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# Is Classical Christian Education Compatible with a Reformed Christian Perspective on Education?

## Abstract

Is the growing classical Christian education movement, based on Dorothy Sayers' trivium methodology, compatible to a Reformed Christian perspective on education? The classical Christian position claims that children progress through three stages of development and that the three components of the trivium complement these natural learning stages. The first stage involves memorizing facts through chants, stories and songs. In the second stage students learn how to argue and analyze by means of formal training in logic. The third stage focuses on learning to express knowledge persuasively and elegantly. When compared to the Reformed understanding of covenant children as well as Reformed purposes and methods of education, classical Christian education is found to be too intellectualistic and elitist to be compatible with a Reformed Christian perspective on education.

## Document Type

Thesis

## Degree Name

Master of Education (MEd)

## Department

Graduate Education

## Keywords

Master of Education, thesis, trivium methodology, Christian education, biblical worldview

## Subject Categories

Curriculum and Instruction | Education

## Comments

Action Research Report Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education

Is Classical Christian Education Compatible with  
a Reformed Christian Perspective on Education?

by

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Thesis  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Education

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May, 2005

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a Reformed Christian Perspective on Education?

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## Abstract

Is the growing classical Christian education movement, based on Dorothy Sayers' trivium methodology, compatible to a Reformed Christian perspective on education? The classical Christian position claims that children progress through three stages of development and that the three components of the trivium complement these natural learning stages. The first stage involves memorizing facts through chants, stories and songs. In the second stage students learn how to argue and analyze by means of formal training in logic. The third stage focuses on learning to express knowledge persuasively and elegantly. When compared to the Reformed understanding of covenant children as well as Reformed purposes and methods of education, classical Christian education is found to be too intellectualistic and elitist to be compatible with a Reformed Christian perspective on education.

## Introduction

Tom Garfield, principal of Logos (Classical Christian) School in Moscow, Idaho, was recently invited to address the Heritage Christian School community in Jordan, Ontario, on classical Christian education. Many in this school community have expressed interest in classical Christian education and they are not alone. “The movement to change to a classical curriculum is taking off in the U.S. among other Christian schools and home schoolers. Garfield says there are at least 100 other Christian schools that have adopted a classical education curriculum” (VanDyk, 1999).

“The current ‘classical education’ movement is, indeed, a movement. It is probably the most notable fad in private education today. In books, pamphlets, and especially in sales catalogs, we find the tag classical attached to all sorts of educational wares...” (Schlect, 2001). A quick search on the internet verifies Schlect’s observations and highlights the fact that this movement has made significant inroads into Reformed Christian communities. Increasing numbers of Reformed Christian college graduates are finding employment in classical Christian schools and existing Reformed Christian schools are considering classical curriculum and instructional methods while new Christian schools are being patterned after the classical model. The movement has attracted so much attention in Reformed communities that in a recent collection of essays on classical education published under the title *The Paideia of God*, an entire chapter was devoted to the issue “Does classical mean Reformed?”(Wilson 1999).

Logos School, the forerunner to the classical Christian education movement was founded in Moscow, Idaho, in 1980. Three years later the Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS) was established and presently its membership has expanded to include 125 schools. The relatively young Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS) not only boasts a membership of 125 schools, but maintains a web site (<http://www.accsedu.org/>) and publishes a newsletter “Classis” to provide guidance to communities and schools who are considering adopting classical Christian education. In fact, numerous websites have been established by classical Christian schools and home school groups that dispense a flurry of information concerning program curriculum, educational philosophy, promotional material, conferences and workshops. Thanks to the internet, a virtual classical Christian education community is working together. The genuine enthusiasm for sharing curriculum and insights is infectious, while a common underpinning is clearly evident. The majority of these schools and organizations champion Dorothy Sayers’ essay on the trivium as their pedagogical cornerstone while Douglas Wilson is revered as the expert on how to apply Sayers’ principles to today’s students.

How should Reformed Christian educators respond to such developments? Having spent decades articulating a Reformed vision for education, refining curriculum, clarifying learning styles and honing teaching strategies, have we missed something important that classicists have uncovered? A lack of researched answers to these questions indicates the current status of this issue. It is my position that we have a responsibility to learn from classical Christian



education's strengths or alert those involved in and attracted to the movement of its weaknesses. Is classical Christian education compatible to a Reformed Christian understanding of education? That is the fundamental question I hope to answer in this paper. To that end, a review of the relevant literature is necessary to set forth the distinctive features of classical Christian education.

#### Research Objectives

1. Describe the current popularity of the classical Christian education movement.
2. Trace the history of classical Christian education to Douglas Wilson and Dorothy Sayers.
3. Explain the classical Christian approach—the trivium.
4. Analyze the underlying assumptions of the medieval trivium by tracing them to their classical roots.
5. Describe the synthesis between these medieval assumptions and classical Christian education.
6. Discuss the compatibility or incompatibility between classical Christian education and a Reformed philosophy of education.
7. Present concluding suggestions for schools contemplating adopting the classical Christian education model.

#### Definitions of Terms

1. Classical Christian education: is an education system that is based upon Dorothy Sayers' essay "The Lost Tools of Learning" in which she connects the trivium to developmental learning stages of childhood.

2. Trivium: is a tool for learning comprised of three components that build upon one another: grammar, dialectic and rhetoric.
3. Grammar: refers to the basic structure of a subject. Sayers claims that each subject has its own grammar. For example, history's grammar consists of dates, events and people; geography's grammar includes maps, vegetation, and geographical features. Science is structured around classifications and the grammar of math involves number groups, multiplication tables and geometrical shapes.
4. Dialectic: a combination of logic and disputation. Its skills include: defining terms, making accurate statements, constructing arguments and detecting fallacies.
5. Rhetoric: the ability to express oneself elegantly and persuasively.
6. States of development: based on her experiences as a child, Dorothy Sayers has theorized that children progress through three distinct learning phases. She has coined these three stages of child development, or learning stages, as: Poll-Parrot, Pert and Poetic.
7. Poll-Parrot: this stage occurs approximately during the ages of 9-11, during which time memorizing is easy and fun, while reasoning is burdensome. Children enjoy reciting, chanting, singing and rhyming, so their education should be tailored to these interests and abilities. Through stories, songs, rhymes, chants and the like, students should be introduced to the grammar of each subject and there should be little concern over whether they understand much of what they are committing to memory at this stage.

8. *Pert*: during the ages of 12-14, according to Sayers, children like to argue, contradict, and challenge authority. At this time they should be taught how to do this properly—in other words, dialectic should be taught.

9. *Poetic*: this age begins at the onset of puberty and lasts approximately two years. Students in this phase are concerned about their appearance, expression, and they have developed interests in particular subjects. Sayers proposes that they be given the opportunity to pursue their interests, while learning how to present their knowledge with clarity and style.

10. *Reformed*: this term is used primarily to define Christian educators and educational programs in the Christian Schools International (and its counterpart, the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools) tradition.

11. *Arête*: the Homeric ideal and educational goal of ancient Greece, which honoured the love of glory, superiority and pride.

12. *Paideia*: the goal of *arête* gradually became that of *paideia*, which took on a less individualistic and more civic minded orientation.

13. *Humanitas*: the Roman variation of *paideia*, meaning, “that which makes a man” and comprising the seven liberal arts believed to liberate people from ignorance.

#### Review of the Literature

##### *The History and Features of Classical Christian Education*

“What does classical education mean?” When a parent asked this question at an information evening during the early years of Logos School, the board, administration and staff were obliged to confess that they had not yet

properly articulated their intent in attaching the label “classical” to their young school (Wilson, 1996). After a period of reflection and study, Dorothy Sayers’ essay “The Lost Tools of Learning” was adopted as the official definition of what the school meant by calling itself classical.

An acquaintance with Wilson and Sayers’ accomplishments will help us to understand their influence. Dorothy Leigh Sayers was born in 1893 to Rev. Henry and Helen Mary (Leigh) Sayers. Before she turned five Dorothy knew how to read and by seven her father was teaching her Latin to complement the French, reading, writing and arithmetic lessons she took with her nurse. When Dorothy turned twelve Rev. Sayers hired a French governess to teach Dorothy and a few neighbor girls German and French and at fifteen she had mastered both languages. At sixteen she was sent to a boarding school and performed very well; she won one of the highest scholarships in England and in the fall of 1912 she began her first year of studies at Oxford University (Dale, 1978).

“Looking back on myself, since I am the only child I know best and the only child I can pretend to know from the inside, I recognize three stages of development. These, in a rough-and-ready fashion, I will call the Poll-Parrot, the Pert, and the Poetic.’ From about nine years to eleven, she was the poll-parrot, who liked to memorize lists and jibberish like advertising jingles. From twelve to fourteen she was pert, fond of contradicting her elders. In the poetic period from fifteen on, she was a moody and preoccupied adolescent” (Dale, 1978).

Eventually in 1916, this energetic, talented and disciplined student graduated with first-class honors in Modern Languages. Sayers' graduation was especially remarkable because she was one of the first women to graduate from Oxford. She soon moved to France to work for an advertising company. Following that she taught elementary school in England for a short time. However, most of her professional career was spent writing.

Sayers was a contemporary of a group of incredibly talented writers: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and G.K. Chesterton, and today many of her fans believe she was a member of the famous "Inklings" who would meet to discuss each other's stories. Alzina Stone Dale, however, the author of a well researched account of Sayers' life, contends that this association has not been verified; rather, Sayers simply counted C.S. Lewis among her friends (Dale, 1978). Nevertheless, Sayers distinguished herself as a writer of detective novels (the Lord Peter Wimsey series), theological dramas, stage plays, newspaper articles, essays, and radio plays for the BBC. She was also a popular lecturer. Sayers has certainly influenced many people. Plays, films and television shows have been based on her stories. Her publications were prolific and dozens of books and articles have been published about her. Many admirers have devoted websites to her as well. Although she was not known as an educational expert, her ideas on elementary education are authoritative to today's classical Christian educators and have become so through the advocacy of Douglas Wilson. Wilson is a gifted author, a popular speaker and a faithful pastor; yet it was his fatherly responsibilities that motivated him to enter the realm of Christian education.

Wilson helped to establish a Christian and classical school because he and his wife realized that their covenantal responsibilities would not allow them to send their children to a secular (anti-Christian) school. The Wilsons realized that Biblically defined education is an endeavor in training children to take every thought captive to Christ. “But how is this to be done, and how is this discipline of mind to be passed on to our children? There is no way to do it without a total teaching environment in submission to the Word of God. We cannot bring every thought captive by allowing some thoughts to aspire to autonomy” (Wilson, 1999). If Christian students must go to school, they must attend schools established for Christian purposes, Wilson decided. An examination of some of his publications will help us to understand why he chose a classical course for his school.

“I am writing this book as a parent—an involved parent. I am writing to parents who would like to be involved in the education of their children and to parents who are already involved, but who want to be more effective” (Wilson 1991). *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* describes the United States’ public education that is becoming increasingly violent, immoral and ineffective at educating children. Wilson cites a number of studies to show that U.S. students lag far behind in international comparisons of literacy, geography, history, mathematics and science.

A number of factors have given rise to this current state of affairs. First, education cannot be non-religious. Government education has been stripped of its foundation for ethics, discipline, and even learning as its programs have been

secularized. For learning to occur, religious issues need religious answers, and secular schools are not equipped to respond to this challenge well. Another factor in the demise of American education, according to Wilson, is contemporary teaching methods. Lack of reading, memorizing, writing, and disciplining have resulted in poor performances in American schools. Therefore, methods to improve education such as increased funding, attracting superior teachers, reducing bureaucracies, increasing parental control, reforming curriculum, etc., will not be sufficient.

We will still have a secular state teaching its faith to its students. “So in this battle for the public schools, it is folly for the Christians to continue to lose and inconsistent for them to win” (Wilson, 1991). It is inconsistent, Wilson argues, because just as Christians do not want to pay for, or have their children taught at, a secular school, so we should not impose Christian education on others, even if the country’s majority was in favor of Christian education.

Wilson also warns against the danger of reactionary motivation taking precedence over principled obedience to the Word of God. Educational matters that concern Christians should certainly be addressed, but not exclusively by fleeing from them as Christian reactionaries. “Instead, as thinking Christians, we should seek to understand the worldview that has produced these symptoms in the public school system, and we should do battle with that” (Wilson, 1991).

Two Scripture passages are appealed to in Wilson’s presentation of “The True Ministry of Education”. The first is Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these commandments which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Wilson's main point is that this passage prohibits parents from abdicating their educational responsibilities, whether that is to a public or to a Christian school. "God wants the children of His people to live in an environment conditioned by His Word" (Wilson, 1991), and parents have been given this responsibility, not an educational institution and not the state.

A second passage appealed to is Jesus' reiteration of Deuteronomy 6:5, found in Matthew 22:37: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." How do you love with all your mind? Develop a Christian worldview in which you will submit every thought to the truth of Christ, in order to learn to think in a distinctively Christian manner about all aspects of life (Wilson, 1991). Christian education must be structured around this goal, Wilson argues; we must obediently act upon this teaching. Loving God with all our mind



involves understanding the world in light of Christ, and for Christian educators, one of the first implications of this principle is understanding the nature of children.

“I have never seen a child who needed instruction on how to sin; it comes naturally” (Wilson, 1991). By nature, all children are sinners through Adam. Yet, the image of God still remains, giving the child dignity that educators must respect. These two aspects are central to understanding children and help to distinguish the role of education. Christian education does not save children; that is the work of God’s grace. But Christian education can prepare students for that grace and trains those who are saved. When truth is conveyed by a teacher who loves whom he teaches and what he teaches, students will learn not only truth but to love it as well. “God has graciously made it possible to bring people to truth by how the truth is presented” (Wilson, 1991). That is why Wilson claims that a sure mark of an effective classical education is a love for learning.

“Conversation with the past is the heart and soul of a classical Christian education. But it is important to guard against a mindless veneration of the past” (Wilson, 1991). Thus a primary feature of classical Christian education is its heavy emphasis on history, not as authoritative, but informative. By learning of tragedies, triumphs, enlightened ideas and great mistakes, students become more aware of their own culture and society. In addition, they acquire a sense of where it is heading. To learn

culture's history, however, students must learn its language, and that, says Wilson, means learning Latin. This is a second distinguishing feature of classical Christian education.

Five more reasons for learning Latin are also offered. 80% of English vocabulary has Latin or Greek origins; learning Latin enlarges a student's vocabulary and improves expression. Latin also teaches the underlying meanings of words, processes of word formation and English language structure. For example, on a prepared test, third and sixth grade Logos Latin students could identify over 80% of unfamiliar English words with Latin origins, but only 33% of the non-Latin derived words (Wilson, 1991). Knowledge of Latin enables students to better understand classical allusions and references that are common to English literature. This will allow them to appreciate literature more and learn it better. A historical perspective is also acquired through this study. Students' eyes will be opened to the elements of the classical world that still exist.

According to Wilson, modern culture will be recognized as still in its infancy when it is compared to the classical age; then students have the opportunity to understand its development better. The learning processes involved in learning Latin discipline the mind. It is trained in the scientific method-observation, precision, comparison and generalization. Latin is also a good foundation for learning other languages. Knowing it, a student will have a good understanding of 80% of French, Spanish and

Italian vocabulary. Wilson insists that this study is not the chosen activity of reactionaries; there is solid educational value in it.

In 1947 another gifted writer penned a complaint about the educational system that served her society. Dorothy Sayers entitled her essay *The Lost Tools of Learning* and presented it at Oxford University, pleading for a return to a medieval educational theory: the trivium. Her diagnosis and prescription concerning the health of British education in the 1940s contained insights that resonated with Wilson's own observations in the United States some fifty years later and the classical Christian school movement devoted itself to applying Sayers' methods. As a result, the third distinguishing feature of classical Christian education is its adherence to the trivium.

#### *The Trivium*

Sayers' essay begins with a lament over her generation's high susceptibility to advertisement and mass propaganda. Educated adults, she alleged, were unable to debate, define terms, construct clear arguments or refute them, and could not distinguish between scholarly and unsound books. Based on these observations, Sayers questioned whether modern education taught students to differentiate between fact and opinion. Then she concluded: "The intellectual skills bestowed upon us by our education are not readily transferable to subjects other than those in which we acquire them: ...we often succeed in teaching our pupils 'subject,' we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think: they learn everything, except the art of learning" (Sayers, 1947).

The medieval trivium could remedy modern education's shortcomings, Sayers insisted. It consisted of two methods of dealing with subjects (grammar and dialectic) and rhetoric, a subject in itself. First, the student learned how language was put together—its rules, structure and how it worked. Second, the student learned how to use language—define terms, make accurate statements, construct arguments and detect fallacies. Third, the student learned how to be expressive and persuasive. When equipped to write a thesis and defend it publicly, the student could graduate, having proven mastery over the tools of learning.

“Modern education concentrates on ‘teaching subjects’, leaving the method of thinking, arguing, and expressing one’s conclusions to be picked up by the scholar as he goes along—medieval education concentrated on first forging and learning to handle the tools of learning, using whatever subject came handy as a piece of material on which to doodle until the use of the tool became second nature” (Sayers, 1947). It must also be noted that Sayers promoted the teaching of the trivium to students as soon as they could “read, write and cipher”. In other words, her call for educational reform did not extend to the primary grades and she did not intend for the trivium to be taught to students under the age of nine.

Concerning child psychology, Sayers admitted that her views were based exclusively on her own development. She remembered that reciting, chanting, singing, rhyming and memorizing were enjoyable for her as a young child, whereas reasoning and analyzing were burdensome. Sayers coined Poll-Parrot to label this stage of child development, which she claimed children progress

through during years nine to eleven. The Pert stage was the second one she identified: children are quick to challenge ideas and authority. This stage evidences more reasoning and questioning than observing and memorizing. Beginning at puberty, children move into the Poetic stage, where Sayers characterizes them as self-centered; at this stage students state their independence, strive for self-expression, and develop specific interests. Based on these ideas, Sayers believed the three parts of the trivium would apply perfectly to the three states of child development. The following paragraphs will outline her vision of the ideal curriculum.

Latin grammar was the key to learning every other subject properly, Sayers explained, and chanting Latin verb endings would be as agreeable to children in the Poll-Parrot stage as singing “eeny meeny, miney, moe...” Learning Latin grammar would provide students with a vast vocabulary for science, literature and history; it would also be a great asset to learning Teutonic languages. Teaching English would involve reciting stories until they were learned by heart. Sayers urged that children’s heads be filled with stories of every kind. Establishing historical perspective with dates, events, people and pictures would be the main goal of history classes, while geography studies would involve memorizing cities, mountain ranges, vegetation zones, etc, with the help of visual aids. Classifying organic and inorganic things would be the main methods used in science class and math would involve much memorizing: the multiplication tables, geometric shapes, and simple sums. Bible studies would include the Old and New Testament narratives of the major themes of creation, fall and

redemption. In addition to that, articles such as the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments should be learned by heart as well. In short, anything useful for the future that can be memorized now should be during the Poll-Parrot stage.

When students become more adept at reasoning than observing and memorizing, the Pert stage has begun and dialectic should be taught. A course in Formal Logic would be the curricular cornerstone at this stage, and the subjects' content and the teaching methods would change. Language classes would emphasize more syntax and analysis—constructing speech. Reading stories would give way to studying (and writing) essays and arguments. Debates would be performed in any subject and dramatic performances would replace choral recitations. Algebra and geometry would be taught as mathematical studies, but would not be identified as isolated subjects but as sub-departments of logic. Historical events could now be evaluated from a Biblical perspective, since the students would have already acquired a system of ethics from Theology. Dogmatic Theology (the rational structure of Christian thought or how to apply ethical principles in particular instances) would help students study geography and history properly. Current events and accompanying newspaper articles should be held up to the laws of logic, and students should not always have to criticize faulty arguments but be given examples of good ones also. Précis-writing would be a valuable exercise to learn the difference between the two. The Pert stage would be the time to assign research projects in order for students to learn how to research and to determine authoritative references. To summarize in

Sayers' own words: "The 'subjects' supply material; but they are all to be regarded as mere grist for the mental mill to work upon" (Sayers, 1947).

Sayers claims that after the Pert stage imagination reawakens and students begin to suspect the limitations of logic and reason. Then, according to Sayers, "The doors of the storehouse of knowledge should now be thrown open for them to browse about as they will." Students should be allowed to specialize in one or two subjects and stay involved in some others. It will, in fact, be difficult to differentiate between subjects and they do not need to study all of them because dialectic will have shown that all branches of learning are inter-related and rhetoric will show that all knowledge is one. Those not pursuing the quadrivium (university studies) should pursue a vocational kind of rhetoric, to prepare for a career, but the culmination of the rhetoric stage and graduation from the trivium should include the public presentation and defense of a thesis. After having graduated from such a program, students will have mastered the tools of learning and will be well equipped to take their place in society.

#### *Classical Roots of the Medieval Trivium*

"Ironically, Sayers never used the word classical to describe her laudable program... Her essay points to an education that is medieval, not classical... When Dorothy advocates a return to medieval education, she proposes a return to the education described by Quintilian and Augustine, and more particularly to Martianus Capella and Cassiodorus Senator" (Schlect, 2001). Capella and Senator perceived that their chief task was to preserve and promote classical learning in the western world. It was Capella, many believe, who refashioned the

seven liberal arts of classical curriculum into the trivium and the quadrivium. His book on curriculum, entitled *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, became a popular textbook during the medieval period. Cassiodorus Senator also influenced medieval curriculum greatly. His *An Introduction to Divine and Human Readings* outlined the seven liberal arts as a program of studies necessary for monks to master before they were capable of translating and copying ancient texts and the Scriptures. If Schlect, a history teacher at Logos School, is correct in his observations concerning Sayers' education proposal, an investigation of these four books is necessary

“For this universe, which has produced the bee-orchid and the giraffe, has produced nothing stranger than Martianus Capella” (Burge, Johnson, and Stahl, 1971). This unflattering comment made by C.S. Lewis, although certainly memorable, is not the only critique on Capella's work, as Richard Johnson, (Capella's translator) also complains:

The allegorical setting, occupying the first two books, was a delight to medieval readers and largely accounts for the work's popularity; but for any reader of an age after Latin ceased to be the vernacular or even the literary language, prodigious effort has been required to plod through Martianus' torturous and neologistic bombast. The setting portions of the *Marriage* constitute some of the most difficult writing in the entire range of Latin Literature (Burge, Johnson, and Stahl, 1971).

Capella's narration of the marriage of Mercury and Philology is a continuation of the classical allegorical method. According to Capella's



story, he was told of the union of eloquence and learning by a character known as Satire, who spoke to him by lamplight on cold winter nights while Capella recorded the events for posterity. The allegory involved Mercury (symbolizing eloquence, the arts of the trivium) who consulted with Apollo about finding an appropriate wife. Apollo, the story goes, suggested the erudite young lady, Philology (the arts of the quadrivium) and their wedding took place before a senate of gods, demigods and philosophers.

Capella was not a Christian writer and his influences are clearly classical. His style echoed Plato's symposium, for Capella chose to present seven long disputations via the mouths of seven supernaturally wise bridesmaids at a heavenly wedding ceremony. The inclusion of mystical characters, an enchanting setting and an allegorical script were probably designed to stimulate greater interest than Capella could hope for from an essay styled script. This proved to be the case for Capella succeeded in establishing a new genre and *The Marriage of Mercury and Philology* developed into one of the most influential medieval textbooks.

Grammar, the oldest of the bridesmaids/dowry handmaids lectured first, followed by the rest of the personifications of the liberal arts. This allegory taught that the seven liberal arts of the trivium and quadrivium were the means of blessing for mankind. They were activities promoted by the gods and the path to union with the gods. Capella regarded this belief as encouraging in a world where men were subject to fate and where

each individual had to contend with jealous and disgruntled gods. It was helpful, he believed, to seek the will of the gods through divination and manipulation, but a better course of action involved improving one's intellectual power, because then one could discover the laws and limits that had greater authority than even the gods (Burge, Johnson, and Stahl, 1971).

Capella's trivium included grammar, dialectic and rhetoric. Grammar, however, included much more than our contemporary understanding of the term as involving mainly language arts skills. Since classical writings served as medieval textbooks, it was necessary for medieval grammar's umbrella to cover history, geography, foreign language, etymology and mythology. Much translating and paraphrasing was needed to help young pupils understand the classical documents they were taught. Grammar served as an introduction to one's cultural inheritance and as a foundation for further training. This explains why not that long ago elementary schools were commonly referred to as grammar schools. Medieval dialectic involved training in Aristotelian logic while Cicero's principles of rhetoric completed the trivium espoused by Capella.

Instruction in the quadrivium came next, being composed of four mathematical disciplines advocated by Plato. Arithmetic—the science of numbers; geometry—the science of shapes and numbers; astronomy—the science of shapes in motion; and music—the science of number in its proportions, were disciplines that, according to Plato, probed the secrets of the physical world, the human soul and divinity. The quadrivium, it was believed, was integral to human

guidance because it trained the mind to concentrate on immaterial things, which in turn, purified the soul (Burge, Johnson, and Stahl, 1971). Capella's program was not vocational; it led to the mystical contemplation of truth and in this way betrayed its Platonic faith in mathematics, which would lead to a proper understanding of the world, man and God.

Schlect is certainly on the mark when he anticipates: "If you read their [Capella and Senator's] works, I doubt you will change tomorrow's lesson plans in your classroom" (Schlect, 2001). Nevertheless, a number of assumptions under-girding the trivium do surface in *The Marriage of Mercury and Philology*. Faith in human intellect, or intellectualism, clearly looms largest, while idealism with its exaltation of ideas and denigration of matter is a close second. Intellectualizing alone is the means to perfect understanding and mastery over the gods. Another assumption that reveals itself is the belief that cultural history is crucial to help one understand current society. Yet, before attempting to determine how this source can help us to understand Sayers' call for educational reform, we should examine Cassiodorus Senator's ideas on medieval education.

Cassiodorus, a Christian, distressed that schools were overflowing with students eager to learn worldly wisdom from the secular letters (classical texts), composed a two-volume book entitled *Divine and Human Readings*. His original wish was to increase the number of theology teachers in the public schools; however, taking his cue from Augustine's book *On Christian Doctrine*, Cassiodorus decided his greatest contribution would be to write a book on how to learn the Divine readings. Not only did he want unbelievers to be converted, he

desired that believers be trained in wisdom and eloquence (Senator, 1971). Like Augustine, Cassiodorus realized the people needed some degree of education in order to read Scripture and learn about God.

To that end he compiled a list of texts from the Scriptures, the Church Fathers and the classical writers, and arranged them into two books. The first, *Divine Letters*, contained principles of instruction for reading divine literature. It described the commentaries that he indexed, written by the Church Fathers on the books of the Bible, writings on the Church councils, the divisions of the Scriptures according to Augustine and Jerome, instructions on copying, translating and correcting texts of Scripture, and some writings from Christian historians.

Book II is entitled *Secular Letters*, and is divided into seven sections. The number seven held significant meaning for Cassiodorus, as did the number thirty-three, which was the number of sections *Divine Letters* contained. He took an allegorical approach to numbers, deriving meaning for his thirty-three divisions in book one from the thirty-three years that Christ walked on the earth, while seven was believed to be a Biblical symbol for significance and eternity; thus, he thought it appropriate that there were seven liberal arts for his second book.

Grammar is the source and foundation of liberal studies, its goal being faultless prose and speech, according to Cassiodorus. *Secular Letters* began with grammar, which included a reading list of suggested secular and Christian texts. The elements of the arts of rhetoric and logic were necessary to know as well. Rhetoric—eloquence in civil matters—was next. Cicero's five elements,

invention, arrangement, expression, memorization and delivery, provided the text for this subject. Cassiodorus explained that according to the statements of secular teachers, logic separates the true from the false by means of very subtle and concise reasoning. Embracing Aristotle's definitions of philosophy and his dialectic method, Cassiodorus' classical assumptions on learning are clearly evidenced in that he considered logic not only an art, but also a science.

Sciences, he believed, were studies free from the snare of opinion, which keep their own rules and always arrive at truth. Reminiscent of Plato's belief in the divinity of mathematics, Cassiodorus states: "...When we turn them over in our minds in frequent meditation, they sharpen our understanding and wipe away the mud of ignorance; and, provided we are favored with soundness of mind, they lead us, with the Lord's help, to glorious theoretical contemplation" (Senator, 1971). Greek faith in reason is reflected in Cassiodorus' confession that math is a science which considers abstract quantity, and in his explanation that abstract quantity is that which we separate from matter or from other accidents by our intellect and treat by reasoning alone.

Clearly evident also is the Greek glorification of theoretical knowledge: "For even if certain difficulties attend the penetration and learning of the sciences, the latter retain the drudgery of elementary studies only until the nature of their delightfulness is explored; when students have completely achieved their goal, they will all be glad to have endured to the end the annoyance caused by this fatiguing toil" (Senator, 1971). His faith in objectivity; his belief in bias-free interpretation of data as well as his confidence in the supremacy of immaterial

logic are a number of assumptions inherent to the trivium that are revealed in Cassiodorus' *Divine and Human Readings*.

During the medieval period, *Divine and Secular Letters* became an established textbook. It served also as a bibliographical guide for students and librarians searching for rare classical texts, thus helping to preserve these documents for generations. Cassiodorus was also instrumental in translating and copying manuscripts, and for transforming monasteries into theological schools and scriptoria. It is surprising that Cassiodorus, after having adopted such a classical view of education, also affirmed that knowledge involves doing good works, and that God still gives knowledge and faith to illiterate people and whomever He wills according to His perfect wisdom. There is an irreconcilable tension here that Cassiodorus, in attempting to synthesize Biblical understanding with a Greek worldview, could not resolve. This unfortunate synthesis was in some way related to an outlook on the relationship between Scripture and philosophy that had been advocated in Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*.

Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* succeeded in formulating an approach to the Scriptures whose principles determined the character of education during the medieval period. It is not a book on how to teach, but a defense of using Classical Education that was compatible with Christian doctrine. Augustine's statement that "every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is his Lord's" has frequently been cited as the watchword of Christian humanism. What has been unfortunately misinterpreted is that

Augustine was not lobbying for all Christians to become classicists, but to become better interpreters of the Bible—and to that end he issued the call for Christians to educate themselves.

Many Christian leaders in his day argued that prayer and the Holy Spirit were the only tools a person needed to know God's Word. Augustine countered this by reminding his readers that a person cannot even read God's Word unless he has at one time learned not only the letters of the alphabet but grammatical rules as well. Literary style and historical context are also matters that must be mastered in order to understand the meaning of Scriptural texts. Furthermore, Augustine goes on to say that according to Scripture, those who know how to teach must exercise their talent as service to God. In Augustine's own words: "Just as a man who knows how to read will not need another reader from whom he may hear what is written when he finds a book, he who receives the precepts we wish to teach will not need another to reveal those things which need explaining when he finds any obscurity in his understanding" (Augustine, 1958). In short, Augustine argued that it was absolutely vital for Christians to get educated (in his situation this meant classically) in order to learn more about Divine Revelation.

While applying principles of Ciceronian rhetoric in his own teaching and writing, Augustine nevertheless argued strenuously that the Scripture speaks according to its own rules. God's Word is not required to conform to Cicero's standards, and when expositors speak on the Bible, they should imitate the Bible's style, not Cicero's. This tension between Biblical and Classical authority was

resolved by Augustine in the well known “Egyptian gold” argument. When the Israelites were delivered from Egypt, God gave them Egyptian possessions. Furthermore, in the wilderness Moses took administrative advice from his non-Israelite father-in-law. According to Augustine, the principle we are to follow is that the Bible urges Christians to adapt whatever ideas or tools that have been providentially created to suit their purposes. “So it is not surprising that Christian writers should have used similar techniques and, indeed, sometimes reached conclusions very like those of their classical predecessors in their search for truth buried in the fables of the classical poets, as if digging it up, as St. Augustine would say, ‘from certain mines of Divine Providence, which is everywhere infused’” (Augustine, 1958). Regrettably, Cassiodorus Senator and many other Christian educators uncritically adopted or synthesized many pagan Greek ideas in their curriculum in the years that followed and Augustine’s misapplied approach left an enduring mark on medieval education.

In addition to this African theologian, a Roman educator named Quintilian made a significant impact on educational methods. An accomplished teacher of rhetoric for over twenty years, Quintilian agreed to write a book on how to teach properly. “My aim, then, is the education of the perfect orator. The first essential for such a one is that he should be a good man, and consequently we demand of him not merely the possession of exceptional gifts of speech, but of all the excellences of character as well” (Quintilian, 1921). This famous teacher desired that his education would equip men to be state leaders—able to legislate and judge properly. Having admitted that the perfect orator cannot exist, Quintilian



nevertheless outlined his ideal educational program, together with descriptions of the model student and the master teacher.

His focus on the ideal program, student and teacher is reminiscent of Plato's fifty-year education plan for philosopher kings, and a number of Platonic assumptions surface in Quintilian's program as well.

...I am not describing any orator who actually exists or has existed, but have in my mind's eye an ideal orator, perfect down to the smallest detail. For when the philosophers describe the ideal sage who is to be consummate in all knowledge and a very god incarnate, as they say, they would have him receive instruction not merely in the knowledge of things human and divine, but would also lead him through a course of subjects... (Quintilian, 1921).

Whereas the product of Plato's education was to be a philosopher king and a god incarnate, Quintilian's goal was to produce the perfect orator—to be accomplished through the program of rhetoric.

What is rhetoric? Quintilian accepted Isocrates' view that rhetoric is the power of persuading. He described it as the science of thinking properly and speaking well. The gods, Quintilian believed, distinguished men from beasts by bestowing them with reason and speech (Quintilian, 1921). These divine gifts, then, are the highest qualities we possess, the most beneficial to cultivate, thus, the most crucial to proper human living and civilization. Quintilian explains:

Never in my opinion would the founders of cities have induced their unsettled multitude to form communities had they not moved

them by the magic of their eloquence: never without the highest gifts of oratory would the great legislators have constrained mankind to submit themselves to the yoke of the law. Nay, even the principles which should guide our life, however fair they may be by nature, yet have greater power to mould the mind to virtue, when the beauty of things is illumined by the splendor of eloquence (Quintilian, 1921).

“I would, therefore,” Quintilian pleads “have a father conceive the highest hopes of his son from the moment of his birth” (Quintilian, 1921). Practically speaking, this would lead to the father being more careful about the character and speech of his child’s friends, nurse and pedagogue. Philosophically, this advice flows from his belief that souls proceed from heaven to human bodies; thus, boys are by nature quick to learn and reason.

The age at which to begin reading and writing was under debate in Quintilian’s day. He encouraged parents to have their children reading and writing before they were seven years old. Children should be taught the shapes of letters first, then their names and order should be introduced. He also cautioned against forcing children to read too quickly at first. He believed that originality was impossible at such young age, and the teacher was limited to developing the faculty of memory. His tenderness is evidenced in the following instructions:

Above all things, we must take care that the child, who is not yet old enough to love his studies, does not come to hate them and dread the bitterness which has once tasted, even when the years of infancy are left

behind. His studies must be made an amusement: he must be questioned and praised and taught to rejoice when he has done well; sometimes too, when he refuses instruction, it should be given to some other to excite his envy, at times also he must be engaged in competition and should be allowed to believe himself successful more often than not, while he should be encouraged to do his best by such rewards as may appeal to his tender years (Quintilian, 1921).

Flogging was another common practice in those days, and Quintilian made his position against it quite clear. It was disgraceful to the student; insensible students would not profit from it and good disciplinarians had no need of it. In addition, he argued that corporal punishment produces pain and fear which are detrimental to learning.

After learning to read and write, the literature teacher would take over to teach interpretation, expression, history, mythology, linguistics and grammar. Grammar involved studying Aristotle's three parts of speech (verbs—force; nouns—matter; and inventions/conjunctions—connections) and additional grammatical terms that were defined by the Stoics: articles, prepositions, pronouns, participles and adverbs. Interjections were added at a later date. As language studies and grammatical rules were still being settled; Quintilian taught that there are special rules which must be observed by speakers and writers. Language is based on reason (analogy and etymology), antiquity (bestows majesty, sanctity, authority, historians and orators) and usage (commonly used, understood, and accepted by society).

In addition, drama, geometry and music were also included in the curriculum for a variety of reasons. Drama and music would add some variety to the school day and help students maintain interest in their work. Geometry exercised the mind, arriving at truths from established premises; closely related to logic, this would be an invaluable tool for an orator in his public debates. To understand the teachings of many wise men of the past, music must be learned, for in times past it had been venerated and hardly separated from literature studies. Each of these subjects, Quintilian concluded, would contribute skills and knowledge that would help the orator in his public speaking.

Despite his Roman anthropology and Platonic beliefs, it is stirring to discover some insights into the nature of children and education that are still familiar to modern Christian teachers. While wrong on many counts concerning education, children and the purpose of human life, a number of Quintilian's assessments on the nature of children are quite accurate. Indeed, even the very worst educator is not wrong 100% of the time and Augustine's "Egyptian Gold" principle rings true. An artist does not have to be a Christian to give some insightful lessons on beauty and esthetics. Neither does a coach or musician need to know the Creator of the heavens and the earth in order to give some instruction in his or her area of expertise. This does not alter the fact that their knowledge and worldview will be seriously flawed; but observations and ideas noted by the pagans are not evil if they do not contradict Divine Revelation and so it is essential for Christian educators to discern between principles that are faithful reflections as opposed to unfaithful distortions of Scripture.

It should be noted that Quintilian's program was not consciously divided into grammar, logic and rhetoric. Roman education in his day was understood to be training in rhetoric and it was believed that every facet of the program contributed to the development of oratorical proficiency. In addition, it is also important to note that this program began after the student had been taught to read and write, as the Romans had adopted the Greek practice of hiring a pedagogue to perform these primary duties. Classical education at this point in history was just one phase of a program that underwent drastic changes throughout the centuries. It was adopted by numerous cultures throughout the ages and local conditions certainly altered the goals, contents and methods of classical educators and it is already clear that there are some differences between Sayers' description of the trivium and the history that has just been presented.

According to Sayers, grammar (the rules and structure of language and subjects) and logic (how to use language) were methods of dealing with subjects, but that is not what the research shows. Capella described grammar as a cultural study such as history, geography, literature and mythology that necessarily involved much translating and paraphrasing, and in Quintilian's program, grammatical rules as well as interpretation and expression were taught by the literature teacher along with the other "grammar" subjects. Learning the geography and history were as much goals of the program as learning how to speak and write well. For Capella and Quintilian, logic meant studying Aristotle's principles of logic but in Cassiodorus' program, rhetoric (eloquence in civil matters) was taught before logic! Quintilian did not even distinguish

between grammar, logic and rhetoric phases in his program, but elaborated on a variety of subjects that would equip students with the skills of rhetoric, enabling them to think well and speak clearly. To summarize, I must point out that while elements of Sayers' trivium are found here and there in the classical/medieval trivium, the program that she describes and advocates did not exist.

Since the educational program of the West had its formal beginnings in ancient Greece, an examination of Greek educational thinking is also necessary to describe underlying assumptions of the medieval trivium. Beginning before the rise of the Greek city-states and ending with the fall of the Roman Empire, the overarching goal of classical education passed through three stages known as *arête*, *paideia* and *humanitas*.

“‘Homer was not a man but a god’ was one of the first sentences children copied down in their handwriting lessons” (Marrow, 1977). This classical lesson fragment on the poet who became known as “The Teacher of Greece” is an appropriate place to begin a review of ancient Greek and Roman education as it immediately reveals something of its content and religious direction.

The main texts were the Iliad and the Odyssey. Homer's gods were powerful and dangerous, yet prone to human vices while the heroic warriors often succumbed to tragic flaws such as pride, impulsiveness or jealousy. His prophets revealed the secrets of the gods to men while sacrifices were offered to please the gods and calm their anger.

Homer's epics were prized for other features as well. The dominant characters obeyed the Homeric ideal of *arête*. They displayed an aristocratic ethic—

the love of glory, superiority and pride. Through these stories boys were taught reading, writing and story telling. Culture dictated that knights be skilled story tellers and so the appreciation of stories and poems was passed down.

Greek culture, between the days of Homer and the rise of the nation states, has been described as the culture of the knight and the scribe. These institutions were the pillars of aristocrat society. Knights served the king and preserved freedom while aristocrats hired scribes to prepare their sons for knightly service. Of course, not everyone became a knight; only the wealthy could afford such a tutorial styled education. Pre-classical education did not involve classrooms, school buildings or a succession of grades; it was much more personal than that. “And so at the very beginning of Greek civilization we see a clearly defined type of education—that which the young nobleman received through the precept and practice of an older man to whom he had been entrusted for his training” (Marrow, 1977).

To “pre-classical” knights and scholars, *arête* was the highest ideal one could attain. The man who displayed *arête* was glorious and heroic. This goal of *arête* gradually shifted to that of *paideia* or wholeness, defined by Plato as “the education in *arête* from youth onwards, which makes men passionately desire to become perfect citizens, knowing both how to rule and how to be ruled on a basis of justice” (Castle, 1969). Poetry, music and gymnastics were the three elements that were believed by the Greeks to develop the mind, soul and body. It is difficult to explain how the knight and scribe relationship that shaped pre-classical education evolved into the *gymnasiums* (physical education facilities) and *palaestras* (music schools) of classical times. However, I think Marrow provides one of the more

plausible explanations for this shift: “With battles no longer won or lost by individual heroes, the old personal ideal of the knight being one of the king’s troops changed to a more collective ideal, the devotion to the state” (Marrow, 1977).

The Greeks exported this ideal throughout the Hellenistic Age and it was eagerly adopted by the nations. Even their eventual political conquerors, the Romans, submitted to the Greek worldview. But over time, hellenistic *paideia* (to make oneself) became the Roman concept of *humanitas* (that which makes a man) (Castle, 1969). The humanities in our liberal arts education programs are the obvious descendents from the classical system; however, the fact that “*humanitas*” used to be the goal for this program is often forgotten.

A number of influential philosophers and their followers wrestled over the direction of classical education over the centuries and in doing so invariably left the marks of their beliefs on the system. For that reason it is necessary to identify and evaluate some of their ideas. Socrates is the first to be presented.

Socrates believed, “The ultimate aim of human education is achieved by submitting to the demands of the Absolute” (Marrow, 1977). To Socrates, absolute truth meant the unchanging principles of human nature; this knowledge, he believed, exists within us but is obscured by pride and prejudice; it must be liberated by determined questioning and testing of opinions. Thus, his Socratic method was born; pure reasoning will lead learners to pure truth, which, he believed, is by nature virtuous, and upon which human happiness and social stability depend. This conviction led him to oppose the Sophists who were gaining popularity during his day. Socrates did not respect their methods of teaching young men in the skills of



rhetoric and public debate but considered such education scandalous and its teachers charlatans.

Socrates preferred asking questions over delivering speeches. His goal was self-knowledge and his method was to ask question after question until the speaker was left with nothing to present but his own ignorance. Socrates desired that all the Sophists and their students would arrive at this state and then accept reason as their guide to the truth. His legacy became a tremendous faith in man's ability to reason properly and to see the truth clearly through intellectual perseverance (Castle, 1969). Although his method of inquiry did not become the established teaching method in the classical schools, this faith in reason is clearly evidenced by those who advanced the trivium in the millennia that followed.

Socrates' famous student, Plato, was very much affected by the death of his teacher. "Until philosophers should become kings or kings philosophers, he believed, states would never be governed" (Hadas, 1962). After all, he was an aristocrat, descended from ancient nobility, whose friends and relatives were tyrants who were overthrown by democratic reaction. The revolutions, Socrates' death, his uncles' deaths and his own unsuccessful attempts to be a politician led Plato to distrust uneducated governors.

Another of Plato's characteristics inherited from Socrates was his conviction that learning must be subject to the truth. For Plato, this meant something more than his teacher's interest in the truth of human nature and conduct. It also meant that sensory information was to be trusted much less than theoretical contemplation. Plato was under the impression that except for enlightened philosophers, most

people mistook “shadows” for reality and had little understanding of the true nature of reality, or “truth”. He illustrates this idea with his cave allegory, claiming that it was essential to contemplate beyond the illusion that this world of flux is all that is real. Plato assumed that truth had to be eternal and changeless. This meant that truth cannot be learned through sensory information, because all that we see and experience changes. Thus, education must prepare us to see beyond the illusions of this life to the eternal that can only be grasped through philosophy. For this reason “Plato condemned the poets (traditional Athenian education), because their myths were lies giving a false picture of the gods and heroes and one that was unworthy of their perfection” (Marrow, 1977).

These two beliefs led him to develop a thorough program of studies that allowed only the best students to progress through its phases and complete the curriculum. Whereas Socrates believed the goal of education was truth and virtue, Plato believed education's purpose was to reveal the principles of reality that would enable philosopher kings to govern cities successfully.

Children between the ages of seven and ten should be subject to two of the traditional pillars of *paideia*: music and physical education as well as reading, writing, arithmetic and geometry. Those ten to eighteen should study the above subjects but more thoroughly at the secondary school. Two years of military service and three years of graduate education in math and science followed secondary studies. Plato recommended admittance tests before each phase in his system which did not end with graduate work. He believed that five years of philosophy studies should follow graduate work and fifteen years of political work and study would

qualify students to begin contemplating “philosophy proper” and the “ideas of the good” that would help them to become legitimate philosopher kings (Banton, 1987).

Interestingly, this extensive program of studies, founded on its underlying assumptions of people, truth and government, despite being promoted by the most popular thinker in history, was rejected. Although it never completely freed itself from Plato’s intellectualism, classical Greece favoured instead a less intimidating program that aspired to more down-to-earth goals. Greece turned to Isocrates and an education that was not primarily concerned with pursuing pure knowledge and truth, but with enabling students to make the right decision after weighing all the evidence (Banton, 1987).

Let us take any concrete problem: the question will be what to do, and what to say. There will never be any theoretical knowledge precise enough to tell us this. The ‘genuinely cultivated’ man, says Isocrates, is the kind of person who has a gift for ‘hitting upon’ the right solution or at least the solution that is most nearly right, the best in the circumstances: and this is because he has the right ‘opinion’. This latter word, which was dismissed contemptuously by Plato, means for the more modest Isocrates the limit of what can in practice be achieved, the only kind of ambition that man can realize (Marrow, 1977).

Isocrates hoped to train men for the political improvement of Greece and his educational goals centred on teaching all his pupils to speak well. He believed an ability to express a problem clearly and to articulate solutions were sure signs of

good thinking and so rhetoric was greatly emphasized in his schools. Quintilian's program (previously described) demonstrates that Isocrates' position on education won out not only among the Greeks but in the Roman era as well.

Unlike Socrates, Isocrates did not believe virtue could be learned through knowledge. "Nevertheless, he is convinced that mental application to any subject worthy to be treated is a sure way of contributing to the development of character and the moral sense, to nobility of soul: 'True words, words in conformity with law and justice, are images of a good and trustworthy soul' (Marrow, 1977). As a result, classical education became more literary again, at the expense of music and physical education; but Greece was spared from an educational system that aspired to perfect the soul and contemplate truth over a fifty-year program of studies" (Castle, 1969).

Aristotle was another influential thinker whose philosophies and practices shaped the development of classical education, although his Lyceum, which had much more of an empirical focus than Plato's Academy, did not gain a prominent place in the classical system either. Both the Academy and the Lyceum were very specialized and remained insulated from public life, allowing Isocrates' school of rhetoric to dominate public education. However, Aristotle's work and influence did help to give rise to more reading, libraries and schools.

Aristotle's emphasis on observation, comparison and classification of all subject matter, even human beings, lead him to critique Socrates' idea that proper reasoning leads to virtue. Instead, Aristotle insisted, "We must be trained in habits of temperance from childhood, even before the reasoning powers are fully developed, for then are laid the foundations of character" (Castle, 1969). The

teaching of manners and civilized behaviour to young children even today reflects this principle of Aristotle. He believed the teacher's task was to steer students through their studies, using natural desires to motivate the student while subjecting the inquiry to the proper application of reasoning skills which would lead to knowledge. His methods reveal two notable assumptions: a behaviourist predisposition and an unreserved faith in objective, human reason from which academia has never been purged.

Another significant phase in the development of classical education occurred with the rise of the Sophists. These were travelling teachers who taught rich young men in the Greek towns to speak convincingly and to win arguments. "... they deserve our respect as the great forerunners, as the first teachers of advanced education, appearing at a time when Greece had known nothing but sports-trainers, foremen, and, in the academic field, humble schoolmasters" (Marrow, 1977). Coinciding with the development of city-states, young men began to pay more attention to getting into a Sophist school to improve their chances of landing a high profile political career. Voluntary military training and service were neglected by many who were losing their devotion to the state and concentrating more on their personal success. Once again, the curriculum became less physical and more literary.

This overview has shown that classical education cannot be neatly labelled and understood very quickly. Being adopted by various cultures throughout different historical eras and subject to changing societal goals and resources, classical education proceeded through numerous phases.

Classical Greece's three pillars of learning, poetry, music and gymnastics, were barely recognizable by the time Augustine and Quintilian were exerting their influence. Plato, already, did all he could to discourage the teaching of poetry (myth and legends)! Furthermore, by the time Capella and Cassiodorus became influential, classical education became further complicated through integration with Christian thought, from a growing sense of decline in civilization, and by means of its conscious attempts to preserve a fading cultural heritage. The main focus of this survey, however, was to expose and highlight the inherent assumptions in the medieval trivium—assumptions about children, learning, truth and God—that must be carefully examined by Christians called to teach God's covenant children. To what extent these assumptions emerge in today's Christian classical education will be examined next.

#### *A Synthesis of Classical Assumptions and Christian Ideas*

It is time to determine the actual relationship between today's classical Christian education and the heritage it claims for itself, that is, the classical educational program that had been adapted and articulated by Quintilian and Augustine, but refashioned into its medieval form by Capella and Cassiodorus.

The classical Christian movement does not claim to sanction every medieval or classical principle of education. Capella's pagan beliefs concerning vengeful, distrustful gods, subject to powers higher than themselves, have no place in it. The seven liberal arts are prized by Sayers and Wilson as means to wisdom, but not as a path to union with the gods. Nor do classical Christian

educators believe men are subject to fate. The idea that humans can become masters over the gods through education is utterly foreign to them as well. That Sayers and Wilson reject these pagan medieval assumptions is important but not surprising.

A difference between the two programs that is quite striking, however, is their definitions of grammar. According to Capella, grammar referred to literature, social studies and mythology with written historical accounts and legends serving as textbooks for these studies. However, Sayers' assertions that grammar is the basic structure of a subject as well as her descriptions of the "grammars" for the various subjects are not found in Capella's or Cassiodorus' books. Classical Christian education's anchor is not secure; the "trivium" approach cannot be found in the articles that the program is founded upon. Yes, grammar and logic were taught in medieval days, but they were not, as Sayers claimed, methods of dealing with subjects; they were actual subjects. Based on Sayers' unsubstantiated claims and encouraged by Wilson's endorsement, today's classical Christian education movement understands the trivium to be more of a teaching strategy than the program of studies that it was.

In addition, classical Christian education assumes that this teaching strategy applies to all children. Again, based on Dorothy Sayers' account of the styles of learning that she could remember preferring as a child, Wilson and others have assumed not only that all children learn according to the pattern described by Sayers, but that ancient educators discovered this and tailored their program to accommodate children's natural learning processes. However, the

research shows that classical and medieval educators organized their curriculum according to what they believed would fashion and mold boys into “proper” men. Classical and medieval education began with material chosen not on the basis of how children learn best, but primarily on the basis of what was necessary to transform them into the right kind of productive citizens and leaders.

Based on this principle, Quintilian even included archaic musical curriculum into his program of studies. Because literature and historical records containing the wisdom of past ages were preserved in ancient songs, Quintilian believed it necessary for his students to study these songs to become better acquainted with the ideas and beliefs that shaped their culture. This brings us to the concept of history.

History as informative, not necessarily authoritative, is a principle shared by both modern and ancient educators. Closely linked to this idea is the assumption that societal cooperation and civilization are impossible without a citizenry sharing fundamental values and skills. These must be introduced and supported in the home, but it is the school’s task to train children in these matters (Wilson, 1991).

Quintilian and Wilson both assume education is to lead and govern. To the former, education equips leaders to withstand the forces that destroy classical civilization, whereas Wilson wishes his students to battle the worldview that has taken hold of his country. Both also realize the role of the family and especially the father in the shaping of his son’s character, recognizing that the school is not the primary influence in a child’s life, and that without the development of an



honorable character, a good education will be of little profit. Although Quintilian discourages corporal punishment because it produces pain and fear which are detrimental to studying, Wilson claims it is necessary for students to be punished physically for severe misbehavior, but if there is no repentance, the child should be dismissed from the school community. Both Wilson and Quintilian recognize that the school cannot produce character that was not developed at home (Quintilian, 1921).

More of Quintilian's assumptions surface in classical Christian education, although most have been modified to some degree. Both programs share the view that teachers of children in the grammar stage must focus on cultivating the faculty of memory; they assert that minds of children at such a young age are equipped to do little more than that. Another similarity is the assumption (although based on different principles) that children are by nature quick to learn. Quintilian argues that souls are heavenly, immaterial beings that naturally attune to abstractions and theories. Wilson, on the other hand, claims God created children to learn His truth provided their teachers present that truths concerning themselves, the world and God properly. Yet both also recognize a human aversion to education. Quintilian acknowledges that boys need wise and tender guidance to learn to love their studies, whereas Wilson recognizes that children are by nature sinful—inclined to laziness, disobedience and apathy toward truth.

It is interesting to note that Plato's idealism, having been somewhat tempered by Quintilian, is in another way revived again by Wilson. According to Plato, a very extensive education system would conform the brightest students to

the demands of the absolute and qualify them to rule. Quintilian, on the other hand, clearly pointed out that the perfect orator could not exist, but, taking his cue from Isocrates, proceeded to set forth his best curriculum regardless, trusting that it would prove beneficial nonetheless. Today, Wilson claims that concerning child-development, “God has given parents a profound authority over their children. If they use that authority correctly, with much love and affection, the children will wholeheartedly follow the God of their parents” (Wilson, 1991). Although the Bible certainly teaches “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it”, we dare not for a second forget that we cannot. We cannot use our authority correctly; we do not have the holy love and affection that is required to raise our children to the honor of God. Wilson’s case may be true, but given the reality of our sinful nature, his point is moot. Yet praise God that His nature is merciful, gracious and loving. Though parental training cannot save children, God’s grace is sufficient for these parents and their little ones.

A brief examination of a group of ancient, yet “unclassical” people, the Hebrews, can help to highlight a particular emphasis in classical education that must be made clear. “There is nothing in Hebrew thinking that encourages man to ‘make himself’, no ideal of *paideia* or *humanitas* that will enable him to shape his own perfection. In the Jewish cosmos God, not man, is the measure of all things” (Castle, 1969). Old Testament believers understood their duty was to learn dependence, not perfection. God provided His people with priests, whose responsibilities were primarily conservative in preserving Biblical forms of worship,

and prophets, whose tasks were to reform disobedient behaviour. Children were signs of God's blessing. While it would be a mistake to label Jewish education “child-centred” in the modern secular sense, Castle points out tremendous differences between classical and Hebraic teaching. Children were not merely tolerated or constrained to become useful; rather, they played a central role in the Hebrew holidays and ceremonies which were designed to arouse their curiosity and gave opportunities for morally based stories to be told. The Passover and other ceremonies indulged children in taste, smell, touch, sight and hearing and allowed all their questions about the feast to be answered.

Contrasting sharply with this Hebraic attitude, to Greek and Roman parents, “[t]he idea of a ‘child-centred’ education was quite foreign to their attitude of childhood. The purpose behind Greek education was to make good adults, particularly good men, and they did not believe that infancy had much to do with the process” (Castle, 1969). In fact, infanticide was practiced regularly, no cultural value forbade parents from selling their children into slavery and no civil law prohibited a father from condemning his child to death! This classical view of the child is necessary to point out because it has implications in today’s classical Christian schools. Classical Christian educators are, of course, innocent of such heinous practices as those just mentioned, yet remnants of this view of the child still linger in today’s classical Christian psychology despite their sincere attempts at articulating a Christian understanding of children. When Wilson advises: “Many parents should not consider it. Classical education has high and challenging standards” (Wilson, 1996), it must be recognized that elements of Plato’s and

Quintilian's elitism have been uncritically synthesized into the very structure of today's classical Christian education.

*Classical Christian Education: Incompatible with a Reformed Christian Perspective on Education*

There is much that unites Reformed Christian and classical Christian education. Both programs are rooted in the faith that God has revealed Himself in the Scriptures which are the ultimate authority not only in educational matters but to all of life's issues. Both highly esteem the value of Bible study, history and literacy; recognizing that there is no neutrality in education, they also both insist that all subjects be approached from a Christian perspective. This similarity also ensures that both programs focus on training children how to think well, which necessitates teaching children to think Christianly. The Reformed Christian community should be encouraged that God is leading increasing numbers of Christians to take more seriously their responsibilities to train their children in the fear of the Lord.

Furthermore, classical Christian education has uncovered a number of insights that Reformed Christian communities would do well to consider and implement as a comparison of the two programs exposes certain weaknesses in current Reformed educational practice. We must take these cautions seriously and repair our damages. It is my plan to address some of these challenges in the pages that follow. However, in response to my original research question: "Is classical Christian education compatible with a Reformed Christian perspective on education?" the research compels me to argue a straightforward "no". My position will be supported by contrasting classical and Reformed responses to the

following questions: Whom do we teach? Why do we teach? And how do we teach? Inevitably these answers will become somewhat intertwined, as each question cannot be discussed without some form of presupposed answers to the others. However, I will attempt to answer them as clearly as possible in the above order.

### *Whom Do We Teach?*

Wilson reveals sound Biblical wisdom concerning the nature of children; he stresses a high view of human dignity yet a realistic view of human sin (Wilson, 1991). Not only does he recognize that many children have a God-given curiosity that Christian teachers should cultivate and discipline into a lifelong love for learning, but that apathy, laziness and rebellion are chief deterrents to developing talents for the Lord. Reformed educators would do well to avail themselves of Wilson's insights and recommendations as his explorations of these issues are more extensive and more practical for teachers than those found in contemporary Reformed educational literature. However, Wilson does not take children's covenant membership seriously enough to ensure that his program will measure up to one that is based on a Reformed understanding of the covenant and its children.

High and challenging educational standards are honoring to God and respectful to children; but the decision to design a school that serves only the best and the brightest, which of necessity leaves the academically neediest and weakest covenant children by the wayside, should be rejected in a Reformed Christian community. Jesus does not want us to love God with our minds only; He commands us to take care of our neighbors as well (Matthew 22). Moses did

not tell the Israelite parents to focus on their intelligent children. He demanded that all children be instructed in every law of the Lord (Deuteronomy 6). James admonishes that pure and undefiled religion in the eyes of the Father involves taking care of those who are the most deprived (James 1). If Christian education is one of our greatest responsibilities to God and one of the greatest gifts we can give to our covenant children, then God's people must make a resolute effort to ensure that the education they design is indeed appropriate for the children God entrusts to them.

This anti-covenantal aspect of classical Christian education is one feature that makes it incompatible with a Reformed understanding of education. Wilson is correct in asserting that through Deuteronomy 6, God gives specific teaching demands to Christian parents. Yet God is addressing not only parents but the entire covenant community with their collective responsibility to love God and in doing so to live in such a way that His covenant children are taught how to live for Him as well. They are called to become stewards over His creation (Genesis 1), to be holy (Exodus 19), and to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28). If Christians organize a school to help accomplish these objectives, its very structure and purpose must cry out that all kinds of covenant children are welcome and necessary to its mandate.

That is why responsive discipleship is emphasized so strongly in Reformed Christian education. After Adam, the heart of every child is inclined to rebel against God—the very Being she or he was designed to worship. This rebellion has severe implications for learning and development, as children were created with unifying

hearts that direct their emotions, thoughts, beliefs, personalities—every issue in their lives. For this reason, Reformed Christian educators see their task as much more than teaching children to think Christianly. As Fennema explains, “The inclusion of both commitment and response is vital to a biblical theory of learning” (Fennema, 1994). God commands His covenant children not only to understand, but also to believe and act upon their knowledge.

“Classrooms must therefore be places where students learn to bear each other’s burdens and share each other’s joys, and where they learn to work together for the common good” (Van Brummelen, 2002). Such an emphasis does not detract from the school’s mission to train students and equip each of them with life skills; neither does it eradicate individual responsibility. Applying this Biblical principle in the classroom is necessary to prevent teachers from implicitly ingraining the individualism that numerous Reformed educators persistently warn against (Stronks and Blomberg, 1993; Van Dyk 1997, 2000). They are concerned that children studying primarily for personal gain, surrounded for twelve years by classmates also working in a system geared principally for individual response, will adopt very unbiblical notions of community and individuality. Without an accurate understanding of who the child is (not just as an individual, but especially a member of the covenant) classical Christian education has not clearly discerned its target and cannot but miss its mark.

Reacting against public schools and governmentally regulated education, the classical Christian movement adopted the *in loco parentis* argument. Schools and teachers derive their authority not from the government, but from parents. And not

wishing to intrude where it believes it has no authority, classical Christian education wishes to focus primarily on training the mind to think Christianly. Believing its role is not to inculcate but to reinforce values taught in the home, classical Christian education trusts that these efforts, combined with church and home instruction, will equip the child for Christian leadership. Van Dyk's caution should be heeded in this matter: "The *in loco parentis* principle suggests that the authority and responsibility of the school are not fundamentally different from the authority and responsibility of the family. And if there is no difference, schools should be able to do whatever parents do" (Van Dyk, 2000).

Just as a dentist, doctor or driving instructor does not fulfil his duties *in loco parentis*, neither do teachers. This is not to say that Reformed Christian teachers may assume a lofty ultra-professional attitude by defying contractual agreements and ignoring parental communication; but that is a different issue. *In loco parentis* unnecessarily confuses the issues of responsibility and authority. Neither the electrician nor the roofer repairing the school building is reminded their labor is performed *in loco parentis*. This does not grant them licence to perform their tasks autonomously; it frees competent craftsmen to do their assigned work well.

On the other hand, while classical Christian education philosophy is at odds with its practice in this case, the Reformed position is not so watertight either. This can be seen in Van Dyk's comparison of the function of church, home and school. While stressing that all three institutions are involved in discipleship, Van Dyk claims that the distinguishing focus of each can be described as follows: "In the home, children are led into a trusting and emotionally secure kind of discipleship. In



the church the focus falls on worship, faith and fellowship. The Christian school, however, aims at knowledgeable and competent discipleship” (Van Dyk, 2000). Wilson would argue correctly from Proverbs and Ephesians that parents, especially fathers, are accountable to God for the education of their children; and the intimate setting pictured in Deuteronomy 6 clearly implies that much of this instruction must take place in and around the home. Although it is certainly worthy for parents to avail themselves of their community’s help via a Christian school if this will assist them to fulfil their parental responsibilities in a more God-honoring manner, none-the-less, principle instructional tasks remain inherent to both church and home.

So it is regrettable that when Reformed educational leaders write about pedagogy and curriculum, they habitually focus exclusively on classrooms and schools. We do not separate education from school work and although many fervent wishes are expressed for greater parental involvement in education, few strategies to accomplish this goal are expressed. Although much Reformed educational literature focuses on “covenant” and “community,” it is usually in terms of student and teacher relationships; parental participation is discussed much less. We would do well to examine whether our school structure encourages parental contribution rather than abdication. In fact, Van Dyk has a timely warning that is of a similar nature: “Surely we agree that while schools are in fact increasingly taking over parenting duties—due to the continuing breakdown of the family—they ought not to do so. They are neither designed nor intended for that” (Van Dyk, 2000).

Given the fresh parental roots of the classical Christian movement, it is not surprising that this association is dedicated to honoring parental responsibilities; it

has structured the school program with this principle in mind. “From Deuteronomy, Proverbs, Ephesians, and other scriptural references, we understand that training children up in the Lord is a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week job. It is also clear from Scripture that the father, not the mother (even though she has the stronger nurturing impulse), has the responsibility to ensure his children are thoroughly trained *i.e.*, educated well, in the Lord” (Wilson, 1996).

This robust classical emphasis on parental responsibility explains why homeschooling is appreciated in classical Christian circles and it is in this light that an unhealthy Reformed tradition should be scrutinized. While classical Christian schools do not take their covenantal responsibilities seriously enough, the Reformed Christian practice has developed a hyper-covenantal reaction. There is little Reformed curriculum generated for homeschool groups and even less attention is given by Reformed Christian leaders to educational issues not directly related to classroom instruction. The Christian school is perceived to be the only covenantal means to fulfilling Deuteronomy 6. This is especially evidenced in Reformed educational policies that actually prohibit teachers from educating their own children at home. Perhaps this strand of thinking is a remnant of the fortress mentality described by John Bolt that characterized the early immigrant years of the Reformed Christian education movement in North America (Bolt, 1993).

Whereas the classical school model is too “parental” and neglects the academically weak students in the covenant community, Wilson himself, as a classical Christian education leader, goes to great lengths to honor the covenant by assisting homeschooling parents who cannot be convinced to enrol their children in a

classical Christian school. And he fervently tries to convince them that their children are better off in an actual school building (Wilson, 2003)! Wilson's example reveals that our practice has become more communal than covenantal, leaving in the lurch children who would be better educated for discipleship in a home environment than in a classroom.

This comparison of the classical and Reformed view of the child reveals differences in our understanding of parental and covenant responsibilities. It highlights the fact that we must expand our reductionistic educational vision that tends to limit covenant involvement to Christian school attendance. A Reformed Christian community ought to encourage Christian school enrolment; but it has no authority to dictate these terms. Such an edict has absolutely nothing to do with Deuteronomy, Proverbs or Ephesians as it does not assist parents in their God-ordained responsibilities; it robs them of this responsibility. This leads us to consider the issue of why we teach in the first place.

#### *Why Do We Teach?*

“For 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” (Sayers, 1947). This no-nonsense, utilitarian approach is appreciated by the founders of classical Christian education. Recognizing the academic failure and repulsed by the spiritual apostasy of the secular education program, these parents latched on to a proposal espoused by this talented Christian writer who shared many of their educational concerns. Learn to think; love learning; understand your cultural heritage; take every thought captive to Christ; develop a Christian

worldview. For these commendable reasons, many pursue a classical Christian education.

Unfortunately, classical Christian education features too many essentialist and perennialist traits that end up displacing Biblical educational purposes. I do not wish to say there are no essentialist or perennialist characteristics to education; of course children must learn facts, skills, cultural understanding, historical awareness, rational thinking and the like. Solomon chooses the verbs: hear, listen, receive, apply, cry out, seek and search (Proverbs 5) to convey the strain required in gaining knowledge and Wilson's emphasis on discipline, effort and accountability flow naturally from passages like this. The expressly stated goals of classical Christian education include: "Teach all subjects as parts of an integrated whole with the Scriptures at the center. Provide a clear model of the Biblical Christian life through our staff and Board. Encourage every child to begin and develop his relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ. Emphasize Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric in all subjects. Encourage every student to develop a love for learning and live up to his or her academic potential. Provide an orderly atmosphere conducive to the attainment of the above goals" (Wilson, 1991). Yet, missing from this list is a goal that takes seriously the admonition: "And further my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:12&13). Classical goal number three

talks about loving God and Jesus, but the program is oriented much more toward the mastery of content than to Christian discipleship.

This emphasis on content over and above individual learning styles, pedagogic strategy, heart response, student application and discipleship is yet a legacy of the ancients' faith in curriculum. Classical culture had such a great respect for the content of the material to be learned that those who taught and how they taught mattered little or not at all. Castle reflects in a humorous yet somewhat bitter tone: "And so the 'trail of cheapness,' which has dogged the teaching profession for centuries, was evident even in this remote past when the most civilized people of the ancient world were content to employ slaves and indigent misfits to teach their children" (Castle, 1969). The *Paidagogos* would escort children back and forth to school and assist them with lessons when necessary. Whether it is ironic or not, the literary ancestors of today's pedagogues were assigned to their teaching duties because they were considered to be the slaves who were the least productive in their household tasks! Similarly, the instruction of elementary school lessons was left to men who enjoyed no more respect than the *Paidagogos*. Teachers received no special training, were poorly paid and were generally disdained by society. As a result, it was not uncommon for a nine year old child to be incapable of writing his name (Marrow, 1977). My concern is that the Greek and Roman purpose for education—grounding their children in a prescribed curriculum to mold them into proper men—lingers in classical Christian education and explains its intellectualistic and individualistic nature.

We can read and write Christian curriculum for eternity and still generate nothing but confusion and gain only fatigue, because the answer to our questions and the truth we need to know is the actual doing of God's will. If our reading, writing and studying are conducted at the expense of fearing God and doing His commandments (loving Him and our neighbor) we do not teach wisdom, but weariness and despair. And when Sayers' individualistic purpose for education is adopted, Reformed educators must recognize that Greek individualism has usurped Hebrew covenantal concern.

We want children to learn to think for themselves, but this is certainly not the definitive characteristic of Christian education.

We strive for obedience, not independence! We teach because God tells us to; He commands us to practice and preach the Christian life. These are the means by which God is glorified, by which children are led in paths of righteousness and by which the covenant community is blessed. We teach not only because children must learn the things we have to teach, but because we have so much to learn about children, obedience and our holy God. That God designed teaching to be a blessing not only to those taught but also to those who teach must prevent us from uncritically taking the classical position that assumes education is the transformation of useless boys into useful men.

Reformed education calls students to practice discipleship and gives them many and varied opportunities to do so. A child's developing relationship with God involves more than working hard at a desk and behaving properly for a Christian teacher. Equipping children for a life of Christian service in this world

and the next is one of the reasons Nicholas Wolterstorff demands: “There must be a carry-over, a significant, deliberately aimed-at carry-over, from life in the classroom to life outside the classroom” (Oppewal, 1997). His fear is that instruction aimed at training children to think Christianly is inadequate; he insists Reformed education be oriented to help children live Christianly. “If the schooling of our children focuses just on mind-formation, then we must expect that when they emerge from school and take up their adult lives, they will *talk* the Christian mind and *live* the mind of the world” (Bolt, 1993). Classical Christian schools are heading in the right direction when they insist their teachers model the Christian life. But this requirement is ill-defined; it must be mandatory that the teaching be specifically Christian.

But Wolterstorff is not the only definitive voice on Reformed education, and even a cursory reading of his literature reveals much criticism of Reformed educational practice, along with demands for ambitious changes. In other words, his description of Reformed education is based more on what he desires than on what he sees practiced. Furthermore, his objections were largely directed against Reformed teaching that he understood to be too intellectualistic in character. How is it then that my criticisms of classical Christian education should echo so closely the charges laid against Reformed Christian education by Nicholas Wolterstorff? A study of Peter De Boer’s monograph, *Shifts in Curricular Theory for Christian Education* with a consideration of John Vriend’s perceptive analysis on Reformed Christian education in our time, *Understanding Differences in Christian Education*, helps to shed light on the confusion surrounding how

classical and Reformed education at times seem so connected, while in other respects the differences between them prove unbridgeable.

According to De Boer, “Reformed Christians in North America still do not have, in a single volume, a definitively expressed and officially endorsed philosophy of Christian education. But if this thirty-five year history of curriculum theory within that community is reasonably accurate, Reformed Christians seem to be fairly well agreed on where they are going” (De Boer, 1983). We have largely succeeded, claims De Boer, in synthesizing the traditional elements of Reformed education (emphasizing the Lordship of Christ, the antithesis, the Christian mind and historical consciousness) with the progressive themes raised in the 50s and 60s (concerning child psychology, development, the nature of the learner, discipleship and heart response). “All this provides a full, rich, theoretical base for a Reformed Christian curriculum aimed ultimately at living the Christian life” (De Boer, 1983).

Vriend agrees that the predominant direction in which Reformed education is heading is clear and recognizable, but he is not completely satisfied with it, as he sees too many progressive and even reconstructionist themes emerging that have begun to replace some essential school purposes. And contrary to De Boer’s analysis, Vriend points out that not all Reformed educators are in accord with the Reformed synthesis just described. He has discerned three perspectives, or differences in emphasis, that have emerged in the Reformed educational community: confessionalists, progressive Calvinists and antitheticals. These classifications, in his view, represent three Reformed approaches to



education that exhibit distinct features because each expresses a unique theological interpretation and cultural attitude. He stresses that each group's emphasis must be carefully considered by all teachers, but admonishes Reformed educators for hastily endorsing preferred teaching strategies and uncritically claiming Biblical support for them. The fact that Reformed educators have been arguing both for and against competition, inquiry learning, cooperative learning and direct instruction in the classroom, claiming Biblically referenced arguments for every strategy has motivated Vriend to take the time to clarify differences in Biblical interpretation and the resulting attitudes toward culture and education that lead some to depend on more traditional teaching practices and provoke others to adopt more progressive pedagogy.

### *Confessionalist*

Vriend concedes De Boer's assertion that Jellema, Stob, Flokstra and Zylstra belong in the "traditional" camp, with their emphasis not on methodology, but on a content of academic liberal arts curriculum designed to cultivate the mind. "The purpose of education was a heart committed to God and working for His Kingdom, but the focus of the school was limited and cognitive, using many ideas associated with essentialism and perennialism" (Vriend, 1992). Today Theodore Plantinga represents a group Vriend classifies as "confessionalist Reformed," who urge Reformed Christian educators to teach our own theology, confessions and history in order to equip students to withstand contemporary temptations. Common grace is very limited and the Christian tradition is under serious attack by the spirits of the age. The school is understood to have a limited

and academic task in child development and is encouraged to respect the role of the home and church in covenant community life.

While stressing these essentialist and perennialist themes, Plantinga adamantly opposes any notion of a universally valid body of truth. That is why he is so opposed to rhetoric about developing a Christian worldview through education. “The point of view emphasis is a hangover from the science ideal and Greek visualism. The thinking behind it—never expressed in quite the words I will use here—is this. Secular thought is a complete body of knowledge whose internal structure is determined by a point of view, or perspective, or philosophy, or perhaps worldview. Christian thought is an alternative body of knowledge (also complete—in principle, at least) which derives its structure from the “Christian perspective” (or point of view, or worldview)” (Bolt, 1993).

It is my conviction that Reformed educators should seriously consider Plantinga’s admonition. Since un-Christian philosophies of education contain only elements or distortions of truth, it is tempting to idealize that a picture perfect, completely accurate philosophy of education exists and that such a one is Christian. This belief is misguided because it assumes a Platonic understanding of truth and knowledge. According to the Bible, we do not know by conceptualizing something or by seeing the whole picture, as is the Western civilization’s (inherited from Plato) understanding of knowing. We know by experiencing; Biblical knowing involves trust. It is detrimental that we use so much visual imagery to express knowing and understanding. This contributes to our defining knowing as visualizing, which easily results in absolutism and

legalism (when we think we see the whole picture) or relativism (when we realize people have different views and that no one can visualize the whole picture).

“My suggestion is that we should give up the illusion that we are imposing a Christian perspective on every bit of subject matter we take up in our schools. Instead, we should understand the uniqueness of the Christian teacher and school primarily in terms of the selection of subject matter. Given that there are more books than we can ever read, more organisms than we can ever study, more historical eras than we can ever investigate, which ones do we focus on as significant for Christian awareness?” (Bolt 1993). It may seem that Plantinga’s approach is too focused on the issue of what we teach and that he neglects the questions of whom we teach, how we do so, and why education matters in the first place. However, Bolt explains, “Plantinga is convinced that ‘teaching is telling.’ Note the shift here from a visual to an oral metaphor. This notion underscores the authoritative and fiduciary character of the task. The teacher does not merely pass on information. He or she has been entrusted with shaping the lives of the community’s children. The teacher’s credibility and moral character are thus crucial qualifications for the task of telling” (Bolt, 1993). While Plantinga is clearly concerned that Reformed education train not only the intellect but Christian character as well, it must be noted that his consideration of learning styles and teaching strategies is quite limited; he stresses Christian awareness over Christian action; in effect, aside from his opposition to speaking of knowledge in visual metaphors and non-commitment to trivium methodology, his confessionalist purpose for education is in many ways similar to classical

Christian purposes for education. This explains not only why certain elements of classical Christian education seem well-matched to a number of confessionalist Reformed educational goals, but also why many confessionally minded Reformed Christians have been attracted to the classical model and are turning to it.

*Positive Calvinist*

The fact that classical Christian education has been attracting so many Reformed believers underscores the point made by De Boer and confirmed by Vriend: Reformed education can no longer be described exclusively in traditional terms. Conservative and confessionally minded Reformed believers lamenting the loss of a more traditional approach have been comforted in discovering a vigorous classical Christian education that is not ashamed to promote some of the very values they feared lost, while Reformed Christian schools have been joyfully welcoming increasing numbers of non-Reformed Christians. The new Reformed education synthesis has De Boer's blessing but Vriend's observations make him hesitant to endorse all these developments. He notes that on the other side of the spectrum of Reformed believers, the positive Calvinists have been very industrious in the realm of education, and are responsible for the shift (or synthesis) in focus described by De Boer.

Positive Calvinists have followed the progressives in being more optimistic about innovations and the natural inclination of the child to learn, to explore constructively, to do what is right, and to be creative. With the progressives they have led in calls for an integrated curriculum, more open classrooms, whole language

instruction, and less restrictive discipline. With less emphasis on knowledge and wisdom from the past and less inclination to build attitudes and skills appropriate to success in our present unjust society, positive Calvinists are more inclined to look to *process* or instructional strategies as a key to Christian distinctiveness.

Therefore, problem solving, cooperative inquiry, critical thinking, and empowerment are accepted more readily than is cultivation of the mind via traditional disciplines (Vriend, 1992).

The positive Calvinist committed to cultural involvement and its conviction that genuine learning involves commitment of the heart and responsive action, is served well by progressive and reconstructionist educational theory.

“Oppewal stressed that for the Christian, knowing is a process of thinking and doing, or mental and physical arts. He emphasized that to know God is to engage in mental acts about Him (rooted in Revelation) but also to respond to Him in obedience or disobedience. Therefore, his interactive methodology was to have three phases: a ‘consider phase’ in which the student is confronted with new material, a ‘choose phase’ in which options for response are clarified and implications better understood, and a ‘commit phase’ where there is a commitment to act on the response of the earlier phase” (Vriend, 1992).

Much of the Reformed educational literature produced in the past twenty years has expanded on the phases of learning proposed by Oppewal; “the positive Calvinist mentality has been the most productive in presenting proposals to shape and reform Christian schooling. This has meant, too, that Christian educators

recently have drawn the most on progressive and reconstructionist theories” (Vriend, 1992).

Wolterstorff’s calls for Christian action and Van Brummelen’s emphasis on personal piety mark the shift from the traditional Reformed educational interest in academic content to an increased emphasis on a child-centered methodology and discipleship training. John Van Dyk can also be recognized as sharing this purpose for education with his focus on collaboration.

He has rejected a directed teaching model that Paulo Friere has characterized negatively as a ‘banking’ approach in which knowledge is deposited in students’ heads by a teacher. In its place Van Dyk proposed the idea of “Shared Praxis” from Thomas Groome in which students share their views and experiences, reflect on these, receive additional information from the teacher, appropriate this information, and then choose personal responses for the future (Van Dyk 1990, p2-3). This approach begins and ends with student experience with the purpose of ‘transforming’ the student’s world and ‘empowering’ the student to act. This approach is far removed from essentialism and perennialism and rather seeks via Christian education to liberate the student as individual and to transform culture through the liberated and empowered insight. It is probably accurate to characterize this as a sort of ‘Christian liberation pedagogy.’ It, nevertheless, has its

roots in the transforming emphasis of reconstructionist and positive Calvinist thought (Vriend, 1992).

This strand of Reformed pedagogy is the farthest removed from the classical Christian approach and it is the direction being taken by the majority of our educational leaders. Blomberg, Brouwer, De Boer, Koole, Stronks, Ulstein, Vander Ark and Vryhof all express their favor with it in *A Vision with a Task* and *12 Affirmations*. Over against the “defensive” confessionalist mentality, positive Calvinists assert “Christians who paint too grim a picture of the world need to remember that the world is not going around meaninglessly; nor is it ‘headed for hell in a hand-basket.’ Instead, the whole creation is being changed for Christ’s coming... students in the Christian school are taught that God the Father is in control, that Christ is triumphant, and that the Holy Spirit is present and working. Our world belongs to God” (Brouwer, Ulstein, Vryhof and Vander Ark, 1990).

Why then do we teach? Vriend’s analysis of *12 Affirmations* reveals that according to the positive Calvinists,

The task of the school is to usher in this new creation.

‘Stewardship, justice, and compassion are [to be] translated into practice’ (p.31). This goal is set over against an intellectual role for the school and over against ‘developing young minds’ (p.32).

Schooling is our wrestling with the social evils of ‘cynicism, militarism, and economic exploitation,’ and ‘above all... provides an environment that stimulates and cultivates compassion’ (p. 34, 38). Christian students are urged to be ‘cosmopolitan’ and to ‘see

the limitations of their own ‘tribal’ (ethnic) culture [rather than] confuse biblical norms with the prevailing Caucasian, capitalistic, middle class, or any other secular norms’ (p 42). Schools should ‘address real problems’ and students ‘generate real products’ because they are ‘change agents’ (p 54). This is vintage reconstructionism and does not express the central ideas of either confessionalist or antithetical Calvinists (Vriend, 1992).

Such forward looking purposes for education contrast sharply with classical ideology. “The reason we need to rebuild is that we do not understand our heritage. We need to rebuild because of what we have lost; we do not know how to rebuild because we have lost it. The resultant problem demands constant humility from all who seek a reformation in education. Returning to the culture of the Protestant West is not something we know how to do” (Wilson, 1996 and 2003). But these two utterly incompatible programs—the first glorifying the future and the second exalting the past—share a common bond. Both cannot help but define themselves except in reaction both to cultural wrongs and to the errors performed in other programs of education. The positive Calvinist has mostly negative things to say about direct instruction, total depravity, classroom discipline, cultural tradition, and teacher authority while classical Christian literature eagerly heaps scorn on programs not sufficiently “classical” or “Christian”! This common bond of dissatisfaction with contemporary Christian education and society has an extremely formative influence on the two programs and inspires them both to reconstruction and transformation. “The wheels are



coming off our postmodern culture, like it was Pharaoh's chariot, and we should not be surprised when we finally see the deliverance of the Lord. To alter the picture somewhat, neither should we be surprised when we find ourselves in possession of vineyards we did not plant and wells we did not dig. This is God's way. But we are supposed to prepare for that time so that when it arrives we are not astonished—and unprepared (Wilson, 1999).

### *Antithetical*

Antithetical Reformed education is not concerned with the classical Christian lament over the loss of our cultural heritage and its sense of responsibility to restore it. Yes, we live in an evil age in which our words and deeds must proclaim God's truth and glory. Yes, we must study and discern past acts of faithfulness and rebellion along with their fruits and consequences. But we are not called to restore our culture to past conditions. Some eras may seem godlier than others, but the Devil has always been busy; he was not on holidays during the Reformation either. Yet Christ has always been Lord over history, directing it towards its appointed end. A Reformed philosophy of education does not allow us to attempt to restore what may seem to have been a golden age.

Nevertheless, I appreciate the classical Christian desire to cultivate a love for learning, an understanding of history and contemporary culture, an attentiveness to sin and an appreciation for discipline. It is also my conviction that the Reformed confessionalist respect for home and church responsibilities that limit the educational function of the school is necessary to remember, as is their intent to be selective of curriculum material. The confessionalist mentality

has helped to protect Reformed education from careless synthesis with secular pedagogy. But the positive Calvinist keen desire for discipleship training, their emphasis on equipping children for Christian action, and their interest in distinctively Christian teaching methods are also essential, it seems to me, to a comprehensive philosophy of education. Positive Calvinists have shown that God's blessings are not restricted to traditional theories of education. We are called to test the spirits and practice discernment continually and not to put our trust in past practice alone.

My beliefs and practice compel me to position myself in this third, antithetical category. No educator can fit perfectly under any one label, and a label is only helpful if it helps us to identify and correct our own, not another's, weaknesses or errors. Since I am using these categories to identify some different areas of emphasis and pedagogic tendencies that reside among Reformed Christian educators, I must place myself under a label as well. My conviction is that Reformed Christian education should be characterized as conscientiously antithetical. Every group mentioned above would agree that Christian education must be antithetical, but what this means is manifested differently in every case. I wish to plead that our differences exist because we are not as antithetical as we should be.

“Because all of life is lived either in service to God or to an idol there is an antithesis between belief and unbelief” (Vriend, 1992). Neither historical wisdom nor modern discoveries; traditional instruction nor modern pedagogy are trusted too much. The antithesis is not a separation of past from present but the

distinction between faith and unbelief; it is the demarcation of the truth from the lie. No human heart can escape it and no humanly formulated and managed pedagogy can deny it or be delivered from it. For this reason an antithetical educator insists that caution and humility characterize all educational philosophy and practice. “This theme follows from the belief that the Christian life, in all its acceptance of God’s good creation and the cultural mandate, is still a struggle ‘against the authorities, against the powers of the dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms’” (Vriend, 1992).

Since God calls covenant children to obedience, they are accountable for their decisions and actions. However, since they are created with no more than childish abilities, they do not have grown-up responsibilities. Adults are accountable to God to lead them to maturity. Children require parents and covenant leaders to instruct them in Christ-like behavior, knowledge and attitudes. The antithetical educator stands behind Henry Zylstra’s assertion that education adds no value to the inherent worth of a student; it simply equips the child for ampler and better oriented cultural activity (Oppewal, 1997).

Why is teaching important? According to the Bible, “To fear God and keep His commandments is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes). This passage proclaims the glorious task granted to teachers: to nurture children in the way God has prescribed for them. Children by nature do not love God or their neighbor and are not instinctively inclined to learn and follow God’s commandments. Teaching children to love God with all their heart, soul and mind requires modeling, instruction, admonition, humility and much prayer. It involves the fruit

of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. Here we see the interconnectedness between the who, why and how of Christian education that Jellema refers to: “Religion and reason and morality are inextricably interwoven” (Oppewal, 1997). The knowledge and attitudes desired to be imparted to students cannot be taught unless they live in the teacher and are upheld in the community.

These covenant responsibilities are works fit for our King. His children are to be taught of the inheritance that is theirs and educators are warned: “Through lack of training the whole inheritance is sometimes lost” (Oppewal, 1997). The curriculum is functional and celebrative. It is important for children to learn literacy and mathematical skills to operate effectively in our society. A sound historical awareness is needed to enable students to understand their culture. Covenant children must be protected from the spirits of our age (individualism, consumerism, materialism, relativism, evolutionism—even capitalism and environmentalism can be listed among the idols of our time), be strengthened to withstand these idolatries and be prepared to give an account of the hope that is in them to their society.

Talents are to be discovered and refined, study skills taught and a love for learning fostered so that students will explore an extraordinary creation. All that God has made is worthy of study and thanksgiving. For service, enjoyment, for glory to God, curriculum ought to cultivate intellectual, artistic and physical abilities. Although the best works of Adam’s sinful descendants are filthy rags when compared to the holiness of God, those born of the Spirit are reckoned as

righteous by the blood of Christ. We who practice righteousness, however pitifully, are counted as righteous before the Father. So we dare to carry out our educational responsibilities.

Antithetical education desires to teach children truth that will give honor to God and be a blessing to them. It seeks to lead children to respond in Godly ways by providing them opportunities to practice this within the curriculum. Antithetical education is certainly not a spotless enterprise. We are no longer permitted to walk and talk with God in unadulterated fellowship within a perfect world. We struggle amid thistles and sweat. Yet we labor in hope and in joy which are as much a part of the curriculum as the skills we practice and the concepts we apply.

Antithetical educators recognize that textbooks, teacher guides and curriculum material are expressions of confession and worldview. That is why it is necessary to develop Christian curriculum and distinctive learning material. Henry Beversluis is a representative antithetical educator who aimed for the development of intellectual, moral and creative growth. He wished to blend the best progressive educational theories with essential features of the traditional curriculum. Yet Vriend's commentary on this matter is important to consider: "But Beversluis' main focus was more on curriculum than on teaching and learning theory. This seems to be true of most Christian educators who feel at home with the antithetical perspective" (Vriend, 1992). I would like to argue that in this area antitheticals have an obligation to widen their focus to include more serious considerations of teaching strategy.

Another antithetical emphasis can be expressed in John Bolt's Trinitarian framework. The argument goes that Christians who emphasize too much of any one Person of the Trinity at the expense of the others, will inevitably distort educational goals. If we focus only on God as Father and Creator we may become too accepting and affirming of creation and culture. If our educational theories concentrate exclusively on Christ as our deliverer we will fashion a more missionary oriented curriculum than an educational one. And if we focus solely on God the Holy Spirit as our sanctifier, we will be inclined to an emphasis on separation and holiness. To prevent these imbalances, the antithetical responds "Christian education must be fully trinitarian and must include the cultural mandate, the missionary mandate, and the call to holiness" (Bolt, 1984, p 113) (Vriend, 1992).

John Stronks and Jim Vreugdenhil's *Hallmarks of Christian Schooling* is a guide to Reformed Christian education that expresses the antithetical position very well. "On pedagogy they express an acceptance of a variety of instructional strategies, including directed instruction, cooperative learning strategies and some individualized instruction. On curriculum they stress a clearly mandated course of studies that is teacher directed but includes flexibility for individual response and exploration" (Vriend, 1992). Stronks and Vreugdenhil emphasize knowledge, skills, attitude and accountability.

Every Reformed educator must include in his/her pedagogical repertoire methods that can be classified as perennial, essential, progressive and reconstructive. It is important to have the proper balance and the antithetical

approach seems to me to include the best arrangement of study and application, personal accountability and covenantal concern, Biblical guidance and life skill development. Its principles and strategies are found in varying degrees in classical, confessionalist and positive Calvinist pedagogy. But in my analysis, the antithetical approach's prudent acceptance of modern pedagogy, its commitment to distinctively Christian content, its understanding of the covenantal educational role of the school in collaboration with the home and church compel me to associate myself with this kind of teaching. Classical Christian education shows its incompatibility to it not only in classical education's excessive emphasis on independent learning and glorification of the Protestant West, but especially in its trivium methodology.

Antithetical Reformed Christian education does not pin its hopes on the trivium in the belief that it is the educational foundation of western culture. We have not squandered a glorious age through neglect of the trivium. Blessings are squandered through disobedience to our holy God, which may be manifested in laziness and poor scholarship; but the trivium was not holy, and much about it certainly should have been discarded. In addition, my research has shown that the trivium underwent drastic changes time after time by those who taught it. At one time grammar involved learning history, literature, mythology, ancient songs and archaic languages all at once. While logic was normally understood to be formal training in Aristotelian logic, grammar rules and terms took centuries to develop before grammar became identified with parts of speech and sentence structure. Elements of rhetoric were modified over long periods of time as well. If the

medieval trivium is necessary to ensure a proper education, Christian classical educators still have much reforming to do as they have not restored the trivium of old but have fashioned a new one. This brings us to our final consideration.

### *How Do We Teach?*

Once again it is fair to report that classical and Reformed teaching have many similarities in terms of classroom curriculum. Both programs teach standard subjects: Bible, history, mathematics, literature, history, music, art, etc. although Latin is unique to classical Christian education. But the principal difference in methodology between the two programs is noticed clearly in classical objective number four: “Emphasize Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric in all subjects” (Wilson, 1991). This objective reveals a major incompatibility between the two programs.

I have already shown that Dorothy Sayers missed the mark in her call for the reinstatement of the trivium. My research has shown that the classical trivium did indeed refer to subject content and not, as Sayers’ claimed, to a teaching strategy tailored to meet the educational abilities of children. Although a tremendously gifted writer, Sayers was no expert in the area of education. She tried her hand at teaching in an elementary school for a brief period, but gave it up quickly and without any misgivings. Furthermore, she readily confessed that her educational theory was based simply upon recollections of her own childhood, personality and education. That she was an extremely talented and motivated student is beyond doubt. Her work ethic was remarkable. Yet her education involved private tutors in a home environment; her own father taught her Latin! It



must be understood that her extraordinary abilities and privileged opportunities do not validate her attempt to prescribe how most children learn, nor do they assure us that Sayers has helpful advice for classroom teachers. She cannot speak for the majority of children and their learning styles; it is irresponsible to assume that she does. In addition, a critical study of her accusations and promises in her keynote essay also reveal some disturbing assumptions.

After beginning her essay with a complaint that people were undiscerning, poor debaters and easily propagandized, she concluded that modern education teaches subjects rather than the art of thinking. This was not the case, she claimed, with the medieval trivium. I have already taken issue with her misrepresentation of the medieval trivium, but I also want to address Sayers' complaint that her generation was severely lacking in discernment and that the schools were to blame for this. First, Sayers supports her claim about the high numbers of improperly educated people in her day with no more than her opinion. Second, she completely absolves the home and church of their responsibility to impart values, good judgment and self-control, making the school wholly accountable for these weighty matters. A school is simply not authorized to usurp all these responsibilities.

Ironically, classical Christian education argues this very point—that its purpose is to bolster values taught in the home, not to inculcate its own. Sayers' strategy of holding formal education accountable for these faults in society only leads to endless criticism of education programs, because she assigns to it a task it is not designed to accomplish. If the church and home are not faithfully laboring

in their duties, therein lies the problem; the school cannot take on these tasks successfully. Like Sayers, Wilson is understandably upset with the (lack of) abilities in today's secular school graduates; but amid the many persuasive calls for well-trained minds, discipline and hard work, Reformed educators must remember that not independence, but equipping children for lives of service is the primary goal of our educational program.

A Reformed philosophy of education insists that memorization, analyzing and presenting are taught simultaneously, not consecutively. Upholding the dignity of subject matter and student, this method underscores that knowledge and skills are to be used, not stored away without comprehension or application. The Reformed understanding of learning goes beyond these three elements that involve primarily the intellect. Reformed learning attempts to reach the whole child; it involves developing skills, serving others, celebrating God's gifts and mourning sin's effects. It is physical, emotional, intellectual, and invites a heart response. Reformed students are called to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit through practice and application.

Furthermore, the belief that all children learn in the same manner is also incompatible with the Reformed understanding that each child is a unique image bearer of God. It is true that most children share similar characteristics and generally develop through the same stages, but curriculum should serve all the children if the school wishes to be called Reformed. Line up 30 children of the same age and ask them to run for twenty minutes. The fastest will cover three times the distance of the slowest and would eagerly run farther! Ask the same

students to draw a nature scene, work out some geometry problems, read a story, construct a persuasive speech, play a musical instrument, write a Mother's Day poem and throw a javelin; it will not take long to realize the incredible range in interest, attitude and talent found in 30 students. Then when actual teaching begins, the varying rates at which students learn can leave no one doubting the incredible uniqueness of each child. Reformed education attempts to treat children as unique image bearers of Christ who are called to develop knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and maturity whereas classical Christian education's focus is far too narrow.

Memorization is not the only, but certainly the primary focus of the Poll-parrot (grades three through six) stage, the time at which grammar is taught. Much time is spent chanting and singing Latin vocabulary including noun and verb endings, math facts, geographical features, historical dates and personalities. A Reformed primary teacher would certainly be interested in picking up some of these teaching tools but to adopt the classical assumption that memorization is the principal intellectual faculty in young children is inconsistent with a Reformed view of the child. Not only does this approach not adequately attend to their cognitive growth, but it does not seriously address their physical, social and emotional development either. Children must be provided with numerous structured opportunities to explore, create, question, practice, play, illustrate and demonstrate already in their earliest years of formal education.

Concerning child development, the classical Christian assessment of children in the Pert (junior high) stage is also seriously flawed. The entire

teaching strategy for students at this age is founded upon Sayers' opinion that they are argumentative. This is incredible! If an unsubstantiated personal opinion has sufficient merit upon which to establish a teaching theory, I must respond with my own observations. I have taught hundreds of twelve and thirteen year old students over the past ten years. Some question authority, others defy it and still more simply follow the rules established for them. A number of students question ideas and traditions but more try not to think too much about these issues that I encourage them to investigate, understand and appreciate. We may not forget that argumentative and passive children are found at every grade level and Christian teachers must be diligent to attend to each and every type of student. Children at the "Pert" age cannot be so quickly lumped into one category labeled "argumentative" and it is a mistake to base pedagogy on such a notion.

Sayers and Wilson assume the logic stage of the trivium is the method to teach students how to question vigorously and properly. While this objective is certainly listed among Reformed educational goals, it should not dominate all instruction at this educational stage. Students cannot be instructed in music lessons, physical education skills, principles of art and many mathematical concepts according to the logic approach. It is purely intellectual in scope and while the development of a Christian mind is necessary, it is not sufficient. Such an approach does not do justice to multifaceted image bearers of God, called to develop all their talents to serve others and bring glory to their King.

Lastly, it is the classical Christian conviction that children in their Poetic (high school) years can be described as terribly preoccupied with their own

appearance and so it is necessary for the curriculum to address this in an effective manner. This is an admirable goal, and, based on my observations, I can sympathize with it more than I can the previous two; yet the rhetoric strategy also leaves much to be desired. It is true that generally peer influence is very strong at this age. We would do well to remember and discuss with our students that this is the case largely because the structure of our educational system takes students from their families for most of their waking hours and surrounds them with hundreds of students with similar fears, desires, experiences and maturity. If all fifteen and sixteen year olds spent most of their time at home with mom, dad and their siblings, it stands to reason that many girls who are in the habit of dressing provocatively at school would not be as inclined to do so at home. Many boys who are convicted at school with the notion that all social interactions are revolving around them, making it terribly important to appear masculine and impressive, would have trouble conjuring up such an indulgent audience at home. Christian teachers must lovingly confront their students with the Lordship of Christ and the call to be followers of their Servant King. Students must be challenged to consider whether it is more important to adhere to a peer group's values or to the values of their Lord and Savior. Rhetoric does not solve the problem that Reformed Christian teachers wish to address.

Rhetoric consists of essays, debates, speeches, literature, apologetics and studies of that nature. It cannot be denied that these are all necessary ingredients in a Reformed program, but a Reformed educator would not be convinced that the fundamental instructional aim at this age involves teaching students how to

present their knowledge aesthetically. This is taught to and required of students through out every grade in Reformed Christian schools. Furthermore, it is simply unfathomable that at the high school level the main priority of education should involve sorting out and organizing all the knowledge the students have acquired in their Poll-parrot and Pert years via grammar and logic. Reflection continues in secondary school; it does not begin there.

Wilson claims that the trivium's three phases mirror Biblical principles of learning and wisdom: "Knowledge is given to young children. They are told to seek understanding. If they seek understanding diligently, over time they will come into wisdom" (Wilson, 2003). This is not an accurate model of education. Biblical knowing, understanding and wisdom all involve trust and obedience. Submission to God in spite of personal doubts also illustrates genuine knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Foolishness is disobedience. The lack of these Biblical ingredients in Wilson's definitions of knowledge, understanding and wisdom prompts Reformed educators to take issue with a definition of wisdom that is intellectualistic and too classical for Christian purposes.

### Conclusion

Classical Christian education has been developed by a group of intelligent and industrious Christian parents eager to find a substitute for an increasingly ineffective and immoral state-sponsored secular education. They oppose the decline of traditional education methods such as writing, reading, history, memorization, discipline, etc. They do not appreciate that the history of western civilization (especially records of Christian influence) is often neglected or

disparaged while cultural diversity becomes more and more celebrated. They see teacher training programs frittering away too much time trying to instill strategies on “how” to teach but inadequately dealing with “what” to teach. Not surprisingly, they recognize close connections between contemporary cultural developments and modern education; after all, both reflect the postmodern values that fuel them.

They did not look for Reformed Christian education programs to adopt or seek out Reformed Christian educational leaders for advice. That is regrettable because we could have given them much assistance. But now some soul searching is in order and Reformed Christian educators should be admonished. Recognizing that educational endeavors are not neutral, and hoping to teach their children a distinctly Christian worldview, Wilson saw professors in a prominent Reformed Christian college advocating that scientific work may not be bound to any ideology or religious belief system, whether natural or theistic. Instead, they argued that scientific inquiry must adhere to the accepted standards in the professional scientific community for the work to be truly called science and to be of benefit to others (Van Till, Young, Menninga, 1988). This lack of antithetical discernment, that science is not neutral and that rebellion against God is evidenced in all human activity, was appropriately denounced by Wilson (Wilson, 1999) and would understandably make him suspicious of Reformed Christian education.

So they developed an ambitious curriculum on their own that challenges students to think critically and Christianly about their culture, seeking to equip

them to fulfill their responsibilities to God in it. Since many confessionalist and antithetical Christians can relate to the cultural criticisms raised by classical Christian educators; the ring of truth heard in many of their proposals is appealing to many as well. They turn to historically oriented, literature based curriculum, and taking seriously the reality of human sin and rebellion, stress discipline and accountability.

However, the movement named itself classical before it knew what that meant; when asked to define their meaning, they turned to Dorothy Sayers' entertaining, but poorly researched and highly speculative education proposal. A helpful exercise for someone interested in Sayers' ideas would be to strip her essay of all its criticism, and evaluate her education proposal on its merit alone. It is my position that Sayers' essay consists largely of groundless accusations, unsupported ideas and faulty conclusions. Children are far more complex than Sayers alleges; sometimes we educators may "cut with the grain" as is her objective, but often we must lovingly and patiently redirect our students away from their tendencies and inclinations. Some love memorizing, some hate it, most children are somewhere in between. Some enjoy arguing, others fear it. Most cannot be characterized by either extreme. Some love attention, some are painfully shy, and most would describe themselves as somewhere between these two poles. Sayers' pupil diagnosis and pedagogic proposal is simplistic and wrong.

Those interested in pursuing the classical Christian model should also realize that the trivium does not address teaching students how to read. The



practice in classical and medieval times was that children began school after they had begun reading. Sayers' program begins at age 9 (the age of the average fourth-grade student) so whatever method classical Christian schools use to teach reading, it certainly is not medieval or classical. This is not to say that they do not do well at teaching this important skill, but once again their pedagogy in this area has nothing to do with the trivium.

What more needs to be said? Several things need clarification. My argument is that classical and Reformed educational goals are incompatible but the apparent exception to this rule lies with Reformed believers who hold to more of a confessionalist than an antithetical or positive Calvinist position. Among these Reformed believers (professional educators among them—to be sure) classical education is spoken of highly and/or practiced. Furthermore, many who educate their children at home turn to classical curriculum as Reformed based curriculum is not produced for a home environment. However, these matters do not take away from the fact that trivium methodology is not and cannot be a Reformed educational strategy. It must also be said that elements of a classical curriculum may serve Reformed educational goals at home and at school, but this is despite trivium methodology, not as a result of it.

The gravity of the antithesis between belief and unbelief should make us sympathetic to classical Christian education. While I cannot endorse it, the fact that hundreds of children are now trained in Christian classical instruction rather than in secular schools makes me rejoice. Neither can I say with certainty that they do not do some things better than we accomplish in Reformed Christian

schools. My advice to Christian schools that will not accept my evaluations and insist on taking the classical path can be reduced to two suggestions, though if I had the authority I would leave them with imperatives. Love the children you wish to teach, for only in obedience to and in conformity with this divine command are you given the authority to teach. The second suggestion is to never neglect the Reformed principle that calls us to continual self-evaluation and reform.

Is there an ideal Christian pedagogy? A perfect balance of skill development, knowledge acquisition, cooperative learning, dialogue, critical reflection? I think there is, as surely as there is perfect obedience, insight and wisdom. But we will not achieve it on this side of glory. Therefore we must continue our pilgrimage in good humour and humility, learning from others and keeping a certain tentativeness about our insights. We must remain open to correction, to balance and to reformation because of our limitations, mistaken emphases and wrongheadedness. We must also be honest about our differences in worldview or perspective and realize that there is no obvious and direct connection between our Christian confession and the educational theories we accept and use. There is a connection, but it is not direct and it is not obvious (Vriend, 1992).

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