

THE CASE FOR CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

*“I am much afraid that the universities will prove to be the great gates of hell, unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures, and engraving them in the hearts of youth. I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution in which men are not unceasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt.”*

*-Martin Luther<sup>1</sup>*

## Are Christian Schools Necessary?

In Ephesians 6:4 Paul says to “...bring [your children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”<sup>2</sup> The Greek word that is translated into English as ‘discipline’ in this passage is *paideia* (παιδεία): “the whole training and education of children.”<sup>3</sup> This word is closely related “to the cultivation of mind and morals.”<sup>4</sup> According to Davies Owens, *paideia* can be thought of as “the key ingredient in each of our hearts and minds that sustains our culture, motivates the choices we make, [and] determines how we see the world.”<sup>5</sup>

In the passage, Paul also exhorts us to raise our children in the Lord’s ‘instruction.’ The Greek word used here is *nouthesia* (νουθεσία): “warning through teaching.”<sup>6</sup> This sort of instruction “improves a person’s reasoning so they can reach God’s solution...by going through His thought-process.”<sup>7</sup>

Can we really say that we are bringing up our children in the *paideia* and *nouthesia* of the Lord when we send them to secular schools? We would say (in most cases) no. Our students will receive

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<sup>1</sup> D’Aubigné, JH Merle. *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*. 1846. Pg. 190  
[https://books.google.com/books?id=yGC82DfmYN4C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=yGC82DfmYN4C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>2</sup> "Ephesians 6:4 (ESV)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed June 09, 2019.  
[https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/eph/6/4/t\\_conc\\_1103004](https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/eph/6/4/t_conc_1103004).

<sup>3</sup> Strong’s Greek: 3809. παιδεία (paideia) -- the Rearing of a Child, Training, Discipline. Accessed June 09, 2019.  
<https://biblehub.com/greek/3809.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Owens, Davies. "An Ancient Future Education." Speech, Repairing the Ruins: ACCS Conference 2018, Texas, Frisco, June 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ue5EwHF06Is>.

<sup>6</sup> Strong’s Greek: 3559. νουθεσία (nouthesia) -- Admonition. Accessed June 09, 2019.  
<https://biblehub.com/str/greek/3559.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

about 12,000 hours of instruction between kindergarten and 12th-grade.<sup>8</sup> During these 12,000 hours, our students are being mentored by people who (typically) believe that truth and morality are relative concepts, they are being taught a world-view by people who think Christianity is utter foolishness, and they are being turned into people whose sense of wonder has been replaced by cynicism and doubt. In effect, this system produces what C.S. Lewis has termed “Men Without Chests”—students who have been robbed of their sense of wonder in God’s creation, their belief in truth and morality, and their sense of purpose.<sup>9</sup>

In response to this argument, some might say, “but some secular school teachers are Christians, don’t they counter the post-modern indoctrination of secular curriculum?” We can tell you that such teachers can do very little to counter the anti-God indoctrination that has almost completely permeated the culture and curriculum of our schools. About all a Christian teacher can do is do their best to love students in a Christ-like manner while hoping and praying that students will come and privately ask about Christ. Any more than this and parents will complain and your job will be at risk. No, the Christian teacher in a secular setting is fighting an uphill battle against the forces of secular indoctrination with one hand tied behind his or her back. This has led us to believe that sending our children to be indoctrinated in secular schools is akin to “...forfeiting our parental authority and failing to be mentors to our children in the moral life.”<sup>10</sup>

### **But Doesn’t the Church Counter the Indoctrination of Secular Schools?**

The Christian Church’s attempt to counter this indoctrination of our youth tends to consist of one youth service per week—or about 45 hours per year. This instruction is primarily seeker friendly (and understandably so) and basic in nature. In our opinion, this is not nearly enough to counter the indoctrination of the public school system (not to mention the world-view indoctrination that is constantly conveyed through mass media and entertainment). One will (typically) not find youth groups engaging in the expository study of scripture, the discussion of great Christian works (such as the works of C.S. Lewis), or the study of apologetics. Yet all of this and more is needed in order to counter the post-modern world view that has taken American schools by storm.

### **Why Classical Christian Education?**

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<sup>8</sup> “Time in School: How Does the U.S. Compare?” Centerforpubliceducation.org. Accessed June 07, 2019. <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/research/time-school-how-does-us-compare>.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, C.S. *The Abolition of Man, Or, Reflections on Education With Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools*. San Francisco: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. Pg. 25

<sup>10</sup> Guroian, Vigen. *Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child’s Moral Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pg. 4

*“The purpose of education has been described by Milton as that of fitting a man ‘to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices both private and public, of peace and war.’ ... Aristotle would substantially agree with this, but would add the conception that it should also be a preparation for leisure... Vocational training, on the other hand, prepares the pupil not for leisure, but for work; it aims at making not a good man but a good banker, a good electrician, a good scavenger, or a good surgeon. You see at once that education is essentially for freemen and vocational training for slaves... If education is beaten by training, civilization dies.”*

- C.S. Lewis<sup>11</sup>

Now, we have to admit that there are already a lot of Christian schools. Why then, do we believe we need to start another one? The answer is simple. Most Christian schools use the Pragmatic Model of education, they do not use the Classical Model, which is the best educational model the West has seen. So what is classical education?

Classical education was the primary educational philosophy used in the West from the Late Medieval Period until Progressive (or Pragmatic) philosophy eclipsed it in the early 20th Century.<sup>12</sup> And while a classical education certainly involves the study of Greece and Rome, the term can be somewhat confusing because it encompasses so much more than that.<sup>13</sup> Here is a succinct comparison of the classical and pragmatic models:

- The aim of classical education is to help shape students into virtuous, moral people who love Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. The goal of Pragmatic education is to produce workers for the state.
- Classical education strives to teach students how to think critically, articulate eloquently, and vigorously pursue the Truth. Pragmatic education seeks to train students to memorize vast sets of information.
- The classical classroom has much less didactic (lecture-based) instruction than a pragmatic classroom. Instead, classical students refine their reading, speaking, and critical thinking skills in Socratic seminars. Let us highlight this difference further

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<sup>11</sup> Mosteller, Timothy, and Gayne John Anacker. *Contemporary Perspectives on C.S. Lewis' 'The Abolition of Man': History, Philosophy, Education, and Science*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Pg. 77

<sup>12</sup> Howe, Daniel Walker. "Classical Education in America." *The Wilson Quarterly*. Spring 2011. Accessed June 10, 2019. <https://wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/spring-2011-the-city-bounces-back-four-portraits/classical-education-in-america/>.

<sup>13</sup> Miller, John J. "Back to Basics." *National Review*. October 01, 2015. Accessed June 10, 2019. <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2015/10/19/back-basics-2/>.

through an example. In a pragmatic classroom, a history teacher will put a PowerPoint slide on the screen that informs students that Thomas More wrote *Utopia*. A few facts will be on this slide and students will be told to memorize them for the next test. They will remember those facts and then promptly forget them after the test. In a classical classroom, students will spend a week reading and discussing *Utopia* and their teacher will ask them key questions to help them unlock and understand the text. Through reading and discussing the work students will gain deep insight into the world of 16th Century England and the political, social, and moral issues of that day. They will then be able to use that knowledge to better inform themselves of the political, social, and moral issues of our day.

- Classical education involves close study and discussion of the Great Books. Through the Great Books, classical students interact with the greatest minds of humanity. Pragmatic students have little need for the Great Books.

Classical education is the sort of education C.S. Lewis refers to in the quotation above. It is the education of “freemen.” Pragmatic education that simply trains students for a vocation is the education, as Lewis says, of “slaves.” Is it not time we took the responsibility of educating our children away from the Pragmatism and indoctrination of the state? Is it not time to reevaluate the way we are educating our children so that we can bring them up in the *paideia* of the Lord?

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