

# The Threats that Come with Success and How to Deal with Them

*“For every 100 people who can stand the test of adversity, one can stand the test of prosperity.”*

Thomas Carlyle

The membership statistics for ACSI Eastern Canada are now in – and they’re pretty good, maybe even a bit “impressive”. All members from last year rejoined (they did in the previous year too) and 4 new school became members. In Ontario, 67% of elementary and high schools have increased their enrollments by over 15 students each while in an additional 5%, enrolment remained unchanged. In the Maritimes 78% of schools saw their enrolments grow by almost 18 students each on average.

That raises three genuine and, very serious concerns:

## ***1. The Easily Forgotten “Least of These”***

When this kind of growth is happening, finances are good and full paying families are reasonably plentiful. Consequently, it’s very easy for schools to forget about the families who understand the importance of Christian education for their children but genuinely can’t afford our tuition. In human terms they might be considered the people Jesus called “the least of these”. Here’s a portion of a letter I received a few of weeks ago:

*“My name is..... My wife and I are missionaries to Toronto to reach people from South Asian. We have four children. And three of our four are currently enrolled in public school in the Peel Region. I was immediately made aware of the situation with the public school system when we moved here, and we’ve been monitoring it very closely since arriving. **We debrief our kids everyday.** I’m wondering if there are any scholarships that (Christian) schools have for MK’s in this region. I feel like I don’t know all of the right questions to ask, but it’s serious enough for us to begin thinking about this. From what I have researched, Christian private education is very expensive. It’s more than we can afford, and I’m trying to understand our options.”*

In the near future, we can expect a lot more responsible Christian parents to come our way out of heartfelt concern for the harmful education their children receive in secular schools. And some families will have very limited financial resources, especially when they’re trying to survive in costly locations like the GTA. We can’t just ignore them. Even if schools say, ‘we’ll let low income folks come for free or nearly for free,’ that is not the answer. In the long run, that means teachers will have greater workloads with no increased pay—and that’s simply unjust. So, the obvious answer for schools and for our ACSI Eastern Canada office is to develop tuition assistance programmes – programmes that are funded with real money, not just with the well-meaning actions of administrators and board members at the expense of their teachers. The good news here is that secular education is so obviously anti-Christian, that financially blessed believers are more likely than ever to give so kids from low income families can attend our schools! The catch is, ***we need to ask them to give***, ask them often, ask them with wisdom gleaned from successful Canadian Christian school development leaders.

I like the way Jonathan McAloon at Fredericton Christian Academy puts it. He says something like, “I don’t ask people for money so we can have better school buildings or more computers or a bigger science lab. I ask them for money so more kids can have a solid Christian school education and come to know the Lord!”

## ***2. The Slow Fade Out of Faith***

It’s such a familiar a story that it hardly bears repeating. Fact is that most of our long-established universities, private schools and even the Ontario public schools were all created as distinctly Christian educational institutions. “Instructions in the schools,” said Egerton Ryerson, founder of the Ontario

Public School system, would be, ‘But a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal when not founded upon and sanctified by the undefiled and regenerating religion of Jesus Christ’ (as quoted in **Egerton Ryerson and His Times**, 1978, Macmillan Publishers). Today the “sounding brass” and “tinkling cymbal” in secular education are absolutely deafening.

But the fade into their current secular or anti-Christian positions, didn’t happen all at once. Convictions weakened gradually. At first, schools made small, seemingly unimportant compromises to their biblical distinctives in order to appease or please special interest groups and powerful individuals. Then there was the lure of public prestige and acclaim that can be so captivating, especially when it includes promises of more money. And if making a few minor religious concessions helps create “*a world class school*”, why not? How seductively that continues to be for independent schools. I don’t think our ACSI member school leaders would make major compromises of course. But the concessions that lead to the disappearance of genuine Christian education in our long-established universities and schools always started small - and they tended to arise when schools were ‘successful’, not when they were hard pressed. And if our “success” in modern Christian schools continues to increase, so will the temptation to compromise. Sometimes we can be pretty good at deceiving ourselves about the heart motives for our actions. Making compromises on biblical principles so a school can grow or achieve financial strength or act “for the greater good” can seem attractive. But, when it comes to our motives, we need greater trust in the principles of Scripture combined with a degree of healthy mistrust of our own hearts. That’s because, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

### ***3. When our Heads Grow Along with our Enrollments***

“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” Romans 12:3

Now I’m going to be personal—about me. I was the founding principal of several Christian schools in the booming expansive days of the 1970s and 80s. Like most Christian schools back then, our student numbers grew rapidly, almost exponentially, in a very few years—0 to 275 students from the first to second year at Brampton (then KRT) and 0 to 425 students at Queensway in the first 4 years, 0 to 275 in 5 years at Oakville. Although I made some stabs at humility about our growth (in my conversations at least), I believed that really, **I** caused most of that ‘success’—with God’s help along the way of course. I chose to focus on **my** school, **our** accomplishments, rather than recognizing that, first and foremost, our school was a small component of God’s amazing, North America-wide Kingdom movement in Christian education. The same was true back then as it is today, that Christian schooling is most effective for all of us when we purposefully and intentionally follow biblical principles without compromise and when we offer each other mutual support in order to advance God’s Kingdom. That means we dare not look on other schools as competitors because of their geographic proximity or think of some as inferiors because of their lack of material or academic blessings. And we dare not operate in ‘splendid isolation’ either.

“For what makes you different from anybody else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” Paul says in 1 Cor 4:7. It took me a long time to grasp that concept. As my Dad used to say, “We’re too soon old, and too late smart.”

Some people might read these thoughts about school growth and conclude that I’m a negative thinker, or a worrier or a killjoy. But maybe, just maybe, God taught me some things of value over these past 40

years in Christian schooling. And maybe they're worth passing on. Mark, Avis la Fin