

A quarterly magazine for Christian day school educators

Christian Educators Journal

*The
Earth
Is For Keeps*

Volume 39 No. 1 October 1999





Bert Witvoet

The Earth Deserves Our Creative Respect

For this first issue of the *Christian Educators Journal* under my editorship I have chosen the theme "This earth is for keeps." I was influenced in my choice of theme when I read a speech given by Dr. Al Wolters at Kozin University in Pusan, South Korea (please, see the first instalment of that speech on page 4 of this issue). But I have other reasons for choosing this theme as my introduction to the readership of CEJ.

As a Reformed thinker, I am accustomed to thinking of creation as the foundation of the Christian life. The triad of Creation, Fall and Redemption, which is echoed even in the Heidelberg Catechism, should signal to all that Jesus is a creation restorer before he is a soul savior (When I say "before," I don't mean to set up a chronological order here, as in creation first, then human beings; but I want to rank things according to main category and sub-categories). "For God so loved the world [of which you and I are a minuscule part] that he gave his one and only Son..." (John 3:16).

Whatever we may think of Wolters' thesis that in the end times God is not going to destroy this earth (and I do think he offers a compelling case), what is of the utmost importance, especially for educators, is that we take God's creation seriously - if only because God took so much pride in his composition that he paid himself the utmost compliment when he said, "That's good." We live in a world where goodness is devaluated enough that in order to say something positive about anything we have to resort to words like "fabulous, amazing, fantastic, stupendous."

When God says, "It is good," the praise rumbles like an earthquake. There just is no "better" or "best" when you apply divine standards. God's report card on himself has only one grade: "G" for good.

God wants his share

And it is this good creation - sullied, though not beyond the point of recognition - which deserves our respect and our care. We are part of this earth, we need this earth and we are answerable for how we use it.

As God's caretakers we approach his world with fear and

trembling, in the same way that we work out our salvation in fear and trembling. In fact, I don't think we need to separate

the two approaches. Our salvation finds expression in the redemption of all the things we are responsible for. Just think of the parable of the tenants in Matthew 21: 33-44. What was the vineyard owner's main concern? He wanted his share of the crop. And what does God want of us? He wants us to work with his investment and make something "good" out of our corner of this world.

If there is one quality that a teacher could be remembered for with great satisfaction, it is that he or she instilled in students a sense of the holiness of God's creation. It matters that we avoid polluting this earth. It matters that we notice a magnificent sunset. It matters that we show kindness to a street person or an enemy. God's imprint is on everything.

Stay alive by being lively

Not only must we tread carefully on this earth, we must also be bold and daring. God is a creative God who makes new things out of nothing. We, his imagebearers, should put a premium on creativity and initiative. Thomas Cahill in *How the Irish Saved Civilization* holds forth that the Roman empire collapsed because it had become a static civilization. In the beginning of the fifth century, originality had disappeared from Roman poetry. Civilized life lay in doing well what had been done before. "Doing the expected is the highest value, and the second highest is like it: receiving the appropriate admiration of one's peers for doing it."

There's a lesson here for Christian schools. Are we merely doing well what has been done before? Is doing the expected the highest value in the hope that we will gain the approbation of the principal, the board, the community? There's a saying that proclaims with an apparent finality of wisdom: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

But the "ain't broke" philosophy does not offer the whole picture. Life does not stand still. Society is always on the move. We are living organisms. Things change. And the only way to stay alive is to change. Not change for the sake of changing, but

Goodbye and Hello to Two Editors

Dear Lorna,

I hope you don't mind one more letter from me, Lorna. It's not a business memo this time. You've retired from the business of CEJ. So this is an occasion to remember, to reflect, and to say "thanks." I do this for myself, but also on behalf of the CEJ Board and its readers.



Lorna Van Gilst

It must be nearly 20 years ago when you made your appearance in my Calvin Summer Workshop for Language Arts and English teachers. I remember that for a creative writing project I teamed you up with a couple of other experienced language arts teachers, and the three of you produced a first-rate script.

When we worked together later on CSI projects, my impressions of your professional interests, classroom expertise and writing gifts were reinforced and deepened. In the early '80s, you wrote an article for CEJ, something few

practicing teachers find the time or courage to do. Not surprisingly, you soon became a column writer for CEJ: "Thinking Thirteen."

Still, you were not prepared for my call when it came, asking you to consider taking the managing editor's position that Lillian Grissen was vacating. But you began to pray about it, for you are a person of faith. And it became clear to you that in God's providence, the Lord was calling you to a new challenge. Therefore you accepted, as you put it in your first editorial in the fall of 1983, with "anticipation and apprehension."

It was absolutely the right thing to do. You steadily improved the appearance and appeal of the journal. You wrote editorials that were models of rhetorical excellence and provocative thought as you wrote about the whole spectrum of educational theory and praxis. You put together significant theme issues. You prodded us, inspired us, informed us and led us to think more seriously or more imaginatively about our task and purpose in Christian education. You reveled in the many opportunities you had to affect the shape of

(editorial cont'd from page 1)

change for the sake of vitality and health. Change for the sake of the Kingdom.

Teachers of the law

We can show respect for the earth by constantly finding new things while preserving the old that is good. Jesus has a word of advice for educators: "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of the house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old" (Matthew 13: 52). Maybe you want to restrict this injunction to Pharisees and Sadducees, but you need not. You, too, are teachers of the law. Creation is a law-filled environment to which we must subject ourselves again and again. Our Father's world is not a willy-nilly world. It's a world that needs to be approached according to its own lawful character. Pilots know that when they obey the physical laws of gravity and aerodynamics. Poets experience it when they grapple with images and words. Educators soon find out how each child must be treated according to his or her character and experiences.

I hope that our schools allow for experimentation and imagination. Don't give in to cynicism, which is an occupational hazard for teachers, who invariably experience a vast gap between their expectations and the students' overall level of curiosity and commitment. I know this is the beginning of the school year, a time when even the most cynical among you will reluctantly admit to a few snatches of hope and newness. But without becoming naive and idealistic, try intentionally to nurture a quality of freshness for the rest of the year. God's mercies are new every morning, and he wants our task to be new every day. God's creation, which includes our students and our curriculum, deserves a twinkle of joy in our eyes and an itch of curiosity in our minds.

That way God, the owner, is acknowledged and justified.

So let's magnify God creatively. We could do what an octogenarian said to his peers: "Let's praise the Lord in a way no young person can. Let's clack our dentures and rattle our bones. For the Lord is great." Now there's a fresh way of being old. You who are mostly young, or not quite over the hill, can do nothing less.

Christian education outside your own classroom and in the many persons and places along the way that, reciprocally, helped to shape you as a Christian teacher.

I had been an English teacher long enough to know that they usually are incredibly busy people. Yet you managed a full teaching load while giving an enormous amount of time and energy to CEJ. You did this as a junior high English teacher in Ripon, California; and you've done it for the last dozen years or so at Dordt College. Somehow you also found time to study for a summer at Cambridge, to attend EPA conferences and international Christian School conferences, to speak at regional conferences, to teach at the Kharkov Pedagogical University in the Ukraine, to earn the Ph.D., and, most recently, to spend a year as a Fulbright Scholar at the University de los Andes in Merida, Venezuela.

Pretty impressive, Lorna. Or, as you would want me to add, it's pretty impressive what the Lord, who calls us, enables us to accomplish when we are faithful to his call. You titled your first editorial, "Lord, Make Me an Instrument." The Lord answered your prayer, Lorna. You've been an instrument of his loving concern and wisdom. You "flourished as his image bearer and ... encouraged [us] to do so as well, in praise to God..." (editorial, October 1991). As you reiterated in your last editorial, "the role of the Christian educator is one of nurturing, of restoring, of appreciating what can be made wholesome and praising to God." Thank you for modeling what you've been teaching us these 15 years through CEJ, Lorna. As you continue your teaching in the English department at Dordt, and no doubt in other places too, we pray that the Lord will give you good health and continue to use you as his Instrument.

Love,

Henry Baron

Dear Bert,

Let me make it clear at once that I, a long-time CEJ junkie, am genuinely excited in welcoming you as the new managing editor. The readers should know that in early spring this past year the Board still had no candidate in sight. There was talk of the need for an interim editor, and some fingers were pointing my way. Obviously, a desperate situation. But in God's inscrutable providence, you were ready to retire from 17 years as editor of *Christian Courier*. As a reader of your

publication, I knew that, but it didn't register when I bumped into you in the Calvin bookstore in April. Later, we chatted a good while in my office before the thought hit me, "This could be the next CEJ editor; this could be the answer to prayer!" Well, to keep the story short, it turned out to be the answer to your prayer as well. For, in a way, your whole professional life can be seen as a superb preparation for this modest but significant challenge of giving voice to CEJ.

You came to Canada with your mother in 1950 as one of seven children. You were 16 and went to work in the fields and in a factory for the next five years. But you knew deep down that your future lay elsewhere. Thus, you graduated from Calvin College in 1959 with a major in Latin and English and minors in philosophy and French. You taught high school for 18 years, including some experience as vice-principal and principal. You earned your M.A. in English from the University of Toronto. But writing was in your bones. You edited the *Christian School Herald* and later *Vanguard* magazine. You wrote a column for the *Banner*. And in 1982 you became editor of *Calvinist Contact*, which later became *Christian Courier*.

I've read a fair number of your editorials, Bert. You're no muckraker. Neither are you wishy-washy. You don't skirt the issues and controversies of the day; instead, you go right to the heart of them and, in Christian wisdom and charity, you expose the core, analyze the arguments, and point to an informed response that consistently honors the lordship of Jesus Christ. Your college major and minors already indicated that you're a thinker, and that you love to shape thought in well-chosen language. Writing has surely been the Lord's calling for you.

What makes us particularly pleased is that your heart has been in Christian education all your life. You've always seen it as a vital means of maintaining and strengthening the maturity of the Church of Christ and of nurturing a proper understanding of this world in relation to its Creator. Even now you serve as chair of the Association of Christian Education in St. Catharines.

On behalf of the CEJ Board and its readers, welcome, Bert! We thank God that you were available and willing to take over Lorna's work. We pray that you will find joy in the work.

Henry Baron

Living the future Now (1)

The Earthliness of Our Eschatological Task by Dr. Al Wolters

Al Wolters is professor of biblical studies at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ont. He has taught philosophy and worldview studies at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ontario.

In this issue of the *Christian Educators Journal*, we publish the first part of a convocation address which the author delivered at Kosin University, a Christian university in Pusan, Korea, on March 3 and 4 of this year. The author began his speech by stating the importance of defining a proper relationship between the Bible and scholarship. The second half of his Kosin address will appear in our December issue.

The Scriptures are profoundly relevant to the Christian academic task, but their relevance is mediated primarily through a biblical worldview and a Christian philosophy. In many areas of academic work the Bible does not have a *direct* bearing on the Christian task in scholarship, but it most certainly does have an *indirect* bearing which is indispensable. Thus, the Bible teaches us very little, if anything at all, about nuclear physics, but the biblical doctrine of creation is of foundational significance for any Christian understanding of this scientific discipline. Similarly, the Scriptures are not concerned to teach a theory of human emotions, but it does teach a view of the nature of good and evil which is indispensable for any Christian theorizing about human emotionality.

In short, the tradition of doing Christian scholarship which I represent — a tradition associated with Dutch neo-Calvinism, and such thinkers as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd — seeks to avoid two equal and opposite errors in defining the relationship of the Scriptures to Christian

scholarship. The one error is that of most fundamentalism, which sees an immediate relationship between Bible and scholarship, and thus treats Genesis 1 as directly teaching scientific geology and astrophysics. The other error is that of most theological liberalism, which acknowledges no bearing of the Bible on scholarship at all, and thus treats Genesis 1 as altogether irrelevant to scientific geology and astrophysics.

The reformational tradition of Christian scholarship has sought to steer a course between these two extremes, between the Scylla of biblicism and the Charybdis of dualism. Instead, it has focused its attention on the task of formulating a biblical worldview and developing, in line with this worldview, a Christian philosophy, which can connect Scriptural teaching with the theoretical, epistemological and methodological roots of the academic disciplines. This is an arduous task, but a necessary one if we wish to honor both the authority of Scripture over all of life (including the life of the mind) and the unique nature of the academic enterprise.

It is within the context of this general conception of the nature of Christian scholarship that it is not altogether surprising that my own academic development has led me from philosophy to biblical studies. My interest in doing Christian philosophy developed into an interest in the worldview which must undergird it, and this, in turn, led me to the biblical writings which gave rise to the worldview.

It will come as no surprise, therefore, that I have chosen to address you today on a topic which again focuses on the Bible and a Christian worldview, and the relevance of the latter for our lives as Christians in the academy. I shall focus my attention on a crucial passage in 2 Peter 3, which I discussed in passing in my little book *Creation Regained:*

Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview (1985), which many of you know in its Korean translation. I shall first give a brief exposition of this passage, then discuss its worldview implications, and finally make a few comments on its relevance for Christians working in the academy today.

God's love causes delay

The passage which I have in mind is 2 Peter 3:3-13 (New International Version).

3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare [literally: will be found].

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God, and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

What the apostle describes here is the Day of the Lord, the great day of judgment which will bring to an end history as we know it and usher in the glorious eschatological future reserved for the children of God.

There is a great deal that could be said about this dramatic depiction of the coming Day of the Lord. In particular, it should be noted that this description serves the purpose of answering the scoffers, who were mocking the Christian expectation of the Second Coming (*parousia*), with its attendant divine judgment. There will indeed be a delay, the apostle says, but this delay is not because God is unfaithful to his promises, but because he is patient, “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (verse 9). In other words, the delay of the *parousia* is because of God’s love, his desire to give the entire human race an opportunity to come to repentance. In a word, the coming of the great and terrible Day of the Lord is being postponed because there is to be a period of missionary activity, when the gospel can be proclaimed to all nations. But when that missionary period is over, the Day of the Lord will surely come in all its fearfulness. This is clearly the main thrust of the passage.

Nevertheless, for my present purposes let me restrict myself to highlighting four

points which are often misunderstood and which are important for understanding the worldview implications of this crucial passage. These are: (1) the correct text of verse 10, (2) the nature of the “destruction” which is here predicted, (3) the underlying imagery which gives it coherence, and (4) the relationship of the present world to the future world.

A fiery end?

To begin with, then, we need to deal with a text-critical issue in verse 10. Many Greek manuscripts have a wording which can be literally translated as follows: “and the earth and the works in it *will be burned up*.” That is in fact the translation that we find in most Western Bible versions, from the days of the early church to the 20th century.

As a result there has been a long and powerful tradition in the Western church which conceived of the entire world, together with all “the works in it” as coming to a fiery *end* on the Day of the Lord. God will finally do away, not only with his earthly creation, but also with “the works in it” — an expression which I interpret to refer, among other things, to the cultural achievements of humankind. It is difficult to overestimate the enormous impact this vivid image has had on the eschatological imagination of Christendom, even though there is no other passage in Scripture which speaks of such a future annihilation of the cosmos by fire.

However, it has become clear since the mid-19th century that the oldest Greek manuscripts have a different wording, which can be translated “and the earth and the works in it *will be found*.” Almost all New Testament scholars now agree that this wording is probably the original one, and I am pleased to learn that the Korean version of the Bible follows that understanding of the text. In other

words, what the apostle Peter actually wrote was that the earth and the works contained in it will be *found* in the future cataclysm of the Day of the Lord.

The implications of this rendering are quite significant. It removes from the biblical picture of the coming Day of the Lord any suggestion that the world and the human culture which it contains will simply be discarded, that it will all go up in smoke like so much firewood. Instead, it suggests that in and through the terrible ordeal of God’s judgment, accompanied by intense heat and universal dissolution, the cosmos and human culture will not be annihilated or reduced to nothing, but will in some significant sense *survive*. God does not discard the earth which he has created, nor even the products of human activity which it contains, but rather he *salvages* them for his eschatological purposes.

Three stages of the same world

It may be objected against this reading of our passage that it everywhere seems to use the language of *destruction*. Consider the following phrases: “the day of judgment and *destruction*” (verse 7), “the elements will be *destroyed*,” (verse 10), “everything will be *destroyed* (verse 11), and “that day will bring about the *destruction* of the heavens” (verse 12). This brings us to our second exegetical point: the nature of the “destruction” which is here predicted.

In order to understand this properly, we must bear in mind that our passage speaks of three “worlds,” each consisting of heaven and earth: a world before the Flood, which is called “the world of that time” (verse 6); the world we inhabit now, between the Flood and the Day of the Lord, which is called “the present heavens and earth” (verse 7); and a future world after the Day, which is called “a new heaven and new earth” (verse 13). The three worlds (which are really the

same world in three periods of its history) are marked off from each other by two cosmic crises: the judgment by water in the Flood, and the judgment by fire on the Day.

In speaking of the future world judgment, the apostle is explicitly drawing a parallel with the earlier world judgment. Just as the former world was “destroyed” (verse 6), so the present world is facing the day of “destruction” (verse 7). However, just as the “destruction” wrought by the water did not cause the world to disappear (in fact, verse 7 says that it continues to be preserved “by the same word” by which it was created), so the “destruction” which will be wrought by the fire will not cause the world to disappear either. Just as the second world is the first one washed clean by water, so the third world will be the second one even more radically purged by fire. In other words, “destruction” in this context does not rule out survival; in fact, it presupposes the survival of that which is cleansed.

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the Greek verb which the NIV translates as “destroyed” in verses 10 and 11 should probably be rendered “dissolved,” to match the references to melting and heat in the context. But to dissolve is to liquefy; it is not to disappear. It presupposes that the substance which has dissolved continues to exist in another form.

Accordingly, what the apostle teaches us here is that the created earth, including all the “works” which humans have accomplished on it, will be “destroyed” in the sense that it will undergo a radical transformation, but a transformation which ensures its survival into the third world, which will follow the Day of the Lord.

A purified cosmos

We come now to our third exegetical

point: the underlying imagery which gives coherence to our passage. We have already noted a number of features in the text which suggest that the apostle has a specific image in mind: the image of God as the refiner of silver or gold, who puts the precious metal of his earthly creation into the crucible of his judgment, and who does so, not in order to discard it, but to purge and purify it. This basic image explains the references to fire and heat, to melting and dissolving, and to the survival of a substance despite its “destruction.” It also explains the suggestion of cleansing which is evoked by the parallel with the Flood, and by the Greek verbs in verses 10 and 12 which

*“God does not
discard the earth ...
nor even the
products of human
activity....”*

suggest red-hot metal and smelting. It is clear that the apostle is describing the Day of the Lord in terms of a cosmic crucible.

This understanding of the apostle’s imagery is clinched by a passage in Malachi, which supplies the Old Testament background to Peter’s eschatological language here. In a famous passage describing the Day of the Lord, Malachi writes:

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then

the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years. (Malachi 3:2-4, New International Version)

The great day of judgment will witness the appearance of the Lord as a refiner, one who puts gold or silver in the crucible in order to melt them. The great question is: who will be able to stand the test of that fiery day of God’s judgment? What can survive the heat of his anger? In Malachi’s vision of the Day, the fire will burn until the purification is accomplished, until “offerings in righteousness,” which are “acceptable to the Lord,” are found at the end of the purifying process. A few verses later the prophet expands on this image: “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace,” bringing a judgment which will mean destruction for the wicked but healing for the righteous (Malachi 4:1-2).

In Peter it is the entire cosmos, not just the Israelite priesthood, that is to be refined in the crucible of judgment on the great day of God’s appearance. In apocalyptic fashion the metaphor is given a cosmic application, for a renewed and purified heaven and earth is found at the end of the purifying process (verse 13).

The image of the crucible now also sheds new light on the puzzling verb “will be found.” We find the same use of this verb in a similar context in the first epistle of Peter, where we read the following:

...so that the genuineness of your faith — being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:7, New Revised Standard Version).

In the Greek, the parallel between the two passages is very striking, since both use the passive of the verb *heurisko* in an absolute sense to describe the result of a refining process which evokes the image of the crucible. There is other evidence as well that the Greek expression "to be found" can have the specialized metallurgical meaning "to emerge purified from the crucible."

We see therefore that all the details of the text seem to fit the basic image of God as the refiner who puts the sin-contaminated world into the crucible. Consequently, Peter's depiction of the Day of the Lord suggests not only judgment, but also hope, not only "destruction," but also purification.

Time and space remain

Finally, we address our fourth exegetical point: the relationship of the present world to the future world. In this connection I would like to underscore two features which characterize the way Peter here describes the connection between the two worlds which are separated by the Day of the Lord; that is, between the world in which we now live and the world of our eschatological hope. I will label the two features I have in mind: *continuity* and *acceleration*.

By continuity I mean the fact that the purified world, the one which is described in verse 13 as "a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" is substantially the same world as the created cosmos which we inhabit, but purged of its sinful impurities. To be sure, the removal of sin and all its effects will mean a dramatic discontinuity; as well, it is difficult to imagine what a sinless world would look like. But this is a discontinuity which is secondary to the underlying continuity provided by creation itself. It is the selfsame creation which will emerge purified from the crucible. God does not abandon the work of his hands; rather, he *salvages* it. The restored creation will lose its distortions and perversions, but there is no reason to suppose that it will lose its earthliness as well. The purified earth will still be the *earth*, with its physicality and vitality, its time and its space.

No doubt it is because of this fundamental continuity which unites our world with the future world that Peter can make the amazing statement that believers today, by living sanctified lives in our world, can *accelerate* the coming of the future world. "You ought to live holy and godly lives," he says, "as you look forward to the day of God and *speed* its coming" (verses 11-12). Apparently it is possible to speed up the coming of the great Day, and thus of the glorious new future, by living lives of sanctity and piety today. Furthermore, it is clear from the main thrust of the passage (the Day is delayed because God wants everyone to come to repentance) that the holy and

"It is clear that the apostle is describing the day of the Lord in terms of a cosmic crucible."

godly lives of God's people is closely tied to the missionary task of the church. The Day of the Lord is *delayed* for the sake of the church's witness to the world; it will be *accelerated* by the carrying out of that witness in the holy life of the church.

If we bear in mind the four points which we have covered — the correct reading "will be found," the relative nature of the "destruction" that is here predicted, the image of the refiner's crucible which unifies the whole, and the strong connectedness between our world and the next — we will have a more accurate conception of what the apostle teaches us here.

In our December issue, Dr. Wolters will focus on the worldview implications of the teaching found in 2 Peter 3.

Dordt Press

recent release

Falling Into Grace

by Laura Apol



This collection of poetry and prose by Dordt alumna Laura Apol explores the grace-filled experience of everyday moments. "The pieces in this collection. . . remind me of how deeply grace runs through and around each of our lives," says Apol, who teaches writing and children's literature at Michigan State University.

1998, paper, 99 pgs., \$10.25 U.S.
ISBN-932914-42-x

other titles

Letters to Lisa

by John Van Dyk

An engaging series of letters between a father (a classroom veteran) and his daughter (a fifth-grade teacher) explore what it means to teach in a Christian manner.

1997, paper, 210 pgs., \$11.95 U.S.
ISBN-932914-37-3

Patterns of the Western Mind

by John H. Kok

A Reformed Christian survey and critique of Western philosophy from the Greeks to the present, including the work of Reformed philosophers.

1998, paper, 263 pgs., \$12.50 U.S.
ISBN-932914-41-1

DORDT COLLEGE PRESS

phone: 712-722-6420
dordtpress@dordt.edu
www.dordt.edu/onlypub/dordtpress

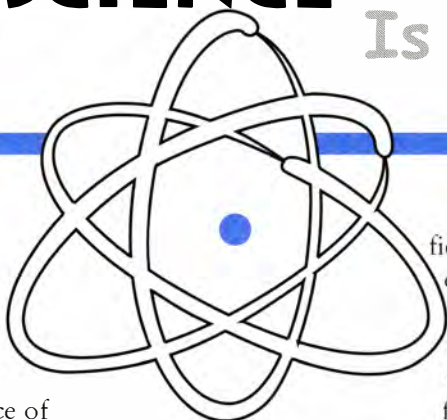


MAKING SCIENCE [^] INTERESTING

Is

by Craig D. Montgomery

Craig Montgomery is associate professor of chemistry at Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C.



Not long ago, I was at a conference of American Christian Schools International to offer a workshop entitled "Making Science Interesting." It wasn't until after the conference that I realized how inappropriate that title was. Science is not something we need to make interesting; rather, it *is* interesting. Unfortunately, many of our students don't believe that to be the case. The main reason for that is their own misconceptions of the scientific task, some of which I shall mention later.

Let me offer five suggestions that may help free science to be the interesting study that it is. As a result of each of the five suggestions I am making, I can recall past students who have been "turned on" to science. Why? Because these are not merely observations of what I have found to work in the past. Each one is grounded in biblical principles. In other words, these suggestions are consistent both with my experience as a teacher and with a Christian philosophy of education. They help define the task of science; that is, why we do science and how we do it.

Science as service

The first suggestion is that science for the Christian is, like anything else, a sacred activity; that is why we do science. All our work, all our activity is to be done to the glory of God. Moreover, I would suggest that in science, perhaps as well as in any other

field of endeavor, we can work to fulfill the "cultural mandate," to "have dominion" as stewards or vice-regents over the creation. An essential step in properly exercising stewardship over the creation is understanding something of it, as we seek to do in science.

In addition, science is very much a means by which we can love and serve our fellow humans. I think of my own area of chemistry and could point out a myriad of ways by which chemistry has bettered lives and relieved suffering (as well as, admittedly, introduced many problems). As Christian educators we need to impress upon students that science is a sacred activity; it is service to God and our fellow man, fulfilling both the cultural mandate and the Great

Commandment of Matthew 22:37-39. Perhaps in this way as well as any we can "make science interesting."

Compound interest

The second suggestion is related to the first. In order for students to view science as such a sacred activity, we need to make connections between science and the world as they experience it. This might be done in part by using demonstrations, but it should not be limited to that. Another method is story-telling; in this way we can build bridges between the concepts of science and everyday experience and culture.

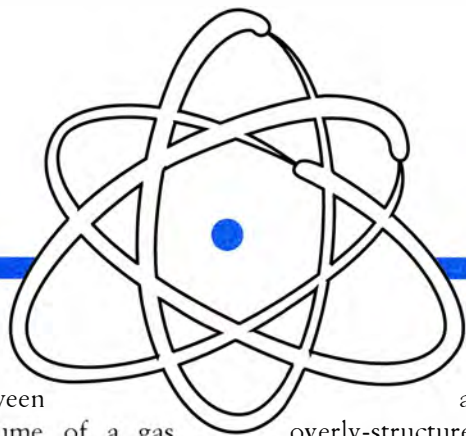
In my freshman chemistry class, I recently began to include a feature which I call "The Molecule of the Week." For a few minutes, I tell the story of an interesting compound from the real world, from theobromine in chocolate to the drug thalidomide.

More than excitement

The third suggestion may be obvious: that we need to use demonstrations. I say "obvious" because of the many individuals who, learning that I teach chemistry, relate stories of high school science teachers and their demonstrations. Clearly, demonstrations can make learning science a very memorable experience. However, I caution that our goal should not merely be to provide memorable moments. Demonstrations can be used for more than that. We need to pause and ask ourselves, "What is the purpose of this demonstration? What do I hope that the students gain by it?" I will mention two such purposes.

The first purpose involves the recognition of different learning styles. It is very possible to present a concept in a number of ways including a visual demonstration. For example, Boyles





Law, which describes the relationship between the pressure and volume of a gas sample, can be presented with a definition, with a proportionality statement, with an equation, with a graph or with a balloon demonstration.

However, a second purpose is that it ties the theory to concrete reality. For most students, the theory of chemistry or physics, for example, doesn't inspire them; they begin to get involved when they see demonstrated for them how a principle explains something that they encounter in everyday life. Like story-telling, demonstrations may enable students to connect scientific theory with the real world and thus to understand better how even science may be viewed as sacred activity.

Innate curiosity

The fourth suggestion again focuses on a proper understanding of the nature of science but this time by applying a biblical understanding of who we are as humans to the question of how we do science.

One common misconception that deters students from pursuing science arises out of the emphasis often placed on a series of steps called the "scientific method." Interestingly, only rarely will two scientists define the scientific method in the same manner.

How, then, is science done? Actually science is all about following our innate curiosity - discovering what our world is like and how it operates. Science thrives on unleashed natural curiosity about our world, a curiosity that is often best exemplified, interestingly, in pre-schoolers. Rather than emphasizing the scientific method, we need then simply to encourage our students' built-in curiosity. This requires hands-on experimentation and is best done through open-ended experiments and

research projects as opposed to overly-structured experiments. Of course, the best way (and the biblical way) to encourage this curiosity in our students is to model it ourselves as practicing scientists.

Furthermore, this view of science is entirely consistent with a biblical understanding of humanity. Indeed, science so defined is merely the outworking of what it means to be human. Although as finite creatures we have a limited understanding of the world about us, we are nevertheless creatures made in the image of God, having rational minds that are capable of and desirous of knowing more about what is around us - and that is science.

Avoid monotony

The fifth suggestion arises from a difficulty that I and many other science teachers encounter continually. Rather than developing and utilizing problem-solving skills, students seek merely to plug numbers into formulas or to follow a series of steps or algorithms. This "algorithm approach" to science is having at least two disastrous effects. First, students do not learn to think; as a result, we end up churning out bad scientists. Secondly, this approach makes science dry and monotonous.

And this approach is inconsistent with a Christian view of humanity. It fails to acknowledge and foster creativity and rationality in our students, those characteristics which are facets of the image of God. Using formulas or algorithms excessively constitutes a robotic approach to science and to teaching.

Rather than emphasizing equations, we need to focus on concepts and develop problem-solving skills in students.

But how? I offer a few possibilities:

* Avoid saying such things as "This

problem merely requires using the following equation...." When giving examples, always make sure that the students understand the concept being discussed and are not just memorizing an equation.

* Try to emphasize the thinking process that one goes through when solving a problem, not as the only way to solve it but as one way to solve it.

* Finally, some of us may need to change the way we conduct classes. The method of "peer instruction" switches the emphasis from the instructor, as the one who teaches and is the source of knowledge, to the student who learns by actively participating in problem-solving groups.

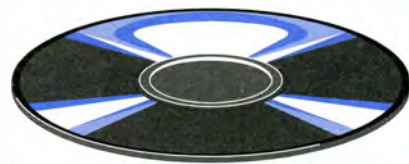
It is vital that we be willing to do what it takes to encourage thinking scientists and not robots programmed to perform a few tasks by following step-wise instructions. Indeed a number of these suggestions may demand that we rethink how we teach science. But whatever style and format we utilize, we must allow students to properly see science as a sacred activity.

Albert Einstein said it well, when he wrote: "I want to know God's thoughts; the rest are details."

Five suggestions:

- 1) Impress on students that doing science is service to God and man.
- 2) Make connections between science and the real world ("The Molecule of the Week").
- 3) Demonstrations recognize different learning styles and tie into everyday life.
- 4) Rather than emphasize the scientific method encourage the students' innate curiosity.
- 5) Instead of emphasizing equations and formulas focus on concepts and problem-solving skills.

Bob Dylan & . . .



by Charlie Adams

Charlie Adams is professor of engineering at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

Eight years ago, while visiting in Lincoln, Nebraska, I stopped in at a record store to look for a particular set of compact discs. To my delight, the store had not only what I was looking for, but it was on sale as well. So after spending a half-hour perusing the complete compact disc display, I walked out of the store \$40 poorer - but rich in anticipation of the aesthetic pleasure I would have by listening on my home stereo system to the almost three hours of music that I had just purchased.

Now that may seem like a rather routine experience, hardly one to write an essay about. Yet there are two elements of this experience that I consider quite remarkable. And they both have to do with the idiosyncrasies of the chief cultural group with which I identify - middle age, Reformed Christians.

Generational loneliness

The first element of the experience which I found a bit remarkable - if not disconcerting - was the consciousness I had, while examining the store's abundance of compact discs, that I was the only one in the store over 25 years old (20 years over, to be precise). I've reasoned that this sense of estrangement I often feel is related to the days and hours during which I usually shop. Having a more flexible job than most people, I have the freedom to avoid shopping with large crowds on weekends or during holidays. That means I usually visit these kinds of stores on a weekday, most often in the summer or during Christmas or Spring breaks. These, of course, are the same times that teenagers find themselves free to frequent such stores. But lately I've been feeling that

there's more to it than that. As I look around me in the record store, I have the sense that I am in a place designed for young people, not for us older fellows.

The second element of my compact disc shopping experience which created in me a kind of unsettling feeling of generational loneliness had to do with the music I purchased. You see, that three-disc set was not Handel's *Messiah*, or Bach's *Mass in B*, both of which I have and enjoy immensely. No, it wasn't classical music at all. It was Bob Dylan's *Bootleg Series, Volumes 1-3*; 58 songs which he recorded from 1962 through 1989 and which had not been previously released. I already have a number of Dylan's LPs and CDs, and so when I noticed an article in *Stereophile Magazine* reviewing this release, I read it carefully. It was so positive in its praise that I had to hear the music for myself. And speaking for myself, it was worth every one of those 40 dollars I spent on it.

But the point is this: there are very few people around with whom I can share my enthusiasm for this kind of music. In fact, there are only two! One is a colleague of

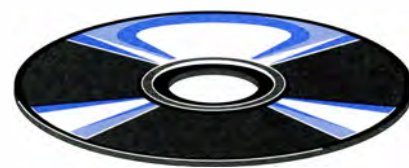
mine in the engineering department at Dordt who is 18 years my junior. And the other is my wife, who remains the vibrant and hip 19-year-old that I married 24 years ago.



Phony division

So what's the explanation? Why do music stores seem to be the exclusive domain of young people? And why is it so hard to find anyone who appreciates Bob Dylan's music among my middle-aged, Reformed acquaintances? (After all, Dylan hit the half-century mark himself 10 years ago!) You may be

..... Beethoven



tempted to respond, "It's because the stuff young people are listening to today, the stuff record stores primarily sell, isn't even music, it's just noise. And as for Bob Dylan, well, he can't even carry a tune!" For the most part, alas, I would have to agree. Much of what is today called pop music is like most of American television: a lot of sound and fury, signifying nothing. As one critic has called television "potato chips for the eyes," so we might refer to most pop music as "potato chips for the ears." And it's true that Bob Dylan's voice has none of the sonorous qualities that we associate with the voice of Pavarotti. But I would argue that there is far more to it than that. We cannot simply write off all pop music as inferior aesthetic drivel any more than we can write off all television as irredeemable and worthless visual junk.

Here we have what I think is the crux of the matter. The generation gap in music, the polarity between classical and pop music is, I believe, related to another polarity that we as a Christian community have blindly bought into the dualistic polarization of life into sacred and secular. Not only has this dualism led us to compartmentalize our faith so that it is active only for a few hours on Sunday, but it has poisoned and atrophied our appreciation of the rest of life. And nowhere is this more the case than in the area of music, where the field itself is shamelessly divided into sacred music and secular music.

Non-expert appreciation

Now, I'm no musician. I don't have the authority or the ability to analyze a musical piece, classical or popular, and subject it to a reasoned aesthetic critique. But just as I can appreciate a sunset, the sleek lines of a well-designed car, or my grandson's smile as he recognizes me and

grasps for my glasses, so too I can appreciate what my intuition tells me are elements of good music.

Brahms' *German Requiem* stirs in me a powerful awareness of the pain of death, even as it subtly reinforces my faith that death has been conquered. Dvorak's *Ninth Symphony* conveys fleeting images of a pristine creation, of great expanses of fertile land and flowing rivers of pure water which suggest not only the unspoiled wilderness that once was North America, but also the eternal expanse in which the New Jerusalem will one day soon appear.

And from *The Bootleg Series*, Bob Dylan singing "No More Auction Block" creates in my mind parallel images of 19th-century American slaves who escaped to freedom, and today's slaves of oppressive ideologies, beliefs and customs, who come to their senses, casting off the shackles of cultural conformity.

My point is that you don't have to be an expert to appreciate good elements in

music. You may not as easily be able to say what are bad elements in music, but with patience and listening experience, even those of us with musically deprived childhoods can begin to know the difference between good and bad elements in music.

Sweeping categories

But here's my main point. I've used two adjectives, "good" and "bad" to describe "elements" of music. My claim is that just as there are good and bad elements in engineering designs, in political theories, in worship services, and in economic systems, so likewise there are good and bad elements in musical pieces. By good and bad I mean obedient or disobedient, normative or anti-normative, in accordance with the way the Lord intends for his creation to work, or contrary to those intentions.

To categorize music as "sacred" and "secular," on the other hand, is to create sweeping and absolute categories which automatically accept or reject whatever you put into them. Doing so blinds us to the disobedient elements in some of the hymns we sing and leads us to reject many of the obedient elements in what we label as "secular" music, whether that be classical or pop.

As Reformed Christians we need to approach music with the same redemptive openness that we say we have for all other areas of life. We need to encourage musicians and music theorists who are Christians to become Christian musicians and Christian theorists by searching for and articulating God's norms for music. Then they will be able to help the rest of us discern more clearly what is good and what is bad in not only the creations of Beethoven, but also those of the Beatles and Bob Dylan.





A teacher invites her

by Carolyn Prinsen

Carolyn Prinsen will take a pregnancy leave of one year from teaching at the Wellandport Christian School in Wellandport, Ont. She and her husband live in St. Catharines, Ont.

"Dear God, thank you that Mrs. Prinsen is having a baby. Please let it come out okay."

These words were spoken by one of my third- and fourth-grade students. In his childlike way, he prayed for the protection of my unborn child - that it will be well when it arrives. Little does he know how fervently I also pray that it will "come out okay," but in a very different way!

Almost daily, the students pray for my baby. They have traveled with me thus far on this amazing journey of witnessing signs of new life. Their simplicity of faith and understanding has touched me time and time again. It being my first child, all of this is foreign territory to me. As I often do, I readily share (some of) my experiences with them. Their comments and prayers have inspired countless laughs and chuckles.

Together we are learning, in the most extraordinary way, some of life's most important lessons. God creates each of us special. It's a miracle that we are even here. Life is precious and a gift from God.

"Dear God, please be with Mrs. Prinsen's baby, that it will be healthy and

wealthy when it comes out."

When a student prayed this during circle prayer time, some chuckled a bit, quietly, trying hard to be respectful. The praying child, on a roll with a well-known cliché, meant well and realized what he said a little too late. Some students later reassured me that it doesn't really matter if the baby becomes wealthy or not. It's the "healthy" part that matters.

The simple (and sometimes muddled!) prayers or remarks of children are so touching. They see my belly grow ... and grow ... and jokingly inform me that I'm "getting fatter all the time"! I was once asked if I ever wished that we could take out the baby and just play with it for a little while.

They acknowledge the reality of life developing inside me - quiet, unseen, but very real. In an age when abortion is readily accepted as birth control and a baby does not achieve human status until it is born, these children faithfully maintain otherwise. This "bump" in my belly is not simply the result of eating too many potatoes (about which I often joke with them); it is a child, an individual created by God. I pray that they will never lose this innocent, yet critical understanding.

Their pure faith inspires me to be sure, each moment, to put the life of this unborn child in the hands of our Father. They remind me to entrust each person and each moment to his care. Suddenly, it becomes clearer. God creates each of us special. It's a miracle that we are even here. Life is precious and a gift from God.

"Dear God, please be with all the ladies who are having babies."

As my pregnancy progresses, we as a class have marveled at how we were created. Our memory work of Psalm 139: 13-14 instantly became more real to all of us. "For you knit me together in my

mother's womb.... I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." I can still see my students' faces and hear the gasps of amazement as they discovered the size of the baby's miniature, beating heart at 12 weeks. I can feel the wonder and awe they felt as they deciphered the ultrasound picture that I brought in two months later. Their feelings mirrored mine upon the realization that we, too, at one time more closely resembled imaginary, strange-looking creatures from outer space than human children. It makes me wonder how people can reject belief in God. How else could all this be so perfect?

And yet, it is not always perfect. One girl's baby brother had died some years ago; others knew of miscarriages their mothers had had. We ended up discussing what happens to babies who die, either before they are born or while they are very young. With tears in her eyes, the first student asked me, "Will I see him in heaven? He never got a chance to say that he loved Jesus!" Admitting to her that I did not know all the answers, I shared with her my own convictions: that God judges us according to what we are able to do and according to what we can be expected to know. I scrambled for some Bible verses that would comfort her and give her peace.

Through all of this, we came to the conclusion that we, as people, now had a particular responsibility to God and to those around us. We know how he wants us to live. We are able to do so much. We have been given so many tools and talents; it is up to us to use them wisely. Not all of us have the same talents. If we did, we would get a few things done well, but nothing else. Suddenly, it becomes clearer. God creates each of us special. It's a miracle that we are even here. Life is precious and a gift from God.

"Mrs. Prinsen, will you tell us about

pupils along on the road of pregnancy



Grades 3 and 4 at Wellandport Christian School pose with teachers Linda Lensink and Carolyn Prinsen

how the baby is going to get out?"

Despite the sheer faith and trust of my students about the miracle of life, there still remain questions about how it all works. We're all human, aren't we? God has given us minds that wonder, curiosity that seeks to be satisfied. Knowing that my students are no different, all I could do was hope that some questions just wouldn't come up, and wait.

But of course, it was not that simple. My students trust me, and I spend a considerable amount of time at the beginning of the year convincing them that they can ask me anything. However, in this case, they were disappointed to discover that I was not going to unravel the mystery for them. They simply had to make do, for now, without having me explain it for them. But it's hard for

anyone not to find answers when seeking, and these students are no exception.

In general, my students ask me countless questions about everything and expect that I have all the answers, just because I am their teacher. Many times, I tell them that I just don't know; that maybe I won't know until Jesus returns. If I do know, I usually share my understanding with them. However, sometimes I decide that it's best for them to wait until they can grasp the issue more fully.

It makes me think that God does the same with us, except that he does it perfectly, and I sometimes make poor decisions. He allows us to see certain things at particular times, knowing when we are capable of understanding. In his infinite wisdom, he is taking care. To us,

there are many mysteries, but in his time, all is made perfect. So, together with my husband, I now eagerly wait for this child to be born.

From its warm, protected hiding place, this tiny being has already taught my students, my husband and me so much about life. Together we are learning in the most extraordinary way some of life's most important lessons. God creates each of us special. It's a miracle that we are even here. Life is precious and a gift from God.

(Carolyn Prinsen has promised to write about her students' reactions after the birth of her child. Readers may want to respond to her article or to the question: Would you have told your third-and fourth-grade students how a child is born?)



Character

by Donna Smith

Donna Smith recently retired from teaching English at Altus High School in Altus, Oklahoma. She serves on the board of directors for the Association of Professional Oklahoma Educators and is the editor of that association's newsletter.

Sometimes God turns everyday lesson plans into four-star productions, and we get curtain calls - if we're ready to go on stage.

I teach high school seniors who plan to become classroom teachers. Recently, because of current fiascos in our nation's capitol, I had been unable to define character development to my students. Some said my examples were "nerdy"; some argued for interpretation based on sports stars and government officials. I decided we needed a brain-break. As our curriculum requires we observe preschoolers in day-care centers, now seemed the perfect time. We'd come back to character education later.

When we got to Little Learning School, we found the youngsters, three to five years old, smearing globs of white glue onto red and yellow paper strips, forming interlocking chains. Happy voices and scuffling feet all but drowned out the director's suggestions as she moved from one nouveau artiste to the other.

A hand tugged at my skirt. I looked down into a chubby cherub's face, wide, blue eyes, half-hidden behind a rake of honey-brown bangs.

"See what me and Shanta made?" She held one end of a lopsided chain. "We do everything together, don't we, Shanta?"

Shanta, her black braids laced with tiny crystal beads and her stubby, brown fingers holding the other end of the string

of lopsided circles, grinned up at me. "Yeah. Me and Rachel are best friends." Watching them hug, I wondered at how easily young children relate to each other, how indiscriminate they are to color, size, gender or handicap, and how innocently they fulfill the biblical teaching, "A man who has friends must show himself friendly..." (Prov. 18:24).



Unexpectedly, an idea formed. I had brought my students here not only to fulfill a part of our curriculum but also to give me time to re-plan my character development unit. Now that whole plan grinned up at me, sticky fingers picking at globby glue.

Work together. In their working together, Shanta and Rachel were

learning to respect each other's particular qualities. For the present, they had not yet learned separation by skin color, bank account, neighborhood, or brand-name clothing. In their innocence, they foreshadowed the values on which strength of character is based.

Share the credit. Rachel and Shanta swung their crooked paper chain between them.

"My pieces are red!" exclaimed Shanta.

"Yeah," sing-songed Rachel. "And mine are yellow."

"Red and yellow go together; red and yellow go together," they chanted, draping the ends of the sticky chain around each other's necks.

Their song echoed Paul's advice to Timothy - that we be not "high-minded" but that we do "good works" and are "willing to share" (1Tim. 6:17-18).

Seeing them so happy with their creation, happy in their charity of each giving the other the credit for its beauty, I recalled an educational conference earlier in the spring. At that time, I learned a beneficial lesson in sharing. The conference leader, besides speaking on the same topic I had presented three months before at a state English teachers' seminar, also took credit for copies of my original handouts. I couldn't help a surge of anger when I saw the folders. However, I had to admit that in her presentation she'd made better use of the material than I. I complimented her later, telling myself that the next time I gave a program I'd contact her for advice in presentation.

Practice compassion. In his letter from Rome, the Apostle Peter directs the new Christians to "be ... of one mind, having compassion one for another ... that ye should inherit a blessing" (1 Pet. 3:8). Peter's instructions exemplify an irony of

in Red and Yellow

life: Adults need instructing; children have intuitive wisdom.

For example, while the children were working together on their decorations, one tyke bounded from partner to partner, dabbing glue hither, thither and yon. In mid-bound, he stumbled against the table, squirting a thick, white stream of sticky-stuff onto the ruffled collar of Shanta's blouse.

"Oh, no!" cried Shanta, pulling at her collar. "My church shirt!" She pushed the bouncer. "You ruined it."

The diminutive pogo-person looked at Shanta, mouth pouting, eyes filling with tears.

Shanta stood still for a moment, then wiped her hands on her red denim pants. "That's all right, Paulie." She helped him to his feet. "Come on, you can help me and Rachel." She looked at me. "Paulie makes a lot of messes, but he don't mean to. He just don't know how to be still."

Shanta's compassionate act brought unexpected tears to my eyes. I heard the Apostle Peter giving her a standing ovation.

Learn perseverance. We spent part of our time observing the children on the playground. Having worked with secondary students for so many years, I had forgotten what it was like to be among whirling dervishes racing for swings, teeter-totters, jungle gyms and sand piles and scuffling for wagons, tricycles and pedal cars.

Ba-a-a-rump, bump, ba-a-a-rump, bump. Startled, I looked down to find Paulie pulling a bright red wagon, across my feet. Eyes straight ahead, he kept to the path, no matter what or who happened to be in his way. Two little people in blue overalls and matching red tennies skipped toward him. One brushed against the wagon, scattering the blocks. Paulie stopped, picked up the blocks, threw them back into the wagon.

But before he could straighten the

handle, a future Olympian hurdled the wagon, spilling the blocks again onto the ground. Surprised at his equanimity, I watched him turn the wagon upright and reach for the blocks, one by one. Having reloaded the wagon, he trudged off once again. When he turned the corner of the yard, the front wheels sank into a patch of deep sand, refusing to budge. That didn't stop him either. Dropping to his knees, he dug the sand away from the axle. Within minutes, he was on his way.

That wagon drama instant-replayed in my mind. How simple life would be if, as Paulie, we kept our eyes straight ahead and let nothing cost us our self-control. How simple life would be if we followed the advice of that other "Paulie" in his

letter to the Corinthians: "...be ye steadfast, unmoving ... your labor is not in vain..." (I Cor. 15:58).

At that moment, one of the workers appeared, ringing a brass bell.

"Yea! Snacks!"

Just inside, the children stopped, eyes wide, mouths agape. While they had been outside, someone had swagged the room with the paper chains. The linked circles made a chain long enough to drape from all corners of the room and hang in streamers from the center light fixture. After a silent moment, they raced from swag to streamer, excited at their creation.

All I could think of was that by working together the children had completed a vision of beauty. Granted, not all circles were the same size; some edges were uneven; many clashed in color; some ends were glue-smeared, while some were neatly stuck together; but all were linked, each playing its part in the colorful panorama.

Later, driving away from the day-care center, my students laughed, recalling how "cute and funny" the preschoolers had been. They didn't know it, but tomorrow they were in for a "four-star production." For tomorrow we'd be back in our character education mode, but we wouldn't be discussing the capitol crew, and we wouldn't be looking at Sports Illustrated. We'd be telling tales about Rachel, Shanta, Paulie, pogo-people, and red and yellow circles.

I felt a curtain call coming on.



The Limerick Phantom

by John A. Flanagan

John Flanagan is professor emeritus of education at Colorado State University. He lives in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Mr. Jones taught seventh-grade English. His class was where Greg began his life at Pershing Junior High. He reported there first period of the first day of classes three months ago.

Greg had a secret. He was the "Limerick Phantom." On 10 of the 12 Mondays since school opened, he had planted a limerick about one of his classmates. At first the sheet of paper appeared on the bulletin board in the back of the room. Then it showed up in a variety of ways. He almost got caught the fourth week.

That narrow escape gave him an idea. The next limerick from the phantom was about Greg.

*A poor English student named Greg
Dejectedly sat on a keg.
He had lost his bag lunch,
He had nothing to munch.
Not even an old hard-boiled egg.*

By putting himself as the target of the phantom, he guessed he would be safer. The whole game was a challenging experience for Greg. Each time he managed the trick, he felt a lot of satisfaction.

"Do you think Mr. Jones is the phantom?" Sara asked him.

Greg smiled. He wondered how many of his classmates suspected their teacher.

"No," he answered, "I don't think he'd do that to us."

"Well, it has to be somebody," Sara said insistently.

"Sure does," Greg called over his shoulder.

That night he sat at the small desk in his room. He had finished his homework, which gave him a chance to work on a new limerick. After two hours he was ready to type it on his dad's word

processor.

"Too late for that tonight," he thought as he began to read the pencilled copy aloud.

*Greetings from the limerick phantom:
A sweet seventh-grader named Clare
Had mountains of very red hair.
Her face flushed bright red,
Matched the hair on her head
If a boy ever gave her "Hi there!"*

Clare sat across from Greg. She had told him she doubted that the phantom would ever write about her. He felt she really wanted it to happen so he waited a week. This time Clare was it. On Monday, Greg found the classroom empty. He stuck the single sheet of paper on the bulletin board with a thumb tack and quickly left the room. Carefully he timed his return exactly as the bell sound ended. Clare was standing at the bulletin board reading her limerick. Although she blushed, she was still smiling when the bell signaled dismissal.

His best friend was Miles. Greg felt he must write about him, but he had to be cautious not to include anything that

Miles could recognize as something only he and Greg knew. He decided to write something ridiculous.

*We have a classmate called Miles
Whose behavior fills us with smiles.
His blue eyes turn brown
If he happens to frown.
If he cries, he weeps crocodiles.*

"Mr. Jones, he did it again," Sara reported.

Mr. Jones read the limerick aloud, as he had all the others, with a pleasant smile on his face. Greg joined his classmates in a laugh. He had successfully phantomized his friends for 10 weeks in a row. It had been a challenge, a really fun thing for him. Now, somehow, he began to feel uneasy about continuing his prank.

That night he lay in bed pondering what to do. He really didn't want the embarrassment of getting caught. Sooner or later, he began to tell himself, he would slip up. He pounded his pillow with his fist as he sat up in his bed.

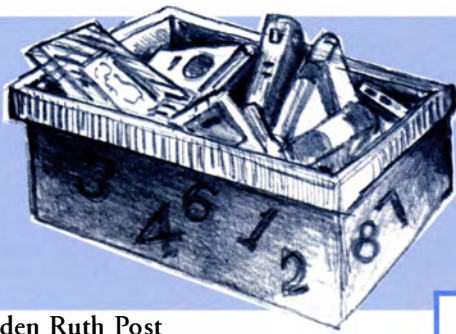
"Just one more," Greg said aloud. "I'll do Mr. Jones and quit."

On the following Monday, the teacher found the envelope on his desk. "What have we here?" he asked. He opened it, chuckled softly and then read the phantom's newest limerick.

*A smart English teacher named Jones
Filled all of his classroom with bones.
Each bone brought a frown,
Was it verb? Was it noun?
Puzzled pupils produced moans and groans.*

The teacher laughed happily with his students, then held up his hand. He was looking directly at Greg as he spoke. "Let's not catch the phantom," he said. "If we do, the limericks might stop." Greg stared firmly into the teacher's eyes. He was certain. He could see it there. Mr. Jones had caught him but he wasn't going to tell. Greg could see no escape. He would have to write more limericks.





Literacy

by Arden Ruth Post

Arden Post is professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**Good Morning
Empty your backpacks and
put on your P.E. shoes**

While the debate has raged over a traditional, skills-oriented approach to literacy instruction and the whole language philosophy of immersing children in literature and authentic contexts, a number of teachers have taken up the Literacy Learning model. Literacy Learning, often referred to as the "New Zealand Model," owes its origins to Marie Clay of New Zealand, who pioneered Reading Recovery, an intensive remedial reading program.

The basic tenets of Clay's theories have been advanced by American educators such as Gay Sue Pinnell of the Early Literacy Learning Institute at Ohio State University, who proposed components of early literacy instruction. Many teachers believe that the Literacy Learning model attempts to take "the best of both worlds": immersion in a rich literacy environment while teaching the skills in context. Of course, teachers put their own imprint on what they teach, as you will see in the following example.

Tricia's first-grade class

Tricia Gort was beginning her second year of teaching first grade at Zeeland Christian School when I visited her classroom. She delighted me with her ability to manage the class, to make productive use of time, to weave among listening, speaking, reading and writing, and to make use of authentic contexts while incorporating skills. Join me as we visit Tricia's class. I arrived as they were completing their devotions and were ready for literacy learning.

Morning message

The following message was written on a large pad which stood on an easel in the front of the room:

The children sat facing it and Tricia stood next to it. She invited children to tell what they knew about the underlined letters, then leading them to examine the sound of y, ck, cks and sh, reminding them of where they might have seen these letters before. The word "and" was noted as a sight word and a part of some other words, too, like "sand" and "land."

"Can you think of any other words that have 'and' in them?" she asked.

"Hand" and "band" were offered.

One child said, "Fand, oops, fan doesn't have a 'd' sound at the end."

"Right," exclaimed Tricia, "but you hear the 'an' sound, don't you? Who can think of words that have 'an' without the final d, like 'fan'?"

"Pan, tan, man" were suggested by children.

Modeling writing and interactive writing

Then it was time for writing. Tricia drew a "plan" for what she would write about, again using the large pad. She drew pictures of her cat and a shoe to serve as her plan, wrote a sentence about them and invited the children to suggest how she might spell each word as she wrote it. "What sound do you hear at the beginning of this? What letters make that sound?" When it was completed, the children read it aloud with her as she pointed to each word: "This morning my cat tried to untie my shoes."

Tricia then directed them to proofread with her. They checked the first two stars on the five-star Writing Chart: Date and Details. Later they would learn the other three-starred areas: Fix Backwards Letters, Fix Upper and Lower Case

Letters, Look for and Correct Word Wall Words.

Confidence in beginning writing

Tricia introduced me as a visitor to their school and invited me to say something to the class. I told them that I taught future teachers how to teach reading, writing, listening, speaking and spelling. One boy raised his hand and announced proudly, "We already know how to spell!" Building confidence in writing is a hallmark of Tricia's teaching while she gradually introduces the skills of "grown-up" writing and spelling.

To direct the students back to their desks, Tricia began singing an action song and the class joined in. Next it was time to write in their journals. Entries varied from pictures to letters to words to sentences. Tricia walked around the room, giving suggestions to reluctant writers.

Poetry time

Again Tricia used a song during transition time, as the children made their way over to the reading corner for poetry time. In a pocket chart on the wall were written the words of a poem which they said together as she directed their attention with a pointer. Each word of the poem was on a separate card in a pocket chart. Tricia then invited children to tell what word they knew. Allison chose the word "quicker." Tricia asked what she knew about it. Allison pronounced the word and said it had "a bossy r." After several children told what they knew about the words, Tricia asked, "Who can find a two-clap (two-syllable) word?" Several hands went up.

Letters and word work

The names of class members, also, provided an opportunity to study letters and sounds. Tricia asked Alden to say the letters in his name, using his name card

Learning:

Profile of a first-Grade Class

or his memory. The class then spelled his name aloud together. Alden stood by Tricia, and his fellow students were allowed to ask him questions. When I asked where he lived, another boy volunteered eagerly, "I know where you live, Alden!"

Alden was also asked what he had for breakfast, to which he responded, "Three sausages and two cupcakes."

The class reacted with surprise and giggles and, perhaps, a bit of envy!

Next Tricia handed slips of paper with the letters of Alden's name to one student who was invited to put them in order on the easel. Then the class named the letters as she removed them one by one and put them in Alden's envelope. Tricia opened her spiral notebook, which contained the name of one student per page, and invited the class to suggest other words that began with the same sound as Alden. This was challenging, but the class came up with the word *awl*. Tricia suggested "awl," although she told them it was an unusual word. Several children suggested other words like "apple," but having sounded them out, everyone agreed that the initial sound was not the same. Further discussion followed on the different sounds the letter *a* could make. Other children's names, also on pages in her book, had been easier and contained several words that began with the same sound.

Tricia gave the children small strips of paper and said, "Fold them like a hot dog - lengthwise." She told them to write their name and the date on the top part of the folded paper. They could copy the date from her morning message. On the bottom of the page, the children would



write the letters of Alden's name. Together teacher and students discussed how to form the letters while Tricia wrote them on the board.

Reading corner

It was time to hear stories in the reading corner. To get the students in place and focus their attention, Tricia chanted an action rhyme, "Watch my hands because

this might change," while clapping her hands and making various hand motions. The children joined in and were soon seated in front of her, chanting and imitating her movements. She read three books: *Pizza Man*, *Have You Seen My Cat?* and *Some Smug Slug*. She invited the children to read with her, especially *Pizza Man*, a repetitive book with which they were familiar. They discussed the sounds of letters in words and talked about what happened in the stories.

Individual and partner reading

Then it was time to get their book boxes. Each student's name and assigned number were on a box. The boxes contained books they knew how to read, a book with their personal story that Tricia had "published" as well as a collection of the poems they had read chorally from the pocket chart. They

were also told to pick two new books to read from the many classroom book baskets that were organized by topic or level of difficulty. Tricia knew that many children would want to read the three books she had just read aloud, so she asked me to call out three numbers between 1 and 19. The students whose numbers I called got to choose one of the books she read. When all the students had their book boxes and the two new books they chose to read, she told them, "Read everything in your book boxes!"

The children began reading aloud and seemed very comfortable with 19 little voices all reading something different. Tricia asked a few children to read to her. Finally she instructed the students to read their books to each other!

It can be done!

Tricia and her class provided an excellent and exciting example of literacy learning that occurred in a natural, integrated way, related to real communication experiences with real messages, real books and real language. She connected listening, speaking, reading and writing within a framework of stimulating activities. She exemplified balanced literacy instruction: the teaching of letter/sound relationships and the enjoyment of authentic reading/writing contexts. And this was only the first month of school!

References:

- Button, K., Johnson, M., & Furgerson, P. 1996. *Interactive Writing in a Primary Classroom*. The Reading Teacher, 49(6), 446-454.
- Fountas, I. and Pinnell, G. 1996. *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children*. Heinemann.
- Mooney, M. 1990. *Reading to, with, and by children*. Richard C. Owen Publishers.
- Post, L., Frankford, M., Marshalek, K. 1996. *Adapting Reading Recovery Strategies for Small Groups of Emergent Readers: A Continuum from Prereading to Guided Reading*. Paper presented at the International Reading Association 41st Annual Convention, New Orleans.
- Smith, J. & Elley, W. 1994. *Learning to Read in New Zealand*. Richard C. Owen Publishers.



by Josie Chinnery

Josie Chinnery teaches primary grades at Abbotsford Christian School, Heritage Campus, in Abbotsford, B.C.

What is God Like?

God! Three simple letters so easy to speak and toss around glibly in our day-to-day conversations. So easy to spell, yet so full of meaning, or meaningless.

G...O...D, meaning...yes, I know him well. At least I think I know him well. I visit him everyday. I greet him, thank him for a new day, and spend time with him in the Word. I meet him in family devotions. On Sunday, I worship him with many others and try to grasp hold of a bigger picture of who God is. A bigger picture. A God who touches my spirit with the warmth of a noonday sun after weeks of dreary wet days.

That is the story of God I share with my third-grade children. I tell them about the God who created and upholds his creation with infinite mercy and love. He made tiny krill to be consumed by gigantic whales. God's unfathomable imagination even has a sense of humor. We talk about God's fingerprints all over his creation. We share our stories. Blessings rain on the windows of our thought processes. Awestruck, we offer a silent prayer of thanksgiving.

I dig into his book, leafing through the tissue-thin pages and catch yet another glimpse of God. I show that picture to the children. I want them to meet the God who saved Noah and killed Goliath, the God who led Moses and kept his promise to Nehemiah.

God! He is still telling stories today. I tell stories of a sick dad who now loves life again. The children tell their stories of sick brothers or sisters, of a wonderful skiing trip and of a big fish that got away. Teachers, tell your stories and listen to the children. Take time to know each other and care for each other. Pray together.

Children love to pray for anything and everything. When we prayed for a lost ring on the playground, we all searched for it in the grass and bark mulch, never thinking it would be found. But it was. What rejoicing! Yes, God is also the God of small things.

Describing

Thinking about the many names of God in the Bible helped

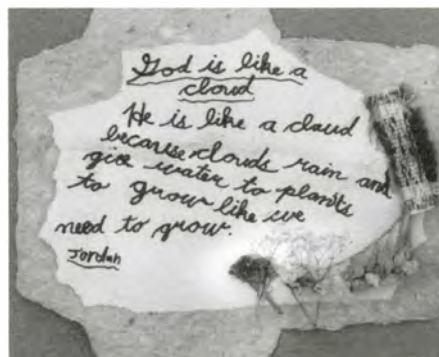
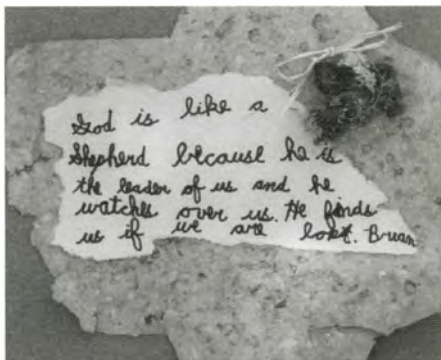
the children see a bigger picture of God and culminated in a writing experience. First, as a class we

brainstormed all the different names for God. We soon ran out of ideas. To keep the thoughts going, I suggested that we go through the alphabet and think of different names for God. The ideas kept rolling in. The children became eager to write down their own ideas. I was totally amazed with their writings. Here is an example, in alphabetical order:

ALMIGHTY, AWESOME
BEAUTIFUL, BRILLIANT
CREATOR, CONQUEROR
DIVINE DELIVERER
EVERLASTING FATHER
EVERYWHERE
GRACIOUS GIVER
HOLY IMAGINATIVE
JEHOVAH
KING OF KINGS
LOVING LIVING LIFE GIVER
MIGHTY ONE
NEVER FAILING
ONLY SON
PROMISE KEEPER
QUICK AS A FLASH
RIGHTEOUS REDEEMER
SAVIOR
THREE IN ONE
UNIVERSE BUILDER
VICTORY MAKER
WONDERFULL!!!!!!

Comparisons

Many of my creative inspirations come from books in our excellent school library. During our morning devotional, I started reading from a book entitled *What Is God Like?* by Mary E. Erickson. The author talks about God being like a potter, a rock, a guide, the sun. After reading the first three devotionals, I wondered what ideas the children might have about what God is like. What images flashed by in their minds



Creating Inclusive Community

Christ-centered educational, psychological, vocational, and advocacy services for people experiencing disabilities.

Consultation services available in areas of:

- **Inclusion**
- **Learning Disabilities**
- **ADHD**
- **Supported Employment**



Christian Learning Center

Contact: R.H. "Bear" Berends, 2520 Eastern Ave. SE,
Grand Rapids, MI 49507 Phone: 616-245-8388
Fax: 616-245-9807 E-mail: CLCNetwork@aol.com

when I said that God is like a king?

I asked them to relate their images before I read the devotional, and was amazed at their creative ideas and zest for sharing. When the book was finished, the children wrote down some of those thoughts in their journals. When I read the journals that evening, I was astounded with the responses. Here are a few examples.

"God is like a dishwasher. Dirty dishes are placed in a dishwasher and the water rushes over and around them. Then they are clean. That's just like God's love pouring over us and washing all our sins out of our heart."

"God is like my everlasting twisty, high-up tree fort. God is forever just like my tree fort. He is up high and looks over all of his children. I can see lots in my fort. Its twisty branches keep my hut safe. God will always keep me safe."

"God is like the sand. Have you ever counted the sand? That's how big God is. The sand goes on for miles and miles. God's love goes on and on. I think it goes to the other side of the world. That's just like the sand."

Constructing

These pictures of God could create everlasting memories and treasures of the heart. Last year, while working with the autumn theme, "It Is God's World After All," we made paper. The children worked in groups of four. They tore up a half sheet of newspaper into tiny pieces and placed them into a liter jar of warm water. The jar was left to stand for an hour. Then each group decided what color paper they wanted, and the appropriate food coloring was added to each jar. The children had to shake their jars until the paper looked like mashed oatmeal. Then each child poured their mixture over a framed screen.

After a few minutes the screen was tipped over on a shiny plastic card, a bit bigger than the paper-making mixture. The paper was left to dry overnight and was easily lifted off the shiny plastic the next morning. One group of children made paper in the morning and one group in the afternoon. Sometimes I worked with the children; sometimes a parent helper took over.

Dried flowers, grasses, petals or seeds may be added. They need to be very fine or flat because pieces of wheat and lavender make holes in the paper. Maybe if you grind them up it might work and give a special effect.

The children were delighted to choose one of their journal entries on what God is like and record it on home-made recycled paper. The month was April, so this made a great Mother's Day gift. After the writing was completed, the children lined up to add a personal touch of dried flowers, ribbon or fabric. I held the glue gun and they created the masterpiece. This became a dazzling picture of God given to a special mom by a loving child - a treasure to be framed, an image to celebrate the goodness of God. The name of all names. YAWEH. GOD IS.

Reference: Mary E. Erickson. 1990. *What Is God Like?* Weston, Ont.: David C. Cook Publishing Co.

Reader Response: Homeschoolers Are Not Covenant Breakers

Mr. Illman is off base in his article "Schooling for Covenant Kids" (CEJ, April '99). I have taught for 15 years at Southwest Christian High School, in Edgerton, MN, and support Christian education. My own three children are using the Christian education system. But

I find that the tone of his article wrongly condemns homeschoolers.

He quotes a previous article which said that "Homeschoolers are, for the most part, independent of any covenantal relationship." How can this be? The primary covenant relationship is between

parents and their children. To elevate the school to the level he does is wrong. At baptism, I, as a parent, promised God to raise my children in the fear of the Lord - the school was not there making the same promise.

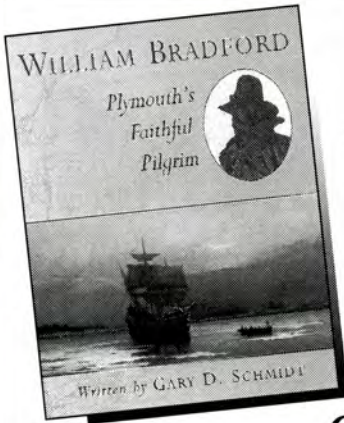

The school is a vehicle I choose to help me in this task. What if the school fails? According to Illman, parents are sinning by taking a very viable option, homeschooling, one that served humankind well for thousands of years. Have generations of parents failed to keep covenant because there were no day schools in place? Are parents sinning, then, who send their children to public schools when Christian schools are available?

Later on he says, "We can remind them that schooling without the umbrella of authority provided by the Christian community is unbiblical." Then he quotes Deuteronomy 6:6-8. I find that ironic. It is the same verse homeschoolers use to carry out their responsibility to their children. That verse does not condemn homeschoolers. Rather, many of these parents choose to be more personally involved in the day-to-day training of their children. Are we as educators the only people who possess the ability to train the next generation? Are we perhaps threatened by the average person who does an excellent job of educating his or her child? Test scores have proven these children receive an excellent education through this system.

The article in general seems to have a magical view of the covenant, as if after the baptismal ceremony a host of evils can be ignored. Having a child in the Christian school doesn't automatically put him in the covenant.

It does seem to me that in offering some solutions to this "problem," Illman might be on to something that will help education move into the next century. Perhaps more education should take place at home while the school becomes the facilitator. His idea of "overseeing independent studies mixed with day campus classes" is worth investigating.

Leland Vanderaa
Edgerton, MN

Tales of Hope and Courage

**WILLIAM
BRADFORD**
*Plymouth's
Faithful Pilgrim*
Written by **Gary D. Schmidt**

"Schmidt paints a warm and cohesive picture of William Bradford."
— *KIRKUS REVIEWS*


*Ages 10 and up * 211 pages
* 63 photos*
Hardcover · ISBN 0-8028-5151-7
· \$18.00
Paperback · ISBN 0-8028-5148-7
· \$10.00

**PRINCESS
KA'IULANI**
*Hope of a Nation,
Heart of a People*
Written by **Sharon Linnéa**

A photobiography of the most beloved figure in Hawaiian history and her heroic fight for Hawaiian independence

*Ages 10 and up * 252 pages
* 97 photos*
Hardcover · ISBN 0-8028-5145-2
· \$18.00
Paperback · ISBN 0-8208-5088-X
· \$10.00

At your bookstore,
or call 800-253-7521
FAX: 616-459-6540
E-mail: sales@eerdmans.com

8022  **EERDMANS BOOKS**
for Young Readers
Grand Rapids/Cambridge
An imprint of W. B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING CO.



Stefan Ulstein

A Curriculum of One's Own *The Literature of Crime*

Stefan Ulstein teaches media and English courses at Bellevue Christian Junior High School in Bellevue, Washington.

Having completed her graduation requirements, Cindy Choi was looking for another English elective. She and I had talked extensively about her desire to become an FBI agent, so I suggested an independent reading seminar in crime literature.

The deal was that Cindy would agree to do nothing but read during fourth period - no studying for other classes, no leaving campus for an espresso. When she completed a book she would write an entry in her annotated bibliography.

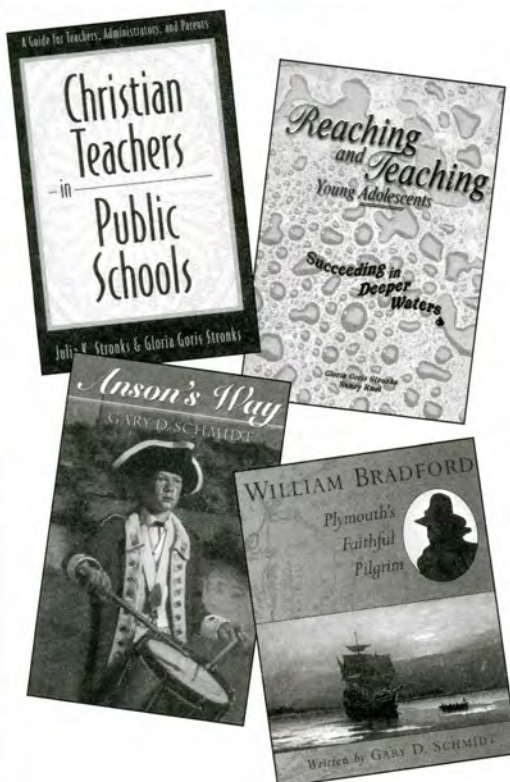
Cindy read 12 books and Shakespeare's Hamlet, which is one of the greatest crime stories of all time. Some of the books

were standards from the Sherlock Holmes series. She also read some true crime stories and Kafka's *The Trial*. Cindy read more books in one semester than some students read all through high school. She enjoyed reading them because she was free to drop a book if it didn't interest her and move on to another. The books gave her insight into her future career.

Once a week she came by to tell me how it was going and we'd have a little chat.

If you'd like a copy of Cindy Choi's annotated crime bibliography, contact Stefan Ulstein at Bellevue Christian School. 425-454-4028 ext. 118, 425-454-4481 FAX or sulstein@mail.bellevuechristian.org.

The Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship



CHRISTIAN TEACHERS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS by Julia K. Stronks and Gloria Goris Stronks.

This book addresses the questions a Christian teacher faces when placed in a public school classroom. Written by an attorney and an education professor it explores the laws of religious rights as well as how to reflect Christ in their teaching. \$11.99

REACHING AND TEACHING YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

by Gloria Goris Stronks, and Nancy Knol.

One of the greatest challenges for teachers is that of reaching and developing the adolescent mind. In this easy to read guide Stronks and Knol provide principles and practical ideas for the classroom. \$10.95

ANSON'S WAY by Gary Schmidt.

Set in eighteenth century Ireland, this historical novel will delight its readers. A young boy, Anson, always dreamt that he would be part of the United Kingdom's Fencibles, and finally the day arrives in which his dreams come true. However, Anson must learn that reality does not always live up to dreams. \$15.00

WILLIAM BRADFORD: PLYMOUTH'S FAITHFUL PILGRIM by Gary D. Schmidt.

Many tales have been written about the Pilgrim's journey to America and religious freedom; but no one captures the adventure and historicity like Schmidt. This novel for readers of any age introduces the founder of Plymouth Colony and captures the imagination. \$10.00

All of these books are available through Calvin College Bookstore, 3201 Burton St., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49546, 800-748-0122 Please include 6% tax if you are a Michigan resident. Shipping and handling is \$4.00 per order. Make checks payable to Calvin College Bookstore or call with your Mastercard, VISA, or Discover card.

CALVIN
College



Ron Sjoerdsma teaches in the education department at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Ron Sjoerdsma

Space Wars

Kate Wells was losing interest and struggling to stay awake. She felt her lack of motivation intensely as Helene Peters reminded her teaching staff for the second time during Hillendale Christian Middle School's beginning-of-the-year faculty meeting that they were all going to have to learn to cooperate when it came to using the computer lab. To Kate, who had been taking her students to the lab for writing process practice since it held rows of Tandys on lunchroom tables, this was an old issue that seemed to have few solutions.

In the early days, few teachers except for Jim Sooterma and Kate had seemed all that enthusiastic about computers. One of Kate's early complaints had been that the Hillendale eighth-graders were coming to her with no keyboarding skills because none of the seventh-grade teachers were spending time in the lab. She wished she had those days back. The seventh-grade team had geared up a few summers before and this past summer had gotten particularly excited about computer simulations - simulations that would require computer lab time for concentrated periods.

Kate had initially agreed with her principal last year that, when they dropped the sixth-graders back to the expanded elementary building, the computer lab schedule would be freed and the previous year's scheduling problems would be minimal. However, it was clear from the meeting's opening volleys that matters were only worse. And Helene seemed to be offering the same old suggestions for lab use as if no one had heard them before. But Kate woke up quickly when she heard her principal say, "This is really a simple matter. We have one computer lab. We have eight classrooms plus all the specials. But essentially we have eight groups. Four blocks a day. That means, if we do this right, you should be able to go to the lab every other day. It's simply about using space fairly - it's not something we should have to go to war about."

Jim was the first to respond. "Come on, Helene. You know our classes don't work that way. When we get into our integrated units, we need several days in a row and sometimes we might go a couple of weeks without using the lab. This is not a war about space - we're talking about curriculum and

good teaching first."

Kate was compelled to add, "And you know that we don't do process writing that

way. I just don't see every other day as a solution. What was the point of spending all the money on Inspiration software if my students have to wait a day or more to follow up with their other prewriting?" Kate could see the problem as soon as she responded. They all would somewhat selfishly look to the interests of their students and their course demands.

Julie Johnson, the new and already outspoken music teacher, chimed in, "You're not counting me. What if I want to bring my music class to the lab for a little theory work on the Internet? You should see some of the great sites for listening skills. There's this one site that"

"Sorry, Julie, we really don't have time for an example, but I get your point." Helene seemed to have an edge in her voice that Kate had rarely heard in their 20-some years as colleagues. Helene quickly picked up on her old refrain. "OK, so we're going to need some flexibility here.. But I don't see a way to solve everyone's problem unless we spend hours, perhaps days, planning out the school year for each seventh- and eighth-grade classroom teacher. I know that's a battle you don't want to engage. I sure don't. Any suggestions?"

After a moment of silence, Bill Hamilton suggested that perhaps he could just give up his time, because most of what he wanted to get out of technology he could do with his graphing calculators in his own classroom.

Bill continued to regularly argue within the eighth-grade team that many students were wasting time in the lab "thinking" about their projects without learning much of anything.

Sara Voskamp, who usually supported Bill's technology "slowdown," responded, "Right, Bill, that would send a great signal. Like math has nothing to do with all the project-based learning we worked so hard to develop. If you give up your lab time, we all suffer."

"You mean all the eighth-grade teachers lose out. Well we've been losing out for a long time." James Perkins, the most experienced of the seventh-grade teachers, had been the primary mover in moving the seventh-grade curriculum into the technology age.

Kate had a sudden flash of inspiration. It had begun with Bill's comment about doing things in his own classroom. She

rolled her idea around a bit while Helene responded to the general chorus of support for Perkins from the seventh-grade teachers.

Kate waited for a quiet moment, and she began slowly. "Helene, I was just thinking." Kate paused and there were none of the usual dangerous-when-you-start-thinking comments. "Or maybe I have a question for you first. When are we scheduled to upgrade the lab? The 80-megahertz machines we got three years ago are already too slow to run some of the new simulation software and especially slow for the new Internet browsers. What's the central office telling you?"

"I haven't heard much, just some comments about whether they were going to put Macs or PCs in next time. But no one talks much about when."

"Ok, let's suppose we're a year or so off with new computers." Again Kate hesitated. It was risky to float a new idea when she hadn't thought it through herself. "Bill's comment about his classroom calculators got me thinking. Maybe it's time to move the computer lab to our classrooms. The wiring to all the classrooms has been finished; we've been able to plug in for almost a year now. So why don't we network a series of minilabs in every classroom? We have 32 computers in the lab right now so each classroom would get four. And then when the new computers come, we keep the old ones for some things like word processing and for our CD-ROM resources, and the new ones could be used for the Internet. I can see an arrangement of computer carts like my husband has at his new office. They can just pull them together or separate them in any configuration they want. And I think they use infrared to connect them to minihubs in their workspaces."

No one jumped in with a comment. Kate realized that she had a picture in her day planner that Ken had given her of his new computer desk, thinking she might like something like it for their home office. The idea was quickly taking shape for her, but she wasn't sure how many others were connecting. She passed the picture around as she continued thinking out loud.

"We all talk about having learning centers in our classrooms and a few of us do, especially in the seventh grade." She needed a few allies. "Why don't we create a couple of technology centers in each classroom? Our kids would have instant access; our scheduling problems would be gone."

"Cool idea, Kate. And one that lots of other schools have been using for some time. It works for me." James Perkins would help her move the idea forward.

Helene stepped in immediately with the logistical and administrative issues. She wondered about implementation. Certainly this could not begin this fall; it would be too disruptive. And wouldn't they miss all the computer lab times that they had been so concerned about just a few minutes ago? And what about printers and scanners and other peripherals that they were now sharing? Did infrared really work? She'd heard it didn't work very well. And wouldn't the new furniture be prohibitively expensive?

As the discussion continued, Kate noticed that very few middle school staff seemed concerned about Helene's implementation barriers. Their principal was a consensus

builder, and when she sensed a general drift - something she was particularly skilled at - she moved the staff forward.

In the end she came to the point of establishing a committee comprised of two eighth-grade and two seventh-grade teachers and herself to study the issue further and make a report to the whole group by their next meeting in September. Kate would chair the committee.

"So," Kate thought as the topic shifted to the more mundane start-up issues like new food service schedules, "Now I get to captain the troops for the next go-around. This could be the motivator I need for this year or it could kill me."

Park Street Kids Inc.

A Christian-based Nursery School starting in down-town Boston is looking for a

Director

who will have responsibility for designing the curriculum, hiring staff, enrolling students, managing the day-to-day activities of the school, and working in conjunction with the Board to implement its vision.

The ideal candidate will have:

- a. Early childhood education training, Masters preferred
- b. Management experience
- c. Creativity
- d. Ability to integrate current best practices in child development with a distinctively Christian curriculum.

Send resume to: Park Street Kids, Park Street Church, 1 Park St., Boston, MA, 02108;
e-mail to: pskids@parkstreet.org; or
fax to: (617)887-0343;
or leave message at (617) 523-3383, ext. 729.

Calvin College
has recently instituted a new venture,

The Beversluis Forum

Named in honor of the late Dr. N.H. Beversluis, the Forum will facilitate lectures, symposia and publications which foster discussion of the Reformed vision of education at the K-12 level.

Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff

will deliver the inaugural lecture in the Commons Annex Lecture Hall at Calvin College on

November 12, 1999, at 3:30 pm

for details contact Clarence Joldersma at (616) 957-6596
or cjolders@calvin.edu



Epic Episode



by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a published writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.

You've heard of doctors making house calls, but what about Christian school teachers?

I experienced the benefits of a house call made by my daughter's future grade-one teacher several days before school started. Miss Koene had heard about Davita's shy character from her kindergarten teacher, and decided a visit would be beneficial.

She was right!

As we prepared for Miss Koene's visit, Davita asked, "May I give her a present?"

"Of course!" I replied.

Davita ran to her room to search for a gift. Several moments later she returned with a good pencil that she'd decorated with a soft foam duck. However, just before Miss Koene came, Davita changed her mind. "You give it to her, Mom," she said.

"No," I insisted. "You do it!" This visit was not for my benefit, but for hers.

Miss Koene arrived on her bike. "May I have a hug, Davita?" she asked. By requesting permission, she respected my daughter's ability to choose. Davita readily agreed and embraced her. She extended her gift to Miss Koene, who accepted it gratefully.

We sat down on the white plastic chairs Davita had set up in the backyard. The huge finger-leaves of the walnut tree above us and the flapping clothes on the clothesline beside us seemed to form a canopy and a wall, like a stage for our important encounter.

I had expected Davita to be reticent with Miss Koene. But she surprised me. Her sheer delight in being privileged with a visit by her teacher seemed to dissipate her shyness.



Davita

A Teacher Makes a House Call



Prompted by Miss Koene's encouraging questions, Davita shared highlights of our recent camping trip

to Grundy Lake Provincial Park: celebrating her sixth birthday there; watching as some men caught a huge snapping turtle by the tail; seeing her father slip on the rocks while he was fishing and plunging into the water wearing shoes, jeans and a jacket; learning that the park's lakes are so clean because no motorboats are allowed on the water.

I grinned as Davita, her bowl of ice cream cake perched precariously on her lap, basked in the attention of her new teacher.

Soon Davita got off her chair and climbed on the large trampoline a few feet away from us. "Look what I can do!" she yelled. Jumping, bouncing on her knees, falling on her stomach and getting up, she reveled in Miss Koene's spotlight.

At the end of our visit, Miss Koene hugged Davita goodbye.

Later, as I reflected on her house call, several benefits became evident to me.

First, the visit allowed for a gift exchange. Davita gave something special of her own to her teacher. Miss Koene endowed Davita with the gift of warm hugs and time spent together. Each was left with a reminder of the love of the other person.

Second, Miss Koene asked Davita questions about her life and patiently listened to her stories. By questioning and listening, she gave Davita this important message: you are special and valuable, and what you say is of consequence.

Third, underneath the canopy of the walnut tree, away from the demands of a busy classroom, Miss Koene accomplished more in establishing a relationship with Davita than she may have in a month of classroom encounters. By giving Davita her undivided attention, she built a significant bridge within a short period of time.

Three days later, on the first day of school, we took along a thank-you card for Miss Koene, expressing our gratitude to her for her house call. As we approached the school, we saw her in the distance on the parking lot. She called out to Davita, "Do I get a hug?"

As I watched this dedicated Christian school teacher hug my child, I experienced God's embrace. And I looked forward to my daughter's positive experience in grade one.



Tena Siebenga Valstar

“He had tried marijuana.”

Tena Siebenga Valstar has agreed to take over the Query column from Marlene

Dorhout. Tena taught for over 20 years in Christian schools in Calgary, Edmonton and Fort McMurray. She is completing her doctorate at the University of Alberta, her dissertation topic being “Living Out Your Vision.” To keep in touch with teaching, she tutors part-time. She lives in Fort McMurray with husband Harry Valstar, an evangelist at the Evergreen Christian Reformed Church. She feels blessed to be step-mom to four grown children and grandma to two grandchildren.

Teachers are encouraged to address questions they might like to have answered to: Tena Siebenga, 168 Windsor Dr., Fort McMurray, Alberta, T9H 4R2, Canada; or e-mail her at valstar@teluspla.net

Question # 1

I gave my eighth-grade students a Bible assignment in which, by using the literary format provided, they were to relate an experience in which they felt the working of the Holy Spirit. I indicated that I would post the finished product. One student wrote a piece which met the requirements of the assignment and which excelled in literary format, but I felt it could not be posted because he told of an experience during which he had tried marijuana. I complimented him on the excellent work but asked him to do another because I could not post his previous piece. His mom felt that the piece should be posted because “we can’t pretend these situations do not exist.” I need some advice.

Response:

I see your dilemma - on the one hand you have invited the students to share from the heart and on the other hand you do not want this posted in a public place where other younger students may read it. My response in helping you sort this out encourages us to look initially at the effect this situation had on the student and, secondly, on the school community.

I compliment you on the choice of assignment and the response you were able to elicit from your student. This is the kind of honesty and authentic response we want to see in a Christian school. Having read the student’s original response, I saw a student in a difficult situation, being pressured by his peers, realizing he should not have given in, and expressing

remorse, and then calling on the Holy Spirit for direction and help so that he

would not do this again. What more could we ask than a confession, a repentance and a calling on the Holy Spirit for guidance? I also understand the mom’s response because she saw her son being open about the situation. It is apparent that the mom is not condoning the use of marijuana, but is pleased that the child has worked through the situation toward a positive outcome.

I wonder how the student felt, having completed the assignment, and in your estimation having done an excellent job and yet being asked to do another. Did he feel “punished” for having given an honest response? I could tell from reading the first response to the assignment that the student gave fully of himself, was open and responded truthfully. His second response on a different topic was not as convincing. Did this situation teach the student to be less than honest (not writing from the heart) in future situations?

How do you deal with it? You cannot undo the situation, but you can learn from it. You were uncertain of community response to a eighth-grade student having tried marijuana. Did you check with your principal/colleagues as to the possible community response? Has anyone in your school previously dealt with a similar situation?

Knowing now that you may get this kind of response to an assignment, you may in the future leave the posting as optional. When you tell the students that you will post their written product, they may choose a different audience. You have to decide what you want from the assignment -authentic personal response with you as the audience, or less openness intended for a wider audience. You may have to let the students decide whether or not they want the completed assignment posted, but again indicate that you will be the final judge as to appropriateness for posting. Students want to know the parameters ahead of time; they don’t appreciate the unexpected.

Do not hesitate to give assignments such as this. Think through beforehand what the consequences might be. As teachers we are responsible for thinking through the whole process as we want to honor the student in accepting their thoughtful response, and at the same time honor our



In his church they dedicate babies

community.

If it is not too late, you might go back to the student and

parent, indicating that you have reviewed the situation, thought about where you could have made changes and what you have learned from the process. Our openness as teachers also helps to build community.

Question #2

We were discussing "The Great Commission" in my grade one class. In response to "Go, therefore, and baptize in my name..." one of my students indicated that in his church they dedicate babies rather than baptize them. Another responded, "My mom doesn't like churches like yours that don't baptize babies." The first child appeared hurt. I was upset by what I heard and eventually took the second student into the hallway and talked about hurting the feelings of others. How would you handle this?

Response:

As I look at this situation, a few things jump out at me: the honesty of first graders, the fact that children emulate the beliefs/values of their parents, our immediate need as teachers to deal with conflict, our desire to heal the hurt, and our adult reaction to children's conversation. We expect young children to be honest and straightforward. This child apparently has not yet learned to cover up his true feelings because of what others may say about or to him. All Christian parents want their child to emulate what they believe and then live accordingly. New parents are amazed at how a two-year-old parrots them and are stopped in their tracks when the child says a word/phrase or carries out an action which is not complimentary to them. They, however, are filled with satisfaction when they see the child walking in God's ways.

I wonder what your being upset really came from? It could have come from the fact that the child's feelings were genuinely hurt or it could have been because you were faced with an adult concept - one which divides the body of Christ, or could it have been both? Not having been present, I don't know all the factors which could affect the response. How many students heard the interaction? To what degree was the second child affected? If this was just between two students, you would do best to talk

to each individually and then bring them together so each could tell the other

what was behind the comment. I am assuming you are in a CSI school which does not teach a doctrinal position on baptism; therefore you would have to explain that some parents baptize babies, whereas others dedicate their babies, but that each set of parents are doing what they believe God calls them to do. You might also tell them that as their teacher you cannot tell them that one parent is right and the other is wrong. Suggest they talk to their parents about it. I suggest you contact the parents of both children, tell them what happened, and indicate what you did.

If, however, this was a discussion that most of the class heard, you may have to tell the class how the boys solved it or invite the boys to share this and again explain that parents have different views on baptism and suggest that they talk to their parents if they have questions. You might also state that you see both boys doing what their parents and God would like them to do. Also include that even though we have different opinions, Jesus still tells us to be kind to one another and that is why it is important that the boys work it out.

If, indeed, the child's feelings were hurt, you will have to deal with the first child on that issue. Be careful that your own feelings do not cloud the situation and make it bigger than the first-grade student saw it. Help the second student tell the first student how he felt. Remind yourself that you are dealing with hurt feelings; the first child should not be made to feel guilty because he has learned a value or belief from his mother.

In being part of an interdenominational Christian school, students will learn that other Christians serve God in ways unfamiliar to them, but that together we make up the body of Christ. For these first-grade students, it is just a beginning. Thank God for his grace towards us and his acceptance of us with all our differing ways of "working out our salvation with fear and trembling."



Steven VanDer Weele

World Religions

Thea Lunk, Which Way To God? A Christian looks at World Religions. CRC Publications, 1998. video: \$35.95, leader's guide: \$12.94, student newspaper package: \$6.95 per student.

Reviewed by Gloria Goris Stronks.

Religion and Bible teachers in Christian high schools and middle schools know that students are very interested in what people of different faiths actually believe. In my own survey of middle school students in Christian schools, students frequently asked questions such as, "If others believe in religions like Buddhism, and they believe as strongly as we do, then can't we be just another group of believers with a god that really doesn't exist, like Buddhists? What really is Buddhism?" Which Way to God? A Christian Look at World Religions is a 10-session course on the beliefs and practices of the four largest world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam. The course was designed to be used with students in grades nine through twelve in church school and Christian day school classes. However, if it is not being used at those levels, teachers in grade seven and eight should examine the material to see whether it can be adapted to meet the needs of their students.

The author's goal in preparing these materials was to help students gain a better understanding of the major religions, and thus equip them to compare those beliefs with their own. A theological perspective is provided and, after that, the first lesson begins with a discussion of questions all faiths ask and answer in order to create a framework within which the different religions may be understood. The class sessions are organized so that students will first study the basic beliefs of a religion and then focus on the daily lives of those who follow that religion.

The students study four eight-page newspapers, each of which describes the beliefs and lives of Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and Muslims. For example, the newspaper on Buddhism has, among others, the following articles: "The Story of the Buddha," "Buddhism in North America," "The Eightfold Path," "The Four Noble Truths," "Buddhism and Christianity,"

"Getting Beyond the Self Through Meditation," "Mastering the Mind and Training the Body Through

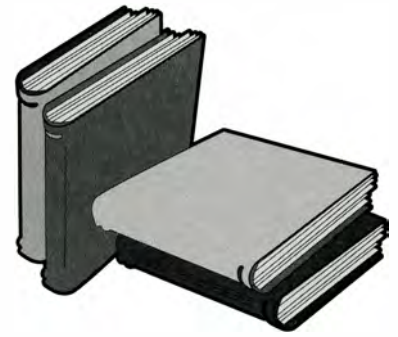
the Martial Arts," "The Dalai Lama," "The Sangha," along with recipes and activities that are enjoyed by Japanese Buddhists.

The video that accompanies the material contains four 10-minute segments, each showing a modern American teenager who practices that religion. This young person walks through and describes their place of worship along with the worship symbols that are used. Then we are taken into the home where our guide tells us how that religion is practiced in daily life.

The leader's guide is extremely useful, especially for teachers who do not have a strong background in world religions. The author has taught world religions to her own high school class and understands what youth leaders and high school teachers need to know in order to make the lessons as interesting and involving as possible. Print resources are provided to help teachers gain the appropriate background for successful teaching along with suggestions for appropriate Bible study that should accompany the lesson. Additional video resources are listed and possible field trips, games, and learning activities are described to help students be actively involved in learning.

This material could be used as a supplement to a Christian high school course in world religions, although such a course would study these topics with much greater depth. However, courses in world religions are often elective. It would be wonderful if every one of our Christian high school graduates had at least this much understanding of these four religions.

In ruling on the 1960s school prayer cases, the United States Supreme Court indicated that public school education may include teaching about religions. Leaders of more than 23 organizations such as the American Association of School Administrators, the American Federation of Teachers, the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and the Christian Educators Association International have sponsored a statement that "public schools demonstrate fairness when they ensure that the curriculum includes study about religions, where appropriate, as an important part of complete education." Can Christian schools do any less?



Feast at His Table

Robert W. Pazmino,
Basics of Teaching
for Christians:

Preparation, Instruction, and Evaluation.
Baker, 1998. 124 pp. Reviewed by
Deborah Kula, 8070 West Lakeshore
Drive, Highland Lakes, Ethel, Louisiana,
70730.

Reviewed by Deborah Kula

Robert Pazmino regards teaching as the exercise of a vital ministry gift. He says in his introduction, "Even though initially strangers to their students, Christian teachers can extend an invitation to feast at a table Jesus has hosted throughout time and into eternity" (p. 13). Believing that good teaching can be a form of evangelism, he encourages prayer before, during, and after each teaching session, prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to work with and through the teacher.

As his subtitle indicates, Pazmino divides the book into three major chapters - preparation, instruction and evaluation. Teachers are to plan their lessons with reliance on God's wisdom, keeping regular contact with God through prayer and Bible reading so that their hearts may be channels through which the Holy Spirit can move to make a transforming difference in the lives of students. Indeed, the Christian teacher must be prepared in spirit, mind, and body, and must pray for his and her students.

The students' circumstances and point of view must also be taken into account in order to make the material relevant and useful. Furthermore, the teacher must consider the context of teaching so that "the formation of a learning community" (p.43) may be facilitated in which the teacher's aim is "to put a feast on the table" (p.19).

The chapter on instruction consists of three sub-parts: prelude, lude and postlude. According to Pazmino's musical analogy, teachers are the conductors of a symphony. In the prelude the students confront issues of the day; in the lude lies the major teaching thrust wherein the instruction of Christian teachers, who speak the truth in love, transforms the students. Questions or pauses can provide interludes during the

instruction to allow students a chance to absorb key points. The purpose of the postlude is "to engage persons

intellectually and psychologically so that they will integrate their learning with life outside the instructional setting" (p. 71) and become doers of the word instead of merely hearers.

The evaluation of teaching should also be undertaken with Christian values in mind. According to Pazmino, "Truth [is] a call for integrity; love [is] a call for care; faith [is] a call for action; hope [is] a call for courage; and joy [is] a call for celebration" (pp. 77-78).

In his conclusion, Pazmino writes: "Teachers who are Christian are called to recognize their partnership with the Triune God. They have the resources of God the Educator, the example of Jesus the Exemplar, and the power of the Spirit the Tutor to instruct in transformative ways beyond the limits of human effectiveness" (p. 101).

This book is more than a popular cheering of the troops to do good work. Pazmino is Professor of Education in a Department of Theology and supports his discourse with substantial notes and bibliography. The book requires careful reading; it challenges the reader to regard teaching as nothing less than a spiritual ministry. And thus it is a book for all of us.

I teach in a public school setting, and the book has raised my expectations and refreshed my perspective about what I can do in my classroom. A Sunday School teacher will benefit from a similar encounter with this book. And it will be useful to those who teach at a secondary or college level and need encouragement as they help students wrestle with life's challenging moral and ethical questions.

Daunting as the book is, it is as true for this as other books of high quality: the view is well worth the climb.

Association News

CEA Fall Convention

The Christian Educators Association will hold its teachers convention on October 21 and 22 at the Century Center/South Bend Marriott in South Bend, Indiana. Over 1700 teachers will attend from Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. The convention covers K-12 and includes over 100 sectionals. This year's theme is "Our Hope for Years to Come." Keynoter: Roger Lundin (Kilby Professor of English, Wheaton College). Devotional Speaker: Tony Van Zanten (Roseland Christian Ministries). Lecturers: John Cooper (Calvin Theological Seminary) and Jim Heynen (St. Olaf College)

For more information contact Susan Lucas, CEA Corresponding Secretary, at: (616) 772-2444; sue@egl.net; 391 Hillview Dr., Zeeland, Mich., 49464.

Heartland Convention

The Heartland Christian Educators Convention will be held on the Dordt College campus in Sioux Center, Iowa, on October 7 and 8. Musician Ken Medema, will speak on: "The Wind in the Door: Cultivating our Imaginations," a theme based on Joel 2:28. Over 450 educators attend this convention from Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. The convention carries workshops for grades K-12.

For more information contact Marion Van Soelen at: (712) 722-6216; csi6@dordt.edu; 498 4th Ave., Sioux Center, Iowa, 51250.

Northwest Convention

Christian teachers of the Northwest United States and Canada (districts 7 and 12) will hold their convention in Lynden, Washington, on October 7 and 8. This event draws about 1,000 teachers from Alaska, British Columbia, Montana, Oregon and Washington state. The theme is "Shine ... As You Hold Out the Word." Michael Goheen (Redeemer College) is the keynote speaker. Some 142 workshops will be held.

For more information contact Liz Siebring-Tolkamp at: (604) 534-2679; ltolkamp@uniserve.com; 5793-211th St., Langley, B.C., V3A 2L7.

OCSTA Convention

The Ontario Christian School Teachers Association will hold its convention at the Regal Constellation Hotel in Toronto, Ontario, on October 28 and 29. The convention theme is "Shine Like Stars ... As You Hold Out the Word of Life." *Banner* editor, John Suk, will deliver the inspirational address; Doug Blomberg, from Australia, will give an educational talk. One thousand teachers representing over 80 Christian schools from Ontario and across the U.S. border are expected to take in 48 workshops from K-12. OCSTA will celebrate its 45th anniversary this year with a banquet Thursday evening, followed by an evening of story telling by author James Schaap.

For more information contact Hank Hultink at: (905) 648-1200; ocsta@ican.net; 777Gamer Rd. E., Ancaster, Ont., L9K 1J4.

Alberta Convention

Teachers of CSI District 11 will hold their convention at the West Edmonton Christian School and High School in Edmonton, Alberta., from October 20-22. About 300 teachers representing 25 schools in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan will gather to focus on the theme: "Set Free" (2 Cor. 3:1).

John Hiemstra (the King's University College) will speak on "Freedom through Justice." Educators can choose between 60 workshops from K- 12.

For more information call Monique Otteson at: (780) 475-2818; Fax: (780) 478-1728; North Edmonton Christian School, 13470 Fort Rd., Edmonton, Alta., T5A 1C5.

California Convention

Teachers of the Southwest Christian Teachers Association will join the California Association of Private Schools at a convention in Anaheim, California, on November 22 and 23. Twenty-three CSI teachers are presenting, and the topic for the convention is "Brain Research and Its Effects on Education."

For more information call Carol Bremer-Bennett at: (505) 863-4412; rcsda@cia-g.com P.O. Box 41, Rehoboth, New Mexico, 87322-0041.

Poetry Nook

Talkin' about a Revolution

Approaching the eve
of a new and
better universe,
worlds collide and
stockmarkets rise.

A millennial fable
of progressive undoing.

Tolerance for error
growing narrow.
Ability to revolutionize
growing immense, and
nations sprinting faster
than Dow Jones
can rise.

So conscious of
this rapid change.
When and how
do we breathe?

Wasted resource
of body and soul...

(Improved Technology
cannot make us
whole.)

Jennifer Pappas

Valley Christian High School junior,
Cerritos, California