

# Do You Feel Cheated?

by Rev. Allen M. Baker III

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The more I read about Classical Education, and the more time I spend teaching it and the more I see the results of it in the lives of our students, the more I feel cheated concerning my own education. Actually by today's standards in most government or private schools, I received an above average education. I know I learned more English grammar and World History than most do today. I still feel cheated however.

I feel like the Russian laborer I heard about who came to the U.S. a few years ago when American companies began to interact with Russian companies. He had always been told that Americans basically lived just like the Russians. While they, he was told, may have few clothes, no cars, poor living conditions, and little food, especially in winter, Americans lived the same way. When in the U.S. for only an hour, and while being shown around Atlanta he asked to go to the local supermarket. He went back several times while in Atlanta. He could not believe the large amounts of varieties of food he saw. He finally said that he was angry. He wasn't angry at us for what we have, but at the Russian government for lying to him all those years. He'd been cheated. That's how I sometimes feel about my own government education. Do you feel cheated?

Well, what happened? Classical Education was abandoned long ago because many educators thought its method of emphasizing grammar in the early years was boring, unnecessary, and too demanding, that which stifles creativity. Hugh MacLennan, in an essay written thirty-five years ago, says that the eradication of Classical Education has brought four losses to western culture. First, we have lost the notion that life is a coherent experience. Most now refuse to believe that order exists, or could possibly exist. Most now see life as utterly meaningless. Two, due to our loss of life being coherent, we have lost a collective self-confidence our forefathers knew. There is little true pride which could rally a nation to defend itself to the death for a worthy cause. Third, due to our loss of collective self-confidence, we have lost our ancient respect for truth as something valuable and unassailable in itself. In short we have lost the notion of objective truth. Our post modern world doesn't think truth is possible at all. And fourth, due to our loss of respect for truth, we have lost the sense that education cannot be easy. We want it to be as painless as possible. This is why so many parents believe it cruel to push their children too hard academically. They don't want to see poor Johnny work too hard, and consequently poor Johnny can't read, think, write, or speak very well.

Look back in history, to the 18th century, when Classical Education ruled the day, and you'll find an amazing felicity of speech and writing. Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence with such simplicity and clarity that any school boy could read it (well, any school boy prior to 1950 could read it) and understand it. Why were 18th century men and women such good writers? They were fluent in Latin and Greek by age 14, and since one can't write ambiguous Latin unless he writes ungrammatical Latin, and since Latin formed the basis for their understanding of English vocabulary, syntax, and style, they also wrote impeccable English. It has always been true that a well-read man, and a man who writes well is an exact man.

By the time most children in Colonial America, who were educated, were fourteen years old, they were fluent in at least two languages besides English, usually Latin and/or Greek and French. They had mastered Calculus, and knew the basics of logic. With this they could go on to more specialized fields of study, then into the world and make an impact there. This was possible because ancient educators knew something modern educators refuse to believe-that young children have an amazing ability to memorize lots of things, though they don't have the ability to reason or understand much of what they memorize. This ability to reason comes later in the early teens, and then, in the mid to late teens they are able to apply what they have assimilated. This fits perfectly with the Trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric.

The Trivium of Classical Education built Western Civilization and we seek to revive this heritage through Classical Christian schools. Do you feel cheated?

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