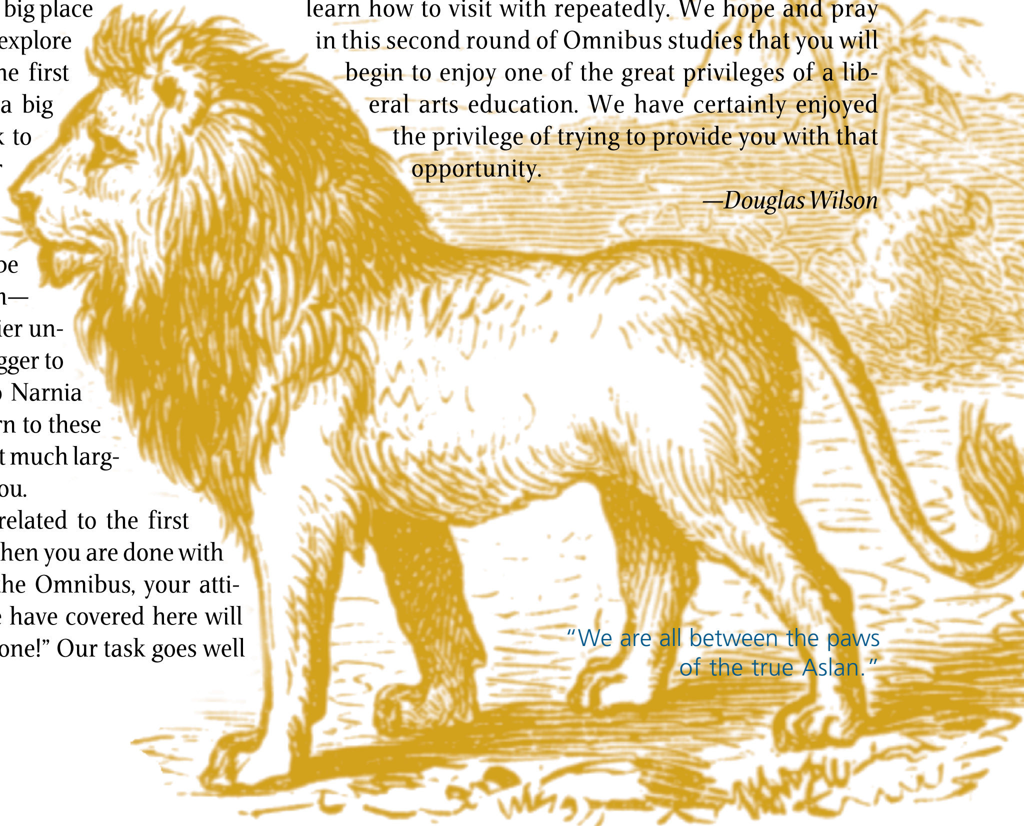
Another reason is that you, the students, are more mature now, and better able to take on more challenging work. When you return to these times, you will discover that you see more and understand more, and not just because you have gone back to a big place that you did not have time to explore fully when you were there the first time. You are going back to a big place, but you are going back to it bigger. This means that your capacities for understanding are greater, and we trust that this time through you will be gaining a great deal of wisdom—as well as enriching your earlier understanding. Aslan seemed bigger to Lucy when she came back to Narnia because *she* had grown. Return to these eras in the full expectation that much larger vistas will open up before you.

There is a third reason, related to the first one. We hope and pray that when you are done with these next three editions of the Omnibus, your attitude to the subject matter we have covered here will not be one of "There! *That's* done!" Our task goes well beyond trying to get you to learn this material—we have wanted to encourage you to love the material, and to love the study of it. We want you to be the kind of adults who return to many of the classics that you have read in the course of your education, and which you will return to for pleasure. We know that some of you will come back to the Omnibus texts for the education of your own children (which is not as far away as you might think), but apart from pragmatic considerations like that, we hope that many of you will recall many of these books with real affection. And of course those books which are stinkers—but which we had you read because of their importance—we hope you treasure your hatred of them all your days. *Mein Kampf* comes to mind.

A few years ago, I began rereading a number of C.S. Lewis's books, books that I had read many years before—some of them as a teenager. And what I found myself discovering, sometimes with a shock, was that I was encountering truths that I have been friends with my entire adult life, but was now coming back to recognize that *this* is where I must have learned that particular thing. There was a time when I didn't know that, and here was the place where this truth and I first met. Sometimes it is hard to imagine that there was a time when you didn't know your oldest friends.

And old friends are the kind of friends that you learn how to visit with repeatedly. We hope and pray in this second round of Omnibus studies that you will begin to enjoy one of the great privileges of a liberal arts education. We have certainly enjoyed the privilege of trying to provide you with that opportunity.

—*Douglas Wilson*



"We are all between the paws of the true Aslan."

Preface to Omnibus IV: The Ancient World

Rome conquered the known world, whereupon Christianity—despite or perhaps because of intense persecution—conquered Rome. Christianity had become legal and dominant for 48 years when a new emperor named Julian took power. He grew up in a Christian home, but then rejected Christianity and embraced old-style Roman paganism. To renounce your religion is called "apostasy," so Julian became known as "Julian the Apostate." When he became emperor, he resolved to do away with Christianity and to bring the old gods back. One of his measures to undo the cultural influence of Christianity was to forbid Christians from teaching and studying the ancient pagan authors.

Julian the Apostate felt that the Christians had taken over the Greco-Roman culture. They are using the pagan writers to undermine paganism! They are using our own writers against us! That's not fair! "If they want to learn literature," his edict read, "they have Luke and Mark. Let them go back to their churches and expound on them." In other words, Christians should just read their Bibles and leave other kinds of knowledge alone. That way, he reasoned, they won't influence the civilization and will just die out.

Julian the Apostate ruled for only 19 months. He was killed in battle and was succeeded by yet another Christian. All of those ambitious plans to restore paganism—including trying to make the pagans take care of the sick and needy like the Christians did—went for nothing. Trying to stop the spiritual and cultural momentum of Christianity would be like going to the Alps and standing in front of an avalanche, ordering it to stop.

There are two major ironies here. First, some Christians today agree with the man who tried to stamp out Christianity and its influence. They think Christians should read nothing except the Bible and have nothing to do with the ancient authors who lived before the coming of Christ. Second, Julian the Apostate was right. Christianity does take over the ancient authors and the classical cultures. Christianity, with a worldview that is so much bigger than rival worldviews, really does swallow them up.

After Christianity, the classical pagan worldview lost its force. For one thing, it was evident that it could not serve as a coherent perspective that could rival Christianity. The different components of classicism contradict each other. Plato criticizes the poets, such as Homer. Aristotle criticizes Plato. Both great philosophers criticize democracy, which the Romans improved with their Republic, which, however, would be overthrown by the Empire. Cicero defends the Republic from would-be tyrants, such as Mark Anthony. Another great Roman author, Virgil, lauds the Empire of the absolute ruler Augustus Caesar.

And yet, from the vantage point of Christianity, the true greatness of all of these figures is thrown in high relief. Christianity supplies what is lacking. Plato sees that all things have an essence, an idea that gives them their form, but it's hard to imagine his realm of ideas, until Christians relate those underlying ideas to the mind of God. Aristotle reasons that the universe must have a first cause; not only that,

Julian the Apostate (331–363)

the universe must also have a final cause, an ultimate purpose, an end that fulfills all things. What these causes are remain obscure in Aristotle, but Christians see in his analysis the necessity of God. Cicero testifies to the objective reality of the moral law. And Virgil in his Fourth Eclogue written in 37 B.C. predicts that a Child will be born who will remove the wickedness of the world and usher in a Golden Age in which the lion will lie down with the lamb.

The Cumaean Sibyl from the Sistine Chapel

It has been observed that Christians invented fiction by rejecting the religious claims of the ancient myths while retaining them as just good stories. One of those myths was that of the Sibyl, an old woman who lived in a cave. To her was given all knowledge, which she wrote down on orderly stacks of oak leaves. The wind, though, blew the leaves away. Now, human beings must learn by finding one leaf after another, putting the isolated truths together as best they can. That's a good story. You don't have to believe in sibyls to appreciate what the story says about the nature of learning. In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante takes the story further. At the climax of the *Paradiso*, in the last canto of the comedy, Dante imagines himself in Heaven, redeemed and coming into the presence of the Trinity Himself. As he does so, Dante sees all of the scattered leaves of the Sibyl flying together, rushing into the light of God. Thus the poet expresses the biblical truth that now we know in part, but then we shall know completely (1 Cor. 13:12). This is also what it is like reading the ancients. We find one leaf of insight after another, but they all come together and make sense in light of the Triune God.

Today the latest cutting-edge ideas maintain that there is no truth and that right and wrong are just cultural constructions. Well, that is what the Sophists believed way back in the fifth century before Christ. If you know the ancients, you know that these new ideas are not only not new, but they have been thoroughly refuted by Plato. Today our scientific theorists are insisting that the only reality in the universe is material and that everything is governed by random forces. Well, that is what Lucretius said in the century before Christ. Someone familiar with the ancients can compare his ideas to those of Euclid (who saw mathematical order built into the universe) and Aristotle (who saw purpose in everything that exists).

Reading the ancients thus gives us perspective. C.S. Lewis said in his essay "On the Reading of Old Books" that each age has its mistakes, but they are usually not the same mistakes. To recognize the blind spots of our own day—and to realize that the contemporary world is not the only world there can be—we need "to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books." He adds that "books of the future would be just as good a corrective as the books of the past, but unfortunately we cannot get at them." You will, however, be able to get at the books of the past, thanks to Omnibus!

—Gene Edward Veith

Publisher's Preface

Have you ever stopped to think what the President of the United States in the year 2040 is doing right now? What about the next Martin Luther or John Calvin? I'll tell you what I hope they are doing. I hope they just finished reading this sentence!

There is no doubt in my mind that classical Christian education and the rigorous study of the greatest works of Western Civilization is a tool to create leaders like no other—godly leaders who understand that this is God's world, Christ inherited it, and we are to take dominion of it to His glory.

Many have begun down the path of studying this material and have not persevered—in their minds it was too hard, too salacious for Christian ears, too unrealistic, too much to grasp, the books were too old or some other "too." Be assured, like the Scriptures say in the Parable of the Sower, the work you do will *bear fruit a hundredfold* if you stick with it. In the lives of our own children we have already seen tremendous benefit and really have just barely scratched the surface.

Our goal with this text is to make the work easier for you. This text should make approaching *Omnibus*, and other material not previously encountered, come alive in a way that instills confidence, and it should convey a sense that young students (and teachers) can handle it.

We have done all we could to make this text a standalone guide for reading, studying and understanding these great books. One reference book in particular will prove beneficial as a resource for this year as well as the following years. *Western Civilization* by Jackson Spielvogel. If you have previously used our *Veritas Press History and Bible Curriculum,* you will want to keep the flashcards from them handy, too.

May you be blessed as you dig in and study the hand of God at work in the past and prepare for His use of you in the future.

—Marlin Detweiler

ADVISORY TO TEACHERS AND PARENTS

In the course of history there has been much fluctuation on what has been deemed age appropriate for young students. And for those of us alive today, there remains great variation as to what is considered age appropriate. The material we have created and the books we have assigned address numerous subjects and ideas that deal with topics (including sex, violence, religious persuasion and a whole host of other ideas) that have been the subject of much discussion of whether they are age appropriate. The judgment we applied in this text has been the same as we apply to our own children.

In the creation of this program we have assumed that it will be used by students in seventh grade and above. Furthermore, we have assumed that there is no part of the Bible deemed inappropriate to discuss with a seventh-grade student. Therefore, the material assumes that the student knows what sex is, that he understands the existence of violence, that he understands there are theological and doctrinal differences to be addressed and that he has the maturity to discern right and wrong.

The worldview we hold and from which we write is distinctly protestant and best summarized in the *Westminster Confession of Faith.* The Bible is our only ultimate and infallible rule of faith and practice.

We encourage you to become familiar with the material that your students will be covering in this program in order to avoid problems where you might differ with us on these matters.

Introduction

"At life's midpoint, I found myself lost in a dark woods," or so a certain story begins.[1] With Omnibus IV, we pass the midpoint of the project. We have been once through all of history, sampling some of the Great Books, drinking more deeply from others, hopefully finding in this reading what we so need—a connection to our fathers and to our cultural tradition. Our culture is starving for answers. The books that you have read and are reading hold many of the answers that are so desperately needed by the church and by our culture today. The path on which we tread is an old one. This has been overgrown by shrubs and thistles not because it is a bad path, but because most people have left it for easier paths that make believe that the past holds no bearing on the future, that we have no connection or obligation to our forefathers, and that the only writing worth reading is on the bestsellers list or on some blog.[2] All of this we deny! All paths that cut you off from your fathers and from the past are false, dangerous, and unsatisfying. They will eventually cut you off from your children and grandchildren and leave you all alone. Remember, it is not good for man to be alone. As we end this "halftime hiatus" in the Omnibus Project, it is good to pause, to remember and reflect. The ancient world—the world to which we return in Omnibus IV—helps us to shake free from the tethers of the Modern quest for autonomy—to be some free standing, free thinking, unencumbered being who creates reality between his ears (and then is stuck living in it all alone). The ancient world, like much of Omnibus and much of the Bible, reminds us that if we would live well we must live dependently rather than autonomously. We depend on the wisdom of our forefathers. We follow the paths they have trod. We know that outside of Christ we can do nothing. Living this way is humbling and realistic. Considering these truths puts us in our places and makes us ready to be thankful for the gifts passed on to us from the past—gifts that cost them much but which they give to us freely. Before we jump into the reading, here are a few thoughts to ponder as we begin Omnibus IV.

First and foremost, I want to thank all of you for the confidence you have placed in us by using this curriculum. I am simply staggered when I consider how many people in schools and how many home school families are reading these books. I have had the privilege of meeting many of you at conferences and speaking engagements across the country. I worried, at one point, that the creation of the Omnibus books would in a way be problematic. It would stop people from doing the hard work of creating classes from scratch or of making the mistakes (and suffering the pain) from which the first generation folks here in Lancaster have learned. What I have found, however, has been a pleasant surprise. The books, for many, have simply enabled the next level of thinking. I ran into folks at one school who put a male and female teacher in each class. The man and woman would debate different issues in front of a young class of 7th graders. They talked about how the different perspectives complemented each other. Brilliant! I discovered delightful devotion in the voice of a teacher in a home school co-op who said that after getting into the books she started having the students over to read together in the evening a couple times a weeks. I remember being introduced to a home school student whose dad introduced me as one of the editors of the Omnibus books. It was quiet for a moment and then he began to giggle. He said, "I read the footnotes." I had to smile to myself. At least one other soul shared the offbeat sense of humor laced deep into the fabric of this project and tucked away behind the guise of tiny superscripted numbers. I am so thankful that this work has been helpful to so many people. It has been a joy to see more people reading and enjoying these books. I believe that this sort of attention being paid to the thoughts of our forefathers is a necessary step if we want to survive as a culture.

While most feedback was positive, some was "constructive criticism." Perhaps this feedback has been the greatest blessing. From emails questioning the grammar of sentences to people questioning whether or not a seventh grader can write a progymnasmata in 50 minutes, I have found wisdom, truth, honest and good humor amongst the criticism. The editors have tried to listen and evolve.[3] We hope that you find this volume fitter and more able to survive.

There are a few points of advice I need to reiterate. Not listening to this advice can cause the greatest and most pernicious problems when studying Omnibus. First, you might not be able to read all of every book. Normally, at Veritas Academy, the school that I run, we skip a few books a year. You need to be careful about this, but our goal is to have enough material for almost everyone. Read according to this principle: Read as much as you can while inspiring love. Now, this does not mean that every student will love every book, but as a general rule I want to measure Omnibus by the number of students who are reading these books long after they graduate. Second, fear not! Some capture the vision for Omnibus, but also feel their own weakness ("I do not know all these books. . . . I am no expert."). I have found this: love, passion and determination mean a lot. If students can learn only from infinitely knowledgeable teachers, then we should be without hope. None of us fit the bill. If, however, God is blessing our work as we pour ourselves into the lives of our children and students, we should continue, and

we should continue with good hope. I have found that my own ignorance has not been a hindrance to my teaching. My students tend to enjoy my stumbling at points. They love it when they can teach me something. The best essay I have ever graded started respectfully: "Mr. Fischer thinks that the answer to this essay is . . . , *but* he is wrong." Finally, remember that the first read is—for many books—only the beginning. Great books do not suffer when you go back to them. I am a big fan of *The Divine Comedy*. I read a different translation each year (I don't know Italian . . . yet). I tell people that when they read *The Comedy* the first time, they need to know that it is hard work. They also need to know that it is worthwhile work. The second and third and fourth reads are so much better. Think of the Scriptures. Do you read them once so that you do not have to read them again? Of course not! Do they bless you when you return to them? More and more!

There are changes that we have made in Omnibus IV. These changes follow a few principles. First, we want the students to do all the work that they can. This book can be used by all sorts of secondary students and adults.[4] Volumes IV, V and VI will be pointed more at the rhetoric age students and skills. Many of the changes that we have made simply recognize this. We have a final goal. We want students to be able to do Omnibus when they are out school—i.e., we want them to learn how to explore Great Books, ask good questions, and relish excellent conversation as thinking, Christian adults. If this goal is realized, then our work has been blessed. Second, we have stressed more rhetorical skills—more debate, more poetry (more to come in V), more aesthetic appreciation. Finally, we have been more selective about the reading. Some books are more important than others. Some parts of some books are more important than others parts.[5] We have tried to pick the most essential and most important reading. I am honestly torn on this point. If you want to read additional parts of books that we read in selection, remember that our Optional Sessions give you time to do some of this. Also, if you do not feel confident in creating your own sessions, remember that reading some sections aloud is a wonderful use of time.

Some of the largest changes to Omnibus IV are some additional session formats that we have added. Chief amongst these is the Student-Led Discussion. This follows the form of the Discussion generally, but it requires the students to write most of the questions and share their best questions with each other. They become contributors to the discussion in an even deeper and more meaningful way in the Student-Led Discussions. During this type of class, have the students read the example questions that we provide and then have them write out their own questions and answers while finishing their assigned reading. Remember that they will not produce perfect questions immediately. Encourage good effort. Also, we have added a Current Events session. This challenges the student to take an issue from their reading and find out how it is still an issue today. We have also added a Poetry form which challenges students to try their hand at writing different forms of poetry. There will be more Poetry classes in future years. Finally, we have added a form for Aesthetics. These sessions introduce students to wonderful pieces of art and challenge them to think deeply about pieces. (These sessions might have been the most fun to edit. I believe they will be a blessing to the students in Omnibus IV.)

We have also altered a few forms. We changed the Writing sessions a lot. I have found that getting good writing from students takes a lot of editorial work. This year you will find our assignments much shorter.[6] We encourage a lot more interaction between teacher or parent and student. In many assignments the students may turn in their work product up to three times, have it graded and returned, and then they can correct it. This should give the students time to create better writing.

While we have changed some of the forms and added some new ones, we have tried to keep the core of Omnibus solid. We are committed to the same things—reading the Great Books, thinking about the great issues of the Christians West, discussing these issues and their applications today, and, finally and ultimately, learning to love our God, our forefathers[7], and our places. This love is the end of life. May you find it as you commune with the writings of the blessed (and the damned) who have gone before you, and may you find your commonality with others as you discuss these books. May that commonality be found ultimately in the source of all wisdom and knowledge—Jesus Christ—and in knowing Him, may you know true life.

—G. Tyler Fischer
Trinity Season, 2009

Endnotes

1 *The Divine Comedy*, of course.
2 This is not a condemnation of all bestsellers; some are really good. It is not a condemnation of *all* blogs—particularly the ones written by the editors of these fine volumes—just most blogs.
3 But our evolution is based on listening, faith and grace—it is a distinctively non-Darwinian form of evolution. Just think—if only the fastest, strongest and best-looking of us have a shot at surviving, most of us are . . . well . . . not going to make it.
4 Why some forward-thinking church does not start using these books for some adult training, I do not know.
5 My favorite example of this is those chapters on blubber and the whale skull in *Moby Dick*. Fascinating . . . maybe . . . but necessary?
6 This does not mean that students should not at times write longer papers. We have found that it is hard to do this in Omnibus.
7 I know some people think that the forefathers I am talking about are not their forefathers. Please do not read "forefathers" this way. I do not mean this in some ethnic sense. I am German (Austrian and Prussian), Norman and Scots. I do not think that I have any of the blood of Abraham, Aristotle or Dante. Yet I hope that in some way, some day some of them will acknowledge that in some way some part of me descends from them. I know this is true because Paul tells me that Abraham is the forefather of all who believe.

Using Omnibus

The second half of Omnibus—volumes IV, V, and VI—continue the journey of learning from the greatest minds of the Christian West. For those of you who have been through Omnibus I, II, and III, thank you for coming along on this journey. (I hope that you are having a good time.) For the seasoned *omnibuser,* I hope that you will enjoy the new features that we have built into volumes IV, V, and VI.

Before discussing the new aspects of these new volumes, let's walk back through the basics of Omnibus. First, know that you join an incredible group of men and women as you read through these books. These books (the Scriptures and all the Great—but lesser—Books) have nourished your forefathers. They have a lot to give as you give yourself to this study. Remember, it is important to realize that some of these books are not to be learned from uncritically—some of them we learn from by the problems they caused.

Before you get started, however, there are a few terms you need to understand. First among them is the word *omnibus.* This Latin word means "all encompassing" or "everything." So, in a very loose sense, the Omnibus curriculum is where we talk about everything. All of the important ideas are set on the table to explore and understand. In a more technical sense, however, this Omnibus focuses our attention on the ideas, arguments, and expressions of the Western Canon, which have also become known as the Great Books of Western civilization.

The *Great Books* are those books that have guided and informed thinking people in Western civilization. They are the books that have stood the test of time. They come from many sources, starting with the Hebrews and Greeks and extending to their Roman, European, and Colonial heirs. These books represent the highest theological and philosophical contemplations, the most accurate historical record, and the most brilliant literary tradition that have come down to us from our forefathers. The Great Books lead us into a discussion of the *Great Ideas,* which are the ideas that have driven discussion and argument in Western civilization throughout its illustrious history.

The Omnibus takes students on a path through the Great Books and the Great Ideas in two cycles. It follows the chronological pattern of Ancient, Medieval and Modern periods. The first cycle is *Omnibus I–III,* and focuses on sharpening the skills of logical analysis. The second is *Omnibus IV–VI,* focusing on increasing the rhetorical skills of the student.

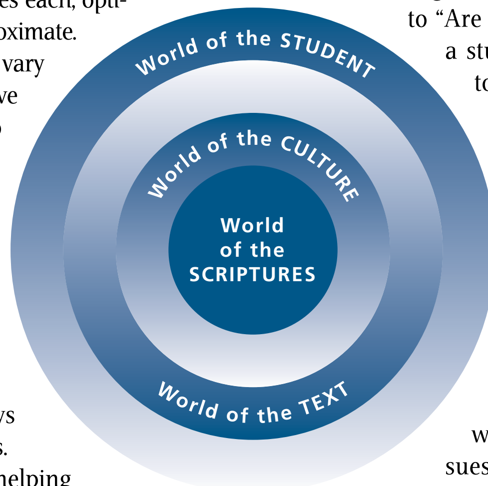
TITLE	PERIOD	YEARS	EMPHASIS
Omnibus I	Ancient	Beginning–A.D. 70	Logic
Omnibus II	Medieval	70–1563	Logic
Omnibus III	Modern	1563–Present	Logic
Omnibus IV	Ancient	Beginning–A.D. 180	Rhetoric
Omnibus V	Medieval	180–1563	Rhetoric
Omnibus VI	Modern	1563–Present	Rhetoric

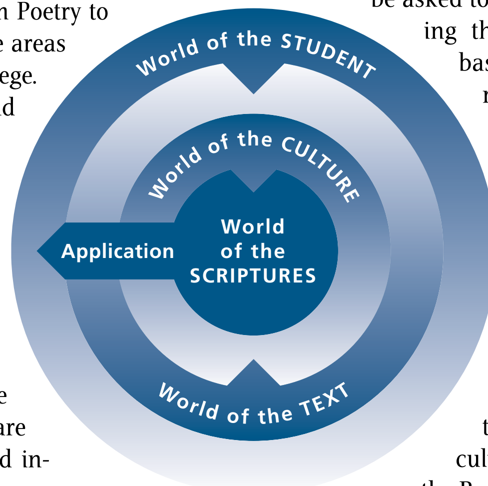
Two kinds of books are read concurrently in the Omnibus, *Primary* and *Secondary*. The list of Primary Books for each year is what might be termed the traditional "Great Books." On this list are authors like Homer, Dante and Calvin. The Secondary Books are ones that give balance to our reading (balance in the general areas of Theology, History and Literature). The secondary list contains works such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings.* These books are usually easier, and less class time is devoted to them. Each year is similarly organized. There are thirty-seven weeks' worth of material. Each week is divided into eight sessions of roughly seventy minutes each, optimally. The time estimate is approximate. Home schooling situations might vary greatly from student to student. Five of these sessions are committed to the study of the Primary Books. The other three are dedicated to the Secondary Books.

In Omnibus IV, V and VI, some changes were made to encourage and challenge students to move toward greater maturity. Two of the biggest changes are the Discipline Essays and a number of new class forms.

The *Discipline Essays* aim at helping students to understand a number of important disciplines—everything from Poetry to Economics. These disciplines are areas that students might study in college. The goal, however, is not to find your college major (although, no doubt, some will find a major among these disciplines). The goal is to help students become well-rounded, mature adults who can converse with other adults on many important topics, with a basic understanding of many of the topics that move the world today. The essays are written to be both enjoyable and informative.

Omnibus IV, V and VI also employ a number of new kinds of sessions. These sessions challenge students to develop the skills necessary to wisely discuss questions in the future after they are done with their study in Omnibus and to encourage even more student involvement in class. Also, these new sessions are intended to challenge students to increase their rhetorical skills and integrate various types of knowledge.





Kinds of Sessions

Prelude

Each chapter is introduced with a session called a Prelude. In each Prelude we seek to stir up the interest of the students by examining a provoking question that is or could be raised from the book. This is done in the section called A Question to Consider. When the teacher introduces this question he should seek to get the students' initial reaction to the question. These questions might range from "Can you teach virtue?" to "Are all sins equally wicked?" Usually, a student in the Logic years will love to argue his answers. Generally, it will prove helpful for a student to read the introductory essay in the student text *before* tackling A Question to Consider. Sometimes a teacher may want to introduce the question first to stir up interest. This "introductory material" will give the students both the general information on the work and a worldview essay which will unpack some of the issues that will be dealt with in the book. After reading this section, the student will be asked to answer a few questions concerning the chapter. These questions are based only on the introductory material they have just read, not on the reading of the book itself.

Discussion

The Discussion is the most frequently used class in the Omnibus. It has five parts. The Discussion seeks to explore a particular idea within a book from the perspective of the text itself, our culture and the Bible. It begins, like the Prelude, with A Question to Consider, which is the first of "four worlds" that will be explored, the world of the student. The world of the text is discovered through the Text Analysis questions. These questions unlock the answer that the book itself supplies for this question (e.g., when reading the Aeneid, we are trying to find out how the author, Virgil, would answer this question). After this, in the Cultural Analysis section, the student examines the world of the culture, how our

culture would answer the same question. Many times this will be vastly different from the answer of the student or the author. The Biblical Analysis questions seek to unearth what God's Word teaches concerning this question. We can call this discovering the world of the Scriptures. So the progression of the questions is important. First, the students' own opinions and ideas are set forth. Second, the opinion of the text is considered. Next, the view of our culture is studied. Finally, the teaching of the Scriptures is brought to bear. All other opinions, beliefs and convictions must be informed and corrected by the standard of God's Word. Often, after hearing the Word of God, the material seeks to apply the discovered truth to the life of the students. Finally, the students are challenged to think through a Summa Question which synthesizes all they have learned about this "highest" idea from the session.

Recitation

The Recitation is a set of grammatical questions that helps to reveal the student's comprehension of the facts or ideas of the book. This can be done in a group setting or individually with or by students. The Recitation questions can also be answered in written form and checked against the answers, but we encourage doing the Recitation orally whenever possible. It provides great opportunity for wandering down rabbit trails of particular interest or launching into any number of discussions. Of course, we cannot predict what current events are occurring when your students study this material. Recitations can prove a great time to direct conversation that relates to the questions and material being covered in this type of class.

Analysis

This session of worldview analysis is focused on comparing a character, culture or author you are studying to some other character, culture or author. This might be done by comparing two or three characters' or authors' answers to the same questions. This type of session effectively helps students to understand the differences between cultures and characters, especially in the arena of worldview.

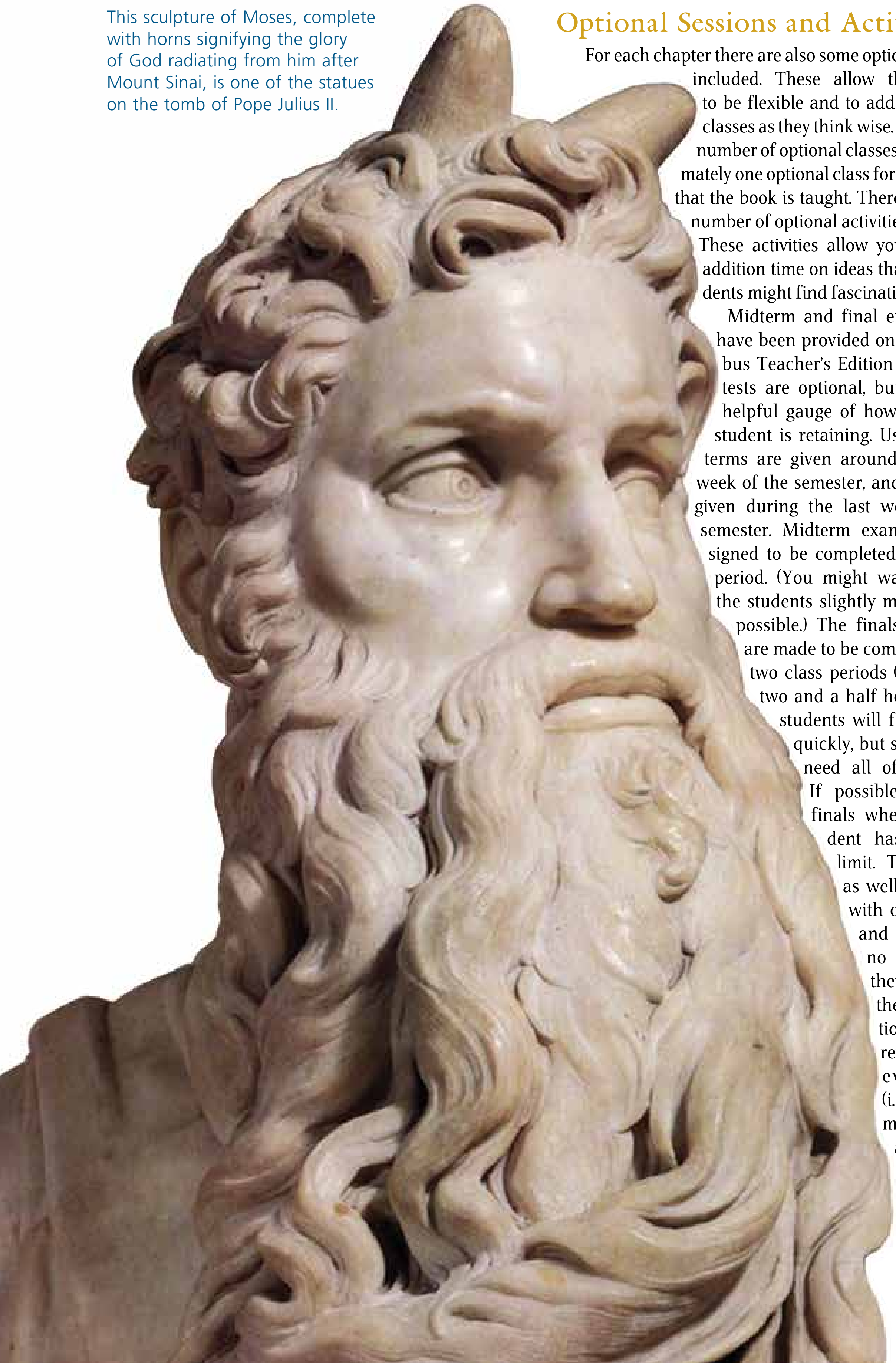
Activity

These classes are focused on bringing creative ideas into the mix. Activities might include debates, trials, sword fights, board games and dramatic productions. Music and art appreciation are also included in this category. These classes are harder to prepare for, but are quite important. Often, the student will remember and understand (and love) the material only if our discussions and recitations are mixed with these unforgettable activities. There are also a number of field trips that are recommended. Often, these are recommended in two categories: ones that most people can do and ones that are "outside the box" experiences that only some will be able to do. The first category might send you to the local museum or planetarium. The latter will recommend ideas like chartering a boat at Nantucket to experience what Ishmael felt on the *Pequod.* Careful pre-planning is important to be able to take advantage of these opportunities.

Review and Evaluation

Weekly testing is not recommended. Students will weary of it and will spend all of their time preparing for tests instead of learning. Choose your tests carefully. Even if a chapter has an evaluation at the end, know that you can use it as a review. The test and the review both work toward the same goal of demonstrating the knowledge of the students and cementing the material into their minds.

Evaluations are divided into three sections. The first section tests the student's grammatical knowledge of the book. Answers to these questions should be short, consisting of a sentence or two. The second section is the logic section. In this section students are asked to answer questions concerning the ideas of the book and to show that they understand how ideas connect with each other within the book. The final section is called lateral thinking. This section asks students to relate ideas in one book with the ideas that they have studied in other books. For instance, the student might be asked to compare Homer's ideal heroes (Achilleus and Odysseus) with Virgil's character Aeneas to discover how the Roman conception of the hero was different from the Greek idea. Finally, students often will be asked to compare and contrast these pagan ideas with a biblical view. So, students might be asked to contrast Homer and Virgil's teaching on what is heroic with the ultimate heroic work of Christ. In this way students demonstrate that they can set ideas in their proper biblical context, showing the relationship between the writing of one author and another. Students should be allowed to have their books and Bibles available during testing. If they have to do extensive reading during the tests, they are not going to be able to finish or do well anyway. Students should not be permitted to have notes of any kind during the test.



This sculpture of Moses, complete with horns signifying the glory of God radiating from him after Mount Sinai, is one of the statues on the tomb of Pope Julius II.

Optional Sessions and Activities

For each chapter there are also some optional classes included. These allow the teacher to be flexible and to add to, or omit classes as they think wise. Usually the number of optional classes is approximately one optional class for every week that the book is taught. There are also a number of optional activities included. These activities allow you to spend addition time on ideas that your students might find fascinating.

Midterm and final exam forms have been provided on the Omnibus Teacher's Edition CD. These tests are optional, but can be a helpful gauge of how much the student is retaining. Usually midterms are given around the ninth week of the semester, and finals are given during the last week of the semester. Midterm exams are designed to be completed in a class period. (You might want to give the students slightly more time if possible.) The finals, however, are made to be completed over two class periods (or roughly two and a half hours). Most students will finish more quickly, but some might need all of the time. If possible, give the finals when the student has no time limit. These tests, as well, are given with open books and Bibles, but no notes, and they feature the same sections as the review and evaluation (i.e., grammar, logic and lateral thinking).

Student-Led Discussions

This kind of session (new in Omnibus IV, V, and VI) fits the form of a regular Discussion, but to encourage more student involvement the students are expected to create their own questions and answers for Text Analysis, Cultural Analysis, and Biblical Analysis. The teacher is responsible for the Summa Question. The assignment appears at the end of the previous session to allow the students to work on it while doing the assigned reading. We would expect that students might need help with this the first few times they try it. These questions will quickly reveal whether or not the students have understood their reading. The teacher should collect students' questions and answers to edit and grade them. In a group setting, teachers may allow the students to ask and answer each others' questions—inserting themselves to correct or guide progress but with as gentle a hand as possible.

Current Events

This session (new in Omnibus IV, V, and VI) challenges students to see the modern relevance of the issue they are studying in Omnibus. The assignment appears at the end of the previous session, and there is no reading assignment, allowing the students to prepare their assignment for the following session. The student will find a news or magazine article and prepare a short presentation demonstrating how the article and the previous readings relate to the issue. Students will show where the issue is present in both their reading and in their articles, comparing the worldviews and critiquing both from a biblical perspective.

Poetry

This session (new in Omnibus IV, V, and VI) first introduces a kind of poetry—like a sonnet, a limerick, a quatrain, a sestina, etc. The student is expected to then write a poem related to some content or object in the book they are reading. During the Rhetoric Stage (tenth through twelfth grade) we are encouraging students to grow in their love of poetry and to begin to write poetry themselves.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics sessions (new in Omnibus IV, V, and VI) introduce students to different pieces of art, ask them to analyze the work and respond to the *content, method* and *meaning* of the work. When studying art, one or more of three general emphases should be covered:

- *Grammar of art* (e.g., why is Moses frequently depicted with horns coming out of his head?)
- *Immediate cultural connection* (e.g., colors or poses used at certain times in history). To evaluate a particular work of art, we need to place the work within its historical context: When was the work produced? And where? By whom? Man? Woman? Collaborative? What were/are the historical implications of this particular work? How does it compare to other works produced in that time and place? How does it compare to other works by this artist? And other artists of that time? And of previous periods? Do we recognize any specific artistic or cultural influences?
- *Deeper meaning* (e.g., How does the blurred focus of Impressionism relate to the worldview of the artists using the form?) All art speaks in a language of signs, symbols and semblances: It looks like some thing, sounds like some thing, feels like some thing or references some thing. In what language does the piece of art speak? Once that is determined, does it speak it well?

Trials

These sessions encourage verbal argument and debate, yielding some wonderful discussion. This kind of class appears more frequently in Omnibus IV, V, and VI than it does in the earlier years.

Writing

Writing assignments in Omnibus IV, V, and VI are shorter than in the earlier volumes. This is to encourage the teacher to edit the work more carefully and more critically. It might mean that the editorial process will take a few cycles before the work is in its final state. We hope that the writing will be shorter but much better by the end of the process.

For those getting ready to teach this curriculum, preparation should be carefully considered. The material has been designed so that it can be taught with little preparation, but this is not recommended. If you want your students to get the most out of this program, you should prepare carefully. First, make sure you are familiar with the book being studied. Also, consult the Teaching Tips on the Teacher's Edition CD before teaching. Knowing where you are going in the end will help you to effectively move through the material and interact with your students effectively.

What's on the CD?

Teacher's Edition of the Text

The teacher text includes teaching tips and additional pages of material, with suggested answers for all the questions, writing assignments and activities in the daily sessions.

Lesson Plans

Session-by-session lesson plans for each chapter.

Midterms and Exams

Tests with answer keys for both semesters. Three versions are provided for each test (labeled A, B and C).

Grading Tools

An explanation of our suggested grading routine, including sample and blank grading charts, as well as a grading calculator in a popular spreadsheet format.

Requirements and Use

The CD is Windows and Macintosh compatible, and requires Acrobat Reader. The installer for the latest version is right on the CD or may be downloaded for free at http://get.adobe.com/reader.

Windows OS

If the main application does not appear automatically, double-click the file named "Omnibus-IV-TE".

Macintosh OS

Double-click the file named "Omnibus IV (Double-click)" to launch the main application. *Macintosh OS 9 and earlier—double-click the individual files you wish to view.*

PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy can be defined simply as the study of the big questions or, looked at from another angle, the *basic* questions. What is the nature of reality? How can we define knowledge? Who or what is man? Why is there something rather than nothing at all? Why is the universe here rather than someplace else?

A Christian student might be initially puzzled by this, wondering what the difference might be between philosophy and theology. The answer is that while philosophy and theology are often covering the same "subject area" ("God," for example), theology is doing so claiming to have answers, at least in principle. Philosophy claims to have the questions, and wants on the basis of man's autonomous reason to refine the questions, and answer them in accordance with the dictates of that reason. But at its best, philosophy *does* train a student to ask and answer questions with care, and this can be training that is of great value to the Christian student.

When the questions are raised and then answered "from outside the authority of autonomous human reason," that's theology. It may be false theology or true, it may be idolatrous or in service to the true God, but at the end of the day, it is some form of theology. When the questions are raised by men, and then pursued "from within," then that is philosophy.

Philosophy as we commonly understand it began among the Greeks. The first great notable philosopher was Socrates (c. 470–399 B.C.). There were philosophers before him, known as the pre-Socratics (obviously), but these men were all eighth-graders on the JV team. Socrates taught Plato, and Plato taught Aristotle, and these three men have dominated philosophical discussion ever since. Alfred North Whitehead once commented that all of western intellectual history consists of footnotes to Plato, which is not too far off.

Now there are two ways to take this—one is to say that his philosophy was so profound that it is not possible to improve upon it, or we could say that the autonomous presuppositions inherent in philosophy mean that we are condemned to spend all our time walking in the same circles, and not very big ones either.

Socrates wrote no books, and his method of pursuing the truth was the dialectical method of asking questions that basically revealed that nobody in Athens knew what they were talking about. This was obviously not conducive to Socrates' general popularity, and he wound up being condemned to die by the city of Athens. Socrates' enduring *ethos* is not that of a dogmatician, but rather of a questioner, a seeker after light. When the oracle at Delphi proclaimed him the wisest man in Greece, he responded to this by saying that this must be because he knew that he didn't know anything. But this *bon mot* was really part of his "aw, shucks" *persona*—there are many hidden dogmatic assumptions embedded in the questions of Socrates, rock solid assumptions about reason, truth, the nature of reality, and far more. At the same time, he *was* effective with this manner of debate. Socrates was the old timer at the pool hall, chalking his custom-made ivory cue, responding to the naïve question of the new kid in town. "No, I don't really play much . . . how about you?"

Plato (428/7–348/7 B.C.) was one of his students, and he was present when Socrates (as an old man) was forced to drink the poison hemlock as the method of his execution. We know virtually everything we know about Socrates from the pen of Plato. Plato wrote the dialogues of Socrates, and so it is not quite clear how much of what we are getting is actually from Socrates and how much was contributed by Plato. Plato taught that everything here on earth is a "shadow" of a transcendent reality in the realm of the Forms. The Forms were ethereal, rational, non-material, and perfect. So, for example, all chairs on earth are what they are because they somehow partake of the ultimate Chair. The same goes for tables and beds. All particular things on earth "answer to" some aspect of the ultimate reality. What this system seeks to do is provide some kind of integration point for all things, a way of getting all things to make sense in a unified system.

Aristotle (384 B.C.–322 B.C.) was a student of Plato's and significantly modified his theory of the Forms. For Plato, the Forms were a transcendent reality, but Aristotle brought everything down to locate the Form of each object within that object. Thus each chair had an essence of Chair within it. The *accidents* of a chair included the fact that it was made out of wood, was red, and had a cloth seat cover. All these things were not part of the *essence* of the chair. That essence or Form was within the chair, but it was not like you could actually locate it. The student should not feel bad about this—the Forms are just really weird, and *that's* why you can't find them. In addition to being a pupil of Plato's, Aristotle also became a tutor to Alexander the Great. His work had a great deal of breadth. He not only wrote on philosophical questions, but also on politics, theater, ethics, zoology, and much more.

Plotinus (c. A.D. 205–270) was the leading exponent of a system called Neoplatonism. He was writing in the context of the rising Christian faith, but does not interact with it directly. It is also important to note he was writing at the point where classical pagan philosophy was on the verge of collapse. In common with every form of Platonism, he was suspicious of the material realm, teaching that it was contemptible in comparison with the realm of ultimate reality. He taught that there was an ultimate transcendent *One,* the source of everything else. This One is infinitely simple, which is a fancy way of saying it has no parts. It also has no attributes, including the attribute of being an "existent thing." It is simply the Good, and is not a self-aware Creator God. This world is here because it is the end result of a cascading series of emanations from that One. In short, the One is an impersonal and perfect potentiality which overflows like a cascading fountain, with each level of the overflow being less perfect. The first emanations were pure like mountain streams, but by the time it gets down to us, it is like sludge from a pipe. To change the metaphor, each level is not a digital reproduction. That means each generation that is farther away from the original is increasingly corrupt.

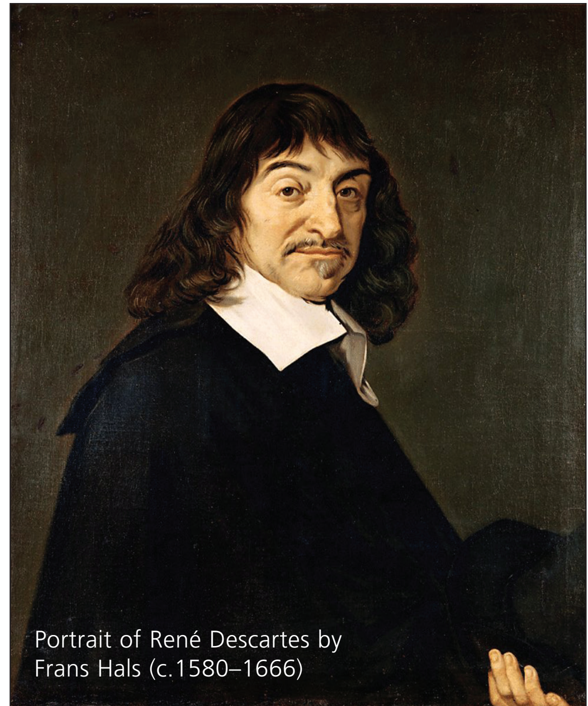
In the history of the West, the ascendancy of the Church meant that philosophy eventually had to take a back seat for a significant period of time. Philosophical tools were certainly used by theologians, to a certain extent, and they were acquainted with the basic philosophical issues. Some, like Boethius, appeared to be doing pure philosophy without reference to Scripture, while many others honed their philosophical gifts within the confines of revealed truth. As a result, there were a number of important philosophical developments in the medieval period—the rise of nominalism in reaction to Platonic realism being one. But the theologians' central passion was theology, and so between Plotinus and Descartes, there was a significant hiatus in philosophy. If we wish to dabble in ironies, there was a thousand years of peace—the millennium spoken of by St. John perhaps?

The gap in philosophical studies that passes over some of the great Christian thinkers is really quite striking, and so the Christian philosophy student should be ready for it. He should perhaps pursue his own reading of great Christian thinkers like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Wil-

Plotinus was suspicious of the material realm, even though he was writing in the context of the rising Christian faith. His thought influenced the beliefs of major thinkers over centuries. Neoplatonic elements in the writings of Saint Augustine were no doubt acquired from Plotinus's teachings.

liam of Ockham, or Duns Scotus. And by all means, if he sees an elective class offered in the thought of any of these gentlemen, he should by all means take it.

René Descartes (1596–1650) should be thought of as the father of philosophy reborn. In his *Discourse on Method,* he was looking for a sure point of traction, a solid footing for human thought that could not be doubted. His starting point was in his formulation of the famous *cogito ergo sum,* "I think, therefore I am." Even in moments of radical doubting, a man cannot consistently doubt that he is in fact doubting, and doubt is a form of thinking, which means that he has to *be* here in order to be thinking. Right? The methodological point to note here is that Descartes began with the solitary thinking individual, and sought to build up the whole system from that indubitable starting point. His starting point was not God. The entire Enlightenment project can really be thought of as an endeavor built up from Descartes, a Cartesian endeavor. Modern philosophy began with the rationalism of Descartes, was carried on in the empiricism of philosophers like John Locke, was driven into a tree by the skeptical doubts of David Hume, and was then supposedly *rescued* by Immanuel Kant.


Portrait of René Descartes by Frans Hals (c.1580–1666)

John Locke (1632–1704) was an empiricist, which means that he believed that man comes to know through his sensory experience of the empirical world. While Descartes was a rationalist and began with reason, the empirical school which came later taught that knowledge was mediated to man through his senses. Locke made important contributions to political theory and social philosophy, but in philosophy proper his main contribution was in the field of epistemology. "How can we know that we actually *know?"* His *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* gave us a new approach to the self. While Descartes held that human reason contained certain innate ideas, Locke held that the mind was a *tabula rasa,* a blank slate, which was then filled by means of experience and reflection.

David Hume (1711–1776) was part of the great Scottish Enlightenment and was an important figure in the history of philosophy. His was the first modern approach to philosophy that was thoroughgoing in its naturalism, believing as Carl Sagan eventually summarized, "The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be." At the same time, the effect of his careful approach to questions resulted in a *skeptical* naturalism, as opposed to the dogmatic naturalism of later thinkers, after they had been inspired by Darwin. Hume is famous for his argument on the low probability of miracles, as well as his critique of the argument for God's existence from design. He also showed that it is not possible to derive ethical direction from a study of the way things are—in short that you cannot derive *ought* from is. The cumulative effect of his philosophy was corrosive to confidence in our ability to acquire knowledge.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) credited Hume with waking him from his "dogmatic slumber" and sought to develop a way out of the *cul de sac* that modern philosophy had gotten itself into. The street was a one-way street, so there was no going back. It led into a *cul de sac,* and so there was no going forward. The solution that Kant offered, and which was received with great acclaim, was to float off over the houses. Kant was a crucial figure in the later Enlightenment, and he sought to give an explanation for the motto of Enlightenment—*sapere aude,* or "dare to know." Kant distinguished between the phenomenal world (which we could know after a fashion), and the noumenal realm, which he maintained we cannot know. This meant that, with regard to questions about God and the afterlife, Kant was a principled agnostic. His central contribution to the history of ideas was his transcendental idealism, which means that we have to deal with things as they appear to us, not as they actually are in themselves.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) was a fascinating Danish philosopher and theologian. In philosophy he wrote in vigorous reaction to the formalism of Hegel, and in religion and theology, he wrote in violent reaction to the dead orthodoxy of the state church of Lutheran Denmark. He is hard to pin down in many ways, but is sometimes thought of as the father of existentialism—although this is probably too facile. The Christian philoso-

The *Übermensch* is a concept in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. When it was first translated into English, it became "Superman,"an interpretation criticized by some for failing to capture the nuance of the German *über* and for associating it with a comic-book character. Nietzsche introduced the Superman to contrast the other-worldliness of Christianity. He said that God was an invention by which men escaped from this world. Superman is free from these failings, and in the face of nihilism creates new values motivated by a love of this world and of life.

phy student will find a great deal to enjoy in Kierkegaard.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) is in many respects the father of existentialism and of postmodernism. He was an exceptionally talented writer, with a taste for memorable aphorisms, sayings and phrases. He rejected the conventional Christianity of his time and was an apologist for a renewed and dynamic paganism. He prophesied the coming of a new Overman or Superman, one who would regard the pathetic moralities of the slave classes with contempt. Nietzsche spoke of the "death of God" in several places, which is one of his more famous phrases, but he was actually speaking of the murder of God. Nietzsche rejected the Christian ideal of charity as nothing more than sublimated resentment over the superiority of others, and urged a master-morality to replace this craven slave-morality. His defenders want to dismiss it as an irrelevant coincidence, but Nietzsche spent the last eleven years of his life completely insane.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) was a philosophical genius and tormented soul. His emphasis on "language games" has contributed to the widespread practice of over-analyzing the language we are using while we are trying to use it. It is kind of like trying to work on the bicycle while you are riding it, or taking out your eyeballs in order to have a look at them. He did a great deal of work in mathematical philosophy, logic, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language. His first work *Tractatus* was taken as their inspiration by the logical positivists, but Wittgenstein claimed that they really misunderstood him, not that this would be difficult. In many ways, Wittgenstein does for modern philosophy the second time what Hume did the first time, which was to highlight the internal tensions and contradictions in every form of autonomy—to such an extent that further progress down this road is not really possible.

Critical Issues

The problem for Christians contemplating a course of study in philosophy is that Scripture teaches us that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). We do not come to a fear of the Lord as a capstone of all our intellectual efforts, a decorative piece to crown all that we have done. Rather, the fear of the Lord is the solid foundation, upon which everything else must be built. That is where we start, not where we end. This means that Christians who are students of philosophy, or even Christians who become philosophers vocationally, cannot ever become full members of the guild. As the philosophers all get out their books, and the Christian does the same, it will soon become evident that the Christian believes he has a book with all the answers in it, which will be quickly identified as "cheating." If the Christian agrees not to use this book, then he has become a methodological philosopher, but at the cost of spiritual compromise. And as long as he uses it, as long as he is a thorough-going Christian, he will not be fully accepted as a "real" philosopher. This state of affairs is not the result of an unfortunate misunderstanding that arose just a few years ago, but rather reveals the state of affairs that has always existed between philosophy and the gospel.

At the same time, despite this tension, many Christians can be found in philosophy departments, and so over time it will be harder and harder for the secular guild to maintain their commitment to philosophical secularism. Contemporary respected philosophers like Alvin Plantinga, who are also clearly believers, have done a great deal to challenge this divide, and Christians who are committed to Christian worldview thinking and "taking every thought captive" ought to be thinking about what philosophy should look like in the future—when philosophy is again done within the context of faith as in the medieval period. There were some things that our medieval fathers did right in this regard, and there were also some blunders that we ought to be careful to avoid the second time around. But all Christian students of philosophy should be thinking in such terms—always rejecting a divided intellectual world. All of it—the whole world—belongs to Christ.

So all Christian students must understand the fundamental antithesis between autonomous philosophy and true wisdom as it is found in Christ. This does not determine whether we may study philosophy, but it absolutely must determine how we seek to do so.

The apostle Paul was acquainted with philosophy, and he took a pretty dim view of it.

> As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ (Col. 2:6–8).

Here he contrasts the vandalism and despoliation of philosophy with the edification that is found in Christ. And he is doing this with the "golden age" of philosophy in mind. He is talking about the philosophers who show up in "great books" programs, and he is not talking about the village nihilist. He couples philosophy with vanity and deceit, and links it to the tradition of men, to the world's basic way of thinking about things. The apostle was almost certainly familiar with the content of the "wisdom of the Greeks"—he wasn't just dismissing something he knew nothing about. This meant, at a minimum, that he was warning the Christians at Colossae about the threat posed by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In the ancient world, the word philosophy had an understood meaning, just as the words stool, trireme, or emperor did. When he goes after the tradition of men and the rudiments of the world, he is targeting those things which carnal men believe to be virtuous. These warnings are not to be classed in the same category with your mother's warnings about pool halls, taverns, and painted ladies. Everybody knows that painted ladies represent a set of moral temptations. Almost no one knows that respected philosophers are even more dangerous.

This focus becomes even more apparent in the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, where Paul is probably concentrating on Aristotle. But whether he is doing that or not, his central criticism of the philosophical approach is that "the world by wisdom knew not God." And if you don't come to know God as the result of what you are doing, then what good is it?

> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:
>
> > 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
> > And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.'
>
> Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after

> wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Cor. 1:18–29).

Paul is clear that by the "wisdom of the wise" (v. 19), or the "wisdom of this world" (v. 20), he means the wisdom of the Greeks (v. 22). As he exults in the superiority of Christ over all these intellectual systems, he acknowledges that they do have a certain impressiveness to them. He says that God has taken weak things to confound the things which are mighty (v. 27). The scribe, the scholar, the urbane debater—God has made them all foolish. In short, on the subject of intellectual and philosophical respectability, which Paul addresses directly here, he makes it perfectly plain that there is a wisdom of the world which God regards as lunacy, and the worldly wise return the favor by treating all those who begin and end with Christ in exactly the same way—as fools.

None of this means that Christians should embrace sloppy argumentation. We should not start maintaining that wet streets cause rain, or that Christianity is true because it starts with the letter C, unlike Buddhism. As mentioned earlier, Christians can learn to ask and answer questions with care, and they can learn this from their unbelieving philosophy instructor. But Paul's warnings do mean that at the center of the philosophical endeavor there is a seduction which all thoughtful Christians must be on guard against.

> I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written:
>
> 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
> Nor have entered into the heart of man
> The things which God has prepared for
> those who love Him.'
>
> But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit

Gian Lorenzo Bernini's (1598–1680) statue of Saint Paul stands in the entrance of Ponte San Angelo in Rome.

> of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:3–14).

This is more of the same. Now in verse 14, what does Paul mean by "the natural man"? An easy assumption for modern Christians to make is that this refers to a frat-boy paganism, someone who is a licentious and lustful drinker of many beers. But natural man here refers to man at his best, not man at his worst. This means that every potential student of philosophy must have his guard up, and must understand where the antithesis really is.

A Christian Response

With all this said, why would any Christian student make the choice of studying philosophy? There are actually many good reasons, but none of the good ones include a desire to "join the club." Assuming the good reasons to be sound, what are some of the basic issues that such a student should consider?

Many of these exhortations apply equally to all Christian college students, going off to study on their own for the first time. But we have to remember that philosophy is probably the only major in college you might consider that the Bible explicitly warns against. This is not the case for mechanical engineering, or forestry, or international relations. When you study philosophy, you really are endangering your soul, and so it is appropriate to take some extra precautions.

First, don't even consider a program unless it is located in a place where you can worship God every Lord's Day in a faithful, biblical church. All faithful discipleship occurs in such community, and so if you are studying secular philosophy in the midst of their community, and you have no Christian fellowship, you will be shaped by that process, however much you might have formed mental resolutions against that kind of compromise. In order to prevent that shaping, it is necessary to maintain your loyalties to God's people in a tangible, on-going way. The apostle Paul says that we are to prevent the world's attempts to drag us back, the world's attempts to make us conform to its standards, by being transformed into something else.

> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1–2).

But note that Paul says that we are protected in our minds by what we do with our *bodies.* This seems counterintuitive to us, but it is actually testimony to the pervasive nature of certain philosophical doctrines that have gotten into the Church. The disparagement of the body's importance is a legacy of Greek thought or Hellenism, and the Church has had the devil of a time with it over the course of many centuries. The idea that what we *think* is the only "really important thing" is an idea that we have had a really hard time with—it is the philosophical gum on our shoe.

It is therefore more important for you to get your body to church (and of course your soul may go, too), even if the worship service doesn't challenge you, than it is for you to stay in your dorm room, meditating deeply on Christian themes. The reason for this is that God's people are your people, and you need to form an attachment to them as your people. And you cannot form that kind of attachment to people without spending time with them. I could not advise anybody to study philosophy if they were not plugged into a vibrant and robust Christian church.

The second caution is very similar to the first. Personal holiness is crucial, and when there has been sin, confession of that sin is even more crucial (1 John 1:9). I have a friend who, when he was a little boy, was taken down to skid row by his father to see how the bums and addicts were living. The father was not a Christian, but he wanted his son to see the end of the road, to see the final destination of a certain class of choices. I have often thought of that example when considering what the world treats as intellectual sophistication, but which an insightful Christian ought to see as an epistemological skid row full of well-groomed, sophisticated sounding ways of knowing truth that are utterly hopeless dead ends. The universities of the world are filled with intellectual refuse and *detritus.* But this is not caused because people are being stupid. Scripture teaches that folly is a moral issue, not an intellectual one.

The Scriptures teach us that men are given over to intellectual darkness and folly because they refuse to honor God as God, and refuse to give thanks to Him (Rom. 1:21). In other words, you don't protect your heart (your personal devotion) by means of intellectual exercises. Rather, you protect your ability to think in a straight line

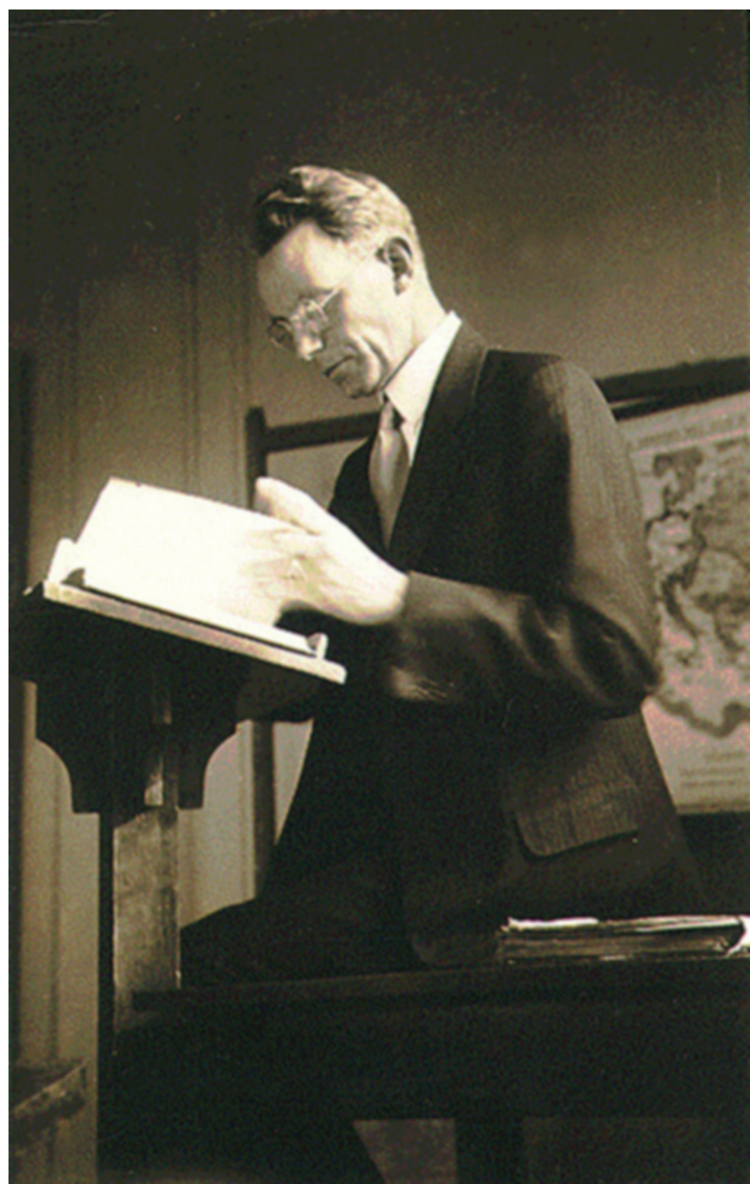
by means of personal loyalty to God, His standards, and His people. To be very specific, if an intelligent young man with a Christian upbringing goes off to college to study philosophy, the quickest way for him to start thinking that Heidegger was profound is by watching a lot of pornography or doing other activities that abandon the scriptural values of his family and community and, therefore, make the ridiculous seem profound.

We have a tendency to come up with reasons for staying away from God, and living in unconfessed sin causes such reasons to multiply like the frogs of Egypt. If a student is doing this while simultaneously engaged in a course of study designed for those who want to stay away from God, it is not hard to predict what will happen.

The third warning is this: don't accept a false head/heart distinction, thinking that you are studying difficult philosophical paganism in the course of your studies during the week, and that this requires some light devotional fluff to counterbalance it. We are called, in the greatest commandment, to love the Lord our God with all our minds—all our *brains*—and this means that your thought life is to be disciplined by Christ along with the rest of you. The points made earlier about the importance of being involved in a church and walking with God in your personal life were not meant to say that these activities counterbalance or "make up for" what is happening in your mind. It is *not* the case that the devil gets your brains, and so you have to give God your weekends and sex life in order to compensate. You are studying the way the unbelieving mind works, studying the different routes it may take, not in order to imitate it, but rather to anticipate and answer it. Another way of putting this is that every Christian studying philosophy really needs to be doing so as an intellectual evangelist or apologist. In addition, Christians who have studied philosophy do not need to worry that much about what's fashionable among unbelieving philosophers. The Christian world has its own interests that we should be addressing "in house." At a minimum, we should want to have a biblical view of knowledge, freedom, mind, language, mathematics, and so on. The Christian trained in philosophy can certainly help the Church frame her questions about these subjects carefully. This *is* an area where the Christian philosophy student can plunder gold from the Egyptians, and many doctrinal tangles and theological controversies could be sorted out if we learned how to use these philosophical tools with care.

Of course, submitting to the yoke of Christ when it comes to your intellectual life will include reading what many Christian writers have faithfully done to answer the intellectual challenges of unbelief. Such writers should, of course, include Cornelius Van Til, C.S. Lewis,

"The whole problem of knowledge has constantly been that of bringing the one and the many together. When man looks about him and within him, he sees that there is a great variety of facts. The question that comes up at once is whether there is any unity in this variety, whether there is one principle in accordance with which all these many things appear and occur. All non-Christian thought, if it has utilized the idea of a supra-mundane existence at all, has used this supra-mundane existence as furnishing only the unity or the *a priori* aspect of knowledge, while it has maintained that the *a posteriori* aspect of knowledge is something that is furnished by the universe."
— Cornelius Van Til, a Christian philosopher.



Francis Schaeffer, and G.K. Chesterton. When I was a student of philosophy, I remember that Chesterton was a lifeline of sanity to me, in a field of study where sanity did not seem to matter that much.

But at the same time, it is important to be reading other Christian writers who are in the same league with your secular studies. If all the non-believers you read are heavy-weights, and the believers are all light-weights, or you read them just to "find an answer," you will eventually get to a very bad conclusion. So even if you have a lot to read, make sure to pursue writers who are weighty and substantive, even if they are not writing in a field that addresses any of the particular questions you are working through in philosophy. Read through Calvin's *Institutes,* for example, or Augustine's *City of God.* They may not answer a particular question that came up in one of your classes, but you will be continually reminded that Christians have brains, and moreover that brains can be used in ways that are entirely constructive. As you do this, be careful to resist the temptation of trying to make Christian categories fit into the philosophical ones. It is easy to become impressed with really smart guys in theology and philosophy, and then to try to force them into the same categories, which rarely works out well.

The fourth caution is that before challenging the tenets of unbelief in the classroom—before you set yourself up to be Apologetics Man—you should strive to be the best student your philosophy instructor ever had. You should do your assignments, read everything suggested, turn your papers in on time and in a legible condition, be respectful, and above all, *do not rush to the refutation.* If the second paper you turn in to this instructor has as its thesis statement that "Kant was an idiot," what you are asking for is for that instructor to never take you seriously. Even if you had a point, which is unlikely, that point might have been made and heard had it been advanced a year or two later.

Your *ethos* as a student needs to be established first. This means that you have to take pains to make sure that you have understood what Kant is actually saying before attempting to explain to your professor how Kant became so silly. Now some might argue that sophomores have a certain divine right to be sophomoric, but Christian students should still remember that they are nineteen years old, at least for the time that they are.

As just mentioned, this is something to strive for, but sometimes things are not quite so tidy. It would be more to the point to say that Christian students should not take the offense unless they have established their credentials as hard-working, diligent students. In other words, don't carry the flag for the Christian faith, don't go over the top for Jesus, unless you have done all your homework. But where does the messiness come in? This scenario outlined above assumes that your professor is just a regular guy, trying to pay his mortgage, and he does not need an ignorant born-againer dominating all his classroom discussions.

But there are other times when the professor is actively hostile to the Christian faith, and he attacks it every chance he gets. There are times when humble college students, who are not as well prepared as they would like to have been, have to defend the

faith. But this is quite different than attacking for the faith. Both are sometimes necessary, but the former can be thrust upon you. The latter ought not to be taken up lightly.

And last, don't become a specialist—resist all temptation to become a philosophy wonk. There are two levels to this. The first is, "don't become a library rat," and the second is, "to the extent you are reading, have only about a third of it be the assigned work. This might seem like a ton of extra work, but it is actually a means of keeping your work proportioned and balanced. This exhortation is simply to make sure you have a life, and that you have one outside the realm of books, and also within the realm of books.

Outside your books, go hiking. Play flag football. Go to the movies. Attend all the church potlucks. When it comes to your reading, reserve about a third of your time to do all your reading assignments. Set aside another third for your Bible reading, and substantive Christian books. For the remainder, make sure you have a steady diet of P.G. Wodehouse, Shakespeare, Billy Collins, John Donne, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Jane Austen. Make sure you stay a reasonable human being.

—Douglas Wilson

For Further Reading

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ISBN 978-1-936648-42-9