

# Why Veritas?

## A Parent's Perspective

### By Jeff Weiland

After a dozen years of intimate involvement with Mr. Zaffini and Veritas, I thought I might try to elaborate for our parents and students a bit of why this school is such an important (albeit small) and special undertaking. This effort was really prompted by my 9<sup>th</sup> grade son's return home last week with a paper he had written for his literature class. The class was studying Stevenson's "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" and my son's paper was an essay, curiously, on "Dr. Jekyll's Evil Side". I will not go in to all of the details but my son's major point was that evil resides in the nature of all of us. Dr. Jekyll could not transfer all of his evil to Mr. Hyde and in fact, his sinful nature would always seek evil. My son supported this thesis with many biblical references as this certainly is a central tenet of the Christian faith. I was struck by the depth of his thought on this classic story, and the integration of biblical truths that had occurred in the classroom discussion of this book.

This has been my observation of most of the classes at Veritas with each of our five children who have attended the school: they are learning critical thinking with depth of content. There clearly has been a major shift in education over the past century and I doubt that this type of thinking occurs in many other schools. When I was in high school in the 60's and studied Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, I recall thinking "that was a good monster story." No depth of thought there! My thoughts on this subject are not a public vs. Christian school problem but a subject that goes much deeper, to the heart of education itself. What is the chief end of education?

Nearly everyone today would say to "get a job" or "prepare for a vocation." As a result, our universities have become specialized vocational schools and our high school curricula have devolved into basically checklists of what the state deems necessary for students to take in order to move on to one of these universities. Although this utilitarian view is pervasive in society it is really an infant as ideas go, dating back only 100 years or so. Prior to this, the chief end of education was considered to be the molding of a civilized man or woman. Christians would add, to the glory of God! Remember the advanced education of our forefathers? The description of this "civilized human being" goes well beyond the modern notion of modest behavior, manners and etiquette, although these descriptors certainly apply. A civilized man understands that there are a few basic questions that undergird all of our thoughts and actions: Who is God? What is man? How should we then live? How should we then live together? Civilized man has wrestled with these questions and is familiar with the debate that has come forth over thousands of years. This intellectual exercise results in a "healthy mind," one that is able to think critically and broadly with perspective of the whole as opposed to the specialization of the narrow. In short, it is a liberal arts education.

Isn't this what we value most about Veritas? I have nothing against our specialized modes of education (of which I am a product as a physician). However, at what cost does it come? On what basis is the nuclear physicist making ethical decisions about nuclear power? Or the biologist about stem cell technology? Nothing in their highly focused training aids them in grappling with the broader ethical and moral issues they undoubtedly will encounter in their chosen field.