

“SINE DOCTRINA VITA EST QUASI MORTIS IMAGO”

VOLUME XXVIII NUMBER I

CLASSIS

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF CLASSICAL & CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

OCTOBER, 2021

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CLASSIS is a quarterly journal of articles and book reviews designed to support and encourage schools around the world that are recovering classical Christian education. Hard copies are available to ACCS members and by subscription.

Publisher: David Goodwin | **Senior Editor:** Tom Spencer | **Technical Editor:** Deb Blakey

CHRISTIANITY AND “WOKENESS”: ARE THEY COMPATIBLE?

by Neil Shenvi, Shenvi Apologetics

*This is a transcription of an excerpt from Neil’s plenary address given June 17, 2021,
at the Repairing the Ruins Conference in Frisco, Texas.*

In the last few years, large segments of both our culture and the church have been captivated by “antiracism,” “antisexism,” “intersectionality,” and “social justice.” But what exactly do these words mean? In this talk, I’ll sketch the core tenets of critical social justice and explain how they undermine basic Christian doctrines. Christians can and should work for biblical justice without adopting ideas that are fundamentally incompatible with Scripture.

...

WHAT CAN WE DO?

ACKNOWLEDGE AND FIGHT RACISM

... What can we do in response to the incursion of woke ideology into the church and into the culture?

Number one, we can acknowledge and fight racism. Many are attracted to woke ideology because it purports to offer a way to end racism, to provide justice, to lift up the marginalized. Christians rightly want to do that, so

when they hear these ideas they immediately gravitate toward them. If you, like me, are very concerned that people are embracing a false and dangerous worldview, then the worst thing you can do is to minimize or ignore racism.

Instead, we should offer an alternative way to seek racial unity. For us as educators, that starts with telling the true story of our nation’s horrific racial past. For example, about 3,400 blacks were lynched between 1880 and 1970, as well as about 1,300 whites. These stories are horrifying. The lynchings were public; people would come home from church and witness these spectacles like they were fun exhibits. People were burned alive, and their fingers passed out as trophies. Viewers sent postcards telling friends about the lynchings they had watched. Too often we think that our nation is different from all other nations. We’re not different. We’re full of sinners. We don’t have to tell people that our country is the worst country or the best country in the world. We can tell the truth, because as Christians our citizenship is not ultimately in the United States. Our citizenship

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is in heaven.

I'm not here to knock the United States. I love being an American. But we have to tell our children the true and the false, the ugly and the beautiful, and be honest about the reality of our history. Too often children have grown up reading a Bowdlerized, sanitized version of history. There were good guys, and there were bad guys, but the United States is portrayed as "always awesome." Then our kids get to college and hear the reality—we have really dark chapters in our past. Texts that are honest about this history then get treated as a divine oracle, and our kids get sucked into a new worldview. We can inoculate our kids by telling them the truth: we live in a very good and a very bad country. We can be honest. Segregation is within living memory, and has a lasting impact today. So fight and acknowledge racism.

BE CHARITABLE

Second, be charitable. This is not for just men or just women or just whites or just blacks or Hispanics. The Bible speaks to all of us. All of us should be "quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry." One way to do this is to listen to people's experiences. Ask someone who is different from you about their childhood, their

racial or ethnic background, their friends growing up. Listen for their perspective. Don't jump in and correct them. The goal is not to treat lived experience as infallible, but to listen before we critique. When you hear a friend talk about "privilege," don't jump down his throat or beat him over the head with a "Marxism hammer." Instead, ask questions: "I hear you talk about privilege—could you explain what you mean by that? Have you ever interacted with critiques of white privilege as a concept?" Do it slowly.

RECOGNIZE THE BIBLICAL ISSUES AT STAKE

Third, recognize the biblical issues at stake. There are some significant biblical principles we must acknowledge and affirm, which must lead us to reject popular ideas in our culture.

1. *Our primary identity is in Christ, not in race, ethnicity, gender, or anything else.* Christ comes first in everything. In Galatians 3:26–28, there is neither male nor female, Jew or Greek, slave nor free—we are all one in Christ. But this does not mean that our other identities cease to exist. When Paul

said there is neither Jew nor Greek, he also said that there is neither male nor female. Are we now gender-blind? Can we not see whether someone is a man or a woman? No! Paul is saying that Christ unites us; we now have the same standing before God, but we're still men, we're still women. Paul was Jewish. He delighted in being Jewish, and grieved for his people. When people came and visited him who were Jewish Christians, he felt no compunction with identifying as a Jewish man. There is nothing wrong with having an ethnic identity, a male or female identity, a national identity. But Philippians 3 says I regard this as rubbish, dung, skubala (σκύβαλα) compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus. Those identities are not erased, but are bound together under a greater identity.

2. *We can only repent of our own sins* (Ezek. 18:14–20, Deut. 24:16, and Jer. 31:27–34). Yes, we are all fallen in Adam, but he is our federal head, and when we become Christians, Christ is our new federal head. Someone living 300 years ago is not our federal head, and we cannot repent for sins we didn't commit. In the Bible, repentance, or metanoia (μετάνοια) means turning from sin. I change my mind, and I change my behavior as a result. I cannot turn from a sin or behavior that I already loathe, which I've never committed. We sin everyday, and should repent of that. But we dare not hold people accountable for the sins of their great-great-great grandfather. The Bible itself says that the son shall not die for his father's sin.
3. *No one's lived experience makes them infallible.* The culture says, "You shouldn't invalidate people's lived experience." But sometimes we must, because lived experience is not infallible. When we interpret our lived experience, our sinful flesh twists our experiences to benefit ourselves. Instead,

PLENARY VIDEO: CHRISTIANITY AND WOKENESS

ACCS member schools may watch a video recording of Neil's plenary address by visiting the ACCS Member's Resource Center.

https://mrc.classicalchristian.org/conference_media/christianity-and-wokeness-are-they-compatible-neil-shenvi/

we must look at what Scripture says, and what objective evidence says. This does not mean we shut people down and refuse to hear their stories. No, you should listen to their stories, and tell them about your own experience. But at the end of the day, each of us must come before Scripture and submit our experiences to God's Word.

4. *Biblical justice means "giving people their due," not "dismantling hegemonic norms"* (Rom. 13:1–7, Is. 1:17). This means both giving the righteous the reward, and giving the wicked punishment. That's a key part of the gospel, because we are unrighteous, deserving God's just punishment, yet in Christ we receive the gift of his righteousness. We've received mercy, not justice. Dismantling "oppressive norms" haphazardly is extremely unwise, because some of those norms—categories like male and female—are God-given. They are not oppressive; they lead to human flourishing. Recognize that how you define justice is extremely important, and will have repercussions for everything you do. So define justice carefully, and biblically.
5. *Diversity is not always good* (Jdg. 21:25, Rev. 17:13–14). In the workplace, do we really want people with differing opinions on whether racism is a sin? Is that a good kind of diversity in the church?

No. There is one way to think of racism, and that's God's way. Certain beliefs are objective, and we do not want diversity of opinion on them. We cannot have one person in our church believing Jesus is God, and one person believing he is not God. Diversity of ethnicity or culture, however, is a good thing, because God has a diverse church of people all around the world who are brothers and sisters in Christ. This is a diversity we can celebrate.

6. Sixth, *the gospel is an indicative statement, not an imperative* (Rom. 4:5, John 6:29). The gospel is about what God did on your behalf, in Christ. It is not a command to go and earn God's approval. Too many people have said, "We want to do social justice, we care so much, we think it's part of the gospel." That is a deadly mistake. Social justice, whatever it is, is something you do. It may be good and noble, but it is not the gospel. The gospel is about what God has done on our behalf to rescue us, because we were helpless to do justice, to love mercy, to obey God's commands about moral purity, sexual purity. We are failures, and God rescued us in his great love and redeems us—that is the gospel.

READ BROADLY

Finally, we should read broadly. People love diversity, and that's good—so I suggest getting books from a wide diversity of authors. Often when people say, "I read diverse authors," they sometimes mean "I read multi-colored authors." That's not what I mean. I mean that you should read ideologically diverse authors. For example, take Voddie Baucham. He requires his children to read *Mein Kampf*, *Origin of Species*, Malcolm X, Langston Hughes, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Lord of the Rings*, Greek mythology. He's not afraid to do that. He himself spends nearly as much time reading books with which he disagrees as those which affirm

his positions, and he is able to identify with and profit from both.

In *Mama Bear Apologetics*, Hilary Ferrer writes, "It's dangerous to separate the world into 'good, safe, Christian authors' and 'bad, evil, non-Christian authors.'" Why is this dangerous? What happens when a "good, safe, Christian author" says something false, or when a "bad, evil, non-Christian author" says something true? Don't let your kids be fooled by these categories; they can't deal with a mixture. You must teach them the ability to discern truth from error, and that requires you to expose them to some false ideas.

Reading broadly first forces you to read critically. If everything you read says the same thing, you don't have to ask yourself why it is true. It exposes your blind spots. If you read ideologically diverse authors, you will find yourself having your blind spots challenged; you will be pushed to reexamine your assumptions. Reading broadly also inoculates you against error. Kids should be exposed to the lies of the devil in a safe, controlled environment so that they build up an immune system that will protect them when they encounter these ideas in college, in the workplace, or on social media. Finally, reading broadly does not require agreement. We seek truth wherever we find it, and sometimes this will be from non-Christian authors. All truth is God's truth. He is the author of all truth, so when we find truth we can credit him regardless of the secondary resource from which it comes.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS:

- *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth* by Thaddeus Williams
- *Beyond Racial Gridlock* by George Yancey
- *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson

Workshop talk slides: <https://shenviapologetics.files.wordpress.com/2021/06/christianityandwokeness.pdf>

BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW IN THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

by Terri Covil, Cary Christian School

*This is a transcription of an excerpt from Terri's workshop given June 16, 2021,
at the Repairing the Ruins Conference in Frisco, Texas.*

The most important responsibility and the greatest privilege we have been given as teachers is to present everything we teach from a biblical worldview. We're fighting against a worldview that is presented by the ruler of this age, Satan. This worldview says that there is not objective truth, but the Bible says there is truth, and that truth is found in the word of God. How does the Bible respond to the worldviews of our culture?

Ephesians 2 says, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts."

Colossians 2 says, ". . . so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments, for though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is."

I love what these verses say about truth. We can have all wisdom, we can have all knowledge, we can understand all things, but truth only comes from Christ. That brings us to the point of the entire workshop: How do we do it? How do we teach kids to add and subtract, label insects and birds and fish, and put sounds together to make words—and still teach with a biblical worldview, never straying away from talking about the Creator?

The first thing we do is start each morning with a firm foundation. Start your students' day off well by greeting them cheerfully when you see them, putting them in a good mood with your cheerfulness (1 Peter 5:14). Then, sing hymns together. This connects us with centuries of believers, and when the words get stuck in their heads, they will ponder what the words mean (Ephesians 5:19). After we greet and sing together, we have a catechism. The question and answer flow of the catechism trains and inculcates students in a biblical worldview, equipping them with ready answers to hard questions (1 Peter 3:15). Finally, we pray together. The Bible tells us to pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests (Ephesians 6:18). Most days we go around the room and every student adds one sentence to the prayer. Other days prayer is teacher-

Terri Covil is a third-grade teacher at Cary Christian School. She holds a BA in religious studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has been married to her best friend, Patrick, for eighteen years, and they have two teenage children.

led, and sometimes we have a place on the board where students can write prayer requests. Other times we have a “thank you day.” On these days we talk about how we could pray all day, praising God for the gifts He’s given. This morning routine takes about fifteen minutes, but it is invaluable, and creates a classroom full of students who are ready to learn.

Using catechism has helped me transform my teaching, helping me to be more intentional in incorporating a biblical worldview. For example, for the language arts, I use this simple catechism:

Who made you and all things?

God made me, and God made all things.

How did God make all things?

God made all things very good, out of nothing, by the power of His word. He spoke and it was so.

Why do we learn to spell correctly?

We learn to spell correctly because God delights in order and the right use of the tongue.

Why do we learn to read and write well?

We learn to read and write well because God has created the written word, and He has placed the mystery of salvation in a written story.

As we study the language arts, we want to help students take note of the beauty of language and the power of storytelling, and how it moves our souls. It helps us think; it helps us understand the world. We always want to bring it back to the story we’re all part of, God’s redemptive story. As you read with your students, teach them to look for truth, goodness, and beauty in the stories. Try not to tell them where it is. Instead, ask them if they can find examples. Don’t stop there. Make sure they are identifying sin and recognizing the consequences of sin in the story. Ask deep questions to gauge whether biblical connections

**WORKSHOP VIDEO:
BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW IN
THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL**

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https://mrc.classicalchristian.org/conference_media/biblical-worldview-in-the-grammar-school-terri-covil-2/

are being made. Have applicable Bible references ready for students to look up to help them draw connections. With these tools they will be able to articulate clearly what they know about God, because they have learned to spell well, to read well, and to write well.

We also use catechisms for math, for history, and for science. Math helps us understand the language of creation, the mind of the Creator and his eternity, the beauty of orderliness, and the symmetry of God’s design. History helps us put the Bible in context, see God’s plan in action, and notice how He uses both good and evil people to bring about his will. Science helps us discover and understand God’s creation, so that we see how all of nature points to the Creator.

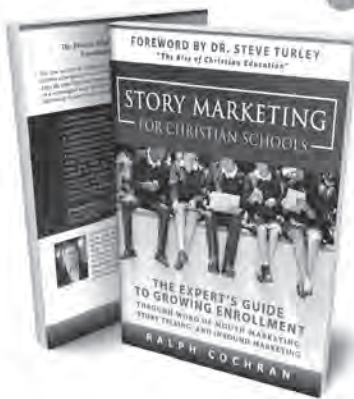
The most important way to cultivate a biblical worldview for your students is to ensure that you are cultivating your own biblical worldview. Paul teaches us how to live like Christians; he says, “Follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Our students are following us, so it is imperative that we are following Christ, modeling a biblical worldview. If we view the world with awe and wonder, our students are going to react to the world with awe and wonder. We have to be ready to answer questions, and the way we do that is by reading, pondering, and meditating on Scripture. Music teaches us and gets stuck in your heads—so listen to music with deep lyrics. Spend

time in nature, filling your own soul. Look around and ask questions. Wonder about things. Ask “Why?” Also, be okay with not knowing all the answers. Be willing to say “I don’t know.” It’s a good thing to teach your students that you can rest in God’s mysteries. By creating a classroom where you are vulnerable, you help your students become willing to ask hard questions, without fear of being wrong.

Our daily goal as teachers can be summarized by Colossians 2:6–8: “So then, just as you received Christ

Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.” The last thing we want is for our students to be taken captive. We want them to be firmly rooted in the rich soil of the gospel and we spend our days planting seeds that will grow into strong trees.

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“

When it comes to marketing that (excellent) school, two kinds of failures are common. Either the school is not marketed at all, or the school defaults to the American factory settings, which means the school is marketed in the same way other products are. Be it butter, cars, books, widgets, or schools, we revert to what someone learned in his business major thirty years ago. But it is a new world, and Ralph Cochran has provided us with a valuable service. He proposes a way of marketing your school as though people mattered, and, as it turns out, this is consistent with the conviction that results matter also.”

Douglas Wilson

Co-Founder of The Association of Classical Christian Schools, Logos School, and New Saint Andrews College and Minister at Christ Church



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PARTNERSHIP AT VERITAS: OUR PHILOSOPHY AND PRINCIPLES

by Keith Nix, Veritas School

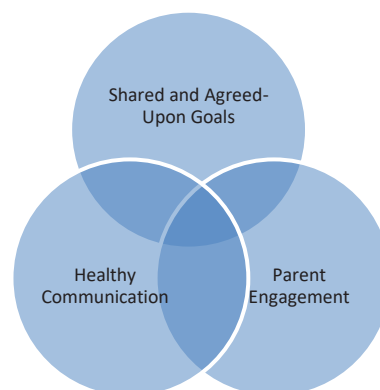


At Veritas, we believe that education can truly be a “garden of delight,” a place where young plants are given excellent nourishment, rich “soil,” and joyful

encouragement. *Partnership of Veritas with Christian parents whose faith is growing within the care of a church ensures that the minds and hearts of students are cultivated not only at school, but also at home and church.*

This partnership is at the very core of who we are as a community of faith and learning. By partnership, we mean we are in covenant with one another, and with God, in this shared vision and mission. Cooperation and collaboration are the paths to successful partnership.

Partnership of Veritas and Christian parents is dependent on three main ideas:



SHARED AND AGREED- UPON GOALS

One distinct and beautiful thing about a Veritas education is the clearly established “telos”—the end goal described in our Portrait of a Graduate. We—both school and parents—have a clear picture of the desired outcome of a Veritas education.

Together we work backwards from graduation to our youngest grades, assessing the school’s curriculum and culture for their alignment with the Portrait of the Graduate. In joining the Veritas community, families are agreeing on the objectives captured in that portrait.

In addition to defining the Portrait of the Graduate, we strive to clearly communicate the educational and cultural core beliefs of Veritas as a Christian and classical

*Veritas School is an ACCS-accredited school in Richmond, Virginia.
Learn more at <https://www.veritasschool.com/>.*

school. Our core beliefs include our Statement of Faith, as well as our classical distinctives such as: instruction in Latin and Logic; pursuit of students' hearts along with their behavior; the study of great literature, art, and music; integration of disciplines; commitment to orthodox Christian theology and standards of morality; and the cultivation of students' affections.

Our published goals and beliefs makeup the non-negotiable "90%" that define us as a school. These goals and beliefs serve as the engine for both our curricular and co-curricular offerings. When families and the school agree on this 90%, the other 10% can be approached with graciousness and flexibility. Agreement on the Portrait of the Graduate, for instance, allows each of us to set aside preferences in uniform details, snow day decisions, and the like. When we disagree on these noncentral issues, there is opportunity to compromise, give preference to others before ourselves (Phil 2: 2–4), and to choose contentment.

Walking shoulder to shoulder in agreement on the major objectives, the 90%, we can avoid much of the distraction and division that so often plague school communities.

HEALTHY, BIBLICAL COMMUNICATION

Partnering well requires healthy, biblical communication from everyone in the community. The school must communicate the goals and priorities mentioned above; teachers must communicate students' academic and social progress; parents must communicate questions, concerns, or helpful information about their children.

A key to healthy communication is understanding the power of the tongue, taking our words seriously. The tongue is a tool, a weapon if you will, that can cause great good as well as great harm. It has the power of life and death. As Christians involved in gospel community with



one another, we should take great care that our words are life-giving, full of grace, and a source of encouragement. When they are not, we should repent to God and to those we have offended. Some of the surest indicators of true gospel-centered relationships are admitting mistakes and confessing sin against one another.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

"Engagement" rather than "involvement" is the best way to describe the role that parents play at Veritas. Parental involvement—volunteering, attending school events, etc.—is important and necessarily fluctuates with seasons of life, but parental engagement both with children about what they are learning and with other adults and families of the Veritas community provides strong support for students as they learn and socialize with classmates. To be part of Veritas is to partner not only with the school but also with the other families God has brought together in this important work.

MODELING

By God's design parents are, by far, the most significant influence in a child's life. While Veritas School will consistently invite students to consider that which is true, beautiful and good; will provide skills for a lifetime of learning; and will fill classrooms with

faculty who love God and others, the school's influence pales in comparison to the impact of the daily-witnessed practices of parents.

For the partnership between parents, church and school to be of greatest effect, students must experience alignment between the three institutions. Adults must be consistent, winsome, caring, and compelling. Children are keen observers.

Hypocrisy, double-standards, and inconsistency are deeply felt and have long-term effects.

We must reflect on what our children witness. How do we navigate conflicts with our spouses, neighbors, bosses, and pastors? What entertainment do we choose, and who do we invite to dinner? Which books are dusty on the shelf and which do we read over and over? How do we speak of those in authority? Do we remain faithful to our commitments, and how do we handle disappointment? How and how often do we seek forgiveness? Are we kind?

The truth is that we all—without exception—regularly fail our Lord, our fellow man, and our better selves. In these moments, what do our watching children learn about God, about His grace, and about making things right? Do they witness lives humbly submitted to the sanctifying work of Christ?

READING (ALONE, TO, AND WITH YOUR CHILDREN)

One of the best ways to be engaged with a child's education is to read. Read to children, with them and in front of them. Encourage children to read beyond the classroom requirement so that they understand that reading is not about school, but about learning, growing, and stewarding the mind God has given them. The benefits of reading are quickly evident in the life of a student—well beyond the assigned work—and equip children for a lifetime of learning and joy.

PARTICIPATING

The administration will hold various parent forums and meetings each year for the purpose of maintaining strong communication with parents. Because of our covenantal model, it is critical that parents take advantage of these opportunities when possible. We ask that every family be represented at three events each year:

- Back-to-School Night
- Community Dinner
- Spring Parent Forum

We also strongly encourage every family to attend one of the many Veritas U sessions we hold each year. Veritas U offers parents the opportunity to attend evening workshops, book discussions, and seminar series led by members of our faculty and administration. Veritas U evenings are held two to three times each year. Recent Veritas U courses include: An Introduction to Classical Christian Education, Reinforcing the Fundamentals of Singapore Mathematics, Navigating the Digital Age, Inspiring Your Children to Read, and a discussion of *That Hideous Strength* by C. S. Lewis.

SPECIAL ANNUAL EVENTS

There are many other very special events in the life of our school that always prove to be a tremendous blessing. We hope you will work these events into the rhythm of your family life.

- Convocation
- Lessons and Carols
- Speaker Series
- Spring Concert
- Art Show
- Commencement

SERVING AND VOLUNTEERING

Parents are encouraged to volunteer at Veritas in many different capacities. Some volunteer positions are for one-time events while others are ongoing. Volunteering helps foster a closer, caring community at Veritas, while allowing teachers to focus on academics. Many of Veritas' events and activities are dependent on the support and creativity of parent volunteers.

Parents will have an opportunity to sign up to participate in committees both in the upper school and lower school.

Examples of volunteer committees are prayer, room parents, golf tournament, community service, and Grandparents Day.

The committee coordinators will work directly with the administration to carry out their activities.

CONNECTING

Engagement is a natural result of connecting. We desire and expect that Veritas parents would be connected—both to what their child is learning and also to the lives of others in the school community. To be a part of Veritas is to not only partner with the school but to partner with the other families God has brought together in this important work. As parents care for their children, it speaks volumes when parents are truly interested in what students are learning and experiencing at school. Knowing that parents also care for classmates and classmates' families prepares children for the communities they will love and serve in the future.

Veritas is not a perfect school seeking to partner with perfect parents who attend perfect churches. We do, however, desire to humbly seek to honor God and His good and perfect gifts by together giving attention to that which is praiseworthy.

THE MYTH THAT AMERICANS WERE POORLY EDUCATED BEFORE MASS GOVERNMENT SCHOOLING

by Lawrence W. Reed, Foundation for Economic Education

Early America had widespread literacy and a vibrant culture of learning.

Parents the world over are dealing with massive adjustments in their children's education that they could not have anticipated just three months ago. To one degree or another, pandemic-induced school closures are creating the "mass homeschooling" that FEE's senior education fellow Kerry McDonald¹ predicted two months ago. Who knows, with millions of youngsters absent from government school classrooms, maybe education will become as good as it was before the government ever got involved.

"What?" you exclaim! "Wasn't education lousy or non-existent before government mandated it, provided it, and subsidized it? That's what my government school teachers assured me so it must be true," you say!

The fact is, at least in early America, education was better and more widespread than most people today realize or were ever told. Sometimes it wasn't "book learning" but it was functional and built for the world most young people confronted at the time. Even without laptops and swimming pools, and on a fraction of what government

schools spend today, Americans were a surprisingly learned people in our first hundred years.

I was reminded a few days ago of the amazing achievements of early American education while reading the enthralling book by bestselling author Stephen Mansfield, *Lincoln's Battle With God: A President's Struggle With Faith and What It Meant for America*. It traces the spiritual journey of America's 16th president—from fiery atheist to one whose last words to his wife on that tragic evening at Ford's Theater were a promise to "visit the Holy Land and see those places hallowed by the footsteps of the Savior."

In a moment, I'll cite a revealing, extended passage from Mansfield's book but first, I'd like to offer some excellent, related works that come mostly from FEE's own archives.

In 1983, Robert A. Peterson's *Education in Colonial America*² revealed some stunning facts and figures. "*The Federalist Papers*, which are seldom read or understood today even in our universities," explains Peterson, "were written for and read by the common man. Literacy rates

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were as high or higher than they are today.” Incredibly, “A study conducted in 1800 by DuPont de Nemours revealed that only four in a thousand Americans were unable to read and write legibly” [emphasis mine].

Well into the nineteenth century, writes Susan Alder in “Education in America,”³ “parents did not even consider that the civil government in any way had the responsibility or should assume the responsibility of providing for the education of children.” Only one state (Massachusetts) even had compulsory schooling laws before the Civil War, yet literacy rates were among the highest in our history.

Great Britain experienced similar trends. In 1996, Edwin West wrote in “The Spread of Education Before Compulsion in Britain and America in the Nineteenth Century”⁴ that “when national compulsion was enacted ([in 1880], over 95 percent of fifteen-year-olds were literate.” More than a century later, “40 percent of 21-year-olds in the United Kingdom admit[ted] to difficulties with writing and spelling.”

Laws against the education of black slaves date back to as early as 1740, but the desire to read proved too strong to prevent its steady growth even under bondage. For purposes of religious instruction, it was not uncommon for slaves to be taught reading but not writing. Many taught themselves to write, or learned to do so with the help of others willing to flout the law. Government efforts to outlaw the education of blacks in the Old South may not have been much more effective than today’s drug laws. If you wanted it, you could find it.

Estimates of the literacy rate among slaves on the eve of the Civil War range from 10 to 20 percent. By 1880, nearly 40 percent of southern blacks were literate. In 1910, half a century before the federal government involved itself in K–12 funding, black literacy exceeded 70 percent and was comparable to that of whites.

Daniel Lattier explained in a 2016 article titled “Did Public Schools Really Improve American Literacy?”⁵ that a government school system is no guarantee that young people will actually learn to read and write well. He cites



the shocking findings of a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education: “32 million of American adults are illiterate, 21 percent read below a 5th grade level, and 19 percent of high school graduates are functionally illiterate, which means they can’t read well enough to manage daily living and perform tasks required by many jobs.”

Compulsory government schools were not established in America because of some widely-perceived failure of private education, which makes it both erroneous and self-serving for the government school establishment to propagate the myth that Americans would be illiterate without them.

As Kerry McDonald wrote in “Public Schools Were Designed to Indoctrinate Immigrants,”⁶ the prime motivation for government schooling was something much less benign than a fear of illiteracy. Her remarkable 2019 book, *Unschooling: Raising Curious, Well-Educated Children Outside the Conventional Classroom*, explains the viable, self-directed alternatives that far outclass the standardized, test-driven, massively expensive and politicized government schooling of today.

If you’re looking for a good history of how America traveled the path of literacy to a national education crisis,

you can find it in a recent, well-documented book by Justin Spears and associates, titled *Failure: The History and Results of America's School System*. The way in which government shortchanges parents, teachers, and students is heartbreaking.

I promised to share a passage from Stephen Mansfield's book, so now I am pleased to deliver it. Read it carefully, and let it soak in:

We should remember that the early English settlers in the New World left England accompanied by fears that they would pursue their "errand into the wilderness" and become barbarians in the process. Loved ones at home wondered how a people could cross an ocean and live in the wild without losing the literacy, the learning, and the faith that defined them. The early colonists came determined to defy these fears. They brought books, printing presses, and teachers with them and made the founding of schools a priority. Puritans founded Boston in 1630 and established Harvard College within six years. After ten years they had already printed the first book in the colonies, the Bay Psalm Book. Many more would follow. The American colonists were so devoted to education—inspired as they were by their Protestant insistence upon biblical literacy and by their hope of converting and educating the natives—that they created a near-miraculous culture of learning.

This was achieved through an educational free market. Colonial society offered "Dame schools," Latin grammar schools, tutors for hire, what would today be called "home schools," church schools, schools for the poor, and colleges for the gifted and well-to-do. Enveloping these institutions of learning was a wider culture that prized knowledge as an aid to godliness. Books were cherished and well-read. A respected minister might have thousands of them. Sermons were long and learned. Newspapers were devoured, and elevated discussion of ideas filled taverns and parlors.

Citizens formed gatherings for the "improvement of the mind"—debate societies and reading clubs and even sewing circles at which the latest books from England were read.

The intellectual achievements of colonial America were astonishing. Lawrence Cremin, dean of American education historians, estimated the literacy rate of the period at between 80 and 90 percent. Benjamin Franklin taught himself five languages and was not thought exceptional. Jefferson taught himself half a dozen, including Arabic. George Washington was unceasingly embarrassed by his lack of formal education, and yet readers of his journals today marvel at his intellect and wonder why he ever felt insecure. It was nothing for a man—or in some cases a woman—to learn algebra, geometry, navigation, science, logic, grammar, and history entirely through self-education. A seminarian was usually required to know Greek, Hebrew, Latin, French and German just to begin his studies, instruction which might take place in a log classroom and on a dirt floor.

This culture of learning spilled over onto the American frontier. Though pioneers routinely moved beyond the reach of even basic education, as soon as the first buildings of a town were erected, so too, were voluntary societies to foster intellectual life. Aside from schools for the young, there were debate societies, discussion groups, lyceums, lecture associations, political clubs, and always, Bible societies. The level of learning these groups encouraged was astounding. The language of Shakespeare and classical literature—at the least Virgil, Plutarch, Cicero, and Homer—so permeated the letters and journals of frontier Americans that modern readers have difficulty understanding that generation's literary metaphors. This meant that even a rustic Western settlement could serve as a kind of informal frontier university for the aspiring. It is precisely this legacy and passion for learning that shaped young Abraham

Lincoln during his six years in New Salem.

Not bad for a society that hardly even knew what a government school was for generations, wouldn't you say? Why should we blindly assume today that we couldn't possibly get along without government schools? Instead, we should be studying how remarkable it was that we did so well without them.

When I think of the many ways that government deceives us into its embrace, one in particular really stands out: It seeks to convince us how helpless we would be without it. It tells us we can't do this, we can't do that, that government possesses magical powers beyond those of mere mortals and that yes, we'd be dumb as dirt and as destitute as drifters if we didn't put it in charge of one thing or another.

When it comes to education, Americans really should know better. Maybe one positive outcome of the virus pandemic is that they will rediscover that they don't need government schools as much as the government told them they do. In fact, we never did.

ENDNOTES

1. Kerry McDonald, "Coronavirus May Lead to 'Mass Homeschooling' ", <https://fee.org/articles/coronavirus-may-lead-to-mass-homeschooling/>

2. Robert A. Peterson, "Education in Colonial America," <https://fee.org/articles/education-in-colonial-america/>

3. Susan Alder, "Education in America," <https://fee.org/articles/education-in-america/>

4. Edwin West, "The Spread of Education Before Compulsion: Britain and America in the Nineteenth Century," <https://fee.org/articles/the-spread-of-education-before-compulsion-britain-and-america-in-the-nineteenth-century/>

5. Daniel Lattier, "Did Public Schools Really Improve American Literacy?," <https://fee.org/articles/did-public-schools-really-improve-american-literacy/>

6. Kerry McDonald, "Public Schools Were Designed to Indoctrinate Immigrants," <https://fee.org/articles/public-schools-were-designed-to-indoctrinate-immigrants/>

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—The Veritas Standard, Parent-Student Edition

Veritas School is an ACCS-accredited school located in Richmond, Virginia. Learn more at <https://www.veritasschool.com/>.

REHABILITATING BEAUTY: HOW C. S. LEWIS FOUGHT THE CULT OF THE UGLY IN HIS FICTION

by Louis Markos, Houston Baptist University

The founding mission and vision of most, if not all, classical Christian schools includes a commitment to Goodness, Truth, and Beauty—not the man-made, relativistic goodness, truth, and beauty taught in most public and many private schools, but the eternal, absolute Goodness, Truth, and Beauty sought after by creedal Christians of all ages and by such “virtuous pagans” as Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero.

Sadly, a growing number of evangelicals who will at least pay lip service to Goodness and Truth have become unwilling to acknowledge that Beauty, too, is one of the Platonic and Christian universals. What Christians who have bought into the post-Romantic notion that beauty is inherently subjective and resides *only* in the eye of the beholder fail to realize is that Goodness, Truth, and Beauty are a package deal. If we allow one to die, the other two will eventually atrophy.

Goodness, Truth, and Beauty embody a kind of balance or harmony that reflects the divine balance and harmony that exists within the triune God. We live in an ordered cosmos created by a good God, not a random universe evolved out of undirected time and chance, and that order is imprinted in our conscience

(goodness), our reason (truth), and our sense of beauty. Granted, as fallen creatures, we are unable to grasp the fullness of divine Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, but that does not mean that they do not exist or that we should not strive after them.

Our modern and postmodern world has decreed that no universal propositional statements can be made in the realms of morality-ethics (the good), philosophy-theology (the true), or aesthetics (the beautiful). If we as believers, out of fear of being labeled “unfair” or “elitist” or “hurtful,” collapse all standards of beauty, we will hasten the triumph of ethical and philosophical relativism in our schools, media, and, eventually, churches.

Would anyone buy season tickets to the symphony if his city chose its musicians on the basis of egalitarian principles that made no distinction between levels of skill and discipline? Certainly not, and yet, otherwise discerning Christians think they are being kind and charitable to less physically attractive women by willfully deconstructing one of God’s greatest gifts: beauty. Is the esteem and self-image of physically weak men raised one iota by people who attack sports as empty and

Louis Markos, professor in English and scholar in residence at Houston Baptist University, holds the Robert H. Ray Chair in Humanities; his 22 books include Lewis Agonistes, From Plato to Christ: How Platonic Thought Shaped the Christian Faith; The Myth Made Fact: Reading Greek and Roman Mythology Through Christian Eyes; and From Achilles to Christ: Why Christians Should Read the Pagan Classics. The issues raised in this essay are covered in a different form and at greater length in Part I of his Restoring Beauty: The Good, the True, and the Beautiful in the Writings of C. S. Lewis.

meaningless? Of course not! Rather, all people are lifted up by the proper celebration of beauty in all its forms.

I grew up in the 1970s, and I, along with my peers, wore clothes that most of us look back on today as truly ugly. But that was not what we were seeking. We really thought we were Adonises in polyester. Not so for many young, and not-so-young, people today. Across our country, a cult of the ugly has been spreading that rejects beauty out of hand to embrace its opposite. I do applaud those who refuse to allow Madison Avenue to sell them its many unnatural forms of beauty, but that does not sanction the explosion of tattoos, body piercings, and deliberately ugly hair and clothing styles that come perilously close to embodying a Gnostic hatred of the body in its masculine and feminine form.

Thankfully, a half decade before the cult of the ugly began in earnest, God raised up a British academic and lover of fairy stories named C. S. Lewis. While boldly championing Goodness and Truth in his apologetical works, Lewis mounted a spirited defense of Beauty in his fiction. That defense is perhaps best captured in an exchange near the end of *The Great Divorce*, a *sui generis* fantasy novel in which the damned are allowed to take a bus to heaven, where they are met by saints who try to convince them, even now, to give up their sin and embrace God's mercy. All but one freely choose to return to hell.

When Lewis asks his guide, George MacDonald, how the people in heaven can be happy when there are people suffering in hell, MacDonald warns him away from such foolish thinking. If heaven were to allow in unrepentant sinners who cling to their misery, envy, resentment, and ugliness, the love, purity, and beauty of heaven would be infected. A day must come, MacDonald explains, when the makers of misery—key advocates of the cult of the ugly—are either cast out or permitted to spoil forever the joy of the saints.

Such insights into the true nature of beauty and ugliness abound in Lewis's three science-fiction novels

and seven Chronicles of Narnia. The church today would do well to heed the advice that Lewis gives in the fictional worlds that he created.

...

Out of the Silent Planet, the first novel in Lewis's Space (or Cosmic, or Ransom) Trilogy, introduces us to a hero (Ransom) who has fully absorbed the modernist worldview in which he was raised. Space to him is cold and dead, something to be studied objectively and dispassionately as one might study a dissected animal under a microscope. The notion that the heavens above might be a realm of life and beauty to be wondered at and enjoyed never strikes him, until he looks out the window of the spaceship that is carrying him to Mars and sees a field throbbing with warmth and radiance. Far from a barren, yawning vacuum, it is the womb of creation.

As his eyes are opened to the beauty of God's cosmos, so are his eyes opened to the beauty of God-given hierarchy. On Mars (or Malacandra), there are three races of hnau (rational creatures): the Sorns, who are philosopher kings, the Hrossa, a Homeric warrior class, and the Pfflittriggi, the blue collar craftsmen of the planet. All three live together in peace and harmony under the rule of an angelic guardian known as the Oyarsa.

As hard it may be to accept for most Americans, including and especially low-church evangelicals like myself, beauty goes hand in hand with hierarchy. Without difference and distinction there can be no beauty; a purely egalitarian world, like the ones that the Soviets, Maoists, and Khmer Rouge rebels tried to build, is a purely ugly one—as banal as it is anti-human.

Beauty rests upon distinction and hierarchy, as it does upon the essential, God-given complementarity of masculine and feminine. This great truth, another one the church desperately needs to learn, is impressed upon Ransom in the second novel, *Perelandra*. As he gazes

with awe and wonder upon the Oyarsa of Malacandra (Mars) and Perelandra (Venus), he realizes for the first time that masculinity and femininity are fundamental realities that run far deeper than our sexual differences or our gendered language.

Egalitarianism is the enemy of beauty, for, in seeking to collapse all distinctions between cultures, classes, and genders, it robs individuals of their unique worth and value. We are, or at least should be, equal before the law and equal bearers of the image of God. Any type of forced equality beyond those two leads in the end to a society mangled and reduced into a colorless, classless, sexless, soul-crippling conformity. Everything Lewis wrote stands in opposition to such a crushing uglification of the human person.

Indeed, he renders that crushing concrete in his third novel, *That Hideous Strength*. Returned to earth, Ransom heads a resistance group to the encroachment of a would-be utopian group (N.I.C.E.) who plans to build a brave new world wiped clean of all inefficiency, individual dignity, and, finally, organic life. One of the key players in this war between God-given distinction and enforced sameness, procreation and sterility, beauty and ugliness, is Mark Studdock, a sociologist who wants to become an executive member of N.I.C.E. and so be empowered to be a shaper and conditioner of the future.

The final step that will secure his initiation into the inner ring of N.I.C.E. involves being locked in a lop-sided room filled with surrealistic paintings meant to disrupt and deconstruct all ethical, spiritual, and aesthetic standards. Only once Mark has let go of his bourgeois notions of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty will he be able to serve the totalitarian goals of N.I.C.E. He almost gives in, when, at the last moment, the perverse ugliness of the room sparks in him a deeper desire for that which is straight and normal. He breaks out of the room and throws off the dark delusion that man needs to be remolded in accordance with progressives, scientific ideals that reject the innate and essential order that God

has written into our conscience, our reason, and our sense of beauty.

...

Rather than try to cover all seven Chronicles of Narnia in a brief essay, I will focus here on four of the novels that expand on the themes discussed above.

In *the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, four children from our world (Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy) are magically transported to the land of Narnia. While there, three of them are given gifts by Father Christmas. Although Peter is given a sword, Susan a bow, and Lucy a dagger, Father Christmas tells the girls that he does not intend for them to fight in the battle. When Lucy says that she thinks she is brave enough to fight, he tells her that that is not the point. The issue is not that she lacks courage but that “battles are ugly when women fight” (chapter 10).

Modern readers tend to balk at these words, but they capture a great truth. Most women would not hesitate to shoot or stab a man who threatened the life of their child, but there is something deeply wrong with having women charge, armed, into battle. Wars are fought, or at least should be fought, to protect one’s home and family. When women are dragged on to the battlefield, the conflict becomes an ugly one, for the action collapses masculine courage and feminine nurture. It signals that the sanctity of the home has been violated and that a potential life giver has been corrupted into an instrument of death.

In *Prince Caspian*, Lewis conjures a beautiful picture of masculine-feminine complementarity by having the four children work in tandem to rescue Narnia from a group of human usurpers known as the Telmarines. While the boys (Peter and Edmund, together with Caspian) fight directly in the battle, the girls (Susan and Lucy) ride on the back of Aslan and help him set free the countryside. Lewis honors both missions equally,

presenting the gifts of masculine courage and feminine nurture as equally necessary.

The Telmarines, incidentally, have done far more than subject Narnia to their military might. They have stripped her bare of her talking animals, living streams, and walking trees. They allow no room for the supernatural in their materialistic kingdom, just as the postmodern promoters of the cult of the ugly allow neither hierarchy nor distinction nor transcendence in their progressive utopia. Both squeeze out the Good, the True, and the Beautiful and then prevent anyone from having a real encounter with any of them.

Of course, in doing so, they willfully blind themselves to any kind of sacramental beauty that might elicit from them wonder, awe, or humility. In *The Magician's Nephew*, Lewis allows his readers to witness the creation of Narnia, which is sung into being by the Great Lion Aslan. When the good characters hear the song, they are filled with joy and consider it the most beautiful music they have ever heard. One listener, an adult, even comments that he would have been a more moral man had he known such beauty existed.

Not so the two evil characters. When the music starts, they cover their ears and think only of how they can kill the Lion and squelch the song. Rather than recognize in the music a force of beauty that could transform them into better people, they sense in it a magic stronger than their own. The music exposes their inner ugliness, their rebellious pride and devouring lust for power, and fills them with destructive rage. For true beauty is like the Word of God; it is a two-edged sword that divides darkness from light, lies from truth.

In *The Silver Chair*, the villain, a Green Witch, has created her own underground lair safe from the exposing light and transformative music of Aslan. There she rules as the queen of a passionless, anti-humanistic anthill, served by gnomes whose personalities she has erased and whose wills she has conformed to her own. She has even made Prince Rilian, son of King Caspian,

forget his true self—that is, until he is set free by two earth children and a Narnian Marshwiggle named Puddleglum whom Aslan sent to rescue him.

When the Witch realizes that Rilian has been restored to his proper nature, she attempts to fool all four of them into believing that her underground world is the only world that is. When they say that they know Narnia is real for they have seen the sun and the Lion Aslan, she convinces them that there are no such things as lions or suns, that they made those things up by looking at cats and torches and imagining what they would be like if they were bigger. No, she insists, there is no reality greater than her dark, drab kingdom.

All seems lost when Puddleglum bravely puts his foot in the fire to clear his mind from the lies of the Witch. Then he boldly proclaims what every believer who refuses to buy in to the colorless, classless, sexless world of the cult of the ugly must be willing to shout from the rooftops of our homes and our churches, our schools and our universities:

“Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things—trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours is the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that’s a funny thing, when you come to think of it. We’re just babies making up a game, if you’re right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow. That’s why I’m going to stand by the play world. I’m on Aslan’s side even if there isn’t any Aslan to lead it. I’m going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn’t any Narnia” (chapter 12).

No matter how hard society tries to press out every distinction that gives life its beauty and its value, no matter how loudly they deny the mystical, God-given complementarity of the sexes, no matter how

vociferously they insist that the Great Books be thrown out of our schools to be replaced with progressive values and politically correct ideologies, we must nevertheless insist that we will live like Narnians.

We have in our possession an ineradicable vision of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, and we must cling to it in the face of all depravity, all lies, and all ugliness.



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