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3 January 2024

The Importance of the Great Books

What is the purpose of life? Who am I, and where am I going? How can we make sense of our world and our neighbor? These questions fill the heart of man. Our desire to understand God, man, and the universe is nothing new, as Ecclesiastes 1:9 declares, “There is no new thing under the sun” (*The New Scofield Study Bible: Authorized King James Version: New Scofield Study System with Introductions, Annotations, and Subject Chain References*). It is a deep longing that all mankind wrestle with as one journeys along life’s road. The Great Books (classics) aid us in understanding our place in this world, who we are, and our purpose, knowing that history repeats itself, we can learn from these valuable books to answer life’s difficult questions.

God has revealed Himself in nature and to man (Romans 1:19-20). The Great Books collection is timeless, for it brings the best ideas and thoughts throughout time to the reader. We have limited time on this earth and do not have time for fruitless endeavors. Paul wrote in Colossians 4:5, “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.” God has commanded us to be good stewards of our time. Why should we start from scratch when we have the great scientists Aristotle, Kepler, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, and others who have discovered and observed God’s amazing creation and how it works? The ideas revealed by God through these men help us appreciate the power and majesty of God and man’s reliance on Him. Who can’t stand in awe as we understand the planetary movement displayed by God’s revealing to Kepler or the revealing of Calculus that Newton unveils? Let us stand on these giants to learn all there is to know of God’s handiwork.

To make the most of our time, we must learn all we can about the past through what has been thought and discovered from the great philosophers, politicians, authors, scientists, and thinkers, that came before us. Plutarch is a wonderful resource for one to learn virtues and vices from real people who have walked life's road. We view diligence through Demosthenes, who worked at being the best orator he could be. Honor in Cato and Cicero is displayed through their devotion to their country and common man. We can also discover mistakes from even famous men such as Caesar without having to make their same errors. As one reads the history, and philosophy books, we can discover how God has called us to rise above our flawed cultural ideas. With this idea, the *Prince* by Machiavelli lets us consider when the end is not justified by the means. With this knowledge, we can live in a way honorable to God, fulfilling our duties to ourselves and our fellow man.

God's greatest commandments are to love Him and to love our neighbor (Matthew 22:36-39). How are we to do this without the knowledge of who God is and who our neighbor is? The Great Books bridge the gap to aid in viewing man as we discover virtues and vices recognized in literature. Studying these great works helps one observe common themes and characters like thread woven in cloth. In Homer's *Odyssey*, one theme shown is loyalty, which Penelope has for Odysseus, and one that all women should emulate for their husbands. Learning of her devotion is a lesson that demonstrates the beauty of marriage, and the God-honored institution that girds each family. Saint Augustine's mother, Monica, demonstrates pure devotion to what love is even when a child falls short. The account of *Confessions* by Augustine displays the story of his wayward ways as a youth, and yet his mother stayed devoted to him, praying for him and not giving up. The unconditional love of a parent for a child is displayed perfectly in the life of Augustine.

These examples demonstrate ideals of familial love; however, Jesus, in His parable, demands that we love all our neighbors regardless of their ethnic, social status, and religious backgrounds (Luke 10:29). How are we to love them when we don't understand them? Diving into The Great Books gives us context, understanding, and sympathy for our fellow men. Learning from men from all cultures, backgrounds, and eras, we come to better understand. Cultures, situations, and periods will vary with man, but all of humankind's experience is wrapped up in the same human conditions. Since all men have the same human conditions, we need to look no further than the best that have been written, The Great Books.

If our goals in this world are to make sense of who we are and our purpose in this world, reading, The Great Books will open our eyes to find the wisdom that De bury describes, "Is more precious than all wealth, and all things that are desirable cannot be compared to it. Whoever therefore claims to be zealous of truth, of happiness, of wisdom or knowledge, must become a lover of books" (16). Let us not forget the valuable resources that The Great Books have provided for us in understanding ourselves and humanity. If "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore let us get wisdom" (Proverbs 4:7).

Works Cited

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