
So Your Parents are Thinking of Sending You to a Classical Christian School

by Joshua Gibbs

Hello there. If you are reading this, it means your parents are considering whether or not they should enroll you in a classical Christian school.

There are a number of directions things could go from here.

As your parents learn more about classical Christian education, they may decide this school is perfect for you. Or they may decide to withdraw their application and look for a school which better suits your needs and convictions. Or they may decide they want you to become a student here, but your application is denied for some reason. Or everything may go swimmingly, and you will be a student here (with a uniform and everything) next year—or next week. Of course, your own thoughts and feelings about the matter are important, too. If your parents want you to become a student at this school, but *you* are entirely opposed to it, the admissions office might determine this school is not a good fit for your family.

If you are reading this, it also means that you are old enough to think for yourself, reason, search your own heart, and take stock of your soul. This little pamphlet is not given to children, but to young adults. The thoughts and feelings of little children about their education matter much less than yours. Having reached a more mature age, you are capable of working *with* this school or *against* it. The administration and faculty of a classical Christian school have many beliefs, habits, and goals which are unlike those of teachers at other kinds of schools. If your parents accept the beliefs, habits, and goals of this school, but you do not, you need to discuss those disagreements with your parents before they enroll you here. While the final decision about whether you enroll at this school isn't yours, this school and your parents care what you think and want to hear you out.

At the moment, though, you probably don't know much about the beliefs, habits, and goals of a classical Christian school. The purpose of this pamphlet is to acquaint you with classical Christian education. If you enroll at this school, I want you to know what to expect from the teachers, the administration, and the curriculum. To keep you interested, I am going to describe classical Christian education in a sincere, unapologetic manner. This pamphlet is not promotional material for the school your parents are considering, and it is not my goal to persuade you that classical Christian education is great and that you should want to come to this school. I simply want to describe the sort of education this school offers and then let you decide whether you should enroll here. If the description intrigues you, great, but if you finish reading this pamphlet and are more skeptical than ever of this school, I will not have failed in my goals. I am not trying to get *everyone* to enroll at a classical Christian school, just the families who actually want a classical Christian education.

In the last decade or so, classical Christian schools have become quite popular, which has led many families to assume classical schools are not all that different from other private Christian schools. This assumption quickly leads families to become frustrated with classical Christian teachers, assignments, classes, and grades, as well as the special events the school offers (or doesn't offer). A classical Christian school *looks* like any other private school, after all, and so the confusion is a little understandable. I have encountered plenty of families who take the "classical" aspect of a classical Christian school to be a gimmick or a marketing strategy that doesn't entail any real difference from other private Christian schools, and who believe that "classical" just means it costs a little more, sort of the way "organic" food costs a little more even though it tastes the same.

After a year or so, these families discover that “classical” really isn’t a gimmick, but a genuinely distinct approach to schooling, and they become antagonistic toward the school because it does not offer what other schools do. Sometimes these families leave, but sometimes they stick around for years and complain the entire time.

I believe classical schools are responsible for accurately communicating how and why they are different to prospective families. If they do this, everyone is much happier in the long run. When students genuinely want what the teachers at a classical Christian school have to offer, they thrive. They come to love their schools so much that they return to visit for years after they graduate. When alumni from my school (Veritas School in Richmond, Virginia) are back in town for Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and spring break, they regularly drop by to talk with their favorite former teachers and even sit in on their classes. There are many ways in which a teacher evaluates his own performance as an educator, but having students come back and visit is quite high on the list.

This pamphlet is written for you, not your parents, so I would like to address some of the aspects of a classical Christian school which teenagers tend to find the most intriguing or perplexing. I don’t want to assume you know much about classical Christian education, even though you may. Instead, I will assume you know *a little* about the classical school your parents are contemplating, and that you’ve seen the campus, seen the students, and know just a little bit about what sort of classes are offered.

If you’ve already decided that you want to enroll at this school, fine, but relax. It’s a weighty decision you need to understand before you make your final decision.

If you’ve already decided that you don’t want to be enrolled here, keep reading anyway. The arguments you’ve presented to your parents about why this school is ridiculous are probably not well-informed, and this pamphlet is full of juicy claims that will help you make the case to your parents that classical Christian education is a complete waste of time.

If you’re undecided about this school, well done.

That’s a safe position. If I was you, I would also want to know more before making a final decision. It could be awful, but it could be wonderful, too.

How To Read This Pamphlet

Right now, there’s a good chance that you’re not all that excited to read this pamphlet. It’s certainly not the sort of thing you would choose to read. Your parents may have asked you to read it, or the school where you’re applying may even be requiring you to read it. You have already sized up the length of this pamphlet, determined it’s going to take about half an hour to read, and are considering skimming or even skipping the boring parts.

I’m not going to tell you that this pamphlet is actually exciting. It’s not. If you read it all the way to the end, you may find it interesting, strange, stupid, or profound, but it won’t be exciting. In this pamphlet, I am going to talk about why old books matter more than new books. I’m going to talk about beauty, truth, emotions, religion, history, and duty. There are no characters in this pamphlet. There is no plot. It’s just a description of how things *are* and how things *should be*.

Let me be honest with you, though: the sorts of things I am going to talk about in this pamphlet are the same sorts of things students at this school talk about every day in their literature classes, civics classes, theology classes, and so forth. In other words, this pamphlet is a bit like this school, which means that if you’re going to make it as a student at this school, you have to be able to make it through this pamphlet. If you hate this pamphlet and find it so boring that you can’t finish it without skimming and skipping, this school isn’t for you.

This pamphlet contains descriptions of classical Christian education, which is the kind of education this school offers, but it also contains a few arguments about *why* this school does the things it does. Some parts of this pamphlet will be easy to understand, but some parts will require you to pay very close attention and read slowly. If you do not have the sort of attention span that can handle the length and depth

of the arguments in this little pamphlet, this school is probably not for you. I hope you're not offended, but the fact of the matter is that many teenagers have so completely ruined their attention spans on video games and social media, they find it difficult to pay attention to anything for more than a few minutes, especially things that aren't exciting. There are many schools out there which have noted just how short the average teenager's attention span is and responded by changing their curriculum and their teaching methods to accommodate shorter attention spans. This school hasn't done that. This school doesn't change with the times. That's part of what it means that this is a classical school. It also means this isn't "an easy school."

I guess you could say this pamphlet is a sort of test, a test that will sort out whether your beliefs are compatible with the beliefs of this school, and a test of whether you have the sort of attention span necessary to make it here.

So, you're not even enrolled here yet and you've already been given your first test. How do you like that? You have to read this pamphlet without skimming or skipping around. You have to give half an hour of your time to something which isn't all that exciting and which contains a few tricky little passages that you'll have to read closely to understand.

Of course, there are also probably a few readers who are actually looking forward to getting into the meat of this pamphlet. "A challenge," they are saying. "I like that. School ought to be challenging. I can handle it."

The "Christian" Part of Classical Christian Education

There are many different kinds of Christians. There are Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and hundreds of other denominations. Most classical Christian schools are open to people of just about any denomination. For the moment, though, I would like to speak about just two kinds of Christians: Christians who go to church every Sunday and Christians who don't.

When I refer to Christians who go to church every Sunday, I mean every Sunday. They might very occasionally miss church because of illness, but that's pretty much the only reason they think legitimate for not being in church on Sunday morning. Week after week, month after month, year after year, they can be found in a church on Sunday morning. Let's call these sorts of people Every-Sunday Christians.

When I say there are also Christians who don't go to church every Sunday, I mean they go to church every so often. They might go once or twice a month, but they might also let six or seven weeks go by without making it to church. Let's call these sorts of people Every-So-Often Christians.

Regardless of what sort of church you go to, this school takes an approach to Christianity which is really only going to make sense to Every-Sunday Christians. Every-So-Often Christians will find themselves frustrated and confused by the sort of claims the teachers at this school make about Christianity. My intention in this pamphlet is not to argue that you should be an Every-Sunday Christian. I'm simply saying that at this school, Christianity is practiced and preached as an Every-Sunday sort of thing.

Let me explain.

Every-Sunday Christians don't go to church every Sunday because they feel like it. They wake up on Sunday morning tired, wanting to go back to bed. And when they get up on Sunday morning, they have plenty of little projects around the house they would like to start on, and they have hobbies they'd like to fuss with, and unfinished work that needs to be ready by Monday. They do not feel like going to church, but they go anyway because they believe it is their duty.

Because they believe going to church is a duty, they do not have to decide on Saturday night or Sunday morning whether they are going to church or not. They already know they're going. They have made a decision (years ago) to always go to church on Sunday.

Every-So-Often Christians do not regard church attendance as a duty or an obligation, which is to say

church attendance is not a priority. Instead, going to church is a thing they do when they feel like it, and they do not often feel like going to church. For this reason, Every-So-Often Christian families are less likely than Every-Sunday Christian families to pray together in the evening or read the Bible together on a daily basis. All of this makes Every-So-Often Christians much less inclined to talk about God on a regular basis, or to discuss the commands and precepts of God when thinking through important matters. If a certain person only attends church when he feels like it, he does not want his religion to inconvenience him, which means that when the teachings of Scripture become difficult to follow (because they are unpopular or thought “outdated”), the Every-So-Often Christian is more likely than the Every-Sunday Christian to simply do what is easy and popular.

However, the teachers at a classical Christian school regard it as their duty to bring the commands and precepts of God to bear on every conversation and every subject. Christianity is not just a part of life, it is our whole life. Christianity is not merely a thing we do, it is our way of doing everything. A classical Christian school is an Every-Sunday sort school, which means that loyalty to our churches and to God’s Word is more important than our feelings, our comfort, or other people’s feelings and comfort. For this reason, a classical Christian school is not embarrassed or ashamed of the teachings in the Bible that make people uncomfortable. It is more important to be faithful to God than to feel good.

Uniforms

The students at this school wear uniforms. Let’s talk about that.

Teenagers care a lot about clothes. Everybody does, but teenagers especially. When you’re a little kid, your parents dress you, but then around twelve or thirteen, you begin to feel silly in the clothes your parents choose for you. You want to dress yourself. Dressing yourself is a way of taking control of your life, a way of showing others that you are confident. At twelve or thirteen, it’s right that you should want to exert more control

over your life. You’re quickly approaching the age of eighteen, when you will become legally responsible for yourself, and your parents have to prepare you for that. When you dress yourself, you show others how you see yourself, which lets them know how you want to be treated. Dressing yourself is a form of self-expression and expressing yourself feels good. But there are more important things than feeling good.

Very few students like wearing uniforms. At best, students *tolerate* them, or they become so accustomed to uniforms that they stop noticing them. Nonetheless, private school students (even the students at this school) are usually excited when special days roll around and they’re not required to wear their uniforms and can wear whatever they like. Such days probably happen five or six times a year. As a teacher, I can also tell you that students are generally not at their best on days when they don’t have to wear their uniforms. They are more easily distracted, more rowdy, and more easily bored. But that’s not why students at this school wear uniforms.

Some people argue that uniforms save time because students don’t have to think about what they’re going to wear every day, and that uniforms are helpful in keeping schools safe because it is easier to identify people who shouldn’t be on the campus. While these statements have some merit, they all suggest the greatest benefit of uniforms is their efficiency and practicality. The goodness of uniforms runs deeper than this, though.

To be honest, classical Christian schools don’t place a high value on practicality. If they did, they would teach Spanish or French, not Latin. They would have accounting classes, not art appreciation electives. It’s not that practicality doesn’t matter at all to classical teachers, it’s just not a primary concern. Classical teachers believe that beauty and virtue matter more than efficiency and practicality, and beauty is never efficient. It is always extravagant. A beautiful house will keep out the wind and rain just as well as an ugly house, but the beautiful house is more expensive and requires more upkeep. Similarly, virtue isn’t always practical. Often enough, the sinful option is quicker and easier, at least in the short run.

I'm not saying that a private school uniform is the most beautiful sort of clothing imaginable, or that a student magically becomes good just by wearing it. However, I am saying that uniforms help train students to care about beauty and goodness. How? A uniform asks a student to care about something other than himself and his own comfort. Over the years, I have heard students make many different kinds of arguments against uniforms, but almost all of them come down to "what I would like," not what other people would like.

Christian high school students often borrow their values and priorities from popular culture, and popular culture places a high value on "expressing yourself," "finding yourself," and "being yourself." A uniform doesn't stop a student from expressing himself, it simply narrows the aspects of himself that he expresses. Every student is a unique individual, of course, but every student is also *a student*, and wearing a uniform reminds students of this fact.

When you're at a classical school, it is more important for you to act *like a student* than it is for you to act "like yourself." This school is not a place where you go to express yourself, it is a place where you go to learn wisdom. Neither is this school a stage where you go to "be yourself" and win the approval and praise of others. That's what social media is for, and a classical Christian school is not a platform set up for students to perform upon. Instead, a school is a place where you go to listen, to mature, to absorb wisdom and knowledge, and to be formed for virtue and good works. Wearing a uniform confirms your shared purpose with other students. You're a unique individual, true, but that's not why you go to a classical Christian school. At a classical Christian school, you will be treated like a teenager, like a Christian, like a boy or a girl, and like a student, all of which are identities you have in common with others. Consequently, at this school you are more likely to be told to "act like a Christian," "act like a gentleman," or "act like a lady," than you are to be told to "just be yourself." You attend a classical Christian school to learn what it means to be a Christian, a lady, or a gentleman. These are not terms we are free to define however we want, and at the age of sixteen or seventeen, no one really

cares what being a Christian means to you. They care that you learn what "being a Christian" means to the wise men and women whom history has vindicated. In speaking of Christ, St. John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30), and a classical Christian school is interested in helping you do this. Wearing a uniform is a small but significant way in which you can decrease, learn to be silent, and make room in your heart for the wisdom of Christ and His friends.

Some readers will take offense at these words, but I would imagine they come as a relief to others. Because a classical Christian school does not place a premium on self-expression, it is not a place where you are under pressure to impress your classmates, put forward fashionable opinions on gender and race, or entertain an audience. Instead, you are free to listen.

Think of it this way. People change a lot in their teenage years. There are plenty of songs, films, and books which you enjoy now that you will despise in three or four years. Things which seem important to you now will soon become boring, and things which bore you now will soon become interesting. If this seems unbelievable, just think of the sort of things which excited you four years ago, and the sorts of behavior which earned the respect of your friends back then. Most of the behaviors and accomplishments that make you popular in middle school aren't worth much in high school, and most of the things that make you popular in high school aren't worth much in college. Likewise, the accomplishments which make a person popular in college won't get him far in the early stages of his career. This is why classical schools don't treat "self-expression" as a priority. The "self" that you "express" at sixteen or seventeen is not going to last very long, which is another reason why it's not all that important to express it. Most people don't enter into a stable self-image until they hit their late 20s or early 30s, at which point they are embarrassed of all the self-expression they inflicted on others during high school.

In writing all this, I don't mean that the teachers at this school don't care what you think, or that they'll never ask you for your personal opinion about anything. Far

from it. Rather, I am offering you a candid defense of uniforms because contemporary American society—especially culture marketed to young people—absolutely despises all the virtues which uniforms attempt to cultivate in students. In requiring students to wear uniforms, a classical Christian school insists that following your heart and being yourself are not necessarily good.

The idea that being yourself isn't important is not one which people raised on social media and pop music will agree with. Classical Christian schools hold that all forms of self-expression must conform to standards of goodness that are indifferent to our feelings. In other words, all human beings have obligations to speak truth, love beauty, and practice goodness, whether we want to or not. As a result, classical Christian teachers do not regard, "That's just what I think," or, "That's just how I feel about the matter," as viable defenses for anything. All opinions, beliefs, and deeds are justifiable only if they are in service of God.

Truth, Goodness, Beauty, and Grades

I really ought to say something about the fact that this school is a private school. Plenty of people assume that private schools are places for rich kids who want to get ahead in life and become leaders, land high-paying jobs, get power, and change the world. There's a reason why private schools have that reputation, but this school isn't that sort of private school.

The writer Walker Percy once said, "You can get all A's and flunk life." This truth sits close to the hearts of classical Christian teachers. For instance, a certain student might perform well on tests, get into a great college, and enter a lucrative career, and yet be wildly unhappy and treat his family poorly. In other words, plenty of high school students graduate with great GPAs but go on to be lousy fathers and terrible husbands, in which case all their study and diligence in school was really for nothing. A high GPA won't keep anyone from being miserable or making others miserable.

Now, teachers at a classical Christian school *do* care about students "doing well" in the worldly sense of the term. If you want to get married and have kids, you want something good and God-ordained, and in order to have such a life, you need a job, a home, a car, and so forth. Simply put, you need money, and there is no point denying the fact that good grades turn into scholarships, scholarships turn into good colleges, good colleges turn into good jobs, and good jobs turn into good money. At the same time, I have been in plenty of arguments with parents who tried to convince me that their child's entire future was going to fall apart because of a low grade I gave on an essay.

The thing is, getting a C in a high school class isn't going to keep anybody from going to college. It *may* keep an ambitious student from going to the prestigious college of his dreams, but a classical Christian school doesn't exist to help ambitious students get into the highest realms of earthly success. There are some private schools that exist for that very reason, but not this one. While I care about my students landing jobs in the future, I am far more concerned that they don't "flunk life," as Walker Percy put it.

You don't have to spend much time in a classical Christian school before you hear someone mention "truth, goodness, and beauty." This is because classical Christian teachers believe that pursuing truth, goodness, and beauty is how you keep from flunking life. Obviously, classical Christian educators are not alone in their interest in truth, goodness, and beauty. Everybody talks about these concepts; however, classical Christian teachers mean something very particular when they use these words.

Many people these days say that truth is entirely relative, or that everybody has "their own truth." Similarly, modern people often say beauty is relative and that everyone is entitled to take pleasure from whatever art or music they like. In conversations about music, you have probably heard people say things like, "You like rock music, I like country, my dad likes jazz, but we don't need to sort out which music is good or bad because it's all a matter of opinion. Everybody likes different things. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." While modern people are less squishy about goodness

than beauty, they also tend to believe that what is right or wrong can change over time, and that behaviors which were thought evil in the past can—because of scientific discoveries or cultural change—suddenly be revealed as good and acceptable.

I should point out that the sort of people who believe that truth, goodness, and beauty are relative tend to bristle at the expression “flunk life.” Why? Because one person’s idea of flunking life might be another person’s vision of perfect contentment and happiness. What gives one person the right to force his vision of “acing life” on someone else?

However, classical Christian schools do not hold that truth, goodness, and beauty are relative. Instead, classical Christians believe that God Himself is truth, and that God Himself is goodness, and that God Himself is beauty. We believe that wherever we see truth, goodness, and beauty, God is revealing Himself to us. The greatest, fullest, and final revelation of God is Jesus Christ, and yet God reveals Himself in many other ways, as well.

Because a classical Christian school does not believe that truth, goodness, and beauty are relative, neither do they believe that “flunking life” is relative and that everyone is free to pursue whatever path in life they like. The fact that a grown man *enjoys* living in his parents’ basement and playing video games for three hours every day doesn’t mean his life is good. If he quits going to church because he has decided God is “too big to fit into one religion,” he isn’t “discovering his truth,” he is abandoning God. If a woman deserts her family to have an affair with her boss, she isn’t “figuring out who she is and what she needs,” she is flunking life. If she spends several hours every day posting photos and videos of herself on social media, she is not “being true to herself,” she’s just shallow and vain.

As much as I would like to get into definitions of truth, goodness, and beauty, it would simply be too big a task for this little pamphlet. For now, it is enough to say that classical Christians believe that truth, goodness, and beauty come from God, not from men,

which means we cannot make them into whatever we want. These concepts are not easy to define and can be tricky to talk about, but classical Christian educators believe that the great books, music, paintings, prayers, and ideas which have lasted teach us about the truth, goodness, and beauty of God.

Earlier I said that classical Christian teachers believe that pursuing truth, goodness, and beauty is what keeps a person from “flunking life.” It might be better to say that *learning to love* truth, goodness, and beauty is what makes a person’s life true, good, and beautiful. The teachers at this school can grade your geometry homework, your chemistry quizzes, and your essays about *Frankenstein*, but they can’t grade your love of beauty. The fact that they can’t grade your love of beauty doesn’t mean that they can’t show you beautiful things, describe beauty to you, and teach you how to love the God who reveals Himself in beauty. At the same time, classical teachers don’t believe that teaching geometry and showing students beautiful things are two different tasks. The geometry teacher at this school believes that geometry is beautiful and that we can discern the character of God in geometry. In other words, you don’t have to decide between learning geometry and learning to love beauty. The two tasks can be one and the same.

Learning to love beauty won’t get you ahead in the world, though, and the fact that classical teachers spend so much time on truth, beauty, and goodness proves annoying to students who just want to get ahead. Those students know that all the time devoted to beauty *could* be spent on facts and data and skills that would help them get ahead, which is what they want the most. “Thanks, but you can leave the whole ‘not flunking life’ thing to me,” they seem to say. “I think I can figure out how to love truth and beauty on my own. What I really need is for you to help me get good SAT scores.” And yet, it’s far easier to figure out the volume of a sphere on your own than it is to figure out how to love beauty on your own. Beautiful things are hard to love. But a classical Christian school exists to help you learn to love true, good, and beautiful things.

Good Taste

It might sound strange to say that “Beautiful things are hard to love,” so let me move back a few steps before we move forward again.

If it seems difficult to believe that beautiful things are hard to love, how about I start this section over with an easier claim?

Here it is: *Cool* things are *easy* to like.

And what makes something cool? Cool things are exciting, funny, sexy, provocative, or clever. Generally speaking, the most popular things in the world are cool, and cool things tend to be *new*. After all, the most popular songs in America right now are songs released in the last several months. The same is true of the most popular movies in the country right now and the most popular books.

There is a difference between cool things and beautiful things, though. Things that are very popular right now tend to not remain very popular for long because nothing stays new for long. The most popular song in the country this week won’t be anywhere near the top of the charts at this time next year. And why do very popular songs lose their popularity? When I ask my students this question, they usually say, “People get tired of them. They hear them too often.” This strikes me as an entirely fair answer. But why do we get tired of some songs but not others? Why are we still listening to Beethoven two hundred years later? Why are we still reading Homer three thousand years later? Why are we not tired of them yet?

The fact that very popular things quickly lose their popularity is evidence of just how attracted modern people are to new things, and not just new movies and books but new beliefs and ideas as well. As soon as something isn’t new anymore, most people lose interest.

The appeal of Beethoven and Homer is very different from the appeal of new, popular, cool things. Beethoven isn’t as exciting, funny, sexy, clever, or provocative as whatever’s at the top of the charts right now. The

people who listen to Beethoven have other reasons for listening to him. Beethoven isn’t wildly popular because his music is not easy to like. It’s demanding. Most people who like Beethoven had to *learn* to like Beethoven. The same is true of Homer, Virgil, Bach, Rembrandt, and pretty much every other thing this school wants to give you.

By your age, you are doubtless familiar with the concept of “acquiring a taste” for things. Coffee, wine, chocolate, olives, pungent cheeses, and oysters are foods that often require effort and practice to enjoy. There are also genres of music that can take a while to appreciate, like opera and jazz. Isn’t it interesting that there are some things which people don’t like and yet *they want to like them*, and other things which people are perfectly content to not like?

Many people admit to themselves that they wished they liked beautiful old things. A man scanning around a radio dial might find a piece of classical music, listen for a moment, and think, “I wish I liked this,” but then turn the dial to something newer, more exciting, and easier to like. Or a woman in a book store might pick up a copy of Homer’s *Odyssey*, flip to a random page in the middle, read a few lines, and think, “I wish I was the sort of person who understood and enjoyed books like this,” before putting the book back on the shelf and finding a more fashionable title that everybody is talking about. However, very few people pick up a lately published science fiction novel, read a line in the middle about time-travelling spies, and think, “I wish that I liked this sort of thing.” And very few people hear the chorus of a newly released pop song and think, “I wish I was into this.” But why? Why do we wish we liked some things but not others?

The sort of things that people wish they liked—i.e. the sort of things people try to acquire a taste for—have a few key attributes in common. First, they tend to be old things. It isn’t worth acquiring a taste for cool, popular things. By the time you acquire a taste for them, they won’t be new and popular anymore. Beethoven isn’t going anywhere, though. Beethoven’s music has lasted two hundred years, which means people will still be talking about Beethoven by the time you’ve learned

to like his music. Second, we want to acquire a taste for good things. We feel a sense of obligation to like good things, or things we know would be *good for us*, whereas we do not feel an obligation to like things that are designed merely to be pleasing. If you don't like a certain pop song or blockbuster film, you don't listen to it again or rewatch it. You simply wait for the next one, which will hopefully be more to your liking.

Because “popular” and “cool” are such short-lived qualities, people who only enjoy popular, cool things never like anything for all that long. They don't develop long relationships with books, music, films, or ideas, which means they lose the ability to think deeply about art, beauty, truth, and so forth. Thinking deeply about anything takes time. If you want to think deeply about books and music, you have to enjoy the sort of books and music you can listen to over the course of a lifetime. Classic books and music and art are the sorts of things you can enjoy at fifteen, twenty-five, thirty-five, fifty-five, seventy-five... We never outgrow them. Our appreciation of such things grows as we get older. As we get older, we understand them more deeply. However, if you don't like old things, you won't understand anything *deeply*. You will care too much about what is unimportant and not enough about what is important. The word we commonly use to describe such people is *shallow*.

There are a great many Christians in this world who secure perfect GPAs in high school, land scholarships at prestigious universities, enter lucrative careers, and are still shallow. The fact that a man is “saved” does not guarantee that he will not be needlessly miserable and discontented in this life. Some of the most miserable people I know are saved, but they never learned self-control or self-awareness. Anyone who wants to deeply love a husband or wife “for better or worse” or to endure persecution for worshipping the true God must learn to love deeply, which means loving year after year after year, even when it is unpleasant to do so.

So, how do you develop a taste for beautiful old things? To be honest, it's the same way you develop a taste for anything.

Imagine that you have a long-lost uncle who is a wildly successful coffee merchant. You know almost nothing about this uncle until he dies and his lawyers contact you and invite you to a reading of his will. In the will, you find your uncle has left you his entire coffee empire, which is worth tens of millions of dollars. However, there is a catch. You cannot receive the inheritance unless you can honestly claim that you love coffee. The lawyers are going to give you a lie detector test wherein you must say aloud, “I love coffee. Coffee is delicious and I deeply enjoy drinking it,” and not set the alarm off.

The problem is this: you *hate* coffee.

You have always hated coffee—from the first sip your father gave you when you were four years old up until today. But then the lawyers tell you that even the catch has a catch. If you cannot honestly claim you love coffee *today*, you may return in exactly one year and take the lie detector test. You tell the lawyers you will be back in a year.

In the meantime, you have one year to learn to love coffee. How would you do it?

When I have offered this same scenario to my students and asked them how they would learn to love coffee, they have given some very fine answers. They say they would begin by drinking coffee every day. Not buckets of coffee, but a few cups every morning. They would begin with lots of milk and sugar, then slowly decrease the amount of milk and sugar so the flavor of the coffee began to take over. “If you want to love something, you have to know *all* about it,” they say, and so they would learn as much as possible about coffee during that year: where it is grown, how it is grown, who grows it... “There must be many different kinds of coffee, as well,” they say, and so they would not drink only one kind of coffee, but coffee from Ethiopia, Kenya, Hawaii, Honduras, Ecuador, Sumatra, and so on. And they would learn all the many ways there is to make coffee: pour over, French press, AeroPress, moka pot, siphon... “It is easier to love something if you're surrounded by people who love it,” they say, and so they would pass the year in cafés and coffee

shops, watching people enjoy their coffee, talking with them about why they love coffee and what coffee they like best. As the year carried on, we can imagine slowly developing a tolerance for the taste of coffee, then a begrudging appreciation, a few moments of pleasure here and there, and then perhaps, toward the end, real and unfeigned *enjoyment*.

I think this is how we learn to love beautiful old things, too. We give a portion of every day to them. We do not need to throw ourselves at the classics and turn our backs on every new thing, but we must give old truths and old beauties their due. A classical education is not about the restoration of a golden age, but the preservation of golden things. To love them, we must learn as much about old beauties as we can, which means discerning how baroque music is different from neoclassical music, how Dante's poetry is different from Milton's poetry, how Rembrandt's style was different from Caravaggio's. Until we can name all these things and distinguish them one from another, they will seem to us like nothing more than silly and dull mysteries.

Finally, we need to surround ourselves by people who love the things we want to love, and we need to listen as they talk of their loves. For all these needs, this school exists. The teachers at this school want to help you develop a taste for beautiful things. This school is a place for students who are not content to merely do what is easy, fun, lucrative, and pleasant. This school is a place for people who are trying to develop a love for goodness and beauty and truth, even when goodness is humbling, beauty is unfashionable, and the truth hurts our feelings.

Finally

By this point, I hope I have said some things about this school which have given you pause. If you were excited at the thought of attending this school before reading this pamphlet, perhaps you now feel a bit more cautious. If the idea of coming here seemed

terrible before reading the pamphlet, perhaps you feel a little less resistant to the idea now. This pamphlet may have confirmed all your best hopes about this school or all your worst fears. Either way, let me suggest a few questions about this school for you and your parents to hash out.

First, if you are enrolled as a student here, what are you most afraid of missing out on? What pleasant things do other schools offer which this one doesn't?

Second, what interesting or good things does this school offer which other schools do not?

Third, are the beliefs of your family basically compatible with what I have written in this pamphlet, or did I say a lot of things that you disagreed with, or which offended you?

As you think about these questions, I encourage you to not merely compare this school with homeschooling, private, or public schooling options. You also need to compare this school with other private Christian schools that are not classical. The classical aspects of this school are not mere marketing, nor are they negotiable. The classical aspects of this school are daily and hourly felt by students and faculty alike.

It is not necessary for you to agree with or to like *everything* I have said in this pamphlet, but if you are going to become a student at this school, you need to discuss everything in this pamphlet that aggravated you with your parents. If you tend to think old things are worthless, boring, and silly, talk that over with your parents. If you attend a church where people tend to think that worship ought to be exciting, that new songs are better than old ones, and that "church" is an outdated term with too much baggage, you may want to show this pamphlet to your pastor and see what he thinks. As I said in the beginning, my goal has not been to persuade you to come to this school, but to describe this school for you so that you can make a good, informed decision. *Bon voyage*.