

CLASSIS

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF CLASSICAL & CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

SINE DOCTRINA VITA EST QUASI MORTIS IMAGO



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ASSOCIATION of CLASSICAL & CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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Confessions of a Self-Professed Pessimist

by Ben Palpant

I guess when Yogi Berra said, “It ain’t over till it’s over,” he was right. I should have paid more mind to the wise guy. And now that I’m thinking about it in terms of our kids, I think the great Yogi may have accidentally struck a biblical cord. If there is one thing that I keep having to relearn it is this: “it ain’t over till it’s over.”

Sometimes I wonder when my students will finally act like adults. I wonder when my own children will stop acting like monkeys. But this is all my failure to live by faith. I keep forgetting that God has a long term plan and that it is a good plan. I keep forgetting that what I might term a hopeless cause is quite possibly the very thing God is looking to use in His grand plan. It is a silly mindset now that I am writing about it, but I suppose we are all guilty of it to some degree or another. And so I write this as a reminder to me and a reminder to you to look beyond the bend, to live by faith instead of by sight, and to remember: it ain’t over. . . yet.

We find this reinforced in Scripture in many places but we also find it in the pages of history. The life of the great Augustine of Hippo is one of these reminders to live by faith. His own early years were such that he suffered from what he called “the worms of regret” for much of his life. He was prone to folly, prone to fall in with bad company, and all his sin was well-disguised from both his parents and his teachers. He and his friends used to snicker at their conquests and at the knowledge that they successfully pulled the wool over the eyes of their authorities.

I’m sure he was like many young men who very nobly say, “yes, sir” and then mock and jibe the teacher’s apparent naivety.

If one were to judge the life of Augustine by his first twenty-five years, it would be a sorry story of lust, deceit, cavalier rebellion, and high-handed mockery. He would have fallen into the pit of history’s ditch, off the road of greatness, and been forgotten there. But we do not judge him according to his early life because Yogi was right: it ain’t over yet. We know Augustine as a “philosophical and theological genius of the first order, towering like a pyramid above his age, and looking down commandingly upon succeeding centuries. He had a mind uncommonly fertile and deep, bold

seeds into the ground. These seeds would later flourish like a mighty plant whose blooms would be seen far across the plains of time. And this gives us great hope to live by faith, not by sight. Augustine’s mother certainly did so.

Augustine was born to a heathen father, Patricius, and a believing mother, Monica. While his father set out to make Augustine a great man of the world, his mother prayed fervently and shed tears for him that he might in due time become a man of God. A child of such maternal faithfulness could not be lost and in him we find verification that the child of one unbelieving parent is sanctified, set apart, holy, and belongs to God through the faith of one believing parent (I Cor.

*If one were to judge the life
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twenty-five years, it would
be a sorry story . . .*

and soaring; and with it, what is better, a heart full of Christian love and humility.”¹

Was he always like that? Emphatically, no! His youth was a wasteland of sin. But God, the Almighty worker of wonders, plowed up the crusty ground and planted

7:14). This is potent stuff and not to be forgotten: though Augustine was living a life of rebellion, his life was set apart by the faith of Monica, “one of the noblest women in the history of Christianity, of a highly intellectual and spiritual cast, of fervent piety, most tender affection, and all conquering love.”² She went to war for her son’s soul and God

² Ibid., 990.

¹ Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity, Vol. 3*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 997.

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Confessions of a Self-Professed Pessimist

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blessed her for it. She believed I Cor. 7:14 and she believed the promises of God and so Monica was able to look at her son with the eyes of faith. Monica looked at her child with a far-reaching gaze, seeing beyond the momentary fear and panic. But let us not delude ourselves into thinking that the eyes of faith never shed tears. She looked beyond the momentary fear and panic, but it was, no denying, still fear and panic. In fact, she wept on Augustine's behalf, "more than mothers are accustomed to weep for the bodily deaths of their children."³ Monica believed God's promises regarding her child, but she saw that her child was spiritually dead and so she wept for him. In this, she is no different than the rest of us who weep over our children's sin, but here there is a very important difference: we often weep out of fear, but Monica was "buoyed up with hope, though no less zealous in her weeping and mourning; and she did not cease to bewail my case before thee, in all the hours of her supplication."⁴

We need, like Augustine's mother, to elongate our scope and vision for the sake of Christ's great name and for the sake of our children. Unfortunately, many parents are raising their children in a defensive mode, hoping only to survive the turbulent years of

pre-adolescence and adolescence. I have difficulty believing that Monica raised her son defensively, however much she may have at times stumbled and struggled as to how most effectively to raise her son for Christ. She believed God to be true and she daily worked to bury the Adam within her son. The first Adam had the upper hand in Augustine for much of his early life until he heard a child chanting Scripture and the second Adam quite suddenly grabbed Augustine by the throat.

When Christ grabs hold, He does not let go; in fact, He fosters in His own a great and growing vibrancy of love toward the Father and a tenderness of heart toward the Spirit. And this longing for the Father bursts with the colors of Christmas. So was it with Augustine, whose longings were such that

When Christ grabs hold, He does not let go; in fact, He fosters in His own a great and growing vibrancy of love toward the Father and a tenderness of heart toward the Spirit

he cried out in his *Confessions*, "I have loved Thee late! Thou Beauty, so old and so new; I have loved Thee late! And lo! Thou wast within, but I was without, and was seeking Thee there." And still more he says, "I had been deafened by the clanking of the chains of my mortality, the

punishment for my soul's pride, and I wandered farther from thee, and thou didst permit me to do so. I was tossed to and fro, and wasted, and poured out, and I boiled over in my fornications—and yet thou didst hold thy peace, O my tardy Joy! Thou didst still hold thy peace, and I wandered still farther from thee into more and yet more barren fields of sorrow, in proud dejection and restless lassitude. . . for thy omnipotence is not far from us, even when we are far from thee. . . Thou wast always by me, mercifully angry and flavoring all my unlawful pleasures with bitter discontent." It is, perhaps, the most beautiful thing to see a sinner fall to his knees and cry out to God in repentance. And though it may be a tardy joy, still it is joy.

This is joy that we long for our children. And this is the very thing for which we hope when our vision is elongated. We look forward to seeing our children live for Christ because they are sanctified, set apart. This is not presumption since presumption is believing in what God has *not* promised. No, this is hopeful, offensive, child rearing and all discipline, exhortation, training,

and praise are backed by the words of Isaiah: "And my elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, and their

continued on next page

3 St. Augustine. *The Confessions*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 51.

4 Ibid., 52.

Confessions . . .

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offspring with them” (Isaiah 65:22b and 23).

It was verses like these that bolstered up Monica when her son was far from God. She remembered that her labor was not in vain. She remembered that Augustine was the descendant of the blessed of the Lord. She remembered that God is faithful, though we are not, and that His purposes are good and right and true. How often, how sadly, we forget. This forgetfulness rears its ugly head in the way parents, including myself, discipline and train their children. Children are shrewd; they know when discipline is motivated by fear, anger, frustration, and shame. They also know that this is not godly discipline. Godly discipline is hopeful discipline; it is confident discipline, assured of fruit. It happens quickly, it is over quickly, and neither parent nor child has lost self-control in the process. Such discipline is beautiful, though painful, and particularly when it is sealed by the act of prayer, together, when all the tears are done. Discipline is about restoration—restoring the wandering sheep to the fold of God.

That is why faithful parents and faithful teachers are not, in general, frustrated folks. Neither should they be surprised at sin. We are prone to wander, prone to live with the “worms of guilt.” So, this entire article is the confession of

a pessimist who is trying to molt his pessimist skin. For much too long my eyes have been turned downward, sometimes inward, and very often backward, and I grow frustrated and fearful. This, my brothers, is unbelief. And though sin abounds, Christians should be optimistic none-the-less, because God is faithful to bless the labors of His faithful ones. So, let us be faithful like Monica.

I wonder when my own children will stop acting like monkeys. I keep forgetting that what I might term a hopeless cause is quite possibly the very thing God is looking to use in His grand plan. And of all people to forget this truth, I should be the last. Repentance came late for me and now I am witness to this sweet truth: “It ain’t over until it’s over.”

So, be not defensive minded. Think like a Christian; optimistically raise your children for Christ, remembering that they are but youngsters, newly treading upon the road of faith, and continue to see your children as future Edwards, Augustines, Mathers, and Wheatleys. Continue to bury the Adam with sound and faithful and judicious discipline, knowing that it is Christ who “works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). He is a good God who loves to remind us that “it ain’t over until it’s over.”

Ben Palpant and his wife, Kristen, live in the beautiful Northwest. They have four wild and wonderful children who thankfully take after their mother most of the time. He has taught literature and writing for the past nine years at The Oaks: A Classical and Christian Academy in Spokane, Washington, and holds a BA from Whitworth College. Ben spends most of his time as a human Mt. Everest, and does his writing after the children are too exhausted to climb anymore. His current writing project (a book he is writing for kicks and for anybody willing to publish it) is an apology for Christian bibliophilia.

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The Pleasure of Writing a Check

ACCS Membership Value

by David Goodwin

Three weeks ago, a naval officer and his wife visited our school. He was leaving the Navy and looking to relocate in a city with a classical Christian school. His wife found our school on the ACCS website, and put Boise on their list of locations. Scenarios like this play themselves out several times a year at our school. Typically, a parent reads *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* or *The Well-Trained Mind* and begins to look for a classical Christian school in the area. When families do enroll after they find us through the ACCS website, they are often our most committed families.

Each year, our school's website receives well over 100 visitors directly linked from the ACCS membership site. This is our largest referral link aside from Google. I believe that each year, any member school listed on the ACCS website will conservatively receive between three and ten visitors to their school because of their ACCS affiliation. Now, at our school, if we enroll just two students a year through the ACCS site (I'm confident that we enroll more than two), we immediately multiply our ACCS membership dues by ten times. Where else can you get a ten times return on your investment in the same year? It gets even more convincing. For each referral that comes in kindergarten or 1st grade,

the payback over the full twelve years of the child's tuition is actually 44 times our annual payment for ACCS membership (the net present value of twelve years at \$4000 per year, less our hard cost of \$500 per student per year).

The Christian community increasingly sees classical Christian education as academically excellent. Schools who are members of ACCS implicitly receive the credibility of the leading membership organization in the movement. These two reasons alone make ACCS membership the best marketing value for classical Christian schools. Add the ability to target teacher and staff recruiting through *The Forum*, the conference discounts, newsletter articles that keep you in touch with other schools, and the reasons for joining are many. I understand that ACCS is working on more ways to add value to your membership. I applaud this effort and look forward to the great things to come. However, the value to our school is already significant.

If your school has a website and the ability to track the links that brought people to your site, I would encourage you to look at those coming from ACCS. In any event, I would encourage you to join. To borrow a phrase from the used car lot down the street: "It's a bargain at 44 times the cost."

David Goodwin is in his fourth year as headmaster of Foundations Academy and has been involved with the school since its founding in 1994. He holds a BIS in broadcast management and public affairs and an MBA from Boise State University. Before working in education, Mr. Goodwin spent 14 years in product and corporate marketing for Hewlett Packard. He and his wife have three children and attend All Saints Presbyterian Church in Boise, Idaho.

Rhetoric: What's It Good For? Absolutely Everything!

A description and defense of rhetoric, its meaning and uses

by Corrina McKenna

When one works at a tree farm in Georgia, work has a way of following one home at night. On days we took cuttings to propagate new trees, I would close my eyes after hours of clipping and snipping and see tubs and tubs of leaves and sticks. Even at bedtime, before I would pass out in exhaustion, my last visions were of tree cuttings.

The same thing happens to a person teaching at Rockbridge. After days of grading papers, if I happen to go to the movies, my mind refuses to rest. I will automatically “grade” the movie on Content, Arrangement, and Style. I don’t mind it half as much as I used to mind the leaves and sticks.

What goes through the rhetoric-saturated mind as the movie plays? Say the script is awkward or convoluted, too repetitive or cheesy (Style: minus 10). Say the sequence of events is disjointed or drops some of the story line (Arrangement: minus 10). Say the movie is pretty enough, but the message is superficial, hackneyed, or inconsistent, the jokes are lame, or rely too much on potty humor (Content: minus 10). What if you can see the set microphone at the top of the film!?! (Mechanics: minus 10. Yes, I have seen that before).

A good movie? Say the special effects are well-crafted, the scenery is beautiful and well-integrated with the plot, the colors are carefully chosen to reflect the mood, and the costumes are authentic and quality (Style: plus 10). Say the narrative is easily followed, with no missing links or dropped narrative threads (Arrangement: plus 10). Say the lines are adapted from a novel with care and integrity, the vocabulary is educated, the dialogue clever and realistic, the themes timeless,

to tell *why* they liked it with some precision.

Rhetoric is not a subject to be studied for its own sake. It is a skills class, a “how-to” class: how to research, how to find arguments, how to write an article, or a paper, or book review, how to organize your thoughts, how to critique and analyze, how to spearhead a project, how to lead, how to understand how to help other people. Rhetoric class is a generic skills class, widely applicable to arguably every field of work and study. Rather than intimidating and obtuse, it very well may be the most practical, down-to-earth class one could take in high school.

Students write a lot in rhetoric class. You can learn a lot about yourself by trying to write well and persuasively. Can I put myself in the background? Can I speak rationally about something I love passionately? Can I hear both sides of an argument? Can I put in the effort to argue my position with evidence and careful thought? What do I believe? Why do I believe it? Do I have a duty to persuade others to this belief? The list goes on. Then there is the actual process of writing. Whenever somebody says, “I know what I mean I just can’t say it,” it is not necessarily true. Making yourself understood, using clear communication, is a necessary part of a life well lived. Rhetoric class is the place to take the time to

The word “rhetoric” seems like such a grand and lofty term. Scholastic and even obtuse, it is, at the very least, intimidating.

poignant, thought-provoking, and they reveal some truth about life or worldview (Content: plus 10).

Taking rhetoric from the classroom to the movie theater is exactly the point of the class. The word “rhetoric” seems like such a grand and lofty term. Scholastic and even obtuse, it is, at the very least, intimidating. It should not be; it is just an old, out-of-use word. It is simply finding all the available means of persuasion for any given situation. For example, the movie makers were trying to persuade you to *like* the movie, *agree* with the message, and ultimately *enjoy* the movie. Did they accomplish this goal? That is where rhetoric comes in, to help you evaluate how well the movie was made. Everybody does this as soon as they walk out. “Yeah, I liked it” is a rhetorical response. Someone trained in rhetoric should be able

cal, down-to-earth class one could take in high school.

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Rhetoric: What's It Good For? Absolutely Everything!

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discipline yourself to learn how to communicate what you really think and reason, and instruct others in the best way to live according to those principles. It is a good place to work out your faith with fear and trembling.

As a side note, rhetoric does not work alone. Aristotle said it is the counterpart to logic. A student could not “skip” to rhetoric without having had logic—one skill depends upon the other. The critical thinking and analysis skills learned in logic are essential and practiced simultaneously in rhetoric. Just as rhetoric is not a subject to be learned for its own sake, logic is also a means, rather than an end, for learning. The difference in the two skills is found in their persuasive aspects. Logic

alone will convince a few stoics, but for the rest of us, there needs to be consideration for every other facet of the human experience, that is, rhetorical considerations.

The ultimate goal for students of rhetoric is not only to critique art, but to produce it themselves. All people in all forms of art and employment utilize rhetoric, consciously or unconsciously. I recently heard a sermon in which the pastor

exhorted parents to encourage their children to pursue the arts. If the worldliness of the art and film culture is repulsive to Christians, we have only ourselves to blame. We gave Hollywood over to the world, therefore it is worldly. We must repent of this, the pastor said, and reclaim Christ's rightful place as the Lord of all areas of life. He used the same argument for the practice of law. Lawyers have a notoriously bad reputation. It is the Church's shame. Secular culture serves secular ends. Again, this is the function

and follow your opinion. Only Christians can claim this confidence and be right. Only Christians can have the kind of selfless love trustworthy enough to lead others for Christ and not themselves, because it is not *their* love, it is God's. Christians frequently complain that it is everyone *but* the Christians doing the persuading in our culture. Rhetoric for Christians is about facing the enemy unafraid and letting our light shine in that darkness.

While rhetorical thinking seems excessively relentless while

Again, this is the function of a Christian rhetoric class: to equip students with the skills to reclaim the whole earth and everything in it—from movie-making to the law to the business world—for Christ.

trying to enjoy a movie after hours of grading, one can appreciate being able to recognize how people try to persuade them and also learn

of a Christian rhetoric class: to equip students with the skills to reclaim the whole earth and everything in it—from movie-making to the law to the business world—for Christ.

This rhetoric apology assumes a Christian worldview. The word “persuasion” assumes that you have a concept of right and wrong, good or bad, firm enough to be confident to persuade others to believe you

ways to think about persuading others. The alternative is passively letting people persuade you, and haphazardly trying to convince others of the truth.

When the Bible tells us to speak the truth in love, it does not mean by accident.

Corrina McKenna is in her third year teaching rhetoric, literature, and journalism at Rockbridge Academy in Millersville, Maryland. Corrina holds a BA in literature with a minor in classics from Hillsdale College in Michigan. Using experience gained as a guest contributor of articles and reviews to her Hillsdale college newspaper, The Collegian, Corrina contributes articles about the school to local papers and edits the student section of the Rockbridge Reporter. She is currently working on a Rhetoric Manual and a Thesis Manual for the school curriculum.

Book Review: Great Books

reviewed by Patch Blakey

As Christians, we are people of The Book. The Bible is the basis for all of our thoughts and actions. No area of creation is neutral, and certainly no element of knowledge may be evaluated apart from the Holy Spirit's divine revelation written in the pages of the Old and New Testaments. Most of the historical books that I've read, while fascinating in their portrayal of past events, have generally been considered only in light of social, economic, cultural or political issues, but seldom have they included religious issues unless from a secular perspective.

Keys to the Classics, by Dennis Oliver Woods, is a serious attempt to provide just such a biblical analysis of the writings of a select group of classical authors. These are men whose contributions to "the Great Conversation" have helped shape the mindset of the current postmodern world in which we live. Woods calls his selected authors "50 men who rule from the grave." Some of these are unbelievers such as Homer, Aristophanes, and Socrates. Others are Christians who lived by faith, but nonetheless did not fully appreciate the broad scope of the Scriptures as they pertain to every area of life. You might be surprised to learn that even includes stalwarts such as John Milton, John Calvin, and Samuel Rutherford.

The first volume is divided into five general areas of history,

including the pagan world before the advent of Christ, the Prince of Peace who established His kingdom, the patristic world, the papal world, and the modern world. The section on the modern world is further

Keys to the Classics: A Biblical Analysis of the Great Books of Western Civilization, Vol. 1

by Dennis Oliver Woods

Clackamas, OR: ClassicalFree Press, 2001,
pp 184, \$29

divided into six ages: Renaissance, Reformation, Revolution, Reason, Romanticism, and Relativism, each with a selection of their principal authors and the ideas they offered the world. The work is also well illustrated.

Each author is introduced with a visual memory "key" and a paragraph summary to help the student remember the individual and the heart of his philosophy. For example, Homer is represented by a Trojan horse, Isaac Newton an apple, Jesus a lamb. These are also sold separately as a "Walk-Thru-The-Bible" style set of flash cards. Each section includes a brief biography of the author, the historical context at the time of writing, a summary of the author's teaching, the implications of these teachings for subsequent history, a biblical analysis of these teachings, and corrective or prescriptive actions to

correct the unbiblical influences of these teachings.

Following this section is a series of objective questions for the student's response to help reinforce the lesson. There is a section of fill-in-the-blanks, true or false statements, matching words from two columns, and a select reading assignment from the author's principal work. The latter is accompanied by a number of thought-provoking questions based on the seminal work. In all, the book contains almost 1,500 review questions. There is also an accompanying

teacher's guide with answers to the questions on the selected seminal readings. The teacher's guide is an easily understood, philosophical treatise in its own right.

This is an outstanding commentary for students being trained in the classics to evaluate what they are reading in light of the Scripture. As Christians, we are to take every thought captive to the Lordship of Christ, and this is exactly what Woods has attempted to do. This is the sort of analysis that the modern Christian world desperately needs. *Keys to the Classics* was a stimulating and thought-provoking read for me; I highly recommend it for you and your students.

The books and flash cards may be ordered at the bookstore on www.kingswayclassicalacademy.com or contact the author at (503) 658-1755.

Book Review: Colliding Worldviews

reviewed by Patch Blakey

Letter from a Christian Citizen by Douglas Wilson is a very small but quite effective response to a book by Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*. I have not read Sam Harris' book and have no intention of doing so for two reasons. First, it is easy to get a clear view of where Harris is coming from in his argument by reading the extensive quotes in Wilson's book. Harris is a self-prophesying atheist who rages against the triune God of the Bible. But this is nothing new, which leads to my second reason for not reading Harris' book. The Bible says "... the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). It is impossible for unbelievers, even very intelligent and highly educated unbelievers, to understand what God says because these things are spiritually discerned, and unbelievers are spiritually dead.

On the other hand, Wilson's brief book is a wonderful and concise apologetic for the Christian faith. Wilson is gracious in his responses to Harris' numerous atheistic points, while also pointing out Harris' fallacies and inconsistencies. Here are a few samples.

Writing to Harris, Wilson

says, "Consider the tsunami from *your* premises. You spoke of the day 'one hundred thousand children were simultaneously torn from their mother's arms and casually drowned' (48). Now I can only understand you being indignant with God over this if He is really *there*. But what if He is *not* there? What follows then? This event had no more ultimate significance than a solar flare or a virus going extinct or a desolate asteroid colliding with another asteroid or the gradual loss of Alabama to kudzu or me scratching my head just now. These are just atoms banging around. This is what they do."

Letter from a Christian Citizen

by Douglas Wilson

Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press,
2007, pp 111, \$14

Wilson also interjects his down-home humor into the discussion while maintaining a very serious position. Wilson writes in response to Harris' denial of valid human witnesses to the resurrection, "One last thing. The closed system that makes up your universe *is* impervious to any evidence to the contrary. Once you grant that

the world works this way, anyone who comes bustling up to you with stories about men who came back from the dead is a *prima facie* nut-job. Simple. But you need to look at your closed-system universe again and look more closely at the price tag this time. Not only is this vast concourse of atoms spared the spectacle of a Jewish carpenter coming back from the grave, it is also spared *all* forms of immaterial realities. This would include, unfortunately, your arguments and thoughts. They are as immaterial as Farley's ghost. Show me your arguments for atheism under a microscope. Then I will think about believing them. What color are they? How much do they weigh? *What* are they made of?"

Letter from a Christian Citizen is a quick yet thought-provoking read. It is instructive as well as entertaining. Even more so, it is a very helpful booklet to help prepare one's children and oneself to counter the

volumes of bilious atheistic blather that are so commonly accepted today as unanswerable by many well-intentioned but unprepared Christians. Wilson's book would make a great addition to any high school apologetics class, and it's also good for promoting productive discussion around the family dinner table.



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