

Trivium-based Education and The Trend Toward Classical Education

By Jody Capehart

There is a resurgence of classical education as a trend among Christian schools. "Classical education: the term immediately evokes images of gruel-fed English schoolboys, broken down by a Dickensian system of droning recitations and quashed boyhood rebellions." (World magazine, October 8, 1994, page 10) So, what is it in classical education that is causing Christians to take a closer look at its application and implications for the conservative school movement?

Classical education can be defined following the patterns of the trivium, which are *grammar, dialectic and rhetoric*.

Classical education can also be defined by the methods used to teach or subjects that are taught, which include classical literature, Latin, moral symbolic logic and rhetoric.



Dorothy Sayers, an academic, a writer and contemporary of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, writes in her essay *The Lost Tools of Learning*, that the three stages of the *trivium* correspond nicely with three stages of development that children go through. The first stage occurring in the elementary years she terms 'poll-parrot'. This is when children love to chant, memorize, recite and store up information. The second is the 'pert stage,' which is in junior high, when kids are becoming disputatious and argumentative. The third is the 'poetic stage' in high school, when they are concerned with appearances.

Douglas Wilson, founder of the Association of Classical and Christian Schools, says, "*In the recovery of Christian civilization in the West, our culture is built on the classical world and the reformation heritage. We cannot detach ourselves from where we've been and what we are. We want to equip leaders who understand where we are and that means*

equipping them with a classical education within a Christian worldview. In our culture, Johnny or Billy might not need it! But our culture needs somebody who does have it."

It is the Christian worldview that education analysts say is the key to making a classical education work. David Ayers, research director for *Practical Home Schooling Magazine*, says that "without Christ, the classics lead to a Dead Poets' Society-type nihilism, an unbiblical *carpe diem*." Is this out of the intellectual reach of the average student? No! Embracing the rich heritage of our culture is essential for ALL students to understand in order to be better citizens of tomorrow. If we are committed to building strong, Christian leaders to lead us in the next century, we must equip them today.

At Legacy Christian Academy, we seek to teach these principles to children who come to us with varying rates of ability and learning styles. We organize all learning primarily around Scripture, the unchanging Word



of God. The next concentric circle is history, which is taught from the original source whenever possible. The core of the third concentric circle is quality literature and the classics. We consider ourselves to be a Christian school first and a classical school second.

The bottom line is that a Christian, classical approach to education seeks to build a foundation that embraces the very essence of what our faith and culture embody. Giving our students these tools to build their education enables them to be better equipped to lead us spiritually as well as intellectually. They will not learn a humanized, watered-down version of the truth, but will study it first hand. From these studies will come learners for life, who have strong Christian, moral convictions to stand up in a world of ever-declining moral values. In conclusion, a classical Christian curriculum integrates character qualities with academics to build strong, godly moral fiber while laying a firm educational foundation in our students.