

Foundational Assumptions in Classical Christian Education

The following theological, philosophical, and educational propositions are ideas that are generally assumed in Classical Christian Education to be true. These statements constitute the operating assumptions in teaching, administering, and leading a CCE school.

- 1. Faith is at the core of human identity.** What you believe about God has everything to do with what you believe about everything else. Religious beliefs are inherent in all other beliefs and are inextricable from your understanding of the world.
- 2. The Gospel must be our primary motivation for gaining wisdom and eloquence –for education.** The Gospel (Christ came to redeem/restore all of creation from its fallen state.) encompasses all of life, every sphere of existence, therefore we study to understand everything to which the Gospel applies.
- 3. Neutrality of knowledge is a myth.** No knowledge is neutral with respect to the Lordship on Christ. This follows from #1 above. $2 + 2 = 4$ because God made it so and created an orderly universe in which it always will be so.
- 4. Human nature is immutable.** Basic human nature, problems, needs, and aspirations remain unchanged. The Christian view that man is fallen, but redeemable has always been true and will always be true. The progressivist view that enlightened modern man has progressed beyond the struggles of prior ages leads to cultural arrogance and the rejection of ancient sources of wisdom.
- 5. Students (and parents, teachers, headmasters, and board members) are fallen.** All students are born in the image of God and also in Adam –in rebellion against God. It is only by God’s grace that students are born into the second Adam –Christ. Christian education must take into account the effects of the fall in children. Biblical discipline, the encouragement of an obedient child and the correction of a disobedient child, is a critical and necessary part of education.
- 6. In the process of education, godly maturity is cultivated through rigor, discipline, order, love and grace** –We are seeking to form the mature, thoughtful, and responsible adult-leader to be, rather than liberating/coddling/indulging the child within.
- 7. Children should learn in an environment saturated by Scripture** (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).
- 8. God has commanded us to love Him with all our being –with ALL our Heart, Soul, Strength and MIND** (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27).

- 9. The family is where the educational foundation in a child’s life is laid and where fundamental educational decisions are made or not made.** God has given parents, not the Church or the State, the responsibility of educating their children and teaching them to faithfully love and serve Him. The role of educators is to be *in loco parentis*, "in the place of the parent" with delegated responsibilities.
- 10. Truth, Goodness and Beauty are objective categories of knowledge that can be studied, known, and understood.** There have been disagreements in history about what the absolutes are, but until the modern era there has never been doubt as to the existence of absolutes. Modern relativism rejects absolutes and allows each individual to define their own version of truth, goodness, and beauty.
 - Truth has to do with ideas and knowledge. Truth is the reflective of God’s truthfulness. His Word is Truth. There are objective absolute standards of Truth.
 - Goodness has to do with virtue, ethics, morals, character, and behavior. Goodness is the reflection of God’s Goodness. God is Good (God = Good). There are objective absolute standards of good.
 - Beauty has to do with form, structure, clarity, aesthetics, and appearance. In Scripture beauty is ascribed to God, Zion, the Temple, God’s people, our Praise, and the heavenly city. The principle of beauty is clearly evident throughout Scripture (creation, worship, etc.). There are objective absolute standards of beauty.

(In a school, beauty is reflected in how we organize, write, dress, speak, decorate, etc. We should always think in terms of clarity and form. Much casual informality is simply a rejection of form and a defiance of standards of beauty. We strive not for the artificial and prideful formality of the arrogant, but the genuine formality of the wise who continually seek to give ideas of truth and goodness their fitting expression.)
- 11. The first priority of the school is to cultivate minds** --to maximize the students’ ability to memorize, analyze, and synthesize information. The priority is not socialization or preparation for a vocation. The goal is to cultivate intellectual ability. The mind is seen and understood as the pathway to the heart (Romans 12:1-2, Proverbs 23:7; Isaiah 26:3).
- 12. The fundamental goal/end of education is wisdom and eloquence** (or something of the sort). Wisdom is defined by and gained from knowing and living the Scriptures and knowing and understanding everything else (broadly). Eloquence is defined as the use of “the proper words in proper places” –being articulate, persuasive and sound in your thinking.

13. Teachers and leaders must view themselves as keepers, guardians, and transmitters of a tradition of wisdom passed down by the great thinkers of the past. Teachers and leaders should immerse themselves in this tradition, so that they learn to love the tradition and its wisdom. The leaders of the community (in order to be proper leaders) must envision the benefits of this education for themselves.

14. Transcendent ideas must be the emphasized. The school must cultivate discussion and engagement with the great ideas and big questions of life –faith, hope, love, truth, goodness, beauty, the problem of evil, etc. Pragmatism is the enemy.

15. Egalitarianism is the enemy. While it is true that all men are created equal before God’s justice and civil law, it is not true that all men are created equal in every other respect. All humans possess equal dignity and worth as image bearers of God and are equal at the foot of the cross and in the eyes of civil law, but modern “equalism” is false. Egalitarianism demands equality of result, equality of outcome, but this is inconsistent with reality--with how God made the world. God made humans of differing athletic abilities, differing intellectual abilities, differing social/relational abilities, differing personalities, etc., etc. Demanding/requiring/expecting equal results and outcomes (e.g. grades) is a denial of God-ordained differences. Achievement of equal results and outcomes almost always requires lowering standards. The result is that the low achieving students get the mere illusion of accomplishment, but the high achieving student is unjustly deprived of substantive progress.

16. Educational Romanticism is the enemy. Educational Romanticism is the belief that most low achieving students have the potential to be high achievers, if only they are provided with the proper environment and opportunity, regardless of the student’s innate intellectual ability. In reality, many of the students who do not perform well academically simply do not have the raw ability to do so. There are no “magic bullets.” High achievement in education requires hard work, plus desire, plus innate ability.

17. Proper Community Identity is critical. Understanding the nature of the institution is essential in cultivating a learning environment consistent with the school’s vision and goals. There must be “integrity” in the school’s leadership, teachers, curricula, and culture. The school is not a family or business or church. It is a school whose mission is to educate –whose primary tasks are teaching and learning.

18. Hierarchy in social and authority relationships must be recognized. The lesser blesses the greater. The lesser is blessed by the greater. There is recognition of and submission to social boundaries in relationships (child-adult, male-female, young-old, etc) and lines of authority in relationships

(child-parent, student-teacher, employee-employer, etc.). In a school teachers do not seek to reach down to the level of the student, but to raise the student to the level of the teacher. A wall of separation –boundary of propriety --is maintained between the teacher and the student. Submission and deference guide those who are lower in the hierarchy. Humility and duty guide those who are higher.

19. The written and spoken word is emphasized as opposed to images (pictures, television, and video). While image-based methods may be employed as are necessary, language-learning must be emphasized, requiring the mind to work actively instead of passively. Students are encouraged to develop a passion for reading and life-long learning.

20. The fundamental tenets of progressive education are erroneous and must be rejected. The tenets of progressive education can be summarized as follows:

- a. The goal of education is socialization or “social reconstruction,” --preparing students to function in a good society (a “good society” as defined by secular educators). The main function of the school is to provide the student with the skills and attitudes necessary for participation in a society defined by certain norms and values --which are generally antagonistic to biblical norms and values. Additionally, this goal of socialization tends to overemphasize the value of a child’s peer relationships (as opposed to family or community relationships).
- b. Education must be centered on the child, -- focused on the child’s subjective needs, abilities, and desires –not on objectively defined criteria or curriculum. Knowledge of prescribed subjects is subjugated to the child’s experience and individual interests.
- c. Childhood is a period of innate innocence and goodness that is morally superior to the tainted lives of adults. The sanctity of childhood should be preserved and cultivated through educational instruction. The child is viewed as a passive and open receptacle for instruction, placing nearly all the burden and responsibility for learning on the teacher.
- d. Progressive education tends to romanticize and even deify childhood. The idea that children are fallen and immature persons is considered antiquated.
- e. Learning must be experiential and holistic. Children learn best in those experiences in which they have a vital interest and that modes of behavior are most easily learned by actual performance. Progressives insist, therefore, that education be a continuous reconstruction of living experience based on “hands-on” activity directed by the child. Teacher or curriculum

directed drill, discipline, didactic instruction, and “book learning” are outmoded.

- f. It educates students according deterministic assessments of aptitude at an early age prescribing college-preparatory tracks for some and vocational training for others.
- g. It generally “vocalizes” the education process, training students primarily to function in the economy.

21. Classical Instruction: Pedagogical Assumptions

- a. Effective education is grounded in instruction in the foundations of language and mathematics. True education creates students who are masters of words and masters of numbers. The mastery of words and numbers serves as the springboard for all other learning.
- b. Instruction (content, methods, and pace) is guided by standards and objectives, not by the individual tastes and aptitudes of the students. Instruction and curricula are much more prescriptive than elective.
- c. The curriculum should be a historically substantive and rigorous liberal arts education that draws deeply from the history and culture of Western Civilization.
- d. Memorization of core-knowledge and the foundational elements of every subject is essential. “Grammar” stage learning is a prerequisite to logic/dialectic and rhetoric/poetic stage learning. The first essential component of learning is “remembering.” “Remembering” is essential to the second essential component of learning – “thinking.”
- e. Students learn through the:
 - (1) Acquisition of New Knowledge -Grammar – natural to emphasize when children are young. Using different sensory modes is important – visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc. –“see it, say it, hear it, write it.”
 - 2) Critical Interpretation –Logic –Beyond memorization to using, analyzing, and experimenting with information.
 - 3) Meaningful Expression of Information - Rhetoric. –using and applying information outside of original context to solve problems or connect information to different contexts or construct new frameworks –in written and oral expression
- f. Classical language study is essential in development of language and cognitive skills.
- g. Cyclical treatment of subjects is important. Review and re-teach often. “Repetition is the mother of learning.”

- h. Because of the unity of knowledge, integration of subjects is necessary wherever reasonably practical.
- i. An orderly environment fosters learning and develops personal discipline.
- j. Academic rigor is required for a true liberal arts education. The students should generally be presented with tasks/content/standards that stretch and challenge them. In addition to recovering lost content, skills, and methods, CCE is also striving to recover lost standards.
- k. Classical education deals deeply with fewer subjects, rather than hastily and superficially with many. Less is More.
- l. Classical education discourages premature specialization and seeks consistent, generalized, broad education.

The contents of this documents are drawn from Douglas Wilson, *The Case for Classical Christian Education*, (Crossway Book, 2003), Robert Littlejohn & Charles Evans, *Wisdom and Eloquence*, (Crossway Books, 2006), Dorothy Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, (1947), and a variety of other publications.