Conversion is the Key
A dose of realism and a few basic objectives from John Heaton.

Spiritual Formation
What’s a School’s Role?

3 Starter Conversation
Charles Evans shares the email exchange that triggered this issue’s conversation about the role schools play in student spiritual development.

5 Only Obedience is Real
Should schools be focusing on spiritual development? Rob Shelton examines the question.

6 Intellectus et Virtus
Brad Green raises the question, “To what end?”

7 Conversion is the Key
A dose of realism and a few basic objectives from John Heaton.

8 Filling the Theological Gap
Andrew Selby argues for the critical role of theology and the contemplation of who God is.

10 What Typical Christian Parents Want in Christian Schools
In the second installment from his upcoming book, John Seel examines hidden parental assumptions.

14 Giving Birth to the Counter-culture
As a Christian leader of a public school, George Sanker focuses on student formation through exposure to the story of Western tradition.

16 Confirmation and Transformation
Patrick Fitzpatrick describes the key role of conflict.

17 Truth and the Moral Imagination
Linda Dey challenges teachers to teach students to think Christianly.

18 The Effect of Transparent Examples
Craig Doerksen focuses on the teacher’s role in humanizing the subject matter and the students.

19 Learning to Live in Reality
A hard look at pervasive dualism by John Seel.

22 School Finances in a Tough Economy
A look at the realities and emotions of private education in tough economic times by Charles Evans.

23 Shoes Matter
Is there a connection between high heels and spiritual formation? Leslie Moeller argues that there just might be.
Happy New Year!

It certainly is a new year. With our economy suffering and a new president, things look very different than at the beginning of 2008. Drafting budgets and setting tuition force difficult decisions in the best of times. Facing a recession of unknown depth or duration can strike fear in the most optimistic leader. But times of change and crisis offer an opportunity for a school to take a hard look at its mission and to evaluate how efficiently their programs and budgets further it.

This edition of The Journal was born out of a brief email exchange on an issue related to the mission of all of our schools: the spiritual formation of students. SCL supports individuals involved in Christ-centered, liberal arts education. No doubt you and your fellow SCL members are motivated, at least in significant part, by the desire to see children grow into committed Christian adults. But what is the school’s role in this endeavor? What does this look like in your classrooms? What are your parents’ expectations and how well do they match the goals of the school? As Editor Chuck Evans puts it, “This topic is easily both the number one mission distinctive of most Christian schools…and the number one source of philosophical conflict.”

We solicited thoughts on the spiritual formation of students from a wide variety of Christian educators committed to classical education. You will find their responses in this edition. At our summer conference this year, Dr. John Westerhoff will continue this conversation as one of our featured plenary speakers.

We hope you find the views in this edition thought provoking. We also hope to hear your views at this summer’s conference. We look forward to seeing you in San Antonio!

Leslie Moeller
Publisher
Editor’s Note: Recently, I was engaged by a good friend and former colleague on the topic of whether Christian schools should make “spiritual formation” a main objective of their missions. It struck me that this topic is easily both the number one mission distinctive of most Christian schools (classical or otherwise) and the number one source of philosophical conflict within Christian schools. As you see below, I have my own ideas on the matter, but I am far from confident that I have figured out a suitable paradigm to address the complex issues involved.

So, in response, we sent the following exchange to more than a dozen Christian school leaders for their take on the conversation and the larger question. You can read their responses throughout this issue.

Dear C,

Everywhere I turn, spiritual formation is the topic of conversation in Christian schooling circles. Always, however, from the point of view that schools are missing the boat by neglecting spiritual formation of students and that the faith dropout rate of students can be laid at the feet of the schools. After twenty years in Christian ministry and education, I am becoming skeptical that schools can or should try to take on the spiritual formation of students. Any ideas?

— R.

Dear R,

I tend to share your skepticism. I would add the nuance that academic training in a Christian context IS spiritual formation. But parents and ministry and school leaders often want something else. I’m not sure they believe that smart Christians are really spiritually better off. So, the spiritual formation or character education program — even Bible classes — is a way to dumb things down for a few hours a week so we can really “get at the kids’ hearts.”

It’s a huge bias. Try to convince a group of parents that one of the main reasons that kids lose their faith in college is not that they are too smart, but that they are not smart enough!

So, what can a school legitimately do? We can teach students to study the Word, and occasionally preach it to them. Parochial/liturgical schools might administer sacraments. We can pray. We can practice self-denial in the context of our academic and social responsibilities. And we can serve others. What else is there? I would guess, if you had this conversation with someone, they would say, “Yes, yes, I know that, that’s all good, but I just don’t feel like we’re getting to their heeeaaaarrts!” And then you say, “What does that mean?” And then they blame you because their kids are acting like teenagers, but especially like the teenagers with whom their parents let them spend every unsupervised minute of every weekend.

The battle is against the bias. CS Lewis, Harry Blamires, Frank Gaebelin, Frances Schaeffer. More recently, educators like Bruce Lockerbie, Doug Wilson, Robert Littlejohn, Richard Riesen, and John Seel are fighting the fight. Who else?

— C

Dear C,

Thanks again for your input on my question. The caution about not overstating as well as the thoughts about how the church has historically approached spiritual formation were very helpful.

A Christian school meeting several years ago got me pondering the role of schools. An admin-
istrator painted a picture of what a “graduate” should look like – the list heavily slanted toward spiritual outcomes – while at the same time admitting that schools were at least 3rd in rank of spiritual influence on students, after parents and church. I politely questioned the emphasis at the time, but received no satisfactory reply. Since then, I have been thinking, observing, and wondering.

Whenever I bring it up with other educators, I get dismissive responses – “Yes, it’s ultimately the parent’s job, but we do have a role—we are, after all, ‘in loco parentis.’” I can agree with that, but “having a role” and making it a concrete objective are two very different things.

I’ll spare you the process, but I have pretty much concluded that Christian education is ill-served when we make spiritual formation of students anything other than an organic by-product of participating in a community of faith centered on academic endeavor. When we say we are about the spiritual training and nurture of students, we either are misrepresenting ourselves or losing sight of our true mission. I also concluded that I had probably stepped over the edge from an alternative, but reasonable position into outright heresy, since it was hard to find others clearly saying the same.

Then my Nov. issue of First Things arrived and Gilbert Meilaender has a review of Stanley Fish’s latest book. As part of the review, Meilaender draws some pretty clear distinctions between what Christian education can and cannot do. I would do him a grave injustice to try and summarize, but it certainly resonated with me. Of course, he is talking about college education, but I think much of it still applies. So, if I am off into deep heresy, at least I’m not feeling quite so lonely!

On Thursday I went to a Christian school conference for the day. The last time I went (several years ago), I was very heartened by the emphasis on academic excellence, raising the bar, the value of challenging the mind. I reported back: “They are singing our song.” This time, I heard over and over ideas similar to “if it doesn’t have an immediate spiritual application and impact, it is worthless.” Even from a college professor. It was discouraging but it is the only logical end if our job is a spiritual one.

There are 1000 facets to this whole discussion and nuances too fine for my reductionistic tendencies. But I would love to see this discussion taking place in the ranks of SCL. Have we just bought into the latest “fix” for the undeniable spiritual anemia of students? I was also intrigued by Ken Myer’s comment in Peter Leithart’s article in the ISI Journal when he wondered if the classical Christian school movement would lose its bearings and be drawn into a utilitarian view of producing cultural change agents. Aren’t these important questions for us to be asking ourselves?

— R

Dear R,

One of the problems with the confusion on this topic is that it subjectivizes what we do, and I think it feeds the consumeristic mentality that we often find ourselves battling with parents. Many Christian parents don’t look to their churches as the most profound spiritual influences in their lives—lots of people I know say that they didn’t learn to be Christians in church, but individuals in college or someplace taught them to be Christians. So when they think about their kids’ faith, maybe we’re the new Campus Crusade.

Would you mind if I circulate your thoughts and see what kind of responses we get?

— C
When I was a youth pastor, I had what many would call a demanding and teaching-based ministry, so all this talk of spiritual formation reminds me of similar discussions I used to have with parents. They wanted the youth group to be less like school. Now, as the leader of a school, the parents want the school to be more like youth group. This leads me to think that “spiritual formation” is not a concern specific to Christian schools, but a trend within American Christianity.

While a youth pastor, I found myself dreaming of a time when I would not have to defend demanding discipleship or serious training of the mind, so when I took the opportunity to lead a classical Christian high school, I thought the time had arrived. Surely, I thought, these will be people who “get it.” As we all know, however, this is not necessarily the case. It seems that many of our parents still traffic in a form of latent Gnosticism: there is “real” life and there is “spiritual” life, and education is not a part of the latter.

So I find myself having to dust off the arguments and advice I used with parents in the church when they had concerns that their students weren’t “growing spiritually.”

1. It seems the city of Corinth had plenty of “spiritual” people in the church, but Paul thought it necessary to educate them: “Now concerning spiritual things, brothers, I don’t want you to be ignorant.” (1 Cor. 12:1) Paul even had to “make known” to them that saying “Jesus is accursed” wasn’t a Spirit-led endeavor. It seems that spiritual formation in the New Testament involved a great deal of instruction.

2. If instruction is spiritual formation, then some might counter that it only concerns “church” stuff and thus, the instruction that is happening in most classes at school isn’t really helping spiritual formation. I counter that Jesus claims to be “the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.” (John 14:6) If this is indeed so, that Jesus is the truth, then what we do with the truth, we do with Jesus. Learning to recognize truth, to admire truth, to defend truth, and to follow truth thus seems a highly spiritual endeavor.

3. Many might concede these two, but when all is done, the retort may follow, “Yes, but I don’t see that it’s real to the students.” By “it” they mean Christianity and by “real” they mean…well, what do they mean? Whatever it is they mean, there is a dominant view out there that seems to argue that “making it real” happens through spiritual formation.

Which brings us back to where we started. When it comes right down to it, perhaps we should admit that Jesus never talked about spiritual formation. He did, however, talk much about obedience. In fact, he said that the measure of how real this stuff is to a person is his or her obedience: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) It seems obedience trumps spirituality, or, perhaps, obedience is spirituality. If that is true, here’s the rub: obedience is an act of the will and cannot be conjured or cajoled, whether in school or a youth group. We cannot “spiritually form” students because we cannot force obedience. What we can do, however, is to educate properly so students are better equipped to obey. Knowing the world accurately conceivably helps them to act obediently and correctly within it. And maybe then we can break down the American Christian Gnosticism that motivates the concern in the first place.

There is no “spiritual” life alongside “real” life. Spiritual life is real life lived in obedience to Jesus Christ.

Rob Shelton is the Headmaster of the middle and upper schools at Geneva School of Boerne, Texas.

January 2009 5
One of the most helpful ways to tackle the question of “spiritual formation” is to step back and ask very basic questions like, “What is the goal of education?” “What kind of person are we trying to form?” If we answer them well, the answers might help us to think through how all learning and studying ultimately serves a certain goal: the formation of a certain kind of person.

Educators tend to be idealists and dreamers. Many of us find ourselves drawn into independent schools, I suspect, because we want something for our children that we did not receive, and we want to experience a different type of education ourselves. There is something very compelling and attractive about being associated with a school that has a grand vision and that is actually accomplishing that vision, even partially.

Many Christian school leaders have been approached by parents concerned that the school’s curriculum or emphases are not “practical” enough, or that the school does not place enough emphasis on “spiritual formation.” This is a dicey question to which to respond. If one says that “spiritual formation” is not a key emphasis then one seems very, well, unspiritual. But if one says that math, English, literature, and science are all peripheral, and that the “real” goal is spiritual formation, one is falling into a different kind of error—where math, English, literature, and science have no ultimate relation to the mission of a school!

Probably the wiser path to follow is to try and tease out the unique way in which a school engages in “spiritual formation.” We may need to steal back the language of “spiritual formation” and think through what such a task looks like in a school setting. I have a hunch that when parents call for “spiritual formation” they are seeking a kind of direct Bible teaching time, prayer time, moral exhortation time, etc. And all of these are entirely appropriate.

“We are working upstream amidst a culture that discourages a coherent and unified understanding of reality.”

As we have tried to hammer out a vision of Christian schooling in the classical tradition at Augustine School, we have tried to constantly ask the question, “To what end?” One of the strengths of an older understanding of education was that the key issue was often one of personal formation. As Christians wrestled with this, they often construed education in terms of shaping a person who 1) could live a wise and virtuous life in the present, and 2) was being prepared for his or her ultimate destiny—the vision of God.

With that sort of goal in mind, we should ask how any aspect of our school or curriculum helps us form the kind of student we desire. Thus, we might point out that the simple practices of reading a book or translating a Latin sentence are character-forming activities (among other things, patience and fortitude are encouraged!). Having to engage in a debate and think on one’s feet is a wonderful “person-forming” exercise where a student is being trained to think and speak well under pressure. In short, everything we do in our schools should be person-forming endeavors. And when our larger goal is person formation, in the sense of molding students into being the people they are called by God to be, we are already engaged in “spiritual formation” of a certain type.

☞ See “Intellectus et Virtus,” continued on page 9
Conversion is the Key

by John Heaton

ike every concerned parent, pastor, or educator, I look at the dropout rates of young people who leave their faith in college, never to return to the Church again, and I wonder how best to stem the tide. I take little comfort in telling myself that schools rank low in the “influence index,” or that spiritual outcomes are not the primary objectives of our typical student profile. I actually take more comfort in embracing a dose of realism—life is tough; pray hard—and I pursue a few basic objectives.

“Life is tough; pray hard ...”

First, I have made a mantra out of telling parents and faculty that our school does not compartmentalize matters of faith. My goal is for spirituality to be pervasive, natural, and uncontrived. As an Anglican parish school, we have Morning Prayer for our students and courses in religion, but matters of faith are not confined to those venues.

Second, I advocate teaching the Bible as the Bible. Long ago I threw out all Grammar School curriculums in this area. I told my teachers to take the Scripture and to do something novel: read it with your students, outline it, make lists of the details, memorize it, and learn chapter content. Forget about curriculums that seek to make a life-application each step along the way, and don’t moralize. I have to trust that the Holy Spirit will do that at some point, but our goal at school will be to do something I don’t think most churches do very well, which is to master the text.

Third, I try to succeed with students where they are. We set ourselves up for failure if we seek to make students the next participants in the culture war. They have their own wars to fight right now, and spiritual formation occurs when they learn spiritual disciplines applied to their problems in the present. Learning faithfulness in the present will help them to be faithful when the future becomes the present. In other words, if our goal is simply to produce students who are future cultural change agents, we may overemphasize ideas, positions, and apologetic methods, and overlook the conversion that they must experience themselves.

Finally, I think conversion is a better way to think about the whole process. Christian experience is not one, but a series of conversions or “turnings” or “re-turnings.” All of us had to learn how to hold our faith as we moved through different experiences in life. We had to re-negotiate ourselves against the Dogmatics we learned at home and in Sunday School. Each time we passed from one stage to the next, whether it was from high school to college, or from college to young adulthood, or into marriage or middle age, we had to undergo a new “conversion” of sorts. We had to move up to the next level, and our faith had to be relevant and vital.

In this way of thinking, a crisis of faith at any level is a crisis of conversion. Jesus said to Peter that “Satan has desired to have you, but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and when you are converted, strengthen your brothers.” Jesus certainly wasn’t referring to a first-time embrace of faith on Peter’s part, but to an on-going and thoroughgoing navigation through a crisis of faith. These transitions can be successfully made when students find the support and encouragement in the people of God at each step in the process. In the K-12 student context, I think that means that we have to be present-oriented and focus on the challenges that students face right now.

Rev’d John Heaton is the Headmaster of New Covenant Schools, Lynchburg, Virginia, which is affiliated with the Reformed Episcopal Church. He is a past Chairman of the Society for Classical Learning, and currently serves as co-editor of The Journal.
Let’s not give short shrift to the role of theological study in spiritual formation. This has always been an indispensable ingredient in the church’s recipe for healthy Christians. When we turn our eyes to the example of those who came before, I will argue that historically theological instruction played a much more prominent role than it does now. Christian schools ought to fill the gap left by our churches in this area.

To start with, I take spiritual formation to mean “having a healthy Christian life.” For most of Christian history, it was believed that growing to spiritual health primarily occurred in the church. In the Reformation, this view still pertained, but the Eucharist no longer was understood to have the same spiritual value as the preaching of the word. Exploring this shift helps us to answer the question of how to do spiritual formation.

The Reformation theologians fundamentally taught that God’s central and complete gift to us, through Jesus Christ in the Spirit, was Himself. As the Westminster Catechism famously states, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” God bestows Himself on us, so healthy Christianity means realizing more and more fully the consequences of that profound gift.

“But,” it might be objected, “surely the Reformation intended to decrease the significance of the institutional Church in light of this gift. How can the Church’s role diminish and yet remain the primary place in which believers are sanctified?”

This objection is only voiced on the other side of the triumph of individualism in the modern and post-modern period, and it would strike the mainstream Reformers and their Protestant heirs as strangely misguided. The Church—and the family as an extension of it—should continue to be the focus of the believer’s spiritual formation. It is in the church that we more deeply come to understand the divine self-disclosure through the preaching of the word, worship, the sacraments, and fellowship. Remember that individual “quiet time” is a relatively recent phenomenon. We should surely pray and read the Scriptures on our own, but such practices do not dislodge the local church, our primary community, as the source of our spiritual formation.

One of the practices that has traditionally been a crucial part of church life—Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox—was catechization and the recitation of creeds in the church service. In addition, sermons tended much more toward what we would now call “abstract” theology (the nature of Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, etc.) and derived moral exhortation from it. All of these factors compounded reveal that the Church highly values theological teaching as an important means of sanctification.

Theology is the contemplation of who God is. Churches affirmed the creeds each Sunday and expected everyone to go through a catechism class in order to learn about God’s character, illustrated especially through the dramatic narrative of His saving work. If sanctification means more deeply grasping God’s gift of Himself to us in salvation, leading to forming our characters as we learn to live in His kingdom, then what better way to achieve this goal than learning theology?

Many of us think of theology as dry and boring. When properly understood as engagement with the loving God of the universe Himself and taught by someone who loves God and can communicate this passion, it will be anything but dull.

For a host of reasons, which I need not rehearse, our contemporary churches have mostly neglected the teaching of theology. If Sunday School (for adults and children) is failing to give God’s people what they need in terms of theological confessions,
creeds, and catechisms, then this is a void into which the Christian school must step. Classical schools are especially well poised to fill this gap since they often already have faculty capable of dynamically teaching these things. The ethos of our schools is to take knowledge *per se* and the past seriously.

I grant that this has not traditionally been the role of the school. However, the Christian school exists for the sake of the church; its task is to educate the next generation of members of the body of Christ.

Let me offer some brief suggestions about how theological teaching should be done. In the lower grades, students should memorize the Lord’s Prayer, the doxology, the Ten Commandments, the Apostle’s creed, along with a denominational confession if the school has one. Memorization should be accompanied with age-appropriate instruction regarding the meaning of these items. In the upper grades, students ought to take time in Bible class or chapel services to work through the meaning of the creeds, which is best accomplished through a catechism. Presbyterian schools will choose the Westminster Catechism, while more broadly Evangelical schools can affirm nearly everything in the oft-overlooked and underestimated Heidelberg Catechism.

I will admit: it is tough to sell this to parents as a solution to the demand for “spiritual formation.” Teaching theology is not the only way to accomplish this, of course, and it will be essential to integrate service to the community, corporate and private prayer, modeling by faculty and staff of a well-formed spiritual life, and the relevant practices I am sure other responders in this issue suggest.

Whether in the school, church, or home, though, let us do well by our students to see them as God’s beloved children who need to be nurtured in his life-giving truth. Let us study theology.

Andrew Selby is a student of historical theology at Toronto School of Theology. He works for ClassicalComposition.com and formerly taught at Trinity Classical Academy in Santa Clarita, CA.

“Intellectus et Virtus,” from page 6

At the same time, if one of our goals is to develop students who can think “Christianly” about all disciplines, and can bring a Christian perspective to bear on all things, more must be said. Given the nature and shape of modern culture, I believe that we are shirking our duty if we think our students will just naturally make certain theological connections as they study and learn math, English, literature, science, etc. They need many prompts to begin to see the various connections and links—connections and links that are subtly and not so subtly denied by the dominant culture. That is, if we want our students to see the unity of all truth under God, we need to intentionally help our students to see these connections, and—in a fragmented culture that has such a dominant influence—this requires some basic teaching about God, man, and the world.

That means teaching and grounding in the basics of Scripture and theology. In short, if we want our students to really see the unity of all truth under God, in every discipline, we have to work with extra diligence, because we know that we are working upstream amidst a culture that so often discourages a coherent and unified understanding of reality.

We need Hugh of St. Victor’s insight from his *Didascalicon*: “Learn everything; you will see afterwards that nothing is superfluous.” We study and learn many things, trusting that we live in a world created, ordered, and governed by a good God, and that, ultimately, God might show us, over time, the unity and beauty of His world. He might show us how “nothing is superfluous.” Insight and wisdom take time, and schools, at their best, provide a place for them and some of that time.

Brad Green is Associate Professor of Christian Studies at Union University and a co-founder of Augustine School. He lives in Jackson, Tennessee.
What Typical Christian Parents Want in Christian Schools

by John Seel, PhD

The fashionable fallacy is that by education we can give people something that we have not got… Unless you can save the fathers, you cannot save the children; that at present we cannot save others, for we cannot save ourselves.”

— G.K. Chesterton

Parents have their dreams for their children. Schools largely tailor their priorities to these dreams as a pragmatic necessity for financial survival. Where, in this matrix of supply and demand, is the prophetic voice? Where is the prophetic school asking what God wants and what the child needs? Education that makes a difference must face these questions.

Brad Green, of Augustine School in Jackson, Tennessee [see Brad’s contribution to this issue’s conversation on spiritual formation at p. 6], wisely challenges prospective parents to identify whether the school’s goals for their child are compatible with their own parenting goals:

When I am visiting with prospective families, I say to virtually every one of them some version of the following: “You should look every headmaster or admissions director straight in the eye and ask simply, ‘What is your goal for my child as an 18-year-old graduate of your institution?’”

I then proceed, with all seriousness, to say, “If that person cannot answer that question, you should politely dismiss yourself and head to the next school. But if they can and do answer that question, you need to ask yourself an important question. Is that my goal for my child’ or, at least, ‘Is that goal compatible with what we want for our child?’”

It is important to ask these questions because they reflect the hidden assumptions parents have in their understanding of the relationship of education to parenting and discipleship. Often, little distinguishes Christian parenting aspirations from those of unbelievers. In general, their aspirations boil down to a variation of “just like me.” Parents want for their child the same approximate experiences that they had when they were their age. Rarely does a parent have aspirations either higher or lower than those their own parents had for them a generation earlier.

One presumes that their children’s spiritual maturity is just as important a priority for Christian parents as academic success. Yet few parents think to ask what God wants and expects in their child’s education. Their decisions about education are the arena where these priorities become explicit.

The most difficult idols to recognize are those that are socially acceptable and religiously justified. Christian parents have difficulty realizing that their attachment to their child can become a source of idolatry. Children are the glue in many marriages, the center of household activities, and the voice on the family answering machine. Little trumps the importance of the child.

By contrast, Jesus lived in what we today call a “tribal” society. The extended family had enormous influence over the person. No nuclear family thought of itself as autonomous from extended family relationships. Jesus’ culture was family-centered not individual-centered, and “honoring father and mother” was a commandment backed by strong penalties. One only has to read Deuteronomy 21:18-21 to sense the seriousness of the matter:
If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard.” Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.

Disobedience to parents is placed in the long list of sins characteristic of the last days in 2 Timothy 3:2. It is central in the list of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity outlined in Romans 1:28-32, with the caveat that those who are disobedient deserve death.

In this context Jesus’ stern warning to put God before all family relationships is striking: “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” (Matthew 10:37-38) Self-denial, taking up one’s cross, is placed squarely in a family context. God first, not family.

We do not own our children. They are a temporary stewardship. They are not an extension of our identities—little people through whom we can have our relational needs met and personal aspirations realized. Yet for many child-centered families, psychological enmeshment has obtained spiritual legitimacy.

How else can one understand the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel? Barren in a society that prized sons, she wept to the Lord and made this vow: “If you will only look upon your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life.” Moreover, when her prayer is granted, this special child, loved as only a mother can love a child after overcoming infertility, is then given back to the Lord. “After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was…and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh…. [T]hey brought the boy to Eli, and she said to him, ‘As surely as you live, my Lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you and prayed for this child, and the Lord granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.’”

This passage is important for contemporary Christian parents, for we too must give our children over to the Lord. Our children are not ours to keep. They are a temporary gift, a means to further our growth in grace even as we seek to equip them to serve Christ and his kingdom with their lives.

When typical Christian parents come to a Christian school, they have clear goals already in mind. They want the school to mirror their values, which too often are a child-centered version of the American dream. They want the school to legitimize their lives. They want their children to be in effect a chip off the old block, and, in most cases, Christian consumer-driven schools provide exactly what parents want.

As in many churches, coming to Christ and becoming like Christ are disconnected in Christian schools. Eager to get students into heaven, Christian schools give little thought or planning to getting heaven into the student. Dallas Willard refers to this as the gospel of sin management: “You can have a faith in Christ that brings forgiveness, while in every other respect your life is no different from that of others who have no faith at all.” Every statistical comparison of Christian teenage behavior bears out this fact. Being a Christian teen or going to a Christian school makes no behavioral difference in terms as compared with nonbelievers. We get what we expect and what our parenting models, youth groups, and schools are designed to produce. Few demand more. Conversion is the expectation; discipleship is not. Becoming an active apprentice of Jesus is reserved for the religious freak, not the normal kid.

Still, parents and schools are too frequently concerned solely with behavior. We have no expecta-
tion that the gospel will fundamentally transform a life and reform one’s character. The gospel is not simply having one’s sins forgiven, but having them forgiven so that one can become a new person infused with the life of Christ. “In Him was life, and that life is the light of men,” John writes in his Gospel. (John 1:4) “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full,” Jesus declares. (John 10:10) “Therefore, if any one is in Christ,” Paul concludes, “he is a new creation.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) The point of Christ’s work on the cross is not just forgiveness, but life.

But we confuse the means with the end. We are forgiven so that we can live in a right relationship with Christ in the here and now. This life, however, is not fire insurance for heaven—a kind of policy we purchase and then put in a desk drawer for some undisclosed time in the future. It is daily spiritual sustenance—“living water” and the “bread of life”—without which we spiritually starve. “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35)

My concern is that parents’ expectations of Christian schools are generally consistent with what is taught in most pulpits—a gospel that forgives sins but does not transform lives, a legalism that coerces behavior but does not change hearts, and a dualism that longs for heaven but has little concern for creation or culture. It is Christianity “lite,” or what Dietrich Bonhoeffer described as “cheap grace”—the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. We do not expect anything more of our children or of our schools because nothing different is taught from our pulpits. Bonhoeffer, having witnessed the impotence of the German church when faced with Hitler, lamented a “grace” that is no gospel.

So schools provide what parents want—mental assent and behavioral conformity, “Get my child saved” and “Keep my child away from worldliness.”

Parents’ attitudes toward education parallel this spiritual pragmatism. Rather than being concerned for the hard work of embodiment—of cultivating a Christian mind and captivating a Christian imagination—parents are focused instead on college placement and career selection. For many parents, education is not an end, but a means to secure a job that will allow their child to live life just as they do. It is merely a step in achieving personal peace and affluence. Henry Edmondson traces this pragmatic orientation to John Dewey and warns, “In making utility the chief goal of education, we sacrifice much of its usefulness.”

Christian schools may promote piety and patriotism, but they do not routinely graduate students committed to the demands of radical discipleship: students who are equipped to take captive every thought to Christ and who expect to serve Christ through their individual callings.

In the end, the fruit does not fall far from the tree. Christian schools serve Christian parents whose values are little different from other parents in their same socioeconomic class and surrounding neighborhood. “This, in fact, is one of the great tragedies of our time,” writes theologian David Wells, “that evangelicals have lost their spiritual status as outsiders to the culture, those who march to a different drummer, and who have the capacity to think about their world in ways that are completely different from what is taken as normative in their world.”

Also, for this reason, as many as 80% of Christian parents don’t even bother with Christian education. Government schools are just as efficient in accomplishing their goals for their child and a whole lot cheaper. We get what we want, but it’s not what we need. Nor is it what God and the gospel demand.

This article is the second of three based on John Seel’s forthcoming book, Special Forces in Kingdom Service: The Calling of Prophetic Schools to be published next spring by Canon Press. Part three, “Parris Island for the Soul: What Christian Students Need” will be published in the next issue of The Journal.
Plenary Speaker Information:

Dr. John H. Westerhoff, III
On Student Spiritual Formation

The Rev. John Westerhoff, S.T.D., Ed.D, D.D. studied theology at Harvard University and the history and philosophy of education at Columbia University. An Episcopal priest, for many years he was professor of theology and Christian nurture at Duke University. Author of more than thirty books, including Will Our Children Have Faith?; Generation to Generation; Education and Culture; and Bringing Up Children in the Christian Faith, he has lectured at universities around the world. Now retired, he is theologian in residence at St. Anne’s Episcopal Church in Atlanta Georgia.

Does your school profess to build future leaders for Christ? How thoughtful and effective are you in pursuing that mission? Dr. Westerhoff will force you to think deeply about how to be an effective long-term influence for Christ in your students’ lives.

John Taylor Gatto
On Effective Education

John Taylor Gatto was named New York City Teacher of the Year on three occasions. In 1991, after being named New York State Teacher of the Year, he publicly quit teaching on the op ed page of The Wall Street Journal, claiming that he was no longer willing to hurt children. Mr. Gatto has dedicated the past eighteen years to challenging the myths of modern education and is an outspoken proponent of school reform. His public speaking has taken him to all fifty states and twelve foreign countries. On April 6, 2008, the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard credited Mr. Gatto with adding the expression, “dumbing us down” to the global discourse. His books include: Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling; The Exhausted School; A Different Kind of Teacher; and The Underground History of American Education.

To what extent does your school teach classically? Has progressive education slipped unnoticed into your classrooms? Are you, as a teacher, having the impact you should or are you just going through the motions? Mr. Gatto will deepen your understanding of modern, progressive education and challenge you to more fully understand what it takes to make a truly great teacher.

Conference Registration Fees Held at 2008 Prices!

Main Conference:
$360 for SCL Members
$399 for Non-Members
Administrator’s Pre-Conference: $150
Register today at www.SocietyForClassicalLearning.org
Giving Birth to the Counter-culture
by George Sanker

I am glad to be invited into this conversation, but I need to make it clear up front that I am the Christian leader of a school instead of the leader of a Christian school— I head up a Classical Core Knowledge Charter School. While I know many might be curious about what I can add to this conversation because of the limitations that I have in a public school, I do believe that the formation of a child’s spirit plays a central role in the mission/vision of our school. My emphasis on formation, however, is implicitly shaped through the story offered through exposure to the Western tradition as discussed by the teachers and staff in the school community. Formation is also reinforced through the distinct nature (i.e., rituals and traditions) of the community.

While I started my teaching career in a private, Christian school, I subsequently decided to see if I could make an institutional impact in the public school world. Four years ago I became principal of an urban charter school. When I first looked at the academic standing of the students that registered to attend my schools, I realized that these kids had been truly let down by the district-run public schools. I would have to ensure that academic excellence was a central component of our school’s culture if these kids were going to have a chance of becoming well-educated, virtuous citizens in their community.

Part of my hope for the project came from the fact that I myself had grown up in these neighborhoods and was able to escape as a result of great mentors who stepped into my life. Solid educational opportunities ultimately enabled me to get into and graduate from a very strong college in the Northeast, something that had not been done in my family to that point. As I reflected on my journey, I tried to look for other examples of success in the black community that ran counter to the current malaise in urban public schools that we read about weekly.

I was overjoyed when I started to read about amazing work that the American Missionary Association (AMA) did with Southern blacks following the Civil War. The AMA, out of the Northeast, sent groups of teachers to establish schools and to teach and acculturate the children of freed slaves into new possibilities that didn’t exist for them before. By 1866 there were about 1,400 Northern white teachers teaching black children in 975 Southern schools. The classical education that these teachers brought, provided a solid foundation in the English language while also exposing students to the broad range of stories in the Western tradition. Through these stories, former black slaves were able to gain a perspective on their situation that they had never had before. With this perspective they gained a new sense of hope and courage to face their situation as newly freed citizens.

One of the success stories from this period was Mary Jane Patterson, whose family emigrated from North Carolina to Ohio before the Civil War. Patterson graduated from Oberlin College in 1862 and became the first Principal of Preparatory High School for Colored Youth—later renamed Dunbar High School—in Washington, DC. While most women were not allowed to take Latin, Greek, and mathematics in college, she insisted on taking these courses and brought her strength and determination into her job at Dunbar. Having this kind of person shaping the standards and traditions of the school...
in its early years undoubtedly had something to do with its later success. The school continued to attract high-achieving black leaders. Three of the school’s first ten principals had graduated from Oberlin, two from Harvard, and one each from Amherst and Dartmouth.

Over the entire 85-year history of academic success in this school, from 1870 to 1955, most of its graduates went on to higher education. This was very unusual for either black or white high school graduates during that era. It is also important to note that not only did Dunbar students go on to college, but many of them became successful, ground-breaking leaders. The first black man to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy came from Dunbar. The first black enlisted man in the army to rise to become a commissioned officer also came from this institution. So did the first black woman to receive a PhD from an American university. And the first black full professor at a major American university. The first black federal judge, the first black general, the first black Cabinet member, the first black senator elected since Reconstruction, the doctor who pioneered the use of blood plasma, historian Carter G. Woodson, poet Sterling Brown, and Duke Ellington, all attended Dunbar High.

What is amazing to me about this story of academic success and student formation is that they did this during a time when there were supposedly no doors open to blacks in the broader culture. Because of their excellence, though, they opened doors that previously did not exist. These stories stand in stark contrast to the low academic standards prevalent in many urban centers, and at Dunbar High School today.

To recover some of the academic and moral excellence that arose in the black community in the last century, I focused first on hiring excellent teachers who knew their content more than their educational psychology. But their intellect alone would not be able to do the job. Like the AMA teachers, the teachers I hired would also need to be living examples of moral excellence so that their students could see the qualities that we sought for them to acquire. I also worked very hard to develop strong rituals and traditions in the school community that reinforced a sense of “we” versus “me” while also providing for regular opportunities to publicly celebrate the embodiment of our core values in particular students.

I realized, despite all of the effort to build a haven of academic excellence, I needed to make sure that we were truly helping our students to become “fully human.” Glimpses of success in this area became evident in conversations with sixth graders as they debated some of the moral issues in The Prince and the Pauper or when seventh graders discussed what it means to be “authentic” in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

I truly believe that the various works from the western tradition that we exposed our students to did make a great impact on many of our students, if not all equally. For once they were able to see a world beyond the videos of BET and the Hip-Hop music that permeates their iPods. For once, they could let down their cynical and jaded attitude toward the world and explore questions of truth, beauty, and goodness in a setting where it was cool to be somewhat intellectual.

One of the best indications for me of the formative impact we had on students took place with the enrollment of new students. As these new students came on board the existing students felt it was their responsibility to acclimate the new students into the unique culture that they had helped to build at our school. While I would love to say that massive cultural changes took place within the doors of my school, they did not. But I am very proud of the tremendous progress that I saw in the young men and women, and amongst the staff and students who worked so hard to build a counter-culture in Washington.

George Sanker is the founding Principal of Imagine Hope Charter School in Firestone, Colorado. He has degrees from Colgate University and Reformed Theological Seminary.
Whenever I ponder the question of whether Christian schools make “spiritual formation” a mission objective, I reflect on my own childhood education, which included fourth through seventh grade in a parochial school. These years happened also to be my first four as a young convert to Christianity.

The pastor taught our confirmation class each day, introducing concepts like eternal security, salvation, and baptism in a traditional denominational context. Concurrently, I was also active in another church in town. Unwittingly, the confirmation class pastor played a huge role in my spiritual formation, not because of the weight of material I memorized for him, but because many of his claims ran counter to what I was hearing in church. This conflict fed my spiritual formation as I tirelessly pursued the truth. My classmates were eventually confirmed, but Sadly not transformed. Their experience lacked the tension that catalyzed my growth. For them, the indoctrination was drudgery—even perhaps, a necessary evil.

I share this personal anecdote to emphasize that young children can think deeply about spiritual truths, but also to challenge our Christian schools to be places where students are safely guided to the truth rather than places where teaching is reduced to simply telling the truth and assessing students for recall or understanding. Knowing truth and experiencing a transformation in the heart because of truth are two different things.

As a school administrator, rather than making “spiritual formation” an objective of our mission, I would prefer to make “the opportunity for spiritual formation” a critical objective. This is not simply playing with words. My hope in creating these opportunities is that God will do a work in our students as they interface with the truths of scripture, as they interact with godly teachers, or as they wrestle with tensions and confusion that may crop up during a lesson. We need to offer the opportunities for students to develop in their spiritual formation, and we need to guard against all that hinders. In so doing, we need to recognize that any spiritual formation—any meaningful transformation of the heart—is the work of the Spirit of God.

Our school caters to Christian students and non-Christian students alike, and we recognize that non-Christian students will not experience spiritual formation without first becoming new creatures through Christ. When we graduate a student who has not become a Christian, despite the intense biblical literacy and integration that characterizes our curriculum, though, our mission has not failed. This is because our mission as a school is limited to what we can do as Christian educators. We can plant, we can water, we can toil in the vineyard, but God gives the increase if He wills and when He wills.

Pat Fitzpatrick is the head of the upper school at St. David’s School, Raleigh, North Carolina.
Truth and the Moral Imagination

by Linda Dey

I agree that “academic training in a Christian context IS spiritual formation.” While there is more to spiritual formation than training the mind, there should not be less. Intellectual training is an important component of spiritual formation and the one the school can most easily address.

Of course, “being smart” doesn’t inevitably lead to being more spiritual, but those who are zealous for God but don’t know why they believe what they believe are those most likely to be “faith dropouts.”

I saw and talked with a lot of faith dropouts and potential faith dropouts while working at L’Abri in the 70’s, and the great majority were those who had been told, “Don’t ask questions; just BELIEVE.” (It was this phenomenon among other things that led two of us former L’Abri workers to begin The Imago School.)

A lot rests on what “academic training in a Christian context” looks like. I think it needs to begin with a clear understanding by all those involved that Christianity is the truth about reality, all of reality. The students should get the message directly and indirectly that knowing who God is and what He says is crucial for a right understanding of everything, and not just for one narrow area of life. Hence, we go far beyond teaching information, and we talk about ideas and how to make judgments about whether ideas are true to what is.

We also are consciously shaping the moral imaginations of our students based on a Biblical view of goodness as we teach literature and history, including biblical history, and see models of virtuous behavior. Students taught to think Christianly about every area of study will come to see Christianity as not just a limited set of rules, beliefs, and practices but as the truth about reality.

I would go so far as to say that a school with a chaplain, a great chapel program, and a separate class in character development or spiritual disciplines but with little concern for a Christian view of reality being presented across the curriculum is actually doing a disservice to students and families by furthering a split view of reality—the view that academic learning and spiritual growth have little to do with each other. All our teaching, along with all our interactions with students, should be infused with the understanding that Christianity is first of all TRUE.

Another way that this kind of teaching about objective reality and true ideas aids in spiritual formation is that it helps students get out of themselves. An inflated view of self and the importance of my feelings and opinions is the main obstacle to growth in godliness. Those who learn to submit to the truth of what is and wonder at its beauty and unity are in a better place for the work of the Holy Spirit to go on in their lives.

Linda Dey is a co-founder and the Academic Dean of The Imago School in Maynard, Massachusetts.
Nuance. My gut tells me this is an important word in this discussion. Our role in teenagers’ spiritual lives is not primarily one as authority, but as example. That was not the case when they were younger. We adults—educators and parents alike—tend to fall back on direct influence. I think teenagers by nature are absorbing our perspectives indirectly. If we don’t grasp this, we will give undue attention to matters that may only be arranging the deck chairs on a sinking ship, while not heeding the importance of the course we’ve charted.

I think the idea of nuance is important, because, on the one hand, I cannot help but disagree that spiritual formation is not our prime objective. At the same time, I cannot help but agree that if we treat it directly—over and above our academic objectives—any apparent short term gains will lead to long term failures in both academic and spiritual formation.

I say that spiritual formation is prime, because, paraphrasing Paul, if we produce brilliant academic students who don’t care for the gospel, we’ve produced obnoxious bells and nothing more. How not to do this perhaps is the substance of this discussion, given that the secular drift of academia happened in places once committed to the gospel as truth and light.

But I have to agree with the side of the discussion that wonders whether direct engagement with the subject will likely only happen at the expense of our academic mission. How many Christian schools with a strong spiritual reputation also have a strong academic reputation? It’s a shorter list than the alternative.

The allusion to schools as the new Campus Crusade strikes me, not only because I have a long history with Young Life, but because, properly considered, I think there is some wisdom there. The strength of their influence, in my experience, has been less in either’s teaching, which is in both cases simplified, evangelical theology, and more in the space both create structurally for voluntary relational role models. It is true that it is the ‘individuals’ within these organizations who influence lives. But that’s something we can value in our schools without sacrificing academic substance.

“How many Christian schools with a strong spiritual reputation also have a strong academic reputation?”

We could run our schools—and teach Calculus, Homer, and the Canons of Rhetoric—in an effective manner either personally or impersonally. In fact, bright students could teach themselves without us. What we bring to our students as classical or liberal arts educators is not only the ability to make the complex intelligible, but that we do so in a human way, thus humanizing both our subjects and our students. This is a Christian endeavor. What we provide on a spiritual level that para-church relationships do not is a confidence in the intellectual integrity of our beliefs. When students are taught by teachers they regard as both brilliant minds and examples of faith, they become equipped with two tools against secular sophistry: their own intellect sharpened, and the knowledge that intellects even sharper than their own have waded through the challenges to the biblical perspective of reality.

They will not see us as the latter, unless we,
Learning to Live in Reality

by John Seel, PhD

An answer to this question needs to first address underlying assumptions: What is the purpose of Christian education? What is the nature of truth? What is the gospel? What is required of discipleship?

The purpose of Christian education is to equip students with a Christian mind – a true understanding of reality and how to successfully live within it. This means more than just knowing a biblical worldview. It also means being given a compelling vision of the good life and how to appropriate right here and now the resources of heaven. Spiritual formation is not optional—something to be added or subtracted from the curriculum. It is the culmination of all the factors that go into shaping what a person loves, what they trust or rely on, and who they follow. Both Pope Benedict and the Al-Qaeda operative are being spiritually formed. The only difference is to what. So the first thing to acknowledge is that every school, including the notorious government schools, is involved in spiritual formation.

The truth we teach is more than cognitive. It includes reason and imagination, being and doing. We must shun all forms of dualism that pits the academic knowledge against spiritual depth, smarts against piety, excellence against devotion.

Many parents, administrators, and teachers struggle with this question because of two factors. First, they have naively assumed the Enlightenment dualism of fact vs. value: science is about objective facts; religion is about subjective values. This is a lie from the pit of hell—and one that is celebrated and assumed by all public school education. Since many of our teachers have been trained by these institutions as have most of our parents, this assumption, though false, is common. When the Bible says that the way up is down, it carries the same epistemic force as the Second Law of Thermodynamics. The good, true, and beautiful are all based on objective norms whether couched in the language of the liturgy or the lab.

Second, they have naively assumed a truncated gospel that only addresses the sin problem but leaves out much of life. By reducing the gospel message to fall and redemption, we have adopted a message that gets people into heaven and fails to get heaven into people. Many Christian parents want the Christian school to simply provide a long altar call in a safe place. If at the same time the school can keep their child from publicly shaming them with an embarrassing pregnancy or drug and alcohol arrest, so much the better. Most Christian schools gladly oblige to focusing more on overt behavior than the heart condition. With enough administrative coercion, students’ heart realities can be faked until they leave for college.

If the gospel, however, includes creation and restoration (in addition to fall and redemption), then a fully orbed discipleship is in view. And true discipleship connects Sunday to Monday, the head to the heart, and the sacred to the secular. The mission of the Christian school emerges as understanding God’s good creation and the ways sin has distorted it, so that, in Christ’s power, we may bring healing to both people and the created order. And, as God’s image-bearers, we are able to exercise responsible authority in our task of cultivating the creation to the end that all people and things joyfully acknowledge and serve their Creator and true King.

All living things depend for their existence on a reality larger than themselves. This is a fact of life. It is not enough to teach our students the
nature of reality without teaching them how to live successfully within it. Our goal for our students is that they become apprentices of Jesus, thereby becoming the kind of person whose lives are dependent on the resources of heaven. Our aim is not merely to create believers, but followers.

Central in our Christian schools must be a curriculum in Christ-likeness and a school culture that encourages reflection on Jesus’ priorities and character. The crisis of the church today is mirrored in Christian schools. It does not lack evangelism; it lacks an understanding of and commitment to discipleship. Competencies in spiritual formation are just as important as competencies in language and math.

We must take care in our schools not to produce modern day Pharisees, those who know Scripture but lack its transforming power. To be truly educated is to know the truth about reality and how to live life on the basis of it. And in the end, reality is relational. To teach that knowledge can somehow be segregated into compartments is to deny the lordship of Christ over all of life—a lordship which demands more than getting all the facts straight, and which demands a daily reliance on a spiritual power that is beyond us.

Dallas Willard observes, “Spiritual persons are not those who engage in certain ‘spiritual practices,’ but those who draw their life from a conversational relationship with God. Thus they do not live their lives merely in terms of the human order in the visible world. They have ‘a life beyond.’” If flowers wither without a life beyond, so will our students. We are dishonest about the nature of reality if we exclude such information from our instruction.

John Seel is a Partner with Donegality Productions, LLC. He is a regular contributor to The Journal.

“If flowers wither without a life beyond, so will our students. We are dishonest about the nature of reality if we exclude such information from our instruction.”

Students’ days of basing their faith in the gospel (as text and as truth) on the authority of others will give way to the need to base faith on the authority of reason and personal commitment—as it should. If we want to influence them, that is how we should engage them.

Regarding the anxiety that we are not “getting to their hearts,” I cannot resist suggesting that it is an overwrought fear, akin to wondering, when a tadpole is halfway to adulthood, whether it really is a frog since it still has a tail. Every generation of youth are apparently uniquely in danger (including us when we were young), providing substance to Bruce Cockburn’s delicious lyric, “The trouble with normal is it always gets worse.”

If we take seriously the fact that teenagers are newly meta-cognitive, newly (and overly) self-conscious, innately protective of their new-found autonomy from adults, and at the same, time lousy managers of their emotions, we would expect, and thus be nonplussed by their flat effect when we adults overtly try to engage them in personal, spiritual matters.

If we were not so impatient for them to appear as “fully formed adults,” when they are not yet developmentally so, and instead attended to the consistent but transient face of adolescent spirituality, I think we would sleep better at night.

Craig Doerksen is the head of upper school at Regents School of Austin, Texas. He has degrees from the University of Oregon and the University of Ireland, Maynooth.
School Finances in a Tough Economy

by Charles T. Evans

Serving schools in two cities affected by the tech bust eight years ago, I saw the effect that a tight economy has on parents’ decisions about private school.

First, it becomes evident very quickly that private school tuition falls into the discretionary spending category for most families. Tuition doesn’t compete with groceries and the mortgage, but it does compete with vacations, college savings, and charitable giving. Families who can still afford private school, but whose income prognosis is uncertain, may instinctively want to redirect tuition money to savings.

Second, as incomes go down and the cost of necessities goes up, many parents expect that tuition should not go up, too—at least not as much as other things they buy everyday. As everything that contributes to the expense of running a school goes up, parents might actually expect the cost to themselves to go down.

Third, whether they truly can afford tuition or not, many parents in a tight economy will feel as if they can’t—that private school is a luxury they are nobly providing for their children’s futures and the school’s benefit. One result is that during tough times, parents expect greater value in proportion to the feeling that they are sacrificing more to pay tuition than they used to.

So, how do we respond to the psychological and economic realities of a downturn while still strengthening the school’s financial base? Our financial management policies should communicate two things to our families: 1) we are confident in our school’s ability to weather a financial storm, and 2) we understand how stressed our families feel about their finances.

1. Avoid lowering or freezing tuition. Lowering tuition reinforces the assumption that the school’s finances are immune to regular economic forces. Schools are labor-intensive services that cannot create cost-saving efficiencies as effectively as other industry sectors. The result is that our costs increase about 2% a year more than the average rate of inflation. So, if inflation this year is 4%, then our costs will rise 6%. A tuition increase of less than 6% leaves fewer dollars per student in our operating budget than the previous year.

2. Keep current families by temporarily increasing tuition assistance budgets. If your middle income families lose jobs or take a short-term income hit, you can build long-term loyalty and protect enrollment by holding them in place with strategic emergency assistance. This is best accomplished by targeting tuition increases on the potential short term needs of families. Let’s say that you currently budget 5% of expenses for need-based tuition assistance on a $2 million budget. An 8% tuition/revenue increase, combined with a 3% increase in tuition assistance funding will provide 24 students with $3,000 in additional tuition assistance. Not only is this a wise use of tuition revenue, but it communicates that your school is serious about addressing the critical accessibility issue and that you have the ability to respond to the needs of your community.

3. Continue to appeal to the mission for gifts. With bad economic news, it can be tempting to curb appeals for donations or to seek gifts indirectly through sales and event gimmicks. But keep a couple of things in mind. The needs that gifts meet did not
disappear because investors lost money. We also do not know the financial situations of our families, and many people still need to give for tax purposes. Even though people feel jittery, the mission of the school is still relevant to parents, grandparents and other friends of the school, and it is your most compelling case for generosity.

4. Focus on smaller gifts. Many major gifts (mid five-figure to seven-figure, e.g.) are made possible by individuals’ investments. With the markets down forty percent over the past year, the original capital of many investments is in jeopardy. Annual funds or mini-capital campaigns typically appeal for smaller cash donations, and as donors protect and rebuild their portfolios, cash may be all they have available. These campaigns also can strengthen the sense of community among our families and friends by focusing on short-term projects and goals that are accomplished through a high degree of participation. Again, we do not know who will give, so it is important to provide strategically important giving opportunities.

5. Invest in value. If enrollment decreases or short-sighted pricing policies shrink your budget, continue to spend on programs or initiatives that increase the value to parents. Perhaps you had planned to add a full-time maintenance supervisor and two part-time teaching aides. Even though the aides will make life easier for teachers, you might consider postponing those hires in favor of a cleaner, more orderly campus. When we find ourselves making tough choices about spending, it never hurts to ask ourselves which investments will make parents more confident that they are making the right educational choice for their children.

A former Christian school administrator, Charles T. Evans is an Executive Consultant with Paideia, Inc. and directs the Texas Association of Non-public Schools. He lives in Austin, Texas.

**Administrator & Board Pre-Conference**

JUNE 24 • SAN ANTONIO, TX

CHARLES T. EVANS OF PAIDEIA, INC.

**Serious Money for Christian Schools: Merely Making Ends Meet or Thriving in Tough Times?**

Discover how your school can thrive now and plan for a prosperous future.

In the midst of the most serious economic downturn in memory, many Christian school leaders are asking themselves, “How did we get here, and how will we survive?”

- Understand the vital relationship between mission, management, and money.
- Develop a policy and planning basis for sustainability.
- Enable investment in programs and services that increase educational quality and build parent loyalty.
- Increase accessibility for a broad socio-economic community of families.
- Raise gift support that will make a transformative difference in the future.

CHARLES T. EVANS, an Executive Consultant with Paideia, Inc., has been associated with the Society for Classical Learning since its founding and has assisted dozens of classical and Christian schools to plan, organize, and grow. Paideia, Inc. exists to help Christian schools become vibrant, sustainable institutions that are deserving of their missions. Paideia assists school leaders in matching their culture-shaping, student-transforming educational visions with habits of strategic planning and financial prudence that will enable the continuation of those visions for generations.
Shoes Matter

by Leslie Moeller

“Thirteen year old girls don’t take women seriously who wear ugly shoes.” At least that was the argument I gave my husband when he commented on the sudden increase in my shoe collection shortly after I started teaching middle school literature. While I’m not above stretching a bit to justify a great pair of heels, I was only half-kidding in this particular instance.

I, like many of the writers in this edition, find the concept of “spiritual formation” a bit difficult to nail down. If we’re talking about the desire in all of our hearts to see our students mature into, instead of away from, Christ while simultaneously sharpening the minds with which they serve him, then I offer yet another question or two to contemplate. What is drawing them away from Christ? And are we presenting a compelling alternative?

As much as we would like our students to pick their role models based on logical analysis filtered through biblical standards, we know they don’t. In fact not many of us do. Take a good look at what kids today find attractive, cool and worthy of imitation and then take an equally objective look at what the church, and our Christian schools by extension, offer instead. I see two primary alternatives. There are the churches where the worship team’s jeans are just as faded, music is just as loud and videos just as slick as those on MTV. The unspoken message is that Jesus is cool and Christians can be too. At the opposite extreme, are the churches that seem proudly, even aggressively uncool, unmodern, and suspicious of anyone who isn’t equally so.

I see very few healthy, appealing role models for young women today inside the church or out. It’s one thing to tell a young teenager that the appearance and behavior of the latest wild child pop star are unhealthy, unbiblical and inappropriate. It’s entirely another to make sure she has an alternative that she just might want to emulate. Every time I step on campus, I am aware that I, like every teacher or administrator, have the opportunity to offer one potential alternative. I have an opportunity to present womanhood as the high calling that my own strong, educated, elegant, Christ-centered, southern mother demonstrated for me.

Stilettos aren’t the cure-all of course. I pray that my students will occasionally see in me a woman who enjoys sharpening her mind as much as her wardrobe and whose standards and expectations are just as high as her heels. Most of all, I want them to see that femininity, intellectual capacity, attractiveness, and joyful Christianity are not mutually exclusive and are all unearned gifts from God. Just maybe a few of my students might want to follow in my well-shod footsteps.

Leslie Moeller is an attorney, a former middle school language arts teacher, former Head of School; and current Chairman of SCL.
Join Us
FOR OUR
2009 ANNUAL
SUMMER CONFERENCE

CHALLENGING SPEAKERS
and
GREAT CONVERSATION
in one of our nation’s
great historic cities

San Antonio, Texas

CONFERENCE DATES
June 25 through 27
PRE-CONFERENCE
June 24
Register Today at
www.societyforclassicallearning.org

SHERATON GUNTER HOTEL
More Details at p.13

Would you like to present at the 2009 Summer Conference?
Proposals for presentations may be submitted to
THEJOURNAL@SOCIETYFORCLASSICALLEARNING.ORG
on or before April 1, 2009.
Proposals should include a brief biography of the presenter and an outline of the presentation.

Administrator & Board
Pre-Conference
June 24, 2009

Charles T. Evans of Paideia, Inc. presents a One-day Pre-conference Seminar
Serious Money for Christian Schools: Merely Making Ends Meet or Thriving in Tough Times?
Register at www.societyforclassicallearning.org. Turn to p. 22 to learn more.