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ACCS

CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION FOR THE WORLD

CLASSIS IS A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTICLES AND BOOK REVIEWS DESIGNED TO SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE SCHOOLS AROUND THE WORLD WHICH ARE RECOVERING CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION. HARD COPIES ARE AVAILABLE TO ACCS MEMBERS AND BY SUBSCRIPTION.

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The Family Is Key

by Patch Blakey

Classical Christian education is the best form of education possible. I do not say that arrogantly, but I do say it forcefully and with confidence. I am acquainted with its results, not only in the quality of men and women that it produced throughout the past 1500 years, but also in seeing the graduates of the numerous ACCS schools I have visited as well as from observing the results of standardized test scores and reading the articles about the many successes of these students from across ACCS.

But is the classical Christian model the primary reason for these successes? I would suggest that as good as the classical Christian model is, there is another element that is even more critical in a student's education. We know that God desires godly offspring (Mal. 2:15). Elsewhere we are told that "children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward" (Psa. 127:3). Children are a gift from God to parents. Parents do not own their children; they are entrusted with them by God, as a heritage, something of value to be stewarded with care. The required aim of this stewarding of children is to produce *godly* offspring to the glory of God.

If placing our children in a classical Christian school was all that was required to produce godly offspring, then that would be sufficient. But as good as classical Christian education is, dropping our children off at the front door of the school every day is not enough. Sadly, we have each probably seen the outcome of such a lack of parental nurturing. Thankfully, we have also seen some exceptions. But we should not base our hopes on providential exceptions, but

rather on humble obedience to the Scriptures and confidence in our faithful God (Num. 23:19).

The godly nurture of our children is a full-time undertaking. Moses told the children of Israel that it was a "24/7" tasking. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:6-7).

This passage demonstrates that parents are engaged in teaching their children about the word of God around the clock, whether they are at home or away, from when they rise up in the morning to when they go to sleep at night. It comes out not only in what parents say, but also in what they do. Parents are always "transmitting," and children are always "receiving."

We should not be surprised to learn that this is so. God created the family, male and female, our first parents, Adam and Eve. One of the God-assigned goals of the family is to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth (Gen. 1:28). But again, the expectation is that the earth is to be replenished with "godly offspring."

We have a number of articles in this issue of *Classis* from administrators and teachers of ACCS schools who have spent years working with parents to help them see the benefit of classical Christian education. These folks have also worked with parents to encourage them to fully embrace their biblical responsibility to educate or enculturate their children in

the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). What these authors have written is not all that can be said on this subject, but it is a very good start. Their articles will, Lord willing, be a source of practical help and encouragement.

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All editions of *CLASSIS* are available from the ACCS website at www.accsedu.org > Publications > 2010 *CLASSIS*.

Patch Blakey is the executive director of ACCS.

Communicating Your Value with Parents

by David Goodwin, *The Ambrose School*

“What’s your class size?” “Do you have sports?” “Are your teachers credentialed?” “Where do your graduates go to college?” Headmasters hear at least one of these questions with nearly every prospective parent visit. These questions reveal two things. First, parents typically value things that have little to do with true education (with the possible exception of class size). Secondly, parents see education as a general commodity, differing in small ways, but generally consisting of a processing system that results in children who possess the skills necessary to enter college.

When we express the value of the Trivium, Latin, or the Great Books to parents, it often falls on deaf ears. Most parents fail to see our values because they don’t come to our schools looking for them. They come looking for the values that our culture says education should be. Our challenge: we need to change the core values of our families regarding education before they will truly appreciate our schools. This is not an easy task.

In six years of meeting with prospective families, I’ve gained a general perspective on our community. You need to know your own community, because it’s probably not like ours. Our city is “the heartland meets California casual.” Mostly white, non-denominational Bible church families dominate our county (excepting the 20% Mormon families). Youth sport teams are among the largest in the nation. We’re one big suburb. We’re not in the Bible Belt, but you can see a casual form of it not far

from here. In this environment, evangelical Christians are content to raise their families as “normal Americans.” Here, possibly more than in most regions, the American *paideia* reigns. What is the problem? The American *paideia* was not conceived of by Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, or John Adams, or even the Puritans. It was popularized by the early twentieth-century progressives. This means that our parent’s idyllic view of school, with its pom-pom-waving cheerleaders, guys in letterman sweaters, and lockers in the hallway adorned with dome pendant lights, is indelibly etched in the vernacular consciousness of each of us.

Most ACCS schools struggle to reach a sustainable class size in their grammar school for about four or five years after they open. Then, word-of-mouth and reputation take over. K–4 generally holds steady, with close to capacity in the upper elementary. Grades seven and eight begin to erode and by ninth grade, when schools are typically in their sixth to tenth year of operation, the high school struggles with a handful of students. Parents leave as their values change. How do we respond? Typically, we scramble to add sports and electives, we hold meetings with eighth grade parents, and we become frustrated when families drift away over time.

To accomplish this growth, even in a down economy, we’ve depended on using every asset we have to communicate our value to parents.

Crass Values

Families come to the school

when they perceive the value exceeds the cost. Families leave because their values change, or the school’s value declines. The crass business model is simple: if the total perceived value by the customer (parent) is greater than the cost (dollars + hassle), then the family stays. If not, they may hold on for a while, paying more than they perceive to be getting (grumbling). In business lingo, this is referred to as the switching cost. It means that any change is a hassle, so people tend to stay with businesses that stop serving their needs—for a while. But this is just a tinder box waiting for a spark to motivate a move.

In theory, the business of running a school is simple: provide strong value (be sure you have a quality product). Communicate that value in a way that parents can perceive it. And finally, and most importantly, build a relationship with parents over time that deepens their appreciation of the value offered by classical Christian education. All the while, keep an eye on hassles that will negatively affect the value equation.

A note on hassles: often, we overlook the parent as we make policies. For example, if you set your start time later in the morning, it may be preferable for learning but there may be a trade-off for parents when dads can’t drop the kids off on their way to work because it’s too late. Hassles often have more influence than they are due in the grand scheme of things. “But,” an administrator may say, “kids are more ready to learn at 9:00 than at 7:45 in the morning!” This is probably true. But, you need to weigh the hassle for parents. Maybe you want only the most dedicated parents at your school, and drop-off should not be

David Goodwin is the headmaster of *The Ambrose School in Boise, Idaho*. Visit www.theambroseschool.org/ to learn more about this ACCS accredited school

Communicating Your Value . . .

set for dad's convenience. This is fine. Just recognize that it will affect your enrollment. You may miss a chance to grow a family toward a strong commitment to classical education if you don't keep them past the first year. (No need to write me about start times. This was only a hypothetical example. There are solid reasons to go either way.)

Understanding Parent Values in the Grammar School

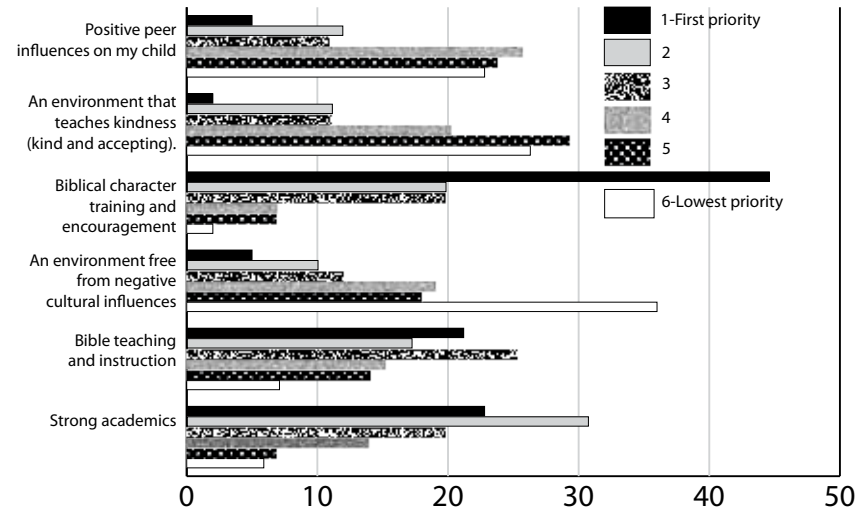
Parents choose a school, and then over time things change. When you think about it, how many businesses do you pay monthly for 13 years? In grammar school, parents value biblical character training and strong academics with a third value pool on Bible teaching. So, when formulating messages to parents you should create a distinctive value for your school using one of these values. For example, *"What does the Bible teach us about art? In Mrs. Greif's art class, students consider others before themselves. They create with the purpose of inspiring others, rather than focusing on self-expression. This means they learn the skilled craft of good painting before they are turned loose to create."* In this way, you tie a parent value (Bible teaching) to a very distinct attribute of classical education.

One problem with communicating the value of classical Christian education is that we're swimming in a different kind of stream. We're looking through different glasses. Or we're working from a different meta-narrative. Pick your analogy. The bottom line is we often have to build value where none exists in the mind of the parent. To do this, we must cast the value through a value they already have. Clearly,

parents value biblical character development. Do a parenting class on "Obey Right Away," "Love Your Neighbor," or "Love What

Strong academics is a high value for parents. More specifically, they want their children to be challenged and well-rounded more

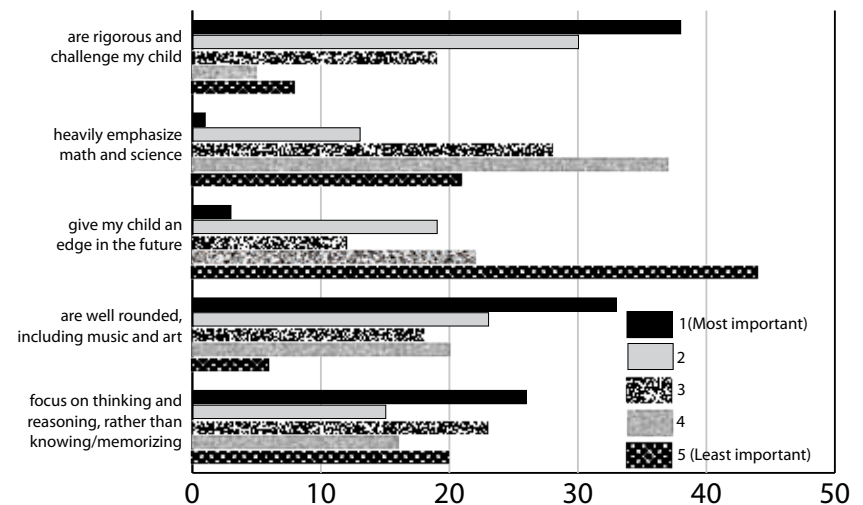
When considering a grammar school (K-6) for your child, which of the following do you want? (Please rank)



God Loves—Love the Standard.” (see Matt Whitling’s “Sins of the Classroom”).¹ Training like this is generally appreciated by parents and it begins to build equity. You need value equity to hold on to students.

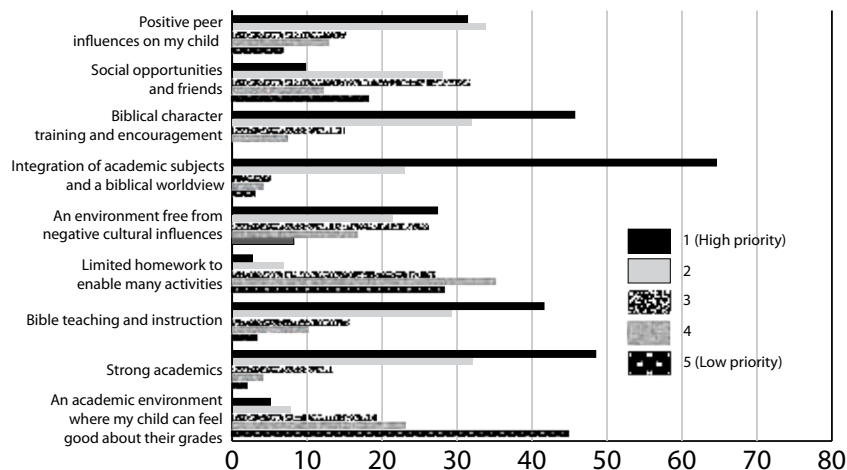
than they want math, science, or an edge in the future. Grammar school parents resonate with a focus on thinking rather than knowing or memorizing. Given the grammar-stage emphasis on memorization, this is an area

When considering a grammar school (K-6) for your child, what do you want academically? (Rank) I want academics that . . .



Communicating Your Value . . .

When considering a high school for your child, which of the following do you want? (If you have younger children, please answer for what you want in a high school when the time comes.)



where we need to be careful in communicating with parents. Often, messaging grammar-stage education involves words like “poll parrot” or “recitation.” However, parents value thinking and reasoning in these stages. We’ve begun to replace words like recitation or chant to describe what we do in grammar school. Instead, we emphasize knowledge that will prepare students for thinking and reasoning in the secondary.

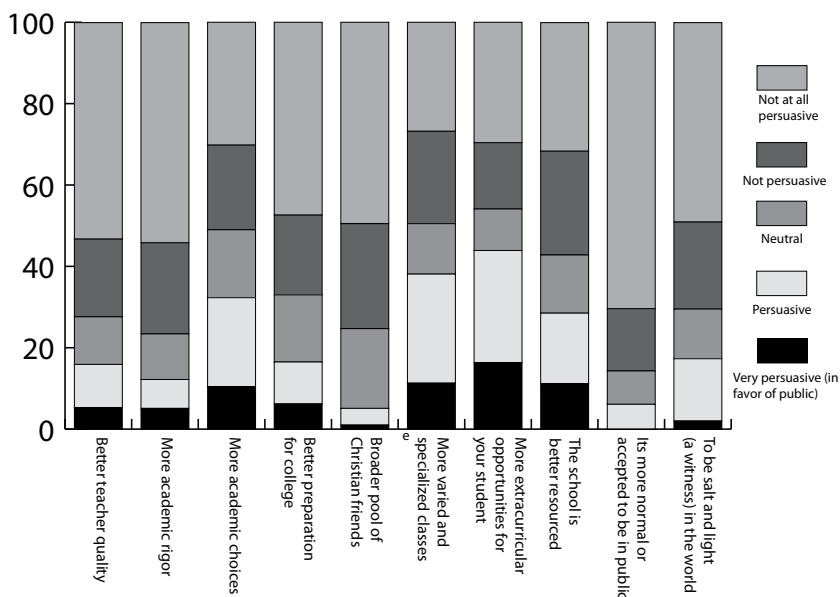
Cultivating Parent Affections

Often, once we have families in our schools, we stop marketing to them. More classically put, we should be cultivating the parent’s affections. To summarize Aristotle, our normal affections must be cultivated to a higher form because we do not naturally love what is true, good, and beautiful. With parents, we must continually till the soil of their worldview to appreciate and love classical Christian education.

Cultivating values is a problematic process because

value moves over time. It’s also difficult because our paradigm is so different that it takes years to fully see our value for most people. One part of the value equation is to continually communicate with parents to build value equity (I sometimes call it “the bank”). Here are a few of the ideas

Thinking of high schools for your children, which of the following statements represent a persuasive reason to place your student in a public/charter/general school.



we have used to fill the bank:

1. Publish a regular (quarterly, as a suggestion) newsletter that you mail out. In it, connect what’s going on at your school with a principle from classical methodology.

2. Create a collection of articles that describe classical Christian education. The articles should be three or four pages. We use passages from “The Great Tradition” (ISI)², C.S. Lewis’ “Screwtop Proposes a Toast,”³ and articles from other publications. We compile them into a single booklet called “Nightstand Articles” and pass it to parents every year.

3. We distribute “Discover Classical Christian Education—You’ll Wish You Could Go Back to School”⁴ to parents, new and existing.

4. Regularly send emails from the headmaster describing what he has been working on in the past week. I always start with associating my work with the philosophy of classical education. Important: my headmaster’s

Communicating Your Value . . .

notes always or usually start with a school event or a current event. This helps parents see the application of classical Christian thought to the real world.

5. Hold practical classes in parenting and the classics in parenting to develop a core of bought-in families.

All of these things, when regularly kept up, provide an ongoing equity with families. Equity builds value, which helps when the equation begins to shift in the secondary. But these things alone will not be enough. The culture of the school needs to constantly reinforce the values of the school. Student retention in the secondary is often as much about the student as the parent. So, you need to communicate value to them as well.

Typically, secondary students begin to influence their parents around the seventh grade. The very thing we promote (the logic phase) at this age can work against us. Students figure out they can have an opinion, and exert influence upon their parents. To retain students, schools should pay as much attention to the students' experience as they do to the parents' experience. Communicating value with students may take more than words.

While there's much more to be said, the central theme is *paideia*. We're not selling soap. We're selling a product that transforms the mind. To do so, we must first transform the way our buyers think. To do that, we must first understand how they think. If you don't already, I suggest that you regularly spend at least an hour with every new family talking about your value and what they value. This will help build an experience on which you can

build. The research included here may help some, but it's just a beginning. Winning the value equation requires that we use terminology that parents understand, connect classical Christian education values with values parents already have, and communicate unceasingly.

NOTES


1. Matt Whitling, "Sins of the Classroom," is available at <https://www.accsedu.org/ConferenceRecordings.ihtml?id=441761>.

2. Richard M. Gamble, ed., *The Great Tradition: Classic Readings on What It Means to*

Be an Educated Human Body (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009).


3. C.S. Lewis "Screwtape Proposes a Toast," in *The Screwtape Letters*.

4. "Discover Classical Christian Education" published by the Ambrose Group can be viewed at http://www.theambrosegroup.org/Parent_essentials.htm.





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Yes, He Can: Helping Parents Cultivate a Commitment to Excellence

by Sharon Daum and Melba Hanson, Cary Christian School

Parents have many expectations, opinions, and concerns about their child's school experiences. Their expectations are influenced by their own childhood experiences, by their peers, and by the prevailing attitudes of the culture in which they live. Teachers also have many different ideas about how to best educate their students. When parents and teachers partner together in a Christian school, there is often an underlying assumption that all involved share the same educational goals. However, as teachers and parents interact, they are often surprised to find that their perspectives are not the same. These differences can create conflicts that inhibit the cooperation and effectiveness of teachers and parents.

Christian school teachers and the parents with whom they partner need a common foundation to guide their thinking. "Cultural thinking" does not provide that foundation because it changes with each new generation of parents. Only the Bible can provide authoritative, unchanging truth to guide our thinking. There are two biblical truths in particular that we need to embrace. The first truth answers the question, who is in charge here? The second truth answers the question, who do I work for?

The first question we need to answer is, who is in charge here? The Bible makes it clear that God is our Creator, and we are His creatures (Col. 1:16, 17;

Psalm 46:10; Phil. 2:9–11). He has every right to demand our submission. Yet, in His divine wisdom, God allows us to choose whether we will submit to His authority or live autonomously. In Luke 6:46–49, Jesus made it clear that the choice we make, either to live a submissive life or an autonomous life, leads to two very different outcomes. He said, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me and hears my sayings and does them, I will show you what he is like; He is like a man building a house who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock . . . But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on earth without a foundation . . . And the ruin of that house was great." Jesus taught that submission to God's authority and adherence to His commands result in a stable, blessed life, but living autonomously results in a ruined life. There are also other passages in the Bible that promote the wisdom of submission (Prov. 1:7) and the foolishness of rebellion (Romans 1:20–32). So, though we have the freedom to choose whether to submit to God's authority or not, submission is clearly the best choice for us.

God has given parents the responsibility to teach their children the wisdom of submission (Eph. 6:4; Prov. 22:5, 6; Joshua 24:15; Deut. 6:6–9). This is not a lesson that most children are eager to learn. They are all born with a propensity to want their

own way and be their own boss (Isaiah 53:6). Yet, a parent who respects God's authority and wants what is best for his child will be willing to do what pleases God rather than to give in to what pleases the child. Parental discipline prepares children to live under the authority of their heavenly Father for the rest of their lives. Hebrews 12:9 states, "Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!" When parents consistently administer rewards for obedience and consequences for disobedience, they are helping their children understand how to live a life of submission to their heavenly Father. A teacher's classroom rules have the same function as household rules: they train a child to live a submissive life rather than an autonomous one. God is in authority over all of us. He has delegated authority to parents; parents have delegated authority to teachers; wise children will submit to authority and thereby build a solid foundation for life.

The second question we need to answer is "Who do I work for?" School is a child's first workplace outside the home. It is the place where he acquires the work skills he will use for the rest of his life. However, it is also the place where his attitude toward work is shaped. When schoolwork becomes difficult, and a child wants to accept mediocrity, he needs to know why he should pursue excellence. He needs a biblical view of work.

The Bible teaches that God created people to be workers. His first command to Adam and Eve

Sharon Daum and Melba Hanson teach at Cary Christian School, an ACCS accredited school in Durham, NC. Sharon teaches first grade while Melba teaches second grade. Learn more at <http://www.carychristianschool.org/>.

Yes, He Can . . .

was to be fruitful and multiply and to rule and subdue His creation (Gen.1:28; Gen. 2:15). Work was never part of the curse; facing difficulty in work was the curse (Gen. 3:17–19). God does not make a distinction between “secular” work and “sacred” work. Colossians 3:23, 24 states, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men . . . It is

the Lord Christ you are serving.” All work is a form of worship (Eph. 6:5–8; Rom.12:1, 2). God has uniquely gifted everyone (Eph. 2:10) and given them everything they need to do the work He wants them to do (2 Peter 1:3–8; Exodus 31:1–6; 1 Chron. 28:20–21). God rewards diligence and punishes laziness (Matt. 25:14–30; Prov. 12:24; Prov. 15:19). Faithfulness is more important to Him than achievement (Luke 16:10; Gal. 6:9). So, when a student questions, who do I work for? he needs to hear that he should not be working to please himself. He should be working to please a God who has created him and gifted him and given him everything he needs to achieve His standard of excellence.

There will be times throughout the year when these biblical truths are not penetrating the hearts and minds of the students. A teacher may need to request a parent-teacher conference in order to discuss a child’s attitude or behavior. Teachers and parents should be careful not to see the conference as a problem-solving session in the sense that the objective becomes attaining a “quick fix” for a problem. This “cultural thinking” will lead to

failed expectations. Instead, the parent-teacher conference should be seen as an opportunity to partner together with the parents to train the child in godly wisdom (Proverbs 22:6). Scripture should be your guide

Sharon and Melba’s 2010 conference workshop is a great resource for teachers preparing for parent conferences. Order the recording from the ACCS website. See Conferences > 2010 Conference Recordings.

in these areas. In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.” This is an ongoing process and should be viewed in such a way. Results may not be seen for weeks, months, or even years.

When a teacher expresses a concern about a student’s attitude toward school work, parents may respond with comments such as, “Your handwriting expectations are unreasonable” or “I tell my child it’s just fine to get an ‘N’ because I don’t want to hurt her self-esteem.” When this “cultural thinking” becomes evident, teachers should view this as an opportunity to remind parents that the student’s job is to honor God with his best work (Colossians 3:23). It is in Christ that we get our meaning and worth, and He is worthy to receive our very best effort. He is pleased when we demonstrate diligence and faithfulness. Encourage parents to stand firm against their child’s tendency to be lazy or to give up because success has not come quickly. God has promised to give that student everything he needs to accomplish a goal through God’s

grace and hard work (2 Peter 1:3-8).

When a teacher expresses concerns about a child’s behavior, parents may respond with comments such as, “God has made my child this way,” “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree,” or “This school is too strict.” When this “cultural thinking” becomes evident, teachers should view this as an opportunity to remind parents of the purpose of rules. Not only are

God’s rules for our good and our protection, but they also reveal our heart’s attitude toward authority. He wants our autonomous spirit replaced with a submissive spirit. Training children to submit to earthly authorities prepares them to submit to God’s authority (Hebrews 13:17). The Bible teaches that parents who love their children discipline them (Proverbs 3:11, 12; Proverbs 13:24). If teachers keep God’s Word in the forefront of their minds, and if they encourage parents to keep the standards high for their children, God will be glorified in the work He has called both to do. This is the commitment to excellence!

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Fathers & the Fatherless in Biblical Education

by Tom Garfield, Logos School

“And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

The above verse is often used by Christian educators, and rightly so, to demonstrate God’s view of the *kind* of instruction children are supposed to receive, that is, a completely God-centered one. What isn’t pointed out often enough from this verse is to *whom* the imperative is given, that is, the father. I know it isn’t pointed out enough because so many fathers, even in evangelical circles, have ignored the application of this clear teaching. To be fair, many fathers do consider this verse, but believe they are doing this adequately by regularly taking their families to church. The application is far more encompassing.

Years ago I had a conference with a mom who was agonizing over whether or not to have her child repeat a grade. She was asking my advice on what factors she should consider in making this tough decision. Instead of spending much time on answering her immediate questions, I told her as diplomatically as possible that this decision which was weighing on her so heavily was not hers to make; it was her *husband’s*. At first I was concerned that I may have offended her, but instead I had the joy of almost visibly seeing a burden fall from her shoulders. She was still understandably concerned for her child, but obviously had more peace knowing that indeed it

was her husband’s decision, and, being the good father he is, he would gladly assume that decision.

Unfortunately, that type of father is all too rare in the broader Christian community, not to mention our general American culture. It hasn’t always been so, as evidenced by this excerpt from

An established, maturing, classical Christian school should have as part of its culture the resolve and means to encourage all its fathers to fulfill their biblical role.

the Little House series: “Slowly and weightily, Pa said, ‘Miss Wilder, we want you to know that the school board stands with you to keep order in this school.’ He looked sternly over the whole room. ‘All you scholars must obey Miss Wilder, behave yourselves, and learn your lessons. We want a good school, and we are going to have it.’

“When Pa spoke like that, he meant what he said, and it would happen.” (*Little Town On the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder.)

I don’t know if Mrs. Laura Wilder was a Christian, but her father was certainly recognized as the authority for his children’s education. American history shows us that he was not unique or unusual in his assuming of that role.

God designed mothers to be the nurturers to their children, and as such, they naturally take a very active part in their children’s education. Moms typically feel the “nest-leaving” far more deeply than do the dads. When that first

little one starts kindergarten, it’s often mom who sheds the tears and diligently scrutinizes every aspect of the school’s instruction over those first critical years. As I’ve mentioned to many people, I would rather meet with a concerned dad vs. a concerned mom any day; I call it the “Mother Bear

Syndrome.” Nevertheless, having designed mothers that way, God still insists that dads take the lead in the education of their children.

How is this to be done? First, it means recognizing that it is the God-ordained role of a father to take the responsibility for his children’s welfare and education. This will likely mean some type of delegation of tasks, but the responsibility cannot be averted. Dad should be at every formal parent-teacher conference. He needs to know what his kids are studying and how well they’re doing. (Our four children were in Logos over a span of twenty-one years so I know how hard it is just to look at all their papers each night.) All problems in school, academic and disciplinary, should receive top priority by Dad. And a “well done!” from Dad should be frequent and meaningful.

At the same time, we live in a fallen world and even in Christian contexts hard providences come; not every family has a dad around to take the lead. This can be the result of a death of a beloved father (as we have experienced),

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Fathers & the Fatherless . . .

divorce (all too often), or even young single mothers.

Sometime during our fourth or fifth year as a struggling little Christian school, I got a unique phone call from Pastor Jim Wilson, a wonderful patriarch of the faith, and a long-time friend, asking me if we would consider enrolling a pregnant young lady. Right away. There was a high-school-aged young woman who lived not too far away and was facing a serious dilemma. Being pregnant during this Dark Age of abortion, she was trying to decide whether to quit school or kill her baby. She was leaning toward the latter since she wanted to finish school but didn't want to face the embarrassment of having her friends watch her "expand," so to speak.

How Jim knew the family of this girl I don't recall, but it didn't matter; Santa Claus knows fewer people than Jim Wilson! He wanted to let this family know that there would be a way for this girl to have her schooling and keep her baby, too. She would move to Moscow and attend Logos until the baby was born, which was at least a good six months away.

What other answer could I give but a hearty yes?! I didn't have to consult the school board, I knew what they'd say, but I got their assurance just the same. The tricky part was going to be informing the other students and their families—particularly the younger ones who were as yet a bit clueless about how these things happen, if you follow me. I wanted all the students to accept this young lady lovingly and respectfully. At the same time, I didn't want them to think that this situation was normal and fine.

So, before the young lady came, I let the parents know and asked

them to support us by talking to their children about how to treat her. I then went to the classrooms and told the kids the essentials: a pregnant girl was coming to attend our school. I said she had sinned by not being married before she had a baby but God says that babies are always a gift from Him. We were all to love her and help her through this difficult time.

The kids and staff couldn't have done better by this girl than they did during the time she was with us. In fact, the older girls were so supportive and kind I admit I was privately a bit worried, especially when the baby finally came and they all visited their new friend in the hospital, showering her with gifts and attention. All their natural and good instincts to love babies came out but I didn't want them to think this was as joyful and right an occasion as it should have been, within a covenant blessed by God. I didn't say anything and was gratified that my concerns were groundless as time went by.

In fact, within the next few years, there were two more young women in similar circumstances who came to us to be educated and loved through their pregnancies. We were happy to accept them both (thankfully they came at different times).

A God-centered education must deal with ALL of life, not just the "academic" side, if there is such a thing. God gave us life in all its complexities and nuances, from messy birth to hard-edged death, and He sustains us throughout. That message should be coming through to our students loud and clear each day, certainly from their families, as well as in each of our classrooms, no matter what grade or subject.

An established, maturing,

classical Christian school should have as part of its culture the resolve and means to encourage all its fathers to fulfill their biblical role. This resolve shows up, for instance, in how the discipline policy is followed, contacting dad first. And these fathers, by raising children with a down-to-the-ground view of how a family is to work, will have children who are a blessing to others. Those "others" will likely include children with single mothers who are also seeking to raise godly children in tough circumstances. In short, the scriptural mandate of caring for widows and the fatherless is very appropriate to these situations.

A vast number of problems, from behavioral to academic, that we currently experience in our schools (yes, even in classical Christian ones) could be dispelled if fathers assumed their God-given privileges and responsibilities toward their precious sons and daughters. Pray for and encourage those fathers you know who are doing the right thing.

Abdication for Dummies: The Best Ways to Ruin a Classical Christian Education

by Ty Fischer, Veritas Academy

Recently, I was talking with a seasoned headmaster from another ACCS school. It was his second day of school—we had yet to start. He had to cut away from the conversation for a moment. When he came back on the phone, he apologized.

Friend: Sorry about that—we have an angry parent and I am going to have to deal with an issue.

Me: On the second day?!?!?

Friend: Yep. Day two. You know what is funny is that I have never heard from this parent in all the time that their child has been here at school. I have never seen them at events. I have not run into them at class field trips. I have not heard word one . . . and now we have a big problem.

Our conversation went on from there and took a more general direction. Both of us are truly blessed. We serve in schools with a very high percentage of extremely excellent parents. Still, the idea of a book came to mind. My working title is: *How to Destroy a Classical Christian Education in Five Easy Steps*. Every year I could add a chapter or two to it. If I could choose one issue that represents the biggest problem for parents and causes the most damage to their children, it is, without a doubt, the sin of abdication. In this article, I will try to expose some telltale signs of abdication in hopes that you, by recognizing these patterns, can root them out of your life. If you do, you can optimize the education and training that your child can receive as you give them a classical Christian education.

Before I jump into this topic, I should lay my cards on the table. I empathize with abdicators. I am the father of four daughters. I know the feeling of seeing some ugly sinful pattern in one of them and being shocked by it. As I waded into the issue, I can see that there is a bigger issue—not with my daughter, but with me. Their sins were once little problems that could have been dealt with by simply nipping them in the bud. Now, I, and (sadly) they, are going to have to suffer for my reticence, distraction, and sloth. In summary, I know something about abdication, but all of this knowledge does not come from observation of the sin in others. Finally, I also have played another, trickier role in abdication: the role of facilitator. As a school, we are not a day-care center, a church, a restaurant, a semi-pro sports franchise, a health club, or a mall. Sometimes parents would like us to be. Sometimes parents leave us because we are not enough of these things for their tastes or for the tastes of their children. This is fine and well, but, of course, I have to pay people twice a month, so I know and understand the tension that headmasters feel when they try to strike a biblical balance as a school. Schools should desire to be a superb social environment with a good athletics program and tasty and inexpensive hot lunches once a week (a.k.a., pizza), and it is not bad to have a few super t-shirts that tastefully bear images of our school symbols. We hope to do this without becoming something

like a surrogate parent. I live in the soup every day. This article is written mainly to parents. So, with all cards facing you I will begin describing some of the top trends concerning parental abdication. These patterns of life destroy the classical Christian education that parents are giving to their sons and daughters.

First, we have the Environmental Fallacy. This occurs when parents falsely believe that parenting is only about finding a good environment and then letting your kids loose in it. These parents are only rumors at your school. To the teacher they might just be the distracted voice on the end of the phone line when they try to communicate to the parent. This type of parent fails to recognize the weight of Deuteronomy 6. In this famous passage, parents—particularly fathers—are required to make sure that Christian education is the air that their child breathes. It happens over doorways, on foreheads, and as you walk, lie down, and rise up. For this type of abdicator, they imagine their job as parents simply to be finding an environment where other people will do all the walking, rising up, and forehead training. This devastates a classical Christian education which is to unite—rather than divide—parents from children (see Malachi 4:6).

Next, we have an odd form of abdication which I call Poisoning the Delegate. Teachers in ACCS schools work with children because the parents of these children have *delegated* some of their authority for part of the day to the teacher. The teacher then becomes the eyes and the ears of the parent

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in the classroom. The teacher and the parent must keep lines of communication open and clear. Anything that gums up or distorts this communication should be of utmost concern to parents. At times, parents themselves can so harm this communication that they will inevitably lose some of the benefit of clear, prompt, and transparent communication from their child's teacher. Typically it occurs when an overbearing parent verbally levels a teacher the first time the teacher mentions anything negative about his child. In these sorts of situations the parent would rather keep a distorted view of their child than see the child with all of his problems and work diligently to fix them. We have had to ask families to leave because of this behavior (rarely, thank the Lord). It is a form of abdication that refuses to see reality or deal with it biblically.

The third type of abdication might be the most prevalent. It is called Male Pattern Abdication. This started a long time ago in a garden far, far away. It happens when Dad delegates everything educational (in the worst cases everything having to do with their child) to mom. Interestingly, I have noted that some dads who follow this pattern are strong proponents of male leadership in the home. They, unfortunately, seem to have read Ephesians 5:22 and 23, memorized it, applied it, and refused to read the next few verses, the Bible, or, I fear, any other literature. That world of words and books is surrendered to the feminine, permanently. These dads seem almost disoriented when I talk to them about their child. You might be involved in this type of abdication if you cannot name the academic

areas where your child is strong, or where they are struggling.

The fourth type of abdication is the Jane Austen Fallacy. Austen's writing is great because she shows you what is happening. She does not tell you everything. I tell my students time and again that if you want to write well, *show don't tell*. This type of abdication happens when parents tell their child how important a classical Christian education is and then live as if it is not important. Our personal statements of faith eventually shine through our lives. Our kids will know what we value. If you, as a parent, pay lip service to reading the Great Books or learning your times tables, but do not value books or learning, do not be surprised when your child smells hypocrisy. Too often these parents want the fruit of classical education without the roots. We do not give kids a classical Christian education because we want them to have the tools to wield dominion and economic dominance over the world. If Christians are faithful and as we faithfully train up our children, we can hope for God (who already gave us His Son) to supply us with all other good things that we need. The question as we educate our children, however, is do we want the tree or only the fruit? We teach them, pray for them, and work with them so that they would be engrafted into God's covenant people (Romans 11:11ff)—not so that we could be masters of the universe and drive really shiny cars. God calls us to love Him—not the blessings that He gives.

Finally, we come to the most deadly and most culturally pervasive form of abdication, the One Stop Shop Fallacy. This occurs when parents decide that their school should become

everything for their child and family. They want a school's devotional life to become a substitute for church. They want the activities and opportunities at school to dominate—yeah, squelch out—all other spheres of life. While schools should offer wonderful activities, sports, and should have clubs, schools are not churches—and should not be; schools are not surrogates for the family—and should not be. My school has no homework in most of grammar school. We do this so that families can have time to do other things. Schools cannot stop this sort of abdication, but they should be sensitive to it and influence families away from it.

Too often, parents—even Christian parents—have learned bad patterns of abdication from the culture. As schools, we have to carefully consider how we should—and should not—serve parents in a culture of abdication. Here are a few practical admonitions—ones sure *not* to solve all your problems in this area. These suggestions, however, might help you start to build a school that encourages and supports good parenting and discourages abdication. Here are two suggestions:

First, let your school be a school. (I have to say this to myself from time to time.) Your school is a school. It is not a church. It is not a family. It feels like a church sometimes because it is full of Christians and it feels like a family sometimes because we bear each other's burdens, but we are neither. Because of this, we are not able to correct all negative cultural patterns. We need the church to do this. When we see, or even worse and much more often true, think we see

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A Different Perspective on *In Loco Parentis*

by Ken Trotter and Joshua Gibbs, Trinitas Christian School

Trey arrived at school in the morning looking a bit hurried and disheveled in his burgundy shirt, khaki shorts, and loosely tied tennis shoes. It was his fourth week in ninth grade at Trinitas, his new school, and the socks he chose to complete his uniform did not match the guidelines. While this was a slight infraction, it was a matter requiring attention. Following our daily morning assembly, I asked Trey for a moment of his time before going to class.

KT: Hi, Trey. How are you doing?

Trey: Pretty well, Mr. Trotter.

KT: Is everything going okay?

Trey: Pretty good, sir. It's lot of work, but I like it.

KT: That's good. Trey, I wanted to speak with you because I noticed the socks you're wearing don't meet the uniform guidelines. I wasn't sure if you understood the policy: is it clear?

Trey: Yes, sir. I know these aren't the right kind of socks. This morning as I was getting dressed for school I went to the dryer and saw that my uniform was still pretty damp. I had another shirt and pants, but grabbed the only pair of socks I had in my drawer. I'm sorry.

KT: Nothing to be sorry for; I understand. I just wanted to make sure you understood the dress code policy and let you know that we expect you to abide by it.

Trey: Yes, sir. I understand the policy.

KT: Very good. I'll give you a note to give your parents so they know that we spoke and what we talked about. You have them sign it and bring it to me in the morning.

Trey: Yes, sir. Thanks Mr. Trotter.

Trey received the note for his parents, and the rest of the day was uneventful. The next morning Trey arrived just before our morning assembly began and my eyes immediately went to his socks. To my surprise, Trey was wearing the same socks from the previous day. He gave me a warm, "good morning" as he passed by and I responded in kind, and then asked him to stop by my office before his first class.

KT: I couldn't help but notice that you're wearing the same socks you wore yesterday.

Trey: Yes, sir.

I smiled.

KT: Still having problems with

the dryer?

Trey: No, sir.

KT: Did you have your parents sign the note I gave you yesterday?

Trey: No, sir.

KT: Trey, what do we call this?

Trey: Disobedience.

Of course Trey was correct. He had not complied with instructions to wear the proper socks, and failed to return the note as requested. But disobedience didn't quite sum up the situation.

KT: I think you can be more specific than disobedience.

Trey: Rebellion?

Quite honestly, I was surprised that he arrived at this answer so quickly.

KT: That's the word that crossed my mind. Trey, yesterday you made it clear to me that you understood the uniform policy and I accepted your excuse because I know sometimes things happen that interfere with our desire to do right. But what I see here is you trying to get around a school rule simply because you don't like it.

Trey: Yes, sir.

We discussed rebellion and together painted a picture of what a rebel looks like, drawing on the Scriptures and personal

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experiences. As we concluded, Trey seemed to understand that the socks were not the issue. We had uncovered a heart in need of care. I gave him a pair of the proper style socks to wear for the day, a second parent note for his parents, and sent him on his way.

The following day both notes were returned signed by Trey's father. I called his dad to see if he had any questions about the matter and to clear up any concerns. The call went well. We discussed Trey's transition to Trinitas, classes, friends, teachers, school rules, and, of course, the rebellion issue. Trey's father described their home to me helping me better understand his family. Following the conversation, I spoke with Trey's teachers and explored ways in which we could enhance our discipleship of this young man.

Trinitas Christian School, according to our mission statement, aims to ". . . assist Christian families in the education of their children . . ." Since the founding of the school, we've been careful to place great emphasis on that word assist. The fully realized *paideia* of God's family is not limited to academic education, nor does it preclude moral instruction, although it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that academics are the responsibility of the teacher and ethics the responsibility of the mother and father. To segregate the two is to unwittingly teach students that knowledge exists in a vacuum, that learning is neutral until ethics moves it, that two and two can make four without arousing the interest of a righteous God. Assisting Christian families in the education

of their children is not a simple divvying up of moral and academic responsibilities. You teach them algebra and we'll teach them not to steal. No deal. Assisting Christian families in educating their children is complicated, difficult, and involves the tedious process of cultivating a God-honoring social

grades, homework, profanity in classic texts, insults traded between students during class or whether to take Good Friday off. Even classical Christian apologists are often too embarrassed by the Bible to treat it as though the stories of Moses, riddles of Solomon, or theology of James had

. . . the Scriptures cannot be gerrymandered into places where it is convenient for us to have them. If the Bible has nothing to do with what is required of your third graders during lunch, there will be problems.

environment wherein parents can expect help in furthering the maturation of their children. This involves something far greater and far more nuanced than merely teaching history and science from a robust Christian worldview.

If this kind of strong relationship between students, teachers, and parents is going to exist, it must be underwritten by something even stronger than mere partnership, and so Scripture is the safe place wherein all moral and intellectual concerns are meted out. II Timothy 3:16–17 declares the sufficiency of Scripture. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

In this passage we find precise teaching on how Scripture forms not only the constitution under which every Christian community lives, but a framework for every Christian relationship. Too often, Paul's teaching here is treated as a guide only for pastoral counseling and parental admonition, but not a fit arbiter on matters concerning

anything to do with something as banal as, say, the school dress code. In doing so, we give ourselves over to the self-satisfaction of repeating mantras about worldview and invectives against Bob Jones while our students and parents grow weary, are allowed to despise school, and place their hope in the day they are liberated from the shackles of nominal worldvism. However, the Scriptures cannot be gerrymandered into places where it is convenient for us to have them. If the Bible has nothing to do with what is required of your third graders during lunch, there will be problems.

To succeed in its mission to faithfully assist Christian families, Trinitas must fashion a way of living that builds on the framework provided for Timothy. We must model a Christocentric lifestyle to fathers and mothers that recognizes their position of authority while enriching their understanding of familial roles and responsibilities. Scripture must be the root of all school policies and procedures, whether those policies concern the curriculum, statement of faith, or proper conduct at

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the drinking fountain. Right conduct in accordance with the teachings of Christ must be lived out by teachers and modeled in the cafeteria, practiced on the athletic fields, spoken in parent-teacher conferences, and discovered in science labs. The music of God's Word must resonate in the hallways and classrooms; He is the cellist, Scripture is the bow, our bodies are the strings, our lives are the symphony. The staff of the school is not only involved in offering education to students, but actively seeks out books and lectures not only on the subjects they teach, but on the very nature of education and discipleship which can then be shared and discussed with parents. The staff must seek out training to recognize when students miss the mark and how to tender thoughtful admonition, reproof that addresses the heart of the issue and leads students to an acknowledgment of their wrongdoing. With this understanding, students can be led to make proper and meaningful atonement for any offense and then be kindly placed back on the path of righteousness.

Garbed in his graduation gown, Trey stood smiling beside his mother and sisters. It was a joyous picture. His father walked up beside me and put his hand on my shoulder. "Thank you for a great four years," he said. "Quite honestly, I don't know who has learned the most from Trinitas—Trey or his mother and I."

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parenting problems with a family, we must recognize that we might not have the authority, power, or jurisdiction to fix the problem. We might find ourselves pointing parents back to their church for instruction and then hoping that they receive good counsel. Sometimes this will not happen. This can be terribly discouraging, but we need to keep teaching people to go to their ministers for instruction, because, believe me, as a headmaster, I do not have the time to be a pastor to all of the school families. I have another job because we are a school.

Second, make sure that open and honest communication flows in a consistent, regular manner from teacher to parents. Schools cannot act *in loco parentis* if teachers and parents do not know each other. This communication might look different in different circumstances, but I would encourage schools to make sure that this communication has both objective and subjective elements. This means that some of the communication needs to be in things like letter grades and numbers. This communication tells parents with a level of objectivity how their child is doing. This alone, however, does not tell the whole story about the student, so teachers need to make sure that they also communicate the growth or struggles that they are seeing in the life of the student in the classroom, in the hallways, and on the playground. This communication is critical.

Finally, I would highly recommend that teachers provide as much communication as possible to parents in a personal manner. Some do this by having a parent-teacher conference. I like having more regular phone communication. During these

interactions, teachers need to be the eyes and ears of the parents, helping parents see their child in all of his or her glory and with all his or her warts. Teachers also need to listen. Parents can help teachers see struggles that children are having and understand why these struggles might be occurring. All too often, odd behavior in a student makes so much more sense after a brief call to the parents. Once, I had a student who—without warning—started skipping homework, falling asleep in class, and being generally cranky. A frustrated teacher brought this concern to me and wanted to start disciplining the student. I recommended that we call the parents. When the teacher called, she found that the family's church was having a weeklong series of special services. These services lasted from 6 to 10 or 11 p.m. The child's normal bed time was 8 p.m. Adjustments were made, but they were made because a line of communication was opened.

Parenting is hard work. Abdication, at least initially, seems much, much easier. In the long run, however, the abdicator has a dreadful price to pay. The faithful parent who daily heads out to the garden to pull weeds, train vines, and sometimes shovel manure which will make the ground fruitful later, will see the harvest of thirty, sixty, and one hundred fold. The Bible points this parent toward this final, wonderful blessing in Psalm 128:3 and 4:

"Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD."

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