

Training the Soul

The Chesterton Academy

By Chuck Colson | Published Date: November 16, 2008

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For most people, the one-room schoolhouse is just something out of the history books. For 11 students in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, the one-room schoolhouse is a living reality. Their tiny, brand-new school, Chesterton Academy, is an experiment that could be the start of what's been called an "education revolution."

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Named after the great Christian thinker and writer G. K. Chesterton—one of my own favorite apologists—the high school was founded by two Catholic gentlemen, Thomas Bengtson and Dale Ahlquist. They were concerned, rightly, that kids today are not being taught to think in school, and instead are having their minds filled with moral relativism.

They're being deprived of the intellectual and moral knowledge that would help them develop into fully rounded, mature, thinking citizens. Headmaster John DeJak, who gave up a successful career as an attorney to help lead the effort, sums it up this way: "We realized that our kids are being robbed."

So the curriculum at Chesterton Academy emphasizes the traditions and heritage of Western civilization that are too often ignored by most of our public schools and, certainly, our colleges.



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Here's how Katherine Kerstin of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, describes the school: "The bright room in Eliot Community Center is hung with icons and medieval art, and lined with such books as Cicero's 'Orations' and Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales.' Students sit around a table, engrossed in Latin verbs. . . . In future years, the kids will study calculus and chemistry, and immerse themselves in great thinkers from Homer to T. S. Eliot. They will also explore once-celebrated arts such as oil painting and Gregorian chant."

And of course there's a Chesterton quote on the wall: "A dead thing goes with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it."

The school even has a rule against saying "like" (as in, "Wow, that's, like, awesome"). Now there's an idea I can really get behind.

In all seriousness, as you've probably gathered by now, something special is going on here. This is the kind of education that our students so desperately need—one that seeks to develop both their body of knowledge and their moral intelligence, and to strengthen their bonds with their family and their society, instead of treating them as isolated and self-serving units.

As I've said before, the two essential ingredients of a good education are the cultivation of knowledge and the cultivation of character. These are the elements that so many of our mainstream schools are now missing—and the elements that educated and thinking Christians are uniquely equipped to provide.

As John DeJak says, “We believe that there is a larger truth, which every other truth relates to—and that truth is God. . . . For us, education is not just about job training, but about seeking the truth and training the soul.”

I say amen to that.

If your child isn’t in an environment where character and knowledge are cultivated, pull together other Christian parents and start thinking about what you can do change the situation. Maybe home schooling is the answer, or some guided after-school work, or classical Christian schools.

Or maybe you, too, can go back to the future and start a one-room schoolhouse dedicated to Truth.

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For Further Reading and Information

[Learn more](#) about the Chesterton Academy.

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