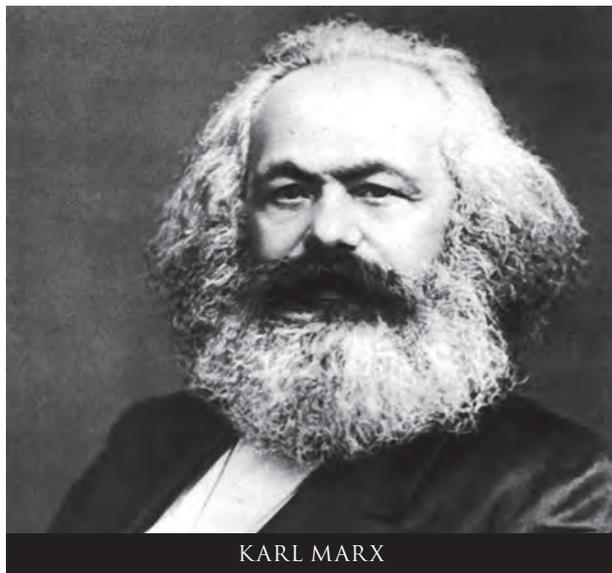


CLASSICAL EDUCATION

GARY NORTH

Classical Christian Education Is Like Marxist Christian Education, But a Lot More Subtle.

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KARL MARX

What if I came before a group of Christian mothers at a home school convention and asked this question? Would you spend money to buy a curriculum program based on a philosophy of education that assumes the following? (1) The legitimacy of homosexuality, especially the seduction of teenage boys by men over age 30; (2) warfare as a man's supremely meaningful activity; (3) polytheism; (4) a personal demon as a philosopher's source of correct logic; (5) slavery as the foundation of civilization; (6) politics as mankind's only means of attaining

the good life, meaning salvation; (7) the exclusion of women from all aspects of public religion; (8) the legitimacy of female infanticide.

Preposterous, correct? On the contrary, at least a third of them have already decided to adopt such a curriculum. It's called the Christian classical curriculum -- also called the classical Christian curriculum -- and it's all the rage these days in Christian home schooling circles and day schools. Parents line up to give their children the education they never had. Christian

Parents don't know how blessed they were not to have had to endure it.

Not having to go through through the unstable hybrid known as the classical Christian curriculum is an advantage every Christian high school student deserves.

Greek society and Greek wisdom were based on all eight of the characteristics I listed above. Classical culture, which flourished for about two centuries, 600 B.C. to 400 B.C. Its primary religious and cultural document was the Iliad, and during the Peloponnesian war, the city-states fought themselves to exhaustion. Greece was easily conquered by Alexander the Great in the 330's. And why not? His tutor had been Aristotle, who taught him all about Greek culture. Alexander learned its weaknesses, and he took advantage of this. But Christian parents don't know its weaknesses, so they encourage their children to have respect for the culture that Paul called to repentance in Acts 17.

Parents who know nothing of Greek history and culture think they are doing their children a favor by assigning them

the classics. What they are doing is to repeat the errors of the Middle Ages: mixing two ways of thinking into one unstable mass. Renaissance humanism triumphed culturally in Italy by scraping the Christian aspects of that unstable mixture.

Of course, the assigned texts have been edited. They do not reveal openly to students or their parents what classical Greek culture was really all about, and what underlay it. Students are not told, for example, that Socrates admitted that a demon ("daimon") told him when his logic was wrong. But he did.

I wrote about this back in 1995. I have not changed my mind. Read what I wrote then. (Following).

This is probably why I never get asked to speak at home school conventions.

CLASSICAL EDUCATION & LATIN

Gary North
ICE newsletter, 1995

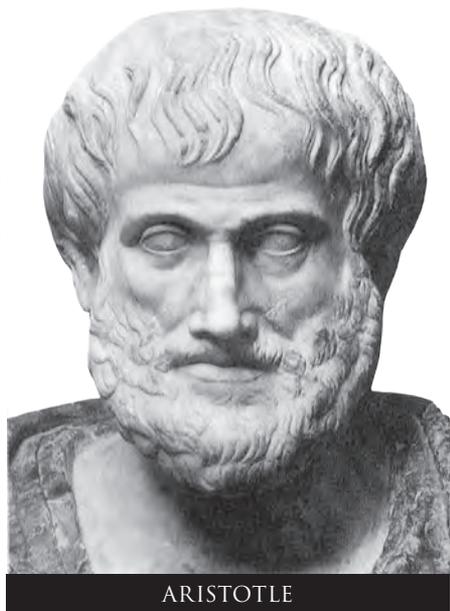
Classical education undermines Christian orthodoxy. Christian orthodoxy has tried to make classical education Christian for over eighteen centuries, and it has always failed; the reverse always happens. Classical education is a Trojan horse: Greeks bearing gifts.

Classical education begins with a premise: the student must learn the classics. The classics are pagan: Greek and Roman literature and philosophy. They were based on the premise that man is the measure of all things, that man's reason is ultimate. The rational side of the Renaissance was based on the same premise. (Its irrational side was also a revival of Greek

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and Roman religion: occult, magical, and either chance-based or fatalistic.) Medieval Scholasticism was as committed to the classics as the Renaissance was, though without classical occultism and pornography. The Scholastics were committed academically far more to Aristotle than to the Bible, especially in their political philosophy. They worshipped at Aristotle's shrine. Prior to the eleventh century, medieval theologians had worshipped at Plato's shrine: neoplatonic mysticism. The Scholastics substituted Aristotle for Plato. There was some gain—Aristotle at least was not a communist, as Plato was—but not in the realm of men's presuppositions. It was the equivalent of substituting Milton Friedman for Karl Marx: better economics, but the same old humanism. For humanism, man is the measure, and man's mind is the sole valid instrument of measurement. The Bible denies this view.



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From the beginning, the medieval university was committed to classical education, and from the beginning, rationalism and irrationalism (mysticism) undermined the Christian roots of education. By the time of Cromwell and the Puritan Revolution of 1642-59, the Puritans suspected that the curriculum of Oxford and Cambridge was against them, yet they did not seek to change it.



They hoped that inward salvation would somehow make Renaissance rationalism Christian. Cromwell changed nothing at Oxford, even though as Lord Protector, he was chancellor of Oxford. John Morgan writes in his survey of Puritan education, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560–1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1986):

Puritans did not venture far from the traditional academic routine. The structures of educational institutions, and the content as affected by Renaissance urgings, seemed to satisfy their need for an academic base. There can certainly be no doubt of the very limited effects of puritans to the legacy of

the Renaissance, or in developing the human intellect in the Baconian sense of the 'advancement of learning'.... A novel theory of learning or education lay outside the necessities of a puritan blueprint for the future (pp. 305–6).

To indulge in classical education is to indulge in Renaissance education. To force a child to learn Latin is to encourage him to accept the premises either of medieval Catholicism or the Renaissance. Yet today's would-be Puritans have accepted the error of those Puritans who built Harvard. Harvard went Unitarian in 1804. Christians know something is wrong with rationalism, yet they seem incapable of breaking with the past.



CORNELIUS VAN TIL

Van Til's apologetics should warn us: the history of Christian philosophy has been one long compromise with the philosophy of autonomous man. From Plato to Newton, from Newton to Kant, from Kant to some cast-off liberal fad, Christian philosophers have sought to baptize humanism. They hope to appropriate for Christ the anti-Christian philosophies of their day or an earlier day. They trust the natural mind of the natural man, refusing to acknowledge the enormous danger involved: the

importation of alien philosophical categories into the Church. And so, without exception, Christians for over 1800 years have surrendered education, and therefore the future (inheritance), to the humanists.

What is the obvious sign of this surrender today? The futile attempt to revive Latin. Why force a child to master Latin rather than New Testament Greek? Greek will enable him to read the New Testament in the original—an obvious benefit. But what is the benefit of Latin? Except for the historian of the ancient or medieval eras—for whom there will be no paying employment—Latin is peripheral. Yet it is seen as the mark of true learning. Latin was the universal language of the Western Church, i.e., Roman Catholicism and early Protestantism. But that learning was deeply compromised with Renaissance humanism. At best, Latin will enable a tiny handful of highly skilled, highly motivated, and poorly paid Christian scholars to read fragments of the Latin Church fathers. Meanwhile, we live in an era in which the vast majority of Christians know nothing of Calvin, where Calvinist pastors have yet to read all of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, let alone Calvin's commentaries. Forget about Latin; teach the *Institutes*. Abandon the futile boast: "My child is receiving a classical education, just like the good old days." The good old days produced the bad new days, step by step. The assumption of intellectual neutrality is the Church's great enemy. Latin education was the primary agency used to spread this lie.

I see home school mothers who cannot read Latin, who have no intention of reading Latin, who are utterly uninterested in anything written only

in Latin, buying Latin grammars to inflict on their hapless children. Why? Because somebody they trusted told them that “Latin is basic to a well-rounded education.” To which I reply: “Latin was basic to the initiation process of pagan and/or deeply compromised academics to gain control over the training of each generation of Christian leaders in England and America.” Latin was a wedge used to separate Christian children from their parents. In the same way that the sex education fanatics today devise ways to keep parents from finding out what teachers are really teaching the children, so was Latin for six or seven centuries. To open the doors of ecclesiastical office and government patronage to your child, Christian parents had to surrender him to the Latin-based curriculum, a curriculum that rested squarely on the autonomy of man. The child was initiated into classical humanism by way of Latin.

What is nothing short of astounding is that there are dedicated Christians today who insist on doing this to their children. They insist on reviving the tool of their ancient enemies in the name of traditional education. But traditional education was Satan’s own tool for capturing the souls of Christians as well as their inheritance. Satan’s agents abandoned that tool only late in the nineteenth century, when it became clear that mass education was going to make the traditional Latin school obsolete as an initiation process for the elite. At that point, the humanists substituted the modern curriculum, in which Latin plays no role. Latin has become a lost tool of learning. Let’s keep it that way!

Gary North ICE newsletter, 1995

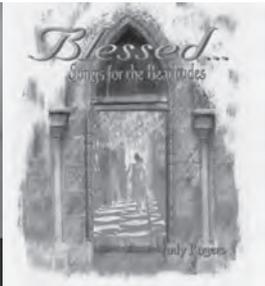
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