

THE CLASSIC OF CLASSICS



THE AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENT is like a centaur. He is half-man. Since he is structured by his curriculum, he remains, like his curriculum, incomplete. In our colleges there is all too little accent on the "well-rounded" personality. If we are to have men and women with an outlook that sees life whole—it will be achieved largely by means of a balanced educational program. An education so designed that it ignores much of our intellectual and spiritual heritage will produce lop-sided and distorted individuals. Such individuals cannot live a "well-rounded" life, nor take a proper place in their community.

Since Augustine was a student in Carthage, no educational system in the Western World has altogether ignored the *classical* element of our heritage. In the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance the *classical* and the *Christian* elements of our tradition were considered inseparable. The education of these eras produced a Dante, an Erasmus, a Michelangelo, and a Milton. It is only in recent centuries that education has refused a significant place to the Judaeo-Christian tradition in the curriculum. Only modern man has been so short-sighted as to build education upon one-half of his intellectual heritage. Since the Renaissance, formal education has been built upon the liberal arts and sciences on the one hand, and upon technical and professional studies on the other—but with little recognition of the place of the Bible in the curriculum.

It might well be asked whether a person is really educated if he does not know the Judaeo-Christian tradition. John Milton would have joined Isaac Newton in an emphatic "No". Still, since the time of the Renaissance the colleges and universities of Europe and America have turned out countless students who have not known in any significant way the great works of the mind and spirit which are embodied in the Christian half of our Western heritage.

It is strange that most education should ignore the place of the Bible in the curriculum. The places of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* have been unquestioned as sources of our classical tra-

dition. It is overlooked that the *Book of Genesis* and the *Book of Judges* are equally significant epics of the origin of ideas and institutions in Western civilization. The histories of Herodotus and Thucydides are studied with admiration, but the chronicles of the Hebrews recorded in *I and II Samuel* and *I and II Kings* are just as brilliant analyses of the rise and fall of a civilization as the works of the Greek historians. Many students have learned of the heroic deeds of Odysseus and of Aeneas, but have never heard of Joshua and of Deborah. Considerable time is given to the study of Alexander the Great and of Julius Caesar, but often no mention is made of the political and spiritual achievements of David, King of Israel—who perhaps had more influence upon the history of the Western world than either Alexander or Caesar.

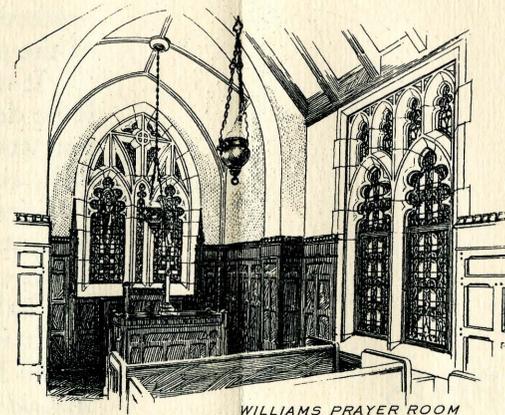
The dramas of Aeschylus, of Sophocles, and of Shakespeare give us many incisive insights into the nature of man. These men saw how pride and arrogance destroy the lives of men and nations. Over against them stand the prophets of Israel—Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah, who saw even more deeply into the souls of men and states, and called what they saw “sin”. The *Oedipus* of Sophocles is a magnificent creation, yet Sophocles does not reach the height attained by Luke as he describes the tragedy of Jesus of Nazareth in what has been called “the most beautiful book in the world”. Never was there a tragic hero in secular drama to compare with this hero of the Hebrews—the lowly Nazarene hanging on the Cross of Golgotha.

If we were to ask what one book has been more influential in the history of the West than any other, we might be inclined to say—*The Republic* of Plato, or John Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding*. Yet if we measure a book on the basis of what it has done to influence human history it may well be that the *Book of Revelation* has influenced the mental climate of the West more than any other book. The *Apocalypse* is carved in stone into the façades of cathedrals, it is illuminated in the pages of manuscripts, popes and emperors and prophets have lived in its light, and scholars find in this Book the well-springs of the “renovation of Western civilization” that we call the Renaissance.

We read the *Epistles* of Cicero and Seneca as remarkable documents giving us an understanding of the minds of these great Romans. We turn to the *Epistles* of Paul of Tarsus and find revealed in these writings an amazing man who completely transcended the limits of his own cultural heritage and reached out to embrace the new and larger one of the world of his day. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, born in the Greek city that had been given Roman citizenship, writing letters in the Greek language to many cities of the Roman Empire. He came as near as any man ever has to belonging to “one world.” Nowhere else in all of literature is there the record of a man that was able so utterly to throw off the prejudices of one culture and “to live and move and have his being” in another civilization.

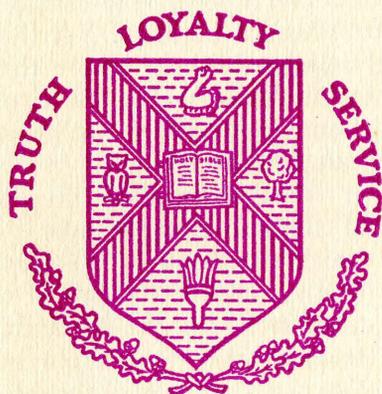
We cannot really understand our Western intellectual heritage without a knowledge of the Bible. The Chartres Cathedral, the *Divine Comedy*, the Sistine Chapel, the *Paradise Lost*, like so many of the great architectural and literary documents that embody our Western historical memory, are derived, in large measure, from the Christian source of our heritage. The West has not produced a major work of art since Augustine that has not woven into it these two aspects—the classical and the Christian elements of our Western heritage. Yet the tragedy is that our universities and colleges blithely ignore this fact. How can a student pretend to know the major works of the mind and spirit in his cultural heritage if he does not know the images and ideas that are to be found in the Bible?

Western man has lived in a framework of Biblical imagery ever since the days in which the *Book of Revelation* was written. The architectural forms of the church structures in Rome and Byzantium were derived from theology and from liturgy—the frescoes and sculptures of the cathedrals of France and England tell Bible stories—the art of Giotto, of Michelangelo, of Van Gogh, and Rouault was inspired by the Bible—the warp and woof out of which have been woven the patterns of everyday life came from the Bible—indeed the man of the West has lived and moved and thought in a Biblical climate for two thousand years.



Yes, the student must know the Bible if he is to understand his civilization. The pilgrimage of his ancestors has been made in its light. They found their inspiration in it and he must find his inspiration there, too. The Bible has determined his art, his literature, and his society. It embodies his highest concepts of freedom, and the dignity of man. It can determine his future if given a chance. "God is not mocked" and no civilization can be expected to achieve stability until it is brought into harmony with the will of God. Only education which recognizes the place of the Bible in the curriculum has symmetry. Such education provides the complete education.

The Bible in the curriculum gives that total vision which the student of today needs if he is to be a total man—and not a centaur. The Bible stands—THE CLASSIC OF CLASSICS.



SOUTHWESTERN AT MEMPHIS