"Virtuality": *Competitor for the Hearts and Minds of Our Children*

The beginning of a new school year is a great reminder of parental responsibility. Perhaps a word of encouragement is in order: I would like to congratulate you on your decision to invest in Christian school education. Even as I congratulate you, I pause to caution you that Christian schooling is a support to your parenting—not a replacement for it.

Your Christian school is distinctive because it emphasizes Christ-centeredness in a very self-centered world. You can recognize this distinctive in your school's focus on spiritual formation in addition to the intellectual development of students. At its best, this emphasis on things spiritual permeates every learning experience. The intention is not to lessen the importance of mathematics or science but rather to help reveal the greater depth and importance of these disciplines and every other academic discipline—including their importance in the nurture and development of each student.

The crucial fact is that education is facing some of the stiffest competition that has ever existed in the world. Your children are facing a world in which nearly everything imaginable is vying for their attention—and more important—vying for their hearts and minds. Furthermore, this "vying for" comes attractively ensconced in a world of technology that has a nearly indescribable attraction for today's youth, as well as a potentially addictive grip on them.

Our technological world has introduced us to new terms such as *virtual reality*—perhaps better stated as "reality of the unreal." Too many individuals of every age level are finding it easier and more enjoyable to engage in "virtuality" rather than reality. The news is replete with the tragic stories of children who became ensnared in inappropriate and dangerous Internet contacts that led to explicit communications, as well as to disappearances, sexual abuse, and other horrors.

Virtual reality and the seeming anonymity of the Internet appear to mesmerize; that world intrigues, it lures, and too often it addicts. The fact is, something that can be very beneficial has become a vehicle for things that can be extremely evil. Some of the brightest and most gifted students have been lured into conduct that has resulted in grave harm to families.

One of the most popular sources of what has become the fear and nightmare of many parents is the popular website MySpace. More than 100 million people use this unique technological network to communicate and to cultivate an assortment of relationships.

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Regardless of the age of your students, you need to know all you can about the competition that is using technology to vie for the hearts and minds of youth. I highly recommend a relatively new book: *MySpace, MyKids: A Parent's Guide to Protecting Your Kids & Navigating MySpace.com* by Jason Illian (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007). You will find that this easy-to-read, 115-page paperback is a great resource for you in your parenting role.

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