

Modern Classical Christian Education: A Return to the Founders' Education
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Abstract:

This treatise serves to examine the phenomenon of classical Christian education in the late twentieth century, fashioned as an effort to return to the classical education and training of the American Founders, which bolstered by Protestant educational ambitions, provided the tools to think intelligibly in defining America's concept of liberty. In effort to delineate the rise and rebirth of classical Christian education in the early 1980s, its term will be defined within the context of its fresh inception, crucially juxtaposed with the American public education system that became normalized in the twentieth century. A traceable history of educational influence on the American Founders from the classical era to the American Enlightenment, including the contribution of the Protestant tradition, specifically the role of Calvinist principles. This inquiry will reveal how the American Founders valued education in their role of defining liberty and equally in the role of preserving that liberty for future generations. Additionally, the advent of American public schools and more specifically the modern progressive education of the early twentieth century, along with its founders and thinkers, will be briefly examined to reveal methodologies and purposes for its creation and development. Finally, an analysis of the issues surrounding American public education that precipitated the recovery of classical education with a biblical worldview and its rise will be presented and examined in light of its growth and popularity as an auspicious school choice. This research is beneficial in understanding the recent growth of classical Christian education and why this educational choice is a liberty advocated by the American Founders.

Christian Worldview Integration:

In a culture accelerating its quest for truth, many options exist for people to explore. From existentialism or pragmatism to solutions offered in science or world religions, people need not go far to discover or ‘try on’ a worldview. These worldviews, based on differing principles, shape society’s choices and preferences, especially seen in education. Currently, the Supreme Court of the United States has ruled that school choice is constitutional at the federal level, however state constitutions vary in their interpretations. This allows the American public to choose a preferred educational choice for children, even if it precipitates relocating to a state that is in alignment with a family’s conviction.

In this examination, it is vital to recognize that educational institutions impart knowledge from presuppositions, “built on the foundation of the educator’s worldview.”¹ Equally, curriculum promotes the worldview of its writers. Because of this, Christians affirm a deep appreciation of the preservation of choice, as Christian education goes well beyond training the mind. Christian educators consider content, context, and cultural application that aligns with the authority of Scripture. For the Christian, the Bible as the absolute moral authority asserts that all of humanity, Christian or not, is *imago Dei*. Being made in the image of God means that humans have the capacity to house virtues that are spiritual in nature, such as love, reason, and goodness. Humans additionally have the capacity to *respond* to such truths. Given the nature of creation’s relationship to the Creator, Christians acknowledge that the Creator is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7).² Thus, Christian education focuses on a biblical moral authority in illuminating and establishing these virtues in addition to knowledge.

¹ Douglas Wilson, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning: An Approach to Distinctively Christian Education*. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1991), 59.

² Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the *New International Version*.

If Christian education, including the classical Christian education revered by America's Founding Fathers, is to persist as an option, it is critical to continue the advocacy of choice. Otherwise, Americans will be forced to subject their children to contrary worldviews, which is not in line with the way the Founders viewed education. Thus, preserving school choice protects the ability for Christian families to present their children with a Christian-based education and maintain the merit of education promoted by the Founders. This research is beneficial in explicating the rise of classical Christian education as a response to cultural issues and examining how the American Founders valued and utilized their own education in defining liberty.