



Convivium Irenicum 2020: “Education and the Kingdom of God: A Protestant Vision for Training in Wisdom”

Plenary Speaker: Gene Edward Veith

This year's plenary speaker is Dr. Gene Edward Veith, Provost and Literature Professor Emeritus of Patrick Henry College. A life-long educator, Dr. Veith has published over 20 books, including *Classical Education: The Movement Sweeping America*, *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*, *Imagination Redeemed: Glorifying God with a Neglected Part of Your Mind*, as well as over 100 scholarly articles. He is also the director of the Cranach Institute at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, IN.

Location: Davenant House, Landrum, SC

Date: June 3rd-6th, 2020

We are now a full generation into the great educational awakening often called the “classical Christian education movement.” Amidst the general desolation of the North American education landscape, classical Christian schools have been cropping up everywhere, and leading Christian colleges (and even secular liberal arts colleges) have been inspired to retool their curricula in deference to the insights of the classical model. The resurgence of interest in Latin and Greek, in logic and rhetoric, in literature and philosophy is enough to warm the heart of any scholar, and promises to breathe new life into churches that have lost the tools for basic catechesis.

But as this movement goes from the fringes to the mainstream, several key questions have come to the fore, highlighting rival visions of what a “classical Christian education” should look like or should aim to achieve. Five questions are particularly pressing:

- 1) **What is the relationship between “classical” and “Christian”?** From the earliest days of the church, Christian scholars and teachers have struggled over the role of pagan thought in a Christian education. Can we plunder the Egyptians without forging golden calves? Do we study unbelievers (ancient or modern) to learn from them, or to learn how to critique them? Classical Christian educators today, although united in seeking to move past a fundamentalist rejection of extra-biblical knowledge, continue to struggle with the question of where and how to seek wisdom.
- 2) **Liberal, servile, or servant-leader?** Perhaps the deepest tension between “classical” and “Christian” visions of education concerns the basic aims of education. For the ancient Greeks, “liberal arts” education was “liberal” because it was for free men only—a comparatively small social elite who had the leisure for contemplation and politics. Everyone else received a very different education in “servile arts”—which is to say the practical skills for building, making, farming, and trading. Today, many educators lament the takeover of education by this “servile” vision, with its narrow utilitarianism and careerist vision of education as mere vocational training. But can we respond merely by lauding, with the ancients, “knowledge for knowledge’s sake”? As Protestants, we must



THE DAVENANT INSTITUTE

teach that we are not only free lords of all, but dutiful servants of all; a Protestant educational vision demands a paedagogy of servant-leadership.

- 3) ***Is classical education for everyone?*** This question closely relates to the previous. Classical education was reserved for an elite, whereas Christian education—especially Protestant education—aims at equipping the whole people of God with the tools to read the Scriptures and wisely serve God and neighbor. Modern education, heir of Protestantism that it is, has sought to thoroughly democratize education, but in a way that drags everyone down to the lowest common denominator, rather than leading everyone up along the path to wisdom. The unresolved tension between these elitist and democratizing visions has bedeviled the classical Christian education movement, which often tries to cram the narrow shoe of elite liberal arts education on the oversized foot of the entire Christian community. There is much room here to learn from the example of the Reformation’s educational reformers, who promoted basic education for all while also recognizing the rigorous training needed for those called to scholarship and leadership.
- 4) ***Must Christian education be churchly education?*** During medieval times, education was the task of the Church, and among Roman Catholics this tight fusion of catechesis and paedagogy persists, at least in principle. The Protestant Reformers recognized the central role of the Christian magistrate in providing for his people’s education, and promoted various forms of church-state partnership in the task of education. Today, our vision of the proper locus of education is hopelessly fragmented. State education has turned against church and family, and some home education has turned against church and state. Classical Christian education has flourished in parish school contexts (for instance, in Anglican churches), and in self-consciously non-church forms (for instance, in Reformed traditions committed to “the spirituality of the church” or “sphere sovereignty”), but no consensus has emerged on the proper role of the church in Protestant education. The result is a host of Christian schools that are either chronically underfunded, and a small number that, run like successful businesses, float free from the accountability of local churches. It is high time for Protestant educators to wrestle seriously with this question.
- 5) ***How can the principles of classical education be extended to serve the church?*** Even as the classical education movement has spurred a comeback of rich, literate, historically-conscious education in primary and secondary schools, and even spilled over into limited educational reform at Christian colleges, our seminaries and churches continue to struggle with ever-declining historical, theological, and philosophical literacy. Ancient language acquisition, once considered a basic skill for pastors, is disappearing from many seminary curricula. Churches continue to offer only the most superficial catechesis (if any) while just down the street, classical Christian schoolteachers instruct their students in the niceties of Patristic Trinitarian debates. How can we bridge this gap? How can we extend this educational awakening into the pulpits and pews?

We welcome paper proposals or guided discussion proposals on any topics that help us toward answering these five sets of questions. Papers or sessions may be historical, exegetical, or normative in their approach. Abstracts of between 200 and 300 words must be submitted to b.littlejohn@davenantinstitute.org by February 1, 2020 for consideration.