

Thoughts From The Circe Institute

CLASSICAL EDUCATION is the cultivation of wisdom and virtue by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness, and beauty.

It must be distinguished from training for a career, which is of eternal value but is not the same thing as education.

I. A or The Paradigm: *The logocentric quest for the ideals of wisdom and virtue*

A. First, a commitment to **cultivating wisdom and virtue** in their students.

- i. While classical education honors and even equips for vocational education (which is more accurately described as training) that is not what classical education is.
- ii. *Vocational training has always been available to any slave—who is not free to govern himself. Thus the term “liberal arts”*

B. Second, it believes in and pursues a **logos, or a unifying principle for all knowledge and action**.

- i. logos: the rational principle that governs and develops the universe
- ii. Logos: the divine word or reason incarnate in Jesus Christ

C. Other common distinctives

- i. the use of classical books and art,
- ii. a general preference for great art, music, and literature,
- iii. an integrated curriculum,
- iv. idea-focused teaching

II. Classical Christian education vs. conventional education

- A. Spiritual--It holds to a different metaphysical paradigm (i.e. it holds to different assumptions about the nature of reality and the way we know it).
- B. logocentric--It orders its curriculum around different principles
- C. missional--It is mission driven rather than market driven (indeed, it seeks to heal the market it serves)
- D. eternal--It seeks different ends for its students

III. It is a rich and vigorous **stewardship**

- A. This means responsibility
- B. It is imperative that we think deeply and carefully about the education or discipleship of our children

Specific Tools of Learning

- C. Language/grammar- a subject and a stage
- i. formal language/grammar study
 - ii. knowledge, facilitates all understanding, precedes logic
 - iii. See John Piper's "A Compelling Reason for Rigorous Training of the Mind"
 - iv. "...we educate our children because we are a people of the Book. Without going so far as to outline the content of a classical Christian education, his argument is the same as that of the medievals who saw the liberal arts as the means of accomplishing this end." Tina MacLennan
- D. Latin- tool for language, Western thought, reasoning, study skills
- E. Logic- a subject and a stage
- i. reasoning, ordering principle, logos, becoming Christlike (the Logos), preparation for philosophy (gaining wisdom).
 - ii. So much of the thought of early writers in the Western Tradition is steeped in Aristotelian logic/rhetoric
- F. Rigor- growth, change needs to take place
- i. School is less like a factory than like a gymnasium. It's a place for developing intellectual strength and stamina
 - ii. Education has to be hard—only by stretching your capacities will they grow.
"Education is about personal formation and growth. It's about enlarging the self for the sake of a better self, rather than for a task to be accomplished. From a Christian point of view, I would argue that it's ultimately about engaging in a lifelong struggle with and for the truth. As such, education can never be easy. If it is, it's not the genuine article. What doesn't cause you some pain will not cause you to grow." Dr. Bruce McMenemy in "Classical Studies and Christian Education,"
<http://www.scholarsonline.org/Info/WhitePapers/CsandCE.html>
 - iii. Lessons from rigor beyond the immediate material (Dr. McMenemy)
 - a) You will learn about how you learn
 - b) You will learn that you can do more than you thought
 - c) Occasionally you will learn that you can survive defeat and still survive
- G. Rhetoric- a subject and a stage
- i. the art of communication
 - ii. the stage of assimilation, ownership, expression, evaluating arguments. Growing in wisdom and application of Truth
 - iii. Participating in the Great Conversation
 - a) Through History
 - b) Through Literature
 - iv. "...one reason we 'care to teach the art of communication' is because we also have the example from the Scripture of those who were trained thus and whom God used as eloquent spokesmen of Truth. It's true; God can use the rough and untrained. We also know that if those are silent, He can use stones. That doesn't mean that we should aim at (or settle for) being stones." Tina M.

Points to Consider

-Classical Education, today it's closest expression is often termed “Liberal Arts,” comes from the ancient and medieval world and was part of the development of Western Civilization. It was the education of our founding fathers. From it, and with its vision was the foundation of all of the Ivy League and first universities in America. They were the necessary foundation to seminary.

-More recently, one of the driving forces that eventually led to the birth of the “Great Books college” was the dearth of students who brought with them adequate skills and background with which to approach the “Bible, theology, and hermeneutics.” Tina M.

-Our present educational system is a result of modernism and postmodernism. It was driven much by the desire to separate knowledge from virtue and morals and from any context. Postmodernism, while rejecting the idea that mankind can save himself through knowledge alone, rejects the idea of Truth being knowable.

-Does such an education produce elitism and is it practical? *“On the long view this method has a good deal to commend it, even in utilitarian terms. My wife has noted that since leaving college, almost every job she has held was a job that was neither defined nor really imagined at the time she began college. Her advantage in getting those jobs and her success in performing them has been largely a function of the fact that she had learned how to learn almost anything./ As Christians, though, we must especially value the fact that such education pays dividends in terms of character formation, personal morality, and discipline, in ways that most other forms of education we have tried do not.”* Dr. McMenemy

-*Love Your God With All Your Mind* by J.P. Moreland demonstrates the value and need for classical education without explicit reference to it. However, it uses the word “rhetoric” in the negative sense of “sophistry” (a tricky, deceitful, and generally fallacious method of reasoning.)

Resources

Circe Institute (circeinstitute.org) directed by Andrew Kern

***Classical Education: The Movement Sweeping America*, by Andrew Kern**

“Classical Studies and Christian Education” by Bruce McMenemy
<http://www.scholarsonline.org/Info/WhitePapers/CsandCE.html>

Love Your God With All Your Mind, by J.P. Moreland

***Norms and Nobility* by David Hicks (reading for the ambitious)**

“The Lost Tools of Learning” by Dorothy Sayers

***The Well-Trained Mind*, by Susan Wise Bauer**

“Why Classical Education” by Fritz Hinrich, <http://www.gbt.org/clasced.html>