

C l a s s i c s

THE BULLETIN of THE
ASSOCIATION of CLASSICAL & CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS
Sine doctrina vita est quasi mortis imago

SEPTEMBER ▪ 2003

VOLUME X ▪ NUMBER 5

Classical and Christian Education Revisited

By Gregg Strawbridge

Classical and Christian education is the granite foundation for the rebuilding of our civilization. This may sound too grand. Bear with me. Faithfulness to our sovereign Lord means: 1. Dig in, 2. Stick to it, 3. Raise the next generation of faithful warriors in the kingdom-so help us God. When Christians think of our society today, it looks like the fishing line knotted in an old tackle box. We have knots from our disunity (all 1023 Christian denominations), tangles from our individualism and affluence, and snags from our defeatist, yet ever popular “Rapture Fever.” To the point of this article, we have line binding us from faithfulness in training our children. Dig in!

In the past, Christians forged a civilization with a lot less funds, faculty, and facilities than any major city’s school district. The “West was won” as believers cultivated the “liberal arts.” Unfortunately, the word “liberal,” like “logic,” “rhetoric,” “catholic,” “liturgy,” and others has developed a sour taste. (The devil is a great lexicographer, you know.) “Liberal arts” means freeing arts. They free and enlarge the mind. So much so that Augustine reports how Julian the Apostate (the Roman emperor, 361-363) forbade “masters of rhetoric and grammar to instruct Christians” because these liberal arts were “conducive to the acquisition of argumentative and persuasive power” (see the *City of God*, 18). Julian the Apostate had more educational sense than many Christians. Dig in!

For those unfamiliar with the classical Christian practice, read the 1947 Dorothy Sayers article, “The Lost Tools of Learning” and Douglas Wilson’s contemporary newly expanded civilization-saver, *The Case for Classical Christian Education* (2002), or for a short summary, see my booklet, *Classical and Christian Education*. Here’s the summary: Like one of these fine old steam engine trains, the Trivium is the engine, the classical content of the great works are the fuel, and the tracks are the truths of God’s Word. We consume classical learning, harnessed in the engine of the Trivium, but our rails are straightened by the whole counsel of God.

The Trivium engine serves in three ways: as a set of important subjects, as an approach to subjects, and as an approach to students. In early medieval times and before, the subjects of the Trivium were simply Latin, logic, and classical rhetoric. These studies (grammar, logic, rhetoric) first developed in the Greco-Roman world. The Christians, such as Cassiodorus (480-575) molded and shaped the liberal arts

Continued on page 2

NATIONAL ACCS BOARD

Tom Spencer ▪ *Chairman*
Logos School
Moscow, Idaho

Mark Dolan ▪ *Vice Chairman*
Foundations Academy
Boise, Idaho

Ty Fischer ▪ *Secretary*
Veritas Academy
Leola, Pennsylvania

Marlin Detweiler
Veritas Press
Leola, Pennsylvania

Tom Eddy
Whitefield Academy
Overland Park, Kansas

Tom Garfield
Logos School
Moscow, Idaho

Rick Hall
Westminster Academy
Memphis, Tennessee

Clay Howell
Providence Christian School
Dothan, Alabama

Ron Lee
(On Sabbatical)
Schaeffer Academy
Rochester, Minnesota

Don Post
Tall Oaks Classical School
Hockessin, Delaware

Bruce Williams
The Oaks
Spokane, WA

Bob Donaldson Ex-Officio

Douglas Wilson Ex-Officio



CLASSIS

CLASSIS is a bimonthly newsletter published by the *Association of Classical and Christian Schools* for its members and friends.

Proposed submissions may be sent to:

CLASSIS Newsletter
ACCS
P.O. Box 9741
Moscow, Idaho 83843

or submitted to:

infoaccs@turbonet.com

To obtain a copy of the ACCS Mission Statement, By-Laws, Confession of Faith, or a full membership list, or membership information write:

ACCS
P.O. Box 9741
Moscow, Idaho 83843

Call:

phone: (208) 882-6101
fax: (208) 882-9097

or visit our website:

web: www.accsedu.org

Executive Director Patch Blakey

Secretary Trish Miller

Executive Assistant.....

Cindy Nightingale

Treasurer Mary Gressard

Classical and Christian Education Revisited

continued from page 1

into what we now see. So important to our medieval brethren, these arts held “a place in the Model of the universe” and in the “cosmic framework” (C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*).

The fruit of using the Trivium is the skill of taking apart a subject, that is, to see the grammar, logic, and rhetoric of any subject. This was Sayers’ observation: “we often succeed in teaching our pupils ‘subjects,’ we fail lamentable on the whole in teaching them how to think.”

The Trivium imparts the “tools of learning.” Sayers’ words are worth printing even again: “The sole true end of education is simply this: to teach men how to learn for themselves, and whatever instruction fails to do this is effort spent in vain.” In contemporary use, we have pressed harder on the third use of the Trivium, as an approach to students. As Sayers instructed and Wilson implemented,

children learn in stages that correspond to the Trivium.

There is a grammar, dialectic and rhetoric stage of learning.

With respect to the fuel or content, part of our

downfall is accepting what [anti-Christian] progressive educator John Dewey taught only the process of education is important, since after all, there is no truth. Dewey is victor in America. He attained his goal: socialization through education. We are socialized, though we can’t read or reason. The classical view, unlike Dewey, values the classics since

they sketch a world of objective values (I recommend Lewis’ *The Abolition of Man* for further study). It is inescapable: all methods require content. Skill in the real tools of learning requires a certain kind of content. For us this is embodied in the Western canon of great books (give or take a few). It turns out to be the liberal arts and sciences. To put it theologically, we must teach God’s revelation, providence, and creation. Stick to it!

Our classical education train has been running on this line for only a decade or so. Is it possible to crash the train so soon? Temptations arise to pull us off the tracks. I will suggest problems that touch on the three basic features of our approach: Trivium troubles, classics killing, and worldview worldliness.

Luther once spoke of how a drunken man may fall off a horse on the left or the right. We can have Trivium troubles from

the left—“Eighth graders can’t do logic.” “Latin is too hard for third graders.” We are familiar with these. On the side, from the right, some parents push their child to skate across the surface of the Trivium too fast. They are sure their first

Sayers’ words are worth printing even again: “The sole true end of education is simply this: to teach men how to learn for themselves, and whatever instruction fails to do this is effort spent in vain.”

born is ready for logic in the fourth grade, since he learned to read at three. Are first graders really ready to do serious historical study? Let me encourage putting our efforts into going deeper into each stage, with more exciting learning. Teach “with the grain,” as Sayers says. Don’t treat the Trivium’s stages as Monopoly—do not pass ‘Go’, do not

Classical and Christian Education Revisited

continued from page 2

collect \$200, go straight to rhetoric. Stick to it!

To others, classical education sounds good until they see this involves studying works of non-Christians, even downright pagans. There's no hiding it. Some of these books were not written by Christians! Couldn't we spend our time learning more of the Bible, or developing character at the expense of teaching/learning? Classics killing is

the shallowly pious resistance to deeper classical studies. Let's remember that Joseph, Moses, and Daniel knew all about the pagan powers (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, etc.). Paul and Luke are replete with quotes and allusions to the Greeks. Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin mastered Greek and Roman classics. We must stand in their shoes to critique unbelief and show, "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1 Corinthians 1:20, Acts 17). We are to stand on the shoulders of past giants. Resistance to depth in the classics boils down to propaganda. Once, Christians vigorously engaged classical pagans and won. Now, "Christians" turn from the vapors of "gospel propaganda" to paganism. It is my prayer that laying the

granite floor of classical education will have the effect that Julian feared. Stick to it!

Finally, worldview worldliness is something of a corrective to falling off the left side on the classics or other aspects of non-Christian culture. We

must recognize that by God's common grace, truth, goodness, and beauty are in unbelievers' art, literature, and music.

However, we

may take our worldview Christianity to the point of worldliness. We may relish the work of unbelievers so much that we fail to fully critique it. We may end up with no enemies, in a world without a battle, where there are no wounded, and have nothing from which to be saved. Faithfulness is faithfulness to the complete Word. We are to raise faithful warriors who by the grace of God use the tools imparted, the talents given, and the timely opportunities to wage war and win. Doing this in the name of Christ means we are called to fruitfulness not to futility. As Paul urged, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that you labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Don't treat the Trivium's stages as Monopoly—do not pass 'Go', do not collect \$200, go straight to rhetoric.

Gregg Strawbridge is the pastor of All Saints' Presbyterian Church, Lancaster, PA and director of WordMp3.com.

"Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body."

Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729)

CLASSIS

Quid Novi?

great hall ProduCtIoNS, INC.

Jim Weiss has been a storyteller for over 25 years. In June, 1989, Jim decided to do something more with the craft that he had formerly practiced solely for pleasure.

He and his wife, Randy, formed a production company, Greathall Productions, and have thus far produced [twenty-nine \(29\) storytelling recordings](#) with enticing titles from classical literature, such as Greek Myths, King Arthur and Sherlock Holmes. Jim's Greathall line is the recipient of 65 major national awards from The American Library Association, Parents' Choice Foundation, NAPPA, the Parents' Council, The Oppenheim Toy Portfolio, The Film Advisory Board, Parents' Guide to Children's Media Award and more. Weiss' newest releases are "The Prince and the Pauper" and "The Queen's Pirate: Queen Elizabeth I and Sir Francis Drake."

For more information, visit their website at www.greathall.com, or contact them directly at: Greathall Productions Inc. Post Office Box 5061, Charlottesville, Virginia 22905-5061, (phone) 800-477-6234 (fax) 434-296-4490