

Traditional Christian School vs. Classical Christian School

Worldview and Character

Statistics don't determine the experience my kids will have at public school, traditional Christian school, or at a classical Christian school. But on average, by going to a Christian school my child will have a more Biblical worldview, will have a greater likelihood to stick with their faith, and will have better relationships than if they went to public school. On average, by going to a classical school, my child will be more disciplined, attain higher academic excellence, know more Scripture, and be better oriented in history and geographically than if they went to a traditional Christian school.

1) Memorizing Scripture

"For things taught early in childhood are lost with difficulty." -Christine de Pizan from "On Princes"¹

At classical Christian school, kids memorize large chunks of Scripture regularly. At The Regents School of Charlottesville where my kids attend, they memorize a passage averaging 10 verses each month from kindergarten through sixth grade. This means entering seventh grade having memorized over 500 verses of Scripture, and having memorized at least one whole book of the Bible (Ephesians). Although memorizing Scripture happens in other settings, it is hard to match the pace, or breadth of memorization that happens in a classical Christian school.

The effects of memorizing Scripture on the Christian life are extolled throughout the Bible. It helps us abide in God, blesses us, causes us to flourish, gives us life, drives out fear, helps us stand firm, keeps our way pure, gives light to our ways, brings peace, enables our prayers to be heard, and gives us the wisdom that leads to salvation.

A small selection of verses on the subject include:

- Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its seasons, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:1-3)
- How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. (Psalm 119:9)
- This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8)
- Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105

¹ Quoted in Gamble, Richard, Ed. The Great Tradition; Classic Readings on What It Means to be an Educated Human Being. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007. Pg. 326.

- Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4)
- Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble. (Psalm 119:165)
- "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (John 15:7)
- ...And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:15)

2) God-Centered Worldview

Classical Christian school integrates Christ into every subject - not just into a class on the Bible. God is part of history and science, playground disputes, discipline and classroom management, just as surely as he is in our churches. This helps children integrate Christ into every aspect of their lives, and forms the lens through which they look at the world.

Rebekah Merkle in *Classical Me, Classical Thee* writes:

Imagine you've been handed a puzzle box, and your job is to complete the puzzle. It's one of those difficult ones with zillions of pieces, but the bad news is that the box also contains pieces from three different puzzles, which have all been mixed up together. Your job is to complete the puzzle that goes with the box. Obviously your first step is to set up the box right there in front of you, and as you pick up each piece, to try and decide whether it belongs in this puzzle or not. The way you tell if it does is by comparing it to the picture on the box. The project is complicated, yes, but certainly not impossible. Now imagine that you had the same task, only this time you didn't have the box to look at.²

Merkle goes on to say that, "the modern public education system in America has made a very focused effort to throw away the box and make sure none of the students ever see it."³

² Merkle, Rebekah. *Classical Me, Classical Thee*. Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2017. Pg. 22.

³ Merkle, Rebekah. *Classical Me, Classical Thee*. Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2017. Pg. 24.

Each day, we are bombarded with competing facts, claims and opinions that need to be evaluated. If we have a framework to evaluate those claims, it takes work to sort it all out, but it is eminently do-able. If we have no framework, the task becomes impossible.

A Christ-centered worldview is a rarity in our modern society. According to a Barna Research study, only 9 percent of people who consider themselves born-again Christians hold a Biblical worldview.⁴ Barna defined a Biblical worldview as believing in six specific and absolute biblical moral truths:

1. Jesus Christ lived a sinless life;
2. God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe and He stills rules it today;
3. Salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned;
4. Satan is real;
5. Christians have a responsibility to share their faith in Christ with other people; and
6. The Bible is accurate in all of its teachings.

Worldview issues are the major reason young people leave the church. The Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Survey found that 34% of American adults have a different religious faith than what they grew up with.⁵ (This number rises to 59% if you include people who go away from the church for an extended time in their 20s.)⁶ The pace of change in this metric is fast—in only 7 years since 2007, the number of Americans rejecting their childhood faith has grown by 20%.⁷ Evangelical Protestants are not immune to this attrition either, with only a 66% retention rate of children keeping the faith as adults.⁸ The major reason for this attrition is unbelief—60% of people reported that they left because they stopped believing the church's teachings (ie worldview).⁹

This worldview crisis is also borne out by worldview testing by the Nehemiah Institute. On a -100 (Socialism) to 100 (Biblical Theism) scale, the worldview of students from Christian

⁴ Barna Group. Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview Among Christians Over the Past 13 Years. Research Releases in Faith & Christianity. March 9, 2009.

⁵ Pew Forum. America's Changing Religious Landscape. May 12, 2015. Available at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

⁶ Barna Group. The Priorities, Challenges, and Trends in Youth Ministry. Research Releases. April 6, 2016.

⁷ Pew Forum. America's Changing Religious Landscape. May 12, 2015. Available at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

⁸ Cooper, Betsy et al. Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion—and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back. PRRI Research. Sep. 22, 2016. Available at: <https://www.prri.org/research/prri-rns-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion/>

⁹ Cooper, Betsy et al. Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion—and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back. PRRI Research. Sep. 22, 2016. Available at: <https://www.prri.org/research/prri-rns-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion/>

homes has declined markedly over the 20 years data has been collected. In 1988, students from Christian homes at public school scored about 35 on the test - in the lower end of the “Moderate Christian” range. In 2011, students from Christian homes at public school scored less than 5 (Secular Humanism). *Students from Christian homes at traditional Christian schools declined from about 50 to 10 (also Secular Humanism)*. In contrast, students at classical Christian schools have increased their worldview scores from about 60 to 70 (Biblical Theism).¹⁰

3) Cultivation of Christian Character

An educational system isn’t worth a great deal if it teaches young people how to make a living but doesn’t teach them how to make a life. - Author unknown

Parents play the preeminent role in cultivating Christian virtues in their children. And yet, statistics show that schools have an influence as well. The Cardus Education Survey collected data from nearly 2,500 US high school graduates between ages 23 and 49 who identified as Christian, measuring more than 40 aspects of civic, spiritual, and academic life. The report attempted to isolate the effect of the school type on these factors (controlling for family influence, socio economics, etc.). The report found private Protestant school graduates:¹¹

- Gave more to their churches and other religious groups.
- Volunteered more in their churches.
- Believed more in moral absolutes, and the infallibility and authority of the Bible.
- Believed more that premarital sex and divorce are wrong.
- Felt their school better prepared them for a vibrant and religious spiritual life.
- Are more thankful for what they have in life.
- Had greater direction in their life.
- Divorced less.
- On every measure of traditional religious beliefs, Protestant Christian school graduates show significantly more adherence to the church teachings than their peers.

¹⁰ Smithwick, Dan. Worldview Assessment & Training. Powerpoint Presentation. Nehemiah Institute. 2012.

¹¹ Pennings, Ray and Wiens, Kathryn. Cardus Education Survey: Phase I Report (2011). Aug. 16, 2011.

The conclusion of the Cardus report is that private Protestant Christian schools played a “vital role in the long-term faith of their students.”¹²

4) Respect for Authority

When an adult walks into a classroom at my children’s school - whether it is a visiting parent or the Head of School, the children stand at their desks and say “Good morning, Mrs. Whomever.” In this small ritual, my children are learning to acknowledge their elders with respect. They are also learning appropriate ways to address an adult.

Classical Christian schools have more rules than public school - or traditional Christian schools. From uniforms to high behavior standards, students must learn to submit to rules. This is spiritually formative as they learn to respect and submit to the ultimate authority: God.

In speaking about monastic life, Rod Dreher writes that, “Submitting to rules one doesn’t understand is difficult, but it’s a good way to counteract the carnal desire for personal independence. There may not be spiritual merit in choosing to eat two dishes instead of three at a meal, but the humility that comes with agreeing to submit to another’s decision that one do so is transformative.”¹³

Conclusion

Plato says that “Education is not the cultivation of certain branches of knowledge.... The real essence of education is that it enables men to reach the true aim of their lives.”¹⁴ C.S. Lewis put it a different way, “Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a more clever devil.”¹⁵

¹² Pennings, Ray and Wiens, Kathryn. Cardus Education Survey: Phase I Report (2011). Aug. 16, 2011.

¹³ Dreher, Rod. The Benedict Option; A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation. New York, New York: Sentinel, 2017. Pg. 56.

¹⁴ Quoted in Gamble, Richard, Ed. The Great Tradition; Classic Readings on What It Means to be an Educated Human Being. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007. Pg. 3.

¹⁵ Quoted in Water, Mark, Ed. The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotes. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. Pg. 298.