

It's Not Classical & Christian **by Patch Blakey**

Charter schools have been around now for several years. So has classical Christian education. Many parents want their children to get the advantage of a classical Christian education, but without having to pay the tuition for it in addition to paying their property taxes. A large percentage of the income from property tax goes towards financing the public school system. If a parent is paying once, why pay for a private school and give up the benefit of one's tax dollars? Charter schools, for all of their popular acclaim, are still at heart, part of the public school system. They operate on tax dollars, not parent-paid tuition. Typically, they operate under the authority of the public school system.

Because of the growing interest in and the demonstrated benefit of classical Christian education, some folks have thought that it would be great to capture and combine the best of both worlds: state-funded education and a classical Christian curriculum. So, how's it working out?

Much has been made of the large charter school in Colorado Springs, The Classical Academy. One Christian leader who has his children enrolled in TCA told me, "The Classical Academy is really a great school. Over eighty percent of the teachers are Christians!" He told me this fact with sincere joy as though eighty percent is supposed to be a good thing. The enrollment is remarkable in this school and local interest in and support for it continues to grow. A recent report shows that this school has a current enrollment of 2,600 students with a waiting list of about 6,000.

In southern Idaho, another charter school was founded about a year or so ago, the Nampa Classical Academy. This school has been in the news of late for challenging a court ruling that forbade the use of the Bible in the school. The school wanted to include the Bible as a great piece of literature, but the Idaho Public Charter School Commission said that the Bible and other religious texts may not be used in the school's curriculum. The subsequent court ruling found in favor of the Idaho Public Charter School Commission. The Alliance Defense Fund, a Christian legal organization, said that it would pursue every viable option to challenge this decision. Most recently, however, the Idaho State Board of Education voted to uphold the closure of the school over financial problems. Over 500 students were enrolled in the school at the time.

Now it has been reported that a newly formed Board of Directors comprised of some members who were a part of Nampa Classical Academy are starting another charter school in Nampa and could take up where Nampa Classical Academy left off. The new charter school is called James Madison Academy.

I appreciate the efforts of the former Nampa Classical Academy and the Alliance Defense Fund to seek to overturn the court's decision against having the Bible in the school's curriculum. However, was the school's objective of including the Bible in the curriculum as great literature really a worthy cause? I do not deny that the Bible is great literature, but it is also the holy word of God. It is divine revelation from our Creator to His creation. This Book is far more than just "great literature."

While many are seeking to utilize the benefit of their tax dollars by creating classical charter schools that operate off of the government school dole, these schools are not classical and Christian schools. They may be classical, but they are definitely not Christian. Nor can they be, given our nation's commitment to the exaltation of pluralism over the lordship of Jesus Christ. Man cannot serve two masters. He will

either bow the knee to Mammon and give his children over to Baal for their state indoctrination at a "pseudo-classical Christian" school without Jesus Christ or he will bow the knee to Christ, tighten his belt, and place his children in a real classical Christian school (or homeschool) which teaches that Jesus Christ is Lord of all and that the Bible is authoritative for all of life. There is no half-way solution.

What would you think if a classical Christian school proclaimed proudly that eighty percent of their teachers were Christians? I hope you would be asking, "What is the underlying worldview of the remaining twenty percent and why aren't they Christians?" Why then would Christian parents be excited if a public school boasts that eighty percent of its teachers are Christians? Christian parents need to apply the same standard in their evaluation. Proverbs says that God hates a double standard (Prov. 11:1).

Classical charter schools may be any number of things; they may well be classical, but they are not classical and Christian. Christian children need a Christian education, not a "baptized" secular education, even if it is classical in nature. Christian teachers do not alone make an education Christian that is secular at its core. Having a curriculum that includes a course on the Bible as literature does not make a secular education Christian. A Christian education unapologetically glorifies Jesus Christ as Lord of all, and acknowledges that in Him alone "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). A Christian education humbly recognizes that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). The classics without Christ were used to teach great pagans, not make great Christians.

While there is cause to rejoice when Christian parents recognize the benefits of a classical education, it is not sufficient unless that classical education incorporates the Lord Jesus Christ as pre-eminent in all subjects. Classical charter schools fall far short of this mark.