Re-Thinking...Part II

continued from page 8

the enemy of the best.

(b) At one point, the authors suggest teaching students to use true but invalid arguments (p. 111). This is surprising, to say the least. We should ask ourselves: Do good ends justify illicit means? Should we knowingly commit logical fallacies simply because they work? Can we in good conscience publicly espouse truth, goodness, and beauty, and then privately take the low road of a purely pragmatic pedagogy? Is that what has given "rhetoric" a bad name in the first place? It may be eloquent, but is it wise?

(c) We think that the third chapter on "Worldview and the Liberal Arts" leaves something to be desired. Littlejohn and Evans do a good job of pointing out that "worldview" is better caught than taught because it is not a set of ideas or principles but that underlying thought and life patterns behind them (a way of thinking). But the paradigm that they propose of Creation–Fall–Redemption–Consummation (also adopted by Nancy Pearcey in *Total Truth*) does not go far enough. It stays in the abstract world and thus loses its usefulness at the practical level (the level where "worldview" lives). Unfortunately, Littlejohn and Evans do not carry this concept far enough.

These quibbles do not detract from the immense value in this book, however. *Wisdom and Eloquence* lives up to its billing as an "indispensable contribution to the

continued in next column

Authors Respond to *Re-Thinking the Trivium?*

Robert Littlejohn and Charles Evans, authors of *Wisdom and Eloquence*, respond to the areas of disagreement contained in the review of their book by Matthew Allen and Joe Bray.

1. **Allen & Bray:** We do not completely agree that the purpose of education can be totally subsumed under the headings of wisdom and eloquence. We certainly appreciate and share the authors' desire to restore the classical ideal to education, as their elevation of eloquence to one of the two main goals of education attests. We have the utmost respect for Augustine, from whom the authors derived the pairing of wisdom and eloquence as descriptive of an educated man.

continued in next column

Re-Thinking...Part II

literature of classical Christian education" and a "remarkable treatise on education." It is, as R. Albert Mohler called it, "a book for our time, our churches, and our children." We can take Mohler's advice to "read, learn, and be inspired." We also can be encouraged. Already, independently, we are implementing many of the suggestions and advice offered by these wizened school heads. There is much more in the book for us to consider in years ahead. It is true that we have a long way to go to repair the ruins and recover the lost tools of learning, but after reading this book, we are encouraged that we are on the right path.

We would even further see a parallel to the two greatest commandments: wisdom equals love for God; eloquence (as they define it as cultural influence) equals love for neighbor. However, we still believe that wisdom and virtue says it better. Wisdom and eloquence may be separated: that is, a man can be wise without being wise or eloquent without being wise. Wisdom and virtue, on the other hand, while distinct, are almost inseparable: one cannot imagine a man who is wise without also being virtuous or vice versa.

Response: Attempts to reduce the purpose of education to any two or three goals always come up short. The fact is, all of life is an education—the life of faith even more so. And no formal educational system can prepare students adequately for the whole range of life's challenges and responsibilities. We chose wisdom and eloquence as main objectives because they are the achievable outcomes which the liberal arts are designed to produce.

The classical tradition is replete with references to virtue as an educational goal, from the Greeks to our times. In fact, we would agree that wisdom and eloquence are *themselves* virtues. Ancient rhetoricians, such as Isocrates, Cicero, and Quintilian agreed that virtuous character was an absolute requirement of oratory, and that it should be taught as part and parcel of a student's total educational

continued on next page

Authors Respond to *Re-Thinking the Trivium?*

continued from page 9

experience. But we disagree with ancient philosophers who maintained that merely *knowing* truth and goodness and beauty automatically results in virtuous living. Virtue requires motivation on the part of the learner to exercise his judgment and self-discipline to apply intellectual knowledge to responsible behavior. And we learn from the scriptures and St. Augustine's subsequent teaching that genuine virtue, or godliness, only follows the prerequisite of faith.

So, while the whole end of education may be summarized as the pursuit of virtue in ourselves and in our students, we believe that wisdom and eloquence are appropriate goals that a classical curriculum can achieve for our students.

2. **Allen & Bray:** We think the authors overcompensate in their attempt to correct perceived confusion surrounding Sayers' intent. They claim that the Trivium as she applied it could not be said to be a methodology, but that seemed to be the whole point of her essay. As noted above, we do agree that grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric are subjects (or disciplines), but Sayers clearly intended to view them as a methodological framework as well. Indeed, the authors implicitly refute their own thesis by smuggling in the back door the very child development principles they seek to throw out the front door. They cite approvingly Mortimer Adler's framework for types of learning: acquisition of new knowledge, critical interaction, and meaningful expression. These categories are practically indistinguishable from what most modern classical Christian education proponents call the grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric stages of learning a subject.

Response: Our point regarding the *trivium* as a pedagogical methodology is not that there are not correspondences that exist between Adler's modes of instruction and the liberal arts, but that the liberal arts themselves are not a method—they are "merely" subject areas. Sayers did intend to view them as a methodological framework, and we think she was mistaken to do so, as this requires that we assign unconventional definitions to ordinary words (grammar, logic, rhetoric). The result, in our view, has been to add one more layer of "education-ese" to the relatively simple art of teaching.

Further, Sayers' stage theory paradigm leads to the conclusion that young children should be taught one way, older children another, exclusively. Instead, we contend that all modes of instruction ought to be utilized in varying degrees with students of all ages. We also contend that the first three of the liberal arts are *language* arts, and are best taught in an integrated way throughout the student's career in school. So, for example, we may not have a stand alone rhetoric class for second graders, but we are teaching them rhetorical principles and skills as they develop a facility with language through the study of grammar.

Our goal in stating our conclusions on this point is to encourage classical schools to be faithful to teach the liberal arts and sciences as they were traditionally conceived. We also hope that teachers who encounter our ideas will think long and hard about these issues and that the result will be schools that exhibit a culture of continuous improvement in the classroom.

3. **Allen & Bray:** We disagree that classical Christian schools should not distinguish between Christian and non-Christian pupils (p. 46). We believe our schools are too new at this business of repairing the ruins, and too fragile, to admit a critical mass of unsaved students—especially teenagers—a few of whom can do a lot of damage to a school's "ethos" in a very short time. For the same reason, we disagree that our schools should admit significant numbers of supposedly "like-minded" families who do not profess Christian faith (p. 68). A couple of "like-minded" students and families who agree with most of our goals and values but don't share the most important ones–namely, our spirituality–may lower the spiritual temperature of a campus culture over time. (When it comes to Christian faith, 90% agreement is 100% disagreement.) In a worse-case scenario, a couple of less like-minded high schoolers who are

continued on next page

Authors Respond to *Re-Thinking the Trivium?*

continued from page 10

resistant to the school's values will inevitably find each other–usually within a day or two–and create a "student underground" that can be fairly imperious to all attempts by teachers and administrators to reach their hearts, and that can inject intellectual, attitudinal, moral, and spiritual poison into the bloodstream of the school's student body. The authors recognize this potential danger, for even while they advocate for a fairly broad admissions gate, they also recognize that "the students we admit are significant contributors to our developing school culture" (p. 69).

We believe that the inclusive admissions policy that Littlejohn and Evans advocate is a recipe for trouble for our schools at this stage in their development. Admitting a critical mass of unsaved students can destroy the culture of the school (p. 68).

Response: There are three issues to be addressed here: admissions, instruction and spiritual formation. First, admissions: We can identify at least four "types" of Christian school missions when it comes to populating the student body and community of families in the school. The first is the "mission" school that uses the draw of the qualities of education offered to attract "all comers" with the goal of evangelizing students and families. Such schools are unconcerned with the spiritual condition of their enrollees, but are very concerned with the spiritual condition of their graduates. The second is the parochial school, whose mission is to educate the children of the families who are members of the sponsoring church.

We also hope that ... the result will be schools that exhibit a culture of continuous improvement in the classroom.

Such schools almost always allow non-member families to enroll their children, but are unapologetic about the denominational emphasis that all families encounter at the school. The third is the covenant school, whose students and families, irrespective of denominational affiliation, must subscribe to (i.e. profess similarly expressed belief in) the school's statement of faith. Such schools, typically, require that at least one parent of every elementary student and every upper school student sign the statement of faith. The fourth type of school has a board- approved statement of faith and requires that every family and/or student assent to an education that is unapologetically based upon this statement of faith. Such schools hold that, since genuine faith cannot be assured by a person's signature, a family's indication that they desire such a faith-based education is the essential ingredient in shaping a desirable student body.

We respect each of these "types" of schools to the extent they are consistent in implementing their mission. Our bias for the fourth type of school is strictly personal and merely a reflection of our exercise of "authors' privilege" to express a subjective opinion now and then. It is also true that there are a number of well-known classical and Christian schools that admit unbelieving families and have since their inception (Logos School in Moscow, Idaho, for example). Our admonition to all schools, whatever the mission, is to be intentional in the admissions process to maintain the desired ethos through the kinds of students admitted.

Our notion of "inclusion" relates (evidently not clearly enough) more to instruction and spiritual formation than it does to admissions. Our encouragement is that schools embrace the great commission to "make disciples." We suggest that discipling students means being purposeful about forming them spiritually, through a robust curriculum in biblical studies and character/virtues development. If we single out the already admitted student whom we believe to be unregenerate and withhold whole-class discipleship from them in favor of individual tutoring in evangelism, we deny them the richness of a program designed to bring all comers into deeper relationships with Christ. Our notion is that a curriculum designed to mature the believing Christian will be equally effective in encouraging

continued on next page

Authors Respond to *Re-Thinking the Trivium?*

continued from page 11

faith in the non-believer. After all, it is Christ, through the Holy Spirit—not our curriculum—that accomplishes regeneration and sanctification in our students.

4. **Allen & Bray:** The authors advocate teaching typing and keyboarding as part of the curriculum of a classical Christian school (p. 89). In the ideal world, we would teach these things and many others beside, but there simply is no room in our core curriculum. While there is nothing inherently wrong with these "subjects," and while they might have some utility in a pluralistic, highly technological society like ours, our fledgling schools typically will have neither the personnel nor the equipment to teach them effectively. Could we offer them as a summer course, an after-school club, or a tutorial if we had enough student interest and the necessary assets available to us? Absolutely, but they should not divert our precious scarce resources from the core liberal arts. The good would then be the enemy of the best.

Response: This is another area that will be determined by a school's curricular goals. If proficiency with technology is not a curricular goal, then a school should not teach it. If it is, then a school must figure out a way to fit it in alongside all of the other important areas of instruction. Ultimately, we think this is a practical question for which there is no absolute "classical" preference, much like whether we teach students penmanship using stick letters or D'nealian.

5. **Allen & Bray:** At one point, the authors suggest teaching students to use true but invalid arguments (p. 111). This is surprising, to say the least. We should ask ourselves: Do good ends justify illicit means? Should we knowingly commit logical fallacies simply because they work? Can we in good conscience publicly espouse truth, goodness, and beauty, and then privately take the low road of a purely pragmatic pedagogy? Is that what has given "rhetoric" a bad name in the first place? It may be eloquent, but is it wise?

Response: Rhetoric has developed an ignoble reputation when it is taught and practiced without a concern for truth. When the Greek sophists of Plato's day were criticized for "making the greater argument the lesser and the lesser argument the greater," it was not because of their style of argumentation. They were properly criticized for using skillful arguments in courts of law to achieve *unjust ends*.

When we teach students to make use of true but logically invalid arguments, we are only acknowledging that logic is itself not a moral good, and that people are often persuaded to think and act wisely through other means than logical arguments.

The best example of the use of true but invalid arguments is the classical proofs for the existence of God. They are all true, but they are circular arguments—logically invalid. Still, many people have been led to faith through the consideration of these powerful arguments.

(Note also the framework we suggest for teaching rhetoric, stipulating that "the primary obligation of oratory is to truth…" p.137.)

6. **Allen & Bray:** We think that the third chapter on "Worldview and the Liberal Arts" leaves something to be desired. Littlejohn and Evans do a good job of pointing out that "worldview" is better caught than taught because it is not a set of ideas or principles but that underlying thought and life patterns behind them (a way of thinking). But the paradigm that they propose – of Creation - Fall - Redemption - Consummation (also adopted by Nancy Pearcey in *Total Truth*) does not go far enough. It stays in the abstract world and thus loses its usefulness at the practical level (the level where "worldview" lives). Unfortunately, Littlejohn and Evans do not carry this concept far enough.

Response: This may be a legitimate criticism, though we do hope that the discussion of worldview serves as a guide for schools as they decide what to teach in their Bible and theology curriculums. We also hope that the framework in this chapter finds consistent expression in the discussions about school culture and the importance of Christian thinking in education elsewhere in the book.

And we certainly are open to suggestions that would have made this chapter more useful to our readers.