

# Classic Response

by J. Rufus Fears and Brandon Dutcher

*Though the nation's educational darkness is great, there is a renaissance underway—and ACCS schools are a part of it. This revival bodes well for America's future.*

By now we're all familiar with the bad news in American education. Students assaulting teachers. Teachers molesting students. High school graduates who can't read their diplomas or place the American Civil War in the correct century. If you've seen Jay Leno's "Jay Walking" segment, you get the idea.

But amid all this darkness, there are pockets of light. All across America, there's an educational renaissance underway—and ACCS schools are a part of it.

In Chicago, for example, inner-city minority children at the Marva Collins Preparatory School are studying poetry and classical literature. At Ridgeview Classical School, a public charter school in Fort Collins, Colorado, first-graders are learning the history of world religions. At Providence Hall, an ACCS school in Edmond, Oklahoma, the second-graders can tell you about the pharaoh Menes and about Egypt's fall to Roman rule. And in classical home schools nationwide, fourth-graders are finding missing variables and conjugating Latin verbs.

All across the country, schools are popping up that are devoted to the educational content and methodology that are the foundation of Western civilization: classical education. In a recent issue of *Remarkable Providences*, the Providence Hall newsletter, Gene Edward Veith,

co-author of *Classical Education: The Movement Sweeping America*, remarked that "classical education is breaking out all over. It's hard to keep up with it. Not only new schools but new associations of classical schools have been organized."

This, of course, is good news for the students fortunate enough to receive this kind of education. They are learning to appreciate truth, goodness, and beauty. But beyond that, this educational revival can make a great difference in America's future, as it made a profound difference in our past.

A classical education is truly an education for freedom. The classics educate for the awesome responsibility of self-government. It is an education intended to make us better—better as individuals, better as citizens of a free republic.

That is how the Founders of our country viewed the legacy of Greece and Rome, which is the essence of a

classical education. Whether Harvard-educated men like John Adams or self-educated like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, the Founders of the United States drew upon the lessons of classical antiquity. This was a uniquely successful generation of statesmen. They declared our independence from the greatest empire of the day, won that independence on the field of battle, and then went on to estab-

lish a Constitution that still gives us liberty and prosperity more than two hundred years later. There is nothing comparable in history.

This is no accident. The Founders had been educated for freedom by the study of the classics. Greece and Rome gave them an inexhaustible storehouse of lessons, virtues to be emulated and vices to be avoided. In declaring our independence, we founded our country on the unalienable right of all men to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, invoking principles that harken back to the *Antigone* of the Athenian playwright Sophocles and to the work *On Moral Duties* by the Roman lawyer and patriot Cicero. Our Constitution was crafted to reflect the wisdom of the Roman Republican constitution,

with its balance of powers.

Above all, a classical education taught the Founders to think historically. They used the lessons

of the past to make decisions in the present and to plan for the future. A classical education also taught them the moral dimension of history. History, for the Founders, was no matter of trivial pursuit. History was a stern judge, and all political decisions had moral consequences.

So take heart. Even though a recent Zogby poll found that more

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# What's Really Wrong with Public Schools?

by David H. Chilton

"To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding" (Proverbs 1:2). The usual argument against public education is very convincing, yet very wrong. It runs something like this: Public schools have become breeding grounds for violence and sexual promiscuity; they often are outlets for socialist propaganda; they now constitute a formidable enemy of religion (e.g. by teaching evolution and prohibiting prayer and Bible reading) and of the family (by teaching sex education and deriding traditional authority structures), and so on. This is not an unmitigated tragedy, since it is being used, under the providence of God, to lead more and more people of faith to abandon the system of public education. No matter what the reason, that is certainly a good result.

Unfortunately, the argument above is not as principled as it looks. It *is not* an argument against state education, but only against certain

perceived ills of public schools, as they now exist. Thus, even among Christians with the argument, you will find the following attitudes:

(1) "The real problems exist in the inner-city schools, but there's nothing wrong with public schools in the better suburbs and the rural, God-centered communities with traditional values";

(2) "We should work to make public schools more moral, by pressuring our legislators to reinstitute prayer and abolish sex-education";

(3) "We should try to force the public schools to give Creation 'equal time' with evolution."

These and similar positions all attest to the fact that much of the opposition to public schools is merely pragmatic: we are very willing for the state to control education, as long as we can be reasonably sure our children won't be beaten, drugged or raped in the library. To put it bluntly, we want our socialism, but we want it *clean*. If only the public

schools would teach what we want them to teach, we would be happy to have our children's education funded by legalized theft. Quite an interesting position, philosophically: we'll give our children a "moral" upbringing by robbing our neighbors to pay for it.

As Christians, we do not argue against abortion simply by citing the dangers of malpractice, nor should we consider it sufficient to oppose state education simply because of its evil consequences. We do not work for safer methods of abortion, nor should we work to improve public schools. The basic argument, you see, is that **the very existence of state schools is immoral**—regardless of the level of "morality" contained in them.

According to the Bible (see Romans 13:4), the state has an extremely limited function, which may be summed up in two points: punishing criminals (as defined by God's law) and protecting the law-abiding. That's it. God has appointed civil rulers as His ministers, and their responsibility is to administer His laws.

The Bible severely limits the powers of the state and just in case rulers might misunderstand the extent of their commission, God built a "strict constructionist" interpretation into the law: the ruler "may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or to the left" (Deuteronomy 17:20).

The Bible does not give rulers the power to educate children; that responsibility belongs to the family. State schools are therefore immoral in principle. They exist only because

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than 60 percent of Americans can name Homer's son on "The Simpsons" while only 21 percent can name one of Homer's epic poems, all is not lost.

"There are few causes more important, or having longer-lasting and ever-widening cultural influence, than rebuilding America's educational infrastructure and recovering the educational heritage that built Western—and American—civilization," Veith says. "This is a cause that, literally, equips the next generation, training them in the disciplines of liberty, so that they can put right so much that has gone wrong."

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