

Five Ways to Ruin Your Classical Christian Education

by Brian Daigle, *Sequitur Classical Tutorials*

Classical Christian education is gaining steam. More schools are cropping up. Record numbers are attending annual conferences. Colleges and universities are paying more attention to the liberal arts. Students are now becoming teachers. And it seems as if every month there is some kind of new journal or new book out on the topic. These kinds of things, I'm sure, are welcomed news to those who have been in the grind from the earliest stages of this movement. And for the ones who are just starting to explore this massive train with all its goodness and splendor, it is music to our ears just as well. Competition is good, and the right kind always benefits both parties. By nature, the kind of work we do as classical Christian educators should welcome both critique and praise. We should be continually engaging in dialogue with both our friends and our foes. This is healthy. Essentially, it is the fruit of Christian love. And, of course, it is classical. We want to affirm the true, the good, and the beautiful while simultaneously checking ourselves to make sure we have not twisted the true, perverted the good, or smeared the beautiful. When we do any of these three, we ruin the education we offer. As this movement of classical Christian education gains strength, we must keep one thing in mind. As sinful men, we have the propensity to ruin things, good things. And our educational ideals are not immune to being ruined.

But what about our students? How are they handling this movement? Though most of the

articles of this sort are aimed at educators, this one is written for students. The good thing about having good teachers is that usually your teachers experienced the chaos long before you experience the order. Most of you who currently occupy the seat in a classical Christian school will never know a day when a classical Christian education didn't exist. In fact, if you dig far back into the recesses of your mind, you will probably not remember a moment when you did not hear the term or hear good and wonderful things about it. This is the education you have always received. This is the education you are receiving. This is the education you know. This is the education we hope you pass onto your children and your children's children. And this is good. It is the nature of redemption. Still, this does not mean you cannot, following in man's propensity, have a great disposition to ruin it—to leave it flattened on the side of the road as you head off to college and into the wild, blue yonder. What you are receiving is a gift, and like any gift, it can be squandered for lesser goods. So, be on guard. What will be said for the remainder of this article is by no means an exhaustive list of things for which you should be on guard. But it's a good start. And it would be a better finish if you considered this advice in light of your own education. There are five ways to ruin your classical Christian education.

The first way to ruin your education is to think and act as if you deserve what you are getting. If the Bible is right, and

it is, then every man, woman, and child on earth deserves nothing less than death and hell. There is, of course, one exception: the God-man, Jesus Christ. And contrary to what you might believe, or what you may have heard from a grumbling upper-classman, your school is neither death nor hell. Thus, the goodness you are receiving there is better than what you deserve, and any "badness" you may receive is not worse than what you deserve. In this way, we must understand sin rightly. In our sin, we have earned nothing other than the death Jesus suffered on our behalf. Do you deserve the clothes you are wearing? Do you deserve the country into which you were born? Do you deserve to taste the sweetness of a peach or feel the furriness of earth? No. You deserve none of it. To think you deserve any of this reality, of which you and I currently partake, is to believe that you somehow merit what you have—that somebody owes it to you. No person, including the persons of the Trinity, owes you anything. Just as well, no person owes me anything. A deserving mentality, as it is often and rightly called, is that kind of thinking—and acting—which places yourself at the center of the universe, as if the earth and its inhabitants are here to serve you.

The opposite of a deserving mentality is one of privilege, of a humble acceptance of a gift which you neither deserve nor can repay. It is this privilege mentality of which we as modern, American Christians are in dire need. This is a privilege. All of it. Your eyesight. Your hair color. The pillow upon which you lay your head. Go ahead, name anything. It is a

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privilege. Have you taken a breath within the past ten seconds? Good. That was a privilege. And this privilege has been offered to you as a gift of grace. This school? Yep, it too is a privilege to us all. One of the greatest traps in which I have seen students fall is to think they are the rightful recipients, in and of themselves, of their teacher's service and their parent's faithfulness. I can always recognize these students because, before too long, they begin demanding things of both their teachers and parents which are neither reasonable nor things they are in a position to demand. Likewise, they begin to leave thankfulness to the birds, as if it were their neglected homework assignment. As Christians we are called to be a people marked with thanksgiving, which means we are to be a people who recognize the difference between a gift and a hard-earned reward. Try and think, rather lie, to yourself that you deserve this small school in your city, or that it is here to simply serve you, and you will waste your education.

The second way to ruin your education is to think and act as if studying here makes you somehow morally superior. The world is big. It is very big. And for us to begin to think that the only morally superior ones in the universe are the ones in our little circles is wholly wrong. God moves in mysterious ways. Common grace is more pervasive than the Gnostics would have you believe. The direction and speed at which His Holy Spirit blows cannot be confined to an educational formula or academic curricula. It cannot be contained within the acres of your school or even the

commercial bounds of your city. If we try to rope it in, bind it, and make it obey us it will only leave us frustrated and bitter. I thank God that we have seen the fruit

unique and appropriate about what is going on here. What is classical education? What is Christian education? What is classical Christian education?

. . . you are privileged to be receiving an education that seeks to develop your entire person in light of a distinctly Christian worldview and a biblical obedience. We want to reach your head. We want to reach your heart. We want to reach your fingertips with truth, goodness, and beauty . . .

of His hands here at Covenant Classical School in Fort Worth, Texas. I also thank God that the fruit of His hands can also be seen in a thousand other contexts. God does not sprinkle magic fairy dust over every classically educated graduate and make him into some kind of hero. God does not raise us out of the muddy woods and make us appear stronger and taller to everyone, like Athena with Odysseus. As teachers, we hope to equip you with a love and understanding of all things useful for a life of righteous obedience. But in this, you should be boasting only in the vast reality of your weakness. Try and think, rather lie, to yourself that this small school in your city is the only place one can come and be filled with Gospel truth and love, and you will waste your education.

The third way to ruin your education is to think and act as if this is just another fancy education. While you will not gain more superiority by simply enrolling in a classical Christian school, there is something quite

Why do we as a faculty uphold the tenets of our school? Is this just another kind of fancy education where we can wear uniforms and have some pompous crest? Is this just another way we can segregate ourselves from the rest of the "filthy people" in our town? Is this just another opportunity for bragging rights among our friends and families at church? This is not just another fancy education, and the answers to the questions just posed are ones you should hope to nail down before you graduate. . . .

Dear student, you are privileged to be receiving an education that seeks to develop your entire person in light of a distinctly Christian worldview and a biblical obedience. We want to reach your head. We want to reach your heart. We want to reach your fingertips with truth, goodness, and beauty as the Triune God has so come to define these. We want to give you an environment where you are able to wrestle with the ideas of the world, the claims of Christ, and the messiness of life. We want to do all of this within a distinctly Western tradition and potently Christian doctrine. We

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want you to learn the connotative and denotative meaning of words. We want you to ask, and figure out, “How in the heck does a person have any foundation for saying something is right and something else is wrong?”

We want you to learn to write good stories, the kind that makes the reader stay up all night to finish, the kind that leaves the reader really wrestling with the axiomatic questions in life. We want you to learn the wonder of putting a drawing into proper lines of perspective, and how the artistic truths discovered in the Italian Renaissance really can help to create a more beautiful society. We want you to appreciate good writing, and work at communication and arguing for the truth. . . . We want you to love, to think, to serve, and live as God has called you. Try and think, rather lie, to yourself that this small school in your city is just another fancy education along the buffet line of modern attempts at fortifying our posterity, and you will waste your education.

The fourth way to ruin your education is to think and act as if graduation is the culmination of your studies. . . . So, what’s going to happen to you? What are you going to do the first year out of school? Where do you want to continue your studies? Why? Why are you attracted to that college, or this way of life, over another? We as teachers hope to equip you, not to make you a piece of equipment for the assembly line of the free market in the West. If you decide to go to college, we hope to equip you to pursue your liberal arts education at the next level. If you decide to go into the military, we hope to equip you to be a faithful and learned soldier

for the free world. Historically, someone who completes the kind of training today’s student will receive at a typical K–12 classical Christian school is just beginning. Seven years of grammar school, two years of logic school and four years of rhetoric school would not make someone a man of letters. This would only be the beginning, a launch pad to a much deeper and rigorous study of the *studia humanitatis*. Ask your teachers about it. I’m sure they could point you to some good literature of days gone by on the subject.

Classical Christian education is not designed to give you all that you will need in the realm of education. If you formally pursue your studies beyond these walls, we are equipping you with a foundation so that the next level of humanities, and humanity, will be one with a sure and certain basis for development. Consider what this means for deciding where you will go after graduation. Consider a school with a less prestigious name. Consider a less pragmatic future. Consider the purpose of the world, your life, and a deeper reality than just an American form of survivalism. The Joneses really don’t have much to offer. I know. I’ve been in their home. Begin really asking what the Lord’s priorities are when it comes to the formation of your mental faculties and heart’s affections. Begin building your personal library now. And continue that construction project into your college years. Then, don’t stop until the Lord calls you away from this life. Afterward, pass it onto your children, and your children’s children. Try and think, rather lie, to yourself that this small school in your city is the culmination of your studies, and

you will waste your education.

The fifth way to ruin your education is to think and act as if this is salvation. As has been said, we are not the church. My colleague, Thomas Warmath, gave a talk last year that has stuck with me. He mentioned that our school, and all of education for that matter, is set up in order to serve the local church. He was right. He is right. Christ did not come to save Covenant Classical School. He did not come to save classical education or institute classical Christian education as the way in which people must come to Him. I am neither a pastor nor a priest, and my lectern is not a pulpit. I cannot save you, and I will not administer the sacraments to you in this capacity. Being in a Christian school is not the key to salvation. . . . Throw yourself into your local church and absorb all that the older men and women have to offer you. Sit at the feet of your fathers. Listen to your mothers. Hear the word preached. Taste the Eucharist upon your tongue. Sing until you sweat. And watch your friends and peers get water poured over their heads—or fully submersed if that’s your pastor’s style. If done rightly, your school will teach you of the same God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God of Augustine. The God of Shakespeare, Chesterton, and Lewis. But we, as a school, will not and cannot subsume the local church. We cannot replace her. The Bride of Christ bows to and serves no one and nothing other than her Groom. We, on the other hand, serve her. Thus, when you go off to college, or wherever you go when you leave your current fold, you cannot substitute your absorption into and service to

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the local church with a college ministry or Monday morning quiet time. . . . But our maturing love for God and our neighbor is inseparable from the work and worth of the local church. Try and think, rather lie, to yourself that this small school in your city is the axis of salvation, and you will waste your education.

As educators, we believe in what we are doing, and that what we are doing by partnering with your parents is to set before you the best literature, authors, and courses for the development of your whole person at this stage of your life. . . . Still, it's important that you not waste your education in this time, and that we all guard against the slippery slopes to which our hearts are prone. You are only here for a short time, and that short time is the most foundational in the grand scope of your life. In this surge of classical Christian schools, faith is necessary. And an understanding that God both gives and takes away is imperative, but blessed be the name of the Lord. And may you become a better refinery of Egyptian gold than any of us.

Top Five Tips for Administrators

by Travis Ketner, Student at Texas A&M-San Antonio

School administration is a challenging and rewarding profession. Equal parts educator and manager, a successful school administrator performs a vital role in the lives of his students and faculty. The administration of a classical and Christian school is made more complex because of the demanding curriculum and the duty of the school to impart biblical values and a Christian example to students.

The following "Top Five Tips" were taken from an interview by Travis Ketner with Mr. Brad Ryden, head of school at Geneva School of Boerne, Texas.

1. Delineate spheres of influence between school administration and the board of directors. An ideal solution is for the board of directors to handle "big picture" ideas such as policies and vision while the full time headmaster or head of school works to implement these policies using his specialized knowledge and background. Mr. Ryden described his relationship with the board of directors for Geneva School as based on "trust and understanding" (1 Peter 4:8). Communication between the board of directors and school administration fosters respect and provides the administration with the latitude to make the day-to-day decisions necessary for Geneva School to run smoothly (Mt. 7:12).

The goal of a successful administrator is to remember that he is responsible for communicating "up" to the board

of directors all of the needs of the school and concerns of his faculty and staff. At the same time, the administrator is also responsible for communicating "down" to the faculty and staff the vision of the board of directors and the policies that the board wishes to see enacted. It can be difficult for the administrator, caught between these two groups; but honesty, humility, and communication are three useful tools for navigating this responsibility.

2. Members of the board of directors have no living constituents. Geneva School sets their goals in terms of a five-year plan. Each summer, the school administration and the board of directors participate in a weekend retreat during which they collaborate on specific goals for the next year. The board of directors, in charge of policy and vision, has the final word on the direction of the school, but all decisions are made with input from Mr. Ryden. It is during this retreat that monthly agendas are written for the entire school year. This provides Mr. Ryden with a set of short-term goals for each month that fit smoothly within a well-crafted, long-term plan. Mr. Ryden prefers that his board of directors think even more long term than five years, but of future generations. "I tell them, you have no living constituents," he says. This motivation and coordination between the board of directors and the administration provides for a truly long-term plan for Geneva School (Proverbs 15:22).

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