

Praise for *Simply Classical: A Beautiful Education for Any Child*

“Cheryl Swope’s Simply Classical gives a clear and practical introduction to classical Christian education and its significance for children with physical and cognitive disabilities, from Helen Keller to her own daughter, Michelle. The reader will be excited by the ideas and deeply moved by her story.”

Dr. E. Christian Kopff
University of Colorado, Boulder
Author of *The Devil Knows Latin: Why America Needs the Classical Tradition*

“Cheryl Swope’s new book is perhaps the best story of classical education ever written. This book will take classical education from the perceived ivory towers of academia into the real life of all people, especially those uniquely blessed with learning disabilities. Here is classical education at its very best, an education that nurtures each soul on purity, truth, and beauty.

Rev. J. Bart Day
Executive Director of National Mission
The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

“As a classical educator, I have seen what classical education can do for my students; however, as a mother of a special-needs child, I was initially unsure whether this education was right for my own son. Cheryl Swope has convinced me that classical education truly is a beautiful education for every child. This book is a treasury of inspirational stories and practical advice. I am already seeing her ideas bear fruit in our home.”

Joanna Hensley
Latin Teacher, Veritas Press Scholars Academy
Homeschooling Mother of a Special-Needs Child

“Cheryl Swope’s Simply Classical is inspiring, touching, delightful, well-written, useful, and very informative. It is a book you will not only enjoy reading but will want to keep for all the special needs resources in the back of the book. It will inspire and give hope to parents and teachers of any child.”

Iris Hatfield
Author of *New American Cursive Penmanship Program*

“Cheryl Swope ostensibly writes about special education, but she also makes one of the clearest and most compelling cases for classical education in print. All children, including academically challenged students, are human beings, and they deserve an education commensurate with that fact. While current special education doctrine favors compromising on content, Cheryl proposes only to moderate its measure. If a child cannot accommodate the amount or depth of knowledge of most children, it is not less, but more important that what they learn be of the highest quality. She implicitly understands St. Thomas Aquinas’ principle that the slightest knowledge of the greatest things is greater than the greatest knowledge of the slightest things.”

Martin Cothran
Director of the Classical Latin School Association;
Editor of *The Classical Teacher*, Author of *Traditional Logic*,
Classical Rhetoric with Aristotle
Memoria Press

“A classical education is like climbing a mountain, each child benefiting from whatever vistas he or she attains in that upward journey. Cheryl Swope shows us that the special-needs child needs and benefits from the uplifting vision of a classical education as much, if not more, than those without learning challenges. Simply Classical gives encouragement and real help for all parents who do not want to settle for second best for their special-needs child. In doing so, the author has advanced the cause of classical Christian education by confounding its critics who claim it is only for the elite.”

Cheryl Lowe
Author of *Latina Christiana*, *First Form Latin*, *Classical Phonics*
Highlands Latin School, Memoria Press

FOREWORD

This book shows how classical education can enrich the lives of special-needs children. The value of this book, though, goes far beyond that particular purpose. It is, in fact, one of the best treatments of classical education—for anyone, at any level—that I have ever read.

The author, Cheryl Swope, is not just spinning theories, though her explanations of the ideas behind the classical liberal arts are lucid, illuminating, and more complete than many accounts. She shows classical education in action, as she and her husband learn to become classical educators and in the effect it has on their two children. Michael and Michelle are the two heroes of this book. They are twins, and they both have had to struggle all their lives with profound mental, emotional, developmental, and physical difficulties. But as we read this book and follow their education, we see them wake up to the joy of language, the satisfaction they find in beauty, and their quite astonishing academic achievements.

It isn't that classical education solves all of Michael's and Michelle's problems—and their story makes us appreciate what their parents have had to undergo, how hard it all is—but we come to know them as human beings. We see the study of logic helping Michael to organize his own thoughts, and we see the study of Latin helping Michelle realize what she can do with words. We see Michael turning his love of history into a job with a museum and Michelle discovering opera. We also hear her doctor marveling that Michelle's achievements are beyond her potential, and we read her poetry. And this is what is sometimes forgotten or never mentioned about classical education: how profoundly human and humanizing it is.

That is in stark contrast to the way special education is often carried out. Most educational programs for special-needs children limit themselves to training for “practical” living. Often this involves what Mrs. Swope rightly calls “dehumanizing behaviorism,”

controlling the children with rewards and punishments in an effort to keep them in line. Many programs never even attempt to enrich their lives. Mrs. Swope has a graduate degree and professional experience as a special education teacher. She draws on that expertise in this book, sketching out what parents need to know about medical conditions and behavioral problems. But she offers a more three-dimensional picture of special-needs students, and she shows how a classical Christian education can build up what many people assume they do not have; namely, the intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual parts of their lives.

If special education can be dehumanizing, the same can be said of progressive education in general. In recounting her own training and early experiences as a teacher, Mrs. Swope captures just what is wrong with conventional education—its reductionism, its trendiness, its romanticized view of children, its oblivious disregard for the wisdom of the past, and its overall triviality—and in doing so throws the classical alternative in high relief.

One of the odd criticisms of classical education is that it is elitist, that while it is fine for elite boarding schools for the wealthy and privileged, it is too hard, too challenging, for us “ordinary” people. My usual reply is that if people who can afford the best kind of education for their children favor the classical approach, we need to make that available to everyone. Classical education, properly considered, addresses what is universal in human beings. The word “liberal” in “liberal arts” comes from the Latin word that also gives us “liberty.” A liberal education was required for the “free” citizen, as opposed to the “servile” education given to slaves. People who need liberating need a liberal education. Marva Collins has applied the principles of classical education in tough, inner city schools with children bogged down in poverty and social dysfunctions, and she has shown just how liberating logic, rhetoric, and Shakespeare can be. Special-needs children also need liberating. Cheryl Swope is the Marva Collins for special education.

As Mrs. Swope explains it, classical education works so well for children with cognitive problems because it is ordered, integrative, and formative. Instead of leaving them as isolated selves, classical education connects them to the outside world and makes them

part of a human community. More than that, classical Christian education makes them part of a spiritual community. Notice the faith of Michael and Michelle, how they participate in church, how they pray and ask Christ for forgiveness, how they have learned to love and serve their neighbors.

Mrs. Swope explains how classical education, contrary to the stereotypes, is actually flexible and can be adapted to a child's level. Contrary to other stereotypes, classical education is very individualized, cultivates creativity, and is designed to be enjoyable.

The book is also extremely practical, showing how classical education can be carried out at home, even by parents who never had a classical education themselves. Mrs. Swope recommends curriculum, gives book lists, and identifies helpful web sites. She even draws up sample daily schedules.

This book tells some compelling stories, not only about the Swope's children but about other children and their families. It is also full of stimulating ideas and practical advice. But lingering in the reader's mind after finishing the book is the personality and complexity of that poet, musician, and Christian known as Michelle.

– **Gene Edward Veith, Ph.D.** is Provost and Professor of Literature at Patrick Henry College. He is the author of over 100 scholarly articles and 18 books on topics involving Christianity and culture, classical education, literature, and the arts. They include *Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature*, *The Spirituality of the Cross*, *The State of the Arts*, *God at Work*, and *Classical Education*, co-authored with Andrew Kern.

PREFACE

Some parents and educators have the misconception that classical education is only for “smart kids.” It is easy to understand why someone might think this way. Latin at age 8? Herodotus by 14? With such standards, one might reason, surely classical education is only for born geniuses—the brightest and best of our children. Certainly for advanced performance at the highest levels of classical study, this theory has merit. But what about those children who are not born geniuses? What about those who, far from being intellectually gifted, are living with cognitive challenges, language disorders, or physical disabilities? Does classical education have anything to offer them? Can classical education benefit *any child*?

No doubt Helen Keller’s concerned parents asked the same question back in 1887. Their young daughter was deaf, blind, and severely “behaviorally disordered.” Distraught and fearful for the little girl’s future, as most parents would be, the Kellers hoped that Helen might somehow receive an education. In the late 1800s, this meant a classical education. Helen Keller began her adapted classical education at the age of six with her private teacher, Annie Sullivan. Although no one could predict the eventual outcome, the Keller family embarked on this ambitious, beautiful journey nonetheless. And the world received captivating evidence that classical education truly can benefit *any child*.

In her later adult years, Helen Keller departed in some ways from the philosophies of classical Western civilization, but her story remains an important one as we explore how classical education can benefit any child. After all, Helen Keller’s education more than a century ago mirrors the classical education of today. As soon as language unlocked Helen’s young mind, Annie Sullivan taught Helen the same academic content other classically educated children learn, but through patient, untiring finger-spelling into Helen’s hand. From ages 8-10, Helen studied geography and history. She

read of Greek heroes and the classical ancient civilizations. She enjoyed beautiful language through good literature. She read poetic selections from the Old and New Testaments, Lamb's *Tales From Shakespeare*, Dickens' *A Child's History of England*, *Little Women*, *Heidi*, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, and countless other books which can still be found on the library shelves of any classical school today. Helen treasured her books: "I accepted them as we accept the sunshine and the love of our friends."¹

From the ages of 11-13, Helen learned Latin from a Latin scholar and French in raised print. She studied more advanced histories of Greece, Rome, and the United States, as Annie continued to spell lessons into Helen's hand. By age 16, Helen read works in the original Latin and German, and at age 20 she enrolled at Radcliffe, where she read literature in French, studied world history, read poetry critically, and learned advanced English composition.

Helen's only real academic failure came when she was 17. One of her teachers made some common errors with this special-needs child, mistakes which continue to be made in many educational settings today. First, the teacher determined that Helen must devote herself only to those areas in which she was *weakest*, namely physics, algebra, and geometry. Moreover, he taught these subjects in a large classroom without necessary modifications. (For example, he wrote visual geometry proofs on the board with no means for Helen to follow along.) As a result, Helen required additional instruction with a tutor before she could enter Radcliffe as previously planned.

Looking back over her education, Helen later wrote, "From the storybook Greek heroes to the *Iliad* [read in Greek] was no day's journey, nor was it altogether pleasant. One could have traveled round the world many times while I trudged my weary way through the labyrinthine mazes of grammars and dictionaries ..."² Helen received a remarkable classical education because her parents and her teachers bonded together to help her, and she persevered. Although her disabilities remained with her all her life, so did her love for literature: "When I read the finest passages of the *Iliad*, I am conscious of a soul-sense that lifts me above the narrow, cramping

[1] Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1905), 105.

[2] *Ibid.*, 93.

circumstances of my life. My physical limitations are forgotten—my world lies upward, the length and the breadth and the sweep of the heavens are mine!”³

If classical education could give Helen Keller the tools to overcome great obstacles and embrace the “sweeps of the heavens” so many years ago, why do even less-severely challenged special-needs children fail to receive such a bountiful classical education today? Largely, the answer is simply historical timing. At the turn of the century, as special education grew in acceptance, classical education began to wane. In the 1930s, “the height of classical study in the United States in sheer numbers,” nearly one million students studied Latin annually.⁴ By the 1970s, so-called *progressive*⁵ and experimental education dominated. About this same time, just as classical education had all but disappeared, the landmark special education legislation Public Law 94-142 passed in the United States. This law mandated public education for all handicapped children. Public, yes, but often much less effective and far less beautiful.

Today, much of “regular education” has strayed so far from the pursuit of that which is significantly true, good, and beautiful, many special-needs or struggling children who have been placed in remedial or even age-based classrooms receive little that is inspiring, excellent, or formative. In the past, even “basic” education meant purposeful instruction in the three arts of language: Grammar (reading, Latin, spelling, penmanship, and writing); Logic (analysis, reasoning, and discernment); and Rhetoric (persuasive eloquence in both speaking and composition). A good liberal arts education also involved the four arts of mathematics: Arithmetic (number), Geometry (number in space), Music (number in time), and Astronomy (number in space and time). These seven liberal arts developed the mind and provided the student with essential tools for learning. Intrinsic to his education, the student also studied history, good literature, and art, all for the formation of a strong

[3] *Ibid.*, 117.

[4] Victor Davis Hansen and John Heath, *Who Killed Homer?: The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Wisdom* (New York: Encounter Books, 2001), 16.

[5] “I believe, therefore, that the true center of correlation on the school subject is not science, nor literature, nor history, nor geography, but the child’s own social activities.” John Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed*, Article III (New York: E. L. Kellogg & Co., 1897), 10.

mind and noble character. Throughout the centuries, catechesis—teaching the Christian faith—has also been urged alongside the liberal arts, for matters of the soul.

Instead, today the ideal in special education is “individualized instruction, in which the child’s characteristics, rather than prescribed academic content, provide the basis for teaching techniques.”⁶ In some special education teacher-training programs, not only progressivism and pragmatism, but also fatalistic, dehumanizing behaviorism dominates. The child’s mind and soul are forgotten.

The special-needs child’s humanity—*any child’s humanity*—must determine the education he receives. Some suggest that as many as 1 in 5 children have special educational needs. Each of these children is a *human being*, created in the image of God. Shall we assign all of these students to a menial, servile education and deny them the riches of a beautiful, humane, liberating education? And, worse, shall we base our deterministic placements on early testing, with no regard to what the child might be able to overcome with the aid of an excellent teacher?

Ancient Roman orator Quintilian wrote:

There is no foundation for the complaint that only a small minority of human beings have been given the power to understand what is taught them, the majority being so slow-witted that they waste time and labor. On the contrary, you will find the greater number quick to reason and prompt to learn. This is natural to man. ... Dull and unteachable persons ... have been very few. The proof of this is that the promise of many accomplishments appears in children, and when it fades with age, this is plainly due to the failure not of nature but of care. “But some have more talent than others.” I agree: then some will achieve more and some less, but we never find one who has not achieved something by his efforts.⁷

Regardless of his challenges, any child is called to do more than receive services; he is called to love and serve his neighbor. Even if he

[6] Daniel P. Hallahan and James M. Kauffman, *Exceptional Learners: Introduction to Special Education*, (Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 24.

[7] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, Book I:I.

is never able to hold a full-time paying “job,” classical education can help the special-needs child bring purpose, love, or comfort to his parents. He is a student with lessons to learn, teachers to respect, and parents to honor. He is a young man who holds the door for aging members of his congregation. She is the person who thoughtfully replenishes a dog’s fresh water bowl while her neighbor is away at work. She is a sister, granddaughter, or niece, with the high calling of gracious and tender service, as God works through her for His loving purposes.

We see uniquely converging opportunities at this time in history. Information abounds on special-needs and struggling learners. Classical education enjoys a re-emergence in numerous and growing pockets, for the youngest children through university levels. Abundant resources now offer instruction in Latin, the history of ancient civilizations, the mathematical arts, and more, at every level and with any amount of repetition and practice the child needs. Teachers, homeschooling parents, tutors—anyone who seeks to teach *any* child—can find helpful curricula for adapting reading, composition, Greek, music theory, literature, logic, and rhetoric. Perhaps the child will eventually prove incapable of progressing to advanced levels in one area or in every area; however, if taught slowly, patiently, and systematically, even those children who are identified with or suspected of having “special learning needs” can receive a substantial, elevating, and beautiful education.

Classical education can address any child’s challenges and cultivate in him a lifelong appreciation for lasting Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. Modifications can help with behavioral and neurological difficulties, language and sensory challenges, specific learning disabilities, and even severe mental illnesses. Be encouraged. Any educable child can receive these great benefits of classical education: greater self-knowledge, timeless tools for learning, a more disciplined mind, a love of study, and a dedicated life of service. Classical education is a beautiful gift to your child, so he can say with Helen Keller, “My world lies upward, the length and the breadth and the sweep of the heavens are mine!”

– Cheryl L. Swope, M.Ed.

Arranged by Conditions, Disorders, and Diagnoses:

ADHD

- *That Crumpled Paper Was Due Last Week: Helping Disorganized and Distracted Boys Succeed in School and Life*, Ana Homayoun
- **National Attention Deficit Disorder Association (ADDA)**
1-484-945-2101
www.add.org

AUTISM & ASPERGER SYNDROME

- *Making Sense of Autism Spectrum Disorders: Create the Brightest Future for Your Child with the Best Treatment Options*, James Coplan, M.D.
- *Autism Handbook for Parents: Facts and Strategies for Parenting Success*, Janice E. Janzen
- *1001 Great Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children With Autism or Asperger's*, Nothohm and Zysk
- **Online Asperger Syndrome Information and Support (O.A.S.I.S.)**
www.aspergersyndrome.org
- **Autism Society of America**
1-800-3AUTISM (1-800-328-8476)
www.autism-society.org
- **Autism Speaks, Inc.**
1-212-252-8584
www.autismspeaks.org
- **Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Partnership**
1-888-474-7277
www.grasp.org

BEHAVIOR DISORDERS

- *Transform Your Problem Child*, James Lehman
- *Conduct Disorders: A Soft Place to Land for the Battle Weary Parent*
www.conductdisorders.com
- *The Total Transformation Program, a Cognitive Approach to Behavior*
www.thetotaltransformation.com

BRAIN INJURY (TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY)

- *Children with Traumatic Brain Injury: A Parents' Guide* (Special Needs Collection), Lisa Schoenbrodt
- **Brain Injury Association of America**
1-800-444-6443
www.biausa.org

BRAIN TUMOR

- **American Brain Tumor Association**
1-800-886-2282
www.abta.org
- **National Brain Tumor Society**
1-800-934-2873
www.braintumor.org

CEREBRAL PALSY

- **United Cerebral Palsy**
1-800-872-5827
www.ucp.org

DEAF-BLIND

- **Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults**
1-516-944-8900
www.hknc.org

DOWN SYNDROME (see also Intellectual Disability)

- *Babies with Down Syndrome: A New Parents' Guide* (Special Needs Collection), Karen Stray-Gundersen
- **National Association for Down Syndrome**
www.nads.org
- **National Down Syndrome Society**
www.ndss.org

DYSLEXIA (see also Learning Disabilities)

- **International Dyslexia Association**
1-410-296-0232
www.interdys.org

DYSTONIA

- **Dystonia Foundation**
1-800-377-DYST (1-800-377-3978)
www.dystonia-foundation.org

EPILEPSY AND SEIZURE DISORDERS

- **Citizens United for Research in Epilepsy (CURE)**
1-312-255-1801
www.CUREepilepsy.org
- **Epilepsy Foundation**
1-800-332-1000
www.epilepsyfoundation.org

HYDROCEPHALUS

- **Hydrocephalus Association**
1-888-598-3789
www.hydroassoc.org
- **National Hydrocephalus Foundation**
1-888-857-3434
www.nhfonline.org

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY (also Mental Retardation)

- *Children with Mental Retardation: A Parents' Guide* (Special Needs Collection), Romayne Smith
- **The Arc of the United States**
1-800-433-5255 | www.thearc.org
Find a local chapter near you: <http://www.thearc.org/page.aspx?pid=2437>
- **American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**
1-800-424-3688 | www.aaidd.org
The AAIDD definition manual contains the world's most current and authoritative information on intellectual disability, including the best practice guidelines on diagnosing and classifying intellectual disability and developing a system of supports for people living with an intellectual disability.
- **Division on Developmental Disabilities (DDD)**
A division of the Council for Exceptional Children, DDD offers many publications and journals for professionals.
<http://daddcec.org/Home.aspx>

LEARNING DISABILITIES (see also Dyslexia)

- **Learning Disabilities Online**
www.ldonline.org

- **Learning Disabilities Association of America**
1-412-341-1515
www.ldanatl.org
- **Learning Disabilities Association of Canada**
1-613-238-5721
www.ldac-taac.ca
- **National Center for Learning Disabilities**
1-888-575-7373
www.nclld.org

MENTAL RETARDATION (see also Intellectual Disability)

NEUROMUSCULAR DISEASES

- **Muscular Dystrophy Association**
1-800-FIGHT-MD (1-800-344-4863)
www.mda.org

NEUROLOGY

- **American Academy of Neurology**
www.aan.com/patients
- **National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke**
www.ninds.nih.gov

PSYCHIATRIC CONDITIONS

- **Juvenile Bipolar Research Foundation**
www.jbrf.org
- **National Association for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)**
www.nami.org
- **Obsessive Compulsive Foundation**
1-203-401-2070
www.ocfoundation.org

RARE DISORDERS

- **National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD)**
1-800-999-6673
www.rarediseases.org

A federation of over 140 non-profit health organizations, provides assistance to support groups, professionals, and advocates for people with rare disorders and disabilities.

SENSORY PROCESSING or SENSORY INTEGRATION DISORDER

- *The Out-of-Sync Child*, Carol Stock Kranowitz, M.A.
- *Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder*, Lucy Jane Miller, Ph.D., OTR with Doris A. Fuller
- **Sensory Processing Disorder Foundation (SPDF)**
www.sinetwork.com
- **Sensory Resources, LLC**
1-888-357-5867
www.sensoryresources.com

SLEEP DISORDERS

- **National Sleep Foundation**
1-202-347-3471
www.sleepfoundation.org

SPINA BIFIDA

- *Children with Spina Bifida: A Parents' Guide* (Special Needs Collection), Marlene Lutkenhof
- **Spina Bifida Association**
www.spinabifidaassociation.org

TOURETTE SYNDROME

- *Children with Tourette Syndrome: A Parents' Guide* (Special Needs Collection), Tracy Haerle and Jim Eisenreich
- **Tourette Foundation of Canada**
1-800-361-3120
- **Tourette Syndrome Association**
1-718-224-2999
www.tsa-usa.org
- **Tourette Syndrome Online**
www.tourette-syndrome.info
- **Tourette Syndrome Plus**
www.tourettesyndrome.net

VISION IMPAIRMENTS

- *Children with Visual Impairments: A Parents' Guide*, M. Cay Holbrook ed.
- **American Foundation for the Blind**
1-212-502-7600
www.afb.org
- **American Printing House for the Blind**
1-502-895-2405
www.aph.org
- **Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER)**
1-877-492-2708
www.aerbvi.org
- **Canadian Council of the Blind**
1-613-567-0311
www.ccbnational.net
- **National Association for Parents of the Visually Impaired**
1-800-562-6265
www.spedex.com/napvi
- **U.S. Government**
National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)
1-800-695-0285
www.nichcy.org
NICHCY is a national information and referral center for families, educators, and other professionals. For updated legislation, see this website.
- **National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD)**
1-800-999-6673
www.rarediseases.org
NORD, a federation of over 140 non-profit health organizations, provides assistance to support groups, professionals, and advocates for people with rare disorders and disabilities.