

# THE CLASSICAL EDUCATION QUARTERLY

+ A JOURNAL OF THE CCLE +

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THE CLASSICAL EDUCATION QUARTERLY - A NEW KIND OF EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL

Welcome to our final edition of THE CLASSICAL EDUCATION QUARTERLY for 2008. The CEQ is dedicated to providing superior educational resources that inform and equip for the task of Lutheran education from the perspective of a classical pedagogy, as distinct from the educational goals and methods of progressive education. Our final issue is somewhat eclectic and on the brief side. For those who want to know what teaching exercises in the progymnasmata can look like, Pr. Kieser provides a wonder glimpse using the example of the ancient tale by Herodotus of *Rhapsinitus and the Thief*. Frequent contributor to the CEQ, Dr. Tallmon, provides an excellent analysis of rhetoric and dialectic in Augustine's timeless essay, *De Doctrina Christiana*. And lastly in the *Book Review Department*, Nate Bohlmann offers an example of the informative, and sometimes outrageous, politically-incorrect guides (PIG books) to most everything. He provides a most favourable review of Thomas Woods', *Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*.

When Abraham was in his prime, he was dwelling in the land of Canaan where God had told him to go, and he was very wealthy. God had blessed him richly. The Lord came to Abraham and told him that He would be giving this land to him and his offspring - offspring that would be blessed and number as the dust of the earth and the stars in the heaven. Abraham noted, however, that the program was yet missing a key component to get the thing off the ground - the first offspring. Then with great humor, God gets it all started with a child to be brought forth from two dottering old centenarians. Don't laugh. 2000 years later, the Lord acts to conclude this covenant promise through a virgin's offspring, who is crowned Savior by Name while He still is a seemingly helpless baby without speech, mobility, or bowel control. Indeed, in the fullness of time, 2000 years ago when an unusual Star was appearing in the east, the manger in Bethlehem was filled with food for sinners. Here He is! Come and gather round - become believers in the foolishness of God and the crazy methods he uses to accomplish your salvation. A blessed celebration of the Festivals of the Nativity and Epiphany of our Lord to you. sah

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## RHAPSINITUS AND THE THIEF: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PROGYMNASMATA BY PR. STEPHEN KIESER

Classical training in rhetoric included a set of writing exercises that were called progymnasmata. These writing exercises were preparatory for the gymnasmatia (lit. exercises). In the progymnasmata students used the writing of other authors for instruction in writing. The idea was to study, analyze, and imitate an excellent writer so that you might learn from him. After a student had completed these rudimentary exercises, he would write their own compositions. In progymnasmata, the goal was to imitate the Greats so that the student's writing might be ready for the public arena, politics, the pulpit, and courtroom.

Fourteen *pre-exercises* were used to instruct in writing.

1. Fable. Students were given a fable, such as one of *Aesop's Fables*. The task was to restate the fable in their own words in an amplified or abbreviated way. Sometimes students were asked to write a new fable that closely resembled the example given to them. One writing challenge that often accompanied this exercise was the requirement to turn indirect discourse into direct discourse.
2. Narrative. According to Quintilian, reciting narratives was one of the first exercises in a rhetorical education. This exercise included students retelling a story from beginning to end and was an important foundational exercise to the exercises that followed.
3. *Chreia*. This exercise's title is taken from the Greek and means, "useful." Here, the student amplified an anecdote about a wise person, an edifying action, or both. Several steps might be included in the composition: praise for the sayer or doer, introduction of a contrast, introduction of a comparison, support for the saying/action with testimony of others, and a conclusion.
4. Proverb. This exercise is similar to *Chreia* except a proverb is used. Generic sentences or moralistic sayings were used as topics.
5. Refutation. These exercises challenged the student to argue against an opposing view. Typically, students were given a myth or legend.
6. Confirmation. This is the opposite of the previous exercise. This simple exercise had students prove a given point of view. By using refutation and confirmation together, students would learn to argue both sides of a question.
7. Commonplace. Here students were to compose by elaborating, praising, or blaming a certain type of person, virtue, or vice.
8. Encomium. This is an exercise that praised a person, place, or thing either generally or specifically.
9. Vituperation. This exercise is similar to the Commonplace but differs in that a specific individual was to be spoken against. Vituperation is the companion to encomium.
10. Comparison. Something greater or equal was set side by side with the subject. Comparison was to build upon the previous two exercises.
11. Impersonation/Personification. Dramatic in form and employing dialogue, these exercises

sought to imitate the character of a person. The writer chose a person (living, dead, real or imagined) who would speak to a given circumstance.

12. Description. The subject to be described could be a person, place, or thing. The goal was to be vivid in writing.
13. Theme/Argument. This was a logical examination of a political or theoretical subject.
14. Defend/Attack a law. Some might consider this more of a declamation (recitation delivered with eloquence). The writer was to argue two sides of an issue while applying it to a specific law (even an imaginary one).

The *Histories* of Herodotus provide opportunity for progymnasmata. Known as the "Father of History," Herodotus (484-ca. 425 BCE) employs these pre-exercises in his writing. Central to his account is the epochal conflict between the Greeks and Persians. Herodotus records one of the earliest non-Western histories. One of the more popular progymnasmata is his encomium of Athens where Herodotus heralds Athens as the savior of Greece during the Persian Wars.

One of my favorite accounts in the tales of Herodotus is the story of Rhampsinitus and the thief (Book 1: Clio). What follows is an attempt to employ the narrative and encomium progymnasmata using Herodotus' account. In the narrative exercise I have attempted to abbreviate a story of approximately 1460 words to 750 words. Also, an effort has been made to turn indirect discourse into direct discourse. As an aside, The Institute for Excellence in Writing has some helpful suggestions for students learning to rewrite stories. In the encomium I have sought to find virtue worthy of praise in the thief who was rewarded for his cleverness. The basic components of encomium are: 1. The "stock" or "ancestry" of the thief, 2. His upbringing, 3. His deeds which are rewarded with fortune, 4. A favorable comparison of the thief with another and, 5. An exhortation.

#### **Narrative – Rhampsinitus and the thief:**

There is told in the tales of Herodotus of a king, called Rhampsinitus, whose wealth in silver was unmatched in his day. Such a sum needed a proper

chamber for its keeping. So a builder was contracted to construct onto the palace a vault for the safe-keeping of the treasure.

*There is told in the tales of Herodotus of a king, called Rhampsinitus, whose wealth in silver was unmatched in his day.*

But the builder was a conniving man. "Aha," he thought to himself, "I shall make for myself a wealthy nobleman. The chamber will be made of the finest hewn stone, but one of these stones will be as slippery as the peel of a banana and easily removed by even the slightest of men." And so, such a chamber was completed.

Presently, the builder fell ill. He called his two sons to the side of his death bed. "I have laid up for you a rich man's inheritance. The king's treasure is yours as you wish. Only remove the stone and take as you wish and you and your families will live as the richest of men."

The sons tarried little and went swiftly to their inheritance. But the king was not ignorant of his wealth. "How can this be? Each day my silver is less but not a door has been tampered nor a seal broken." King Rhampsinitus was replete in astonishment.

"A trap will reveal the witty mystery," said the king and he placed a trap near his wealth in the chamber to ensnare the clever thief.

Soon, the two sons were back to the stone which had opened to them their riches. One of them, upon entering the vault, was immediately entangled with no hope of release. "Woe of woes!" he said to the other. "Quick, dear brother, do what you must. Cut off my head so that you and our family will not be found out." The brother agreed and removed his brother's head and slipped away unfounded.

When morning broke the king could not believe what he found; "There is a headless man in a sealed treasure chamber? What can this be?"

"I shall find the perpetrator," declared the king. "Take this man's body and place it in the midst of the palace wall for all the people to see. And if anyone is seen weeping or lamenting this dead man, seize him immediately."

But the brother was still the cleverer. He brought the guards of the body a good supply of strong drink and soon the guards were fast asleep. "One last trick on these," the brother said, and with that he took a razor and shaved the right side of each of the soldiers' beards.

The king was even the more vexed to hear of the latest tale of the clever thief and devised a last and final plan to catch him. The king called his daughter to himself and gave her these instructions: "I will send word throughout my kingdom that the king's daughter will grant the favor of any man and let him have his way with her if only he will tell her what was the cleverest and wickedest thing he had ever done. When he confesses, take hold of him and do not let go."

The daughter obeyed and received one man after another. Finally, the clever thief came to her room and confessed, "the wickedest thing I have ever done was to cut off the head of my brother when he was ensnared in a trap in the king's treasure chamber... and the cleverest was to trick soldiers into a drunken sleep to retrieve his body."

*The king was amazed at the shrewdness and boldness of the man. He decided no longer to condemn the thief, but rather to reward him.*

When he finished, the king's daughter tried to seize the thief. But the thief took advantage of the darkness in the room and rather handed her the arm of a dead man. She imagined it to be the hand of the thief and cried out, "I have caught him! Come quickly!" By the time the soldiers arrived, the thief had slipped away once again.

The king was amazed at the shrewdness and boldness of the man. He decided no longer to

condemn the thief, but rather to reward him. King Rhampsinitus made a public decree, "The thief shall have free pardon and a rich reward whenever he makes himself known." The thief took him at his word and appeared before the king whereupon Rhampsinitus commended the dishonest man because he had acted shrewdly. "You are the most knowing of men and I wish to call you, 'my son.' Take my daughter in marriage. All I have is yours." And the thief was married to the king's daughter and was known throughout the entire world as one who excelled all other Egyptians.

### **Encomium – Rhampsinitus and the thief:**

The thief made Rhampsinitus the fool with the cleverest foils ever heard.

Thievery is often never considered a compliment, yet Rhampsinitus has praised his skill.

The thief was not of a nobleman's stock, but wealthy he came to be.

Silver and gold and a wife were gifts of the king, but shrewdness was given paternally.

Who would have thought it? A slippery stone? A dead man's hand?

The king was fooled again and again.

The thief's clever ways has won the day and the princess as his bride. Christ, the Savior, once told a tale of similar substance and charm.

His parable called the shrewd manager, "wise," and made him an example for all.

"For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are people of the light. Therefore, use worldly wealth," Jesus said, "to gain friends for yourself. So that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

Thievery is no compliment, but shrewdness is a gift divine.

Consider well Rhampsinitus' thief; his virtue was cloaked in a robber's disguise.

Look carefully at the clever way, and perhaps, a jewel will lie.

Note: For more on progymnasmata see the following web pages.

<http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Pedagogy/Progymnasmata/Progymnasmata.htm>

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/resources/rhetoric/prog-aph.htm>

<http://grammar.about.com/od/pg/q/progym1term.htm>

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### **... ABOUT CCLE**

THE PURPOSE OF **THE CONSORTIUM FOR CLASSICAL & LUTHERAN EDUCATION** IS TO PROMOTE, ESTABLISH, AND EQUIP INDIVIDUALS AND SCHOOLS COMMITTED TO CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN DOCTRINE AND A CLASSICAL APPROACH TO EDUCATION.

**THE CONSORTIUM** AND EVERY MEMBER ACCEPTS WITHOUT RESERVATION THE CANONICAL BOOKS OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS AS THE INSPIRED AND INERRANT WORD OF GOD AND ALL THE SYMBOLICAL BOOKS OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH AS A TRUE EXPOSITION OF GOD'S WORD.

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## **RHETORIC AND DIALECTIC IN ST. AUGUSTINE'S *DE DOCTRINA CHRISTIANA***

**BY DR. JAMES TALLMON**

If it is true that, as Aristotle said, rhetoric is a counterpart of dialectic and ethics, then there should be a relatively discernable point at which dialectic, ethics and rhetoric all converge. The overlap of dialectic with rhetoric, for instance, is exemplified by the fact that *discovery* is sometimes a synonym for *invention*--the prime canon of rhetoric. Moreover, discovery of truth is traditionally accepted as one of the ends of dialectical inquiry. There is a point at which the process of invention entails a sort of rhetorical dialectic. This is an intriguing relationship given the historically rigid, dichotomous treatments of dialectic and rhetoric. Saint Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* serves as a profitable study of that relationship because, Augustine advances a Christian ethical standard, a practical logic (which focuses on the unique challenges of Christian hermeneutics), and a

Christianized version of eloquence. Does Augustine's combination of those particular elements render *De Doctrina* a rhetoric - or is it a dialectic? If rhetoric is reflected, what type of rhetoric is it - philosophical, practical, formulaic, or a hybrid? A selective textual analysis will provide the necessary means of determining which, if any, of the three components is privileged in Augustine's doctrine for Christian teachers. This exploration will close with a more general meditation on the place of rhetoric in advancing matters of faith.

*The overlap of dialectic with rhetoric, for instance, is exemplified by the fact that discovery is sometimes a synonym for invention--the prime canon of rhetoric.*

### TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Augustine's first book takes the shape of an axiology by virtue of his initial division of the subject matter into "things" and "signs". Axiology is the study of relationships between various goods, self, and those things surrounding self. Ethics, for example, is the study of the good implied in the relationship between self and others. Politics studies the good in terms of power relationships, and so on. In Book One, Augustine clearly proceeds in an axiological fashion as he teaches the reader (and would-be teacher) how one ought to relate to things. In so doing, Augustine asserts that some things are to be used and some are to be enjoyed. More importantly, as Augustine explicates the right relationship between selves (both my self and other selves) he unfolds his ethical doctrine--the doctrine of charity--beginning in chapter XXII.

The doctrine of charity is Augustine's ethical imperative, derived from scripture. We are all obligated to love " . . . that which is equal to us and that which is above us." This twofold love constitutes an ethical standard because " . . . all other loves flow into it . . ." (23). Augustine's elaboration of the way in which charity constitutes an ethical standard is perhaps the most profound statement in *De Doctrina*.

*He lives in justice and sanctity who is an unprejudiced assessor of the intrinsic value of things. He is a man who has an ordinate love: he neither loves what should not be loved nor fails to love what should be loved; he neither loves more what should be loved less, loves equally what should be loved less or more, nor loves less or more what should be loved equally (23).*

But, in the final analysis, *De Doctrina* is not authored as a profound book and Augustine swiftly moves to harness his profundity for practical purposes. Chapter XXXVI (page 30) begins a transition to Book Two which contains Augustine's teaching on the interpretation of scripture.

*Whoever, therefore, thinks that he understands the divine Scriptures or any part of them so that it does not build the double love of God and of our neighbor does not understand it at all. Whoever finds a lesson there useful to the building of charity ... has not been deceived, nor is he lying in any way (30).*

There are two interesting points about the above passage: (1.) In it, Augustine establishes a standard for correct hermeneutics, and (2.) It demonstrates (in rare fashion) the borderland between ethics and dialectic. The ethical rule of charity is utilized as a standard for judging the accuracy of scriptural interpretation; a dialectical tool for discovering truth.

If Book One can be understood as Augustine's ethical doctrine for Christian teachers, then Books Two and Three can be understood as a practical logic for Christian teachers; practical in the sense that, in it, Augustine develops just enough of the dialectician's art for his readers to aid them in their hermeneutic capacity. As I mentioned above, Augustine divided his subject matter into a study of things and signs. Book Two begins with an examination of signs and quickly moves to the particular signs most important to the would-be teacher: words. Ambiguities are a major stumbling block to correct interpretation, of scripture so, naturally, Augustine focuses his analysis on techniques for clearing up ambiguities.

## *De Doctrina* is, in one sense, simply a textbook for students who plan to teach the scriptures--a seminary textbook on teaching the Word.

In chapters XXV-XL, Augustine briefly reviews the "human institutions" (of secular education), validating those disciplines useful to the Christian exegete. Book Three is the amplification and direct application to scripture of the dialectical method Augustine developed in the previous book. He maintains the focus on biblical interpretation by providing a plethora of examples of his method from scripture. Book Four is Augustine's treatment of eloquence. He begins with an internal summary and then a disclaimer:

*I must thwart the expectation of those readers who think that I shall give the rules of rhetoric here which I learned and taught in the secular schools. And I admonish them not to expect such rules from me, not that they have no utility, but because, if they have any, it should be sought elsewhere if perhaps some good man has the opportunity to learn them. But he should not expect these rules from me, either in this work or in any other (118).*

Here is Augustine's version of the rather standard disclaimer. The way I perceive such reluctance to associate with the first principles of rhetoric is twofold: First, the principles of rhetoric (at least as conceived in the Roman tradition) are indeed elemental and mundane. While much in the way of rich teaching on rhetoric is available, the standard treatment--aimed as it was at schoolboys--is rather superficial. Second is rhetoric's perennial bugaboo - guilt by association. From earliest times rhetoric has been associated with all manner of bombast and sophistry; an unpleasantness that especially prompts Saint Augustine to dissociate himself with rhetoric, at least at first glance. The disclaimer must also be understood in the specific context of Augustine's purpose: i.e., that he wishes to groom his sheep for their responsibilities as teachers--as opposed to tending a flock of declaimers! Again, at the risk of sounding redundant,

Augustine makes eloquence serve his practical ends. Hence comments like: "[T]hose with acute and eager minds more readily learn eloquence by reading and hearing the eloquent than by following the rules of eloquence" (119). Augustine apparently did not find it in the best interest of his pupils to study the depths of any of the several potentially deep topics he treats in *De Doctrina*. However, he does not avoid giving practical guidelines. In much the same way that he provided tools for discovering truth, Augustine now explicates a practical set of stylistic guidelines. For example, on page 123, we find Augustine's doctrine of propriety. That is, "Just as there is a kind of eloquence for youth and another kind for age; that should not be called eloquence which is not appropriate to the person speaking." Of the plain style: "But in all their utterances they should first of all seek to speak so that they may be understood . . ." (133). And so on. Augustine explains the styles appropriate to teaching and why a given style is appropriate to a given teaching situation. Chapter XVIII is an interesting example of Augustine's attempt to extract from Cicero useful guidelines for the Christian teacher. He utilizes the Ciceronian categories of forensic eloquence for his own purposes by contrasting the role (and appropriate style) of teachers to the role and style of lawyers.

Much of Augustine's concern with style can be reduced to exhortations to his reader to appropriately adapt to both the audience and the situation. Consider, for example, the following lines: "But no one should think that it is contrary to theory to mix these three manners; rather, speech should be varied with all types of style in so far as this may be done appropriately. For, when one style is maintained too long, it loses the listener" (158). Augustine closes his treatment of eloquence by stressing the importance of audience-centeredness.

#### THE QUESTION OF RHETORICAL DOCTRINE IN *DE DOCTRINA*

Using the sampling of passages above as evidence for surmising Augustine's rhetorical agenda in *De Doctrina*, we will now return to our earlier questions. We have observed what he did . . . now, what is it that he did? Is it a rhetoric, and, if so, what sort of rhetoric is it? It all depends. It all depends on how we define rhetoric, on the purposes of the author, and on how much latitude we are willing to allow in order to uphold our argument! Let us view rhetoric

through the eyes of Saint Augustine (for the time being,) and granting his stated purposes, give him the benefit of the doubt wherever possible. After all, it is his treatise and I think he is clear enough about both his intentions and his choices regarding the degree of rhetoric he included in his treatise.

*Therefore, it would seem that Augustine's treatments of dialectic and eloquence are purposefully sketchy so as to avoid undue encumbrance. It is important to always bear in mind Augustine's practicality.*

*De Doctrina* is, in one sense, simply a textbook for students who plan to teach the scriptures--a seminary textbook on teaching the Word. As Augustine makes clear from his thesis, the work has two broad divisions; discovering the truth and teaching the truth. Insofar as Augustine's goal is to equip students with only the necessities of their vocation, he avoids writing a detailed handbook for either section: The tools for discovery are few and the tools for teaching are fewer. Therefore, it would seem that Augustine's treatments of dialectic and eloquence are purposefully sketchy so as to avoid undue encumbrance. It is important to always bear in mind Augustine's practicality. He refuses to over-equip his young pupils. They are his "light brigade." In another important sense, *De Doctrina* is more than a simple textbook on teaching. No doubt due to his expertise in rhetoric, Augustine saw an opportunity to achieve his purposes in short order: he needed only to acquaint his troops with the rhetorician's art, make a few generalizations from rhetoric to teaching, and they would be off and running the good race, fighting the good fight. However, the choice to utilize rhetoric was not entirely unproblematic. That is why in *De Doctrina*, we observe several instances of Augustine carefully attending to potential abuses of the art. Matters such as, "This is not a full-blown rhetoric"; "Yes, it is acceptable to glean from pagan authors, but, no, one must not expect to achieve blessedness by the study of pagan authors"; "Rhetoric has been used for

ignoble ends--so beware"; etc. Each of these caveats is interesting and one could speculate on Augustine's perceptions about the power of rhetoric or the value of secular education, but such are not the questions at hand.

Keeping in mind both Augustine's end (equipping Christian teachers) and the particular fashion in which he construes his means of achieving that end (an ethic + some dialectic + a bit of eloquence), one begins to identify a strong rhetorical undercurrent in *De Doctrina*. Considering the Aristotelian conception of rhetoric in its fullness (that it is a counterpart of both ethics and dialectic), I would conclude that *De Doctrina* is a thoroughly rhetorical approach to equipping Christian exegetes. Augustine brings together enough ethics to establish a rule for hermeneutic purity, enough dialectic to aid in exegesis, and enough Roman eloquence to accomplish his practical aim. In other words, Augustine has pulled together a concise volume that covers the essentials of *invention* and *style* without overdosing his pupils on rhetorical theory. It is narrow, limited, practical and "sanctified" for Christian workers, but nonetheless, discernable as a rhetoric. One final question requires our attention.

#### ON THE ROLE OF RHETORIC IN MATTERS OF FAITH

Can Christian teaching and preaching, with their emphasis on apodeictic proof, ever be regarded as rhetoric? Augustine writes that, when one is speaking to those who ought to do something but do not wish to do it, "then those great things should be spoken in the grand manner in a way appropriate to the persuasion of their minds" (145). Apparently he felt that persuasion concerning matters spiritual was a viable possibility. The question shifts then to whether or not Augustine was right to think so. I believe he was right. Of course the "proofs" of Christianity are demonstrative (apodeictic) but conversion is the domain of evangelism, not teaching. The distinction between the ministry of the evangelist and that of the teacher is critical to the question at hand. The end of teaching is growth or maturity. Thus "practical Christianity"--principles for individual growth and maturity, (many of which come veiled in ambiguity--parable, allegory, etc.)--is the stuff of which sermons are made. Such arguments are not based on apodeictic proof, but on case reasoning, explications of moral dilemmas, contingencies, and the like. Christian

teachers exhort those who already believe to develop the habit of choosing well (which is maturity or, "sanctification" or "blessedness" or, to borrow Aristotle's term against Augustine's advice, *eudæmonia*). The domain of rhetoric is especially the realm of promoting individual maturity through situated arguments, validated by, but not solely based upon, apodeictic claims.

*The end of teaching is growth or maturity. Thus "practical Christianity"--principles for individual growth and maturity, (many of which come veiled in ambiguity--parable, allegory, etc.)--is the stuff of which sermons are made.*

But, on the other hand, rhetoric should not be made a worship. Perhaps that is the spirit of the question. George Kennedy is correct when he asserts that conversion should be understood as an act of the Spirit, but I would prefer to view rhetoric as a tool in the hands of God. I think it not too impious to propose that, through the word and faith, rhetoric somehow helps effuse the conversion (the acceptance of apodeictic claims) of those whom God calls. Finally, in a more general sense, theological questions are multidimensional: they frequently hold together--in suspension--both categorical and contingent elements. Excepting the few tenets of orthodoxy, theological questions are treated as just that--questions. Scripture is itself, open to interpretation except among rabid fundamentalists. But then, rhetoric has never exactly flourished on the desolate shores of the idiot fringe. The delicate nature of treating such complex questions underscores the wisdom with which Augustine composed *De Doctrina*; he baptized his pupils without saturating them; a rare feat ... even for a Saint!

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## ... BOOK REVIEW

THE POLITICALLY INCORRECT GUIDE TO  
AMERICAN HISTORY, BY THOMAS E. WOODS, PH.D. REGNERY  
PUBLISHING, 2004, 246 PAGES.

REVIEWED BY NATHAN BOHLMANN

The PIG books (as they've come to be known) have a reputation for introducing the reader to a topic with an easy-to-read style and a whole lot of substance that the reader may or may not have encountered before. Such is the case with *The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*. Lest the reader be unfamiliar with PIG books, the back cover does a nice job of telling you just what you should expect from this book: "Everything (well, almost everything) you know about American history is wrong". Talk about a hook! The temptation in writing a review of such an important book as this is to go chapter by chapter saying "Look here" or "Look there"! Such encouragements are really unnecessary however. Simply picking up the book and reading the first few pages will lure you in to find out more. Soon enough, you will have read the entire thing and will be asking yourself, "Why hadn't I heard that before?" I say, soon enough, because for a history book, this is a very easy and enticing read. The Preface states, "A word on what this book is not. It is not, and is not intended to be, a complete overview of American history." To that end this book limits itself to important and somewhat controversial events in American history. There are 18 chapters enclosed in 246 pages covering topics from "The Colonial Origins of American Liberty" to the important wars in American history (more about these later) to Bill Clinton. Lending weight to the book is a 10 page Bibliography as well as an extensive index. Along the way we are treated to "Books you're not supposed to Read" and statements by people involved in the event under discussion. These are very well chosen to support the facts as presented. For instance, on the question of why the Southern soldiers fought, a quote from both a Southern soldier and a Northern soldier point strongly to the contention that the War Between the States was fought because the South felt they were fighting another War of Independence.

*"Everything (well, almost everything) you know about American history is wrong".*

No review of American history, as this book purports to be, would be worth its price without a thorough treatment of the wars of America. Dr. Woods does not disappoint. While not covering every military skirmish, we are treated to The Revolution, the War Between the States, World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War. Of course no war is fought in a vacuum and Dr. Woods does an excellent job introducing the reader to the foment of war in each case. For the Revolution, he points out that it was not at all like the French Revolution but rather was fought to conserve liberty (and thus it was truly a Conservative Revolution).

*One can argue, rather forcefully, that the events which constitute the remainder of the book are all dependent on misreading or ignoring the Constitution.*

I digress for a moment from the war track to point out one of the most important chapters in the book, the chapter on the Constitution. This chapter has a plethora of sidebars, quoting the Founders, and giving us two *Books We're Not Supposed to Read*, pointing out why the Constitution posits a Federal government that is a servant of the States - not the other way around. One can argue, rather forcefully, that the events which constitute the remainder of the book are all dependent on misreading or ignoring the Constitution. As Dr. Woods writes at the end of this chapter:

*These are a few important aspects of the U.S. Constitution of which all Americans should be aware. If the Constitution were to be preserved, Thomas Jefferson explained, the people would have to keep vigilant watch over the federal government and be alert to its encroachments upon the rights of the states and of the people. As Jefferson said, "In questions of power then, let no more be heard of*

*confidence in man, but bind him down by the chains of the Constitution."*

From there, Woods moves to an understanding of what happened to throw the country into the war, known incorrectly, as the Civil War but more accurately known as The War Between the States. I say, "More accurately," because a true Civil War would be fought over who controls the government. This war was not like that at all but was rather fought for Independence. Note especially the sidebar on the last page of the chapter entitled "A Quotation the Textbooks Leave Out". Note also that this war started a disturbing trend in the wars of America: it was started by deceit. Woods maintains that Lincoln started the war by attempting to re-provision a federal fort in Charleston harbor as a pretense to get the South to fire first so he could call on 75 000 militiamen to "quash" the rebel states. This decision prompted the secession of four more Southern states: Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, and Arkansas.

And the tragic war was on. Dr. Woods covers it well, all the way through Reconstruction. The next war to be covered is World War I. Dr. Woods makes a strong case that America should never have been in that war but was drawn in through propaganda and some absurd positions by Woodrow Wilson. The most tragic result of World War I was World War II. The punitive Treaty of Versailles is well-recognized by historians as a major causative factor in World War II. Hitler appealed to the patriotism and honor of the German people who detested the Versailles Treaty. Wilson was partially responsible for the Versailles Treaty.

## *The most tragic result of World War I was World War II.*

On the way to World War II, we are treated to a discussion of the 1920s, the Great Depression, the New (rotten) Deal, and Communism in America. All chapters provide excellent treatments of their subjects.

Then we enter chapter 13, "The Approach of World War II". If the reader gets nothing else out of this chapter, they should understand that FDR lied the U.S. into this war. As Dr. Woods puts it, "That FDR used deceptive means to try to draw his country into the war is acknowledged by everyone except, apparently, most textbook authors." Also, "the president's claims that he was working day and night to keep the United

States out of the war were at this point becoming farcical." Finally, Dr. Woods lays bare FDR's provocation of the Japanese. The next chapter talks about the consequences and aftermath of World War II. Here it is mentioned that, "In fact, from the Korean War onward, Congress would never again officially declare war." This is still true today, 5 years after the book was published.

The final chapters cover the topics of Civil Rights, JFK & LBJ, welfare's failure, Vietnam's origins (simply welfare writ large), the misnamed Decade of Greed, and finally Bill Clinton. I simply must quote the final two paragraphs of the book, whose sub-heading is "'The era of big government is over' -- say what?"

*Toward the end of his term, President Clinton said, apparently in all seriousness: "The era of big government is over." He said that while presiding over a government so enormous that the Framers of the Constitution would have fainted at the sight of it. The Federal Register, which lists all federal regulations in effect, continues to hover between 60,000 and 80,000 pages. Through the Medicare and Social Security programs, the federal government has made promises of benefits that over the next several decades will prove to be under-funded to the tune of tens of trillions of dollars. The level of taxation necessary to fund them would grind the economy to a complete standstill. The era of big government does not, in fact, seem to be over just yet -- unless those unfunded liabilities should bankrupt the federal Leviathan once and for all. Meanwhile, the federal courts routinely violate the self-government of the states. Throughout the 1990s, voters approved state ballot initiatives on questions ranging from immigration to affirmative action, only to have imperial federal judges strike them down. So much for self-government, the principle on which the War for Independence had been based. As we have seen, the Framers of the Constitution had expressly sought to avoid precisely this: a federal government whose own power went essentially uncontested, while it struck down perfectly constitutional state laws that it happened not to like. And Americans, by and large, do not know enough of their own history to be able to challenge any of it, or even to realize that a problem exists. It was on that sobering note that the*

*twentieth century, sometimes called the American Century, drew to a close.*

Sobering indeed! This review only touches on a very small portion of the book. I can highly recommend it for anyone, but especially those who want the truth about their America. Thomas E. Woods, Jr., Ph.D. is a prolific author. In addition to the book here reviewed, he has written *33 Questions You're Not Supposed to Ask about History*, several books on the Church and the Market, and with Kevin R. C. Gutzman, J.D., Ph.D., *Who Killed the Constitution?*.

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## **CACLE IX**

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**The Consortium for Classical  
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Dates: June 30 - July 2, 2009

Place: St. Paul's Lutheran Academy,  
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