

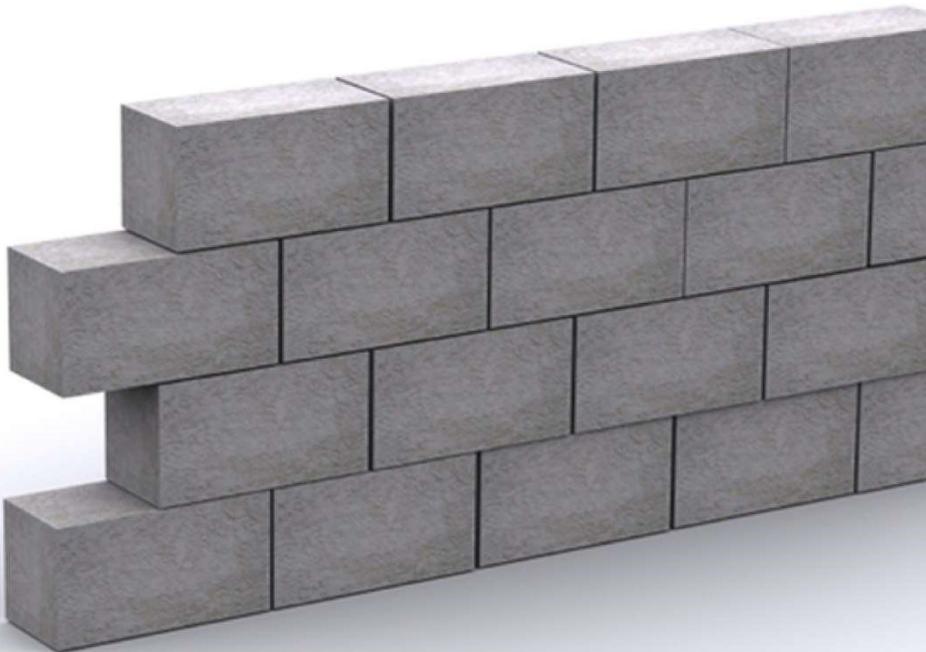
BUILDING

ON A

FOUNDATION

CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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Building on a Foundation: Classical Christian Education

Much has been written and discussed regarding the state of education in North America. Children are leaving both primary and secondary school underprepared in the ability to think critically and to enter the workforce ready to make a significant contribution. Many have blamed the education system and the methods of education that are being utilized in the public system. Also concerning, especially to the Christian parent, is the secularization of the public schools. This has been happening for decades but in recent years there has been not only a disregard to teach what is right, but there has also been a push to celebrate what is evil in the name of tolerance. Over the past 35 years, a philosophy of education known as classical Christian education has started to gain momentum, especially among Christians. This movement essentially endeavours to prepare young minds to think properly, and to learn how to learn, with a distinctly Christian education grounded in the biblical Christian worldview. The overarching idea of classical Christian education is that, instead of simply teaching children subject matter, they are taught how to learn so that all through their lives they think biblically about all matters of life. For example, many

people forget how to use trigonometry to find the angle in a triangle; however, if students are taught how to progress from knowing the mathematical fundamentals to eventually come to understand the concepts in trigonometry, they will be prepared for learning new things and for success later in life as they have learned to build from first principles. In this paper, I will examine the history behind the classical Christian education movement. I will discuss the philosophy that drives education in the classical method and show that it is consistent with a biblically sound Christian worldview. Finally, I will look to the more recent developments of this movement in the last 30 years to show why I believe this is a positive development that will benefit children greatly.

A Brief History of Classical Christian Education

It is important when writing on a subject, especially a subject with the vast variation in meaning such as “classical education”, to define the terms being used. When we think of classical education, many things can come to mind. We could consider the educational approach during the ancient Greek and Roman periods. We might think of an education similar to what is being taught in the public system but

with an addition of the classical languages such as Latin and Greek. We might think it is an education rooted in the study of the classic works of western civilization. For the purposes of this paper, I am defining classical education as having a basis rooted in the seven liberal arts. When we talk of the seven liberal arts, we are not talking about subjects per se. The seven liberal arts are the art of learning that helps any student move through various subjects, texts and ideas because they have been taught the foundations of each before moving on.¹ Historically, two specific terms have been used to capture the seven liberal arts, the trivium and the quadrivium. The three stages of the trivium are grammar, logic and rhetoric; some have noted a correlation of these stages with the developmental stages of children. In its most basic form, the trivium seeks to ground children with an ability to think and learn.

The trivium first appeared in medieval Europe and grew out of the modest tutoring in Latin that started in monasteries and cathedrals;

¹Gene Edward Veith, Jr and Andrew Kern, *Classical Education: The Movement Sweeping America* (Washington: Capital Research Center, 2015), 17.

eventually the trivium became the basis for all education in the west.² During this time, Latin was the cornerstone language of the educational system with the emphasis on theological training.³ Thus, Latin and theology represented the foundational knowledgebase necessary to prepare men to become contributors to society throughout the western world. Students progressed through each stage of the trivium (grammar, logic and rhetoric) learning the language, mainly Latin; they were taught how to properly understand (grammar), use (logic), and master (rhetoric) the language. Specifically, grammar taught the fundamental rules of language, the logic stage taught them to use the language well and reason within it, and the rhetoric stage taught students to master the language by learning how to use it to form arguments and communicate their thoughts well. These three stages were considered the building blocks of education.

Along with the trivium, classical education utilized the quadrivium. The quadrivium consisted of arithmetic, geometry, music

²Adolphe E. Meyer. *An educational History of the Western World* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965), 76.

³Ibid.

and astronomy. These were considered the mathematical side of classical education alongside the foundations of language found in the trivium. Together, they constituted the seven liberal arts. For the medieval period, it was important to know how to communicate and know how to learn well prior to learning various subjects. The purpose of a foundation in the seven liberal arts and the trivium in particular was to give students the foundation of learning before study of specialized subjects or what we would consider a typical university education today. Adolphe Meyer, who has written on the history of western education, says of the trivium, “For several centuries the trivium maintained itself an undisputed master in the educational drill halls – indeed, it had not even a rival.”⁴

Education in the Middle Ages was also intrinsically linked to the church. William Boyd, an award winning Scottish educator, writes:

by the end of the Eighth Century (when Theodulph and Charlemagne were prescribing universal education) all cathedrals and collegiate churches had a song school and a

⁴Meyer, 77.

grammar school associated with them, and that the song school was no longer a purely professional school for the training of choristers, but an elementary school as well; and the grammar school in like fashion no longer merely preparatory for theological study, but an institution in which the future clergy received a general education in company with all the professional classes.⁵

The church controlled the education process, and education was not only for the purpose of educating future clergy, but also for those who were studying for professional services such as law and administration. This meant that as long as the Bishop or Bishop-appointed teacher was well versed in the Christian worldview, where the Bible is the starting point of all learning, then the things taught were taught with that in mind. Indeed, theology was the cornerstone of education and the dissemination of theology was one of the reasons that a formal educational system existed.

⁵William Boyd and Edmund J. King, *The History of Western Education*, (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1977), 114.

The seven liberal arts as the basis of education remained prominent well into sixteenth century reformation era Europe. This can be seen in Geneva during the time of John Calvin. He said, “The liberal arts and good training . . . are aids to a full knowledge of the Word. They are a public necessity...”⁶ According to Calvin, the proper use of education is to help people better understand the Word of God and therefore serve God and understand Him better. In setting up the educational system in Geneva, Calvin set up a system of grammar, rhetoric and logic (the trivium) with a strong emphasis on both Latin and Greek.⁷ In doing this, the colleges in Geneva, which would be the equivalent of modern secondary schools, attracted students from countries all over Europe because they became known as providers of a superior education.

The eighteenth century ushered in what has come to be known as the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason. In it, the biblical foundation of the past was replaced by reasoning and observation as the basic foundation that lead to truth. During this time, people began to

⁶Meyer, 164.

⁷Ibid, 165.

question the method of education, and the strictness of the trivium went out of style as psychology became more prominent and the church became less influential. Individuality became one of the all-important tenets of education instead of learning how to learn. John Dewey, a giant of progressive educational reform, wrote in the nineteenth century, “the imposition from above [by this he means traditional learning] is opposed to expression and cultivation of individuality. To external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience.”⁸ Dewey was commenting on the traditional classroom where discipline was demanded, and the teacher’s job was to impart knowledge and contrasting that with his ideal method where the student is to be encouraged to figure it out on their own, and that free activity leads to experience that will provide the necessary knowledge. Through thinking and influences like Dewey, educational authorities have progressively tried to distance themselves from the picture of a teacher teaching from the front and move more toward experience as the greatest teacher. By

⁸John Dewey, “Experience and Education” in *The Philosophical Foundations of Education*, ed. Stephen M. Cahn (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970), 223.

the twentieth century, not much about the educational system was still considered classical. A few private schools adhered to teaching Latin and Greek but their method of instruction were not classical in the vein of the definition given earlier. It was the breakdown of the educational system in the United States that led to the renewal of classical Christian education as a viable choice for Christian parents.

The Re-emergence of Classical Christian Education

In 1947, Dorothy Sayers declared in a speech at Oxford University that she was worried about the state of education in the emerging modern age. She asked the question, “Has it ever struck you as odd, or unfortunate that today, when the proportion of literacy throughout Western Europe is higher than it has ever been, people should have become susceptible to the influence of advertisement and mass propaganda to an extent hitherto unheard-of and unimagined? . . . Or do you sometimes have an uneasy suspicion that the product of modern educational methods is less good than he or she might be at disentangling fact from opinion and the proven from the plausible?”⁹

⁹Dorothy Sayers, “The Lost Tools of Learning,” in *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning*, by Douglas Wilson, (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 1991), loc 1682.

Even seven decades ago, Sayers recognized that the educational process was failing people in giving them the tools needed to know how to learn and discern properly. Since then, as those driving educational philosophy have pushed the (Dewey) ideology forward, the state of education has proven to be unsuccessful at appropriately educating our children. Virtually everyone in the United States agrees that the educational institution is broken but attempts to answer the problem have largely come from government and political leaders in the form of more money being thrown at an already broken system, coupled with more progression into the very philosophy that brought the system to where it is today. Douglas Wilson, in his book *The Case for Classical Christian Education*, documents the decline in a compelling way. He looks at the increasing violence in the school system,¹⁰ the overuse of drugs,¹¹ and the academic decline.¹² He states, “When it comes to literacy, one-third of fourth graders were at the place where all fourth graders should be.”¹³ Because of this, and the simultaneous

¹⁰Douglas Wilson, *The Case for Classical Education*. (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2003), *loc* 155.

¹¹*Ibid*, *loc* 179.

¹²*Ibid*, *loc* 210.

¹³*Ibid*, *loc* 216.

secularization of the public school system, many Christian parents have discarded the public schools as a viable option for the education of their children. Some have turned to homeschooling, others to local private Christian schools, where teaching occurs similarly to the public system, but within the context of a Christian worldview; some private Christian schools have recently turned to the classical approach.

There are many veins of classical education that have emerged in recent years.¹⁴ Some relate directly to Christianity while others are inherently secular; however, an overarching theme is that they do not see education as only a means to the desired end defined as a high paying job. Education is viewed as a good unto itself because it strives to help shape people into better citizens by not limiting to the mere teaching of facts, but rather the focus is on teaching facts rooted in an understanding of something greater. In a secular classic school context, this greater good is typically defined as mere morality. For classical Christian schools, the facts are rooted in the greater good of biblical

¹⁴For a great overview of the different strains of Classical Education that have begun to emerge refer to *Classical Education: The Movement Sweeping America*

Christianity. For the rest of this paper, I will focus on the classical Christian movement.

A leading proponent of the classical Christian education movement is Douglas Wilson. In 1981 he spearheaded the starting of a school called Logos School in Moscow, Idaho. After reading the speech by Dorothy Sayers he was struck by her approach to classical education. She took the trivium from the medieval European educational system, brought it to the twentieth century and applied it to all subjects. She saw the three aspects of the trivium align closely with the stages of development in children. For instance, the grammar stage where rules and fundamental skills are memorized correspond with the period where young children are able to memorize songs and language more easily than later on in their lives. As children age, they were better equipped to put the pieces together (logic stage) and then, ultimately, to master them (rhetoric stage).

Logos School has grown significantly and continues to be very successful. It has a growing national reputation and the school is known

for academic excellence.¹⁵ Christian parents saw the academic success of Logos School along with the benefits of the classical model and how they taught from an unapologetically Christ-centred worldview. Many parents were intrigued, and so, following the publication of Wilson's book entitled *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning*, opened schools similar to Logos School. Eventually Logos School was overwhelmed by the amount of people reaching out for help to start these schools. In response to this, the Association of Classical Christian Schools (ACCS) was founded. The ACCS helps people in the United States open classical Christian schools and ensures that those under the banner of the ACCS are teaching and structuring the school in a way consistent with the classical Christian method. According to the ACCS website as I write this paper, there are currently 35 accredited schools in the United States and 18 schools in the accreditation process. It has even gone global with a few schools outside the U.S. including one in Canada called Westminster Classical Christian Academy located in Toronto, Ontario. It

¹⁵Sayers, loc 1307.

is an affiliate school of the ACCS and are currently leading the way in classical Christian education in Canada.

Is the Classical Christian Model intrinsically Christian?

Classical Christian education is rooted in the Christian worldview, which means that every single subject is taught from the starting point that the Bible is true. Wilson writes, “Every Christian must adopt an implicit, absolute, childlike wonder at the glory of the Scriptures. We must be people of the Book, knowing it top to bottom, front to back.”¹⁶ This is the cornerstone and foundation of the curriculum, and it is the basis for every subject that is taught. All subjects are taught recognizing that God exists and that He ordered and created the world and has revealed Himself to His people in Scripture.

But is the methodology Sayers’ envisioned essentially Christian? We could make almost any educational theory Christian by approaching it from a Christian worldview, but is there anything uniquely Christian about the use of the trivium itself? Wilson argues that the scriptural distinction between knowledge, understanding and wisdom can be

¹⁶Ibid, loc 1460.

correlated to the trivium's grammar, rhetoric and logic.¹⁷ It is perhaps, an exaggeration to attempt to document a one to one correlation and Wilson admits as much; however, he does show that there are stages to understanding. He goes on to show that the stages of the trivium mirror the stages of a child's development and, in turn, the stages bring a person from knowledge to wisdom and understanding. The book of Proverbs describes a progression of folly through four distinct levels that, without wisdom, ultimately leads to depravity: first, is the simple-minded fool; second, the dullard; third, the stubborn or evil fool; and finally, the scoffer. A person left on his or her own will progress from simply not knowing (the simple fool) to eventually become one who is disdainful toward God (the scoffer). Seeing this progression shows the importance of classical Christian education. As children are taught how to learn through the trivium in the context of the Christian worldview, we are able to reach children when they are still only at the level of a simple-minded fool. More than merely teaching facts about certain subjects, classical Christian education provides the foundation for all future learning and equips children to understand fundamentally how

¹⁷Ibid, loc 2012.

to study and learn, while simultaneously pointing them to the Bible and towards the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).

Could other educational methods be also viewed as Christian?

Yes, they very well could be. The Bible does not give one method for educating children; however, scripture clearly states that the education of children is the responsibility of parents (Proverbs 22:6). It is also clear that the classical Christian method is wholly consistent with the teachings of the Christian faith.

Classical Education and the Public School System

So, what exactly is the difference between how children are taught in the public system and how they are taught in a classical Christian school along the lines of the ACCS? As I previously stated, classical Christian schools incorporate the trivium into all aspects and subjects of learning. Wilson says,

Grammar, logic and rhetoric will be emphasized in all subjects. By grammar, we mean the fundamental rules of each subject (again, we do not limit grammar to language

studies), as well as basic data that exhibit those rules. In English, a singular noun does not take a plural verb. In logic, *A* does not equal *not A*. In history, time is linear not cyclic. Each subject has its own grammar, which we require the student to learn. This enables the student to learn the subject from the inside out.¹⁸

This is a very big distinction from what happens in the public educational system. The public school teaches subjects in a less strict progression. Grammar (the fundamental rules) is taught alongside the more complex ideas. Grade one is where students begin to learn to write. In the current grade one literacy curriculum in Ontario, students are expected to write stories and know story structure while still learning basic grammar. One of the overall expectations for writing in Ontario's grade one curriculum is, "draft and revise their writing, using a variety of informational, literary, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience."¹⁹ This is done

¹⁸Wilson, *Recovering*, loc 1125.

¹⁹ Ontario. 2006. The Ontario curriculum grades 1-8: language. Toronto: The Ministry, 42.

before the basic rules of language are in place. The specific expectation for grammar in the curriculum says,

use parts of speech appropriately to communicate their meaning clearly, with a focus on the use of: nouns for names of people, places, and things; the personal subject pronouns I, you, he, she, it, we, they; verbs to tell what they do and feel; some adjectives; and simple prepositions of place (e.g., in, on, at, to)²⁰

The problem is that the students are being expected to write and revise at the same time as the tools to do that are being introduced. The foundations of the language have not been taught to these students before they are expected to put it together and use the language in a complex way.

A good way to understand the classical model is to recognize that there are parts to the whole of knowledge, and that it is impossible to immediately gain mastery of knowledge through the educational process. Therefore, the classical education system works like building

²⁰ Ibid, 46.

blocks. First a foundation is laid and the parts of the subject are taught and they build upon one another. Continuing from the example above, the foundational rules of grammar are taught first, so that the student has a mastery of language beyond the mere vernacular that one speaks. I recently visited a classical Christian school and observed a grade 3-4 class. When students struggled with spelling or grammar, they were referred to the rules of the language they had already mastered, and they were able to figure out for themselves the correct answer with little guidance. The power of classical education is to help the students master the parts of the material so that they are properly equipped to use and then master the whole. This is a vastly different approach than the public system where all parts are taught simultaneously.

Math is another excellent example of how the public and classical approaches differ. The good overall goal of the public system aims for independent thinking to guide problem solving with the philosophy that as students work on figuring out the problem, they learn the skills to solve the problem and grow in their problem-solving ability. The difficulty is that they fail to teach the foundational skills necessary for effective problem solving before expecting students to

solve problems. I've been in many classes and administered many tests, and the number of grade 6 - 8 students that have no idea how to perform basic multiplication or division in the public schools is astounding. They are bright kids but frustrated because they were never properly taught the foundational skills. They are not being taught to stand on the shoulders of those who have come before and who already did the work to know the most efficient way of solving a problem. Instead a disdain for the past is shown. Students are taught to do things in a round-about way and the less effective method is taught as having as much validity as the more effective method that would take a fraction of the time. Fundamentals are not taught well and thus students are not set up for success.

There is an emphasis in the public system for students to figure things out for themselves. They want classrooms to be active places where students are actively learning and problem solving and learning through experience. There is a place for this in the classroom, but when these things are attempted without prior formation of a proper foundation or basis in a subject, students who are more intelligent have an advantage because they are able to figure out a problem

independently while the rest of the class sits on the sideline and does not learn. This is why the use of the trivium and teaching to the development of the child is important. Trying to have a child that is too young think in a critical way (the rhetoric stage) before they have been taught the fundamental tools used in critical thinking (the grammar and logic stage) is foolish. Experiential education is good as a supplement but cannot be the basis for education. The grammar, logic, and rhetoric progression makes sense. Teaching the basics and foundations of the subjects is important before attempting or expecting fluency in any subject. The foundation of every subject is God and the rules that govern those subjects should be taught first.

I recently came across an opinion piece published in the *Globe and Mail* by university mathematics Professor Anna Stoke entitled “Ontario’s math system is broken. So why isn’t the government fixing it?” Professor Stoke comments on the Ontario math curriculum, “Unsurprisingly, students are left without the solid foundation needed to tackle more complex problems. Students need basic facts and techniques in long-term memory, developed through hours of practice

to become strong problem solvers.”²¹ She also references the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) which is responsible for assessing students’ comprehension of math and literacy. The 2015/2016 results show that only 46 percent of students in the province of Ontario are at or above the provincial standard for mathematics in grade 6. In the Waterloo Region District School Board, the results are slightly better at 50 percent meeting the provincial standard.²² The government-sponsored, so-called progressive education system is failing our children.

In light of the concerns expressed by Professor Stoke, the classical approach retains the fundamentals as centrally important to the educational process. Multiplication tables are memorized. Addition and subtraction are taught well before students are expected to perform higher order mathematical functions. Susan Bauer, author of *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home* uses the

²¹ <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/ontarios-math-system-is-broke-so-why-isnt-the-government-fixing-it/article31664784/>

²² [https://eqaoweb.eqao.com/eqaoweborgprofile/Download.aspx?rptType=PBS&_Mident=66176&YEAR=2016&assessmentType=3&orgType=B&nF=q\\$FRsUhIZuVYVlyFwJBf~fslash~5vGsfUFQ0d8EheYXxxkMSs=&displayLanguage=E](https://eqaoweb.eqao.com/eqaoweborgprofile/Download.aspx?rptType=PBS&_Mident=66176&YEAR=2016&assessmentType=3&orgType=B&nF=q$FRsUhIZuVYVlyFwJBf~fslash~5vGsfUFQ0d8EheYXxxkMSs=&displayLanguage=E)

same theory as Wilson in a homeschool setting. In regard to mathematics she states,

The job of laying mathematical foundation should be taken seriously. Basic mathematics – the skills of addition and subtraction, multiplication and division, the knowledge of basic geometrical shapes and patterns, the ability to think through word problems, a firm grasp of the relationships between numbers – is as vital to high level mathematical achievement as an understanding of punctuation and sentence structure is to high level language use.²³

Classical educators view the fundamentals as foundational, and teach them properly to equip students for success, because it is important to learn the basics before being expected to think critically in any field. The philosophy is clear: first master the parts, then build on the foundation towards a mastery of the whole.

²³ Susan Wise Bauer and Jessie Wise, *The Well Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009), loc 2175.

Also, attempting to create an active learning environment without discipline and order is a recipe for failure. In the public system there is very little respect for teachers and very little administrative support in classroom management; the negative effects of this show in the way the students behave in a classroom. As a supply teacher for the Waterloo Region District School Board for the past few years I have seen this firsthand. As students get older, their respect for the teacher and for learning in general erodes because teachers have no authority, except for their philosophy of making learning fun as a tool to control the class. I have been in junior high classes where educational assistants have come to me at the end of the day and lamented about the overall behaviour of the class and the lack of respect toward the teachers and administration. Classical Christian educators take a disciplined classroom seriously and there are high behavioural expectations for students. Classes are orderly because the culture of the school demands an orderly classroom. There are strict consequences when students misbehave and disrupt the class because it is important to have an atmosphere where all students can learn. In this type of environment, a student's chance for success is maximized.

One of the arguments against classical Christian education, apart from the secular argument against Christianity being infused in the educational process, is articulated by Lisa VanDamme in an essay from *The Objective Standard* entitled “The False Promise of Classical Education.” She states,

It is a mistake to divide the learning process into the artificial stages of grammar, logic and rhetoric. Beyond the immediate, perceptual level of knowledge, the acquisition of *all* knowledge at *every* stage requires grammar, logic and rhetoric . . . There is no stage in a child’s development during which it is proper to teach him facts apart from their relationships to one another, because beyond the perceptual level, no fact is self-contained, or intelligible on its own, independent of connections to and differentiations from the rest of his knowledge.²⁴

²⁴ Lisa VanDamme, “The False Promise of Education,” in *The Objective Standard, Vol. 2, No. 2*. (Glen Allen, VA: The Objective Standard, 2016) from <https://www.theobjectivestandard.com/issues/2007-summer/false-promise-classical-education/>

She has a valid point that knowledge is interrelated and that connections are needed for understanding but although the grammar stage is indeed about memorizing many things, it is a gross understatement to say that the grammar stage is merely memorization of facts. Rather, grammar is about learning and understanding the basics so, as the subject progresses, students understand the fundamentals of the subject. The example that VanDamme gives to show what she sees as the futility of the classical method is as follows:

While teaching a young child the meaning of the word “renowned,” you would not properly ask him to memorize the definition and part of speech. You might offer examples of historical figures who could be called renowned and ask the students to think of examples of their own; you might compare “renowned” to “famous” or “infamous,” identifying the common element of their meanings and making clear the distinctions among them; you might ask the students to think of an antonym for renowned; you might ask them to write a fictional paragraph that describes someone who goes from

obscurity to renown. Such exercises, which require connections, differentiations, applications, and creativity from the child, are essential to his coming to thoroughly grasp the meaning of the word.²⁵

The problem with this example is that it is a misrepresentation of what is going on in classical education. The way that Bauer talks about teaching in this phase is by reading a lot to the student. If a word comes up that a student in grade 1 does not know, for example, it might be entirely appropriate to get them to memorize a definition. This is building the foundation for later when the more critical thinking happens. All the things that VanDamme gives to explain her idea of the proper way to teach a word to a young child are fundamentally flawed unless there is already a basis or foundation on which to build upon. Definitions and parts of speech are important and should be learned, and this does not take away the interconnectedness of the subjects. Again, the seven liberal arts are more about learning how to learn, than about learning facts about specific subjects. Cross-curricular activities

²⁵ Ibid.

are encouraged in classical education and for instance, students might be learning the skill of writing while learning the history of the protestant reformation. In that scenario, a classical teacher would bring those together and ask students to write an essay on the topic of the reformation. Classical education is all about laying a solid foundation for future learning.

Core Aspects of Curriculum

As I stated earlier, at the core of the entire curriculum is the biblical worldview. Nothing is taught in classical Christian education that contradicts the Bible and sound theology, and the Bible should be taught to every student with an emphasis on the gospel. That being said, there are aspects of a classical Christian education curriculum that should be examined when investigating the topic because these also help differentiate it from other models. The first we will look at is literacy. Reading is important and vital to learning. Without a good literacy base, all learning is crippled. It is thus paramount that students are able to read at a young age and gain a mastery of reading. Reading is first taught through phonics, and then the rules of language are

taught as the building blocks of the foundations of language mastery. Other traditional subjects would also be studied in the context of the trivium: mathematics, science, geography, art, music, physical education, and history. Each would start with the foundational rules and move toward mastery as the student progresses. For history, there must be an emphasis on western civilization. Douglas Wilson says,

Western culture receives the emphasis it does because this is the culture in which the Christian faith has made the greatest advances. Western civilization is not synonymous with the kingdom of God, but the histories of the two entities are so intertwined that one cannot be understood apart from the other. Try to imagine a decent history of the West that made no reference to Christianity or a church history that made no mention of Charlemagne or Constantine.

Therefore, there must be a focus on the West because Christianity is the heritage that our North American culture was built upon. Of course, it is important to understand that the west was not the only civilization

that existed throughout history, but it was the civilization that led to the most freedom and the spread of Christianity throughout the world. The focus should be understanding how we got where we are and to understand the mistakes and the triumphs of the past in an honest way that leads to a knowledge moving forward into the future.

One subject is seemingly more peculiar to the classical education model, the study of ancient languages and in particular, Latin or ancient Greek. Latin is a language that, in the words of Wilson, “promotes mental discipline; it encourages literary appreciation; it leads to a mastery of English; it provides a solid foundation for preparation for Christian ministry.”²⁶ Latin is a precise language and to learn it takes discipline. Learning Latin is hard work, but that is not a reason for discarding it; rather, it is a reason for embracing it to teach the students hard work. Wilson goes on in his defense of Latin, “Long experience has shown us that the discipline required for learning another language, particularly Latin, is a discipline peculiarly suited for application elsewhere.”²⁷ Because of the way that the Latin language is arranged

²⁶ Wilson, *The Case*, loc 2090.

²⁷ *Ibid*, loc 2125.

and the way the grammar is ordered, learning Latin helps students with the learning of other Languages including Koine Greek , the language in which the New Testament was written. Additionally, Latin has the added bonus that it is the basis of many of the early great works of theology and classic literature. Also, it is more similar to English and helps students to understand English and the sciences better as many of the things named in the scientific world have Latin as a base.

Koine Greek is structured very similarly to Latin, and thus many of the benefits of Latin transfer to the learning of ancient Greek. Knowledge of Koine Greek gives students the ability to read the New Testament in the original language which provides insights that can be hard to see in a translated version. Of course, our English translations of the biblical text are excellent, and one can fully understand the Bible by reading an English version; however, there is a reason that seminaries require the learning of original languages. It is beneficial, and the more laymen that are fluent will only help and build up the church. The same is true for Biblical Hebrew. Teaching Greek and Hebrew equip students as Christians and helps to promote a culture in the church that is more literate in theology.

An important concern of the classical system for many parents is how difficult it can be to start a student who has not always been engaged in classical education, given how progressive the curriculum is from year to year. It is difficult for a student to transfer into the system in the upper grades because they will be expected to know things and have a foundation that they do not have due to their educational history. Principals of schools currently using a classical Christian pedagogy have been forthright by stating that it is difficult for upper grade students to transfer into the classical education model, but they also assure that it is not impossible. Students must be willing to put in the additional work required to catch up to the rest of their class, and many students have been able to do so successfully. However, others have been unable to make the transfer into the classical model during the older ages. The schools have had to provide extra help to assist these students, and sometimes this means starting them in an earlier grade than their age would necessitate.

The classical system works best when a student is involved from the beginning and works his or her way through the entire educational process. Since the movement is relatively new, there are

not many statistics that can show the effectiveness of this educational approach on a national level. Logos school, however, has been around since 1980 and some statistics are available for comparison:

By all available measurements, the ACCS program is an astonishing success. On standardized achievement tests, three out of four Logos seniors consistently score in the top 25 percent. One class of Logos seniors had a composite – that is, an average – SAT score in the ninety-sixth percentile, meaning that the entire class ranked in the top 4 percent of students in the nation. In 2011-2012 six of 27 Logos juniors received letters of commendation and three were recognized as National Merit Scholar semi-finalists. Logos students regularly outperform their peers in state-wide academic contests. The main problem for Logos graduates seems to be the intellectual let-down when they go to college [or university].²⁸

²⁸ Veith Jr and Kern, 30.

The benefits of classical Christian education have clearly been serving the students of Logos school well.

Conclusion

Classical Christian education has been around for a very long time. Its re-emergence in recent decades is an attempt to bring not only a solid Christian worldview into the classroom, but also to provide an education that prepares students for success later in life. The most appealing aspect of classical Christian education is the Christ-centered world view that is paramount to the entire endeavour. Also, of critical importance is the fact that the school does not succumb to diluted Christian conviction but holds to biblical conviction in matters of faith and practice. The fact that convictional Christianity is at the very core of classical Christian education as a system is vitally important. Parents can send their children to a school that believes and teaches doctrine that they themselves believe and want taught to their kids. Students are brought up not only taking a Bible class but having the Biblical worldview infused and foundational to every single subject. Thus, the most appealing aspect of classical Christian education is that students

get the foundation and reason for the educational enterprise (to glorify God) correct.

Classical Christian education is a method with high standards, which is always a good thing. Children read by grade 1 or 2 and they start Latin in grade 3. These are demanding subjects and students need discipline to succeed. Schools that have high expectations tend to be schools where those expectations lead to success. It is important, however, to cultivate a culture within the church and in parents that not only accepts the high demands of the school but understands the necessity for it and that it is for the child's good. Parents must support the administration and agree with the underlying philosophy driving the classical Christian education model, or the whole system will fail. The classical method has been proven in the schools that have implemented it. The ACCS has grown because it has been successful. If the students coming from those schools were significantly behind the public system or unprepared for the future, the school would not have multiplied and the ACCS would not exist. The schools are not supported in any way by the government or any outside organization, so the only way for them to grow is for parents to see them working and join the journey. The

classical Christian educational method makes sense logically, and it has been proven in a practical way.

As a church, we have a desire to start a Christian school. We want to train our children in the ways of the Lord and support our parents during a cultural climate that is increasingly hostile to Christianity. More specifically, for the reasons provided above, we desire to start a classical Christian school. The classical Christian education model is a superior philosophy of education. It is Christian in its foundation and provides a robust education that will serve our students well in all areas of life.