

# ROCKBRIDGE REPORTER

A Newsletter for Rockbridge Academy

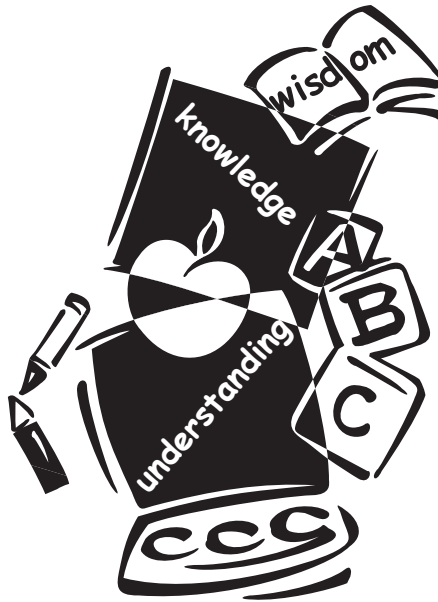
September 2003

## CLASSICAL EDUCATION *by Michael J. McKenna*

As Saint Augustine saw his culture crumbling around him in the midst of the collapse of the Roman Empire, he noticed that young Christians were not being trained to be that peculiar people Christ had called them to be, to be set apart. As he preached in the North African city of Hippo, his parishioners came to him, asking how they could be educated accordingly. Unfortunately, he did not have a ready answer. There was no pattern for Christian education. There was a model of pagan classical education. He knew that the shaping of the mind through the disciplines of grammar, logic, and rhetoric was a good thing, but did it agree with the dictates of the gospel?

My son...incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding. Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding (from Proverbs 2).

Augustine began to put together a new academy there in Hippo, for a small number of young students that he desired to disciple. He wanted to provide a kind of a fortress in which to train these young students. He believed that the church was to create this fortress so



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*Proverbs 2:6*

that the children may be trained as warriors of Truth, who would become equipped to take that Truth to the lost and crumbling world outside the fortress walls; Where they may be taught the first principles of the faith in a logical, orderly progression, moving from knowledge, to understanding, ultimately to the place of wisdom and discernment.

Eventually, those three categories of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, which he drew from Proverbs, became stages of developmental learning for a

new kind of curriculum, which was really not so new after all. What Augustine did as he searched for a model of Christian education was to realize that the biblical pattern of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom coincided with the three stages of the Trivium—grammar, logic, and rhetoric.

### *The methodology of the Trivium*

The grammar, or knowledge stage, was the stage where a young student would come and get...knowledge, the bits and pieces, the ABC's of any subject. The ABC's of language would be...the ABC's, and phonics, and vocabulary.

And the student obviously has to memorize these things. There's no trick to memorizing the multiplication tables. There's no interactive video that can enable you to grasp the ABC's of history. You have to memorize the fact that in a steamy summer in Philadelphia, 1776, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and the other founding fathers began the chain of events that was to sweep away the British rule of the North American colonies and usher in a new age. You have to memorize that stuff...there's no other way.

So the knowledge, or grammar stage is a rote memory stage where the bits and pieces of raw data are poured into the minds of young people. And often-times these are isolated little fragments of data; there's not much holding it all

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## CLASSICAL EDUCATION...*continued*

together. And yet the data needs to be there.

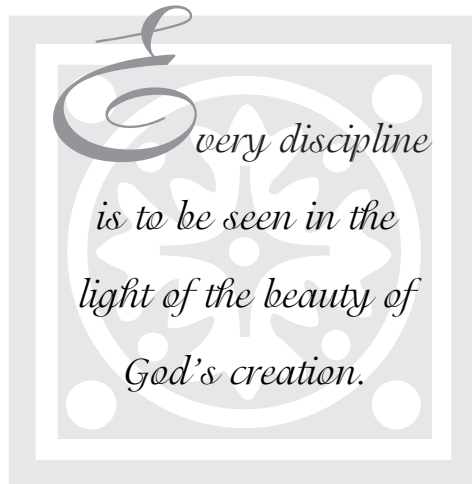
We moderns don't like rote memory; it's too much like work. Children may complain a bit about all the memorizing, (the truth is, they usually think the chanting and singing is great fun), but at this stage in their development, their minds are like sponges. "I just can't memorize the whole prologue to the Constitution of the United States; it's just too hard!" And then they memorize it just like that! It's embarrassing!

Next, upon the foundation of knowledge must be placed a structure of understanding. This understanding stage is the logic stage. It is a stage that takes the bits and pieces of knowledge and makes connections, weaves a fabric of understanding, so that vocabulary words are now woven into sentences; so that mathematical abstractions suddenly become a way to count your change and balance a checkbook; so that the events of the Reformation and Renaissance and the Jihad of Suleiman, which all happened within a 20-year span from Martin Luther's 95 theses to the writings of Calvin's Institutes, are seen as a confluence of remarkable events that all come together to praise the God who is the author of them all. You see those bits and pieces are all isolated and floating out there, but when we have understanding, when they're taught in the context of the logic stage, we can then begin to weave it all together and we can see the revolution that is occurring by God's hand in history.

But again, the ability to just understand a subject is not enough. It is clear that we are to proceed on to wisdom, or the rhetoric stage. I'm no Hebrew grammarian but I can use a Strong's just as well as the next guy. "Wisdom" is a word that literally means "skillful with the fingers; artful." It is a word that is used of craftsmen. It is a word that describes people who take their knowledge and understanding and put it to

work. They set it to action, they have discernment, and they know what must be done. During the rhetoric stage, students learn to take the knowledge they now understand, and put it to use through the available means of persuasion...rhetoric.

True education isn't truly accomplished until this training is complete, until our knights exemplar have been fully equipped, until the students have gone through all three stages. They have the foundation of knowledge (grammar), they built upon that knowledge base with understanding (logic), and they



crowned their understanding with wisdom (rhetoric). Wisdom is the practical application; it is the skillful craftsmanship that makes western Christendom more than just a series of achievements.

This system of education is the archrival, the utter and complete opposite of the educational world that we have come to see grow up around us. And it is profoundly biblical!

In addition to the three stages of the Trivium, classical education has certain biases, which we also need to understand.

The language bias: Classical education places a strong emphasis, not only on the structural understanding of the native tongue, and the literary, poetic and lyrical fruits of that language, but

also learning the grammatical structures and gaining competency in several other languages. Latin has always been taught in classical schools, not because it's traditional, but because Latin provides such an incredible insight into the minds of our classical forebears, and insight into the English language and an open door to the learning of so many other Romance languages besides. We need to understand how the degeneration of language ultimately indicates the degeneration of a culture.

The history bias: Every discipline must be rooted in an understanding of precedence, of what comes before. We must comprehend Euclid, if we are to truly comprehend geometry. It's not enough to teach a few problems and memorize a few theorems. We have to have a background, a historical basis. Likewise, we need to understand our culture in terms of the sequence of events as God has woven his good providence in space, time, and history. We need to understand these things if we are to have a proper understanding of who we are, where we are, and where we are going.

Christ, as a man, came into history in time and space. As such he was rooted in the history of the Hebrew people; he lived in the present time applying the word of God to every area of life around him; and he died and rose again to redeem a people yet to be born; and he sent his Spirit to equip those people to bring the gospel to bear on every sphere of human activity.

The aesthetic bias: This simply means that every discipline is to be seen in the light of the beauty of God's creation. Every study is to be adorned with the glory of the gospel. Therefore, classical education is full of music and art and architecture. It is full of nature studies. It's full of the wonder and the splendor of God's orderly creation. The sciences are not some mere practical approach to getting things done. But

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# JOSH DAVIS, GAVIN BLAIR

## FINALISTS FOR MARYLAND DISTINGUISHED SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Students in Maryland high schools are permitted to enter the states' Distinguished Scholarship Program. Finalists in the Distinguished Scholarship Program are eligible to receive a \$3000 merit-based scholarship for up to four years for attending a Maryland college or university, for a total of up to \$12,000. Students are evaluated on two scales: by their cumulative GPA, and by their PSAT/SAT/ACT scores. For the academic year 2002-2003, more than 4,000 students applied. Approximately 368 students were selected as finalists.

From Rockbridge Academy, both Josh Davis and Gavin Blair were chosen as finalists! Be sure to congratulate them the next time you see them.

***Congratulations, men!***



## Giant Food A+ Bonus Bucks Program

Each year, Rockbridge Academy participates in the Giant Food Bonus Bucks Program. This is a program in which your food shopping dollars are able to earn cash for your child's school. In the 2001-2002 school year, Rockbridge received \$1414 in cash benefits. In the past, once the parents designated a particular school as their beneficiary, that was it. However, last year the program was changed so that parents were required to designate EACH YEAR which school they wanted to receive the benefit. As a result, in the 2002-2003 school year, our benefits declined to \$777.

Please don't forget to designate Rockbridge Academy as your choice to receive the Giant Food credit. You don't have to be a Rockbridge parent to participate on the school's behalf, either. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and neighbors can designate Rockbridge as their school of choice as well. If you have questions, our school coordinator for the Giant A+ Bonus Bucks program is Tammy Sheir.

## ROCKBRIDGE ATHLETICS

Soccer practice for both boys and girls soccer teams began in earnest on Monday, August 18. Over 20 athletes came out for both team practices. The boys soccer team began practicing at Arden Field, and the girls practiced in the early evening near the home of coach Dick Sentz on Generals Highway.

This is the inaugural year for girls soccer at Rockbridge, so it was quite exciting to see so many eager young ladies (not to mention moms and dads), drilling and dribbling their way across the fields. If you want to be a part of this exciting new chapter of Rockbridge Academy, Coaches Hollidge, Feeney (boys), and Sentz (girls) could use a few helping hands. Contact the school office if you can volunteer your time and talents.

### CLASSICAL EDUCATION...continued

rather the sciences are seen as the progressive revelation of the depth and the breadth and the height of God's majesty in the entire world.

In Philippians chapter 4, the Apostle Paul states, "whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things." This is the essence of the aesthetic bias.

The observative bias: In classical education, the task of the master is simply to enable the child to see, to hear, to taste, to feel, to observe...to see what is actually there. How many students today cannot discern the difference between Georgian and Baroque architecture? How many students today wouldn't be able to tell you the difference between the passionate romanticism of Rachmaninov's 3rd Piano Concerto, and the classical balance and sublime depth of the slow movement of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto? How many children, even here in Maryland, couldn't tell you the difference between a Baltimore oriole and a cardinal? The reason that they can't is because they've never been taught to hear, or to taste, or to touch, or to see. They've never been taught to observe.

A language bias, a history bias, an aesthetic bias, and an observative bias: these things are at the heart and soul of what we are. These are the good things in life. These are the kinds of things that enable us to appreciate life. They give us breadth and depth. This is the stuff of life! It's as practical as a perennial garden, as glorious a pursuit as catching fireflies with my boys on a summer evening. Terribly useless stuff in today's modern view of the ultimacy of the pragmatic.



# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- SEP 8 .....First Day of School—Grades 1-12
- SEP 9.....First Day of School—Kindergarten
- SEP 26 ....Back to School Night - K-6 gr. @ 7:00 p.m. (*Park on back lot only.*)
- OCT 3.....Back to School Night—7-12 gr. @ 7:00 p.m.
- OCT 17 .....Picture Day—*Individual Pictures Taken*
- OCT 24.....Daytime Open House—8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

## A NEW YEAR, A NEW WEBSITE!

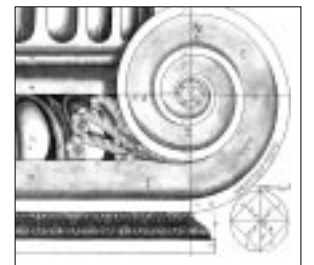
We have a new look, and new online tools on the Rockbridge Academy website! You can always be informed about events and cancellations with our online calendar! Read up on your child's teacher, download past Reporters, and check out the student life at Rockbridge. You can even fill out forms and applications online. Be sure to take advantage of this great new resource!

**[www.rockbridge.org](http://www.rockbridge.org)**

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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